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Decolonisation of the Malay World: A Museum Revisit

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Abstract
Most museums in Malaysia especially the Muzium Negara (National Museum) have been under the jurisdiction of different ministries, from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to the Ministry of Local Government and Environment, then later to the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism with recent move to the Ministry of National Unity. However, the museums have never been under the Ministry of Education and not seen as academic institutions, but rather as tourist sites. Studies on Malaysian museums revolve around the management and promotional strategies under the tourism lens while the critical studies on the narrative of the Malay world history from the pre-colonial period to the colonial period and the fight for freedom have been minimal. The main objective of this exhibition text analysis and the critical curatorial observation is to explore the narrative in the Muzium Negara in terms of the fight against the colonisers to gain independence and the representation of the Islamic-Malay civilisation history throughout the museum. The analysis revealed that the narrative in Muzium Negara is a colonial narrative of a nation state and provide a very minimal narrative of the fight against colonialism. There is also a lack of representation of the Islamic-Malay civilisation despite having many Malay Muslim sultanates in the Federation of Malaysia to reflect aspects of the Islamic-Malay civilisation. The findings suggest that the national museums such as Muzium Negara should include a civilizational approach in the representation of Malaysia as a form of decolonisation.

Keywords: museum, decolonisation, Malay-Islamic civilisation, representation

Introduction

Education and knowledge sharing has always been the quintessential element throughout the numerous redefinitions of museums according to International Council of Museums (ICOM), since its inception up till the most recent definition in 2022, "…*They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.*"[1]

The term museum, etymologically derives from the Greek term, '*mouseion*', which refers to spaces that would be considered as "a place of contemplation" where learning and objects were combined (Simmons 2016, 1813; Findlen 1989, 60-63). While the concept of museums that is commonly understood today for the practice of collecting and displaying objects stems from the 'cabinet of curiosities' (also called *Kunst- or Wunderkammern*) (Murray 1904), where the curious collectors would organised their collections in ways to promote the transmission of knowledge as one of the true *raison d'être* behind the growth of cabinets of

curiosities (Schulz 2003, 175-187; Mauries 2011). However, these cabinets of curiosities were built upon the interests and curiosities of the collector-cum-curator. The cabinets were showcased and presented to only a selected few, usually among the elites of the same social strata, and not catered for the general public (Hudson 1977).

The cabinets of curiosities phenomenon became popular between the aristocrats, nobilities, traders, and scientific researchers in the sixteenth century. Their introduction to the new world outside Europe had driven them to widen the range of their collections and the habit of collecting were no longer merely a hobby or to learn more about the world but also to elevate their social status at the same time (Impey andMacFregor 2001). The collection, interpretation, and display of objects collected from the exotic 'other' resulting from European exploration expeditions then became a way to further elevate social status and continue to promote the European '*Doctrine of Discovery*' (Dunbar-Ortiz 2015, 197-207; Silverman 2010). Collecting practices abroad were an inherent part of colonialism, and these collections are displayed under Western classification systems.[2]

By the second half of the nineteenth century, nearly every country in Western Europe had opened a comprehensive museum which saw the opening of more than 100 new museums in the United Kingdom and at least 50 new museums in Germany alone (Bazin 1967; Lewis 1985, 480-492). However, what sets apart the collection practice in the fifteenth century and the nineteenth century collection is the high colonialism especially during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The late nineteenth century was an era of modern colonial capitalism, driven by militarised companies with superior military power to conquer and hold territories far from their metropole in Europe. Museums in Europe emerged as a place for the empire to show off the colonies to convince the public of their mission to 'civilise the savages.'

Empire-building and museum-building went hand in hand throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with museums emerging as active tools of the empires through the blending of politics with aesthetics, education and entertainment to explicitly push forward empires' propaganda; on the benefits of colonialism with racialised ideals and Eurocentric narratives (Aldrich 2009, 138).

Decolonisation

During the 1940s to the 1960s saw rapid decolonisation throughout Africa and Asia, the decolonisation in the form of transferring the political sovereignty from the coloniser to the formerly colonised. Obtaining independence and the transfer of sovereignty is not just an event; it is a process. The political decolonisation is usually the first step of the decolonisation process for a newly established nation state. Political independence did not put an end to the imperial legacies as decolonisation has a multitude of levels and processes. Subtly and often invisibly, those legacies remain embedded into the social and cultural everyday life for both; the former colonies as well as the former colonisers. Undoing the effects of colonialism and its remnants in areas of historical narratives and education are some of the steps to accompany the independence of a formerly colonised land. Therefore, decolonisation is a topic that cuts across disciplines. On that note, there is also no one way to decolonise as there is a diverse of areas to decolonise.

No colonised land is the same as the other and no imperialist coloniser is the same as the other. Even in the twenty-first century, the world has yet to see fully liberated countries around the globe with the neo-colonialism and the on ongoing settler colonisation of Palestine, including other countries as well.[3] Each has its own story and history. There are the settler colonisers,[4] and there are those who had attained decolonisation less violent than others. While the imperialist colonisers on the other hand, had their own different approaches in transferring their power to decolonise the land they had colonised.[5] The decolonisation and the birth of new

nations nevertheless changed the role of museums in Europe[6] and with the emergence new nation states meant new museums are now seen to be used for nation-building as well.

Museums in Malaysia

It was during the time of high colonialism[7] which saw first museums in the present-day Malaysia opened, namely the Perak Museum (1883),[8] the Sarawak Museum (1886),[9] and the Selangor Museum (1898).[10] These museums were established long before Malaysia became a nation state and unsurprisingly these museums' first curators were British and so was the curatorial practice which was deemed 'British'.[11] Even the architecture of these museums had the English architectural styles such as Victorian, Flemish, and Moorish.[12]

Nevertheless, when Malaysia emerged as a new nation state in 1957, it did not take long for Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman to recognise the importance of museums in the process of nation building and mooted the idea of a national museum in 1958 which saw the construction begun in 1959. Eventually, the national museum, *Muzium Negara* was officially open in 1963.

While decolonisation prompted changes in museums in Europe, new museums in new nation states like in Malaysia were opened to assumed new roles for museums, which is to assist in instilling new national identities and newfound nationalism. Part of forming a national identity, in Southeast Asia, only Brunei and Malaysia made Islam as the state religion after achieving independence. As a result, Muzium Negara, under the Malaysian Department of Museums (Jabatan Muzium Malaysia) are guided by the federal constitution and the National Cultural Policy, which placed Malay and Islam in a primacy position in the general national narrative (Ahmad 2014). The Muzium Negara along with twenty other museums[13] under the Department of Museums. The department is currently under the Ministry of National Unity since January 2023. Previously, the department been moved several times from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (1963) to the Ministry of Local Government and Environment (1974) and the most recent ministry before the current move, the department was under the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (from 2018 to 2023).[14]

Many studies on museums in Malaysia have been conducted with one of the widespread topics is on the technology application and the importance of online engagement (Hassan 2006; Isa et al. 2012; Shaharir & Zanuddin 2018; Saidon, Rozak@Razak & Samsudin 2011; Wahid et al. 2022). There have also been the studies on museum representation (Ahmad 2010; Ahmad 2014; Thompson 2012). Although topic on colonial influence in museums have been highlighted (Dellios 1999; Zaini, Esa & Adam 2022; Jalal 2020), not much has been done on the Malay-Islamic civilisation and the fight against the colonisers representations in Malaysian museums. Despite museums in Malaysia are not seen as an educational institution, many studies have also been conducted on learning in museums (Napiah et al. 2019; Ligun et al. 2017; Talib, Ghani & Yusuff 2019; Hassan & Karim 2023). Learning through museums come in many forms,[15] nevertheless, exhibitions are considered the central operation of a museum (Suarez & Tsutsui 2004). This reiterates the importance of assessing critically the exhibition and exhibition text in conveying the learning experience and to educate the visitors.

Malay Kingdoms Gallery

The Muzium Negara today has four galleries with its Gallery B, the Malay Kingdom Galley featuring the Muslim kingdom of the Melaka Sultanate as its main highlight, in line with the federal constitution and national cultural policy. Before putting forth the Melaka narrative, the gallery acknowledged the Hindu-Buddha past with the display of the *Avalokitesvara* Hindu statue and a ship model from the Hindu kingdom of Majapahit as well as a replica panel from

the Buddhist temple, Borobudur in Central Java. While the exhibition text highlighted the early Malay Kingdoms before the fourteenth century CE such as Langkasuka, Kataha (Kedah Tua) as well as the early Malay kingdoms in the Peninsula, such as Gangga Negara, Beruas and Manjung (in present-day Perak); Folo-an (in present-day Terengganu); Tan-Tan and Chih Tu (in present-day Kelantan) and Temasik (in Singapore). While the Sriwijaya and Majapahit kingdoms highlighted as the predominant pre-Islamic kingdoms.

Throughout the gallery, the representation of the Melaka Sultanate concentrated mainly on the written exhibition text, rather than through the artefacts. The artefacts displayed are mainly not artefacts from the Melaka Sultanate period. The nearest by association and period to the Melaka Sultanate was most likely the display of the coins used. The exhibition text dedicated on Melaka included sub-topics such as Melaka's founding father (Parameswara), the folkloric hero (Hang Tuah), its administrative system,[16] its written laws,[17] Melaka's trading system, goods traded in Melaka, coins used for trade in Melaka and the discovery from the shipwrecks of the Straits of Melaka.

The gallery then proceeds to highlight Islam and Melaka. Under the info panel, '*Islam Comes to Melaka,'* it mentioned that the conversion of Sultan Megat Iskandar Shah (1414-1423/4), the second ruler of Melaka to Islam was framed as "*an important event in the history of the country"*. This info panel serves as a preamble to the series of info panels that followed suit that framed Islam as the main contributing factor in making Melaka a successful port city. In addition, having a Muslim ruler was also framed as the main factor for Melaka to be a glorious port city which attracted and became a preferred port for Muslim traders. In turn, Islam positively influenced the social, economic, and intellectual habits of the Malay community. Another info panel also attributed three of the Sultans of Melaka; Sultan Muzaffar Syah (1445-1459), Sultan Mansur Syah (1459-1477) and Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah (1477-1488) to have made Melaka prosperous and respected due to the Islamic teachings that strengthened the government.

The gallery projected Melaka to be '*a centre for the propagation of Islam in the archipelago*,' which mentioned individuals such as Makhdum Saiyid Abdul Aziz, Maulana Abu Bakar, Maulana Sadar Jahan, Maulana Jalaluddin and Qadi. However, there are no mention of who they were and where they were from. It only mentioned that the conversion of the Melaka ruler encouraged many religious scholars and missionaries to come from Arabia, Persia, and India. There is also a diorama intended to depict the conversion of the Melaka ruler with the text written as follows:

> "*This diorama shows the conversion to Islam of the Ruler of Melaka by Saiyid Abdul Aziz, a religious scholar from Jeddah and one of his followers. This event was the first step that led ultimately to Melaka's becoming a great centre for the dissemination of Islam, renowned throughout the Archipelago.*" [18]

However, consequent info panels did not elaborate who Saiyid Abdul Aziz nor any of the other info panels explained the backstory of who he was. Even the '*Ruler of Melaka*' and the year this event took place were also not mentioned in any of the subsequent info panels.[19] In addition, the accompanying artefacts on display after the diorama and the info panel on the '*Malay Kingdom of Melaka: Centre for the Propagation of Islam in the Archipelago*' did not have any intellectual or religious manuscripts in the Jawi script or the al-Qur'an to represent Islam intellectualism.

The connection between Melaka Sultanate and other Malay kingdoms is included in an info panel under the title, *Malay Kingdoms: Contemporaries and Successors of Melaka.* It mentioned other Malay kingdoms such as the kingdom of Johor-Riau-Lingga-Pahang, 18th century kingdoms of Kelantan, Terengganu, Johor, Pahang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan

while Perak was mentioned to be the royal legacy of Melaka when its first Sultan, Muzaffar Shah I, the son of the last Sultan of Melaka Sultan was installed in 1528. However, Kedah, as the oldest unbroken independent kingship line in the Malay and Islamic world is not mentioned in the Malay Kingdom Gallery. On the other hand, the Brunei kingdom, and the Sulu Kingdom, both had a dedicated info panels for their respective kingdoms.[20]

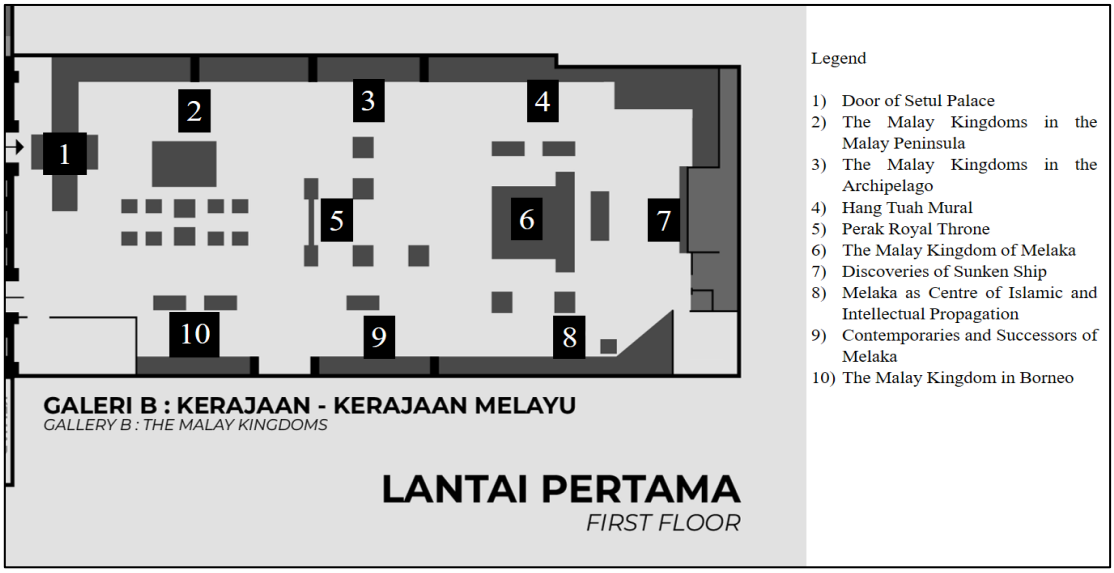

Figure 1: Exhibition Floor Plan – Gallery B: Malay Kingdoms.
Source: Muzium Negara e-brochure.

Colonial Era Gallery

From the entrance of the Colonial Era Gallery (Gallery C), visitors are greeted with the European gaze. The gaze presented the Portuguese view upon arriving in Melaka with the visual painted on the wall depicting the invading Portuguese approaching Melaka, instead of a depiction of Melaka defending herself against the European invasion (Figure 2). Another Eurocentric element of the gallery is the display of a model ship, the *Flor del Mar*, a Portuguese ship. There were no replicas of Melaka's models or ships.[21] No depiction or any models to represent Melaka before the city was destroyed by the Portuguese invasion.

Figure 2: The Arrival of the Portuguese, section 19 of Muzium Negara Gallery C.
Source: Writer's collection, 2024.

There is, however the replica of *A Famosa.* After reiterating the fall of Melaka in 1511 in the info panel, the A Famosa was highlighted as one of the oldest forts in present-day Malaysia, built in 1512. The info panel indicated that the construction of the fort was ordered immediately to be built on the same site as the fort built that was built by the first Melaka sultan. It mentioned that the materials used to construct the fort was taken from "*a nearby hill and also from derelict mosques and tombstones of the Malay Sultans of Melaka*". [22] The term used to describe the mosque was '*derelict*' which is rather peculiar especially when there was no mention of the grand mosque[23] of Melaka in the Gallery C nor in the earlier gallery B, the Malay Kingdom.

Throughout the gallery, the narrative is the colonisation from the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch colonisation of Melaka. The Dutch was able to colonise Melaka only after defeating after the Portuguese in Melaka in 1641 with the help from the Johor Sultanate. The Dutch rule in Melaka lasted from 1641 to 1824. There was not much elaboration on the Dutch colonisation in Melaka or its relations with the other Malay states.

After brief description of the Portuguese and Dutch colonisation of Melaka, the gallery then proceeded to highlight the British, the main feature of the gallery. The info panel on the British occupation starts with the occupation of Pulau Pinang, Singapore, and Melaka, or as the British had termed it; the Straits Settlement. According to the info panel, the occupation of Pulau Pinang began in 1786 after Francis Light declared British ruled Pulau Pinang[24] and named it the "Prince of Wales" Island.

In the manner on how Francis Light occupied Pulau Pinang was simplified. The exhibition text did not elaborate that Francis Light did not honour his promise to the Sultan Kedah. As part of the agreement, Francis Light were to provide military assistance to Kedah whenever Kedah is attacked by land or sea. Kedah, however, did not receive any military support from the British as promised by Francis Light when Siam attacked Kedah (Reid 2013, 3-30). Instead of using the term 'treachery,' 'treason' or 'betrayal,' the info panel wrote, '…*the Company's deliberately ambiguous promise*'.[25]

Another 'incomplete' panel is on the Pangkor Treaty 1874. The treaty was mentioned as the beginning of the official intervention[26] of the British in the Malay States administration. It only mentioned that the treaty was to acknowledge Raja Abdullah as the legitimate Sultan of Perak and the assassination of J.W.W. Birch, the first British Resident in Perak, who did not honour several terms in treaty and sparked dissatisfaction amongst the Malays.

However, the preamble to the 'intervention' of the British was the *Larut Wars*, the wars between Chinese triads which had begun to spread to Pulau Pinang, thus affecting the British's colonial capitalist economy.[27] This was however, not mentioned in any panels talking about the 'British intervention'. This can be interpreted as a typical colonial narrative as it did not provide any reciprocal narrative on whether the locals need the so-called 'intervention.'

The representation of the other states such as Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu were minimal and misrepresented. The info panel titled, '*Kedah, Terengganu, Kelantan and Siam*' is misrepresented with the 'close' relations between Siam and the three Malay states; Kedah, Terengganu, and Kelantan. It mentioned that Kedah, Terengganu, and Kelantan were under the auspices of the Siam government but did not provide any background or the duration of the 'close relations'. With Kedah had established its sultanate in 1136 and Terengganu in 1708, the simplified text on Siam's 'close relation' with these states would allow assumptions that these states have always been under the Siam rule. Even though Kedah was occupied by Siam in 1821, this occupation was the highlight on the info panel. The Siam occupation of Kedah lasted for only twenty-one years (Ahmad 1971, 97-117), a short period considering Kedah's long history as the longest unbroken kingship since 1136.

While Kelantan and Terengganu who only received British Resident in the early twentieth century is not part of the narrative in both galleries except for a mentioned in the

Gallery B that the sultanates were established in the eighteenth century and an artefact display of the royal seal of Sultan Omar of the Terengganu Sultanate (r. 1806 –1876) dated 1286 Hijri (1870 CE), which was before Terengganu received any British Adviser. Such framing demonstrates on how the narratives in these two galleries are framed in a colonial framing. Furthermore, the following info panel summed up that Johor, Kedah Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu were the Non-Federated Malay States under the British rule, again this is a colonial construct that has been used until today.

After a glimpse of the British colonial infiltration in the Malay states of the present-day Malaysia, the gallery extensively displayed and narrated the British capitalist economic activities. From tin to coffee to timber to coconut, the gallery presented the British's glorious economy and its 'contribution' to the states in the Malay Peninsula. There is also an error on the info panel that is possibly create a confusion and a misunderstanding of colonial capitalist economy. Under the info panel for tin, the text had used the term 'Malaysia' and described that "*… by the end of the nineteenth century, Malaysia had become the largest tin producer in the world*"[28] (Refer Figure 3, section number 6). This sentence contains historical error in the context of using the term 'Malaysia' as Malaysia as a country, as nation state did not exist in the nineteenth century. The info panel highlights is the success of the British colonial's capitalist economy. Then, towards the exit of the gallery, the museum provided a brief snapshot of the Japanese occupation.

However, after all the glorification of the British capitalist economic activities, the final info panel of the gallery mentioned the resistance of the locals against the colonial power, which only received 203 words worth of text in the info panel titled, '*Warriors*' (Refer Figure 3, section number 8). The 203-word in a single info panel simplified a summary to present the 'reaction of the warriors'. The reaction was to defend their land and sovereignty against the British intervention. There are twenty-nine names across eight states of the present-day Malaysia[29] cramped into the same info panel without mentioning any wrongdoings of the colonisers or any injustice, oppression, or the violence carried out by the British colonisers.[30] The mention on why and what sparked the 'reaction' from the warriors to oppose the colonisers was also absent in the exhibition info text.

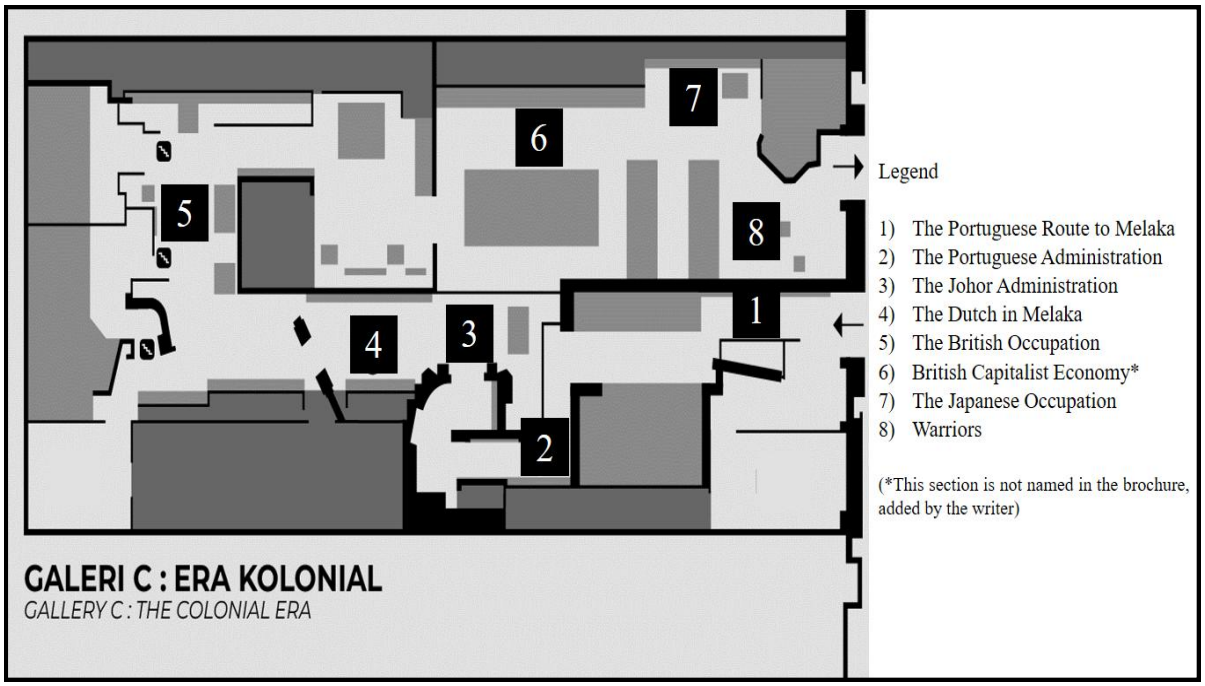

Figure 3: Exhibition Floor Plan – Gallery C: The Colonial Era
Source: Muzium Negara e-brochure

Accompanying the info panel are two display cases; one displaying artefacts that once belonged to Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong, an ulama from Terengganu, consisting of a *kopiah* (cap), talismanic buckle and a *watikah* box. Whereas the other display case had its caption written, '*Handwritten religious book collection*' without stating the name, the year, or a synopsis of the book, a stark contrast compared to the information elaborated on the artefacts display of the British colonisers. This minimal mention of the resistance against the colonial powers is an illustration that the narrative in the gallery is still a colonial narrative.

Discussion

Malaysia is a nation state made of fourteen states[31] from which nine states (Kedah, Kelantan, Johor, Perlis, Pahang, Selangor, Terengganu, Perak and Negeri Sembilan) still have existing Malay rulers until today, unlike many other Malay kingdoms which have dissolved and vanished.[32] Although the Melaka Kingdom is given the primary focus in the gallery, the lack of representation for some of these states in the Gallery B is clearly representing a narrow view of not only the Malay-Islamic kingdoms (sultanates) throughout the region but also the kingdoms in the Malaysian context. The inclusion of these states and sultanates in the gallery would be an important element in the representation of the Malay-Islamic civilisation and *weltanschauung*. Representation of the wider states or sultanates in the region would also help to highlight the free movement of people within the region, and the cross-cultural encounters which would exert more understanding of the interconnectedness of the people in the Malay Archipelago beyond modern-day nation states before colonisation. The exclusion of these states in the narrative of Malay kingdoms in the gallery do not represent the vast sultanates and kingdoms that exist within the region, past and present.

In the case of the Malay-Islamic civilisation representation in the Gallery B, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu as well as Pahang were not represented. These four states had recorded traces and the presence of Islam that preceded Melaka but none of them were mentioned in the Gallery B in the Islamic civilisation or kingdom context. The narrative in the museum's representation of the Malay-Islamic civilisation did not include any of the following; the Kedah monarch, the oldest unbroken line of kingship that has been an Islamic sultanate since 1136 CE, Kelantan with the twelfth century CE findings of the *dinar al-Julus Kelantan* (gold coins) dated 1181 CE (577 Hijri), Pahang with the discovery of a Muslim tombstone in Kampung Permatang. Pasir dated 1028 CE (419 Hijri), or the Terengganu *Batu Bersurat* (Stone Inscription), an iconic inscribed stone dated 1303 CE (702 Hijri) which constituted as the earliest evidence of *Jawi*[33] script in the Malay world and one of the oldest testimonies to the earliest proof of Islamisation in the region with the writing of Islamic law.

All these artefacts nor the history of the Islam in these states were not mentioned in the gallery despite preceding Melaka. However, a replica stone with the inscription *Ibnu Sardan 213*,[34] was displayed in Gallery B and is said to be evidence of the Islamic civilisation presence in the Lembah Bujang in Kedah. However, no further elaboration on this claim and backstory is not written anywhere in the gallery. If displaying replicas is practiced, then replicas of the artefacts mentioned above is an option to consider to display in representing Islam beyond just the Melaka sultanate.

To decolonise is to acknowledge the colonial past and to think self-critically about how the past operates in the present and eventually break away from its frame (Lonetree 2009). Museum exhibitions can effectively disrupt colonial constructions of Indigenous history and culture. Engaging in truth telling, and honour indigenous understandings of history are essential to reflect a decolonising agenda. Additionally, museums need to present narratives from the local perspective, challenging colonial legacies such as social segregation and deconstructing writing on nationalist history to decolonise[35] and decolonising museums encompasses multiple

interpretation that includes the sharing of collections (Coombes & Philips, 2020). Proactive identification, interrogation, deconstruction, and replacement of hierarchies of power that replicate colonial structures are also involved in the decolonisation of museums (Lonetree 2009, 322-337).

Conclusion

Decolonisation needs to take place at all levels of human interaction – the political, social, cultural, spiritual, and psychological – to truly enable healing, renewal, and restoration. Storytelling assumes a critical part to this process as it involves "telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past" (Smith 1999, 34-35). As mentioned earlier, different communities and countries have varying degrees of encounters and differing colonisation.

Therefore, each society would and can have its own curatorial traditions or patterned ways of seeing, valuing, assigning meaning to and treating objects. For the Malay-Islamic civilisation, it is no different. The Malay-Islamic civilisation is an interconnected open civilisation that has established a vast network of not only trade but geopolitical and geo-cultural relations. Melaka, Banten, Aceh, Palembang, and other port-cities in the Malay Archipelago prospered for centuries, and had developed its own network of trading centres, interlinked and interdependent with one another even before the colonisation of the region. The flourishing of Malay-Islamic civilisation did not occur in isolation from the rest of the world; rather, interactions between various cultures helped shape the civilisation. Thus, the representation the Malay-Islamic civilisation can be a conflated curatorial approach and reflect the influence of the Arabian, Indian, Persian, Chinese, and European civilisations in its display.

In addition to the text on the info panels, artefacts and its additional text/information also play an important part in the Malay-Islamic civilisation representation. In the Malay-Islamic civilisation, artefacts especially manuscripts[36] are essential. Artefacts in the museums such as manuscripts and the even artistic element such as calligraphy can also become tools for Malay-Islamic civilisational revival.[37] Accordingly, galleries exhibiting the Malay-Islamic civilisation would need to emphasise the importance of these two elements and include them in its representation. The coming of Islam and the Islamisation of the language in the region not only allowed the mass conversion of the people to Islam, but also imply the vibrant Muslim intellectualism and literature of the Malay-Islamic civilisation. The manuscripts together with the language, *Bahasa Melayu*[38] was not represented in both galleries although they were displayed.

Highlighting the Malay manuscripts whether it is the illuminated al-Qur'an, *hikayats, kitab-kitab, syairs* or even letters in the *Jawi*[39] script provides a great representation of the Malay-Islamic civilisation. If one were to discuss revivalism of the Malay-Islamic civilisation, the Malay language should be included in the conversation because the Malay civilisation is an Islamic civilisation and the language is a major part of it (Al-Attas 2011). Malay civilisation grew with the advancement of Islam in the Malay world and the modern Malay language (Malay-Arab) and the Jawi script (Malay-Arab) are proofs to the role of Islam in the Malay world. Inevitably, these manuscripts reflect positively on the various encounters in the Malay Archipelago with the Arabic, Indian, Persian, Chinese, and European influence in its language will retaining some of its Sanskrit vocabulary.

Therefore, projecting the Muslim cosmopolitanism in representing the Malay-Islamic civilisation is pivotal to provide how vibrant the civilisation is. Therefore, Arabian, Indian, Persian, Chinese, and European civilisations together with the Malay Hindu-Buddhist-animist past should be included and acknowledged in the representation of the Malay-Islamic civilisation in the galleries of museums.

Aside from the emphasis on language and artefacts, to better the representation of the Malay-Islamic civilisation is to improve its colonial narrative. From the resistance against the colonial is almost absent in the galleries studied. In addition, the narrative of the colonisation in the Malay Archipelago also needs elucidate the relations and the encounters between the locals and the colonials that is manifold. The Gallery C have presented the storyline as though the whole Malay Peninsula was submissive after the fall of Melaka in 1511. There was minimal mention of the activities of the other states and sultanates during the Dutch colonisation in Melaka. The silence can only allow people to assume that the European colonisers have controlled the whole archipelago.

The wrongdoings and the violence of the colonisers also need to be added in the narrative and the storyline of the exhibition on colonialism. The museum representation of the Malay-Islamic civilisation needs to entail a profound and critical engagement with the colonial past, not its erasure. It is rather a continuous negotiation of languages, materials, and aesthetics which can deconstruct the official narratives offered of colonial histories.

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Notes

1. The renewed definition of the museum took place in 2019, with the complete definition as follows; "*A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing*".
2. Among a growing literature, see (A. E. Coombes 1994), (Barringer and Flynn 1998), (Penny 2002) and (Kriegel 2007). There are a number of books on exhibitions of colonialism in various forms and venues, including (Bloembergen 2006) and (Mathur 2007). Also see (Giblin, Ramos and Grout 2019, 471-486).
3. According to the United Nations (UN), when it was established in 1945, almost a third of the world's population then - lived in Territories that were non-self-governing, dependent on colonial powers. Today, there are 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories such as the French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), and American Samoa are some of the territories still administered by countries that were former colonisers such as France, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (US). See UN's issues and campaigns for decolonisation (https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en).
4. Settler colonialism involves colonisers permanently settling in a region, displacing, or marginalizing Indigenous populations to establish dominance. Unlike traditional colonialism, it focuses on replacing native societies with settler institutions. Examples include: the United States (US) with the European settlers displaced Native Americans, in Australia and New Zealand; the British settlers marginalised the Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples, as well as in Canada where Indigenous peoples faced systemic displacement. Lastly, the ongoing settler colonialism is Israel and its project of displacing Palestinians and carrying out genocide.
5. Three key points that distinguish colonialism from other forms of domination; a) its

manipulation and transformation of an entire society; b) its emphasis on hierarchical cultural dissimilarity between coloniser and colonised, with a distinct antipathy toward intellectual exchange and counter-acculturation; and c) colonialism is not only a structural relationship "but also a particular interpretation of this relationship" (Osterhammel 2005, 16)

6. After the independence of Indonesia, the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam restyled itself the IndiesMuseum, then in 1950 became the Royal Tropic Institute (Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, KIT) with the museum proper renamed the Tropical Museum (Tropenmuseum). While in France, the Quai Branly Museum now contains the collections of the now-closed *Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie* (National Museum of Arts of Africa and Oceania) and the ethnographic department of the *Musée de l'Homme.* The *Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie* began as the colonial exhibition of 1931, was renamed in 1935 the *Musée de la France d'Outre-mer,* then in 1960 the *Musée des Arts africains et océaniens,* and finally in 1990 the *Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie.* In 2003 the museum's collection was merged into the Quai Branly Museum. See (Sauvage 2007) and Royal Tropic Institute website, https://www.kit.nl/about-us/our-history/.
7. A time of modern colonial capitalism, driven by militarised companies with superior military power to conquer and hold territories far from their metropole in Europe. It was during that period, museums in Europe were entangled with colonialism while actively acquiring and collecting of objects.
8. The Perak Museum was opened by Hugh Low; the third British resident of Perak and the museum was meant to be part of official research on material culture.
9. The Sarawak Museum was established by Charles Brooke in 1860. A temporary museum was set up in 1886 but a proper museum was built later and eventually opened its door to the public on 4th August 1891. See Sarawak Museum website: https://museum.sarawak.gov.my.
10. The Selangor Museum was built by the British and Selangor governments in 1898 but the right wing of the museum was destroyed in 1945 during the World War II. While museum collection was moved to the Perak Museum, the old museum structure was demolished to make way for the new National Museum in 1963.
11. The old Selangor Museum was of the Flemish style of architecture and Victorian type of display. A legacy continued in the Muzium Negara. See (Sheppard 1964, 32-34).
12. The Sarawak Museum was a Victorian building before its extension in 1911, see (Leh 1993, 16) and the Perak Museum until today has been described to maintained the building since its opening, refer, (Perak 2018) and http://www.jmm.gov.my/ms/muzium/muzium-perak.
13. There 21 museums and one gallery (Galeria Perdana) under the Department of Museums Malaysia currently. There are no museums under the Department of Museums Malaysia in states such as Pulau Pinang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Sabah, and Sarawak. Although there are other museums in several states such as Kedah, Pahang and Melaka under the Department of Museums Malaysia, they coexist with the other museums under the State government.
14. From 1990 to 2023, the department have been mainly under the ministry of arts and culture that has been renamed or rebranded according to the government of that time. Various names of the ministry of arts and culture include Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Tourism (1990), Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Heritage (2004), Ministry of Unity, Culture, Arts, and Heritage (2008), Ministry of Information, Communication, and Culture (2009), Ministry of Tourism and Culture (2013-2018) and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture Malaysia (2018-2023).

15. Learning in museums in Malaysia come in various forms such as through guided tours, lectures, workshops and publications. See (Yatim 2005).
16. The administrative system consists of the Sultan at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy, assisted by five senior officials – the *Bendahara* (Chief Minister), the *Penghulu Bendahari* (Finance Minister), the *Temenggung* (Minister of Defence), the *Laksamana* (Admiral) and the *Syahbandar* (Harbour Masters).
17. *Hukum Kanun Melaka* (Canon Laws of Melaka) and the *Undang-undang Laut Melaka* (Melaka's Laws of the Sea).
18. The text written for the diorama accompanying the info panel under the title '*A Centre for the Propagation of Islam in the Archipelago'* in Gallery B of the Muzium Negara (accessed / visited on 7 November 2024).
19. The 'ruler' mentioned in the text, one can only assume it was Sultan Megat Iskandar Shah (r. 1414-1423/4), the second ruler of Melaka, who reverted to Islam as mentioned in the earlier panel, '*Comes to Melaka*'.
20. Refer to Figure 1, the exhibition layout, info panels on Brunei and Sulu is position in number 18.
21. There is a ship model however in the Gallery B, but it was the model of a Javanese ship, which is not related to the Melaka-Portuguese clash.
22. The text written on the info panel for the *Porta de Santiago, A Famosa, Melaka* replica in Gallery C of the Muzium Negara (accessed / visited on 7 November 2024).
23. On the Melaka grand mosque, see (Mokhtar 2023). For the accounts of the dismantling of the stonework of Melaka's royal mosque and other mosques are by Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da India (1858 [c.1556]),* cited in (Pintado 1993, 243); and by Giovanni da Empoli in a letter of 1514, cited in (Loureiro 2008, 74-92).
24. The paper will reduce the term 'Penang' as it is colonial term and will use the term 'Pulau Pinang.'
25. The text written on the info panel for '*The British Occupation of Penang, Singapore and Malacca'* in Gallery C of the Muzium Negara (accessed / visited on 7 November 2024). The term 'betrayal' or 'treason' by Francis Light was not mentioned, however according to a letter from Francis Light to Sultan Abdullah, dated 13th March 1785 (MS 40320/7, f. 148 1785) in (Merican and Amin 2021). *"…and so, after awarding Pulau Pinang, the enemies of the Yang Dipertuan coming from the sea and from land will be the enemies of the company."* What this means is that Sultan Abdullah and his territory will be protected by the East India Company (EIC) from his enemy, especially the Siamese and Burmese, but the Francis Light did not fulfill that promise.
26. The Braddell Parliamentary Paper 465/74 1873, page 165, paragraph 41 mentioned four problems for the British government find solution in Perak, but the disputed succession to the Perak throne and the position of the Mentri in Larut were not genuine problems at all as explained in (Wynne 2000, 282-298).
27. At the end of the third Larut War in 1873, the revenues of Larut had fallen from $15,000 to $ 1,500 a month. (Wynne 2000, 285).
28. The text written on the info panel for 'Natural Rubber' under section of British Intervention in Gallery C of the Muzium Negara (accessed / visited on 7 November 2024). Refer also *Figure 3*.
29. The warriors mentioned were in the states of Perak, Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Terengganu, Kelantan, Pahang, Sarawak, Sabah, and Naning of Melaka.
30. See the British Colonial Violence and the little war in Perak from (Gordon 2017, 27-94).
31. There are 13 states and a Federal Territory that makes up the fourteen states, namely Kedah, Pahang, Kelantan, Johor, Perak, Perlis, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan,

Terengganu, Sarawak, Penang, Sabah and Melaka. The Federal Territory consist of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya.

32. Before the nineteenth century, there were about 70 Malay kingdoms in the region. See (Ming 2016).
33. Jawi script is Malay language written in Arabic script with five additional letters constructed to fit the Malay phonemes but not found in classical Arabic alphabet.
34. If it is 213 Hijri, it would be between 828 and 829 CE. However, no further information was provided in the gallery.
35. As suggested by (Arainikasih and Hafnidar 2018, 105-120).
36. In 2014, the National Library of Malaysia released the Dasar Manuskrip Melayu or Malay Manuscript Policy, which defined Malay manuscripts as anything that is handwritten using Jawi script in the Malay language about the Malay world and civilisation and at least 100 years old.
37. For Ilkhanid miniature paintings and manuscript as tool for Islamic revivalism, see (Gruber 2010) and for the role of calligraphy in Sunni revival, see (Tabbaa 2022), chapter 2.
38. It was mentioned in the Gallery B about Bahasa Melayu being the *lingua franca* during the Melaka period.
39. Using the *bilad al-Jawah* to signify the Islamic Jawi identity. The term came to surface in Arabic and Persian texts, which has since given the *nisba* (a name qualifier indicating one's geographic origin) "*al-Jawi*" to the region's collective Muslim community. With a tradition of writing in Indic alphabets and a large Sanskrit-sourced lexicon, the Malay tongue adapted the Jawi; an alphabet of Arabo-Persianate letters. See (Za'ba 2019), (Seok and Rosli 2015) and (Tajudeen 2017).

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