

# A Regional Study of The History of The Muslim Minority In Singapore (1965-1990)

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## Abstract

*This research aims to examine the historical area of Muslim minorities in Singapore during the period 1965 to 1990. Singapore is a multicultural country with a majority Buddhist, Christian and Taoist population, but also has a significant Muslim community. Despite being in a non-Muslim majority, the minority Muslim community has contributed substantially to the country's social, political and economic history. In this study, the author uses a holistic and multidisciplinary historical approach to understand the dynamics of the Muslim minority historical region. Data and primary sources were collected from historical archives, academic literature, and interviews with historical witnesses who had direct experience of the research period. This paper describes the development of the Muslim minority historical region in Singapore during the period 1965-1990, including the factors that influenced social and cultural changes in the community. It also considers the role of the government and religious institutions in promoting social integration between minority and majority Muslims. The results show that the minority Muslim community has undergone significant changes during the period. Some of the aspects studied include the development of religious institutions, Islamic education, political participation, and interaction with other religious groups. This research provides new insights into the history of Muslim minorities in Singapore and contributes to further understanding of the dynamics of multiculturalism in the country. The results of this research are expected to be an important reference for future historical and social studies.*

**Keywords:** Muslim Minorities, Singapore, History



## Introduction

Singapore is an island nation located in the southeast of the Asian continent. The country has a long history as a strategic trading center and port that attracts nations from around the world. Geographically, Singapore is in a region rich in cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.

Singapore is known as a multi-ethnic country, where ethnic Chinese make up the majority with a share of 78 percent, followed by Malay (Islam) at 14 percent, Indian 9 percent, and the rest consists of various ethnicities. In this composition, Islam can be categorized as a minority group. Malay ethnicity is very synonymous with Islam considering that more than 99 percent of ethnic Malays are Muslim, although not a few other ethnicities are Muslim. Looking at the experience of various countries, as a minority, Islam is always considered a problem in the process of national development.<sup>1</sup>

While the majority of Singaporeans identify with Buddhism, Christianity and Taoism, the country also has a significant Muslim community. Despite being a minority, Singapore's Muslim community has played an important role in shaping the country's multicultural and social identity.

The historical area of Muslim minorities in Singapore during the time period between 1965 and 1990. This is an interesting period to study as it covers crucial times in Singapore's history, including the separation from Malaysia in 1965 which made Singapore an independent state.<sup>2</sup>

The historical area of Muslim minorities in Singapore has its own uniqueness and dynamics in facing challenges and social changes related to various aspects of life, such as religion, education, politics and economy. As a non-Muslim majority country, how minority Muslim communities interact with the majority and maintain their religious and cultural identity is an interesting question worth exploring.<sup>3</sup>

Singapore as a multicultural country and the importance of understanding the historical region of Muslim minorities in its social and historical context. In addition, the purpose, relevance and methodology of the research used to examine the research questions will be outlined.

By delving deeper into the historical area of Muslim minorities in Singapore in the period 1965 to 1990, it is hoped that this research can provide valuable insights for a deeper understanding of the role and contribution of the Muslim community in

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<sup>1</sup> Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, "Making Sense of an Evolving Identity: A Survey of Studies on Identity and Identity Formation among Malay-Muslims in Singapore," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2006): 371-82.

<sup>2</sup> Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, "Beyond the Rhetoric of Communalism:," in *Reframing Singapore*, ed. Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Derek Heng, Memory - Identity - Trans-Regionalism (Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 69-88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt45kf1j.8>.

<sup>3</sup> Aljunied.

achieving multicultural harmony in Singapore, as well as its implications in understanding the country's social and historical dynamics.

## **Method**

The research method, namely qualitative research, also has the aim of increasing understanding. Qualitative research methods are used to gain a better understanding of the world around us, thus requiring researchers to focus on the meanings and processes that shape social phenomena. Therefore, qualitative research is conducted through an in-depth study of a social phenomenon from a particular region, group, or individual. The intended qualitative method is to describe the various tools and resources that can be used to collect data that comes in the form of spoken or written language that is not formalised into numbers and then analyse it.<sup>4</sup>

This historical approach is expected to provide in-depth insights into the historical area of Muslim minorities in Singapore and contribute significantly to the understanding of the dynamics of the country's multicultural society.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **From Tumasik to Singapore: The Origin of Singapore**

The country of Singapore was called the Tumasik region, and since the late 12th century it was one of the ten beautiful cities under Majapahit rule. Included in the nagarakertagama manuscript is also the mention of tamasek as cities included in the colonisation of the majapahit kingdom in Java. Later changed to Singapore. By a son of the Tamil king named Sang Nila Utama with his wife Banten princess Wan Sri Bini while sailing to this area. Based on Malay historical legend, after these two people and their entourage arrived at this place, they saw a wild animal crossing the road. The beast was as big as a goat, it turned out to be a lion, and Sang Nila Utama gave this city the name Singapore.<sup>5</sup>

The area now known as Singapore was originally inhabited by an indigenous tribe called the Malays. Malay fishermen and traders settled on the island since prehistoric times, capitalising on its strategic location at the crossroads of trade routes connecting the Middle East, India and China. They lived in harmony with nature and built a thriving community along the coast of Singapore.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Umar Suryadi Bakry, "Metode Penelitian Hubungan Internasional," *Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar* 14 (2016): 27.

<sup>5</sup> Yun Tsiao Hsu, "Notes on the Historical Position of Singapore," *TA - TT -*, 1962, 22, <https://doi.org/LK> - <https://worldcat.org/title/969393365>.

<sup>6</sup> "Singapore Tourism Board. 'History of Singapore,'" n.d., <https://www.visitsingapore.com/see-do-singapore/history/>.

In the 15th century, Singapore was part of the Majapahit Empire in Java. However, in the early 16th century, the Portuguese arrived in the region and introduced European influence to Singapore. They sought to control the spice trade in the region and built a fort in Singapore. Subsequently, the Dutch took control of Singapore from the Portuguese in the mid-17th century and made it part of the Dutch East Indies. However, the Dutch presence in Singapore did not last long, and in 1819, a British merchant named Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles arrived on the island. Raffles saw Singapore's potential as a strategic port and established a British trading post here.<sup>7</sup>

In the following decades, Singapore thrived as a trading centre, with an increasing inflow of immigrants from countries such as China, India and Arabia. In 1824, Singapore was officially declared a British Crown colony and became part of the Straits Settlements, which also included the surrounding territories. From the 14th century to 1511 AD, Singapore became part of Malacca. Parameswara, who was originally a Hindu who was expelled by Majapahit from Tumasik, then founded the Malacca kingdom 1396-1414 and reclaimed the Tumasik/Singapore area. As a result of intimate relations with Muslim merchants, Parameswara eventually embraced Islam and took the title Sultan Iskandar Syah.<sup>8</sup> In the 18th century Singapore was then under the rule of the Johor sultanate, with a tumenggung as head of government. In the 19th century Singapore became a very important transit port because of its strategic route, especially in channeling and bridging between traders from western regions such as Arabia, Persia, India and even Europeans with traders from China. The Europeans finally paid attention to the function of the port of Singapore.<sup>9</sup>

In 1942, Singapore fell to the Japanese during World War II and experienced a difficult period of colonisation. However, after the war ended, Singapore again became a British colony. In 1959, Singapore was granted self-governing status as a state within the British Commonwealth, and in 1963, joined the Federation of Malaysia. However, political and economic strife led to Singapore gaining full independence in 1965 and becoming an independent sovereign state.

Since then, Singapore has made tremendous progress in many fields. With stable leadership, pro-business government policies, and a focus on education and innovation, Singapore has successfully established itself as a financial, trade, and technology centre in Southeast Asia. The country is also renowned for its modern infrastructure, efficient transport system and high quality of life.

From Tumasik to Singapore, this journey illustrates the remarkable transformation of an island once inhabited by Malays into a developed and globally influential nation. Singapore is a successful example of harnessing cultural diversity,

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<sup>7</sup> "Singapore Tourism Board. 'History of Singapore.'"

<sup>8</sup> James Nach, *Malaysia Dan Singapura Dalam Lukisan*, Terj. R. S (Jakarta: Mutiara, 1976), 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> A Josey, *Singapore: Its Past, Present, and Future* (University of Queensland Press, 1980), 17, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=VLhGAAAMAAJ>.

limited natural resources and hard work to achieve economic and social progress. Its long history and rich cultural heritage keep Singapore an attractive destination for travellers from all over the world.

## **Singapore Before Raffles and the Raffles Era (British Colony)**

### **Pre-Raffles**

Singapore, an island nation located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, had a rich and interesting history before the arrival of Stamford Raffles in 1819. Before the arrival of Europeans, Singapore was already a place inhabited by various indigenous tribes, especially the Malays. In prehistoric times, the island was home to Malays who lived in harmony with the natural surroundings. They capitalised on its strategic location on the maritime trade route between the Middle East, India and China. Singapore, known as Temasek or Tumasik in those days, became an important trading centre and port.

During the 14th century, the Srivijaya kingdom in Sumatra, led by king Sang Nila Utama, is thought to have had influence in this region. It is said that this king landed in Singapore and saw a lion, which later became the city's emblem. While there is no concrete evidence of the lion's presence on the island, this legend has become an important part of Singapore's identity.

During the 15th century, Singapore was part of the Majapahit Empire in Java. However, in the 16th century, Europeans, particularly the Portuguese, began to visit and control trade in the region in their bid to control the spice trade routes. The Portuguese were later replaced by the Dutch, who took control of Singapore in the mid-17th century and made it part of the Dutch East Indies.

During this period, Singapore experienced a significant decline in trade and economic activity due to competition from other ports in the area, such as Melaka and Batavia (now Jakarta). Singapore was abandoned and left in a state of neglect for some time. New developments occurred when Stamford Raffles, a British officer and administrator, arrived in Singapore in 1819. Raffles saw Singapore's strategic potential as a natural harbour and granted permission to the British East India Company to establish a trading post on the island. This decision gave Singapore a fresh start, and in the following decades, it developed into an important trading centre in the region.

However, the history of pre-Raffles Singapore is an important part of the country's story. These historical traces show the island's importance as a place inhabited and traded by various groups before British colonisation. Understanding pre-Raffles Singapore provides a deeper insight into the city's cultural and historical roots before it became what we know today.

## **Raffles Era**

In 1819, Raffles, then the British Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, arrived in Singapore. The motivation behind his visit was to expand British power in Southeast Asia and establish a strong trading post on the island. The choice of Singapore as a new trading location was due to its strategic geographical advantages, with deep waters and a favourable position in the middle of the busy trade routes between China, India and Southeast Asia. Within a short time, Raffles managed to secure an agreement with the Sultan of Johor, who was the local leader, to open a free port in Singapore. This move attracted traders and businessmen from various countries, including China, India and Europe, who saw great potential in trade on the island.

Raffles had a grand vision for Singapore. He developed plans to design a modern city that would act as the region's main trading centre. He introduced laws regulating trading activities and built infrastructure such as roads, warehouses and administrative offices. Raffles also involved the local Malay community in the management of the city, recognising their cultural interests and creating harmonious cooperation.

In 1824, Singapore officially became a British Crown colony. This change in status had a major impact on the development of the city. The British sent a governor and military forces to administer the colony. Singapore became part of a region known as the Straits Settlements, which also included Penang and Melaka. This union gave Singapore greater protection and security, as well as better economic benefits through access to Britain's vast colonial markets. Under British rule, Singapore experienced rapid development. Singapore's harbour became one of the busiest in the world, connecting trade routes between China, India, Europe and the Southeast Asian region. This success made Singapore a prosperous trading centre, and the city continued to grow and expand in terms of population and economic activity.

During the British colonial period, Singapore also became a centre of administration and government. The British legal system was implemented, and government institutions were established to manage the colony. In addition, schools and educational institutions were built to improve the education and quality of life of the local population. Singapore in the Raffles era was the beginning of a remarkable transformation for the island. British colonisation brought changes in everything from the economy to infrastructure and governance. The legacy of this era is still visible in Singapore today, with a well-preserved legacy of British culture, architecture and legal system.

Singapore's development as a British colony has provided a strong foundation for the country's future growth and success. Singapore's position as a trading centre



and economic hub has continued to evolve over time, making the country one of the most developed in the world today.

### **The Entry and Development of Islam in Singapore**

The arrival of Islam in Singapore The entry of Islam into Singapore is related to the process of the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia. Regarding the process of the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia, historians differ on when and where it came from. There have been many studies on the theories of the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia, both theories and critical reviews of these theories. Therefore, this explanation is presented briefly based on one of the existing reviews.<sup>10</sup> The following are the theories of Islamisation in Southeast Asia.

1. The first theory, the "Arabian Theory", states that Islam came to Southeast Asia directly from Arabia, specifically from Hadramaut. According to this theory, Islam entered Southeast Asia during the first century Hijri or the 7th and 8th centuries AD. The process of Islam's entry at this time was characterised by the dominance of Arab traders in the West-East trade. This theory is supported by the fact that Chinese sources mention that by the 7th century AD, there was an Arab trader who became the leader of an Arab Muslim settlement on the coast of Sumatra.<sup>11</sup>

Crawfurd supports this theory, although he still considers the role of Muslims from the east coast of India, the "*Mohammedans*" of East India. Kaijzer, on the other hand, argues that Islam in Southeast Asia did come from the Middle East, but more precisely from Egypt, because Muslims in Southeast Asia, especially in the archipelago, are predominantly of the same Shafi'i school of thought as those in Egypt.

Niemann and de Hollander slightly revised Keijzer's view, stating that the source of Islam in the archipelago came from Hadramaut. Veth, on the other hand, only mentions "*the Arabs*", without revealing whether it was from Hadramaut, Egypt or India. This theory is also strongly held by Hamka, who says that despite the role of Persia and India, Islam first entered Southeast Asia brought directly by Arab Muslims. Likewise, Al-Attas asserts that Islam entered Southeast Asia

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<sup>10</sup> The explanation of the theory of the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia is entirely derived from, including the sources, referenced in the notes in, Boharudin, "Kedatangan Islam Dan Islamisasi Di Asia Tenggara," 2011, <https://boharudin.blogspot.com/2011/04/kedatangan-islam-dan-islamisasi-di-asia.html>. However, the theories he put forward were confirmed by referring to Azyumardi Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan* (Bandung: Rosdakarya, 2000), 31-34. Azyumardi Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara...*, h. 31-34. In addition, as a reference Syamsuddin Arif, "Islam Di Nusantara: Historiografi Dan Metodologi," *Islamia, Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Peradaban Islam* 7, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII* (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 1994), 6; Boharudin, "Kedatangan Islam Dan Islamisasi Di Asia Tenggara"; Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan*, 31.

directly brought by Arab Muslims. This can be proven by what he calls the “general theory of the Islamisation of the Nusantara”, which must be based on the history of Malay-Indonesian Islamic literature and the history of the Malay Worldview as seen in the changes of key concepts and terms in Malay-Indonesian literature in the 10th to 11th centuries AD. According to him, after Islam came, there was a shift in Malay Worldview. Similarly, before the 17th century CE, all relevant Islamic literature on religion in Southeast Asia was derived from Arabic names, not from Indian Muslims. Even the names and titles brought by the bearers of Islam to Southeast Asia were Arab-Persian Muslims.

2. The second theory, the “Indian Theory” put forward by several Dutch scholars, including Pijnappel (1872), who said that Islam in the Archipelago came from India, specifically Gujarat, so this theory is better known as the “Gujarat Theory”. According to him, the origin of Islam established contact with Southeast Asia departing from the Gujarat and Malabar regions. Based on French translations of the travel records of Sulaiman, Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta, he states that the Arabs of the Shafi'i school, after immigrating and settling in the Gujarat and Malabar regions of India, then brought Islam to the archipelago. In Pijnappel's view, the earliest contact was through trade. He believes that through trade it was possible to establish contact between Islam and Southeast Asia, even according to him Persian terms from India were used in the language of the people in the port cities.<sup>12</sup>

This theory was confirmed by Snouck Hurgronje who said that when Arab Muslim communities were already established in several cities in the harbours of the Indian Subcontinent, they entered the Malay Archipelago as the first propagators of Islam. He mentions the port city of Dakka in South India as the carrier of Islam to the Archipelago. After that, it was the Arabs, especially those who identified themselves as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad by using the titles Sayyid and Sharif, who carried out and completed the process of propagating Islam, either as preachers or as Sultans. Morrison, in 1951, confirmed India as the origin of Islam in the archipelago. He named the Koromandel coast as the place where Muslim traders travelled to the archipelago.<sup>13</sup>

3. The third theory, the “Bengal Theory”, was presented by Q. Qadarullah Fatimi who concluded that Islam entered Southeast Asia or Nusantara through Bengal (Bangladesh). According to him, Islam first arrived around the 8th century AH (14th AD). He drew this conclusion based on Tome Pires' statement that the majority of prominent people in Pasai were Bengalis or their descendants. Islam first appeared in the 11th century in Peninsular Malaya from the east coast, not the

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<sup>12</sup> Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII*, 3; Boharudin, “Kedatangan Islam Dan Islamisasi Di Asia Tenggara”; Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan*, 32.



west (Malacca), through Canton, Phanrang (Vietnam), Leran and Trengganu. In addition, some of the inscriptions found in Trengganu are also more similar to those in Leran, East Java.<sup>14</sup>

4. The fourth theory, the "Persian Theory" states that it was Persian traders who brought Islam to Southeast Asia. This theory is supported by strong data on the voyages of the Persians to India and through Southeast Asia to China. According to the Chinese journal Yuan-Tchao, who wrote Tcheng-yuan-sin-ting-che-kiao-mou-lou in the 99th century, recorded that about 35 ships from Persia had anchored in Palembang in 99 AH (717 AD).<sup>15</sup>
5. The fifth theory says that the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia was fuelled by a "battle" between Islam and Christianity for followers or adherents of each religion. This theory was proposed by Schrieke. He argues that, in fact, the Portuguese expansion, which later became colonisation efforts, was a continuation of the Crusades in Europe and the Middle East. According to him, the Portuguese adventures and voyages to Asia were an ambition and desire for honour combined with religious fervour. After they were able to expel the Moors (Muslims) from the Iberian Peninsula, then conquered several areas along the west coast of Africa until they reached the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, then they continued colonisation in Southeast Asia.<sup>16</sup>

Schrieke's opinion is reinforced by Reid who says that in the 15th and 17th centuries there was an increase and strengthening of religious polarisation and exclusivism, especially Islam and Christianity. However, this theory was criticised by Naquib Al-Attas who was quite harsh. According to him, Christianity as a religion is not an important enough reason to show the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. Because, for Al-Attas, Christianity emerged and gained influence in the archipelago during the 19th century. Al-Attas' rejection is reasonable, because he insists that Islam spread in Southeast Asia since the 1st century AH or 7th century AD.<sup>17</sup>

Taking into account the above theories, Islamisation in Singapore is not expected to be different from the process of Islamisation that occurred in other regions. The Islam that developed in Singapore was the same as the Islam that

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<sup>14</sup> Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Arif, "Islam Di Nusantara: Historiografi Dan Metodologi," 17; Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan*, 32. which mentions Pijnappel's view that people in the port cities of the archipelago already commonly used Persian terms, despite having travelled through India first.

<sup>16</sup> Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII*, 13; Boharudin, "Kedatangan Islam Dan Islamisasi Di Asia Tenggara." This theory is more of a "Conversion Theory" or a theory of the conversion of Southeast Asians to Islam. About the conversion of Southeast Asians to Islam Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan*, 37-39.

<sup>17</sup> Azra, *Renaissance Islam Asia Tenggara Sejarah Wacana Dan Kekuasaan*, 32-34; Arif, "Islam Di Nusantara: Historiografi Dan Metodologi"; Boharudin, "Kedatangan Islam Dan Islamisasi Di Asia Tenggara."

developed, especially in Malacca, which in this case was the Shafi'i school of thought. According to the mazhab theory, it is possible that the Islam that developed in Singapore came from the Coromandel Coast and Malabar, or from Hadramawt. But given the dominant position of Hadramaut traders in Singapore, it is also possible that in the second wave, in the early 19th century, Islam developed in Singapore from Hadramaut. As for the carrier, since Singapore became better known after it was opened by Raffles and became a trading port since 1819, it was the traders who played a role here. As for when Islam entered, the data that can be held is that before the Hadramaut traders entered Singapore, namely in 1824, a mosque was built which is estimated to have been made in 1820. And it is the oldest mosque in Singapore. The previous period, between the 14th and 18th centuries, was inhabited by pirates and sea bandits.

In the context of Islamisation in Southeast Asia, Tumasik (then Singapore) occupies a strategic position in the Strait of Malacca. "The strategic position which is an added value that Singapore has made it a trade transit from various regions. On the other hand, apart from being a trade transit, its strategic location has also enabled it to become a centre of information and communication for Islamic preaching, both during the Malacca sultanate (before the arrival of European colonials), then colonial, until the early 20th century. This important role soon ended when Singapore separated from the federated state of Malaysia, Muslims became a minority, then the Muslim community, which is mostly Malay, occupied a second-class position under ethnic Chinese. In later developments, Islam in Singapore was spread by scholars from various parts of Southeast Asia and the Indian Subcontinent, such as Shaykh Khatib al-Minangkabawi, Shaykh Ahmad Aminudin, Shaykh Habib Ali Habsi.<sup>18</sup> Based on the above theories of Islamisation, it is certain that Muslim traders from Arabia and Persia, in particular, who travelled to the Malacca Straits between the 8th and 11th centuries AD, had also visited and stopped at Tumasik. This was because Tumasik was already an important port city contested by Srivijaya and Majapahit as explained above. However, regarding the arrival of Islam in Tumasik specifically, there are several opinions that can be mentioned, namely:

1. According to Azmi, Islam has come since the first century Hijri, because in the middle of that century, Islamic Arabs had reached the Malay archipelago and at the same time they were preaching Islam.
2. According to Fatimi, around the 8th century AH (14 AD). This opinion relies on the discovery of a lettered stone in Trengganu which is dated 702 AH (1302 AD).
3. According to Majul, 15th or 16th century AD. This opinion is unacceptable because there is also evidence that Islam had entered before that (8th century AH/14 AD), even since the first century AH (7 AD), namely with the discovery of tombstones in Tanjung Inggis Kedah in 1965.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gushairi, "Islam Di Singapura," 2010, <http://agushairi.blogspot.com/2010/09/islam-di-singapura.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Gushairi.

Another opinion says that until now there is no clear evidence of when Islam first entered Singapore, but based on estimates contemporaneous with the active times of Muslim traders in Malacca. Because in the 8th century these Muslim traders had reached Canton, China, which is likely to stop at the islands that have been populated in the Malay peninsula. Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi was one of the Muslim traders who contributed to spreading Islam in Malay land.<sup>20</sup>

Such discrepancies have always occurred because scholars have often looked at it from different perspectives or from different routes of entry. If the trade route followed the one that entered Southeast Asia along the west coast of Aceh, via Barus, in present-day North Sumatra, then it would have reached the Sunda Strait and the southern coast of Java. However, if the trade route entered the Strait of Malacca, then it is certain that the merchant ships would have stopped at Tumasik before continuing their voyages to other regions, especially to China. The shipping route followed the east coast of Sumatra, passing through Malacca, Tumasik, Banten and the North Coast of Java. Therefore, it is not certain when Islam entered Singapore. However, given the bustling trade activities in Tumasik and based on the above sources that Tumasik was also a large trading city at the time, there is a strong suspicion that a Muslim community had grown there between the 8th and 11th centuries AD.

### **Composition of Singapore's Muslim Population Until 1990**

Singapore (formerly Tumasik) itself occupies a strategic position and therefore plays an important role in the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. Since ancient times, Tumasik has been a busy port city visited by merchant ships from various parts of the world, India, Persia, Arabia, and including Europe.<sup>21</sup> Even from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century, Singapore became a centre of information and communication for Islamic propagation, through the production, reproduction and distribution of printed religious books, from Southeast Asia as well as the Middle East and Europe.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of ethnic percentages, Singapore's population has remained relatively stable since the mid-19th century. An impressive demographic shift occurred in the early 19th century, when the Chinese slowly began to take over as a prominent majority population compared to the Malays. As of 1891, Singapore's Chinese population was 67.1%, Malays 19.7%, Indians 8.8% and others, including Europeans and Arabs, 4.3%. A census conducted in 1990 showed the total population of Singapore to be 2.7 million. The composition of the population consists of a Chinese

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<sup>20</sup> Ajid Thohir, *Studi Kawasan Dunia Islam: Perspektif Etnolinguistik Dan Geopolitik*, Jakarta (Rajawali Pers, 2011), 23.

<sup>21</sup> Geoff Wade, "An Early Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia, 900–1300 CE," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, no. 2 (2009): 231–33.

<sup>22</sup> Sugahara Yumi, "Publications of Kitabs and Development of Using Jawi and Pegon Scripts," *Dalam Kawashima Midori, A Provincial Catalog of Southeast Asian Kitabs of Sophia University*, Tokyo: Sophia University, 2010, 9.

majority with 77.7%, Malays 14.1%, Indians 7.1% and others 1.1%.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, if the population is seen from its religious composition in the same census in 1990, it is as follows: Buddhism 31.1%; Taoism 22.4%; Islam 15.3%; Christianity 12.5%; Hinduism 3.7% and other religions 0.6%.<sup>24</sup> Judging from the religious composition, ethnic Malays are predominantly followers of Islam. Or it can even be said that ethnic Malay means Islam.

The 14.1% composition of the Malay population is equal to 380,600 people. In terms of education level, they are: Non-Formal Education 15.1%; Primary Education 32.7%; Junior Secondary Education 47.3%; Senior Secondary Education 3.5% and Higher Education 1.4%. Meanwhile, when viewed from the composition of their occupations, they are: Technical and Professional 9.7%; Administrative and Managerial 1.1%; Religious Teachers 15.4%; Sales and Service 14.0%; Agriculture and Fishing 0.3%; Production and Relations 13.57% and others 2.5%. Regarding labour participation between men and women, it is: male workers 78.3% and female workers 47.3%.<sup>25</sup>

In the twenty years between 1970 and 1990, according to Sharon Siddique, there have been dramatic changes in Muslim-Malay Singapore. There has been an increase, for example, in education: in junior secondary education from 36.4% to 47.3%; in senior secondary from 1.0% to 3.5% and in tertiary education from 0.2% to 1.4%. In terms of occupation, what is most interesting is the decreasing percentage in agriculture (from 5.3% to 0.3%); sales and service (from 27% to 14%), and the sharp increase in production (43% to 57%). A shift has also occurred in the ability of ethnic Malay skills to keep up with high-tech developments. This is because higher wages are only possible with higher levels of skills and productivity. The average monthly family income is \$ 2,246.

### **The Process of Islamisation and Civilisation Building in Singapore**

The process of Islamisation in Singapore cannot be separated from the presence of ethnic Malays who inhabit the island. As mentioned above, the identification of Islam cannot be separated from the ethnic Malays. However, an early problem in the development of Singapore's Muslim community was the lack of traditional indigenous leaders, which affected their interests when dealing with the British colonial government, which had its own priorities.

In the 19th century, Singapore's Muslim community fell into two categories: indigenous Muslims and migrant Muslims. Indigenous Muslims were those who had settled there from the beginning. These indigenous Muslims were Malays. This group constitutes the Muslim-majority. While Muslim-migrants include Bugis, Javanese, Sumatran, Riau, Arab and Muslim-Indian migrants. Sharon Siddique distinguishes

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<sup>23</sup> John L. Esposito, ed., *Ensiklopedi Oxford: Dunia Islam Modern*, jilid 5 (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Sharon Joy Siddique, *Being Muslim in Singapore: Change, Community and Consciousness*, 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Siddique.

between migrants from within the region, namely Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Riau and Bawean; and migrants from outside the region, namely Arabs and Indians.<sup>26</sup>

Although Arab and Indian Muslims are a minority, they are among the wealthier and more educated classes. Those of Arab descent have formed a network of commercial elites, owning land and housing, investing in plantations and trade, and controlling the batik, tobacco and spice trades.

The Jawi Peranakans, descendants of Malabar-Indian marriages with Malay women, are traditional Malay leaders who are credited with preserving the Malay language and nationalism. They mostly work as da'i, translators, madrasa teachers and as traders. Their position ranks second only to the Arabs. Thus, they are classified as an elite group, both in social and economic strata.

These people, mainly Arab migrants, were the main funders of mosques, educational institutions and Islamic organisations.<sup>27</sup> Since the mid-19th century, when the Dutch imposed repressive measures and restrictions on Indonesian pilgrims, Singapore became their alternative departure point. The brokers of the pilgrimage were Arab migrants.

It is recorded that in 1824, the first Arab to enter Singapore was Sayyid Abdul Rahman Al-Sagoff, along with his son Ahmed. In 1848, he founded the firm of Al-Sagoff and Company. His son, Sayyid Ahmed married Raja Siti, brother of Hj. Fatimah, Sultanah of Gowa in Sulawesi. In later developments, many Arab families became the economic elite in Singapore, such as the Al-Kaff, Al-Sagoff and AlJaffri families. In addition, Arabs played an important role in the publication and distribution of religious books and the spread of orthodox and reformist Islamic thought from the Middle East in Southeast Asia. They also played an important role in education. Among the most important madrasahs were *Madrasah Al-Junied al-Islamiya*, *Madrasah Wak Tanjong*, *Madrasah Al-Sagoff* and *madrasah Al-Ma'arif al-Islamiah*.<sup>28</sup>

In 1876 the Jawi Peranakans began publishing Malay newspapers and magazines that were used for teaching in Malay schools. They sponsored the publication of Malay romances and poetry and translated Arabic religious texts. They endeavoured to align the Malay language with English and absorb Arabic into Malay. Sheikh Muhammad Tahir (1867-1957), who had studied in Mecca and absorbed the thoughts of Abduh, published the magazine *Al-Imam* in Singapore.

*Al-Imam* tried to awaken Muslims to the importance of education. *Al-Imam* emphasised the importance of using reason in religious matters and challenged traditional beliefs and practices. Arabs, Jawi Peranakans and Malays, had also sponsored the reconciliation of Islamic reformism and the Naqsyabandiyah and Qadiriyyah orders from Mecca and Cairo. From Singapore Islamic reform spread to other parts of Southeast Asia through trade, the hajj and movements of students,

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<sup>26</sup> Mona Abaza, "A Mosque of Arab Origin in Singapore: History, Functions and Networks," *Archipel* 53, no. 1 (1997): 61-83.

<sup>27</sup> Ira M Lapidus, "A History of Islamic Societies" (Cambridge University Press Cambridge, n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> Abaza, "A Mosque of Arab Origin in Singapore: History, Functions and Networks."



religious teachers and Sufis. The prominent role of Singapore and Penang was thus as cultural mediators; translating the new purity, rationalism and vitality of Islam into Malay and also into terms relevant to the local, Nusantara-Malay framework.

## **Conclusion**

The historical area of Muslim minorities in Singapore during the period 1965 to 1990 provides an in-depth understanding of the role and contribution of the Muslim community in the context of a multicultural society. The results show some important findings. Development and Transformation, during this period, the Muslim minority historical region experienced significant development and transformation. The Muslim community continued to adapt to social, political and economic changes in Singapore, and had an active role in shaping the country's identity and character.

Role of the Government, The Singapore government plays a key role in facilitating social integration between minority and majority Muslims. Contribution to Social and Economic Life: The minority Muslim community makes meaningful contributions to various aspects of social and economic life in Singapore. Active participation in education, entrepreneurship and the social sector has strengthened their standing and influence in society. The minority Muslim community in Singapore plays a role in the context of a vibrant multicultural society. The research also highlights the importance of co-operation and recognition of religious and cultural diversity in achieving social harmony in the country. The results of this study are expected to serve as a valuable reference for further research on the history and lives of minority communities in multicultural environments.

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