

CREATING “GREATER MALAYSIA”

Decolonization and the Politics of Merger



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TAN TAI YONG

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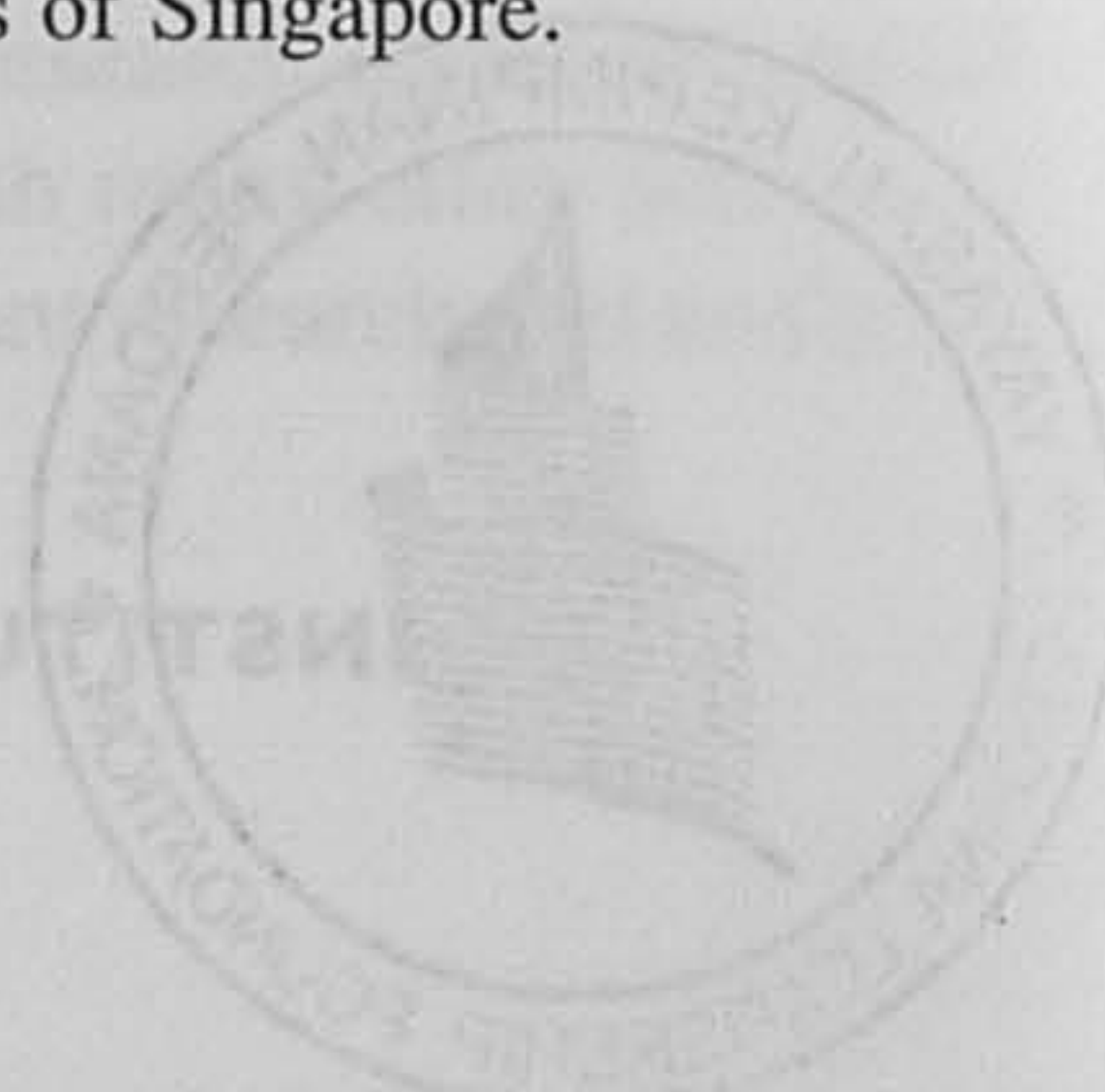
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Preface

This study of the politics of merger between Singapore and Malaysia stems from my on-going interest in the emergence of post-colonial states in the aftermath of empire in Asia. While the formation of Malaysia has attracted the attention of scholars since the late 1960s, the contexts and processes have not been subjected to deep historical analysis that could illuminate the critical decisions that were taken during that episode in the history of Singapore and Malaysia. Although there has been a spate of books dedicated to Singapore's association with Malaysia, none has examined, in detail, the manner in which the deal was constructed by the major parties concerned — British officials on the ground and in Whitehall, the People's Action Party (PAP) government in Singapore and the Alliance leaders at Kuala Lumpur. With the de-classification of official records of the 1960s in the British archives in the past few years, the opportunity has presented itself for historians to dig deeper and to provide a fuller picture of the events of that momentous period — the transition between the end of British rule and Singapore's independence through Malaysia.

My interest in the history of Singapore's independence through merger was further piqued by the publication of the memoirs of Singapore's founding Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew in 1998. In volume 1, *The Singapore Story*, Lee recounted Singapore's tumultuous years in Malaysia, culminating in separation in 1965. The story of the failed merger between Singapore and Malaysia has generated excitement from both sides of the causeway, especially on the personalities and issues that had contributed to the break-up. Analysing the contentious and acrimonious relationship between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur between 1963 and 1965, it became apparent that the seeds of dissension had indeed been sown earlier, when the deal was being worked out that would bring Singapore, the Federation of Malaya

and the Borneo Territories of North Borneo and Sarawak together to form Malaysia. To understand the difficulties that emerged between 1963 and 1965, it is therefore necessary to take a few steps back — to look into the history of the making of Malaysia — to understand why the new Federation that was constructed in 1963 was fraught with so many innate problems. This study is intended as an analysis in the making of a flawed federation, the important prequel to the story of separation.

In the course of the research and writing of this book, I have benefited from the guidance and support from several colleagues and friends. It was Edwin Lee, former Head of the History Department, who set me on the path by suggesting that I venture beyond my preoccupation with South Asia to explore Singapore's own historical transition from colonial to post-colonial state. As Head, he generously provided me with time to research and write, and it was with his support that I was able to secure a research grant from the National University of Singapore to undertake research in London and Australia. I would like to acknowledge the university's support in this regard. Ernest Chew and Albert Lau, my colleagues in the History Department, encouraged and guided me in the early stages of my research.

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Pitt Kuan Wah, Director of the National Archives, and his colleagues for facilitating my research through ready access to their archival and oral history collections. Tim Yap Fuan from the Central Library at the National University of Singapore (NUS) has offered constant support by keeping me updated with new publications on Singapore and Malaysia. I am grateful to the Singapore Press Holdings for allowing me use of a number of images from their photograph collections.

In the course of my research I have received timely help from a number of research assistants. I would like to express my thanks to Gabriel Thomas, Claudine Ang and Irene Lim. To Irene, I am especially grateful for her tremendous effort during the final stages of this book. She was able to multi-task admirably, helping with research, bibliographic compilations, proof-reading, and pulling all the loose ends together.

I would like to thank Mr Kesavapany, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, for encouraging me to publish this manuscript,