

HERITAGE CLASSICS

13 MAY 1969

The Darkest Day in Malaysian History

0.505
OM

LEON COMBER



**13 MAY
1969**





13 MAY 1969

The Darkest Day in Malaysian History

LEON COMBER

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1012166



Marshall Cavendish
Editions



Cover design: Benson Tan

© Graham Brash (Pte) Ltd

Cover design © 2009 Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited

Reprinted 2012

This edition published under licence from Graham Brash (Pte) Ltd

by Marshall Cavendish Editions

An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International

1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Request for permission should be addressed to the Publisher, Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited, 1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196. Tel: (65) 6213 9300, fax: (65) 6285 4871. E-mail: genref@sg.marshallcavendish.com. Website: www.marshallcavendish.com/genref

The publisher makes no representation or warranties with respect to the contents of this book, and specifically disclaims any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for any particular purpose, and shall in no events be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damage, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Other Marshall Cavendish Offices

Marshall Cavendish Corporation. 99 White Plains Road, Tarrytown NY 10591-9001, USA • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand) Co Ltd. 253 Asoke, 12th Flr, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongroey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Times Subang, Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

Marshall Cavendish is a trademark of Times Publishing Limited

National Library Board Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

Comber, Leon.

13 May 1969 : the darkest day in Malaysian history / Leon Comber. – Singapore :

Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2009.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13 : 978-981-261-776-7

1. Malaysia – Ethnic relations. 2. Chinese – Malaysia – History. 3. Malays (Asian People) – Malaysia – History. 4. Malaysia – History. I. Title.

DS595

959.505 — dc22

OCN298925246

Printed in Singapore by Times Printers Pte Ltd

959,505
COM



To the 'Children of 13 May'



Contents

<i>List of Plates</i>	viii
<i>Foreword by YTM Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, DMN, KOM, CH</i>	ix
<i>Author's Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xiv
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
1. The Beginnings of Plural Society in Malaya: Chinese and Malays	1
2. The Special Position of the Malays: Historical Background	8
3. Population Growth and Social Change: Chinese and Malays	16
4. Sino-Malay Relations: The Japanese Occupation and British Reoccupation	24
5. The Interplay of Sino-Malay Relations: The Emergency to Merdeka	35
6. Prelude to the 13 May 1969 Riots	51
7. The 13 May Riots	63
8. Aftermath	73
<i>Appendices</i>	89
<i>Notes</i>	103
<i>Bibliography</i>	119
<i>General Index</i>	129

List of Plates

Between pages 50 and 51

1. UMNO political meeting (*author's photo*)
2. Malcolm MacDonald (*University of Malaya Press*)
3. Dato Harun bin Haji Idris (*Federal Photo Library*)
4. Lieut. -Gen. Sir Harold Briggs (*Federal Photo Library*)
5. Dato Onn bin Ja'afar (*University of Malaya Press*)
6. Tunku Abdul Rahman campaigning in the 1955 elections (*Federal Photo Library*)
7. Tunku Abdul Rahman and members of the Federation of Malaya Cabinet (*Paul Popper Ltd.*)
8. Dato Sir Cheng-Lock Tan (*Federal Photo Library*)
9. Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (*Federal Photo Library*)
10. Lee Kuan Yew (*University of Malaya Press*)
11. Tan Siew Sin (*Federal Photo Library*)
12. Syed Ja'afar Albar (*University of Malaya Press*)
13. Sir Henry Gurney (*The Associated Press*)
14. Tun Abdul Razak (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia*)

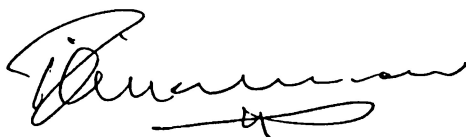
Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to pen a few words of introduction for Leon Comber's historical survey of Sino-Malay relations, leading up to the 13 May 1969 disturbances.

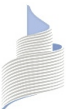
Mr. Comber is indeed well qualified to write this account as he has a good working knowledge of our national language, Bahasa Malaysia, as well as being well versed in Chinese, and as a Malaysian citizen, he is one of the select band of Europeans who has a deep and warm appreciation of our culture and way of life.

It is the only work I know which attempts to provide in such a clear, concise and objective form the main scenario of Sino-Malay relations in Malaysia for the layman to follow. Mr. Comber's style is lucid and attractive, which makes his book easy to read, and he deals with quite complicated issues in a refreshingly clear way. I feel sure that future scholars will be greatly indebted to Mr. Comber's work for providing the framework on which further detailed research may be carried out.

I wish Mr. Comber's book all the success which it deserves and I hope that many of our people will read and benefit from it.



(Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra)



Author's Preface

On 15 March 1981, the *New Straits Times* published the following letter from Maarof Bakar, who described himself as a labourer:

'Many young people, now in their twenties, were eye-witnesses to the race riots of May 13, 1969. They will never be able to forget what they saw.

'They were children then, aged between 10 and 15. But they were old enough to understand what was happening, young enough to be observers rather than participants.

'The images of buildings on fire, soldiers carrying guns through the streets, racial violence, racial hatred and prejudices were magnified in their eyes.

'Today, they are young adults. They feel they have an important mission. They feel they have a responsibility to always remind themselves and others of the time they saw the power of destruction that can be unleashed when emotion defeats reason.

'They search for answers to the questions that disturb them. They search the past, the history of this nation. No group of people are so intense about finding reasons for the riots they witnessed as children. No group of people in this land show greater interest towards race-relations as they do.

'I call them the children of 13 May, and I am proud to be one of them.'

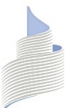
This study, then, is dedicated to the 'children of 13 May' in the hope that it will help them to understand the questions which still haunt them. It is based on an acquaintance (and fascination) with Malaysia extending over thirty-five years, when the author who was then a young staff officer on 34th Indian Corps headquarters, first landed on the west coast of Malaya near Port Swettenham in September 1945 with the 'Operation Zipper' invasion force. However, the actual research and writing was spread over two years or so, and was originally presented as a dissertation in part fulfilment of the degree of MA in Comparative Asian Studies at the University of Hong Kong.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Mary Turnbull, Professor Peter Harris, Dr. Leigh Wright, Professor Khoo Kay Kim, Professor Syed Hussein Alatas, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, Dennis Bloodworth and Leonard Rayner for help in various ways.

I would also like to record my indebtedness to Rupert Emerson's classic study, *Malaysia, A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*, and other works listed in the Bibliography, without which this book could not have been written.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the following authors and publishers for permission to reproduce copyright material from the works indicated: Ooi Jin-Bee and Longman Group Ltd., *Peninsula Malaysia*; R.K. Vasil and Oxford University Press, *The Malaysian General Elections of 1969*; Rupert Emerson and The University of Malaya Press, *Malaysia, A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*; *New Straits Times* of 15 March 1981; Government Printer, Singapore, *The Economic Development of Malaya: Report of a Mission organised by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development*; and Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan 1971—1975*.



Abbreviations

<i>AMCJA</i>	All-Malaya Council of Joint Action	<i>MPABA</i>	Malayan People's Anti-British Army
<i>CIA</i>	Central Intelligence Agency	<i>MPAJA</i>	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
<i>CLC</i>	Communities Liaison Committee	<i>MPAJU</i>	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union
<i>DAP</i>	Democratic Action Party	<i>MRLA</i>	Malayan Races Liberation Army
<i>FAMA</i>	Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority	<i>NCC</i>	National Consultative Council
<i>FELDA</i>	Federal Land Development Authority	<i>NEP</i>	New Economic Policy
<i>FMS</i>	Federated Malay States	<i>NOC</i>	National Operations Council
<i>IMP</i>	Independence of Malaya Party	<i>PAP</i>	People's Action Party
<i>KMM</i>	Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Association of Malay Youths)	<i>PERNAS</i>	Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (State Trading Corporation)
<i>KMT</i>	Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)	<i>PETA</i>	Pembela Tanah Ayer (Defenders of the Motherland)
<i>KRIS</i>	Kesatuan Ra'ayat Indonesia Semenanjung (People's Association of the Indonesian Peninsula)	<i>PMIP</i>	Pan Malaysian Islamic Party
<i>LPM</i>	Labour Party of Malaya	<i>PPP</i>	People's Progressive Party
<i>MARA</i>	Majlis Amanah Ra'ayat (Council of Trust for the Indigenous People)	<i>RIDA</i>	Rural and Industrial Development Authority
<i>MAS</i>	Malay Administrative Service	<i>SMP</i>	Second Malaysia Plan 1971-75
<i>MCA</i>	Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association	<i>SEDC</i>	State Economic Development Corporation
<i>MCP</i>	Malayan Communist Party	<i>UDA</i>	Urban Development Authority
<i>MIC</i>	Malayan/Malaysian Indian Congress	<i>UDP</i>	United Democratic Party
<i>MCS</i>	Malayan Civil Service	<i>UMNO</i>	United Malays National Organization
<i>MNP</i>	Malay Nationalist Party	<i>UMS</i>	Unfederated Malay States

Introduction

This small volume is an attempt to chronicle the long road to the 13 May 1969 riots in Kuala Lumpur, which were acknowledged by the Malaysian authorities to be the most serious racial riots in the history of the country. It is not primarily concerned with recounting the events of that tragic occasion, but is an attempt to lay bare the underlying reasons for what happened and to provide a comprehensive, yet concise, historical picture of the complex Sino-Malay relationship in Peninsular Malaysia, for both layman and student of race relations alike.

In order to do this, the interplay of the two main communities in Peninsular Malaysia, the Malays and Chinese, has been scrutinized from a historical viewpoint, going back to the time of the earliest Chinese settlements in Malaya.

It was only after the tremendous influx of Chinese immigrants in the second half of the nineteenth century that Sino-Malay friction began to grow. There were differences of customs, language, food and religion. But, more importantly, the 'world view' of the two communities was poles apart too. The Chinese were xenophobic and sinocentric. On the other hand, the social and religious structure of the Malays made it impossible for any other religious or ethnic group, with the exception of Arabs or Indian-Muslims, to be integrated with them. Inter-marriage between the two communities, which would have helped to break down racial barriers, was extremely rare, as the non-Malay partner would be required to embrace the Muslim faith.

Most of the early Chinese immigrants were in the true sense of the word 'aliens', and moreover, transient aliens, as the great majority of them had no intention of settling in Malaya but only of seeking their fortune and, if they were fortunate enough, returning, wealthier than they had ever dreamed of, to their ancestral villages in China. However, as the twentieth century progressed there was a growing number of local-born Chinese who began to think of Malaya as their home and who had no intention of returning to China. It was this section of the Chinese community which



began to demand citizenship rights and some say in the running of the country.

When the 1931 Census revealed for the first time that the Malays were outnumbered in their own country by the non-Malays, it came as something of a shock to both the Malays and the British colonial authorities. The Malays were concerned about preserving their heritage and birthright as the indigenous people of the country, a factor which had been recognized by the British in the treaties entered into with the Malay rulers much earlier on. Restrictions were imposed on further immigration by Chinese, and steps were taken to control Chinese schools, which were 'alien enclaves' teaching Chinese values and loyalties inappropriate to the Malayan setting.

The Japanese occupation (1942–5) gave the British Colonial Office time to 'rethink' the situation and to formulate plans for the reoccupation of the country after the Japanese had been defeated. In the meantime, Japanese rule exacerbated the ill-feeling between the Malay and Chinese communities. Although both communities suffered, the Chinese were the worse off because they were distrusted by the Japanese, especially as China had been at war with Japan since 1937, and Chinese communist and other volunteer units had put up a stiff resistance to the Japanese during the closing stages of the battle for Singapore.

The Malayan Union plan which the British introduced on their return to Malaya in 1945 did not find favour in Malay eyes, as it gave away too much to the non-Malays, and it had to be withdrawn and replaced by the Federation of Malaya Agreement, which reaffirmed the 'special position' of the Malays and recognized the sultans as sovereign monarchs, which meant *ipso facto* that the Federation of Malaya was a Malay state.

By the early 1950s, it was clear that the main grounds for dissatisfaction and resentment on the part of the Chinese were their lack of citizenship rights; the national language issue, which they feared would lead to the stamping out of the Chinese language and culture; the national education policy, favouring Malay as the medium of instruction; and what they perceived as the privileged 'special position' of the Malays.

In order to present a united front to the Reid Constitutional Commission which was drafting the constitution for an independent Malaya, UMNO and the MCA leaders agreed in 1956 to a 'bargain' or 'pact' whereby the MCA conceded Malay 'special

rights' in return for more liberal citizenship terms, as well as a free hand for the Chinese in pursuing their economic and commercial interests.

As Tunku Abdul Rahman put it in 1969, 'The Malays have gained for themselves political power. The Chinese and Indians have won for themselves economic power' (see p. 64). It is indeed, this 'bargain' which has bedevilled Sino-Malay relations in more recent times, as the younger generation of Chinese do not wish to abide by it. Moreover, the matter was not made any better by the People's Action Party's campaigning in the 1964 Malaysian general elections for a 'Malaysian Malaysia', and Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's challenging the 'special rights' of the Malays, which was to lead to Singapore's expulsion from Malaysia. In fact, the electioneering leading up to the 1969 federal and state elections released dangerous pent-up racial feelings and emotions both on the Malay and the Chinese sides, and it seemed as if both communities were moving inexorably towards a massive confrontation on a scale which had never before been envisaged.

The spilling of blood on 13 May 1969, and the terrible disturbances which followed, almost tore the country asunder. Parliament was suspended for twenty months and the country was ruled by a National Operations Council. By the time parliament resumed, many changes had taken place. Tunku Abdul Rahman was no longer prime minister. He had resigned in September 1970 after leading the country as a multiracial symbol for fifteen years. The *Rukunegara*, or official state ideology, had been announced, and a 'New Economic Policy' (NEP) had been unwrapped. Several contentious and potentially dangerous matters dealing, for example, with Malay 'special rights', the national language, religion, and so on, had been removed from the domain of discussion not only in public but also in the hitherto privileged confines of the Dewan Rakyat and the state legislatures. The *Rukunegara* made it evident that neither the Malay nor Chinese extremists were going to be able to claim victory, as it tried to steer a middle path between the interests of the two communities.

The New Economic Policy, which has been spelt out in detail in the *Second Malaysia Plan 1971—1975*, follows a two-pronged approach: the restructuring of the economy to 'correct economic imbalance' between the Malays and the Chinese, and the eradication of poverty among all Malaysians.

If the spirit of the NEP is adhered to in practice, so that, as the

plan says, 'no particular group will experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation', then there can be no objection to it, but obviously much depends on the way in which the policy is interpreted and administered by the Malaysian authorities.

The cut-off point of this account is the resumption of parliament in February 1971, as what happens after that marks the beginning of yet another panel in the unfolding scroll of Sino-Malay relations.

In dealing with the 13 May 1969 racial riots and Sino-Malay friction, attention has been focused on what happened in Peninsular Malaysia rather than in Singapore or Sabah and Sarawak, and events in the latter three territories have been referred to only when they have a bearing on the subject of this book.



Chapter One

The Beginnings of Plural Society in Malaya: Chinese and Malays

Since A.D. 414, when Fa Hsien, the intrepid Buddhist monk and pilgrim, stayed in Java for five months on his way back to China after a stay of fifteen years in India, the Chinese have continued to visit the *Nanyang* (Southeast Asia) in increasing numbers. However, as far as the Malay Peninsula is concerned, the earliest record that we have from Chinese sources of a Chinese colony there comes from the account of Wang Ta-yuan, who in 1349 mentions Tumasik, or old Singapore.¹

The first significant Chinese settlements on the islands of the Malay archipelago date from as early as the thirteenth century. At San-fo-ts'i, in the neighbourhood of Palembang in Sumatra, there were several thousand Chinese, and it was one of the important ports of call for junks from China and ships from India.² Nevertheless, perhaps the best known early contacts with Malaya occurred during the early Ming dynasty, when the Chinese eunuch admiral Cheng Ho visited Malacca several times in the first half of the fifteenth century, and his name is still commemorated there in its deified form as Sam-po-kong.³ One of his secretaries, Fei Sin, writing in 1436, reported that there were some people of Chinese descent living there,⁴ which seems quite likely as it is customary to date the history of Chinese settlements in Malaya to after the establishment of the Malacca Sultanate *circa* 1400.⁵

Malacca was probably the first and certainly the largest place of any Chinese settlement in Peninsular Malaya, although there were other long-established communities of Chinese traders living usually in the Malay rulers' villages situated at the river mouth, where the Malay chiefs could control riverine trade and impose a tax on it. Some of these were permanently settled communities whose founders had married local women, and their offspring formed the nucleus of what later, during the nineteenth century,



13 MAY 1969

The Darkest Day in Malaysian History

"MALAYSIA'S proud experiment in constructing a multiracial society exploded in the streets of Kuala Lumpur last week. Malay mobs, wearing white headbands signifying an alliance with death, and brandishing swords and daggers, surged into Chinese areas in the capital, burning, looting and killing. In retaliation, Chinese, sometimes aided by Indians, armed themselves with pistols and shotguns and struck at Malay kampongs (villages)."

— TIME magazine, 23 May 1969

In his refreshingly insightful and sensitive account of the events and influences which culminated in the breakdown of Sino-Malay relations, and erupted into the violent racial riots of 13 May 1969, Leon Comber has produced a work that will interest and benefit not only the scholars but the general public and in particular, the 'children of 13 May'.



Leon Comber is an honours graduate, in Modern Chinese Studies, of London University's School of Oriental and African Studies, and took his Master of Arts degree in Comparative Asian Studies at the University of East Asia, Macau. He has a knowledge of B... and Chinese (Cantonese and Put...

visit our website at:
www.marshallcavendish.com/genref

 **Marshall Cavendish**
Editions

 **Kinokuniya**

13 MAY 1969

(452)-S 08/2017
9789812617767 3022946708



9 789812 617768

PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

YAYASAN KEPIMPINAN PERDANA

cb-HI0900-0001 E0035

RM 39.90

9 "789812"617767"



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA