CrossMark

Modern Asian Studies **50,** 1 (2016) pp. 385–398. © Cambridge University Press 2015
doi:10.1017/S0026749X14000699 First published online 15 July 2015

REVIEW ARTICLE

Malay and Sanskrit

FERNANDO ROSA RIBEIRO

English Department, Stellenbosch University, South Africa; and Institute of Asia and Pacific Studies, University of Nottingham Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: fernandor@sun.ac.za

Bahasa Sanskerta dan Bahasa Melayu (Sanskrit and Malay). By James T. Collins. Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, Pusat Pembinaan & Pengembangan Bahasa, École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2009, pp. 142, Rp. 15,000 (ISBN 978-979-91-0141-9).

Collins' book presents a comprehensive, if necessarily concise, approach to the issue of the relations between Sanskrit—very broadly conceived, including various South Asian languages and writing systems—and Malay, equally broadly conceived, as his work contains forays into other Austronesian languages such as Tagalog, Batak, Rejang, and so on. Collins is not a Sanskrit specialist. Besides, in such a comprehensive and succinct work, covering so many fields, it is inevitable that the author will occasionally fall short here and there, although this in no way detracts from the value of his book. In particular, there is a complex interlocution that the author weaves throughout his text with his intended audience (see below for details). Collins has in fact made a name for himself in Malay linguistics, and perhaps his best known work (extant both in English and Indonesian translation) is *Malay, World Language: A Short History*.[1] In the book reviewed here, Collins largely taps into over a quarter of a century of his own research and publications in English, Malay, and Indonesian, as well as a plethora of centuries-old colonial works related to Nusantara, originally published in Spanish, Dutch, English, French, and German (he can apparently read in all these languages,

[1] Collins, James T. (1998), *Malay, World Language: A Short History*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Indonesian translation (2005), *Bahasa Melayu, bahasa dunia: sejarah singkat*, Jakarta: Yayasan Obor & KITLV).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

bar perhaps Spanish). It is a very informative and delightful work, and it should be translated into English and made more widely known.

Besides, his work is much more than merely informative. It is in reality an attempt to construct a social history of Malay. Collins has a very keen sense of history, and not only of a linguistic kind. He accordingly touches, even if only briefly, on several important highlights of the historical intersection between Sanskrit and Malay, as well as on the history of related linguistic approaches in the past 200 years. In this way, an amazing array of languages and works comes up in this short book, ranging from classic works to obscure ones (at least to non-specialists), published in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the West. In a preface and five short chapters (and, unfortunately, no index), Collins also tackles the thorny issue of colonial knowledge and its very real consequences in the post-colonial era, especially in what concerns Malaysia. The intriguing fact that a book obviously written mostly with a Malaysian audience in mind has been published in Jakarta will be tackled below. Considering how difficult it is to obtain Indonesian books in Malaysia (to the point that the best option is actually to fly to the neighbouring country to visit bookshops once in a while), this is no incidental matter. Although I got my copy from the library of the University of Malaya, the book is generally not available to Malaysian readers, in spite of the fact that it remains in print in Indonesia.

In his *Prakata*, or 'Foreword', Collins says that profiting from an invitation to take part in a seminar on 'Sanskrit Scholarship and the Civilization (*Perabadan*) of the Malay World', held at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) in 2002, he decides to undertake to read again *catatan lusuh* and *buku yang berdebu*, that is dog-eared or creased records and dusty books (*sic*, p. 12). He will indeed bring up many such works throughout his account. He adds that maybe because of its origin readers will get a sense of the atmosphere of the scholarly world of Malaysia in his book. In reality, the reader does get more than a taste of Malaysian academia in this book's often critical appraisal.

The first introductory chapter lays out the historic scene by beginning with a piece of news appearing in *The Star*, a government-aligned tabloid. According to it, Malay is the fourth most commonly used language in the world (*sic*), a perhaps not untypical example of the bombastic statements found in local tabloids. Collins then expends several pages showing statistics and even diagrams indicating that Hindi has many more speakers than Malay. If we add to Hindi the number of speakers of the closely related languages of Urdu and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Punjabi, the picture becomes even grimmer for Malay. He estimates that there are between 350 and 650 million speakers of Hindi, using both conservative and maximum estimates, whereas the equivalent numbers for Malay range between 200 and 250 million. The author concludes: '*daya ingat dan pengetahuan setengah sarjana tidak terlalu kuat tentang perihal India serta peran negara itu dan perabadannya di dunia, apalagi utamanya di Nusantara*', that is, in a free rendering, the memory and local knowledge among specialists about India and its role and the influence of its civilisation (*perabadan*), especially in Nusantara, is not very strong (p. 19). As it turns out, criticism of local knowledge about the historic Indic connection and related linguistics is a major feature of his book.

Next, Collins indicates that Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi have their origins in Sanskrit, a language also important for Hinduism and Buddhism, with moreover an ancient presence in Nusantara. His model is that of Latin and the Romance languages. Unfortunately, though he quotes from Masica's massive work on Indo-Aryan languages, an important authority in the field, Middle Indo-Aryan languages are perhaps the ancestors of today's New Indo-Aryan languages (such as Hindi and so on), rather than Sanskrit, in spite of the important influence of the latter on the former's vocabulary. Collins means his book as a contribution to building the domain of studies of Nusantara (*ilmu Nusantara*), which he defines as including the whole of Island Southeast Asia and Malaysia, as well as the south of Thailand and even the Muslim schools in Cambodia which use Malay (p. 20, note 1). He also notes that in Malaysia the name Alam Melayu or 'Malay World' is used instead of Nusantara. Of course, 'Malay World' retains strong ethnic overtones in Malaysia's ethnically divided society, to the point that some scholars prefer to use 'Malaysian studies' rather than the more traditional *Pengkajian Melayu*. Unfortunately, though locally certainly broader and more inclusive, 'Malaysian studies' places the emphasis on the nation-state to the detriment of the larger region, which is justifiably the focus of Collins' book. It should be noted here that in Malaysia there seems to be a certain resistance to including the country in a broader field under the name of Nusantara studies. As a matter of fact, 'Nusantara' is often associated with Indonesia, and more particularly with Java. It is therefore seen as a designation that does not place the emphasis on, and perhaps does not even include, 'Malay'. The matter is, however, complex and cannot be treated here. The issue is not merely one of nomenclature, as becomes clear through reading Collins' book.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rather, as will be seen below, it is about nationalist perspectives in local academia, particularly as they are informed by various kinds of colonial knowledge.[2]

The second chapter is an enticing summary of historical studies of Nusantara, beginning with Chinese descriptions of Sriwijaya, made by travelling Buddhist scholars between the fifth and seventh centuries AD, foremost among them the famous I-Ching (pp. 22–26). These well-known Chinese sources have proved vital in reconstructing Sriwijayan history, otherwise known mostly through somewhat scant inscriptional material (also treated in some detail by Collins), and (usually) recent archaeological research. It should be remembered that 'public' knowledge of Sriwijaya—undoubtedly one of the most important polities in the early history of Nusantara, a maritime power straddling both sides of the Straits of Melaka and therefore controlling the East–West trade between China and India—is not even 100 years old. Coedès' pioneering article on Sriwijaya, quoted by Collins, was published only in 1918.[3] Collins makes an important point, namely, that Nusantara in the past was not only a geographic entity, but also a conceptual centre (*pusat*) for *ilmu Sanskerta dan Buddhisme* (p. 25), where, for instance, Chinese monks would learn Sanskrit and study religious texts, before proceeding to India. Though this is a well-known fact in the specialized literature, it bears repeating, especially in the local post-colonial context, where widespread ignorance of local history can be prevalent even in academic circles, let alone outside campus. Also, as shown by the recent destruction of a centuries-old *candi* or Hindu-Buddhist temple in Kedah in northern Peninsular Malaysia, located in the famous Bujang Valley (a far older site than either Borobudur or Angkor Wat, as it possibly dates to the first two centuries of the Common Era), local heritage associated with the Hindu-Buddhist past is not valued in official circles. In fact, the Malaysian government's attitude to the Hindu-Buddhist heritage has ranged from a large degree of indifference to near phobia, as when even colonial-era Hindu temples are destroyed in Kuala Lumpur, for instance, to make way for 'urban development', just as in the

[2] It is perhaps apposite to note here that an internet search for '*ilmu Nusantara*' brings up many sites related to *ilmu ghaib* or *ilmu kejawen*, *ilmu hikmah*, and so on, all names related to esoteric and mystical sciences.

[3] The article was originally published in French, and was only made available in English translation in Malaysia in 1992, and in Malay as late as 2009 (see below).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

case of the Bujang Valley.[4] This last is a major Southeast Asian archaeological site that remains comparatively little researched, not to mention evidently inadequately preserved and little valued. What is, therefore, from an international scholarly point of view, nearly humdrum historical information featured in Collins' work, may in this way be positively controversial in terms of the Malaysian public sphere, with its well-known, overwhelming official emphasis on the country's Islamic heritage (if only a sanitized version).

Collins is obviously astutely aware of the ideological underpinnings of the historical perspectives of his Malaysian (academic) audience (in free English rendering):

> The pre-eminence of Sriwijaya and other centres of Sanskrit studies in Nusantara [here Collins mentions in a note Champa in today's southern Vietnam], as sources and pathways for the transmission of Sanskrit and Buddhist knowledge and tradition in those ancient times, has certainly left its influence. This last thoroughly pervades the development of Malay civilization itself, first and foremost in the language and culture of Nusantara. Nevertheless, the influence of Sanskrit on Malay is not only a fact one thousand years ago. We must brush off the Orientalist perspective to the effect that supposedly the 'era' of Indic influence is already past, as it was replaced by another 'era' ... That influence did not cease either with the fall of Sriwijaya or with the expansion of the glory of Islam in Nusantara, as usually depicted by Orientalists and their naive followers (p. 27).

It is difficult to know whether Collins is fully aware of the implications of the excerpt above, both in Nusantara and outside it, whoever the 'Orientalists' may be. First, he makes short work of a major, canonical historiographical perspective, both inside and outside Nusantara. This perspective posits a rupture and a large degree of discontinuity between a Hindu-Buddhist era and an ensuing Islamic one. This rupture is virtually an article of faith in Malaysia, for instance, both in academia and in the public domain, where no gradualist view—say, of a slow, centuries-long transition, never fully achieved, as elements of the past remain active in the present—seems to be accepted. The existence of Bali alone—stressed by Collins—gives the lie to a long-gone Hindu-Buddhist era in terms of the larger Nusantara world. Hence also the great importance of stressing, as Collins does, a Nusantara-wide perspective, instead of one narrowly based on current national boundaries, as is usually the case. I cannot

[4] See, for instance, http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/248240, [accessed 30 June 2015]. (It is a paid site.)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

go here into the details of this historiographical issue, important as it is.

I must nonetheless point out that it is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where both academia and the public domain seem to suffer from an unusually high degree of near-amnesia in what concerns local histories (hence the recent, casual destruction of Hindu-Buddhist heritage in Kedah mentioned above). The rejection of a Creolized present—namely, a situation where diverse influences of various origins mingle together and change in complex ways—is a cornerstone of not only official policies, but even non-official views of local society and history. In this way, the Hindu-Buddhist past is often considered, for all concerned, to be the heritage of the Hindu sector of the Indian 'race' in the country. This is nothing short of a narrow appropriation of the past. Unsurprisingly, when the author of these lines tried to learn Sanskrit recently, he came across a single instructor in Kuala Lumpur, who happened to be a locally born and bred fundamentalist Hindu. I cannot possibly imagine any local Muslim, or any other thinking person for that matter, who might wish to receive instruction in the language from such a person. Except for two Westerners, namely Andrea Acri in Singapore (with the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre), and Arlo Griffiths in Jakarta (with the École française d'Extrême-Orient), the whole of Nusantara seems to be currently deprived of any local or foreign scholar who is a certified Sanskrit specialist (that is, someone with a PhD in Sanskrit from a well-known university). To the best of my knowledge, Malaysia, for instance, currently has none.[5]

It is also apposite to say something here about Orientalism as it relates to Malaysia. Though of course the relevant literature is known in Malaysia (especially Edward Said's book), there is currently

[5] I am not surprised, as there are hardly any scholars who know either Portuguese or Dutch either, even for reading purposes only—two languages which are also important for the study of Malaysia's past. Romo Kuntoro, a recently deceased Indonesian scholar, knew some Sanskrit and was quite knowledgeable about all forms of Javanese. There seem to be quite a few people around who know some Sanskrit, both locals and Westerners, but unlike in Thailand, there are no certified specialists as such. Udayana University, together with the Indian government, intends to establish a Sanskrit course (see http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/india-corner-at-indonesia-s-udayana-university-113112700440_1.html, [accessed 30 June 2015]). Arlo Griffiths in Jakarta knows both Old Javanese and Sanskrit, and Andrea Acri from the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre in Singapore is currently teaching Sanskrit at Udayana. It is interesting to think that Nusantara is today in a position not entirely different to that of a country in the West without any Classics departments, and therefore hardly any scholars who know either Latin or Ancient Greek well.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

no concerted, sustained, and continuing debate, as far as I know, about Orientalism in the country, although the National University of Malaysia (incidentally a university with which Collins has often been associated locally) has had for years now an Institute for Occidental Studies (IKON), which occasionally puts forth critical studies of the West. These are clearly at least in part intended as a counterpoint to Orientalist views, or rather as a counter-Orientalist discourse based on the 'East', or on Eastern (or rather, in this case, Malaysian) views on Orientalism.[6] In this sense, the critical horizons once opened up by Malaysia's leading critique *avant la lettre* of Orientalism (the book is perhaps Island Southeast Asia's most famous social sciences work ever, and happens to have been published exactly one year before Said's much more famous title, that is, in 1977), namely, Syed Hussein Alatas' rightly celebrated, and still in print, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, do not seem to have been explored much further and in greater depth, as, in fact, Collins' work itself indicates (see below). Besides, there is no local association, as far as I know, between Sanskrit and Orientalism, as seems to be the case in India. In this way, it is interesting to note that Collins' view on Orientalism may be an interpretation largely ungrounded in any local debate on the matter. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he does not quote from any local work on the subject.

There is a previous, short review of Collins' work by Arlo Griffiths, a Sanskrit specialist based in Jakarta (see note 5).[7] It is mostly of a technical nature, and points out, for instance, that Collins gets his diacritics wrong, and that he is generally not particularly knowledgeable about Sanskrit or Sanskrit studies. Griffiths commends his book, however, and suggests moreover that Collins should consult Sheldon Pollock's acclaimed book on the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis'.[8] Pollock has also written on Sanskrit in Southeast Asia.[9] As a linguist, Collins does not seem to be aware of Pollock's work, though he is aware of the work of major historians and archaeologists of the past

[6] See, in this regard, Nair-Venugopal, Shanta (ed.) (2012), *The Gaze of the West and Framings of the East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, although not all essays in this volume are by locals or concern local matters. I must also add here that the Malaysian editor is far from insensitive to the intricacies of Indic and other heritage in Malaysia.

[7] Griffiths, Arlo (2009), *Bijdrage tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, 165 (2–3): pp. 385–388.

[8] Pollock, Sheldon (2006), *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men. Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

[9] See Pollock, Sheldon (1998), The Cosmopolitan Vernacular, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57 (1): p. 6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and present, such as Coedès, Gonda, Jacq-Hergoualc'h, Manguin, Miskic, and so on. His account is therefore generally historically well-informed. Nonetheless, it is to be doubted whether Pollock's work would ultimately be of much value for Collins' purpose, namely, fashioning an area of Nusantara studies for the post-colonial present (and future) which is not largely in denial, or even somewhat delusional, about the region's past (see below). This is not the place for discussing Pollock's undoubtedly unique work, following more or less closely on the footsteps of illustrious predecessors such as Coèdes, Majumdar, Sastri, and several others. Nor am I qualified to do so. It is nonetheless impossible to overlook the fact that Pollock's impressive perspective—namely, of a vast, highly influential Sanskrit cosmopolis firmly anchored *in the remote past*—may in fact go down well among local followers of nationalist perspectives in Nusantara (though I doubt very much that there are many people here who are aware of his work).

Of course, I am not implying here that Pollock is aware of the fact, or, worse, that he did his research with the predicament of post-colonial Nusantara in mind (he clearly did not: though he wrote about Southeast Asia, he remains first and foremost an outstanding scholar of medieval India). Besides, his perspective is without a doubt quite useful for thinking about, for instance, the Arabic cosmopolis in both South and Southeast Asia, as Ricci has recently shown in a pioneering work.[10] Nonetheless, if Collins' view is to blossom into a future of historically savvy Nusantara-wide studies, some sense of what Simona Sawhney has called the 'modernity' of Sanskrit is necessary here (she is interested in the use of Sanskrit works by late colonial and post-colonial Indian intellectuals, Gandhi included).[11] Perhaps, rather than 'modernity', it would be more adequate to talk about the actuality or even the abiding power of Sanskrit. At any rate, it is important to cultivate a sense that Sanskrit is not only in the past, but also in the post-colonial present and future, as Collins indicates. Therefore, a view of Sanskrit merely as a vast, striking, philological necropolis, no matter how historically well founded, is at best somewhat inadequate for this purpose.

Collins shows in some detail how European scholars through the centuries constructed a vast field of *joint* Sanskrit and Nusantara

[10] Ricci, Ronit (2011), *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[11] Sawhney, Simona (2009), *The Modernity of Sanskrit*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

studies, intriguingly usually including several languages (for instance, Sanskrit, Malay, Tamil, Hindustani, Javanese, Balinese, Batak, and so on). He points out that nowadays it is not possible to find, one or two exceptions aside (see above), scholars who are equally knowledgeable about Indic and Nusantara languages (Ricci is another exception that comes to mind, though she knows Tamil instead of Sanskrit, as well as Malay and Javanese). This is in stark contrast to the nineteenth and even the twentieth centuries, when quite a few scholars (Indians included from the late nineteenth century) were conversant with both South Asian and Southeast Asian languages. Back in the seventeenth century, the Dutchmen Danckaerts and Honius were already aware of the connections between Malay and Sanskrit (p. 29). Nonetheless, we would have to wait until British rule, and the late eighteenth century, for a full blossoming of philological and literary studies, with the path-breaking studies of people such as William Jones in Calcutta and William Marsden in Sumatra, both working for the English East India Company (pp. 31–34). They were no doubt much aided in their pioneering endeavours by a variety of local scholars, as another famous British name of the time, Thomas Stamford Raffles, shows, as he paired up with the equally renowned Munshi Abdullah in Melaka. It is in fact intriguing to think that the scholarly panorama Collins unveils with such dexterity, if only in a concise way, is nothing less than a vast European-Indic-Nusantara joint cosmopolis.

As the links between Indic languages and European ones were investigated, often for the very first time, so were the links between Sanskrit and Nusantara languages. From this perspective, it is perhaps not surprising at all that someone like Franz Bopp would propose in the mid nineteenth century that Nusantara and Indo-European languages were actually related to each other, a view that nowadays is considered unacceptable in linguistic and other circles (pp. 40–41). At any rate, the 'dusty books' that Collins excavates are actually an amazing crop. Though some of the scholarship in question is inevitably dated, as he himself points out, what strikes the modern user of the materials he mentions is their awareness of historical multilingualism, as well as of the intimate connections between different languages: Favre's Malay—French dictionary, for instance, is in Jawi, the Perso-Arabic-derived script, and its entries often include equivalents in Batak, Javanese, Sundanese, Tagalog, and so on, in their original scripts, as well as the original Sanskrit (in Devanagari script, just as in the case of Marsden's works). It is therefore a multilingual and comparative dictionary, on the one hand, and an etymological one, on the other.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Perhaps the apex of this scholarly tradition is Gonda's still justly famous *Sanskrit in Indonesia* (the title is somewhat of a misnomer, as Gonda takes the reader on a dizzying and highly erudite trip all the way from the Philippines to Madagascar—p. 45). Collins manages to convince the reader that these works deserve to be revisited and reconsidered.

One caveat must be made here: Collins' view of all this earlier scholarship as fulfilling a colonial need to administer, control, and inventory is on the whole correct. He adopts a post-colonial studies perspective, and accordingly calls this knowledge 'cadastral' and 'descriptive' (p. 36). Nonetheless, he himself shows that this view hardly does justice to the 'dusty books' he is bringing back to light. We certainly need critical post-colonial perspectives to deal with the literature in question. In this regard, an author quoted by Collins comes to mind here, namely, Richard Winstedt, a scholar of Malay studies whose work is still in use nowadays, but whose views must certainly be taken *cum grano salis* at the best of times. Notwithstanding this fact, what Collins unearths with almost uncanny insight is a treasure trove of scholarship that, in some ways, remains unsurpassed to this day (Gonda's philological and other work comes to mind, and so does Coedès' varied work), in spite of their blatant colonial origins (Coedès famous *États hindouisés—Indianized States*—was first published in Hanoi in 1944; the first edition of Gonda's *Sanskrit in Indonesia* dates from 1952).[12]

Chapter 3, 'Tulisan', or 'Script', is full of illustrations and photographs of ancient *prasasti* (that is, royal inscriptions in Sanskrit, Malay, Javanese, and so on), as well as examples of the various Indic scripts in Nusantara, all of them ultimately derived from Pallava, a southern Indian script, though the link is not necessarily direct, and there may also be other Indic influences (in fact, it turns out that the actual link is rather to various forms of Late Brahmi, not to Pallava as such, contrary to what the early scholars whom Collins read believed. In this regard, Griffiths accordingly levels some criticism at Collins in his review). From Kutai, in today's East Kalimantan (Borneo), where the first fourth-century inscriptions are found, to a fourteenth-century manuscript found in Sumatra by Kozok in recent years, almost the full range of local scripts comes up in this chapter. What may surprise the reader is to find out that, though only very marginally, Indic-derived

[12] It now also exists in Hindi translation: Gonda, J. and Alakhanirañjana Pandeya (2001), *Indonesíyā mem Samskrta*, Varanasi: Sampurnananda Samskrta Viśvavidyalaya.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

scripts are still in use to this day in Nusantara, including when writing Malay (p. 72). This undermines to some extent the notion that such scripts are now part of the past, though Rumi (Roman script) has certainly become hegemonic in the post-colonial era all over the region, bar, for instance, in parts of Kelantan in northern Malaysia and south Thailand, where Jawi is still used, as well as in other parts of Nusantara. The inscriptions are actually only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, as people usually wrote through the centuries in perishable materials such as various palm leaves and tree barks, and unless manuscripts were periodically copied, they rotted away in the tropical weather (p. 63). It is therefore not surprising that comparatively little has reached us, especially from Sriwijaya and other ancient polities, though it is now believed that the still vast and largely untapped, though later Balinese and Javanese, manuscript repositories may have their ultimate origin in Sriwijaya.

Chapter 4—'Leksikon'—is in many ways the most important part of the book. It shows the multifarious, often surprising paths words have taken to reach Nusantara from divers parts of India, as well as from various Indic languages at different times, all the way from antiquity to the late colonial era. Today it is practically impossible to speak Malay without using Sanskrit-derived words, in spite of the undeniable weight of later borrowings from Arabic, Persian, Portuguese, Dutch, English, and so on. In this regard, it is truly amazing how many different trails have been blazed between South Asia and Nusantara. Sanskrit words have come into Malay through various Prakrits and Middle Indo-Aryan languages (in fact, as Gonda pointed out long ago, what used to be called by an older generation of scholars the Hindu 'colonists' did not in fact speak Sanskrit—p. 111), through colonial Hindustani, through Tamil, through (Old) Javanese, and so on. There is therefore no distinct, unequivocal route, specific time frame, nor any single group of people responsible for their introduction. In reality, even Europeans—for instance, the British East India Company officials who originally only knew Hindustan—and their Indian troops and officers might be responsible for their introduction. Moreover, the various scripts—and words carried by them—reached all the way from the Straits of Melaka to the Philippines, where the Spanish missionaries found out in the sixteenth century that their catechumens could write down in their own Indic-derived script what they were being taught (p. 83), at a time when, in Europe, the vast majority of people were illiterate. Sanskrit was in fact so widespread that scholars have theorized about an 'Archipelago Sanskrit', that is, local forms of Sanskrit with no

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

known, clear equivalent in India, though this view is criticized by Gonda, Schoterman, and others (p. 105).

As a matter of fact, even the Malay numeral *tiga* ('three') comes from Sanskrit (altogether five numerals from one to ten are not Austronesian in origin). Here Collins criticizes Asmah Omar in a longuish disquisition (pp. 111–113), as she believes that *tiga* is of Austronesian (and therefore 'indigenous') origin. Collins in reality criticizes Omar's work about half a dozen times throughout his short book. This, as it turns out, is no small matter. As mentioned above, it is more than slightly peculiar that his book was published in Indonesia, with the support of the École française de l'Extrême-Orient in Jakarta. Nonetheless, it is not a book meant only or mostly for Indonesians. Most of Collins' publications in Malay, before and since, have in fact been issued by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the official Malaysian government body in charge of the Malay language and Malay publications. This book was also originally meant to be published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, but—and here Collins is fairly diplomatic— it did not happen. As we read on, it slowly becomes clear why. The book can easily be read as no less than an explicit indictment of the whole post-colonial Malay studies establishment in Malaysia. Though this becomes particularly clear towards the very end (pp. 125–126), for anyone who is familiar with the lay of the land, the criticism levelled about half a dozen times against the work of Dato'[13] Asmah Omar, the doyenne of Malay linguistics and stalwart of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, is probably more than enough to make sure that the book would never be publishable in Malaysia, especially not by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Asmah Omar incidentally has a truly amazing number of publications to her name, and she is one of the main scholars responsible for creating the linguistic apparatus, and much of the scholarship, that helped elevate Malay to the status of a modern, official medium in the past 40 years. South Africa (and other countries) in the first half of the twentieth century used to have figures with the official title of 'Government Ethnologist'. Asmah Omar can be said to be Malaysia's 'Government Philologist'. Omar, however, is not the only name mentioned by Collins in his criticism of local academia. To add insult to injury, he also mentions another professor, Dato' Ismail Hussein, one of whose brothers happens to be a famous *Sasterawan Negara* ('National Laureate', an official title

[13] Dato' or Datuk is an official, prestigious non-hereditary title, not entirely unlike 'Lord' or 'Lady' in the United Kingdom.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for distinguished people in the creative arts), namely Dato' Abdullah Hussein, while another brother, Dato' Ibrahim Hussein, is a renowned painter. It is therefore worth going into the details of Collins' criticism.

Collins takes issue with both Asmah Omar and Ismail Hussein, as well as Amat Juhari, another local scholar, for positing that Rencong script—an Indic script used in south Sumatra to this day—is actually not of Indic, but of 'indigenous' (*peribumi*) origin. Collins quotes from Asmah's work (*Alam dan Penyebaran Melayu*, or 'The Realm and Expansion of the Malays', a work published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 2005). According to the quote, Asmah states that the Malay world already had the signs or attributes (*lambang-lambang*) of an 'indigenous script' (*tulisan peribumi*) before the arrival of 'external influences' (quoted on p. 67). She goes on to mention Lampung, Rejang, and Jambi (*sic*) scripts as examples, all of them, as Collins stresses, south Sumatran scripts of well-known Indic origin. As Collins mentions, the fact of their ultimately Indic derivation has been known since at least the times of Marsden's pioneering publications 200 years ago, and they are therefore currently not in dispute in any international fora. There is in fact, historically, not a single form of Nusantara script that is not ultimately of 'outside' origin, be it Indic, Perso-Arabic (Jawi), or Rumi (Roman script). This is unsurprising, as in reality nearly all of the world's known scripts ultimately derive from at best only three or four different historical sources, as Collins points out. In this regard, Nusantara therefore finds itself in excellent company together with most of the rest of humanity.

In her edition of the translation into Malay of Coèdes' two articles on the Sriwijaya inscriptions (published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 2009), one of which (originally published in 1918) is also used by Collins (he lists the French original, however), Omar does not mention any of the intervening scholarship between 1930 (the date of Coèdes' last paper in Malay translation) and 2009. Besides, she makes a gratuitous comment, stating that there is no necessary, direct connection between the Malay in the Sriwijayan inscriptions, on the one hand, and Peninsular Malay, on the other. She adds that the inscriptional Malay should be considered as only a kind of south Sumatran variety.[14] The comment is gratuitous because there are no other contemporary sources for Old Malay, apart from the inscriptions. It should also be noted that one of the inscriptions

[14] Cœdès, George, Laurent Metzger (trans), and Asmah Haji Omar (ed.) (2009), *Inskripsi Melayu Sriwijaya*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. xiv.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press

comes from Ligor, in the Isthmus of Kra, and therefore on peninsular territory, in today's south Thailand (Nakhon Si Thammarat). Sriwijaya was in this way never merely a south Sumatran polity. This apparently gratuitous comment, however, makes sense against the background of the prevailing ideology of *ketuanan Melayu*, or 'Malay supremacy': as the Sriwijayan inscriptions are obviously not Muslim, they cannot therefore be considered as being in the ancestral language of today's Malay or Bahasa Malaysia, but only in a vaguely and obliquely related ancient variety.[15] Coedès' paper on the Ligor inscription has not been included in the book. There is also Damais' path-breaking paper from the 1960s on an unknown Nusantara language on one side of the inscription, whereas the other side has, alas, an inscription in Old Malay (both papers have in fact been translated and published in Malaysia, in English, years ago, together with Coedès' papers translated into Malay, though Omar makes no reference to this fact).[16]

Collins closes his short but enticing book with a final chapter openly advocating for a renewal of local (that is, mainly Malaysian) Malay studies, away from what he says is a colonial mindset, toward a truly post-colonial one. I have chosen to end this review with Collins' own haunting words. After lambasting the colonial-style *pengkajian Melayu* now prevalent in the country, he adds (in my own somewhat awkward rendering of his seemingly impeccable Malay):

> Malay studies of this kind is only a continuation of the colonial project, instead of the trigger (*pencetus*) of a new understanding and insight of a post-colonial nature. It stands to reason that we should build and firmly establish a field of Nusantara studies that delves into and scrutinizes earlier research, but does not tie itself to colonial knowledge. The attachment of Malay studies to colonial science, that we often witness nowadays, is no different to a fastened *kerbau* [water buffalo] who is tethered in the middle of a parched pasture, and is only able to bellow in anger again and again (p. 126).

[15] Ideologically but also constitutionally, 'Malay' is defined in Malaysia as someone who speaks Malay and is a Muslim. In this way, non-Muslim Malays, even though they may be a sociological reality, especially but not only in the past, are, legally speaking, virtually impossible.

[16] Pierre-Yves Manguin writes the useful introduction to the collected papers by Coedès and Damais: Coedès, George and Louis-Charles Damais (1992), *Sriwijaya: History, Religion and Language of an Early Malay Polity*, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X14000699 Published online by Cambridge University Press