THE FORMATION OF MALAYSIA:
SHARED HISTORY, VARIED IMAGES*

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The formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 has attracted much scholarly interest in recent years. The opening of archival records relating to the formation of the federation in particular has enabled scholars to re-examine these important and complex historical events. A general survey of writings in Malaysia and Singapore on this period of shared history reveals varied images and interpretations. The federation is variously represented as a response to the red tide, an imperial plot, an accident of history and a neo-colonial grand scheme. Nonetheless a more informed historical debate has been taking place.

Amid these scholarly debates, several works by individuals involved in these historical events have also attracted much interest. These biographical narratives offer an insider's view of the events. This article examines two major biographical narratives relating to the formation of the federation. The first, written by a former senior Cabinet Minister, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, is titled Memoir on the Formation of Malaysia. The second, The Singapore Story, is written by Singapore’s former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. Both authors were deeply involved in negotiations leading to the formation of the federation. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman’s published thoughts on the formation of Malaysia are too brief to be given equivalent attention here. Ghazali and Lee’s works provide an elaborate insider’s perspective of the formation of the federation and offer valuable insights into the evolution and realization of the idea. Both had access to official records relating to the events and are of a high literary quality. Ghazali's 465-page

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