The Relationship between Language Proficiency and Inter-Ethnic Relationships

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Introduction

For much of its history, Malaysia has been a multilingual state. Traders from India brought with them the Sanskrit and Tamil languages, along with the Hindu and Buddhist religions. Inscriptions of the earliest form of the Malay language show many words that have been borrowed from the Sanskrit language. For example, many words in the Malay language are derived from Sanskrit, such as manusia (human being), which is derived from the Sanskrit manushya, which means “human being.” In the early 16th century, Portuguese soldiers conquered Malaka and held the city for over a century until the Dutch took it from them in 1641. British traders also came to Malaya during the 17th century, but it was not until the end of the 18th century that the British presence on the Malay Peninsula was really felt. Throughout the 19th century, the British took control of the various states of Malaya. Malaysia was known as Malaya before 1963) until they had complete control of Peninsular Malaya. The British also began to bring in contract labourers from India to work in Malaya.

Due to these huge foreign influences, many languages were spoken by the population in Malaya and the Malay language adopted many words from Portuguese, Dutch and English. Under British administration, English became the official language of the country and was used for all official purposes.

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