

# Singapore's nationalist movement toward independence



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The history of Singapore had been recorded by Chinese sea trader from third century but during that time the island was full of forest and only few tribes had settled on. It was said that Singapore at that time was considered as a small village for fishery place of Malayan. This trading post on Singapore had signed On 6 February 1819 which let British prepare and take control only sea port but didn't allow to further doing on the rest land. Many people came to live in the island or just lived to earn money and sending back to their hometown mostly the Chinese people, some married within native people that was why there were mostly Chinese in Singapore.

In 1826-1946 British created a straits settlement (Penang, Melaka, and Singapore) because these three islands could serve as the economic support to British in term of sea trading port. The ships could easily access between these three ports and making trade exchange, however, Singapore was a leading port among Penang and Melaka, then being more famous until 1946 Singapore became a separate British Crown Colony.

### **Motive of nationalist movement**

There are many reasons that contribute to the motivation of nationalist movement in Singapore against British crown colony both internal and external factors. For instance, the major rubbers and tins in Singapore would be allowed to sell at London market only, so whenever the product had been collected, it was directly exported to British even there were some Chinese traders came to the plantation before being exported but Singapore had no right to sell to them. Some Chinese people in Singapore had supported money to republic of china, communist movement.

The British believed that western people were superior and Singaporeans were inferior so that they treated people in different ways. For instance, British didn't want Singaporeans to enroll to learn Chinese school but preferred for those learning English and Malay languages because Malay people and school were less than Chinese Mandarin School. They also allowed Christianity to flourish in Singapore to reduce belief of Chinese because they taught in English which then making them being unsatisfied to British very much. However, the totals of 72, 000 children in Singapore were approximately sent to Chinese school 35, 000 but English school 27, 000 and Malay School about 1, 000. The people were waiting for headmaster to gain self government out of British colony such as Chinese communist people as they were discriminated by western policy, in addition after the world war II, People had survived under the very strictly law of immigration and emigration which set up by British to rebuilt Singapore but people inside couldn't move out to meet relative such as China. They even couldn't welcome for relative to come and live in Singapore too. More evidentially, Singapore had survived with British colony but very dangerously and frightened to the colonial of Japanese from 1941 to 1946. Thousands were killed during this occupation mostly Chinese communist people and were forced to answers every questions from Japanese seeking for communist movement in Singapore but they were encourage to learn Japanese language and Japanese official provided bonus to people could speak Japanese instead of Chinese and English. After the Japanese occupation, Singapore lost confident on British which mainly duty to protect Singapore.

## **Nationalist Movement in Singapore**

British colony in Singapore did not focus on territory but the main concern was trade, so British activities in Singapore mostly was to develop an unknown island to become a famous island which could serve its interests, especially, to compete with the Dutch East India Company. That was why the nationalist movement in Singapore seems to be not aggressive like other countries in South East Asia. Singapore used to be one part of Malaya which almost population was Chinese, so most of the nationalist movement came from Chinese. As the result of Japanese occupation in Malaya and Singapore, Chinese people lived in Singapore was treated harshly and thousands of them were killed. This event impelled the Malay Chinese people try to end the Japanese occupation by created a nationalist movement called the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army. After WWII, Japanese was withdrawn from Malaya as well as Singapore, but this nationalist movement still existed. In contrast, this was not a nationalist movement anti Japanese as before but it was changed to a nationalist movement anti British colony in Malaya as well as in Singapore. At the same time, there were other nationalist movements in Malaya and Singapore to demand for self government and independence, and it forced British to consider about that request.

First was Labor Front led by David Marshall who was the first Chief Minister of Singapore, and the second was the People's Action Party (PAP) led by Lee Kuan Yew. On 13 May 1954, National Service Riots or Anti-National Service Riots is a riot in Singapore that occurred due to the communist influence. Then in 1956, there was a Chinese Middle Riots led by students of Chinese High School who supported communist rule. It was not doubtful for this

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success because firstly British refuse the Marshall's request due to the reason of communist influence and riots in Singapore made by communist, but later on these problems were solved with new leader that could make British felt confident after leave. Anyways, increasing of Chinese population in Singapore created an opportunity of PAP to win the election in 1959 by supported voices from the communist and radical students. By that time, Lee Kuan Yew the leader of PAP became the first Prime Minister of Singapore. Lee wanted to solve this problem by merging Singapore in the Federation of Malaysia. Meanwhile the British and Malay ideas, on 09 July 1963 Singapore joined in the Federation of Malaysia as well as Sabah and Sarawak. After that Singapore's problems still happened in the Federation that urged other nationalist movement demanding for separation Singapore from the Federation of Malaysia and became an independent state.

This unequal treatment made Chinese in Singapore suffered and tried to find the ways to move or separate from Malaysia Federation. On July 1964, there were riots called Race Riots occurred. About 3, 000 people were arrested. This riot killed 13 people and 106 people were injured. These two riots had expressed the violence and discrimination between Malay the majority in Malaysia and Chinese the majority in Singapore.

Furthermore, the uncommon of the economic self state's interests between Singapore and Malay in the Malaysia Federation led the conflict among the states governments. The economy or trades of Singapore and the rest of Malaysia Federation were unequal and too much restrict for Singapore. On the other hand, Malay want to exploit some benefit from the Singapore economy by taking some part of Singapore exported goods to be its own.

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The opposition of this intention made the conflicts and riots in order to move Singapore out of Malaysia Federation. However, the intention of Malay was ended by the British decision, by the time the concerning turned to Malay, because Malay worried about the Singapore economic growth that may dominate the Malay economic someday.

## **Benefits of nationalist movement**

After these movements, Singapore was able to gain more specific benefits including political management, economic development, improving educational system, raising human right activities and paving a good way toward independence.

Starting from the first self-government, it let Singapore make decision on internal management. The British allowed Singaporean participate in political activities such as legislative council member had been extended seats and people could elect freely. This meant that Singapore had partial right for its own control as a sign of positive for the nearest future independence and they would not gain independence if self-government were not existed. This fully self-government was allowed Singapore to take part of Malaya federation.

The development had shift Singapore from industrial estate to industrialize economy which was more improvement in production and profit to feed country. It was even allowed for students to continue degree at foreign countries, but mostly they preferred to learn at China because Chinese people in Singapore used to suffer from both British and Japanese. However, the remained education system from British colony had made this country

educate children as western styles until nowadays English has been a leading and most speaking in Singapore and Chinese as a second communication language.

Singapore had risen in human right aspect after the establishment of its own self-government because this was the vital policy of Singapore, but discrimination had still happened among Malay and Chinese. As the result, people in Singapore could live together without any conflict because of self-government helping to compromise and combine in one unity society. All of these mentioned points; Singapore got many essential consequences from their nationalist movement toward independence such as economic advancement, political management, and educational institution.

## **Conclusion**

In brief, the nationalist movements in Singapore were drawn from the three main reasons such as culture, economy, and politic.

During the colony, British brought its culture to Singapore and almost wanted to eliminate the host culture. Actually, in Singapore the majority population were Chinese but the Chinese education had very low level meanwhile English language was educated and used as the formal language of state. Economic interests were the most need of colonial state and also the dominant state like the Malay in the Federation. That was the reason why self defence of Singapore's own interests was important.