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# SINGAPORE

## AN EMERGING CENTRE OF

## 19<sup>th</sup> Century Malay School Book Printing and Publishing in the Straits Settlements, 1819-1899

### Identifying the Four Phases of Development



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HISTORICAL EVENTS SUGGEST that Singapore emerged as a centre of Malay school book production in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through four phases of development.

Firstly, it was not accidental that the printing began in Singapore since its founding in 1819, but a conscious policy was likely to have been initiated by its founder, Sir Stamford Raffles and Dr William Morrison, the co-founder of the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca (1818-1843).

#### **Introduction: British Presence in the Malay Peninsula**

In 1786, the East India Company took possession of Penang. From 1786 to 1805, the island was a dependency of Bengal, and in 1805, Penang created the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Presidency, with a large staff of officials (Mills, 1925, pp. 18-30). In that same year, Raffles became the secretary of the Penang Presidency at the age of 24. He learnt the Malay language and soon replaced the resident and interpreter with his letter writing abilities in the Malay language (Cross, 1921, pp. 33-34).

#### **Raffles and the Manuscript Tradition**

In 1810, Raffles was appointed Agent to the Governor-General of the Malay States by Governor-General Minto in Calcutta. Subsequently, Raffles set up a base in Malacca in December the same year to prepare for the invasion of Java in 1811 (Bastin, 1969, pp. 9-10). During this period, Raffles employed Ibrahim, Tambi Ahmad bin Nina Merikan, Munshi Abdullah, his uncle Ismail Lebai and his younger brother Mohammed as copyists of Malay "letters and texts" (Hill, 1955, p. 72).

#### **The Founding of Singapore in 1819: The Singapore Institution and the First Printing Presses**

After Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, immigrants from Malacca, China, India and the neighbouring islands of the Netherlands East Indies flocked to the island (Saw, 1969, pp. 37-38). In 1824, the immigrant Malays made up about 43 per cent of the total population of Singapore. By 1860, the percentage dropped to about 15 per cent, as shown in Table 1. Chinese immigrants formed the largest racial group, at about 61 per cent in 1901. Malays were the largest minority race, compared with the Indians and Europeans.

#### **Raffles' Education Policies for the New Settlement**

Education was recognised by Raffles as one of the first needs of his new settlement (Neilson, n.d., p. 1). In 1819, Raffles wrote the first education policy for the island:

1. To educate the sons of higher order of natives and others;
2. To afford the means of instruction in the native languages to such of the Company's servants and others as may desire it;
3. To collect the scattered literature and traditions of the country, with whatever may illustrate their laws and customs and to publish and circulate in a correct form the most important of these, with such other works as may be calculated to raise the character of the institution and to be useful or instructive to the people (Raffles 1991a, p. 33).

Reverend Robert Morrison, the distinguished Chinese scholar and first Protestant missionary to China, then read a paper suggesting that the London Missionary Society (LMS) sponsored Anglo Chinese College (1815-1843) (Harrison 1979, pp. xi-xii) in Malacca be removed to Singapore and amalgamated with the proposed Singapore Institution (Philips 1908, p. 269). The modified proposed Singapore Institution was to consist of three departments:

- I. A scientific department for the common advantage of the several College that may be established.

- II. A literary and moral department for the Chinese, which the Anglo-Chinese College affords, and
- III. A literary and moral department for the Siamese, Malay, & c., which will be provided for by the Malayan College (Raffles 1991b, p. 75).

Raffles' accounts of his educational schemes - one dated 1819, on the establishment of the Malay College at Singapore (Raffles 1991a, pp. 23-38), and one dated 1823, describing the foundation and policy of the Singapore Institution (Raffles 1991b, pp. 77-86), was intended for the whole region, the Malay Peninsula, Singapore and the Indonesian Archipelago. His educational schemes therefore were designed to include not only the principal peoples of the Malay Peninsula, but also the Javanese, the Bugis, the Siamese and other people from the surrounding islands (Hough, 1933, p. 166).

The second minute, dated 1823 at the meeting of the trustees, gave an account of the foundation and policy of the Singapore Institution. A proposed plan of the building drawn by Lieutenant Jackson was approved, and plans were made to purchase printing presses with "English, Malayan, and Siamese founts of types", "and also to employ, on the account of the Institution", a printer. LMS missionary Samuel Milton was appointed to take charge of the presses and superintend the printing. Mr John Argyle Maxwell, Secretary to the Institution, was requested to take charge of the Library and Museum of the Institution, and to act as the Librarian (Raffles, 1991b, p. 83).

As a collector of Malay manuscripts, Raffles would have known that he would need to translate European texts into Malay, and to convert Malay manuscripts into books for his proposed Singapore Institution. He also knew the importance of having printing presses, and would have known that the LMS missionaries brought the printing presses to Malacca to print the first Malay books as well as Chinese books (Ibrahim Ismail, 1982, pp. 193-195).

**First Phase: First Printing in Malay in 1822**

Rev Samuel Milton went to Singapore in October 1819 to establish a mission, and permission was given by Major

Farquhar to set up a station upon his arrival (Milne 1820, p. 289). In 1821, Rev Claudius Henry Thomsen quit the LMS Malacca station to establish a Malay mission in Singapore (Medhurst, 1838, p. 315). Rev Thomsen and Munshi Abdullah "reached Singapore between the second quarter of 1821 and the middle of May, 1822" (Gibson-Hill, 1955, p. 195). Thomsen took with him a portable press and settled in Singapore (O'Sullivan, 1984, pp. 65-66). The first printing in Malay occurred in 1822 when Abdullah translated into Malay a Raffles proclamation making gambling and the opium farms illegal. The evidence is not conclusive but this was printed by the Mission Press and distributed around October 1822. The Mission Press, as it was designated, catered to the commercial and government needs of the infant settlement for eight years without a competitor (Byrd, 1970, pp. 13-14).

**Second Phase: Missionary Printing and the Malay Classes at the Singapore Institution, 1817-1846**

***The LMS and the Malay classes at the Singapore Institution, 1817-1846***

It was the LMS which first brought printing in Malay to the Straits Settlements by establishing stations in Malacca (1815-1843), Singapore (1819-1846) and Penang (1819-1844). The first printing in 1822 in Singapore was in Malay, (Byrd, 1970, p. 14) when LMS missionary Thomsen brought with him a press from Malacca the same year (O'Sullivan, 1984, pp. 65-66). In 1826, the colonies of Penang, Malacca and Singapore were amalgamated to form the Straits Settlements (Jarman, 1998, p. v.). In 1832, the seat of Government was transferred from Penang to Singapore (McKerron, 1948, p. 126).

According to the Annual Reports of the Singapore Institution (1834-1837) and the Singapore Institution Free School (1838-1843), Malay religious tracts and books from the LMS stations in Penang, Singapore and Malacca were used by the Malay classes of the Singapore Institution.

**TABLE 1: POPULATION OF SINGAPORE BY RACE, 1824, 1834 AND 1860  
SHOWING MALAYS AS THE LARGEST MINORITY ETHNIC GROUP**

YEAR	MALAYS	CHINESE	INDIANS	EUROPEANS	OTHERS	TOTAL
<b>1824</b>	4,580	3,317	756	148	1,882	10,683
	43.0%	31.0%	7.0%	1.0%	18.0%	100%
<b>1834</b>	9,452	10,767	2,322	577	3,211	26,329
	37.0%	41.0%	8.0%	2.0%	12.0%	100%
<b>1860</b>	11,888	50,043	12,973	2,385	4,445	81,734
	15.0%	61.0%	16.0%	3.0%	5.0%	100%

Sources: Crawford, 1839, p. 375; Newbold, 1839, p.285; Braddell, 1861, p. 3.

### **The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and the Malay classes at the Singapore Institution, 1834-1842**

In 1834, the ABCFM established a station in Singapore after transferring their Chinese xylographic printing from Canton. Alfred North, a printer by training arrived in 1836 and became a special student of Munshi Abdullah. Only two tracts in Malay were printed (Croakley, 1998, p. 26). North collaborated with Munshi Abdullah to publish two Malay books, *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah* (1838) (Gallop, 1990, p. 97) and *Sejarah Melayu* (1840/41) (Ibrahim Ismail, 1986, pp. 17-19). These books were used as school books in the Malay classes at the Singapore Institution in 1852 (Singapore Institution Free School, 1853, p. 21), and were the first school books published by a local author. Two years later, Munshi Abdullah passed away in Mecca (Raimy Che-Ross, 2000, p. 182). After the Opium War in 1842, many Chinese ports were opened and the LMS and ABCFM missionaries closed their stations and left for China (Graaf, 1969, p. 37).

The history of the spread of Malay printing in Southeast Asia in the first half of the 19th century is very much the history of the Protestant activity in the region (Gallop, 1990, p. 92). In Singapore the ABCFM also contributed to the spread of Malay book printing and publishing.

### **Third Phase: Keasberry, the First Official Translator and Printer of Malay School Books, 1847-1875**

In 1846, Benjamin Peach Keasberry was ordered to close the work in Singapore, but he refused to leave. On 2 April 1846, he wrote to the LMS in London, telling them that he could not "reconcile himself to the thought of this station being given." (Haines, 1962, p. 226). He was convinced that his work lay among the Malay speaking population, although he was left without resources. He was allowed to use the mission press and the mission property at Bras Basah Road. Keasberry supported himself and his work by printing and teaching (Bachin, 1972, p. 12).

**TABLE 2: ENROLMENT OF MALAY CLASSES, INSTRUCTORS, AND SUPERINTENDENTS OF THE MALAY SCHOOL OF THE SINGAPORE INSTITUTION, 1834-1841**

	1834	1835	1836/37	1837/38
Malay school	12	13	20	51 (2 classes)
Instructors	NA	NA	NA	Mohd Ariff Mahomed Yeosoff
Superintendent	NA	NA	NA	Alfred North Munshi Abdullah
	1838/39	1839/40	1840/41	1842/43
Malay school		41	16	Abolished
Head teacher		Mohd Ariff		
Instructors		Sobhany Jumum		
Superintendent	A. North J. S. Travelli	A. North B. P. Keasberry	A. North B. P. Keasberry	
			Munshi Abdullah	

Sources: Singapore Free School, 1835, p. 2; Singapore Free School, 1836, p. 5; Singapore Free School, 1837, p. 7; Singapore Institution Free School, 1838, p.14, p. 72 & p. 74; Singapore Institution Free School, 1839, p. 7; Singapore Institution Free School, 1840, p. 16; Singapore Institution Free School, 1841, p. 17; Singapore Institution Free School, 1843, p. 4.

**TABLE 3: NUMBER OF PUPIL BOARDERS AT KEASBERRY'S MALAY MISSION SCHOOL DURING THE YEARS 1847 TO 1866 (SELECTED YEARS)**

1847 <sup>1</sup>	1859/60 <sup>2</sup>	1861 <sup>2</sup>		1863 <sup>2</sup>		1864 <sup>2</sup>	1864/65 <sup>2</sup>	1865/66 <sup>2</sup>
Boys	Mixed	42 (B)	13 (G)	45 (B)	12 (G)	Mixed	Boys only	Boys only
13	50	55		57		56	50	47

Notes: According to the *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements* from 1859 to 1864 there were mixed enrolments of boys and girls.

Sources: <sup>1</sup>Buckley, 1965, p.322; <sup>2</sup>Jarman, 1998, p. 218, p. 366, p. 370, p. 522, p. 640 & p. 744.

**TABLE 4: TOTAL ENROLMENT AND AVERAGE ATTENDANCE AT SEKOLAH ABDULLAH (ABDULLAH'S SCHOOL) FROM 1861 TO 1866**

	1861/62	1862/63	1863/64	1864/65	1865/66
<b>Total enrolment</b>	15	28	50	87	72
<b>Average attendance</b>	–	20	35	63	68

Sources: Jarman, 1998, p. 218, p. 366, p. 370, p. 522, p. 640 & p. 744.

**TABLE 5: TOTAL ENROLMENT AND AVERAGE ATTENDANCE AT TELOK BLANGAH MALAY SCHOOL FROM 1861 TO 1866**

	1861/62	1862/63	1863/64	1864/65	1865/66
<b>Total enrolment</b>	63	52	55	71	62
<b>Average attendance</b>	–	26	33	38	30

Sources: Jarman, 1998, p. 218, p. 366, p. 370, p. 522, p. 640 & p. 744.

In 1856, the Temmenggong of Johore and the East India Company (EIC) each contributed an annual sum of \$1,500 to set up two Malay schools, one at Telok Blangah and the other at Kampong Glam, and to support Keasberry's Malay mission school. In addition, part of the money was used to translate Malay manuscripts and publish them "to instruct Malay youth" (Jarman, 1998, p. 88). Keasberry was the first person to be officially appointed to translate and publish Malay school books for the Colony.

Keasberry's death brought an end to any extensive work in the Malay language on the peninsula for 20 years (Hunt, 1989, p. 41). In addition, the translation and production of Malay school books was interrupted, since his printing presses were sold to John Fraser and D. C. Neave in 1879 (Makepeace, 1908, p. 265). Fraser and Neave went on to publish directories, guides and company reports in English (Md Sidin Ahmad Ishak, 1992, p. 81).

#### **Fourth Phase: The Straits Settlements Under the Colonial Office and Expansion of Malay Government Schools: The Education Department's Government Malay Press, 1885-1899**

In 1867, the Straits Settlements were transferred from the control of the Indian Government to that of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. In 1870, the First Governor, Sir Harry Ord, appointed a Select Committee "to enquire into the State of Education in the Colony." Upon the recommendations of the Committee, the first Inspector of Schools was appointed in 1872 to greatly extend and improve Malay vernacular schools (Wong & Gwee, 1980, p. 11).

In 1891, 16 per cent of Malay boys aged 15 and below in the Straits Settlements were enrolled in Malay vernacular boys' schools. By 1901, 22 per cent of Malay boys in the same age group went to Malay vernacular boys' schools in the Straits Settlements (as shown in Table 6).

**TABLE 6: PERCENTAGE OF MALAY BOYS AGED 15 YEARS AND BELOW IN MALAY BOYS' SCHOOLS IN SINGAPORE, PENANG AND MALACCA IN 1891 AND 1901**

STRAITS SETTLEMENTS	TOTAL MALAY BOYS' SCHOOLS	TOTAL ENROLMENT	MALAY BOYS AGED 15 YEARS AND BELOW	PERCENTAGE
<b>1891</b>				
Singapore	21	834	4,672	18%
Penang	65	3,006	21,705	14%
Malacca	61	2,965	15,239	19%
<b>Total</b>	147	6,805	41,616	16%
<b>1901</b>				
Singapore	16	1,073	4,555	24%
Penang	65	4,103	31,851	13%
Malacca	64	4,861	16,804	29%
<b>Total</b>	145	10,037	53,837	22%

Sources: Hill, 1892, 284-287; Elcum, 1902, 218-222; Merewether, 1892, 43; Innes 1901, 19.

**TABLE 7: PERCENTAGE OF MALAY GIRLS AGED 15 YEARS AND BELOW IN MALAY GIRLS' SCHOOLS IN SINGAPORE, PENANG AND MALACCA IN 1891 AND 1901**

STRAITS SETTLEMENTS	TOTAL MALAY GIRLS' SCHOOLS	TOTAL ENROLMENT	MALAY GIRLS AGED 15 YEARS AND BELOW	PERCENTAGE
<b>1891</b>				
Singapore	4	95	4,871	2%
Penang	4	301	20,966	1%
Malacca	6	185	16,804	1%
<b>1901</b>				
Singapore	4	92	5,447	2%
Penang	13	418	32,390	1%
Malacca	12	282	16,541	2%

Sources: Hill 1892, 284-287; Elcum 1902, 218-222; Merewether 1892, 43; Innes 1901, 19.

**TABLE 8: 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY MALAY VERNACULAR NEWSPAPERS USED IN MALAY VERNACULAR SCHOOLS**

TITLE OF NEWSPAPER	JAWI PERANAKAN (1876-1895) <sup>o</sup>	SEKOLA MELAYU (1888-1893) <sup>o</sup>
Script <sup>o</sup>	Jawi <sup>o</sup>	Jawi <sup>o</sup>
Frequency <sup>o</sup>	Weekly <sup>o</sup>	Weekly <sup>o</sup>
Print run <sup>1</sup>	Varies from 85-275 (Average 234) <sup>1</sup>	Varies from 200-250 (Average 233) <sup>1</sup>
Based on available records	Average for 18 years = 234 <sup>1</sup>	Average for 3 years = 233 <sup>1</sup>
Schools in the Straits Settlements	In 1887 <sup>2</sup>	In 1890 <sup>3</sup>
Singapore	20 (Boys)	19 (Boys)
	3 (Girls)	3 (Girls)
Penang	55 (Boys)	56 (Boys)
	5 (Girls)	6 (Girls)
Malacca	60 (Boys)	58 (Boys)
	5 (Girls)	3 (Girls)
Total	148	145

Sources: <sup>o</sup>Lim, 1992, 6 & 10; <sup>1</sup>Roff, 1972, p. 21; <sup>2</sup>Penny 1888, 196-199; <sup>3</sup>Hill, 1891,102-105.

### The Establishment and Growth of Government Malay Vernacular Girls' Schools, 1884-1900

Malay girls' schools were only founded in 1884, as there were difficulties to overcome in the establishment of such schools (Hill, 1885, p. 150). In 1901, no more than 2 per cent of Malay girls were enrolled in Malay vernacular girls' schools in the Straits Settlements (as shown in Table 7). The rapid expansion of Malay vernacular schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was mainly confined to boys' schools.

It is likely that the shortage of Malay school books resulted in the Government's purchase of two Malay vernacular newspapers, the *Jawi Peranakan* (1876) and *Sekolah Melayu* (1895) to be used as reading materials in the Government Malay schools (Jacobson, 1889, p. 216).

It was not until 1885 that Malay school book printing and publishing resumed with the setting up of the Government Malay Press. This was normally regarded as part of the Government Printing Office, and the books printed on this press bore the Government Press imprint (Proudfoot, 1993, p. 592). In 1888, the firm Kelly & Walsh was appointed "to sell all books required in the schools (Penny, 1888, p. 189). By 1893, Kelly & Walsh supplied books not only to the growing number of pupils and schools in the Straits Settlements, but also to those of the Malay States, Johore, Muar, Borneo and Sarawak (Hill, 1894, p. 322).

In 1894, out of 24 Malay school books printed in Singapore, 19 or 73 per cent were produced by the Government Malay Press (as shown in Tables 9 and 10).

**TABLE 9: LIST OF 24 MALAY SCHOOL BOOKS USED IN MALAY VERNACULAR SCHOOLS IN 1894**

NO.	TITLE <sup>1</sup>	PRINTER <sup>2</sup>
1.	Malay Book No. I	Unable to locate
2.	Malay Book No. II ( <i>Pohon Pelajaran</i> )	Government Malay Press (1887)
3.	Malay Book No. III ( <i>Jalan Kepandaian</i> )	Government Malay Press (1890)
4.	Malay History ( <i>Hikayat Tanah Melayu</i> )	Government Malay Press (1885, 1891, 1892)
5.	Malay Elementary Arithmetic ( <i>Ilmu Kira-Kira</i> )	Government Malay Press (1898)
6.	Malay Geography ( <i>Hikayat Dunia</i> )	Government Malay Press (1894)
7.	Malay Table Book ( <i>Hitung Cabut</i> )	Government Malay Press (1890, 1893)
8.a.	Elmu Bintang, Part I (Natural Philosophy)	Government Malay Press (1890)
8.b.	Elmu Bintang, Part II	Government Malay Press (1891)
9.	Sanitary Primer ( <i>Urip Waras</i> )	Government Malay Press (1891)
10.	Agriculture ( <i>Ilmu Peladang</i> )	Government Malay Press (1892)
11.	Physiology ( <i>Kejadian Selerah Anggota</i> )	Government Malay Press (1891)
12.a.	Hikayat Abdullah, Part I	Government Malay Press (1888, 1890, 1894, 1897)
12.b.	Hikayat Abdullah, Part II	Government Malay Press (1889, 1890, 1894, 1898)
13.	Hikayat Jahedin	Government Malay Press (1888)
14.	Alf-laila-wa-laila, in 4 parts (Arabian Nights)	Thomas Trusty (1891-1893)
15.	Galila Deminah	Government Malay Press (1887, 1897)
16.	Hikayat Miskin	Thomas Trusty (1886, 1888, 1894)
17.	Pelayaran Abdullah	Government Malay Press (1891, 1893)
18.	Hikayat Bakhtiar	Government Malay Press (1889)
19.	Pemimpin Johor	Mohd Haji Amin (1895)
20.	Malay Book No. II, Romanised	Kelly & Walsh (1899)
21.	Robinson Crusoe	Government Malay Press (1893)
22.	Howell's Arithmetic ( <i>Ilmu Kira-Kira Howell</i> )	Government Malay Press (1892)
23.	Key to Howell's Arithmetic ( <i>Jawab Ilmu Kira-Kira</i> )	Government Malay Press (1893)
24.	Duabelas Cherita, Romanised	Government Malay Press (1893)

Sources: <sup>1</sup>Isemonger, 1894, p. 43; <sup>2</sup>Proudfoot, 1993.

**TABLE 10: 19 OUT OF 24 SCHOOL BOOKS LISTED IN 1894 WERE PRINTED OR PUBLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT MALAY PRESS**

	PRINTER/PUBLISHER	TITLES
1.	Government Malay Press (part of the Government Printing Office)	19 (79%)
2.	Kelly and Walsh (European company)	1
3.	Thomas Trusty (European company)	2
4.	Mohd Haji Amin (Malay printer)	1
5.	Unknown	1
		24

It was thus through these series of historical events and collaborations that Singapore emerged as a centre of 19<sup>th</sup> century Malay school book production and distribution in the Straits Settlements.

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From the 19th century until World War II, the Malays enjoyed favourable treatment and disproportionate employment to colonial governmental posts; this was concurrent with a sharp increase in the Malay population by immigration to Singapore from the Malay Peninsula, Java, Sumatra and the Celebes. Coming from various background from the Malay world, nonetheless they are tied together by a similar Malay cultural assimilation. Contents. Population of the Malay in Singapore 1. History of the Malay Kings of Singapore 2. Malay Kings of Singapore (1299 -1396 AD) 2.1. Malay Kings of Singapore (1699 -18