



Impact of Educational Institutions on the Development of Printing Press in Malaya: 1880-1930

Noraidah binti Awang Damit¹

Elmira Akhmetova²

Abstract

This article reviews the role of educational institutions in the development of printing press industry in Malaya from the mid of the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The main focus of the paper is to investigate the effects of educational institutions on the emergence of printing press companies. The paper suggests that, although the printing press was already present in Malaya in the early nineteenth century, there were no companies yet being interested to produce local newspapers and periodicals until the arrival of the London Missionary Society as well as other European educational and missionary activities at Malaya. Their arrival, as the paper suggests, coincided with the increased role of education, which is evident in the rapid growth of educational institutions. The major finding of the paper is that the establishment of the printing press in Malaya was influenced by both, the growth in educational institutions and the European intervention, even though the former should be considered as the main factor.

Keywords: *printing press in Malaya, educational institutions in Malaya, Malay periodicals, London Missionary Society, missionary activities in Malaya*

Introduction

Since 1860s the printing press in Malaya has become one of the major important elements that affected the connection between people of the region with the outside world. As compared to other means of communication during that time, newspapers had a great impact in connecting people not only with respect to the economy, but also the society and the politics. In addition, the newspapers provided comprehensive information on regional news. Admittedly, people understood the essential role of the media in maintaining societies' awareness of the regions' affairs. However, the demand for newspapers in 1860s was not as great as nowadays due to the fact that most of the people in the region were not yet aware or interested in the media. These facts also led to the turbulence in the industry whereby some companies had to stop issuing newspapers.

The main demand for newspapers and magazines came from the traders' community, which was mostly located in Singapore and Penang (Roff, 1972). However, although the demand for newspapers was primarily from the traders, the printing press also attracted other communities

¹ Noraidah binti Awang Damit is MA student at Department of History and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: noraidah20071989@gmail.com.

² Elmira Akhmetova is Assistant Professor at Department of History and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: elmira@iiu.edu.my.

during that time, especially the educational institutions. Several newspapers, instead of focusing on economy, had discussed education as their main agenda. Interestingly, the first newspapers issued in the Malay Archipelago by the Christian missionaries aimed at educating people about ethics and morality (Roff, 1972). The end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the emergence of several Muslim newspapers in the Malay Archipelago, whereby the local Muslim scholars published their works and tried to share their ideas with others.

There is no doubt that the printing press, especially the newspapers, had a great impact on the people's lives during that time. Along with the spread of nationalism and religious awareness, these newspapers brought changes to the field of education. The educational institutions in Malaya during that was not in favour of education of the locals as the British were neither committed to its provision nor allowed it for the locals, which was mainly due to the fact that they wanted to protect their own interests. However, due to the pressure from the Malay elites, they decided to establish schools for the locals but limited to the elite class only. Nevertheless, the development of educational institutions went through drastic changed in the early nineteenth century when the British allowed more Malay schools to be established and to be accepted more students.

This article accordingly examines the contribution of the educational institutions in Malaya from the 1880s until the First World War period. The sources are gathered from various libraries in Malaysia including the national library, while online databases are used to find books, articles, theses, and dissertations related to the topic of the present article.

Education in Malaya During the British Colonialism

In 1800s Malaya consisted of the strait settlements and seven states. The geopolitical situation of the region kept changing under the British rule and this led to more systematic political governance in Malaya as compared to the previous centuries. It is interesting to note that the British caused a great geopolitical transformation in Malaya. Although the British colonialism was commonly viewed negatively by the natives, some of their legacies had a positive impact on the region and worth to consider. In fact, not only the geopolitical situation, but also the socio-economic condition of the population was affected by colonialism. The aftermath of the Anglo-Dutch agreement permitted the British India Company to obtain their firm position in Malaya although the British India Company viewed this offer as a burden and eventually decided to employ the policy of non-interference. However, by looking at the situation during these days, to employ such passive policy was not a wise decision for the company as their main interest in the region was attached to the leaders of the local community and their attitude of not interfering in conflict led to the risk of losing their economic and political influences. As they agreed to interfere in the local conflicts, a new outcome had emerged. With the British, due to the conflict, they were able to secure their interests in the Malaya and gained control as the political power since the local leadership became gradually weak and dependent on the British. The British consequently managed to gain economic and political control of Malaya.

Yet, despite the glories that British attained in the Malaya, some other problems appeared very soon. Great rights brought great responsibilities to the British. Consequently, the British was

totally dependent on the consistent development in the region, whereby required to solve endless local conflicts. This situation was not too different from their other colonies such as India or Burma. Their responsibilities included the development of communication network such as transportation, road, railway, and telegram; administration; enhancement of the political system; and, most importantly, the enhancement of educational system in Malaya. In this article, we analyse the development of one of such responsibilities of the British, education in Malaya since 1850s.

Prior to the establishment of a systematic educational system in Malaya during the British colonialism, the traditional education relied on the institution of *Pondok* or *Madrrasah*. These two institutions constituted the main medium for children's education in Malaya, particularly in Islamic studies. The British colonialism reshaped this traditional educational system on the example of its experience in India. The Malay elite demanded from the British the right to get school education. At first, the British in Malaya showed reluctance towards such demand from elite as they believed in its negative effect. Eventually, unable to tackle the pressure from the local elites, and, perhaps, taking the lessons from the Mutiny 1857 in India, the British agreed to offer education to Malay elites. The British consequently became more lenient towards education of the Malay people but was still cautious about "over-education," which they had faced earlier in India. Despite the worries that the local people may become more rebellious after obtaining education, the British had no choice other than to be positive and satisfy the demand. Therefore, in the way of creating the mechanism to satisfy the local demand for education and, at the same time, control the masses from being over-educated, the British decided that only the elites will have access to get education in English schools. This strategy, however, would not last long due to the rapid development of school buildings, teacher training centers and the establishment of libraries.

By 1850, the English schools had already been established in Malaya by private institutions, mainly by the Christian missionaries as they championed in leading the development of education in Malaya. Their curriculum did not fit with the expectations of the Malay people as they totally ignored the Islamic studies, the main focus of education for the Malay community. It is quite possible to figure out the response of the Malay people to the private school initiatives provided by the Christian missionaries. Peter Wicks clearly pointed out that educational institutions by the early 1800s were mainly run by the missionary and independent groups (Wicks, 1980). Rosnani Hashim also stated that, by the mid-1880s, the trend of education in Malaya was dominantly controlled by the private foreign people, mostly led by the Christian missionaries with the English as the medium of instruction (Hashim, 2011). Both scholars agreed that the establishment of educational institutions in Malaya started among the strait settlements first and only then spread into the federal and non-federal Malay states. Among the earliest schools were Penang Free Schools (1816), Malacca Free Schools (1826) and Singapore Institution (1823). However, the development of education prior mid 1880s developed quite slowly due to the opposition of Malay Muslims to the Christian missionary agenda (Hashim, 2011).

Willingness to provide their children with proper education, however, was stronger in the hearts of the Malay Muslims, and the parents wanted to send their children to study modern subjects such as mathematics, history, and science, which were not provided by traditional *pondok* or *madrrasah* systems. This motivation encouraged the locals to struggle for the rights to access to modern educational institutions thus could affect their children's future. In most of the cases, these demands came from the elite groups who had the high positions in the British administration and the royal institutions. Consequently, several schools were established by the British to meet the demand of the local elite, but with the limited capacity and the system which should serve the British strategy to secure their interests in Malaya.

Nevertheless, after the mid-1880s, the British policy has been changed and the British administration started paying attention to the demand of the Malay elites for a proper educational institutions for the locals. In addition to the pressure from the Malay elites, another important event took place in 1867. Malaya was handed to the Colonial office from the British India (Hashim, 2011). Consequently, the process of establishing educational institutions had increased more rapidly despite the British administration continued being quite cautious about the public Malay schools.

The rapid development of educational institutions in Malaya, consequently, became a reality by the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Statistics provided by Malaysian Strategic Research Center demonstrate that, for three consecutive decades, i.e. in 1872, 1882 and 1892, the number of schools in the states of straits' settlements were 16, 85 and 189 respectively. The enrollment figure, on the other hand, testifies a tenfold increase in twenty years from 596 in 1872 to 7218 in 1892 (Baginda & Schier, 2003). The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries had witnessed even greater increase in the number of schools in Malaya, including Penang Free School, Malacca High School, St. Xavier's Institution, King Edward VII School, Taiping and Anglo Chinese School in Klang.

Lim Peng Han in his article entitled "Malay Schools and School Libraries in the Straits Settlement under British Colonial Rule before the Second World War, 1876-1941" also detected an increase in the number of schools in Malaya before the First World War. It should be clarified here that, when we speak about educational institutions in Malaya, teachers' training centers and libraries also are included to this category. The most known teachers' training center during that time was the Sultan Idris Training College. The statistics of enrollment into the Malay schools in Penang, Singapore and Malacca at the beginning of the twentieth century show that the number of Malay male students in 1931 was about 20,264 in 174 educational institutions (Han, 2008). Meanwhile, the number of school libraries by 1935 was 165 and even though the schools were just for boys, still, the figure evidences a rapid development of educational institutions in Malaya.

In spite of the rapid growth of educational institutions, particularly school libraries, there was a deficiency of text-books and reading materials due to the lack of printing press in Malaya. The establishment of educational institutions, schools, libraries and teachers' training centers required the rich variety of reading materials, including books, text-books, newspapers and magazines.

Accordingly, the drastic change in educational system in Malaya led to the new developments in terms of producing intellectual and literary works.

The Emergence of Printing Press

Printing press in Malaya has emerged in the early nineteenth century by the missionary activists. The group of the Christian missionaries known as the London Missionary Society (LMS, 1786-1842) was mainly located in the region of straits' settlements and has established itself as a prominent missionary society in Penang and Malacca in the early nineteenth century. This society established its printing press company known as the Missionary Press in Malacca (Salleh, 2010). Besides, they also established the church as their main center of missionary activities. Interestingly, this group had separated itself from the British authority effectively gaining independence from the empire's control (Hashim, 2011). Printing press has been utilized in delivering the message of Christianity to local communities and propaganda purposes. Yet, the emergence of printing press should not be simply seen as a tool of religious propaganda alone. Before the arrival of the missionaries, the Malay literature has already spread well among the elites, although was not accessible to the masses. Consequently, the establishment of the printing press company had enabled the literary works to reach the masses, while the writers became able to share their thoughts to the greater audience. Though it is true that publishing of literary works was instrumental in the rapid growth of the printing press in Malaya, another significant reason also should be taken into consideration. By the nineteenth century, the revivalist and renewal movement (*Islāh* and *Tajdīd*) of the Muslim thought emerged in the region in parallel with the same developments happening in most of the Muslim majority countries under the colonial rule. Further developments related to printing press can be observed through Stamford Raffles' efforts in improving Malay education, particularly in Singapore. This was also the beginning of the prominence of Munshi Abdullah, the Malay author. His initial appearance followed by two Western scholars, Alfred North and Benjamin Peach Keasberry, who had been interested in developing the printing press in Malaya as well (Lim, 2010). The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) sent Alfred North to Singapore where he worked as a teacher and learned the Malay language from Munshi Abdullah. They accordingly worked together in publishing Abdullah's literary works, such as *Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah* (1838) and *Sejarah Melayu* (was printed in either 1840 or 1841). After working with North, Abdullah started to collaborate with Benjamin Peach Keasberry in publication. Keasberry, prior to his involvement as one of the LMS members, was also the member of ABCFM. These three figures played the key roles and worked together in developing printing press in Malaya. This is quite evident in their efforts to train 50 locals at a school established by Keasberry, where he had provided a training not only for the Malay and English studies, but also instructed the skills of printing, book binding, lithography and the composition of books both in English and Malay to them. The death of Munshi Abdullah and Keasberry, consequently, have not cease the development of the printing press in Malaya. At this time the British authority had not get involved in the transformation of the printing press. Since the printing press developed rapidly, the colonial authorities began to form their own printing institution known as the Government

Press. This press was basically a response from the government to the development of educational institutions in Malaya, which largely was satisfying the scarcity of the reading materials in modern schools. Other significant printing press organizations were the Methodist Publishing House, and Kelly and Walsh Ltd. These two European companies also served to fulfill the demand for reading materials, and thus emerged as the main producers of the printed educational materials.

To sum up, the development of new intellectual works in Malaya had been encouraged by the emergence of the printing press, and, thanks to the reform in educational structure, the new technology had been utilized for the benefit of the future generations in Malaya. This transformation was undoubtedly owed to the awareness and continuous efforts from foreign and local peoples, who believed that the right to education shall not be abandoned even if it may cause unrest or dissatisfaction among the locals against the colonial government. As a result, the Malaya region witnessed a new type of intellectual discourse and connection among the population through the printed press, which also contributed to the growth and enhancement of the educational system.

Malay Literary Works in the Late Eighteenth and the Early Nineteenth Centuries

As has been highlighted in the previous pages, the initial strategy of the missionary schools was to provide education among the Malay community. We also stated that the British Empire adopted a policy of encouraging the establishment of educational system for the Malay elite. Yet, this British policy did not achieve significant results. Until the early nineteenth century the public schools in Malaya were still not properly developed due to the lack of sponsorship. Consequently, the London Missionary Society, represented by two significant figures, Thomas Beighton (1790-1844) and John Ince (1795-1825), grew in prominence and spearheaded the educational development in Malaya. The establishment of formal educational institutions by the LMS led to further transformation in Malaya, especially after the printing technology has been introduced by Beighton in Penang, who owned a printing office there.

The schools lacked reading materials and text-books, thus the LMS aimed at producing the main reference and teaching materials for students (Adam, 1992). The agenda that they included in every book and pamphlets was mostly related to the importance of good manners and ethics. Even though they revealed their main agenda openly, many Malay people still did not trust education of their children to them as it has been perceived as an act leading to a deviation from Islam. The LMS accordingly tried to convince the Malay parents that they do not aim at converting Muslim children into Christianity and education of their children was extremely important. Eventually, because of the lack of attendance and the change of the British policy towards the educational system in Malaya during that time, the role of missionary groups as the main providers of educational and reading materials had gradually been reduced.

By the mid nineteenth century, the Malay literature had become the center of attention due to the emergence of the first newspaper in Malaya, known as *Jawi Peranakkan*³ in 1876. This marked the first newspaper issued by the Malay people if not by the entire Muslim world. The founder of this newspaper was Munshi Mohd Said bin Dada Mohiddin (Adam, 1992). It has been first issued in Singapore and issues at the beginning were not regular or consisted of the news covered by the editor alone. In general, *Jawi Peranakkan* provided the latest news from the region, as well as the translated news from foreign newspapers, advertisements, and Malay poetry. The death of Munshi Mohd Said led to a temporary slump of the newspaper, which was later revived by the editor of *Skola Melayu*, Mohamed Ali Al-Hindi, in 1893 (Roff, 1972). Under the new leadership, *Jawi Peranakkan* came up with a fresh and more comprehensive content. Nevertheless, due to financial problems, the newspaper could not survive and ended its operation by 1895. Many scholars agreed that *Jawi Peranakkan* was among the earliest newspapers that affected the awareness of the Malay society about the importance of reading and also led to a formation of several other periodicals in the region.

The newspaper *Skola Melayu* (Malay School in English, 1888-1890) established by Munshi Sheikh Muhamad bin Gulam Hussain Al-Hindi in 1888 was intended to provide a source of reading material for Malay students (Roff, 1972). It has printed news from outside Singapore, including Sungai Ujong, Bentan, Java, Padang and other regions in Malaya, as well as news from Europe and other parts of the world. In addition to covering of current news, *Skola Melayu* also included articles, poems and interesting stories. It provided some useful information such as the currency rates and advertisements. *Skola Melayu* has been sold mainly in Singapore and other straits settlement states at the price of 15 cents per issue, while its price outside Singapore was 25 cents. This newspaper was eventually closed by the end of 1890 due to financial problems. However, as has been mentioned earlier, its owner Munshi Sheikh Muhamad bin Gulam Hussain Al-Hindi became the next editor of *Jawi Peranakkan* until 1895. Other notable newspapers in Malaya issued at the end of the nineteenth century included *Bintang Timor*, *Peridaran Shamsu wal Qamar*, *Jajahan Melayu*, and *Lingkongan Bulan* (Han, 2008).

Another significant Malay periodical published in the early twentieth century was *al-Imam*. The emergence of this first serious periodical in Malaya indicated the beginning of the Islamic reformist and revivalist movement in the region. It was produced between 1906 and 1908 by two prominent Muslim Malay scholars, Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin and Sayyid Shaikh al-Hadi, who were influenced by the thoughts of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Ridha. Therefore, *al-Imam* resembled the periodical published in Egypt by ‘Abduh and Rashid Ridha, called *al-Manar*, as it covered various current issues related to Islam and Muslims and propagated the importance of purification of Islam.

Another type of literature deserves to be highlighted here as one of the earliest printing press productions in Malaya was literature books. Among the earliest Malay books that maintains its popularity until the present days is *Hikayat Abdullah* (“Story of Abdullah”) first published in

³ The term "Jawi Peranakan" refers to locally born, Malay-speaking Muslims of mixed Indian and Malay ancestry. As newspaper was established mainly by the representative of this group, they took their group name as a title for that periodical.

1849. This book written by Munshi Abdullah is an account of Malay society in Malacca and Singapore. Prior to this book, Munshi Abdullah wrote another book entitled *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan* published in 1838. Today these two books are considered to be the main sources of history of the Singaporean and Malaccan societies in the nineteenth century. Besides Munshi Abdullah's works, another novel written by Shaikh al-Hadi entitled *Hikayat Faridah Hanom* (published in 1920s) played an important role in the Malay intellectual development and could be considered among the pioneering works in the regional book publishing. This novel narrates a story related to the issue of the emancipation of women in the Malay society. It is claimed to be a Malay prototype of an Egyptian novel with the story setting used from the Egyptian society perspective.

To sum up, the early developments of printing press in Malaya resulted in the rapid emergence of newspapers, magazines and book publication. It is true that, until the beginning of the twentieth century, the issuing of newspapers and magazines was limited in terms of time and quantity, and the number of published books was limited as well. Yet, these original works played a significant role in establishing the culture of publication in the region. Later, the number of publications were multiplied and passed knowledge from the past generations to the future ones.

Reading Materials at Educational Institutions

The rapid educational development in Malaya starting from the mid-nineteenth century led to a new challenge for the British colonial administration. There was a severe shortage of school reading materials, which were essential for students as well as for instructors. Positively, the Malay scholars had already began producing literary works, and local printing press had emerged soon to facilitate the production of newspapers, magazines and books. Thus newspapers and books were utilized at the Malay schools as their primary reading materials and the newspaper *Skola Melayu* was the mostly used one among them. The educational development accordingly went concurrently with the development of the printing press. Let us bring some figures of schools and student enrollments of that time, which effectively hint at the actual demand for reading materials.

The number of schools in Malaya including in the strait settlements in 1900 marked 169 overall with 7344 enrollments and this included the girls' schools. The records of figures taken just eight years earlier indicate that there were only 85 schools while the enrollment was 2200 students. These figures perfectly demonstrate the drastic change in the number of schools and students in the century, whereby the demand for text-books and reading materials also grew sharply. The statistics, however, do not include information of other federal states, which definitely may increase the number of schools and students. By 1916, there were 365 schools in the federated states with 18034 enrollments, while there were 137 schools with less than 7923 enrollments in the unfederated states (Han, 2008). These numbers demonstrate clearly the picture of schools development in the early twentieth century Malaya.

Another institution closely related to the development of printing press in Malaya was the school library. By 1930s, the number of school libraries in the Strait settlements reached 165 (Han,

2008). Thus it can be suggested that the development of schools in Malaya by the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries had rapidly increased and this eventually led to new educational and intellectual developments including printing press. The available sources indicate that the production of printed literature, especially books, started to increase sharply as early as the mid-nineteenth century when school enrollments had multiplied. Consequently, the British government needed to be involved in printing industry to facilitate the students' and teachers' needs for reading materials. The failure of the missionary activities in convincing the local Malays to utilize their reading materials at local schools has also been noted by the colonial government. Thus, the British government had no other choice than the enhancement of the *Jawi* text publications. The printing press companies, on the other hand, put efforts to change the *Jawi* alphabet to Latin. Yet, due to the rapid increase in the number of schools and the firm nature of the local communities, the government seriously confronted the transformation into Latin. Notable literary works and newspapers printed prior to the end of the nineteenth century still used the *Jawi* script. Also, there is no clear information on the entire list of books had been used at educational institutions as reading materials until the end of the nineteenth century. We know only the most popular titles such as *Sang Maharaja Singa*, *Hikayat Taman 'Ajaib*, *Cherita-cherita Duka Shakespeare*, *Pelayaran Gulliver*, and *Cherita-cherita Sherlock Holmes* (Han, 2008).

Consequently, the usage of reading materials in the educational institutions in Malaya by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries had been enriched by newly developed regional printing press.

Conclusion

This article studied the role of educational institutions in the development of printing press industry in Malaya from the mid of the nineteenth until the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Although the printing press was already present in Malaya in the early nineteenth century, there were no notable companies that had produced local newspapers and periodicals, and this has not been changed until the arrival of the London Missionary Society as well as other European interventions in Malaya. Their arrival, as the paper suggested, coincided with the increasing role of education, which is evident in the rapid establishment of educational institutions. The paper concluded that the establishment of printing press in Malaya was influenced by both, the growth in educational institutions and the Western intervention, even though the former was the main factor. Until today, education and printing press are closely correlated with each other, and the enhancement of these institutions is absolutely vital for the future generations and lifelong learning.

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