Appraisal of Formative Years of Malaysian Book Publishing

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INTRODUCTION

IN studying the contemporary Malaysian book trade it may be useful to examine the role of the colonial ruler in shaping the educational system because the life of a book-related industry is much dependent upon the development of the preliterate and oral-based society into the book-reading society of the 90s in Malaysia. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to study the general thinking on education and development and its impact on the present structure of the trade.

Today Malaysia is considered as a developing country and is in process of industrial upgrading and diversification which is surely pushing her to emerge as a major economic power in the Asian Pacific rim at the end of the century. In 1992, Malaysia's Gross National Product was assumed to be around RM140 billion or approximately US$50 billion. With the present population of about 20 million and an income per capita at around RM7450 or US$ 2850, Malaysian GDP is about the same as New Zealand and Ireland (Osman 1993, 46). Vision 2020 is a blueprint produced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia with clear intention to steer the country into developed nation status by year 2020. It is hoped by then Malaysian society will be democratic, liberal and tolerant, economically just and infused with moral and ethical values (Mahathir, 1992).

The goal of government immediately after Independence was to correct whatever imbalance that had been created by the colonial era, and logically the main thrust of action

was to plan for the progress of society, develop the political, economic and socio-cultural fabric. For example, the Malaysian government played very active roles in stimulating and maintaining growth in rice and palm oil markets since Independence. Definite policies were designed to manage the growth leading to the success of the agricultural sectors. All efforts were clearly concentrated in accelerating the economy through massive investments in infrastructure, agriculture and rural development.

However, growth of a book publishing industry in Malaysia is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Post-Independent publishing of books for schools and the general market by local publishers began in earnest only in late 1950s. Prior to that the book market was monopolised by British publishers who saw the former colony as a good market and had provided Malaysian readers with their books except books in Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Tamil. Book publishing in the developing world began taking strides in a systematic way only a quarter century ago when these countries became free from colonial rule (Malhotra 1984, 81).

Upon closer inspection of the book trade it is apparent that Malaysian book publishing has inherited amongst other things a book trade structure which has no clear distinction of roles within the trade: there is the obvious overlapping of functions between author and bookseller, that of publisher and printer and that of wholesaler and importer/distributor. More importantly, it is apparent that growth of the trade is slow. the market is small, unorganised, fragmented and divided further into urban and rural segments. The situation is further burdened with the lack of reading habit although there is growth in literacy and increase in spending power.

This study is carried out primarily as an effort to investigate how small and large Malaysian publishing houses define their marketing mission. It is hoped that the findings will help shed some light on how Malaysian publishing houses can establish effective marketing directions for their companies in order to ensure that the market is fully arrested and tapped.

It was reported widely in the print media that the average Malaysian reads only half-a-page of one book a year (*The Malay Mail*, 1993.) This is based on a survey of the reading habit covering books read for fun and excludes reading for information from textbooks or other information sources. The Director-General of the Malaysian National Literary Society then, Datuk Hassan Ahmad, who was also the former Director General of DBP and former Permanent Ambassador to UNESCO, suggested that such a rate fell below the UNESCO reading recommendation of 80 pages per person per year for developing countries (UNESCO Rep. 1967, 17).

However, it was clear from the outset that the researcher has immediately to address problems faced by producers of cultural products which are not high on the desired list of the purchasing public even though there is an obvious improvement in the rate of disposable income among the public. The Treasury Economic Report (1993) showed that the total

spending of Malaysia's domestic residents has increased at a rapid rate and in 1992 the potential domestic market was over RMl50 billion. Still, book producers regard the business as a huge undertaking with slow and doubtful returns, but its importance and potential, if managed efficiently, should reinforce the commitment to improve the situation.

Therefore the early part of the study seeks to investigate reasons behind this discouraging performance in a very important trade. What has contributed to this state of affairs which can be described only as a small and unexciting market with slow and small returns of investment produced by a small demand from a community that regards reading and writing and other literary pursuits a relatively minor part of their lives although a great deal of attention is given to reading for schooling and academic purposes?

Although the trend is changing for the better, this still remain as the crux of the matter; what makes a community poor readers, poor library users and more importantly for this study, poor book buyers? These attributes of the Malaysian public are cited as reasons why publishers, especially of general books, are reluctant to invest and tie up capital in publishing ventures. (Azizah 1996, 17).

If Malaysia is setting her goals towards being recognised as a developed nation. its book industry, which can also be seen as indicative of the nation's intellectual developrment (Hassan 1987, 93, Rohani and Rustam, 1987), has a long way to go before she joins the ranks of truly well-developed publishing nations inAsia, in the fullest sense of the term, like Japan. Japan in 1990 had attained 100 per cent literacy status and had published a total of 40,567 new titles, a majority of which are general titles with income from books listed as Y849 billion (Japan Club, 1994).In 1991. The Japanese publishing industry was reported to be worth US$22 billion (Ho 1992, 34). The publishing industry in Japan is also aided by the fact that the Japanese authorities claim that every man, woman and child is a reader, at least of the magazines. It is reported that in 1990, 3,889 magazines were published. Japan's success story is also attributed to support from 120 million highly information-oriented people (Minowa 1991, 90) and their advanced technologies and superior management systems and other significant features such as its distributive systems, especially the role of the giant distributors, selling by consignment and their retail price maintenance system (cf. Hattori 1984, 121).

In comparison with advances nations, the Malaysian book trade leave much to be desired. The sluggish state of book development in the country is not making a significant contribution to achieving the objective of developing literary development and to increase considerably the number of books published in the country. In the same year (1990) statistics on the Malaysian side showed a turnover of RM250-400 million (Ho 1992, 34) and 4,578 new titles (National Library 1992). The rate of literacy was reported in Parliament as 79.9 per cent. However, the mainstay of Malaysian publishing is still the production of books for the school system. Shaari (1993,7) reported that 102 publishers were selected to supply textbooks to Malaysian schools for the 1992-1993 school session. The number of publishers selected have exceeded even the list of members of the MABOPA itself! However this is

indicative of the fact that Malaysian publishers still are not able to break free of educational publishing and venture into publishing of general books, considered by some book people as the real indicator of literate society. Instead, what we have as a general scenario of the Malaysian book scene is a publishing industry involved mainly in the production of textbooks, all kinds of supplementary reading material for students concerned mainly with examinations only. There is also a proliferation of model question and answer books, work books and revision courses. Thus, of the yearly production of about 3,000 titles of books, more than 60 per cent are books for the educational systems, about 25-30 per cent are general books (including literary and creative works, general knowledge books for children and religous books) and about 10 per cent are higher learning books (including textbooks for university level and some scholarly and academic works (Shaari 1993, 8).

Despite the rapid economic progress experienced in recent years, the Malaysian book trade is still suffering from setbacks unlike the other sectors inthe economy. The rapid economic growth of about 8 per cent a year has generally boosted the incomes of the masses, however, this has failed to spill into the book trade. The problem seems to point in the direction of the lack of reading consciousness and habits and this condition is recognised as the main deterrent to publishing growth in Malaysia (Ong 1978, 94). Table 1 shows the mean monthly expenditure of households onbooks derived from the 1984 survey on the reading habits and interests of Malaysian people (DBP 1984, 27). The mean expenditure on books was RM 4.00 which represented only 15 per cent of the total monthly expenditure.

Table 1. 1
Mean monthly expenditure on books

Ethnicity	Mean	S.D	No. of households
Malay	4.1	24.8	3,420
Chinese	5.2	16.7	2,178
Indian	2.3	7.0	571
Location			
Urban	6.6	25.4	2,615
Rural	2.3	15.5	3,431
Language			
Malay	4.1	24.7	3,486
Chinese	4.8	16.4	2,079
Tamil	1.0	3.8	465
English	11.2	18.4	166
SES			
Low	2.1	13.7	4,247
Middle	6.8	26.2	1,360
High	18.3	44.8	450
Overall	4.3	21.0	6,196

Source: *A Survey on the Reading Habits and Interest of Malaysian People*, DBP 1984, 27).

Such problems in the local book trade system from our past. Thus a clear understanding of Malaysia's historical background could provide the contextual information on the probable causes and effects that gave rise to the situation as seen today.

To begin with, a brief description of the early cultural and intellectual history of Peninsular Malaysia will be presented.

EARLY MALAY CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Asmah (1982, 58) claims that among the legacies of the British colonial government, the most valuable is the English language. While this heritage cannot bedisputed the colonial era was accountable for some controversies in the educational policies executed in the colonial lands. There is a scholar of thought that claimed that there is a traditional absence of any overall policy for education in the colonies and it was only from 1923 that the Colonial Office (CO) finally recognised the need, prompted by strong missionary pressure, to establish an Advisory Committee on the subject (Whitehead 1989, 269). Trocki (1992, 92) suggested that even when colonial government initiated the establishment of the school system it was with the intention of recruiting local personnel for clerical services in government service and and commercial houses.

In pre-World War I and II Malaya, the British colonial government's lack of enthusiasm for native education was matched by the Malays who were unwilling to send their children to government schools because the curriculum did not include subjects related to Islamic knowledge. This reluctance to embrace fully the introduction of a vernacular Malay education can be easily understood because the Malays had already in their history a long and creative tradition of indigenous learning. Writing, both as literature and for communication, had been in use for centuries (Gullick 1965, 52). Accounts by the famed Chinese traveller I-tsing even mentioned pre-Islamic centres of learning in the Malay archipelago of Indonesia and Malaysia. When Islam came to the Malay world in the thirteenth century, beginning with Pasai (modern Acheh) on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, the Malay world was further enriched with the acquisition of a new alphabet and literature (Winstedt 1966, 130).

Muslim evangelisation, like the tradition of the Christian mission, gave great significance and importance to personal reading of the sacred scriptures. Thus in the Muslim tradition too, a great deal of importance was and still is given to acquiring the skill to read the Quran and the studies of the interpretations and other religious writings. Therefore in a sense there existed in the Malay world a long tradition of religious scholarship where students were personally tutored by religious experts, the Imam or To Guru, in private learning areas called the *pondok* (literally hut), private houses of Malay chiefs and the courts of the rulers. This early learning and and memorising of the whole scripture was followed by further education in Muslim theology pursued by those able tto finance eductaion in Muslim centres of scholarship in Mecca and Cairo (Winstedt 1966,131).

There were also other forms of lay education although they were not literary in the real sense. Malay students were expected to cultivate a flair for elocution and were trained in the art of debate. Other literary activities include readings from texts in the greater tradition of the courts to oral-based forms such as the ingenious *pantun*, proverbs and pithy sayings. They were also expected to be well-versed with the oral traditions of animal fables and satires, anecdotes and the cycle of trickster stories. To this day this literary style remained popular. Malay novels from their earliest debut till now enjoy good demand and some new titles are launched with all the hype not unlike the British version.

The indigenous Malay by the arrival of the first European would have acquired religious, literary and secular education and was well-versed with his oral traditions. He would also, in full accordance with earlier traditions of the Malay world, be fully receptive towards the introduction of new influences and ideas that would have further enriched his outlook. Such traits before had led to the emergence of the Malay entrepot state and also to the cultural melting pot that was Melaka. However the arrival of the Portuguese with their political agenda and the subsequent siege of Melaka brought the collapse of the sophisticated Asian trade network (Andaya and Andaya 1982, 55) and with it the Melaka Sultanate which brought repercussions throughout the Malay archipelago. This encounter should have brought the benefits of Western civilisation but instead colonisation blocked such benefits to the colonised lands (Syed Hussein 1977, 20).

The Malay archipelago after the fall of Melaka was marked by the continued presence of Europeans who were driven by international rivalry amongst themselves. By this time the states had little scope for opposing the Europeans. The European domination was based on superior military technology, economic strength and national and mercenary armies (Trocki 1992, 87). Any chance of revival was finally dashed by the establishment of trading centres by the British in Penang in 1786, Melaka in 1824 and Singapore in 1819 which later emerged as the major entrepot for the region. What had initially started as the establishment of trading centres led to full intervention due to the development of a new demand for tin from 1840s and for rubber at the turn of the century (Tarling 1992, 29).

Studies by Andaya and Andaya (1982), Porter and Stockwell(1987), Whitehead (1989), Tarling (ed.) (1992), Proudfoot (1993) and Bartle (1994) show that educational programmes by missionary organisations and the government were linked to the motives behind Western intervention in Southeast Asia. As far as Malaya was concerned, Kratoska and Batson (1992, 250) quoted two reputable colonial officers assigned to the Malay states. Frank A Swettenham believed that British intervention was "duty forced upon England" and "imperative from motives of humanity alone" although he admitted that he was certain that it would be "highly beneficial to British interests and British trade". Hugh Clifford found the Malay peninsula in the the 1880s "surrounded by all appropriate accessories of the dark centuries" which needed immediate liberation.

However, even before British intervention, the Roman Catholic missionaries since the

coming of the Portuguese had begun working in education and had established the mission school in Penang in 1826. After the territories of Penang, Melaka and Singapore were united as the Straits Settlements and the Straits of Melaka came firmly into British hands, the missionaries saw this as the "passage through which the light of the Gospel seems ordained to pass" to China (Bartle 1994. 21).

In their efforts to spread the gospel over the whole Orient. The missionaries began to alienate the local people. Proudfoot (1993, 12) felt that Christian evangelical zeal brought the local intelligentsia against the Christians and anything the Malays perceived as controversial, including the introduction of the first printed translations of the Bible into Malay by the Dutch East India Company as early as 1629. Another example of what must have been one of the early collisions between the two beliefs was the report written by Martha Wallace, a missionary teacher with the British and Foreign School Society (BFSS). In 1829 when she was put in charge of the girls' education of a school, she lamented that the Malay school had run into trouble because Malay parents insisted that their children be taught nothing but the Quran and that she would rather see it empty than comply with the request (Bartl 1994, 25).

Another major communication problem was the problem of readability of the translated Christian scriptures. It was a well-known fact then and even now that the Malays could not accept any other language of worship than Arabic (Proudfoot 1993, 42). The Malays, as customary then and now, would memorise prayers in Arabic, so even if the scriptures were translated into Arabic, the Malays could not read them because very few Malays had full command of the Arabic language outside the rituals of worship. Proudfoot (1993, 12) argues that this problem of access to the Malays led to the initial introduction and promotion of the romanised script of the Malay Jawi from the middle of the nineteenth century. It also led to the setting up of schools to teach basic literacy and numeracy so that students could read the printed word of the gospel either in the Malay Rumi (romanised Malay alphabet) or in English. The romanised Malay alphabet was introduced into the Malay vernacular school curriculum in 1897-1899 (Proudfoot 1993, 18).

Therefore Miss Wallace's Malay-medium programme in the secular public school, the Singapore Free School, would use spelling books, tracts and bibles prepared by the missionary B.J. Keasberry. After a circulation of around 14,000,000 pages of literature (not all in the Malay language) from the Mission Press, the the Malayan campaign was abandoned in the 1840s due to lack of achievement (Proudfoot 1993, 13). Instead the missionaries turned to China which until then remained closed to their influence.

Keasberry stayed on to carry out his individual work in education and was later responsible for a major initiative in Malay printing and publishing. In an attempt to capture his readers, Keasberry, with the help of Abdullah Munsyi (1796-1854) pioneered the use of lithography which reproduced not the printed text but a facsimile of the manuscript. He had recognised the Malay affinity with the manuscript form and with the co-operation of Abdullah, produced multi-coloured lithographs that could be easily read by the Malay readers. In other words, the precursor to the marketable tome in the Malay world.

Keasberry also stopped disseminating free copies of the Missions publications to everyone. Instead free copies of their publications were given only to interested literates. Apart from translations of Christian scriptures, Keasberry published Malay language magazines such as *Taman Pengetahuan* 1848-51 (The Garden of Knowledge) and *Cermin Mata* 1858-59 (Eye Glasses).

It is important to realise that given the opportunity, the Malay world would readily embrace new ideas and new technology that would further broaden its knowledge base. It is important however to also realise that rapid technological changes in industrial Europe remained inaccessible to the colonised lands. The future of the Malays then was tied up with British policy in the Straits Settlements, especially policies pertaining to education because it has considerable influence over the growth of book publishing (Minowa 1991, 143).

BRITISH COLONIAL POLICY AND THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF MALAYSIAN PUBLISHING

Stange (1992, 560) opines that missionary work was the catalyst that had facilitated the transfer of oral traditions into writing which in the end led to literacy for the Malays who were keen to preserve their language while receiving an acceptable form of modern education and technology. Despite this spin-off it is justified to maintain that the slow rate of growth in modern education that could lead to further development of an indigenous intellectual base and equip the Malay to face the rapidly changing free world was a direct result of the educational policy of the CO.

It was mentioned earlier that British lack of enthusiasm for native education was matched by the resistance of the Malays towards government schools for reasons which should be clear. The reality is that the underlying policy of the CO was not lost upon the natives. Despite the rhetoric of la mission civilisatrice or Kipling's White Man's Burden (cf. Fanon 1963. Said 1993 and Tarling 1992), British colonial policy was conducted in the "fond traditions of parsimony and neglect" (Whitehead 1989, 271). They were also keen to avoid repeating their mistake in India whereby their education policy had created a class of educated natives who became critical of their policies. Thus what was actually carried out was basically a static policy which became "a euphemism for excessive paternalism and lethargic conservatism" (Whitehead 1989, 271).

In Malaya the Pangkor Engagement of 1874 marked the beginning of the British period. Frank Swettenham, one of the most influential British officers, was anxious that instruction should be given on a need-to-know basis only, adequate only to the point of helping the children become better farmers rather than offering them any wider view of life. E.W. Birch, a colonial secretary, was satisfiedto know that the education system "does not over-educate the boys... almost all (of whom) followed the avocations of their parents or relations, chiefly of agricultural pursuits" (Orr 1972, 79).

Even when Malay vernacular education was introduced to fight illiteracy it was not solely advocated in the interests of social development but more of social Darwinism. It was to prepare the Malays to accept their place in colonial society (Andaya and Andaya 1982,231). It is sobering indeed to realise that from 1800 until decolonisation during the Second World War and Independence in 1957 very little was done to prepare the Malays to face the rapid expansion of science and technology in the Western world. There was no investment in human capital that could guarantee the supply of educated young Malays from the villages, from the masses.

In marked contrast, Japan for instance was free from colonial influence and was able to promote the country's literacy development after contact with the West. Realising the great benefits that could be reaped from the Western knowledge industry, Meiji Japan introduced compulsory education in 1872 and by 1900 illiteracy was almost eradicated (Jeffries 1967,33). The fact that Japan was far more populous, rich and sophisticated had also contributed to the rapid literacy development. Moniwa (1991, 143) for instance, argues that publishing takeoff followed successful education policies by the Germans in the eighteenth century. There, education was also made compulsory and by 1780 book clubs made their debut and all Germans were reported to have spent part of their time reading.

There were brief periods of respite although they were probably spin-offs from education policy for the Malays. Stamford Raffles had plans to develop Singapore as a centre for education which materialised later on. He encouraged Malay nobility to educate their children in the English-medium schools. Anglophiles from the royal houses of Johore and Perak saw the advantages of English educational systems and actively supported them in their states.

Malay vernacular schools received the attention of R.J. Wilkinson when he was appointed Federal Inspector of Schools in 1903. He saw the state of neglect, lack of teachers and training opportunities. He observed that the majority of teachers "had never read any books except those used in their classes and that only three out of 50 had more than a shillingsworth of literature in their private library" (Hon-Chan 1967, 227). Proudfoot (1993, 77) claims that Wilkinson in his report ignores or dismisses locally-published books. Among Wilkinson's successes was the standardisation of Malay spelling which was accepted and used in Malay publications thereon.

He was succeeded by R.O. Winstedt who began his long career in Malaya as Director of Education. His tenure resulted in the establishment of Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in 1922. Although the College was intended to teach gardening and agriculture for commoner Malays, it later became a think-tank for Malay awareness. When it was merged with the Malay Translation Bureau its publishing programme included a newspaper, a magazine, Malay textbooks and other publications from the teacher trainees.

Thus, book publishing in Malaysia began to emerge into its modern form beginning from the nineteenth century with the introduction of the Jawi and later on the romanised

Malay script. Early activities involved translations of Arabo-Persian works on religion into the Jawi and later Rumi scripts. Previously any form of reading or study were conducted in an unsophisticated, face-to-face settings of religious instruction or oral-based traditions. This sphere of traditional religious studies was the basis of trends in Malay literacy, cultural and intellectual history. In these groupings, teachers, readers and listeners studied, analysed and memorised the Quran. The Quran's first verse begins with the call to read/recite. Thus oral recitation and oral transmission of the Quran has been the main component of Malay education. The literate and the oral intermingled in an atmosphere of reflection and memorisation and this blended very well into the lives of rural Malays.

In pre-war Malaya this tradition of religious studies and oral traditions was most active in Kelantan and later on in the northern part of Perak, areas at the periphery of British interest and outside mainstream secular education. These areas later developed into centres of learning, publishing and printing. For example, the state of Kelantan in the north eastern part of the peninsula evolved as a centre for Islamic knowledge and publishing and this development is well documented by Roff (1972 and 1974).

In due course these places emerged as vibrant centres of Malay reformist education, publishing and ultimately nationalism. Robinson (1993, 232) finds that Muslims under colonial rule accepted print technology more willingly and quickly. Previously, Muslims put great importance on learning from the scholar or the author himself and were cautious of the printed word. Print technology was not accepted in the Muslim world until the nineteenth century, when they were compelled to use it to protect their faith, four hundred years after Western usage.

Bowen (1993, 629) points out that in the British and Dutch colonies of Southeast Asia the reformist schools developed a two-tier system of religious communication. At one level was the publishing of periodical journalism for the masses and the other was the publication of all archipelagic materials into local vernaculars such as Javanese and Malay. Sheikh Mohd. Tahir and Sheikh Al-Hadi, reformist followers of Sheikh Mohamed Abduh of the Al-Manar Group in Cairo, returned to Malaya and started the first Malay newspaper *Al-Imam* in 1906. Roff (1972) dealt in great detail with the development of Malay and Arabic periodicals in the Malay states from 1876-1941. The study is developed further by Proudfoot (1993), detailing early Malay printed books up to 1920. The survey thus covers the first hundred years of Malaysian printing with reports on marketing, distribution and quantity of publications which were not covered by Roff in his earlier study. This study was later extended to the period until 1949 (Mohd. Sidin, 1992).

During these formative years of Malaysian publishing the structure of their business was small-scale and informally organised. Publishers were also retailers and buyers were encouraged to buy directly at publishers' premises. The Malay Islamic Press played an active role and their productivity until 1920 surpassed the European press who could not gauge the needs of the reading public (cf. Proudfoot 1993). Readership support from the

pondok and reformist educational system was the basis of their success. To this day religious publishing remains one of the most active areas in the Malaysian scene.

The second trend in the early years of Malaysian publishing had its origin in early Malay literature which evolved into modern Malay literature. The list of Malaysian scholars who studied this area is extensive. It includes Abu Bakar (1992), Ismail (1976), Teeuw (1961) and Winstedt (1977). The most prominent originator cum innovator of modern Malay literature was Abdullah Munsyi. He was right in the centre of events by virtue of his position as language teacher to none other than Raffles and the missionary Keasberry. His critical account of Malay lifeas observed on his many trips produced the first autobiographical works in Malay. *Pelayaran Abdullah* (The Voyage of Abdullah) was chosen by Wilkinson as part of his publishing efforts in the Malay Literature Series in 1904. It was a move to push for Malay literacy in Rumi. The Malay script using Roman alphabets. over the popular Jawi script which is based on Arabic. During this disorienting period in Malay historiography, romanised and Jawi scripts existed concurrently.

Although the British preferred the easier Rumi script they limited usage and readership of this medium to only three years at the primary level. What little was needed in terms of Malay textbooks was adequately met by the Malay Translation Bureau at SITC. The fact that Malay-medium schools were seen as less prestigious, less marketable on the job front in comparison to English-medium schools, also contributed to a further immobilisation of Malay-based elements. This expropriation of cultural identity (Fanon 1963, 170) led to literary resistance in the works of the reformists at the turn of the twentieth century, as articulated by Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi, Shaykh Mohd. Tahir bin Jalaludin and others and institutions like Majlis Ugama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu Kelantan (The Council of Islamic and Malay Customs of Kelantan) (cf. Roff, 1974 and Syed Hussein, 1977).

Syed Sheikh bin Ahmad Al-Hadi remains a significant persona in Malay cultural and intellectual history. Apart from penning *Hikayat Faridah Hanum*, the first Malay novel, in 1925, he was also instrumental in publishing the earliest Malay newspaper *Al-Imam* in 1906 at his own press. In addition he was a religous teacher trained in Cairo and had journalistic capabilities. His novel marked the beginning of a literary output outside the old aristocratic manuscript tradition. Readers and writers of novels represented the newly literate masses deeply rooted in the acricultural cycle of peasant experience. They were brought up listening to romantic adventures of popular folk tales. The Malay novel in the twenties and thirties accompanied the moment when Malay peasantry began to move out of rural life into clerical, white-collar occupations of the newly growing urban areas (Watson 1989, 45). This genre has retained its popularity because of its proximity to the Malay roots, accompanying all their anxieties and experiences of rural life into the new environment of post-Independent cities.

PUBLISHING AND THE POST-COLONIAL STATE

Curiously enough events that prompted the first decline in Malay publishing after 1900 and later on during the post-World War II years were both executed in good faith. The decline after 1900 was a direct result of the influx of imported books from Mecca, Cairo and Bombay. Local publishers of repute turned to retailing and entered the global market in a sense by becoming stockists for books printed in Istanbul and Russia (Proudfoot 1993, 44).

It would have been the most natural development except that by turning their attention to retailing, the publishers had indeed lost focus of their most crucial role, that of developing and producing locally written, printed and published books for a newly-emergent and captive market. This period also proved to be a major turning point whereby previously exclusive texts for the courts enjoyed by the privileged class could then be made available to the masses with the introduction of print technology. But, ironically enough, in the 1920s also, the Malay world had become recipients of mass-produced cultural products from abroad.

On the English language front, grants in the form of books for missionary work and school lesson books had been regularly sent to the Empire since the early days of the missions. However around 1875-76 there were reports of decline in the demand for old lesson books because new textbooks were being supplied by commercial publishers who had by then entered the trade. They must have seen the potential market due to rapid development of English education in Singapore and other cities of the Straits (Bartle 1994, 32). If some form of partial control of excessive flow of books from abroad had been exercised at this point, the local publishers would probably not have turned to retailing. Or, if this move into marketing had been encouraged and supported, a more developed system of bookselling might have prevailed as early as this period in the history of the Malaysian book trade. However, given this situation, it was inevitable that the local trade could not chart its own course effectively and had thus figured prominently only in the study of Malaysian cultural and intellectual history, not for developing publishing infrastructure, establishing their grip on the local market, or stimulating the knowledge industry, much less the ecomony.

The other period of decline in the local scene followed the post-World War II years. It could be attributed to certain developments in the international arena and by British desire to avoid scrutiny and critique from outside the Empire, mainly from America and UNESCO (Whitehead 1989, 277). The Americans had advocated an egalitarian policy in education in the Philippines and worked towards preparing the Filipinos for self-government (Kratoska and Batson 1992, 251).

As was suggested by Minowa (1991, 143), a good system of education could launch publishing takeoff. However the reader will realise that progress in literacy in the formative environment of Malaysian publishing was manipulated to give rise to a few streams-of

development which in the final analysis brought disservice to the Malays (Hon-Chan 1967, 288). One result that is especially of importance to this study is the lack of stimulation in the enviromnent to create a pro-leaming society which could lead to a pro- reading society and which in turn could lead to a pro-book society.

There were indications that literacy was spreading by 1870 (Gullick 1965,53), and Roff (1977, 162) also mentions that the Malays from 1880 had organised literary and debating clubs and had a network of publications to disseminate their ideas. The census of 1920 counted a round figure of 175,000 literate Malays in British territories (Proudfoot 1993, 89). They presumably were the readers of religous literature and didactic novels published during the period. From the English-medium schools they would also read about heroes from Greek mythology and English literature. In addition the literate Malays were also avid readers of newspapers and magazines from Constantinople, Cairo and from Indonesia. However it is belived that the majority of this group were from the elite English educational system and urban areas, whereas the vast majority of the Malays, especially from the vernacular schools, were left in rural poverty and were unable to reap the benefits of a well-planned and progressive system of education. The Malays were "led down a blind alley" (Hon-Chan 1967, 288).

The wind of change in British colonial education policy began irnmediately after the Second World War (Stockwell 1992, 347 and Whitehead 1989, 277). By this time they were watched by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) founded in 1945, which immediately launched an international agenda to eradicate illiteracy and was devoted to the cause of books (Behrstock 1991, 29). The seminal study and subsequent publication of UNESCO's *World Illiteracy at Mid-Century* painted a grim picture in the distribution of illiteracy around the world round about 1950 (Jeffries 1967, 26). The colonial authorities then became more attentive towards the need for literacy in the colonised lands after the Second World War. There were urgent calls for economic and social progress and the birth of political revolutions.

The UNESCO survey reported that two-fifths of the world's adult population cannot read or write pushing the colonial authorities to rapidly reassess their priorities in order to concur with rapidly changing ideologies and international opinion. The British responded by establishing the British Council although the Council was originally set up before the Second World War to counter cultural propaganda by other European powers. The Council was organised to help literary and education movements by contributing British expertise and material (Jeffries 1956,188). Independent Malaysia, being one of the Commonwealth members, became a major recipient of British Council aid and donation. Along with the Christian bodies, the United Kingdom government provided textbooks, educational materials and English literature. Gifts of nearly 1.5 million books from the Americans and nearly 2.5 million books from United Kingdom were distributed to schools, libraries, reading rooms, hospitals and institutions in 1964-1966.

In Malaya, Winstedt (1966, 133) reported that by September 1956 there were 4878 schools with 972,665 pupils, of whom 398,412 studied in Malay, 320,168 in Chinese, 205.563 in English and 58.522 in Indian (Tamil). These four diverging streams resulted trom the way the British administered separate educational policies for the three ethnicgroups in pre-Independent Malaysia. These policies strengthened the divisions between the communities (Trocki 1992, 116). The impact of these distinct segments, so vastly different from one another, is tremendous on the market structure of contemporary Malaysia. At the same time Malaysia had become a major market for English books because the medium of instruction in the mainstream education system was English. The former colonies had an almost unlimited capacity to absorb English books (Jeffries 1967, 147). Buchan (1992, 349) also considers them as natural market places for British book exports since local publishing industries had not been fostered to become producers of books. The colonies presented a vast market consisting one-fifth of the habitable world and UK publishers began to establish contacts with these markets in the early 1900s.

One of the earlier efforts was undertaken in 1915 by E.C. Parnwell of OUP who travelled to Africa, Malaya and Hong Kong to promote the Oxford English Course. These early excursions paved the way towards the later opening of branches all over the Empire. A branch in Singapore was established in 1955 which moved later to Kuala Lumpur in 1957. OUP's Overseas Education Department remained active even after the dissolution of the old Empire and by 1967 overseas exports had reached nine million books, representing 55 per cent of sales (Sutcliffe 1978, 115). The Far East branch in Kuala Lumpur became the most successful producer of educational books and enjoyed buyers preference in the constantly growing demand for the teaching of English as a second language in the region (Barker 1978, 58). OUP is still a major player in Malaysia and when the local government changed the medium of instruction for schools to Bahasa Malaysia in the mid-70s, the local arm of OUP, Penerbit Fajar Bakti took over the task of publishing books in Malay.

After the War, UK publishers who were handling the overseas service began to realise that they have to "export or die" although they had already managed to secure a fair share of the overseas school market (Attenborough 1975, 173). In the 1950s, one the earliest expatriate bookman of Malaysia, Donald Moore, began to play an an active role in the local publishing scene. Moore arrived in Singapore in 1947 after serving as a war-service naval officer. He was encouraged by UK publishers, especially the Hodder and Stoughton group to set up what may be the earliest agency house in the country. Soon other UK book publishers were also represented by the Donald Moore Group and in the 5Os the agency had offices and warehouses in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Hong Kong and Tokyo (MBPA, 1968). Apart from basically fulfilling a marketing function the Group did venture into local publishing. Moore himself was instrumental in reactivating the local publishing scene by coming up with a list of local works written by expatriates. He began to diversify his activities and it is believed that by doing so his business began to weaken. Attenborough thought that it was a case of "expand and die" (1975,178). By 1967 it was evident that this Group had over trading problems and Moore had to sign over his business to, among

others, Hodder and Stoughton who had a majority share. It was later operated under United Publishers and Eastern Universities Press, managed by Goh Kee Seah in Singapore. Heinemann Educational Books also left the Moore Group and established abranch in Kuala Lumpur in 1961. Heinemann reported a sales profit before tax of £169,000 in 1982 from Asian subsidiaries (St. John 1990, 479).

Therefore the period between the 50s and 70s was marked by active involvement by British publishing houses. Even then it must be realised that the activities here were mainly efforts taken in a second market; Singapore was the main thrust. Sutcliffe (1978, 284) maintains that the overseas branches were not more than stockists for the sale of Oxford books. One thing is certain: the indigenous book publishing centres in Kelantan and Penang began a period of decline due to imports of books from overseas in English as well as Malay.

However it is accepted that by then the local book trade had evolved into a commercial enterprise and the activities had, exhibited early beginnings of book marketing practices such as the placing of advertisements, book competition, book reviews and incentives for bulk purchases. Throughout this period of infancy local publishers had problems with capital and excessive inflow of books. Foreign publishers had no financial constraints and were actively pursuing the textbook market, the most lucrative market, while indigenous publishers had to contend with the production of general books, mostly dime novels, stories and romances in a society just emerging out of illiteracy and neglect.

It is clear therefore that Malaysia at the threshold of Independence remained underdeveloped as far as the indigenous book-related business is concerned. By the late 1940s the indigenous publishing centres in Kelantan and Penang began to decline, leaving Singapore as the only centre of activity. In the 1950s publishing activities in the local scene were mainly carried out by the members of the *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* or *Asas 50* (Generation 50s Literary Society), a group comprising of writers, journalists and poets. They were all committed to the national cause and many were involved in the literary and language activities and publishing. Their political and literary agenda called for progress and awareness of the importance of knowledge and is believed to have reactivated the indigenous book trade and marked the beginning of the nascent book industry in post-Independence Malaysia.

Coincidentally, this period of rebirth met head-on with the first period of overseas expansion ot British publishing. By a quirk of historical coincidence too, this period was accompanied bv the spreading influence of UNESCO and book aid activities of UNESCO Press, UK and America. Provision of free books for the newly-independent and book-hungry society is an honourable act. Such undertaking had provided immediate relief by offering cheap reprints, subsidised and used books covering a a wide range of subjects. It was soon realised that the long and arduous road to full literacy and good education for the masses is a crucial responsibility of government and nation-building. Unfortunately outright aid does not help create a viable publishing industry (Buchan 1992, 33). Instead it created

a situation of over flow of books which deterred local publishers from venturing into the business and thus carrying out their roles in the trade.

At this threshold point too new governments felt the necessity to intervene and began to take over certain sections of the book business which are considered crucial, such as textbooks. Again, this well-meaning act had produced the institutionalised arm of government publishing through the establishment of Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, DBP, in June 1956. Although its primary duty is developing and promoting Malay literature and language, DBP holds the monopoly in primary level (year 1-4) textbook publishing, which is disadvantageous to publishing development in the country. In fact, DBP's activities may have been detrimental to the growth of the local industry. However, DBP has been exemplary in developing the literature of the nation. After all, the creation of literature is the one thing that must come from within the nation and no amount of external aid could help nurture the creativity of a people (Jeffries 1967, 139). Due to this belief, all efforts should be taken to ensure that books are ably produced by our own indigenous capabilities. Books must be written, published and above all must be accessible to one and all by an effective marketing system. At the same time the industry should remain open to the free flow of books especially educational materials, as endorsed in the 1950 Florence Agreement.

Altbach (1992, 122) suggests that British colonies fared better than colonies ruled by other European powers in the sense that the British publishing companies paved the way towards a better organised publishing infrastructure. He also maintains that they laid the foundations of the modern book industry and had recruited and trained local editors who later left to set up their own companies. These publishers too supplied books where none were available, especially in the Third World. In some cases these companies had indigenised their operations, like OUP, Longman and Heinemann and continue to lead the market without any competition from the local publishers. However, Altbach, in agreement with the general consensus reviewed here, also feels that the colonial rulers themselves had not contributed enough to the development of the indigenous knowledge base.

It was only after Independence that the book development aspect was nurtured and planned by new governments in order to build up a young nation imbued with all the ideals of nationalism and pride in one's history and traditions and most importantly the reality of Third World aspirations vis-a-vis the international knowledge system.

The weakness in the Malaysian situation points to the tradition of not having a continuous growth in the intellectual tradition and never trying to seriously cultivate the habit of reading for pleasure and life-long education. Coupled with a relatively young print-on-paper publishing and a long history of oral tradition, it seems the business of book publishing needs to be reassessed and restructured right from the roots of its existence in order to ensure the proper rites of passage into an orderly and systematic build-up of book publishing and bookselling business infrastructure. The options are a synthesis between proven models with adjustments in order to suit local ways of managing the book trade.

Looking back into the historical past may help us to understand the predicaments facing the nation now but it must be realised that continual recrimination or completely putting the blame on the past will get us nowhere. Attempts must be made to rectify and build up from the positive elements left behind.

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