

## Colonial Knowledge and the Construction of Malay and Malayness: Exploring the Literary Component

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### ABSTRACT

*'Colonial knowledge' has been the most powerful form of knowledge in decolonized societies but increasingly less recognized, because it has become naturalized and embedded within those societies. Indeed, it remains the single most dominating source of power and legitimacy for the post-colonial state, particularly those surviving on ethnic nationalism. This brief essay explores the role of the literary component, as part of colonial knowledge, in the construction of 'Malay ethnicity'. In the process, it shall demonstrate that the literary component is an integral and indispensable part of the colonial investigative modality; hence the construction of classifications and categories that elaborate, refine and even embellish the invented ethnic category 'Malay'.*

*Keywords: colonial knowledge, construction of Malay and Malayness, literary component, investigative modality.*

### INTRODUCTION

Since 1988, I have been analysing the process of identity construction in Malaysia. An aspect of it touches upon the role of 'colonialism' and 'colonial knowledge' and how categories and classifications introduced and used during the colonial era have become naturalised into the social life of Malaysians, both at the authority-defined and everyday-defined levels. The empirical focus has been on the Malays as a community. The choice is both personal and academic. As a person, I wish to know more about the community that I have been born into, not only knowing it in the popular sense, but more importantly in the academic-analytical sense. Admittedly, I know a lot more about the community in the popular and everyday life-world sense, but I strongly feel there is still a lot more to be done in the latter sense. This is one such attempt, indeed a modest and exploratory one, too.

I would argue that colonial conquest was not just the result of the power of superior arms, military organization, political power, or economic wealth, it was also the result of a cultural invasion in the form of a conquest of the native 'epistemological space', or, put simply, the dismantling of native thought

system, hence disempowering it of its ability to define things and subsequently replacing it with a foreign one, through a systematic application of a series of colonial investigative modalities. It is this 'cultural technologies of rule' employed successfully by the British that has not been discussed in-depth by historians of Malaysian society. In Malaysia, it seems to be analytically convenient, almost routinised, for historians and others to accept an unproblematised 'colonial knowledge', both as the basis and the accepted form of Malaysian and Malay history. This is despite the fact that there exists the politico-academic attempt, until today, to 'indigenize' Malaysian history by privileging the native-Malay viewpoint.

Indeed, it is an admired effort; but the emphasis has clearly been motivated by the perceived conceptual and 'cultural-nationalistic' need to re-interpret history rather than to problematise and question the construction of historical knowledge, in this case the colonial knowledge, which, in fact, is the basis of identity formation in modern Malaysia. The lack of analytical attention, especially in Malaysia, on the problematic origin, development and nature of colonial knowledge has also been the result of viewpoints that have emphasized either the good or bad side of the paternalism which informed colonialism, but have nothing to say about colonial knowledge itself. This is sadly true as evident in a contribution on the state of Malaysian historiography made by no less than Cheah Boon Kheng (1997), a retired history professor from Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

This deafening silence on colonial knowledge, something which has been taken as given, or taken-for-granted or as something natural, both amongst historians and non-historians, is a cause for intellectual and ideological concern, especially in the context of the present development of Malaysian studies and society. My basic concern here is clearly about the 'identity of knowledge', one which has even escaped the mind of many scholars and analysts who themselves are deeply involved in the general study of (people's) identity.

For instance, in the discourse on Malay identity in Malaysia one could argue that colonial methods of knowledge accumulation and the resultant corpus of knowledge gathered has been critical in providing not only substance, but also sustenance to the whole exercise. The sheer amount of 'facts' accumulated and amassed by the British, be it on traditional Malay literature or modern history of Malaya, establishes without doubt the hegemony of colonial knowledge in Malaysia's intellectual realm. Thus, a sustainable discussion on Malay identity, whether in the past or at present is made possible by the rich colonial knowledge. Milner (1994) demonstrated convincingly that even the discourse on 'politics' (or should I say 'identity') amongst the pre-war Malay writers-cum-nationalists was informed mainly by or conducted within a framework of colonial knowledge.

In the first part of this essay, I would present an argument that the history of the much discussed contemporary Malay identity and Malayness, largely

a colonial-orientalist construction, reflects very much the identity of the overall history of Malaya and then Malaysia, one that was dominated, shaped and 'factualised', culturally, by colonial knowledge. In short, colonial knowledge has not only enabled conquest of British Malaya and the Malays as well as the immigrant population, but also was produced by it, as much as by the more obvious and brutal modes of conquest that first established colonial power in the Straits Settlements and later in the Malay states. The first half of the second part of the essay takes a brief look on how Malay and Malayness was constructed, namely, the creation of the three pillars of Malayness – *bahasa, raja dan agama* (lit. language/Malay, sultan/Malay and religion/Islam), through the implementation of a host of colonial policies directly affecting the Malays, all of which came to be officialised and instituted during the colonial period within the framework of colonial knowledge. This in turn has given rise to the modern idea of a Malay 'race' (*kaum*) and 'nation' (*bangsa*) as strongly reflected in its nationalist and anti-colonial movement, but embellished and localised by the British for its immediate ideological and materialist interests in British Malaya. The second half deals directly with matters relating to the contribution of the literary component to colonial knowledge and the construction of the ethnic category Malay and Malayness, through an examination of the contributions of three major colonial administrator-scholar figures, Raffles, Wilkinson and Winstedt.

#### COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE, THE METHODOLOGY AND MODERN IDENTITY FORMATION

What is relevant here is for us to examine further the methods of knowledge accumulation that were responsible in creating an impressive corpus of colonial knowledge. I find the approach introduced and applied by the anthropologist Bernard Cohn (1996), based on his longitudinal research on British rule in India extremely useful.

He argues that what enabled the British to classify, categorize, and bind the vast social world that was India (by implication in Malaysia, too) so that it could be controlled was its all-important 'investigative modalities' devised to collect and amass 'facts'. These 'facts' and translation works made it possible for the British to conquer the 'epistemological space' that he mentioned. According to Cohn, "an investigative modality includes the definition of a body of information that is needed, the procedures by which appropriate knowledge is gathered, its ordering and classification, and then how it is transformed into usable forms such as published reports, statistical returns, histories, gazetteers, legal codes, and encyclopedias" (1996: 5).

Cohn also shows that some of the investigative modalities are general in nature, such as historiography and museology. The survey and census modali-

ties are more highly defined and closely related to administrative needs. These modalities are constructed and tailored to specific institutional or 'departmental' agenda and become routinised in the day-to-day colonial bureaucratic practices. Some are even transformed into "sciences" such as economics, ethnology, tropical medicine, comparative law, or cartography, and their practitioners became professionals (Cohn 1996: 5). Obviously, this was an activity of not only the British, but also other colonial powers, including the Dutch, as explored by Pyenson (1989) and the French (Mamdani 1996).

There are six major investigative modalities employed by the British and they are as follows. First, there is the 'historiographic modality' that has three important components: (1) the production of settlement reports, which are produced on a district-by-district basis, and it usually consists of a detailed account of how revenue is assessed and collected by the different local indigenous regimes and a collection of local customs, histories and land tenure systems; (2) the ideological construction regarding the nature of indigenous civilizations which eventually provided the space for the formation of a legitimising discourse about British civilizing mission in the colony; and (iii) constructing the histories of Great Britain in the colony through such methods as the creation of 'emblematic heroes' concretised in the form of memorials and sacred spaces in various parts of the colony. The second modality is the 'survey modality'. It encompasses a wide range of practices, from mapping to collecting botanical specimens, to recording architectural and archeological sites of historic significance, or the most minute measuring of peasant's field. When the British came to India, and later Malaysia, through systematic surveys, they were able not only to describe and classify both countries' zoology, geology, botany, ethnography, economic products, history and sociology, but also created an imaginary nationwide grid and could locate any site in both countries for economic, social and political purposes. In short, the concept of 'survey' came to cover any systematic and official investigation of the natural and social features of indigenous society through which vast amount of knowledge were transformed into textual forms, such as encyclopedias and extensive archives.

The third is the 'enumerative modality', particularly in the form of official census, that enabled the British to construct social categories by which the indigenous society was ordered for administrative purposes. In fact, census was assumed to reflect the basic sociological facts, such as race, ethnic groups, culture and language. It thus objectified social, cultural and linguistic differences amongst the indigenous peoples and the migrant population that led to the reification of Malaya as polity in which conflict could only be controlled, from the colonialist's viewpoint, by the strong hands of their bureaucracy and armed forces. This control was effected through 'the surveillance modality', the fourth in the modality list. Through this modality detailed information was gathered on 'peripheral' or 'minority' groups and cate-

gories of people whose activities were perceived as a threat to social order were closely observed and contained, often using methods such as fingerprinting.

The museological modality is the fifth. It begins with the perception that the colony is a vast museum, thus its countryside is assumed to be filled with ruins and it is a source of collectibles and curiosities, or artifacts, to fill local as well as European museums, botanical gardens, and zoos. This modality became an exercise of macro open representation of the indigenous antiquity, culture and society to both local and European public. The sixth and final modality, which is the travel modality, complements the museological one. If the latter provides concrete representations of the natives, the former helps to create a repertoire of images and typifications, even stereotypes, that determine what is significant to the European eyes, something usually considered as aesthetic – ‘romantic’, ‘exotic’, ‘picturesque’ – such as architecture, costume, cuisine, ritual performances, historical sites, and even bare-breasted females. These images and typifications are often found in painting and prints as well as novels and short stories, written by the colonial scholar-administrators or their wives and friends. The tradition of coffee table books, for instance, emerged from such a context.

These modalities represent, according to Cohn (1996: 1), a set of ‘officialising procedures’ upon which the British established and extended their capacity into numerous areas controlled by defining and classifying space, making separations between public and private spheres, by recording transactions such as sale of property, by counting and classifying populations, replacing religious institutions as the registrar of births, marriages, and deaths, and by standardizing languages and scripts. The colonial state therefore introduced policies and rules that helped frame the peoples mind and action within a pre-decided epistemological and practical grid.

For instance, the famous Malay Reservation Enactment of 1913 first defines who is a Malay and second defines the scope of the use of land categorized as such and eventually sets the public and commercial value of the land. Since this particular Enactment is instituted in eleven different *negeri* (province) in Malaya each, according to the *negeri* constitution, offers a slightly different definition of who is a Malay. So someone of an Arab descent is a Malay in Kedah but not in Johor, or someone of a Siamese descent is a Malay in Kelantan but not in Negeri Sembilan. It could be said that Malay and Malayness is not only created and represented but contested through a single legal document such as the Malay Reservation Enactment 1913.

In a different circumstance, the growth of public education and its rituals fosters official beliefs in how things are and how they ought to be, because the schools are crucial ‘civilizing’ institutions and seeks to produce moral and productive citizens. Through schools much of the ‘facts’ amassed through the officialising procedures or investigative modalities are channeled to the younger population, thus shaping their own perception what social reality is, most of

which are constructed by colonial knowledge anyway. More than that, with the existence of Chinese, Malay, Tamil and English schools, ethnic boundaries becomes real and ethnic identities become essentialised and ossified through elements such as language and cultural practices. Mandarin, as a language, for instance, is never the mother tongue of the Chinese, instead their respective dialects are (Dikotter 1992).

The bigger and more lasting sociological implication that colonial knowledge has impacted upon the colonised is the idea that 'nation-state' is the natural embodiment of history, territory and society. Thus nation-state becomes dependent on colonial knowledge in determining, codifying, controlling and representing the past as well as documenting and normalising a vast amount of information that form the basis of its capacity to govern. We are too familiar with 'facts' provided by reports and statistical data on commerce and trade, health, demography, crime, transportation, industry and so on, all of which is taken as self-evident in an unquestioning manner.

We rarely question the identity of these 'facts', at least in the Malaysian case. These facts and its collection, conducted in the steep tradition of colonial knowledge, lay at the foundation of the modern post-colonial nation-state, such as Malaysia. The whole Westernization process, and the onset of the modernization project, through which the nation-state concept is introduced and practiced, is indeed founded on such knowledge which is rooted in the European world of social theories, belief and thought system and classificatory schema that subsequently shape and reshape the lives of the subjects.

What I have briefly described above is basically the identity of a history, most if not all of the Malaysian one. It is within this history that modern identities in Malaysia, such as Malay and Malayness, have emerged, consolidated and reified. Against such a background, I shall now proceed to examine the experience of identity formation and contestation in Malaysia, in particular the contestation about Malayness, both in the past and at present, and the role of literature.

## THE CONSTRUCTION MALAY AND MALAYNESS: THE LITERARY COMPONENT

### HISTORICAL BACKDROP

In a recent important contribution, framed within Anthony D. Smith's empiricist concept of *ethnie*, Reid (1997) sketches the different meanings and applications of the term Malay and Malayness in the history of the Malay archipelago: first, as self-referent categories amongst the peoples inhabiting the archipelago; second as a social label used by the peoples of South Asia and China, who were mainly traders, and third, by the Europeans, namely, the Portuguese, the

Spanish, the Dutch and the British, as travelers, traders and eventually colonizers.

In the first and second instances, arguably a non-European context, Malay and Malayness, by the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, were associated with two major elements, namely, (1) "a line of kingship acknowledging descent from Sriwijaya and Melaka and (2) a commercial diaspora which retained some of the customs, language and trade practices in the emporium of Melaka" (Reid 1997: 7). The kingship (read *kerajaan* and the royal family), as a pillar of Malayness, was more prominent in the area around the Straits of Malacca. Islam was also considered as another pillar of Malayness because the kingship had Islam as the provider of its core values. The commercial diaspora constituted peoples from outside the Straits of Melaka area, such as from Borneo, Makasar and Jawa. They defined their Malayness in terms of language and customs, thus adding two more pillars of Malayness.

Sociologically speaking, the way the label Malay or Malayness was used by indigenous inhabitants of the archipelago during the pre-European era was both objective and subjective in nature. The kingship was used as an objective measure. The use of Islam was both objective and subjective, in the sense that it was an objective criterion to define the kingship and his subjects (Muslim and non-Muslims). However, subjectively, anyone who embraced Islam could be counted as Malays. Equally, those non-Muslim and non-Malay could be labeled as Malays as long as they lived the Malay way of life, speak and write Malay, put on Malay costumes, cooked Malay cuisine and become an integral part of the Malay trading network.

Interestingly, this was not dissimilar to the way the Portuguese, Spanish and the Dutch were using both the label Malay and Malayness. Both, being merchants first and ruler second, their main concern were materialistic. Ideologically, at home, unlike the French and the German, they were not propagators of the concept of nation-state, but more inclined to frame their approach towards 'civilising' the natives (perceived at first as non-human) within a vigorously religious orientation. This is confirmed emphatically by Norman Davies, in his brilliant *Europe: A History* (1997), when describing the activities and behaviour orientation of European overseas, including in the 'East Indies', in mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. He said:

Europeans sailed overseas ... for reasons of trade, of loot, of conquest, and increasingly of religion. For many, it provided the first meeting with people of different races. To validate their claim over the inhabitants of the conquered lands, the Spanish monarchs, for instance, had to first establish that non-Europeans were human ... and were ordered to read out to all natives peoples: 'The Lord our God, Living and Eternal, created Heaven and Earth, and one man and woman, of whom you and I, and all the men of the world, were and are descendants'. To confirm the point, Pope Paul III decreed in 1537 that 'all Indians are truly men, not only capable of understanding the Catholic faith, but ... exceedingly desirous to receive it. (1997: 510-511)

Like all merchants and sailors trading across oceans, compiling detailed inventory lists of people and things, including the cargoes, carried in their ships was a mandatory exercise for the Portuguese and Dutch merchants not only for reason of general accountability but also for the sake of safety. Therefore, they had to devise ways and means of classifying and categorizing the content of the ship, including the sailors and officers. It is in these records that it was found that captains of ships were identified and recorded by Dutch harbourmasters as Chinese, Javanese, Bugis-Makasar, Balinese, Madurese, Arab and Malay captains and sailors, too. They were mainly adopting the local labels without any conscious attempt to reconstitute and redefine according to a preconceived European notion. Therefore, both the objective and subjective local notions embedded in the social labels 'Malay' or 'Malayness' remained unchanged.

Based on these evidence, Reid (1997: 8) argues that the subjective aspect of Malay and Malayness, as observed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, allowed plurality in the subsequent composition of the social category Malay because it was "exceptionally open to new recruits from any background". He thus postulates that "it (Malayness) can be seen to have evolved towards the idea of *orang Melayu* as a distinct *ethnie*", indeed a helpful analytical construct to tie together the historical evidences available to him. However, using the same evidences, one could still offer alternative analytical construct because they could be read in many different ways. The fact that the British reconstituted the whole meaning of Malay and Malayness, almost ignoring its *ethnie* sense, as described by Reid (1997: 10) himself, is instructive.

Not unlike in India, as described by Cohn (1996), the British in Malaya developed an entirely different approach towards acquiring an understanding of the natives, especially the Malays. It began during the East India Company era, especially from early 16<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with 'merchant-scholars' like Raffles playing the important role. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after direct British intervention, it was the crop of colonial officers who became the 'administrator-scholars', who, not unlike anthropologists and antiquarians, diligently and painstakingly studied the Malays and the other natives. Both sets of scholars were not only interested in 'socialscape' (the laws, language, culture and economy), but also of the 'enviroscape' (flaura-fauna and the environment in general). They have at their disposal a set of investigative modalities informed by a Scottish Enlightenment idea that human beings should be classified in a scientific manner not dissimilar to the way Carl Von Linne (Linnaeus) and Charles Darwin classified all living things. In the social scientific sense, these modalities became more refined and was further informed by a notion of cultural relativism that clearly exhibited, in Edward Said's term, "orientalism". Hence, through various ideas and methods within each of the investigative modalities (namely, historiography, survey, museological, enumerative, travel and surveillance) and through colonial knowledge, the



British was able to construct, with supporting 'facts', and introduced many names and categories which many in Malaysia today thought as something natural and have existed since time immemorial. It is in this context literature plays an important role to give content and substance to the colonial construction of Malay identity.

#### THE LITERARY COMPONENT

The literary component of colonial knowledge is often neglected because it has always been discussed under the broader theme of 'language and culture', in particular, how the native language and knowledge of local culture become standardized by the colonialist for both the general administrative purpose of official communication and interaction with the indigenes. The language in particular became the medium of instruction in vernacular schools or teachers' colleges set up for the locals. Literature thus became an integral component of the schools or teachers' college curriculum. For that reason, language, more than literature, has often been seen as directly related in the construction of an ethnic identity. In fact, in the context of Malayness, the Malay language or *bahasa Melayu*, is seen as one of its pillars, not Malay literature.

However, if we examine closely, it is not too difficult to discern the critical role of the literary component, and activities related to it, in constituting and establishing the 'Malay language' as a critical element in constructing Malayness. In the following pages, we shall explore briefly the role and contribution of three well-known British scholars – one 'merchant-scholar' and the other two 'administrator-scholars' – in the construction of Malay and Malayness through their individual efforts in studying and writing on various aspects of Malay literature and on the general topic of Malay culture; they are Stamford Raffles (1782-1826), R.J. Wilkinson (1867-1941) and R.O. Winstedt (1887-1966).

*Giving the Malay a Nation and History: Stamford Raffles the 'Merchant-Scholar'* The single most important British 'merchant-scholar' that has been responsible for developing what could be called 'Malay colonial knowledge' was Stamford Raffles, who was once the Governor-General of Batavia and subsequently became the founder of Singapore. He was a scholar in his own right. Besides being greatly informed by the Scottish Enlightenment tradition in his general orientation, he seemed to have been deeply influenced by the German Romanticist movement in Europe, especially the ideas of Johann Herder (1744-1803) who emphasized common language, blood and soil as constitutive elements of *Volk*. This influence was amply articulated in his finest and defining essay, entitled "On the Malayu Nation, with a Translation of its Maritime Institution" in the journal *Asiatic Researches* (Vol. 12, 1816, original 1809: 140-160) that set the tone for the subsequent discourse on Malay

and Malayness amongst the Europeans as well as amongst the Malays much later. He wrote:

I cannot but consider the Malayu nation as one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, and preserving their character and customs, in all the maritime states lying between the Sulu Seas and the Southern Oceans, and bounded longitudinally by Sumatra and the western side of Papua or New Guinea. (Raffles 1816: 103)

Raffles thus became the first scholar who not only introduced the concept of 'Malay nation', but also elaborated on the concept of the 'Malay race', the 'Malay world' and 'the Malay language'.

What was more significant was the fact that he also gave the Malays a history. Together with his friend Dr. John Leyden, who was then residing in Penang, Raffles renamed a Malay chronicle, originally called *Sulalatus-Salatin* (lit. Royal Protocol), translated into English by his friend Dr. John Leyden, as *Sejarah Melayu* or the *Malay Annals*. This Raffles did in his "Introduction" to the Leyden's translation, the full title of which is *Malay Annals; translated from the Malay language by the late Dr. John Leyden, with an introduction by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (London: Longman, 1921). What Raffles effectively did at once was not only to claim that "here it is, the book on the history of the Malays" but also denied the fact that there were a number of other palace-centric Malay chronicles of the same genre which collectively could be categorized as the history of the Malays, too. Instead of claiming the rest as such, he chose one and claimed it as the history of the Malays as if to support further his contention in the "Introduction" that the Malays not only a race and a nation, it also has a history.

In short, Raffles provided an epistemology for Malay colonial knowledge based upon European classificatory schema and social theory of the Enlightenment and Romanticist kind. Such an orientation was also informed by a kind of 'free trade and the civilizing mission' approach that often occupied Raffles' mind then. In a sense, he provided a critical input into the making of a 'Malay literate civilization' more than many scholars of Malay studies would be willing to, with the exception of Alatas (1976). Thus, the 'Raffles paradigm' on the Malays was established, particularly through the *Malay Annals*. It later came into used and popularised as a text for the study of the Malays, hence a critical contribution to the creation of 'Malay studies'.

*Constituting a 'Malay Literature, Ethnography and Malay Studies': Richard James Wilkinson and Richard Olof Winstedt, the 'Administrator-Scholars'* Wilkinson was a British administrator who studied Malay during his student days. After a brief stint as a district officer, he became a school inspector for the colonial Department of Education. Later, he rose in the ranks rather quickly in the colonial administration in British Malaya to reach the

position of Colonial Secretary, based in Singapore. In 1916, he was posted to West Africa to become the Governor of Sierra Leone from 1916 to 1922, after which he retired.

When he was in Malaya, his major pre-occupation was compiling a two-volume *Malay-English Dictionary* (1903). It is useful to note that a large proportion of the Malay entries was drawn from Malay literary sources. Important as it may be the dictionary and his other contributions in constituting a corpus of knowledge that could be broadly categorized as 'Malay literature and ethnography' were equally significant. However, the most important contribution of Wilkinson was his research, documentation and writing on various aspects of Malay culture and ethnography, between 1907 to 1927, which was compiled in a volume called *Papers on the Malay Subjects*. The research and publication of the volume was mooted by no less than the Council of British Residents, who in 1906, agreed to set aside some funds for that purpose. The themes that were researched into included history, government and law, art and craft, social life, culture and literature. Wilkinson was appointed as the general editor to these series of *Papers*. It is also useful to point out that in one of the essays, "Malay History and Literature", Wilkinson offered for the first time not only a categorization of Malay literary genres, but also traced the origins of the Malays to West Sumatra. Under the section "History" in the same volume of *Papers*, Wilkinson also wrote a "History of the Peninsular Malays".

This compilation of papers became important not only to trainee colonial administrators, but also to those who were interested in understanding the finer points of culture, literature, belief system, etiquette and history. Indeed for a long time, it became the 'authentic' authority on the 'Malay subjects', used by academicians and others. It became an integral part of the colonial knowledge in constituting the Malay identity. All in all, Wilkinson could be considered as a pioneer in the construction of 'Malay literature and ethnography'.

What is more significant is the fact that he was a member of a small group of British officers who was considered as being 'pro-Malay' or had "real love for and sympathy with the Malay people" (Roff 1994: 130). However, his pro-Malay position was informed by what could be termed as 'exotic and paternalistic concerns', namely, the need for the protection and preservation of the Malays and its culture.

Winstedt, on the other hand, a former assistant to Wilkinson, was well-known for his study on Malay literature, particularly Malay classical literature. In fact, his most famous book is entitled *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, first published in 1940 and later a revised edition was published in 1960. Prior to the publication of this book, Winstedt had been a regular contributor to the *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JSBRAS) and *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JMBRAS). Indeed, his book consisted of materials culled from essays which

had appeared in *JSBRAS* and *JMBRAS*. These essays and eventually the book were based on his painstaking research and documentation over a period of some forty years. Even until today, he is still considered the pioneer on the study of Malay classical literature.

Indeed, Winstedt was a prolific writer, having written more than fifteen books and scores of articles on Malay language, history, literature, customs, laws and arts, very much in the mould of Sir Edward Tylor, a famous British social anthropologist. In this sense he is more influential than his mentor, Wilkinson, in the consolidating the corpus of material that was to become the basis of 'Malay studies'. This contribution is further enhanced by the fact that he also published textbooks to be used at Malay Teacher's Training College, such as *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (lit. A Malay History Book) co-authored with Daing Abdul Hamid Tengku Muhammad Salleh, published in 1918. In the same year, Winstedt also published a geography textbook entitled *Ilmu Alam Melayu* (lit. Malay Geography). It was meant for teachers and students in the teachers college as well as Malay schools.

Along with contributions from other colonial administrator-scholars, such as Swettenham, Skeat, Maxwell and others, the Malay colonial knowledge became the main source of what came to be known as 'Malay studies', that eventually was instituted as one of the academic programmes, called the Department of Malay Studies, of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Malaya that was established in 1949. The department grouped its courses into three, namely, language, literature and culture. Some of the academic staff were indeed former colonial administrators whose contribution in the study of The Malays were important and they were supported by academicians from the Netherlands. The department played a critical role in producing graduates, most of whom are Malays themselves, who later became administrators in the Malayan civil service, both before and after the Independence. In fact, many ended up as politicians and cabinet ministers.

The department has continued to play an important ideological role in providing Malay leadership, political and others, with research and publications that has contributed to further strengthening of 'Malayness' as a ethno-political ideology, not only for the Malays, but also for the so-called 'national culture' policy which proclaimed 'Malay culture' as the basis of that policy. In this context, colonial knowledge remains the main pillar of Malay ethnicity and Malayness in Malaysia even until today, of course with some reconfigurations owing to political and social changes.

## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the essay, I stated that the nature of the present analytic endeavour is an exploratory one. It promises to explore the role of the literary

component (literary meant in the broader intellectual sense), as part of colonial knowledge, in the construction of 'Malay' as ethnic category and 'Malayness'. Admittedly, in strict empirical terms, what I have presented as evidence is brief and sketchy. However, my intention is to prove three rather simple points: first, that literary component is an integral part of each of the colonial investigative modality, more obvious in the historiographic, survey, enumerative, and travelogue modalities but less so in the rest; second, that combined with other facts, data, ethnographic and material culture artifact, knowledge on native literature classify, categorize, consolidate and objectify a particular social group and give it an identity, in this case, an ethnic one; and third, such invented social groups become naturalized through the implementation of colonial policies that manipulate their existence. For these reasons, 'colonial knowledge' shall continue to be the most powerful form of knowledge ever existed, but increasingly less and less recognized because it never has been or will be systematically analyzed or questioned as long as it is the source of power and legitimacy for the post-colonial state, particularly those surviving on post-nationalism of the ethnic kind. This brief exploratory essay, therefore, provides an empirical example from the Malaysian case and thus invites debate and criticism.

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