

“An Author’s Relationship with His Audience”: The Earliest Autobiographical Work of a Local Malay

Rahimah Hamdan and Arba’ie Sujud

Department of Malay Language, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication,
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract: This study describes the confusion regarding the term ‘autobiography’ which is being disputed by some scholars of Malay literature as well as proves that *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar Johor*, written by Mohamad Salleh Perang is the earliest Malay autobiography. In the early 20th century, the colonial scholars were of one mind in their recognition of *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* and *Hikayat Abdullah*, written by Abdullah Munshi as the first Malay autobiographical works. This recognition, in turn, led to the division of the history of Malay literature into the traditional and modern periods. Nevertheless, the recognition accorded to Abdullah Munshi gave rise to a controversy when it was said that his works were not composed for the ruler and the Malay audience but for the Western colonialists. The autobiographical works that deserve recognition should be those that were written for the ruler and the Malay audience because of the close relationship between the Malay community and their ruler. By using C.W. Watson’s scale for Western autobiographies, this study discusses the pertinence of *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar Johor* as the earliest autobiographical work of a local Malay. Indirectly, the recognition of Abdullah Munshi’s work as the first autobiography should be reviewed because it would not be fair to recognize a work whose contents were hurtful to the ruler and the Malay audience. In conclusion, this study has triggered a re-interpretation of the history of Malay literature in this country if the autobiography genre is used to mark the beginning of the ‘modern’ period.

Key words: Malay literature, conventions, audience, autobiography, Mohamad Salleh Perang

INTRODUCTION

Western colonization arrived in the Malay world as early as the 15th century. For the first three centuries (1511-1800), the colonialists from the West were not interested in knowing and understanding the people whom they colonized (Sweeney, 1987). The Portuguese, who conquered Malacca in 1511, were said to have failed as colonialists because they did not leave a legacy of scholarly knowledge in the land that they occupied (Hussein, 1974). Their presence was motivated more by economic concerns so much so that it did not have a profound impact on Malay literary activities (Ding, 2004). However with the advancement of the era of Romanticism, which swept through Europe in the 18th century (around 1800-1850), these colonialists enthusiastically immersed themselves in the literature, culture and language of the colonized society in reaction to development of the Industrial Revolution in Europe (Hussein, 1974; Sweeney, 1987).

At the same time, the Darwinian Theory which was growing rapidly in Europe, created the concepts of ‘the white man’s superior’ and ‘the white man’s burden’, thus,

reinforcing the racism perspective in Western societies. Directly, the world community has now been classified into two groups, namely the colonisers (superior) and the colonized (inferior). As Magubane (1996) opined in relation to this phenomenon: “If a ‘scientific’ basis could be found to justify imperialism and enslavement and the ‘civilizing’- of the ‘inferior’ races, then the ‘superior’ races could justify claim to be carrying ‘the white man’s burden’”.

By means of their colonial ideology, the European officers and those who benefitted from their ideas, created characters that were biased against the indigenous community. These colonial scholars avoided researches on the negative aspects of colonialism but instead preached that the ‘ways and culture of the West’ were superior, Westerners should lead the world, they were entitled to the wealth of the Orient and they made the best administrators. At the same time, the colonisers blamed those who were colonized as being the factors for their backwardness and exploitation. The exploitation of the colonized society was shown to be a noble process of improvement and a form of education (Alatas, 1977). This gave rise to many research reports on the colonized

societies covering their flora and fauna, culture and literature, which were safely stored in their academic journals such as Knaap (1994)'s opinion:

“In order to rule the colonies properly, the colonial power of the time were of the opinion that they needed not only a strong army and navy and a well-trained civil service but also scholarly and practical knowledge of indigenous society. Scholarly interest in the colonies can thus be interpreted as an offspring of the process of colonial state formation. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in England and France as well as in the Netherlands, all sorts of journals came into being to disseminate knowledge about the colonies. Few of these journals survived the wave of decolonization after the Second World War. In the Netherlands only two survived, *Bijdragen* and (*Nieuwe*) *West-Indische Gids*, founded in 1919. The other well-known journal on Southeast Asia from this period that is still in existence is the *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, founded in 1878”

In the 18 and 19th centuries, there were also a number of works by Malay authors in those states that were under Western rule. Malay literary works, which had all along been ‘istana and raja centric, now changed to meet the demands of the Western administrators, who were referred to as ‘*rajas*’. The aim of these written works was to reveal the significance of their presence to the colonized communities (Sweeney and Phillips, 1975). Local individuals serving as teachers or *munshis* would either write on their own initiative for their European patrons (for example, *Hikayat Raja-raja Siam*, which was written for van der Capeller) or according to the instructions of Western administrators (*Adat Raja-raja Melayu* for De Bruin and *Memoirs of a Malayan Family* for the British resident *butter Hunnings*). The control of the ‘European Courts’ over the production of Malay literary works based in Singapore intensified when Abdullah Munshi appeared with his autobiographical works titled *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* in 1838 and *Hikayat Abdullah* in 1843. Abdullah Munshi’s closeness to the colonialists, due to his job as a translator, greatly benefitted his activities as an author. He was free to experiment with a new trend that was developing in Europe at that time, namely the realism trend, where compositions were considered as actual recordings of the life of a society. Hence, all the experiences of dilapidation and poverty had to be mentioned in a transparent manner based on how they were perceived. Milner (1995) described the realism trend applied by Abdullah Munshi as “the use of first person

pronouns, reality descriptions of historical events and harsh criticisms of the culture, socio-political culture and practices of the Malay community”. Obviously, this writing style was very unfamiliar to Malay authors and, in fact, challenged the long inherent conventions of Malay literature. Nevertheless, it was based on this ‘aberration’ that Abdullah Munshi was recognised as the ‘Father of Modern Malay Literature’ in 1907, directly marking the end of the traditional period and the onset of the modern era in the corpus of Malay literature.

A SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORKS IN THE MALAY WORLD

The emergence of Abdullah Munshi as a Malay language teacher as well as an English interpreter originally, introduced a new phenomenon into the Malay literary world. Due to his familiarity with the colonialists, he was easily influenced by the introduction of realism. Apparently, this trend promoted a manifestation of the reality of human life without mixing it with elements of myths and the supernatural or transcendent (Rani and Zariat, 2006). This change was a ‘culture shock’ to the conventions that had been upheld by the Malay authors in particular and the traditional Malay society as a whole in general. According to Skinner and North (1978):

“For writers to break out the establish pattern and begin to subject their society and its norms to an even moderately critical scrutiny, an a result of which new themes, new forms, new styles-in fact a new ‘modern’ literature-would emerges, required some form of ‘cultural shock”

Abdullah Munshi dared to change the conventions of Malay penmanship, thus introducing a new style of writing in Malay literature. This resulted in the birth of autobiographies, biographies, memoirs and several others at the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century (Skinner and North, 1978). Then, there appeared the names of ‘new Malay’ authors who were English-educated such as Ibrahim Munshi, Mohamed Salleh Perang and Mohamad Said Sulaiman (to name a few), who went on to present a new phenomenon to the development of local literature. The recognition of Abdullah Munshi as the ‘Father of Modern Malay Literature’ in 1907 planted the seeds for the destruction of the of the ‘raja centredness’ concept in Malay literary works. This recognition was strengthened four decades later by the support of Western and local scholars such as Winstedt (1969) and several others to name a few. Several decades after Abdullah Munshi was recognised

as the figure who stood between the traditional and the modern periods in Malay literature, a prominent scholar rose in the late 1960s to challenge that recognition by introducing another figure. According to Al-Attas (1970), that title belonged more to Hamzah Fansuri in the 17th century because his works were based mainly on rationalism, which was more appropriate for the Malay-Muslim audience. In addition, unlike works by previous Malay authors, individualism and self-expression were clearly highlighted in Hamzah Fansuri's earliest Malay autobiography, *Syair Dagang*. He was the first author to use pronouns in the third person such as in *Syair Dagang*, which read, "Hamzah Fansuri in Mecca, sought for Allah swt. in the Kaabah, from Barus to Kudus it was too difficult, finally he found Him in his home". Being a true Malay-Muslim, he should be given that recognition based on his 'innovativeness' in Malay literature as in the excerpt below (Al-Attas, 1970):

"[...] *Syair Dagang* as part of an early autobiography, [...] then it seems that his parents died when he was still young, leaving him straitened circumstances which eventually forced him to lead the wandering life of a trader in many lands. During this period of travelling he must have made his acquaintance with Sufism into which he finally became fully initiated. From the life of a wandering trader Hamzah now passed on to the life of a wandering mystic learned in the doctrine of the Sufis. He had travelled in the Middle East and in Java. He had been in Siam and in Malaya. He tells us that, notwithstanding the fact the he had journeyed far and wide in quest of God-his travels extended from Makkah to Kudus he finally discovered God within himself"

Al-Attas (1969) also highlighted the great contribution by Hamzah Fansuri in placing Aceh as a famous Malay-Muslim government from the aspect of the development of knowledge and religion in the 16th and 17th centuries. Consequently, Al-Attas (1970) was of the opinion that Hamzah Fansuri was more qualified than Abdullah Munshi to be given the title 'Father of Modern Malay Literature' because of his contributions to the world of Malay-Muslim knowledge covering religion, language, literature and culture. This opinion was supported by Ahmad (1940) on the grounds that although Abdullah Munshi was said to have introduced innovations through his techniques and language, his works did not reflect the authentic conventions and identity of the Malays (Ahmad, 1940). Furthermore, according to Al-Attas (1969), the 'modern' concept of the

West must be explained in detail in view of the close link between that concept and 'humanism' in the Western sense. The 'modern' concept of the West which appeared in the 14th century, accentuated rationalism, individualism and internationalism, while rejecting any relationship with God (Al-Attas, 1969). Thus, the Malay-Muslim community cannot be labelled with this 'modern' concept of the West because the concepts of rationalism, individualism and internationalism should be in harmony, rather than in conflict with religion (Al-Attas, 1969).

Furthermore, according to Al-Attas (1969), the arrival of Islam to the Malay world brought about a paradigm shift, from the aesthetic to the scientific, to the language, literature and world view of the Malay community. The new direction of thinking was reflected in the language that was used to convey logical reasoning and scientific analysis. In this regard, Hamzah Fansuri was the first Malay intellectual to write a rational scientific paper in Malay and he fully deserves to be known as the 'Father of Modern Malay Literature' (Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas) as stated in the following passage:

"Hamzah Fansuri must be regarded as the first man to set in Malay all the fundamental aspects of the Sufi doctrines and his writings must be regarded as the earliest of the kind in the Malay and for that matter, in any other languages of the Malaysian Archipelago. I would go so far as to suggest that as far as a systematic, i.e. logically consistent and intellectual, writing in Malay is concerned the suggestion that his writings are the earliest should not be taken as covering only in the field of Malay mystical literature but also the field of Malay literature in general: in the entire field of Malay literature before Hamzah we know of the existence of no comparable work and whatever we know tends to suggest that there was in fact none"

Besides Al-Attas (1970), who rejected Abdullah Munshi as the first author of autobiographical works in the Malay world, several other scholars such as Skinner (1976) with *Hikayat Perintah Negeri Bengkulu*, Sweeney (1980) with *Tarikh Datuk Bentara Luar Johor* (Mohd. Salleh Perang) and E.U. Kratz in 1991 with *Surat Keterangan Syeikh Jalaluddin (Fakih Saghir)*, tried to promote the works that they were researching as the first Malay autobiography and biography. Nevertheless, Sweeney (1980)'s recognition of the work by Mohamad Salleh Perang (*Tarikh Datuk Bentara Luar Johor*) invited controversy from among several other scholars after Abdullah Munshi. For example, Fang (1985) rejected *Tarikh Datuk Bentara Johor* as being the first Malay autobiography. According to him, an autobiography is

A self-portrait or retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence stressing his individual life and especially the history of his personality". *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor* does not have much to say about the life story of Mohamad Salleh Perang. Rather, it only briefly discusses the life of this figure and explains the history behind the opening of the state of Johor. In fact, the third volume of this work resembles the diary of the Sultan of Johor because it recounts many of the activities in the life of the Johor ruler. Therefore, this work does not come close to the format of an autobiography (Fang, 1985). It is also titled 'Tarikh' which means 'annals or history'. Accordingly, Liaw opposed the statement by Sweeney (1987) to recognise this work by Mohamad Salleh Perang as the first Malay autobiographical work but instead continued to promote *Hikayat Abdullah* as being the most qualified for the title. Rahmat (1996) came up with a different perception of this figure in her study. She simply compared Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang to six other authors who sparked 'modernism without coming to a solid conclusion to either support or oppose Sweeney (1980)'s statement.

Another scholar who criticized the recognition of *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor* as the earliest Malay autobiographical work was Watson (1989). He launched his rebuttal by proposing a definition for 'autobiography', citing Dilthey as follows: autobiography provided the best entrée into the task of historical interpretation. Through the autobiography, the reader is in an ideal position to recover an individual's perception of historical change". autobiography in this way subsequently gave rise to the historical study of the autobiography as a literary genre which directly reflected certain stages in the evolution of Western consciousness. The suggestion was made very early on the autobiography was a peculiarly Western form of literature predicted as it was on a concept of self, an individualism which was absent in other cultures".

Watson (1989) agreed with Fang (1985) that *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* is a piece that describes the political situation as witnessed by the author and which was hidden from the view of the readers. Thus, according to Watson (1989), it would be more accurate to categorize *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* as a 'memoir' because Mohamad Salleh Perang "sets down for self-justification his own version of events".

Hence, Watson (1989) outlined three categories of autobiographers who could be found in the 19th and 20th centuries in the Malay world, namely, authors who had studied under a Western education system; authors of European descent and authors whose works were sponsored by the West such as Christian missionaries or

European administrators. On the whole, all these authors wrote for non-native audiences, namely for the European audience. Watson (1989) also denounced Abdullah Munshi as the first Malay autobiographer on the grounds that he was too distant as a 'Malay' and did not write for the Malay audience. In fact, he stressed excessively on the individualness of his personality and his works, which were in the interest of European audiences for the sake of maintaining his status as a recognized author. In this regard, Watson (1989) introduced three types of self-representations in Malay autobiographies, namely ethnographic autobiographies (*Hikayat Abdullah* by Abdullah Munshi), historical autobiographies (*Pulang Si Tenggang* by Muhammad Hj. Salleh) and fictional autobiographies (Rendra's poems). According to him, even though it seemed confusing compared to the actual form of an autobiography, the poetic self-representation style was 'highly visible autobiographical literature' (Watson, 1989). He (Watson, 1989) added, the author's image of the 'self' that is introduced in the text should be that of a 'detached observer', where his personality as a whole is channelled to his readers and the author only acts as 'the seeing eyes'. For Watson (1989), the study of an autobiography should not be based on the contents of the work but on the strategy of the author in relation to his readers. Thus, according to Watson (1989), Western autobiographical writings must be derived from the following scales:

- The author has experienced the three stages of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood) which have certain connotations and significance for his life and country
- Believes that his descendants would want to know his life story
- Believes that his life story can serve as an example and set meaningful boundaries for other individuals
- Believes that all that is written is true and can be documented
- Now the author has reached the end of his service (retired) and has the time to read and write

The question is is it true that *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor*, written by Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang, does not meet Watson (1989)'s autobiographical scales as mentioned above Was it enough for Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang to act as 'the seeing eyes' in his work? The objective of this paper was to solve this problem by analysing *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor* according to the 5 scales of a Western autobiography by Watson (1989) and by assessing the accuracy of this work produced by a Malay author for his Malay audience.

**TARIKH DATO' BENTARA LUAR JOHOR
ACCORDING TO WATSON (1989)'S
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SCALES**

Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor was written by Mohamad Salleh bin Perang, a Johor leader who has contributed much to the development and modernization of the state. He was holding the post of Dato' Bentara Luar Johor when he wrote this piece. The first part of this work revolves around his life history from childhood until he ended his career in the Johor administrative system. The second part contains a letter to his friend, Na Tien Piet and the final part of this autobiography consists of his travelogue and notes from his diary recounting his time in Japan and China when he served with Maharaja Abu Bakar. In Sweeney (1980)'s opinion, this work deserves to be recognised as the first Malay autobiography because '[...] it was produced when the idea of recounting one's own life story was still a novel one and the concept of autobiography still alien in Malay society'. Skinner (1976) also agreed that the autobiography genre was a genre that was very new to the Malay community as could be seen from his opinion:

““While the oral recounting of one's life history-usually in response to a request is not uncommon in Indonesian and Malaysian tradition, autobiography developed relatively late and began to flourish only in the age of print literacy. In the pre-print era of palace literature, literacy was largely the domain of the scribe, whose skills were devoted to the service of his patron. For a scribe to write his autobiography would have been inconceivable. Lese-majeste apart, he would have been unable to postulate a reader. The only hint of an autobiographical bent in Malay palace manuscripture is a short, yet very positive description (in the third person) of Amin, the royal scribe, in the *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, composed by Amin, the royal scribe! Even after the spread of print literacy, a Malay writer might well consider it necessary to undertake an elaborate rhetorical apologia to justify writing about himself as in the case of the *Tarikh Datuk Bentara Luar Johor* by Mohamed Salleh bin Perang”

In reality, Mohamad Salleh Perang was exercising prudence in the sense that he was trying to introduce a new genre to the Malay community and, at the same time, hoping that this genre would be accepted by his ruler and people. Thus, by using the 5 scales of an 'autobiography'

according to Watson (1989), *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* will be analysed in order to prove that this work meets the elements of an autobiography and was indeed written 'by a Malay for the Malays' in keeping with the relationship between the author and his audience. The author has experienced the three stages of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood) which have certain connotations and significance for his life and country.

Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar presents the life story of Mohamad Salleh bin Perang, who was the *Datuk Bentara Luar* of Johor. He begins the story of his life by telling about his birth in 1841 in *Teluk Belanga*, Singapore. He was the youngest of 7 children born to *Panglima Perang bin Mohamed Salleh* (father) and *Yang Jaleha binti Basir* (mother). His life as a child was not an easy one. After the war, his parents had to work hard to support the family. Nevertheless, Mohd. Salleh always showed an interest and talent in everything he put his hand to.

During his childhood, he was taught to read the *Koran* and he was given free lessons on Islam in 1850 under the tutelage of a religious scholar in *Teluk Belanga*, Singapore. Instead of being charged a fee, he was tasked with carrying water and chopping wood throughout the period of his study. After two years, Mohamad Salleh Perang was enrolled at the *Bukit Zion English School* in 1853 (*Keasberry English School* at the age of 12 years). Throughout his time at the school, he proved to be an astute student and the headmaster of the school himself, the Reverend *Keasberry*, recognised his intelligence and this was mentioned in his work as follows:

“[...] besides Mr. Keasberry already knew, because I was tested by the headmaster several times and I often won gifts and prizes for beating the other pupils either at writing, composition or arithmetic” (Sweeney, 1980)

During his youth, *Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang* also learned from *Abdullah Munshi* throughout his time at *Keasberry School*. *Abdullah Munshi* was one of the individuals who were responsible for identifying the potential in *Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang* until he finally proposed that he be employed as a teacher at that school as mentioned in the excerpt as:

“[...] went to study at that school together with a second teacher who taught at *Bukit Zion* by the name of *En. Abdullah* from *Penang* because it was he who suggested to Mr *Keasberry* that I should be a teacher of the Malay letters [...] so I remained there to teach and I lived in the home

I remained there to teach and I lived in the home of the teacher I mentioned earlier at Arab Street in Kampung Gelam, teaching in the school during the day and learning from my teacher the English letters related to my lessons during the night” (Sweeney, 1980)

Mohamad Salleh Perang’s education was interrupted for a while because of the conflict that arose between Sultan Ali’s people and His Royal Highness Temenggung Tun Ibrahim. However, the British Governor intervened and helped to restore order. At the same time, Johor started to show some progress after the future ruler (Abu Bakar) returned from his studies and was appointed to rule together with Encik Long Menteri (Tahir, 2013). Then in 1856, Mohamad Salleh, for the first time, served as a clerk for Encik Long Menteri (Encik Abdullah bin Tahir). In 1858, he worked as a clerk at Iskandar Puteri, in 1862 as the Commissioner of Police and in 1883, he was appointed as the Deputy Chief of State.

From his autobiography, it is apparent that Dato’ Mohamad Salleh Perang’s advantage lay in his fluency in the Chinese language. This was evident in 1861, when at the age of 20 years he began learning the Chinese language and art, thus endearing himself to the Chinese people. His friendship with Na Tien Piet, a Chinese poet who had written many poems in Malay, was also mentioned by him in his work. This was coupled with his fondness for Chinese literature as noted in *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar Johor* as:

“[...] and I am very fond of reading the stories of China and especially the tale ‘Sam Kok’ because it has many useful lessons and many analogies that should be heard [...]” (Sweeney, 1980)

Furthermore, from his description of his adult life in his autobiography, it is obvious that he was very dedicated to the state of Johor. He served as the Chief Surveyor, Chief of clove and black pepper cultivation in Johor, Government Commissioner of Muar-Kesang and Commissioner of Batu Pahat from 1893-1911. As Chief Town Planner, Dato’ Mohamad Salleh Perang was responsible for opening the towns of Muar in 1887, Tangkak in 1891, Endau in 1892 and Batu Pahat in 1893.

His contribution to the Malay arts was proven through his introduction of ghazal music which was continued by his grandson, Pak Lomak. His greatness as a native Malay with an intelligence to match that of the colonial scholars of the West was evident when he

successfully drew the first map of Johor, which was written in Jawi script and was acknowledged by the British Survey Authority in London. This was proven in his work as follows: “After three years, the map of the state of Johor was certified to be accurate by the survey heads in London” (Sweeney, 1980).

Therefore, it is not surprising that he was awarded the title Dato’ Sri Paduka Mahkota Johor (S.P.M.J) by Sultan Abu Bakar in appreciation for his services to the state of Johor, so much so that he is well-known as the Chief Architect of Modern Johor. He went through many ordeals during his time of service with the Johor State government, especially the false accusations that plagued him throughout his service. Clearly, Dato’ Mohamad Salleh Perang was a Western-educated Malay individual who was loyal to his ruler. This was evident as each stage of his life had significant connotations in the life of the country. Finally, after undergoing various tests and weathering the storms of life, he passed away on Friday, 21.7.1915 (at 6.15 pm), equivalent to 18 Shaaban 1333, at the age of 79 and was buried at the Bukit Mahmoodiah Cemetery, Johor Bahru.

Believes that his descendants would want to know his life story: Through his works, Dato’ Mohamad Salleh Perang believed that his descendants would want to know about the series of successes in his life, given that for 7 years his descendants faithfully served the royal dynasty of Johor. This proves that the records in *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar* are precious historical memories for his current and future descendants to commemorate the services extended by their ancestors to the Johor government. Furthermore, the title of ‘Perang’ in his name symbolizes the heroism inherited by the descendants of Dato’ Mohamad Salleh since time immemorial as stated in the first part as follows:

““[...] because for generations our ancestors had, in all sincerity, sworn their allegiance to the throne of the sultan of Johor, beginning with the warlord, Lajat bin Abdul Rahim who served Sultan Abdul Jalil; the warlord Awang bin Lajat, who served Temenggung Abdul Rahman from Riau to Bulang and from Bulang to the island of Singapore; Mohamed Salleh bin Awang, who served Temenggung Ibrahim in Singapore at Telok Belanga and this poor man, Mohamad Salleh bin Perang, who served during the time of Sultan Abu Bakar until Sultan Ibrahim from Telok Belanga to Johor Baharu” (Sweeney, 1980)

“[...] I come from a family line that was born and raised in Johor and that served in the Johor government for seven generations, from the time of the grandfather of the late Sultan of Johor to the present time. It can be said that my ancestors have been serving from the time of the late Sultan Ahmad, who founded the Johor government in Malacca in the year 1511 [...]” (Sweeney, 1980)

According to Watson (1989), the author believed that his descendants would want to know his life story, especially his mission. This was because he was a great person who had made many contributions to the development of modern Johor. He wanted his descendants to follow in his footsteps because he believed that the Malays had the same capacity and ability as Western individuals to develop their own country. The highest award earned by him was the title Dato' Bentara Luar Johor as mentioned as:

“On 3 March, this poor man was given the title Dato' Bentara Luar Johor as I pledged my loyalty, in all sincerity, to His Royal Highness, the ruler and to the state of Johor” (Sweeney, 1980)

All his contributions are fully recorded in Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor, including events such as the Jementah War, the opening of several districts in Johor and the development of Johor into a modern Malay state. However, Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang could not avoid the jealousy and envy that was stirred up against his wisdom and prowess as the right-hand man of the sultan of Johor in the development of the state. Hence, at the beginning of his record, Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang called on his descendants to remain loyal to the ruler even if they had to bear the burden of man's 'slander' as follows:

“[...] and it is a very heavy trust and advice that I leave to my children and grandchildren and future generations, that it should never cross their minds to have any bad intentions towards the ruler himself or to abandon the state and the territory of Johor as their lives would never be safe” (Sweeney, 1980)

In the third part of his work, Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor, Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang also included elements of a diary or record of his travels (travelogue) when he accompanied the Sultan of Johor abroad but he composed it in the form of a pantun berkait, thus adding the Malay touch to his work. This proves that he wanted his descendants to know about the culture and

geography of the community outside the state of Johor and Malaya in general. He also wanted them to have an open mind and to embrace the modernization that had been achieved in foreign countries. For example, he realistically described the scenery in Japan in his work as follows:

“[...] as we entered the estuary of the Shimashi Straits, we could see the beauty and loveliness of the several hills on the island and the narrow and white sandy straits punctuated by islands with green rice fields and the Japanese in their fishing boats or in their tiny huts. The northeast wind was much colder than usual” (Sweeney, 1980)

Another proof that he authored a new genre without forgetting his traditional heritage was the use of 'pantun berkait' in his efforts to describe his experiences as a Malay traveller as shown below:

“From afar a sliver of land is seen
Far in the midst of a turbulent sea
Safe at sea, safe on land
We are blessed to visit this country

The great waves of the sea are never at rest
A part of the Pacific Ocean
We are blessed to visit this country
To leave Johor for the land of China

A part of the Pacific Ocean
Various seasons of calm and turbulence
Rewarding us with the gift of strength
Until we arrive at Indera Island

Especially during the typhoon season
It is renowned for its gigantic waves
It is known as the Island of Japan
Preserve my ruler, bless Johor” (Sweeney, 1980)

The pantun berkait above clearly shows that Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang, in an effort to emulate the autobiographical style introduced by the West, did not forget his true identity as a Malay. In fact as a Malay, Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang did not run away from using a 'rhythmic language' in his work but instead, he successfully incorporated these pantun elements into it, so much so that his work was openly accepted by the Malay community.

Believes that his life story can serve as an example and set meaningful boundaries for other individuals: The

commander's blood that flowed in the veins of Dato' Mohamad Salleh caused him to stand out as an administrator who was respected by the Malay community. What is more is that since 'Life is linked to custom, custom is linked to Islamic tradition and Islamic tradition alone is the Book of Allah', Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang believed that the Malays could not live without applying their customs and culture in their lives. One culture of the Malay community is humility, especially in their relationship with their ruler. According to him as the ruler's right-hand man, he should always be 'conscious' of his position as a 'servant of the king'. This was the criterion that enabled his work to be accepted by Malay audiences because 'the ruler and his people can never be parted' but are closely intertwined by the contract that was signed between the two parties at the beginning of the establishment of Malacca. Furthermore, he wanted his life story to be an example and to provide useful boundaries for other Malay individuals. Thus, it was not surprising that Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang still used the third person pronoun, that is, 'fakir', thus emulating previous authors such as the writer of *Sulalatus Salatin Sejarah Melayu*, in clothing 'his individualism' with self-abasement out of respect for his ruler as can be seen in these excerpts: fakir approached His Royal Highness at the palace and His Majesty asked, "How are you Dato'? Did you receive my letter?" Fakir replied, "I did, Your Majesty and I have come". (Sweeney, 1980) "On 18 March, fakir returned to Batu Pahat with a very sad heart because His Majesty looked very 'frail' during his voyage to London this time" (Sweeney, 1980) at that time fakir could not express the emptiness in his heart as he shed tears" (Sweeney, 1980). This phenomenon was due to Dato' Mohamad Salleh's concern in upholding the code of conduct of Malay writers as the writers of the traditional era were careful to keep to the concepts of sovereignty, curses and treason in their writings. In order to realize these concepts, the traditional writers often referred to themselves as 'The Owner of the Story' or 'The Teller of the Story' because they felt that they were part of the audience listening to 'the owner of the story' as he told his tale. In fact, the traditional author not only represented the voice of his patron but his patron was also his main audience (Sweeney, 1990). Hence, in an effort to convey the 'truth' to his audience, the author must produce works that are meaningful and valuable to the storyteller (Sweeney, 1997). Sweeney (1990) also stated that the tradition of using the third person pronoun had been in existence in conventional Malay writings since the 17th century. For example, Enci' Amin as the author of *Syair Perang Mengkasar*, Raja Chulan in the book, *Misa Melayu* and Raja Ahmad and Raja Ali

through *Tuhfat al-Nafis*. They appeared as 'a character' in their own works. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Dato' Mohamad Salleh expressed his individualism in such a way because he was obviously a writer who was constantly concerned about maintaining his relationship with his audience.

According to Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang, every individual should be honest and swear allegiance to the ruler. It is only when a person is loyal to his leader that he will be able to constantly receive the blessings of Allah as stated in the excerpt as: don't be afraid to do good and to do right to your ruler. If Allah is willing, certain rights in a perfect life will die but a good or evil name will remain forever in this world. Amen. One Who Submits to God!"

Being endowed with a great knowledge of geography, he fulfilled his responsibilities by sketching the first map of the state of Johor in such a trustworthy and honest manner that he succeeded in settling a dispute between Malacca, Johor and Pahang over the state boundaries as mentioned in the excerpt as:

"Thus, I was obliged to take care of the work on that gambier plantation alone and I became the chief engineer. I went about surveying all the land that was under the rule of Johor. After three years, the map of the state of Johor was completed and was acknowledged by the survey heads in London as being accurate in its measurements" (Sweeney, 1980)

Dato' Mohamad Salleh also wanted his race to always live with high moral values in keeping with the good manners that have always coloured the culture of the Malay Muslims. This could be seen in his notes about Mr. Long, who shared much of his knowledge and experience when he first ventured into the employment world as follows:

"Mr. Long was a gentleman who was very generous. He took a lot of interest in me and taught me and advised me on all the rights for my welfare as well the rules and customs of the government. He also taught me the proper way to write to the great rulers and furthermore, he added to my understanding by giving me copies of several useful and beneficial letters which he had collected from government departments [...]" (Sweeney, 1980)

He also presented himself as a Malay who was very embarrassed to write about himself. This clearly proves that Dato' Mohamad Salleh composed his autobiography based on the specific mandate that it would be beneficial to future generations and not out of 'arrogance' or 'pride'.

This is reflected, for example, in the verse below to his Chinese friend, Na Tian Piet, who wanted him to write something about himself: I personally find it to be something that is perplexing and difficult to mention (Sweeney, 1980). In reality, the *weltanschauung* of the Malay community is very different from that of the West. Unlike Westerners, the Malays do not see themselves as ‘individuals’ because they feel that it is inappropriate for them to be in the public limelight. In addition, the concept of ‘shyness’, that is stressed among the Malays, reflects the psychological and physical dimensions of their reluctance to promote themselves (Sweeney and Phillips, 1975; Sweeney, 1980). According to Sweeney (1980), the Malay autobiographers who were recognized by the West were “unrepresentative, inauthentic and not truly Malay”. According to Sweeney (1990), the idea of telling one’s life story to an audience was regarded as something that was ‘foreign’ to the Malay community. Malay literature that is communicated orally only uses the ‘third-person pronoun’ and even though the storyteller intends to include his life story, he never refers to himself as ‘I’. Instead, the storyteller will insert himself as the main character in his narrative to the Malay audience. Sweeney stated that the reason for the absence or the lack of response to the narration of a life story among the Malay community was:

“[...] it would have seemed pointless to preserve in writing that material which had not been considered worth preserving in the pre-writing era that is speech not processed for storage in a stylized form. For this reason alone, therefore, it is not surprising perhaps, the life stories written by protagonist are not found in the manuscript tradition”

One of his actions that endeared him to the ruler and his community was his adherence to Malay literary conventions, where his criticisms were not personal or biased but instead were based on facts. In describing Rahmat (1996) stated, he has projected himself and criticized his raja without breaking the widely-accepted conventional norms and values of his society while at the same time enhancing the feudal tradition”. This can be proven by some of the following passages:

- Day and night I would eat at the home of Mr. Hook, which was five miles out of town his home was filled with wonderful books (Sweeney, 1980)
- At night, along the Ulu Straits and Iyo, many people would be bathing naked (Sweeney, 1980)
- I went to see the castle and here I saw many strange sights (Sweeney, 1980)

- The Governor of Yokohama was very gracious and seemed to be smarter than the other governors we had visited (Sweeney, 1980)
- Chong Tok was more than sixty years old and he was a big talker (Sweeney, 1980)

Dato’ Mohamad Salleh Perang was a Malay with a big heart. Through his autobiographical essay, he still incorporated several symbolic elements that were very much synonymous with the works of the Malays. He included several sayings, proverbs and idioms in keeping with the definition of Malay literature as ‘beautiful language and useful content’. For example:

- Like a creeping plant that wraps itself around a branch and a large piece of wood (Sweeney, 1980)
- Like a jeweller who knows his precious stones (Sweeney, 1980)
- Like sitting in the house of a blacksmith, if the sparks do not fly and get him, surely the smoke will spread and sting his eyes (Sweeney, 1980)
- Just like the sound of many beetles (Sweeney, 1980)

The above statements, proverbs and idioms prove that Dato’ Mohamad Salleh had a very high regard for his customs and culture, so much so that every fact that was written in his autobiography was interwoven with the thinking and reasoning of the Malays. Therefore, it was hoped that all that was recorded by him would benefit his audiences, be they the rulers or the people. The statement by Skinner (1976) as describes how audiences are able to determine the quality and significance of a story in an autobiography: “An autobiography results from a series of choices from the remembered (or even created) life of the author. He selects what he considers to be significant or, more to the point, what he believes his audience will consider significant and worth reading. This process entails the omission or suppression of a vast amount of remembered material”.

Believes that all that is written is true and can be documented (objectivity): Dato’ Mohamad Salleh Perang always entered the important dates in the facts that he wrote about. This corresponded with the autobiographical genre of the West, which emphasizes the recording of the date and time so that every fact presented can be verified as to its accuracy (objectivity) and truth. Consequently, several important dates were mentioned by him in *Tarikh Dato’ Bentara Luar* as in the Table 1.

This proves that Dato’ Mohamad Salleh complied with the Western autobiographical scale that focuses on the accuracy of facts based on events that actually

Table 1: Several in portat date with explanation

Events	Year/Date
Year of birth	1841
Worked as a clerk for Mr. Long at the age of 15	1856
Clerk at Iskandar Puteri	1858
Studied Chinese language and art	1861
Chief of Police	9.12.1868
Jementah War	25.10.1879
Jementah War Chief	2.12.1879
Accompanied the Maharaja of Johor on a visit to China and Japan	28.4.1883 to 9.10.1883
Maharaja Abu Bakar visited England	24.5.1855
Maharaja Abu Bakar became the Sultan of Johor on 13.2.1886	1886
Received the title Dato' Bentara Luar Johor	3.3.1886
Opening of Muar	1887
Settled border problems between Malacca, Johor and Pahang. Gunung Ledang was included within the boundaries of Johor	28.11.1889
The issue of rumours being spread in Cohong and Batu Pahat	1891
Advised the ruler concerning Endau	1892
Opened and developed Batu Pahat without financial assistance from the sultan	1893
Sultan taken ill and went to London. He passed away in London and was buried in Johor on 8.9.1895.	1895
Letter from the sultan to take his house	1.5.1899
Audience with the sultan to hand over grant	5.5.1899
Helped to solve border issue between Pahang and Johor	1899

occurred. Thus, based on Watson (1989)'s scale above, it is clear that the author of *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor* tried to ensure that his autobiographical work would be accepted and enjoyed by his Malay audiences and would not be hindered by any particular prejudice or sentiment.

Now the author has reached the end of his service (retired) and has the time to read and write: According to Rahmat (1996), this autobiographical work was rewritten by Dato' Mohamad Salleh based on his early records, starting with his birth until the end of his service under the sultan of Johor. For that reason, his work was divided into three parts (his life story, his letter to Na Tian Piet and his travelogue). This means that Dato' Mohamad Salleh actively rewrote and compiled his work after he had completed his service (retired), using the 'zooming technique' (Rahmat, 1996). The book, *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor*, was then compiled once again by Mohamed bin Hj. Alias and was published by Penerbit al-Attas in 1928 following the death of its author. According to Rahmat (1996), Dato' Mohamad Salleh was a special author because: Intended to portray his life as that of a typical traditional Malay subject who sees his own life only in relation to his king. He strongly believes that the main purpose of his life is to serve his king, a long inherited role which he cherishes and is nothing but proud to perform. He is well aware of the cultural taboo and religious prohibition against any form of self-glorification, arrogance or even simply talking about oneself".

CONCLUSION

This study proves that the opinion of Watson (1989), who doubted that *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor* was a

Malay autobiographical work, was inaccurate. This is because the five (5) scales of a Western autobiography proposed by Watson (1989) were met by Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang in his book. Furthermore, this autobiography was written by a Malay author who was very much aware of the sensitivities of the ruler and his audience and complied with the literary conventions of that period, unlike the author, Abdullah Munshi.

Clearly, Watson (1989)'s rejection of *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* as a Malay autobiographical work is questionable, especially the concept of the author as 'the seeing eyes'. Moreover, Watson (1989)'s view that studies on autobiographies are not based on the content of the work but on the strategy used by the author in dealing with his readers accurately describes this work by Dato' Moahamad Salleh Perang. In Sweeney (1990)'s opinion, the author of *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor* was an aide-de-camp to Maharaja Abu Bakar. He saw his records not only as a future reference about Johor but as the performance of his responsibilities as the ruler's right hand man. Furthermore, the current events mentioned by Mohamad Salleh in his book were part of the events in his life. These included the opening of the state of Johor, which he felt was most fitting as it was the greatest achievement of his career. Thus, Sweeney (1990) gave a true definition of an 'autobiography' as, "[...] is a self-portrait or a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence stressing his individual life and especially the history of his personality". Sweeney (1990) also reinforced his argument by quoting the opinion of Wayne Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* regarding the concepts of 'implied author' and 'postulated audience', which must be highlighted in selecting the earliest Malay autobiographical work. According to him, *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar* fulfilled both these concepts because this

Malay emphasized the Malay ethos, namely 'a Malay implied audience', while these elements were not taken into account by Abdullah Munshi in his writings but instead, he only tried 'to postulate a European audience' (Sweeney, 1990).

Therefore, based on the above analysis of Dato' Mohamad Salleh Perang's work, it was found that C.W. Watson's opinion in rejecting this piece as a Malay autobiographical work is inaccurate, especially since it is obvious that *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar Johor* fulfils the five scales of a Western autobiography proposed by him. This clearly shows that this work deserves to be recognized as the earliest Malay autobiography and that the traditional-modern periodization proposed by Wilkinson should be reviewed. Indeed, the best work is one that has been proven to have been accepted by its audience and also conforms to their ethos and mind-set as stated by Sweeney (2006) with regard to *Tarikh Dato' Bentara Luar*:

It is not Salleh's aim to impress some Europeans but his fellow Malays. In this he is helped by employing the appropriate rhetorical style which includes the creation of common ground, in order to win the readership over; by showing proper humility by hiding one's own light and achievements behind someone superior whom one serves and on whose behalf alone one's acts; by putting oneself and one's actions into a chain; by using an impersonal style and only reluctantly refer to oneself; by self-denial; by the desire to gain a good reputation, "to be loved and understood as modest, erudite and sincere, humble, sensitive and impartial; by giving faedah or benefit to the reader; by providing a record of achievement which shows the unique qualifications, abilities and talents of the person concerned with the aim to demonstrate that person's dedication, stoicism and fairness"

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