

## The Antecedent of Malay Studies: Socio-Cultural Perspective

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**Abstract:** The initial establishment of University Malaya cannot run from society's demands towards the requirement for social sciences and the community. The objective of this study is to observe the initial establishment of University Malaya in general as well as to study specifically the history of Malay studies since its inception in Singapore before its relocation to Kuala Lumpur. Since the proposed 1948 Carr-Saunders Report to establish the mapping of the development of higher education in Singapore, among other issues, it was suggested that Universiti Malaya establish the Malay studies field. It will serve as a place which will mobilize the Malay culture and civilization. The implication of the suggestion brought forth the Malay studies department. All aspects of the establishment of Malay studies were analyzed based on the local society's sociocultural perspective. This study uses data from work produced by early literary figures who were involved in early Malay studies and during the middle of the 1960-1990's. Sources such as memoirs were also referred to observe the students' and scholars' experiences within the Malay studies field. Based on this analysis, it was found that Malay studies has expanded and has moved with time and is flexible in managing the field of Malay studies.

**Key words:** Education, mobilize, civilization, socio-cultural, field

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### INTRODUCTION

The King Edward VII Medical College was established in 1905 by Governor Sir John Anderson. During that period, it was known as the Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School to cater to the shortage of government medical and health assistants in Penang and Singapore. The idea to establish Raffles College was brought forth in 1823 when Stamford Raffles suggested that an institution that will serve as a medical and intellectual learning centre should be formed. However, it was only founded in 1928 and had its official opening in 1929 by Hugh Clifford, the Governor of Singapore. R.O. Winstedt became its first principal and its system spanned 3 years and was considered more systematic compared to King Edward VII Medical College. The existence of the institute brought forth the idea that the establishment of a university for the future will cater to the need for education of teachers for them to be placed in secondary schools and to offer scientific practice and technical aspects orientated towards the university (Lim, 2013). Therefore, University Malaya was established in October 1949 when the increase of intake of students and needs increased in Malaya. University Malaya was established through the merging of Raffles College and the King Edward VII Medical College.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study analyzes University Malaya's early establishment in general and specifically studies the history behind Malay studies since its inception in Singapore before its relocation to Kuala Lumpur. The study will use data from work produced by early literary figures who were involved in early Malay studies and during the middle of the 1960-1990's. Sources such as memoirs were also referred to analyze the students' and instructors' experiences within the Malay studies field. Socio-cultural studies of the antecedent of Malay Studies is the study of social-historical, cultural and philosophical contexts for the understanding of Malay studies. This understanding is necessary for ongoing critical inquiry concerning ways that Malay studies aims and reflect from taken-for-granted cultural assumptions as well as formal institutional and political policies.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Malay education institutions:** The early establishment of Malay education institutes possesses a long history. It cannot escape from society's demands towards the importance of social sciences and the community.

Referring to the suggestions provided by the 1948 Carr-Saunders report in the mapping of the development

of higher education in Malaysia, among others it was suggested that universities in Malaya should be the place to mobilize the Malay culture. It imagines a department that not only shoulders the responsibility of creating and conserving literature's scholarly status and the Malay tradition but it also serves to refine and influence the modernization of the Malay language. The establishment of an ideal Malay Studies department should function as the foundation for citizenship and the scholarly heritage and vision towards its future.

**Malay studies:** Based on this idea, Pendeta Za'ba was elected to lead the first Department of Malay studies. Prior to this, it took a long period of time to identify a suitable candidate. This problem did not just occur within the Malay studies field. In fact, it also occurred in Tiong Hua Studies. The Malay studies field was already vast prior to the arrival of the Europeans until the European colonization. The borders of the study is also vast, spanning from the Malay culture within the Malaya Federal States to Indonesia, Brunei, Southern Thailand and the Philippines. In other words, the Malay world spans the Malay speakers formed by the Austronesia Malay-Polynesian cluster.

However as a country that has yet to be independent at that time, the focus was oriented towards studying the locals and had not yet expanded throughout the vast Malay world. According to Roolvink (1962):

“The establishment of a Malay Studies Department in the University of Malaya was appropriate for still other reasons: That the Federation of Malaya is the very area for the study of the Malay language does not need to be argued and apart from this such a department is a condition sine qua non for a University of Malaya to develop a truly Malaysian character and to firmly establish itself with its roots deep in its own country”

Apart from that, the need to educate the community, especially new students became a priority as well. It was obvious that many references found at that time were based on orientalist. Books written by Winstedt, Hookyaas, Skinner and de Josselin de Jong were sources that became references seeing as during that period, the West was still in control of the epistemology behind Malay studies which was a part of orientalism.

**Early challenges:** When Malay studies was introduced in University Malaya the nation had not yet achieved its independence. During that time, Malay studies was taught in English as it was the medium of instruction in Malay studies despite the fact that a huge number of the

students were locals and the instructors were able to understand the Malay language. Therefore, after gaining independence, the fight to use Malay as the medium of instruction for all fields of study began (Mohd, 2004). The outcome of this fight resulted in enabling Malay Studies to be conducted in Malay as its medium of instruction. This also included other fields of study such as literature and social sciences.

However, it has now turned into a paradox beginning from the end of the 20th century. This is because it was required for the non-sciences courses in universities to be conducted in English. It seemed as though the agenda to teach science and mathematics in English has paralyzed the fight towards achieving a national language.

The Department of Malay Studies was established in University Malaya, where it was located in Singapore in 1953 following the Carr-Saunders report. After University Malaya Kuala Lumpur was founded in 1959, the Department of Malay Studies also relocated and became one of the biggest departments in the Literature Faculty (Norazit, 1995). During that time, the learning process was liberal with the multi-disciplinary nature of education sciences in Malay studies. This means that those within the literature field will be able to pursue the anthropology and sociology field. Syed Husin Ali, for example, conducted a literature study known as the ASAS 50 movement at the industrial training level supervised by C. Skinner while the masters degree was in the field of Rural Communities entitled Social Stratification in Kampung Bagan supervised by M.G. Swift who was a lecturer from the Malay Studies Department. After graduating, he was appointed as an assistant lecturer at the Department of Malay Studies in 1963 (Syed, 2012).

**The Malay education world in university Malaya:** The history of Malay studies began when the Faculty of Social Sciences was established together with the English Language, Economics, Geography, History and Mathematics departments. The Malay Studies, Social Studies, Philosophy, Language and Chinese literature fields were established between 1953-1954. During that time, it was difficult to find a suitable candidate and it was only in the early years of 1953-1954 that Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba) and K.C. Ho were able to lead their departments respectively (Lim, 2013). Za'ba resigned in December 1958. After Za'ba's leadership, Malay Studies was taken over by R. Roolvink. After that, Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana replaced Roolvink. In Singapore, after University Malaya relocated to Kuala Lumpur, the Malay Studies department was re-established in Singapore University in 1962 and in 1967, Syed Hussein Al-Atas became the head of department for Malay Studies in Singapore.

Hikayat Iskandar which contains 640 pages written in 1857 serves as the first reference of Malay literature for University Malaya through the efforts of Dato' F.W. Douglas (Lim, 2013). The Malay Studies department was a part of the Faculty of Social Sciences that relocated to Kuala Lumpur in early 1959 (2013). However, first year students of Malay studies have already registered as early as September 1957 (Lim, 2013). This issue demonstrates the excitement and reception received from the students within the Malay community.

It was only in 1959 that Anthropology and Sociology were fields taught in University Malaya when it was initiated by the Malay Studies Department in Kuala Lumpur. The cultural and community sciences field prior to that was found in University Malaya in Singapore and was offered by the Social Work department together with parts of Malay cultural studies by the Malay studies department in Singapore. Josselin de Jong initiated it while conducting a research on adat pepatih in Negeri Sembilan and Minangkabau based only on library research (Zainal, 1995). This issue actually signifies the early developments of the history of Malay studies that has gone through an evolution.

According to the University Malaya records, the instructor in 1959-1960 consisted of Professor R. Roolvink while the lecturers were C. Skinner, Mohd Zaki Badawi and the assistant lecturer was M.G. Swift. In 1962-63, there were additional lecturers namely C.A. Mees (Dutch graduate) similar to Roolvink, Tjoa Soei Hock were also graduates were also graduates from Dutch universities. Meanwhile, Mohd Taib Osman graduate from United States university. At that time ismail Hussein was also the assistant lecturer.

However, after the 1960's, the Malay Studies department was restructured with the existence of three fields which are namely linguistics, literature and anthropology and sociology. The department continued to expand according to the changing times. It was during the 1977/78 session that the department was requested to conduct Rancangan Penulisan Kreatif dan Deskriptif which was then converted into the Writing Department and is now known as Media Studies which combines media studies and journalism. During the 1980/81 session, Rancangan Bahasa Melayu was founded in this Department to cater to and train Malay language and literature teachers for schools and colleges (Norazit, 1995). That meant that the Malay Studies Department is flexible towards the changing times and attempted to fulfill the needs of the time.

In 1995, the Malay Studies Academy was established to help shape its own identity which was always shadowed by the Literature and Social Sciences Faculty.

It was through the Malay Studies Academy that the Malay Studies field was able to offer degrees within its own field and to decide on its own direction as an education organization.

### **The socio-cultural impact of Malay studies in university**

**Malaya:** In the socio-cultural field, the Field Department founded the anthropology and sociology field in Malaysia (Norazit, 1995). This is because many graduates within the socio-cultural field were becoming instructors in other university departments like the department of anthropology and sociology at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Among those names is Abdul (1995). According to Rustam Sani:

“... Not all but a huge portion of the lecturers in the Anthropology and Sociology Department possess similar academic backgrounds. A huge number of them originate from backgrounds of former “adult” students who were trained in the Malay Studies Department, University Malaya specifically in the field of Malay Cultural Studies and have later continued their studies at the masters level in anthropology and/or sociology departments at universities overseas (specifically the US, UK and Australia (translated by researcher)”

Rustam (2009) also summarized that the developments of social sciences and specifically anthropology and sociology at the Anthropology and Sociology Department in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia served as a kind of exploration that stems from the Malay Cultural Studies approach which is a part of the Malay studies, whereby this field is then combined with the influence received by the developments in the fields of anthropology and current sociology in the Western world. It contributes to its own traditional knowledge, creativity and is integrative. Such are University Malaya's contributions to Malay studies through the development of anthropology and sociology in University Malaya.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on this discussion, it was found that Malay studies is one of the earliest fields established in University Malaya's history. It was founded in 1953 and experienced developments that were in line with the changing times. The Malay studies field has contributed a lot towards the development of social sciences and humanities, specifically towards the Development of Malay Studies within the Malay society. What is more dominant is its contributions towards the founding of the Anthropology and Sociology Department in Universiti

Kebangsaan Malaysia. Evidently, Malay studies which was first founded under the Literature and Social Sciences Faculty was able to stand on its own as the Academy of Malay Studies in 1995. It is here that Malay Studies began offering degrees in its own field and has been able to determine its direction as an education organization.

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