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QUR'AN SCHOOLS IN THE MALAY PENINSULA: A TRADITIONAL EDUCATION TEMPLATE BETWEEN CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

*Malay Yarımadası'nda Kur'an Okulları:
Değişim ve Süreklilik Bağlamında Geleneksel Eğitim Yapısı*

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QUR'AN SCHOOLS IN THE MALAY PENINSULA: A TRADITIONAL EDUCATION TEMPLATE BETWEEN CHANGE AND CONTINUITY¹

Mehmet ÖZAY

Abstract

This study examines the Qur'an schools in Malay Peninsula during the British colonial rule. It investigates how these educational institutions were perceived by the colonial rule and analyse the process of their transformation over the decades. It is also crucial to clarify the concept of Qur'an schools within the juncture of overall Islamic education centers operated not only in Malaya but also in the Archipelago, which were functional enough in the dissemination of traditional religious knowledge and values to the new generations. The colonial rule delivered new educational initiatives such as the Malay vernacular schools by implementing various policies on the basis of a Euro-centric approach in the latter period of colonial rule. The colonial rule integrated Qur'an classes emulating partially the practice of Qur'an schools into newly established Malay vernacular schools in order to attract the interests of the Malay parents in an effort to convince them to send their children to these institutions. Although Malay families got used to these new education initiatives and register their children at these institutions, it is asserted that the secular-based vernacular schools are deemed to have caused degradation in the socio-cultural and religious structure of traditional Malay Muslim societies. In this context, this new education system is a subject matter to be studied and analyzed as a phenomenon of change in social structure. It is also worth observing the reactions of the Malay Muslim communities during this process towards the new educational establishment. The analytical narratives of this study rely on sources produced during the colonial period and other related sources of contemporary literature.

Keywords: Sociology of Religion, Qur'an Schools, Education, Malaya, British Rule.

Malay Yarımadası'nda Kur'an Okulları: Değişim ve Süreklilik Bağlamında Geleneksel Eğitim Yapısı

Öz

Bu makale, İngiliz sömürge yönetimi altındaki Malay Yarımadası'ndaki Kur'an okullarını ele almaktadır. İngiliz sömürge yönetimi tarafından bu okulların algılanışı ve zamanla nasıl bir dönüşüme konu olduğu üzerinde durulmaktadır. Sadece Malaya topraklarında değil, coğrafi olarak Malay Takımadaları olarak adlandırılan ve günümüzde Müslümanların çoğunlukta olduğu Adalar bölgesini de içeren bölgedeki diğer İslam toplulukları arasında da, genel İslami eğitim kurumları içerisinde yer alan bu yapının Malay genç nesillerine geleneksel dini bilgi ve değerlerin aktarılması üzerinde durulmaktadır. İngiliz sömürge yönetimi, Avrupa merkezci bir yaklaşımın ürünü olarak gündeme gelen çeşitli politikaların eğitim kurumu üzerindeki yansımaları olarak adına 'Malay yerli okulları' denilen yeni eğitim kurumları hayata geçirmiştir. Sömürge yönetimi, özellikle farklı eyaletlerde yönetim birliğinin sağlanmasıyla birlikte, söz konusu bu yeni eğitim kurumlarında, Malay Müslüman ailelerin ilgisini çekmek amacıyla kısmi dini eğitim verme

¹ This paper was presented during the "International Symposium on Sociology of Religion" held on 10-12 May, 2018 in Aksaray University organized by the collaboration of Aksaray University and Muhafazakâr Düşünce Dergisi.

yolunda geleneksel Kur'an okullarına benzer bir yapı oluşturarak, adına Kur'an sınıfları denilen bir uygulama başlatmıştır. Malay Müslüman ailelerin ilgisi zamanla bu eğitim kurumuna yönelmekle birlikte, seküler temelli bir yapı üzerine inşa edilen Malay yerli okullarının Malay-Müslüman sosyo-kültürel ve dini yapısında tetrici olarak tahribinde bir rolü olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Bu durumda, yeni bir eğitim sisteminin Malaya topraklarında uygulamaya konulması, bu toplumlarda toplumsal yapı üzerinde değişimlere konu olmuştur. Bu noktada, Malay Müslüman toplumunun bu süreçte gündeme getirdiği bazı tepkiler de ele alınmaya değer bir gelişmedir. Bu çalışmada gündeme getirilen tartışmalar, öncelikle sömürge döneminde üretilen bazı kaynaklar ile buna ilâve olarak konuyla ilgili çağdaş literatüre başvurularak ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Sosyolojisi, Kur'an Okulları, Eğitim, Malaya, İngiliz Yönetimi.

INTRODUCTION

This article sketches briefly the course of Qur'an schools and formation of Malay vernacular schools in Malaya during the British administration. Qur'an schools are regarded as a historical and "traditional educational institution in Malaya" (Rauf, 1964, 96). In particular, this paper deals with this subject pertaining to its few distinct aspects. The first is how the concept was highlighted by the British rule. The second is what it practically corresponded in relevant socio-religio and cultural environment of Malay-Muslim communities.² In regards, the present writer focuses on a strain of analysis based on primary sources produced in the relevant period in Malaya and related sources of contemporary literature.

Teaching and learning of the Qur'an is the very fundamental education process in Muslim societies since the beginning of the Prophet (Pbuh). The history of this institution goes back to the dawn years of Islam. Caliph Omar (634-644) sent some delegations to various regions to introduce and conduct Qur'an lessons in mosques on 17 H, during his reign. Its educational system and environment known as *halaqa* was practiced as a model taken from the implementation of Prophet Mohamed teaching, in particular, *hadith* based on chain records of saying (Pedersen, 1929, 525; Khan, 1990, 68). This explanation demonstrates that 'teaching Qur'an in mosque' is traditional learning model experience which has been also observed in Malaya and the Archipelago throughout

² Malay is globally considered to cover as large area as the continent of Europe. The very beginning of the 18th century (1701), Thomas Bowrey writes that Malay countries including "Sumatra, Borneo, Bantam, Batavia and other parts of Java" in his work entitled A Dictionary English and Malayo, Malayo and English. See: Jones Russell. "Introduction", In A Dictionary and Grammar of The Malayan Language, William Marsden (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), 6.

the centuries. This is not surprising to the fact that the Islamization process was primarily conducted through the efforts and attempts by Arab proselitizers encouraged by the British.³

Qur'an schools are no doubt taken into consideration as salient institutions under Islamic education. In regard to this, Qur'an schools, as a constant movement cannot be alienated from the Islamization process, referred to a tradition of delivering knowledge and skills to the new learners on the basis of the Qur'an and Hadiths. And these institutions functioned in order to mould Islamic behavior, skill, and character to lead the younger generation to acquire a place in their own social environments.

Here I would like to present briefly on the education interactions of the Malay children in early stage of their education in Malaya. The basic tenet is their learning method of the Holy Qur'an (*menjgaji Qur'an*) at home via the help of the elder people in their family through recitation (*membaca*) and memorization (*menghafal*). This process is also conducted through knowledgeable individuals in religious sphere who are generally named as Tok Lebai. In addition to teaching the Qur'an, Tok Lebai taught fundamentals of Islam such as personal duties (*fardu 'ain*). After this early stage of religious education, the parents sent their children to pondok and madrasah. The children study *kitab jawi*, popular religious books about Islamic law, (*fiqh*), kalam (*usul al-din*), Qur'an exegesis (*tafsir*), and the prophetic tradition (*hadith*) in Malay language written in the Arabic script. In addition to this educational aspect, the above-mentioned institutions are vehicles for the construction of Malay Muslim identity at early age of the children (Shamsul, 2005, 116; Nashabe, 1989, 6-7).

Though this sort of traditional education system commenced in early centuries in parallel to the Islamization period, various societies named these institutions by their own religio-cultural basis. According to this, these institutions were called by distinct names such as *dayah/zawiyah*, *ranggang/surau*,⁴ *pondok pesantren*, hence the content and function were all the same, say, to disseminate Islamic knowledge and values (Jadi, 1990, 10-11). It is worth observation at the root of these words in brief.

³ "The Primitive Religion of the Malays", The Times of Malaya and Commercial Advertiser of the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements, Wednesday 28th March 1904, No. 5, 1: 2.

⁴ "Surau, a derivation from a Sanskrit word denoting a type of Hindu temple which was established in the area... Suraus apparently served as basis from which these missionaries conducted their campaign for conversion". Mohammad A. Rauf, A Brief History of Islam: With special reference to Malaya (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1964), 83.

As seen in Aceh context, the early establishment of this religious institution is called *zawiyah*, in Arabic, which later on transformed as *Dayah* (Sulaiman, 1997, 32). The other relevant names given to these institutions are *pondok* (Arabic *funduq*) as observed in other parts of the Sumatra Island such as West Sumatra or Minangkabau region; *pesantren*, (*santri* in Sankrit language) mainly in the Island of Cava (Bosworth etc., 1995, 296).

While the younger generation acquired their early education at home through parents or elder members of the household, they may also attend *masjid*, *langgar*, *rangkang* or *meunasah* which exist in almost all villages hosting traditional Islamic education (Peeters, 1997, 21; Hasjmy, 1984, 103).

These institutions are considered as formal and largely organized ones with relevant peer groups and appointed teacher. The children who already reach five or six ages are entrusted to a religious teacher. It is observed that younger generations experienced almost the same mode of education.

Learning Arabic alphabet and principal prayers are considered as an introductory session and necessarily functional for the learners' being exposed on learning the Qur'an. In addition, Malay vernacular language in Jawi form is considered as a common practice at abovementioned institutions (Rauf, 1964, 96). Students continue their education in other institutions such as *pesantren* (*dayah*), *meunasah*, whose original form was *madrasah*. And they study on the basis of their capacity and capability studying various classical books available in Malay and Arabic languages (Yakub, 1980, 302; Shabri, 2000, 44).

With regard to this, teaching Qur'an as the fundamental stage of Islamic education should be traced to the early Islamic political entity such as Samudra-Pasai in northern tip of Sumatra Island in the Malay Archipelago. Aligned with this, Northern Sumatra constitutes a role model for the paradigm of the traditional Islamic education.

As M. A Rauf (1964, 93) states that the Malay generally settled in rural areas, say, villages and conducted their idyllic life far from the urban conditions. Comparatively their life was simple and they had their own way of traditional life included religious learning and practices through their own establishments to some or larger extent particularly shaped through common daily routine attendance to the mosque and Qur'an schools teachers and imams of these religious institutions were among the Hajjis whom considered having advanced knowledge to guide the

community including younger generation to mirror the Qur'an teachings and some other basic creeds of Islam into their life (Hassan, 2004, 407).

And it is understood that "the old Malay Qur'an schools were often residential. They were taught to repeat correctly the Arabic formulae with which every lesson began and ended and to read mechanically the Qur'an and the principal prayers in Arabic after studying the Arabic alphabet. In some cases, after learning to read the Qur'an in Arabic, they were taught a little Malay." (Chelliah, 1960, 35; Newbold, 1971, 91-92). This type of school was generally regarded as "boys schools'. Even though it was not uncommon for boys educated at Qur'an schools and they had better access to this institution, it does not mean that the girls remained backward (Gould, 1993, 107).

Qur'an schools providing education of Qur'an starting from learning Arabic alphabet, *nahiv*, *sarf* and similar subjects and though limited approaches, it might have included learning the Qur'an by heart wholly to become *hafiz*. In addition, it can be assumed that there were basic Islamic credentials such as *fiqh*, *hadith*, based on the capacity and capability of the teacher who might have been an elder person conducted *hajj*, an imam having responsibility to conduct practices in *masjid* or mosque. As revealed in some papers, the individuals conducted *hajj* incumbency were regarded as *haji-ulama* and were given task to teach basic Islamic education including teaching the Qur'an. This education was aimed to inculcate Islamic values to the younger members of the Malay society by socializing them in peer group and mostly probably in the environment of a *masjid* or mosque (Othman, 1998, 146; Monahan, 1931, 4).

No doubt that through learning by heart the Qur'an verses is inevitable process as observed since as Muslim the individuals are expected to be able to perform daily prays. It is also probability that at least some of the students continued their study of Qur'an by memorization method to become *hafiz* in case the teacher was capable to continue the education. As M. A. Rauf recognizes that the learning of Qur'an was conducted on the basis of 'parrot-like repetition', he does not delineate, unlike the British officials' evaluation and criticism, the importance of the spiritual effects of reading and memorizing the Qur'an (Rauf, 1964, 97).

During the process, some young learners possessed sharp intellect were able to complete studying in shorter period. On the other hand,

though some others had to pursue longer time, they could not come up with a successful end (Newbold, 1971, 90).⁵

Education for Malay Muslims was meant to mold their children into Islamic education. In this term, we should highlight Qur'an schools which served for the fundamental needs of the Malay Muslim children. Social leaders including religious scholars and knowledgeable individuals encouraged the community to establish and contribute to the Qur'an educational institutions which preliminarily occurred in surau, mosques and or the house of imam. This is very successive track of instruction conducted in Arabic script based on learning Quranic verses or surah which were very practical necessities in daily life of a Muslim.

Parents with religious responsibility considered these institutions as significantly contributed to the future of their offspring. On the other hand, while these schools were exposed to structural changes, a course called 'Qur'an classes' were implanted in curriculum of the secular schools founded by the colonial government created to restructure the Muslim students' ideas suited to colonial interest.

This phenomenon is revealed in numerous biographies belonged to late Malay generation who lived under the British rule in Malaya in 20th century. Based on these account religious school experiences during early practices of religious education described that they attended these institutions operated in the afternoons as a complementary, after regular secular education in the mornings (Hashim (n. d), 12). For instance, Mohamad Said who was professional medical doctor and former chief secretary (*Menteri Besar*) of Negri Sembilan narrated in his memoirs that during his very early years he was taught Arabic script, *jus amma*, short *surah* of the Qur'an by his father. When he was 6 years old, he was sent to the Qur'an class. Hence the Qur'an class was not limited to reading and memorizing, instead, the pupils were exposed to variety sorts of basic courses such as *siyar*, the life of the Prophet Mohammad (Said, 1982, 12, 29). At the age of 9 students were able to complete reading the Qur'an. While continuing primary school, students also were learning how to read the Qur'an (Said, 1982, 33).

⁵ I think what Newbold argued over here may be relevant to the idea mentioned as follow: "The young studied the Qur'an either at home or in meunasah. This learning process commenced by studying alphabet through the medium of books such as Qaidah Bagdadiah. After this stage, they continued the learning process through Juz'amma." See: Ismuha (1976). *Ulama Aceh Dalam Perspektif Sejarah*, Monografi, Jakarta: Lembaga Ekonomi dan Kemasyarakatan Nasional Lembaga, Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LEKNAS-LIPI), 14.

1. BRITISH PERCEPTION OF QUR'AN SCHOOLS

This text aims to clarify the concept of Qur'an schools, which the British colonial administration referred to Islamic education centers in Malay region. It should be emphasized that this type of school was not a new initiative established under the British colonial rule who intervened the social sphere in Malaya gradually throughout the 19th century. Instead, as seen above, Qur'an school is a threaded traditions accompanied Islamization process since earlier centuries dissemination of religious knowledge and its reflections to the daily practices in this particular society, had acculturated flexibly into various social element of indigenously distinct "language (dialects), habits, and feelings" among the Malay folks.⁶

I would like to highlight my contention about the British perception and response towards the Islamic education system throughout their crucial turning points as the sole colonial rule in Malaya. This assertion is based on the notes witnessed in primary sources such as, British report published periodically, memoirs of the prominent British colonial authorities, cross-investigated by existing secondary literatures. In regard to this, the western travelers, missionaries and government officials reflected their own countries' facts attribute to religious education and its quality while observing Islamic schooling activities in Southeast Asia. Hence, it can be professed that this relation which built on a false interpretation have caused misunderstandings on Islamic education in Malaya. As the result, its reflection mirrored through similarity between Sunday schools or Christian schools in numerous areas such as in Ambon, and Qur'an schools, rote learning and memorization of the Qur'an etc. (Carlen, etc., 1992, 15; de Jong, 2012, 51).

Based on this findings, it is essential to assert that both name and the provided content of these education institutions were observed and regarded parochially by the British colonial rulers to some or larger extent. The reason of the British prejudices to this traditional education was based on their ruling policy, in which they regarded the natives as subaltern. British intentions to impose their western cultural perspectives reflected as it transformed the mind-set of native societies through education. It can be argued that this institution, like the similar ones rooted in native societies as mentioned above, were seen as the challenges for the colonial rule.

⁶ Robert L. Jarman (ed.), "Miscellaneous", Report on the Administration of the Straits' Settlements During the Years 1855-56', In Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements 1855-1941 Archive Editions, 1: 1855-1867, 1998, Oxford, 23.

This idea should be taken into more investigative consideration because the British educational experts believed that the Islamic education centers are as places where memorization was the only method imposed. Hence, what is more conspicuous is that while this approach itself no doubt a reflection of an orientalist view which “designated” the other beyond the west as “irrational” as quoted by Shamsul from Edward Said (Said, 2003, 106), the British had a bias in defining these institutions and did not have a clear ideas and approaches to understand the root and implementation of these institutions in its traditional context. A general negating approach of the British towards this type of school was to emphasize on teaching method of memorization.⁷

Interestingly, such idea gained its supporters among the native Malay intellectuals as revealed in their very own biographical writings. For instance, Munshi Abdullah, a renown 19th century Malay intellectual, had a critical approach to his own people not to regard the British education. By his pragmatic approach, Munshi asserts that Malay would earn their lives after educated at the mentioned schools. Hence, during the discussion between Munshi and the Malay folks, the latter also grew suspicious of Munshi instead, believed that he would also lose his religion following this sort of idea (Hill, 1970, 126).

The critic towards the British observation and commentary pertaining to the Qur'an classes or schools laid on subtle and crafty approach by disregarding core vision of teaching-learning methods in pesantren, instead blaming the whole activity on memorization as key method. The fact that there were distinguished pondok-pesantren in Malaya during the British colonialism had been overall ignored unless systematically negated. Notwithstanding even some historians argue that the Islamization process commenced earlier in Malaya than Jawa which hosted pesantren institutions in the 16th century in Jawa (Dhofier 1999, 14). In this regard, the assumption of the British about this issue must have been based on their distaste and confusion as seen in the approach of the Dutch in Nusantara (Laffan, 2011, 103).

British writers and colonial officials did not refer to the institution of pondok, although traditional Islamic education center which had been initiated firstly in northern provinces of Malaya such as Kelantan, Trengganu and Kedah at the beginning of the 19th century (Abu Bakar, 2000,

⁷ 11 Straits Settlements, Paper Laid before the Legislative council by Command of His Excellency the Governor, Tuesday, 4th May, 1875, No. 818, by Edward W. Shaw, Lieutenant-Governor, 199.

373) were productive during colonial presence. Beyond that, these centers, whether with similar or different names, widely exercised Islamic educational system and facilities throughout the Archipelago historically. These institutions were the hub of teaching and learning activities with the significant contribution and dissemination of knowledge from the Mekkan educated scholars (Bradley, 2013, 1).

What the British educational experts and observant mention in their work regarding the traditional Islamic education in Malaya draws a contradictory picture from the experienced past and contemporary works conducted by the local, Malay Islamic scholars. A recently published catalogue of manuscript collections in Aceh showed various types of Jawi books that implied to the existing productivity of Islamic education centers provide enough proof against the abovementioned argumentations (Fathurahman – Holil, 2007).⁸

On the other hand, it should be highlighted that why the British colonial officials did not name pondok but Qur'an classes to their instead, is important. Since as it is mentioned in various sources and my interviewees during the field work mentioned in some other relevant papers, it is a must to highlight that the history of pondok education goes back to some centuries ago.⁹ This fact leads us to think about the idea that the British did not involve directly pondok education which was mainly conducted in north and northern-east part of Malay Peninsula. As seen in some explanations pertaining to the history of Islamic education in Johor, which was an adjunct state during the British existence in Singapore, "the first religious school was opened in 1895. Before this year, the religious education was conducted in various levels and under distinct names such as al-Qur'an" (A. Rahman, 1999/2000, 57).

Gradual expansion of the British colonial rule in Malay Peninsula also reflected its impact on the changing process of educational institutions. In this regard, beyond the regions such as Penang and Singapore Islands and port city of Malacca, the rest of Malaya, traditional Islamic education institutions including in the form of Qur'an schools, in particular, in

⁸ It can be argued here that there is a sort of similarity between the approaches and perceptions of British and the Dutch about the content and scope of Islamization. As it is asserted that the latter failed to realize the importance of similar educational organizations since there is "no mention of pondok, dhikr or even tariqa" in a dictionary prepared in Jawa Island in 17th century. See: Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 75.

⁹ See: Mehmet Özay, "A Discussion Pertaining to a Classical Teaching Material and its Methodology: Masail al Muhtadi li Ikhwanil Muhtadi", *8th World Conference on Muslim Education (Malaysia-Selangor-Shah Alam, 12-13th November 2012)*.

northern and eastern sultanates continued. Relevant to this geographical division, we may offer a map of religious education on the basis of northern region, central Malaya, southern region.

The English educated circles stood apart from the pondok Arabic-educated ones. Kelantan and Trengganu formed a separate sub-group because, in these two states alone, the pondok challenged the schools with the medium of English. The British had control of the education institutions in central Malaya hosting four Malay states and the city of Malacca under the British mandates. One striking fact in this particular region is that the British gradually established their control upon Qur'an schools as well. The southern region, say, the Johor province, which included the Island of Singapore in the early stages of the British rule, possessed Anglo-Malay education institutions. In addition to this, because of this province bore ancient past such as a classical sultanate, Islamic values were transmitted to the younger generations through supplementary courses integrated at above-mentioned institutions (Gungwu, 1992, 220-221).

2. BRITISH INVESTMENT OF EDUCATION: MALAY VERNACULAR SCHOOLS

The British initiation of modern education structure went back to early decades of the British existence in the region. They invested gradually on this sphere commencing essentially from the period of establishment of Singapore in 1819 followed years later where numerous city in Malacca was taken over from the Dutch rule on the basis of the London treaty agreement in 1824.

In the earlier establishment process, Thomas Stamford Raffles urged educational activities to be exclusively made for the offspring of the Malay elite. However, the structural development was commenced just after the year 1867 when the Straits Settlements were freed from the charge of the Colonial Governor in India. This institutional change led the Colonial Office officiated in the Straits Settlements to administer its own policies including the field of education (Fatt, 1978, 10; Hogh, 1933, 168).

In regard to this process, the first Malay school started under the premises of Free Schools, which were initiated on the basis of European educational development, which first established in Penang Island in 1821 and then followed in Singapore Island in 1834 (Wong – Hean, 1980, 2; Michael, 1965, 10).

In addition to the role of dissemination of knowledge, Qur'an schools played a role for the community such as socialization of the younger generation and its integration into their socio-religious environment (Othman, 1998, 146).

Raffles encouraged some zealous individuals from missionary societies such as, C. H. Thomson from London Missionary Society, who acquired accordingly the Malay language and initiated establishment of a Malay school with some twenty to thirty pupils, among whom at least few seem to have been converted to Christianity (Raffles, 1991, 536; Sng 1980, 31).¹⁰ Though this initial stage without being any product of an organized educational structure, the second part of the 19th century witnessed the official consideration of establishment of Malay schools by direct involvement of the British rule (Rauf, 1964, 67).

In addition, the educational initiatives of some missionary groups were supported by the British colonial rule. During the process, the colonial rule took responsibilities of secular school operation. - Three distinct types of schools functioned at the same time (Gungwu, 1992, 220).

Before dealing in detail about the vernacular schools, it should be emphasized briefly why the British colonial education invested in this sort of school. It is understood from the various sources that the British authorities underestimated the socio-cultural establishment of the native society and regarded it as the one needed to be developed in almost all aspects of life including education. In essence, the purpose of establishment of Malay vernacular schools was to convert the native children "the son of the fisherman or the peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been." (Rauf, 1964, 97).

Since the topic discussed issue is vernacular schools, other particular types of institutions will not be taken into consideration. Thus it is observed that the establishment of the Malay vernacular schools, in particular, took the stage gradually after 1870s. For instance, some reports from late 1850s referring this school asserting that "small vernacular schools" had not been much significantly developed.¹¹ By the mid of 1870 were some improvements observed both in terms of the number of this

¹⁰ London Missionary Society was the pioneer Protestant group operating among the local people in Malacca and later on Singapore. See: Bobby E. K. Sng, *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819-1978* (Singapore: Graduates' Christian Fellowship, 1980), 24.

¹¹ Colonel Orfeur Cavanagh Governor of the SS, "Annual Report of the Administration of the Straits' Settlements During the Years 1859-60", (1860), 12.

type of school. And students were exposed teaching-learning process of reading, writing and arithmetic by the efforts of the British authorities.¹²

It is understood that these schools were improved and well-established in the course of few decades, around 1890s (Swettenham, 1891, 56). For instance, Sungei Ujong, one of the crucial Malay settlements in Western coast of Malaya, did not experience the implementation of such three vernacular schools till 1884.¹³ In addition, the prominence of Malay language was also salient issue. The British intended to start integration process, essentially, of the Chinese who were capable to talk but “unfamiliar” to Malay in Arabic calligraphy.¹⁴

These educational activities were based on general British colonial educational policies. In particular, as observed in the colonized India, the British authorities whether they were affiliated with utilitarian, liberal or evangelist missionary groups they had a similar fathom bound towards the superiority of Western culture and education. For instance, Thomas Babington Macaulay, the renown educationalist, refers explicitly this idea and asserts that the natives should be given education to create a class of people who would be Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes (Peer, 1991, 34).

This approach has been considerably valid throughout the colonial rule and education investment diffused from the capital to small cities and villages. The colonizers strategically used the education system to instill this asymmetrical social ideology in their colonial subjects but it was also constantly being reaffirmed by a range of other social and linguistic practices. First, colonization gave rise to a new language hierarchy in which the language of the colonizer was inscribed as the most prestigious language and came to dominate the administrative and mercantile structure of each colony (Migge – Leglise, 2007, 301).

In this context Malay vernacular school had a significant place in conversion of the Qur'an schools in Malaya. It is observed that the British rule separated and ruled accordingly the education facilities among the distinct ethnic structures. So the classification of education was based on the type of language instruction. In regard of this, Qur'an schools, English,

¹² Straits Settlements, Paper Laid before the Legislative council by Command of His Excellency the Governor, Tuesday, 4th May, 1875, No. 818, by Edward W. Shaw, Lieutenant-Governor, 199.

¹³ “Negri Sembilan”, The Malay Mail, Thursday, 6th October 1898, No. 440, 4: 3.

¹⁴ Richard James Wilkinson, “The Times of Malaya, and Commercial Advertiser of the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements”, (1904), 2; “Romanized Malay as a Language for the Straits Chinese”, The Times of Malaya, and Commercial Advertiser of the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements, (1904), no.50, 3.

Chinese and Indian schools are samples of the variety of schools (Ginsburg – Robert, 1958, 155).

The reason of the British to define and describe these schools was based on few aspects. One of which was to differentiate their own educational initiatives as seen in the forms of ‘Free schools’ which were also open to Malay Muslim communities, in particular, to the sons of the elite beyond the non-Muslim communities, say, Chinese and Indians. There was also another option for Malay Muslims operated in the form of ‘Malay vernacular schools’ whose medium of instruction was Malay language, including the courses such as, “elementary arithmetic and hygiene”, reading and writing as well. These schools were attempts, in particular, by the British scholarly rulers so as to realize social engineering to some or larger extent, establishing the Malay language as the medium of instruction and reproducing Malay classical texts. Thomas Stamford Raffles was no doubt the earliest ruler who “expressed a desire to establish Malay schools after he discovered that reading and teaching was concentrated around the reading of the Qur’an in Arabic.” (Alisjahbana, 1976, 43; Cheliah, 1960, 13; Rauf, 1964, 97).¹⁵

The year 1872 marked an important stage in the development of Malay education, since the educational inspectorship was proclaimed in that year. Thus, after the establishment of Education Department in the British administration, A. M. Skinner, the newly appointed Inspector of Schools established Malay language schools (Malay vernacular schools) based on Qur’an schools (Rauf, 1964, 97).

He realized that no progress could be made in Malay education until and unless the teaching of Malay was separated from the teaching of the Qur’an. However, he also realized that he could ill afford to incur the displeasure of the religious teachers whose livelihood depended to some extent on their Qur’an teaching. These early Malay schools which originated in the Qur’an classes were partially assisted by the East India Company during the early part of the nineteenth century. Later, state governments took over this role. In time, these early schools developed into Government Malay Schools which were financed from public funds and were the forerunners of Malaysia’s present day, National Primary Schools (Furnivall, 1943, 32; Wong – Hean, 1980, 2).

¹⁵ 11 Straits Settlements, Paper Laid before the Legislative council by Command of His Excellency the Governor, Tuesday, 4th May, 1875, No. 818, by Edward W. Shaw, Lieutenant-Governor, 199.

It is understood that teaching the Qur'an as a course at Malay vernacular school became a routine implementation. As seen in educational reports, "... the Qur'an is taught in our vernacular schools compulsory measures need not be thought of and he acknowledges the great assistance he has received from district officers and Malay headmen..." (Swettenham, 1891, 56).

Though the British colonial administration acquired the facility of the Qur'an schools and recruited the village priest or the Hajji to teach the Qur'an and the principles of the Mohammadan religion as mentioned above, the former did not allow the Hajji to take part and conduct formal educational process in the morning sessions. Instead, the British, as a proof of dissociation of the religious education from secular one, appointed the Hajji to run the Qur'an classes in the afternoon session to appease the demands of the Malay parents (Rauf, 1964, 97; Gullick, 1987, 265).

The implementation of secular type of education of the British administration caused embarrassing situation among the Malay parents and the latter had lessening interests in Government schools. In particular, when the control of administration in Malaya was replaced from the East India Company to the Colonial Office in 1867, free education was facilitated as an official policy for children of all communities. While this process witnessed general tendency of expansion of secular education, to some or larger extent deteriorated religious instruction was held in the mosques and conducted by private agencies (Yegar, 1979, 259). Hence this education was structured on the basis of British convention transferring the epistemology until the material necessities into the Malay societies.

It can be asserted that the transformation of traditional Islamic education institutions in Malay Peninsula is relevant to developments both in the changes of colonial rule which was centered in Calcutta, but the Straits Settlements were given special rule named as Colonial Office organized in the Island of Singapore. In addition, paradigmatic changes in Britain in 1860s were also taken effect on the new implementation of educational initiatives by the colonial rule.

3. THE ESSENCE OF QUR'AN CLASSES IN VERNACULAR SCHOOLS

As mentioned here the type of schools which the British observed or witnessed was the institution conducted as elementary or initial level facilitated by imams of the masjid or knowledgeable elders who at the same time acted as teachers.

Malay language in the form of Jawi which is also given as a name to written documents as 'Kitap Jawi', had existed before the British colonial rule established in Malaya (Abdullah, 2015, 339). Teaching activities conducted through the medium of Malay Jawi, since the Malays were not significantly capable of Arabic language, thus books named as Kitab Jawi were functionalized in the process. As mentioned by Abdullah Munshi the Arabic language was used by the Malays only in worship and prayers (Ngah, 1982, vii).

This is also a signifier that the institution under observation was not a complete Islamic education institution, instead a short term activity conducted in a surau operating in village level in order to disseminate basic and fundamental issues in Islam. Though the process was relatively shorter and its dissemination process was led by a knowledgeable persons, not specifically religiously entitled scholars. As we witness the scholarly studies in pondok/pesantren historically in the works of history of education and observed in the established traditional religious institutions during the research.

While vernacular schools initially operated by the missionaries were gradually expanding, the Malay parents' concern grew assuming that their children would become converted into Christianity. These social repercussions gave way to British administration to find Malay vernacular schools so as to attract the attention and interest of the Malay parents. In addition, the British authorities appointed instructors chosen among the individuals in the village community who were capable to teach the Qur'an and fundamental knowledge of Islamic tenets after the regular teaching hours of secular subjects (Roff, 1967, 71; Gullick, 1987, 265).

During the process, it is also assumed that the British colonial authorities initiated vernacular school project for the various ethnic communities in Malaya including the native ones. Due to the multi ethnic social structure and governmental policy, there emerged two categories of schools during the British period; first, the vernacular schools, such as the Malay vernacular; the Chinese vernacular and the Tamil vernacular schools, the English schools which were often concentrated in the urban areas where the immigrant races tended to congregate (Wong - Hean, 1980, 2).

On the basis of this changes, the Malay youth could be taught at Malay vernacular schools which the language of instruction was Malay language (Wong - Hean 1980, 2; Chelliah, 1960, 13, 63; Kee - Hean 1972, 7). In regard to this institutional change in educational structure as observed in

the form of vernacular school, it is safely asserted that the origin and tradition of this novel type of school is based on religious institution (Furnivall, 1943, 9).

CONCLUSION

This paper is a preliminary view, portrays a general picture of Qur'an schools conjecture under the British colonial rulers which turned as a role player in the transformation of Malay vernacular schools in Malaya.

It should be emphasized that Qur'an schools, which are the fundamental Islamic educational institutions as observed in distinct Islamic geographies, have been operated throughout the centuries in Malaya as well. And since the Qur'an is the fundamental source of Islamic belief system, the younger generations are exposed since their early stage educational process. In regard to this, the Malay society was not an exceptionally skipped the experience before and during the British colonialism. Hence, the latter as examined during the reign of various administrative staff such as Thomas Smatford Raffles, Frank Swettenham and Richard J. Wilkinson, had their own epistemology and educational planning on the basis of pragmatic rule of the Malay land and initiated to transform this institution into a Malay vernacular education system.

Though the administrators such as Raffles considered significantly the idea of setting up of vernacular schools, beyond few exceptions such as, the Free Schools in Penang (1821) and Singapore (1834), the implementation of this sort of educational institution was only realized consistently in late decades of the 19th century. As highlighted in the text, the beginnings of Malay vernacular education in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States had their roots in Qur'an schools in which the pupils were exposed to learning the principal prayers in Arabic. In addition, they were taught a little Malay after they had learned to read and write the Qur'an in Arabic (Wong - Hean 1980, 2).

The intention of the British to establish Malay vernacular schools was to serve their long-term influence in this colonized land to create a new feature of indigenous classes and administrative cadres. Throughout the process, traditional religious education institutions, say, Qur'an schools, became a direct influence and were subject of change. In particular, the British colonial administration exercising the power under the establishment of Colonial Office initiated this policy (Latif, 2008, 56).

In a nutshell, this text clarifies the concept of Qur'an schools, which was a name given by the British colonial rule to replace broader intellec-

tual chain of existence belonged to the Islamic education centers in particular. It should be emphasized that this sort of school was not a new initiative while the British initiated their rule in distinct regions in Malaya gradually throughout 19th century. Hence, both the name of these institutions and the content of education provided in these schools are observed to have been interpreted in bias by the British colonial rule to some or larger extent. The reason of the British prejudices to this Islamically traditional way of education was based on their ruling policy including education to impose their civilizational and cultural hegemony to transform the native societies.

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