

## **Chapter II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A search was made from the CD-ROM at the UML of the following databases: *Singapore National Bibliographies* and *Singapore Periodical Index*. Printed materials, periodicals and conference papers at UML and DBPL were also perused for issues related to the subject under study. The keywords that were used to retrieve the literature were Baba, Peranakan, Straits-born Chinese, literature, language, Baba Malay and a combination of these. The findings from the literature are summarised in the following sections.

#### **2.1 The Baba Language**

The Baba language is colloquial Malay, in contrast to standard Malay. The Babas saw the need for a written language to fulfil their reading needs. From the late 1880s to 1950, the publication of romanised Baba Malay in the form of newspapers, magazines, poems and translated works on Chinese classics appeared under Baba penmanship especially in Singapore. Basically the newspapers were used for broadcasting and advertising, and the rest of the published Baba literature were used for leisure purposes.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Babas started to publish newspapers, magazines and books in Baba Malay. The Babas published their first romanised newspapers in 1894 and their first romanised periodical appeared in 1919 (Roff, 1972). The first

published newspaper was a bilingual (English and Malay) newspaper called *Straits Chinese Herald* in January 22, 1894.

As more Babas gained proficiency in English, they began to speak in English rather than their own mother tongue. Consequently, the demand of either translation works or Baba literature decreased. After the Second World War, the Baba publications had shown a distinctive falling off. This was caused by the loss of their financial position as a result of the Japanese military occupation of Malaya.

## **2.2 Other Literary Expressions**

### **2.2.1 The Baba Newspapers**

The *Straits Chinese Herald*, which was also known as *Surat Khabar Peranakan* was published in Singapore and was sold on a subscription basis at the Straits currency of \$1.00 per month. Outside Singapore, it was sold at \$1.30 post-free. The paper was published daily except on Sundays. The paper carried mostly local and foreign news, stories and advertisements. In the first issue, five reasons were proposed to motivate the editors to continue with the publication of the newspaper even when they were facing hard times, and there are:

- a. To improve the knowledge of the Asiatic world;
- b. To know events of daily life;
- c. To learn English;
- d. To learn colloquial Malay; and
- e. To act as an instrument for voicing out opinions.

However, the *Straits Chinese Herald* did not survive long. In May 5 1894 issue (volume 1, number 87), the editorial announced that the paper would be absorbed by

*The Daily Advertiser* from May 7, 1894. This information was printed in the *Straits Chinese Herald* on 22 January 1894 till 5 May 1894.

The second Baba newspaper was called *Bintang Timor*. It was published in Singapore on July 2, 1894. This was started by Song Ong Siang who was a lawyer, and Tan Boon Chin, who was a clerk. The manager of the paper was Song Seck Kum. *Bintang Timor* was the first fully romanised Malay newspaper in Malaya. It was a daily paper until the end of March 1895; there after it was published thrice weekly on every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. It was also distributed in Singapore, Batavia (now Jakarta), Padang (now Sumatra), Kuala Lumpur, Labuan, Perak, Johor and Sarawak. This information was printed in *Bintang Timor*, 2 July 1894 till 2 July 1895.

There are four pages in each issue of the *Bintang Timor*. The first and the last page were usually devoted to advertisements and announcements. The rest were daily news, stories in series and poems. In fact, it provided the opportunity for the Baba writers to publish their works. Tan Chee Beng (1982) studied one of the Baba *pantun* (poem) written by Si Melata and published in volume 1, no. 10, in 12 July 1894 in-depth. Tan commended that *Bintang Timor* is a good resource of research on the Straits Chinese's views and writings at that time (1981). However this newspaper ceased publication after the July 2, 1895 issue because of poor subscription and bad debts. The reasons were made known in the issue published on 2 July, 1895, volume 2, no. 112.

Goh Cheng Lim and Wan Boon Seng published another romanised Malay paper called *Kabar Slalu*, also known as *Daily News* in English on January 5, 1924. The paper carried business news, advertisement, local and foreign news, editorial views and stories. It was also the first newspaper which published a series of translated works of the Babas. It too ceased publication on 16 May 1924. This news was reported in *Kabar Slalu* from 5 January 1924 till 16 May 1924.

*Kabar Uchapan Baru* is another weekly bilingual publication (English and Baba Malay), which was also known as *Eastern Weekly Review*. The first issue was published in 4 February 1926. After 1927, it was published fortnightly. Siaw Hay Yam was the translator. It was published from 4 February 1926 until January 1931.

### **2.2.2 The Baba Magazines**

Beside newspapers, a number of Baba magazines were published at the same time. One such outstanding magazine was *The Straits Chinese Magazine: a Quarterly Journal of Oriental and Occidental Culture*. It was published in English. The first romanised Malay magazine was *Bintang Pranakan*, a romanised Malay weekly published by Wan Boon Seng on 11 October 1930 in Singapore. It was published in Baba Malay on each Saturday and was sold at ten cents per copy. Wan Boon Seng provided a series of the Chinese story *Ow Liat Kok Chee* which was translated by Seng and San. These series of stories were later published in four volumes in 1931.

Altogether there were 36 pages in each issue of the *Bintang Pranakan*, including the front and back covers. The front cover had two portions, the lower portion was for advertisements and the upper portion was for the regular logo of the magazine. The



design showed a star shining over the title '*Bintang Pranakan*' which means Pranakan Star. The title was surrounded by a coconut tree on the left and a rubber tree on the right. There was also a picture of a lion, a tiger and a bag of tin below the title. Coconut, rubber and tin symbolised the important natural products of Malaya. The lion symbolised Singapore, whilst the tiger symbolised Malaya.

*Bintang Pranakan* had regular features of editorials, local and foreign news, sports, market quotations, announcements, columns for humour, poems and photographs. *Bintang Pranakan* seemed to be widely distributed as it had agents in Malaya (Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Batu Pahat, Johor Bahru, Seremban, Kuala Pilah, Kampar, Taiping, Ipoh, Butterworth, Alor Setar, Sungei Patani and Trengganu), Sarawak (Kuching and Miri), Labuan, as well as in Tandjong Pinang of Rhio, Java (Semarang, Soerapaya), and Bangkok. However, *Bintang Pranakan* did not last long. According to Roff (1972) the magazine ceased publication in June 1931 after 34 issues.

In April 1932, *Sri Pranakan* was published weekly by Wan Boon Seng. The content of this issue was similar to *Bintang Pranakan*. However, almost half of the stories were devoted to publishing the series of Chinese story called '*Yeo Boon Kong Cheng Lam Ban*', translated by Seng and San. Wan Boon Seng later published this story in four books between 1933-1934. *Sri Pranakan* seemed to published poems and songs more regularly than *Bintang Pranakan* did.

Each issue of *Sri Pranakan* had 32 pages, including the front and back covers. The front cover showed a tiger on the left and a lion on the right, with their front legs

reaching up to a shining star. This magazine was more expensive and it was priced at fifteen cents per copy. The magazine was published in Singapore but was also sold in Malaya (Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Bahru, Seremban, Taiping, Trengganu, Kuala Lipis and Teluk Anson). Sarawak (Kuching), Java (Semarang and Soerabaya) and Thailand (Bangkok).

Another periodical was *Story Teller*, a fortnightly publication. The first volume was published on 30 June 1934 and the last volume was on 12 October 1935. This magazine merely published the Chinese story of *Beng Leh Koon*, which was translated by Khoo Peng Yam.

### **2.2.3 “*Pantun*” and “*Lagu*”**

After a few centuries of residing in Malacca, the Babas have adopted many aspects of the Malay culture. The Babas have contributed greatly towards the variations in *bangsawan*, *pantun* (poems) and *lagu* (songs) of Malay literature.

*Bangsawan* is a type of opera, which performs stories based on folklore, with singing and minimal spoken dialogue. It was first introduced in Penang in the late 19th century. Soon it became popular and was adopted as a local culture. The Babas who patronised this type of opera were called Baba *bangsawan*. It is a sort of musical entertainment in which, the dialogue is interspersed with songs and Malay poems. The songs and the Malay poems that came between the *bangsawan* were called *pantun* and *syair*. (Khoo, 1996)

A *pantun* consists of four rhythmic lines in the sequence of a, b, a, b, the first two of which are shaped to prepare line three and four phonetically by means of an alluding sound, or to allude in a symbolic way to the essence of the last two lines. *Pantuns* are proverbial in nature. In the past, they were not commonly written down by the Malays but rather recorded by European scholars. The *syair*, with its final rhyme scheme (a, a, a, a), can achieve epic length. *Syair* normally expressed the feelings of a mystic or lover but also narrated historical and legendary events (Khoo, 1996).

In Malacca, the most popular Malay poem and music adopted and developed by the Babas is in the form of *Dondang Sayang*. *Dondang Sayang* or love poems are rendered in rounds of quick repartee between two singers or group of singers. The *Dondang Sayang* style originated from Malacca and eventually spread to Penang, Singapore and Sarawak. It is one of the most elaborate forms of *pantun* singing. It is accompanied by the music of a violin, a gong and *rebana* (tambourines) (Tan, 1981).

Vaughan (1879) mentioned that the Babas in Malacca were good in *pantun* and lagu. This is actually in reference to *dondang sayang*. This form of oral literature has become written literature as the Baba society grew and developed. The earliest *pantun* was written by Mohamad bin Moor Ta Kup in 1889, and was published by the Koh Yew Hean Press in Singapore. The title of the book is *Ini Pantun Karang-karangan*. Salmon believed that he was a Muslim converted Baba (Salmon, 1980). However this copy is not accessible in any of the local libraries. The last copy of *pantun* that is available was written by Lee Chee Lin in 1999, named *Pantun dulu-*

*kala Peranakan Cina* according to Ding's unpublished list *Buku Pantun dan Syair Baba Malaysia yang Sudah Dikumpul*. (16 February 2001).

The description of the various manifestations of previous Baba literary works shows that very few studies have been undertaken on the Baba publications. Although the study of Baba culture is well recommended by the anthropologist and sociologist, very few studied the Baba literature, and there is no attempt as yet to bibliographically control all Baba literary works. This would be the main focus of chapter four.

### **2.3 Translated Works**

One important contribution of the Baba newspapers is that they devoted some columns to creative writings such as poems and short stories. The *Bintang Timor* published a serial entitled *Hikayat Perchintaan Si Puteh* (The Love Story of Si Puteh) commencing from its first issue. The magazines were published mainly to advertise short stories as well as translations of Chinese serial classics. The *Sri Pranakan* carried a series of story entitled *Yeo Boon Keng Cheng Lam Ban*. The Chinese story published in the *Story Teller* is *Beng Leh Koon*. Like the short stories published in the newspapers, these translations were well received by readers, and they were later published into books by popular demand. In fact, the most outstanding writings of the Babas were their translated works rather than the original creative works (Teo, 1980).

As early as 1889, people like Chan Kim Boon had already begun to publish novels translated from Chinese classics, but the development of such literature was

hindered in the 1920s. Chan who wrote under the pen name 'Batu Gantung' was one of the famous Baba literary figures. He specialised in translations of Chinese classics into Baba Malay. His epic work was a translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* or *Sam Kok*, which ran to 30 volumes. In addition to that, he also translated *The Water Margin* and *Journey to the West* (Tan, 2001).

Yang Gui Yi in 1987 had published an article on inter-translated works between Chinese and Malay. He categorised the evolution of the inter-translation activity into three periods. The first period was the social interactions that caused the inter-translation process. Yang also noticed that the Malay language that was being used at that period was the 'broken' Malay or Baba Malay. The second stage was the patriotic idealism period that stirred the speedy inter-translation. That was also the time that Standard Malay was introduced widely. Lastly, education was broadly introduced after the independence of Malaysia in 1957. This implied that inter-translations became unnecessary as most readers could read Malay directly. However, the Chinese translated works still remained. The difference is the translated material has led to a shift to local literature from Chinese classic. This implied that the extinction of the Baba literature was not sudden but gradual. Although there is still a small number of Baba works being published, the Baba Malay that is being used is different from the past.

Kow Mei Kao (1988) studied solely one of the translation literature – *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi*. He proposed *The Transmission of the Liao Zhai Zhi Yi in the Malay World*. Four versions of translation works on *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* have been discovered. The first translation appeared in Batavia in 1895. This translation contained 28 stories on the

supernatural that originated from *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi*. In 1915 another translation appeared in Jakarta, but it was almost identical to the original version. Similarly, there was also another translation of *Lian Xiang*, one of the stories from *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* in 1938. However, in 1965 Neo Jo-Ian translated three stories that had not been translated before into Malay in a work entitled *Sastera Tionghua Sa-pintas Lalu*. Kow had attempted to contribute to the enrichment of the language and literature of the local Baba society. Kow's research showed that the Baba translators did not translate the whole piece of a particular Chinese classic, but they were translated selectively.

Liao Jian Yu (1991) in his *Chinese Literature Translation Works in Indonesia and Malaysia* showed that a small number of Chinese literatures have been translated to Indonesian language and Malay. Besides that, the qualities of the translation work were not impressive. The Indonesian translated works seems to be more in numbers compared to translations into Baba Malay. Most of the Indonesian translated works are translated from the popular Chinese fiction or *Tong Shu Xiao Shuo*, whereas the Malaysian translated works were mainly from the Chinese classics. Liao expected that the quantity and quality of the translated work would improve giving better impact to the Malay literature. His expectation did not really happen as the present translated works used Standard Malay rather than Baba Malay.

Yang Quee Yee (2001) published an article which described his study on the groups of people who were involved in the inter-translation and their works. Mainly, there are two groups of translators. The first group was the English educated Chinese, which implied that the Babas were the pioneer and had produced over sixty titles.

The second group was the Chinese educated Chinese. Though they only started writing after 1950s, their works undoubtedly survived better than those writers by the first group. The translation works of these two groups were entirely different. The Babas selected the Chinese classic as their material and used colloquial Malay as their medium. The latter selected not only Chinese classic, but also the Malaysian Chinese literature, and the translation was into standard Malay. Yang concluded that the latter group contributed more to racial interaction since they have selected local material and used standard Malay, which is understood by a larger population of readers. The Babas translation works survived for sixty years and the main reason for its cessation was the decline in the use of the Baba language.

## **2.4 Baba Literature**

Many studies have been made of the historical, sociological and linguistic aspects of the Baba community, but apparently until the late 1970s nobody had raised the question of how, and to what extent this community felt the need to create a body of literature in Malay. Salmon (1977) was the first person who seriously studied the Baba literature. Before her, there was a small number of writers who published various articles. Mei (1961) wrote an article regarding Chinese novels in the Malay language. He commented that these novels were not given enough attention than it actually deserved. Huang Yao (1967) also commented that the Baba literature was hardly read by the non-Baba community and proposed more research in this area. Wen (1970) introduced one small article on Chan Kim Boon, one of the outstanding Baba writers.

In 1977, Salmon wrote *Writings in Romanized Malay by the Chinese of Malaya: a Preliminary Inquiry* in French in *Archipel* 14, 1977: 79-100. An English translation by Anne Destenay with a few commentaries and corrections was published in *Kertas-kertas Pengajian Tionghua (Papers on Chinese Studies)* vol. 1, December 1977: 69-95. Salmon (1987) later revised her list of the works in Romanized Malay. In the revised list, Salmon listed 94 titles. She highlighted a few representatives of the Baba literature penmanship such as Chan Kim Boon, Na Tian Piet and Wan Boon Seng. She divided the Baba literature into two periods. The first was the years between 1889-c.1920 which was regarded as the early development stage of the literature and was dominated by Chan Kim Boon. Year c1930-1942 was the recrudescence period, which was dominated by Wan Boon Seng. Salmon commented that the Baba literature should not be approached as literary criticism. It should be taken as a study of linguistic or history. Salmon's work has inspired further study on the Babas through their literature.

Clammer (1980) was also one of the scholars who studied the Baba literature. From the sociological point of view, Clammer proposed several reasons why the Babas did not produce great literature and the worth of studying their literature. The Baba roots arose from the combination of three competing traditions – the Malay language, the Chinese heritage and the British colonial political culture. As a result of these features, there was no full concentration in developing its literary aspect. Nevertheless the study of the Baba literature was still being encouraged for four reasons:

- a. It fascinated scholars on minority literature in Southeast Asia;
- b. It provided a source to study the internal changes of the Baba culture;



- c. It provided a model of interaction between literature and society; and
- d. It provided a source of social history, customs, culture and mores of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Tan Chee Beng (1981) approached the subject of Baba literature in accordance to the type of Baba publications comprising poems, newspapers, magazines and translated works. Tan studied the sociology of the Babas and their language, ethnicity, customs and their literature. In the conclusion, Tan pointed out that the enthusiasm for publishing Baba literature is an expression of pride of the Baba identity. Chinese stories were mainly chosen to be translated because the Baba culture remained deeply rooted to its Chinese connection. Tan's research provided an understanding not only of the translated works but also of the Babas' creative works such as their poems, newspapers and magazines.

Another scholar, who examined the Baba literature thoroughly, was Teo Lay Teen (1980) She looked at the characteristics of one full Malay translation of the Chinese classic, entitled *Khian Leong Oon Yew Kang Lam* (Emperor Qian Long Toured the Jiangnan). The study devoted two chapters to the Malay language used by the Baba translators. She has narrowed the scope of the study to loanwords and grammar, and to the characteristics of the translation compared to the original. She commented that the translation works are not easy to read. Most were 'loose' translations of the translated works. The translators emphasised the content of the stories and were not attached to any style. She further explained that this may be because the literary works were mainly used as reading materials for leisure. Teo's work has opened avenues to the documentation of the Baba works.

Mei Jing (1983) studied about Baba translation literature, in his paper entitled, *Chan Kim Boon and Baba's Translation of Chinese Literature*. He studied the relationship between Baba Malay and the translation literature. At the same time, he upheld that Chan Kim Boon pioneered the Baba translation works and was the best translator. His study focused on Chan Kim Boon and opined that Baba literature played an important role in the literary development in Malaysia.

## **2.5 Bibliographies of Baba Literature**

Very few bibliographies on Baba literature has been compiled. Proudfoot (1993) has compiled a list by working through the registration of *Straits Settlements Government Gazette* (SSGG), which was the quarterly *Memoranda of Book Published*. However, he observed that the Baba publication was rarely registered in the SSGG.

Perpustakaan Tun Sri Lanang, National University of Malaysia has attempted to compile a union list of Baba literature. They have published *Katalog Induk Koleksi Sastera Cina Peranakan* (1988) and succeeded in gathering Peranakan titles held in three of the major local university libraries, National University of Malaysia, University of Malaya and Science University of Malaysia. However, the peranakan literature listing was extended to include works by the local Baba community as well as the Indonesian Peranakan community. The total collection of this list is 1,322 titles, the majority being the Indonesian Peranakan literature kept in the National University of Malaysia collection. The intention of preparing this bibliography was to assist researches who wanted to study the literature and

language of assimilated Chinese. Another objective is to inspire the researchers to compliment the list. Nevertheless the bibliography is only limited to titles found in the three university libraries.

In 1989, an attempt was made to locate and record Malay books published in the Malaysia and Singapore region during the first hundred years of printing, from 1818 to 1920 by Ian Proudfoot (1989). He has recorded about 2,200 items which were located in 13 national, public and academic libraries in England, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. The books included Christian missionary publications, a few Baba translations of Chinese romances, school books, guides to Islamic doctrines, and a great number of popular *syair* and *hikayat*. Many of these old books may now survive in only one copy. In conclusion, he pointed out that the task of identifying, securing and preserving this material is urgent. His effort of identifying the material has successfully increased an awareness of the need to identify, secure and preserve the Peranakan material.

Proudfoot has completed a bibliography of the early Malay printed books in 1993. He assembled 1,000 titles comprising over 2,000 editions and located 2,650 items. The list was restricted to publications in Malay, other Southeast Asian languages and Arabic, which were issued in the Straits Settlements, the Malay States of the Peninsula and immediate associated areas (Sarawak, Riau, Palembang and Bencoolen). Proudfoot has compiled the list according to persons and institutions, places of publication, languages other than Malay, Baba books, Titles, Bibliographical lists and Library Shelf lists. Proudfoot's work is heavily referred as the basis for the present study.

The Za'ba Memorial Library first attempted a listing of peranakan literature in *Katalog Koleksi Melayu* (1980). Lately, it has published *Koleksi Sastra Peranakan*, the listing of Baba literature in University of Malaya (1998). The intention is similar to the publication of Perpustakaan Tun Seri Lanang. However the list is restricted to holdings of the University of Malaya Library (UML) only. The UML holds about 150 titles of both Baba literature and Indonesian Peranakan literature. However the listing is brief and provide only the main entry, title of the book, edition and publisher. The shelf number is not provided.

## **2.6 Summary**

The search on available literature shows that very few studies have been undertaken on the Baba literature. The Babas has published creative and translated works since the 1880s. The creative works consisted of the Baba newspapers, magazines and *pantun*. The Baba translated works exemplified the main creative effort of the Baba community at that period of time. Very few listings of the Baba literary and translated works were undertaken. Published sources also indicate that studies on the Baba language was more popular than on the Baba literature. Chapter four will describe in detail the translated works found from the various listings mentioned in this chapter.