

Chapter V

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussions

Today, Baba translated works can be traced in various libraries, while some are in individual holdings. This literature has been studied from various aspects. Clammer (1980 and 1981) has made an attempt to study the Baba literature from the social aspect, while Teo (1981) analysed the Baba language through translated works. She also provided a list of 69 titles of Baba translated works. These two contributions have provided a platform for further exploration into state of the Baba literature. This study began by describing the background and the relevant issues concerning the Baba literature. The Baba translated works were once the favorite reading material of the Baba community.

From the period of 1880s to 1950s, the Baba community achieved high financial and political positions. They declared themselves as “True British Subject”. This implied that the Baba community during this period was settled and possessed good relationship with the colonial government. They have also assimilated the habit of reading.

They read Baba literary works for leisure time. Those involved in publishing, did not publish with the intention of gaining money, as they were already rich. The publishers have mentioned that the price of the books was minimal. As a result,

Baba literature did not survive long when the colonial government withdrawn from Malaya and the Babas lost their financial and political positions.

The existence of the Baba translated works came along with the introduction of the printing technology in 1880s. It was traced that the first printing in Malaya was introduced by the London Missionary Society (Byrd, 1970), which was later taken over by the private sectors, who began to produce large number of literary works. The Baba translated works were produced mainly by the Baba's own publishers and printing presses. Due to their educational background, the Babas have published their literature in Baba Malay and the English language. The Baba Malay literary works were published in large numbers and were more popular compared with their English works. Basically the Baba literature was divided into creative works and translated works. Both creative and translated works had not receive enough attention as they deserved.

A few attempts have been made to bibliographically control the Baba literary works. Salmon (1977; 1987) pioneered the study in this area and had raised the interest of many scholars. She has compiled 94 titles of Baba literary works, out of which 71 titles were translated works, and the rest were Baba *pantun*. Tan Chee Beng (1981) compiled a list of 74 titles of Baba translated works in 1981. Both Salmon and Tan provided a brief bibliographic listing which also included English translated titles. Their lists were used as secondary source to locate the existence of the present Baba translated works. However, some of the titles from the list are not held by major libraries both in Malaysia and Singapore.

University of Malaya Library and National University of Malaysia Library (UKM) both published a list of Malaysia and Indonesian Peranakan literature. A total of 63 out of 176 titles provided by UML and 60 out of 1,322 titles provided by UKM are Baba translated works. Proudfoot also compiled a list of 26 titles on Baba translated works up to year 1920. This amount is almost equivalent to the result of this study which has collected 25 titles from the time frame of 1889-1919. The differential amount among the list was minor. The result of this study indicated 68 unique titles published between the period of 1889-1950. The minor difference might be caused by the fact that the previous studies had included titles from private and uncatalogue collections.

After perusing the OPACs of six libraries and bibliographic listings, this study provided 68 unique titles. Many early published Baba translated works have undoubtedly been lost and the attempt to preserve is crucial. From the findings, the British Library which was the former depository library possessed the smallest collection (only 9 titles). It is believed that many of the early published materials have not been catalogued and therefore cannot be accessed through the OPACs. In time, it is hoped that more titles will be discovered.

The effort of studying the persons involved in the Baba translated works was worthwhile. The results indicated that the translators were mentioned in most titles. Probably, they were the key person in the process of translation. The role of other persons was less mentioned as their main responsibility was to assist the translator to complete the publication. Hence, those who worked with assistants produced more publications. Wan Boon Seng who translated 22 titles was assisted by various

persons. The partnership between Seow Chin San and Seow Phi Tor who translated 6 titles also indicated that co-operation produced more publications.

This study has helped to highlight those involved in Baba translated works. Their contributions towards the national heritage of Malaysia literature cannot be denied. The names that emerged in the study can be used to supplement the list of literary writers in the early 20th century.

Publishers and printing presses of the Baba translated works were mostly located in Singapore. However the creative works, such as the *pantun*, are published in Penang, Malacca and Kuala Lumpur (see Appendix I). The reasons for this situation are complicated and various. The distribution of the Baba translated works was restricted by the characteristics of the publication, which may be serialised. Due to the serialised format, it has limited circulation and are mainly confined to those in the Straits Settlements. Where else the publications of the *pantun* which was normally completed in one volume, could be published whenever and wherever the creativity of the author arise.

The Babas were also mainly English educated and very few were Chinese literate. For the translated works, knowledge of both Chinese and Baba Malay language were needed. Therefore the publication of the translated works did not grow in every Straits Settlement. The publication of translated works thrive under conducive economic conditions, manpower and the demand of the market. This was indicated for the period in the early 1990s.

The contents of the translated works were categorised in five groups: folklore, romances, chivalrous stories, legends and historical stories. The sources of the translated works were mainly Chinese classical stories, which reflected the taste of the Baba community. The Chinese classical stories revealed five major contents. However the ideology of Confucianism is not directly introduced to the Baba readers. There is no evidence to show that the philosophy of the Chinese, Confucianism and Taoism are strongly held by to the Baba community. The Babas were English education and were given and obtained much favour by the colonial government. The Babas were culturally influenced by the Chinese. Because of their strong colonial favour, and could afford to translate works under better economic conditions.

In the later years, the Babas no longer published their literature in large numbers. The language that they used has shifted to proper Malay, or standard Malay instead of Baba Malay. The national education system was introduced since the independence of Malaysia. The majority of the society was literate only in the standard Malay and this equally apply to the Baba family. Today, the Baba language is only spoken in a Baba family and was seldom written. As a result, the Baba literature with its own language did not receive good response from the society in general as well as the Baba community. The activity to bibliographically control the Baba literature is few. Entries in the primary sources were studied and a list of Baba translated works were identified and listed.

5.2 Limitations

This study has some limitations. The Baba translated works was distributed in limited copies and very few were reprinted, except for *Sam Kok* (1932). Hence, such translations have become rare and at the present are only available in a few libraries and personal collections. Consequently, this has created access problem to those who want to study the individual titles.

The Baba translated works are categorised as rare collection in all of the six libraries and kept in closed stacks for preservation purposes. This has also created access problems to the titles. Besides, some libraries have not catalogued this collection and titles could not be identified from the library catalogue. Salmon's list (1987) heavily depended on British Library Catalogue and discovered various titles that were not catalogued.

Collections from the National Museum of Singapore and School of Oriental and African Studies have not been accessed and this has limited chances of discovering more unique titles. Physical examination of titles is crucial in order to collect the descriptive elements of the titles. In addition, organisation like the National Museum of Singapore is not a library and therefore only provides a bibliographic listing. This has prevented the researchers from making a closer study of this collection.

Furthermore, the study on the Baba penmanship, publishers and printing presses and their works are very few. Therefore, the process of data collection consumes a great deal of time.

5.3 Suggestions

There are still scope for future studies to supplement the findings obtained from this study. There are some publications which cannot be located in any of the six libraries. These are *Gak Wee* (1891) by Wee Kay Seck, *Soon Bang Yan Ghee* (1904) by Lau Say, *Loh Thong Sau Pak* (1907) by Lau Kim Kok, *Bang King* (1931) by Lim Soon Seng, *Heng Guan Seo Chia* (1933) by Koh, Johnny, *Beng Leh Koon* (1936) by Khoo Peng Yam, *Ang Siew Chua* (1936) by Lim Siew Him and Koh Choon Kwang. These titles were found in the Salmon (1987) and Yang's (2001) list. Besides, the incomplete volume in the collection has caused problems in compiling a complete list of titles. As such, there are gaps in the list provided in the appendix. Main collectors such as UML should endeavour to identify the location of those titles and acquire accordingly to complete the existing collection.

In future, this study could include other Baba works such as the creative works of the Babas, *pantun* and *syair*. The Baba *pantun* were original creative works, which reflected their thinking and culture. Besides, the contents of the *pantun* are different compared with the translated works. The contents of the *pantun* mainly reflected the Baba daily life. The authorship of the *pantun* is another area yet to be explored. According to the collected Baba poem (see Appendix I), there are single publication solely on the *pantun*. Short poems were also published in the Baba newspapers. Hence the direction for further study on this aspect is clear. This contribution hopes to enrich the studies on Baba literature, as well as the Malaysian literature.

Besides the *pantun*, the newspaper published by the Babas which are full of contemporary information, might provide an area of study. The newspapers were

used to publish not only the news, but also the advertisement, announcement and literature. To have an extensive viewpoint of the former time and Baba community, the newspapers becomes one of the most useful sources. The Baba magazines, such as *Sri Pranakan*, *Bintang Pranakan* and *Story Teller* were also used to published serialised translated works. The stories from those magazines, provided another facet to the Baba literature.

The comparison between Baba literature and Indonesian Peranakan literature can be made to complete the study on Peranakan community. Although these two ethnic communities had assimilated the local culture, they are entirely different in presenting their way of lives and culture. These can be studied in detail from the literary viewpoint and through the library listing.

Further studies of primary records can be undertaken to include the study on specific coverage, the study of the authorship of the Baba literature, the publishing trade and the reading culture of the Baba community.

5.4 Conclusion

This research has attempt to analyses the Baba literature produced by its community between 1889 to 1950, with particular reference to Baba translated works. From the historical aspect of the Babas, the study has provided political, economic, and social perspective to the analysis of the Baba literature. Basically, there are two major categories of Baba literature. The earliest existence of Baba literature can only be traced as far as back to 1894, when the newspaper, *Straits Chinese Herald* (1890)

and *pantun* such as *Buku Sahyer dan Pantun Melayu* (Lim Hock Chee, 1890) and translation works (1889) was published.

The translated works has been discussed in-depth through the analysis of five major fields. This includes the persons involved in the publication, the active publishers and printing presses, the favourite of the readers and translators, the description of the translated works and the library holdings.

The Baba literature has not been given sufficient attention throughout the century until recently. However a thorough study of the Baba language, Baba translation works, Baba literature and Baba bibliographies in the Straits Settlement have been undertaken. The records of the major collectors of Baba translated works were studied and analyses to serve the purpose of exploring the Baba community. The major library is Malaysia and Singapore has put extra effort on collecting the Baba literature. The British Library which is the former depository library of Straits Settlement also holds a few of the Baba literary works. The investigation on the Baba literature should be active. Even though the publication of the Baba literature has declined, their contribution to Malaysian literary heritage is undeniable.