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## A window to Malaysian society

By [A Murad Merican](#) - May 29, 2019 @ 9:49am

Too many theses in the social science and humanities produced by local universities have been impoverished by the prejudice in the use of newspapers.

RECENTLY I was alerted to a bibliographic list on Malay periodicals by the Perpustakaan Universiti Sains Malaysia. The Senarai Bibliografi no. 43, titled Majalah dan Suratkhabar Melayu Terbitan 1887-1969 (Malay Magazines and Newspapers published 1887-1969), was arranged by the

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late Dr Badriyah Salleh, a historian at the School of Humanities.

The 1999 publication of the library comprising its Malay newspapers and magazine holdings was to provide a guide, particularly to history students who were following the course “Dokumen-Dokumen dalam Sejarah Malaysia” (Documents in Malaysian History).

According to Badriyah, it can also assist other students and researchers who study Malaysian history. Indeed, the holdings are useful for students and scholars of other fields, disciplines and academic themes too such as journalism, political science, literature, linguistics and literary studies, cultural studies and ethnic studies.

Badriyah listed the periodicals in alphabetical order and divided each one into sub-topics/issues thought to be useful. She has also listed the dates related to the issues written. She clustered the issues/topics into the larger domains as in “Politics”, “Economics” and “Social”. Also under the larger domains were more specific topics. Examples are the Development of Nationalistic Sentiments and the Depression, under the Politics and Economics domains respectively.

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The bibliography listed a total of 34 periodical titles. Except for Fajar Asia published during the Japanese colonialism period, the periodicals are in Jawi. In the process of preparing the bibliography, Badriyah referred to, thus far, the standard reference on lists of Bahasa Melayu newspapers and magazines and the role of these as sources for the nation's history. The sources have been broadly used by researchers and scholars over the decades in the study of Malay newspapers and journalism.

One that I have used since the 1980s and which elevates the importance of newspapers as sources for historical and social science scholarship in Malaysia is Khoo Kay Kim's Majalah dan Akhbar Melayu sebagai sumber Sejarah (Kuala Lumpur, Universiti of Malaya Press, 1983). For anyone studying early Malay language newspapers and journalism, W.R. Roff's classic Bibliography of Malay and Arabic periodicals published in Straits Settlements and Peninsular Malay States, 1876-1941 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973) is a critical source. The other two referred to by Badriyah were Ahmet Adam's Sejarah dan Bibliografi Akhbar dan Majalah Melaui abad Kesembilan Belas (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994), and Antologi eseji Melayu dalam Tahun-tahun 1924-1941 (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966) by Zabedah Awang Ngah.

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The publication serves as an index to newspapers and magazines held at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) now Hamzah Sendut Library. The bibliographic list is not exhaustive. Not all periodicals held in the library have been listed due to several limitations. But the bibliographic list certainly serves the functions of promoting the existence of the library's holdings on a cultural and intellectual artefact most neglected within the social sciences and the humanities. One reason being the condescending attitude of students and faculty themselves towards newspapers as sources for research. Theses in the social sciences have often neglected newspapers and other periodicals as empirical sources. There is the misleading notion that since newspapers and periodicals (and through much of the theses that I have examined and encountered over the years) are not categorised as "indexed publications/journals", they are therefore unworthy of use for scholarly work. Newspaper articles are simply deemed non-legitimate materials for theses and journal articles. Indeed, a wealth of empirical sources about ourselves and the past of society are left to rot due to such erroneous beliefs and attitudes by Malaysian academics and theses supervisors.

The misplaced obsession with "cited materials" has neglected a culturally and intellectually vibrant source of knowledge on past and contemporary expressions, style and society. Too many theses in the social science and humanities produced by local universities have been impoverished by the prejudice in the use of newspapers and other periodicals. The USM bibliographic list comprises periodicals with titles such as Bintang Timor (USM Mikrofilem no. 2793), published in Singapura; Taiping-based Jajahan Melayu (1897) (USM Mikrofilem no. 2784); Suara Benar (1932-1933) (USM Mikrofilem no. 2829), which appeared in Melaka; Pemimpin Melayu (1933-1934) (USM Mikrofilem no. 2828), published in Pulau Pinang; and Juita (1952-1953) (USM Mikrofilem no. 2795), published in Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan.

It also holds issues of the first Bahasa Melayu newspaper in Malaysia, the renowned Jawi Peranakkan (USM Mikrofilem no. 2826). The USM library only holds copies from 1887 to 1894. Jawi Peranakkan was first published in Singapura in 1876. Jawi Peranakkan covered much of the Malay archipelago. In fact, it was the earliest version of a regional newspaper in this part of the world.

In the 18 years of its publication, the periodical placed correspondence in Sumatera (Deli), Java (Batavia) and Borneo (Pontianak), apart from those in the Malay peninsular and Pulau Pinang. Jawi Peranakkan also reported on the North Borneo Agreement, the influence of the Brookes in Sarawak, and affairs in Sulu. It can serve as an indispensable source on the workings of British administration, the appointment of the residence in the Malay states, the dispatching of munsyis (teachers) to government offices to teach Bahasa Melayu, Jawi and English to their clerical staff.

The major newspapers before World War II, namely Lembaga Malaya (Dato' Onn) (1935-1941) (USM Mikrofilem no. 2794), Majlis (1940-1951) (USM Mikrofilem no. 1091), and Saudara (1928-1940) (USM Mikrofilem no. 1067) are available. Only 14 years of the Kota Baru-based Majalah Pengasoh (1954-1968) (USM Mikrofilem no. 2792) can be studied. The fortnightly magazine, first published in 1918 by the Majlis Agama Islam dan Adat Istiadat Melayu Kelantan, continues till today. The daily Utusan Melayu is available with issues from 1939 through 1960 (USM Mikrofilem

no.533). Even then, the listing is incomplete with several issues missing.

And finally among the 34 titles in the bibliographic list, there is the little known, short-lived Perkhabaran Dunia (1932) (USM Mikrofilem no. 2824). The information available is that the Singapura-based magazine first appeared in February of 1932 and lasted till March the same year. There is no information on frequency of publication. But from the dates cited, it could be a weekly. Apart from covering secret society fights, the fall in the price of rubber and its implications, Perkhabaran Dunia also carried stories on Japanese masseurs in Singapura, the Sino-Japanese war, the smuggling of opium, and the loyalty of the Malay sultans to the English.

University and public libraries must indeed be serious in developing and publishing their holdings and bibliographic lists. Strategising and promoting such wealth on the nation's past augur well for the preservation of the materials through (public) accessibility and use. Not digitising these is not an option. Microfilms, like the past, are perishable if not curated well.

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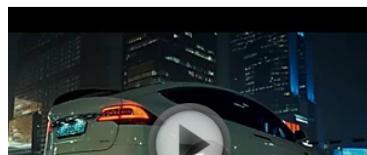
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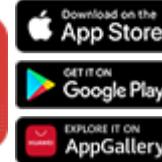
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