

PONDOK EDUCATION IN SEBERANG PERAI: ITS EVOLUTION AND UNIQUENESS¹

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This essay focuses on the historical development and uniqueness of the pondok educational system in the northern region of peninsula Malaysia especially Seberang Perai. Unlike the more modern secular education, the pondok system does not guarantee employment for its graduates. Yet in the past it managed to gain much support from the local community and it became the preferred choice of the locals to educate their children. Despite its inaccessibility into the location, problems of transportation and the provision of very basic amenities, the pondok still managed to attract many students from the northern region, other parts of Malaya (later Malaysia) and outside the country. Some of the contributory factors identified for these phenomena were the strong local interest in religious knowledge, nationalism and the social standing of pondok teachers or Tok Guru within the local community as manifested in the writing of religious treatises which were either printed in Penang or Seberang Perai. This essay discusses the evolution of the pondok amidst a difficult environment and to explain how they managed to hold on until the present day. Attention is also directed towards the publication of religious treatises and their marketing in the Seberang Perai area and the connection of the publishing houses with local pondoks.

Keywords: *pondok*, Islamic education, religious treatise, publishing houses

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic traditional educational institution or *pondok* is well-known in the northern region and the east coast since the late 19th or early 20th century. For the rural Malay society the *pondok* was the place to deepen their knowledge in Islamic teaching and related matters. *Pondok* education attracted the local Malays and foreigners. In the beginning, teachers known as *Tok Guru* from neighbouring areas like Patani and Sumatra were brought in to set up *pondoks* besides local Malays who had completed their studies abroad notably the Middle East. The *pondok* focused on the teaching of Islam for the local community.

Before 1800 Seberang Perai was part of the Kedah sultanate. Hence the laws of Kedah were applicable to the area. In 1800 Seberang Perai was ceded to

the East India Company (EIC) following the failure of Kedah to retake Penang by force. Earlier in 1786 Penang was ceded to the EIC and its strategic location enabled the new settlement to be developed into a bustling port that attracted immigrants and trade. However, the local Malays remained either as fishermen or rice farmers. In the second half of the 19th century the population of Seberang Perai was approximately 2,000 with 90% of them Malays who had migrated from Kedah following the Siamese invasion and occupation of the state between 1821 and 1842 (Earf, 1861).

THE *PONDOK* AND ITS UNIQUENESS

Pondok means a small house or maisonette. Quite often it was a temporary building constructed from wood or bamboo with thatched roof. In this study, the *pondok* has a special meaning and is closely connected with traditional Islamic educational institution. Spatially, the *pondok* system consisted of a few huts constructed around the residence of the *Tok Guru* or mosque. The *pondok* served as living quarters for students during their study with the *Tok Guru*. Most of them came from different places including neighbouring states or from outside Malaya. Each *pondok* which comprised a small space and cooking area could accommodate two or more students. The *pondoks* were provided with very basic amenities with water secured from a nearby well or river while kerosene lamp was used for lighting. In recent years both have been replaced by electricity and pipe water.

It was commonly believed the *pondok* originated from Patani in south Thailand. Its physical appearance was believed to be based on the Siamese-Buddhist institution known as the *asyram* (Ahmad Jelani, 2006: 97) while the *pondok* was used as hostel for students. This form of residence was very popular in south Thailand in the 17th and 18th centuries. After the Siamese attack on Patani towards the end of the 18th century the traditional educational system began to move into the neighbouring Malay states notably Kelantan and Kedah. Most scholars believed the *pondok* came to the Malay states in the early 19th century following the migration of Patani scholars into the northern part of peninsula Malaysia and elsewhere. In Kedah, there were approximately 179 *pondoks* registered during 1930–1940 (Ahmad Jelani, 2006: 97). The *pondok* institution also received tremendous support from the Malay rulers. Sultan Muzaffar Syah I of Kedah (d.1179M) gave his permission for the teaching of Islam in every mosque and to allow the *Tok Guru* to propagate Islamic teaching among the population. It was stated in the Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa (Kedah annals) (Dzulkifli, 1972: 48) that,

...Jika demikian Tuan bolehlah kita suruh kerjakan seperti kata tuan itu, serta menitahkan kepada Menteri yang keempat

menyuruh kerahkan segala penghulu dusun kampung anak isi negeri itu mengerjakan masjid serta suruh datang belajar ilmu syariat kepada Tuan Syeikh Abdullah...

...If that was so, we can order (people) to do as you had explained, and instruct the fourth minister to command every village head to build mosques, and ask them to come before Tuan Syeikh Abdullah to learn the Islamic teaching...

It seemed that in the initial period the community's recognition of the *pondok* institution was lukewarm but Malays were fast to take the cue from their rulers. As head of the Islamic religion, the Sultan's words were taken positively by the people while his connection with the *pondok* had the effect of increasing student numbers. *Pondok* students consisted of both ordinary folks and members of the royalty. With student increment the *pondok* subsequently expanded while the village where it was located became well known throughout the land (Afifudin, 1986: 42; Abdul Halim, 1982: 11; Teuku Iskandar, 1970: 887; Ahmad Jelani, 2006: 104–105; Matheson and Hooker, 1988: 43; Awang Had Salleh, 1977: 33, 42).

Most of the *pondoks* during the early years were private institutions which were owned either by the local community or the *Tok Guru*. Their humble beginnings started with the cutting down of the forest (*ihya' al-mawat*) or draining the swamps. By 1850, it was reported that most of the forest and swampy areas of Province Wellesley had been cleared for agriculture and settlements. Thus the *pondok* system had brought about changes that the entire local Malay community gave their full support for its establishment. Local villagers worked together to put up the basic structures besides making contributions through endowment or waqf. This created a sense of belonging towards the *pondok* which was firmly upheld by the villagers who saw the *pondok* as the place to obtain Islamic teaching and learning.

As a traditional institution, the *pondok* does not merely concentrate on student education. Its wider function was to educate the surrounding community with better understanding of Islamic knowledge and the basic tenets of the religion. As non-Arabs, the local community needed a teacher to guide them in worldly wisdom and to prepare them for the Hereafter. In practical sense the *pondok* could reduce illiteracy at the local level through reading of the *kitab* (religious treatise) and the picking up of rudiments of Arabic. Local villagers could attend the study sessions as part time students or when they were free from other chores. In this way the *pondok* served as an informal academic centre for the rural Malay community.

Pondok students came from various localities; neither was it restricted to any particular state. Under a well known *Tok Guru*, the *pondok* could attract students from outside the district and the state which resulted in the increase of

the local population. Some students stayed permanently after their appointment as teachers for the *pondok* upon the completion of their study. Others stayed on after marrying local women and to help their in-laws in working the land. Thus the legacy of the *pondok* was sustained by subsequent generations that resulted in the expansion of the local community.² In sociological sense, the expansion of the *pondok* could subsequently expand the village and increase its population; some of these villages later coalesced into small towns.

As an institution the *pondok* carries the concept of "living education" with the learning activities taking place all day long. The students and *Tok Guru* lived close to each other in the same neighbourhood. For the former, the learning process was not only during the formal study sessions with the *Tok Guru*. Students were taught before and after the five daily prayers and they gained knowledge at the mosque, the farm, the market as well as within the community (Shellabear, 1977: 151). These unique learning activities went on until the students completed their formal study, which was based mainly on the reading of the prescribed *kitab* and practicing religious instructions in both *fiqh* (Islamic law) and *aqidah* (Islamic faith). In the practical aspect, students have to conduct religious ceremonies like acting as *imam* (to lead prayer congregation), teacher, preacher and taking the lead in burial ceremonies within the village.

The close relationship between villagers and the *pondok* community bound them together in various religious activities. The respect and cooperation among them were instrumental in sustaining the *pondok's* continued existence. Villagers willingly donated money and materials for the *pondok* (*infaq*); they also looked after the young students (Abdullah al-Qari, 1974: 91). The money was utilised to buy wood, roof, sand, books and for repairs of the *pondok*. Students were provided with accommodation and education for free. They only had to pay the costs of electricity and groceries³ (Mohd Sarim, 1978: 25). To get cash, students assisted the *Tok Guru* or other local folks during the harvest or to tap rubber. Quite often the *Tok Guru* owned substantial land which he received as *ihya' al-mawat* or gifts. According to various studies (Mahani Musa, 2003: 35; Hill, 1977: 89; Ahmad Jelani Halimi, 2006: 141) between 1822–1833 prominent Islamic teachers owned substantial land in Kedah; only the nobility and the sultan possessed more land.

As for their academic background, the *Tok Guru* usually had mastered Islamic law, theology, *sirah*, interpretation of the Quran, hadith, philosophy and Arabic. Most of them had studied in Makkah or Madinah. The subjects taught were based on the knowledge of the *Tok Guru* as well as the *kitab* used. New teachers would teach any subject as required by the head of the *pondok* (*Tok Guru*) but within the confinement of Islamic studies. In the early days there were no connections between the *pondoks* as each stood on its own. Each *pondok* managed its own books (both texts and reference books), syllabus and topics of study. Neither were there any discussion, tests, examinations nor a standard curriculum. The goal of each *pondok* was to disseminate knowledge of Islam to

the public. In order to achieve this goal, some *pondok* made it compulsory for students to memorise the Quran in part or in its entirety. The medium of teaching was Malay although some *pondoks* used Arabic manuscripts in their learning activities (Awang Had, 1977: 41; Ahmad Jelani, 2006: 81; Ramli, 2006: 18).

It was only later that the *pondok* curriculum underwent a paradigm shift from its individual coaching. Transformation took place in both the course of study and the method of teaching and learning. Some *pondoks* got together to discuss standardising the syllabus to enable their students to pursue further studies in Makkah or Madinah. The syllabus was expanded to incorporate Islamic philosophy (*tasawwuf*) and method of worships (*tarekat*). However, the changes were not enforced on the students. Students were attracted to the *pondok* either because of its curriculum or the teaching staff. They came from various parts of the country to master a particular subject. This means each *pondok* had its own uniqueness that differentiated it from other *pondoks*.

In the early 20th century, the teaching system in the *pondok* was changed to the class or madrasah system. The method of study through a circle (*halaqah*) around the *Tok Guru* and instruction through reading and listening (*talaqqi*) were no longer practised under the new study format. Its curriculum was reorganised to suit the time. Students could know their course of study, its duration and syllabus through a proper arrangement (*nizami*). After 1957 the transformation of the *pondok* was also due to government requirements to assess student output and to ensure the educational process was done in a proper manner. A good student, even from the *pondok*, should be able to pursue his study further or to apply for a government job. The secular school system which introduced western syllabus that produced various benefits had discouraged many from joining the *pondok* (Ahmad Jelani, 2006: 96). On the other hand, others were uneasy at official attempts to regulate and control these *pondoks*. A bigger challenge came with the establishment of more vernacular schools since the 1960s. This led more and more Malay families to put emphasis on western education instead of the *pondok*. Once secular schools became a national institution Malays began to abandon *pondoks* (Ahmad Jelani, 2006: 96). For most parents the national school was the best way to educate their children and to ensure a better future. This had considerably affected the sustainability of the *pondok* and forced its transformation into a new school system. As a result, most *pondok* have changed to the *madrasah* system in order to sustain the student numbers (Abdullah Ishak, 1995: 4). It is not surprising that most of the present day religious schools actually originated from the *pondok* especially those in the category of Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) or Peoples' Religious School and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama (SMKA) or National Religious Secondary School.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE *PONDOK* IN SEBERANG PERAI

Formerly known as Province Wellesley, Seberang Perai is made up of a narrow strip of land opposite Penang island. It is part of Penang state which is located in the northern region of Malaysia that includes Perlis, Kedah and northern Perak. Historically, both Penang and Perlis were part of the Kedah Sultanate. In 1786 Penang was ceded to the EIC; in 1800 Seberang Perai was ceded to Penang after Kedah's attempt to retake the island ended in failure. Perlis was detached from Kedah in 1842 by the Siamese. As these states were close to southern Thailand,⁴ they also came to share cultural similarities and traditions.

Historians are still in the dark as to who actually pioneered the *pondok* educational system in the northern region. Its starting point could not be far off from other *pondoks* which had been established in Patani and Kelantan. These states have shown remarkable achievement in Islamic progress since the coming of Islam in the 15th century (Ibrahim, 2005: 22, 25; Nik Anuar, 2000: 16). In Kedah for instance, Sultan Muzaffar Syah I had taken a strong interest in religious activities in the state and had appointed religious teachers, also known as "Sheikh al-Islam," for consultation and advice on Islamic matters. The title was derived from an Islamic preacher, Sheikh Abdullah Yamani who had introduced Islam to Sultan Muzaffar Syah I in a rather fanciful way in the year 1136 (Mat Kassim, 1981: 18). However, Kedah's most popular Sheikh al-Islam was Sheikh Wan Sulaiman who was appointed for the post in the first decade of the 20th century.⁵ His great grandfather who was known as Wan Su came from Patani.⁶ Many scholars believed the *pondok* institution in Kedah started in the 18th century.⁷

In Patani, religious activities such as teaching and learning were believed to have started in the 17th–18th century. In this case, the Patani ruler and Islamic scholars worked closely together in propagating the religion either from the residence of the *Tok Guru* or the mosque. Most of the students came from north Malaya and the east coast besides Sumatra, Cambodia and later Singapore. To accommodate the large number of students from outside Patani, *pondoks* were constructed around the mosque or the *Tok Guru's* residence. Many believed this setup duplicates the *asyram* in the Siamese-Buddhist institution (Ahmad Jelani, 2006: 97). However, the concept of setting up a *pondok* around a mosque was already in place since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). After his move to Madinah, the mosque became the central place for meeting, learning and consultation between the Prophet and the Muslim *ummah* (community of believers). In Patani among the leading *pondok* teachers were Sheikh Daud bin Abdullah al-Fatani, Muhammad Syafi'i bin Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Fatani, Ahmad Muhammad Zain al-Fatani and Zainal Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani. Their proficiency in religious knowledge attracted hundreds of students from various parts of Southeast Asia while the religious treatise they wrote were kept by students as reference even after they had completed their study. However, the

development of the *pondok* was interrupted by the Bangkok-Patani conflict of the early 20th century (Sharom Ahmat, 1984: 13; Nik Anuar, 2000: 57). For their safety, most of the teachers and students migrated to Makkah and the northern Malay states. Their presence consequently brought profound changes in their new destinations.

Most of them came to Seberang Perai, Kedah and Kelantan to set up new *pondoks*. In Kedah, the focal points of these Patani refugees were the south part of the Sungai Muda, the Kedah border and north Seberang Perai. The choice of Seberang Perai was influenced by blood-relation with the locals besides the British presence that guaranteed safety from the Siamese (Zaharah, 1966: 15; Wan Shamsuddin, 1996). Bagan Ajam, Telok Ayer Tawar, Penaga, Bagan Jermal, Sungai Dua and Permatang Tok Jaya were some of the villages in north Seberang Perai that were graced by the *pondok* until the present day (Ramly, 1980: 134). To summarise, political conflicts in Patani, blood ties and closeness of the new location to Patani were some of the crucial factors that led to the establishment of *pondoks* in the northern region notably Kedah and Seberang Perai (Awang Had, 1991: 101; Kobkua, 1991: 94).

In Seberang Perai, the *pondok* institution was believed to have started in the middle of the 19th century. Among the earliest *pondoks* established in Seberang Perai were Pondok Tuan Minal in Sungai Dua (1875), Pondok Syekh Abdul Samad in Permatang Sungai Dua (1875), Pondok Haji Mahmud Taha in Bagan Belat, Teluk Air Tawar (1880), Pondok Sungai Derhaka Seberang Perai Tengah (1880), Pondok Ibrahim Aceh or Tok Syekh Aceh at Permatang Janggus (1885) and Pondok Haji Ahmad Padang Lalang at Bukit Mertajam (1890). Pondok Tuan Minal was founded by Syekh Wan Zainal Abidin bin Wan Muhammad al-Fathani while the Bagan Belat Pondok was initiated by Tuan Guru Haji Mahmud Taha. Pondok Tok Syekh Aceh was established by Haji Ibrahim while Tuan Guru Hj. Ahmad had opened the Pondok Haji Ahmad Padang Lalang (H. Abdulhalim and Muhammad Azizan, n.d.: 84).

By the end of the 19th century or early 20th century, many more *pondoks* were established in Bukit Mertajam, Padang Lalang, Kubang Semang, Kepala Batas, Penanti and Sungai Bakap. Wan Zahidi (1993) has identified the *pondoks* which were founded in Seberang Perai between 1900 to 1960 which he listed as follows.

1. Pondok al-Masriah, at Bukit Mertajam was founded by Haji Muhammad Saleh bin Baqi al-Masry in 1906.
2. Madrasah al-Ahmadiyah al-Ijtimiah at Padang Lalang. The *madrasah* was founded around 1906 by Tuan Guru Haji Muhammad. Between 1920 to 1940, the *pondok* had more than 200 students. However in 1988, the number had decreased to 16 students and two teachers.
3. Pondok Kubang Semang, Seberang Perai Tengah was established by Haji Mahmud Taib in 1920.

4. Madrasah Da'iratul al-Ma'arif al-Wathaniyah, Kepala Batas which was founded by Haji Abdullah Fahim in 1926.
5. Madrasah Manabiul 'Ulum, Penanti was founded in 1932 by Sheikh Othman Jalaluddin al-Kelantani. He had studied in Patani and had initiated the *pondok* which was known as Manabil al-'Ulum wa Natali' al-Nujum in central Seberang Perai (Syed Muhammad Dawillah Al-Edrus, 2006: 177). The *madrasah* was transformed into a religious school during Haji Soleh Sheikh Othman's time.
6. Pondok Pokok Sena, Kepala Batas was founded by Tuan Haji Hussein bin Haji Muhammad or Tuan Hussein Kedah in 1934.
7. Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Abdul Majid was established at Permatang Janggus, Penaga during the Japanese occupation in 1942.
8. Madrasah Irsah al-Asyraf al-Wataniah, Sungai Bakap was founded in 1953 by Tuan Guru Haji Yusof Haji Saad. The madrasah followed the *pondok* system in their teaching until 1957.

As for the *pondok* founders in Seberang Perai, a few of them were not of local origin while their backgrounds varied. Quite often their names were appended to the *pondok* they had established. Haji Zainal or Tuan Minal Sungai Dua (1820–1913), for instance, came from Patani and had studied in Patani before his move to Seberang Perai to open a *pondok* at Permatang Sungai Dua. Syeikh Abdul Samad bin Abdul Malik Kelombong hailed from Jering (Yaring), Patani; he initiated the Pondok Permatang Tun Samad. Both Haji Mahmud Taha and Ibrahim Acheh (also known as Tok Syeikh Acheh) originally came from Indonesia while Tuan Haji Salleh Masri who initiated the Pondok al-Masri came from Negeri Sembilan but had mastered Islamic knowledge in Patani and Indonesia (Syed Muhammad Dawilah al-Edrus, 2006: 172).

Some founders of *pondoks* at Seberang Perai were actually related to one another. The Pondok Seberang Perai was initiated by Syeikh Jalaluddin bin Muhammad Yusya al-Kelantani; his relatives were involved with the Pondok Permatang Sungai Dua, Pondok Kampung Setol and Pondok Permatang Buluh. The last three *pondoks* were founded by his sons – Haji Zakaria, Haji Muhammad Salleh and Haji Abdullah. Another *pondok*, the Pondok Manabiul Ulum Penanti was founded by the parents of his daughter-in-law while one of his grandsons, Haji Jaafar had founded a *pondok* at Padang Lalang. Between 1822–1833, these religious teachers owned considerable plots of land in Seberang Perai (Hill, 1977: 79–89). Marriages between them further cemented family ties among these *Tok Guru* and others including the *kadi*, *Penghulu* and the Kedah royalty (Mahani, 2006: 46; Vaughan, 1858: 152–153).

As an outsider who had moved to a new place, the choice of location for a *pondok* was not without its problems. The location that was selected must not be claimed by others in the first place. This means the *pondok* was often located in the rural areas that were still undeveloped. This could also provide

opportunities to students and the local community to find temporary employment during their study period either in the paddy fields or rubber orchards. Between 1900 and 1950, approximately 200 *pondoks* were located in the northern region while their students came from various parts of Southeast Asia including Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia and Singapore (Jasni, 2009: 432). In the early 20th century, *pondoks* had played an essential role in educating the Malays. Even with the coming of the modern system of education, *pondoks* had stood firmly with its traditional way. The close ties between the *pondok* community and locals have led to mutual cooperation that enabled the *pondok* institution to continue to prosper. To the locals the *pondoks* remained the focus of their respect despite its traditional structure or the uncertainty of employment for its graduates (Noriah, 2005: 176–177).

One crucial point in the evolution of *pondok* is the scholarship of the *Tok Guru*. The *Tok Guru's* mastery of myriad disciplines of Islamic knowledge not only attracted students but also non-students to undertake the journey of knowledge. The *pondok* institution might be informally carried out but its unique identity and flexible curriculum have attracted the attention of the local community to keep coming to the *pondok*. In addition, the scope of study in *pondoks* which explore informal religious teaching were an added factor. Following the Siamese wars of 1821–1842 and British colonial rule, the teaching of Islam included the concept of " *Jihad* ", this was fully expounded among *pondok* students and the community. The many wars against the Siamese in 1831, 1836 and 1838 were waged under the influence of the *pondok* community (Burney, 1912: 210; Mahani, 2003: 17–27; Abdullah Zakaria, 1996: 240–270; Nik Anuar, 2000: 57; Kobkua, 1991: 92). In this sense the Islamic solidarity propagated by the *pondok* community was channelled to unite fellow Muslims in the region to face such political adversities.

BOOK PRINTING AND THE *PONDOK*

In the *pondok* educational system, the publication of religious treatise or *kitab* provided crucial teaching materials; these also enabled the dissemination of knowledge to the general public. In the field of Islamic knowledge, many religious treatises and books were produced from the late 17th until the 20th centuries with most of them written in Jawi (Mohd Nor, 1982: 1–8; Roolvink, 1975: 2). According to Mahayudin (1994: xxi), most of the books used in the *pondok* were written in Jawi. It started in the 17th century as most Malays then were illiterate in Arabic. The arrival of Islam to the region might have taken place earlier but the printed *kitab* Jawi which were the primary source in understanding Islam was a more recent phenomena, which was in the 19th century. Before the Second World War, the majority of Malays were more familiar with the Jawi

script instead of Roman letters. The former was also closely related to the Arabic letters as used in the Quran.

These religious treatises touch on a wide area of Islamic knowledge covering subjects on faith, laws, traditions, translation of the Quran and hadith, history, ethics and Islamic thought. Their contents were mostly the adaptation of classical Islamic books from the Shafi'i school and based on the standard syllabus which was taught in Makkah, Madinah and the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Some of these were written by *pondok* teachers or *Tok Guru* and were later used as teaching or reading materials. These books attested the capability of particular *Tuan Guru* in sharing knowledge and guiding the Malay community in the Islamic way. This means every *pondok* had its own teaching materials; *pondoks* also chose books that were deemed suitable to their particular needs. Under the *halaqah* and the *talaqqi* methods of religious study, these books were essential for the students. The students would focus on these texts while the *Tuan Guru* would read them out and provide explanations. For the students, the books were important both for revision and as reference materials. These books were also read by the local community and served as reference materials for the general public.

Scholars have never doubted the role of Jawi manuscripts or Islamic books in the expansion of Islamic knowledge as well as promoting the institution of the *pondok*. Efforts to publish Jawi manuscripts began under the Ottoman caliphate in the second half of the 19th century. Malay scholars domiciled in Makkah assisted in the project. A committee known as "proof board" (*badan pentashih*) was formed in Makkah in 1884;⁸ this board meticulously evaluated all manuscripts before their publication (Mahayudin, 1994: xv). Through printing, books became widely distributed within the region. Among the prominent Malay Muslim scholars who were involved in book printing were Sheikh Ahmad bin Zain al-'Abidin al-Fatani and Sheikh Daud al-Fatani (Hurgronje, 1931: 287). Many of their writings as well as those from other Islamic scholars were published during this period. The printing was undertaken in Istanbul, Cairo and Makkah; it later moved to Patani and Penang. Nowadays, many Jawi manuscripts could be found in the national archives of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore besides London and Leyden.

By the end of the 19th century or early 20th century, Penang and Patani began to undertake the printing of Jawi manuscripts. The nature of the *pondok* learning which was based on the *halaqah* and *talaqqi* system required a large number of texts. This subsequently led to the mushrooming of printing houses. Until the end of 1945, about 20 printing houses were located in Penang excluding Seberang Perai (Siti Amirah, 2012: 78). In Penang the existence of Islamic printing houses was inspired by the role of Acheen Street in the hajj business especially for the northern region including Patani. As the "Second Jeddah" Acheen Street provided opportunities for selling religious books relating to the hajj or on Islam in general.

At that time Arab influence was dominant in the region including in the printing sector. Most of the printing houses established in Penang since the 1860s were dominated by Arabs or those of mixed Arab ancestry. These include Maktabah H. Abdullah B. M. Noordin Arrawi, Persama Press, Sulaiman Press and Papers Sdn. Bhd., al-Huda Press and The United Press. Most of the *pondok* in Seberang Perai procured their reading materials from these printers. For instance, *Kitab Tathrif al-Arifi fi Tasrif as-Sharf* (1935) and *Kitab Asy-Syarh al-Kabir* (1939) were written by Syeikh Usman Jalaluddin Penanti and printed by the Persama Press. Another religious treatise the *Kitab al-Durrah al-Nafi'ah fi Asyath al-Sa'ah* (1371H) which was written by the same author was printed by the United Press. Both the Persama Press⁹ and the United Press¹⁰ have printed many books which originally came from the *pondoks* in Seberang Perai. These companies not only provided *pondok* reading materials, they also disseminated the writings of *pondok Tuan Gurus* from the Seberang Perai area as well as *pondoks* from Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu (Siti Amirah, 2012: 5). The al-Huda Press, for instance, had printed *Kitab Kisarul Aksir lish Shaghir 'indal Kabir li Ma'rifatillahil 'Alimil Khabir* in 1937. It was written by Tuan Hussein Kedah who founded *pondoks* in Alor Ganu, Bohor, Bagan Ulu, Sungai Limau, Padang Lumat (all five are located in Kedah) and the Pondok Pokok Sena (Seberang Perai). The United Press had printed *Kitab al-Durrah al-Thaminah al-Gharibah fi Ad'iyah al-Tawaf, wa Du'a' 'Arafah wa al-Ziyarah* in 1968. It was written by Syeikh Muhammad Daud bin Sulaiman bin Syarif al-Kalantani al-Makki who founded the Pondok Sg. Durian of Kuala Krai in Kelantan.

Besides these Arab owned companies, there were other printing houses which were owned by Malays and Indian-Muslims. They had started as early as 1899 (Noriah Mohamed, 2005: 165). They included the Maktabah Matabaat Darul Muammait, Pustaka Islam, Suasana Baru and Jelutong Press. The books were printed either in Jawi or Arabic (Jelani Harun, 2005: 161). The Jelutong Press had printed *Kitab Ithaful Murid fi Ahkamit Tajwid* which was written by Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin. In the long run the writing, printing and marketing of religious treatises helped the *pondoks* to sustain their role in disseminating knowledge to the public. Quite often the *pondok* appointed their own agents to distribute these books and other assorted printed materials.¹¹

Other than the *Tok Guru*, owners of printing houses had also written books on Islam. In many cases their knowledge of Islam came through formal study at the Al-Azhar University or other traditional institutions like the *pondok* and *madrasah*. In Penang, Md. Ali Mohamed Rawa who owned the Persama Press had published *Kitab Aqa'id al-Diniah* in 1937. This book discusses the Islamic faith and its ideology (Siti Amirah, 2012: 81). Syeikh Abdullah al-Maghribi who owned the al-Huda Press had published *Kitab Ilmu Balaghah, Kitab Munir al-Ifham, Mushaf al-Sultani al-Hamidi*, a translation of the Quran and the life history of the Prophet. Similarly, both Hj. Abdullah bin Mohamad Nordin Arrawi and his son Hj. Yusof Rawa had published *Kitab Tafsir al-Rawi*

which discusses the translation of the Quran (Siti Amirah, 2012: 89). These publications were subscribed by the public, *pondoks*, *madrasah*, schools, mosques and the State Islamic Religious Council.

However after 1997, most of the Muslim owned printing companies had moved to Seberang Perai due to the high rentals for space. After the withdrawal of the Rent Control Act in 1997 many building owners began to raise rental charges which were beyond the means of these printing houses (Siti Amirah, 2012: 115). On the other hand, the low rental charges in Seberang Perai as well as the high demands for books and teaching materials from *pondoks* in the area provided a way out for these printing houses (Syed Mohamad Dawilah al-Edrus, 2005: 122). Based on these facts, it was clear that *pondoks* in Seberang Perai had evolved from various factors unique to each *pondok*. The relationship that binds the *Tok Guru*, *pondoks*, books, students/the local community as well as the conflict in Southern Thailand had impacted on the institution of the *pondok*, its evolution and progress (Bruinessen, 1995: 17).

CONCLUSION

The discussion has highlighted some factors that have affected the establishment of the *pondok* and its evolution, beginning with the need to have a deeper understanding of Islam, the need to follow closely the Islamic way of life and to act as a bulwark against foreign incursions notably the Thais and the British. The coming of western colonial powers to the region and the resultant Islamic resurgence had encouraged locals to seek Islamic knowledge so that Islam became their whole identity vis-a-vis the colonial rulers be it Siam or Britain. Patani's loss of political independence after 1831 served as a catalyst to the Malay-Muslims to unite under Islam. As a result, Malays became more conscious of Islam vis-a-vis the infidels and the need to follow closely the teachings of the religion. The establishment of the *pondoks* served all these needs besides moulding a better Muslim. The *pondok* focuses both on the theoretical aspect of religious learning and its practical side through the involvement of students with the surrounding community.

The *pondoks* were closely identified with the *Tok Guru* whose reputation in Islamic learning was instrumental in attracting students from the northern region of Malaya or from outside the country. Between 1910s and the 1940s thousands of students moved from one *pondok* to another to seek knowledge from various *Tok Gurus* who were well-known in their specific fields. Many *Tok Guru* were also prolific and were highly respected writers in their own right. They wrote various religious books which were printed locally. These Jawi books were widely used in the *pondok* besides serving as reference materials by the community. In this way printing houses had greatly assisted the development of the *pondok*. In many cases there were close linkages between them.

By the 20th century the *pondok* had begun to re-examine its curriculum based on Middle Eastern institutions to ensure the *pondok* remains relevant and attractive to the local students especially for those who were unable to further their studies in Cairo, Makkah and Madinah. Despite the many challenges currently faced including from vernacular schools, the *pondoks* still managed to survive as many Malays still see the essentiality of the traditional system for modern society through their unique method of teaching and learning.

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NOTES

1. A different version of the essay had appeared in Malay as "Transformasi Institusi Pondok: Tradisi dan Modenisasi" in *Warisan Wilayah Utara Semenanjung Malaysia*, ed. Ooi Keat Gin, 173–188. Pulau Pinang: Universiti Sains Malaysia Press.
2. Private letters of Haji Mansor bin Md. Akib, "Perkembangan Pengajian Pondok di Kedah". National Archives of Malaysia Kedah/Perlis Branch, SP3/D/1.
3. Ahmad Zaki bin Hj. Ghazali. Head of the Section of Wakaf, Kedah Islamic Council. Interviewed at Alor Setar, 28th August 2009.
4. In south Thailand the provinces involved were Satun, Songkhla and Yala.
5. In Makkah, Wan Sulaiman was taught by many well known teachers including Syeikh Nik Mat Kecik al-Fathani, Syeikh Wan Ali al-Kalantani, Syeikh Ahmad al-Fathani, Syeikh Daud bin Mustafa al-Fathani, Syeikh Ahmad Lingga, Syeikh Ahmad Khatib Minangkabau and Syeikh Muhammad Zainuddin Sumbawa.
6. His full name, Wan Sulaiman bin Wan Siddiq bin Wan Aman bin Wan Net bin Wan Su. Wan Su also held the post of Datuk Temenggung Kolot Bukit Lada.
7. Private letters of Haji Mansor bin Md. Akib, "Perkembangan Pengajian Pondok di Kedah". National Archives of Malaysia Kedah/Perlis Branch, SP3/D/1.
8. Syeikh Wan Ahmad Muhammad Zain al-Fatani was appointed by the Ottoman Caliphate as a supervisor and proof reader in the printing company namely, al-Matbaah al-Miriyyah al-Kainnah in Mecca.
9. For example, *Kitab Luqtah al-Ajlan mimma Tamassa ilayhi Hajatul Insan* (1911), *Hadiqatul Azhar war Rayahin* (1958) and *Tayyibul Ihsan fi Tibbil Insan* (1985) were written by Syeikh Ahmad al-Fatani.
10. For example, *Kitab Bisyaratul Amilin wa Nazaratul Ghafilin* (1887) was written by Syeikh Ahmad al-Fatani.

11. The company owned by Haji Putih bin Syaikh Abu Basyir had 17 agents in 1895 to market its books in the west coast and as far as Aceh, the east coast of Sumatera, Singapore and Kalimantan. Two years later, 26 agents were engaged including in Bangkok (Norah, 2005: 92).

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