

Malay Comic Books Published In The 1950s

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Abstrak: *Sumbangan buku-buku komik kepada kumpulan karya kreatif Melayu tidak harus diketepikan apabila meninjau perkembangan kesusasteraan Melayu sezaman. Sedar akan kegunaan bahan bentuk ini sebagai salah satu sumber rujukan, Perpustakaan Univeristi Malaya telah menyimpan segala buku-buku komik yang dapat diperolehi. Sebahagian besar dari koleksi ini diterbitkan dalam tahun 60an. Hanya terdapat 26 judul yang diterbitkan dalam tahun 1950an yang dianggap unik. Makalah berikut cuba memberi penghuraian ringkas mengenai buku-buku komik terbitan tahun 50an ini. Senarai judul-judul beranotasi disertakan.*

It is difficult to ascertain when the first Malay comic book was published. Very little mention has been made on this type of literature in literary works covering the development and growth of Malay literature. Studies on local children's literature also seem to bypass this phenomenon. This may have arisen out of phobia against materials which were often regarded as ephemeral and thus not the concern of academicians. However to ignore its existence would mean one would have viewed a rather incomplete picture of the local literary and creative scene. It is felt therefore, that comic books warrant a mention when studying the Malay literary scene past or present since it undeniably played a role in providing reading materials for children, adolescents and the more imaginative adults.

Definition

As an artistic phenomenon, it can indeed be regarded as unique in its format, a hybrid, part pictorial and part verbal, although the former must be considered its prime feature. It is variously known as 'comic strips', 'comic books', 'comic cartoons' or as the 'funnies'. Cartoons reflect a graphic joke or hu-

morous illustration and drawing on any subject. It may appear in a single frame. Comic strips are those which appear in two or more sequential frames. A comic book is therefore a book of comic strips. David Kunzle¹ purports that an illustrative material could only be considered as a comic strip when it fulfills the following conditions:

1. There must be a sequence of separate images, that is, images should appear in a sequence of more than one frame. Therefore it may vary from the standard of four which one often finds in the daily newspapers, to a more integral sequence published in the form of comic books.
2. As mentioned earlier, the pictorial element must be considered the prime feature, that is, there must be a preponderance of images over text. The inclusion of text in speech balloons is not essentially a strip characteristic. Early Western and Malay strips do not have this characteristics as the figures are drawn to mime action, the action was then explained or commented upon by captions placed either directly above or beneath the pictures. Dia-

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¹ Kunzle, David. *The early comic strip: narrative strips and picture stories in the European broadsheets from 1450 to 1825*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973.

logues in balloons are often included simultaneously at later periods.

3. The medium in which the strips appear and for which it is originally intended must be reproducible, that is, in the printed form for mass distribution. The strips can either appear as features in daily newspapers and magazines or in comic book form. As it is often available for mass distribution, it is therefore potent as a cultural influence.
4. The sequences of illustrations must tell a story, which can be both moral and topical in content. Often stories are reduced to simple elements such as good triumphing over evil, greatness in might, punishment for crimes etc.

The Library Collection

A search was made of the Library's various special catalogues, to identify the existence of comic type materials. It was found that, the Bahagian Koleksi Kebangsaan has quite a substantial collection of Malay comic books mostly published in the 60s with a few published in the 50s and 70s. Because of its unique form and because the library feels that it should occupy its own place within the realm of

creative Malay literature, the library has been keeping whatever comics that has come its way. Those published in the 50s are considered rare since they are fairly difficult to obtain and what is left may only be found in private collections. Hence, more exposure should be given to those published in 50s so as to stimulate further research and awareness of the need to collect and preserve this type of material. The library has about 26 titles of Malay comic books published in the 1950's. A substantial number are found within the Za'ba Collection. Most of those kept in Koleksi Kebangsaan are published in the 60s.

Publishers

Based on the 26 titles published in the 50s it is found that there are six publishers involved in publishing comic books within this period. They are, The Malay Press (Kuala Pilah), Zawiyah Publishing Home (Johor Bahru), Penerbitan Keluarga (Singapura), Penerbit Melayu Ltd. (Johor Bahru), Kassim Ahmad (Alor Star) and the Jabatan Pelajaran dan Persuratan Kedah, Cawangan Alor Star. The most prolific of these are The Malay Press, Penerbitan Keluarga and Zawiyah Publishing Home. Very little has been written or researched on these printing presses and publishers. Among the few is Mohd. Jamin bin

Total number of titles[†] of Malay comic books according to type of stories held by the University of Malaya Library

Type of Stories	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	Total by type of stories
1. Historical romances/ Folktales	22	42 + 6*	—	—	69
2. Crime/Mystery	2	36	—	—	38
3. War Stories	2	5	—	—	7
4. Modern Love/ Moralistic Stories	—	37	—	—	37
5. Science Fiction	—	2	2	—	4
6. Modern Collected Works	—	—	5	3	8
Total Collection	26	128	7	3	163

[†] Titles not volumes since some titles may range from 2–13 volumes.

* Indicates Indonesian titles.

Lebai Din² who made a study of the Malay Press in Kuala Pilah. According to Mohd. Jamin the Percetakan Melayu or The Malay Press was established in 1939 by Abdul Ghani bin Abdullah jointly with Syarikat Pengangkutan Melayu, a transportation company, renting a shop at no. 198, Jalan Tong Yen, Kuala Pilah till 1975. This printing press is still in existence today, housed at Bangunan MARA, Jalan Seremban, Kuala Pilah. Abdul Ghani was born in Lubuk China, Melaka on 1912. Before setting up the printing press at Kuala Pilah, he was actively involved in various other presses at Tanjung Malim, Muar, Sungai Ujong, Ipoh and Bentong. When he decided to set up the printing press at Kuala Pilah he had accumulated enough experience and was quite established as a publisher and printer. He also set up his own distribution agency known as the 'Sentosa Store'. In his thesis Mohd Jamin concentrates on the short stories and poems published in *Juita*, the monthly periodical The Malay Press published during the 50's. He also lists out in great length the Malay novels published by the Press but in passing mentions that the Press,

'... juga menerbitkan roman-roman sejarah, bukan sahaja dalam bentuk buku tetapi juga dalam bentuk komik'

('... also published historical romances not only in the book form but also in the form of comic books')

Amongst the 26 titles held by the library, 8 were published by The Malay Press.

Another publisher, Zawiyah Publishing Home, began publishing Malay comics in 1952 and used Annies Printing Works as its printer. Its comics were published under the series 'Majalah Comic Melayu'. The Bahagian Koleksi Kebangsaan has only 5 titles published under this series, one being found in the Za'ba Collection. The comics published under this series seem to have achieved a wider circulation. Its year 1, no. 3 issues gives a list of its distribution agencies in Singapore, Palembang, Bukit Tinggi, Bandjermasin and Surabaya³. The sale price was 30 cents in Malaya and 1 rupiah in Indonesia. All its

comics were in Rumi.

Penerbitan Keluarga was a Singapore publishing house addressed at 28, Bristol Road, Singapore 8. Almost all its comic books used the printing press at Johor Bahru, that is, Annies Printing Works, at 59, Jalan Tan Hiok Nee. The Library has 9 titles by this publisher.

Illustrators

A mention about the artists involved in the comic book trade during this period is essential. In most cases; the artists also arranged and wrote the script for the stories. Twelve names emerged. It is however, not possible to determine whether an artist wrote and drew for any one particular publisher based on the library's small collection. The following are the publishers and the names of artists whose work they published:

Publishers	Artists
1. The Malay Press	Ahmad Mokhtar bin Abdullah. Embong bin Mohd. (Kampung Bt. Tumboh, Kuala Terengganu) Hassan Muhammad. (Malay School, Pasir Mas, Kelantan) K. Bali Thailand (P.N. Secondary School, Sungai Padi, District, S. Thailand). Saat Umar Saidin Yahya Y. Hassan
2. Penerbitan Keluarga	M. Inabry Muhammad Ibrahim (Johor). Othman Kangkong (Kelantan)
3. Zawiyah Publishing Home	Razak Ahmad
4. Penerbit Melayu Ltd.	Membina
5. Kassim Ahmad at Wah Shong Press, Alor Star	Saidin Yahya
6. Jabatan Pelajaran dan Persuratan Kedah	Saidin Yahya

²Mohd. Jamin bin Lebai Din. *Percetakan Melayu Kuala Pilah sebagai satu institusi kesusasteraan*. Latihan Ilmiah (B.A.), Jabatan Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya, 1976, p.106.

³Inside front cover of *Taskara: Maharaja Penyamun*, narrated and illustrated by Abdul Razak. Johor Bahru, Zawiyah Publishing Home, 1952. (Siri Majallah Komik Melayu, Th. 1, bil. 3)

Most of the comic books during this period are not artistic enough to appeal to lovers of fine engravings yet naive enough to appeal to lovers of the primitive art form. Most are pen sketch drawings using or Indian black or blue ink. However more colours are used for attractive cover illustrations.

Contents

Most of the comics published during the 50s are historical romances, especially stories based on the Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu. Out of the 26 titles, only 4 are crime or war stories. Stories are narrated in simple language. Narration within frames is an essential feature with occasional speech balloons. More than half are in the Jawi text which may explain why the speech balloons are less popular, for it was probably difficult to accommodate lengthy dialogues in Jawi within the limited space available. Essentially, most of the stories are meant for adolescents and adults. This is also true of those published in the 60's, where love romances predominate. The theme of historical romances was purposely chosen during the 50s to fan nationalistic spirit amongst the Malay readers. This was clearly evident from the editorial note found, for example in comic books published by the Malay Press. Abdul Ghani Abdullah, its publishers clearly conveyed his intension in this editorial note⁴.

'Buku komik ini kita keluarkan hanya untuk memperingatkan kisah-kisah lama kerana sebab suka memperingatkan kisah-kisah yang lalu akan memberi faedah kepada chita-chita yang baharu sebagai pandu. Kisah lama ini ada kait mengait dengan chita-chita kemerdekaan bangsa hari ini'.

('We publish this comic book solely to remember past stories. These past stories will benefit and guide our future hopes. These past stories are related to our aspirations for independence today').

Another interesting feature which accompanied the various comic books is the advertisements featured. These advertisement fell into two categories. The first being advertisements of forthcoming

publications, which enlightened one as to the types and titles of books published. The second type of advertisements features names of bookstores which in most cases acted as the publisher's distribution agency for not only its publications but also its products. The most prominent was the Zawiyah Publishing Home which sold products ranging from deodorants 'Obat Ketiak hamis' for \$2 per bottle to health tonics 'Zetpiech iron tonics' which it sold for \$1.50 per bottle. The names of the stores mentioned in these advertisements also provided clues of bookshops which may still be in existence and which may still have kept some of pre-Merdeka publications. A good example is the Malay Press, Kuala Pilah which is still in existence today.

Below is a list of comic books published in the 50s held within the Bahagian Koleksi Kebangsaan. Under each publisher the titles available are listed.

The Malay Press (Kuala Pilah)

1. *Berjuang di laut.*

Narrated and illustrated by Hassan Muhammad, under the guidance of K. Bali Thailand. Kuala Pilah, Abdul Ghani Abdullah, 1954? 23p. Jawi. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5113 SM. Saa. (A war romance. This story runs up to page 18. Pages 19–20 include a short comic story 'Putri Rimba' (Jungle princess), illustrated and narrated by K. Bali).

2. *Keris Melaka.*

Story by Ahmad Bakhtiar (Ahmad bin Abdullah); illustrated by Saidin Yahya. Kuala Pilah, Malay Press, 195?. 27p. Jawi. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5136 Ahma. K.

3. *Laksamana Bentan atau marhum mangkat di julang.*

Narrated and illustrated by Embong bin Mahmud. Kuala Pilah, Abdul Ghani Abdullah, 1954. 15p. Jawi. PL5141.41. Embm .L (A historical tale, about Sultan Mahmud Shah who ruled Bentan, and who was knived to death by a brave warrior, Megat Seri Rama

⁴ Editorial note in, *Singapura tua dibuka*, compiled for narration and illustrated by Saat Umar. Kuala Pilah, Sentosa Store, 1955.

near a mosque at Kota Tinggi, Johor to avenge the death of his wife who was put to death by the Sultan).

4. *Pembela tanah ayer.*

Narrated and illustrated by K. Bali Thailand. Kuala Pilah, Abdul Ghani Abdullah, 1953. 27p. Jawi. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5113 SM. Saao. (A war romance, set during the Japanese occupation).

5. *Radin Mas.*

Narrated by Salleh Ghani; illustrated by K. Bali Thailand. Kuala Pilah, Abdul Ghani at the Malay Press, 1954. 21p. Jawi. PL5141.41 Salg. R. (Legendary tale of a Javanese princess, who suffered ill treatment from her step-mother. This issue forms the first part of the story. The continuing issue is not available in the library. A photograph of K.Bali measuring 8.5 x 11 cm appears on the back cover).

6. *Singapura tua dibuka.*

Compiled for narration and illustrated by Saat Umar. Kuala Pilah, Sentausa Store, 1955. 26p. Jawi. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5113 SM. Saao (A historical tale about Sang Nila Utama who landed at Telok Belanga, Temasik. At the beach he saw a lion which his aide Demang Lebar Daun, explained was called 'Singa', thus the name Singapura came about).

7. *Sudah ajal.*

Narrated and illustrated by Y. Hassan. Kuala Pilah, Sentausa Store, 195?. 24p. Jawi. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5141.4 Has. (A folk tale set at a village in Kelantan which was under the leadership of Penghulu Abdullah who ventured to kill all the wild beasts; which surrounded the village but was eventually killed by a tiger).

8. *Tun Munawati.*

Narrated and illustrated by Ahmad Mokhtar bin Abdullah. Kuala Pilah, Sentausa Store, 195?. 22p. Rumi. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5141.2 Abdga. C (A folk tale, about Datok Jagor who planned

to seize power from the reigning king and marry the princess).

Zawiyah Publishing Home.

All its comics are published under the series 'Majalah Komik Melayu', and printed by Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru.

9. *Maharaja Sulung (Tarzan Melayu).*

Narrated and illustrated by Razak Ahmad. Johor Bahru, Zawiyah Publishing Home, 1952?. 13p. Rumi. (A folk tale set in Riau about Maharaja Sulung who endeavoured to rid of all tigers but was eventually killed by a tiger).

10. *Malim Deman.*

Narrated and illustrated by Razak Ahmad. Johor Bahru, Zawiyah Publishing Home, 1957. 16p. Rumi. Series no; Th. 1, bil. 5. (Adapted from a Malay folk tale about Tuan-ku Malim Deman who married Puteri Bongsu from the heavens (kayangan). When he became king after his father's death, Malim Deman ignored Puteri Bongsu in favour of Dayang Si Kembang China. The princess flew back to the heavens taking with her their son. With the help of Raja Jin, Malim Deman pursued his consort).

11. *Perjuangan Hang Tuah dan Hang Jebat.*

Narrated and illustrated by Razak Ahmad. Johor Bahru, Zawiyah Publishing Home, 1952?; 16p. Rumi. Koleksi Za'ba. Series no; Th. 2, bil. 11. PL5113 SM' Saao. (About the infamous duel between Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat based on the series from The Malay Annals. This comic book mentions other titles, which the library does not possess. The titles mentioned are:

Th. 1,	bil. 1	—	<i>Gajah Puteh</i>
	bil. 4	—	<i>Meminang Putri Gunung Ledang</i>
	bil. 7	—	<i>Kanena roboh Kota Melaka</i>
	bil. 8	—	<i>Budak hitam</i>
	bil. 9	—	<i>Panglima Chik di Pulau Pinang</i>
	bil. 10	—	<i>Puteri Sa'dong</i>

- bil. 11 — *Hidup sengsara; cerita purbakala*
 bil. 12 — *Gembala lembu; cerita rekaan*

12. *Taskara: Maharaja Benyamun.*

Narrated and illustrated by Abdul Razak Ahmad. Johor Baru. Zawiyah Publishing Home, 1952. 13p. Rumi. Series no; Th.1, Bil. 3.

(A folk tale set in the Middle East, about a thief Taskara, who was forced out of Pataliputra and was killed on his return to the town).

13. *Yatem.*

Narrated and illustrated by Razak Ahmad. Johor Bahru, Zawiyah Publishing Home, 1952. 14p. Rumi. Series no; Th. 1, bil. 6.

(A folk tale about Yatem who could communicate with beasts and his duel with Bawak an orang hutan who kidnapped small children from the villages).

14. *Jebat Derhaka.*

Narrated and illustrated by Muhammad bin Ibrahim. Singapore, Penerbitan Keluarga, 1956. Printed at Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru. Issue: Th. 2, bil. 5. 32p. Jawi PL 5113 SM. Saao

(At head of title: Dipadankan dengan Hikayat Hang Tuah. A more detailed and better illustrated version of the Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat duel)

15. *Kumpulan Kapak Bungkus.*

Narrated and illustrated by Othman Kangkang (Kelantan). Singapore, Penerbitan Keluarga, 1956. Printed at Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru. Issue: Th. 1, bil. 4. 28p. Jawi. PL5113 SM. Saao

(A modern tale of mystery and crime set in Kelantan).

16. *Lukisan Sejarah Melayu.*

Singapore, Penerbit Keluarga, 1955. Printed at Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru. 23p. PL5141.41.

(Describes the historical beginning of the Malay

Peninsula from early times to the return of the British to Malaya after the Japanese surrendered. No speech balloons are used. Illustrations are explained by captions placed on top or bottom of each frames).

Penerbit Keluarga (Singapore)

17. *Pembela.*

Compiled and illustrated by M. Inabry. Singapore, Penerbitan Keluarga. 1955. Printed at Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru, 27p. Jawi. PL5113 SM. Saao

(Date of publication was determined by the date which accompanied the illustrator's signature. This comic book is divided into two sections. Pages 1–16 feature the story 'Pembela', while pages 18–27 feature the story 'Sejarah Pulau Pinang'. Pembela is a historical tale about Temenggong who was favoured by Sultan Megat. This favour ignited jealousy in Bendahara Bahaman who instigated the Sultan against the Temenggong who was eventually put to death. The Temenggong's wife sought refuge with the Orang Asli in the nearby jungle and raised their son, Pembela, who eventually avenged his father's death. The story is incomplete in this issue, the remaining can be found in the comic book entitled 'Perang Naning')

18. *Perang Naning.*

Compiled and illustrated by M. Inabry. Singapore, Penerbitan Keluarga, 1956. Printed at Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru. Issue: Th. 2, bil. 3, 33p. Jawi. PL5113 SM. Saao

(At head of title; Sejarah Alam Melayu. The comic book is divided into two sections; pages 1–20 accommodate 'Perang Naning'; pages 22–26, 'Pembela' (pt. 2); pages 27–32, completes the story 'Singapura di dalam pemerintahan Seri Wirakerma' (pt. 2). 'Perang Naning' revolves around the reign of Sultan Iskandar Shah, the last Sultan of Singapore and the first Sultan of Melaka).

19. *Rahsia Kejatuhan Singapura.*

Narrated and illustrated by Saat Umar. Singapore, Penerbitan Keluarga, 1956. Printed at

Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru. Issue: Th. 2, bil. 7. 32p. Jawi. PL5113 SM. Saao
(At head of title: Dipetik dari Sejarah Melayu. The story is about 'Dang Anum the consort of Sultan Iskandar Shah who was put to death as the result of slander by the Sultan's other consorts. Dang Anum's father Sang Rajuna Tapa avenged her death by conspiring with Majapahit which successfully attacked Singapore and Sultan Iskandar Shah was forced to flee to Melaka).

20. *Rumah Puaka.*

Narrated and illustrated by Othman Kangkang (Kelantan). Singapore, Penerbitan Keluarga, 1956. Printed at Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru. 27p. Jawi. PL5113 SM. Saao
(A modern crime story about a house thought to be possessed by spirit which turns out to be a warehouse where a group of thieves kept their stolen goods. The hero is Lukman, a police constable instructed to investigate and solve the case)

21. *Singapura di dalam Pemerintahan Seri Wirakerma.*

Compiled and illustrated by Saat Umar. Singapore, Penerbitan Keluarga, 1956. 28p. Jawi. Issue; Th. 2, bil. 2, PL5113 SM. Saao
(At head of title: Dipetik dari Sejarah Melayu. A more detailed version of the 'Badang' story. The story is incomplete and the remainder is found in the comic book entitled 'Perang Naning')

22. *Tunggal Junjongan.*

Narrated and illustrated by Muhammad Ibrahim (Johor). Singapore, Penerbit Keluarga. 1957. Printed at Annies Printing Works, Johor Bahru. Issue: Th. 3, bil. 1. 32p. Jawi. PL5113 SM; Saao
(Based on the folk tale, Hikayat Unggun Cik Tunggal)

R.H. Yusof (Johor Bahru)

23. *Panglima Abu*

Narrated and illustrated by Membina. Johor Bahru, R.H. Yusof, 1957. Printed by Pener-

bit Melayu Ltd, Johor Bahru. Published under the 'Army Comic Series', no. 3, 22p. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5136 Pan

(A folk tale about an island called Pulau Indrakala and the duel between Panglima Anum and Penghulu Ali. In their quest for power, Panglima Anum was killed and his wife Kemala Sari fled with their only son (Panglima Abu) to a neighbouring island. Panglima Abu eventually avenged his father's death).

Kassim Ahmad (Alor Star)

24. *Badang Beroleh gagah.*

Story and illustrations by Saidin Yahya. Alor Star, Karim Ahmad, 1955-1958. Printed by Wah Shong Press, Alor Star. 16p. Jawi. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5113 SM. Saao
(At head of title on cover: Dari sejarah Melayu, Tun Seri Lanang. Another version of the 'Badang' story)

25. *Kota Melaka dibangunkan.*

Narrated and illustrated by Saidin Yahya. Alor Star, Kassim Ahmad, 195? Printed at Penang and Straits Press Co., Penang. 12p. Jawi. Koleksi Za'ba. PL5113 SM. Saao
(At head of the title page. 'Dari cerita asli Sejarah Melayu, Tun Seri Lanang'. Relates the story of Rajah Iskandar Shah who settled in Melaka after fleeing from Majapahit and Singapore, particularly on how he became a Muslim).

Jabatan Pelajaran dan Persuratan Kedah, Cawangan Alor Star

26. *Putera Hang Tuah.*

Story and illustrations by Saidin Yahya. Alor Star, Jabatan Pelajaran dan Persuratan Pelajaran Kedah, 1953? Printed at the Wah Shong Press, Alor Star. 3 volumes, Jawi. PL5141.41 Sidy. P

(A historical tale set in Melaka during the reign of Puteri Gunung Ledang. Peace was being kept by a brave warrior Hang Derahman who was later given the name Putera Hang Tuah when he succeeded in keeping peace by wiping out pirates who menaced the nearby seas).



Cover illustration of, *Jebat Derhaka*, narrated and illustrated by Muhammad bin Ibrahim. Singapore, Penerbitan Keluarga, 1956, issue; Th. 2, bil. 5.