



Print Culture in the Sultanate of Riau-Lingga during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Print empowers ways of communicating an idea. In fact, in many ways, it could promote democratization of an individual's expression, which sometimes can be uncontrollable and even anarchic. Though printing has powerful impact on society; it has been ignored in mainstream scholarship. Existing studies about printing press and its impact on the Malay world are limited. It is surprisingly marginalized in the mainstream scholarship despite the fact that history actually bears witness that printing played an important role in the past. Thus, this article discusses the print culture in the Malay world with special reference to the Kingdom of Riau-Lingga. It begins by describing the techniques of printing especially lithography and typography used in the Malay world. It also explains the advent of the print technology in the Dutch East Indies in general and Riau in particular, and how the print culture gradually replaced manuscript in knowledge transmission during the time of Raja Ali Haji. Subsequently, it describes how the Rusdhiah Club utilized this technology during the end of the 19th century in Riau-Lingga.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Sultanate of Riau-Lingga was a Malay kingdom, which emerged from 1824 to 1911. It is also known as *Nagari Segantang Lada*, which refers to “thousands of large and small islands spread out across the vast sea” [1]. It consists of numerous big and small islands. The capital of this sultanate was located in the province of Riau-Lingga Islands. Zakariya and Oktasari state that this sultanate was a maritime kingdom whose territories included sea with thousands of islands and the majority of its population was (and still is) Muslim [2]. This kingdom served as a prominent literary cultural and religious center in the Malay world and it had produced renowned writers such as Raja Ali Haji (Henceforth, RAH). This study focuses on the development of print culture in Riau-Lingga during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Print culture is “the key term for an interdisciplinary field of study that has emerged from traditional book history scholarship to encompass a wide range of printed materials and the social, political, material, and economic processes of their production, circulation, and reception. Scholars of print culture, who primarily hail from the fields of bibliography, literature, and history, analyze books and other printed texts as material objects and study their role in shaping cultural relations” [3]. This article describes the Rushdiah Club early involvement in printing activities and its evolution and development in the later, more matured stage of its activism. Subsequently, it describes how the Rushdiah Club utilized this technology during the end of the 19th century in Riau-Lingga; and the transfer of the Rushdiah printing activities to the neighboring areas, especially Singapore and Penang.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND METHODOLOGY

This study examines the advent and impact of print culture in Riau-Lingga during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its main objectives are as follows:

- To discuss the major techniques of printing used in the Malay world.
- To examine the impact of print technology on the transmission of knowledge in the region.
- To analyse how the Rushdiah Club utilised this technology as a non-violent means for resistance against colonialism.

This study adopts the methods of textual analysis and historical research through a critical examination of the primary source materials. The major primary sources used in this study are the documents located at the Library of Yayasan Indera Sakti Penyengat Island, The National Archives of Indonesia and major libraries in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

3. PRINTING TECHNIQUES IN THE MALAY WORLD

Lithography and typography were the two printing techniques used to produce Malay books. Lithography may be considered as a variant or modification of the conventional method of creating manuscripts. Conversely, typography produced texts, which were totally different from manuscripts. When people read a manuscript, they can feel the definite touch of a human hand through the written text on the page. However, typography puts the body in contact with a machine, giving a distinctive feeling of development and progression.

3.1 The Lithographic Press

Colta Ives explained the invention of lithography as follows:

Lithography was invented around 1796 in Germany, by an otherwise unknown Bavarian playwright, Alois Senefelder, who accidentally discovered that he could duplicate his scripts by writing them in greasy crayon on slabs of limestone, and then printing them with rolled-on ink. Because the local limestone retained, so relentlessly, any crayon marks applied to its surface, even after repeated inking and printing, lithographs (so called from the Latin for stone ‘litho’ and mark ‘graph’) could be printed in almost unlimited quantities. When improvements in printing technology made it possible to add colour to lithography, and increase the size of the printing base, commercial possibilities ballooned [4].

The lithographic presses developed rapidly in Europe from the 1820s. In 1826, this press arrived in India from England, and was used to print governmental documents. The date of arrival of a lithographic press in Riau was not recorded. But in the 1860s, many printed Malay books; especially *syair* and *hikayat* could be found. The machine was probably brought by Arab or Indian traders or by those on their way

home from pilgrimage [5]. However, before the Rushdiah Club was established, Dutch printing presses already existed in Batavia. The Riaunese probably bought the machine and materials, like ink and paper, from Singapore or the West Asia.

The palace press was the first and therefore the oldest press in the kingdom. The Lingga and Straits Printing Office (known as 'Rumah cap Kerajaan') employed this lithographic technique. Some of their productions included *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* (1886), *Mukaddimah* (1887), *Napoleon I* (1888), *Napoleon III* (1889), *Pelayaran Abdullah* (1889), *Taman Beradu* (1890), *Taman Permata* (1889), and *Suluh Pegawai* (1891). All of these publications were printed in Lingga, which was the seat of the Sultan. Some of lithographic books that were found to be printed in Penyengat, the seat of YTM, included *Saat musytari* (1856), *Bustan al-Katibin* (1857), and *Futuh al-Syam* (1879) [6]. This printing press was probably moved to Penyengat, or this could be the sign that other lithographic presses existed in Penyengat. After almost 50 years, this lithographic technique became familiar to local Malay printers, including the Riaunese. There were books with high quality calligraphy and fabulous illustrations, printed on watermarked paper. This preference was caused by many factors. Apart from the relatively cheap cost of materials (i.e., limestone), Malay scribes, who were traditionally used in manuscript writing, could transcribe their text onto the stone surface with special ink. They also had to manage the position and physical layout of the book. They had to master painting skills, in order to create beautiful covers and illustrations within the book.

As the materials were cheap, the price of books was also cheap. Nevertheless, this printing technique could not produce many books quickly, as it was a very slow process. Individual letters could not be read clearly, compared to books produced by a typographic press. This type of press stopped operating, not only because the political situation was worsening, but also because of the superiority of typographic presses.

3.2 Typographic Press

Typography requires more sophisticated technological skills, which are indispensable in the transmission of information and knowledge. The small Muslim printing companies, which were primarily lithographic in nature, soon

declined around the turn of the 19th century; this included the Lingga and Straits Printing Office. Around 1894, with the courtesy of YTM X Raja Muhammad Yusuf, a typographic press was built in Penyengat. The press was located in the Rushdiah Club's office, approximately ten meters from Sultan Abdurrahman's palace (Istana Kedaton), at Kampung Tengah, Penyengat. We can still see the site of the Rushdiah Club's headquarters, even today. It was situated near Raja Ali Kelana's house on Penyengat Island. However, a local family of Penyengat inhabitants have built their house on the site, but we can still see the foundations of the Rushdiah Club's office, including its stairs, which were made from sea stone. An informant showed us the location of the printing press chamber and its remnants [7]. The decree on the abdication of the Sultan was read in this office on 10 February 1911. The fact that we can only find the foundations of the palace and the Rushdiah Club's office is probably because they were destroyed by the inhabitants, under the order of the Sultan, to avoid the Dutch from occupying Penyengat Island in the future.

In 1906, the al-Imam printing company in Singapore was established and financed by Raja Ali Kelana. It used a typographic machine to print the *al-Imam* magazine. Other typographic printing presses, under the control of Rushdiah Club members, were the Ahmadiyah and Jelutong Presses. Although these presses were expensive, they produced good quality books. The machines and their equipment were probably imported from Europe. At the end of the 19th century, this technology was easily obtainable from Singapore, as the British company, Linotype and Machinery Limited, opened a branch in Singapore. They also acted as an agent for the Dutch East Indies, Siam, and Indo China [8]. However, some Malay printers in Singapore purchased their machinery from Egypt, Beirut, or India. The Ahmadiyah Press advertised that they used a typographic press and stated that they imported their materials from Beirut.

4. PRINT CULTURE DURING THE TIME OF RAJA ALI HAJI

The printing press was introduced in 1624 in The Dutch East Indies due to the endeavors of the missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church [9]. Its aim was to publish Christian literature for Latin missionary schools. Nevertheless, that particular printing press was not used, due to a lack of an

operator to run it. It was only after intervention from the government in Batavia, that a printing press was finally established, in 1668 [10]. At that time, it produced its first print of the thirteen and a half pages of *Bongaaisch Verdrag* (A treaty of peace signed between Admiral Cornelis Speelman and the Prince of Macassar, Sultan Hasanuddin dated March 15, 1668). In 1668, printing was strictly prohibited without permission from the censorship authority, which was exercised by the VOC officials [11]. After the VOC ceased to exist in 1809, a Government Printing Press in Batavia (named *Landsdrukkerij*) was established to manage a printing and publishing business in the Dutch Republic. It operated until 1942, amidst the Japanese occupation. When was the printing press in Riau itself established exactly? Abu Hassan Sham stated that it is difficult to determine the early existence of a printing press in Riau. He mentioned that based on printed works, it started to produce prints after 1880, following RAH's death [12]. Based on a study by Jan van der Putten, we can surmise that it was already there in 1850. We can trace the existence of a printing press in Riau, by examining the publications of poems and other works by Raja Ali Haji as he was engaged and obsessed with the benefits of a printing press. Putten mentioned that at least two of the four surviving products, printed on the lithographic press in Penyengat, were written by RAH [13].

It is true that some works of RAH were printed and published in Batavia, with the help of Dutch officials. Once, in his letters to Roorda van Eysinga in Batavia, he showed his interest in two editions of Malay stories, namely *Taj al-salatin* and *Hikayat Sri Rama*, which were sent by Roorda van Eysinga as a gift. The *Taj al-Salatin* copy amazed him, as it was printed in Malay text, with an Arabic script on the right-hand page, and a Dutch translation on the left-hand page. He did not find any errors, which can usually be easily found in a book written by hand, such as incorrect spelling, bad writing, or messy ink corrections. He then sent *Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk* to Batavia, hoping that Roorda would kindly heartedly print it for him. It was finally printed and published in the *Tijdschrijf voor Neerlandsch Indie*, in 1847, together with its Dutch translation. This brought his name to the fore amongst Dutch administrators. Coincidentally, this came at a time when the Dutch sought a standardized Malay language, which could serve for bible translation, communication with indigenous courts outside of Java, and for educational

purposes. RAH's spoken and written language was a Johor dialect that was favorably received by the Dutch, since they regarded it as the purest form of a standardized Malay language.

Again, RAH's untitled poem about his recovery from sickness, was, with the help of a Dutch naval physician, printed and published in 1853 in the Dutch annual *Warnasarie*. It became the only poem to be published in Malay in the journal for nearly ten years. The administrator-historian Netscher in the Dutch journal of the Batavian Society published another poem, *Gurindam Duabelas*, in 1854. Through publication of these poems, RAH's reputation as a poet was firmly established towards the end of the 1850s. A Dutch civil servant, Hermann von de Wall, wrote an article in 1854, which emphasized the importance of printing, by quoting a letter from the Resident Van der Ven. In that letter, the resident stated that he had come to the Muhammad Azhari printing shop in Palembang in 1855. He was assigned the task of compiling a book on Malay grammar and a dictionary. In March 1856, one year after his arrival in Riau, a lithographic press was setup on Penyengat to print a chart of astrological calculations, the *Saat Musytari* (Auspicious Times). *Bustanul Katibin* was printed using this printing press in 1857 in Penyengat, and was reportedly reprinted and used in schools in Johor and Singapore. Von de Wall had already found a copy of the printed *Bustanul Katibin* when he came to Riau, and became good friends with RAH and Haji Ibrahim. In his article (a review on *Bustanul Katibin*) that was sent to the Batavia Society, he validated the existence of a lithographic press on Penyengat, but without mentioning any further details.

Nevertheless, H C Klinkert (a Dutch Bible translator) never mentioned the existence of a printing press on Penyengat. Klinkert went to Riau in 1860 to improve his proficiency in Malay and to correct the 18th century Bible version, with a Malay translation. During his stay in Riau, he collected many Malay manuscripts, and sometimes created edited copies or articles, which he then sent to journals in Holland or Batavia. In fact, he filed a request for a lithographic press with the Bible society, which was later withdrawn. If the few copies, of the texts printed on Penyengat between 1856 and 1857, did not survive, together with the references in Von de Wall's articles; the existence of a lithographic printing press on Penyengat would surely be pure speculation. However, the preserved second catalogue of the

Batavian Society collection by Van der Chijs indicated a third proof of the existence of a lithographic printing press on Penyengat Island. He lists a book that he identifies as a poem printed in 1868/69 in Riau. It is not clear where he got this information from, since there was no mention of either the printer or the author. The book includes thirty-seven pages, along with a title page, that explains the word *Awai*. After its publication, the poem proved to be a very popular story, as different Singaporean printers reprinted it at least five times during the 1880s.

The fourth proof is from a Malay translation of the *Futuh al-Syam*, which was based on an Arabic original, written by al-Waqidi. Information in the colophon states that the text was printed in Riau, on the island of Penyengat on 7 July 1879 (17 Rajab 1296 H). There was no information about the printer or where he or she had learned how to work the press. As the press belonged to Muhammad Azhari in Palembang, we can only guess that the press and other equipment used for lithographic printing, was brought from Singapore. The printer may have been one of the many Arabs visiting the region, or living in Riau. RAH, as the central figure involved in the literary world of Riau, never mentioned the existence of a printing press in Riau. He probably assumed that the lithographic press was similar to manuscript tradition; and he did not regard it as a real printing press. In his letters to Von de Wall, he several times requested a printing press and emphasized its importance. Indeed, during a meeting with Dutch residents, he was asked to calculate the cost of a press. He also sent a letter to Haji Ibrahim with the same request, together with an outline of his reasons. The Dutch authorities probably refused his request, since there is no further mention about the existence of this press.

Again, in 1872, his letters to Von de Wall stated the proposed details and cost for printing, of approximately f 2000, and asked him to print his monolingual Malay dictionary. Compared to the reported price of a lithographic press, of approximately f 500, it appears that he actually requested a more expensive typographic press. Since there is no other mention of this, it is assumed that this request was also rejected.

On 27 March 1872, he sent a letter outlining his plans to invite a Singapore-based printer, Muhammad Nur ibn Haji Muhammad Said. He was the publisher of a lithographed version of the *Usul al-Din*, printed in 1862, and of the *Tanbih*

Al-Ikhwan, printed in 1864. This is proof of the links that existed between printers in Singapore and writers in Riau, during the latter half of the 19th century. RAH relished the positive effects that printed books could have on his reputation; as well as for Penyengat. This was highlighted when he identified many mistakes in the Arabic scripts, in a copy of *Hikayat Golam*. This *hikayat* was translated by RAH's father's mentor, Viceroy Jafar. The Dutch firm Lange typographically printed it, in 1860. He also needed a printing press, in order to minimise his financial burden of having to pay for scribes. The absence of a press would worsen his already bad health condition, since he must work hard to make several drafts by hand. During the next period, printing in Riau would be continued by the Riau courts; mainly Rushdiah Club members, by means of a number of books printed on a typographic press on Lingga and Penyengat Island, during the last decades of the 19th century; and in Singapore and Penang during the early 20th century.

5. THE PRINT CULTURE DURING THE TIME OF THE RUSHDIAH CLUB

The emergence of printing and publishing activities in Riau, and later on in Singapore and Penang, cannot be detached from the efforts of Rushdiah Club members. The printing press under the control of the Rushdiah Club members can be divided into two categories, according to their ownership. First, printing press under the palace and Rushdiah Club and second, the private and individual printing presses under the control of one of the Rushdiah Club's members. Their roles and concern on these presses, can only be taken into account if they participated as either contributing writers, founders, financial supporters, or even printers or publishers themselves.

5.1 Printing Press under the Palace

The printing press under this category was *Maṭbaʿat al-Riyawwiyah* and *Maṭbaʿat al-Aḥmadiyyah*, which were established by the YTM X Raja Muhammad Yusuf al-Aḥmadī. The YTM gradually entrusted this printing press to the Rushdiah Club's management. Surprisingly, both were the names of a same printing press, a notion that they already distinguished job descriptions of the publishers and printers. *Maṭbaʿat al-Riyawwiyah* was used when books were printed for palace interests, such as *Khuṭbah Jumʿah* and royal law. Meanwhile, *Maṭbaʿat al-Aḥmadiyyah* was used if the books

printed were not for the immediate need of official affairs, but for public or private consumption [14]. The word Ahmadiyyah had nothing to do with Ahmadiyyah as a sect in Islam. Rather, it belongs to the epithet of the YTM X Muhammad Yusuf al-Ahmadī. In fact, al-Ahmadī explained that he was a follower of Ṭarīqah Naqshabandiyyah Mujaddidiyyah Ahmadiyyah.

According to Wan M. Shaghir Abdullah, Matbaat Riauwiyyah, and Matbaat Ahmadiyah in Riau represent a continuity of Maktabah Fataniah in Makkah. Ahmad al-Fatani, and his printing press Maktabah Fathaniyah, influenced the activity of printing and publishing of kitāb *jāwī* in the Malay world. Many Malays, including people from Riau, went to Makkah for pilgrimage or studied under Ahmad al-Fathani's guidance. Some of them were the royal families of Riau, Raja Ali Kelana, Raja Khalid Hitam, and Raja Ahmad ibn Raja Endut. They were greatly enthused with what the printing could do in changing the conditions of the Malay world, which fell under colonialism.

Matbaat Riauwiyyah's main concern was to print various documents, letters, reports, or other governmental publications, which were mostly not publicly consumed. However, a general publication-like book made by the Sultanate's clinic, a tiny book on medicine and its usage instruction, published by Matbaat Riauwiyyah, can be read without restriction. Normally, any printing and publishing company under the palace or organization never thought about profit, and they did not operate with a commercial aim in mind. The financial advantages in Matbaat al-Riyawwiyyah and al-Ahmadiyyah in Penyengat are still being questioned. Although they received financial support from the Sultan, or the YTM, we do not know whether their publications were sold or given away freely. In addition, some publications were published after the death of the authors, as there was no information provided about royalties. If authors received royalties, this would support the production of more writings. The following presses clearly sold their publications and gave royalties to their authors.

5.2 Private and Individual Printing Presses

In many cases, printers and publishers began their careers as writers. Then, they would be involved in book printing, publishing, and marketing activities, whilst still writing their works. This is what some members of the Rushdiah

Club did. The following are printing presses that were influenced by some of the club members, or in some way, had a relation with or participated in it.

5.2.1 Al-Imam printing press

Al-Imam Printing Co. Ltd. (also known as al-Imam Press Ltd.) was located at 18 Weld Road, Singapore, in 1906. In 1910, it moved to 26 Robinson Road and again in 1918, to 17 & 18 Weld Road. It was mentioned that they began operations with a \$20,000 (Straits Dollars) capital [15]. Raja Ali Kelana undoubtedly gave his wholehearted support to the projects in which Sayyid Shaykh al-Hādī was involved, such as the al-Imam Printing Press, where he was one of the founders [16]. Apart from Shaykh Awad Saidan, who was involved as one of the original financial backers of al-Imam, and the Acehnese Shaykh Salim al-Khalili, Raja Ali Kelana was also a major sponsor of this printing press [17].

However, there is no clear information about the financial situation of this press, until its reorganisation in 1908. With the help of Sayyid Muhammad ibn Aqil ibn Yahya, the press continued to operate. The Board of Directors of the al-Imam Printing Company Limited, consisted of following people:

1. Managing Director: Sayyid Muhammad ibn Aqil
2. Company Secretary: Mohd. Abu Bakar Mohd Yahya
3. Chief Editor: Hj. Abbas ibn Mohd Taha
4. Director: Sayyid Shaykh al-Hādī
5. Sayyid Hasan ibn Shihab

During the beginning of the 20th century, religious issues began to be discussed and debated in the media, following the influence of reformist movements in the West Asia, launched by Muhammad 'Abduh (1858-1905). The constant flow of people in and around Singapore resulted in the exchange of ideas, including the idea of reformism. The reformists tried to reform Islam to cope with the social and economic challenges of the Malay world. *Al-Imam* magazine, which was modeled on the reformist periodical, al-Manar (The Lighthouse), was claimed to be the pioneer in this debate in the Malay world. Al-Imam Printing Company successfully began printing 31 issues of the *al-Imam* magazine (The Leader) in *jāwī*, on 23 July 1906 (1 Jamada al-Akhir, 1324AH). However, *Al-Imam* magazine ceased production in December 1908, following a deficit of financing.

Shaykh Muḥammad Ṭāhir Jalāluddīn (founder and editor), and Abbas Muhammad Taha (editor), were kindred spirits in the reformist movement. The director of this magazine was al-Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salam al-Kilali. Meanwhile, Raja Ali Kelana, Raja Hitam Khalid, and al-Hādī, were active contributors. Snouck Hurgronje stated that *Al-Imam* was “a suitable place for Raja Ali Kelana and others to publish their desires and grievances” [18].

The increasing anti-colonialism feeling amongst Riau courts, and the Dutch anxiety towards their resistance, brought the case of abolition of Sultan to the surface in 1911. As the al-Imam printing press was essentially a Riau-sponsored venture, the events in Riau affected the welfare of this press. Apart from that, it printed *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis dan Sekalian Raja-rajanya* in 1329/1911. It also printed *Kumpulan Ringkas* in 1909, which was written by Raja Ali Kelana.

5.2.2 Jelutong press

The Jelutong Press was the sixth active printer from 20 prominent printers in Singapore and Malay Peninsula. In 1927, after facilitating and managing numerous *madrasah* (or Islamic schools) in Singapore (1907), Malacca (1915), and Penang (1919), Sayyid Shaykh founded the Jelutong Press in Jelutong, Penang. He began writing novels and other books, in order to get enough income to support the monthly journal, *Al-Ikhwan* (the Brethren). This journal was first published in September 1926, eighteen years after *al-Imam*'s termination. His novel, *Hikayah Faridah Hanum*, was the best-seller and extremely popular at that time. The Jelutong Press's initial capital was derived from royalties from his novel. In addition, he invested every asset that he owned, including mortgaging his house, to start the Jelutong Press novels [19]. The Jelutong Press only had three core staff, Encik Ismail (machinist and compositor), Mohd Ariff b. Haji Mohd Shariff (clerk and accountant), and Arifin Ishak (marketing and sales manager). The Jelutong Press continued to print *Al-Ikhwan* in 1927. Its logo declared “Believers indeed are brothers” (Qur’ān, 49:10). After depending only on himself, al-Hādī was finally assisted by young Malay writers, such as Harun Aminurrashid and Buyong Adil, who later became celebrated Malay writers. *Al-Ikhwan* improved its appearance with better quality papers and illustrated pages with photographs. It had a limited circulation and al-Hādī said that he did not publish *Al-Ikhwan* to make a profit. To penetrate the secular reading

market, a weekly newspaper, *Saudara*, was launched in 1928, and began producing twice weekly in 1932. *Saudara* had a series of editors, namely Mohd. Yunus b. Abdul Hamid, Abdul Rahim Kajai, Sayyid Alwi, al-Hādī, Abdul Wahab b. Abdullah, Syaikh Muḥammad Ṭāhir Jalāluddīn, Abdul Majid b. Sabil, and Mohd Amin b. Nayan. However, *Saudara* ceased publication in 1941. For the next 14 years, until the Japanese occupation of Malaya, the Jelutong press printed books, novels, journals, and other publications, which were mostly reformist in nature. It incorporated modern literature of all kinds, from popular journalism to the first Malay novels. The falling price of rubber, between 1928 and 1929, made everything very strenuous. From 1930 onwards, the economy was declining and lead to many bankrupt companies. This was probable reason for the *Al-Ikhwan* to stop its production in 1931.

5.2.3 Maṭba‘at al-Aḥmadiyyah of singapore (Ahmadiyah Press)

Whilst the Sultan was forcefully abdicated in 1911, de jure the Dutch never suspended status of the Rushdiah Club. The members never felt violated by colonial law when continuing their activities. A trade company, named Syarikat Ahmadiyah, was established in 1906. It was built far away from the centre of the Sultanate, on Midai Island; one of the Pulau Tujuh islands, 750 kilometers away, near to the South China Sea. This company was a co-op belonging to the Rushdiah Club members who specialized in coconut and copra trading. Its objectives were to give prosperity to the royal family, create jobs for the Riau people, and counterbalance the Chinese domination in the Malacca straits. Its Singapore branch was established in 1915. Through the success of this company, the Maṭba‘at al-Aḥmadiyyah well known as Ahmadiyah Press was established in 1920 in Kampung Glam, Singapore. However, some scholars said that it was established in 1912 [20]. In 1921, it opened a new office at 50 Minto Road, Singapore. Ahmadiyah Press was the third most active press amongst the Malay printers and publishers in Singapore and Malay States. According to Wan Muhammad Shaghbir Abdullah, apart from economic factors, the aim of Syarikat Ahmadiyah was to continue the efforts of Maṭba‘at Faṭāniyyah in Makkah, to spread Islamic teaching through their printing activities. This press printed works of international Malay ‘ulamā’, from Aceh, Palembang, Patani (South Thailand), Banjar, and Minangkabau.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the role of print culture in Riau-Lingga, a topic that has not been adequately studied in the existing literature. Indeed, the print culture played an important role in the transmission of knowledge in the Kingdom of Riau-Lingga by facilitating mass-production of printed books. This had empowered society with knowledge in the Dutch East Indies, Malay Peninsula and the Straits Settlement. Print culture was instrumental in bringing about the cultural and social change. Furthermore, the printed materials that emphasizes on the reformist Islam, contributed to the dissemination of Islamic reformism in the Malay world. In response to the challenge of colonialism, the Rushdiah Club utilized printing effectively to promote their ideas to wider audience in the Malay Archipelago. Indeed, the Rushdiah Club has made immense contribution to the Malay-Indonesian world through knowledge empowerment of the Malay society in the Dutch East Indies, Malay Peninsula and the Straits Settlements. Without a doubt, book printing broadened the intellectual vistas of its audience. As a result, the literate Malays in the Archipelago who were exposed to these writings developed political consciousness, and they in turn engendered broader changes in their respective societies. A comparative study on the roles of print culture at the regional level would be very useful in broadening our understanding of this important topic. It is hoped that future research would embark on this aspect.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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