

The Straits Chinese Contribution to Malaysian Literary Heritage: Focus on Chinese Stories Translated into Baba Malay

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Abstract

The Chinese born in the Straits Settlements of Peninsula Malaya (Penang, Singapore, Malacca) are called Babas to distinguish them from those born in China. The Babas are rooted from three different races, Chinese, Malay and English and as such their lifestyles show a mixed blend of the Chinese, Malay and European cultures. Because of this cultural background, the Babas exhibited a unique cultural mix in the clothes they wear, their culinary skills, architectural styles, language and literature. The paper describes the characteristics of 68 Baba translated works published between 1889 and 1950; focusing on the publication trends between the period under study, the persons involved in the creative output, the publishers and printers involved, the contents of the translated works, the physical make-up of the works and the libraries where these works are held.

Keywords: *Baba Peranakan literature; Chinese in Malaya; Malacca; Singapore; Publishing and publishers; Printing presses; Authorship pattern*

The Chinese Babas

The Chinese born in the Straits Settlements of Peninsula Malaya (Penang, Singapore, Malacca) are called Babas to distinguish them from those born in China (Tan, 1993). Today, the Babas refer to the descendents of the Straits born Chinese. The female Straits born Chinese are referred to as Nyonyas. The term Peranakan is often used interchangeably with the Babas even though they are quite different. Peranakan is the designation for locally born Malaysian of mixed parentage. Hence, a Baba can be a Peranakan but a Peranakan is not necessarily a Baba. In the early years, the children of the Penang Babas were usually brought up in accordance to their father's side of the family, even when their fathers died young and the children were left with their local mothers (Purcell, 1967; Vaugh, 1971). The

mother's influences were more pronounced among the Malacca Babas, and as the Malays were the majority ethnic group in Malacca, the influence of the Malay culture was definitely stronger. This dominance influenced the language spoken and the literary orientations of the Babas. The Malacca Babas spoke a mixed language comprising Malay words juxtaposed with Chinese words, whereas the Penang Babas spoke Hokkien interspersed with Malay words. In the context of this article, the word Baba denotes the Malacca and the Singaporean Babas as the Singapore Babas are the offshoot of the Malacca Babas.

The Babas were rooted from three different races, Chinese, Malay and English and as such their lifestyles showed a mixed blend of the Chinese, Malay and European cultures. Because of this mixed cultural background, the Babas exhibited unique cultural characteristics in the clothes they wear, their culinary skills, architectural styles, language and literature. The Babas were Hokkiens from the Fujian Provinces in China who traded in the Malay Peninsular. They did not bring along their women since they did not intend to stay permanently in the Straits Settlements. Eventually early Chinese migrants began to marry Malay women and this gave rise to the Baba community (Chia, 1980).

The Baba language is colloquial Malay and used as a trading language. The unique features of the language are the use of Chinese words juxtaposed by words of Chinese origin for unfamiliar Malay words and mispronounced Malay words (Shellabear, 1913). As such, the literary works produced were based on this spoken language. Both Shellabear (1913) and Png (1963) have compiled lists of Baba Malay vocabularies. Png found 350 known Chinese loan words and the proportion of such words was estimated to be about 10 percent. Gwee (1993) compiled a list of Baba Malay words, phrases, sayings and idiomatic expressions. Tan (1980) and Pakir (1986) contented that the Baba Malay is a distinctive Malay dialect, with consistent linguistic structure and a variation of the standard Malay language, which feature Chinese loan words. The process of acculturation has given rise to a distinct dialect which gave the Baba an ethnic identity. The Baba language was popular because it was the trading language and the lingua franca of the Straits Settlements.

The Babas were pioneers among the Chinese in the Malay Peninsular to publish in the romanised Malay language. They were actively involved in publishing newspapers, magazines, and books and translated Chinese stories. The Babas published their first romanised newspaper in 1894 (*Straits Chinese Herald* also known as *Surat Khabar Peranakan*). Other newspapers they published include *Bintang Timor* (1894), *Kabar Slalu* also known as *Daily News* in 1924, *Kabar Uchapan Baru* or *Eastern Weekly Review* in 1926. A number of the translated Chinese stories were published serially in these newspapers. For an example, the *Bintang Timor* published a serial entitled *Hikayat Percintaan Si Putih* [*The love story of Si*

Puteh] (Teo, 1980). Another source, where the Chinese translated stories were published was the magazines, which the Babas also published. The first romanised Malay weekly was *Bintang Pranakan* (1930). It was in this magazine that some of the Chinese stories were published, which were later reproduced in separate volumes. One such example was *Ow Liat Kok Chee*, translated by Seng and San. Another weekly, *Sri Pranakan* was published in 1932 and this magazine published the Chinese story, *Yeo Boon Kong Cheng Lam Ban*, translated by Seng and San, which was later published in four volumes. The Babas also published the *Story Teller* (1935) and this magazine published the Chinese story of *Beng Leh Koon* translated by Khoo Peng Yam. It is evident that the Baba newspapers and periodicals contribute to the development of Baba literary works by publishing original and translated Chinese stories.

The following sections will describe the characteristics of the Chinese stories translated into Baba Malay published between 1889 and 1950; focusing on the publication trends between the period under study, the persons involved in the creative output, the publishers, the contents of the translated works, the physical make-up of the works and the libraries where these works are held.

Trend of Publication

Searching the library catalogues of six libraries, known to avidly collect Malaysiana literature, revealed 68 unique titles. The titles were published between 1889 to the 1950s. The Baba Malay translated publications revealed three periods of active publication trends. The most active period was in the 1930s, when more than 50 percent of the Baba Malay translated works were published (39 out of 68 titles) (Figure 1). The first period of publication productivity extended between 1889 and 1909, which marked the beginning of publication activity in which 18 works were published. The second period covered the years between 1910 and 1929, which produced 10 publications. The last period was between 1930 and

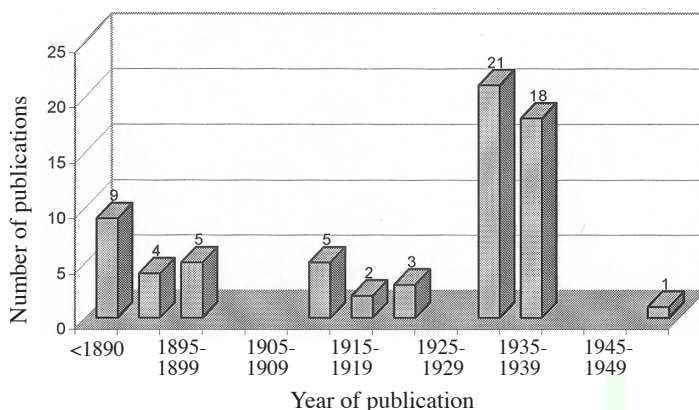


Figure 1 Baba Translated Works (1889-1950)

Table 1 Baba Malay Translated Unique Titles (1889-1950)

Period	Titles	Year(s)	
1889-1909	<i>Gong Kiah Sie</i>	1889	
	<i>Heng Guan Seo Chia</i>	1889	
	<i>Kasatu Bijak Lahsana</i>	1889	
	<i>Kim Ko Kee Quan</i>	1889	
	<i>Lwee Hong Thak</i>	1889	
	<i>Mai Yeu Long</i>	1889	
	<i>Teong Chiat Ghee</i>	1889	
	<i>Hong Keow</i>	1889-1892	
	<i>Ban Wah Lau</i>	1890	
	<i>Gnoh Bee Yean</i>	1891-1892	
	<i>Hong Keow</i>	1892-1893	
	<i>Sam Kok</i>	1892-1896	
	<i>Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Say</i>	1895	
	<i>Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Tang</i>	1895	
	<i>Chin See Bee</i>	1899	
	<i>Chin Suat Buay</i>	1899	
	<i>Lip Guan Poh Kuan</i>	1899	
	<i>Song Kang</i>	1899-1902	
	1910-1929	<i>Ban Wha Law</i>	1910-1912
		<i>Sum Hup Poh Kiam</i>	1910-1916
<i>Lwee Hong Thak</i>		1911	
<i>Kou Chey Thian</i>		1911-1912	
<i>Pho Kiu Si</i>		1913	
<i>Mai Yew Long</i>		1915	
<i>Tiong Chiat Ghee</i>		1915	
<i>Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Say</i>		1921	
<i>Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Tang</i>		1922	
<i>Teck Cheng Ngo Ho Peng Lam</i>		1922	
1930-1939		<i>Ang Bin Sio Chia</i>	1931
		<i>Ow Liat Kok Chee</i>	1931
	<i>Say Han</i>	1931	
	<i>Tang Chay Liat Kok</i>	1931	
	<i>Wakang</i>	1931	
	<i>Pat Bee Tor</i>	1931-1932	
	<i>Sam Ha Lam Tong</i>	1931-1932	
	<i>Hong Sin</i>	1931-1937	
	<i>Hong Sin Ban Sian Tin</i>	1931-1939	
	<i>Lee Tan</i>	1932	
	<i>Ngo Chu Low Tang Kia</i>	1932	
	<i>Siang Ha Ngo Liong Huay</i>	1932	
	<i>Sam Kok</i>	1932	
	<i>Cheng Teck Koon Yew Kang Nam</i>	1933	
	<i>Chit Sih Pat Meng Su</i>	1933	
<i>Kek Hua Siuchia</i>	1933		

	<i>Lee Lo Chia</i>	1933
	<i>Yeo Boon Kong Cheng Lam Ban</i>	1933-1934
	<i>Hoon Chong Lau</i>	1934
	<i>Khiang Tai Kong</i>	1934
	<i>Cheng Tiong Suat Gak</i>	1934-1938
	<i>Chay Kong Wak Hood</i>	1935
	<i>Khian Leong Koon Yew Kang Lam</i>	1935
	<i>Lek Boh Tan</i>	1935
	<i>Nah Kong Tong Pak Han</i>	1935
	<i>Sam Hap Beng Choo Pokiam</i>	1935
	<i>Teck Cheng Cheng Pak</i>	1935
	<i>Tian Pah Tor</i>	1935
	<i>Ong Cheow Koon Hoe Huan</i>	1935-1936
	<i>Chow Thau Hong Boo Koon</i>	1936
	<i>Flying Swords</i>	1936
	<i>It Ki Mui/ Chit Kiam Chapsahnh Kiap</i>	1936
	<i>It Ki Mui/ Chit Chu Chapsahnh Seng</i>	1936
	<i>Tio Kong Inn</i>	1936
	<i>Lam Koon Ong Soon Pin</i>	1936-1938
	<i>It Ki Mui Peng Suanh Chat</i>	1938
	<i>Sam Kok Inn</i>	1938
	<i>Cheong Moh Inn</i>	1938-1939
	<i>Tau Lau Sam Boon Kuay</i>	1939
1950	<i>Botan Kiongchoo</i>	1950

1939, which indicated a rise in publication output to 39 publications. Only one publication, *Botan Kiongchoo* was published in 1950 (Table 1).

Persons Involved in the Creative Works

An interesting characteristic of persons involved in the translated Baba Malay literary works was that a single person may assume a number of roles. A translator was often also the illustrator and the publisher. A number of the translators were assisted by a reader who reads out the Chinese classical stories to the translators who were usually illiterate in the Chinese script.

Between 1889 and 1909

Eleven persons were involved in the production of translated Baba Malay literature between 1889 and 1909. The prominent names were Chan Kim Boon, Tan Beng Teck and Tan Phiak Kong (Figure 2). Chan Kim Boon (CKB) was also known as Batu Gantong and was born in Batu Gantong, Penang in 1851. He was probably the most famous translator during the early period. His translation works include *Sam Kok* (1892-1896) and *Song Kang* (1899-1902). The former was translated from the Luo Guan Zhong's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the latter from Shi Nai An's *Water Margin*. The other well-known translations were *Hong*

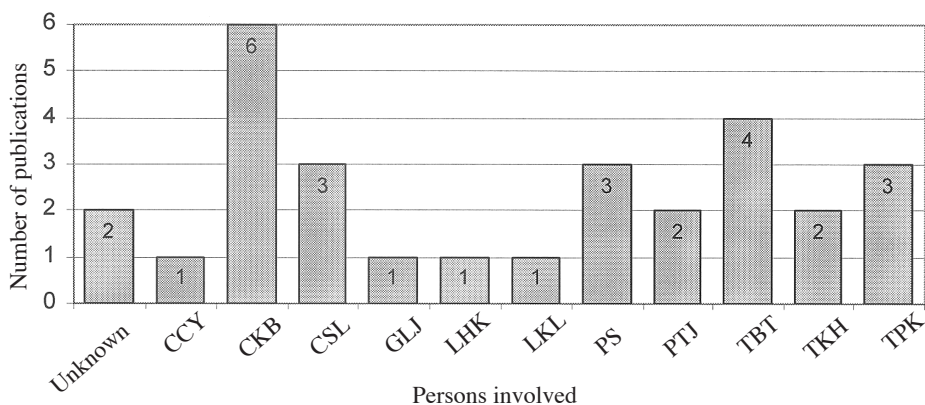
Keow (1891), *Hong Keow* (1892-1893) and *Gnoh Bee Yean* (1891-1892). Chan continued to translate another two famous Chinese classics entitled *Pho Kiu Si* (1913) and *Kou Chey Thian* (1911-1912), or *Journey to the West* between 1910 and 1929.

According to an announcement in *Sam Kok* (15 December 1892), Chan promised to translate the following titles: *Kim Ko Ki Kwan*, *Leow Chai*, *Pow Kong Ann*, *Si Kong Ann*, *Na Kong Ann*, *Swi Huo* atau *Song Kang*, *Lim Ai Chu*, *Chey Thian Hoey Sion*, *Wan Ju Yak*, *Keng Gno Cheong*, *Hoon Chong Lau*, *Chit Hiap*, *Cheng Tong*, *Cheng Sai*, *Ho Gnoh Tai*. However, only *Song Kang* (1888-1902) and *Chey Thian Hoey Sion* [which was later entitled *Kou Chey Thian* (1911-1912)], could be traced. The rest of the titles could not be located.

Tan Beng Teck (TBK) was another prominent translator. He was also the earliest translator that could be traced. His first translated works were *Heng Guan Seo Chia* (1889), *Hong Keow* (1889), *Kim Ko Kee Quan* (1889) and *Lwee Hong Thak* (1889). Surprisingly, his translated works stopped after 1889. According to Tan (1981), TBK left for Japan after publishing only three volumes. It was Chan Kim Boon who continued the translation of Tan's work (volumes 4-8) and later revised TBK's earlier works (volumes 1-3).

Both Chek Swee Liong and Peng Swee & co. translated three stories, *Teong Chiat Ghee* (1889), *Kasatu Bijak Lahsana* (1888), and *Mai Yeu Long* (1889). The story of *Mai Yeu Long* (1889) and *Teong Chiat Ghee* (1889) were subsequently compiled into one book. Pang Teck Joon translated 4 titles, two of which were translated in the early period (*Chin Suat Buay*, 1899 and *Chin See Bee*, 1899).

Lye Kam Lim addressed himself as L.K. Lim, translated the *Gong Kiah Sie* (1889), a story about a foolish person. Other translators of the early period were,



CCY Cheah Choo Yew LHK Lim Hock Kee TBT Tan Beng Teck
 CKB Chan Kim Boon LKL Lye Kam Lim TKH Tan Kheam Hock

Figure 2 Persons Involved in the Creative Works between 1889-1909

Goh Len Joo who translated *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Tang* (1895), and Lim Hock Kee who published *Ban Wah Lau* (1890).

Most of the Baba translated literary works were highly illustrated. Tan Phiak Kong was one of the most outstanding illustrators of this period. He illustrated *Chin See Bee* (1899), *Chin Suat Bee* (1899) (Figure 4), *Gnoh Bee Yean* (1891-1892), *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Tang* (1895) and later *Ban Wha Lau* (1910). In *Ban Wha Lau*, he only illustrated the first volume. In volume five of *Gnoh Bee Yean*, Tan provided a portrait of himself in the Ming Dynasty’s costume, holding a paper fan and wearing glasses (Figures 3 and 4).

Tan Kheam Hock helped Chan Kim Boon in *Gnoh Bee Yean* (1891) and volumes 1, 6 to 8 of *Hong Keow* (1892). Tan was born in Penang and was an active public figure in the Straits Settlement. (Song, 1923). Another helper of Chan Kim Boon was Cheah Choo Yew who also helped to translate volumes 6 and 8 of *Hong Keow* (1891). There were two titles that bore no translators’ name and these are *Lip Guan Poh Kuan* published in 1899, and *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Say* in 1895.



Figure 3 Tan Phiak Kong’s Self-portrait



Figure 4 Tan Phiak Kong’s Illustrations

What made Chan Kim Boon well-known was his effort in translating three famous Chinese classics, namely *Sam Kok* in 30 volumes (1892-1896), *Song Kang* in 19 volumes (1899-1902) and *Kou Chey Thian* in 9 volumes (1911-1913) (Tan, 1981). After his death in 1920, the activity of translating Chinese stories into Baba Malay declined, especially during the First World War years (1914 to 1929).

Between 1910 and 1929

During the years 1910-1929, the well-known persons involved were Cheong Guan Boon, Pang Teck Joon and Siow Hay Yam (Figure 5).

Only 10 titles were being translated during this period. Pang Teck Joon had translated *Lwee Hong Thak* (1911) and *Ban Wha Law* (1910). Tan Phiak Kong was the illustrator of *Ban Wha Law*. In 1889, Tan Beng Teck translated the *Lwee Hong Thak*, a legendary story about a black and white snake with Kho Boon Han. Lim Hock Kee had translated the *Ban Wha Law* in 1890. This was a military story about a general during the Sung Dynasty known as Tek Cheng. Lim Hock Kee translated this story in 8 volumes, where else Pang Teck Joon translated it in 10 volumes.

Siow Hay Yam translated *Teck Cheng Ngo Ho Peng Lam* (1922) in 7 volumes and *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Say* (1921) in 10 volumes. Cheong Guan Boon translated *Mai Yew Long* in 1915 and *Teong Chiat Ghee* in 1915. The *Mai Yew Long* and *Teong Chiat Ghee* had been translated by Chek Swee Liong and Swee Peng & co. in 1889. However, the title of previous edition by Chek Swee Liong was spelt differently as *Mai Yeu Long* and *Teong Chiat Ghee* respectively. The former publication was 31 pages and the latter was 57 pages long. The edition of Cheong Guan Boon was longer with 116 pages and 100 pages respectively. The difference in pagination was dictated by the style of the translations.

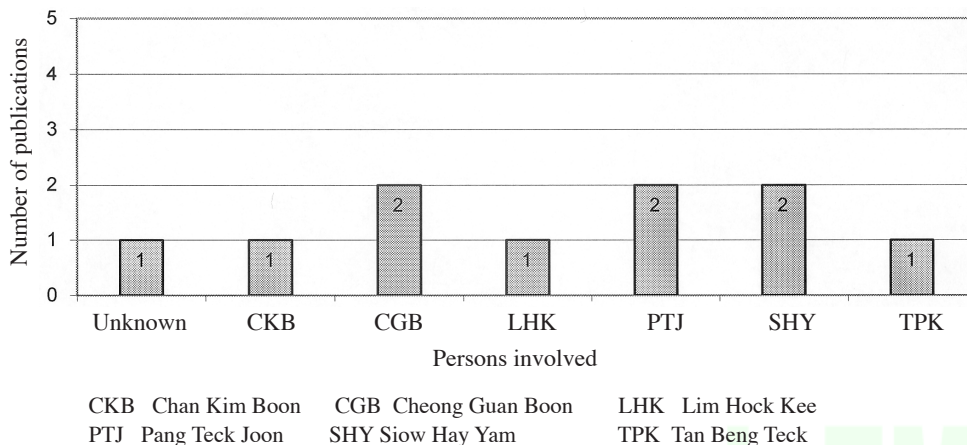


Figure 5 Prominent Persons Involved during 1910-1929

The translator of the second edition of *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Tang* (1922) could not be traced. Chan Kim Boon continued to translate the story of *Kou Chey Thian and Pho Kiu Si*, which told the story of Zhang Sheng and Yin Yin. This is the famous romance of Chinese classics. Chan Kim Boon started the story on the eighth volume of *Kou Chey Thian*, and continued it into the ninth volume. Lau Kim Hock translated the story of *Sum Hup Poh Kiam* in 1910. His other translated work was *Loh Thong Sau Pak* (1907). This title could not be traced in any of the six libraries but was mentioned by Salmon (1987), Tan (1981) and Yang (2001).

Between 1930 and 1939

There was no Baba translation works published in 1930. According to Teo (1980), the reasons for this situation was the shortage of proficient translators and the difficulty in obtaining original Chinese texts from mainland China for translation. However, after 1930, a revival was observed. During this period, 38 titles were published and 14 names emerged. This period also marked the peak of the publication period for Baba translated works.

Most titles were translated by Wan Boon Seng (Figure 6) or pseudonymed as Panah Pranakan. He alone had translated 21 titles during that period. In 1950, he translated *Botan Kiongchoo*, which marked the end of the translation work of the Baba Malay. Wan Boon Seng was often assisted by Lee Seng Poh, Seow Chin San, N.M. Seng, Tan Yew Aik and Tan Chin Thuan and these assistants helped translators to be productive.

Lee Seng Poh was responsible for 8 titles. His name was first listed in *Hoon Chong Lau* (1934) as a helper and also *Sam Hap Beng Choo Pokiam* (1935). Later he translated Chinese book on his own, which included *Chay Kong Wak Hood*

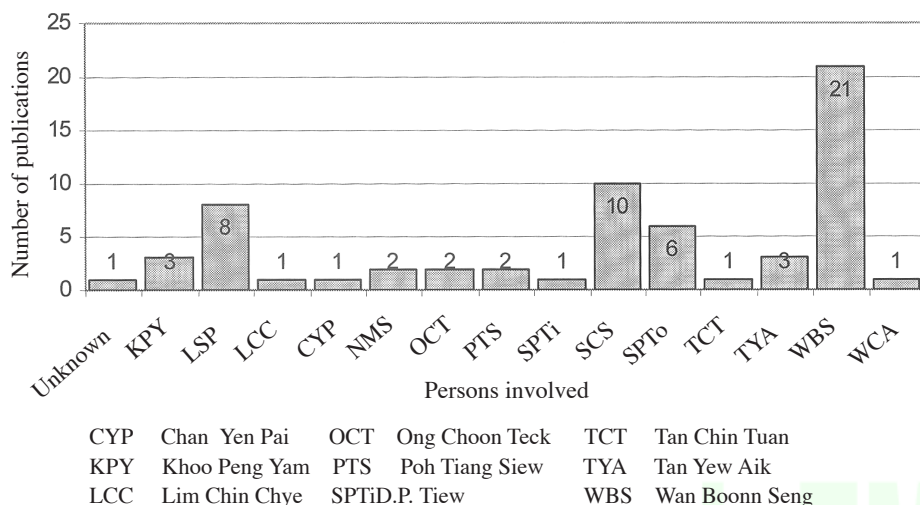


Figure 6 Prominent Persons Involved During 1930-1939

(1935), *Cheong Moh Inn* (1938), *Chow Thau Hong Boo Koon* (1934), *Khian Leong Koon Yew Kang Lam* (1935), *Ong Cheow Koon Hoe Huan* (1935) and *Tian Pah Tor* (1935).

Another productive translator was Seow Chin San. He translated ten titles and had also assisted Wan Boon Seng in three translations, *Say Han* (1931), *Wakang* (1931) and *Ow Liat Kok Chee* (1931). He was later assisted by Seow Phi Tor [Seow Phee Tor], who published six translation works between 1931 and 1938. Chin San also assisted Wan Boon Seng in *Say Han* (1930) where he was named as San, the short form for Seow Chin San.

The names of other persons were mainly involved in one or two titles. Poh Tiang Siew had translated *Sam Kok Inn* (1938) in one volume and *Tai Lau Sam Boon Kuay* in 22 volumes (1939) with the assistance of a Chinese reader, Ong Choon Teck. Ong also helped Lee Seng Poh who translated *Cheong Moh Inn* (1939). He was a Chinese and romanised Malay reader rather than a translator. Another Chinese reader was N.M. Seng, who also helped Wan Boon Seng in translating *Hoon Chong Lau* (1934) and *Sam Hap Beng Choo Pokiam* (1935). Tan Yew Aik was also the Chinese reader for Wan Boon Seng who helped translate *Lek Boh Tan* (1935) and *Tio Kong Inn* (1936).

Wee Chin Ek translated the story of *Lee Tan* in two volumes in 1932. Lim Chin Chye helped Lee Seng Poh to translate *Chay Kong Wak Hood* (1935). Tan Chin Thuan was the Chinese reader for Lee Seng Poh in his translation of *Tian Pah Tor* (1935). An illustrator named in this period was S.P. Tiew who illustrated the front page of *Ngo Chu Low Tang Kia* (1932). No further information on this person could be traced.

Multi-Roles of Persons Involved

Almost two third of the persons named were involved as translators (16 persons) (Figure 7). Others were named as Chinese readers. The role of a translator and a reader was different. A translator was usually illiterate in Chinese written script. For example, Wan Boon Seng was always assisted by a Chinese reader because he could not read the Chinese written language.

There were also four titles that did not indicate any names; *Pat Bee Tor* (1931-1932), *Lee Tan* (1892), *Lip Guan Poh Kuan* (1899) and *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Say* (1895). Only the publisher, Chew Tian Sang and assistant publisher, Khoo Peng Yam was mentioned in these works. This might be because the publishers disagreed to nominate a translator or editor for the publications.

The multi roles played by some of the persons involved are clearly indicated in Figure 8. For example Lee Seng Poh was the helper of two publications, as well as the translator of six publications. A helper could assist the translator, or he is a reader for the chief translator. Wan Boon Seng was the translator of eleven publications, as well as the editor of eleven publications. Wan was not only a translator,

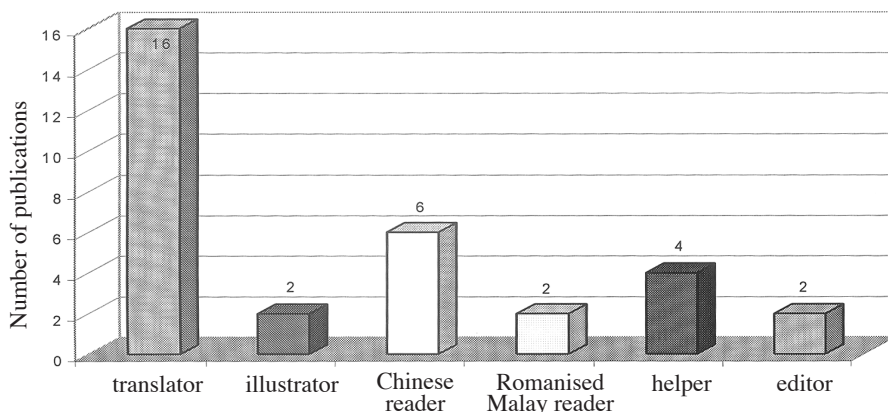


Figure 7 Overlapping Dist. among 3 Factors

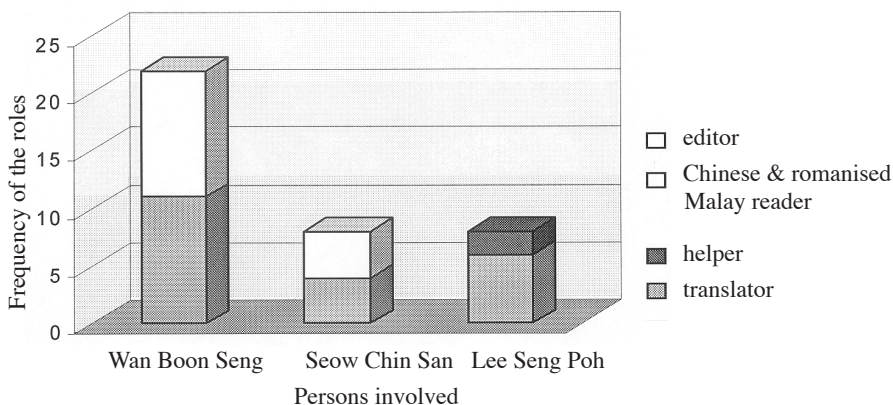


Figure 8 Persons Who Assumed More Than One Roles

he was also a publisher as well as a poet. Wan was often assisted by Lee Seng Poh, N.M. Seng, Seow Chin San, Tan Chin Thuan and Tan Yew Aik. Normally, if there is a helper, Wan would name himself as the author (pengarang).

Table 2 shows that Wan Boon Seng was involved in the largest number of publication (22 titles), followed by Seow Chin San (10 titles), Lee Seng Poh (8 titles), Seow Phi Tor (7 titles) and Chan Kim Boon (6 titles). The rest were involved in a small number of publications. Tan Phiak Kong was the illustrator of four publications. The others were normally translators or helpers. There are ten names that were mention only once among the 68 publications. The result indicated that there were 103 persons involved in the 68 translated works for which, two persons were involved in 32 titles and four persons in 4 titles.

**Table 2 Persons Involved and Total Publications
of Translated Works**

Persons Involved	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency
Wan Boon Seng	22	22
Seow Chin San	10	32
Lee Seng Poh	8	40
Seow Phee Tor @Seow Phi Tor	7	47
Chan Kim Boon	6	53
Unknown	4	57
Pang Teck Joon	4	61
Tan Beng Teck	4	65
Tan Phiak Kong	4	69
Chek Swee Liong	3	72
Khoo Peng Yam	3	75
Peng Swee & co.	3	78
Tan Yew Aik	3	81
Cheong Guan Boon	2	83
N.M. Seng	2	85
Ong Choon Tek	2	87
Poh Tiang Siew	2	89
Siow Hay Yam	2	91
Tan Kheam Hock	2	93
Chan Yen Pai	1	94
Cheah Choo Yew	1	95
Goh Len Joo	1	96
Lau Kim Hock	1	97
Lim Chin Chye	1	98
Lim Hock Kee	1	99
Lye Kam Lim	1	100
S.P. Tiew	1	101
Tan Chin Thuan	1	102
Wee Chin Ek	1	103

The Active Publishers of Baba Translated Works

There were 32 publishers and 21 printers involved in the production of the Baba translated works. More than 50 percent of the publishers are one time publishers (17 out of 32). More than 50 percent of the printers produced more than two titles each.

A total of 32 publishers were involved in publishing the 68 titles. Five titles did not indicate the publishers involved. The results indicated that all the publishers were located in Singapore. Among the publishers, Wan Boon Seng was the most active. He had published eight titles out of 68 titles (11.4%). According to Sidin (1998), Pranakan Book Coy was owned by Wan Boon Seng. If this is true,

then Wan Boon Seng had published 12 titles in total (17.1%). Pranakan Book Coy was also one of the most popular publishers of that period of time. Wan Boon Seng did not only published Baba translation works, he also published three Baba Malay magazines, *Bintang Pranakan*, *Sri Pranakan* and *Story Teller* and two Baba newspapers, *Kabar Slalu* and *Kabar Uchapan Baru*. His contribution towards the Baba community was indeed significant.

The second active publisher was Kim Seck Chye Press, located on Cross Street, Singapore in the late nineteenth century and later moved to Teluk Ayer

Table 3 Publishers and the Number of Publications

Publishers' Names and Addresses	Number of Publication	%
1.Wan Boon Seng	8	11.4
2.Kim Seck Chye Press, 98 & 99, Cross Street or Teluk Ayer Street, Singapore	6	8.6
3.Nanyang Romanized Malay Book Co., 10 & 12, Upper Cross Street, Singapore	5	7.1
4.Chan Kim Boon	4	5.7
5.Pranakan Book Coy	4	5.7
6.Seng Poh Huat Coy, 12 Upper Cross Street, Singapore	4	5.7
7.Chin Ho Bros., 56, Upper Cross Street, Singapore	3	4.3
8.Seow Chin San, 14 Upper Cross Street, Singapore	3	4.3
9.Sing Seng Book Co., 12, Upper Cross Street, Singapore	3	4.3
10.Chin Inn & Co.	2	2.9
11.Chinese Directory & Press, 102, Tank Road, Singapore	2	2.9
12.D.T. Lim & Co., 353 North Bridge Road, Singapore	2	2.9
13.Koh Kim Guan	2	2.9
14.Peng Swee & co., 125, Victoria Street, Singapore	2	2.9
15.Tan Beng Teck, 621 North Bridge Road, Singapore	2	2.9
16.What Seck Chye Press, 20, Mansur Street, Singapore	2	2.9
17.Chin Poh Huat	1	1.4
18.Chin Teck Bee & Co., 185 South Bridge Road, Singapore	1	1.4
19.Chop Seng Poh Huat Shanghai Press, no.12, Upper Cross Street, Singapore	1	1.4
20.Fang Heng Press	1	1.4
21.Kong Guan Hin Press, 1 Kim Seng Road, Singapore	1	1.4
22.Lat Pau Press, Singapore	1	1.4
23.Lim Eng Hock	1	1.4
24.Lye Kim Lim, 13, Kim Seng Road, Singapore	1	1.4
25.Mercantile Press	1	1.4
26.Nanyang Malay Romanized Book	1	1.4
27.Oon Sye Chin & Sons, 193, Joo Chiat Place, Singapore	1	1.4
28.Poh Teng Siew	1	1.4
29.Sam Kong Cheah & co., 5-24 River Valley Road, Singapore	1	1.4
30.Sang & Yam [Chew Tian Sang & Khoo Peng Yam]	1	1.4
31.Sing Seng Wah Seong Press	1	1.4
32.Union Press	1	1.4
Total	70	100.0

Street, Singapore in the early twentieth century. It had published six titles of Baba publications. The third active publisher was Nanyang Romanized Malay Book, which published 5 titles. One publisher, the Nanyang Malay Romanized Book was suspected to be the same publisher as Nanyang Romanized Malay Book co. (see *Tau Lau Sam Boon Kuay*, in 1939). Chan Kim Boon and Seng Poh Huat Coy were the fourth active publishers and they each published four titles. Chan Kim Boon's translated works were also published by other publishers. For example, Koh Kim Guan had published *Sam Kok* (1892-1896), Lat Pau Press had published *Hong Keow* (1892-1893) and Kim Seck Chye Press had published *Gnoh Bee Yean* (1891-1892). The rest of his translated works were self-published.

The results indicated two categories of publishers, the personal publishers and commercial publishers (Table 4). The early period indicated a higher number of publishers involved, with a ratio of publisher to books of 1:1.6. This ratio increased to 1:3.3 between 1910 and 1929 and 1:2.2 in the 1930s. However, there were four publications whose publishers could not be identified and those were *Lip Guan Poh Kuan* (1899), *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Say* (1895), *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Say* (1921), and *Seeh Jin Quee Cheng Tang* (1922).

Table 4 Categories of Publishers

Publishers	1889-1909	1910-1929	1930-1939	Total	% of Total
Personal publishers	4	–	6*	10	31.3
Commercial publishers	7	3	12	22	68.7
Total	11	3	18	32	100.0
Total number of publication	18	10	40	68	

*Included *Botan Kiongchoo* which was published in 1950

The Printing Presses Involved in Publishing the Translated Works

Based on the 68 titles published between 1889 and 1950, it is found that there are 21 printing presses involved in printing 62 Baba translated works. A total of 15 titles did not provide the names of their printing presses and 9 titles were printed by two printing presses (Table 5). All printing presses were located in Singapore. The most prolific of these were Khai Sing Press, Tak Seng Press, Kim Seck Chye Press and Nai Beng & co. They each printed five or more Baba translated works. Among the 68 titles, eleven were printed by Khai Sing Press (18%). Based on the advertisement in *It Ki Mui Peng Suanh Chat* (1938), it was indicated that Khai Sing Press was all of these: the printer, lithographer, photo engraver, stationer, account book and rubber stamp manufacturer. The press marked its services using following slogan, “ Satisfaction guaranteed; Printing work of every kind neatly done; Charges very moderate; Orders from all points on the Malayan Coast; Promptly attended”.

Tak Seng Press was the second biggest printing press and was located at 147 Hill Street, while in some titles its location was indicated to be at 23-9, Coleman Street, Singapore. Kim Seck Chye Press was located initially at Cross Street and later moved to Amoy Street. Information on the other printing presses cannot be traced. Denodaya Press was owned by an Indian Muslim and printed the *Ban Wah Lau* (1890) story.

Very few printing presses were personal presses. One personal press was Lim Kim Poh, the printer of *Song Kang* (1899-1902). Personal printing presses were rare because the cost of owning a printing machine was high. According to Sidin (1998), Koh Kim Hean Press and Union Press were two of the printing presses that owned lithography units. In general, the Baba printing presses gained better and newer printing technology compared with the Malay printing presses (Sidin, 1998). Kim Seck Chye Press used the letterpress approach in printing.

There were seven printing presses, which were also publishers. Among them were Chinese Directory & Press, Fang Heng Press, Kim Seck Chye Press, Lat Pau Press, Mercantiles Press, Union Press and What Seck Chye Press. Lat Pau Press also published a Chinese daily newspaper entitled *Lat Pau*. It is observed that the publication of Baba translation was initiated and made popular in Singapore. The Babas in Malacca had shown less interest in publishing Baba translated works.

Table 5 The Printers and the Number of Publications

Printers' Names and Addresses	Number of Publications	%
1.Khai Sing Press, 64, Upper Cross Street, Singapore	11	18.0
2.Tak Seng Press, 147 Hill Street or 23-9, Coleman Street, Singapore	7	11.5
3.Kim Sek Chye Press, 174, Telok Ayer Street, Singapore	6	9.8
4.Nai Beng & Co., 166, Cross Street or 115, Amoy Street, Singapore	5	8.2
5.Lat Pau Press, Singapore	4	4.9
6.Poo Wah Hean Press, 621, North Bridge Road, Singapore	4	6.6
7.Shanghai Press, 48, Upper Cross Street, Singapore	4	6.6
8.Chinese Directory & Press, 102 Tank Road, Singapore	3	4.9
9.Mercantile Press	3	4.9
10.Fang Heng Printing Co. 28, Pagoda Street, Singapore.	2	3.3
11.Hock Song Eng Kee Press, 83, Cross Street, Singapore	2	3.3
12.What Seck Chye Press, 20, Mansur Street, Singapore	2	3.3
13.A.M.R. Nayudu	1	1.6
14.Chee Yow Press, no.10, Trengganu Street, Singapore	1	1.6
15.City Press, 116, Bencoolen Street, Singapore.	1	1.6
16.Denodaya Press	1	1.6
17.Koh Yew Hean Eng Kee Press, 18, North Bridge Road, Singapore	1	1.6
18.Lim Kim Poh	1	1.6
19.Nanyo Printing Office, 75-77, Middle Road, Singapore	1	1.6
20.Nee Hwa Press, 32, Purvis Street, Singapore	1	1.6
21.Union Press	1	1.6
Total	62	100.0

Contents of the Baba Translated Works

Most of the Baba translations cover stories based on history and chivalry (Table 6). Out of the 68 titles, only 10 were romances, 9 were folklore and 7 were legends. Though the stories were narrated in Baba Malay, some of the stories were interspersed with English expressions, Chinese characters and transliterations. Explanation was normally provided after the Chinese transliterated word or Chinese characters. For example in *Sam Kok* (Figure 9), there are 15 Chinese characters, included those found in the footnotes. For each Chinese character there was an explanation behind it. This practice made it easy for readers who did not understand Baba Malay well.

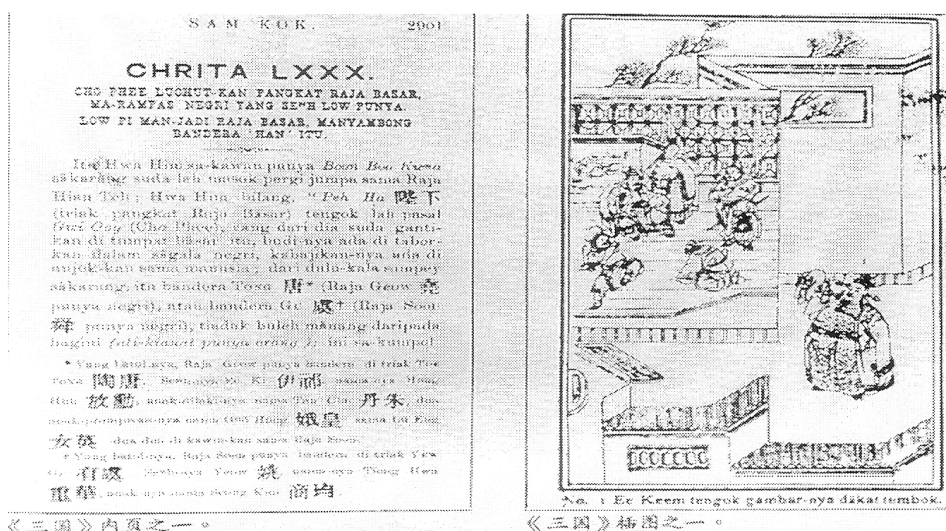


Figure 9 *Sam Kok* (1894-2001)

Another distinctive characteristic of the Baba translated works was its serialised format. Out of the 68 titles, 48 titles were published in series. The longest serial was *Cheong Moh Inn* (1938) which consisted of 55 volumes and ran up to 1,759 pages. Another, *Sam Kok* (1892-1896) was published in 30 volumes and the total pagination ran up to 4,622 pages.

According to Proudfoot (1993), the serialised publication format was not the normal practice of European and Muslim presses. One of the reasons was that the Baba translation works were published based on subscriptions within Singapore only. Where else the distribution of titles printed by the Muslim presses were distributed not only in Singapore but also throughout Southeast Asia.

The translated works were for recreational reading. Although the Babas had no problems in reading literary works written in the Malay language and preferred translated works from Chinese stories. This interest was partly inspired by the

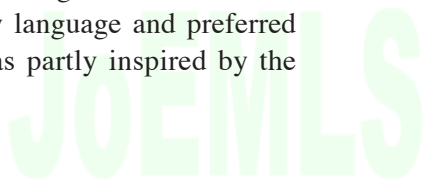


Table 6 Categories of Baba Translated Works (1889-1950)

Categories of Contents	1889-1909	1910-1929	1930-1939	Total
Folklore	6	1	2	9
Romances	4	1	5*	10
Chivalrous stories	2	2	14	18
Legends	1	2	4	7
Historical stories	5	3	16	24
Total	18	9	41	68

*Included *Botan Kiongchoo* which was published in 1950

numerous number of Indonesian Peranakan translations and partly because they were more comfortable with stories set within the Chinese ideology and culture. Therefore, it was not surprising that historical and chivalrous stories attracted the Baba readers most. Lastly, as long as there were readers, such works continued to be published. As appropriately explained in *Sam Kok Inn* (1938), “Ada rupa-nya, ada nama-nya dan ada penguna-nya serta ada-lah dengan harganya” [For every type of story there are readers and works from each type were priced differently].

Physical Descriptions of the Baba Translated Works

Romanised typesets was used in the printing technique of the translated works. The typography used in the Baba translated indicated the use of Romanised Malay, Chinese characters, English expressions, punctuation marks and the use of the footers and header, the italic font style, the superscripts and subscripts. In other words, the works were published in a fanciful style.

Among the 68 titles, 60 titles started with the phrase “**Chrita dulu-kala bernama....**” which means “This is a ancient story entitled....” In fact, this is the usual way a Chinese storyteller would begin a story. Baba translations have reconstructed the Chinese style of story telling into a written form by beginning a title with “**Chrita dulu-kala**”. However, there was no standard spelling used. “Cerita” was variantly spelt as **chrita**, **chreta**, **charita** and **cherita**.

Some of the cover of the titles was colourful, such as *Chow Thau Hong Boo Koon* (1936). The intention was to attract buyers. The size of the publications was normally within the range of 19cm×14cm to 16cm×10cm. In the UML collections, the photocopied titles were given a bigger margin of 21cm. The size of the books was handy for readers to keep and read. This was probably another marketing strategy used by the publishers.

The main characters and incidents were sometimes illustrated on the front page. The illustrations used for the books were normally related to the story of each chapter. However, not every publication was illustrated. The illustration was drawn in the style of woodcuts, the traditional form of illustration in Chinese xylographic printing. This phenomenon revealed that the Baba community was

attracted to stories with illustration.

The preface of some titles normally gave information about current releases. In *Lek Boh Tan*, it was stated that “In satu chrita dulu-kala nama-nya **Lek Boh Tan**.... blom perna lagi siapa sipa kluar-kan.... Chritanya betol Extra Special A — chuma di-dalam 10 buku saja, complete set-nya.” [This is an ancient story called Lek Boh Tan.... have never before been published by anyone.... The story is truly special — in complete set of 10 volumes]. The preface was used to persuade readers to purchase the titles (see *Ngo Chu Low Tong Kia*, 1932). Chan Kim Boon used the preface to introduce himself or introduce other persons involved (see *Kou Chey Thian*, 1912). In fact, he even printed his own photograph on the preface. This was done to create a sense of belonging. Chan Kim Boon also published several readers’ correspondences. The contents of the correspondences in the prefaces were normally in praise of his good effort in the translation works and those who complimented and encouraged him.

The cost of each title ranged from ten cents to two dollars in Straits currency. This was costly and few could afford it at that period of time. Therefore, the buyers of the translated works most probably belonged to the upper class. The books were also printed in attractive colours of red, brown, blue and black ink.

Library Holdings

The attempt to locate the Baba translation works indicated that the University of Malaya Library (UML) possessed the largest collection of Baba titles (61 titles). This is followed by the Singapore National Library (SNL), Science University of Malaysia Library (USM), Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Library (DBPL), National University of Singapore Library (NUS) and the British Library (BL) (Figure 10). UML possessed 14 out of 18 titles published between 1889-1909, 10 out of 11 titles published between 1909-1929 and 38 out of 41 titles published in the period of 1930-1939. Most of the titles held were duplicated in order to preserve the collection. Out of 61 titles, UML holds 15 unique items, which was not held by any other libraries.

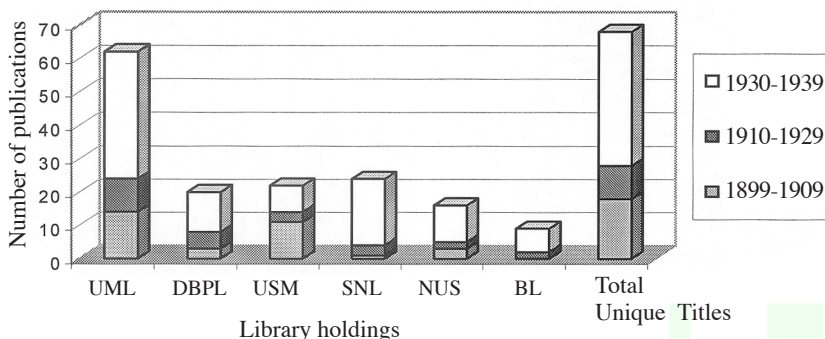


Figure 10 Library Holdings and Number of Publications

The Singapore National Library (SNL) was the second largest collector of the Baba translated works. It held 24 titles of the Baba translated works. The majority of the collection was published between 1930 and 1939 (20 out of 24 titles). SNL was the former depository library during the Straits Settlement Government. It held one unique title entitled, *Lee Tan* (1932).

The third largest collection of the Baba translation was the USM library. USM library held 22 titles, almost one third of the total Baba translated works. USM library also held 3 unique items which was not owned by any other libraries. USM library also held more titles published during the period of 1889-1909 (11 out of 22 titles). The reason for this was probably because the translator of the earliest period came from Penang, such as Chan Kim Boon and Tan Beng Teck.

DBPL possessed 20 titles, which constituted the fourth largest collection. DBPL held 12 out of 18 titles published between 1930-1939, 5 out of 10 were published between 1920-1929 and 3 out of 18 were published between 1889-1909. In fact, the catalogue record of DBPL indicated they should hold 24 titles. However, only 20 titles were found. The National University of Singapore held 16 titles and the British Library held 9 titles. These two libraries mainly owned Baba translated works published between 1930 and 1939.

Conclusion

The Baba translated works are categorized as rare collection in all the six libraries and kept for restricted use. This had caused accessed problems. The 68 titles used in the analysis were titles located from library catalogue and almost all the titles were handled physically. There were some publications listed by individuals, which could not be located. For example, seven titles listed by Salmon (1987) and Yang (2001), could not be located. It is suspected that some of the libraries have not catalogued the titles they held and as such hinders access. Salmon's list (1987) heavily depended on the British Library catalogue and she discovered titles that were not catalogued.

Between 1899 and 1950 the Baba translated works were the favourite reading materials among the Baba community. Members of this community were financially able and some held political positions in the colonial offices in the Straits Settlements. They were loyal "British subjects" and gradually assimilate the British culture, life style and that includes reading. The Baba translated works were read for leisure. The Babas were also self-sufficient in the production of their reading materials, publishing, newspaper, magazines, original and translated creative works. They owned their own printing presses which were modern and located themselves in Singapore. The decline and demise of the publication may be the result of the very characteristics of the publications, which dictates and restricted its circulation, confining it only to those in the Straits Settlements. Also, standard Malay became widely used and the Babas began to publish works in standard

Malay. As a result the Baba language remains as a spoken language to this day.

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