

【Summary】

Jawi Pekan Community in Penang during the Early 20th Century and its Relationship with the Malays

YAMAMOTO Hiroyuki

William Roff's study of Malay nationalism has been confined within a Singaporean framework, with little attention paid to other regions such as Penang. To understand the evolution of Malay ethnic identity without a Singaporean bias, it is necessary to focus on the Peranakan or mixed Malay descent, including Jawi Pekan of Penang. Jawi Pekan is a collective term for individuals of mixed Indian and Malay heritage in colonial Penang. As 'Jawi Pekan' carried a pejorative connotation, the nomenclature was replaced by the more neutral 'Jawi Peranakan' in much of the post-independence research. However, the Jawi Pekan community today has been consigned to obscurity both within societal narratives and academic research. Not much is known about their relationship with the Malays, and how the group faded from collective memory. This paper uses articles from the English-language daily *Straits Echo*, published from Penang during the first half of the 20th century, to decipher the contextual meaning assigned to the term Jawi Pekan by colonial administrators and Malays, and to examine the changing status of the Jawi Pekan community within local society in relation to the Malays.

The British administrators viewed the Jawi Pekan community as a rugged populace, an impression perpetuated by their recurrent appearance in case or trial records in the *Straits Echo*, a pattern that persisted until the 1910s. Some Malays distanced themselves from any association with the Jawi Pekan, even though they too were Muslims. A nuanced discourse was observed in the exchanges within the 'readers' letters' column of *Straits Echo* in 1923. While some advocated for a distinct categorisation of Malays and Indians based on the scientific concept of race, others contended that Jawi Pekan should be assimilated into the broader Malay identity. In more disputes in 1931, the idea of collective identity underpinned by a framework for political participation was proposed, which converged the Malays and Jawi Pekan in a unified group. When the state Malay associations in Malaya discussed the formation of a national Malay association in the 1930s, the Penang Malay Association proposed that a person be considered Malay if one of his/her parents was Malay. However, the Singapore Malay Union's stance, advocating for Malay heritage from both parents, was eventually adopted. When the ethnic Malay party UMNO was formed in 1946, the Penang Malay Association took on its Penang state branch. Although the designation Jawi Pekan receded into the background, the Muslims of Indian descent to which it referred were assimilated into the Malay identity within Penang.