

State Papers Collection – The First Two Years

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Abstrak: Rencana ini menghuraikan usaha penubuhan sebuah koleksi baru di Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya dengan tujuan mengumpul dan menyimpan bahan-bahan penerbitan rasmi yang dikeluarkan oleh Kerajaan Malaysia dan agensi-agensinya. Rancangan ini bermula sebagai sebuah projek penyelidikan oleh Ketua Pustakawan dengan sokongan kewangan Universiti. Ini membolehkan perlantikan kakitangan sambilan untuk menjalankan kerja-kerja luar dengan maksud mengumpulkan bahan-bahan dari sumber-sumbernya sama ada secara hadiah, pembelian atau penyalinan. Koleksi ini kini berjumlah 4,338 tajuk bahan unik dalam bentuk monograf, berkala, laporan tahunan, risalah dan buku kecil, dan pelbagai yang lain seperti peta, carta, dsb. Bagi setengah-setengah judul, terdapat beberapa naskhah tambahan dan naskhah-naskhah ini akan digunakan sebagai bahan pertukaran dengan perpustakaan-perpustakaan lain. Maklumat mengenai setiap bahan dalam Koleksi Persuratan Rasmi ini dimasukkan dalam sebuah pangkalan data komputer. Sokongan kewangan seterusnya adalah diharapkan supaya projek ini dapat diluaskan ke jabatan-jabatan Kerajaan yang masih belum diliputi.

Introduction

In many countries of the world, government publications remain a basic and authoritative source of information. Established bibliographies, lists of official publications and other such bibliographical listings are periodically published for the guidance of those using such publications. These published guides to official resources are prevalent in developed countries.¹

Official publications not only reflect the history of a country but also the role played by the government in the process of development. The role of the government is even more significant during a period when the nation has faced political, economic and social challenges.

In the past 40 years alone, Malaysia has seen one world war; engaged in a long-drawn out struggle with communist guerillas; achieved independence from the colonial regime; and after independence, has had to solve a multitude of social, economic and political problems. These processes have resulted in a tremendous variety of official publications being produced.

They represent a veritable store of information for those researching any aspect of Malaysia's historical or current development.

Up to this point in time, bibliographic control of government publications has been fairly minimal and in certain areas, positively primitive. With the exception of a few departments, such as the Government Printing Department, the Department of Statistics, and some departments under the Ministry of Agriculture, very few other departments have maintained physical or bibliographical records of their publishing activities. Up to this point in time, it can be safely stated that there is no single library collection of most of, let alone all of, the publications produced by all government departments and their agencies.

From the viewpoint therefore of giving guidance to the researcher into the official publications of the Government and to facilitate their access to such documents, it has long been felt that a collection of government documents be established which should be as complete as possible.

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¹See, for example, HMSO's *Government Publications*; and titles in the Pergamon Press Guides to Official Publications series, such as T. Kuroki, *An Introduction to Japanese Government Publications* (1981); J.A. Downey, *US Federal Official Publications* (1978); and J.E. Pemberton, *The Bibliographic Control of Official Publications* (1982), etc.

Government Publications in the University of Malaya Library (UML)

Up to 1985, the University of Malaya Library (UML), like most major libraries in this country, had been receiving a significant number of publications by way of legal deposit² or as gifts from government departments. The classification and cataloguing practices of all libraries tend to scatter government publications as a form of publication, since the intent of technical processing is to collocate materials by subject. Lamentably, like many libraries servicing a big readership, many of items once held by the Library have been lost.

All these factors have doubtless resulted in major frustrations being felt by readership when they are on the trail of publications issued by one department over time; or many departments on the same topic, and more so when they are researching the activities of different government departments over time. Increasingly, therefore, it has been felt necessary for some library or other to establish a collection where only official publications of this country are put together; preferably not loaned out so that at any one time access to all materials on related topics is made available to any interested user. Constraints of space, funding, staff and energy have so far contributed to this intention being just so much wishful thinking. By the '80s however, research activity had made the establishment of such a collection imperative for rendering service to an ever-growing community of researchers into this country's history and development. The establishment of the National Collection or Bahagian Koleksi Kebangsaan (BKK) at UML in 1976, and its presence by the '80s gave additional impetus to the plan to establish an official papers collection which would supplement and consolidate the image and services of BKK. In late 1984, the Librarian wrote up a proposal as a personal research project to be submitted to the University authorities. It was felt that since the project would necessitate not only close but also extensive work, that the work of collection at least might as well benefit more than one library. It would however have been beyond the capability of the project to collect for more than one other library.

The library of the Institute for Public Administration (Institut Pentadbiran Awam: INTAN) seemed the most focussed library for such a collection. From the beginning, therefore, it was planned that the project would collect materials on behalf of both UML and INTAN libraries so that two collections would be established in the country: one being mainly targeted to a scholarly or academic community; and the other being established for the bureaucracy.³ In January 1985, official blessing was obtained from the office of the Chief Secretary to the Government; by July 1985 discussions had already been held with the Institut Pentadbiran Awam for this project to receive their official cooperation.

Funding

It was not until August 1985 that the University of Malaya released an initial sum of M\$15,000 (against a full request for M\$45,000) for the Librarian to undertake this research project.

By September 1985, a research assistant (Miss Kristin Cheah) was appointed, who is a fully qualified librarian with a degree in the humanities. In October 1985, two students (Ghazali bin Mohd. Fadzil and Othman Hisham bin Ali) from the Institute of Technology, MARA (ITM) library school were also appointed to help with the initial pilot project.

Between September and November 1985, the three staff appointed were given training, and to initiate the project. They began by searching the Library for monographic works published by government departments. These included special committee reports, census reports, economic development plans; etc. By the end of this project, the collection totalled just 828 titles: the fruits of over twenty years of collecting by UML.

Pilot Survey

A questionnaire was devised for the use of a pilot project undertaken in November 1985. This was aimed at eliciting information from ministries and their departments relating to:

- their monographic publications

²UML is only a demand depository i.e. it has the right to receive publications only when a demand has been made by UML. It does not receive all publications automatically upon publication.

³Subsequently in 1986, INTAN felt that they would prefer to keep only a listing of all materials collected or available in the UML collection. Due to constraints of staff, space and funding, INTAN felt that they would not be able at this point of time to collect everything located. Duplicate copies collected by UML for INTAN are currently being 'held in trust' for them; at some future date INTAN Library may also request photocopies or may wish to purchase titles for use at the INTAN Library. For the moment, until the collection at INTAN is established, it is envisaged that senior officers of INTAN would be welcome to refer to the collection at UML.

- their series publications
- extra information on the establishment and history of the department
- their willingness to participate in a gift scheme to this project.

The whole of November 1985 was taken up with the administering of this questionnaire. The pilot survey also established:

- i) the types of problems faced by the students in administering the questionnaire, such as transport problems (if any), responding to the questionnaire, and cooperation given by the departments;
- ii) the usefulness of the questionnaire as a means of eliciting information needed.

The pilot project thus allowed the Coordinator (the Librarian) to find solutions to problems discovered as well as to make amendments to the procedures and the questionnaire. All preliminary procedures were finalised by the end of November 1985.

Phase I: Collection-building (December 1985)

December 1985 was given over entirely to visiting various ministries and all departments and sections within ministries.

For this purpose, ten more ITM library school students were engaged. The team proved to be an enthusiastic and responsible one; and on the whole, the project proceeded smoothly.

Collection-building consisted of three major activities.

- i) All publications located and could be obtained as gifts were so acquired.
- ii) All publications which could be purchased were also acquired.
- iii) All other publications located which could not be acquired were requested on loan; photocopies were made for UML, and originals returned to the government department concerned.

By the end of December 1985, only 17 (out of a national total of 26) ministries had been visited. A total of 109 departments had been visited; a total of 142 persons contacted.

A total of 5280 items (including quite a few duplicates) had been collected. The collection comprised mainly monographic works and serial publications (997 titles, or 4452 items including duplicates) together with a few hundred posters, pamphlets, maps and organisation charts (828 items).

The project at that point in time had cost the university M\$8,000. This sum however excludes the cost of acquisition of the books/serials.

Phase II: January–December 1986

It had originally been planned that the first six months of 1986 would see the last nine ministries contacted. The final six months would be devoted to processing materials collected; appraisal of the project thus far; and producing a computerised list of the collection.

However additional funding was not assured till well into September 1986.⁴ The balance of the 1985 funding was therefore used to retain the services of the research assistant (Miss Cheah). Thus no follow-up exercise could be done for the remaining nine ministries. Processing work together with some 'mopping-up' operations by the research assistant and the Coordinator were undertaken through 1986. Some 'difficult' departments with complicated publishing histories were also studied by the Coordinator. Gifts programmes have been pursued fairly vigorously; and a few major purchases (mainly of annual reports of government departments) made, to augment the collection and to replace items lost from the UML collection.

The major activity was the establishment of a computerised database for the collection.

As at 31 December 1986 the size of the official publications collections, or the 'PR' collection, as it is now popularly called,⁵ is as follows.

Type of Materials	Number of Volumes	Number of Titles
Monographs	1,581	1,558
Serials (excluding annual reports)	2,240	1,080
Annual Reports	745	691
Pamphlets & Booklets	987	863
Miscellaneous (maps, charts, etc.)	212	146
Total	5,765	4,338

Composition of the Collection

Given the manner in which the project has developed so far, it is hardly surprising that the collection is basically a hotch-potch of materials.

Serial collections dominate: a proliferation of single issues or non-complete runs of newsletters;

⁴ In mid-September another M\$12,000 were granted; bringing the total funding to \$27,000 so far.

⁵ For Koleksi Persuratan Rasmi: State Papers Collection.

bulletins and serial directories of many government departments. These have all been acquired on the dubious principle universally understood by the librarian: Better something than nothing at all!

Monographic works, including special reports, are still rather scatty, with vast lacunae in older materials waiting to be filled.

For both formats, the collection is nearly totally 'official' as traditionally defined, i.e. having emanated from any government department. However a decision has been taken to make an exception for a very small amount of materials which are either entirely devoted to a government department, agency, or institution; or give much relevant information on government agencies and activities. Examples are as follows.

Monographic works: Utusan Publications, *Askar Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur, Pustaka Budiman, 1983; and AMW Communications Management, *The Malayan Railway: 100 Years, 1885-1985*, Kuala Lumpur, 1985.

Serial works. These include the Malay Mail's *Information Malaysia* series.

The collection, however, is not entirely without its merits. By dint of careful bibliography, frantic searches, and pure serendipity, it now encompasses the following materials.

- (i) *Census reports:* of the Straits Settlements from 1871-1911; of the Federated Malay States for 1901 (in microform); of Malaya for 1931, 1947; and of Malaysia for 1970 and 1980.
- (ii) The Ministry of Finance's *Property Report* from 1978.
- (iii) Bank Negara's *Annual Report* from 1959.
- (iv) A good run of the Malaysian *Official Yearbook*, from the late 1950s.
- (v) A complete run of the Employee's Provident Fund *Annual Report*, from 1952.

Continuing efforts are currently being made to study key departments in turn and attempt to obtain at least their principal documents.

Official Cooperation

UML would like to place on record our gratitude to the many government departments which cooperated with this project; and to the multitude of long-suffering public servants who agreed to be interviewed. Many gave of their time and expertise; quite a few went to some lengths to help; some even

donated their personal copies of publications so as to allow UML to have a complete run! It is hoped that such kind cooperation will be extended to us in the future.

Further Phases and the Future

In many ways, the project is still hanging. Some federal ministries are yet to be visited; state departments are yet to be contacted; and government companies or public enterprise companies are yet to be touched. All these had been planned for and are yet hoped to be carried out.

Yet it cannot be gainsaid that the current collection of over 10,000 volumes (including duplicates), collected in just over a year, has seen fair progress. Thus it would be a pity if additional funding is not made available in the coming months to carry the project along. One would have to wait a little patiently to see what 1987 will bring.

Exchanges & Gifts

In the meantime, the PR collection is ready to enter into exchange schemes with any library (or individual) interested in this genre of literature.

Many valuable titles of official Malaysiana have been gifted to this collection: including various Malaysian Plans; official yearbooks; and annual reports of various departments. A list of those duplicates available for exchange will be prepared by March 1987 and will be distributed to libraries interested in exchanging materials. Such libraries/individual scholars are invited to correspond with the Coordinator (Librarian) for queries on the collection, as well as on exchange procedures. UML would welcome both originals, photocopies or microform titles for exchange; and would provide titles in similar formats. It should be noted that from this collection, only exchanges of official publications from both parties will be made.⁶

Conclusion

The PR collection is yet an infant. But like all infants, it hopes to grow healthily; but with forecast cutbacks of various sorts, it is likely that future acquisitions will depend heavily on gifts and exchanges.

Limping or leaping, however, the PR collection remains a felt presence at UML and all efforts possible will be made to see that it becomes eventually a real resource point for research.

⁶UML itself has other exchange schemes for all manner of materials made from the Acquisitions Department.