

The Irrationality of Malay Proselytisation: The Failure of Education as a Tool for “Civilising” Native

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Published online: 28 April 2022

To cite this article: Sharifah S. Ahmad. 2022. The irrationality of Malay proselytisation: The failure of education as a tool for “civilising” native. *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* 29(1): 51–70. <https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2022.29.1.3>

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Abstract. Critiques of imperialism tend to focus on the motivations of empire-builders located at the metropolitan. However, seeing from the vantage of the women and men in the colonies, realities were often more tragic. The present article seeks to test a proposition pertaining to the irrationality of colonialism by examining the Anglican missionary work in education used as a tool for evangelising Malay society in Sarawak. The correspondence by the mission’s leader Bishop Francis Thomas McDougall (1817–1886) to the missionary societies in England, namely, the Borneo Church Mission and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, constitutes the main source-material informing the argument on the irrational motivation that drove the proselytising activity in the mid-19th century Sarawak. Utilising the concept “El Dorado”, it is argued that the subterranean facets of fantastical dream, ungrounded hope and fanatical imagination produced real-life disillusionment for the historical agents carrying out the dystopian programme of civilising Malay and other natives. It is found that the proselyting mission had failed to succeed because it was predicated on the intolerance of religious difference and the compulsion to subdue it. The article concludes by reiterating a perspective that considers irrational motive as a significant historical force.

Keywords and phrases: El Dorado, Anglican missionary, 19th century Sarawak, Malay education

Introduction

The article examines the irrational motive underlying the establishment of the first Anglican mission, specifically, its proselytisation activity among Sarawak Malay. Sarawak, as found by the pioneering Anglican missionaries as they set foot on 29th June 1848, was an impoverished and a war-ridden raj. Why would

the Borneo Mission send their clergies to a hostile territory and for their clergies to willingly accepted the risks for a less than assured glory?

Information about Sarawak in the mid-19th century emanated mainly from the white rajah James Brooke (afterwards will be referred as “James”). He had submitted papers to the London Missionary Society in a bid to persuade a mission to be established in Sarawak. The account of Sarawak presented by James was one that emphasised his so-called humanitarian vision in liberating the natives from the alleged oppressive old regime centred in Brunei. Reverend Charles David Brereton (1790–1868) was dazzled by the white rajah “single-handed” gallantry in turning a country from a state of “tyranny, extortion and grossest darkness” to a government of law and order. James was said to herald a new era for the people of Sarawak whose lives were now valued by the “energetic philanthropy” of their new rajah, “in the rescue of captives, the abolition of slavery and other crimes” (Brereton 1846, 7 and 8). James had also promoted the idea that he had received “friendship” from the people who rendered him an “undisputed authority”, “not only within the limits of his own territory, but throughout the whole of ‘Borneo proper’” (Brown 2007a). In return, he saw upon himself an obligation to bring a “permanent improvement” to the people destined for a civilised path under Christianity. His posturing to the evangelical community was a success. A mission was thereby launched under the leadership of Francis Thomas McDougall (1817–1886).

Methodology

This article seeks to investigate the motivation that drove the mission’s proselytising activities among Sarawak Malay. The main character of the pioneering mission was Francis Thomas McDougall (afterwards will be referred as “Frank”) who founded the first Anglican establishment in Sarawak consisted of a mission, a school, and a dispensary. He and his wife, Harriette, spent 18 years in establishing, directing, organising and expanding the mission. Under his leadership from the year 1848 to 1866, the mission had achieved modest gains among the Dayaks by placing chaplains in the outstation posts in Banting, Lundu, Quop, Merdang and Undup. The mission’s appeal among the Malays, however, was limited and unsuccessful despite the proximity of their kampung to the centre of the church operation. This begs questions: “What did Frank saw in Malay society then that made him believed they could be proselytised?”, “How did he confront the crisis that had ensued from the discrepancy between his expectation and the actual reality that disprove it?”. These were the questions that the current article wishes to explore by referring to the collection

of personal correspondence by Bishop McDougall as a medium to identify the experience and challenges faced by mission’s founder in the attempt at Malay proselytisation.

The life of Francis McDougall in Sarawak was known primarily through his letters and correspondence between the years 1848 to 1866. His letters were republished in various forms, such as a biography authored by his brother-in-law, Charles Bunyon (1889), the transcription of the bishop’s letters by Max Saint (1992) and the chronicle of Anglican church by Brian Taylor (1983). The McDougall’s letters referred in the study are deposited in Pustaka Negeri Sarawak. His narrative is analysed using the framework “El Dorado” emphasises the ambivalence he encountered in proselytising Malay.

El Dorado

What was irrational about the evangelical attempt directed towards Malay society? To assist inquiry into the question, the article has utilised a critical concept of El Dorado that signifies irrational motives underlying the project of imperialism. As argued by Andrekos Varnava (2015, 1), “imperial powers established and expanded their empires, while states, companies and individuals, settled places, often on the basis of promising perceived and exaggerated expectations of value rather than sound, evidence-based reasoning”. In a compilation of works revisiting the cases of El Dorado, historians have identified the existence of El Dorado phenomena across various imperial contexts. Example of the exaggerated expectation could be found in the gold rush in the south Americas, Canada and Australia in the 1850s and the failure in realising a utopian vision for a commonwealth between the natives and the settlers, such as the failed experiments in Virginia, North Africa and East Africa (Varnava 2015, 8–10). In these cases, El Dorado is a category that represents an aspect of imperial experience that was fuelled by an unrealistic expectation of wealth, victory and idealism, only to be ended with disillusionment.

There is a reasonable basis for applying El Dorado in the examination of proselytisation among Sarawak Malay. The concept underlines the exaggerated expectation in what was believed to be a promising field for Christianity. The expectation was driven by the global defeat of Muslim sultanates in the hands of the technologically and militarily powerful Europeans became a tell-tale that Christianity could offer both a spiritual and cultural civilisation to the conquered Muslims (Stanley 1990, 69). However, from the perspectives of the women and men-on-the-spot, the reality encountered was perilous. The struggles to

make sense of the “alien” culture and the will to resist the failure in fulfilling the providence were overwhelming. It was these struggles that featured in the reading of the missionary education for Malay.

James Brooke in Britain (1st October 1847–1st February 1848)

As James Brooke reached Southampton on 1st October 1847 after an absence of nine years, his exploits in the East was already known to the British metropolitan elite (St John 1994, 122). It was for them that his series of writings and publications were trained at, starting with Captain Keppel’s *The Expedition to Borneo of H.M.S. Dido* released in 1846. James was hoping to influence the thinking behind the government’s policy that could secure his dominion in Sarawak (Middleton 2010, 386). Through his agent, Henry Wise, he intended to use the access to the metropolitan audience to draw their commercial interest to Sarawak (Tarling 1982, 59). In the eyes of the educated elites, the rajah’s state-building was consistent with his duty as a British subject in promoting the crown’s commercial interest in the East following the opening of trade in China in 1842 and the founding of Singapore as the British economic hub in the Far East (Middleton 2010, 385).

Despite the bloody accounts of Brooke’s execution of “pirates” and the plundering and burning of Malay and Iban villages, rice-fields, and boats in Padi, Paku and Rembas in 1843, including the followed-up military expedition in the towns of Pematut, Undup and Banting in 1844, Keppel’s publication appealed to Victorian sensibility. This was because Brooke’s accounts of Sarawak had been consistently couched in the language of humanitarianism and British values (Middleton 2010, 388). He presented himself as a liberator of poor classes of native from the rule of a despotic Malay kingdom of Brunei. To further his humanitarian ambition, he opened a path for a Christian mission to spread the words of Gospel for his subjects. He was confident that Christianity could play a humane role in lifting the Dayak out of their “primitive manners and customs”, of whom under the previous Brunei representatives, had been “shamefully abused by ignorant people” (Templer 1853, 173).

From the missionary perspective, embarking on a Christian mission in Sarawak offered a tantalising publicity in its international battle for Protestant ascendancy in the empire. The prospect of a missionary establishment in Sarawak offered the chance for asserting the English church as a global player. There was commitment among missionary supporters in England to see a successful mission in Sarawak where it could act as a springboard for the entire island.

The intent was stated in the London Missionary Society’s newsletter dated July 1847. It emphasised the need for an episcopal superintendence from London capable in providing administrative and financial support to the mission (Brown 2007a). Subsequently, a Borneo Church Mission was formed by Reverend Charles Brereton to collect donation towards the establishment of the new mission. In November 1847, a meeting was convened in Hanover Square where the attendees, among others, were Admirals H. Keppel and C. Bethune, the antagonists of the expeditions against Saribas and Brunei, respectively. Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall appeared as one of the speakers and eventually appointed to lead the Anglican mission to Sarawak (St John 1994, 129). He was fired up with the prospect of proselytising “thousands of Dayaks”. Upon listening to James Brooke presentation, Frank exhorted the time had come “to send out a duly consecrated and qualified staff because otherwise there can be no unity of purpose nor can it ever abide in strength or produce much fruits” (Saint 1992, 15). The enthusiasm was partly religious, partly mythical. According to his biographer, Charles Bunyon, the spectre of the rajah heroism must have captivated Frank, so he “desired to throw in his lot with the hero” (Bunyon 1889, 23). From James’ perspective, upon listening to McDougall’s exhortation, quietly “hoped that his actions would be more sensible than his words” (St John 1994, 129). Yet, he surmised a dose of realism might not be what was needed for Frank then.

Francis Thomas McDougall in Sarawak (July 1848–December 1866)

Francis Thomas McDougall was born into a military family at Sydenham, London in 1817. Both his father and grandfather were army officers. He also had an uncle and a great-uncle served in the Royal Navy. The various travels of his father’s regiment, particularly around the Mediterranean between 1825 and 1834, meant that the young McDougall enjoyed an independent boyhood, but also one that deprived him of a more regular and systematic formal education (Edwards 2007, 204). In his mother, Frank received a Christian upbringing whose values in discipline and morality coloured his future approach towards missionary. Frank was trained in surgery at Kings College. A post as a private physician took him to Oxford in 1841 and after two years at Magdalen Hall passed the examination and proceeded to Masters in Arts in 1845. His marriage to Harriette Bunyon in July 1843 brought him into a family that included the influential Bickersteth dynasty, one of the luminaries of the church establishment (Saint 1992, 16). He was ordained as a priest in 1846 (Saint 1992, 17). On 18th October 1855, he was consecrated the Bishop of Labuan in a ceremony in Calcutta.

Frank, Harriette and their infant son, Harry, sailed from England on 30th December 1847 in *Mary Louisa*. In their party was Reverend William Wright (1810–1870), his wife Nancy and their servant; nursemaid Elizabeth Richardson; and Harrington Parr, the relative of Mrs. Wright's family (Saint 1992, 17). They arrived in Singapore on 23rd May 1848, sailed on *Julia* and arrived in Kuching on 29th June 1848 and were welcomed by Arthur Crookshank, the chief administrator. James Brooke was on an official trip to Labuan and only returned on 4th of September. The entourage was placed at the Court House until the Mission House completed in February the following year. The rajah had selected a sprawling ground at the centre of the small town for the mission's church, school and accommodation. Upon meeting James for the first time, Harriette found him to be "the kindest and most considerate person in the world" (Bunyon 1889, 29). He also paid a visit to the school ran by Reverend Wright and his wife indicated his support for the Malay and native's education.

Encountering Sarawak Malay

There were two aspects of Malay society that were outstanding for Bishop McDougall, namely, their cultural disposition and their attitude towards Islam. Of their character, Frank noted the following: "Their manners are very pleasing, and though naturally reserved and slow in giving their confidence, what that is gained I think they may be fully trusted. Of their old piratical and predatory habits here are at least scarcely a vestige remains. Their moral character is respectable" (Bunyon 1889, 40). Of their religious attitude, he described:

Our Sarawak Malays are orthodox Mahommedans, but they are neither bigoted, nor well taught in their own tenets; indeed, they often come to me to read the Koran to them, as they have no Malay translation, and there are very few of them except the imam and a few of the Hajjis, who understand anything of Arabic. (Brown 2007b)

His analysis of Kuching Malay revealed the traits that he perceived to be unthreatening to the mission's presence and also, the traits that could be susceptible to Christian influence. Despite having "a deep sense of truths of religion which Mahometanism inculcates" (Bunyon 1889, 41), he perceived them not to be that well educated. This was a weakness that Frank saw as an opportunity for the mission to claim its place in Malay society.

The poor state of knowledge could only mean that the Malay could be persuaded by the offer of a more superior, rational, Christian education. Frank believed that a proper and qualified use of mission's education could produce the "truth" effect on the learners who could lead to the discovery of Christianity and embrace

it. Nevertheless, he was aware for the mission’s education to gain ground, it must not be directly offending the people’s religious sensibility. The education strategy that he envisaged stressed the “common grounds” between Islam and Christianity, through gradual and “careful education” of their children taught by well-trained teachers in a close environment (Bunyon 1889, 41). The education of Malay children was viewed a safe, albeit a long-term approach to gain converts. Given the general tolerance and the respect that he found in the society, he saw no reason why his scheme could not produce success.

Intellectual approach to proselytisation

In the 19th century, the expansion of British imperial power in Muslim lands in Africa, India and Southeast Asia had paved the way for proselytising mission in the colonies. There was an ideological motivation for the mission to expand their presence in the Muslim lands. The subjugation of Muslim under European imperialism created an impression of an impending millennium fashioned after the fall of Antichrist (Porter 2004, 34), hence, encouraged the Christian believers to commit to “the Gospel’s missionary command, ‘Go ye therefore and teach all nations’” (Porter 2004, 33). This theory had spurred dedicated personnel to embark on potentially hazardous, but spiritually rewarding journey to places yet to be reached by the gospel. Following the new zeal at overseas expansion, there had been methodological debate about which types of approach that yields practical value. The general approach adopted vary on the type of society. For preaching among the aboriginals a “civilising process” was preferred (Porter 2004, 35) conceived through the means of religious education and practical life skills in modern agriculture and carpentry. For preaching among Muslims, an intellectual approach was thought to be more appropriate and a “rational disputation” with Muslim clerics (Porter 2004, 212). These approaches were similar in their intent in showcasing the superiority of Christian knowledge in preparing the natives for a modern life, temporally and spiritually.

Malay, the language of Christianity

In Frank’s view, education was a “powerful auxiliary”¹ to the missionary success. He believed that for a successful instruction in religious knowledge, student must be able to access the knowledge in their vernacular. Frank emphasised the importance of vernacular language in producing students who could understand Christianity and explaining it to the people in their native language: “This is the first beginning of education, from which we may hope in due time more, then to send forth those who will be instrumental in Christianising their unconverted Brethren”.²

The use of vernacular in education entailed two aspects. First, a teacher must be able to master the Malay language before they could be sent to preach. For outstation clergies, mastering the local language became practical necessity and which they acquired over the long presence in the fields, as had Walter Chambers (Iban), William Chalmers (Biatah) and John Richardson (Selako). The use of vernacular had also enabled the translation religious texts. In the early years, Frank was relying on Malay-language Bible produced by Reverend Benjamin Keasberry (1811–1875) in Singapore. The translation of Christian texts into Malay had been a prolific activity under the leadership of Keasberry. He organised activities that had the effect in strengthening the use of Malay language by establishing a Malay Chapel whose sermon was delivered in Malay, starting a Malay school and engaging Abdullah Abdul Kadir (1797–1854) as the teacher and translator. Keasberry had also provided language training for the corps of Anglo-American missionaries arriving in Singapore in the 1840s (Hill 2009, 289). Despite Keasberry's credibility, Frank was suspicious of the quality of his translation mainly because of the engagement of the munshi – “a shrewd and bigoted Mahometan”.¹ Nevertheless, he continued to use Keasberry's translation and modelled his mission's education after his.

Experimenting Malay education pre-1850

In 1848, Kuching was a town of about 12,000 populations (Bunyon 1889, 40), consisted of mostly Malays whose villages located at both sides of Sarawak River. There were Chinese blacksmiths operating at the town, few Dayak longhouses, one of which was within the walking distance to the mission's land. Spencer St John, who arrived that year, described there was very little trade in Kuching then owing to the disturbances at the coast had prevented antimony vessel and other traders from approaching and leaving Sarawak coast. The revenue from trade and other taxation rarely exceeded 1,500 pounds a year (St John 1994, 143). The weak state of the economy was instantly felt by the missionary-pioneers. Frank wrote that a single clergy might live with 80 pounds a year, but a family man could not have survived with less than 200 pounds. The cost of laundry was more expensive than in Norwich, while the cost of livestock (chicken, pork, deer and fish) and manual labourer cost more than they were in Singapore.³ Against the economic hardship, the missionary had to make do: “I must not only be architect but head joiner, carpenter, blacksmith, etc.”³

The first school, known as the “adult school”, was opened less than a month after their arrival. The school was located on the ground floor of the Court House, which had turned into a temporary base for the mission's dispensary and school operating on different hours of the day. The head-teacher was Reverend William

Wright who taught the first cohort of six Malay and Dayak adults writing and reading in Romanised alphabets. There was also an adult school for women under the tutorship of Mrs Wright. It offered reading, writing and home skills like sewing. Wright’s role in the adult school ended abruptly when he tendered his resignation. Frank cited a variety of reasons for his short-term presence, from dissatisfaction with the accommodation at the Mission House, to the refusal to alter the co-education system⁴ and the final straw, rejection of his request for a salary increase, “in time when food and labour at famine price”.⁵ The school moved on despite the early setback. James Brooke agreed to support the half of the salary of Wright’s replacement, Henry Steele, a former employee of sago manager, Mr. Ruppell.⁴ He left after a stint described as “a failure”.⁶ For the women’s school, Harriette was assigned as Mrs Wright’s replacement. The school attracted steady interest among the ladies of leading families in Kuching, “at least a dozen” Malay ladies and elder girls attended Harriette’s school to learn writing, reading and sewing.⁶ Harriette was delighted by her students: “The women are very pleasing; they are really ladylike in their manners, their shyness with men giving them a reserved, dignified sort of behaviour” (Bunyon 1889, 44). This type of education, however, had little value as their prospect for conversion was negligible, yet they did enhance the good relation between the church and the leading families.

The mission conceived education as a long-term strategy to produce native Christian to be sent as teachers in their community. In 1851, Frank explained his education policy as follows:

I look upon it (the school) as the one great fact that has resulted from our labours in Sarawak, the nucleus of an institution which will one day supply a Native Ministry for Borneo and in the meanwhile it is a point of attraction which fixes the attention of the natives upon the mission and causes them to regard it favourably. (Taylor 1983, 23)

For a Malay education to succeed, Frank was counting on the appeal of learning Romanised Malay, basic English and a practical “industrial class” taught by his German employee, T. Stahl, a builder for the church and the Mission House.

Frank had experimented various types of school to fit into his proselytising strategies. His main intention was to recruit young children whose fertile mind was more susceptible to a Christian moulding. In addition to the adult school, there was also a “home school” concept. It required children aged two to ten to live as boarders for a period of up to 10 years to isolate them from “native influence”. By this way, the pupils could receive total immersion in religious

instruction and Christian values. The first of the “home school” was reported in September 1848 with their first group of Malay and Dayak orphans. In 1863, it was reported over 40 boys and nine girls in the home school.⁷ James was reported to be supportive of the concept and had contributed 50 dollar a month, albeit, on irregular basis: “The rajah quite agree with the opinion I expressed of having a certain number of children to be brought up entirely apart from Malay influence by taking them entirely from their parents and feeding, clothing and educating them ourselves”.⁵ The practise in adopting little children ceased in 1863 due to the successive resignations of the school’s housekeepers.

An early success of the mission’s education was a high-profile conversion of a “son of an impoverished” Brunei Malay *pangeran* (Saint 1992, 24) who was brought to Kuching by James Brooke after the assassination plot against his family in 1846. The Malay *pangeran* was a young man, “cannot be more than 18 or 19 years old”, was disfigured by a “bad cut” across his mouth and his chest from the attack in Brunei. Frank early impression of him being “a Mahometan of a strictest kind and warmly attached to his religion” (Brown 2007c). The young *pangeran* was showered with attention. In addition to schooling, the padre had also provided regular medical care for his wounds. In December 1849, he was baptised⁸ and renamed “John”. Frank felt vindicated and had stepped up his effort by requesting graduate from Keasberry’s Malay school to come and work at the school. Rati (a Malay teacher from Singapore) arrived in 1849 to take up the teaching task in the home school.

Most of the early converts to the mission were involuntary. They were orphans and war captives of military expeditions from *Dido* (1843), *Patusan* (1844), *Beting Marau* (1849) and *Rainbow* (1862) sent to the mission by the order of the rajah for care and upbringing. The earliest of them were children of his deceased European officers from their liaisons with Malay and Dayak mistresses – Peter Middleton, Mary Douglas, Julia Steward and Thomas Williamson, aged 5, 4, 3 and 2 years old, respectively, were the first to be baptised on 3rd December 1848 (Taylor 1983, 10). At the conclusion of Beting Marau expedition, six captive women and three children were submitted for adoption and baptism.⁹ The native converts played strategic role in native proselytisation. They became the role model for self-improvement effected from the mission’s education and upbringing. Peter Middleton, for example, followed the preaching team led by Reverend Walter Chambers to the Dayak area of Quop in the year 1856 (Taylor 1983, 48). Julia Steward was sent to Church Education School in Dublin in 1860 and returned as a teacher at the mission’s girls’ school as was Mary Douglas who ended up marrying the schoolmaster, Daniel Owen.

Experimenting Malay education post-1850

From the year 1850, there were two significant developments that had changed Frank’s perspective about Malay proselytisation. The first related to the exodus of some five thousand Chinese from Pemangkat into Kuching town in the month of August 1850 as a result of the civil war between the rival Chinese guilds over the mining rights to goldfields in Sambas (Lockard 1976, 112). The faction that lost the war abandoned goldmining and fled to Sarawak, taking with them wives, children, parents in seeking for new settlement. The Chinese parents, who were destitute by the war and ravaged by sickness and poverty, surrendered their children to the mission’s home school, thereby increased the number of pupils and converts. The earliest baptism of the Chinese children took place on 2nd February 1851 (Taylor 1983, 17). Another development related to what he perceived as a threat of Islamic proselytisation in Dayak areas. His visit to the peace-making ceremony between Kanowit and Skrang tribes in 1850 reinforced his suspicion: “there are the Milano, Balau, and the teeming population on the rivers Baram, Saribas and Rejang, equally open to us and if we do not occupy them, rest assured it will not be long the emissaries of Islam and of Rome will take them out of our hands”.¹⁰ Unlike Malay in Kuching, the Dayak tribes that he encountered from his reconnaissance in Lundu (1849), Kanowit, Quop and Merdang (1850), all appeared eager to have a “teacher” place in their communities.

Given the new prospects, Frank found himself in need of a new ally that could help in the expansion of missionary education among Dayak and Chinese. He found Bishop Daniel Wilson (1778–1858) of Calcutta who provided the much needed reinforcement. Charles Fox and William Nicholls were the earliest batch of teachers dispatched from Calcutta in view of a mission in Dayak areas. Reverend Walter Chambers arrived shortly after from England for similar task. In preparation of their outstation duties, the recruits were taught Malay language and basic medical skills (Taylor 1983, 19). More recruits from the Bishop’s College arrived such as William Gomes (1851), Charles Koch (1855) and W. Cameron (1856). In 1853, a takeover by the Society of Propagation of Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) had amplified the resources for the ambitious Sarawak mission.

Given the new interest for Dayak and Chinese conversion, the mission’s recruitment of Malay children for its home school waned. Most likely persuaded by the *datu* who did not wish to see Malay children being left out, a government sponsored a “Malay day school” opened in August 1851. It was held at the Court House and ran from 7:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Its first batch of 10 students were Malay pupils of the home school.¹¹ Charles Fox was tasked to teach the Malay day school. He was described a “regular and industrious in his habits”.¹² The school was temporarily closed when he resigned from the mission (Taylor 1983, 42). Fox replacement supposed to come from his colleague in Calcutta, a *Ruppa*, described having a “somewhat brusque, impetuous and hot disposition”,¹³ later, changed his mind about coming to Sarawak. A graduate of Keasberry’s school, Rejab, was enlisted as its teacher in 1856. The bishop viewed him positively, being “clever, excellent knowledge in Bible studies, and the only Malay Christian known to be true to his profession”.¹⁴ His time in Kuching was cut short following the Chinese Insurrection in 1857.¹⁵ Rejab’s replacement was W. Cameron, a graduate of Bishop’s College, described as a “truly converted, holy minded, zealous, evangelical young men” whose views had come off strong against the Malay pupils.¹⁶ He was eventually sent to Lundu to assist Gomes. The Malay school was closed in 1862 after the government did not renew its financial commitment ¹⁷ following the disinheritance of the rajah’s nephew, John Brooke Johnson.

A separate Malay school was conceived by Datu Bandar Muhammad Lana in 1852. He asked Frank to send one of his teachers for the school based in his.¹⁸ William Nicholls was assigned as the head-teacher given his experience in teaching Muslim pupils in Calcutta making him familiar in “the prejudice and bigotry of Islam”.¹⁹ Another reason for the new assignment was his unsuitability for rural mission. In Frank’s view, Nicholls lacked “enthusiasm”, “kindliness” and “real love”.¹⁹ Nicholls was unhappy and frustrated by the constraint imposed upon him from directly preaching to his Malay pupils. He returned to Calcutta after several months in Kuching. After Nicholl’s resignation, Reverend Andrew Horsburgh, recruited from St. Paul’s college in Hong Kong, was sent to teach temporarily at Datu Bandar’s school. He arrived in Kuching in 1852, came across “a thoughtful, modest, earnest minded young man, a firm churchman of no extreme view” (Taylor 1983, 27). By the end of 1854, he was reportedly had taught reading and writing to the pupils while the two eldest students were taught geometry (Taylor 1983, 30). In 1855, Horsburgh was reassigned to teach a school in Banting. It was reported that 17 Dayak pupils enrolled as students, but only two attended the instruction regularly (Taylor 1983, 43).

There was also a short-lived effort at introducing western home-skills. When Frank was in England in the year 1852 to 1854, he had campaigned for the recruitment of female missionary willing “to raise the character of Malay ladies, who are quite uneducated and have no occupation, by a constant personal intercourse with them in their own homes” (Taylor 1983, 39). A Borneo Female

Mission Fund was organised to collect donation for the first ever women missionary to Sarawak. There were three missionaries sponsored under the Fund. “Miss Williams” who arrived in April 1855, Sarah Coomes in August 1856 and a relative to Mrs McDougall, Elizabeth Woolley in December, (Taylor 1983, 49). However, the plan to teach the wives and daughters of *datu* was disbanded as the relation between the church and the *datu* became frosty following the tension between James Brooke and the anti-Brooke faction, represented by Datu Gapor, intensified, had led to the latter’s dismissal as Datu Patinggi in 1854. Instead, the plan was diverted into assignment among Dayak women and girls. The female missionaries were enthused by the appeal of making a difference for the Dayak women and girls, only to become disillusioned later. Miss William was beset by depression after the resignation of Charles Fox.²⁰ Sarah Coomes was sent to Lundu along with Polly Nelson, one of the orphans redeemed during the Beting Marau war, to assist Gomes. She found there were only three boys at the school, while the “others came occasionally”. Sarah was frustrated by the apathy shown towards women’s education, fell ill and had to resign. Elizabeth Woolley, who married Chambers in August 1857, was an exception. Frank described her “a truly Christian lady” who had become valuable support to her husband’s preaching.²¹ In 1865, it was reported that Mrs Chambers “had 20 to 30 little girls” under her tutoring (Taylor 1983, 77).

The end of the road for Malay education

In the early years, the mission’s received political support for its education programme from the Malay leaders in Kuching. Datu Bandar often came and visited the school,⁶ and they had formed a friendship that enabled the bishop to form a positive opinion of him: “He is a sensible, thoughtful man and although strict Mahometan, was not a bigot and anxious for young Malay Sarawak to be instructed (Taylor 1983, 28). Similar impression was made of Haji Abdul Rahman:

He is a zealous for Islam, but he does not oppose us at all. Indeed, at present he is my friend and promises to send the Malay children regularly for instruction and to impress the parents with the necessity of having them taught. This will doubtless help our views in the long run – for as instruction is imparted to the Malays, they will shake off Mahometanism.²²

He further reiterated the general tolerance of the people towards him in a report published in a missionary journal in England: “They do not appear to have any enmity to me as a Christian minister” (Brown 2007b).

Notwithstanding the support, the turnout for his school was frustratingly low once the people finally realised he could not disassociate Malay education from the overall missionary enterprise. The accommodations the bishop had done, such as creating separate classes for boys and girls⁴ and the hiring of Malay teachers had failed to address the concern over his evangelical motive. His Malay teachers failed to make a desired impact on public perception. Rati refused baptism and resigned in 1851,²³ while Rejab asked for a transfer for fear of his life following the Chinese Insurrection, as had Pangeran “John”.²⁴ It was also not helped by the recruitment of overzealous teachers like Nicholls and Cameron. There was also political constraint that limits what the mission could do for Malay education. In the general design of the rajah, religion came only second to his political scheme. Whilst James did support the mission’s education and even countenance some of the bishop’s Malay recruitment, he grew wary by Frank’s relentless pursuit. James recognised his rule could only be sustained by the support of the *datu* friendly to him. Risking it could lead them to combine forces with the anti-rajah factions of Datu Patinggi Gapor and Sharif Masahor. Following the consecration of St Thomas church on 18th January 1851, James sensed there was a concern among Malay over the implicit motive of constructing a huge, imposing church in a visibly Malay populated town. He wrote to Frank to warn him of not getting too heavily involved in the Malay community: “The Dayak population must be moved in the mass, and as a rule the jealousy of the Mohammedan population must not be roused. We have now toleration, charity and peace and these blessings must not be risked by the indiscreet zeal of Christian men striving to introduce their faith among others”. No doubt, Frank saw James’ warning an interference to his ecclesiastical duty, while the rajah asserted his will must precede the church’s interest, failure to heed, the church leader should ideally vacate his post, as James stated: “I consider certainly some authority within the church itself is necessary to control the clergy and to offer the government a responsible person, with whom it could treat and in whom it could confide” (Bunyon 1889, 86).

The end of the road for Malay education: Bishop McDougall’s version

It all began in the year 1850 after the return of a “haji” (Abdul Rahman) from Mecca: “I find there is a great revival among the Mahometans here, the growth of our church has aroused them and a new importation of haji from Arabia during my absence stirred up their bigotry and zeal for Islam”.²⁵ The haji had rekindled “the dying flame of Islamism” by exhorting people to fulfil religious duty like fasting and attending congregational prayer. Frank was conscious that he might not be able to work his way into the community as he had before without raising an alarm.²² Although Frank reported that he had shown him

respect and kindness, his underlying intention was suspect. His nervousness about the potential threat that the haji could bring to his mission was not altogether personal because he was echoing a global western fear of an of an Arab-fuelled Islamisation among their colonising subjects. In this regard, the haji or returning pilgrims were feared for their Islamic appearance. The wearing of an “Arabian dress code” was taken as a proof that they had adopted a worldview similar to their Arab’s “fanatical brethren” (Aljunied 2005, 106). Indeed, Rajah James too imagined Islamic threat a possibility in Sarawak should Malay felt the church was out to preach them, as he warned Frank in a letter dated 28th January 1851: “You are aware of this danger and know that I speak the words of sober reason when I say that let the bigotry of Islam once be roused, the mission will not succeed and wars and bloodshed may attend an attempt to introduce Christianity” (Bunyon 1889, 82).

Subsequently, the mission’s activity among Malay was curtailed by the increased attention to Dayak and Chinese missions. This meant that more clergies and teachers had to be recruited to support the mission’s works. When new reinforcement arrived from St Augustine College in 1858—William Chalmers, John Glover and William Hackett—coincided with cholera epidemic in Kuching, their sight triggered further uncontrollable anxiety to the extent that Frank began to imagine a repeat of another Insurrection, this time by the conspiracy of hajis: “No amount of personal attachment can ensure which was becoming more and more fanatical in their Mahometanism – numbers go to Mecca, sometimes yearly, and the number of Christians as surely visibly increases and any frenzied hajis who raised an outcry upon ever so trivial a cause would get all our throats cut in no time”.²⁴ The intense fear aggravated his ailing health: “This consciousness keeps me in a nervous uncomfortable state and is making an old man of me. I do not tell my fears and alarms, but they are the more harassing perhaps to myself because my sleep broken by nervousness unnatural to me”. In June 1859, the killing of former teachers Charles Fox and Henry Steele in Kanowit, appeared to vindicate his deep-seated fear of some Islamic militancy. He called attention of the secretary of SPG that the situation in Sarawak became increasingly “headless and heedless”, a “time of great trial and of imminent danger.”²⁶ Although the bloodshed against his congregation that he feared most did not materialise, the panic among church community did not abate. A schoolteacher, William Hackett, quit the mission while Frank took leave to England to recuperate from extreme nervousness before returning in March 1862 (McDougall 1992, 184). His inconspicuous design for Malay conversion was all but gone.

Dystopian Sarawak (January 1865–December 1866)

Since early 1865, Harriette McDougall was unsettled about staying in Sarawak for much longer. She had been worried about her husband's heart nervousness. She was inclined to accept the view of Frank's personal doctor, Dr G. Budd, who advised the bishop to return to England to recuperate. The bishop was reportedly suffering from rheumatism that had caused his right hand to paralyse, yet he was determined to stay on until the 20th anniversary of the founding of Sarawak mission. Harriette disagrees, she felt they could not wait for much longer as they were living in the thick of an anarchy. In the same year, an outbreak of cholera ravaged Kuching which had sent people into panic, shops were shut and the epidemic spread into rural missions in Lundu and Banting (Bunyon 1889, 260). Harriette wrote to her mother in June 1866 summing up the restlessness: "The present state of things is like going back to the dark ages and indeed we are worse off now than we were then. Vessels were infrequent, bazaars were sadly empty, the sugar mill long since shut up" (Saint 1992, 161). An opportunity presented to them when in October 1866, a family friend Captain Reid of H.M.S. Rifleman, called upon in Kuching. The captain persuaded the bishop to take time off to England to allow his health time to recover. Frank relented, but not after he consecrated a church in Labuan. The McDougalls and their youngest, Mildred, departed Kuching in early December 1866. It was not supposed to be their last, but personal circumstances had made it difficult to return.

Conclusion

In early 1857, Bishop McDougall spoke of the success in taking Muslim and heathen children at a very early age and bringing them up as Christians.²⁷ Most likely, he was referring to the orphans submitted to him prior to 1850 whose number probably not more than 10. In 1851, he reported the "original seven Malay and Dayak children" cost the mission three dollar a month.²³ Notwithstanding the limited gains, his contribution to modern Malay education should be acknowledged. The instructions in the home school, the day school and Datu Bandar (Muhammad Lana) school used romanised Malay. Malay was also used as the language for religious instruction among Dayaks in the rural areas. The prayer, service and sermons were conducted entirely in Malay language. The bishop used Malay in his recitation of "St Paul's speech" in Bau during his preaching visit in 1856 (Taylor 1983, 48). Walter Chambers used Malay language in his sermon during his inaugural visit to Quop in the same year (Taylor 1983, 48), while Horsburgh read gospel stories in Malay to his Dayak students in Banting.

The unsuccessful use of education as a tool for proselytising Malay was not an isolated case. Comparison to schools operated in the outstation revealed similar apathy. This was reported by the mission’s teachers like Sarah Coomes in Lundu, Reverend Horsburgh in Lingga and Mrs Chambers in Banting had justified the irregular attendance to the livelihood cycle like farming season (Taylor 1983, 43, 56 and 77). The government’s frequent wars and mobilisation of men were also a factor that interrupted the school routine. In 1863, it was reported that the male Dayaks in Banting had to stop attending school and had their baptism postponed because they were called for the government expedition against the Kayan.²⁸ The same happened in Kuching during the government’s Beting Marau expedition to eliminate the Iban league of the so-called “pirates” of Skrang and Saribas in July 1849 as the town was deserted and people kept themselves indoor in fear of retaliation. The white rajah too was nervous as he called for reinforcement from the mighty Royal Navy’s *Albatross* and *Nemesis*. Frank reported the scenario: “Now the rajah has returned, everything must again be prepared, and every able man was called away from the place. The expedition will start as soon as the men of war are to help us arrive and they are daily expected”.⁶

The mission was also hamstrung by the perpetual economic crisis made it too difficult for their staff to commit to a long-term presence. The low pay relative to the high cost of living resulted to resignation of its schoolteachers. The first headmaster of the school and one of the pioneering mission staff, Reverend Wright, resigned in January 1849 because of his request for a raise was not approved. Another schoolteacher, Charles Fox, shifted career into the government service as Resident of Lundu in 1855 and later was moved to a new station in Kanowit. The long-serving assistants Stahl and his wife, Elizabeth Richardson, left the employment for Singapore in 1858 as they were unable to sustain the family with a salary worth 50 dollar a month.²⁴ Martin Allen, a young recruit for the school, “a good and true” man, had also left the mission after less than a year to work at Borneo Company in 1857.²⁷

The bishop’s inability to reconcile the contradiction in his imagination between his mission to reform Malay and to replace Islam by the “lights of Christ” and his perception of Islamic fanaticism was not in itself startling. His missionary approach towards education presupposed a clash between a degenerated Islam and a modern Christendom. He perceived the Malay apathy to education typified of those belligerent fanatics yet ignorant people. It was through this framework the Christian education for Malay was doomed from the beginning.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for the anonymous reviewers who have read the submitted draft meticulously and offered pertinent suggestions. A sincere appreciation to Pustaka Negeri Sarawak and their most able staff whose assistance have facilitated the research that has gone into the article.

Notes

1. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 1st January 1849. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
2. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 30th November 1848. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
3. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend Charles David Brereton, 31st July 1848. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
4. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 24th February 1849. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
5. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend Charles David Brereton, 18th September 1848. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
6. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 9th June 1849. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
7. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend Ernest Hawkins, 19th February 1864. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
8. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Captain C.D.R. Bethune, 27th December 1849. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
9. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 25th August 1849. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
10. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend Ernest Hawkins, May 1850. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
11. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 15th August 1851. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
12. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 24th February 1851. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
13. In a letter of Bishop Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend W.T. Bullock, 14th September 1855. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
14. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend Ernest Hawkins, 12th December 1856. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
15. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Charles Bunyon, 17th April 1857. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
16. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend W.T. Bullock, 3rd May 1858. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
17. In a letter of Harriette McDougall to Eliza Bunyon, Autumn 1862. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.

18. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 13th May 1852. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
19. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 15th August 1851. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
20. In a letter of Bishop Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend W.T. Bullock, June 1855. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
21. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend Ernest Hawkins, 4th June 1857. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
22. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 13th December 1850. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
23. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 29th March 1851. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
24. In a letter of Bishop Francis Thomas McDougall to Charles Bunyon, 11th October 1858. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
25. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend T.F. Stooks, 29th June 1850. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
26. In a letter of Reverend Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend Ernest Hawkins, 18th October 1859. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
27. In a letter of Bishop Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend Ernest Hawkins, 5th January 1857. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.
28. In a letter of Bishop Francis Thomas McDougall to Reverend W.T. Bullock, 16th May 1863. Sarawak, Malaysia: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak.

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