OFFICIAL REPORTS ON EDUCATION IN THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS AND THE FEDERATED MALAY STATES 1870 — 1939

Official Reports on Education:
Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States,
1870-1939

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PREFACE

This book purports to bring together the full texts of, or the relevant extracts from, the more important official reports which chart the development of education in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States from 1870 to 1939. It presents them in a form which may be useful to students of history and education who are interested in the region. The documents are taken from official publications which unfortunately are out-of-print and hence not easily accessible. Our introduction and commentaries attempt to place them in context and to serve as guides to the uninitiated. The publication of the book will, it is hoped, meet a genuinely felt need, especially in Malaysia and Singapore.

The main aim of this collection of official reports is to illuminate the slow and often tortuous process by which a public system of education has been built. It begins with the 1870 Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council to enquire into the state of education in the Colony, and ends with the 1939 Report of the Commission appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to study higher education in Malaya. Between the covers of the book, then, we have included a total of twelve reports which, taken together, tell a continuous story of educational development and change spanning a period of some seventy years. It must, however, be emphasised that these reflect the 'official' viewpoint, which is certainly not the only important one in terms of the overall educational development of the territories concerned. For example, very little is said about Chinese education, although by the year 1938, there were 91 534 pupils in Chinese schools as against 44 036 in English schools, in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. For the full story, one has to probe beyond what is collected in this book.

We are indebted to many historians and educationists for their suggestions, co-operation, and assistance. We also wish to thank the librarians and staff of the national libraries and archives of Malaysia and Singapore, for their helpfulness and patience. In particular, we are grateful to the Director of the National Library, Singapore, for permission to use the Library and publish the reports. Without their support, this book would never have seen the light of day.

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INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

In 1826 the three British possessions of Penang, Malacca and Singapore were combined for economy of administration and other considerations, to form the Straits Settlements, a Presidency administered by the East India Company from India.[1] In 1830, the Presidency, having contributed nothing but heavy deficits to the Company, was abolished, and the Straits Settlements became a Residency under the control of the Presidency of Bengal. This continued until 1851 when the Straits Settlements were removed from the supervision of Bengal to that of the Governor-General of India.

Neither the East India Company nor the India Office, which replaced the Company in 1858, appeared to be interested in the Straits Settlements; the administration incurred a minimum of effort and cost, and was, as might be expected, inefficient. But trade flourished, and in 1858 a petition of transfer to the direct rule of the British Crown was presented to Parliament by the mercantile community, particularly from Singapore. After protracted negotiations, the formal transfer of the Straits Settlements from the control of the India Office to the Colonial Office was effected in 1867.

By this time the political conditions in the Malay States of Selangor, Perak, Pahang and Negri Sembilan were ripe enough to invite British intervention. Selangor and Perak were in a state of chaos with the collapse of their Sultans' authority, the wars among rival chieftains over tolls for tin and jungle produce, the feuds among Chinese tin-miners, who employed secret societies for protection, the strife between the chieftains and the tin-miners, and the increase of piracy. In Pahang there was a struggle for succession following the death of Bendahara Ali. A similar struggle ensued in Negri Sembilan after the death of the Yamtuan Besar. In all the states, debt slavery was widespread.

Again the merchants in the Straits Settlements petitioned the British government to protect their interests in these states. As a result, the Governor-designate, Sir Andrew Clarke, was instructed to ascertain the actual situation in each state and in particular to consider the advisability of appointing a British Resident in each of the states. The governor went beyond his instruction; in 1874 he summoned a meeting of the ruler, the chieftains and the secret society leaders in Perak. The Pangkor Treaty was signed and a British Resident was appointed. This was soon followed by the appointment of British Residents in the other three states. In 1896 the four states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang became a federation, often referred to as the Federated Malay States.[2]

Gradually the British extended their control to the rest of the Malay Peninsula. The northern states bordering on Thailand had since the early nineteenth century been under the suzerainty of the Siamese. In 1902, Sir Frank Swettenham, Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States, negotiated an agreement with the Siamese which, while recognizing the rights of the Siamese over these northern states, provided that the Siamese advisers in Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis could be British officers. The next logical step was the Treaty of Bangkok (1909), by which the rights of the Siamese over the four states were transferred to the British, and a British adviser was sent to each of the states. Johore, in the southern part of the peninsula, had earlier accepted British protection; under a subsequent treaty, in 1914, a British adviser-general was appointed. Eventually, the five states came to be referrred to collectively as the Unfederated Malay States, although each state had its own separate and distinct administration up to the end of 1941.

Thus by World War I, Malaya had three types of constitutions:

1) The Straits Settlements (that is, the island of Singapore, the island of Penang along with Province Wellesley, and the territory of Malacca) which were administered as a British Colony.

2) Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang, which had been protectorates since the 1870s and 1880s, after 1896 became the Federated Malay States.

3) Kedah, Perlis, Trengganu and Kelantan, (which were transferred to Great Britain by Siam in 1909) and Johore, (which asked for a British adviser-general in 1914) were separated protected States and were referred to as the Unfederated Malay States.

The various stages and processes of migration by land and sea over thousands of years have resulted in the present 'plural society'[3] of the Straits Settlements and the Malay States. The Malays, though essentially united by language and religion, have come from different parts of Malaya, Sumatra, Java and other islands of the Malay Archipelago, with their respective dialects and local customs. The Chinese, though mainly from South China, can be sub-divided into several dialect groups – Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese and others – each with its distinctive traits and specializing in different kinds of skills. The Indian immigrants include Tamil, Telegu or Malayalam-speaking Indians from South India as well as Gujeratis, Punjabis, Bengalis and others from the North. It is essential to bear in mind this background of a plural society if one is to understand the educational pattern of the British period as well as some of the present day problems relating to educational policies. Only then can one proceed to make an objective analysis of, and suggest possible solutions to, the current and complex problems in education.

Educational Background[4]

Partly because of this ethnic background and partly because of governmental policy, there emerged two categories of schools during the British period: first, the vernacular schools, such as the Malay vernacular, the Chinese vernacular and the Tamil vernacular schools; and second, the English schools which were often concentrated in the urban areas where the immigrant races tended to congregate.

The beginnings of Malay vernacular education in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States have their roots in the Korean schools. In these schools the pupils were taught the principal prayers in Arabic. In addition they were taught a little Malay after they had learned to read and write the Koran in Arabic. Chelliah[5] thinks that the first recorded formal instruction given to Malays in Malay was in the Penang Free School premises in 1821 and in the Singapore Free School in 1834.

The year 1872 marked an important stage in the development of Malay education. In that year, Mr. A. M. Skinner, the newly appointed Inspector of Schools, established Malay-language schools based on the Koran classes. He realized that no progress could be made in Malay education until and unless the teaching of Malay was separated from the teaching of the Koran. However, he also realized that he could ill afford to incur the displeasure of the religious teachers whose livelihood depended to some extent on their teaching the Koran. These early Malay schools which originated in the Koran classes were partially assisted by the East India Company during the early part of the nineteenth century. Later, State Governments took over this role. In time, these early schools developed into Government Malay schools which were financed from public funds and were the forerunners of Malaysia's present day National Primary Schools. The most succinct statement of British educational policy reflecting this concern for the children of the Rakyat (people) was given by Sir George Maxwell:

> The aim of the Government is not to turn out a few well-educated youths, nor yet numbers of less well-educated boys; rather it is to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been, and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his own lot in life fits in with the scheme of life around him.[6]

On the other hand there was another line of thought regarding the education of Malays, held by another group of British administrators as exemplified by J. P. Rodger, then Resident of Perak. The virtual absence of Malays from the prestigious Malayan Civil Service became a major topic on the agenda of the Rulers' Conference held in 1903 and Rodger used the occasion to remind his colleagues of the British obligation in this connection:

It must never be forgotten that these are Protected Malay States and not British Colonies

and that the British officials are here to advise and assist and not to supersede the Rulers in the administration of their own States. One of the most difficult problems to be solved is how best to employ in the Administration, the sons and near relations of Rajas and Chiefs, who but for British intervention would now be in full administrative charge of large and important districts.[7]

He then suggested that a special English school be established for the education of the Malay traditional elite in the Federated Malay States.[8]

The man to take up Rodger's suggestion was R. J. Wilkinson, who arrived in the Straits Settlements as a Cadet in 1899, and in 1903 was appointed Inspector of Schools for the Federated Malay States. He soon became involved in Rodger's proposal to set up an English residential school for the sons of Malay royalty and the Malay aristocracy. To Wilkinson must go the credit for establishing the Malay Residential School at Kuala Kangsar in 1905. Once the idea of a special English school for Malays had been suggested, he became the driving force behind the idea, being responsible for formulating it and working out its details, and more importantly, for having it accepted by his superiors. According to him, entrance to the proposed school was to be based chiefly on academic merit (rather than social origin) while still reserving a certain number of places each year for young Malay aristocrats of royal blood. In this manner he thought the school could both prepare those destined by birth for high office for their future duties, and at the same time create a cadre of Malay administrative civil servants from amongst the brightest pupils in the Federated Malay States. Modelled upon and run along the lines of a English public school, it trained an elite corps of English-educated Malay civil servants from among the sons of the former Malay ruling class, thus perpetuating their ascendancy in relation to the rest of Malay society. In 1909, the School was rehoused in a new building and became known officially as the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, and unofficially referred to as the 'Eton of Malaya'. In brief, "British policy towards the Malays was based on the fundamental division in traditional Malay society between the rulers and the ruled. . . (and) a system of public instruction in the vernacular for the broad mass of the Malay peasantry on one hand, and the successive attempts to provide a select number of Malays, for the most part the sons of Rajas and Chiefs, with an education in English on the other".[9]

The earliest record of Chinese schools was that made by the Reverend G. H. Thomsen, who reported in Singapore in 1829 that "there was a Cantonese school at Kampong Glam, another at Pekin Street, while there was a Hokkien school also at Pekin Street".[10] These early Chinese schools imparted only a classical education that had little or no relevance to the needs of the Straits Settlements. As in China, the pupils were taught letter-writing and the use of the abacus. The teachers themselves were more often than not untrained and in many instances were either quacks or fortune-tellers who looked to teaching purely as a means of making a livelihood.

Despite these failings, the Chinese schools in Singapore multiplied rapidly, especially between 1900 and 1919 – a period when the political and social changes in China had tremendous repercussions on overseas Chinese. This was the beginning of an era when Chinese politics and overseas Chinese education became almost inseparable. Under the impact of modern ideas, many of them revolutionary in nature, the old system of Chinese education crumbled and gave way to the new.

So far the British authorities had adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the Chinese vernacular schools but when their activities became revolutionary and prejudicial to the government, measures were taken to control them. The Registration of Schools Ordinance of 1920 marked the end of the neutral attitude of the authorities *vis-à-vis* vernacular education in general and Chinese education in particular. It also emphasized the determination of the government to control and supervise education in these dependencies.

The first recorded formal education given to Indian children through the Tamil-medium was that provided in the Singapore Free School in 1834.[11] The Christian Missions also helped in promoting Tamil education despite difficulties such as the small number of the school population, the apathy of parents and the lack of suitable facilities such as teachers, premises and textbooks. Examples of this include the St. Francis Xavier Malabar School established in 1859 by the Roman

Catholic Mission, and the Methodist Girls' School opened by the Methodist Church in 1887.

In the Federated Malay States the Labour Ordinance of 1923 benefited the children of labourers, especially Tamil labourers working in the estates. Under this Ordinance, the employer was required to maintain a school at his own expense for the children of his labourers when there were ten or more children of any one race between the ages of seven and fourteen. The Ordinance was also instrumental in bringing about the appointment of the first European Inspector of Tamil schools in 1930 who was assisted in his duties of inspection by an Indian Assistant Inspector. It was only in 1938 that an education officer, specially trained in India, was appointed as Inspector of Indian schools in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States.

The second category of schools was the English schools which included (a) the 'Free' schools and (b) the Grant-in-Aid schools. In October 1816, the first 'Free' school, the Penang Free School, was founded by the Reverend R. S. Hutchings. His plans included an English section, the vernacular sections and a girls' department – all within the same school organization. In his 'Address to the Public on behalf of a School to be established in Prince Edward Island', of 6 February 1819, Hutchings outlined his scheme for, and the advantage of, such a project.

> First, that the school may be open to the reception of all children of this island, of every description, whose parents or friends are willing to submit them to the rule of the Institution. Second, that it will be the first object of the Institution to provide for the education of such children as would otherwise be bred up in idleness and consequent vice, and without any means of obtaining instruction either in useful learning or any manual employment, and to implant in them the early habits of industry, order and good conduct. Third, that such parents as are capable of supporting the expense of the education of their children shall be called upon for payment of such small demands as may be thought proper to be required. Fourth, that any part or all of the children may be instructed in reading and writing English and in the common rules of arithmetic. Fifth, that great care be taken that the prejudice of parents to the Christian religion be not by any means violated.[12]

Another equally remarkable example of a 'Free' school was the Singapore Free School which was closely connected with the founder of Singapore itself, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. The foundation of the Institution was laid in April 1823, but before any appreciable progress could be made, he had to leave Singapore because of ill-health. With his departure the plan for the Institution was shelved. His successor had different ideas as to the kind of education that would be suitable for the people. Crawfurd maintained that "the natives of Singapore have not yet attained that state of civilization that would benefit from the enlarged system of education held up by the Singapore Institution and to prosecute it under the present circumstances on the footing originally contemplated would be to incur a heavy expense without any early prospect of corresponding and adequate benefit".[13] The Governor-General, the Marquis of Hastings, accepted Crawfurd's decision, though for reasons other than purely educational. The immediate scheme that Raffles drew up failed, but in 1837 the buildings he had commenced were used by the Singapore Free School.

The other type of English school was in the main established and maintained by missionary and charitable societies, principally, the London Missionary Society, the American Methodist Mission and the Roman Catholic Mission. These schools were open to children of all races and creeds. Their aim was to provide a general education and a better standard of moral life based on the tenets of Christianity. They also provided a useful element of competition in the educational system. It was through this type of school that the various Christian missionaries were able to contact almost every racial group in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, and to spread their religious influence.

The system of teacher training would naturally be in line with that of the school system, and therefore it is not surprising to find one system of teacher training for the vernacular schools and another for the English schools. When the government first began to organize a system of Malay vernacular education in the second half of the nineteenth century, it recruited teachers largely from the Hadjees who had the experience of Koran classes in the kampongs. The demand for Malay tea-

chers in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States moved the Education Department to convert the Malay High School in Singapore into a training college for Malay teachers in 1878. In 1901, another training college was started in Malacca by R. J. Wilkinson which offered a two-year course for Malay teachers for the Straits Settlements. In 1916, R. O. Winstedt was commissioned by the government to make a special survey of vernacular education. His report on Vernacular and Industrial Education in Java and the Philippines, 1917, resulted in the opening of the training college at Tanjong Malim, in Perak, in 1922. This college, the Sultan Idris Training College (named after the Sultan of Perak) prepared Malay teachers over a period of three years, based on the curriculum as recommended in the Winstedt Report. The success and progress of the college was very much the work of its first principal, Mr. O. T. Dussek, who spent practically the whole of his service of twenty-one years in the Malayan Civil Service at the Malacca and Sultan Idris Colleges.

One of the main problems of the Chinese schools in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States was the lack of suitable teachers. Also, the fact that most of the teachers had to be recruited from China precluded the inculcation of a local outlook in Chinese schools. As the demand for primary teachers grew, attempts were made to supply them locally by the opening of Simplified Normal (and later Normal) classes attached to the Chinese High Schools.

At first teachers for the Tamil vernacular schools were recruited from India but just before World War II, a three-year week-end training course was introduced in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. The teachers were trained only for primary education.

A committee (the Woolley Committee) was set up in 1870 to enquire *inter alia* into the position of the training of teachers for English schools in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. This Select Committee of 1870 recommended the pupil-teacher system as a remedy for the lack of trained teachers in the two territories. In 1904 and again in 1910, a central training college for men was proposed in Singapore, but the idea had to be abandoned because of the lack of applications for admission. An experimental teacher training course in Kuala Lumpur, in 1905, proved successful and this was followed by a two-year Normal Course for intending teachers in Penang, in 1907. In 1914, a committee appointed to enquire into the training of teachers and the work of the Normal Classes stressed the urgent necessity of establishing a training college, a view that was upheld by the 1928 Education Conference. Raffles College, established in 1928, was the main source of graduate teachers right till 1941.

In the territories under discussion, there were as many, if not more, religious affiliations as there were ethnic groups. The Malays were bound by the common tie of Islam. The Chinese for the most part were either Buddhists, Confucianists or Taoists, while the Indians were Hindus. In the midst of this varied pattern of religious worship was a small minority of Christians represented by the Protestants, the Methodists and the Roman Catholics. These missionary bodies began by attending to the spiritual needs of their own members but in time extended their interest and service to the other sections of the community. Their combined influence on education in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States has survived the 'ups and downs' of educational policy and is still remarkably visible, though to a much lesser extent than before.[14]

Though the governmental policy was *laissez-faire,* the mission schools were never entirely free to do as they wished. The British authorities supported them when it suited their purpose and placed restrictions on them when this seemed necessary in the light of their own aims. Colonial governments were always sensitive to indigenous religious traditions. This accounts for the fact that though religious instruction was given in all the English schools which were conducted by Christian missions, "no child shall be compelled to be present when such religious instruction is given, nor may any child be refused admission to a Grant-in-Aid school on grounds of religious belief ".[15]

As in England the British authorities in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States proceeded cautiously on the matter of giving aid to mission schools. In this respect, the principle of State and Church partnership guided the British administration in instituting a grant-in-aid scheme. Thus in 1855 the government made the provision of grants dependent on two conditions: firstly, the school should be open to inspection by government officials; and secondly, the school should

charge the pupils a fee, however small. After 1874, a third condition was required before a mission school could receive any government grant, namely, that public funds should not be used for the purpose of proselytizing, and that religious instruction should be given outside of the regular hours and only to those who had asked for it.

> While the value of ethical training for school children was recognized, the declared policy of government was to force no child to receive religious instruction or attend religious observance against the wishes of his (or her) parent or guardian. No religious instruction shall be given and no religious observance shall be practised during the hours fixed for secular instruction, but they may be carried out either before or after the ordinary school hours.[16]

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the economic life of the Malay Peninsula and Singapore began to be affected by fundamental changes. The tin-mining industry, the rubber industry and the development of Singapore as an entrepot, produced in due course not only new social classes, but also large revenues which could be used for various social services, including education.

The tin industry in the Federated Malay States which was responsible for a very substantial proportion of Chinese immigration, also led to improvement in communications which in turn hastened the growth of towns to serve the requirements of the mining area. The production of tin became an important source of revenue, derived from licences for prospecting and rents for land, and, above all, from an export duty on the saleable tin. The other industry which had far reaching effects on the economy of the Federated Malay States is the rubber industry. Most of the rubber was planted in Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Johore, where communications were good. Large-scale rubber cultivation required a large labour force, and this was recruited from India. Directly or indirectly, rubber contributed to the growth of towns, ports and communications. More than anything else, perhaps, rubber provided the largest single source of government revenue. This important source of income financed governmental expenditure on public utilities and social welfare. The early importance of Singapore was due to its improved facilities for storage and shipment, which was of considerable assistance to the export of tin and rubber from the Federated Malay States. The growth of Singapore as an entrepot was reflected in the size of the population. In 1830 the population was 16 634; in 1836, 29 984, and in 1870, 80 792. By 1901, the total figure had risen to 228 555. The history of education in any country shows that economics has always been a major factor in determining the educational structure of the particular country. This is no less applicable to this part of the world, particularly when considering the siting of the schools, the curriculum, the regulation of grants to educational institutions, and the promotion of vocational education.

As has been mentioned earlier, there were two categories of schools: the vernacular schools and the English schools. The vernacular schools, particularly the Malay and Tamil vernacular schools, were mainly in the rural areas, while the English schools were in the urban centres of Penang, Malacca and Singapore, where the day-to-day trade and business was carried out. The siting of these schools was dependent to a large measure on geographic and economic considerations. The curriculum also reflected the economic trend of the period. The early history of education in these territories showed that the main purpose of education, especially English education, was to teach children reading and writing as well as arithmetic, with a view to obtaining just that amount of knowledge as would secure them gainful employment in the developing modern sector of the economy. As H. R. Cheeseman, a former Director of Education, was to reiterate in 1954, in a lecture delivered in London, the local English school "was in the first place purely vocational, to provide clerks for the merchants."[17] A system of competitive examinations for the award of scholarships was another means of ensuring that the prescribed curriculum was being followed and that the schools were doing their job of preparing the children for the desired vocation or a profession. Thus from 1885, the requirements of the Queen's Scholarship Examinations, founded in 1885 in honour of Queen Victoria by Sir Cecil Clementi, then Governor of the Straits Settlements, affected the content of the curriculum of the English schools. This prestigious scholarship was awarded, "to allow promising boys an opportunity of completing their studies in England and to encourage a number of boys to remain in school and acquire a really useful education".[18]

Another influence on educational development in these territories was the system of government grants to schools, especially English schools. In this regard, the British administration seemed to have been guided by three principles: charity, partnership, and a sense of responsibility. The first two led to a system of grants-in-aid which became very important as an auxiliary to the direct measures for the extension and improvement of general education, especially after the middle of the nineteenth century. The third principle brought about the establishment of new schools and the 'taking over' by the government of established schools that could not work efficiently without such help.

The fundamental principle during the first half of the nineteenth century was that religious and secular knowledge should be given gratuitously to the poorer classes, whenever possible. In accordance with this principle of charity, the government was prepared to assist the London Missionary Society and later the Roman Catholic Mission with allowances. The government adopted a different line of action with the other type of English schools – the 'Free' schools. It identified itself more and more with these schools on the principle of partnership, and in time granted them a larger monthly allowance. One can see here the influence of contemporary English politics and educational ideas. It was a time when England herself was divided on the issue of allotting grants to denominational schools. In the territories under discussion, the government worked in partnership and close cooperation with the trustees, and undertook to maintain the school buildings at public expense. This principle of partnership between Government and private enterprise was recognized by Raffles. He had expected the native chiefs and wealthy Chinese to come to the aid of his Singapore Institution along with the government. Indeed, as early as 1857, the government had enunciated the policy that its contribution towards education would be proportionate to the amount furnished by local effort.

The system of 'payment by results' was adopted by the Legislative Council in 1874. However, the Education Code of 1899 regulated that the system of 'payment by results' be substituted by that of grants given by 'classification'. The principal objectives of this new system were first, to make grants dependent on general efficiency rather than on individual passes; second, to encourage missionary and other philanthropic bodies to undertake work in education; third, to emphasize the importance of teaching English; and lastly, to establish a system of grants to help pupil-teachers. The system of grants by classification became unsatisfactory after World War I because of the rising cost of living and the increasing demands on education. The Lemon Committee, appointed in 1919 to enquire into the financial position of the aided schools recommended *inter alia* a new system of grants by 'payment by estimates'. The government accepted this recommendation, which in effect meant making up the difference between the revenue accruing from fees and other sources, and the approved expenditure of a school. The government also fixed the salaries of missionary teachers at a flat rate and gave generous help to aided schools for new buildings and equipment.

The introduction of this new system showed that the aided English schools, such as the mission schools, were no longer regarded merely as a cheap means of providing education. They were accepted as an integral part of the educational system, as their valuable contribution was recognized. The system of grants more than paid off well; the efficiency of the aided schools and the contribution they made to the educational progress of the two territories testified to the success of the system, so much so that it is still in force today.

The promotion of vocational education likewise illustrated the influence of the economic factor on education. Government attitude towards vocational education at the turn of the century may be gleaned from the 1899 Annual Report which read:

> In Malaya as in India, there is often a cry for more vocational instruction with complete disregard to the fact that our schools are all too vocational and utilitarian, and that the greatest fault is that they are not promoting genuine culture. Parents and schoolmasters are compelled by the economic conditions of modern life to train the pupils primarily to earn a livelihood.[19]

This question of 'cultural education' and 'education in order to earn a living' has preoccupied and will continue to preoccupy educationists all over the world. As seen against the background of

nineteenth century Malaya, it was obvious that before the local people could learn to appreciate culture they must first have the wherewithal to live. That accounts to a large extent for the popularity of the English schools during the British period. It was unfortunate, however, that the bías of the public for 'white-collar' jobs and the corresponding prejudice against manual work brought about an imblance between academic and technical education, with disastrous results as the years went by. As the Annual Report on Education in the Straits Settlements, 1937, put it:

> For a long time the demand from the English schools for clerks was greater than the supply, and a Cambridge Certificate or the Standard VII Certificate was a commercial asset, ensuring a competency in adult life. Today, the supply is greater than the demand. With the spread of English education, knowledge of that language will cease to be an 'open sesame' to fortune or even to a livelihood, and one of the gravest problems today is to devise for the coming generation, types of instruction fitting the young of Malaya for such careers as the country offers. There can be no doubt that the bulk of the inhabitants must turn to agriculture and other industries. Any ideal of education not adjusted to local wants must lead to economic dislocation and social unrest.[20]

It was in this context that H. R. Cheeseman was asked to report on vocational education in 1938.

The early history of higher education in Singapore exemplifies the debt due to private enterprise. In 1904, a petition was sent to the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir John Anderson, by the leading members of the non-European communities. "Your petitioners desire to bring to your Excellency's notice, the desirability of establishing and maintaining in Singapore a Medical School where residents in this Colony and the Federated Malay States may be trained so that they may be able to enter the Government service as Assistant Surgeons or practise their profession as general practitioners."[21]

The Governor, in reply, asked the non-European communities to raise $71 000 as a sign of public spirit and co-operation. On receipt of this reply, a meeting of the petitioners was held at which the Governor's offer was accepted and arrangements were made for the collection of the necessary funds. The Medical School began work on 3 July 1905, and was formally declared open by Sir John Anderson on 28 September. As the economic value for more advanced education was recognized, it led to a clamour for the establishment of yet another college to provide facilities for higher education locally, so that more could benefit by it. Again the Government insisted on the private sector sharing its financial responsibility. In this instance, it made clear to the people that Government contribution would be proportionate to the amount furnished by local effort. This reminds one of the 1857 despatch of the Court of Directors which states: "For instruction of a higher order, the wealthier class of the public should be approached with a view to obtaining their willing co-operation in supporting the means of a more advanced education through public subscription. The contribution of Government towards the provision of a higher education in English should be proportionate to the amount of local effort."[22]

The year 1919 – the centenary of Raffles' founding of Singapore – provided a fitting occasion for the establishment of a college of higher learning in the island. The Maxwell Committee, set up in 1918 to consider and report on a scheme to commemorate the occasion, declared itself "unanimously of the opinion that the most suitable memorial (for the centenary) is a scheme which will provide higher education for the people of Malaya and Singapore with a view to preparing the foundation upon which a university may in course of time be established." The recommendation was endorsed by the Firmstone Committee of 1919 which provided the basis for the founding of Raffles College – the nucleus of the future University of Malaya. The government offered to provide the building (not exceeding M$1 000 000) and to give an annual grant of M$50 000 towards its upkeep, on condition that the public subscribed M$2 000 000. The response was so good that on 22 July 1929, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Hugh Clifford, was able to preside at the official opening of Raffles College.

To sum up: during the British period, certain prime factors, such as the multi-racial population,

the diverse religious and economic backgrounds; the different cultural and value systems influenced and shaped education in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. The Government established and maintained Malay vernacular schools as well as English schools. The immigrant communities attended the English schools or set up their own vernacular schools. By not attempting to create an integrated multi-racial education system, the British helped to shape and maintain broad communal divisions of the new plural society which their economic and immigration policies were largely responsible for creating. An equally significant fact was the failure or inability on the part of the British to even create a single Malay educational system catering for all sections of Malay society, the consequences of which have continued to shape Malay social and political development down to the present day.[23]

This, then, is the barest skeleton. The official reports that follow will provide the flesh and blood. It must, however, be pointed out that there are many missing links: Chinese and Tamil education, for example, were hardly touched upon in these reports, although the number of children they catered for constituted half the total school population of the territories covered in this book. Such omission reflects official indifference, negligence, partiality as well as ignorance. Thus the picture presented by a study of these reports is inevitably a distorted one as far as the **overall** educational development of the territories is concerned, and this must be constantly borne in mind by the readers. In short, these official reports present the **official** point of view, and must be clearly understood as such. But being 'official', they exerted tremendous influence on the direction towards which educational advances were taken, and on the shape education assumed as a consequence of such thrusts. While they did not tell the whole story, they at least told the most important part of it.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive study of these three Settlements see C.M. Turnbull: *The Straits Settlements, 1826–67 – Indian Presidency to Crown Colony,* Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1972.
2. See Eunice Thio: *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula, 1880–1910,* University of Malaya Press, Singapore, 1969.
3. The term 'plural society' appeared initially in J.S. Furnivall's *Colonial Policy and Practice,* Cambridge, 1948, in which he defined it as "a unit of disparate parts which owes its existence to external factors, and lacks a common social will".
4. For a brief study of educational development in Malaysia and Singapore, see Wong Hoy Kee and Gwee Yee Hean: *Perspectives – The Development of Education in Malaysia and Singapore,* Heinemann, 1972.
5. Chelliah, D.D.: *A History of Educational Policy of the Straits Settlements.*
6. Chief Secretary's Report, Federated Malay States, 1920.
7. Minutes of the Conference of Chiefs of the F.M.S. held at Kuala Lumpur, on 20th, 21st, 22nd and 23rd July 1903, in Supplement to the Selangor Government Gazette, 2 October 1903.
8. Khasnor bte Johan: The Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, 1905–1941, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1969.
9. See Rex Stevenson: *Cultivators and Administrators – British Educational Policy towards the Malays, 1875–1906,* Oxford University Press, 1975.
10. Gwee Yee Hean: "Chinese Education in Singapore," in *150 Years of Education in Singapore,* Teachers' Training College Publications Board, Singapore, 1969, Chapter V.
11. Doray, Joseph: "Tamil Education in Singapore" in *150 Years of Education in Singapore, op. cit.,* Chapter VII.
12. Notes on the History and Present Condition of the Penang Free School, in the *Free School Magazine,* Centenary Number, 1961, Vol. 4, No. 4.

13. For an account of Crawfurd's opposition to the proposed Institution, see Chapter II of *A History of Raffles Institution, 1823–1963,* by E. Wijeysingha, Singapore, 1963.
14. See "The Christian Mission and Education in Malaysia and Singapore," by Wong Hoy Kee, in *Teacher Education in New Countries,* Vol. 12, No. 2, 1971.
15. Code of Regulations and Government and Grants-in-Aid English and Vernacular Schools in the F.M.S., 1902.
16. Report of the Proceedings at the Education Conference held in Singapore on 27–30 August 1928.
17. H.R. Cheeseman: "Education in Malaya, 1900–1941", in *The Malayan Historical Journal,* Vol. 2, No. 1, July 1955.
18. Straits Settlements Annual Report on Education for 1908.
19. Straits Settlements Annual Report on Education for 1899.
20. Straits Settlements Annual Report on Education for 1937, p. 158.
21. Song Ong Siang: *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore,* London, 1923, p. 365
22. Straits Settlements Records, Series S. No. 210.
23. See Rex Stevenson: *Cultivators and Administrators, British Educational Policy towards the Malays, 1875–1906,* Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 199.

1. Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council to enquire into the state of Education in the Colony (the Woolley Report), 1870.

Published: 1870
Chairman: R. Woolley
Members: W. H. Read
W. R. Scott

Terms of Reference: To enquire into the state of Education in the Colony.

When the Straits Settlements were administered by the East India Company (1826 – 1851) and later by the India Office (1851 – 1867), the grants-in-aid to education recommended by the Governor had to be approved by the Government in India, to which the Governor was responsible. But after 1867, when the Straits Settlements became a Colony, with the Governor-in-Council responsible to the Colonial Office, the grants were determined by the Legislative Council, subject, of course, to the approval of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Sir Harry Ord, who arrived in the Straits Settlements in March 1867, was full of enthusiasm with his appointment as the first Governor of the newly established Colony. He was ready to remedy the deficiencies of the Indian administration and bring in the benefits of colonial rule. One of his first acts as Governor was to appoint on 8 December 1870, a Select Committee, under the Chairmanship of Colonel R. Woolley, "to enquire into the state of Education in the Colony". In the preface to the Report, the Committee stated that "education in the Colony has been and is in a backward state" because of insufficient encouragement by the government on the one hand, and the indifference of the Malays, on the other. Turning to the future, the Committee stated that after having considered the two courses open to them, namely, either "to begin **de novo** *and thoroughly re-organize all the existing establishments or to take the Schools as they now are and by a gradual process endeavour to place them on a more satisfactory and improved basis," the Committee decided on the latter approach and recommended that it be put into effect, first, by appointing an Inspector of Schools; second, by reforming the existing Grants-in-aid system, which mainly applied to English schools whether they be missionary or privately run; and third, by greatly extending and improving vernacular education, especially Malay vernacular education. The Committee was of the opinion that a boy, whether he be Chinese or Malay, could make no real progress in education until he could first be well grounded in his own language. The Committee earnestly hoped that "under an improved scheme, a successful effort will be made to secure to the rising generation the incalculable benefit of a sound, moral and liberal Education".*

On 28 December 1872, Mr. A.M. Skinner, a young British official of the Penang Administration, was appointed to the newly created post of Inspector of Schools. Sir Harry Ord made reference to this when he said:

"In the matter of Education, a step, and I think an important one, has been taken by the appointment of an Inspector of Schools whose duty it will be to inspect all the schools and report on the condition, as also what further schools are required, and in fact to place before the Council so full a statement of the condition in the Colony, as shall enable you to feel that you have safe grounds on which to decide to what extent funds shall be appropriated for its advancement, and in what manner". (Legislative Council Proceedings, 1872).

Skinner held the post of Inspector of Schools until 1879, and during that period was responsible for creating an educational system that was to remain essentially the same throughout the remainder of the century. But other than the appointment of the first inspector, the promises held out by the Report remained largely unfulfilled.

Your Committee considered it their duty in the first place to submit a series of questions (Appendix A) to the officials and other gentlemen in each Settlement qualified to give valuable information on the subject of Education in the Colony. Selections from their replies are appended to this Report, and they afford a striking proof of the diversity of opinion existing on the subject of Education – in what form it should be communicated, and to what extent it should be carried.

The number of Schools and their classification at different periods, extending back to 1823, the year in which the Raffles Institution was established in Singapore, are given in the Report furnished by a former Committee, and laid before the Legislative Council on the 29th October 1869. Looking over the various reports made by former Governors of the Settlements, particularly those furnished by Colonel Butterworth and Mr. Blundell, it is evident that the progress of Education has been slow and uncertain, arising in a great measure from the indifference of the different races, more particularly the Malays, to receive instruction, and to the want of sufficient encouragement from the Government itself. There are a great number and variety of Schools in the Colony, some purely educational, others combining Charity with Education. Many of them are under the control of the Roman Catholic Clergy, but all, apparently, having a system of their own, unchecked, as a rule, by any Government supervision. By Government grants-in-aid, by voluntary subscriptions and other means, considerable sums of money have, during the last few years, been expended in the cause of Education, but owing to the absence of effective supervision and the want of well-defined principles on which the Schools should be conducted, your Committee is of opinion that the general result has been far from satisfactory. The Raffles Institution at Singapore, the Free Schools in Penang and Malacca, and the Roman Catholic Seminaries in the different Settlements have so far done good, that they have turned out many young men competent to earn a livelihood in Government and Mercantile Offices, but it is much to be regretted that the majority of these Clerks know only how to read, write, and speak English imperfectly, and their education has been such, that very few of them are in a position to make any material advancement in life, or to enjoy and improve their leisure by reading and adopting other means of self-culture. It is true that most of them are competent to work out a simple sum in Arithmetic, and to copy English in a good legible hand, but as a general rule they have no ideality: ideas they have none, and they are quite incapable of expressing themselves in writing, either grammatically or logically. In your Committee's opinion this unfortunate state of things is mainly due to the short time that boys are kept at School by their parents, and to many of them, when at School, spending their leisure hours in thinking in and speaking some other language than English. Looking to the minor Schools in the Settlements, such as the Vernacular Schools; your Committee is of opinion that they have hitherto done little or no good. In almost every instance the sole object aimed at in such Establishments is to teach the boys to read a few chapters of the Koran, and no general knowledge is attempted to be communicated. An exception to this has been Mr. Keasberry's Malay School, from which many boys have been sent out competent to earn a respectable livelihood as Copying Clerks, Compositors and Book-binders. On the other hand the Education of Females has not been neglected, but the results in this department have, in your Committee's opinion, been very much less satisfactory, generally speaking, than in the education of boys. From the above observations it will be seen that your Committee considers the state of Education in the Colony has been and is in a backward state, and it is now its duty to suggest what should be done to improve and promote it.

Your Committee is of opinion that there can be no doubt that Government has the most material interest in the promotion of Education, the welfare and social position of the Colony depending very much on the character and conduct of the different races who go to form its population. The educated classes find employment and thereby tend to diminish crime, for it is the idle and uneducated whose names swell our Police Reports, as well as the naturally vicious and disorderly.

There are two courses open to the Colony to improve its Schools, – either to begin *de novo* and thoroughly re-organise all the existing establishments, or to take the Schools as they now are, and by a gradual process endeavour to place them on a more satisfactory and improved basis.