

1st Malaysian International
Drawing Marathon



Editor | **Safrizal Shahir
Izmer Ahmad &
Shahrul Anuar Shaari**

The Early Drawings of Malaya (1880-1894) by Frank Swettenham

Sarena Abdullah

School of The Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia

This paper discusses the drawings and watercolours produced by Frank Swettenham during his career period in Malaya. Frank Swettenham or Sir Frank Athelstane Swettenham (1850-1946) was the Former Resident, the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States (F.M.S.), then the Governor of the Straits Settlement and the High Commissioner of the F.M.S. His skill, tact, tolerant cynicism and self confidence, supported by his fluency in the Malay language and his vast knowledge of the Malay custom had helped him in developing and building relationship with the Malay Sultans, which eventually led to the formation of the F.M.S. and changed the British policy towards the Malay States after 1860s.

Drawings and paintings of early Malaya is not a new subject in terms of curatorship. In fact, there were a few catalogues that had addressed and documented early views of Malaya as early as 1660.¹ It must be pointed out, however, that the documentation and readings of these early works are still limited and have not been further explored especially in terms of postcolonial scholarship. Besides Sophia McAlpin's *The Landscape Palimpsest*² in which she discusses landscape paintings of Malaya in the early 19th century in terms of British understandings of the region via visual documentations, a proper and critical study of these early drawings produced by Frank Swettenham for example, have not been discussed. The drawings and watercolours of Frank Swettenham and George Giles in the collection of Lim Chong Keat for example, have been exhibited and published by The Malaysian-British Society in 1988,³ but a critical analysis of the drawings and how it reflected the view or perspective of British as a colonizing power have not been explored. Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss Swettenham's sketches and drawings of Malaya that was published in the catalogue of the exhibition in a more critical manner, in a postcolonial context to be precise.

Specifically in the context of the fall of four Malay States - Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang to the British by the formation of F.M.S. in 1896, I would like to point out here that even though the case of colonization in Malaya differ from other places, the colonial capitalism ideology as suggested by Syed Hussein Alatas⁴ can be used in understanding the sociological and psychological approach of colonial powers in Malaya. This could be investigated primarily in terms of literary sources that in a subtle way denigrate the native population. Besides that as I will discuss here, visual documentations such as sketches,

¹ See *Early Views of Penang and Malacca 1660-1880*, (Penang: Lembaga Muzium Pulau Pinang, 2002); and Chong Keat Lim, *Penang Views 1770-1860* (Penang: Penang Museum, Summer Times Publishing, 1986).

² S. McAlpin, *The Landscape Palimpsest: Reading Early 19th Century British Representations of Malaya* (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, 1997).

³ Lim Chong Keat and Henry Barlow, *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolour and Sketches* (Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian-British Society, 1988).

⁴ I am employing Syed Hussein Alatas framework in this paper. See Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: Cass, 1977).

drawings and watercolours by Swettenham, can also be scrutinized as embedding colonial capitalism as suggested by Alatas. Even though it is impossible to establish a rigidly demarcated onset of colonial capitalism, it is sufficient to say here that by the 18th century in Southeast Asia as in the case of Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, the power of colonial capitalism was already firmly entrenched.⁵ At that time, Europe's commercial capitalism was booming, making Southeast Asia the victim of its first phase of capitalism and served as another Europe's geographical discovery. This had led to the British acquisition of territories in Penang, in 1786, acquisition of Malacca from the Dutch in 1795, and acquisition of Singapore in 1819 forming the Straits Settlement and constituted into the Crown Colony in 1867. British businessmen then were taking great interest in the Malay States due to their conviction that involvement in Malay States was needed so as to preserve British capitalist interest in the region.

Frank Swettenham played a key role within this context as he was the British officer who played a major part in with what British term as "intervention" in the Malay states. The youngest child of six siblings born to James Oldham Swettenham and Charlotte Elizabeth, Frank Swettenham, sat for cadetship in the Straits Settlement eighteen months after he completed his studies in St. Peter's School in York. Then he set sail for Singapore at the end of 1870 arriving in January 1871. Upon arrival, he worked with the Secretariat in Singapore in which his first task is to familiarize himself with the work of the various departments and to learn Malay. He passed successfully his Interpreter's examination fifteen months after his arrival in the Colony, in which a large part he is indebted to his teacher Mohd. Said b. Dada Mohyiddin, editor for the first Malay newspaper, *Jawi Peranakan*.⁶

In 1874, British Government policy towards the affairs of the Malay States changed so as to preserve British interest especially in Singapore and Penang. This is because the state of Selangor and Perak were in turbulent unease due to the contending Malay royalties over the throne and the Chinese factions over the tin mines in Larut, threatened to spill over Penang, and added with outbreaks of piracy, lawlessness and mayhem in Selangor.⁷

Swettenham's important initial role begins in the fall of Perak into British Protected Malay States under British colonial office in Singapore. He assisted in the discussions and helped to draw and translated the Pangkor Engagement from English in Malay together with Munshi Mohd Said in January 1874. The most important provision in that Engagement is that a British officer, termed as Resident, will be accredited to the Sultan's court and that his advice "must be asked and acted upon all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom."⁸ Swettenham later with W. A. Pickering and Captain Dunlop successfully settled the mining dispute in Larut. Soon it became clear however, that British "advice" did in fact mean British control.⁹ When the new Resident of Perak, Hugh Low, objected to circular from Sir William Robinson, reminding the Residents that they had been placed in the States as advisers, not as rulers, he was assured by the Governor that he could continue to govern as he had been doing but the fiction that the Residents are merely advisers must be kept up.¹⁰

Swettenham was then sent to Langkat, Selangor in August 1874 by Sir Andrew Clarke, the Governor of the Straits Settlement due to the coastal piracy regarded precarious to

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ William R. Roff, *Stories and Sketches by Sir Frank Swettenham* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), xi.

⁷ Ibid., xii.

⁸ Henry Barlow, "Biographical Notes on Frank Swettenham," in *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894* (Kuala Lumpur: The British-Malaysia Society, 1988), 11.

⁹ John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 7-8.

British's interest in the region. For the second time, his considerable ability, diplomacy, and liberal disposition with his forceful personality with the Malays and Sultan Abdul Samad, Sultan of Selangor at that time was seen as a great value to the British. This he did with such good effect that within two months the Sultan had written to Clarke claiming that Swettenham, "... is very clever; he is also very clever in the customs of the Malay government and he is very clever at gaining the hearts of the Rajas with soft words, delicate and sweet, so that all men rejoice him as in the perfume of an opened flower."¹¹ Consecutively, the Sultan of Selangor accepted the British "advisor" to his court.

When Sir Frederick Weld was appointed Governor, he appointed Swettenham to fill in the vacant Resident job in Selangor in September 1882. With this appointment, he set to lay the foundation to a modern city of Kuala Lumpur by establishing the first railway (from Kuala Lumpur to Klang) in order to established good Public Works that is required from the Resident. His enthusiasm, skill and ability were also repeated during his term of Residency in Perak two years later.

In April 1885, he then went to visit the Bendahara (Sultan) of Pahang with the support of his superiors in Singapore and London, to exploit a rift between the Bendahara and his brother to bring Pahang into the fold of the Protected States.¹² By the year 1890s the four basic units of the Protected Malay States were formed consisting the state of Perak, Selangor Pahang and Negeri Sembilan. Swettenham and others during that time had increasingly aware of the need in administrative uniformity and closer association between the four States that each has its own Resident, employ British "advise" as its legislative apparatus, administrative practices and separate budget. Most importantly, the varying economic fortunes of rubber, tin especially needed to be exploited to fulfill British's move towards Industrial Revolution.

Once again, Swettenham's intimate relation and influence with the Sultans played a key role in the success in British's plan of the Federation. He was sent by the Governor to each Sultan to explain the scheme and obtain their signatures for the Federation's agreement. Due to Swettenham's persuasive scheme in exploiting the State's internal affairs, the Sultan's were resistless and in 1895 when the four states were federated. The speed with which Swettenham obtained the agreement of the rulers involved in this development was startling, and can only be partly explained by Swettenham's obvious ambition to become the first Resident General of the F.M.S.¹³ He served this capacity until 1901 when he reached the highest ladder of Malayan officer by becoming the High Commissioner for the Malay States and the Governor of the Straits Settlement and retired three years later in 1904.

Despite various manipulation in the internal affairs of the Malay States, British colonization of Malaya was described by Swettenham as,

"The Malay states are not British Territory, and our connection with them is due to the simple fact that 70 years ago the British Government was invited, pushed and persuaded into helping the Rulers of certain States to introduce order into their disorderly, penniless, and distracted households, by sending trained British Civil Servants to advise the Rulers in the art of administration and to organize a system of government which would secure justice, freedom safety for all, with the benefits of what is known as Civilization; and of course, to provide an annual revenue sufficient to meet all the charges of a government which had to introduce railways, roads, hospitals, water supplies, and all the other

¹¹ Roff, viii.

¹² Barlow, 13.

¹³ Ibid., 13-14.

requirements of modern life."¹⁴

Besides his official involvement in the formation of the Federated Malay States, Frank Swettenham, during his stay in Malaya produced several drawings and watercolours. These drawings, sketches and watercolors as collected by Lim Chong Keat, were published together with George Giles drawings in the book *Frank Swettenham and George Giles Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894*¹⁵ in 1988 as I have mentioned earlier. This book had included 55 drawings and watercolours by Swettenham and 36 by Giles. In the essay of the book, Barlow suggested that the works were probably done during the exhaustive period when Swettenham was working between Selangor and Perak in 1884 and 1885. Barlow suggested that it is easy to imagine Swettenham during this period with his increasingly unhappy marriage, seek considerable relaxation in his drawings. Especially those made particularly on the occasions when he took a few days off from Kuala Kangsar or Taiping, up the hills to the cooler climate of "The Hermitage" on Gunong Arang Para or at "The Cottage" above Taiping.¹⁶ Little is known though of George Edward Giles. He was only known as Swettenham's companion during the 1885 trip to Pahang and the Assistant Commissioner to Major Walker and Sir Hugh Low during that time.¹⁷ What took to be a personal relaxation drawing project or useful later as illustrations in his book, *Footprints in Malaya*.¹⁸ The book documents the first hand account of Swettenham's experience and travels of Malaya and even includes his visits to India, China, Japan, Honolulu and other places.

In the essay on Swettenham and Giles's watercolor and drawings, Lim Chong Keat suggested that Swettenham's and Giles's role as "Documentary artist,"¹⁹ but I would like to point out here that these images are not mere amateur drawings of Malaya and the Malays. It should be read rather on the other hand, as visual documents that registers how the colonizer view the colonized and the colonized land though Swettenham noted that,

*"I do not pretend to be an artist in any sense, so the desire to present artfully has not worried me. I had some sort of story which it interested me to tell, and I have told it in my own fashion as a sufficient object in itself."*²⁰

Swettenham's drawings could not escape from the colonizer gaze especially if read and framed within the context of his position and role in the formation of the F.M.S. Therefore, I would like to point out here that these images could not escape from the Western ideology that underlies their expansion of the European power in the 18th and 19th century throughout the rest of the world. As McAlpin reasserts in the introduction of *The Landscape Palimpsest* on the landscape drawings of Malaya, that "... there is no such thing as an "innocent" eye and that whatever the subject of these visual records, they will almost certainly be the product of the artists' own cultural and artistic construct."²¹

There are a few observations that can be made in regards to the drawings by Swettenham – first, Swettenham's drawings and watercolors general focuses on the landscape and second, in terms of figures, there is an obvious lack of interest in the rendition of the Malays and other natives living in Malaya. For example, the native figures as a subject

¹⁴ Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1948), vi-vii.

¹⁵ Keat and Barlow.

¹⁶ Barlow, 12.

¹⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹⁸ Frank Swettenham, *Footprints in Malaya* (London, NY and Melbourne: Hutchinson & Co., 1942).

¹⁹ Lim Chong Keat, "The Swettenham-Giles Collection," in *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894* (Kuala Lumpur: The British-Malaysia Society, 1988), 20.

²⁰ Swettenham, *Footprints in Malaya* 4.

²¹ McAlpin, vi-vii.

never occupy a central position. They are either absent, appear very minimal as part of the landscape itself, in a passive position or busily engaged doing a task or a job.

We can observe from Swettenham's drawing and watercolors that he is generally interested in capturing the landscape, riverscape and seascape during his travels in Malaya. This could be seen in how he identifiable specific locations due to the representation of recognizable topography. This does not come as a surprise as the effects of the climate had a profound influence in the way of life of Europeans in Malaya and throughout the tropics. Butcher claims that Europeans generally believed that physical and mental deteriorations were the inevitable results of living for long periods in the tropics therefore, that makes it impossible for them to settle permanently in the tropics. Therefore, it is essential for them to return to a temperate climate periodically during their careers to recuperate from the effects of their stay and to strengthen themselves for another tour of duty.²² Since distance and the government's leave policy prevented British officers from taking frequent trips to their homeland, Europeans looked for other ways to refresh themselves in a cool environment.

According to Butcher, Penang Hill was the first used as a hill resort in the days when the East India Company ruled the Straits Settlement followed by the first bungalow was built in 1884 for the use of the Resident of Perak. Two other bungalows - one on Maxwell's Hill and another at the government tea garden-were built nearby to accommodate Perak government officers, and 1892 another one was built on Gunung Kledang near Ipoh.

It can be suggested here that Swettenham must have also affected by this general European belief, as there were a number of sketches that were drawn from the spot that he called "The Hermitage" and "The Cottage". This could be seen in a few "Untitled" works that he just notes as "Untitled (View from 'The Cottage') (c. 1884) (Figure 1), "Untitled (Gunong Bubu-From 'The Hermitage' & G. Bubu-5450 Ft. Hermitage-3200 Ft.)" (c. 1884) (Figure 2), "Untitled ('The Cottage' with Penang Island in the Distance)"



Gambar 1: Frank Swettenham, Untitled
("View From the Cottage"), c. 1884.

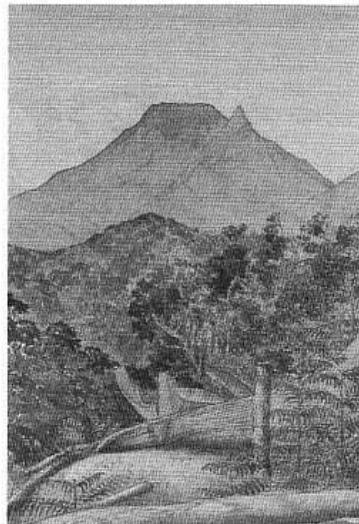


Figure 2: Frank Swettenham, "Untitled
(Gunong Bubu-From the Hermitage & G. Bubu-5450 Ft.
Hermitage-3200 Ft.)" (c. 1884)

²² Butcher, 68.

(c.1884), "A View from the Cottage, Perak" and "A Small Stretch of The Perak River Looking Towards the Residency, Kuala Kangsar from The Hermitage on Gunong Arang Para, Bubu Range" (1884). This impressionist view of the mountain in "Untitled (View from 'The Cottage')" (c. 1884) (See Figure 1), was most likely drawn from "The Cottage" on Bukit Caulfield in Taiping Hills from the elevation of 4200 ft, captures evocatively the nuances of sunset.

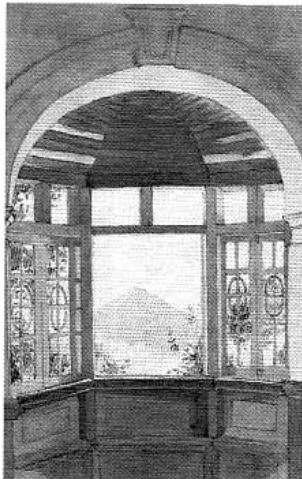


Figure 3: Frank Swettenham, "Untitled (View of Gunung Pondok through alcove window Residency at Kuala Kangsar)," not dated.

Mountain views always enthralled Swettenham. Whether he is inside or outside, he would seek to capture the peak of the mountain and frame it into somewhat a nostalgic land. "Untitled (View of Gunung Pondok through alcove window Residency at Kuala Kangsar)" (Figure 3) and "Untitled (Gunong Bubu-From the Hermitage & G. Bubu-5450 Ft. Hermitage-3200 Ft.)" (c. 1884) (Figure 2), best described that there exists a relationship between the observer and the observed. The first work is a watercolor that was probably completed from the Residency in Kuala Kangsar with the details of the windows and alcove transparently looking outwards to a distant peak profile of Gunung Pondok. The vast enfolding landscape outside could be seen as an allegory of himself who is a foreign person to the outside world of the wilderness of the native people.

In the second work, a similar framing device is used with the tall buttress tree on the right that consequently lead our eyes up to the peak of Gunung Bubu. This framing device can be seen in a few other drawings in a way suggesting an inside/outside interplay that could probably represent Swettenham's own situation at that time. He as an observer of a foreign land and its people. He tries to understand their mentality, belief and culture so that he could mediate, intermingle, and hopefully be embraced by the Malays, so that he could play his role as a superior deciding on the future of Malaya and its people. This could be seen in the way when he responded on the request of Independence from the British, "The Malay is a Muhammadan and looks to his Raja as the ruling authority. The ballot box makes no appeal, and self-government has no attractions. If we could order him differently, give him a new idea of life, we should only make him unhappy."²³

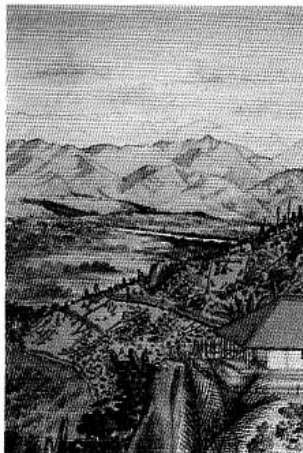


Figure 4: Frank Swettenham, "Across the Valley of the Perak Pahang River, from 'The Hermitage' - Meru Range in Middle Distance - Main Range in Background," (c. 1884).

From the drawings, the vista of the mountains and landscapes are not only concerned in a general geographical documentation but his landscapes and panoramic vistas never escape in its representation of the land that promises various potential capital sources to the British. The dominant theme could be seen in his two works "Across the Valley of the Perak Pahang River, from 'The Hermitage' - Meru Range in Middle Distance - Main Range in Background" (c. 1884) (Figure 4) and "The Promised Land" (c. 1884) (Figure 5). As I have mentioned earlier, "The Hermitage" is another Swettenham's favorite retreat located on Gunung Arang Para, just South of Kuala Kangsar. We could see from these images that he not only captured the refreshing landscape from the vantage point of 3200 ft. or his fascination of on topographical features, but how he perceived the land as a promising source of wealth in supporting that can fulfill not only British's capitalist scheme but also British's power in the new rising technology.

The Main Range in the background, and the Meru Range in the middle distance, separating the Perak River from the Kinta Valley are the backbone of the Kinta Valley that is rich with tin that consequently being dominantly mined by the Chinese and the Malays. In the foreground itself the estate on which "The Hermitage" as suggested by the catalogue was probably then being cleared for the planting of rubber, and we can see the jungle trees newly felled for this purpose. Rubber and tin were definitely the two main supports of the F.M.S economy and therefore the main sources of government revenue, either directly in the form of duties on exports or indirectly in the form of railway charges or taxes on activities related to rubber and tin,²⁴ and they are important sources that supports British's emergence of Industrial Revolution.

²³ Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* xii.

²⁴ Butcher, 16.

For example, in defense to the fall of Malaya to the Japan, Swettenham claims that there is no fault in British's administration that led to the downfall of Malaya to the Japan in 1942 and he argues this primarily in terms of revenues:

"I have not seen anywhere a list of charges made giants the administration of affairs in any Malay States that I have read, and know to be true, countless statements of the phenomenal progress and development of Malaya from the year 1874 to the year 1941. Readers are invited to note that beginning with debts, directly the British residents took a hand in affairs, these Malay States advanced and prospered and grew rich year by year, until they astonished the world. From a revenue, which in 1874, to the year 1941 is of phenomenal progress. Beginning with debts, directly the British residents took a hand in affairs, these Malay states advanced and prospered and grew rich, year by year. From a revenue which in 1874, could not have reached £200,000, the four Federated Malay States in 1940 enjoyed a revenue of £12,000,000, with a trade valued at £67,000,000, of which the export duty on tin gave £2,500,000 and on rubber over £800,000".²⁵

If we look through the drawings by Swettenham as published in *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolour and Sketches*, we could observe that the Malays or native people of Malaya are never central as a subject. Though it can be suggested that his fascination lies in the landscape rendition of Malaya, his skill in figure drawings is not lacking. In a series of "Untitled" works such as "Untitled (Head of a lady; from a Photograph)" (c. 1880/1890), "Untitled (Female nude on tip toes holding what appears to be a tray)" (c. 1880/1890), "Untitled (Head of another lady, from a photograph)" (c. 1880/1890) and "Pencil Drawing for 'The Young Bacchus'" (1894), his drawing skills proves that he is able to render figuration in such a detail and meticulous manner.

Perhaps it can be suggested that in the lists of works above, Swettenham's drawings are more detail and capture the best impression of the European women and nude figure that is of his interests because such drawings have been completed with ample time and have been modelled after photographs. In his drawing and sketches during his trip to Perak and Pahang however, these drawings and watercolours have been done impromptu. Nevertheless, his lack of interests in the natives of Malaya as a subject is a surprise as in his writings, he never fails to scrutinize and discuss the Malays as a subject, though somewhat with sceptical perspectives. Swettenham's drawings and watercolors for example, did not depict any native people of Malaya, Malay or not. If they were, it was only miniscule and only being portrayed embodied in the whole landscape not as a main character.

For example, in the his drawing entitled "Batu Serlin" (1885) (Figure 6), the figure of the Malay man even though is at the center of the composition did not confront or face the viewer. The figure was drawn as he was walking ahead towards his companions by the boat as if walking and fading through the landscape of the river scene. This monochrome water color was probably done on Sunday May 3rd, 1885 during Swettenham's Pahang trip with George Giles and Martin Lister.²⁶ Swettenham's other drawings that have included the natives also always capture them engaging in some sort of activities. This could be seen in "Untitled (On the Pahang River)" (1885), "Untitled (The Same but Different)" (1885), "Untitled (Boat On Pahang River)" (1885), and "Untitled (River or Lake Scene, Pahang River)" (1885). In these river scenes, the natives only exists as boat peddlers, unidentified, faceless and miniscule in comparison to the whole landscape or riverscape.



Figure 5: Frank Swettenham, "The Promised Land" (c. 1884)



Figure 6: Frank Swettenham, "Batu Serlin," (3rd May 1885).

²⁵ Swettenham, *British Malaya*, x.

²⁶ Keat and Barlow, *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolour and Sketches* 120.

Even though according to John G. Butcher, circumstances as well as official policy encouraged close relations between British officers and the people they governed,²⁷ and I have outlined in the first part of this paper, there is never any sort of equality in Swettenham's relation with the Malay people and their Sultans. Butcher even claim that that the most striking as aspect of the relationship of the British officials and the Malays was the admiration officials expressed for the Malays as they are regarded as perfect gentlemen, courteous, reserved, and yet intensely proud and always ready to defend his honor,²⁸ Swettenham on the other hand, described the Malay as:

*"The real Malay is a short, thick-set, well built man, with straight black hair, a dark brown complexion, thick nose and lips, and bright intelligent eyes. His disposition is generally kindly, his manners are polite and easy. Never cringing, he is reserved with strangers and suspicious, though he does not show it. He is courageous and trustworthy in the discharge of an undertaking; but he is extravagant, fond, of borrowing money, and very slow in repaying it."*²⁹

"Above all things," wrote Swettenham, the Malay "is conservative to a degree, is proud and fond of his country and his people, venerates his ancient customs and tradition" and 'fears his Rajas'. Moreover, the Malays had a proper respect for constituted authority."³⁰

The minimal regards that he has for the Malays for example, can be seen in how the images of the Malays appear on his drawings. As I have discussed previously, they are mostly either absent, or plays a minimal role, and mostly passive. It appears to be as a visual subject, the Malays were off little interest to Swettenham in terms of artistic source or even as a documentative subject. His perception and approach in his relationship of the native people of the colony for example, clearly framed in a chapter entitled the "The Real Malay," in which he wrote,

*"To begin to understand the Malay you must live in his country, speak his language, respect his faith, be interested in his interests, humor his prejudices, sympathies with and help him in trouble, and share his pleasure and possibly his risks. Only thus you can hope to win his confidence."*³¹

Such observation is not neutral, as an observer who is conscious of the major changes of the Malay society, Swettenham scrutinizes the Malay people with the eyes of superiority, of a colonizer. His knowledge of the people and the "sympathetic" strategies that he employs consequently enables him to subtly maneuver the Malays Sultanate themselves, finally finding themselves loosing their power to an alien power.

Unlike his other drawings in which the Malays are mostly absent or appear to be without any identity or character, "Tanjong Malim Ulu Bernam" (1884) (Figure 7) is the only drawing that depict a clear rendition of a Malay man, in this case the figure of Tanjong Malim's Penghulu or Head of the District, Haji Mustafa. Penghulu is not a high ranking post in the Sultan's court, but it is a high post among the people of the kampongs. The only depiction of a Malay man, presented in this drawing by Penghulu Haji Mustafa, still succumbed to Swettenham's view of a colonizer gaze. Haji Mustafa is their leader presented with in a contemplative and melancholic mood, looking afar and passive, never active. In the depiction, Haji Mustafa posed in a vulnerable sitting position, as if defenseless to protect his own people. His projection of the Penghulu can be suggested

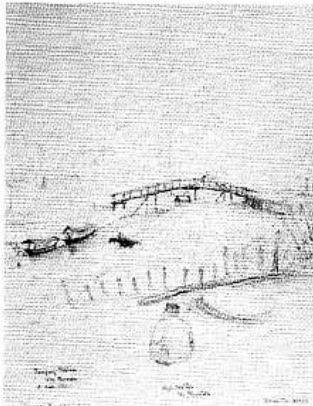


Figure 7: Frank Swettenham, "Tanjong Malim Ulu Bernam," (16th September 1884)

²⁷ Butcher, 52.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Frank Swettenham, *Stories and Sketches*, 16-17.

³⁰ Butcher, 52-53.

³¹ Frank Swettenham, *Stories and Sketches* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), 16.

as in parallel with his perception of the Malay people in general. In which his only high regards for the Malay people is only for the Perak Sultan himself. He explains,

*"The ablest Malay I ever knew was the late Raja Idris, Sultan of Perak. He returned from a visit to Egypt and England when I was the British Resident in Perak, and I went to the station to meet His Highness and drove him to the Residency, where we had a talk. After his news, I showed him an Indian newspaper I had received lately and read to him a leading article it contained on the government of his own State. The article said that I, as British Resident, ran the government and exercised all authority, while the Ruler was kept in the background. When I had translated the article into Malay for him, Sultan Idris Said, "What is the matter with the man? What does he want? Of course you do the work - that is what you are paid for. You always consult me about everything of importance before it is done and when that is settled you do it. You are trained for the job. I could not do it, and don't want the trouble if I could."*³²

This undermining perspective of the Malays was meant to justify British's occupation in Malaya since the level of competence of the Malay people is so low. His only high regard in terms of intellectual competence and character is only of the Sultan of Perak and that is mainly because the Sultan was agreeable to Swettenham's position in court. It can be suggested here how British officials see themselves in Malay term, as *raja*.³³ British officials saw certain similarities between Malay society as it existed in the late 19th century and the pre-industrial society of their homeland, it is therefore not surprising to find evidence that some officials tended to see themselves as lords and the manor and the Malay *rakyat* as their tenantry.³⁴

The lack of positive interests in the Malays as a visual subject is startling. In comparison with a drawing made during the trip, of himself, Giles and Lister during their trip to Pahang in 1885 entitled "The Start, Midday, and Climax Evening" (1885) (Figure 8), the portrayal of these three characters were meticulously drawn with enough details identifying them as the three British officers that led the expedition. The characters stand out in terms of appearance, details and identifiable characterization through various headgears and outfits, and smaller details such as the smoking pipe and the walking stick in "Climax Evening."

Another interesting view is his perception of Islam as the religion of the Malay people through him peering at the mosque in "A Malay Mosque from a Malay Window, Ulu Bernam" (1884) (Figure 9). Capturing the subject matter through the window of Syed Abu Bakar's house, over the river at Ulu Bernam, he showed the mosque on the other bank with elevated outdoor huts which could also have been a religious school. On his several trips to that area, Swettenham had developed a close relationship with many of the local personalities, as has been described in his various journals but his journeys were made not for sightseeing purposes but actually to enable him to make contact and influence the Malays and persuading them in accepting British Administration. His description of the Malay's religion as "Muhammadan" fits into what Said describes "Mohammedan" as the relevant (and insulting) European designation, imitative of a Christian imitation of true religion.³⁵ Swettenham writes,

"The Malay has been a Muhammadan since the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah of Malacca, who flourished in 1276, and made his kingdom the third greatest in the Archipelago-Majapahit, in Java, being the first, and Pasai, in Sumatra, the second. It is unlikely that the Malay

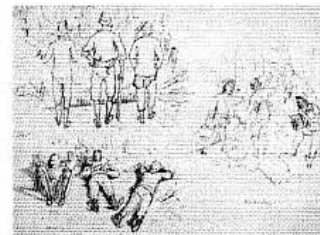


Figure 8: Frank Swettenham, "The Start," "Mid-day," and "Climax-Evening" (17th April 1885)

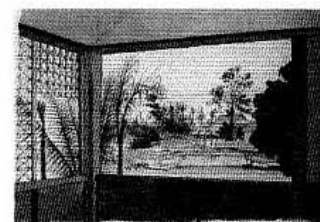


Figure 9: Frank Swettenham, "A Malay Mosque from a Malay Window, Ulu Bernam," (17th September 1884).

³² Swettenham, *British Malaya*, xi.

³³ Butcher, 54.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 66.

has ever been a religious bigot, it is not in his nature; and though he is professing Muhammadan and ready to die for a faith which he only dimly understands, he has never entirely abandoned the superstitions of his earlier days."³⁶

To conclude, from Butcher's studies clearly show that the Europeans did not regard Malaya as "home." Most men began their careers in Malaya when they were in their early twenties, they found wives in Europe, and, largely because of beliefs about the effects of the tropical climate on Europeans, they returned periodically on leave. They sent their children to Britain, and they spent their retirements in Britain. During their years in Malaya they enjoyed social activities that were to be found in British society, read British newspapers, and closely followed events in Britain.³⁷ This is true in the case of Swettenham himself, even though, his knowledge of the Malays, their customs and his great rapport with the Sultan, from these images, it can be suggested that Swettenham had never position himself as a Malay friend that he appeared to be. In a way, I hope that this paper had discussed clearly the ideological framework of what looks to be a simple "documentary image." I am in agreement with Syed Hussein Alatas that, there is a pressing need to correct the colonial image of the Malays. Not only because that these negative images still exert and influence how the non Malays perceive the Malays but such negative perception on the Malay society still have a strong influence among a section of Malay intelligentsia in the context of current modern Malaysia.

³⁶ Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* 144.

³⁷ Butcher, 225.

Bibliography

- Alatas, Syed Hussein. *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* London: Cass, 1977.
- Barlow, Henry. "Biographical Notes on Frank Swettenham." In *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894*. Kuala Lumpur: The British-Malaysia Society, 1988.
- Butcher, John G. *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* Kuala Lumpur and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Early Views of Penang and Malacca 1660-1880*. Penang: Lembaga Muzium Pulau Pinang, 2002.
- Keat, Lim Chong. "The Swettenham-Giles Collection." In *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894* Kuala Lumpur: The British-Malaysia Society, 1988.
- Keat, Lim Chong, and Henry Barlow. *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolour and Sketches* Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian-British Society, 1988.
- Lim, Chong Keat. *Penang Views 1770-1860* Penang: Penang Museum, Summer Times Publishing, 1986.
- McAlpin, S. *The Landscape Palimpsest: Reading Early 19th Century British Representations of Malaya* Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, 1997.
- Roff, William R. *Stories and Sketches by Sir Frank Swettenham* Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Swettenham, Frank. *Footprints in Malaya* London, NY and Melbourne: Hutchinson & Co., 1942.
- _____. *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1948.