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"[WOMEN] SHOULD BE HELPMATES AND NOT DRAGS UPON THEIR HUSBANDS":

FEMALE EDUCATION IN BROOKE SARAWAK, 1841-1941

by

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Introduction

The provision of education was not given serious consideration by the Brookes, and it was to the credit of Christian missionaries and the Chinese community that schools were started and education developed during this period. Alongside the promotion of schooling for boys, European missionaries advocated female education. But the supporters of education for girls faced an uphill task of scaling the wall of conservatism; their eventual success owed to their ability in convincing parents that sending daughters to schools would transformed them into accomplished home-makers. Home economics and the practical skills of managing a household were the central theme in the curriculum of female education. Progress in schooling for girls was gradual and achievements modest, particularly encouraging results was among the Chinese which in time appreciated the advantages of an English-medium mission education for their daughters. But within Malay and Iban communities, female education did not make much headway. The religious conservatism of the Muslim Malay community frowned upon young girls being taught by strangers in schools. The general indifference exhibited by the Ibans towards schools and education in general negated most efforts in

¹ This paper is part of a wider study of the role played by women in Sarawak history before 1963.

encouraging schooling for girls (or boys, for that matter).

Unfavourable Attitudes towards Formal Schooling for Girls

The Brookes did not have a clear-cut policy on education for Sarawak throughout the century of their rule. The Brookes perceived education and formal schooling, particularly along Western lines, as a disruptive influence to the traditional way of life of the inhabitants; Brooke intention, as far as possible, was to maintain the general *status quo* of the people and country. Understandably development in the field of education was sluggish and marked by official unenthusiasm and overall indifference. Apart from some efforts by Charles Brooke in sponsoring Malay schools and the institution of the Government Lay School, the Brooke government left the task of the provision of education and the establishment of schools to Christian missions and Chinese communities. The missions established head schools in Kuching and Sibü which largely catered for the Chinese population, and smaller and lesser schools in the rural areas for Dayak² children. The Chinese, wherever they have sizeable settlements, would endeavour to have schools that provided vernacular education which utilized the dialect of the community.

Traditional views within Malay and Chinese societies in pre-War Sarawak of the role of girls and young women as wives and mothers worked against the attempts at female education. A typical Sarawak Malay outlook towards female

² The term 'Dayak' in the context of this study denotes Sea Dayak or Iban.

education is exemplified by the opinion of Datu Isa, wife of the Datu Bandar,³ the most senior Malay noble. When asked by Ranee Margaret, wife of Rajah Charles Brooke, about the idea of how beneficial it would be if she (the Ranee) and other Malay women were to learn to read and write in Malay, Datu Isa's reply was as follows:

No, that would never do. Writing amongst women is a bad habit, a pernicious custom. Malay girls would be writing love letters to clandestine lovers, and undesirable men might come into contact with the daughters of our house. I do not agree, Rajah Raneë [Margaret], with the idea, and I hope it will never come to pass.⁴

Although Datu Isa's retort might appear narrow-minded, her reaction was more to protect the good name of the women of her household rather than to obstruct their acquisition of knowledge *per se* as demonstrated by her later actions.⁵

Malay girls in pre-War days led sheltered lives. They received religious instruction from their mother or other close relative. At the same time they were being instructed early in childhood to perform household chores. Such training in domestic work was considered an important part of a young girl's upbringing in preparation for her future role as a competent wife and home-maker. Unlike their male siblings, Malay girls were not allowed to mix freely outside the family circle and were constantly chaperoned during public functions lest their

³ The Malay *Datus* were the traditional leaders of the Malay community. The *Datu Patinghi*, the *Datu Bandar*, and the *Datu Temenggong* were the three local Malay leaders acknowledged by James Brooke. The *Datu Patinghi* controlled the Malays on the left-hand branch of the Sarawak River while the *Datu Bandar* the right-hand branch. The *Datu Temenggong* dominated the Malays of the coastal areas. The *Datu Hakim* was responsible for judicial matters affecting the community and the *Datu Imaum* acted as the religious authority. See S. Baring-Gould and C. A. Bampfylde, A History of Sarawak under Its Two White Rajahs, 1839-1908, London: Henry Sotheran, 1909, p. 207.

⁴ Margaret Brooke (The Ranee of Sarawak), My Life in Sarawak, London: Methuen, 1913, p. 159.

⁵ See below.



Datin Isa, wife of Datu Bandar, Bua Hassan and children.

morality was questioned which might affect adversely their chances of marriage. Having unmarried daughters brought shame and ridicule to the family; a situation no respectable Malay would endure. Attending a public school, even in an all female institution, was greatly discouraged as it was considered inappropriate for young unmarried girls to be taught by strangers.

Notwithstanding the Chinese reverence for education, young Chinese girls were not afforded education for reasons not unlike those in Malay society. Although education for boys was given top priority and provided at great sacrifice by poor families, female education was generally neglected among the Chinese irrespective of their socio-economic status. The conservative Chinese considered it unbecoming for their daughters to attend schools and taught by strangers. The public appearances of maidens were few and far apart, and a chaperon was always present on such occasions. Under such circumstances sending one's daughter to a school would undoubtedly exposed her to all and sundry, and consequently demeaned her reputation and chances of marriage. Like his Malay counterpart, a Chinese with spinster daughters would not only bring dishonour to the family name but also posed a financial burden. Unlike male members of a household who could contribute their labour in farming or trading, daughters had no economic value in terms of contribution to the family coffers. Their duties in performing household chores undoubtedly important, however, has no economic value; therefore supporting daughters was burdensome. Furthermore, raising daughters was a wasteful task: when daughters were eventually married off, Chinese society dictate that they leave their family and join their husband's household. Hence, there was little incentive for investing in the education of daughters as she will inevitably leave the family upon her marriage.

The Dayaks and other indigenous peoples, on the other hand, were not so

prudish with regards to the upbringing of their daughters. Nevertheless, for their children irrespective of sex, they see very little value in sending them to the mission school which was the only type of school available in the outstations where the bulk of the Dayak population settled. Informal education whereby fathers train sons in the art of hunting, gathering of jungle produce for food and trade, and techniques in hill-rice farming, whilst mothers instruct daughters in household responsibilities was the norm in Dayak society. An Anglican missionary who had spent a considerable time among the Dayaks described the informal learning process of a young female child as follows:

The girls like to help their mothers and learn to become useful at an early age, and to do the different kinds of work a woman is expected to do. When a woman is plaiting a mat of split cane, or of reeds, she often gives the short ends, which she has cut off, to her little girls, who sits by her and tries to make a little mat with them. ... often seen little girls of ten and eleven being taught by their mothers how to weave cloth.⁶

Attending school and learning to read and write seemed superfluous and irrelevant in a Dayak community where the written word was not known. In 1870 an Anglican missionary described the prevalent attitude of the Dayaks towards literacy in this manner: 'The fact is the people do not see any good in being able to read and write unless it brings food to the store or money to the bag.'⁷ A century later a Dayak in the Lemanak argued that formal schooling had no pragmatic benefits therefore no place whatsoever in Iban society. He illustrated his point by coining the following poetic verses:

Duduk bangku enda bulih padi;
Utai pinsil enda nyadi sangkah babi.

⁶ Edwin H. Gomes, Children of Borneo, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912, p. 27.

⁷ MS Report from the Reverend John L. Perham, Banting Mission, to S.P.G. 30th September 1870 (USPG Archives).

Sitting on a school-bench doesn't grow rice;
A pencil's no use for spearing a pig.

It was then a difficult and labourious task that befell the outstation missionary schoolteachers in trying to convince Dayak parents of the need to send their sons and daughters to school.

Furthermore, Rajah Charles Brooke himself expressed deep concern for the future of Dayak girls in the Kuching mission schools.

I ask, what is it to be their future when they are grown-up? One thing very certain is they will never be able to live in their own country again or marry their own race nor be able to farm or do the work of Dyak women in their own land - separated from their own people - they will become waifs ... to be prostitutes ... I should be sorry to think that this is what our [D]yak girls will come to - but it is in my opinion almost a certainty if they are educated in Kuching away from their own people + country.⁹

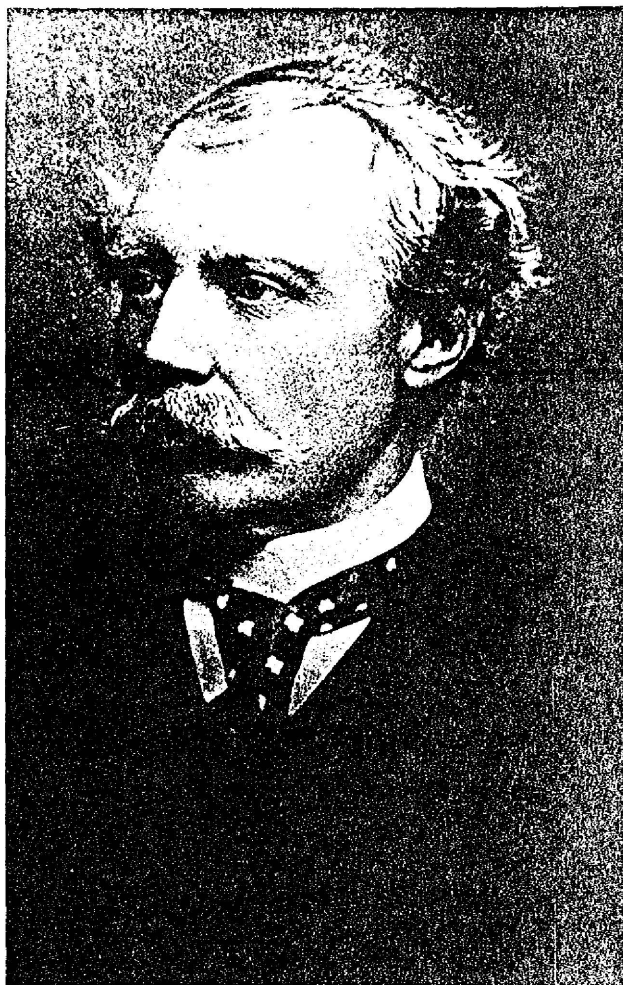
He cited examples from the mission schools of Singapore and Penang where schoolgirls were the 'occupants of the brothels, or who are enticed there at night time'.¹⁰ Consequently he ordered that the handful of Dayak girls in the Anglican and Roman Catholic schools in Kuching be sent home.

In short, societal disapproval and general official indifference coupled with Charles's specific objection to the schooling of Dayak girls in Kuching schools, hampered the development of female education in Sarawak. Notwithstanding the rather unsupportive environment, there were steadfast individuals who initiated schooling for girls and work tirelessly towards expanding these educational opportunities.

⁸ Quoted in Erik Jensen, The Iban and their Religion, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, p. 214.

⁹ MS Letter from Charles Brooke to the Bishop W. Robert Mounsey. 8th May 1913. H.H. The Rajah's Letters April 1913 to November 1915 (SMA).

¹⁰ Ibid. Also, see MS Letter from Charles Brooke to the Archdeacon A. F. Sharp. 5th August 1909. H.H. The Rajah's Letters August 1906 to April 1913 (SMA).



Rajah Charles Brooke

Going Against the Grain

Ranee Margaret and Malay Female Education

Following the birth of her second son, Bertram, Ranee Margaret, in the loneliness of the Astana (palace) and in her quest to acquaint herself with the 'knowledge of the people, of their beliefs and their aspirations', sought the companionship of the womenfolk of the Malay nobility (the *Datus*). These ladies, the wives, consorts and daughters of the *Datus* were invited to the Astana during the evenings to hear old women reciters who relate legends and romantic stories. Inspired by the vast knowledge and skill of such women storytellers who somehow acquired these ancient folk tales and committed them to memory, Ranee Margaret felt that 'it was a pity Malay women could not read or write their own language'.¹¹

Despite her failed attempt at convincing Datu Isa of the usefulness of literacy for Malay women as mentioned above, Ranee Margaret decided to acquire the rudiments of the Malay language herself by taking lessons from a noted teacher, Inchi Sawal, formerly the letter writer to Rajah James Brooke. By being able to converse and write in Malay after a few months under Inchi Sawal's tutelage, Ranee Margaret convinced Datu Isa that there was no harm in women acquiring literacy. The latter decided to allow her married daughters and daughters-in-law to join in the lessons. The *Datu Imaum* offered his blessings as well believing that 'it will be a great incentive to the Malay women to improve

¹¹ Brooke, *My Life in Sarawak*. p. 157.



Ranee Margaret Brooke

their minds and strengthen their hearts'.¹² Remarkable progress was made whereby Daiang (Dayang) Sahada, a daughter-in-law of Datu Isa and wife to Abang Kasim (later appointed *Datu Bandar*), wrote in poetic *Jawi* (Malay script) verses a history of Sarawak.¹³

Spurred by such success Ranee Margaret was enthusiastic in establishing a proper school for women and young boys. Abang Kasim was supportive and allowed part of his house to be the venue of this embryonic school. Like Abang Kasim who was impressed by his wife's educational accomplishment and interest, Rajah Charles too reciprocated his Ranee's determination by building the first government-sponsored Malay school which opened in 1883 with an enrolment of 80 pupils and installed Inchi Sawal as master.¹⁴

But ironically when this Malay school was established which prompted the opening of 'another Malay school on the opposite side of the river',¹⁵ boys dominated the enrolment whereas Malay girls, for reasons already cited, were in the minority.

When the Government Lay School, a brainchild of Rajah Charles, was established in 1903, there was a section for girls.¹⁶ Nevertheless, conservative

¹² Ibid, p. 162.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See SG, 2 July 1883.

This school, later referred to as Abang Kasim School, received an annual grant and was officially administered by the government which provided salaried teachers for it. Its name was later changed to Kampong Jawa School.

¹⁵ Brooke, My Life in Sarawak, p. 164.

¹⁶ The establishment of the Sarawak National College, usually called the Government Lay School, in July 1903 by Charles Brooke marked an important milestone in the development of education in Sarawak, particularly for the Malays. Initially this institution served all races but later, during the Third Rajah's reign, catered solely for the Malays.



Dayang Sahada (1890)

and prejudicial attitudes towards female education ensured that the female enrolment in this institution was small and insignificant.

Establishment of Girls' Schools

Wholly female schools were initiated by the Christian missions which established such institutions as counterparts to their boys' schools. Both the Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries had realized that their young men converts needed Christian trained and educated young ladies as life partners. The Methodist minister, the Reverend James M. Hoover, and his wife, Mary, were conscious of this reality: 'On returning to Borneo [Sarawak] they [Methodist school Chinese male graduates] found only girls with little or no education and Jim and Mary Hoover realized that fine Christian homes could not well be built on such foundations.'¹⁷ Moreover, from the experiences of the Roman Catholic Fathers, female education was essential and presumably urgent which prompted the mission

The Government Lay School became an alternative institution vis-a-vis mission schools of formal schooling for Malay boys. Echoing the Rajah's idea of what form the school would take, namely his concept of *masing-masing bertanggung*, the Gazette explicitly explained its rules:

The rules will be simple, and the first is that the school will do its utmost to educate each race, first of all in their own language ... and this will be the primary and principal consideration and aim of the establishment, and which the Government think it truly essential to enforce.

SG, 1 November 1902.

For the Government Lay School, see Ooi Keat Gin, 'Sarawak Malay Attitudes Towards Education During the Brooke Period, 1841-1946', Journal of South East Asian Studies, 21, 2 (September 1990): 352-5.

¹⁷ Frank Cartwright, Tuan Hoover of Borneo, New York: The Abingdon Press, 1938, p. 107.

to request for the services of Sisters to provide schooling for girls.

The earliest converts tended to be young men. There was a marked resistance to religious change among the women. While this situation continued the work [of the missionaries] could have little permanence and there was little hope of establishing Christian communities, only a fear that once they were married the young men would lapse back into paganism.¹⁸

Chinese vernacular schools managed by local Chinese communities, whether in towns or in rural districts, had mixed enrolments. Female students, however, were either in the minority or unrepresented. Likewise, the mission-managed vernacular schools of the outstations that catered for the Dayaks had few girls on their roll.

St Mary's and St Teresa's

St Mary's and St Teresa's were the premier English-medium girls' schools of the Anglican and Roman Catholic missions respectively. St Mary's had a longer history which dated back to the 1850s to the days of the first Rajah. It was the efforts of Mrs Harriette McDougall, wife of the Reverend (later Bishop) Frank T. McDougall, in catering to the educational needs of female orphans (and later, day scholars) at the Mission House in what was then referred to as the 'Home School'.¹⁹ This Home School was the nucleus of the boys' school of St Thomas's while the girls' section became St Mary's. St Teresa's, on the other hand, had its origins in the Convent established in 1885 at Kuching by the Congregation of

¹⁸ John Rooney, Khabar Gembira (The Good News): A History of the Catholic Church in East Malaysia and Brunei (1880-1976), London: Burns & Oates, 1981, p. 152. Also, see Heidi Munan-Oettli, They Came to the Land of the Headhunters ..., Kuching: St Teresa's School, 1987, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ See Harriette McDougall, Letters from Sarawak, reprinted from the edition of 1854; London: Wheldon & Wesley, 1924, pp. 69 and 81.

the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of St Joseph.

Both St Mary's and St Teresa's had boarders as well as day-scholars. The majority of the students in both institutions were Chinese from Kuching; a small number of these schoolgirls were from outstations as far as Miri, some became boarders while others lived with relatives in Kuching. Some of the older girls in St Mary's were already engaged to be married to Christian men and their future husbands, usually mission educated themselves, placed their fiancées in the school to be educated.²⁰ St Mary's School provided an elementary education up to Standard III; later in 1910 the fourth Standard was added, and in 1927 the seventh Standard was also taught.²¹ St Teresa's offered Standards VI and VII from 1924.²² Despite the stern opposition of Rajah Charles to the education of Dayak girls in the Kuching mission schools, St Mary's had a few Dayak girls as boarders during the 1920s.

Mary Hoover and the Methodist Foochow Schools

The Foochow schools of the Lower Rejang presented an unusual example of Chinese schools that were inspired by the Methodist mission in their establishment but utilized the Foochow dialect as the medium of instruction in contrast to the English-medium mission schools in Kuching or the vernacular (Dayak or Malay) mission schools in the outstations. English was taught as a separate subject but

²⁰ 'Abridged Report of the Proceedings at the Twenty First Annual Meeting of the Borneo Mission Association on June 12th [1929],' The Chronicle, 20, 4 (November 1929), p. 4.

²¹ See Brian Taylor and Pamela M. Heyward, The Kuching Anglican Schools, 1848-1973, Kuching: Lee Ming Press, 1973, p. 69; and The Chronicle, 19, 4 (May 1928), p. 5.

²² Munan-Oettli, Land of the Headhunters, p. 35.

was not emphasized. Reverend Hoover was instrumental in establishing schools among the Foochow and Cantonese communities in the Lower Rejang. His first task, shortly after his arrival in 1903, was the setting up of a boys' school which attracted an initial group of thirty pupils.²³ However, his missionary activities and medical visits did not allow him to devote his energy to the schools; instead the educational work was left to his wife, Mary.

Mary Hoover contributed much to Chinese female education being single-handedly instrumental in initiating and developing schooling for girls among the Foochow community in and around Sibu. Testimony to her work is expressed in this tribute penned in 1947.

To Mary Hoover fell mostly the education of the girls, and it is true to say that now up and down the Rejang there are hundreds of Chinese women who remember with gratitude her loving teaching and kindness. To have attended her school in Sibu was a mark of distinction, and it was said that the ambition of many a young Chinese lad was to get one of her "old girls" as a bride.²⁴

Sekolah Permaisuri

A truly historic event occurred in 1930 with the opening of the Sekolah Permaisuri at Kampong Satok, Kuching, as the first government-sponsored Malay school for girls. Ironically belated as seen retrospectively from the efforts of Ranee Margaret and her Malay lady companions, the Sekolah Permaisuri nevertheless was undoubtedly a notable achievement on the part of the Brooke authorities in breaking down to a certain extent the conservative barrier of the Malay

²³ Letter of 14th April 1903 from the Reverend James Hoover to Brother Speer, a supporting friend in Pennsylvania, quoted in Cartwright, Tuan Hoover of Borneo, pp. 81-82.

²⁴ SG, 1 September 1947.



Reverend James Hoover



Mary Hoover

community's objection to schooling for girls.

Sekolah Permaisuri could traced its origins as far back as the mid-1890s. The *Datu Bandar*, Abang Kasim, mooted the idea of a school for girls in 1894 but his suggestion proved too advance for the Malay community then.²⁵ It took another three decades as well as through the forceful and determined efforts of Abang Abdillah, the son of Abang Kasim who was appointed *Datu Bandar* in 1924, to realize the establishment of an all-girl Malay school. During an address at the Speech Day of the Government Lay School in 1925, Abang Abdillah resurrected his father's vision of a school for Malay girls in Kuching.²⁶ The once conservative attitude and traditional outlook of the Malay community had by then gradually given way to more progressive ideas.

Like his generous father before him, Abang Abdillah allowed the Sekolah Permaisuri to operate temporarily at his house from 1926 to 1930 while awaiting the construction of its premises at Kampong Satok.

'[Women] should be helpmates and not drags upon their husbands'

A Curriculum for Future Wives and Mothers

The main intention, as mentioned earlier, of establishing schools for girls by the Christian missions was to prepare and train them to assume responsibilities and role befitting a wife, mother and home-maker. The basic assumption was that these girls would eventually be married to young Christian men and together they shall raise a family and home based upon the teachings of Christ. Although not

²⁵ See SG, 1 December 1894.

²⁶ See SG, 1 October 1955.

abiding by Christian principles of nurturing a family and household, Malay girls of Sekolah Permaisuri too were expected to be housewives and mothers in accordance with Islamic teachings.

With marriage and family life as the future agenda in the lives of female students, all the schools for girls without exception emphasized a practical, as opposed to a literary, academic oriented curriculum. Mary Hoover considered that the purpose of education for girls was to ensure that they 'should be helpmates and not drags upon their husbands', and, fit and prepared to build good and comfortable homes.²⁷ Simplicity and thriftiness were the hallmarks of the set-up and management of her schools; virtues which 'her girls' were expected to emulate and practise in their future roles as wife and home-maker. To ensure there were no 'drags', a practical curriculum was taught emphasizing the learning of modern domestic skills, simple nursing and nutrition.²⁸

The curriculum at St Mary's and St Teresa's also stressed training in the domestic arts. Girls at St Teresa's, for instance, 'were indeed taught to read and write, *but much of their time was spent in needlework, laundry, cooking and child care*'.²⁹ The English-medium curricula at St Mary's included reading, writing and some simple arithmetic with practical subjects like needlework which included embroidery and lace-making. Some domestic knowledge and hygiene considered necessary to future home-makers like laundry and housekeeping also made up part of the curriculum; and as recreation the girls were taught singing

²⁷ Cartwright, Tuan Hoover of Borneo, p. 107.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 108.

²⁹ Rooney, Khabar Gembira, p. 152. Emphasis added. For St Mary's, see Taylor and Heyward, The Kuching Anglican Schools, pp. 65-66; and Borneo, S.P.G. Handbook Series, London: S.P.G. House, n.d., p. 46.

and participated in games.³⁰ Girls at Sekolah Permaisuri were taught the 3R's but the main focus of instruction, however, was in domestic skills and handicrafts.³¹

Like Mary Hoover's 'girls', Convent-trained girls too were highly in demand as wives. The Sisters at St Teresa's even went a step further by acting as the 'parents' of their orphaned charges and provide their trousseau at the time of marriage.³²

Overcoming Prejudices: Some Achievements in Female Education

Beginning with the teaching of the 'five China dolls', Chinese orphans left under the care of the Nuns, St Teresa's population by 1937 grew to 363 pupils, making it the largest girls' school in Borneo then.³³ St Mary's too had students in the hundreds by the 1930s, likewise Mary Hoover's school at Sibu. By 1933 Sekolah Permaisuri had a respectable enrolment of fifty.³⁴ Moreover, in the Malay boys' schools, girls generally constituted a fifth of the total enrolment.³⁵ Although no figures were available for the Chinese vernacular schools which also had a mixed enrolment, the number of female students was likely to exceed the one fifth

³⁰ See 'Third Annual Report of the Bishop of the Diocese, 1st December 1920', Diocese of Labuan and Sarawak, Annual Report 1920, Borneo Church Mission (In connection with S.P.G.). p. 11.

³¹ See Sabihah bt Osman, 'The Development of Malay Vernacular Education in Sarawak, 1841-1941', Jebat, 14 (1986), p. 39.

³² See Rooney, Khabar Gembira, pp. 152-3.

³³ See Munan-Oettli, Land of the Headhunters, pp. 3-4, 15-16 and 55.

³⁴ SG, 3 June 1933.

³⁵ See SG, 1 October 1925.

as in the Malay boys' school considering the more forward looking attitude of the Chinese community vis-a-vis their Malay counterpart.

Conservative and rather archaic attitudes towards female education gradually begin to change particularly among the urban Chinese population. The large enrolment at the mission girls' schools indicated a shift in opinion and a realization of the benefits of schooling for girls. The practical curriculum offered by St Teresa's and the reputation of its graduates as consummate homemakers, proudly known as 'Convent girls', fostered a favourable image which consequently increased its enrolment.

In the case of the Sarawak Chinese, it was still education for its own sake as far as girls were concerned. There were no professions a respectably brought-up girl could enter. But having a daughter spend a few years at the Convent proved to one's neighbour that one could afford it, and it might also enhance her value in the eye of a similarly educated future husband.³⁶

Although practical domestic subjects were largely emphasized in female education, there was a realization from the mid-1920s that a more academic-content curriculum was favourable and to the future interest of the girls. In 1940 St Teresa's presented its first candidate for the Cambridge Junior Certificate Examination.³⁷ In the case of Sekolah Permaisuri, 1940 was an auspicious year which witnessed the success of seven girls who had completed a special examination and qualified themselves to enter the English-stream of the Maderasah Melayu, the highest grade Malay school during the Brooke period.³⁸ At

³⁶ Munan-Oettli, Land of the Headhunters, p. 33.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 57.

³⁸ Sabihah binti Osman, 'Pelajaran bagi Anak-Anak Perempuan Bumiputra di Sekolah-Sekolah Melayu Kerajaan di Sabah dan Sarawak pada Zaman Kompeni Berpiagam (1881-1941) dan Rejim Brooke (1841-1941) - Satu Tinjauan', Malaysia in History, 18, 2 (December 1975), p. 7.

In 1931 the Brooke government created the Maderasah Melayu, an amalgamation of the Kampong Jawa School and the Government Lay School, to curb a worrying

St Mary's, Junior Cambridge classes were started in 1935 with four masters from the boys' school of St Thomas's offering their assistance.³⁹ It came as no surprise then to hear of graduates of these girls' schools, armed with acceptable qualifications, returning as teachers to serve their alma mater. For instance, three out of the four teachers that taught at Sekolah Permaisuri in 1941 were former graduates of the school; they each had passed Standard VII, the highest grade then offered by the school.⁴⁰

Among Brooke official circles, there were also supportive voices of female education. Illustrative of this was the government patronage and financial contribution afforded the Sekolah Permaisuri. Another indication was the views expressed by R. W. Hammond, who was commissioned by Rajah Vyner's government to look into the state of education in the country. In his 'Report', issued in 1937, Hammond admitted the Brooke government's negligence of female education in the past.⁴¹ He felt that more efforts had to be made to encourage parents to send their daughters to school and the government should on its part establish more schools for girls.⁴² Although the Pacific War interrupted the implementation of

trend among Malay youths aspiring to be clerks in the civil service armed only with a 'smattering of English'. The Maderasah stressed a practical curriculum to produce graduates who had no claims on clerical positions. Instead it was the desired objective of the authorities to ensure that after some basic schooling in practical subjects, Malay youths would return to their village and community and help develop the land.

For the Maderasah Melayu, see Ooi, 'Sarawak Malay Attitudes Towards Education', pp. 355-6.

³⁹ See Taylor and Heyward, The Kuching Anglican Schools, pp. 69 and 72; and, The Chronicle, 24, 1 (February 1936), p. 15.

⁴⁰ Sabihah binti Osman, 'Pelajaran Anak-Anak Perempuan Bumiputra', p. 7.

⁴¹ See R. W. Hammond, 'Report on Education in Sarawak', typescript, 1937 (SMA), p. 97.

⁴² Ibid.

Hammond's recommendations, it demonstrated a more positive attitude of Brooke officialdom towards the issue of female education.

Concluding Remarks

Notwithstanding the untiring work of the advocates of female education, the results were discouraging. Conservative attitudes remained firm and unmoved, particularly strong within Malay-Muslim society irrespective of urban or rural communities. It was only through the latter years of the 1930s that witnessed a small breakthrough in the Malay-Muslim wall of conservatism as exemplified by the existence of the Sekolah Permaisuri. Even amongst the Chinese, who were relatively the most progressive vis-a-vis other communities, the number of Chinese girls who partook of formal schooling was but a small number. The commendable efforts of the mission schools in convincing Chinese parents to the benefits of sending their daughters for formal education was the single most important reason for the increase in enrolment in these schools. Unlike for boys, economic factors did not feature in the decision of Chinese parents in wanting education for their daughters.⁴³ The practical training in domestic skills proved to be the most appealing feature of the curriculum of schools for girls. But as the late 1920s and the 1930s had shown there was a realization that there was a real need to incorporate more academic-based instruction to enable girls to pursue careers, the most appropriate professions then being teaching and

⁴³ For the arguments of the predominance of economic motives in acquiring an English-medium mission education in Sarawak, see Ooi Keat Gin, 'Mission Education in Sarawak During the Period of Brooke Rule, 1841-1946', Sarawak Museum Journal, 62, 63 (New Series) (December 1991): 283-373; and, 'Education in Sarawak: From Brooke Rule to Colonial Office Administration, 1841-1963', Borneo Research Bulletin, 24 (1992): 62-67.

nursing.

It was only during the post-Brooke period that attitudes gradually begin to change amongst the various ethnic groups towards formal education and a realization of its socio-economic and political benefits. Progress in female education, though still slow, became more promising during the late 1940s and 1950s under Colonial Office tutelage.⁴⁴

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Abbreviations

SG	Sarawak Gazette
SMA	Sarawak Museum and State Archives, Kuching
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, London
USPG	United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, London

⁴⁴ Sarawak was ceded to the Britian in mid-1946 and came under the administration of the Colonial Office in London which governed it as a Crown Colony.

For the development of education during the post-Brooke period, see Ooi Keat Gin, 'Education in Sarawak During the Period of Colonial Administration, 1946-1963', Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 63, 2 (December 1990): 35-68.