

TRAVEL SKETCHES OF MALAYA BY SIR FRANK SWETTENHAM

(Lakaran Perjalanan di Malaya oleh Sir Frank Swettenham)

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Abstract

The representation of Malaya (presently known as Malaysia) was evident through the works of both trained and amateur artists, among them Robert Smith, William Havell, James George, James Wathen and William J. Huggins. Besides these artists, representation of Malaya was also done by British officers who were sent to Malaya during the 19th century. One prominent figure was Frank Althelstane Swettenham (1850-1946), the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States (FMS) (1896-1901). This paper will examine some of his travel sketches of the Malayan landscape that inconspicuously reflected the British empire's ideology of industrialization, colonization, and exploration, and to the extreme extent of resource extraction and exploitation. Although it can be argued that the production of such imageries could be seen as a tool of anthropology or as a form of documentation and record, inevitably, such imageries were clues in understanding the changing landscapes and representation of landscape during the 19th century Malaya.

Keywords: Travel sketches, British Malaya, Frank Swettenham, drawings, travel writing, landscape

Abstrak

Gambaran Tanah Melayu (kini Malaysia) telah dikesan melalui karya-karya seniman terlatih dan amatur, antaranya Robert Smith dan William Havell, James George, James Wathen dan William J. Huggins. Selain seniman ini, penggambaran Tanah Melayu juga dilakukan oleh pegawai British yang

dihantar ke Tanah Melayu pada abad ke-19. Seorang tokoh yang menonjol ialah Frank Althelstane Swettenham (1850-1946), Residen Jeneral pertama Negeri-Negeri Melayu Bersekutu (1896-1901). Artikel ini akan mengkaji beberapa lakaran perjalanan landskap Tanah Melayu oleh beliau yang tidak secara langsung menggambarkan ideologi empayar perindustrian, penjajahan dan penerokaan, dan sampai ke suatu tahap pengekstrakan dan eksploitasi sumber yang melampau oleh orang British. Walaupun boleh dikatakan bahawa penghasilan imejan tersebut boleh dilihat sebagai alat antropologi atau sebagai satu bentuk dokumentasi dan rekod, tidak dapat dielakkan, imejan-imejan ini ialah petunjuk untuk memahami perubahan gambaran landskap pada abad ke-19 di Tanah Melayu.

Kata kunci: Lakaran perjalanan, British Malaya, Frank Swettenham, lukisan, penulisan perjalanan, landskap

INTRODUCTION

Recognized as a separate literary genre, travel writing has been subject to extensive critical attention. Interestingly, the same cannot be said for travel sketches. This paper will discuss the position of Sir Frank Althelstane Swettenham towards Malaya, not through his travel writings but most importantly through his sketches as published in *Watercolours & Sketches of Malaya, 1880-1894*¹. Though not a trained artist, Frank Swettenham², was known as the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States (FMS) (1896-1901), then the Governor of the Straits Settlement and the High Commissioner of the FMS (1901-1904), and published a few books on what we now term as travel writing. The sketches that will be discussed here however, were done when Swettenham was working in Selangor and Perak in 1884 and 1885.

During the British Empire, travel was common especially for the English colonial administrators. For a few of these administrators, these travels led them towards writing – either through journals, reports, even short stories and novels or now what is described as travel writings. Frank Swettenham, as I will discuss in this paper, sketched, drew and even painted with watercolours during his free time when he was in Malaya to document what he saw.

As this paper will demonstrate and further position, it is not only travel writings that can be studied as the only source of historical perception of colonial powers but also sketches which are another form of visual documentation. Though mostly unofficial and were done in private moments, sketches are also a valuable source of evidence on how the colonial administrators perceived their colonies, in this case Malaya.

In general, travel writings that were produced from and for a different context and times are typically marked by approaches that we find objectionable nowadays. For instance, travel writings used to be an essentially “masculine” form and mostly dominated by male Europeans writing about the rest of the world. As a result, there were persistent silencing of the colonial “Other” and women’s voices in these writings. This is not a surprise as most of these travel writings were written by men and describing male experiences. If we were to study the works of art, in this case sketches, drawings, and paintings done by colonizers, we can read them similarly like the works of literature. As Sophia McAlpin reasserts in the Introduction of *The Landscape Palimpsest: Reading Early 19th Century British 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” (1997: vi-vii).

Travel sketches as a form of visual documentation, although mostly unofficial and were done during private moments – are also a valuable source of evidence on how the colonial administrators perceived their colonies during the 19th century Malaya, now Malaysia. An amateur artist like Swettenham, through his sketches and watercolours, presented the environment and the changing landscapes across Malaya. Swettenham sketched using pencils and painted using watercolours as these were convenient mediums to bring along in his travels.

This paper will situate how artists (albeit an amateur one) like Swettenham, have responded to these new or transforming natural worlds, especially when the artist himself, contributed and led Britain’s extraction and exploitation of local resources as a result of Britain’s colonial expansion to cater for industrial revolution.

As Swettenham’s travel sketches were done during his assignment in Malaya, his sketches and writings could be highly viewed as reflecting the British’s attitude of that time, especially if read in the context of his position and his role in forming the Federated Malay States (FMS) itself.

As the former Resident and the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States (FMS) – Swettenham’s skill, tactfulness, self-confidence, his fluency in the Malay language and Malay customs helped him in developing and building relationship with the Malay Sultans. This enabled him to play a key role in which what the British term as “intervention” – although these “interventions” were in fact Britain’s colonization of Malaya. Swettenham later also implemented and oversaw various policies that became the foundation of modern Malaya by supervising the planning of railways, roads, irrigation networks, land cultivation and plantations, and others.

Viewing Travel Writings and Sketches through Syed Hussein Alatas' Colonial Capitalism Ideology

This study draws on the postcoloniality as its larger conceptual framework based on Edward Said's Orientalism (1994) and specifically Syed Hussein Alatas's (1977:9) framing in his study of *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* which notes that in the increasing post-colonial scholarship, the study of the Malays has been overwhelmingly dominated by ideological forces that were uncritical and superficial. Although this was observed way back in 1977, in the field of art history, the postcolonial reading and criticality in analyzing sketches, drawings, photographs taken by colonial administrators are still limited even until today.

As such, the study of Swettenham's travel writings and sketches that will be analysed and discussed in this paper is pertinent in expanding and expounding deeper critical analysis of these materials in the context of postcolonial studies. This paper will examine these travel writings and sketches by employing the colonial capitalism ideology as explicated by Syed Hussein Alatas. Syed Hussein Alatas characterized the 18th century in Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia as having these colonial capitalism traits:

... (a) predominant control of and access to capital by an alien economic power, (b) the control of the colony by a government run by members of the alien power, acting on its behalf, (c) the highest level of business, trade and industry, held by the alien dominating community, (d) direction of the country's export and import trade to suit the interest of the alien ruling power, (e) a bias towards the agrarian mode of production as opposed to that of industry, (f) the minimal expansion of technological and scientific skill, (g) the organization of production around semi-free labour, (h) the absence of guilds or trade unions as a counterweight to exploitation, (i) the non-involvement of large sections of the population in direct capitalist enterprise, and (j) the presence of a set of antitheses in the colonized society described by the term dualism. (Syed Hussein Alatas, 1977:2)

Although the effective period of colonial capitalism covered the 18th and 19th centuries and the first half of the 20th century, Syed Hussein Alatas (1977:2) pointed out that it is impossible to establish a rigidly demarcated onset of colonial capitalism, but he believes that by the 18th century it is safe to say that the power of colonial capitalism was firmly entrenched in Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia – as within this time span many great changes had taken place in the structure of the indigenous society. At that time, Europe's commercial capitalism was booming

making Southeast Asia the victim of this first phase of capitalism as it served as “Europe’s another geographical discovery”, it was being colonized and even though there was an astounding increase in overseas trade it was only to support Europe’s capitalism boom. This 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 interest in the region.

The direct or indirect link with the context of colonial capitalism ideology which will be analysed and read through Swettenham’s travel writings and sketches can be argued as also supporting the sociological and psychological approach. It could be seen in ways of colonial powers denigrating the native population and the image of the native to justify the compulsion and unjust practices in the mobilization of labour in their colonies, in order to rationalize European conquest and domination of the area as part of the larger agenda of the colonial capitalism. The Malays as described and visualized in this study is also in parallel with Said’s observation of the Orientals – who were rarely seen or looked at and if they were seen through, they are analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over (Said, 1994:207).

Frank Swettenham’s Background and Role in the Formation of the Federated Malay States (FMS)

Frank Swettenham (1850-1946) was the Former Resident, the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States (FMS), the Governor of the Straits Settlement and the High Commissioner of the FMS. His skill, tact, tolerant cynicism and self-confidence supported by his fluency in the Malay language and his vast knowledge of the Malay customs had helped him in developing and building relationships with the Malay Sultans. This in turn eventually led to the formation of the FMS and changed the British policy towards the Malay States after 1860s. On top of that, Swettenham also implemented and oversaw policies that became the foundation of modern Malaya by supervising the planning of railways, road, irrigation networks, land cultivation and plantations, and others.

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 was 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, for which to a large extent he is indebted to his teacher Mohd. Said bin Dada Mohyiddin, editor for the first Malay newspaper, the *Jawi Peranakan* (Roff, 1967:xi).

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 turbulence due to the contending Malay royalties over the throne and the Chinese divisions over the tin mines in Larut, these threatened to spill over Penang, and added with outbreaks of piracy, lawlessness and mayhem also to Selangor (Roff, 1967:xii).

Swettenham's important initial role begins with 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 together with Munshi Mohd Said the Pangkor Engagement from English into Malay 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" (Barlow, 1988:11). 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 (Butcher, 1979:7). When the new Resident of Perak, Hugh Low, objected to the circular from Sir William Robinson, reminding the Residents that they had been placed in the States as advisors, 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 advisors must be kept up (Butcher, 1979:7-8).

Swettenham was then sent to Langat, Selangor in August 1874 by Sir Andrew Clarke, the Governor of the Straits Settlement due to the coastal piracy regarded precarious to British interests 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” (Roff, 1967:viii). 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 carry out good public works that was 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 (Barlow, 1988:11). By the year 1890s the four basic units of the Protected Malay States were formed that consisted the state of Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Negeri Sembilan. Swettenham and other British officers during that time had increasingly been aware of the need in administrative uniformity and closer association between the four States, each having its own Resident, by employing the British’s “advisor” as its legislative apparatus, administrative practices, and separate budget. Most importantly, the varying economic fortunes of rubber and tin especially needed to be exploited to fulfil the 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 the 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 Sultans were unable to resist and in 1895 the four states were federated. The speed with which Swettenham obtained the agreement of the rulers involved in this development was startling, and only partly explained by Swettenham’s obvious ambition to become the first Resident General of the FMS (Barlow, 1988:13-14). He served in this capacity until 1901 when he reached the highest ladder of Malayan office 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 manipulations in the internal affairs of the Malay States, British colonization of Malaya was cleverly 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 requirements of modern life. (1948:vi-vii)

Frank Swettenham's Travel Sketches

Swettenham had a few of his writings published. The first work was the first Malay dictionary entitled *Vocabulary of the English and Malay languages* in 1881 and his collaboration with Hugh Charles Clifford to produce *A Dictionary of the Malay Language* (1894). Other early books that have been written and published under his name are *About Perak* (1893), *Malay Sketches* (1895), *The Real Malay: Pen Pictures* (1907), *Unaddressed Letters* (1898), *Also and Perhaps* (1912), *Arabella in Africa* (1925), and finally *Footprints in Malaya* (1942). His best short stories and sketches have been selected and republished again in *Stories and Sketches* (1967). A few of his reports and documentation includes *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* (1929), *Report of the Mauritius Royal Commission, 1909* (1910) and his other writings have also been compiled and by editors Peter Laurie Burns and Charles Donald Cowan in *Sir Frank Swettenham's Malayan Journals 1874-1876* (1975).

Publications by Swettenham himself regarding his experience in Malaya or by scholars who studied him are extensive. But no extensive research has been done on Swettenham's travel sketches and travel writings. Therefore, this paper can be viewed as a minimal attempt to review Swettenham's travel sketches in particular within the context of postcolonial analysis. Only Robert Hampson has discussed the writings of Swettenham's precursor, Hugh Clifford, in *Writing, Travel and Empire* (2007) and discussed the influence of Swettenham's career and writings on Hugh Clifford.

In terms of works of art, early drawings and paintings of early Malaya are not a new subject in terms of curatorship. The research on these early drawings on the other hand, is still limited. Significant documentation of these early Malaya visuals appear in the publication of a few books such as *The Raffles Drawings in the India Office Library London* (1979), *Prints of Southeast Asia in the India Office Library, Penang Views, 1770-1860* (1979), and *Early Views of Penang and Malacca 1660-1880* (2002). The focus of these books is merely publication of the visual documentation pertaining to the geographical areas as reflected in the titles of each book. Other scholarship that attempt to contextualize these visual

documentation persists in Sophia McAlpin's *The Landscape Palimpsest* (1997) in which she discusses landscape paintings of Malaya in the early 19th century in terms of the ideas and constructs that are essential for understanding landscape painting especially in the context of Malaya.

Besides these few books, a compilation of Frank Swettenham and George Giles' works in Lim Chong Keat's collection were exhibited and published by The Malaysian-British Society entitled *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894* (1988). The book includes fifty-five drawings and watercolours by Swettenham and thirty-six by George Giles (in which the figures for this paper are taken from).

In the introductory 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 and in a period of his increasingly unhappy marriage and this is especially for those produced when he took a few days off from Kuala Kangsar or Taiping, to go to the top of Gunong Arang Para to the cooler climate of "The Hermitage" or at "The Cottage" above Taiping (Barlow, 1988:12). Eventually, what was to be a personal relaxation drawing project was later useful as illustrations in Swettenham's book, *Footprints in Malaya* (1942), the book that documents Swettenham's first-hand account of his experience and travels of the Malay Peninsula and also his visit to India, China, Japan, Honolulu, San Francisco and other places.

In terms of sketches, drawings, and paintings, it must be noted that what these British administrators produced in terms of these works might be used more as a tool of anthropology (as in documenting their observations of the places that they were assigned to), rather for any aesthetic merit. In Lim Chong Keat's essay "The Swettenham-Giles Collection" (1988) for example, Lim positions Swettenham as a documentary artist, topographical observer, recorder of events, and observer of the political, physical, and social scenario of Malaya. Although Lim Chong Keat highlights that the collection of the work remains amateurish efforts of colonial officials who have usefully illustrated and documented the situations and environment of their times, I will position these sketches not as mere record of events but as reflective of the Western gaze, that is how it reflected the view or perspective of the British as a colonizing power.

I would like to point out here that it is important to discuss these sketches in the context of postcolonial discourse. For example, Lim Chong Keat makes a commendable effort in *Penang Views 1770-1860* (1986) to research, compile, and document about 160 earliest images of Penang. But there is need to develop a postcolonial reading of the visual images constructed by the works of these British

painters/officers as compiled in the book. In *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894* (1988), Lim only discussed Swettenham and Giles and positioned them as documentary artists. Likewise in *Penang Views 1770-1860* (1986), Lim only looks at these visual images as kind of colonial legacy that we should appreciate. On the other hand, my paper will problematize this position and suggest that the significance of the visual images such as those produced by Swettenham, should be read as visual texts that could be related to the power structure and dichotomy of the colonizer and the colonized, the occidental and the oriental, the west and the east. This is especially if we were to read it in the context of Swettenham's position and role in the formation of the FMS as previously discussed.

A few observations can be made on Swettenham's sketches as published in the book *Frank Swettenham and George Giles: Watercolours and Sketches of Malaya 1880-1894* (1988). First, his sketches reflect his lack of interest in Malaya especially in terms of its people. Second, there is a persistent romanticization of landscapes and mountains. Third, the sense of the drawing although amateurish reveals a distant gaze between the colonizer and the colonized and lastly, his sketches also reveal the British's interest in the land only as a source of rich raw materials.

If we were to look at all the sketches by Swettenham in the above-mentioned book, one major observation that can be made is that there is an obvious lack of interest in the rendition of the Malays and other natives living in Malaya. The native figures never occupy a central position as a subject in Swettenham's sketches. They are either absent or appear very minimal as part of the landscape itself; either in a passive position or busily engaged doing a minimal task. They were being portrayed as not only marginalized, but silent as well. Syed Hussein Alatas (1977) in his book argues that "... the colonial ideology utilized the idea of the lazy native to justify compulsion and unjust practices in the mobilization of labour in the colonies" and this idea is being mooted in support of the colonial capitalistic ideology that justify "... Western rule in its alleged aim of modernizing and civilizing the societies which had succumbed to the Western powers" (pp. 2, 7).

If we look through the drawings by Swettenham, we can observe that the Malays do not play any active role in the context of British colonial capitalism, meaning they have not been portrayed as industrious or working laboriously such as in the lucrative trade of tin-mining or rubber plantations. In his drawing entitled "Batu Serling" (1885) (Figure 1), even though the figure of the native is at the centre of the composition he does not confront or face the viewer. In other words, he is



Figure 1³ Batu Serlin (1885).

left without any identity. 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. A few other sketches that have included the natives show them to be engaged in some activities but unrelated to the British occupation on the economic activities of Malaya. This could be seen in “Untitled (Boat on Pahang River)” (1885) (Figure 2), “Untitled (The Same but Different)” (1885) (Figure 3) and “Untitled (River or Lake Scene, Pahang River)” (1885). In these river scenes, the natives only exist as petty boat peddlers, unidentified, faceless and miniscule in comparison to the whole landscape or riverscape.

Even though according to John G. Butcher, circumstances as well as official policy encouraged close relations between British officers and the people they governed (Butcher, 1979:52), we could see from Swettenham’s sketches and writings that there is never any sort of equality in his relation with the Malay people and to a certain extent even their Sultans. This could also be seen in Swettenham’s undermining description of the Malays:

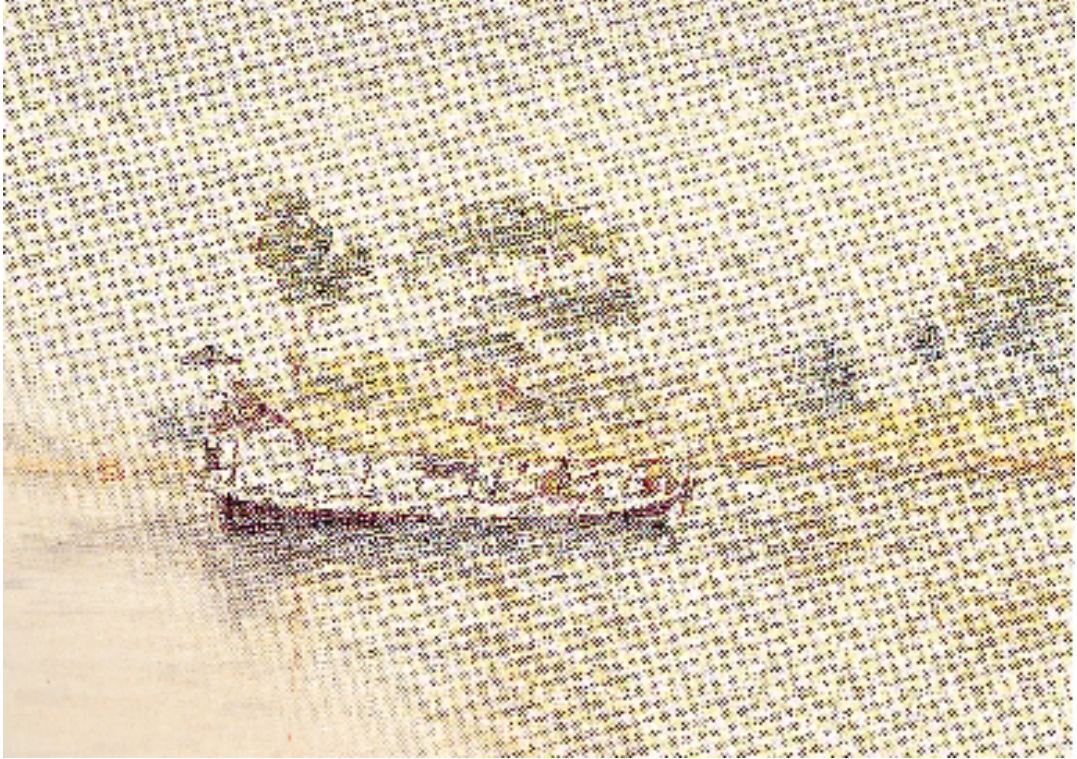


Figure 2 Untitled (Boat on Pahang River) (1885).

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. (1967:16-17)

Furthermore, in *Malay Sketches*, Swettenham (1967:3) wrote that the Malay is conservative, proud, and fond of his country and people. They worship their ancient customs and traditions and their feeling of fear towards their Raja and highly respected what constituted as authority. This undermining position could be seen in how the images of the Malays appear in his drawings in which, the Malays as a subject (or non-subject) are mostly either absent or play a minimal role. Malays are seen as mostly passive and of little interest to Swettenham in terms of artistic source or even as a documentative subject. Unlike his other drawings in which the Malays are mostly absent or appear to be without any identity or character, “Tanjong



Figure 3 Untitled (The same but different) (1885).

Malim Ulu Bernam” (1884) (Figure 4) is an exception. It depicts 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 or the villages. But even this only depiction of a Malay man, presented in this drawing of *Penghulu* Haji Mustafa, succumbed to Swettenham’s colonizer gaze. This could be seen in how Haji Mustafa is presented with in a contemplative and melancholic mood, looking afar and passive, not active, in his sitting position. In the depiction, Haji Mustafa posed in a vulnerable sitting position, as if defenceless to protect his own people.

Therefore, it can be suggested here that to Swettenham, there is no reciprocity between Swettenham and the Malays. This is not surprising, for he was a British officer who was always conscious of his duties (White man’s burden) towards the Malay society. It can be argued here that Swettenham scrutinizes the Malay people with the eyes of authority. The position of a colonizer who is astute and perceptive



Figure 4 Tanjong Malim Ulu Bernam (1884).

– his knowledge of the people and the “sympathetic” strategies that he employs in his administrative strategies as previously discussed in the early part of this paper enables him to subtly manoeuvre the Malay Sultanate themselves into giving their autonomous power to the British. His perception and approach in his relationship of the Malays were 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, humour his prejudices, sympathise with and help him in trouble, and share his pleasure and possibly his risks. Only thus you can hope to win his confidence” (1967:16).

If he were to have any high regard for the Malay people it is only for the Sultan of Perak and that is because the Sultan is in agreement with him, and how the British runs things. He explains this here:

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. (1948:xi)

This perspective of undermining the Malays was meant to justify the British’s occupation in Malaya since the level of competence of the Malay people was 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. This is in parallel in how the British officers saw themselves in Malay term, as the *rajah*. 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 of the manor and the Malay *rakyat* as their tenants and did not deserve to be the subject of interests (Butcher, 1979:54).

The lack of interest in the Malays as a visual subject is obvious. In comparison with a drawing made during the trip, of himself, Giles and Lister during their trip to



Figure 5 The start, midday, and climax evening (1885).



Figure 6 Untitled (Head of a lady; from a photograph) (c. 1880/1890).



Figure 7 Untitled (Head of another lady, from a photograph) (c. 1880/1890).

Pahang in 1885 entitled “The Start, Midday, and Climax Evening” (1885) (Figure 5), the portrayal of these three characters were meticulously drawn with enough details identifying them as the three British officers who led the expedition. The characters stand out in terms of appearance, and identifiable characterization through various headgears and outfits plus smaller details such as the smoking pipe and the walking stick. This is to say that Swettenham is not a person without skill in figure drawings. We could further witness his skills in a series of “Untitled” works such as “Untitled (Head of a lady; from a Photograph)” (c. 1880/1890) (Figure 6), “Untitled (Head of another lady, from a photograph)” (c. 1880/1890) (Figure 7) “Untitled (Female nude on tip toes holding what appears to be a tray)” (c. 1894), and “Pencil Drawing for ‘The Young Bacchus’” (1894). His drawing skills prove that he is able to render figuration in a detailed and meticulous manner.

Perhaps it can be counter argued that in the lists of works above, Swettenham's drawings are more detailed and captured the best impression of the European women and nude figures because these drawings were produced at leisure and had been modelled after life figures or photographs. On the other hand, his drawings and sketches during his trip to Perak and Pahang have been done impromptu. I would still like to argue here that it does not explain why Swettenham's sketches of the Malays could not be better or could at least be of a major interest in his endeavour.

Apart from the absence of the natives in terms of their rendition in Swettenham's sketches, we can find that most of Swettenham's sketches and drawings, portray the Malayan landscapes, riverscape, seascape, and mountains. We can observe from Swettenham's representation of recognizable topographies in his sketches, drawings and watercolours that he was generally interested in capturing such views during his travels in Malaya. This does not come as a surprise as at first, the effects of the climate had a profound influence in the way of life of Europeans in Malaya and throughout the tropics. Butcher explains that Europeans generally believed that physical and mental deterioration were the inevitable result of living for long periods in the tropics. Hence it was impossible for them to settle permanently in the tropics. Therefore, it was 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 (Butcher, 1979:68). 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.

It can be suggested here that Swettenham must have also been 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 8), "Untitled (Gunong Bubu-From "The Hermitage" & "G. Bubu-5450 Ft. Hermitage-3200 Ft.)" (c. 1884) (Figure 9), "Untitled ("The Cottage" with Penang Island in the Distance)" (c.1884) (Figure 10), and "A View from the Cottage, Perak." This impressionist view as depicted in these works with yellowish brown as if taken from an autumn scene in England show the early and mid-century aesthetic that was affected with the spirit of romanticism.

Let us examine the relationship between the observer and the observed in the paintings like "Untitled (View of Gunong Pondok through alcove window Residency at Kuala Kangsar)" (Figure 11), "Untitled (View from "The Cottage")" (c. 1884) (Figure 8), "Untitled (Gunong Bubu-From "The Hermitage" & "G. Bubu-5450 Ft. Hermitage-3200 Ft.)" (c. 1884) (Figure 9), and "A Malay Mosque from a Malay Window, Ulu Bernam" (1884) (Figure 12).



Figure 8 Untitled (View from “the cottage”) (c. 1884).



Figure 9 Untitled (Gunong Bubu from the hermitage & G. Bubu-5450 Ft. Hermitage-3200 Ft.) (c. 1884).

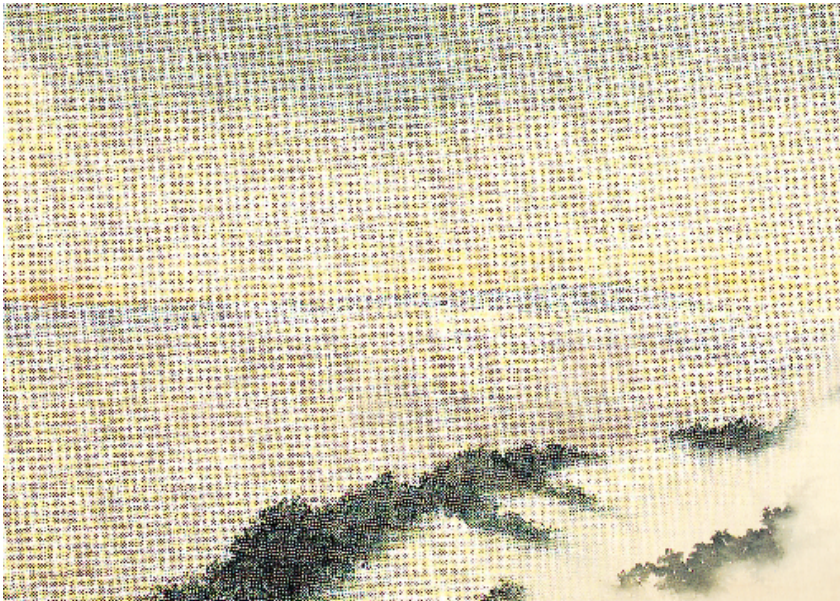


Figure 10 Untitled (The cottage with Penang Island in the distance) (c. 1884).



Figure 11 Untitled (View of Gunong Pondok through alcove window residency at Kuala Kangsar).

The first work is a watercolour 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 Gunong Pondok. Mountain views always



Figure 12 A Malay mosque from a Malay window, Ulu Bernam (1884).

enthralled Swettenham. Whether he was inside or outside, he would seek to capture the peak of the mountain and frame it into somewhat a nostalgic land. It can be suggested here that the vast enfolding landscape outside could be seen as an allegory of himself who is a foreigner to the wild outside world of the native people. A similar framing device is used that will lead our eyes up to the peak of the mountain, for example, in Figure 8 and Figure 9, where a partial plant of a tree appear on the left or the right side of the drawings in a way framing the view – suggesting an inside/outside interplay that could probably represent Swettenham’s own situation at that time as he was an observer of a foreign land and its people.

Another similarly interesting work appears through him peeking at the mosque in “A Malay Mosque from a Malay Window, Ulu Bernam” (1884) (Figure 12). 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. However, his journeys were made not

for sightseeing purposes but actually to enable him to make contact and influence the Malays and persuade them into accepting the British administration. His description of the Malay's religion as "Muhammadan" fits into what Edward W. Said describes "Mohammedan" as the relevant (and insulting) European designation, imitative of a Christian imitation of true religion (1994:66). 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 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. (1948:144)

His writing shows that Swettenham tried to understand the Malays – their mentality, belief, and culture – so that he could mediate, intermingle, and hopefully be embraced by the Malays, in order to play successfully 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" (1948:vii.). Therefore, it can be said that Swettenham tended to see himself as the custodian of the Malays, speaking on their behalf but he does not exactly see himself as a part of the Malay people – he is somewhat in between the observer and the observed.

If we were to agree with Syed Hussein Alatas's position as briefly discussed before, we could see how Swettenham's sketches and writings also exemplified how the colonizers only look at the colonized land with capitalistic interests. This is in particular how the land, as a major source of rich raw materials, has been exploited for the benefit of the British's commerce and industry since the late 19th century. From the sketches, the vista of the mountains and landscapes are not only concerned in a general geographical documentation but it also drawn representing the various potential capital resources to the British. 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 13) and "The Promised Land" (c. 1884) (Figure 14), Swettenham not only captured the refreshing landscape from the vantage point of 3200 ft. and his fascination for topographical features but also how he perceived the land as a promising source of wealth in supporting

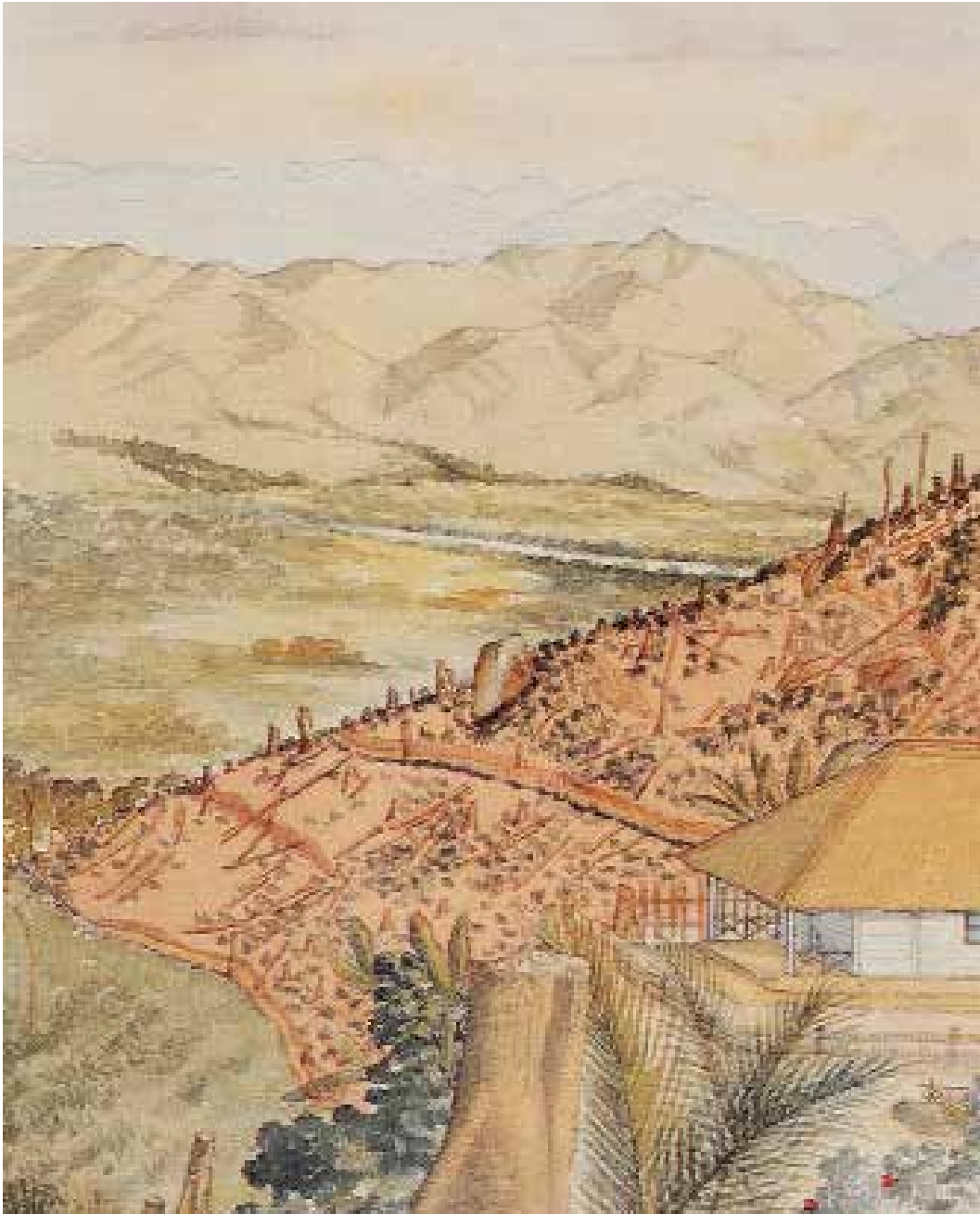


Figure 13 Across the valley of the Perak Pahang River, from “The hermitage” – Meru range in middle distance – Main range in background (c. 1884).



Figure 14 The promised land (c. 1884).

British's capitalistic scheme. With the Main Range in the background, and the Meru Range in the middle distance, separating the Perak River from the Kinta Valley which are the backbone of the Kinta Valley, Swettenham looks at the rich soil with tin that consequently was being dominantly mined by the Chinese and the Malays. The foreground is 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 FMS 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 (Butcher, 1979:16), and they are important sources that supported the British's emergence of Industrial Revolution.

For example, in defence to the fall of Malaya to the Japanese, Swettenham claims that there is no fault in the British's administration that led to the downfall of Malaya to the Japanese in 1942 and he only looks at these events primarily in terms of revenues and nothing more.

I have not seen anywhere a list of charges made against the administration of affairs in any Malay States, but 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, 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. (1948: x)

CONCLUSION

To conclude, cultural theorists, ethnographers, and postcolonial thinkers have questioned the colonizing and misguided gaze of the Western observer and most of this had been done in the context of travel writing. As this paper has demonstrated, not only travel writings but travel sketches, drawings, and paintings in a more general sense can be viewed in such a way. Postcolonial studies for example, are not limited to travel writings or the literary texts in general, but we can push this position further and investigate this in the context of sketches, drawings, and paintings done by colonial officers.

This paper also reiterates the fact from Butcher's studies that 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 (Butcher, 1979:225). This is true in the case of Swettenham himself, even though his knowledge of the Malays or their customs and his great rapport with the Sultan set him apart from the rest. From these images, it can be suggested that Swettenham had never positioned himself as a Malay friend that he appeared to be. In a way, I hope that this paper has spelled out clearly the ideological framework of what looks to be a simple "documentary image" as posited by Lim Chong Keat. There is a pressing need to correct the colonial image of the Malays and problematize the understanding of the Malays oftentimes taken from western sociological viewpoint. For these negative images still exert and still have a strong influence among a section of Malay intelligentsia and non-Malays in the context of current modern Malaysia.

NOTES

1. This is a revised and expanded version of an essay entitled “The Early Drawings of Malaya (1880-1894) by Frank Swettenham,” in *1st Malaysian International Drawing Marathon*, ed. Safrizal Shahir, Izmer Ahmad, and Shahrul Anuar Shaari (Penang: School of the Arts, USM, 2011), 75-85. The same essay had been translated under the title “Lukisan-Lukisan Awal Malaya (1880-1894)” published in the same book. The author would like to thank the editors and publisher for permission to reprint some materials from the essay above. This paper had also been presented under the title “Sketches of Malayan Landscapes by Frank Swettenham (1850-1946)” at the 109th College Arts Association (CAA) Annual Conference, 10th – 13th February 2021, New York (Online).
2. Who I will refer here as Frank Swettenham as he is known.
3. All the figures in this paper are taken from Lim (1988).

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