

“MEDUCATION”: Workshop for SCAC English Ministry 2nd Methodist Heritage Convention (20-22 Aug. 2010), Sibul, Sarawak.

By Judy Wong

Why ‘MEDUCATION’ ?

Sunday school started as a regular school for chimney sweeps in England in the 18th century to provide quality education. Methodists then linked quality education with the church everywhere they go. Thus “meducation”.

Because of the presence of Methodist mission schools in the past, the impact of it on our society and nation has been monumental. However as early as the 1960s, with changes in the national education policies in Malaysia, we have seen the diminishing presence and authority of the mission schools which in turn has inevitably led to the diminishing presence and influence of the products of mission schools in our society and nation as a whole.

This paper aims to look into the past, in order to understand the present, with the hope that we can be challenged to act for the future.

The Past

Church and School

The Methodist church’s interest and concern in education can be traced back to John Wesley’s involvement in starting the first Methodist School. In 1883 when Dr Thoburn landed in Singapore with Rev. Oldham, no sooner that the first Methodist church was planted the first school was also started by Rev. Oldham. The Anglo-Chinese school (ACS) Singapore began on 1st March 1886. In the following year, a school for girls was started.¹

SINGAPORE: As more missionaries came to the east, along with the recruitment of more local help, The Methodist Mission was to develop one of the most extensive educational systems in Malaya and Singapore. At one point the schools were more than the churches. *“Between 1900 and 1940, as many as 90% of all the Methodist missionary personnel and ordained local workers were involved directly in various educational institutions.”*² In the early stages, almost all the missionaries had to pastor the churches and teach and be the heads of the mission schools.

MALAYA: The same pattern also took place in Malaya. In his article in the Star newspaper in 2003 and inserted in the tercentenary celebration magazine of John Wesley, Allen Koay shared that *“The founding of the Methodist faith in Malaysia goes almost hand in hand with the founding of the Methodist education system in the nation.”*³

The lists below show the mushrooming of the establishment of Methodist mission schools:-
1891- ACS, Penang ; 1891- MGS KL; 1897- MBS KL; 1899- MGS Taiping; 1895- ACS for Boys & ACS for Girls in Ipoh; 1903- ACS Kampar & Teluk Anson; 1903- ACS Nibong Tebal; 1907 - MS Parit Buntar; 1903- ACS Setiawan; 1904- MGS Malacca; 1915- ACS Negeri Sembilan; 1924- ACS Klang; 1929- ACS Sungai Siput; 1936- Methodist Boys School Sentul; 1938- MGS Kuantan; 1946- Anglo –Tamil School Malim Nawar; 1947- MGS Raub.

After WW II, the clamor for independence was loud and clear, but the Methodist Church continued to plant schools such as :-

1950- Chinese Methodist School Ipoh; 1950 -Methodist Primary School Port Swettenham; 1951- Methodist Tamil School Kapar (Government aided); 1953 Methodist Primary School Banting; 1957- Methodist Secondary School Banting; 1957- MG Primary School Teluk Anson; 1955- Meth. Private School Ayer Tawar; 1960- Methodist Primary School Petaling Jaya.⁴

SARAWAK: A chapter on 'A Short History of Sarawak Schools' by Dr Cheng Chung-Sing in Ho Seng Ong's book 'The Methodist Schools in Malaysia' provides significant historical information and photos.

Under the leadership of Mr. Wong Nai Siong, the Methodists settlers arrived in Sibu in 1901. When Rev. James Hoover came in 1903 as a missionary, he was entrusted by the 2nd Rajah of Sarawak, Sir Charles Anthony Brooke to oversee the Foochow settlers. In 1903, he started ACS in Sungei Merah. In 1913 Mrs. Hoover started the Yuk Ing Girls School. The Boys School was transferred to the Agriculture School in Bukit Lan. In 1925 English stream classes were started together with Yuk Ing School. In 1946, the Methodist Secondary School came into being at the present site whereas the Primary School remains at Island Road, Sibu.

In 1939, Methodist work among the Ibans began. Several Methodist Schools were set up in Kapit and also up-river.

What is most astounding is that *"by 1949, the Methodist Church was responsible for the organization of nearly 60 schools in the 3rd Division."*⁵

[Re. Appendix 1 List of schools, p 788]

Down Memory Lane: MY STORY

As a product of 'meducation', I was overjoyed to read the write-up on the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS), Sarikei. It was so nostalgic, so consoling and so confirming to see photos of Mr. and Mrs. John Pilley on their work in establishing schools & Churches especially in Sarikei.

[Re. Appendix 2 ACS Sarikei p 806]

Many events of childhood days at the mission house and mission school in Sarikei would resurface frequently in dreams till adulthood. One such memory was an event of following the Pilley's in a van to go to the villages in Sarikei to ring bells. What was most amazingly nostalgic for me was when I read in Dr Cheng's article that indeed a van was bought in 1956 for education purpose.⁶

I still have very vivid scenes of those days after Mr. and Mrs. Pilley took me and my two younger sisters in to live in their mission house [in 1956 after the death of my mother] for a few months and then for more than 5 years we stayed in the hostel of ACS, Sarikei.

As an educationist all my life and particularly when such issue as student enrolment comes up or when I see people queuing up in long lines to enroll their children into a particular school, very often I would always end up telling the story of 'those early days' when I followed the Pilley's to go to the 'sambah' (that's how they would say it) to ring bells. The picture of me with some other children inside the van is very vivid. The van was parked in a rural village where a few houses were quite close to one another.

We would help ring the bell to attract people to come out. The Pilley's and one or two other teachers would talk and appeal to the parents to send their children, particularly girls, to Su Hua

kindergarten or to Anglo-Chinese Primary School. Now I can rest assure that it was not my imagination.

Of course it was not very long after that, probably just two or three years later, that people would come and some very persistently to either the mission house or to the school to appeal and plead that their children or so-and-so's child be squeezed into a particular class.

When touching on this, I cannot help but remember fondly my father, who became the school gardener of ACS, Sarikei. He only had 3 months of education in his childhood days in China. He soon realized the paramount importance of education, especially for girls, (even though he had wanted to give away his daughters at birth in Sarikei, due to extreme poverty).

I still have the mental picture of him one morning bringing in an extra chair and put it at the back of my primary 2 classroom in 1956 so that my youngest sister who was at least 4 years younger could also start school. Why not? He knew where to get the extra chair. How would he know there might be such thing as application, registration or age limit? "The earlier you start, the better", people began to say. He often reminded us "to study hard so that one day you can go to America to study."

As for my dear old father, indeed his dream came true. By God's grace, all his 5 children including his 3 girls had the opportunity to have university education in the U.S. His life and his children's lives were all impacted forever. From one who had little tolerance for Christianity, when my mother took her little children to Church, he became a transformed man who truly loved God and the Methodist church until his last day on earth.

The Present

Church and School

As the years went by, and as the countries and governments developed, churches and schools began to go its separate ways, some due to changes in government and government policies, some due to the neglect on the part of the church or its pastors nearby. However, even though the number of mission schools and their influence has decreased in the present scenario, the impact on society and country is still something to behold. To a certain extent, I would dare say the present Methodist Church theme of "Spreading Scriptural Holiness, Transforming the Nation" had already been achieved from the past to the present, perhaps not so much directly through the churches, but through 'meducation'.

The impact

The mission schools both in Malaya and Singapore developed quite quickly into remarkable institutions of learning. During the Japanese Occupation they all suffered many setbacks. After the war, many mission schools re-opened and underwent various forms of changes.

SINGAPORE: After the War, when the many Methodist mission schools were re-opened, most of the faculty and administrative staff of the schools were locals rather than missionaries. When Singapore became a self-governing territory in 1959 and an independent country in 1963, the entire education system underwent broad changes. The government made changes by dropping subjects like Latin and Bible Knowledge. Chapel services were only held before classes commenced.⁷

However by the 1970s, the Methodist Church of Singapore reintroduced Religious knowledge and Moral Education as part of the ACS (Anglo-Chinese School) curriculum.

There is no doubt that a big difference exists between the Malaysian and Singapore governments up to the very present day when it comes to dealing with the former mission schools. The Singapore government had provided and still is providing the major funding for ALL schools.

The impact on the society is best reflected in what the government representative said at the official opening of the new ACS Barker Road campus in July 2003. Dr. Tony Tan, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister, paid tribute to the Methodist Church in Singapore and honored the ACS for its commitment and respect for the traditions of its past as well as for excellence and innovation in ushering in the future. "It's strong ties with the Methodist Church and its Christian heritage have always sought to anchor its student in sound moral values and a strong sense of community. Those who gain most from the benefits of community must also bear the heaviest responsibilities and have the keenest sense of social and community obligations. This has been most clearly shown in the spirit of giving and service to school and community that has been the distinctive hallmark of the ACS alumni."⁸

What better way to sum up the impact of 'MEDUCATION' !

MALAYA: The legacy of the past missionaries cum early local teachers and educationists are very well documented in Ho Seng Ong's book. I will only attempt to list names and what had been said of many of them through written words including eulogies. For such people as Rev. William Oldham, Sophia Blackmoore, Mrs. James Hoover and many, many others, the impact of their work, the new lease of life that they gave to hundreds and hundreds of students, can never be fully expressed in words or engraved in statues.

SARAWAK: In Sarawak even though the Methodist mission schools concentrated in the 3rd Division, 'meducation' together with the work of the Catholic and Anglican Churches has great impact and significance similar to that in Malaya.

When we look at the many community and political leaders of Sarawak who were the products of mission schools and the fact that to this present day our state can enjoy more openness, more tolerance, more racial harmony, more religious freedom, government funding for church projects, religious buildings etc. at the envy of our West Malaysian counterparts, one cannot help but appreciate and be thankful for this legacy.

My disturbing concern is..... 'for how much longer? '

The Role of Mission Schools in Nation Building

Although it may be difficult to estimate the full extent of influence of mission schools on national development, *"they no doubt added to the westernization of Malaysian values in politics, economies, and social structure. What is clearer is that they played an important role in creating an English speaking elite which had an abiding influence on the shape of Malaysia's national life."*⁹

D.R. Daniel, a product of MBS KL (Methodist Boys' School Kuala Lumpur), who became a well-known educationist in the Methodist circle in West Malaysia, says his education taught him an important thing, *"Integrity in life. The greatest commandment of all is love the Lord your God, with all your heart and mind and soul, and your neighbor. That's what influenced me at an early age in my life."*¹⁰ He shares that when he was teacher and headmaster, *"the first thing that we built was loyalty to the school, regardless of racial or ethnic background. So we would have games against other schools, and*

students would cheer for the school team. We instilled that in them. Then, from there, we would get loyalty to the community. Then it moves on to loyalty to the nation.”¹¹

When it comes to this significant aspect, Mrs. Gloriosa Rajendran, renowned educationist from the Anglican background, strongly advocates that there is hope for the present and the future.

As a result of the Aziz Commission Report of 1971, a big difference took place in the role of the church as it no longer has a part in the selection of teachers or principals. Since then the church has to admit that *“we have lost our influence in the schools because we have failed to be concerned for the children in them and to treat them as our responsibility.”¹²*

What is more disturbing and calls for a re-awakening is her sharing about the lack of ‘good Samaritans’ to *“make the sacrifice of time and money and be inconvenienced,”¹³* as what the past missionaries and teachers did in the past in teaching the less, the least and the lost. *“This is not because we have people of other faiths as our heads. Sad to say I have seen, in two of our schools how in spite of going to the Ministry and the Education Department to personally request for the posting of Anglican candidates to two of our schools, the schools deteriorated under both these heads who used the promotion just for their own advancement and did not even identify themselves with the already established Christian activity in the school. So what am I saying? I am saying that we are to be blamed for the present situation in which we find ourselves.”¹⁴*

Sad to say, the same scenario is also true in the Methodist and other mission schools. The Methodist Church in Malaysia still has 43 government-aided Methodist Primary schools, 25 government-aided secondary schools, 6 private Methodist Schools and 2 private Methodist colleges to act upon.

Former Secretary of COE (Council of Education for the Methodist Church in KL) Mr. Goh Keat Seng reminds us that *“As we look back on our collective experience of a hundred and fifty years, we will see traces of both success and failure. The silver, it is true, is now a little tarnished. But old boys and old girls still sing the school song, yell the school yells. Current boys and girls still rope in the academic honors and the sport medals. Parents still lobby for their children to be admitted to the old school. School chapels, wherever they are kept open, still attract droves of fellow travelers, seekers and proselytes. A sprinkling of dedicated heads still fights the good fight. God is still out there, working among school children. Do we leave Him to work alone?”¹⁵*

Mr. David Boler in his article on ‘Christian Schools in Malaysia’ stressed very aptly that *“The challenge before us now is how best we can pool our resources and channel our manpower towards maintaining the CHARACTER of these schools in keeping with the changing circumstances of today. There is no doubt that these schools have had and continue to make a unique contribution to the progress of the nation.”¹⁶*

“Our task is to find strategies and devise a system of networking through which we will be able to utilize our schools for the best possible results. We need to re-examine the areas in which the church can play a meaningful and significant role in the schools. We need to recognize that even as the demand for places in our schools increase, there is a public avowal of our role in education.”¹⁷

“Rather than dwell on past practices and traditions which are no longer possible because all schools are fully aided and all our teachers and principals are Government servants, let us probe avenues for pooling the resources of the church universal and enabling our Christian

teachers to be nurtured towards taking on more responsibility in our schools. Church leaders could help significantly in identifying and monitoring potential leaders in the school situation. We should also try to instill in our young, the importance of entering the teaching profession as a Christian so that through their lives they may continue to touch the lives of the children they teach.”¹⁸

Realizing the powerful influence of Christian teachers not only in the mission schools but in all schools, I have been passionately involved in TCF (Teachers Christian Fellowship) especially at Sarawak level in organizing events to mobilize Christian teachers through conferences and motivation seminars. However, many Christian heads, teachers and also churches do not seem to share the same vision.

What is more critical and alarming is that when the Church is still given the opportunity for ‘maximum consultation’ with the Education department with regards to the appointment of school heads, the Church is agonized with the embarrassing situation of shortage of suitable candidates.

The Future

Church and School

For this section I will refer to my own article written in 2000 after attending a symposium on ‘The Future of Mission Schools’ [Re. Appendix 4. The Future of Mission Schools]

The Challenges

- Church & School working side by side for the branding of an institution called ‘Methodist’ in maintaining the school ethos and presence of pastoral care
- Setting up of more private mission schools now for the sake of the future [Re.The success story of MSC (Methodist School Cambodia)]
- The role of TCF in motivating and challenging the ‘paid missionaries’ in schools to leave their legacy
- Heart to Heart Education as the Heart of Education
- Government not to see the mission schools as a threat

Conclusion:

As Mrs. Rajendran puts it, “the opportunities to establish schools of excellence are there if only we would appropriate them. We only have ourselves to blame for losing the influence we once had but in spite of this, it is not impossible to rebuild. It is a slow and somewhat uphill task but is not impossible. It requires the motivation of the heart of the Samaritan.”¹⁹

I cannot agree with her more. We all need to have that heart.

Finally, together let us ponder upon the following and listen to Him:

- Do I have a bigger heart for ‘MEDUCATION’ now?
- At the end of the day, what would my LIFE-SENTENCE be as an educator? As one empowered to impact education ?

John Wesley started it. The former missionaries came and established it.
Now, it is up to all of us to revitalize it. !!

Notes:

1. Yong Chee Seng, *Methodist education in Malaysia: A Historical Perspective*, article, p.2
2. Bobby Sng, *In His Good Time*, p.193
3. Allen Koay, *Education the Methodist Way*, p.96
4. Yong, *Ibid*, p.2-4
5. Cheng Chung-Sing, *A Short History of Methodist Schools in Sarawak*, p.784
6. *Ibid*, p.811
7. Christie House, *Methodist Schools of Singapore : A Model*, article, p.3
8. *Ibid*, p.4
9. Robert Hunt, *The Churches & Social Problems*, Chapter 14 in 'Christianity in Malaysia, p.329
10. Koay, *Ibid*, p.101
11. *Ibid*, p.7
12. Gloriosa Rajendran, *The Role of Mission Schools in Nation Building*, article in TCF InStep, Sept. 2009, p.7
13. *Ibid*, p.7
14. *Ibid*.
15. Goh Keat Seng, *The Christian Experience in Education: Origins, Development and Prospects*, paper for MCFC-CFM Symposium, Oct. 2000, p.4-5
16. David Boler, *Christian Schools in Malaysia*, paper, p.7
17. *Ibid*, p.7
18. *Ibid*.
19. Rajendran, *Ibid*, p.8

Other sources:-

1. "Methodist Schools in Malaysia" Book by Ho Seng Ong, Published by Board of Education of the Malaya Annual Conference, 1964
2. 'The Impact of Branding an educational institution "Methodist", ' Final Report, 2008 by Roehampton University, London for the Methodist Church.

