



The making of Malaysian solidarity: A historical look at education and social cohesion in Sarawak

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Abstract

In a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi religious country like Malaysia an education system that promotes inclusion and participation of all citizens, where diversity of learners is recognised and acknowledged would certainly enhance national solidarity. Such an inclusive education, which aspires to promote social cohesion through greater understanding, respect and interactions among students, may be grounded on the four principles/pillars of *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to be* and *learning to live together*. The demographic plurality of Malaysia which consists of the 11 states in Peninsular Malaysia, and the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo calls for this inclusive education system. How much do Malaysians know about one another? In particular, how much do Malaysians from Peninsular Malaysia know about their fellow citizens in Sabah and Sarawak, and vice versa? Sarawak, being the only state in Malaysia ruled by ‘white Rajahs’ for about a century, offers an interesting opportunity to see whether the education system evolved has promoted inclusion and social cohesion within itself as well as within the larger Malaysian society. By analysing the history of Sarawak education, beginning with the Brooke rule from 1841 to 1946, and continuing to the British administration from 1946 to 1963 this article concludes that social cohesion beyond inter-ethnic boundaries was not considered an important agenda during the Brooke as well as the British administrations thus leaving the present government with the ongoing monumental task of effectively utilising education in the making of the Malaysian solidarity.

Keywords: Brooke administration, education, inclusion, Malaysia, Sarawak, social cohesion

Introduction

When we looked into the literature on education in Malaysia, we will find that much is written but the emphasis is mostly on the national education scenario. The focus of researchers and writers are mainly about education in Malaya, education in Malaysia with special attention on Peninsular Malaysia, and the issues relating to the problems of education for a multi-ethnic society like Malaysia. On the education scenario for particular States, and especially for the two East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, the literature is minimal. When news of the Lahad Datu incident appeared in the Malaysian media on early February 2013, many people were taken by surprise and began asking questions such as ‘where is Lahad Datu? Which part of Sabah and who were these people who had intruded into Malaysian territory? Who was this person who claimed to be the Sultan of Sulu? Did he and his supporters have the right to make such a claim and ‘invade’ Sabah? What was the history behind all this? Such questions reflect the lack of exposure, awareness and understanding among Malaysians with regards to their fellow citizens, places in Malaysia and generally the history associated with these people and places.

In any case, do Malaysian students get to learn about the people of Malaysia, their respective histories and places of stay in detail from the education system?

During the latter part of 1957 and January 1958, Radio Sarawak broadcasted a series of 16 talks on 'The Peoples of Sarawak'. These talks were well received and were repeated in full in the latter months of 1958 till January 1959. Organised by Tom Harrisson, Curator of Sarawak Museum 1947-1966 (Sarawak Museum, 2014), a.k.a. 'Barefoot Anthropologist' (BBC, 2007), the talks were later compiled into a book edited by Harrisson himself. Harrisson's (1959, 1) argument for the importance and seriousness of such a project is:

that people who live in a country with many kinds of people living in it owe that country a positive duty to get to know about the peoples other than their own. It is not enough to take the different peoples for granted. In the pressures of the modern world, it is dangerous not to know your neighbour, even if you cannot love him. Eighty per cent of racial misunderstanding is not due to deliberate nastiness or self-interest, but simply due to ignorance, apathy and disinterest. These talks were aimed, unashamedly, at that nasty risk – the complacent person of any race who doesn't care a damn about any other. Sarawak has such! There is no more place for that attitude in present day Sarawak. People who will not be bothered to know what their neighbours feel, are a menace to a decent country in a dangerous world".

Education not only teaches the individual to read, write and count (3Rs), but also to learn about his/her own history, culture, spiritual traditions and that of other communities. Hence, the student acquires academic literacy, and at the same time, social-cultural literacy as he/she will be equipped with knowledge and skills on how to relate with others, especially those different from them. Education should thus train students to understand the genesis and development of diversity, learn to adapt and accept such diversity, and gain an insight into how to live and relate respectfully with others. School as an educational institution can be a place to inculcate this 'wisdom of love', where students, teachers, principals, staff and parents regard one another with respect and take responsibility for the wellbeing of the other. This 'wisdom of love' presupposes a desire or motivation to take responsibility for the wellbeing of the other, by ensuring the other that the self means no harm, poses no threat to the other. For a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-regional country like Malaysia, such wisdom shown through mutual respect and acceptance is important.

In Malaysia, it is important for students to learn, know and understand about their fellow Malaysians, their cultures, languages and religions. An education system that promotes mutual respect through the principles of inclusion and participation of all citizens, as well as the four pillars of education (*learning to know, learning to do, learning to be* and *learning to live together* (Delors, 1996), are guarantees of social cohesionⁱ, that is greater understanding, respect and interaction among students of different historical, ethnic, religious, cultural, socioeconomic, gender and regional backgrounds.

In a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country like Malaysia, it is essential to ensure an education system that promotes inclusion and participation of all citizens, where diversity of learners is recognised and acknowledged. An inclusive education, which aspires to promote social cohesion, that is, greater understanding, respect and interactions among students of different historical, ethnic, religious, cultural, socioeconomic, gender and regional backgrounds, should be grounded on these four principles/pillars of education: *learning to know, learning to do, learning to be* and *learning to live together*. The demographic plurality of Malaysia calls for our education system to provide such opportunities for our young generation to learn and know more about themselves, their own community, fellow country folk and their respective way of life and belief systems. Malaysia consists of the 11 states in Peninsular Malaysia, and the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo. How much do Malaysians know about one another? In particular, how much do Malaysians from Peninsular Malaysia know about their fellow citizens in Sabah and Sarawak, and vice versa?

This articleⁱⁱ focuses on Sarawak, with the main emphasis on the history of education, beginning with the Brooke rule from 1841 to 1946, and continuing to the British administration from 1946 till the formation of Malaysia in 1963. The data for this article is principally from secondary sources. Attention is given to the views and policies of the Brooke regime and British administration towards education for the people of Sarawak.

Sarawak, being the only state in Malaysia ruled by ‘white Rajahs’ for about a century, offers an interesting opportunity to see whether the education system in Sarawak, past and present, promoted/promotes inclusion and social cohesion among its multi-ethnic population as well as between its population and the larger Malaysian society.

As a Federation, Malaysia is governed by a federal government who has the power to make laws for the whole country and run the country according to these laws. Nevertheless, States, through their respective Legislative Assemblies, have power to make laws over certain matters for their own States. Education comes under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government (Federal Constitution, Ninth Schedule, Federal List, Number 13, 185). According to Lee (2010, 89), the Malaysian education system was a highly centralised and bureaucratic system where most of the important policy decision-making occurred outside the schools. The World Bank Report on Malaysia’s education published in December 2013 also attests to the fact that Malaysia’s education system is among the most centralised in the world (The World Bank, 2013: 2).

Post-1963 system of education in Sarawak is not unlike that in the other states of the country as the top-down philosophy dictates a strictly centralised mode of operation, though there is some influence from its early history.

A brief description of the concepts education and social cohesion is necessary to put into perspective the role of education in enabling inter-ethnic understanding.

Education and social cohesion

Education is a common word used with varied definitions and meanings. Most writers see education as an ultimate goal or as a means towards some outcome. A review of education reports and education policies illustrates the lack of a coherent definition of education. The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2015, launched on 6 September 2013, for example, did not provide a definition. The emphasis in the Blueprint is more towards what education can do in terms of nation building and human resource development (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013: E-2).

The National Education Philosophy for Malaysia, formulated in 1988 and revised in 1996, appraises the Government’s vision of education as a means for the holistic development of the children – intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically:

Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are well responsible and capable of achieving high level personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, society and nation at large (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013: E-4).

Another dimension that is important but not included in the Education Philosophy is ‘social’. Students might be competent physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually (*jasmani, emosi, rohani dan intelek* [JERI]), but they might lack the ability to relate and build meaningful relationships with others. Hence, a more inclusive definition would be JERIS (*jasmani, emosi, rohani, intelek dan sosial*) - physically, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually and socially.

Many policy makers and governments have given much attention towards social cohesion. Colonialisation, modernisation, urbanisation, globalisation, migration, economic growth, political and social development have brought radical changes to the livelihoods and lifestyles of individuals and societies. Besides positive changes to lifestyles, people are also faced with increasing crime rates, violence, isolation and alienation. These social ills depict a breakdown in relationships based on trust, recognition, respect, understanding and acceptance. Coherence or coming together of individuals and communities as a larger common community characterised by diversity but based on the basic principles of trust, recognition, respect, understanding and acceptance has thus become a major agenda for many countries and their governments.

What then is social cohesion? The dictionary defines cohesion as the act or state of sticking together tightly (Merriam-Webster, 2014). This meaning suggests that cohesion refers to a state in which different components ‘stick’ or hold together to form a coherent, orderly and meaningful whole.

Chan, To and Chan (2006, 289-290) noted that ‘social cohesion should be understood as a state of affairs concerning how well people in a society ‘cohere’ or ‘stick’ to each other. The authors further noted that this cohesiveness or ‘sticking together’ is ultimately a reflection of individuals’ state of mind, which will be manifested in certain behaviour; in particular, people in a society are said to be ‘sticking’ to each other only if the following three criteria are simultaneously met:

- a. they can trust, help and cooperate with their fellow members of society
- b. they share a common identity or a sense of belonging to their society
- c. the subjective feelings in (a) and (b) are manifested in objective behaviour [social cohesion is not only about people’s feelings or psychological conditions; it is about certain behaviour or acts of belonging, trust, cooperation and help].

Chan, To and Chan (2006, 290) offered this working definition for social cohesion: ‘Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and horizontal interactions among members of society as characterised by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations’.

Did the education system in Sarawak under the Brooke rule engender social cohesion among its peoples of diverse backgrounds and localities?

Education in Sarawak during the Brooke Administration 1841 - 1946

Socio-political scenario

Sarawak is located in the north-western part of the island of Borneo and occupies an area of some 48,050 square miles. The coastal area is a swampy alluvial plain but further inland the country becomes hilly and the interior bordering Indonesian Kalimantan is mountainous. Extensive areas of the country are densely covered by primary equatorial rainforest and less than 25% of the land is used for agriculture. In the past, the chief means of communication were the numerous rivers. There was only a limited network of roads owing to the difficult terrain. Today, there is a good system of roads in urban areas but in rural areas, the network is limited and can be non-existent in remote areas due to the difficult terrain. Air transport within Sarawak, introduced after the War, is expensive, infrequent and dependent on weather conditions (Ooi, 1996: 1).

As for its population, Sarawak is multi-ethnic, with many indigenous or native groups as well as a relatively large Chinese population. Table 1 below gives the population breakdown for the years 1871, 1947, 1960 (pre Malaysia) and the year 2010 (latest census data):

Table 1. Population by ethnic groups 1871*, 1947*, 1960* and 2010**

Ethnic group	1871	1947	1960	2010
Malay	57,770 (41)	97,479 (18)	129,300 (18)	568,113 (23)
Iban (Sea Dayak)	77,934* (55)	190,326 (35)	237,741 (32)	713,421 (29)
Land Dayak (Bidayuh)	-	42,195 (8)	57,619 (8)	198,473 (8)
Melanau	NA	35,560 (7)	44,661 (6)	123,410 (5)
Other Bumiputeras+	-	29,867 (5)	37,931 (5)	156,436 (6)
Others	NA	NA	NA	9,138 (0.4)
Chinese	5,442 (4)	145,158 (27)	229,154 (31)	577,646 (23)
Indians	NA	NA	NA	7,411 (0.3)
Non Malaysians	NA	NA	NA	117,092 (5)
Total	141,146	540,585	736,406	2,471,140

* In 1871, no distinction was made between Ibans and Land Dayaks (Bidayuhs).

+ Include Kenyah, Kayan, Kedayan, Murut, Kelabit, Bisaya, Punan and native communities.

() Figures in brackets denote percentage of total population for the said year.

Source*: Ooi (1996, 3)

Source**: Sarawak State Planning Unit (2012, 13)

The beginning of Sarawak as an integral state was in the year 1839 when James Brooke, an English adventurer, arrived in Kuching. At that time, Sarawak was governed as a province of the Brunei Sultanate. A rebellion was staged by Sarawak Malays against Brunei rule.ⁱⁱⁱ James Brooke intervened on behalf of Brunei and brought a peaceful settlement. In return for his services, James Brooke was proclaimed as the first White Rajah of Sarawak in 1842.^{iv} For the rest of his reign, he waged a war against piracy and headhunting, and at the same time defended himself successfully against his enemies in the British Parliament (Ooi, 1996: 9-10).

Sarawak was recognised as a sovereign and independent state by the United States of America in 1850 and by Britain in 1864. When James Brooke died in 1868, his nephew, Charles Brooke (1868-1917) succeeded him. Charles Brooke, who reigned for fifty years, extended the boundaries of Sarawak to what they are today and laid the foundation of a modern state. He was succeeded by his son, Charles Vyner Brooke in 1917, who became the Third Rajah (Ooi, 1996: 11) till 1946.

At the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Japanese invaded Sarawak in 1941 and occupied the country until September 1945 when Australian forces liberated the territories. In April 1946, the British Military Administration handed over the government to the Rajah. Rajah Vyner Brooke thought it expedient that Sarawak be ceded to the British Crown. Certain sectors of the local population, particularly among the Malays, objected to the cession of Sarawak to the British Crown. Sarawak became a Crown Colony in July 1946. The Colonial Government carried out post-war reconstruction and implemented development programmes in all fields. In September 1963, following the recommendations of the Cobbold Commission set up to ascertain the views of the local population and supported by an opinion survey under the auspices of the United Nations, Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia (Ooi 1996, 12) [together with Sabah and the states in Peninsular Malaysia].

The Brooke Rajahs ruled Sarawak in a paternalistic manner based on mutual trust and affection between ruler and ruled. Personal rule and the absence of an intrusive bureaucracy were hallmarks of the Brooke Government. Administratively, the country was divided into 'Divisions' under a Resident, and further sub-divided into 'Districts' headed by a District Officer. The seat of government was in Kuching, which was and still is, the administrative and political centre of the country (Ooi, 1996: 12-13).

How was education during the Brooke rule in Sarawak?

Education scenario

When Sarawak was ruled by the Brooke family from 1841 to 1946 (105 years; technically 100 years from 1841-1941 due to the Japanese Occupation), education for its people was not an important agenda; it was accorded low priority. Education during the Brooke administration aimed to provide workforce for the government and to make the people better farmers or fishermen than their parents. The education system was not seen as a medium to change the traditions and lifestyles of the people. Thus, they were given basic education to enable them to be slightly better farmers and fishermen than their parents. However, the people of Sarawak were not homogeneous; they came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and dwelling in different localities. The outcome of a century's rule of the Brooke family on the education scenario is:

1. the emergence of a plural school system with diversified purposes and objectives: Malay education, Native education, Chinese education, Indian education, English education
2. the provision of education by different stakeholders: the Brooke government and the private sector (Christian missionaries [Anglican, Roman Catholic, Seven Day Adventist, Methodist], Malay-Muslim religious authorities, Chinese communities)
3. unequal development both spatially and ethnically: spatially as in urban Kuching being more progressive in development of educational facilities, and rural Sarawak being less developed in educational facilities; ethnically as higher literacy rate among Chinese, and lower literacy rate among Natives

Hence, in the context of the plural Sarawak society, how have such educational outcomes play a role in fostering a common Sarawakian identity and social cohesion? Thus, a better understanding of the education system during Brookes' rule would require us to examine the education policies the Brooke family had for the various ethnic communities of Sarawak then.

Brookes' attitudes towards education

The Brookes practised an indifferent and laissez-faire attitude towards the provision of education for the people of Sarawak. Throughout the reign of the three Rajahs (James Brooke 1841-1868, Charles Brooke 1868-1917 and Charles Vyner Brooke 1917-1946), there was no clear-cut policy on education for Sarawak. Education and schooling was regarded as an 'intrusion' and 'disruptive influence' on the general status quo of Sarawak native life.

Education for Malays

The Brookes regarded the Malays as the 'governing race' and recognised the need for Malays to be educated in their own language. This policy of providing education in the mother tongue or in the students' own language was carried out for the other communities as well. Education was regarded as an instrument for improving the living conditions of the Malays in their traditional occupations: from farmer to better farmer; from fisherman to better fisherman.

The first Rajah, James Brooke, was in favour of preserving the cultural integrity, customs and traditions of the Malays, and this policy was continued by Charles Brooke and Vyner Brooke. The White Rajahs wanted to rule Sarawak with their own people (handful of Europeans) and co-operation of Malay Chiefs.

The Malays in Sarawak had their own traditional system of education (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 43). By traditional is meant religious education provided by religious teachers or religious authorities such as Tok Imam, Tok Haji and Arabs who came as traders and thereafter resided in Malay villages. Such religious education entailed learning the Holy Quran, as well as learning to read and write Jawi. These lessons were conducted in mosques, suraus, or the homes of the religious teachers. According to Sabihah Osman (1990, 45), there was no evidence to indicate that there were *sekolah pondok* (literally, hut schools) in Sarawak, such as the ones existing in the States of Perak, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Pahang. Upon completion of their religious studies, the students would continue their daily routine of helping their parents and relatives at home or village, in the fields, farms or out at sea. Indeed, Charles Brooke, the Second Rajah, encouraged the Malay students to go back to their land and traditional livelihood as agriculturalists after receiving basic education.

The more fortunate students would get to continue their religious studies (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 45) and the opportunity to 'graduate' as religious teachers or officers.

Education among the Malays then was particularly confined to boys and men. Girls and women were not given the opportunity to learn to read and write as the Malay elders felt such literacy would be a cause for misbehaviour among the girls. However, such negative perception towards girls' literacy soon declined, especially due to strong encouragement by Margaret Brooke, the wife of Charles Brooke (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 45).

More schools were set up when Charles Brooke took over the reign from his uncle in 1868. He advocated that each of the major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, Indians, but excluding the non-Malay natives) be taught through its own mother tongue. The people, however, were given only basic literacy and numeracy as well as training in practical skills related to their livelihood.

Charles Brooke observed the increasing interest of the Malays to learn the 3Rs – reading, writing, arithmetic – that in 1883, he opened the first Malay school funded by the government. In 1901, he mooted the idea for a school providing education in the mother tongue to the people of Sarawak. This concept was realised in 1903 with the establishment of the Government Lay School. This school provided education to the Malays, Chinese and Indian students, but excluded the non-Malay natives. It was a school with different streams of instruction, according to specific mother tongue - Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. The students for these different streams were taught the same subjects but in their respective mother tongue. This means that students studied in the same school but separated according to ethnic group and medium of instruction. Secular subjects such as reading and writing Jawi and Rumi, basic arithmetic, mother tongue language (Malay/Chinese/Tami), English language (elective subject), morals and customs of each ethnic group were taught, as well as vocational training (sewing, handicraft, farming). No religious subjects were taught (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 50). Malay parents, however, regarded the Government Lay School with scepticism, as it offered only secular education and no religious education (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 52).

Why did Charles Brooke establish such a school, within the same compound but with separate medium of instruction? It seemed that Charles Brooke wanted to safeguard the 'purity' of the various ethnic languages and cultures as well as to prevent the neglect and loss of these languages and cultures. At the launching of the Government Lay School, Charles Brooke outlined its objectives: (1) to maintain the traditional system of the different ethnic groups in Sarawak; and (2) the existence of such schools with education in the mother tongue will enable students to learn and know about their historical origin and cultural roots (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 51). Half a century later, in 1953, UNESCO 'endorsed' Charles Brooke's vision of the importance of education in the mother tongue with the publication of a monograph titled 'The use of vernacular languages in education':

It is axiomatic that the best medium of teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. However, it's not always possible to use the mother tongue in school, and even when possible, some factors may impede or condition its use (UNESCO, 1953: 11).

Charles Brooke's Government Lay School could also be said to be the forerunner of present-day 'Vision School', initiated by the Malaysian government in 1995. Primary schools of three media of instruction – Malay, Mandarin, Tamil – in the same vicinity would be located within the same compound and share common facilities as well as jointly organise select school events (Malakolunthu, 2009: 123). If Charles Brooke had hoped to preserve and protect Sarawak's ethnic languages and cultures through his Government Lay School, Vision Schools, on the other hand, were seen by the Malaysian Government as a way to foster inter-ethnic integration and unity among the students because of their close proximity and increased opportunities for interaction. To what extent the existing Vision Schools in Malaysia achieved this aim is debatable; however, the Education Ministry seemed optimistic at the success of such schools, as it announced plans to build more Vision Schools so as to foster greater unity and integration among primary school pupils (New Straits Times, 7 September 2013).

Charles Vyner Brooke, the Third Rajah, reinforced his father's philosophy on education for Malays and its aim, that is 'education for Malays would include practical curriculum and de-emphasising the teaching of English'. The State school was modified to serve Muslims only (Malay Muslims and Melanau Muslims), and also male students. The Malay community did not want their daughters to go to school or have an education. Literacy among daughters would lead to moral degradation; somehow the same logic was not applied to sons. Nevertheless, some parents did send their daughters to school, but their numbers were small enough not to warrant mention in most education reports. The first Malay girls' school was established in 1926 and thereafter, girls' enrolment increased gradually.

Education for non-Malay natives

The Government Lay School mentioned above did not cater to non-Malay natives. This was in line with the Brookes' concern that

"Education, if adapted ... is a real benefit, though it probably may have the effect of causing native races to become formidable opponents to the European governments, scattered over the world, as the Philippines were to the Spanish government. Education is the principal factor of revolution (Ooi, 1996: 20)

The White Rajahs were concerned about the implication of Western education for the natives, that is they feared that the natives would rise and revolt against them once they become educated. Why was not the same concern extended to the Malays? Or Chinese community? The Brooke government did not have an educational policy for the non-Malay natives. Apart from the fear of possible native revolution against them, the Brookes thought that the natives were not teachable. They also thought

that the natives' educational needs were well-provided for by Christian missions and their missionaries. These missions set up mission schools and encouraged the natives to send their children to these schools.

James Brooke had an open policy and attitude towards the Christian missionaries. He invited these missionaries to Sarawak as he thought they would support his administration and assist in providing education to the non-Malay natives. These missionaries would help to 'civilise' (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 82) the natives of Sarawak through religion and education. James Brooke looked at these two institutions as a means for the non-Malay natives to free themselves from animism and superstition. The Christian missions built schools using English as the medium of instruction and to spread Christianity.

The non-Malay natives themselves were very interested in education, as such, they accepted the education provided by the missionaries. For the missionaries, this was a good opportunity to spread their Gospel - through schools, as well as through churches, hospitals, and farming. Education was in no short supply as there were various denominations – Anglican (represented by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel), Roman Catholic, Methodist, Seven Day Adventist and Borneo Evangelical Mission – all working hard to increase their congregation.

Chinese education

Like the situation with non-Malay natives, the Brooke administration did not have a clear-cut policy towards Chinese education. It was one of indifference as the Brookes left it to the Chinese to take care of their educational needs. The Chinese were allowed to establish own education system and schools with their own finance. There were dialect schools with the various Chinese dialects as medium of instruction. Some Chinese schools received minimal grants-in-aid (maintenance grants); however they were subjected to the regulation that schools receiving such grants should provide education in English or Malay as part of their school curriculum.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese schools in Sarawak promoted Chinese national ideals, with teachers and textbooks coming from China (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 52). The Brooke administration intervened in Chinese education only when the situation was perceived to be detrimental to their authority and to Sarawak. However, the 1930s political upheavals in China and ascendancy of the Chinese Left caused the Brooke government to be more vigilant of Chinese schools. Chinese schools were excluded from the list of responsibilities of the Education Department until 1946. Chinese school qualifications were also not recognised by the government and by the European commercial enterprises. The standard of Chinese schools was reportedly low and the Brooke government approved this low standard and low achievement:

“... the standard of Chinese education offered is low but ... it exactly suits the state of development of the country, since it fits Chinese children for moral social and business life without unfitting them for agricultural pursuits and without creating either a politically-minded student army” (Secretary of Chinese Affairs in Ooi, 1996: 24).

Vyner Brooke took over the reign from his father in 1917 and continued the approach of the Brookes with regard to the provision of education to the people. More schools were set up by the Chinese and Christian missions. Available data show an increase from 145 schools of various types in 1930 to 219 schools in 1938, as shown in Table 2. As many of these schools were located in the big towns (such as Kuching and Sibul), children in the rural areas and the interior were largely left out.

Table 2. Type of schools in Sarawak

Type of school	1930	1938
Anglican Mission schools	13	11
Roman Catholic Mission schools	15	27
Seventh Day Adventist Mission schools	1	3
Malay schools	24	33
Chinese schools	91	144
Dayak schools	1	1
TOTAL	145	219

Source: Idrus, S., Ahmad, S. & Santhiram, R. (1990, 70)

The Government had set up 'lay schools' for the people of Sarawak, in particular the Malays, Chinese and Indians (but not the non-Malay natives) since the time of Charles Brooke. However, the unstable enrolment and financial difficulties eventually forced these schools to close. Although the Malays and other natives had the option of attending mission schools, most could not do so because of the location of these schools and the fees imposed, and because of the fear of conversion to Christianity (especially among the Malays).

In 1919, the Brooke administration decided to convert all the government 'lay schools' into Malay schools. Between 1926 and the 1930s, more Malay schools were set up in smaller towns like Sadong, Bau, Simanggang (now Sri Aman), Sarikei, Mukah, Matu, Bintulu and Limbang. Some of these schools later ceased operation due to unstable enrolment.

The Chinese communities progressed faster in the provision of education as they did not depend on government aid. They set up more schools especially during the reign of Vyner Brooke. In 1927, 19 schools were set up by the Foochow communities in Sibu, Bintangang (now Bintangor) and Sarikei. Only one of these schools was financed by the Methodist Mission. The Hokkien community in Kuching established the first school for girls in 1922 with an enrolment of 100 students.

During the Brooke era, only primary education was given emphasis. Secondary education was provided by the mission schools, Chinese schools, one Malay school (*Madrasah Melayu*) and Batu Lintang school.

The Brookes emphasised a practical curriculum as against a literary one, in the schools for the native population. At the same time, the Brookes discouraged the introduction of English-medium western education as a contaminating influence on the cultural integrity of the native population. Nevertheless, western schools established by Christian missionary societies in Kuching were tolerated and these English-medium mission schools catered mostly for the Chinese community. The Christian missionary societies also maintained vernacular (Malay and Dayak) schools in the outstations for the indigenous peoples. The Brookes in general adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards Chinese vernacular education. The Chinese on their own initiative and resources set up vernacular schools largely modelled on those in the mainland and functioned independent of any government control. However, the premium the indigenous peoples and the Chinese of Sarawak placed on white-collar employment in the government civil service or in European commercial establishments overrode all other considerations in their attitudes towards the type of education they sought (Ooi 1996, 13).

Education in Sarawak during the British administration 1946 - 1963

Vyner Brooke agreed to Sarawak becoming a British crown colony on 1 July 1946 after the devastation during the Japanese occupation. After four years of Japanese occupation, many of the schools had been demolished or were in a state of disrepair. The colonial government inherited a state with many different systems of education. There were also not enough educational institutions to meet the demand and needs of the people in the rural and interior areas of the state.

After the Japanese occupation, there was an upsurge of demand for formal education especially at the primary level. The number of children registered for school increased from about 19,000 in 1940 to 30,000 in 1946. This was mainly due to parents realising the importance of education for their children.

The colonial government could not cope with this increased demand and continued the Brooke 'policy' by encouraging the missions and other interested parties to set up their own schools. Focus of education then was improving livelihood and little attention was given to social cohesion despite the diversity of ethnic groups in the state. Consequently, more schools were set up by the Christian missions and Chinese and Malay communities, both in the town and rural areas. Towards the end of 1947, there were 58 mission schools with an enrolment of 5,087 students. The Malay communities set up their own schools known as *sekolah rakyat* or people's schools. The number of such schools increased from eight in 1947 to 54 in 1954 as shown Table 3:

Table 3. Number of *Sekolah Rakyat*/Village Schools from 1947 – 1954

Year	No. of schools	No. of teachers	No. of students
1947	8	18	591
1948	30	47	1563
1949	38	58	1891
1950	35	45	1769
1951	30	41	1408
1952	36	49	1408
1953	49	65	2407
1954	54	66	2573

Source: Idrus, S., Ahmad, S. & Santhiram, R. (1990, 122)

The colonial government built 17 primary schools in 1947 for the Dayak, Kenyah, Kayan and Murut communities. The government's limited financial capacity did not permit the building of a sufficient number of schools. A mechanism was devised to free the government from being solely responsible financially. The government set up local authorities to be responsible for establishing new schools, maintaining buildings and financing the daily operation of the schools. The government argued that setting up local authorities was a step towards democracy and self-governance.

The first local authority was set up in 1948 in Kuching, the state capital. By the end of 1960, there were 23 local authority schools. All the schools established by the local authorities were primary schools. All the district schools set up by the government were eventually placed under the local authorities except the special schools, *Madrasah Melayu* and Batu Lintang school. The number of schools and students under the local authorities increased from 270 and 17,182 in 1957 to 338 and 23,521 in 1958 to 386 and 23,079 in 1959 to 433 and 32,240 in 1960 (Idrus et al., 1990: 163).

During colonial rule, secondary education was provided mainly by the mission and Chinese schools located mainly in the big towns. It was only in 1957 that the colonial government established a secondary school at Tanjung Lobang in Miri. In 1959, another two secondary schools were established, one in Kanowit and the other on the outskirts of Kuching. Two more schools were established in Mukah and then-Simanggang in 1961, and later in Bau, Kuching and Limbang. Students wishing to continue their studies had to sit for a selection exam (common entrance exam) after they had completed Primary 6.

The disparities in academic performance and infrastructure between the urban and rural areas increased due to the different systems and types of schools. The colonial government commissioned two studies to look into the existing education system and to make recommendations for improvement, producing *The Blue Report* in 1935 and *David McLellan report* in 1960.

The Blue Report (Napsiah Mahfoz et al., 2010) recommended that English be used as a medium of instruction except in Chinese schools. Malay and Chinese were to be taught as subjects in the curriculum. The report also recommended that the weaknesses in the implementation of the curriculum be rectified by improving the quality of training for teachers. One recommendation was for the government to play a more aggressive role in the provision of education and another was to give grants to the mission and Chinese schools to enable them to continue providing education to the people. Two types of grants were proposed: an operating grant and a capital grant. These recommendations were approved in October 1955 and became known as the Grant Code. The Grant Code had many positive impacts on the education system. Teachers began serving under a unified service and salary scheme. School fees and other payments were reduced. As a result, student enrolment increased.

Inevitably, the segregation policy of many different systems of education along racial lines (plural school system) practised during the Brookes' rule continued into the British colonial period. However, the Colonial Office which took over the administration of Sarawak in 1946, from the outset, formulated education policies as part of its plans in preparing the country for self-government and eventual independence. Hence, unity among the multi-racial population and the people's loyalty to Sarawak were educational objectives of the Colonial Government. The Brookes also left behind a wide gap in educational levels between the indigenous races and the Chinese. The education policy of the Colonial Government therefore aimed to narrow the educational disparity between the indigenous

peoples and the Chinese, and gradually to phase out the plural school system in favour of a national education system. However, several obstacles and problems had to be overcome in the provision of education for the native population. Besides certain sections in the Chinese community were not enthusiastic about the idea of abolishing education along racial lines and creating in its place a national education system (Ooi, 1996: 13-14).

The education system in the State improved towards the end of the colonial period where from 1959 onwards, efforts were made to integrate the different school systems. By 1962, all schools used the same curriculum and the students sat for the same examination. The primary objectives of this integration is to close the gap in terms of access to education and academic performance between the different ethnic groups and to increase the *rakyat's* awareness on citizenship and loyalty to the State.

When Sarawak achieved independence by being a part of Malaysia in 1963, the various Malaysian Development Plans provided financial allocations for the increase of primary, secondary, technical and vocational schools. It also benefitted from the supply of qualified teachers from the peninsula.

Sarawak has inherited the Brookes and Colonial Government's legacy on the importance of education for the people of Sarawak, and especially in terms of the role of education as a tool to promote unity and to achieve social mobility. Emphasis is given to education across all levels, from early education to primary, secondary and tertiary education, both in the public and private sectors.

During the Brooke regime (1841-1941 [1946]), education was seen as an instrument of material and moral welfare to improve the living standards of the Malays and non-Malay natives within the traditional context (i.e. to make the people better farmers and fishermen than their parents). James Brooke had a liberal policy of not wanting to disturb the traditions and customs of the natives. Although he believed education would not help the natives much, he nevertheless allowed Christian missionaries to set up mission schools for the natives. He believed that religion as imparted through these mission schools could help the natives to come out of their shell of animism and superstitions. Charles Brooke had a more hands-on policy on education in Sarawak. He set up government lay schools for Malays (also the Chinese and Indians). However, education for the non-Malay natives were still left in the hands of Christian missions and missionaries. Charles Brooke believed in the philosophy that students should be taught in their own mother tongue, thereby advocating vernacular education with students learning about their own historical origins, community, culture and traditions using their mother tongue. Education should be given to the local people, but not too much: 'What is the use of the 3Rs if the natives could not plant padi?' (Sabihah Osman, 1990: 121).

The Chinese population and those wanting alternative education were left to their own devices to set up their respective schools (Chinese vernacular and Christian mission schools). Vernacular schools set up by the Brooke government and Christian missionary societies which stressed a practical curriculum with the aim of improving the subsistence living conditions of the Malays and non-Malay natives met with a general lack of enthusiasm. This could be attributed to several reasons: preference of religious to secular education; fear of conversion to Christianity; and not seen as viable socio-economic investment for employment and improvement of living standards (Ooi, 1996: 1).

The Colonial Office administration used education to achieve political and social ends. The schools that the Colonial Office set up taught an academic-oriented curriculum using a Western language (English) as the medium of instruction. These schools were popular among the local population for the graduates could obtain employment in the government bureaucracy, European commercial houses and banking establishments (Ooi, 1996: 1).

To the local people, formal schooling was a channel for social mobility – "a means of escaping from a rural subsistence-based existence to a higher status white-collar position in the urban society" (Ooi, 1996: 1).

Conclusion

The history of education in Sarawak from the Brooke administration to British rule embodies an education system that was liberal but marked by differentiation and separation. Each ethnic group could pursue their own vernacular education while at the same time enjoyed the privilege of religious education. Social cohesion beyond inter-ethnic boundaries was not considered an important agenda

for the Brooke as well as the British administrations. The first government lay school established by Charles Brooke, the Second Rajah in 1903, where students from three main ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese, Indians) studied in the same locality but with different media of instruction, came close to signify an attempt at fostering interaction among the different ethnic groups.

With the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the Malaysian Government inherited such an education scenario from the Colonial Office. The government is left with the monumental and challenging task of using education to build a Malaysian nation among its diverse people across disparate regions, not only among the people of Sarawak but more so among the people of Malaysia. Fifty years on, the challenge continues ...

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ⁱ Social cohesion is an ongoing process of developing strong social relations on the basis of inclusion and participation among members of a multiethnic society by utilising social capital (*hope, trust, reciprocity, interaction and connection*) to engender shared/common values, sense of belonging (*feeling of common identity and commitment*), social mobility (*reduction in wealth disparities*) for instilling recognition, respect and reconciliation (*3r*) towards the creation of a united multi-ethnic society (1R + 3r Team 2013).

ⁱⁱ This article is based on a paper presented at the 4th Social, Development and Environmental Studies International Conference 2013, 19 March 2013 Puri Pujangga, UKM, Bangi, organised by the School of Social, Development and Environmental Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK), UKM

ⁱⁱⁱ One argument on the cause of the rebellion was that it was instigated by the Sultan of Sambas on the suggestion of the Dutch. The second argument was that the local people were unhappy with the oppressive rule of Brunei pengiran who imposed heavy taxes on the local population. Hence they rose against him (see Ooi 1996, 9).

^{iv} This 'intervention' by James Brooke is said to be motivated by Brooke's desire to gain ownership and political control over Sarawak, rather than his desire to help or to seek a trading post (see Sabihah Osman 1990, 18).