

Education in Southeast Asia From the Second Half of the 19th Century to the Early 20th Century

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After establishing the governances in Southeast Asian nations (except Thailand) in the second half of the 19th century, Western governments implemented economic, political, cultural, and social policies. In particular, education policy not only affected the socio-economic, but also had long-term effects of their colonial rule. In addition to the long tradition education that had profoundly influenced the culture, thought, and lifestyle of indigenous peoples. Colonial governments adopted a new, secular education followed by the Western model in Southeast Asia countries. This new education had many differences compared to the traditional education in program, content, management, etc. The setting-up of the new education was the long fighting process between the religious education and the secular education, between the conservative and radical forces. The article presents and analyzes the new education in Philippines, Myanmar, and Malaysia from the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century to confirm popularity, science, and humanity of this new education.

Keywords: Myanmar, Philippines, Malaysia, new education, Southeast Asia, 18th-19th century

Introduction

Based on economic, political, social, cultural, and educational changes in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, European colonial governments in Southeast countries had applied these changes into specific circumstances of their own colonies. In particular, new education system which had secularity had been conducted and it had brought positive results in education of Southeast Asian colonies. Secular education with many new subjects, such as foreign language, history, geography, mathematics, science, painting, physical education, and music had been introduced into curriculum from primary schools to high schools. Unlike the previous period, the age of schooling was set at six years old and primary education was compulsory. There were many different types of schools for both male and female. Colleges, universities, vocational schools, including schools for disable people were formed, which belonged to public or private schools. New education gradually dominated and became the foundation for future education of Southeast Asian nations. This article will focus on the presentation about education in three countries, namely, Philippines, Myanmar, and Malaysia under colonial context from the second half of the 19th century to the early 20th century in general.

Method

In order to solve this topic, this paper will analyze and compare data/documents which related to the Philippines, Myanmar, and Malaysia education through the colonial period, including documents of colonial

governments and officials and researches of scholars.

The article is approached educational issues from a regional perspective and used a comparative method between traditional education and modern education of Southeast Asian colonies. From that, the article confirms the secularity and the dominance of new education system in Southeast Asia from the mid-19th century onwards.

Findings and Discussion

The Education of Philippines Under the Spanish Rule

After establishing its dominance in the Philippines (1571), Spain enforced its governance policy in all aspects, including education. The Catholic Church and the Spanish Government had established various types of schools in the Philippines which all aimed to spread the Christian faith and Spanish culture to the Islands, and converted the religion of indigenous people.

We can divide the Spanish colonial Philippines into two periods:

The period of theological education (1571-1863). In this period, education in the Philippines was in the hands of clergy, mostly of the religious orders of the Catholic Church, such as the Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, and Recolletans. The role of the government in the education area under this period was minimal. The education system in the Philippines was under the control of the Church. The friars were both missionaries and concurrent tasks of a teacher, farmer, doctor, and so on. They were no professional teachers who were not trained by pedagogical schools.

The main courses in this period were as follow:

1. The Bible with the main content of the Seven Sacraments (especially Baptism and Eucharist);
2. Reading: Tagalog (Spanish was only taught to the upper classes);
3. Writing;
4. Arithmetic (mainly counting);
5. Music (mostly hymns).

In addition, depending on the different classes, curriculum was added the subjects, such as pottery, knitting, gardening (for boys) and sewing, and lace-making (for girls).

The course of study consisted of reading by the alphabet and syllable method, the learning of sacred songs and music, a little arithmetic, and writing for the advanced students. The contents of the materials to be read were religious Instruction was given in the dialect of the community. Spanish was taught to the more brilliant students, especially to the sons of the principalia (Sobritchea, 1989, p. 72).

In this unequal education system, education for women was very limited. It seemed to be a male privilege, although there were still girls' schools. Even in women's schools, in fact, they were only for the daughters of well-to-do families. Learning content focused on rudimentary reading, writing, arithmetic, religion, and needlecraft.

Under the period, the oldest universities, colleges, and vocational schools in the Philippines were founded by missionaries or the Catholic Church. The first school was built in 1565 in Cebu by the Augustinians, followed by the Franciscans in 1577, the Jesuits in 1581, and the Dominicans in 1587. In 1590, the Jesuits founded Colegio de Manila, later renamed Universidad de San Ignacio in 1621. The oldest university in the Philippines and the whole of Asia was the University of Santo Tomas, which was founded by the Dominicans on April 28, 1611.

From 1571 until the Education Reform of 1863, primary education was entirely in the hands of priests or parish bishops. There were very few schools and practically all were for Hispanic children and Filipinos who derived from the rich or elit class. Even at higher levels of education, schools were only available to certain groups and had racial discrimination. A record wrote,

The collegiate must be of pure race and have no mixture of Moorish or Jewish blood to the fourth degree, and shall have no Negro and Bengal blood, or that of any similar nation in their veins or a fourth part in Filipinos blood ..., and during more than two-thirds of the Spanish period higher education was not available to the Filipinos on equal terms of the Spaniards. (Schwartz, 1971, p. 208)

The period of secular education (1863-1898). Deriving from changes in education in Spain, in 1863, the Spanish government enacted an Education Act, which was considered a revolution in Philippine education. Accordingly, a new educational system was run and funded by the government: public education system.

The content of the 1863 Act included the following key points:

1. Building public schools from primary to university. Primary education was compulsory and free for all Filipino children between the ages of six and 12 in the towns which had at least 5,000 habitants, a school system for boys and a school system for girls;
2. In addition to the native language, Spanish was compulsory at all levels;
3. Establishment of pedagogical colleges to train professional teachers for both foreign and indigenous people. After graduation, they were official teachers and were paid salary;
4. Unifying the program and standardizing the teaching content, besides Bible education, many new subjects, such as language, mathematics, geography, history, hygiene and sanitation, drawing, etc.

Later, the government also opened vocational schools for maritime, agriculture, forestry, medicine, sewing, etc.

Through this Education Reform, many elementary schools have been established in entire Islands. In 1866, the number of elementary schools was up to 1,474 (Mendoza-Guazon, 1928, p. 19), in which 40% were for girls, and this figure increased to 1,593 at the end of Spanish rule. Besides, there were 951 private primary schools and 314 religious primary schools (Schwartz, 1971, p. 262).

Since the Education Reform of 1863, the public school system had expanded to whole islands, including the primary, secondary, and tertiary education systems, particularly the primary education system in all towns. These schools had given Filipinos an opportunity to interact with advanced education.

Through the 1863 Reform, the role of the government in education increased, and the influence of the Church was no longer decisive as before. The characteristic of education had changed from a religious education to a secular education, which was advanced and modern, and was in line with the trend of world education at the time. However, this education system still had many theological and unequal elements.

The Education of Myanmar Under the British Rule

Before the arrival of the British, traditional Myanmar education gained a great achievement in teaching Buddhist scriptures, ethics, and traditional rituals, but it did little to provide practical knowledge to students to serve their life (Andrew, 1995, pp. 50-52). At the Pagoda schools that the Burmese called “Kyaung”, the abbots were usually both the principal and the teacher. The higher level Kyaung was only for boys and girls only studied in Kyaung of villages.

From the mid-19th century onward, with the recognition of the independent existence of the Pagada education system, the British Government in Myanmar gradually established and perfected new education that was secular in this colony.

The new educational system consisted of three different types of schools:

1. English schools (taught in English);
2. English-Burmese schools (taught in both English and Burmese);
3. Indian schools (taught in Tamil).

Besides, the Kyaung managed by Pagadas still existed. However, over time, the number of learners in the Kyaung had decreased, while the number of students in English-Burmese schools was increasing and became the kind of the most popular school in Myanmar. If Kyaung education mainly taught Buddhist scriptures, ethics, and behavior, the school system managed by the British added many new subjects, such as Arithmetic, and Natural Sciences, Music, Arts, Hygien, and Sanitation. ... Students were both aged six years and over boys and girls, regardless of race and class. From 1945 to 1948, the school system of general education included the following levels:

1. Primary school for children from six to 11 years old;
2. Post-primary school for children from 11 to 15 years old;
3. Pre-university school for children from 15 to 18 years old.

Primary and post-primary schools were free and compulsory (Thein, 2000, p. 6).

Despite many difficulties, this new education system has attracted the attention of Burman, so it brought in the profound changes in the education of Myanmar in the late of 19th century and the first half of 20th century. Data on the increase in the number of primary and secondary schools in Burma have shown the success of the colonial education in Burma. Between 1891 and 1931, the number of public schools increased by 18.3%, and the total number of students attending school increased by 52.3%. In 1901, 22.8% of the school-age children in Burma were enrolled in secular classes which were established by the British authorities. This number increased to 31.2% in 1931 (Fuqua, 1992, pp. 114-115).

The Education of Malaysia Under the British Rule

Like in Myanmar, the British colonial administration from the beginning of the 19th century had no policy to forbid the development of traditional Islamic education in Malaysia, in contrast, they also facilitated this education system continuing to exist and develop. Before the arrival of British, in the Malay states, there were many Koranic classes that focused primarily on teaching knowledge of Islamic law and some traditional occupations, such as carpentry, knitting, and embroidery. These Malay classes were called Pondok, and this Pondok education continued to grow in parallel with the secular education system which was established by the British from 1816 to 1957.

It is possible to divide the education of colonial Malaysia into two main stages:

The period of 1816-1867. In an attempt to reform the Malaysian colonial education, the British colonial administration under the governor Stamford Raffles established a new education that had secular and equal characteristics in order to train the human resources who were employed in the British Administration. This Stamford Raffles's view was supported by the British Government and became a model for Malaysian education throughout the British rule in the Malay Peninsula (Ozay, 2010, p. 148).

During this period, many British-style schools were established in different areas. In 1816, the Penang

Free School was born, in 1823, Singapore Free School was founded, and the Malacca Free School in 1826. These schools were called “free” not because of exempting tuition fees, but they opened to the boys of all indigenous families and did not have any discrimination of race and religion. The school system was taught in English, with English-style subjects that had a profound impact on traditional education.

The period of 1867-1941. Malaysian education in general and the Straits Settlements in particular had a great turning point, because the management of the Straits Settlement moved from the Indian Department to the Department of the British Colonies. There were four main types of schools in this period:

1. The English schools which were taught in English and had the best facilities, curriculum, and teachers. However, the tuition of these schools was very high, so only this kind of school was only for the British children and the children belonging to Malay well-to-do families;

2. The Malay schools, were originally a complex Jawi language, then latinized and called Bahasa Malayu—a readable and easy-to-write alphabet. This considered a symbol of the modernization of traditional education in Malaysia (Ozay, 2011, p. 37);

3. Chinese schools (taught in Chinese, mainly for Chinese children);

4. Indian schools (taught in Tamil, mainly for Indian children).

Curriculum of Indian schools and Chinese schools had specific content for each, but both of them studied History, Geography, Science, Mathematics, Ethics, Writing, Physical Education, and Music. Students from five to 15 years old had enrolled to this education. All of these four types of schools had schools for boys and schools for girls (Lim, 2009, pp. 57-81).

The learning process was divided into six years of elementary school, three years of junior high school, and three years of high school. Normal schools were established, including Tamil language schools for Indians. Also, the public education system from primary to college was established. In addition to public schools, there were also private schools and supported by government.

By the 1920s, library systems began to appear in schools, most notably in English schools (Lim, 2009, p. 71). This was a significant improvement in facilities and positive support for the education process. Next, many vocational and technical schools were established. In 1926, Federal College of Vocational Training was founded, the Raffles College in 1928, and the Technical College in 1931. At the same time, the government issued legal documents on education, such as education law, education decree, education committee, education director, education inspector, etc.

According to the census of Ministry of Malaysian Education in 1968, at the elementary level, the number of students in Malay schools was the highest, but in high school level, the number of students who studied the UK schools was the highest, followed by the Chinese schools, Indian schools, and the lowest was Malay schools (Ministry of Education, 1968, pp. 32-43).

Thus, in the early 19th century, the British entered secular and advanced education into the Malaya Peninsula. It was an education with a variety of schools for both indigenous and immigrant as well as British, creating a diverse environment and learning opportunities for habitants living in the Malay Peninsula. Subjects contained a huge of scientific content and career guidance that adapted life of communities. Besides, Islamic education was still maintained. By 1957, there is more than 50% of Malaya’s literate population (Abdullah, 2012, p. 41; Lee, 1972, p. 8), while many other colonies, such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, this figure was much lower. This educational policy had created positive changes in Malaysia’s economy and society and laid the foundation for the development of Malaysian education in the next stages.

Conclusion

Prior to the mid-19th century, education in most Southeast Asian countries was dominated by religious organizations and public schools were not established. However, from the second half of the 19th century onwards, new state-run education emerged, most notably in the Philippines, Myanmar, and Malaysia. This new education derived from the cultural and educational changes following the human and scientific trends in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the colonial empires in Southeast Asia have applied these changes to their colonies, such as the Philippines, Myanmar, and Malaysia. As a result, new secular and modern education system had gradually dominated compared to the religious and traditional education system.

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