

## **French Translocalities and Alternative Colonial Genealogies of Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Malaya**

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### **Abstract**

Much has been discussed on the presence of the British in Malaya and their role as a catalyst for the creation of a multi-ethnic nation. However, there is another set of narratives by a European community that is often left out of this conversation on colonial networks, the French. These have often been at the periphery of discussions, predominantly because they were produced in French, with translations few and far between. In this paper, we attempt to bring various documentation produced by the French community into the circle of postcolonial conversations on early life in Malaya, with the aim of highlighting other European perspectives on the region that existed alongside predominant British narratives. These are drawn particularly from an exploration of selected texts written by French individuals who visited or settled in Malaya in the nineteenth century. We focus on three main groups among the French community, namely seafarers, Catholic missionaries (who were simultaneously either lexicographers or translators), and geological explorers. Of particular significance are the translocal linguistic, cultural, and religious mobilities that were generated as these French

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individuals made their way through and engaged with a territory that was primarily under the jurisdiction of the British colonial administration and the alternative genealogies of knowledge that were produced.

### **Keywords**

French missionaries, French explorers, French lexicography, translocalities, colonial genealogies of knowledge, British Malaya

### **Introduction**

Colonial Malaya has often emerged from a syntax dense with the semiotics of colonial Othering, most prominently from Hugh Clifford (1866-1941), Frank Swettenham (1850-1946), Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) and Somerset Maugham (1874-1965), to name a select few. Yet, one needs to remember that there was a multi-levelled tier to the European presence in the region, from the fifteenth century. The most prominent powers that often vied for monopoly on maritime routes in the region were the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British. The French were also present though they have often been left out of the conversation on colonial networks in the Malay Peninsula.

When tracing narratives by the French in Malaya, one often thinks of the two famous French novelists, Henri Fauconnier (1879-1973) and Pierre Boulle (1912-1994), whose works on life in the rubber plantations in Malaya gained visibility through translations into English. However, there were also a host of travel writings by French explorers as well as missionaries that were produced at the same time as their British counterparts. These have largely remained outside the frame of postcolonial critical analyses, mostly because they escaped being translated into English, or were not visible enough. What were their views on life in colonial Malaya and how did they compare to the predominant British viewpoint? In the following discussion we bring texts by French missionaries and explorers into the circle of postcolonial conversations on colonial genealogies of knowledge on British Malaya to provide an insight into alternative colonial genealogies of knowledge.

Though the involvement of the French in Southeast Asia is predominantly linked to Vietnam and Cambodia, imprints were nevertheless evident in the Malay Peninsula from as early as the sixteenth century. According to Anthony Reid, France's initial contact with the Malay Archipelago can be traced to the expedition of the Parmentier brothers to this region in 1529 (Reid *The French in Sumatra*, 196). In 1719, a French seafarer, Pedro-Villamont Garden, is said to have been approached by Sultan Abdul Jalil Riayat Syah (1643-1721) of Johor as he was exiled to Terengganu, seeking French protection (Kratz 49). Khoo Kay Kim makes similar reference to Pedro-Villamont Garden as well as two other instances of French seafarers calling at the port of Terengganu. Khoo writes of a French vessel steered by a Captain Le Blanc that was said to have

called at the port in 1755 as well as the ship *Jean Baptiste* commandeered by Jean-Francois de Surville (Khoo 18). The last is corroborated in John Dunmore's translation of accounts by de Surville, his fellow ship officers, Guillaume Labé, Pottier de l'Homme as well as the ship's clerk, Pierre Monneron. Their entries provide insights into ethnographic notes on general setting and landscape, glimpses of communal life and commercial transactions, and were "useful documents for the light that they shed on European knowledge of Trengganu" (Dunmore 145). These early accounts hint at the burgeoning French interest in the Malay Peninsula. However, French interest would only gain momentum with the advent of la Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris or the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (henceforth M.E.P.), and through them, the flurry of translocal French-Malay translocalities.

### **Translocalities, movements, and mobilities**

Arjun Appadurai (2005) uses the term "translocality" to refer to movements and mobilities and the conditions that are created for the "the production and reproduction of locality" in and through mobilities. Such mobilities are created as "various circulating populations" are interwoven with local communities, simultaneously drawing together intimations of their own nation states as well as the local environments in which they operate from (Appadurai, 220). While Appadurai uses this term to refer primarily to contemporary mobilities and interconnectedness between nation states and their far-flung communities in terms of diaspora and/or refugee communities and electronic mobilisation in the contemporary setting, it can also be useful in the context of nineteenth-century mobilisations of missionaries and explorers. This is especially significant as Appadurai focuses on the relational rather than the spatial dimension of locality and all the complexities that arise from the "socialisation of space and time" (Appadurai, 210), in short, the interactions that develop in and through everyday spaces or the quotidian.

In the following discussion, we trace the imprints of French manifestations of translocalities in nineteenth-century Malaya within the context of linguistics, religious mission development, and geological exploration for French commercial enterprises in nineteenth-century Malaya. We explore the inner circles of translocal corporeal, cultural, and religious mobilities that were generated as French missionaries and explorers made their way through territories that were primarily under the jurisdiction of the British colonial administration as well as active local Malay kingdoms with their own administrative networks. We also reflect on threads of intra-communal engagements between these various groups and the insights they provide on parallel sets of colonial genealogies of knowledge that has heretofore been predominantly seen from the British point of view. As language and communication were central factors in the French-

Malay encounter, we begin with French lexicographical activities in the Malay Peninsula.

### **French linguistic translocalities in the Malay Peninsula**

The production of several key bilingual dictionaries by the French in the nineteenth century played a major role in facilitating linguistic translocalities, the phenomena of the relational dimension in colonial lexicography, as French travellers, sojourners, and settlers negotiated their way around the communities of the Malay Peninsula. French lexicography of the Malay world followed the similar routes of their Dutch and British predecessors, borne initially within merchant contexts that would later develop into more sustained French genealogies of knowledge of the region. One of the earliest French-Malay dictionaries is recorded to have been produced by Pierre Boze, in 1825, destined for merchants and sailors who frequented the Polynesian Archipelago. Boze stayed several years in the region and devoted himself to the study of the Malay language, having observed that it was the main language of trade at the Archipelago at that time and felt that it occupied a similar status to that of the French language in Europe (Boze i-ii). Like other semitic languages i.e. Arabic or Hebrew, the Malay language was written from right to left. However, in what can be seen as one of the early French translocal engagements with the Malay world, Boze used Latin alphabets and transcribed the pronunciation of the Malay words *à la française* – the French way. In 1856, another Frenchman, Ch. Bougourd, produced a dictionary also meant for fellow French mariners to assist them on their travels. While Boze's dictionary was arranged alphabetically, Ch. Bougourd's was arranged according to different themes. Like Boze though, he preferred to use the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic alphabet. These dictionaries were however rather rudimentary and meant more to facilitate conversations and communications between the French merchant community and the local Malays.

In 1875, Pierre Favre published a comprehensive Malay-French / French-Malay dictionary. Favre was first a missionary of the M.E.P. and would proceed to become professor at l'École des langues orientales (School of Oriental Languages) in Paris. According to Labrousse (1976), Favre's dictionary contained examples from many different languages of the region that were interwoven with his own etymological explanations. In his Preface, Favre notes that he reached out to British lexicographers J. Richardson as well as Marsden for assistance in reading and transcribing the Jawi script presented in the dictionary. The dictionary also contained a multifaceted corpus drawn from various Malay legends, folklore, poetry as well as translations of biblical texts.

The production and circulation of these numerous texts epitomise translocal engagements. The negotiations with a variegated corpus, navigated across a vast network of intertextual as well as intercommunal engagements, accentuate highly social and relational dimensions of discursive space.

Movements occurred between plurality of texts and individuals from various nationalities circulating in the Malay Archipelago, and with it too, the commingling of various colonial imaginaries. Favre would go on to be quite an established scholar, circumventing the more established route of daily journal entries on missionary activities compiled and sent forth to their superiors in France. Some of his writings included notices on his travels along the interior regions of the Malay Peninsula and his encounters with the various communities of forest dwellers that were published in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* as well as the *Bulletin of the Geographical Society*. He is notably famous for publishing *An account of the wild tribes inhabiting the Malayan Peninsula, Sumatra, and a few neighbouring islands: with A journey in Johore and A journey in the Menangkabaw states of the Malayan Peninsula* in 1865. Favre's interest in the Malay world was also seen in numerous translated works, most notably those by Abdullah bin Abd-el Kadir, a renowned writer native to the Malay Peninsula (Lombard, 6). The last is a reminder that Favre's presence in the Malay Peninsula was part of a larger community of French missionaries, with their own relational networks. The dictionaries as well as grammar books in local languages were of paramount importance in facilitating mission development in the Malay Peninsula.

### **French religious translocalities**

Mission stations were vibrant hubs for translocal connections. On one level, there was the French-Asian connection between parish priests and their local communities, communicating in various tongues. On the other, there was the constant circulation of communications between the local mission station and religious superiors in the headquarters in France. Recording the various facets of everyday life was a general requirement of missionary postings. While these texts were primarily for the information of their religious superiors in the M.E.P., they contained significant micro narratives in the form of descriptions of various encounters with local communities as well as the sights and sounds of local communal life.

One of the very first French missionaries to arrive on Malayan soil were Arnaud Antoine Garnault and Joseph Louis Coudé. Their journey emerged from an interconnecting network of socio-religious mobilities. First stationed in Bangkok, they were forced to flee their mission outposts following religious persecution. According to Anthony and Helen Reid, the two missionaries had first fled to Phuket where they made the acquaintance of "Catholic Eurasian Martina Rozells" who was the common-law wife of Francis Light (169). The meeting ground of the Portuguese and French and British in an island off the Siamese coast emphasises the aspect of circulating populations and the generating of translocalities. Catholicism was a central connecting factor that drew the disparate individuals together. The role of the infamous Francis Light in this scenario subsequently helped to propel the French missionaries onwards to the

Malay Peninsula. Instead of heading towards Penang though, Garnault and Coudé first travelled to Kuala Kedah and were subsequently given a house by the governing Sultan of Kedah that was converted into a chapel. This episode reveals the production and reproduction of localities as a result of interlocking circuits of power.

The act of the Malay ruler is believed to have been a strategy to circumvent Siamese authority by aligning with what was perceived to be more powerful European forces. The kingdom of Kedah was obligated to pay a yearly tribute to the Siamese King by way of the *bunga mas* or the tree of silver and golden flowers for protection. The bestowing of the Malay house to the missionaries and its subsequent transformation into a chapel further serve to fortify the beginnings of translocal religious mobilities as French Catholic worship took shelter and coalesced under a Malay roof (Pillai, “The Synekism of Catholic Faith” 345). Coudé had made his way back to Ayutthaya as he had since been appointed Vicar Apostolic (Pillai and Brown, 50) but Garnault preferred to remain in Kedah as he felt that the port of Penang was an ideal location for communications with mission posts across Asia (Reid 169). Unfortunately, this first French religious footfall did not make much headway though as there was a very small community of Catholics at that time, mainly those of Siamese descent sheltering from persecution in their home country.

The 1800s would see a proliferation of mission outposts that flourished in tandem with the influx of migrant Chinese and Indian workforce in the tin mines and coffee and later rubber plantations. The development of these settlements was marked in turn by missionaries who were themselves part of a circulating French community. Given that missionaries had to acquire some level of communication skills to successfully evangelise among the Chinese and Indian communities, those who were sent to the Malay Peninsula often arrived from China (as well as Macao and Taiwan) or India (Pondicherry) where they would have had to undergo training in the respective languages for successful evangelism. Italian Jesuits had already begun translating Roman Catholic bibles, catechisms, and other instructional materials from Latin into Mandarin and Tamil. French missionaries proceeded to do the same and as religious contexts moved from one linguistic platform to the other, their attendant cultural nuances began to circulate alongside, reproducing in turn Roman Catholic tenets in different linguistic localities, thus generating mobilities of meanings.

### **The regional nexus of French translocalities**

Most M.E.P. missionaries who arrived in the Malay Peninsula relied heavily on an internal network of communications. As per Garnault’s reference to the viability of Penang for trans-Asian missionary communications, the trajectories of missionary life revealed the workings of a nexus of inter-relational connections. Poised strategically in the corridor of “trans-peninsula portages and entrepôts”

with ships plying the maritime routes between India and China (Reid *Regional Networks* 62), missionaries could easily move between regions to lead other mission stations and obtain necessary religious materials. Michel Lolivier, the First Superior of College General is said to have arrived in Penang from Macao in 1808, accompanied by 5 Chinese seminarians. The College General also saw seminarians from Vietnam and other parts of Asia, becoming a potent hub of translocal connections, and subsequently a generator of one of the earliest Asian networks of knowledge (Reid *Regional Networks* 67-70). M.E.P. missionary Laurent-Joseph-Marius Imbert who arrived in Penang in 1820 had also spent a brief amount of time in Singapore before leaving for East Asia, mainly Macao, Szechuan, and onwards to Korea. While stationed at Penang, Imbert was joined in 1821 by Mathurin Pierre Pécot, who subsequently left for Bangkok in 1822 following only to promptly return to Penang in 1823. In a recent translation of a collection of letters that were exchanged between Pécot and a host of M.E.P. missionaries, Anthony Reid and Helen Reid (2020) present significant glimpses into the various translocalities that unfold within the circuit of the missionary network of communications. The following excerpts from Pécot's letters are from their translated and edited article. Like Garnault before him, Pécot reveals similar sentiments on the suitability and viability of Penang as a transregional hub for Christian mission work:

I believe I can assure you that the Christian community of Pinang will one day become one of the most flourishing, and the most interesting, of the Orient. Pinang is a seaport which is becoming more significant every day. It is a little Calcutta and is for that immense city what Macao is for Canton. From there one can communicate easily with the whole Orient. (Reid and Reid 173)

However, as much as he makes note of the transregional networks, he is also quick to point out his allegiance to his own mission community:

I was the guest of the Reverend Fr Daniel, an Indian Dominican from Goa. We even went out in one of his vehicles. Don't criticize me, it was improper but in no way was it my choice. I was so ashamed that I would have liked to be back on board our ship. The next day I went out alone on foot into the territory, as far as I could. (Reid and Reid, 174)

The account draws attention to the internal boundary lines between Catholic missionary communities. The Dominican missionary from Goa mentioned in Pécot's account came under the jurisdiction of the M.E.P.'s rival, the Padroado, which was the religious patronage of the Portuguese. Pécot also makes references to rival Protestant missionary efforts of translating prayer books into the local languages:

The manuscript that I am sending you is entitled *Baktian Sabarian, id est exercitium quotidianum*. It contains the morning and night prayers, the wording of the Mass, prayers for confession and communion, hymns,

almost covering the whole year, a few of the gospels and the Passion of Our Lord, and finally a catechism that is accessible to the peoples of this country. The heretics [Protestant Christians] reproach Catholics for making people pray in a language they don't understand—viz. Latin—it is good to give them Latin prayers, but with a translation into the vernacular. That is why we have translated some pieces, e.g., the *Gloria in Excelsis*, *Te Deum*, *Salve Regina*, etc, which we will nevertheless say in Latin. (Reid and Reid 180)

Pécot's entreaty to his fellow missionaries to ensure a provision of vernacular translations of Latin religious material alongside the original foregrounds his due cognizance of the need for evangelical efforts to bridge the gap between cultural worlds. Translations of religious texts effectively mobilised Christian tenets not only into different linguistic locales but also their attendant cultural nuances. However, Pécot is careful to accentuate the importance to "render as faithfully as possible the pronunciation of the Malay" (Reid and Reid 181) in romanised translations, pitting these against Protestant missionaries deemed more ethnocentric in their approach to translation, choosing to prioritise English orthography over Malay. He subsequently spends a great deal of time explaining the rules of Malay grammar and the dialectics of the encounter between French and Malay orthography in the printed world. It ought to be noted that these reflections were penned at least 50 years prior to Favre's dictionaries. They thus quite possibly provided the scaffolding for Favre's set of bilingual dictionaries and its attendant Franco-Malay modulations. This brings us to the next section of our discussion, that of the everyday encounters between the French who were present in Malaya and the micro narratives of encounters with the various local communities.

### **French genealogies of colonial knowledge from the vantage point of a missionary**

Between the years of first French missionary contact with the Malay Peninsula and the publication of Favre's dictionaries, counterparts from the M.E.P. actively journeyed through the rural interior, especially through smaller towns along various waterways in the inlands and recorded various scenes of local engagement as they set up missionary posts. French explorers too operated within the hub of such networks, guided by various local communities, both on the move and when they stopped for shelter along the journey. Given that memoirs, letters, and travel journals played an important part in the circuit of communications in the 1800s, we pursued the trail of translocal connections from two such narratives that emerged from French encounters with community life in Malaya within the context of religious mission development and geological exploration for French commercial enterprises.



The first text is that of a memoir by French missionary René-Marie-Michel Fée on the foundation of a Tamil Catholic parish dedicated to Saint Joseph, in the town of Bagan Serai, Perak. The memoir, written originally in French and published in the bulletin of the M.E.P. in 1892, was subsequently translated into English by the editors of the *Malaya Catholic Leader*, also an M.E.P. publication founded specifically for the communication of Catholic news to a fast-growing Catholic community in Malaya (Pillai *French and Diasporic Tamil Catholic Mobilities* 226). We refer to the translated version in the *Malaya Catholic Leader*.

Fée arrived in Penang in 1879. Shortly after his arrival, he was entrusted with tending to the pastoral care of the incoming migrant Tamil communities beginning to settle in the northern states of the Malay Peninsula. Fée subsequently established several mission outposts in the area, his most significant contribution being the setting up of a parish community for Tamil Catholics in the town of Bagan Serai, Perak. The minutiae of everyday life that Fée records in his memoir contains rich ethnographic material. However, as Malaysian scholar, Shamsul Amri Baharuddin puts it, the perennial dismissal of “the ‘text’ of the everyday-defined social reality as a valid source of information and data” is “tantamount to the political suppression, even exclusion, of the ‘voices from below’ or the “subaltern voices’ from mainstream consideration and concern” (477). The French missionaries, operating in a setting that was officially governed by another imperial force, were rendered somewhat subaltern within the larger milieu of studies on British Malaya in particular. This was in two contexts. Firstly, most studies in and of this period focused on the British and were primarily produced in the English language. French missionary texts, produced in the French language, did not play a major role. Secondly, because the nature of the texts that they produced were primarily of evangelisation, the content was further pushed to the margins. An attendant result of this has been that other types of data, especially ethnographic in nature, have been excluded from the frame of knowledge. Yet, these marginalised texts can be significant in offering alternative paths to knowing the past and consequently, alternative genealogies of colonial knowledge. We provide a few of these samples from Fée’s memoir.

On a particular morning, on the way to gather supplies for his foundling parish, Fée recounts the scenery that unfolds before his eyes almost as if he was a painter of the French Renaissance. He travels “seated in a Malay boat scudding gracefully down the river” with “banks displaying now some wild scenes, now some groves of coconut trees shading a few Malay cottages” (13). When he reaches the river mouth, he marvels at “the azured sea glittering in the sun, and in the offing, dotted with a flotilla of fishing boats with sails of various hues” (13). He ends his reflection by drawing parallels with the setting of French pastoral artwork, where “a painter would have seized his brush, a poet would have called up the Muse” (Fée *The Beginning of a Tamil Settlement in Malaya* 16 March, 13). However,

he remains duly cognisant of the mission at hand, and the narrative thread is drawn back to remind him of his main objective of mission development.

Intimations of France are however not only interwoven through the allusions to the French Renaissance. It is also evident in the discursive form, as the memoir reflects the genre of the anecdotal essay as popularised by French philosopher Montaigne with its attendant principles of humanism. These are duly portrayed in the egalitarian predispositions of the M.E.P. missionary, arriving on the heels of the Revolution at home. Yet, bearing in mind that the journey from France to Malaya was driven by evangelism, a strong Christian sensibility also flows through Fée's narrative through the evidence of biblical intertextuality in the form of parables. The trope of the good Samaritan is evoked through his tale of "two good Chinese attap merchants" who offer his travelling party shelter and food as they find themselves caught in a storm on the journey back to the parish (Fée *The Beginning of a Tamil Settlement in Malaya* 23 March, 13). In a similar vein, Fée recounts an episode of two visiting missionaries of the M.E.P. who, on their way home, found themselves in a precarious situation as they faced "a deep and broad canal" in the middle of their journey, with only "a nibong trunk" for a bridge. While one missionary braved the journey across, the other came to a standstill midway through. Fortunately, "two good Chinese happening to pass by heaved him up with their brawny arms and carried him all panting on the other bank" (Fée *The Beginning of a Tamil Settlement in Malaya* 13 April, 13). This second episode reflects the mobilities of the missionary's narrative point of view as he interweaves three subtexts. Firstly, there is the intimation of intra-communal visits and visitations within the French missionary network. Secondly, there is the allusion to the biblical parable of the good Samaritan (also seen previously). Thirdly, there is a significant micro narrative of the more liberated modes of engagement between different communities that unfolded alongside the regimented colonial orchestrations of ethnic segregation and separation. These select examples provided from Fée's memoir serve to remind us of the importance of acknowledging "the coexistence of multiple historical streams and the ways individuals in complex settings relate to each other from different vantage points" (Vertovec 1026). They are especially significant in steering us away from the established dialectics of the cause and effect of colonial divide and rule that has been presented from and of the colonial British vantage point.

### **French genealogies of colonial knowledge from the vantage point of a geological explorer**

We proceed next with the travel journal of a French explorer and tin mining prospector, Jacques de Morgan. Morgan and other French explorers like him have remained largely on the periphery of colonial genealogies of knowledge that have primarily been trained on the British vantage point. Being a geologist and engineer by training, Morgan had taken up various commissions to survey

precious stones as well as metal ore in the East. One of those commissions led him to Malaya, to prospect for tin mining opportunities in the northern state of Perak, as initiated by an offer by a company in France. The travel journal that Morgan kept was emblematic of what Mary Louise Pratt has termed as the planetary project of colonial meaning-making in the contact-zone between European and non-European cultures, encoding landscapes for imperial expansionist aspirations (Pratt 4). However, while these contact zones were primarily seen as unequal platforms of power, Morgan's text reveals slight variations to this familiar trope, most significantly perhaps due to his reliance on British colonial administrative assistance. He was after all travelling in a land that was under rival European governmental jurisdiction, the British. The initial moments of his arrival in Malaya already reveal the formation of French translocal connections. In the very detailed background and biography provided by Andrée Jaunay of the 2020 translation of Morgan's journal, we are told that Morgan first visits the French Catholic missionaries in Georgetown, Penang and is subsequently provided "a servant who spoke English well as the local language, and a cook" (Morgan, xx).

The episode foregrounds significant aspects connected to French translocalities. There is evidence of the internal network of cooperation between the French community circulating Peninsula Malaya at that particular era. Integrated into this is the intimation of French Catholic identity. The missionary in Penang is not the only French Catholic parish de Morgan visits. Another mission station is illustrated among the many sketches in his memoir, clearly depicting a wooden house with a cross, identifying it as the Taiping Catholic Mission (3). One of the buildings clearly resembles the present-day Taiping Catholic Church, thus revealing the temporal dimension to translocality as well. Thirdly, there is the scale of social translocality in terms of intercultural communication within the local environment, with the requisite of both English, seeing as they were in a British administered region, and Malay, the language of the land and the everyday lingua franca.

Morgan's subsequent travel into the Malay Peninsula reveals the widening circles of translocality as his path intersects with individuals from his own as well as various other communities. The latter is most pertinently revealed by the prerequisites for permission granted for his travel into the state of Perak as set by a British resident, Frank Swettenham. Morgan was to provide the British a detailed map of the interior of Perak, outlining its watersheds. This effectively draws the Frenchman into the imperial project of surveillance and knowledge gathering. We are told that Morgan also volunteered to offer detailed information on the communities living in the interior. This willingness to participate in the Orientalist trading in ethnographic knowledge gained him a letter of introduction from the British resident that in turn enabled him to approach the various local rulers and chieftains to secure food supplies, guides, and transportation needed

to facilitate his expedition into the interior of Perak. The travelling party that finally accompanied Morgan was a heterogenous amalgamation of various circulating communities. It consisted of a Frenchman, a British, a local Eurasian as well as “around 25-30 Malays of Mandailing origin [...]” (Morgan, xxii). As Morgan proceeds on his journey, we witness an interweaving of both French and Malayan environments in the narrative imaginary. We present a few examples as we move towards the end of our discussion on French translocalities in nineteenth-century Malaya.

By the time he had begun to travel on the 17th of July, Morgan relates that he was accustomed to abstaining from alcohol and had also taken to donning the manner of clothing common to the local communities, as they were more suited to the climate. Additionally, over the five months of his travelling the Sultanate of Perak, he had also become used to the Malay customs and had also learnt their language (Morgan 2). As Morgan ventures further into the interior, two scenes stand out as significant demonstrations of Franco-Malay modulations of translocalities. In the first instance we witness a sense of ecological affinity drawn between France and Malaya:

The river is a true mountain torrent and provides one of the most attractive tropical forest views one could possibly see. The bed of the river is completely clear of trees and shrubs, while the banks are covered with impenetrable thickets. Double rows of huge trees set by chance in a straight line shelter this waterway, which is hidden from the rays of the sun by an enormous dome of greenery. One might compare it to an avenue in an enormous French-style park. The proportions of this avenue are such that our elephants seem puny in comparison with its natural grandeur. (Morgan 8)

The vantage point draws on connections, rather than binary oppositions, between the local geophysical environment and that of France. It also presents glimpses of French humanism with its exhortations of transcending preconceptions and prejudices. This is once again revealed when Morgan encounters a series of caves along his journey:

The second cave only has two openings and penetrates much deeper into the mountain. It culminates in a large hall which reminds me of the nave of a Gothic cathedral. The space is enormous, its echo fantastic, and the Malays refrain from talking because they believe the echoes are spirits who reproduce these sounds to express their anger against these intruders who are disturbing their peace. (Morgan 28)

The passage reveals a subtle sense of affinity between French and Malay spheres, within the context of both spatiality and spirituality. The comparison of the interior environment of the cave to a gothic cathedral evokes not only the Catholic consciousness of the explorer. It also emphasises French cultural nuances as most French churches were built in the gothic architectural style. Yet

by proceeding to interweave the Malay spiritual viewpoint, an inter-cultural bridge is also formed in the narrative imaginary. We do not mean however to discount the various signposts of the meta consciousness of the colonial discourse of Orientalism that abound in the text. While these do exist, our discussion of Morgan's text is primarily situated within the context of French translocalities as part of the larger French collective pattern that we have traced from the outset to offer alternative genealogies of European colonial knowledge that were produced from and on the Malay Peninsula.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this article was primarily to unravel the long thread of translocalities within the context of the French presence in nineteenth-century Malaya. We were especially concerned with bringing a community that has been largely excluded from the frame of scholarship on nineteenth-century Malaya to the forefront. This side-lining of the French has been largely due to the fact that their narratives were mainly produced in the French language, whereas most studies on British Malaya focus on texts that are in the English language. Then there is also the attendant perception of their role as confined within the context of mission and development. By tracing, unearthing, and disclosing the French voices that exist in the repertoire of colonial productions of knowledge on Malaya, we have ways in which they can offer alternative paths to knowing a past which has been primarily dominated by more dominant British colonial genealogies of knowledge.

Our investigation led us to conclude that the French missionaries were evidently the most significant actors in this subplot of colonial discourse. We focused primarily on the first 100 years of the arrival of the French in British occupied Malaya as our aim was to tease out the threads that ran parallel to British activity in the nineteenth century. As we meandered through the intricacies of the various activities of the French in the region, we were able to detect intersections not only between various subsets of the French community, but also that of the substratum of the ideological legacies of French Humanism. The latter was especially pertinent in revealing the cross pollinations of French and Malayan localities that were generated as a result of the corporeal, linguistic, cultural, and religious mobilities, in tandem with the approach of translocalities as laid out by Arjun Appadurai.

We hope that this discussion can lead to more active engagement with the French perspectives on Malaya as they unfurled further in the twentieth century and the attendant evolutions in thought. We think here especially of two recently published works by French authors, duly translated into English, the first being the lectures of French ethnologist Jeanne Cuisinier, and the other, that of the director of the College General set during World War II. We conclude by

stressing the importance of locating different stories, different voices, and different angles to the monologue of British colonialism in Malaya.

### Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a grant funded by the Embassy of France in Malaysia (185 Axe Project :185MYS0704 / UKM Grant Code: SK 2021-001) as well as the National University of Malaysia Grant code GUP-2019-056. We are particularly grateful to Anne Vanessa Vincent for research assistance rendered in the preparation of this article.

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