

THE FEAR OF COLONIAL MISCEGENATION IN THE BRITISH COLONIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Between 1820 and 1923, European and American travelogue writers in the Southeast Asian British Colonies looked down upon Europeans participating in miscegenation with local women. They felt that it was a “barbaric” institution, and if Europeans participated in miscegenation, they were destroying the racial hierarchy that had been established during colonialism. They feared miscegenation would blur the racial lines that had been used as the basis for control over the colonies. Miscegenation also produced children of mixed races, called Eurasians. Eurasians became a separate class, however, the British and Southeast Asians did not know how to classify and treat them. Eurasians were not accepted by Europeans or Southeast Asians, they were a group of people not even recognized as a class. Why did the European and American travelogue writers fear miscegenation between Europeans and Southeast Asians? By examining European and American travelogues, I will argue that in the Southeast Asian British Colonies between the years 1820–1923, British and American travelogue writers feared miscegenation between Europeans and Southeast Asians because it challenged the existing racial structures.

For this paper I will rely exclusively on the Travelogues of Europeans and Americans. They provide a window into the culture of Southeast Asia which Southeast Asians themselves did not write about. Southeast Asian culture was new and different to European and American travelogue writers, however. As such, they documented extensively what which was foreign or strange to them. Though relying exclusively on travelogues limits this paper by excluding the Southeast Asian perspective, my purpose is to analyze the European and American perspective on Southeast Asian culture. Travelogues proved the best source for such analysis.

For the history of miscegenation in Southeast Asia, I will mainly rely on John G. Butcher's *The British in Malaya 1880–1841 The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia*. According to Butcher, colonial miscegenation came about due to the necessity for female companionship.¹ He goes on to speculate that concubinage occurred mainly in rural settings, and that these woman not only provided companionship, but they also helped acclimate European men to their new Southeast Asian settings.² Later in his book, Butcher describes how concubinage began to decline in the early twentieth century as Europeans in Southeast Asia began to make more money and were able to afford to bring European wives over.³

Ann Stoler has several interesting theories about miscegenation that she derived from her readings of Michel Foucault. Stoler theorizes that more and more Europeans began to view miscegenation negatively as the bourgeois classes in Europe began to grow during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ She goes on to say that with the growth of the bourgeois class, there came a growth of the bourgeois morality or racial purity.⁵ The new, growing, bourgeois morality was based on the belief that Southeast Asians were unsophisticated and unable to control their primi-

¹ John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880–1841 The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Oxford, New York, and Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979), 196.

² Butcher, 200.

³ Butcher, 202.

⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 44.

⁵ Stoler, *Race*, 45.

tive and sexual desires. In order to demonstrate bourgeois sophistication, they had to be the opposite: they had to control themselves sexually.⁶ She argues that the European middle class claimed the people who could be characterized by their sexual promiscuity were the people that were meant to be in the lower classes, which even included Europeans participating in concubinage with Southeast Asian women.⁷

European colonization occurred in two phases. During the sixteenth century, Spain and Portugal were the first European countries to colonize.⁸ Individual glory and state glory were the primary objective during the first phase of colonization. These expeditions also sought to secure capital and to spread religion. Spain and Portugal had both been crusading against the Muslims in Europe and Northern Africa for centuries, and the “New World” was a great opportunity to spread Christianity and increase its global popularity relative to Islam.⁹ Imperialism was also about trade. Imperialism allowed the Dutch to dominate European trade and allowed the British to dominate trade with India.¹⁰ The second phase of imperialism, occurring after the French Revolution, was more of a competition among the different European countries. It was a battle to see who could control the most land and prove their nationalism. This second phase was dominated by competition between England and France to see who the strongest and largest imperial power.¹¹

Europeans began to colonize Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century for trade. The Portuguese were the first dominating imperial power in Southeast Asia—starting with the capture of Melacca in 1511.¹² The Spanish also arrived and imperialized the Philippines during the sixteenth century.¹³ After the Spanish-American War at the end of the nineteenth century, the United States waged a war against the Philippines, and official-

⁶ Stoler, *Race*, 183.

⁷ Stoler, *Race*, 194.

⁸ Nicholas Tarling, *Imperialism in Southeast Asia: A Fleeting, Passing Phase* (London and New York), 27.

⁹ Tarling, 26.

¹⁰ Tarling, 27.

¹¹ Tarling, 39.

¹² Tarling, 37.

¹³ Milton Osborne, *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1968), 77.

ly colonized the region in 1902.¹⁴ The mainland portion of Southeast Asia was colonized during the second phase of imperialism by the British and the French. The French occupied Vietnam in hopes of being able to trade with China, and also because they had lost India to Britain.¹⁵ The British moved into Burma for a few reasons, the most important were the disputes between the Burmese government and Britain about borders. Burma had frontier zones between India and Burma that the government claimed no responsibility for, but they would not let the British occupy that region.¹⁶ The Burmese did not have defined borders like the British did, so the misunderstanding between the British and the Burmese caused conflicts and in the end, war.¹⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, the British occupied all of Burma. Soon after the British started occupying Burma, the French moved into Cambodia and Laos to compete with the British.¹⁸ Thailand was the only Southeast Asian country that was not colonized. By employing European tactics, the Thai government successfully resisted colonization and remained a buffer zone between the French and British colonies.¹⁹

The British saw miscegenation as dangerous to the colonial structure because it contradicted the belief that Southeast Asians were inferior to Europeans. In one American travelogue from the Philippines, the writer compared the way that the British and the Spanish treated the natives. He commented that the British ridiculed the Portuguese and the Spanish for allowing interracial marriage. The British felt that miscegenation would result in the decline of the colonial government and even the decline of home government of the colonizing power, even though they did not explain how.²⁰ The conclusion that interracial marriage would lead to the decline of the colonial structure could only result from the fear that interracial marriage blurred the lines of the racial hierarchy that the British had established. According to the same American travelogue writer, the

¹⁴ Paul A. Kramer, "Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire: the Philippine-American War as a Race War," in *Diplomatic History*, 40.

¹⁵ Osborne, 68.

¹⁶ Osborne, 64.

¹⁷ Thongchai Winichakul, *Maps and the Formation of the Geo-Body of Siam*, 73.

¹⁸ Osborne, 70.

¹⁹ Osborne, 71.

²⁰ James A. LeRoy, *Philippine life in town and country*, (New York: Putnam, 1905), 38.

British believed that interracial marriage produced “mongrel,” “inferior and “renegade” Eurasian children.²¹ The British did not know how to classify Eurasians and did not want to recognize their European descent. In order to maintain their racial hierarchy, the British needed to establish the inferiority of Eurasians in any way possible, including the use of derogatory words to describe them. Ann Stoler explains that miscegenation presented questions that Europeans were not ready to answer. One of those questions was how to maintain white supremacy when their racial purity was threatened by miscegenation.²² The British response to this question was to classify Eurasians as inferior and employed derogatory language to make them social outcasts and discourage others from participating in miscegenation.

European travelogue writers dismissed concubinage between Europeans and Southeast Asians because they did not want to admit that European men were part of the problem to the degradation of their racial structures. A British travelogue writer in Burma made excuses for British men falling into concubinage. He claimed that Burmese women had sweeter and more affectionate personalities, therefore British men could not help themselves.²³ Ann Stoler remarks that Europeans also felt by keeping the race pure and abstaining from promiscuity, they were establishing their superiority over Southeast Asians.²⁴ But concubinage would make the established racial structures harder to define, thereby making it harder to maintain their racial superiority. An interracial couple threatened the Caucasian racial purity. But they feared that if they admitted that British men were willing participating in miscegenation it would encourage other British men to do it as well. In an attempt to deter other British men from it, travelogue writers refused to admit that British men were consciously able to consent to concubinage.

²¹ LeRoy, 38.

²² Fredrick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, “Introduction Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (Nov. 1989): 610.

²³ Fitz, William Thomas Pollok, *Sport in British Burmah, Assam and the Cassyah and Jyntiah Hills: with notes of sport in the hilly districts of the northern division, Madra: presidency, indicating the best localities in those countries for sport, with natural history notes, illustrations of the people, scenery, and game, together with maps to guide the traveller or sportsman, and hints on weapons, fishing-tackle, etc., best suited for killing game met with in those provinces, vol.1* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), 11.

²⁴ Stoler, *Race*, 193.

To establish that British were not at fault for participating in miscegenation, other excuses were made by travelogue writers. For example, one writer claimed that Europeans could not help themselves. The climate of Southeast Asia weakened their strength to stand by their British morals.²⁵ These outrageous claims were only used to remove all blame from Europeans and place it on the natives, or the climate of the colony itself.

Other European travelogue writers tried to emphasize that miscegenation was temporary, which degraded the European men to a more uncivilized status in order to maintain the established racial structures. One British travelogue writer states that Europeans only stayed with Burmese women temporarily and rarely ever called them “wife.”²⁶ The term “wife” was an endearing term that elevated women to a more respectful status. Having a wife was stabilizing and permanent. But this travelogue writer alludes that refusing to call Southeast Asian women wife, even if that was in fact what they were, was degrading. It kept Southeast Asian women in an inferior status to Europeans. The same travelogue writer continued to say that Burmese women were not seen as suitable companions. English travelers only stayed with Burmese women until they could return to England to find a real wife.²⁷ His implicate argument was that British men were not actually attracted to Southeast Asian women. While living in Southeast Asia, British men had no other option than to lower themselves by being with Southeast Asian women until they could return to England and find a suitable woman. European travelogue writers could not admit that British men preferred to participate in concubinage because it would have been admitting that their racial structures were in fact changing and that British men were partly responsible for it.

Miscegenation produced Eurasian children that were not European or Asian; they were a people without an identity that had the ability to change the European established racial hierarchy. Christina Firpo mentions that in Vietnam, Eurasians were clearly recognizable as being of French descent. But the French viewed this as a threat to their racial purity and su-

²⁵ John Turnbull Thomson, *Some glimpses into life in the Far East* (London: Richardson and Company, 1864), 253.

²⁶ W. R. Winston, *Four years in Upper Burma* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1892), 228.

²⁷ Winston, 229.

periority.²⁸ A British travelogue writer noticed that Eurasians were divided amongst themselves based on how closely they resembled Europeans.²⁹ The Eurasians with the skin tones and facial features that more closely resembled those of Europeans had higher social statuses than those that had features that more closely resembled Southeast Asians. This made it seem like there were several racial categories within the Eurasian community. This confusion over racial hierarchies within the Eurasian community created confusion among the British. The British were confused as to how to categorize Eurasians racially. The British had established a strict racial hierarchy. They were also convinced that they would be able to maintain a racial purity amongst the Europeans. So they were not prepared when British men began to participate in miscegenation and producing another race.³⁰ As Ann Stoler put it, Eurasians “straddled the divide” between colonizers and colonized.³¹ This “divide” blurred some of the racial lines between Europeans and Southeast Asians, which terrified the British.

Travelogue writers also noticed that Eurasians were disliked by both Europeans and Asians.³² Not only were they despised by the Europeans, but since they despised their Southeast Asian heritage, they alienated themselves even further by rejecting the Southeast Asian community.³³ This left Eurasians isolated and alone. The British feared Eurasians because they did not know what Eurasians would do, since they were not accepted by either community. Eurasians were also alienated in their own families. One travelogue writer wrote that in Eurasian families, the lighter skinned children had more privileges than the darker skinned ones.³⁴ The British feared that

²⁸ Christina Elizabeth Firpo, “‘The Durability of the Empire’: Race, Empire and ‘Abandoned’ Children in Colonial Vietnam 1870–1956” P.H.D. dissertation, University of Los Angeles, 2007.

²⁹ Richard Curle, *Into the East: notes on Burma and Malaya* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1923), 50.

³⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), 42.

³¹ Ann L. Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures.” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (Nov. 1989): 638.

³² Curle, 49.

³³ Thomas Wallace Knox, *The boy travellers in the Far East, part third: adventures of two youths in a journey to Ceylon and India with descriptions of Borneo, the Philippines Islands and Burmah* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882), 302.

³⁴ Thomson, 251.

unrest in the Eurasian community for not having a place in the previously established racial structure might lead to political unrest. Eurasians did not belong to European or Asian societies and they suffer disadvantages for it.³⁵ They were rejected from some jobs and events because they were Eurasian. The British would not allow them access to all European events or to high ranking European jobs. Furthermore, Southeast Asians would not accept them into the Southeast Asian community. In most cases, the European father left and the family was financially cut off and without a father.³⁶ Having their European fathers leave lead to feelings of abandonment and alienation as well. In some cases, when the European father left, the family became poor. So not only were the Eurasian children alienated from most communities, they were left with no means to support themselves.

Eurasians were so disoriented about where they belonged, that they fought to be seen as European, while Europeans fought to reject the notion that Eurasians were of European descent, creating a tension among Eurasians that Europeans feared. A British travelogue writer noted that Eurasians wanted to demonstrate their European heritage so much that they over exaggerated and tried to be more patriotic than their British fathers.³⁷ Yet Daniel Gorman explains that “Britishness” is defined by “character, masculinity, whiteness, and Protestantism.” He goes on to explain that, obviously, not all Europeans possessed all of these qualities, but they required the colonized to possess all those qualities if they wanted to be accepted by the European community.³⁸ Yet Europeans wanted to reject them so much that they created unobtainable standards in order to keep Eurasians inferior. But identification as Europeans was not only to be accepted into the European community. Eurasians also tried to demonstrate their European heritage in an attempt to rise socially among other Eurasians.³⁹ The more European a Eurasian appeared to be, the more benefits they could gain, especially if they could pass for European. Eurasians that closely resembled

³⁵ Winston, 229.

³⁶ Winston, 229.

³⁷ Curle, 50.

³⁸ Daniel Gorman, “Wider and Wider Still?: Racial Politics, Intra-Imperial Immigration and the Absence of an Imperial Citizenship in the British Empire,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 3, no. 3 (Winter 2002): 1.

³⁹ Curle, 51.

Europeans were given better jobs, but were still kept socially inferior to actual Europeans. One travelogue writer stated that they were so consumed trying to be European, something that they were not, that they are essentially empty.⁴⁰ They were so busy trying to emulate Europeans, that they did not create a unified community of their own. And Europeans feared that if they recognized Eurasians' European heritage, it would destroy the racial hierarchy that they had tried to hard to maintain.

European and American travelogue writers writing between 1820 and 1923 feared miscegenation. They saw it as a threat to their racial structures. They spoke about it negatively to try to deter other Europeans from participating in concubinage because it blurred the racial lines between Europeans and Southeast Asians. It also produced Eurasian children that the British were not prepared to deal with. They did not want to recognize Eurasians' European heritage because that would also blur the racial lines. These fears lead European travelogue writers to write about miscegenation derogatorily in order to deter other Europeans from participating in it as well. They also felt the need to excuse European men for participating in miscegenation because they refused to believe that European men were part of the reason that their established racial structures were being challenged and even changed. Europeans refused to become a part of the Southeast Asian culture, which created problems when miscegenation began to mix European and Southeast Asian cultures. Because Europeans refused to accept miscegenation, they excluded an entire class of people, one that would eventually fight against rejection.

⁴⁰ Curle, 50.

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