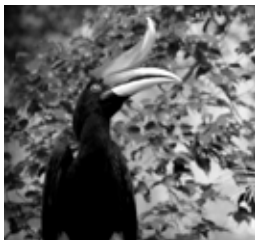


CHAPTER 14

THE STATE OF SARAWAK

The hornbill is a protected bird in Sarawak, and it is also the symbol of the state. Therefore Sarawak is also known as “The Land of Hornbills”.



Hornbill

Rajang River,
the longest river in Malaysia

SARAWAK – ODE TO RAINFORESTS

Sarawak is also known as the “Land of Hornbills”; her neighbouring state is Sabah. East Malaysia is made up of these two states which are separated from the Malay Peninsula by the South China Sea. While East Malaysia occupies the northern part of the Borneo Island; the southern part of the island, called Kalimantan, belongs to Indonesia. Brunei Darussalam, with a land area shaped like two bags, sits between Sabah and Sarawak. Being the largest city in East Malaysia, Kuching is the capital of Sarawak. In Malay, Kuching literary means “cat”, hence Kuching is also called “the city of the Cat”.

With a land area of 124,449 sq. km., Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia. The longest river in Malaysia, Rajang River, traverses the vast land area. The humidity of Sarawak is high and luxuriant foliage is abundant, making it one of the best-known tropical rainforest zones in the world. The state population of about 2.5 million consists of Dayaks, Chinese, Malay, Melanau and others. There are altogether 26 ethnic groups living in Sarawak.



James Brooke



Malaysia was formed in 1963

HISTORY

The caves in Sarawak are a major tourist attraction. The biggest and most famous of them, the Mulu Caves, are classified as a world heritage site. Another tourist hot spot, the Niah Caves, was found to be a human habitat more than 30,000 years ago. However, it was not until 1841, while under the rule of the Brooke family, that Sarawak was known to the outside world. Before that, it was part of the Brunei Sultanate. It all began when a British adventurer named James Brooke brought a thank you letter to the Brunei official based in Sarawak on behalf of his friend in Singapore. Later, Brooke was conferred the title of Rajah (meaning king or ruler) for the part he played in the suppression of a local uprising. Since Brooke was a white man, he was also called the “White Rajah”. At that time, the territory of Sarawak was limited to the area surrounding Kuching.

The Brooke dynasty lasted three generations. Meanwhile the domain of Sarawak gradually extended from Kuching to Lawas in the far north. In 1941, Japan invaded and occupied Sarawak. In 1946, it became a British colony. Sarawak was officially granted independence and joined with Sabah, Singapore and the Federation of Malaya to form Malaysia in 1963.



Sing Ang Tong, the first church set up
by the Methodist congregation in Sibuan

MISSIONS IN SARAWAK

As an Englishman, it was quite natural for James Brooke to invite the Anglican Church to establish churches in Sarawak. The first bishop of the Borneo Anglican Church, Rev. Francis Thomas McDougall, arrived in Sarawak via Singapore on 29 June 1848. The Anglican missionaries built a seminary and a church on a hilly land given by the Rajah. They began to sow the gospel seed in Sarawak, witnessing not only to the indigenous people but also to some Chinese.

The year 1881 marked the arrival of the Catholic Mill Hill missionaries in Sarawak. They began working in Kanowit at the upper stream of the Rajang River, reaching out mainly to the Iban people. The Catholic Church then set up a base in Sibuan in 1889.

During the rule of Rajah Charles Brooke in 1900, a Foochow speaking “Kangchu” Wong Nai Siong obtained a contract from the Rajah to develop the outskirts of Sibuan. Wong brought in three batches of workers from his home village in China. Whilst in Sibuan, Wong fostered the spirit of Christ’s unconditional love in a working environment of “no opium, no gambling”. In addition, he established five churches and a primary school. In 1904, he handed over the whole project to an American missionary, Rev. James Hoover and returned to China. Rev. Hoover introduced the planting of rubber

trees to Sibu, thus marking the beginning of prosperity for the town and its people. Henceforth, the Methodist churches in Sibu expanded and focused on evangelising the Chinese. Their outreach to the Ibans started in 1939.

In 1928, the Evangelical Church in Borneo, later known as the Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB), was founded by Australian missionaries who worked among the indigenous people in Limbang, northern Sarawak. SIB set up the first Chinese church in Limbang in 1958. With the establishment of a Chinese department in 1980, SIB began to plant Chinese churches in different parts of Sarawak.

In 1963, Rev. and Mrs. Percy King, missionaries from Australia, came to Miri and started the Miri Gospel Hall. Subsequently, more Gospel Hall branches were established as they focused on church planting and mission work, mainly among the Chinese.

In 1972, missionaries commissioned by the Southern Baptist Convention arrived in Sarawak and founded the First Baptist Church. 15 years later, the Chinese speaking congregation of the First Baptist Church formed the Grace Baptist Church. The Emmanuel Baptist Church was started in 1991.

The other Chinese churches in Sarawak include the Assembly of God (founded in the 1950's), Christian National Evangelism Commission and Glad Tidings Church (both formed in 1970) as well



26 ethnic groups in Sarawak

as the Full Gospel Church (established in 1982). In recent years, more churches such as the Blessed Church, City Harvest Church, Living Water Church and Bread of Life Christian Church were set up.

If we use the census of 2000 as a guide, Christians (both Catholics and Protestants) constitute nearly 43% of the population in Sarawak. This means the number of Christians in the state is about 880,000 and their main denominational breakdown is as follows: 400,000 Catholics; 150,000 Anglicans (mostly the indigenous people and some Chinese); 150,000 SIB (mostly the indigenous people); 120,000 Methodists (mostly Chinese with some Ibans).

The 187,000 Chinese Christians make up about 20% of the state Christian population, or 30% of the 530,000 Chinese population in the state. (Note: Since the majority of the Chinese and indigenous people in Sarawak are Christians, Good Friday is made a state public holiday.)

THE CHRISTIAN IMMIGRANT

The high proportion of Chinese Christians in Sarawak could perhaps be linked to the influx of Christian migrants from China more than a hundred years ago. In 1889, Sing Ang Hakka migrants arrived

in Sungai Maong, near Kuching. Many of them had Basel Christian Church background. However, as there was no Basel Church in the area, they were invited to join the Anglicans.

The Foochow pioneers who came to Sungai Merah and Sungai Ensurai in Sibu in 1901 were mostly Christians of the Methodist Episcopal Mission (the modern day Methodists) background. Moving along the banks of Rajang River, they gradually scattered to other places in East Malaysia.

In 1911, the Xinghua speaking Chinese of Methodist background came to Sungai Aup and Teku in Sibu.

Major Christian denominations that have had a long history in Sarawak like the Anglicans, the Methodists and the Catholics, have established many good schools in the state. These have nurtured numerous talents including many political leaders over the years. Other than the schools, these denominations have also contributed significantly to the community through the hospitals, orphanages, outreach to the disabled, street ministry, broadcasting network, counseling and day care centres they started.



Missionary
- James Hoover



Methodist Girl's School,
the first girl school in Sibuluh

SPECIAL INTRODUCTION TO JAMES HOOVER

In 1901 and 1902, a local leader, Wong Nai Siong, recruited the Foochow natives to Sibuluh to cultivate the “New Foochow” fields and started a Methodist Episcopal Mission (present day Methodist Church) at the river bank of Sungai Merah. This church is known as Sing Ang Tong now. When Wong returned to China in June 1904, he was succeeded by an American missionary, James Hoover.

Hoover came to Sibuluh in 1903. He took care of the Foochows, and served as a communicating bridge between the people and the local government. Not only learning their language and helping them, Hoover also started a school for some 33 Foochow children later.

He gave up the comfort in his hometown and brought civilization upon the then jungle land. However, as we was trying to explore a new land in the interior, he ended up contracted malignant malaria and died in Kuching hospital.

Hoover lived in the Rajang River Valley for about 32 years. By the time he passed away, he had built 41 Methodist Churches and 40 schools. He had devoted his whole life to the Foochow people of the Rajang River Valley. In surrendering his all to God, he had helped to modernise Sibuluh, bringing glory to God and blessing to man.

James Hoover had achieved an outstanding record of many

firsts in Sibü and the Rajang River Valley:

He purchased the first batch of rubber seed.

He brought in the first steam boat.

He established the first rice mill.

He organized the first Methodist Girls' School.

He installed the first generator.

He set up the first agricultural school.

He ordered the first icemaker.

He was the first to use a lumber circular saw.

He was the first to use a wireless telegraph machine.

He had laid a solid foundation for Sibü's progress toward modern civilisation!

As a result of the outstanding contributions of the Methodist Church in the development of Sibü, the Municipal Council specially granted the church a piece of land to build perhaps the only public park to commemorate the missionaries who had served there. The James Hoover Memorial Park was officially opened on 27 July 2007.



Profile of Sarawak

Area: about 124,449 square kilometers

Capital: Kuching

Total population: more than 2.5 million
Ibans, Dayaks & other indigenous peoples (48%),
Malays (22%), Chinese (26%),
non-citizens and others (4%)

Religions: Christianity & Catholicism (43%),
Islam (32%), Buddhism or Taoism (15%),
traditional tribal religions (5%), no religion (4%),
others (1%)

Prayer for Sarawak

1. Pray that the people in the state will continue to enjoy the freedom of worship, freedom to preach the gospel and build churches.
2. Pray that the indigenous people of Sarawak will continue to enjoy the freedom and right to use the Bibles printed in their mother tongue.
3. Pray that the Christian politicians will serve the people as salt and light in the community.

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