

Article

Globalization and Religion: The Case of Malacca and the Work of Robert Morrison

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Abstract: Religion has long been a significant factor in the process of globalization. In this article, the author attempts to explore and review religious factors involved in the history of Malacca (Melaka) and in the missionary work of Robert Morrison in the early 19th century. Malacca has long been a meeting place for various religions in their respective processes of globalization. Robert Morrison was the first Protestant Missionary to come to the Chinese Mainland. He arrived in 1807. However, after 10 years of working in Canton and Macau, he made a proposal for setting up a mission school in Malacca, hence the Anglo-Chinese College of 1818. It was found that, indeed, Morrison had learned much from his experiences in China and in Malacca, especially in paying due respect to Chinese culture.

Keywords: globalization; religion; Robert Morrison; Anglo-Chinese College; Malacca (Melaka)

Introduction

Though the term ‘globalization’ is often thought of as a modern concept, the process of globalization is an old one, especially in regard to the cultural transmission beyond national borders, and can be traced back centuries. Religion has been a vital factor in this process. In his exploration of the relationship between ‘globalization’ and ‘religion’, Peter Beyer affirmed that religion as culture had played a significant role in the development, elaboration and problematization of global society ([1], Introduction). Indeed, there has been a growing awareness that ‘globalization’ and ‘religion’ are not quite separate entities. Nor should ‘religion’ be seen as an ‘outside’ respondent or ‘victim’ in the process of globalization. Modern scholars began to see religion as an integral part of globalization and

reckon that it is one that was a proactive rather than a regressive force in the development of globalization, being intertwined in a way that influences most of the worldwide political, economic and cultural processes ([2], Introduction). It should also be noted that contemporary globalization is the outcome of a long historical process that includes the historical development of religious movements around the globe, hence the religious factor in the context of globalization ([2], pp. 145–165). The spread of religion should be understood, not simply as a result of migration of religious believers because of political or economic reasons, but that ‘religion’ in itself is an important moving force in the process of globalization, such as in the Christian movement of ‘the evangelization of the whole world’. In this paper, I shall use the history of Malacca and the work of Robert Morrison as a case to review the relevant connections between religion and globalization. There are indeed some significant findings we could extract from this lively case of Robert Morrison and Malacca.

History of Malacca

The history of Malacca revealed the fact that religion has indeed been a significant factor in the development of globalization in the region. As we study Malacca closely, we find that the city has a unique history of its own that could provide some good insight not only in the study of Protestant missionaries, such as Robert Morrison in setting up schools for inter-cultural dialogues, but also in the study of the impact of other religious traditions in the area, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Islam. Malacca is a typical example of how the great religions have imprinted their many influences on a place. The city has been a busy trading centre in Southeast Asia for centuries, lying on the southern part of the Malay Peninsula and providing a comfortable port of call for all trading vessels in their passage between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. It has also been overtaken as a colony by various peoples from East Asia and Europe. Indian traders first came to the peninsula in the first century A.D. The Indian Emperor, Harsha (606–647 A.D.) was a patron of Shaivism and Buddhism. He sent missionaries to the South during his reign, hence starting the spread of Indian cultures and religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism, throughout Southeast Asia. Hinduism became the state religion of many Southeast Asian states, including Malaysia, until the 13th century. Indian (Hindu) beliefs and culture were regarded as a higher culture of the time and, hence, it was natural that the Malay people had adopted Indian cultures into their own culture. That was why Malay culture used to be foundationally close to Indian and Hindu cultures in many aspects [3].

Then came the Muslims in the 13th centuries A.D. The movements of the Muslims could be seen in a global context, as it was partly because of their defeats by the Christian Crusaders in Europe in the eleventh and twelve centuries that the Muslims were held back from Europe and began to move from the ‘Near East’ to the ‘Far East’, as well as to Southeast Asia. There was a wide spread of Islamic religion especially under the Ottoman Empire in 1300 A.D., which spanned from Asia Minor to India and to Southeast Asia. As a result, there was not only a huge expansion of trade and commerce, but also the spread of Islamic civilization, including all the cultural and social aspects of the Islamic religion ([3], pp. 7–13). When the Muslims came to Malaysia, there was already the existence of Indian cultures, with Hindu and Buddhist temples, beliefs and rituals in the area. The intrusion of Islamic religion furthered another hybrid culture and a syncretised mix of religious traditions ([4],

pp. 69–90). Since 1414, the ruler (sultanate) of Malacca had become a Muslim. Islam then became the state religion of Malacca until the arrival of the Portuguese from Europe in 1511.

Since the beginning of the 15th century, the Chinese came to establish relationships with the Malacca Sultanate. The Chinese Emperor Yongle sent huge naval expeditions under the leadership of Admiral Zheng He (1371–1433) and visited Malacca six times for trade and commerce. As a result, the Sultanate sent tributes to China, and in return, China sent her princess to be married to the Sultan. China also sent out 500 Chinese men to accompany the princess and they had brought with them Chinese beliefs and culture, which were later transformed to become ‘Baba Nyonya Culture’, another syncretised mixture of Chinese and Malay cultures in Malacca [4,5]. Chinese people settled in Malacca and married Malay ladies down through the centuries. The Baba Nyonya Culture had helped in many ways to preserve the Chinese culture for the younger generations and held them together within the Chinese community in Malacca. Protestant missionaries, like Robert Morrison, found themselves interested in staying in Malacca simply because of this Chinese community. Though they had already been living in Malacca for a few centuries, they had kept the Chinese language and culture in many ways. While the Qing government was enforcing a “closed-door policy” at the beginning of the 19th century, the Protestant missionaries could still work with this Chinese community in Malacca, as a step towards preparing themselves for the opening of China in later years. That was why Morrison launched his plan for setting up the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca in 1818, so as to have closer contact with the Chinese community there.

Christianity came to Malacca in 1511. This was another wave of cultural globalization. It was the Portuguese who captured Malacca in 1511, in order to seize the control of all trade and commerce through the Straits of Malacca. They ruled over the land for 130 years, till 1641. The coming of the Portuguese at this time signified also the religious situation in Europe. It was the decline of power of Roman Catholicism in Europe that had pushed the kings in Spain and Portugal to extend their support to the explorers of the ‘New World’, so as to help also for the expansion of both their kingdoms and the Roman Catholic Church by military forces. Hence, both the army and the missionaries were sent out together with the explorers and colonizers such as Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) and Vasco da Gama (1460–1524). It was Alfonso de Albuquerque (1453–1515) who had the support from the king of Portugal and captured Malacca for the king in return. This Portuguese colonization of Malacca opened the door for the spread of Christianity in the Far East and the evangelization work of the Roman Catholics for over a century. The most famous Catholic missionary was St. Francis Xavier (1506–1552) who came to Malacca on 8th May 1545. St. Francis Xavier, who was well-known as ‘the Apostle of the Indies’, had been dreaming of setting up a mission station at Malacca and expanded his missionary work to Japan, China and India. Unfortunately, he died on 3rd February 1552. The St. Francis Xavier Church was built in memory of his work in Malacca ([3], pp. 14–21).

Then, in the year 1641, came the Dutch explorers and colonizers. The Dutch Reformed missionaries followed the examples of the Roman Catholics and started their evangelization work in Southeast Asia and the Far East, using Malacca as a missionary base. It is also interesting to note that the Dutch missionaries were more interested in the Chinese community than the Malay people in Malacca, as they were looking beyond the state to the reach of China in the Far East. The missionaries started translating the Bible into Chinese and attempted reaching out to the Chinese community in Malacca. Their work, especially their activities in education and publication, had inspired the two missionaries

from the London Missionary Society, William Milne and Robert Morrison, who came in the early 19th century.

With the rise of her military forces and dynamic sea power, Great Britain took over Malacca during the Napoleonic wars of 1795, and officially signed the Treaty of London with the Dutch colonies in 1824. The capture of Malacca opened the door to Protestant missionaries from the United Kingdom. That was why William Milne and Robert Morrison were sent to the Far East by the London Missionary Society and they arrived in Malacca in the early 1810s. They learned from previous missionaries and especially the Dutch Reformed missionaries' approach to the Chinese community in Malacca. That was also why Robert Morrison had made a proposal in his "Ultra-Ganges Mission Plan" to set up a mission school for the Chinese in Malacca. The Anglo-Chinese College was set up in 1818 and was later moved to Hong Kong after it was ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Nanking in 1842.

It was during the Second World War that Malacca was overtaken by Japan for some years and it was after the War that Malaya (or 'Malaysia') declared her independence by uniting all the states on the Malay Peninsula in 1957 [3]. Furthermore, in order to unite and get control over this religiously pluralistic country, the new Malaysian government claimed to uphold Islam as its state religion. Hence, Malaysia became an Islamic country.

Robert Morrison—The First Protestant Missionary in China

Robert Morrison was the first Protestant Missionary who arrived on the Chinese Mainland in 1807. How did he come to know about China? When Morrison was preparing himself for missionary work in London, he came across the text of a Chinese translation of the New Testament Bible in the British Museum Library. He was surprised to find that Chinese characters were so sophisticated and beautifully written. Therefore, amongst other places, he chose China as his missionary field. His request was accepted by the London Missionary Society, but Morrison could not go directly to China. He was rejected by the British merchants. Being well aware of the Chinese (Qing) government's 'closed-door policy', which would not allow any foreign missionary to enter the Chinese territories at that time, the British merchants simply refused to take him on board. Therefore, Robert Morrison took the route via New York in America and then boarded a ship, *The Trident*, from New York to China. This was indeed a global journey for Morrison, travelling from Europe to America, finally arriving at China in Asia on September 4 1807. Upon arrival in China, Morrison discovered that he really could not enter the Chinese Mainland as a missionary, so he worked as a translator for the British East India Company and lived in Canton and Macau on the southern coast of China ([6], pp. 62–136).

For the first ten years, Morrison focused his time on learning the Chinese language and culture, and started compiling an English-Chinese dictionary, alongside with his translation work of the New Testament Bible ([7], pp. 38–45). The work as a translator and an interpreter helped not only to guarantee Morrison's stay in China, but also to improve a lot his understanding of the Chinese language and culture, which was an essential foundation for his translation of the Bible and his future ministry in China. The work was slow but steady. After ten years, Morrison submitted a report to the London Missionary Society, entitled: "*A Retrospect of the First Ten Years of the Protestant Mission to China*" (dated 4th September, 1817) ([6], pp. 243–245). Morrison admitted that the mission in China was not an easy one and that it was very slow progress. There was only one Chinese convert found,

named Tsae A-ko (蔡高), who was employed as a printing helper for Morrison. Tsae had been convinced by the work of Morrison and was finally baptized in October 1815, at the age of twenty-seven ([7], pp. 60–61). In his report, Morrison enclosed a proposal for “The Ultra-Ganges Mission Plan”. One of the proposals made was the setting up of a mission school in Malacca, the “Anglo-Chinese College”, which aimed at (1) the promotion of a better understanding of European and Chinese literature and culture; (2) the peaceful spread of the Christian faith and the East-Asian civilization throughout the globe ([6], p. 261; [8]). Why did Morrison choose to set up the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, awaiting the opening of China? [8] Though Morrison could not preach to the Chinese on the Mainland, he was convinced that since China was a civilized country, the best means of evangelization was through the understanding of Chinese language and culture. After ten years in preparation, Morrison had equipped himself with proper understanding of Chinese language and culture and he now found a Chinese community in Malacca who could read and speak in Chinese. They could be a perfect target group for evangelization of the Chinese people outside China ([6], p. 244). Hence, he started the Anglo-Chinese College there. As he stated, the aim of the College was to promote a better understanding of European and Chinese language and literature, to cultivate mutual dialogues between the two cultures, and to pave ways for the peaceful spread of the Christian faith and the East-Asian civilization around the globe ([6], pp. 222, 261). He had a vision of seeing the college as the ‘school for open minds’, and Malacca to be not only the ‘Athens of the East’, but also the ‘Jerusalem of the East’ ([6], p. 264). It is interesting to note that even in the early 19th century, Protestant missionaries like Robert Morrison had already entertained such ideas of respecting ‘heathen’ cultures and working to promote better understanding of different cultures through the study of their languages and literatures.

Morrison had made significant contribution in promoting the study of Chinese literature and culture at the Anglo-Chinese College. There were altogether seven Presidents of the College from 1818 on, until the year 1843 when the College was moved to Hong Kong. The seven Presidents were:

William Milne (1818–1822)

James Humphrey (1822–1824)

David Collie (1824–1828)

Samuel Kidd (1828–1832)

Jacob Tomlin (1832–1834)

John Evans (1834–1840)

James Legge (1840–1843)

Of the seven Presidents, some were so interested in the study of Chinese language and culture that they later became great Professors of Chinese Studies in well-known universities. For instance, David Collie had completed the translation of *The Four Books* (《四書》) in 1827 while he was still the President. Samuel Kidd was later appointed as the first Professor of Chinese at the University of London in England. He had trained a great number of students as Sinologists while he was a professor in London. One of his students was James Legge who followed his path and became the seventh President of Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca in 1840. James Legge was well-known for his translation and commentary work on *The Four Books* (《四書》) and *The Five Classics* (《五經》), which are still reckoned as authoritative commentaries of Chinese Classics nowadays ([9]; [10], p. 21).

James Legge was later appointed as Professor of Chinese Studies at Oxford University, England and had trained a great number of students to be Sinologists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

As for the training of Chinese students, there were two known Chinese preachers, Leung Fat (Liang Fa, 1789–1855) and Ho Fuk Tong (Hoh Fook Tong, 1789–1855) worth to mention here. They were among the first ordained evangelists and pastors who had made significant contribution to the spread of Christianity in 19th century China. Leung Fat had helped print the first complete Chinese Bible, which was jointly translated by Robert Morrison and William Milne. He had also written a number of Christian books and pamphlets, one of which was *Quan Shi Liang Yan* ('The Benevolent Words to Advice the World'). The pamphlet had inspired a young scholar, Hong Xiu Quan (1814–1864), who eventually established the 'Tai Ping Heavenly Kingdom' (or known as 'Tai Ping Rebellion') in China in 1851 [11]. The other student, Rev. Ho Fuk Tong was the second Chinese minister ordained by the London Missionary Society in China. He was put in charge of the Union Church in Hong Kong, which had played a significant role in society too ([12], pp. 6–13). James Legge had brought four students to United Kingdom and they became the first group of Chinese students to visit Buckingham Palace and were the guests of the Queen ([10], p. 23). There was another school, the Morrison School, which was set up in 1836, to commemorate the death, and continue the work, of Robert Morrison ([10], pp. 24–28). The president, Samuel R. Brown had brought 3 of his students to the United States in 1847—Yung Wing (Rong Hong 1828–1912), Wong Fun (Huang Kuan 1829–1878), and Wong Shing (Huang Xing 1827–1902). Yung Wing became the first Chinese student to graduate from an American university (Yale College) in 1854. Yung became a lifelong supporter of reform in China. He successfully persuaded the Qing government to send young Chinese students to the U.S. to study Western sciences and technology. During 1872–1875, he brought, altogether, 120 young Chinese students to the U.S. and these students made significant contribution to the modernization of China in the early 20th century. Yung received an honorary Doctor of Laws from Yale University in its bicentenary in 1876 ([13], p. 83; [14], p. 9). The other student, Wong Fun, moved to the United Kingdom after studying for one year at Monson Academy in Massachusetts, and became the first Chinese student to attain a MD qualification as a physician and received a Ph.D. in Medicine from Edinburgh University. Another student, Wong Shing attended Monson Academy for one year and returned to China (Hong Kong) because he had been ill since arriving America. He later became the first Chinese juror in Hong Kong and succeeded Ng Choy as the second senior Chinese member of the Legislative Council in Hong Kong (1884–1890) ([10], pp. 24–28).

It was also recorded that in 1823 Malacca's Anglo-Chinese College had already stored a collection of 3380 book volumes, of which 2850 were in Chinese and the rest were in European and other Asian languages. Hence, the College would probably be the first Asian Studies research centre in the Far East ([10], p. 18). The Anglo-Chinese College was moved to Hong Kong in 1843 and later continued with a new English name, 'Ying Wa College', while the Chinese name "英華書院" remained unchanged. The school building has been moved to various places and is presently located at Shum Shiu Po, Kowloon, Hong Kong [15].

Conclusion: Globalization and Religion

In the article, “The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement between the World Wars”, Dana Robert, an American historian, has reminded us that the Christian missionary movement could be seen as “the first globalization” ([16], pp. 50–67). She argued that Christian missionaries were among the first group of people who had attempted global visions in spreading the Christian gospel and Christian culture to the world, or in their own terminology, ‘the evangelization of the whole world in this generation’ ([17], p. 504). Indeed, besides Christianity, other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam did share similar global visions and spread their religions in similar ways. Hence, they had also contributed greatly to the processes of globalization, especially in the Far East and in Southeast Asia.

The history of Malacca and the story of Robert Morrison were really good cases for the study of the significant role of religion in the context of globalization of cultures. In the case of Malacca, religion was indeed a great moving force in such processes of globalization. It was the sending out of missionaries by the Indian Emperors that led to the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism, together with Indian rituals and cultures to the Far East and Southeast Asia. Religion as culture went hand in hand with commerce and politics, and they could not accomplish their work of evangelization so effectively and rapidly without the help of military forces. The coming of the Muslims was found even more vivid when it was seen from a global perspective. It was because of their defeat in Europe by the Christian Crusades that the Muslims were forced to turn to the Far East. The Muslims continued their conquest in Southeast Asia and ruled over Malacca for over a century. The Islamic culture was so imposing that the Malay people had incorporated much of it into their own culture. The religion was even claimed by the Malay Government as its state religion during its independence and Malaysia became an Islamic country. On the other hand, Christianity, whether it was Roman Catholicism, which came in the 16th and 17th centuries, or Protestantism, which came in the 19th and 20th centuries, had also brought its Christian gospel and Christian cultures to Malacca. However, since they were the ‘late-comers’ in the state, they became ‘cultural otherness’ in the non-Christian world in Asia. Peter Beyer, the Canadian sociologist of religion, has suggested this concept of ‘the factor of cultural otherness’ in his study of globalization and religion ([18], p. 367). When Christian missionaries first came to Malacca as a non-Christian world, they had already identified the local Asian cultures as ‘heresy, heathendom and superstition’, but very soon they were shocked to find that the Asian cultures—whether they were Indian, Chinese or Malay cultures, or whether they were Hindu, Buddhist or Islamic—were equally civilized and deserved to be respected as ‘cultures’ too. In the same article, “De-centering Religious Singularity: the Globalization of Christianity as a Case of Point”, Beyer raised the issues of authority, orthodoxy, authenticity and legitimacy when Christianity experienced the process of globalization, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. As he saw it, the ‘de-centring of Christianity’ was expressed in the ‘loss of centralized authority’ and ‘the separation of religious authority from religious authenticity and legitimacy’ ([18], p. 369). In other words, global Christianity spawned multiple localizations and particularizations of religion, with the question of religious authority largely divorced from that of authenticity and legitimacy. Hence, Global Christianity had to pay due respect to all local cultures, whether they were European culture, American culture, Asian culture or Chinese culture [19]. Several

of his theses could be found vividly relevant in the case of Robert Morrison and throughout the history of Malacca.

For instance, Morrison took a global route to China and arrived in China in 1807. Being a Protestant missionary, he had to learn to move between cultures, not only the crossing between lands and continents, from Europe to North America, then to Asia; or from Great Britain to the United States, then to China. It was also a crossing between cultures, from Western cultures to Asian and Chinese cultures. When Morrison came to Canton, he was not allowed to enter the city as a missionary and he had to respect the local culture. Hence, he worked as an interpreter for the British East India Company and settled to live between Macau and Canton. Morrison began to learn to build bridges between cultures. He started learning Chinese language and Chinese culture, and began to equip himself to be a good interpreter of Chinese culture and a good translator of the Bible into Chinese. He completed *The Lord's Prayer in Chinese Characters* (《中文主禱文》) and *The Holy Bible* (《神天聖書》). He had written a textbook, *A Grammar of the Chinese Language* (《中國語文凡例》), together with *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (《華英字典》) [20]. It was in such encounter with Chinese language and culture that Morrison had learned to understand the language and to pay due respect to Chinese culture. He had also found that 'translation work' was not merely a mechanical arrangement of words, but it involved a deeper understanding of cultural and historical contexts, especially when one was dealing with the Chinese language and culture ([21], pp. 1–8; [22], pp. 65–83). Morrison had probably learned it so well that later, when he made a proposal to set up the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca, he set a dual purpose for the college: 'Firstly, (it was) to promote two-ways communication between Chinese and European languages and literatures, so that Europeans may be able to learn more about Chinese language and cultures and the Chinese may learn more English and about European cultures; Secondly, to help the peaceful spread of Christianity and East-Asian civilizations' ([7], pp. 164–165). In other words, 'Education' was not merely the learning of a language, but also its culture and literature. In addition, 'Communication' must travel two ways, with teachers and students, Europeans and Chinese, both learning from one another at the same time. Hence, what could missionaries do in the process of globalization? It was the building of bridges so that through this 'two way' education, both teachers and students could cross the bridges and enter into communication and dialogue between the two cultures; therefore, they were mutually educated. The term 'Anglo-Chinese' was indeed a great invention. What Robert Morrison attempted to do was the building of bridges, which would link the two cultures together. As a result, the Anglo-Chinese College had produced not only great Chinese scholars who were well-versed with European cultures, but also many great Sinologists for the West, including the two college presidents: Samuel Kidd, who had become the First Professor of Chinese at University of London; and James Legge, who became a Professor of Chinese Studies at Oxford University in England. Both had contributed significantly in the processes of cultural globalization in the past centuries ([10], pp. 18–22; [23], pp. 3–11).

In short, the history of Malacca demonstrates clearly the importance of the religious factor in the process of globalization in Southeast Asia, and the missionary work of Robert Morrison has shown how Protestant missionaries learned to respect local cultures, especially Chinese culture in this case, which remained a crucial factor both in the re-thinking of the significant roles played by religion in the process of cultural globalization and also in the conception of the interplay between globalization and religion as we think of it today.

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