

Stuart McKee

Indigenous Enlightenment: Printing and Education in Evangelical Colonialism, 1790–1850

University of Nebraska Press, 2023. 586 pp.

In *Indigenous Enlightenment* (2023), Stuart McKee provides a synoptic survey of the symbiotic relationship between education, printing, and evangelism that pervaded the British colonial world during the period 1790–1850. McKee situates the development and expansion of evangelical Christian print culture into Asia, the South Pacific, and the US Borderlands within the establishment of various Christian mission societies, whose publications reprinted reports from its missionaries around the globe attesting to the power of alphabetic literacy in aiding conversion. The mercantile circuits of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific limned the edges of this colonial evangelical world, as imperial explorers such as Captain James Cook, and colonial administrative appointees such as William Jones, renowned philologist and author of the *Asiatick Researches* (1786), were tasked with collecting vocabularies of the Indigenous languages they encountered and supporting missionary literacy efforts.

The first two sections of the book explore how emerging language ideologies in Europe facilitated the link between alphabetic literacy and evangelization that *Indigenous Enlightenment* explores. McKee traces this linkage to the establishment in England of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospels (SPG) in 1701 and rightly emphasizes the global vision of its pursuits. As McKee quotes one hopeful Pacific missionary: “We are stretching out our hands to the west and to the east—to India on the one hand and to the Sandwich Islands on the other—and we almost imagine that ere long we shall encompass the globe, and join hands with you in China” (38). The achievement of this global vision of Christian evangelism demanded that the missionaries work on understanding languages only recently known in the West, and then grafting their own emerging theories of literacy education onto projects aimed at “reducing” these languages to writing. First located in the English metropolis and the SPG, the centre of gravity for these efforts gradually shifted to New England in the United States, as the establishment of the American Bible Society (1816), the American Tract Society (1825), and—most importantly—the American Board for Commissioners of Foreign Missions (1810) set in place an industrial infrastructure for producing missionary texts in a variety of non-European languages.

Across the globe, this project met with various Indigenous societies whose languages and relations to writing and printing varied markedly. In Tahiti and Hawaii, for example, the vernacular had never been expressed in an alphabetic or logographic form, and thus the missionaries’ work began from scratch. In the case of the prospective converts in India and China, however, where there existed well-established writing systems for their Native languages, and in China, locals operated a form of printing that predated the European invention of movable type by a millennium.

Given this state of affairs, Indigenous people became critical participants in the missionary literacy project. In previously unwritten languages, locals provided

Europeans with the initial vocabularies they needed to formulate semantic exchanges across the linguistic divide that was crucial to crossing the theological gulf the missionaries also were determined to breach.

Translators needed Native speakers—ideally, Native speakers with some knowledge of the target language, English. In the case of Bengali, there was an extra step involved since Europeans were almost wholly ignorant of the language and its accompanying Devanagari script. In these cases, the missionaries turned to languages they shared with Asian intellectuals to serve them as an intermediary mode of communication. In Bengal, Persian turned out to be the key to this dilemma, and throughout McKee's description of the process in Bengal, we see Persian speakers and writers, Bengali intellectuals, and English missionaries shuttling between various languages (including texts Protestants were not so comfortable with, such as the Vulgate Latin Bible) in order to accomplish their linguistic evangelism.

Finally, Native labor was crucial to turning these translations into printed form. In Bengal, for example, an Indigenous intellectual well-versed in the language and traditions of the host country, Ram Basu, played a key role in the production of Christian texts. In the case of the Bengali Bible, McKee notes, "one Bengali compositor, one Persian compositor and nine [local] pressmen and a bookbinder" (261) were needed to finish the project.

Because McKee is himself a scholar and teacher of the history and practice of typography and publication design, *Indigenous Enlightenment* is strongest when it digs into the fascinating documentary evidence the missionaries left behind describing in great detail the set-up of their presses, the manner of forging new type, and their enlistment of Indigenous labor to run the presses. Those interested in the history of education will also encounter clear summaries of how the British and American Common School systems, publicly subsidized local community schools, were adapted to the needs of Indigenous communities around the globe, as well as the introduction of educational theorist Joseph Lancaster's "monitorial system" of classroom governance, which placed more advanced Native students in charge of the education of their younger classmates, and thus opened up new social roles for them in their communities. The relationship between production of textbooks and the expansion of European pedagogies into both Native and non-Native schools is also brought into sharp focus, as McKee describes how mission schools differed from their non-Native counterparts especially in regards to how print shops were often attached to the schoolhouse, and Native male students charged with learning the print trade as a way into the "enlightenment" to which McKee's title refers.

Readers who are interested in the Indigenous communities' responses to this missionary literacy project, however, would do well to consult other sources that explore these points of view in much greater depth. Hilary Wyss's study of monitorial school in the Indigenous school at Cornwall, Connecticut in the 1820s, *English Letters and Indian Literacies* (Penn UP, 2012), does an excellent job of characterizing Indigenous students' relationship to the missionary literacy project as "the tactical appropriation of language." Similarly, Bryan Kuwada's exploration of translation in Hawaiian missionization, *The Mana of Translation* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2024), helpfully

re-characterizes the missionary efforts to produce Christian texts in the local language as “extractive translation,” thus making clear the strong reciprocal relationship between US and English imperialism and the “enlightenment” project McKee’s book describes.

Indigenous Enlightenment is amply illustrated with thirty-two figures, many of which benefit greatly from McKee’s own expertise in typography, and the book’s detailed index will prove useful for those readers seeking primary sources to ground their understanding of Indigenous education in the nineteenth century. This is especially true of McKee’s decision to break down the pedagogies and activities of these schools along the lines of the Indigenous languages involved—Bengali, Native Hawaiian (*Olelo Hawai‘i*), and Dakota, among many others. It will no doubt serve as an indispensable resource for those who wish to dig deeper into the history of Indigenous literacy practices across the globe, as well as those tracing the print literature traditions of subsequent generations of Indigenous writers and readers.

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Anna-Leah King, Kathleen O’Reilly, and Patrick J. Lewis, eds.

Unsettling Education: Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Land

Canadian Scholars, 2024. 408 pp.

This year marks a decade since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada released its 94 Calls to Action. It is within this context that the edited collection *Unsettling Education: Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Land* serves as a call to accountability and a resource to strengthen the ongoing efforts of reconciliation. Editors Anna-Leah King, Kathleen O’Reilly, and Patrick J. Lewis have compiled 18 chapters featuring both the voices of Indigenous and settler scholars. The book is split into three sections: Unsettling (chapters 1–4), Indigenization (chapters 5–12), and Decolonization (chapters 13–18).

This book aims to support educators of various disciplines to implement the unsettling of settler colonial structures as well as advocate and support Indigenization and decolonization within the academy. The importance of learning through ethical relationality, humility, and empathy while centring the knowledges of Indigenous peoples particularly around Land is threaded across all chapters. Although this book is dense as it spans across 400 pages, the vastness of topics throughout the chapters allows educators to intentionally select specific chapters to serve as mandatory or supplemental readings for undergraduate- and graduate-level courses within education, specifically the fields of history of Canadian education, teacher education, adult education, educational leadership, as well as other disciplines such as women and gender studies, English literature, mathematics, fine arts, and even linguistics. Moreover, this book would also be an excellent resource for professional development and additional qualification sessions for K–12 teachers and post-secondary professors.