

5026948

A HISTORICAL MONOGRAPH

IMMIGRANT
LABOUR AND THE
DEVELOPMENT
OF MALAYA

1786-1920

B. N. JACKSON



5026948

~~602043~~
外文书库

A HISTORICAL MONOGRAPH

F249.338.11-09
E701

IMMIGRANT
LABOUR AND THE
DEVELOPMENT
OF MALAYA

734

1786-1920



by

R. N. JACKSON, M.A. (*Cantab.*)
(MALAYAN CIVIL SERVICE)

Price: \$4

PRINTED AT THE GOVERNMENT PRESS
BY THOR BENG CHONG, ACTING GOVERNMENT PRINTER
FEDERATION OF MALAYA
1961

FOREWORD

*By The Hon'ble Dato' Suleiman bin Dato' Abdul Rahman,
Minister of the Interior, Federation of Malaya.*

It is a pleasure to me both to authorise the publication of this book and to write the Foreword.

Since the days of Raffles and earlier, our civil servants have maintained a tradition of amateur interest in the history of the country, and this book is written in that tradition. It is commendable that the material should have been collected and the chapters written in such limited private time as is left to a busy Malayan Civil Service officer after his official duties (which are by no means confined to 'office hours'). The writer sought for his material from motives of disinterested curiosity and has set down the result in a straightforward non-controversial manner. The sources used were available to anyone with the inclination and patience to seek and study them, and were in no sense made accessible to the writer because of his official position.

The story in the following pages has not been told before with the same detail and perspective. It needed telling. And I am sure it may be read with profit by civil servants, historians interested in improving upon it, and others who feel that the past development of our country is a subject worthy of their attention.

DATO' SULEIMAN BIN DATO' ABDUL RAHMAN

November, 1960.

AUTHOR

Born 1920, Northumberland, England; Educated City of Leeds School and Jesus College Cambridge; Commissioned in R.E.M.E., 1942/46 serving in U.K., India, Burma, Ceylon and Malaya. Malayan Civil Service from 1947—Colonial Office, 1947-8; Assistant Registrar of Societies, Singapore, 1949; Studied Chinese in Macao, 1949-51; Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Negri Sembilan, 1951; Assistant Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Singapore, 1952; Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Malacca, 1953; Settlement Councillor, Malacca, 1953/5; Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Perak, 1956; Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Johore, 1957; Regional Commissioner for Labour (South Malaya), 1957; Deputy Secretary, Ministry of the Interior, 1959.

PREFACE

A few years ago, I grew eager to know more of the historical background of the situations with which my work in the Chinese Secretariat and the Labour Department had brought me into contact, but found that the available books whetted rather than satisfied the thirst. Stimulated particularly by Blythe's *Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya*, I decided to look more closely at the sequence of events and conditions relating to Chinese labour, especially in the early days, and also to seek out the equivalent story of Indian labour. When this appetite was keenest, I was posted to Johore Bahru. The different weekly holiday set me free each Friday to visit the Raffles Library in Singapore and dip into its shelves and archives. These, supplemented by my personal library and the resources of friends, enabled me to go a long way towards picking out the story as it developed from the 'beginning'. This book is the fruit of that private quest undertaken during leisure hours to fill the gap in my knowledge. In it I have set down the result of the enquiry, to help to bridge what I found during my reading to be a surprisingly wide gap in the bookshelf of Malayan history.

In writing, I have done my best to stick to facts and to avoid making comments or judgments. I have used extensive quotations of the words of the contemporary sources, to try to let the authentic flavour of the times seep through. I have concentrated on the main stream of employment, which is in estate agriculture and tin mining, and have not dealt with the varieties of miscellaneous work found in the towns, or with the Malay agricultural subsistence economy, or with the labour employed by Government departments. Except for early mention of Singapore, I have restricted myself to the territory of the Federation of Malaya. And I have not dealt with the temporary dislocations caused by the First World War.

I stop at 1920. It would be cynical though not wholly untrue to say that this was because on reaching that point I was transferred away from Johore and the Raffles Library, to Kuala Lumpur. But the main reason was that I saw 1920, as far as any year can be a boundary, as the year by which the economy of

Malaya just about reached the size, shape and pattern that it has approximately retained since. The problems which appeared to arise after 1920 were different in kind from those I had been following, and had already been written about to such an extent that I frankly felt no urge to spend my spare time investigating them more fully.

Performance inevitably falls behind both desire and intention, and I am only too aware of the shortcomings of the pages that follow. But I offer them in the belief that they contain material of some use to those interested in the subject.

I am most grateful to the Hon'ble Dato' Suleiman bin Dato' Abdul Rahman, Minister of the Interior, whom I am at present privileged to serve, for authorising these chapters to be published and for very kindly writing the Foreword. Needless to say, the responsibility for the contents of the book rests on myself alone.

R. N. JACKSON

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR,
Kuala Lumpur, 13th November, 1960.

GLOSSARY

<i>arrack</i>	- - -	rice (or coconut) spirit.
<i>attap</i>	- - -	palm-leaf thatch.
<i>bahara</i>	- - -	a measure of 800 lbs.
<i>bertam</i>	- - -	a material similar to wicker.
<i>cassava</i>	- - -	tapioca plant.
<i>chuliah (chooliah)</i>	-	South Indian (term now obsolete).
<i>dulang washer</i>	-	female panner for tin ore.
<i>kangany</i>	- - -	South Indian foreman-cum-recruiter.
<i>karang</i>	- - -	tin-bearing earth.
<i>kepala</i>	- - -	foreman.
<i>kheh thau</i>	- -	Chinese foreman.
<i>kling</i>	- - -	South Indian (term now obsolete).
<i>kongsi</i>	- - -	company, partnership; kongsi-house.
<i>kongsi-house</i>	- -	Chinese labourers' living accommodation.
<i>kongsi kong</i>	- -	Chinese daily-rated mining labourer.
<i>lau kheh</i>	- - -	indentured Chinese labourer on second or subsequent contract.
<i>mandor</i>	- - -	South Indian foreman.
<i>nai chang</i>	- -	Chinese piece-rated mining labourer.
<i>pikul</i>	- - -	a measure of 133 lbs.
<i>samsu</i>	- - -	rice spirit.
<i>sinkay (sin kheh)</i>	-	newly-immigrant Chinese indentured labourer.
<i>tindal</i>	- - -	South Indian foreman.
<i>towkay</i>	- - -	Chinese proprietor or boss.
<i>ulu</i>	- - -	the interior of the country.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Foreword</i> - - - - - - - -	iii
<i>Preface</i> - - - - - - - -	v
<i>Chapters</i>	
I. The Beginning of Modern Development -	1
II. The Early Straits Settlements - - -	19
III. Tin Mining before 1880 - - -	30
IV. Early Chinese Immigrant Communities -	42
V. Indian Immigration to 1884 - - -	57
VI. First Attempts to Control Chinese Labour -	70
VII. Further Development of Tin Mining - -	79
VIII. Early Plantation Agriculture in the Malay States - - - - - -	91
IX. Indian Immigrant Labour, 1884-1904 - -	96
X. Indian Immigration Fund and the supply of Indian Labourers - - - - -	109
XI. Javanese Labourers - - - - -	127
XII. Indian Labourers 1904-1920 - - -	132
XIII. Tin Mining to 1920 - - - -	141
XIV. Chinese Labourers 1900-1920 - - -	147
<i>Bibliography</i> - - - - - - -	158
<i>Index</i> - - - - - - -	161

Chapter I

THE BEGINNING OF MODERN DEVELOPMENT

Malaya in 1785

* One hundred and seventy-five years ago, the Malay Peninsula was sparsely populated, politically disunited, and economically undeveloped. It was covered almost entirely by dense tropical jungle and the inhabitants, no more than a quarter of a million, were Malays who lived in small settlements along the coasts and rivers.

Although this population had its race, its language and its Muslim religion in common, nevertheless there was no unity. The political organisation was one of small river states of varying degrees of independence and isolation. The north, in particular Kedah and Kelantan, came under the vague and fitfully exercised suzerainty of Siam. In the south, the sultanate of Riau-Johore held a diminishing sway over what are now Johore and Pahang. The central part of the peninsula, west of the main mountain range, was occupied by the three independent (but by no means monolithic) states of Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan—the latter, as the name implies, being in itself a confederation of nine states, while of Selangor it has been said:

Most of its Malay population . . . lived along the coast at the river estuaries, of which there were five . . . Each river mouth was a natural centre of government and Selangor was five states in one.¹

The pattern was feudalistic. Anarchy, strife and insecurity were commonplace.

The people in the various pockets of settlement lived as self-supporting rice farmers and fishermen, their means of communication with the outside world and other settlements being usually by water. They collected jungle produce and in a primitive fashion mined tin to export in exchange for cloth, opium, salt, tobacco and even rice. Their economy was in no way characterised by specialisation. Isolation in small village communities made a large degree of all-roundness essential, and the fact that nature was bountiful and livelihood easy made specialisation unnecessary.

¹Gullick—*Yap Ah Loy*—p. 5.

The pirate, the fisherman, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the weaver, the medicine man were also rice planters,²
and

Everyone was on occasion a cultivator, a fisherman, a miner, a collector of produce or a labourer.³

Every man could earn a living by working for himself and none need earn a wage.

Two institutions existed which appear to have satisfied such demand as arose for what would otherwise have been wage labour—slavery; and feudal service. The slaves were prisoners of war, captured pagan aborigines, negroes brought back from Mecca by wealthy pilgrims, or criminals who to escape punishment for their crimes surrendered themselves to their Raja as his slaves. There were also debt-bondsmen.

The ownership of a number of slaves and debt-bondsmen was a mark of a man of rank, wealth and influence . . . They served in his household, cultivated his fields and worked his mines.⁴

Feudal service (in effect a kind of forced labour) consisted in the obligation of a tenant to perform a certain amount of work for his overlord in return for being allowed tenancy of his land. This service was, at the order of the chief or Raja requiring it, organised by the village headmen. Under a just chief, there was no grumbling, but the exactions in Kedah and Patani at a slightly later date, for example, were severe enough to induce considerable numbers of Malays to abandon their land and migrate to the British-controlled areas of Penang and Province Wellesley.

In this Malay economy there was no middle class to perform the functions of distribution. Trade and marketing were, for large transactions, in the hands of the rulers and chiefs whose wealth (if they could be called wealthy) came from the monopoly exercised over whatever export trade there was and from tolls levied on the passage of goods. Francis Light in 1771 wrote from the 'kingdom' of Kedah to his principals in Madras:

The king is the only merchant and without his licence no one can buy.⁵

²Winstedt—*The Malays: A Cultural History*—p. 103.

³Gullick—*Negri Sembilan Economy*—p. 54.

⁴Winstedt—*Op. Cit.* p. 43.

⁵Winstedt—*Notes on History of Kedah*—p. 179.

Small trading was done 'by peasants trafficking in boats and by women selling foodstuffs in evening markets'.⁶

The islands of Penang and Singapore, before long to become flourishing and populous British trading centres, were as yet covered with jungle and had few or no inhabitants. They were of no greater significance than the many other forest-covered islands around the coast.

The only speck of contrast in this general picture of a disunited, undeveloped peninsula was the town of Malacca and its small hinterland, held by the Dutch but by this time no more than a palsied tentacle of the vast commercial empire that they had built up in the large islands to the south. Originally the centre of a flourishing Malay trading kingdom, Malacca had been captured in 1511 by the Portuguese, who developed the town and fort and built churches and substantial houses. In 1641 they lost it in battle to the Dutch. The Dutch developed the town still further, but by 1785 their power was so much on the wane that they had ceased to regard Malacca as important. They retained it largely to prevent others from having it and to preserve (though only at Malacca itself) the remnants of the monopoly, which they had earlier been fairly successful in enforcing along the west coast, of tin exports, cloth imports, and all dealings in pepper, cloves, opium, nutmegs and resin. The population of Malacca was only 7,216 (including, in contrast to the rest of the peninsula at this time, some 1,390 Chinese) and the town was a stagnant backwater—a place with a past rather than a future—in fact already the 'sleepy hollow' which it has resented being nicknamed up to this day.

Penang

Such was the peninsula when, on the 11th August 1786, Francis Light, with the concurrence of the Sultan of Kedah, took possession of the hilly island of Penang (15 miles long, 9 miles broad, and separated from the mainland by a 2-mile wide channel) on behalf of the English East India Company and established a settlement there. The founding of Penang was the first great event

⁶Winstedt—*The Malays: A Cultural History*—p. 114.

in the development of modern Malaya, and the event from which the story of Labour in Malaya may most appropriately be said to begin.

The East India Company had no strong interest in Malaya, its main commercial activity being the China trade which had grown up over the previous 25 years—a trade in the one direction of large cargoes of tea from Canton and in the other direction of supplies of opium from Bengal. This trade had expanded enormously in both directions since 1784 and the sea-route through the Straits of Malacca had become of vastly increased importance to Britain; a reliable port of call and supply was needed on the route—⁷ ‘a good anchorage and place of victualling, watering and refitting’. Light explained:

Not only commanders of British vessels, but foreigners, continually complain of there being no place of safety east of the Bay of Bengal for ships to take shelter in and refit at.⁸

Penang was founded to meet this need. But it was realised that it would also be a useful trading station, ‘a market for the produce of the neighbouring countries’, to handle the transshipment trade; a place to which local produce would make its way, instead of to Dutch-controlled ports, to be made up into cargoes for Europe, and from which the reverse trade in supplying cloth and opium could be conducted. The Governor-General of India, in his letter of instruction to Light as the first Superintendent of Penang, wrote:

We must leave it to time and your good management to establish it as a port of commerce. If the situation is favourable the merchants will find their advantages in resorting with their goods to it.⁹

And there was a third consideration. A settlement like Penang could provide land on which to grow spices for shipment to Europe ‘without the trouble and expense of importation’, the only other sources of supply being under Dutch monopoly control in the islands of the archipelago.

To ensure success, Light wished to attract residents of all nationalities. He allowed newcomers—European and Asian alike—to

⁷Swettenham—*British Malaya*—p. 34.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Quoted by H. T. Sutton in ‘*Straits Times*’ 4-10-58.

occupy whatever land they could clear (almost all of it being covered by 'dense jungle') on promise of a future title. His policy achieved its object, for large parts of the eastern side of the island were rapidly cleared and occupied. To attract traders, he had been instructed 'to make the port free to all nations' and 'to refrain from levying any kind of duties or tax on goods landing or vessels importing'. This policy, a revolutionary innovation in the area, was also effective. There was a 'rapid influx of settlers', attracted by the order and safety of British rule, 'the delightful novelty of free trade' at a port with no duties and open to all-comers, the 'convenient position as a market for the produce of the neighbouring countries', and the cheapness of land and absence of formalities in acquiring it.

At the end of the first year, Light was able to report:

Our new town contains 200 houses, Chinese, Malabars and Malays. Besides these, we have small villages A considerable number of fruit trees, coconuts and plantains have been planted lately¹⁰

There were a few Europeans, who occupied the more favourable sites. The shops were mostly kept by Chinese, of whom there were more than sixty families living in the town, 'whither these industrious people daily continue to remove from the adjacent countries, where they had previously settled'.¹¹ And by 1788 more than 400 acres of land had been cleared and cultivated.

Trade and settlement increased. In 1794, Light reported that between one and two thousand Bugis traders now came every year and stayed from two to three months on shore—'the best merchants among the Eastern Islands The great value of their cargoes whether in bullion or goods, make their arrival much wished for by all mercantile people'.¹² By 1795 at least 5,875 acres of land had been cleared in various parts of the island, mainly by Malays and Chinese but also by Europeans, Siamese, Burmese and Indians. A count of the inhabitants taken in 1797 showed a population (excluding Europeans and the garrison) of 6,937. By 1801 it had increased to 10,310—723 persons with landed property; wives, children, relations, friends and servants to the

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Leith—*A Short Account*—p. 7.

¹²Winstedt—*Notes on History of Kedah*—p. 180.

number of 8,375; and 1,222 persons who were their slaves. And this despite the fact that:

many of the settlers, European and Asiatics alike, were adventurers of a type not likely to settle down permanently on the island. Further, the island was unhealthy . . . The death rate was very high among all sections of the community . . . Many of the holders of land died or left the settlement and valuable lands were continually falling into the market . . . to be picked up cheaply.¹³

The value of imports and exports in Spanish dollars (the common currency of the area) *rose from Nil in 1786 to \$853,592 in 1789 and \$1,418,200 in 1804—goods from Britain and India (opium, cloth, steel, gunpowder, iron and chinaware) being sold in exchange for 'Straits Produce', i.e. the typical products of the archipelago (rice, tin, spices, rattans, gold dust, ivory, ebony and pepper.)

In 1800 a strip of the mainland opposite Penang was obtained by treaty from the Sultan of Kedah and named Province Wellesley—'that part of the sea-coast that is between Qualla Kream and Qualla Mooda, and measuring inland from the sea side sixty orlongs'¹⁴—the aim being to gain complete control of the harbour and an assured food supply. Leith explained that the people

* Since the days of the Portuguese the coins most widely in use, most readily accepted by the natives, were the silver dollar (varying at different times from four shillings and six pence to three shillings and six pence) and the copper cent (roughly equivalent to a half penny) . . . Nominally the rupee was the only legal tender in the Straits Settlements and all Government accounts were kept in rupees. Apart from this, the rupee was practically ignored by the whole population of the Straits, and the dollar remained the most universal form of currency in the Archipelago.

L. A. Mills—'*British Malaya*'—p. 267.

The currency in which the merchants generally calculate commercial transactions is the Spanish dollar divided into cents. Its value varies from 100 to 120 pice.

Newbold—*Vol. I*, p. 24 (1839).

¹³Stevens—*History of Prince of Wales Island*—p. 381 and 5.

¹⁴Maxwell and Gibson—*Treaties and Engagements*.

of Penang were too busy trying to make money to grow their own food, which had to be imported:

No considerable supply of paddy or cattle can ever be expected from the Island, as the value of land is so high, and the price of labour so great, that no man will ever appropriate any part of his land to pasture or paddy fields, which can possibly be turned to any other purpose of a more profitable nature; very little paddy is cultivated, and no cattle reared on the Island. The former is merely for the use of slaves, who perform the labour.¹⁵

Early Immigrant Population

The commercial and labouring population of Penang was almost exclusively immigrant. It is true that a number of Malays moved across from the nearby mainland to settle, but the proportion was small and, as far as the new developments were concerned, they were said to do 'little else but cutting down trees, at which they are very expert. They are incapable of any labour beyond the cultivation of paddy'.¹⁶ The main immigrant communities were the Indians and the Chinese.

The Indian connection with Malaya dated back to the early centuries of our era and there was regular trading intercourse. Penang being an East India Company settlement, governed from Bengal, it was natural that there should be a considerable Indian element in the population. Before 1800 the settlement was made a penal station for convicts from Bengal, of whom there were 772 in 1805. The army garrison came from Madras and provided a direct link with South India, and the European entrepreneurs who brought their enterprise to Penang did so *via* India and trailed clouds of India after them. Some of the early settlers, too, were Indian merchants from Bombay. The regular traffic of ships to and through the Straits made the journey easy for traders, boatmen and 'coolies' alike.

As early as 1794, Light referred to the South Indian population as:

..... the Chuliahs, or people from the several ports on the coast of Coromandel. The greater part of these have long been inhabitants of Quedah and some of them were born there. They are all shopkeepers or

¹⁵Leith—Op. Cit.—p. 20.

¹⁶Ibid—p. 50.

coolies. About one thousand are settled here, some with families. The vessels from the coast bring over annually 1,500 or 2,000 men, who by traffic and various kinds of labour obtain a few dollars with which they return to their homes and are succeeded by others.

These are rather a drain upon the stock of the island, but as they are subjects of the Company it ultimately tends to the general good.¹⁷

Leith, writing in 1804, says of them :

Many of them are merchants, fixed inhabitants, and possess property to a very large amount; the greatest proportion, however, of the Chuliahs reside on the island only for a few months; then having disposed of their goods, and purchased a fresh cargo, they return to the coast (i.e. to South India). The coolies and boatmen are Chuliahs; these two descriptions of people remain, one, two or three years, according to circumstances, and then return to the coast.¹⁸

The presence of so many Chinese immigrants requires more elucidation. The Chinese connection with South East Asia was, in fact, almost as longstanding as the Indian, and the pattern of Chinese activity in the area had been established long before Penang was founded. By 1720, for instance, there were eighty thousand Chinese in or near the Dutch settlement at Batavia, as merchants, shopkeepers, artisans, fishermen and coastal traders; many were employers or labourers in the sugar industry which was then expanding in Java, where in 1710 there were 130 sugar factories, mainly in Chinese hands. The Chinese worked tin mines on the Dutch-controlled island of Banka from about the same time. And in Brunei in 1776 'above the town were many pepper gardens belonging to the Chinese'.¹⁹ They were thus present in the archipelago in considerable numbers and there was a large and regular traffic of immigrants between China and the 'Southern Ocean'. 'At the Eastern Islands junks from China annually arrive in the favourable season and bring a great number of people to take up their residence in these quarters'.²⁰ A letter of 1805 states that :

Such immigrants pawn their persons to the owner or Captains of the junks for a passage and victuals to the amount of 20 Spanish dollars or £4 sterling, which they borrow on arriving at their destination from relations

¹⁷J.I.A. 1850, Vol. V, p. 9.

¹⁸Leith—Op. Cit.—p. 47.

¹⁹Purcell—*Chinese in South East Asia*—p. 457.

²⁰R. T. Farquahar, Writing in 1804—J.I.A. Vol. VI, p. 162.