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PAPERS ON
MALAYAN HISTORY

edited by
K. G. TREGONNING

INTRODUCTION

These fourteen papers were presented to the First International Conference of South-East Asian Historians held in Singapore in January 1961. Publication of their work in book form has been made possible by a generous grant from the Lee Foundation.

The study of Malayan history is undergoing a swift change. For many years it has been regarded in a Europe-centric fashion. It has been written either as the history of the European in Malaya, or it has been looked at from outside; or both. Now it has become generally accepted that the Malayan community itself must be the centre of studies. Malaya itself has become the core, and developments are studied in the light of their effect on it. It is as if one now studies Malaya from within, looking outwards, the correct way after all to study the history of any country. This stand is clearly reflected in these papers.

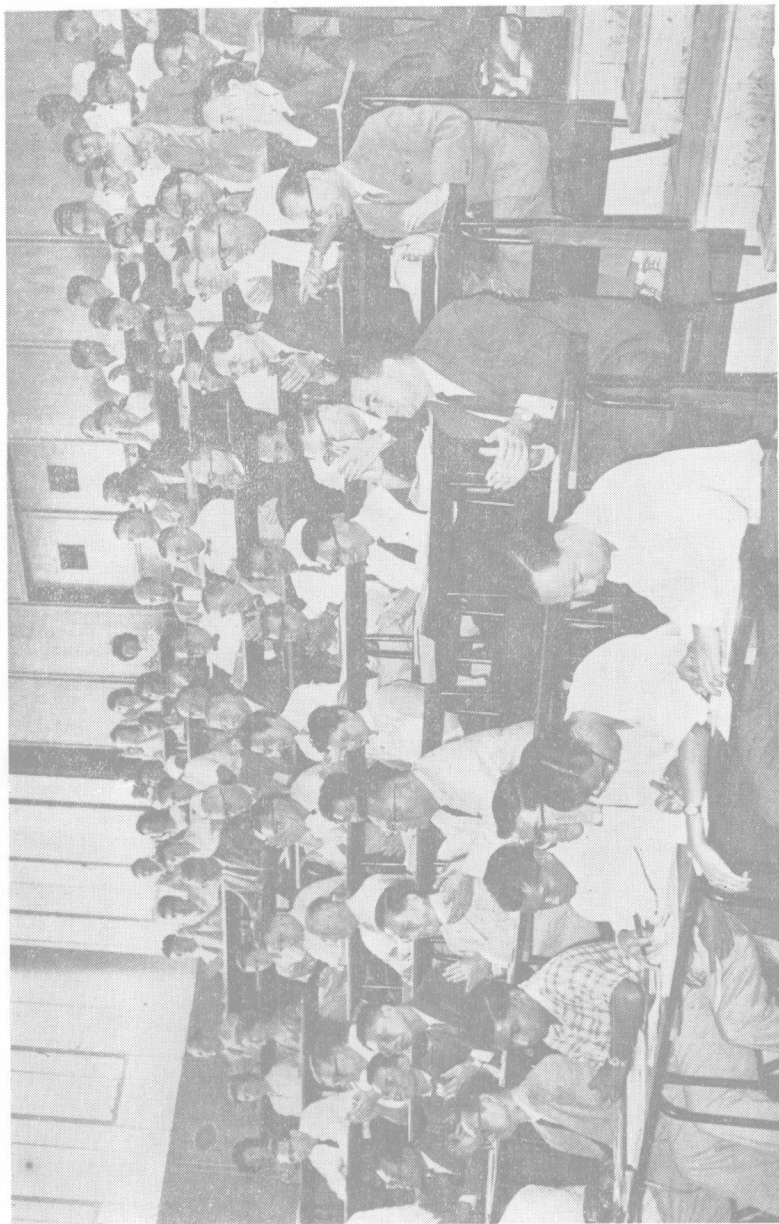
Here is assembled for the most part recent research by the post-war generation of Malayan historians. As their work illustrates, Malaya offers exciting research possibilities. There is a vast field for historians, sociologists, economists, jurists and others to explore. If this book and the Conference from which it sprang stimulate further study into the history of the area, particularly by Malaysians themselves, then Dato Lee Kong Chian I am sure will feel well rewarded, and my hopes too will have been realized.

K. G. TREGONNING,
Raffles Professor of History.
University of Malaya in Singapore.

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CONTENTS

		Page
Introduction		iv
Francis Light	<i>K. Sukhabanij</i>	1
The Malayan Tin Industry	<i>Wong Lin Ken</i>	10
Indian Immigration to Malaya, 1786-1957	<i>Kernial Singh Sandhu</i>	40
British Policy in Malayan Waters in the 19th Century	<i>N. Tarling</i>	73
The State Councils in Perak and Selangor, 1877-1895	<i>E. Sadka</i>	89
The British Forward Movement, 1880-1889	<i>E. Thio</i>	120
Justice and the Adat Perpatih: Law or Lore?	<i>B. J. Brown</i>	135
Kaum Muda-Kaum Tua: Inno- vation and Reaction among the Malays, 1900-1941	<i>W. Roff</i>	162
Pang Society: The Economy of Chinese Immigrants	<i>T. Suyama</i>	193
The Kuomintang in Malaya	<i>Png Poh Seng</i>	214
The Historical Position of Singapore	<i>Hsü Yun Tsiao</i>	226
Labour Organization by Chinese in Singapore in the 1930's	<i>N. Parmer</i>	239
The Japanese Policy for Malaya Under the Occupation	<i>Y. Itagaki</i>	256
Notes on the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya	<i>H. Groves</i>	268

SIAMESE DOCUMENTS CONCERNING CAPTAIN FRANCIS LIGHT.

BY KACHORN SUKHABANIJ.

National Library, Bangkok.

In the Library of the School of Oriental & African Studies in London, there are about 60 Letters in Siamese addressed to Captain Francis Light from the provincial governors of P'uket, P'attalung, Trang, etc. The first letter bearing the name of Captain Francis Light was dated 1773 A.D., and the last one was dated 1792 A.D., just two years before the time of his death. With the assistance of Mr. O. Simmonds of that School, the writer succeeded in having these Mss. microfilmed for the National Library in Bangkok. There is also another Siamese Mss. belonging to Captain Francis Light, a Siamese Primer, bearing his name as owner with the date 1778 A.D., which explains his mastery over the Siamese script and language.

Captain Francis Light is generally known as the Founder of Penang, but his biography is far from complete. There are gaps in his life, especially the early part before he acquired the Island of Penang for the British East India Company in 1786 A.D. These Siamese Letters may throw some further light on this period of his activities.

From the traditional history of Bangkok, Thonburi Period, Captain Francis Light was referred to as "Captain Hlek, the Governor of Penang," who in the year 1776 A.D. despatched to the Court of Bangkok 1,400 muskets and various complimentary commodities. Light's official appointment to be Superintendent of Penang was not authorized until 2nd May 1786, but as these Siamese Letters will bear out, he was moving about from P'uket to Penang and to Kedah between the year 1773-1786 A.D., and was honored by King Taksin to the title of nobility: *P'ya Raja Capitan* in the year 1778 A.D. presumably because of the various

muskets despatched for the defence of the country. The title: Governor of Penang in the year 1776 A.D. might be a mistake made by the Court scribe, or it might be a claim made by his Agent at the Court of Bangkok.

In Mr. H. P. Clodd's book: *Malaya's first British Pioneer — The Life of Francis Light* (Luzac & Co., London, 1948) it was stated that Light embarked at Blackwell for Bombay & Madras in January 1765, and arrived at Kedah via Acheen in August 1771. His activities around Kedah, P'uket and finally Penang may be taken as from August 1771.

There is however one Letter in his possession, but his name did not appear in it, bearing the date of 1763 A.D., two years before his arrival in the East. It was in the form of a Promissory note made out by a husband and wife to an undeclared person, for the value of Tin: 1 P'ara, 2 Tamlung and 3 S'lung — against which their little son was mortgaged as guarantee. This note bore the date: P'uket, Saturday, Seventh Month, Tenth Night of the Waxing Moon, Year of the Goat, 1125 which corresponds to 1763 A.D., four years before the fall of Ayudhaya to the Burmese. How Light came in possession of this Promissory Note is not known, but as he was very friendly with the Governor of P'uket in the reign of King Taksin (1762-1782), he might have acquired or bought this document from the Governor or his officials.

Mr. Clodd states in his book (p. 7) that "a contemporary writer recorded that the Sultan (of Kedah) conferred a title of nobility — Dewa Raja upon Light, and for authority he quotes John Crawfurd's *Journal of an Embassy to Siam*. Now on page 22 of John Crawfurd's book, Crawfurd writes: "The person who recommended it (Penang) to the attention of the Government of India was a Mr. Francis Light, who had traded and resided for a number of years at Siam and Queda, and who had a title of nobility from the former country". Obviously Crawfurd means the title of nobility, P'aya Raja Capitan, bestowed on Light was from King Taksin, whom Light was accorded an audience in one of his visits to Bangkok in the year 1777 A.D. The ceremony of conferring upon Light the title of "P'aya" must have taken

place about this year, as we find in a Siamese letter dated 1779 that he was referred to as "P'aya Raja Captain" by his first friend in the island, now ex-Governor of P'uket. As a result of this audience, Clodd (p. 29) quotes Light's letter to Calcutta dated the 22nd September 1777, relating how King Taksin "in his conversation expressed a strong desire of cultivating friendship with the Honorable Company and showed great uneasiness at no English vessels having come to his port. He said his soldiers would go against Mergui this season and if they took it he would give it to the English." King Taksin in the year 1777 was in his 10th year of reign, and had just succeeded in repelling the Burmese army headed by the famous Maha Sihasura, Hsinbyushin's foremost general. His offensive against Burma was not to be, however, as the country needed a respite after a seven-years (1770-1777) defensive war against Hsinbyushin's armies. Had Mergui been taken from the Burmese, King Taksin might 'give it' to the English as a concession to trade freely, but as to cession of territory after a bloody conquest, we doubt Light's word.

Captain Francis Light's overture in Kedah in 1771 resulted in a failure, as the Honorable Company had ignored him and despatched in February 1772 the Hon. Edward Monkton to negotiate for the Company for a Grant of settlement in Penang with the Sultan of Kedah, Muhammad Jiwa Mu'azzam Shah II. The Sultan's demand for an offensive military alliance was vetoed by the Honorable Company, and so Light in disgust retired to live in the island of P'uket.

Light's residence in P'uket started about June 1772, after one year's overture in Kedah. At P'uket, he 'co-habited' with a lady of Portuguese descent, Martina Rozells, who eventually bore him five children (Clodd, p. 26). He made friends with the Governor and must have been on good terms with him even after he was deposed. Though making P'uket his head-quarter till the year 1786, Light made voyages to different places at different periods, e.g. to Bangkok, Calcutta, and finally to Kedah again about January 1786. At Kedah he again succeeded in obtaining a grant of Settlement in the island of Penang from the new Sultan, Abdullah, which he reported to the Honorable Company.

This time, in a letter of instruction dated 2nd. May 1786, the Company authorized him to take possession of the Island which he eventually did on 12th. August 1786. The rest of the story at Penang is well-known.

These Siamese letters may throw some light for the period of years he had made P'uket his headquarters, i.e. from 1772 to the year 1786. Let us go through some of them in order to get some information of his activities and his services to the Court of Bangkok during this period.

The first document bearing Light's name was dated 1777, but given to a certain Captain 'Mang-ku'. It runs: "As Captain Light has instructed Captain Mang-ku to take delivery in his name of 100 B'ara of tin from the King being the cost of 926 muskets with the instruction to hand over these muskets in Bangkok, and Captain Mang-ku has now made delivery of 900 German muskets, together with 926 'Su-tan' muskets, totalling 1826 muskets, and also some cloths and silk which the officials have bought: it is ordered that the prices of all these muskets and silken goods be paid for in full in tin at P'uket. This note is given on Friday, Eight month, 2nd. Eighth, 7th. Night of the Wax Moon, Year of the cock, Year ending in 9". This Siamese year corresponds to 1777, probably August of that year. It looks as if the document was issued at Bangkok.

The second document bearing Light's name, but this time his title of nobility was given, was dated 1779 A.D. It was a short note written by the ex Governor of P'uket and two officials to P'aya Raja Capitan to acknowledge receipt of goods to the value of 13 and a half p'ara of tin with a promise to pay for them in tin in a few months time. The note was given Wednesday, Eight month, 1st Night of the Waxing Moon, Year of the Pig, Year ending in the figure 1. This date corresponds to July, 1779 A.D.

From this year on, Captain Light was always referred to as P'aya Raja Capitan, so we may take it that he was given the title of nobility by King Taksin in the year 1778 A.D.

The third, fourth, and fifth letters to Light were all dated 1786 A.D. The third letter was written about April of that year, the fourth about August, and the fifth the month was unreadable, but the context states that Light was already

stationed in Penang, and therefore, it must be written after 12th. August 1786 — the official date of Light's occupation of Penang.

All these three letters were written to Light by different persons, but all bore the same theme: the Burmese invasion of P'uket early in that year.

The back-ground of these letters should be given here, so as to get some idea of what happened in Siam, Burma and also at P'uket.

King Taksin was deposed in April, 1782 and his foremost general was crowned king, known as Rama I. As for Burma, Hsinbyusin's son, Singu, ruled from 1776 to 1782, during which time there was a lull in the war between Burma and Siam. In 1782, however, a palace intrigue deposed Singu, and his uncle, Bodawpaya, came on the throne. So, from 1785, war between Burma and Siam briskly resumed.

In the war of 1785, although the main Burmese army was repulsed at the Three Pagodas Pass, three small forces (of 3,000; 2,500; and 4,500) were making raids towards P'uket, Ranong and Nakorn Sridhammarat. The force against P'uket probably arrived around January or February, 1786 with 3,000 men.

The third letter addressed to Light, dated 12th, April, 1786, relates that the Burmese force invested the town of P'uket for a month, and was eventually repulsed, leaving behind 300-400 dead. A request was then made that Light supply the town and the surrounding area with goods and food. This letter was written by Chao P'aya Surin, the Commissioner for P'uket and its eight adjacent districts of the West coast.

The fourth letter was from Ok-Pra Plol Plakdi, an official in the P'uket administration, dated 1st October 1786, informing Light that his Agent, Captain Leaky (Liki?) could not speak the language of the country and therefore to trade with him was very difficult, that Light should send Captain Slard (Scott?) to represent him and to bring over some 2,000-3,000 gunnies of rice for sale as the people was still short of rice. (To this request, Light sent over 500 bags).

The fifth letter was from the Acting Governor of P'uket,

dated after August 1786, informing him that he and the Commissioner were not on good terms, and that he was ordered to proceed to Bangkok, and if he was confirmed Governor of P'uket, he would on his return proceed to Penang to give thanks to his benefactor.

This Acting Governor of P'uket would probably be a relative or nephew of the ex-Governor who died just before the Burmese force invested the town — whose name, in Mr. Clodd's book, (p. 35) was given as "Pia Pimon, the Governor".

It appears that Light, after having failed in his venture to get Penang for the Honorable Company in 1772, turned his attention on the island of P'uket. From the moment of his arrival in June, 1772, he entered deep into local politics, as reported by the Hon. Monkton to Madras before leaving Kedah in the same year: (Clodd p. 25) "Light had settled at Junk Ceylon as a private trader and had been well received by the Governor and principal inhabitants of the island", that "the King of Siam had lately sent a man over to depose the old Governor and that they were shut up in a small compound and were without arms and ammunition. They were surrounded by one or two thousand Siamese and would very shortly fall a sacrifice to them unless he got assistance from me." Monkton continued: "All the head people of the island are willing to give the Company any terms they might ask for their protection. But as I dare not think of embarking on such an enterprise without your Honour's permission, I have ordered Captain Wedderburn, of the Tankaville, to touch there and make signals by firing of guns if he can bring off Mr. Light."

This deposed Governor, whom Light sided with in 1772, must be the writer of the second letter, who, in 1779 was still living. However, when the new Governor was installed by King Taksin, Light did not lose time in getting into friendly relations with him.

The idea of getting Mergui for the Honorable Company intervened after Light had an audience with the King in Bangkok in 1777, but since the Siamese had not captured Mergui as forecasted by the king, Light reverted to the plan of getting P'uket. But the Siamese army under

Rama I was too strong for the Burmese, so Light saw no opportunity of taking possession of the island without serious quarrel with the Court of Bangkok. In 1785, his second friend the Governor died, and though the Governor's relative was set up as Acting Governor, a new man was despatched from Bangkok to administer P'uket with its eight adjacent districts covering the west coast of the Peninsula. Had the Governor or P'aya Pimon still lived, it would still be doubtful whether Light would succeed in his venture. As the results bore out, in late 1786, while Light officially occupied Penang for the Honorable Company, an army under the King's brother moved down to Nakorn Sridhammarat and Songkla, and eventually succeeded in forcing Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu into tributary states in the same year.

After 1786, whether Light still played on with the idea of taking P'uket is not known, but he still kept on good relations with the Court of Bangkok. The task of building up Penang as a sea port and of governing a new Settlement must have been very heavy, and French and Dutch political intrigues at Kedah must have occupied all his spare time.

In one of the last Siamese letters addressed to Light, there is one from the Court of Bangkok, written by the Smuha P'ra Kalahom, Prime Minister for the South, dated August, 1792, addressed to P'aya Raja Capitan: "The King of Siam has ordered the following to be conveyed to you: in March, 1792, the Governor of Tavoy had despatched a golden letter with gold and silver tributary trees to Bangkok, requesting to be readmitted under the protection of Siam as of old, but Mergui has not done the same. Hence, the King will despatch his royal brother in November with an army and navy to take Mergui, Martaban, Bassein, Rangoon as well as Ava, whilst a land force from the North will also push up through the Shan States into Upper Burma. As the number of soldiers who will take the field will be very great, requisition has been despatched to the Sultan of Kedah to convey rice to the island of P'uket in November. Considering the friendly relations long existed between P'aya Raja Capitan and the Court of Bangkok, it is hoped

that P'aya Raja Capitan will lend a helping hand by despatching 400-500 kwien of rice, together with cannons, muskets, ammunitions, etc. to proceed with the forces of Kedah and P'uket for the maintenance of the Siamese army. When instructions from the Commanding General, the King's Royal Brother, for the ships to set sail are received, it is expected that the ships supplied by P'aya Raja Capitan will start with the rest. As for the cost of rice, and all articles of war, as well as wages and salaries for all service men supplied, they will be paid for as has been customary. Moreover, all the ships captured at Tavoy will also be presented to P'aya Raja Capitan. If, however, P'aya Raja Capitan does not lend a helping hand to our national cause, friendship between us (will be at an end). English text of this letter (also accompanys) (written on) . . . eighth month, sixth night of the waxing moon, year . . . (July 1792 A.D.). Official Seal (of the Smuha P'ra Kalahom).

This letter refers to one of the counter-offensives of the Siamese army into Burma from the year 1787. The counter-offensive of the year of the Rat, 1792 A.D., did not go according to plan. After capturing Tavoy, it was found only that the town with difficulty could be kept. So instructions were given to migrate the population into Siam, and the town to be burnt to the ground. We do not know whether Light supplied the requested articles, and if so, what was his share of the war. But it is quite evident from this letter (and various others) that Light maintained friendly relations with the Court of Bangkok till the very last years of his life. He died in office as Superintendent of Penang on the 21st October 1794.

Arriving in Kedah in 1771, Light first tried to obtain for the Honorable Company the island of Penang, then P'uket then Mergui, then P'uket again, with no result until finally he succeeded in 1786, after 15 years persistent efforts, in obtaining the island of his first choice for the Honorable Company. In the same year, however, the Court of Bangkok reasserted its claim of suzerainty over Kedah, and, in addition, forced Kelantan and Trengganu to become its vassal states. It was through Captain Francis Light that the Court of Bangkok started its contact with the English, and,

giving allowance to his ambition to serve his Country, it was found that he never failed to give services to the Court of Bangkok when called upon to do so. Hence, the title of nobility, P'ya Raja Capitan, conferred upon him by King Taksin in 1778 and later confirmed by Rama I, was befittingly bestowed.

May the noble soul of 'P'ya Raja Capitan Hlek' rest in peace.

THE MALAYAN TIN INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF WESTERN INDUSTRIALIZATION ON MALAYA

BY WONG LIN KEN

University of Malaya in Singapore.

This paper is a very limited study on the connection between the rise of the Malayan tin industry and the growing demand for tin in the West as the result of industrialization. The aim is to show that this industrial demand for the metal had a particular impact on the direction of the Straits tin trade. No attempt is made to trace the development of tin mining itself, but as the bulk of the Straits tin came from the Malay Peninsula, the direction and expansion of the physical volume of the trade can be taken for the purpose of this paper as adequate evidence that there was a growth in mining activities in Malaya in direct response to the expansion in the industrial demand.

The history of tin mining in Malaya, like that of gold mining, goes back to prehistoric times. The demand for tin in the Bronze Age of Malaya must have been met by production in the local mines. It has even been claimed that the vast quantity of tin used in the bronze works of the ancient Mediterranean world came from Malaya as well as from Spain and Britain.¹ The early tin miners of Malaya were succeeded in the fifth century by Indian miners. Henceforth, the control of the foreign tin trade of Malaya came into the hands of a succession of non-Malay merchants. From the fifth century onwards, Indian merchants took the metal to India where it was in demand for the manufacture of Hindu images. Then in the ninth century, Arab merchants came to Malaya in quest of tin. By 1291, tin was already being exported to China. From

1. Wray, L., "Some Account of the Tin Mines and Industries of Perak", *Perak Museum Notes*, No. III, 1894, pp. 1-3.

1511 onwards, the tin trade was under the influence of the Portuguese until their political and commercial decline in the East at the beginning of the 17th century. From this date to the end of the eighteenth century, when the supremacy of the Dutch, in the Malay Archipelago was challenged by the British, the tin trade was dominated by the Dutch who sought strenuously to monopolize the traffic. The Dutch made treaties with the local princes who undertook to supply at fixed prices favourable to the buyers all or most of the tin produced in their territories. In the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Dutch secured and extended their control with varying success over the exportation of tin from various Malay states on the western seaboard of the Malay Peninsula, namely, Kedah, Perak, Selangor, and Sungei Ujong.² Until the discovery of tin in Banka in 1711, Malaya was the principal producer of the metal in the Archipelago.³ With the emergence of a new centre of production, the Dutch had to extend their control of the tin trade to Banka if they were to maintain their monopoly of the traffic. This was done in 1755.⁴

Since the discovery of the Cape route to India, there was always the possibility that tin from the Malay Archipelago would be introduced into the European market, which had been the commercial preserve of Cornish tin from time immemorial. As early as 1513, the Portuguese had imported into Europe some tin from the East.⁵ In the 18th century, the Dutch began to ship regularly small quantities of Banka tin to meet their own requirements in Holland. In 1787, they unloaded some of their unconsumed tin in the London market and depressed the price of Cornish tin to

2. Winstedt, R. O. (Editor), *Malaya, the Straits Settlements, and the Federated and Unfederated Malay States*, London, 1923, p. 123 et. seq.; Winstedt, R. C., *Malaya and Its History*, London, (date of publication?), p. 118; Burkill, I. H., *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of the Malay Peninsula*, 2 vols., 1935, vol. I, p. 483.

3. Crawford, J., *History of the Indian Archipelago*, 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1820, Vol. III, pp. 451-2; Phipps, J., *A Practical Treatise on the China and Eastern Trade: Comprising the Commerce of Great Britain and India, Particularly Bengal and Singapore, with China and the Eastern Islands*, Calcutta, 1835, p. 334. Henceforth referred to as Phipps, *A Practical Treatise on the China and Eastern Trade*.

4. Furnivall, J. S., *Netherlands India*, Cambridge, 1944, p. 202.

5. Lewis, G. R., *The Stanneries*, Cambridge, 1924, p. 53.

such an extent that British tin producers feared competition from oriental tin. But the amount of tin brought back to Holland by Dutch traders was small. Between 1760 and 1789, the average quantity of the metal imported annually was no more than 256 tons, and in only one year, 1787, did the amount exceed 500 tons.⁶ This was because Banka tin could not compete with the Cornish product, and was brought to Holland as ballast rather than as an article of trade. The lucrative part of the Banka tin trade was in the East. The insignificance of Europe as an outlet for Banka tin may be gauged from the fact that, during thirty years from 1760 to 1789, the quantity of Banka tin shipped to Holland did not amount to more than 7,669 tons, which worked out to be no more than 18% of the total yield of the mines in Banka during these years.⁷ There was indeed a possibility that Cornish tin might be sold in the East, if the price of the metal in the oriental market allowed an attractive margin of profit over the cost of producing and transporting the article from the Cornish mines. At least on five occasions before 1789, Cornish tin had been shipped to China by both private traders and the East India Company, but on not a single occasion had the speculation been paying. However, in 1789 the East India Company made the first successful shipment of Cornish tin to China, and in the course of the next twenty-eight years Cornish tin invaded the China market, which, until then, had been the preserve of tin produced in the Malay Archipelago.⁸

In the 1780's the demand for tin in the China market had exceeded the supply, so that prices of the metal became inflated, ranging from £84.10s. per ton to £105 per

6. Carne, J., 'The Tin Mines of Cornwall', *Journal, Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. II, 1839, p. 267. Flower, P. W. *A History of the Trade in Tin and a Description of the Ancient and Modern Processes of Manufacturing Tin-Plates*, London, 1880, pp. 20-203. Henceforth referred to as Flower, *A History of the Trade in Tin*.

7. The amount of tin imported into Holland is calculated from Carne, *Journal, Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. II, 1839, p. 367; the amount of tin produced in Banka is calculated from *International Tin Research and Development Council, Statistical Year Book 1937*, p. 36.

8. Unwin, G., *Letters, Remarks, etc., with a View to Open Extensive Trade in the Article of Tin from the County of Cornwall to India, Persia and China*, London, 1790, pp. 6-27; Carne, *op. cit.*, *Journal, Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. II, 1839, pp. 262-3; Flower, *A History of the Trade in Tin*, pp. 20-21.