

**THE EVOLUTION
OF THE
URBAN SYSTEM
IN MALAYA**

LIM HENG KOW

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List of Abbreviations Used

A.A.A.G.	Annals of the Association of American Geographers
A.J.S.	American Journal of Sociology
A.S.	Asian Studies
E.D. & C.C.	Economic Development and Cultural Change
G.R.	The Geographical Review
J.M.B.R.A.S.	Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
J.S.B.R.A.S.	Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
J.T.G.	Journal of Tropical Geography (formerly Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography)
M.J.T.G.	Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography (now Journal of Tropical Geography)
P.S.	Population Studies
P.V.	Pacific Viewpoint
S.E.A.D.A.G.	South East Asia Development Advisory Group
S.G.R.T.	Soviet Geography: Review and Translation
T.E.S.G.	Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie
T.P.R.	Town Planning Review

INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the existence of a few functionally important trading centres from the early centuries, Malaya¹ had no traditional urban system prior to the colonial-immigrant days. Indeed, it is doubtful if Malaya ever experienced what is known as 'primary urbanization'.² It is also doubtful if any of the traditional centres could be described as an 'orthogenetic city'.³ However, contemporary Malaya is quite different. With over forty percent of her population classified as 'urban', she is indeed the most urbanized country in Asia with the exception of Japan and Israel.⁴ The present-day urban system of Malaya, with cities and towns arranged in a hierarchical order, largely conforms to a lognormal distribution,⁵ and is regulated by the spatial economy functioning through the transport network. Considering that the present system of cities and towns in Malaya has only developed in the last 150 or 200 years, the change has been rapid and the development phenomenal.

The purpose of this study is to examine the developmental process in the formation of this system. This is motivated by a modest desire to fill a corner of what seems to be a big gap in urban studies in Malaysia. Urban research is relatively new in the country and research workers have been few.⁶ Moreover, the main focus has been on individual cities or aspects of individual cities.⁷ In common with the rest of Southeast Asia, comprehensive studies of city systems 'are virtually non-existent'.⁸ The present work concerns itself primarily with the

¹ This study traces urban development up to the end of the colonial regime (e.g. 1957), the term Malaya thus covers, unless otherwise stated, the Malay Peninsula and its associated islands including Singapore.

² An initial phase of urbanization when 'the pre-civilized folk more or less share a common culture which remains the matrix for the urban culture which develops from it'. See Hoselitz, B.F. (1955), 'Generative and Parasitive cities', *E.D. & C.C.*, Vol. 3, No. 3. See also Chapter 1.

³ Orthogenetic cities' are those which carry forward into 'systematic and reflective dimensions an old culture'. They are the cities of 'Great Tradition', capable of translating the folk society into the urban world. See Redfield, R. and Singer, M. (1954), 'The cultural role of the cities', *E.D. & C.C.*, No. 3, No. 1 p. 53.

⁴ Based on 1957 population Census of the Federation of Malaya which classified as 'urban' all centres of over 1,000 inhabitants.

⁵ See Hamzah Sendut, (1965), 'Statistical Distribution of Cities in Malaysia', *Kajian Ekonomi Malaysia*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 49-66.

⁶ Hamzah Sendut (1970), 'Urban Development in Malaysia', in Breese, G. (ed.), *Research Priorities for Urban Roles in National Development in Southeast Asia*, Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group, p. 76.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 78.

⁸ Ginsburg, N.S. (1965), 'Urban Geography and "Non-Western" Areas', in Hauser, P.M. and Sonnore, L.F. (ed.), *The Study of Urbanization*, New York, p. 345. Lately geographers specialized in Southeast Asia have shown more interest in the spatial and functional character of the systems of cities in the region. (See SEADAG Reports (1972), *Ad Hoc Urban*

evolution of the urban system with a view to providing a base for a thorough examination of the structure and the characteristics of the system at a later stage.*

Urban systems evolve over space and time and are intimately related to the socio-economic development and the geopolitical conditions of the country. A study of this nature calls for a historical approach. It seeks to trace the development at various stages within which the isolated settlements originated and grew or declined, and it examines the factors which contributed to the integration of the settlements and the evolution of a spatial structure. As the study is mainly concerned with the emergence of the urban system, the cities and towns will be looked at in concert and attention will be directed to those forces which were operative in the creation of the whole integrated structure. The growth of individual towns will be examined in depth only in so far as it sheds light on, or was significant in, the formation of the entire system.

Taking as its working hypothesis the assumption that Malaya had no traditional urban system in the past and that the present-day system of towns and cities is largely the product of the colonial-immigrant complex, this study focuses its attention on the following areas: the ancient trade centres of Kedah and Malacca (and briefly, the settlements of the Johore kingdom), the mining towns in Perak, the administrative capital (and its port) in Selangor, the agricultural urban settlements in Trengganu and Kelantan, and the colonial ports of Penang and Singapore.

The cases of Kedah and Malacca serve to illustrate respectively the failure of a city-state and a commercial empire to generate an indigenous urban system; together they point to the inherent weakness of the Malay Peninsula in terms of urban development, namely the absence of extensive agricultural land and a large concentration of population. Consequently the Peninsula did not experience, in spite of its favourable geographical position and long historical contacts, the benefit of a land-based political power centripetal, strong and durable enough for the individual centres to perpetuate themselves, and less still, for a nodal region of settlements to emerge. The kingdom of Johore exemplifies the difficulties encountered by a lesser political unit during the scramble for control by the European powers in Southeast Asia, and the impediments to the development of indigenous centres up to the end of the eighteenth century.

The case of Perak demonstrates resource-based development as against the trade-oriented centres of Kedah and Malacca, with the immigrant miners providing the driving force for urban growth. In the process of urban crystallization initiated by the mining industry and the immigrants, the traditional society was largely bypassed, and the indigenous settlements were more often than not left out of the mainstream of development. Later development in the state reveals

Development Seminar, pp. 2-3.) In Malaysia, Hamzah Sendut's 'Statistical Distribution of Cities in Malaysia' (Hamzah Sendut (1965), *op. cit.*) has been hailed as one of such studies. Hamzah himself however, considers it more as an exercise in methodology.

* A broader study of the urbanization process in the whole of Malaysia, both before and after 1957, is currently being undertaken by the author.

the weaknesses of tin-based urban settlements. The rapidity with which the settlements sprang up and grew was matched by a 'stop-go' fluctuation and a constant shift of centres of importance, dictated by the changing fortunes of the mines. Not until the administrative or commercial functions and transport facilities brought about by the colonial economy were added to the mining towns could the latter enjoy a greater measure of permanency and a sustained growth. A more settled and stable pattern of development in keeping with the resources endowment began to take shape. It was then too late for Perak to retain its lead in the urban development of the Federated Malay States: with locational and political factors working in its favour, Selangor forged ahead.

Selangor, also rich in tin resources, could have been another Perak but for its central position in the Federated Malay States. As it was, the concentration of political functions and the convergence of transportation networks at Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the Federated Malay States, gave it more than an edge over the neighbouring states. From the turn of the century, the centre of gravity of economic development moved from Perak to Selangor. An urban 'point' development as against the urban 'surface' development in Perak began to emerge. The most important mainland nodal point of the urban system, in contrast to the two colonial ports, took root in the shape of Kuala Lumpur. With the rapid growth of the capital came development of its port outlet (first Klang and later Port Swettenham) and more recently the satellite towns.

Given the political and economic framework, inevitably it had to be the colonial ports of Penang and Singapore, more than any other centres, which set the pace and fashioned the evolution of the urban system throughout the colonial period. Acting as bridgeheads and headlinks for the colonial economy, the two ports occupied the commanding heights of the spatial structure. The lesser coastal ports were reduced to the status of commercial and functional dependencies, and the interior centres also developed under the shadow of the two ports. Geopolitical factors, however, heavily favoured the development of Singapore at the expense of Penang. The interplay of forces placed Singapore as the leading centre only a decade after its foundation. It rapidly grew to become the primate city of the country.

The situation in Trengganu and Kelantan perhaps reflects what could have been the pattern of urban development throughout the Malay Peninsula but for the colonial-immigrant complex, exploiting to the full the tin resources. The east coast was not entirely free from the impact of the colonial-immigrant complex. Through lack of minerals, it was spared the full force of the colonial-immigrant onslaught, and development was visibly more traditional than foreign, more agricultural than mining-orientated. Physical isolation and inadequate transportation facilities made its integration into the mainstream of economic development more difficult. Development of the urban subsystem was natural.

The story of the evolution of the urban system in Malaya is thus one of isolated and uncoordinated development of individual centres and non-development of the indigenous system in the past, and the rapid development of urban centres and formation of an urban system during the last two hundred years. The driving force has been that released by the colonial-immigrant complex.

II

This then is what the following chapters set out to examine. It remains for this Introduction to concern itself briefly with (i) the systems approach in urban studies, (ii) some points to be borne in mind in considering the evolution of urban system in Malaya and (iii) the question why the colonial-immigrant complex, which generated the present-day urban system in the country, did not set off a process of urbanization and bring about the formation of an urban system based on the traditional settlements.

An urban system is defined as a set of nodes, represented by the urban centres, and linked by transport networks in a space-economy. Treating the urban centres as elements of a set has the advantage of providing a clearer understanding of the spatial and functional relationships of the centres as a whole, for they do interact with varying degrees of intimacy between and among themselves, particularly within the space-economy. This approach is borrowed from systems analysis which some geographers see as a valuable basis for geographical studies.⁹

The systems approach has its roots in general systems theory, the concepts of which have been extended into geography. A system is described as '....a set of objects together with relationships between the objects and their attributes'.¹⁰ Systems fall into two categories: closed systems and open systems, each with different attributes.¹¹ The nodal region in human geography with its set of objects (towns, villages, farms, etc.) related through circulating movements, and energy inputs coming through the biological and social needs of the community, can be considered as constituting a system. With rare exceptions, systems of cities are open systems. Berry contends that cities and sets of cities are susceptible to the same kinds of analysis as systems, and are characterized by generalizations, constructs and models.¹²

The 'systems' idea is, as Haggett suggests, implicit in most central-place theory. The systems approach attaches great importance to two concepts: that the urban centres are conceived as the crucial points in the space-economy and that 'all centres in a region exist as part of a system such that the effects of social and economic change rebound among them'.¹³ The closeness of urban centres and the space-economy has been emphasized. Friedmann has defined cities as a

⁹ Harvey, D. (1969), *Explanation in Geography*, E. Arnold, pp. 448-9.

¹⁰ Hall, A.D. and Fagen, R.E. (1956), 'Definition of System', *General Systems Year Book*, I, pp. 18-28.

¹¹ A closed system has definable boundaries across which no exchange of energy occurs. In an open system, the opposite condition exists. See Haggett, P. (1965), *Locational Analysis in Human Geography*, London, pp. 17-19. More to the point, the basic distinction between the two is that an open system is able to interact with the environment, while a closed system is not. See Herbert, D. (1972), *Urban Geography: A Social Perspective*, David and Charles, p. 279.

¹² Berry, B.J.L. (1964), 'Cities as Systems Within Systems of Cities', *Papers and Proceedings of the Regional Science Association*, 13, p. 161.

¹³ Hodge, G. (1968), 'Urban Structure and Regional Development', *The Regional Science Association Papers*, Vol. 21, p. 102.

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series of overlapping, interdependent networks in which one affects the others. Within the organization of economic activities the urban centres are the centres of activity and of innovation, focal points of the transport network, and locations of superior accessibility. They form a system of cities arranged in a hierarchy according to the functions performed by each, and surrounding each of the cities in the system are corresponding areas of urban influence or urban fields.¹⁴

Berry and Horton advance the idea of 'urban environment'¹⁵ and suggest that as the endowment changes so does the urban system. This has the effect of generating further changes in final demand in a circular and cumulative sequence in which causes merge into consequences and consequences become causes. Thus it becomes impossible to distinguish the natural from the man-made.¹⁶

The systems approach has been widely adopted by geographers in their studies of cities and towns. McNulty, drawing on his experience in Ghana, suggests that the urban system is inextricably bound to developments in the space-economy. He feels that the growth of urban centres, where social and economic activities are concentrated, should be viewed as an integral part of the changing socio-economic life of the area.¹⁷ McGee, in a discussion of Southeast Asian cities, emphasizes that '... cities are simply a reflection of a wider socio-economic system, and within the context of the underdeveloped world, each country has been shaped and moulded by the penetration of other socio-economic systems.'¹⁸ This is echoed in Carter's study of the growth of the Welsh city system.¹⁹ The Russian geographers, with different emphasis, regard the system of urban places as 'a kind of economic-geographic structure'. They suggest that the city-forming basis of systems of urban places is to be found in integral territorial-production complexes the character of which (size, type of specialization, degree of concentration of production, etc.) determines the basic structural characteristics of such systems.²⁰ Mabogunje views cities as essentially the points of articulation of an economic system. The efficient functioning of cities, according to him, is circumscribed by the detailed characteristics of the economic system, its productive capacity, its transport system and technology, and the general level of income of the populace. From this he argues that ideally, every economic system should generate its own appropriate system of cities.²¹

¹⁴ Friedmann, J. (1969), *Regional Development Policy: A Case Study of Venezuela*, The M.I.T. Press.

¹⁵ 'Urban environment' was put forward and defined by Perloff as 'a contained (but not closed) highly interrelated system (or subsystem) of natural and man-made elements in various moves' which in turn produces the 'urban resource endowment'. Cited in Berry, B.J.L. and Horton, F.E. (eds.) (1970), *Geographic Perspectives on Urban Systems*, Prentice-Hall, p. 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*
¹⁷ McNulty, M.L. (1969), 'Urban Structure and Development: The Urban System of Ghana', *The Journal of Developing Areas*, Vol. III, pp. 159-76.

¹⁸ McGee, T.G. (1971), *The Urbanization Process in the Third World*, London, p. 18.

¹⁹ Carter, H. (1969), *The Growth of the Welsh City System*, University of Wales Press, and Carter, H. (1972), *The Study of Urban Geography*, Edward Arnold, Chapter III.

²⁰ Blazhko, N.I., Voskoboinikova and Gurevich, B.L. (1969), 'Systems of Urban Places', *Soviet Geography: Review and Translation*, Vol. X, No. 7, p. 365.

²¹ Mabogunje, A.L. (1968), *Urbanization in Nigeria*, University of London Press, p. 22.

Berry sums up the triangular relationship: the most immediate part of the environment of any city is the other cities, and for systems of cities, the most immediate environment is the socio-economy of which they are a part.²²

Smailes, on the other hand, stresses that urban systems are the products of long and complex historical development, and that their constitution is not deducible from a *a priori* assumption.²³

Whilst views, emphasis and indeed definitions may differ, the systems approach to urban study, bringing it more in line with contemporary modes of scientific thought, is being increasingly accepted as a better way to unravel the complexity of the growth process, and the typology and the interdependence of the urban centres perceived as spatial systems.

Various aspects of systems of cities have been studied. Berry has examined some of the ways in which our understanding of cities and sets of cities (in short, urban systems) has been enhanced.²⁴ He has also explored the relationship between regional economic development and the urban system.²⁵ In separate contributions, Blazhko (with his colleagues) and Smailes deal with the structure and the components of the systems²⁶ from different angles, while McNulty, in addition to studying the structure, also traces the development of the system.²⁷ Others focus on the nature, growth, basic dimensions, diffusion, etc., of urban systems.²⁸ The present study is concerned with the evolutionary process of the formation of the urban system.

III

The urban system of a country evolves from and operates within the context of its cultural history, socio-political institutions, transport and economic development. The urban system in Malaya was subject to the operation of the colonial economy.

The imposition of the colonial economic order and its impact on spatial integration were thus the determining factors throughout the development of the urban system. In the absence of a traditional system of cities, the colonial space-economy was both a cause and a consequence of the urban system in Malaya. The urban system as it is today has yet to shake off the uneven structure imprinted by the colonial economy.

²² Berry, B.J.L. (1964), *op. cit.*, p. 161.

²³ Smailes, A. E. (1971), 'Urban Systems', *Institute of British Geographers, Transactions*, No. 53, p. 1 and footnote 2, p. 12.

²⁴ Berry, B.J.L. (1964), *op. cit.*

²⁵ Berry, B.J.L. (1969), 'Relationships between Regional Economic Development and the Urban System', *TESG*, LX, No. 5, pp. 283-307.

²⁶ Blazhko, N.I. and Gurevich, B.L. (1969), 'Structural Mathematical Analysis of Systems of Urban Places', *Soviet Geography Review and Translation*, Vol. X, No. 7, pp. 374-83 and Smailes, E.A. (1971), *op. cit.*

²⁷ McNulty, M.L. (1969), *op. cit.*

²⁸ See for instance Berry, B.J.L. and Horton, F.E. eds. (1970), *Geographic Perspectives on Urban Systems*, Prentice Hall, *op. cit.* Chapter II, pp. 20-35, and Chapter VI, pp. 150-168, Carter, H. (1969), *op. cit.* and Hudson, J.C. (1969), 'Diffusion in Central Place System', *Geographical Analysis*, Vol. No. 1., pp. 45-58.

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The colonial origins and subsequent development of the urban centres are, therefore, important to bear in mind in considering the evolution of the urban system in Malaya. Another factor which should be taken into account in this connection is that, apart from the colonial ports, most of the important urban centres during the early stage originated from mining settlements. This was closely tied to the nature of the colonial economy, and it was significant for subsequent urban development.

The importance of the mining origin of the centres and their subsequent growth are twofold. First, the towns which evolved from mining settlements did not perform central functions. Rather, they performed special functions with peculiar locational demands. The regulating forces suggested by central-place theory (or the rank-size rule) were inoperative in determining the size, spacing and distribution of the centres in the early phase of the evolution of the urban system. Secondly, the urban landscape was dominated by a single type of economic activity. During the early stage it had the common features, of unplanned, hurriedly-built huts, a rapid growth of male immigrant population, a measure of 'floating' conditions and an atmosphere characterized by impermanency.

It was not until the settlements acquired administrative functions that there was any element of stability, let alone permanency. It was not until the introduction of such facilities as communications that the settlements had relations with their neighbours. There was thus little impetus for the development of trade other than what was required for the immediate needs of the mining community. Until such conditions prevailed, the mining area presented a monotonous urban landscape, without rank-size stratification and lacking any regional centre.

The mining origin of the settlements had both immediate and long-term effects on the evolution of the urban system. In the early stages of urban settlement the mining areas were characterized by the fluctuation of centres and constant changes in their relative importance. In spite of the long period of 'settling down' and 'sorting out' set in motion by the requirements of an integrated spatial economy, the special circumstances of the origin of the settlements continued to be very much in evidence.

Throughout the long evolutionary process the mining origin made itself felt in many ways. As tin deposits were found in places away from the traditionally well-settled regions, the mining settlements exhibited elements typical of 'frontier' settlements; the 'exhaustive' and 'mobile' nature of the mining agglomerations created an impermanent pattern of settlements which bore little relationship with the hinterland. Although the incomplete socio-economic structure of some of the settlements and the lopsided demographic composition of the mining community presented obstacles to the achievement of full urban status, the settlements with rich and long-lasting mines were able to develop rapidly into fast-growing centres, once they acquired a measure of permanency and the necessary administrative and commercial functions and communication facilities. Most of the interior centres of importance in Malaya experienced such 'success' stories in their early stages. They thrived on rich resources and their rate of growth put them in the forefront of urban development. Consequently, they were able to maintain their high position in the hierarchical order.

Mining origins apart, other factors contributed to the distorted development of the urban system. Social, physical and military elements all played a role at various stages.

The structure of the urban system for instance is one in which the well-developed and integrated section of the system lies outside the originally densely settled areas of the country. This 'anomalous' structure should be viewed in terms of the traditional settlements of the Malay population failing to develop into modern urban centres and in the context of the colonial-immigrant origin of such centres. Unlike those in the mining areas of Western Europe,²⁹ Malayan settlements did not undergo the transformation from traditional villages to extractive agglomerations, which in turn developed into modern centres. Rather, the strongest nodes or set of nodes of the urban system reflect the concentration of the immigrants and the colonial economy.

The geography of the country also presented physical barriers to the natural development of the system. The system developed well in the tin and rubber belt along the west coast, while on the east coast regional subsystems developed with only marginal links with the main system. The fishery and agriculture-based urban subsystems of the east coast contrast strongly with the main body of the system in the tin and rubber belt of the west coast. By virtue of its proximity to this zone, the traditional settlement area of the north-west manifests a greater measure of integration with the main system. Efforts have no doubt been made since Independence to rectify the imbalance in the urban system but the force of historical inertia continues to be felt.

The establishment of the Resettlement of the New Village Scheme at the height of the Communist insurgency during the early 1950s is another element to be kept in mind in understanding the distorted evolution of the urban system. The resettlement scheme involved the physical movement of half a million people from isolated rural locations into compact and closely guarded settlements. Over four hundred New Villages were thus created.³⁰ The scheme transformed the settlement landscape of the country. By rehousing the dispersed Chinese peasant farmers into the new settlements, the resettlement scheme succeeded to some extent in converting great stretches of the Malayan countryside, where once only isolated farmsteads had existed into a landscape of new towns and villages.³¹ Most of these new towns and villages were located along major roads to facilitate military supervision; others were within easy reach of the existing settlements or on the periphery of old townships. In terms of urban development, the resettlement scheme resulted in the creation of many new towns, the 'elevation' of some of the villages to urban status, and the enlargement of some well-established towns. The scheme brought about greater urbanization both in

²⁹ c.f. Jackson, R.T. (1968), 'Mining Settlements in Western Europe: The Landscape and the Community', in Beckinsale, R.P. and Houston, J.M. eds., *Urbanization and its Problems*, Oxford, p. 151.

³⁰ Hamzah Sendut (1962a), 'The Resettlement Villages in Malaya', *Geography*, Vol. 47, Part 1, p. 41.

³¹ Dobby, E.H.G. (1952), 'Resettlement Transforms Malaya: A Case-History of Relocating the Population of an Asian Plural Society', *E.D. & C.C.*, Vol. 3, p. 168.

area and population (mainly the immigrant component) without a corresponding increase in agricultural support, and it also contributed to the premature emergence of a conurbation.

The creation of the new towns or the newly promoted towns had yet another effect on the urban system. The hierarchical order and the distribution of towns, which are crucial to central-place theory, were disturbed.

One might thus sum up that, notwithstanding the existence of isolated trade centres dating back to the early centuries, Malaya lacked a traditional urban system prior to the colonial-immigrant days, and the urban centres which provided the scaffolding for the present-day urban system had their genesis in the colonial ports and the mining settlements. These centres were not formed in response to the social and economic needs of the indigenous population. They were a foreign creation in a landscape originally barren of urban settlements. Their establishment and subsequent development tended to prevent the kampong settlements from being transformed into urban centres. Those which underwent transformation successfully became part of the urban system but lacked significance in its overall structure. Those areas which did not feel, or were late in feeling, the full impact of the forces set in motion by colonial development and immigrant activities succeeded only in evolving a set of towns forming a weak subsystem in the shadow of the main system. The colonial and mining beginnings and the framework of a plural society under colonial rule, led to a highly uneven development within the urban system. It also resulted in the lopsided development of the system within the country. 'Modern Malaya', asserts Purcell, 'is in the main the joint creation of British and Chinese enterprise'.³² This statement applies also to the urban system of the country.

Granting that the colonial-immigrant complex was indeed the driving force behind the evolution of the urban system, it may still be asked why the same force, imposed upon the Malay society, did not succeed in bringing about urbanization and the formation of an urban system with the traditional settlements as its core. Theoretically, it could have done so. The actual course of development, however, proved to be different. The colonial economy, based heavily on mining enterprise and later commercial plantations, relied on the immigrant instead of the indigenous population for labour, and areas of intensive economic activities were, by physical constraints and human design, spatially separated from the traditional settlements. As a result, the urbanizing process was largely confined to areas where colonial and immigrant enterprises were concentrated, and the traditional society was bypassed or left out. Thus 'secondary urbanization', as expected in a peasant society, through contact with 'urbanizing' cultures, did not take place in its original sense, at least in the 'core area' of the country.

This is not to imply that the traditional society was totally insulated from the impact of the colonial-immigrant spatial economy. The weakening and disintegration of Malay political power began when large numbers of immigrant miners set foot on the mainland, and was speeded up by the turbulence caused

³² Purcell, V. (1976), *The Chinese in Malaya*, Singapore, p. vi.

by the warring immigrant groups in their struggle for the control of mines and the sharing of profits. The socio-economic fabric of the traditional society was also eroded. The original society which was communally and economically self-sufficient,³³⁻³⁴ gave way to one which became part of an economic system of exchange much larger than its immediate community.

The point to be stressed here is that with the development of the colonial-immigrant economy (which required more administrative centres, nodal points, communication lines and a continuous influx of immigrants), a plural society³⁵ emerged. A triangular situation developed in which the colonial and the immigrant elements and social orders (these elements overlapped spatially and interacted more closely) combined to produce what essentially became the urban sector of the society, while the traditional areas were left out of the mainstream of economic progress and remained rural. Indeed, some parts of the traditional areas were choked by the colonial-immigrant elements, in terms of urban development.

The situation in Negri Sembilan is a case in point. A large number of the inhabitants of Negri Sembilan claimed descent from Minangkabau immigrants.³⁶ Some of the Malay chiefs were among the most successful traders there in the middle of the last century and the retail trade in towns and villages was still in the hands of the Sumatran Malays up to about 1890.³⁷ Negri Sembilan, however, was also one of the main centres of Chinese tin mining.³⁸ Chinese traders, following the miners, moved in and gained ground so rapidly that it was decided in 1897 to move them from the Malay villages and to concentrate them in their own villages. Soon 'Chinese trade centres' appeared in contrast to the 'Malay agricultural settlements'.³⁹ At the same time, the tin mines in Sungei Ujong prompted the colonial authorities to build a road to replace the river waterway, and then a railway to link Port Dickson and Seremban. While Seremban was on its way to becoming the state capital and a large Chinese town, and Port Dickson a colonial port, the Malay bullock-carts which plied the road were being gradually put out of business.⁴⁰ The once self-sufficient Malay society found itself being squeezed from both sides, though safe from physical encroachment. Gullick has observed that 'There was no manufacturing industry of any kind....If there had ever been a cottage textile industry it had vanished; all cloth was imported'.⁴¹

³³ Dobby, E.H.G. (1958), *Southeast Asia* (sixth edition), London, p. 128.

³⁴ Gullick, J.M. (1951), 'The Negri Sembilan Economy of the 1890s', *JMBRAS*, XXIV, 1951, p. 55.

³⁵ Furnivall, J.S. (1944), *Netherlands India*, (second edition), Cambridge, p. 446. Furnivall defines a plural society as 'a society comprising one or more elements or social orders which live side by side yet without mingling, in one political unit'.

³⁶ De Josselin de Jong, P.E. (1951), *Minangkabau and Negri Sembilan*, Leiden, p. 178.

³⁷ Gullick, J.M. (1951), *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³⁸ Newbold, T.J. (1839), *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, two vols., London, p. 94.

³⁹ Gullick, J.M. (1951), *op. cit.* pp. 53-54.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 54.

Negri Sembilan was one of the key states in the tin and rubber belt and was relatively urbanized. But the Malay communities, such as the one in Jelebu, remained rural. Lack of economic specialization and organization was obvious. Swift noted that the Malays did not have a place in the simple marketing and processing of their primary products.⁴²

Thus, although the Malay civilization was 'very much a trading one',⁴³ the traditional society largely failed to develop a web of trading centres, linked by communication lines, such as that which emerged in Java.⁴⁴ With the exception of the northern part and north-eastern coast of the country, such an elaborate marketing system, and above all, the domination of the indigenous population in the functioning of the system, did not figure significantly in the economic structure of the Malay society. Even when it did exist, as in Trengganu and Kelantan, the scale of the system was much smaller and less elaborate, the indigenous control was far from absolute.

Clearly the situation of the Malay society was far from conducive to urban development. Such a situation was by no means confined to Negri Sembilan, for throughout the country the traditional society was characterized by its 'ruralness', with the kampong dominating the settlement landscape. 'Indeed', Fisher observed, after colonial rule had become a thing of the past, 'in the strict sense of the term there are no indigenous Malay towns, and even the traditional state capitals are little more than overgrown villages'.⁴⁵ The 'real' towns and cities on the other hand bear vividly the imprint of the colonial-immigrant complex.

By and large, the Malays were self-supporting rice farmers and fishermen. Economic exchange between groups and communities was limited because of self-sufficiency and lack of specialization, as well as difficulties of movement. Winstedt suggests that:

'The Malay failure to specialize was due firstly to his isolation in village communities encircled by forest and too small to maintain the specialist, and secondly it was due to bountiful nature that made livelihood easy. The pirate, the fisherman, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the weaver, the medicine-man were also rice-planters in season. Only the luxury demands of the few courts encouraged a more complete specialization in weaving, metal-work and the forging of weapons, crafts that became obsolete or waned before foreign competition.'⁴⁶

⁴² 'Rural Malay society exports primary products to the rest of Malaya and imports consumption goods. All economic functions other than primary production are carried on by other races, above all by the Chinese'. Swift, M.F. (1965), *Malay Peasant Society in Jelebu*, London, p. 28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ In Java 'Most of the internal trade is carried on through the native markets, or pasars, which form a network linking rural villages to their local town markets and town markets to each other and the city markets. Imported and factory-made goods consumed by the peasant population are also handled by these markets. While certain aspects of wholesaling and certain products are handled by Chinese (and to a lesser extent Arabs and Indians) the markets are dominated by Javanese. See Dewey, A.G. (1962), *Peasant Marketing in Java*, The Free Press of Glencoe USA, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵ Fisher, C.A. (1966), *South-east Asia: A Social, Economic and Political Geography*, London.

⁴⁶ Winstedt, R. (1950), *The Malays: A Cultural History* (revised edition), London, p. 135.

The Malay society at this stage was undoubtedly 'based upon self-sufficiency at the cost of economic progress';⁴⁷ the kind of marketing system based on internal trade which was developed by the indigenous population in Java, was sadly missing.

These circumstances provided the immigrant groups with the initial opportunity to operate with a greater degree of freedom. Had the Malay society developed a web of trading centres and interior towns, some 'anchor' points would have been afforded for the colonial spatial economy. Admittedly, the colonial economy did not operate for the advancement of the indigenous population, and a new spatial framework had to be imposed. However, had they been located at important nodal points within the spatial transportation network, some of the traditional centres could have been integrated or 'rejuvenated', as in Java and Nigeria,⁴⁸ by the colonial space-economy. The resultant urban system would not have been the creation of the colonial and immigrant elements, culturally and spatially foreign to the traditional society. As it was, the traditional society did not provide an existing framework, and the immigrants and the colonialists took full advantage of the vacuum to start afresh, bypassing the indigenous society.

On the other hand, but for the great influx of immigrants, the traditional society could have eventually adjusted itself to the new economic order. It might have developed urban centres of its own in contrast to the colonial ports and administrative centres, or centres of 'dual' character, with the colonial and indigenous elements juxtaposed in the same locality. As it was, the immigrants not only flooded the mining districts and plantations, but also spilled over into the traditional society, and took into their own hands trading and other economic activities. The belated activities of economic exchange and urban development by indigenous efforts were thus held in check.⁴⁹

The immigrant element, therefore, was as important as the colonial element in the making of the modern towns and cities in Malaya. Unwittingly it might have played an even more important role in hindering the traditional society from developing its urban centres, for it served the purpose of the colonial economy more efficiently.

The urban system of modern Malaya is thus very much a product of the colonial-immigrant complex.

⁴⁷ Gullick, J.M. (1951), *op. cit.* p. 55.

⁴⁸ See Mabogunje, A.L. (1968), *op. cit.*, London; and by the same author (1970), 'Urbanization and Change', *The African Experience*, Vol. 1, Evanston, pp. 340-346.

⁴⁹ Dobby is right in saying that 'there was no significant displacement of the old settlement by the new or the indigenous by the foreign'. It is, however, open to question whether the opening up of mines did not produce an economic struggle between the miners and farmers. For with the miners came the traders, and indeed many miners later turned traders who dominated the economic scene in both immigrant and traditional areas. See Dobby, E.H.G. (1958), *op. cit.*, p. 130.