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(Essays on Malaysian Historiography)

Edited by
Cheah Boon Kheng

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Foreword

This volume on the historians and the writing and research of Malaysian history, edited by Dr Cheah Boon Kheng, our journal editor, is the first of two volumes on historiography, which the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society is publishing to commemorate its 130th anniversary this year. The second volume is "Historians and their discipline: The call of Southeast Asian History" which is being edited by Emeritus Professor Nicholas Tarling of the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

The MBRAS in its 130th existence, except for a short break during the Japanese Occupation of Malaysia (1941-1945), has played a major role in publishing the works of historians and other researchers from all over the world on Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, its three main areas of interests. Its journal and monographs are widely circulated and their contents frequently cited. Not many learned societies have enjoyed such a long history. The society has been able to sustain itself largely through its worldwide membership, the sales of its publications, and donations from governments and other bodies. We hope the members and the general public will continue to support its publications.

The society would like to thank contributors to this volume, and Ms Anita Murray our copy-editor for preparing the work for publication, and Miss Sally Lee for secretarial assistance.

Dato Henry Barlow
Hon. Treasurer, MBRAS
7th May 2007

Notes on Contributors

Abu Talib Ahmad is a professor of history and dean of the School of Humanities at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. His research interests include Southeast Asian history, modern Japanese history and, currently, museums and memorials in Malaysia and Singapore. His recent publications include *Reflections on Southeast Asian History since 1945* (edited with Richard Mason) in 2006 (Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang); *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History* (edited with Tan Liok Ee) in 2003, (Singapore University Press: Singapore); *The Malay-Muslims, Islam and the Rising Sun: 1941-45* in 2003 (MBRAS monograph) and *Japanese Civilisation* (in Malay) in 2005.

Badriyah Haji Salleh retired as an associate professor at the History Department in the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. After her retirement she took up an appointment briefly as a curator at the Melaka Museum. She obtained her Ph.D. degree in history at the University of Columbia in New York. She is the author of several journal articles and has edited with Dr Tan Liok Ee a book on Malaysian historiography, *Alam Pensejarahan: Dari Pelbagai Perspektif*, (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka: Kuala Lumpur, 1966).

Haryati Hasan is a lecturer in history at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. She obtained her Ph.D. from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 2004, and her M.A. and B.A. degrees from Universiti Malaya in 1994 and 1999 respectively. She has published journal articles on Malay women in Kelantan.

Hamidin Abdul Hamid is a senior lecturer in the History Department at Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. He obtained his B.A (Hons.) degree from Universiti Malaya in 1994 and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in African History from the School of Oriental and African Studies at University of London, U.K. in 1996 and 2000 respectively. His other interests include social history and Malaysian historiography.

Cheah Boon Kheng retired in 1994 as a professor of history at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. Since his retirement he has held visiting professorships at the USM, at the Australian National

University in Canberra and at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. His books include *Red Star Over Malaya* (Singapore University Press: Singapore, 1983), *The Peasant Robbers of Kedah, 1900-1929: Historical and Folk Perceptions* (Oxford University Press: K. Lumpur, 1988); *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2002) and *To'Janggut: Legends, Histories and Perceptions of the 1915 Rebellion in Kelantan* (NUS Publishing: Singapore, 2006).

Loh Wei Leng was formerly a professor in the History Department at Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. Her research interests include the economic, business and maritime history of Malaysia. Her recent publications include the essay, "Multicultural Organizations in Asia", in the special issue of *Asia Pacific Business Review*, Vol. 11, No. 4, December, 2005, of which she was guest editor with Heidi Dahles; "Researching Business Networks and Firms in Malaysia" in *Chinese Business History,* Fall, 2004; and "The Colonial State and Business: The Policy Environment in Malaya in the Inter-war years" in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* 33 (2), June 2002.

Mahani Musa is a lecturer in the history department at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang. She obtained her Ph.D. degree from Universiti Malaya in 2003. Her major areas of research are Malaysian social history and the histories of Penang and Kedah. She has published journal articles and monographs, both in Malay and English. Her book *Malay Secret Societies in the Northern Malay States 1821-1940's* was published by the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (MBRAS) in Malay in 2003 and was awarded the society's Mubin Sheppard Memorial Prize. Her most recent book is *The socio-economic history of Malay Women in Kedah* (in Malay), (UKM Press: Bangi, 2005).

Nik Haslinda Nik Hussain is a lecturer in the History Department at Universiti Sains Malaysia. She obtained her B.A. (Hons.) degree from Universitas Udayana, Denpasar in Bali, Indonesia in 1993, her M.A. from Universiti Sains Malaysia in 1998 and her Ph.D. degree from Universiti Malaya in 2006. Her Ph.D. degree thesis is on land and agriculture in Kelantan, 1881-1941. She has published journal articles on Malay rural society and agriculture.

Paul H. Kratoska taught Southeast Asian history at Universiti Sains Malaysia from 1977 until 1987, and at the National University of Singapore from 1987 until 2005. He is currently Managing Director of NUS Press (formerly Singapore University Press). He has written widely on the Japanese occupation, on food and nutrition, and on school textbooks in Southeast Asia. His publications include *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History* (London: C. Hurst, 1998; Japanese translation: Tokyo: Kojinsha, 2005.)

Danny Wong Tze Ken is an associate professor at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya in K. Lumpur. His research interests involve Vietnamese history in the 17th and 19th centuries, Cham-Malay relations and contemporary Vietnamese foreign relations. He is currently doing research on the history of Sabah, East Malaysia and the Chinese community in Malaysia. His books include *Vietnam-Malaysia Relations during the Cold War* (Penerbit Universiti Malaya: Kuala Lumpur, 1995); *The Transformation of an Immigrant Society: History of the Chinese of Sabah* (Asean Academic Press, London, 1998) and *Historical Sabah: Community and Society* (Natural History Publications, Kota Kinabalu, 2004).

Introduction

Cheah Boon Kheng

Since the 1950's and 1960's debates on Euro-centric versus Asia-centric forms of history writing, Malaysian historians have moved away to debate and write their own autonomous histories. Where the earlier debates on historiography were between Malaysians and foreigners, the debates among Malaysian historians themselves now relate to approaches, methodologies, interpretations or how to determine the origins, roles and contributions of the various ethnic groups in the country. They also deal with "alternative histories" – women's history, subaltern history, and post-modern history. They address questions like, "What is to be written?" and "How should it be written?" The impact of an event like the Japanese occupation of Malaysia, for instance, is seen or interpreted differently by historians and by each of the ethnic groups, or in the 'national history,' as presented in the nation's history school textbooks, or in the various state museums.

Within Malaysian historiography, there appear to be two distinctive schools of historians. They differ from one another in their methodologies and approaches, according to Dr Hamidin Abdul Hamid of the history department at Universiti Malaya (UM) in Kuala Lumpur, who is one of our contributors. In a paper he presented at a history seminar at Universiti Malaya on 19th August 2006,[1] Dr Hamidin observes that the two schools are: the dominant or widely influential group of "Rankean and conventional historians" at Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, and the other, a minority of social historians at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. The former includes the first generation of Malaysian historians like Professor Emeritus Datuk Khoo Kay Kim, who were trained at UM's history department and were among those who pioneered the writing of autonomous history in Malaysia. Their impact is such that many junior members of the UM's department and graduate students still follow the Rankean and conventional style of history writing and research. However, the second group of historians, says Dr Hamidin, use social science theories in writing Malaysian history. Dr Hamidin, who himself is a social historian, (see his

1 See Hamidin Abd. Hamid, "Perdebatan yang hilang: Teori dan Sejarah di Malaysia," paper presented at a workshop on postgraduate studies, Department of History, Universiti Malaya, Pantai Valley, Kuala Lumpur, 19 August 2006.

joint essay with Haryati Hasan on 'Writing Marginalized groups into Malaysian history'), says that although the USM social historians emerged from the second generation of post-graduate students or lecturers at UM, yet they broke away to strike out with their own approach in history writing. They differ not only from the UM 'Rankean and conventional historians' in their choice of themes and topics, but also in their methodologies and use of social theory. "Their approach particularly 'history from below' has given an unambiguous picture of social history in Malaysia and made its own impact," says Dr Hamidin.[2]

Besides social history, members of the USM's history department have also been greatly interested in following the latest trends in modern historiography. A major influence on these historians was initially exerted by a senior member of the department, the late Dr R. Suntharalingam, who taught a course in theory and method in history and motivated colleagues and students into thinking about theoretical frameworks and latest historical perspectives in the teaching, learning and research of history. He published two books of his lectures on historiography for students, and initiated the writing and publication of several volumes of staff essays on theoretical topics such as nationalism, colonialism, violence and society. Another influence on the members was derived from the close interaction they had with the USM's School of Social Sciences, especially their sociologists and political scientists in peasant studies, and those researching on poverty, underdevelopment, gender issues and women's history. The USM's history department's interest in historiography led it to organize a national conference on issues relating to Malaysian historiography on 17th–18th August 1992 and an international conference on Southeast Asian historiography, from 30th July to 1st August 1999. An outcome of the first conference was a collection of papers, *Alam Pensejarahan: Dari Pelbagai Perspektif*, (The World of Historiography: From Various Perspectives), edited by Badriyah Haji Salleh and Tan Liok Ee and published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Kuala Lumpur in 1997. The second conference resulted in the publication of another volume of papers, *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History*, edited by Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, in 2003 by Singapore University Press and the Center of International Studies at Ohio University.

In this present volume the contributors, who come from present and former members of the history department of USM and three like-minded historians from Universiti Malaya, focus on neglected topics of research or on new approaches and challenges emerging within Malaysian historiography. The project was first mooted at a history department

2 *Ibid.,*p.8.

meeting in 2005 when the editor, who had retired from USM in 1994, returned to its School of Humanities as a visiting professor for a year. Several of those initially invited to participate had indicated their interest in contributing papers, but due to heavy work commitments, had eventually to withdraw from the project. Consequently, the project's earlier aim of covering a wider spectrum of issues, including diplomatic history, perspectives on ethnic histories and the state histories of Sarawak and Sabah, has only been partially achieved. A few essays in this volume do touch on these areas, such as Abu Talib's Ahmad's essay on state histories, Nik Haslinda's on the history of the *Orang Asli* (formerly known as the aboriginal groups) in the Malay Peninsula, and Danny Wong's and Loh Wei Leng's works make frequent references to Sarawak and Sabah.

The papers are thematically focused on approaches and new areas of research that have already emerged but not gained much ground in Malaysian historiography. Much of current Malaysian historical writing is still descriptive, narrative and empiricist, due to the Rankean influence, and lack analysis, interpretation and theoretical frameworks. The Rankean school at UM has often argued that Malaysian historians should first gather more descriptive data in a "conventional way" before becoming preoccupied with theories or following trends in European historiography.[3] But it is impossible that Malaysian historiography should remain stagnant and aloof at this level indefinitely, without venturing into new theoretical areas or a new set of topics for investigation, or raise questions about the goals and methods of history generally. Should historians concentrate only on thick descriptions and narratives? Historians cannot avoid making generalizations about patterns of human behaviour. Historians also cannot capture the fullness of past experience. Their accounts are necessarily only partial. Historians should, therefore, liberate their thinking from the tyranny of empiricism to generate intellectual excitement; otherwise historical research and writing will remain a dull and uninspiring discipline. Between 1976 and 1990, the general trend in modern historiography had shifted from political and social history toward intellectual and cultural history. New and exciting aspects of human experience are always being discovered. Historians must try and learn from the efforts of others to make sense of their own lives and their complex changing social world. It is increasingly difficult to accept Ranke's view that history is merely narrative and description or is the only way to mirror past reality, "*as it actually was".* Cheah Boon Kheng's

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3 Such a view has been expressed by Khoo Kay Kim in his essay, "Malaysian Historiography: A Further Look," in *Kajian Malaysia,* 10(1), 1992: pp.37–62.

essay discusses the heated debates between the three schools on the elusive nature of achieving historical truth. What the papers in this volume suggest is that new approaches are constantly needed, as modern historiography is complex, changing and inadequate to capture our social world. Further challenges to historians have come from newer trends like deconstructive and postmodern history. Malaysian historians must open their minds to new ideas and approaches, be willing to accept changes and incorporate whatever is beneficial and constructive.

The Book

In this volume Abu Talib Ahmad leads the team with two essays. In his first essay he draws attention to a neglected area in current Malaysian historiography – the 'state histories' in Malaysia. Lamenting that a full-length 'state history' of Kedah state has yet been written, he cites an abundance of sources to justify the undertaking of such a venture. These include Malay literary, historical and legal texts and more recent official records and oral accounts. Court scribes, amateur historians and state museums have all had a hand in writing or presenting some form of Kedah's state history, but their accounts do not seem comprehensive enough. Strangely, no professional historian in the universities has shown any interest in this genre of state histories. Abu Talib suggests the possibility of constructing a more composite and integrated form of Kedah's 'state history' based on all existing historical accounts, including the traditional *hikayat* (Malay historical narratives) and the specific studies that present-day professional historians themselves have researched and written on some aspects or other of the state's political, economic and social activities.

In his second essay Abu Talib Ahmad suggests a revisionist approach towards writing pre-colonial Malay social history through the use of Malay *adat* (customary) laws and Islamic laws in the Malay world not only as historical sources, but also as a means of understanding how past Malay societies achieved a modicum of social stability and the rule of law. This approach challenges the position of some Western scholars, who have argued that these laws were not workable, or were hardly enforced. He examines the *Undang-Undang Melaka* (the Melaka Laws) and others that combined *adat* and Islamic elements, several post-Melaka legal texts and the position of women in these texts to demonstrate how the laws contributed towards creating Malay social stability.

Badriyah Haji Salleh follows up on Abu Talib Ahmad's approach by using a 19th century text of a *syair* (a Malay long poem), the *Syair*

Tantangan Singapura, as an historical source for the study of Malay society in early Singapore. This particular syair, in fact, comprises three short syair, written in 1837, but they were put together under one title and this was discovered only in 1986 at the National Library in Paris. They are considered as "dark syair" since they contain messages of discontent. Unlike another 19th century Singapore Malay syair writer, Munshi Abdullah, the chroniclers of these syair are critical of the British authorities and the sultan in Singapore. Tuan Simi is the author of two syair, while the author of the third is anonymous.

Cheah Boon Kheng's essay surveys the three main schools of modern historiography – the empiricist, the constructionist/social science and the deconstructive – and evaluates their respective strengths and weaknesses. He examines how these schools, especially the latest postmodern history, have impacted on or present challenges to Malaysian historical writing. He outlines the controversies and debates, looks at the failure of traditional historical methods, the elusive nature of historical truth and argues why Malaysian historians need to explore the role of the historian more critically. Malaysian historians need also to confront the challenge of the latest postmodernist position by understanding their representations of the past, that history is defined as the textual product of historians and narrative as the textual model for the past itself.

In their essay Haryati Hasan and Hamidin Abd. Hamid argue against the Rankean approach to historical writing and urge Malaysian historians to take up the writing of Malaysian social history. They should focus on marginalized groups who would otherwise have no place within Malaysian history. In their own case study of social history, they highlight the role played by Malay trishaw (pedicab) riders in Kota Bahru in Kelantan state between 1960s and 1980s as pimps or 'middlemen' of prostitutes. They show that even with the use of official sources, it is still possible to write Malaysian social history of such marginalized groups. More importantly, they argue, it is the historian's interpretation and framework of analysis that will provide the defining moment for these groups.

Paul H. Kratoska in his essay laments the fact that nationalist historians writing about Malaysia's past tend to write "prospectively", that is looking forward into the present rather than backward or "retrospectively" into the past in order to justify current policies in Malaysia, thereby forgetting the problems of periodisation, geographical borders, state structures and civic identities. The proper understanding of the colonial state, he argues, is not through the present nation-state, with its implied uniformity, but through an awareness that Malaysia and its component parts went through different phases under different names and as different

territories. He takes to task historians who falsify the past and misrepresent its different periods by treating Malaysia as if it were a unified entity before the British came. Malaysia, he asserts, comprised many Malayas including a Malay Malaya, a British Malaya and a Malaya of different peoples. Similarly, Malaysia's history could also be constructed or periodized around developments in economic activities – in agriculture, mining, in banking and finance, the activities of agency houses, in labour supply and so forth.

Loh Wei Leng in her survey of Malaysian economic history writing observes that there are more publications on the 19th century, with less on the late, post and pre-colonial periods, more written on the peninsula than on Sabah and Sarawak, and more on the key primary commodities, tin and rubber. Notwithstanding the new writing in the last two decades, Malaysian economic history is limited in its coverage, in terms of its temporal, spatial and sectoral focus, and that it is short on the application of the analytical tools of economics. Because fewer economists have been drawn to history, fewer economic history articles have utilized theories and sophisticated statistical techniques employed by the cliometrically-inclined economic historians of the west since the 1960s. However, she argues that there is plenty of room for more work on the late, post and pre-colonial periods.

Nik Haslinda Hussain's essay calls for a new perspective on the history of the Orang Asli (aboriginal groups) in the Malay Peninsula as a marginalized community from the end of the 19th century until the 1960's. Their history must be constructed from a social-cultural viewpoint. Providing statistics of their population and different groups, she argues how ethnographers had discovered the Orang Asli and exposed them to the impact of the outside world, transforming their lives forever. It was largely the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960) that led to intensified government efforts to bring them into permanent settlements closer to urban areas, to provide them with security and protection and to prevent them from falling under the influence of the communist insurgents. Despite the best intentions of the Malaysian government to promote their welfare, and bring them within its development programmes, they remain a marginalized and neglected group.

In her essay Mahani Musa points out that despite archival efforts to expand the collection of data on the history of Malay women in Malaysia, studies in that field are still lacking, compared with studies on the history of Malaysian Chinese women. In her survey of the sources available, she focuses on the rich data on Malay women that has emerged from the state archives of Kedah and Kelantan. She shows the potential for studies of the

socio-economic history of Malay women in the two states through a meticulous scrutiny of a variety of official documents. She believes more data on Malay women in other state archives wait to be uncovered. It is only when women's history for all states is known, she argues, that a more comprehensive Malay women's history in Malaysia could be attempted without risking the pitfalls of generalization.

Finally, Danny Wong Tze Ken's essay reveals that despite considerable progress over the years in the writing of Malaysian Chinese history, gaps exist not only in terms of language, but also in approach and the sources consulted. There is a need to move beyond the *conventional survey* approach to examine the historical progress of the community in a more meaningful manner, and to venture into new areas. Historical studies written in Chinese tend to be culture-inclined, based on individual states, or on dialect sub-groups, while those in English usually focus on political development and the transformation of the community in relation to the larger framework of the Malaysian state. Histories written in Chinese are rich in detail and anecdotes, while those in English are more general and focus on broad themes. Their different approaches and interpretations in the available historical surveys show the field of study is split into two main streams of approach and thought, and serious efforts must be made to bridge this divide. A more integrated and comprehensive account of the history of the Malaysian Chinese still awaits writing.

These essays embrace a healthy skepticism about the power of elites and challenge many dominant views, especially in national histories, offer contesting visions of the past and encourage changes in perspectives and approaches. A few essays have called for recognition of the roles and contributions of women, minorities, and other excluded groups, and draw attention to neglected topics of research. One or two essays have urged historians to re-examine the theory and practice of their discipline, aware that many are hostile to philosophical and methodological criticism of their work. Generally, the essays emphasize the need for Malaysian historians to produce histories with varied perspectives thought to be more in tune with the values of a socially divisive society based on the diversity of ethnic, gender and human experience. With globalization, when new history standards are being published in the world that seek to incorporate recent scholarship on women, minorities and marginalized groups, new themes and topics, and with innovative theories, approaches and methodologies, it would be short-sighted for Malaysian historians to close their eyes to what is happening around them. The need to harness new and positive ideas to the research and writing of Malaysian history in the twenty-first century cannot be denied.

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Scribes and Historians, State Museums And State Histories

Abu Talib Ahmad

Introduction

There is not much focus on Malay state history or provincial history and its development in current Malaysian historiography. Many of us are familiar with the various Malay state chronicles of Pahang, Perak, Kedah, Kelantan and Johor which have been in existence since the 17th century, hand copied from one generation to another that resulted in different versions. Most have been transliterated into Romanised Malay and are available in printed form. These chronicles are invaluable in shedding light on the traditional Malay world view although their historical importance is somewhat suspect. Then there are the works of amateur historians like Buyong Adil, Muhammad Salleh Haji Awang (Misbaha) and Saad (Asaad) Sukri Haji Muda, who had published their versions of state history during the second half of the last century. As they wrote state histories in English, fellow amateur historians James F. Augustin and G. Mohamed Khan might be better known outside Malaysia, but less so within the country. Having published a state history for each of the states in the Malaysian federation, Buyong Adil is the most prolific of these amateur historians and the most well known. The works of these amateur historians exhibit a certain continuity with the court scribes before the emergence of professional historians in the second half of the 20th century. But the professional historians have shunned the production of state histories, although they have subjected various histories of the states to critical enquiry.

Focussing on Kedah's history, this essay attempts to assess the importance of the court scribes and amateur historians and their works. The essay also discusses the kind of Kedah state histories that have been written by Malaysia's professional historians and organisations, like state museums, and state libraries, and whether these have developed beyond what had already been achieved by either the court scribes or the amateur historians. Attention is also given to the possibility of writing a more acceptable state history. Kedah offers the best example of the differing phases of state history writing involving the court scribes, amateur historians, the professional historians, the state museum and the state

library. Even the local chapter of the Malaysian Historical Society is actively involved in the production of various aspects of state history. The following discussion is confined to the works of Malaysian authors.

Court scribes and state history

In the heyday of the Malay sultanates, the writing of state history was left to the court scribes who went about their business at the behest of the ruling sovereign. The kind of state history created was necessarily dynastic, focusing on the raja or sultan and his royal genealogy. Myths and legends were inserted to buttress the grandeur of the ruler and his lineage. More often, the merits of these works are literary rather than historical. Scrutinised under the rigour of modern historical method, which is very much a western construction, these chronicles become anything but history. Understandably, western scholars, and many local ones (including Abdul Hadi Hasan in the 1920s), were critical of them and dismissed them as "pseudo-history," while others defended them. The defenders argued, quite rightly, that one had to look beyond the myths and legends to get to the real story or history, and to grasp the traditional Malay world view. In fact to understand traditional Malay historiography, a study of this kind of state history is a necessity.

Broadly, there are two variants of court scribes. The first refers to the more traditional author of the classical state history or chronicles of states like Kedah, Perak[1] and Kelantan[2] besides the *Sejarah Melayu,*[3] which refers to the glorious Melaka sultanate and its society that encompass both traders and agriculturists. Not much is known about these types of scribes, other than that they were local literati from the nobility who were ordered by their ruler to compile the history of the state so as to inform subsequent generations of the glory and splendor of the sultanate. A few provide glimpses of their person, like Tun Seri Lanang who was a high ranking official of the 17th century Johore sultanate and who is regarded as the compiler of the *Sejarah Melayu,*[4] or Raja Chulan

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1 Raja Chulan bin Hamid, *Misa Melayu Hikayat Salsilah Perak* [Misa Melayu history of Perak genealogy] (Kuala Lumpur, Pustaka Antara: 1968)

2 Mohd Taib Osman, *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* [Kelantan chronicle] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 2004)

3 *Sejarah Melayu The Malay Annals* edited by Cheah Boon Kheng and romanised by Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail (Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS: 1998); and Abdul Samad Ahmad, *Sulalatus Salatin* (Sejarah Melayu) [Sulalatus Salatin (the Malay Annals) (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1979)

4 Abdul Samad Ahmad, *Sulalatus Salatin* (Sejarah Melayu) [Sulalatus Salatin (the Malay Annals)] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1979)

Raja Abdul Hamid, the compiler of the *Misa Melayu* who was an accomplished poet and awarded the title Raja Kechil Besar by his cousin the Perak sultan in the mid-18th century. Raja Chulan was later assassinated by an aggrieved husband. Other scribes like the author of the various versions of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* remain unknown; the scribe (or author) of the 1898 published version was Muhammad Yusof bin Nasruddin who based it on various manuscripts of the *hikayat* then available in Singapore[5] while the Maxwell 16 version was copied by Muhammad Nuruddin bin Ahmad in Penang in 1879.[6]

The second type of court scribes is basically a 19th and 20th century phenomenon. They had served in the state administration and became scribes either, while still in service, or on their retirement. Coming from the period's literati class this latter type did exhibit some rudiments of the modern style of history writing, in particular their incorporation of dates, albeit based on the Muslim calendar which might pose problems to readers. Although oral traditions remained the main source of reference, these scribes do describe in detail events that were closer to them, such as the founding of the modern sultanate of Pahang[7] and Johore in the mid-19th century.[8] Their manuscripts were handwritten in Jawi, and many copies are presently preserved in various libraries and archives but a few copies were printed and have been made widely available. Equally significant, is the attempt to do away with the myths and legends and to relate their work as "history" using such words like *tarekh* (date) and *tawarikh* which is the Arabic word for history (popularised by Winstedt during the First World War, although their usage had begun as early as the 1870s) and used widely until the 1960s before being supplanted by the word *sejarah* which also means history. A few notable court scribes of this variant are Wan Yahya Wan Mohammad Taib and Muhammad Hassan, both from Kedah. Others, like the authors of less publicised manuscripts remain unknown although their works evinced much interest from many quarters. Some do have a point to prove on matters affecting the state, such as the succession issue of Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1881[9] or to emphasize, besides political loyalty and unity, that members of the Perak

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5 Hendrik J. M. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority: The Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Ithaca, Cornell University: 1988) p. 89, 101

6 Hendrik J. M. Maier, *In the Centre of Auhority*, p. 166

7 Kalthum Jeran, *Hikayat Pahang* [The Pahang chronicle] (Petaling Jaya, Fajar Bakti: 1986)

8 Mu'jizah, *Hikayat negeri Johor* [Johore chronicle] (Jakarta, Pusat Pengembangan Bahasa, Departmen Pendidikan Nasional: 1991)

9 Khoo Khay Jin, "Tunku Kudin: A Scribe's Defence" in *JMBRAS* 63 (1): 1990

line especially descendants of Bendahara Raja Mahmud (Marhum Sayung who died in 1815) were the legitimate heirs of the Melaka dynasty and the rightful successors to the Perak throne.[10] However this latter type of scribes became extinct with the onset of the amateur and professional historians although their works continue to exert some influence on subsequent historical research.

In traditional state history writing of Kedah, three significant and representative works are, namely, the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* [Kedah Annals], *Salasilah atau Tarekh Kerja-an Kedah* [Genealogy or the dates/history of Kedah] and the *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* [Dates/history of the Kedah royal genealogy]. They are actually different versions of the history of Kedah, all seen from the perspective of the ruling class. The latter two were published in the first quarter of the 20th century and were closer to the modern historical tradition. The *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* fits into the genre of traditional historical works like the *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*.[11]

Siti Hawa Salleh, the leading local scholar who has studied the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa,* has criticised western scholars who generally accorded little recognition to the Kedah Annals. She wrote favourably of James Low, an official of the East India Company (EIC), who had treated the annals favourably although the reason Low did so, was to show his readers Kedah's dependant position on Siam: he argued that since Kedah was Siam's vassal, the Siamese invasion of 1821 was an internal affair that did not justify British interference.[12] Neither was Siti Hawa pleased with Hendrik J. M. Maier's criticism of her monumental study of the Kedah Annals.[13] Siti Hawa also seemed to be uneasy with the attraction among younger scholars to Maier's intertextual study of the same chronicle which is very much influenced by post-modernism which has gained wide currency since the 1960s, and which Siti Hawa is uncomfortable with. To many younger scholars like Noriah Taslim, Maier's interpretation is a novelty as it attempts to make the reading of the Malay *hikayat* much more interesting and relevant to the contemporary setting, by decoding the meanings and metaphors in the text. Unlike what has been criticised by Siti Hawa, Maier actually argues that the Kedah

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10 Amelia Ceridwen, "The Silsilah Raja-Raja Perak l: An Historical and Literary Investigation into the Political Significance of a Malay Court Genealogy" in *JMBRAS* 74 (2): 2001 pp. 46–73

11 Siti Hawa Salleh (ed.), *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* [The Kedah Annals] (Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Malaya Press: 1991)

12 Hendrik J. M. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority*, p. 24, 38, 40–41, 45, 49

13 Hendrik J. M. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority*, pp. 154–155 and p. 176

Annals is a much better "example of Malay literary genius, more reliable and more persuasive than the *Sejarah Melayu."*[14] To James Low, Maier accorded much less flattery, describing this EIC official's translation of the annals as "not just to discover how things had been in the past, but to distil facts from it that could be utilised in the situation of his own day, in the interests of present needs: Kedah should be left to Siam, and the Malays still have a long way to go on the road to human perfection and rationality."[15]

Coming back to Siti Hawa's arguments and echoing the views of scholars like A. Teeuw and Amin Sweeney (and repeated by later scholars like Amelia Ceridwen), Siti Hawa suggested that readers look at the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* from the perspective of the local cultural milieu especially "from the perspective of the one who ordered it to be written (the raja or sultan), the one ordered to write it (court scribe) and the socio-political values at the time it was written." She reiterated that most classical Malay literary works are straight-forward, and they use a variety of representations which were known within Malay society to convey their messages. These works originated from the palace for certain purposes, and readers have to grasp the explicit meanings which are more important than the implicit ones. As for the date of its compilation, the earliest local experts suggest, is the mid-17th century when the first Kedah laws were compiled although Maier insists it was done in the early 19th century.[16]

In her passionate defence, Siti Hawa claimed the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* is a great literary and historical work. I agree it is a great literary work, but have reservations that it is a great historical work. The chronicle revolves around the rulers of Kedah and is divided into two parts – the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic periods. The scribe did not put much emphasis on the truth (reality) or otherwise of his facts: everything is possible with the permission of Allah the Al-mighty (which includes *rezeki*, *perkara yang memutuskan rezeki, jodoh pertemuan* and divorce).[17]

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15 Hendrik J. M. Maier, *In the Centre of Auhority*, p. 49

16 Mariyam Salim (ed.), *Undang-Undang Kedah* [The Kedah laws] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 2005). The earliest of the 5 series of Kedah laws namely the port laws (undang-undang pelabohan) was compiled in 1060 Hejira or 1650 AD during the reign of Sultan Rijaluddin Mahmud Shah which subsequently witnessed the rapid development of commerce with trading links with the Indian subcontinent and the Malay archipelago. This study also critically reassesses an earlier study by R. O. Winstedt, "Kedah Laws" which received much acclaim when it first appeared in 1928 in *JMBRAS* 6 (2).

17 Siti Hawa Haji Salleh (ed.), *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa,* p. lxvi

The strength of the chronicle lies in the period after Islam was accepted by the Kedah aristocracy. It then is filtered down to the *rakyat* although the method ascribed to the spread of the faith is rather fanciful (although manifesting the genius streak of the author). The destruction of idols and other Hindu-Buddhist paraphenalia failed to erase unIslamic cultures and values which remained for a long time in the state's Malay society. In fact the intermixture of Islamic and Indian influences in the text is a reflection of the importance of both in Malay society.

Siti Hawa has labelled the author of the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* a great writer [*penulis agung*] with a talent for story telling, highly knowledgeable in various fields, and smart enough to undertstand his role as a court scribe.[18] This scribe was able to combine historical facts with myths and legends to project the history of Kedah with the focus on the raja, his family, the chiefs and the aristocracy. For this purpose, he was faithful to the traditional convention of Malay historical writings namely (1) to record for posterity the sultanate, and, (2) to maintain and strengthen the ruler's aura through the exposition of his genealogy, besides highlighting the ruler's special strengths. As in traditional Malay historiography, Siti Hawa admits that both anachronism, fiction and facts were all jumbled up. As a historian, I find these facets indistinguishable from each other, thus significantly diminishing the historical value of the text.

The main thrusts of the Kedah Annals are many, and these include the founding of the state and how Islam came to Kedah. Attention is also given to the system of court succession, the appointment of chiefs, the division of functions and responsibilities among the chiefs and state officials, the position and continuity of *adat*, economic development, relations with other states/powers, wars and so forth. The dates especially for the pre-Islamic period and to a certain extent even after Islamisation are woefully inadequate, while the myths and legends made their presence felt in an overbearing manner. Yet the lack of a time frame was not a drawback to the text, for according to Siti Hawa, what took place was much more important than the date of its occurrence. If the raja is projected as a supernatural being with an undoubted right to rule, the people too, especially the nobility, had the right to go against a wicked and evil ruler like Raja Bersiong. Kedah's mythical origin as described by this chronicle is extraordinary but no different from other chronicles in Asia like the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* which provide an equally mythical origin of

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18 Siti Hawa Haji Salleh, *Sebutir Pasir* [A lump of sand] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1992) pp. 52–53

the Japanese state[19] or the *Glass Palace Chronicles* which trace the history of Burma to the 6th century BC, a claim not supported by any archaelogical evidence.[20]

Some of the places mentioned in the text such as Naka, Sungai Mas, Bukit Meriam, Bukit Jambul, Kayang (Perlis), Gunung Keriang, Bukit Lada and Kubang Pasu are factually verifiable. Sungai Mas was an ancient trading site that linked Kedah with India and the Middle East and the West and China in the east, a vibrant linkage that is corroborated by archaeological evidence.[21] The existing lack of interest in these places was related to their Hindu-Buddhist cultural connections although the significance of the Bujang Valley is much more than Indian influences – namely Kedah's connection to the global and international trade and its impact on indigenous society. This aspect has not been systematically studied, although Mohd Supian's study on the archaeology of the Bujang Valley does add to our understanding of early Kedah history in terms of the spread of Indian cultural influences (6th to the 9th centuries) and trade (9th until the 13–14th centuries), although the discussion, and the evidence, lacked depth compared to similar studies on other parts of Southeast Asia during the same period.[22]

The other well known state history, *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* is similarly dynastic.[23] Maier made a penetrating comment on this text, and other local scholars like Mohd Isa Othman followed suit. Both agreed on the importance of this text as a historical document. It was

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19 *Kojiki* translated with an Introduction and Notes by Donald L. Philippi (Tokyo, University of Tokyo Press: 1977); and, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* translated from the original Chinese and Japanese by W. G. Aston (Tokyo, Charles E. Tuttle: 1975)

20 Pe Maung Tin and Gordon Luce (trans. & eds.), *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma* (London, Oxford University Press: 1923)

21 Mohd Supian Sabtu, *Tamadun Awal Lembah Bujang* [The early civilization of the Bujang valley] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 2002)

22 See for instance Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia: The 7th and 8th Centuries* (Tokyo, The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco, The Toyo Bunko: 1998); Michael Aung Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu, The University of Hawaii Press: 1985); Gordon Luce, *Phases of Pre-Pagan: Languages and History* vol. 1 & 2 (London, Oxford University Press: 1985); and Janice Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma: Early Pyu Cities in a man-made Landscape* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Presss & ISEAS: 1990)

23 See also the discussion in Mohammad Isa Othman, "Al-tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah: Sebuah Pensejarah" in Abu Talib Ahmad & Cheah Boon Kheng (eds.), *Isu-Isu Pensejarahan (Esei Penghargaan kepada Dr R. S. Suntharalingam)* [Issues in historiography (Essays in honour of Dr. R. S. Suntharalingam)] (Penang, Universiti Sains Malaysia Press: 1995) pp. 31–43

compiled on the order of the regent, Tunku Ibrahim Sultan Abdul Hamid[24] who was unhappy with an earlier state history *Salasilah atau Tarekh Kerja-an Kedah* which was compiled by Wan Yahya in 1911. *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* was written by Muhammad Hassan Muhammad Arshad (1868–1941) who had liberally used *tawarikh* in the text while his sources were court documents, family papers, and oral history. How much the imagination of the scribe was put into the text is not known; a point Maier had raised, as we have no access to the sources that were consulted by Muhammad Hassan.

Muhammad Hassan's intellectual pedigree is impressive. His ancestor was Sheikh Abdul Jalil al-Madani the religious guru for Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Adilin Muadzam Shah who had three sons (two from his Kedah wife – one of whom was Sheikh Abdul Kadir[25] who became the state mufti – and one from his Palembang wife, Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Palembangi) who had rendered meritorious service to the Kedah sultanate. His father Muhammad Arshad was an influential penghulu, and later served as confidential secretary to Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah (1854–1879). He died in Bangkok in 1879, while on a mission to settle the succession crisis, while his brother Muhammad Ariffin served as the Kedah state secretary between 1905–22 and a member of the first State Council. Muhammad Hassan was born in 1868 and had his early education in Alor Setar along with Tunku Abdul Hamid who later became sultan (1882–1943). A close confidante of Abdul Hamid he accompanied the Sultan on trips to Burma, India, Siam, England and France. After his retirement, Muhammad Hassan was given a pension and *ampun kurnia* (royal gift), a fief in the Telaga Mas area. He was also appointed as one of the lesser chiefs and in 1936, became one of the first recipients of the Justice of the Peace awarded by the British administration. In 1926 the regent ordered him to write a history of the state which became known as *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah*. It was printed in 1928 in Penang by the Jelutong Press. This version is in Jawi, while the Romanised version was published in 1968 by Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka which was based on a manuscript provided by one of Muhammad Hassan's family members. There is a printing error in pagination in the Jawi version when the following page after 140 appears as page 201 although there is no interruption in the flow of the text.

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24 Muhammad Hassan, *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* [Dates/ history of the Kedah royal genealogy] (Pulau Pinang, Jelutong Press: 1928)

25 Muhammad Hassan was the great grandson of Sheikh Abdul Kadir and his equally famous brother was Muhammad Ariffin.

I have consulted both versions and found the Romanised one better. This version contains a foreword from former prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman (1957–70) who was a son of Sultan Abdul Hamid, an introduction by the transliterator and a short biographical note of Muhammad Hasan as well as a photograph of him in formal attire. Unlike the Jawi version, the Romanised version is divided into twenty chapters which are appropriately titled to provide easy reference.

Muhammad Hassan continues the style of the earlier court scribes by projecting a positive image of the sultans depicting them as "*sangat kaseh akan segala menterinya dan sentiasa mengambil insaf di atas rakyat isi negeri*." Undeniably the text is devoid of the myths like the Raja Bersiong (ruler with tusk) as found in the Kedah Annals but Muhammad Hassan certainly did not write the full story as shown by his cavalier treatment of various aspects of Kedah history such as the *Bunga Mas dan Perak* (Gold and Silver Flowers), the dismemberment of the state into Setul, Kubang Pasu, Kayang and Kedah proper, Kedah's relation with Acheh notably during the early 17th century,[26] the endless domestic and external challenges faced by a number of its rulers including Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Adilin Muadzam Shah (1710–1778) who was troubled by challenges from close family members that culminated in a rebellion in 1771. This also involved the Bugis and the contest for the throne in 1880–81 that involved Tunku Kudin and the future Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (1882–1943).[27] The focus on interstate relations was meant to highlight the grandeur of the ruler as of equal rank with, if not higher than, other traditional despots within the region, not an unusual aspect which is comparable to other chronicles such as the *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* (Kelantan chronicle) which, similarly, focuses on the raja, his family, the chiefs and the aristocracy and Kelantan's relationship with Siam through the story of Puteri Sa'dung who had become an icon of sorts.[28]

Unlike most amateur historians, Muhammad Hassan's list of Kedah rulers in the *Al-tarikh Salasilah* include the pre-Islamic ones starting from

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26 Yet others like Mansur Ahmad had quoted extensively from Muhammad Hassan in his little book *Acheh Melanggar Kedah [Aceh attacked Kedah],* (Penang, Sinaran Brothers: 1956) which actually did not enrich Kedah history as the series intended to do.

27 See the thought provoking discussion in Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, "The Kedah Succession Crisis 1879–1882" in *JMBRAS* 62 (2): 1989; and Khoo Khay Jin, "Tunku Kudin: A Scribe's Defence" in *JMBRAS* 63 (1): 1990

28 Mohd Taib Osman, *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 2004); see also Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, "Dialogue of Two Pasts: 'Historical Facts' in Traditional Thai and Malay Historiography" in Abu Talib Ahmad & Tan Liok Ee (eds.), *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History* (Ohio, Ohio University Press: 2003)

the first ruler, Maharaja Derbar Raja who came from Persia to Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah who was listed as the 33rd raja. The prominent ones were Sultan Ataullah Muhammad Shah 1 (1687–1698), Sultan Mahmud Shah 11 (1506–1548), Sultan Dhia'uddin Al-Mukaram Shah 1 (1661–1681), Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Adilin Muadzam Shah (1710–1778), Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah (1778–1797), Sultan Zainal Rashid 1 (1845–1853), Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah (1853–1879), and Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (1882–1943).

The first ruler Maharaja Derbar Raja, a non-Muslim, put in place a form of administrative structure and responsibilities of the high ranking state officials including the four and eight chiefs (menteri empat and menteri lapan). He also brought in the *nobat* (state drums) although a more recent account indicates it was brough in much later. By the time of the 4th ruler Sri Maharaja Kerma Diraja, also a non-Muslim, "*peratoran menteri-menteri ke Empat, ke Lapan dan ke Enambelas diperketatkan dan pekerjaan masing-masing ditentukan*." Kedah had a system of Raja Muda or Crown Prince who was usually the sultan's brother or uncle but who did not succeed to the throne. An exception was Sultan Dhiauddin (1798–1804) who was later challenged by the deceased sultan's eldest son Tunku Pangeran who later became Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin. Dhiauddin is now condemned as acting sultan in some accounts, although he is officially accepted as the 21st ruler of Kedah. Another challenge led to a civil war, and, in two other cases in the second half of the 19th century, the challenge from the Raja Muda and his supporters was strong, but did not precipitate warfare.

To the scribe, Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Adilin Muadzam Shah, one of the his favourite rulers, exemplified the learned ruler, who was credited with instituting a new currency and weights and measures, such as the *relong* (equal to one and half acres) which is still in use to measure land. The ruler also founded Kota (Alor) Setar which became the new state capital in 1735. An earlier system of currency was put in place by Sultan Mahmud Shah II (1506–1546) which was based on the one widely used in Melaka before 1511. In fact Melaka's influence was also evident in commerce and the port regulations of subsequent Kedah rulers. Muhammad Hassan included a dialogue which Sultan Muhammad Jiwa had with his senior officials, including his religious guru Sheikh Abdul Jalil al-Madani, the *mufti,* and the *mufti*'s timely injunction against rulers and officials dabbling in trade.[29] Kedah's territory had also expanded to

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29 Muhammad Hassan, *Al-tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah*, Romanised version p. 115–121; Jawi version 135– 203 (sic 140)

include Tongkah, Trang, Ranong and Mergui, while piracy was kept at bay through vigorous measures. These definitely contributed to the kingdom's prosperity and expansion of trade.

His other favourite ruler is Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah, described as the father of modern Kedah, but whose ascension was challenged by the Raja Muda although, in the end, the support of the lesser aristocracy powered by the three Wans – Wan Ismail, Wan Ibrahim and Wan Muhammad Taib – proved crucial. This sultan went on to develop Kota Setar (notably road construction) and encouraged Chinese traders to expand trade in the town (and the state). He also opened the first Malay school in the state and brought in the rudiments of modern health services. Undoubtedly all these were facilitated by the good relationship he enjoyed with both the Siamese and the British in Penang.

Inadvertently, scholars are drawn to compare the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* with the *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah*.[30] One area of comparison is the origin of the Kedah rulers. Merong Mahawangsa is compared with Derbar Raja, a refugee Persian prince who was elevated to the rajaship by local chiefs after he and his retinue landed in the Merbok area. Another significant difference is the spread of Islam which took place during different reigns (not to mention the different mode of its spread). In the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* Islam was spread by Sheikh Abdullah from Yemen during the reign of the 7th raja; the same missionary appears in the *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* but his appearance is during the reign of the 9th ruler (521 Hejira or 1136 AD). At present, this date is semi-officially accepted as the time of the arrival of Islam to Kedah, and the start of its ruling house which has been in place unbroken since then.[31]

Equally significant, is the different treatment given to the sending of the *Bunga Mas dan Perak* (the gold and silver flowers) to Siam. The *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* claims this was instituted during the reign of the 3rd raja as a mark of civility and affection while the *Al-tarikh* states this took place during the reign of the 7th ruler, out of gratitude for the Siamese vassal state of Ligor's crucial assistance during the war with Burma. This offering included a gold tree with four branches, cloth, lance and spear. The *Al-tarikh* states the gift was sent once every three years

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30 Siti Hawa Salleh (ed.), *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, pp. LXll–LXlll; *Al-Tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* the romanised version. See also Mohd Supian Sabtu, *Tamadun Awal Lembah Bujang*, pp. 11–19

31 Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusoff, *Kedah Darul Aman Sepanjang Zaman* [Kedah Darul Aman through the ages] (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992) pp. 2–3

although there is not much mention in the text "as it had become a customary practice" except in the early 19th century when Tunku Anom, the reigning Sultan's cousin was appointed to head the Kedah *Bunga Mas* delegation to Ligor. Elsewhere we know of its vicissitudes depending on the strength of Siam to make impositions and Kedah's ability to resist them.[32] Others like Mohd Supian, just like James Low had rudimentarily undertaken before, have compared the various state capitals as highlighted in both chronicles with archaeological evidence which support the existence of Kota Aur, Kota Sungai Mas, Bukit Meriam and Bukit Penjara – all located between the Merbok estuary and the Muda river.

In contrast, the *Salasilah atau Tarekh Kerja-an Kedah* made only a feeble attempt to adulate the raja and his genealogy. Not much is known of its author Wan Yahya Wan Muhammad Taib. He was born in the early 1870s or late 1860s and had his early education in Seberang Perai. Before joining the civil service he served in the Kedah police and rose to the rank of inspector. As a senior official of the Kedah sultanate Wan Yahya was appointed as the first Superintendent of Opium Monopoly, later served as Changloon (Kubang Pasu)[33] district officer & magistrate and between 1922–29, was the Kedah state secretary. He died in 1935. His father Wan Muhammad Taib was Kedah's *mufti* very close to the sultan; his grandfather Wan Musa, the Dato' Paduka Maharaja Temenggong Anggota Desa (one of the four second rank chiefs or Menteri Empat who was associated with the state's land forces) died a martyr (*mati shahid* hence the addition of the name Wan Musa al-Shahidi in some accounts) with Tunku Kudin at the Kuala Kedah fort in 1831. There is also a canal from Kodiang to Kuala Sanglang that still bears his name (Sungai Korok Wan Yahya): it was dug when he was the State Secretary. Wan Yahya was a progressive official, who supported reforms undertaken by the Raja Muda whom he adulates in his text. His state history was based on oral sources which he hoped would satisfy his readers. Apparently it did please the laity but not the aristocracy (Maier indicated otherwise) and possibly the British with Wan Yahya's biting criticism of the EIC's role in assisting the Siamese during the 1821–41 war of anti-Siamese resistance.

The *Salasilah atau Tarekh Kerja-an Kedah* was published in Jawi in 1911 in Alor Setar and the romanised version in 1913 and reprinted in

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32 R. Bonney, *Kedah 1771-1821: The Search for Security and Independence* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press: 1974) second reprint pp. 11–19

33 At that time the districts were Changloon (Kubang Pasu), Yan, Kuala Muda, Kulim, Krian and Langkawi while Kota Setar was administered directly under the central administration at Alor Setar (presently there are 11 districts in the state).

1928 reflecting what Maier claims the Malay inability to choose between the continuation of traditions and the break towards a new era. Wan Yahya chose to commit to "observable facts rather than drawing on rules and themes of the heritage."[34] Undoubtedly, this chronicle is the most objective of the traditional state histories and nearest to the modern form of history writing, in Maier's words, "a challenge to tradition's authority." Its strong anti-Siamese tone was reflective of similar feeling in Kedah after the state was "sold off" to Britain by means of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. *Salasilah atau Tarekh Kerja-an Kedah* discusses briefly Kedah's early history, starting with Merong Mahawangsa who founded the sultanate in 630 AD. His descendant later brought in the *nobat* which is associated with the aura of the ruling house and played during royal installations, wedding ceremonies and other auspicuous occassions. There is much more excitement in the text with regards to the arrival of Islam in the 14th century (in contrast to other accounts) which was associated with Sheikh Abdullah from Yemen. With Islamisation, Kedah rulers assumed Islamic names and Kedah came to be known until today as Kedah Darul Aman (the peaceful village or country).

Towards the end of the 16th century, Kedah began to encounter foreign contacts and threats. Both the East India Company (EIC) and the Dutch began their overtures around this time. Kedah also attracted powerful neighbouring rulers like Acheh's Sultan Iskandar Alam who attacked the state in 1619 and destroyed its trade and pepper plantations. The chronicle depicted the Kedah ruler Raja Sulaiman as a prisoner of Iskandar Alam who died in captivity in Acheh.[35] In 1641 the Dutch opened a factory in Kedah but closed it down in 1651.

Wan Yahya was particularly incensed with Siam's role in the destiny of the state. Significantly, there is no mention of the *Bunga Mas dan Perak* anywhere in the text. Rather, the account is a catalogue of Siamese infringements on Kedah's sovereignty beginning with the attack in 1720 during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Jiwa. It was also during his reign that domestic contests for power came to the surface, with one group led by one of his brothers enlisting Bugis assistance from Selangor that led directly to the 1771 rebellion. Kedah's search for foreign assistance to ensure its security led to the "cession" of Penang island to the EIC in 1786 for a fee of 6000 straits dollars on the belief that Kedah would get the much sought-after security against the Siamese. Most accounts blamed

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34 Hendrik J. M. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority*, p. 133, 138

35 Wan Yahya Wan Muhammad Taib, *Salasilah atau Tarekh Kerja-an Kedah* [Genealogy or the date/history of Kedah state] (Penang, Merchantile Press: 1928) p. 4

Francis Light for the failure of Kedah to secure such military assistance but Wan Yahya defended the English captain by highlighting a letter purportedly sent by Light to the governor general in which he urged the provision of assistance failing which Kedah would make overtures to the Dutch or the Danes. In 1800 Sultan Dhiauddin Mukarram Shah ceded the mainland territory of Perai for 10,000 Spanish dollars. This came in the wake of Kedah's failure to retake Penang by force in 1791.

Wan Yahya blamed Siam and her demands for manpower and war materials for Kedah's weak position in the early 19th century. In 1788 Kedah was ordered to supply 5000 men and 150 war boats in the war against the Burmese. To this scribe this represented Siamese attempt "to weaken the state to facilitate a takeover." In 1811, Siam again asked Kedah to supply another 1500 men and 100 boats against the Burmese and again in 1818. In 1816 Kedah was ordered to attack Perak and the Kedah forces went as far as Kuala Kangsar to fulfil its obligation to Siam although the *Al-tarikh* claimed the attack was to settle the Kedah-Perak boundary dispute in the Selama region. These incessant demands only impoverished the state and rendered her weak. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin's poor relationship with the chiefs exacerbated the situation.

In November 1821, the Siamese launched a surprise attack and conquered Kedah. Siamese forces were to stay on for the next 21 years despite local harrassments. To this scribe, this move was the culmination of Siamese efforts that had been in place in the preceding 90 years without Kedah being aware of this grand design. To further weaken the state, Kedah was dismembered into four provinces namely Setul, Perlis, Kubang Pasu and Kedah proper – all governed by different persons .

Kedah Malays and their supporters including those from Penang did not give up easily to the Siamese occupation and they organised resistance in the 1820s and the 1830s. In 1829 Tunku Kudin or Syed Zainal Abidin who was related to Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin launched a counterattack against the Siamese position in Kedah, but he perished in 1831 at the Kuala Kedah fort with sixty of his loyal followers. Another attempt by Tunku Muhammad Saad, the sultan's nephew, in 1838 similarly ended in failure, despite the initial success of capturing the Siamese positions in Alor Ganu and Singgora. There was much bravery and heroism as well as slaughter by both sides. Physical destruction whether in Langkawi or the Kedah mainland was comprehensive, with homes, villages and rice fields burnt to the ground by Siamese forces.

However, Wan Yahaya did not pass judgement on these Malay fighters unlike Muhammad Hassan who described those who perished at Singgora as *mati shahid* (died in the cause of the religion) meaning that

the war against Siam was *jihad* (holy war).[36] On the other hand, amateur historians like Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof regarded these Kedah fighters as nationalists who had risked their lives for the independence of Kedah.[37] This argument is also being pushed by a few historians, notably Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali and Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail. Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, for instance, has argued for the beginning of Malay nationalism from this period based on the anti-Siamese struggles of the Malays in defence of their nation (Kedah) as they understood it at the time.[38] I find this interpretation exciting as it would change our understanding of the origins of Malay nationalism and the way Malaysian history is being presented at the moment. It also means reassessing Siam as a colonial power within the region, perhaps not quite like the 19th - 20th century western hybrids.[39]

To Wan Yahaya nothing much had happened in the state after 1842 until the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid beginning in 1882. At this time, two Kedah territories, namely Perlis, which was already under Syed Sufre Jamalulail who was a cousin of the sultan ,while Setul, was under another cousin, Tunku Abdul Rahman, both titled High Commissioner with the Sultan of Kedah, as *Chao Phaya Saiburi,* exercising overall jurisdiction. On the death of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Ku Din Ku Meh, the superintendant of prison assumed the High Commissionership. Ku Din later tried to become the raja of Setul by dealing directly with the Siamese, an action that neither pleased the court scribe nor the Kedah royalty. His change of name to Tunku Baharuddin (and status) infuriated Sultan Abdul Hamid and perhaps the scribe as well. At present, his descendants live in Penang, Thailand, Kedah and Kelantan with most of them reverting to

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36 Muhammad Hassan, *Al-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah* (Romanize version) p. 150. One of them was Sheikh Abdul Samad, Muhamad Hassan's great grand-uncle (son of Sheikh Abdul Jalil Al-madani with his Sumatran wife). Both Sheikh Abdul Samad, his half brother Sheikh Abu Bakar, who was the state mufti and many others were regarded as heroes and "nationalist" by Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof of the State Museum.

37 Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof, *Kedah Darulaman dalam Sejarah Like-like Liku-Liku Perjuangan Menuju Kemerdekaan, 1791-1957* [Kedah in the struggle for independence, 1791–1957] (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992) pp. 9–14

38 Talk by Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail to history post-graduate (mixed mode) students at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 18 March 2006.

39 See the discussion on the old and new imperialism including the Siamese variant in Cheah Boon Kheng & Abu Talib Ahmad (eds.), *Kolonialisme di Malaysia dan Negara-negara Lain* [Colonialism in Malaysia and other countries] (Petaling Jaya, Fajar Bakti: 1970)

Tengku, in line with royalties from the other states instead of Tunku which is associated with the Kedah royalty.[40]

The text provides glimpses of the succession contest especially in the late 1870s and early 1880s besides the rivalry between Sultan Abdul Hamid and his brother Tunku Abdul Aziz who was the Raja Muda. This scribe gave much credit to the Raja Muda for the many administrative reforms such as the introduction of office hours, defining the power of the district officer, the introduction of the land office, court regulations, licensing and registration of oxen (ostensibly to put a check on rampant cattle thefts), the construction of schools and the formation of the State Council although, in fairness, the Siamese factor has to be taken into account, while some of these were implemented after the Raja Muda's death in 1907. The reader is also informed of the "resistance group" within the state or the traditionalists. Yet the Raja Muda, often described as the most westernised of the Malay elites at that time, failed to reform the financial administration due to the opposition of the sultan although in fairness he too was prone to similar lapses in financial matters.[41] The effort to abolish the *kerah* and debt bondage in 1909–10 was lauded as beneficial to the people. To Wan Yahya, British rule was not entirely abhorrent as it had significantly improved the state's finances and enhanced the position of the *rakyat.*[42] How this came about is not explained in the text although the peasants now had to pay a fixed land tax, and land rent to the state which they found burdensome.

Wan Yahya was equally frank in his criticisms of the sultan's weaknesses in financial administration notably with regard to overlapping rights for revenue farms, soliciting loans from Penang merchants, and lavishness in giving presents at a time when the state finances were already in bad shape. In 1904 a grand wedding feast for the sultan's five children costing $125,000 with festivities for 44 days and nights (often dubbed the three million dollar weddings) was the last straw that broke the

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40 Abdullah Long Puteh, *Sejarah Negeri Setul* [History of Setul] (Alor Setar, Malaysian Historical Society Kedah Branch: 1971); and Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof, *Selayang Pandang Kerajaan Melayu Setul "Mambang Segara"(1808–1909)* [Glimpse of the Malay sultanate of Setul "Mambang Segara" (1808–1909)] (Alor Setar, Malaysian Historical Society Kedah Branch branch: 1985); Hasfalila Hassan, "Sejarah Warisan Pusaka dan Salasilah: Kajian ke atas Ku Din Ku Meh" [History of genealogy and heritage: A study of Ku Din Ku Meh] (School of Humanites: Elong Long essay for HSM 315 Documents in Malaysian History 2, 2006)

41 Sharom Ahmat, *Tradition and Change in a Malay State: A Study of the Economic and Political Development, 1878-1923* (Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS Monograph no. 12: 1984) p. 68

42 Wan Yahya Wan Muhammad Taib, *Salasilah atau Tarekh Kerja-an Kedah*, pp. 21–22

camel's back. The debtors were mostly British subjects who clamoured for repayment. The sultan was informed of the state's financial position and possible recourse actions including a tax of $5 per family and the abolition of *kerah* which the sultan refused to sanction.[43] Without much choice the overture was made to borrow $2.6 million from Siam although the scribe did not mention who initiated this move. We now know that both the Raja Muda and his mother Wan Hajar had a hand in this.[44] The loan was used to settle a variety of debts owed by the state including salaries and allowances for its officials. To Wan Yahya, this marked the beginning of Kedah's weak position, forcing her to accept advisers appointed by Bangkok but to Sharom Ahmat, it meant the end of the traditional phase of Kedah history. Wan Yahya's state history continued to influence later amateur historians like Buyong Adil, Haji Ibrahim Ismail and G. Muhammad Khan as well as historians like Sharom and Mohd. Isa Othman.

Amateur historians and state history writing

Between the late 1920s and the 1980s there was a proliferation of amateur historians and their forte was state history. Notable examples are Buyong Adil[45] of Perak, James F. Augustin[46] of Kedah, Saad Sukri Haji Muda[47] of Kelantan, Haji Mohd Said Haji Sulaiman of Johore,

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43 Wan Yahya Wan Muhammad Taib, *Salasilah atau Tarekh Kerja-an Kedah*, pp. 15-16

44 Thow Eng Kee, *Kedah Selepas Perang Kulim: Faktor British dan Siam dalam kajian Perkembangan Sosio-Politik Kedah, 1888-1909* [Kedah after the Kulim war: The Siamese and British factor in the sosio-political development of Kedah, 1888–1909] (Alor Setar, Neadly: 1995) pp. 7–73

45 Buyong's published state histories include the following: *Sejarah Kedah* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1980) *Sejarah Perlis* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1981), *Sejarah Terengganu* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1974), *Sejarah Pahang* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1972), *Sejarah Johor* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1971), *Sejarah Negeri Sembilan* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1981), *Sejarah Selangor* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1971), *Sejarah Perak* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1972), *Sejarah Sarawak* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1972) and *Sejarah Sabah* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1972).

46 James F. Augustin, *Bygone Kedah* (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992). Augustin had also contributed articles for the journal of the Kedah Historical Society. See for instance, *Kedah dari Segi Sejarah* [Kedah in History] Langkawi Special Number 5: August 1971 which contains 4 articles that he had written.

47 Saad (Asaad) Sukri Haji Muda, *Detik-Detik Sejarah Kelantan* [Events in the history of Kelantan] (Kota Bharu, Pustaka Aman Press: 1970)

Muhammad Salleh Haji Awang (Misbaha)[48] from Terengganu, G. Mohamed Khan from Kedah.[49] The most recent addition was Haji Ibrahim Ismail, a former teacher from Kedah who was also active in the Malaysian Historical Society Kedah branch while his state history was published by the respectable Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) Press.[50] Haji Buyong and another amateur historian Asmad had published a popular history of all the states in the Malaysian federation including the Federal Territory (aka Kuala Lumpur). Former teacher Asmad had his state histories published under the *Lambaian Nusa* [Wave to the motherland] series in 1987.[51] Buyong's series are easy to read and popular, especially among university students who abhorred consulting the more serious texts, quite often written in English while Asmad's appealed more to secondary school students, covering a brief discussion on the physical features, economy, history and culture of each state.

Less known is Abdul Hadi Hassan (1900-1937) who was never associated with any state history but, instead, with a series of history books of the Malays in the Nusantara region, which was published in the late 1920s. He had commented disparagingly on the usefulness of the *hikayat,* or chronicle, such as the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* as a historical source.[52] Through his three volume series on the Malay world (Alam Melayu) and his bookstore in Tanjung Malim, Abdul Hadi influenced the subsequent generation of amateur historians including Buyong Adil who was his colleague at the Tanjung Malim Teacher Training College (MPSI) and radical young Malays (former students of MPSI) of the late 1930s and 1940s like Ibrahim Haji Yaakob who espoused the somewhat doomed *Melayu Raya* [Greater Malay] concept.[53] These amateur historians especially Buyong Adil are well known while many others were only known within a limited circle, although they too, were knowledgeable in local history and provide important sources of

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48 Muhammad Salleh Haji Awang, *Terengganu dari Bentuk Sejarah hingga 1918* (Terengganu history until 1918) (Kuala Lumpur, Utusan Publication: 1978)

49 G. Mohamad Khan, *History of Kedah* (Penang, Penang Premier Press: 1958)

50 Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu* [Glimpses of the history of Kedah] (Sintok, Universiti Utara Malaysia Press: 1987)

51 Some of the state histories are *Sejarah Perak Darul Ridzuan* [History of Perak Darul Ridzuan] (Melaka, New Holland: 1987); *Johor* (Melaka, New Holland: 1987); *Kedah* (Melaka, New Holland: 1987); *Kelantan* (Melaka, New Holland: 1987); and *Pulau Pinang* [Penang] (Melaka, New Holland: 1987).

52 Abdul Hadi quoted in Hendrik J. M. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority: The Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, p. 127

53 Ramlah Adam, *Sumbanganmu Dikenang* [Your contributions are remembered] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1999) p. 44

reference while their published works cover various aspects of local history that are otherwise neglected.[54] They were also active in the local chapter of the Malaysian Historical Society.

The discussion begins with Buyong Adil who had a varied career in both the colonial and post colonial service, including at the MPSI. Buyong was known for his short study of all the states that form the Malaysian federation including Singapore and ,before that, two books on the history of the Malay world which was a continuation of Abdul Hadi's efforts. Some of his histories are rather short while others, such as those of Pahang and Terengganu are longer. In continuing the tradition of the court scribes and British scholar-officials, Buyong's studies are basically political histories that dwelt at length on the pre-British period while the period after 1945 up to the 1970s or 1980s was treated in just a few pages. For the pre-British period the various state chronicles were an important source of reference for Buyong; for early Kedah, for example, he merely copied large chunks from the *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah*. Undoubtedly Winstedt's history of Kedah which was published in 1936, based on "objective history", seemed to have influenced the way Buyong wrote his state histories but without dismissing existing Kedah state histories as his references.

In fairness, Buyong did consult other sources in particular oral traditions, and works by western and local scholars although these are not mentioned in the text. Regarding the lengthy discussion on Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin, for instance, and the sultan's search for security, Buyong depends heavily on the much acclaimed study by R. Bonney entitled *Kedah 1771–1821: The Search for Security and Independence*. The reign of the present Sultan Abdul Halim Muazzam Shah who has been on the throne since 1958 is also included in the narrative.

What kind of state history did Buyong Adil write? His state history is both political and dynastic focussing on the sultan and the royal genealogy. Like the *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah*, Buyong's *Sejarah Kedah* is divided into the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods with the Islamisation of the ruling class by an Arab preacher Sheikh Abdullah being the turning point in the history of the state: the sultan adopting an Islamic name, the construction of mosque and minarets for the muezzin to call the daily prayers and the introduction of the Arabic scripts. Buyong also uses the Hejira for his dates although, unlike *Al-tarikh Salasilah*

54 Haji Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof, Selayang Pandang Kerajaan Melayu Setul "Mambang Segara" (1808–1909) (Alor Setar, Malaysian Historical Society Kedah Branch branch: 1985)

negeri Kedah, the western equivalents are given in the text. Like the earlier state histories there is much praise for certain rulers such as Sultan Ata'allah Muhammad Shah ll (1688–1698) and his great grand son Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Adilin Muazzam Shah (1710–1778). The former was described as "making serious efforts to improve the peoples' livelihood, ordered all chiefs to enquire the condition of their charge, and provided encouragement to the *rakyat* to venture into agriculture and crafts-manship to further develop the state"[55] which is taken verbatim from the *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah.* Sultan Muhammad Jiwa had developed the state by opening up rice lands, instituting new weights and measures, rid the state of the piracy menace and reaffirmed existing *adat* (customary practices). Yet his reign had to cope with domestic and external challenges notably Siak and the Bugis which came to a head in 1771. The Mahsuri episode which took place during his reign and the 1721 Siamese invasion of Langkawi were also discussed.

As for the 19th century rulers Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah (1854–79) was commended for bringing in modern development through the opening of Kuala Muda town in 1856–57 which was followed by an influx of Chinese to the state, the construction of a road linking Alor Setar to Anak Bukit, the opening of the first Malay school specifically for the royalty and nobility in 1861 in the Kota Setar district, the opening of the Kedah-Singgora road in 1866, and the opening of lands by Chinese planters to plant coffee and cinnamon.

An important theme in the *Sejarah Kedah* is the search for foreign assistance during the 18th and 19th centuries. Buyong's indepth discussion was reserved for Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (1804–1843) which covers 19 pages of the text while Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah (1778–1798) commanded 11 pages. This search saw the "cession" of Penang in 1786, Kedah's failure to retake the island in 1791, the state losing its sovereignity in 1821 and subsequent restoration in 1842. Sultan Abdullah ceded Penang to the EIC in anticipation of military assistance but the English never lived up to his expectation. On this point Buyong put much blame on the English.

Like the earlier court scribes Buyong did not pass judgement on Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin and his ascent to the throne through Thai interference which was the beginning of active Siamese intervention in the domestic competition for power among members of the Kedah ruling house. Like the court scribes, Buyong condemned Tunku Yaakob as a

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55 Buyong Adil, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah* [History of Kedah] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1980) p. 26

traitor for conniving with the Siamese that led to the 1821 invasions although historian R. Bonney had shown that there were a variety of factors that led to the invasion, notably Kedah's conduct in the interstate relationship with both Siam and Burma.[56]

Buyong discusssed at length the Siamese invasion, the gallant Kedah defenders, those taking part in the anti-Siamese resistance, and the cost that Kedah had to pay. Malay resistance was heroic, but, at times futile, such as the escapades of Tunku Muhammad Saad and his men, or that of Tunku Muhamad Taib and his followers. Like the court scribes, Buyong blamed the British blockades of Kuala Kedah and Langkawi for the failure of this resistance. As for the Siamese dismemberment of Kedah, Buyong relied on Muhammad Hassan in giving face to the ruling class by asserting that this was done by the Malays although elsewhere in the text it was mentioned that in 1843 a Kedah royal entourage was granted an audience by Rama III who decreed that Kedah, Setul, Perlis (Kayang) and Kubang Pasu were to send the *Bunga Mas* directly to Bangkok. Following the transfer of sovereignity in 1909, Buyong reiterates, as did the court scribes, the change in the destination of the last *Bunga Mas* from Bangkok to London via Singapore.

In 1854–55 Siam again became prominent in the succession dispute among the contenders to the Kedah throne. In 1855 the winner Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah paid a visit to the Siamese court soon after his installation as sultan and married an adopted daughter of Rama IV – Wan Khatijah Nik Abidin (popularly known as Wan Jah) who was from the Pattani royal family. In August 1873 Kedah had to send a military force to Tongkah to subdue the Chinese secret society uprising. In the following year Rama V paid a 6-day visit to Kedah on his way home from a European tour. In 1879 Siam came into prominence again in determining the subsequent rulers, Sultan Zainal Rashid Muazzam Shah ll (1880-81) and his successor, Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1882. Like Wan Yahaya, Buyong paid tribute to Raja Muda Tunku Abdul Aziz who was described as a capable administrator and sang praises of his contributions to Kedah.[57] Like the court scribe, Buyong did not discuss his sudden demise in 1907 which a recent account claimed was due to an overdose of opium, while not discounting the possibility of suicide.[58]

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56 See also Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Asia Tenggara Hubungan Tradisional Serantau* [Southeast Asia, Traditional regional relation] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1997)

57 Buyong Adil, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah*, p. 79

58 Thow Eng Kee, Kedah Selepas Perang Kulim, p. 78 citing the report of the Siamese Advisor G C Hart in Yearly Report on the State of Administration of Kedah.

Less known is Dato' James F. Augustin (1898-1986) who was formerly with the Kedah education service. Born in Penang Augustin received his early education in Taiping and Penang but served in the Kedah education service for most of his career. Between 1917–41 he taught at the Government English School in Alor Setar which later changed its name to Sultan Abdul Hamid College. After the war, he was given the task of reorganising and reopening the college. In 1946 he was promoted headmaster of Ibrahim School in Sungai Petani and just before his retirement, Assistant Superintendant of Education for Kedah and Perlis. After his retirement Augustin served as Senior Lecturer for teachers of English schools in Kedah and Perlis until 1961. In 1954 James Augustin was appointed a member of the Federation Legislative Council representing the Eurasian community. He had also contributed some informative articles to a historical journal.

Augustin's *Bygone Kedah* was originally part of a series of articles (63 in all) which were published in the *Straits Echo* under the column "Bygone Kedah." His references are varied including the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah*, oral sources, numerous western books which he indicates in the text and his own personal observations and experience as when he describes the Japanese occupation and the period immediately after.[59]

In *Bygone Kedah* one would not miss the thematic emphasis namely Kedah-Siam relations which occupies a significant portion of the text, Kedah during the British period and World War II in Kedah. It ends with the immediate postwar period with a discussion on the communist guerrila takeover, the issue of hoarding and profiteering, the reopening of the Sultan Abdul Hamid College and the collapse of the Malayan Union. There is much life and colour in Augustin's coverage of war time Kedah which was based on his personal observations and a diary written by his brother who was in the railway volunteers. One basic problem with the text is the dates and facts are all mixed up. Augustin did not pass any judgement on the rulers like Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin who became sultan in 1804 with Siamese assistance. His favourite ruler is Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah (1854–79) who was described as wise, able, a man of culture, possessing good relationship with both Siam and the British, and who brought development to the state in the field of agriculture, the development of Alor Setar and Malay education.

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59 James F. Augustin, *Bygone Kedah* (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992)

Augustin's state history also covers other aspects that are significant to those interested in social history such as the postal services, including the first issue of Kedah stamps, Alor Setar in the 1880s, hospitals and prisons, education including for girls, horse racing which became a major pastime of the ruling class, transportation, buffaloes for farming and fighting and sporting organisations. Ausgustin provides much colourful information on buffalo fighting which was later banned in 1936 because of the cruelty inflicted on the animals and perhaps to reduce the incidence of cattle theft.

Augustin also has his heroes who fought and died for different causes. One was Tunku Kudin (Syed Zainal Abidin) who died a heroic death at the Kuala Kedah fort in defence of Kedah's independence from a neighbouring imperial power. The other heroes were much nearer to him, those who had shown exceptional bravery in the defence of the imperial possession from another imperial power namely Japan. One such individual was Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf who managed to bomb Japanese positions at Singgora despite overwhelming odds.

G. Mohamed Khan, formerly of the Kedah education service (retired as acting inspector of Tamil schools), was the first person among the locals to write an English version of the history of Kedah in 1928. He had also published a Tamil version which was probably the only one of its kind in Malaysia. *History of Kedah* was subsequently revised and republished in 1939 and again in 1958. The 1958 edition forms the basis of the following discussion. Mohamed Khan had consulted a variety of sources including studies by western and Indian scholars and the work of the court scribes notably Muhammad Hassan. There are no photographs or illustrations in the text, in his words, to minimise the printing cost although Mohamed Khan had collected a substantial number of photographs which are catalogued at the end of the text. The book is divided into 22 chapters including a lengthy chapter each on Penang and Perlis both of which were historically a part of the Kedah sultanate.

History of Kedah covers various grounds and some of the emphasis really stands out, notably the nature of Indian influence during Kedah's early history and, after the arrival of Islam. Interestingly the date of the arrival of Islam, cited around 1136, coincides with the one promoted in the state's semi-official history. The Hindu-Buddhist influence was brought by a variety of colonists including religious luminaries and traders who had migrated from India to settle in Kedah since the first century AD due to various reasons. To support his case, Mohamed Khan adduced a variety of archaeological evidence although a more recent study has put emphasis on the role of the indigeneous elites who had already attained a high level

of sophistry to appreciate Indian cultural borrowings if not to improve on them.[60]

G. Mohamed Khan refers to the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* for Kedah's early history and the relation between Kedah and Ayutthaya, Perak and Pattani including the sending of the *Bunga Mas & Perak*. The Kedah-Malay wars were replete with bravery, heroism and cruelty perpetrated by the Siamese especially during 1821-41. The spread of Islam to Kedah seemed to have taken place much earlier than the 15th century through both Arab traders and missionaries from Sumatra. This case is supported by the observation of Arab traders like Ibni Khordabeh of the 12th century and the Abbasid coin of 848 which was found at a temple site. Much more important is the role of Sheikh Abdullah in the 15th century who managed to convert the Kedah aristocracy to Islam. On this, he seemed to have combined the views of both Wan Yahaya and Muhammad Hassan. Yet the old belief did not disappear completely for "conservative instincts, tended to reconcile the new belief with old forms of Hinduism while Muslim tombstones were still carved with Hindu emblems and designs even after the 15th century."[61]

Mohamed Khan's discussion of Francis Light is treated in the chapter relating to Penang. Unlike the court scribes his position is ambiguous. In one place he defended the English captain describing him as one who "knew the Malay language and customs very well and in 1771 when he met the Sultan of Kedah at Kangar on crossing over from Acheh to examine trading prospects, he became his trusted friend...He made frequent attempts to obtain British military aid to Kedah as he had promised verbally but when he received in February 1793 a London directive that he was not to make any offensive or defensive alliance with Kedah he was shocked. His chronic malarial fever was hence aggravated and he died within the wooden stockade of the Cornwallis fort at one on the morning of 21 October 1794."[62] Elsewhere the man was described in less flattering terms: "But Francis Light gave the sultan all manner of hopes of his securing British military aid and kept him hoping."[63] The aid never came but Light held on to Penang.

Mohamed Khan views favourably the British rule in Kedah after 1909: "Kedah had a dynamic progress under Britain with rapid material

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60 Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman, *Arkeologi Pra-Islam Pesisiran Selat Melaka: Evolusi atau Migrasi* [Pre-Islam arkeologi archaeology in the littorals of the Melaka Straits: Evolution or Migration] (Bangi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press: 1999)

61 G. Mohamed Khan, *History of Kedah* (Penang, Penang Premier Press: 1958) p. 23

62 G. Mohamed Khan, *History of Kedah*, p. 102

63 G. Mohamed Khan, *History of Kedah*, p. 104

progress." Superficially this assessment is probably correct as, after 1909, there was improvement in the state's land management, improvement in the life of the paddy planters especially with regards unscrupulous money lenders, improvement in land communications both with Penang and Siam, and the introduction of programs relating to health and modern British education. In reality we are still uncertain how far the material benefits of colonialism had improved the livelihood of the *rakyat* as few economic and social studies on Kedah had been undertaken until recently. In the case of Malay education things were pretty much left to the Malays themselves, while both the coloniser and the ruling elites did very little especially for women education until the 1930s.[64] In the economic sphere the peasants' life had not improved much until 1941 and they continued to be victims of Chinese capitalists (both money lenders and rice millers), Malay landlords, and the bureaucratic state which benefited in the form of new taxes.[65]

However one is troubled with the text which at times is confusing and misleading. For instance, the list of Kedah rulers, from Merong Mahawangsa until Sultan Badlishah the 39th ruler, includes female rulers and those from Java and India (a Sailendra king and three Pallava kings), whereas the court scribes mention only 33 rulers. A more recent account excludes the non-Muslim ones and reduces the number to 27.[66] Mohamed Khan also viewed highly Sultan Abdul Hamid whom he described as "the most devout sultan in the country." It was well known that both the Sultan and his brother Tunku Mahmud had been active in strengthening Islam in the state; both had read sermons during Friday prayers not just during the opening of the Zahir mosque in 1915. The sultan also initiated the practice of reciting the Quran at this mosque on a competitive basis.[67] However the sultan was equally known for his unIslamic activities, notably horse

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64 Mahani Musa, *Sejarah dan Sosioekonomi Wanita Melayu Kedah, 1881–1940* [The history and socio-economy of Kedah Malay women, 1881–1940] (Bangi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press: 2005)

65 Afifuddin Haji Omar, *Pembangunan Ekonomi Kaum Tani* [Economic development of the peasants] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1986) ch. 3

66 See the list of Kedah rulers in Wan Shamduddin Mohd Yusof, *Kedah Darulaman Sepanjang Jalan* [Kedah Darulaman through the ages] (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992) p. 26; in a more recent publication the same author counted Kedah rulers at 28, the officially accepted number. See Wan Shamsudin Mohd Yusof, "Senario institusi Kesultanan Kedah" [The sultan institution of Kedah] in Mohamad Sukeri Khalid et. al. (eds.), *Kedah 100 Tahun, 1900-2000: Isu-Isu politik dan Sosioekonomi* [Kedah 100 years, 1900–200: Political and socioeconomic issues] (Sintok, Universiti Utara Malaysia Press: 2002)

67 Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu*, pp. 160–161

racing and gambling.[68] Similarly he puts a high mark on Sultan Badlishah: "His greatest asset is his understanding the rapid political change in and round Kedah. To this must be added his approved ability in the Islamic duty for the country. Thus he leads Kedah to progress and prosperity." Whereas Buyong Adil describes the same ruler as one of the more reactionary Malay sultans in the postwar period, one who was sceptical of the ability of the emerging national leaders to steer Malayans and the country into independence and nationhood.[69] In recent years attempts have been made to relook at this issue by examining letters Sultan Badlishah had written to various British officials and fellow rulers explaining the reasons for his signing the MacMichael treaty and his subsequent opposition to the Malayan Union.[70]

Perhaps the most significant work of these amateur historians is *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu* which was published by Universiti Utara Malaysia in 1989 and written by Haji Ibrahim Ismail. The author, a former teacher and member of the Kedah branch of the Malaysian Historical Society, had consulted the standard texts including Wan Yahaya, Muhammad Hassan and the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Zulkifli Mohd Salleh edition), essays that were published by the Malaysian Historical Society Kedah branch and Wilkinson's 1927 study on the Malays. Equally important are oral traditions that had been passed from generations to generations, for instance with regard to the reign of Sultan Sulaiman, Mahsuri and Panglima Busu of Setul (who later lived in Bandar Baru to escape the Siamese). To Haji Ibrahim the *Al-tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* remains the best source for Kedah history before the 19th century which has not been surpassed.

Based on the continuous existence of the royal family for more than 1300 years Haji Ibrahim claims Kedah to be the oldest state in Malaysia and in Southeast Asia. This continuity was contributed mainly by the system of political alliances between Kedah and her more powerful neighbours that enabled her to have a "little independence and protection." This system was buttressed by tributary relations which unfortunately was viewed differently by the protector.

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68 Thow Eng Kee, *Kedah selepas Perang Kulim: Faktor British dan Siam dalam Kajian Perkembangan Sosio-Politik Kedah, 1888–1909* pp. 61-62 see especially the Sultan's statement of expenditure for the years 1896–1899 "Penyata Kewangan Sultan 1896–1899".

69 See also Mohd Isa Othman, *Pengalaman Kedah & Perlis: Zaman Penjajahan British* (Kuala Lumpur, Utusan Publications: 2001) p. 239

70 Ismail Haji Salleh (comp.), *The Sultan Was not Alone* (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1989)

The book stresses the importance of the institution of the raja for the state and the Malays which is no different from the court scribes. Thus "*raja itu payung negara. Baginda menjadi tempat rakyat bernaung dan berteduh. Mudah-mudahan dengan adanya ketaatsetiaan kepada raja dan negara (Kedah state), akan menjadi lambang persefahaman antara raja dengan rakyat yang sentiasa hidup dalam suasana keharmonian, bertambah makmor dan aman sejahtera*."[71] This interpretation is also in line with the current emphasis on the importance of the monarchy in Malay society which was heightened during the Malayan Union controversy of 1945-46.[72]

Haji Ibrahim has accepted the importance of the pre-Islamic period during which Hindu-Buddhist elements predominate. This lasted until the mid-12th century when Islam came to Kedah. Yet he differs from earlier accounts with his assertion of Merong Mahawangsa (of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*) and Maharaja Derbar Raja of *Al-Tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* being the same person. His rationale: both originated from Persia or the Eastern Roman empire. He accepted 1136 as the date for Islam being officially embraced by the court. However he argues, citing the Langgar tombstone of 903 AD, that Islam had reached Kedah much earlier than Acheh. Thus with Pattani, Kedah became the bulwark against the spread of Buddhism from Siam to the Malay peninsula resulting in both becoming targets of incessant Siamese designs."[73]

Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu is still a form of dynastic history with the focus on rulers who were based in Kota (Alor) Setar from the early 18th century onwards until the present Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah while the earlier rulers received only passing mention. Glimpses of various aspects were thrown in to augment the text and these include Kedah in the early 1850s based on selective use of Logan's observation, details on the *Bunga Mas & Perak*, the discussion of two forceful personalities namely Wan Muhammad Saman (prime minister) and Tunku Kudin (former Raja Muda and viceroy of Selangor), the *nobat*, its rituals and components, the variety of flags used in Kedah which were introduced in 1911 to replace the previous plain ones (yellow, red and black flags), the various royal regalia used in royal weddings and the

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71 Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu* [Glimpses of Kedah history] (Sintok, Universiti Utara Malaysia Press: 1989) p. 16

72 Ramlah Adam, *Sumbanganmu Dikenang* [Your contributions are remembered] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1999) discusses contributions made by the Malay right (as represented by Dato' Onn Jaafar and UMNO) and the Malay left through Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, Ahmad Boestamam and Ishak Haji Muhammad.

73 Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu*, pp. 18–19

installation of sultans and the state anthem which was introduced in 1937. The Alor Setar rulers begin with Sultan Muhamad Jiwa Adilin Muadzam Shah whose remarkable reign has already been discussed, although one is not certain what Haji Ibrahim meant when he wrote *"kerajaan sudah berubah sedikit demi sedikit kepada kerajaan orang ramai" (demokrasi)*: whichever way one looks at it, the existence of democracy in a feudal society like Kedah is beyond any imagination. Also discussed are the construction of the Balai Besar and the Mahsuri episode. The Balai Besar (audience hall) was constructed in 1738 with quintessentially Kedah Malay architecture while the present building was rebuilt in 1904 based on the original design. This audience hall served a variety of purposes including "*tempat bermesyuarat pembesar-pembesar negeri, tempat mengumpulkan rakyat jelata kerana mengiystiharkan sesuatu pengumuman, tempat upacara penabalan raja, upacara menyambut surat-surat dari kerajaan asing, dewan jamuan negeri, tempat pertandingan membaca syair, berzanji dan membaca hikayat-hikayat lama, upacara berkhatan putera-putera raja dan adat istiadat pertunangan."*[74] In 1904 the Balai Besar was the venue for the so-called "three million dollar weddings" while in 1947, it hosted the UMNO delegates meeting which was opened by Sultan Badlishah. The story of Mahsuri of Langkawi is another significant aspect of the narrative as Kedahans, including those from the Kedah State Museum and the Malaysian Historical Society Kedah branch, had accepted her as a historical figure[75] even though there are historians who are not at ease with it. Equally important to the text is the Siamese attack on Langkawi in 1721 which exhibits much heroism on the part of the local folks and uninhibited cruelty and wanton destruction committed by the Siamese forces. Descendants of the Thais who were pinned to the interior of the main island still survive to this day in Air Hangat, Pulau Tuba, Selat Pancur and Telok Apau.

The reign of Sultan Badlishah (1943-1958) is discussed at length, as the reign witnessed important events in the history of the state namely the Japanese occupation, the BMA period and Malayan Union and political awakenings that led to independence in August 1957. Among other things the Japanese occupation saw the formation of SEBERKAS in July 1945 with its twin goal of political and economic upliftment of the Malays. The

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74 Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu*, p. 42

75 See the special issue on Langkawi in *Kedah dari Segi Sejarah* [Kedah in history] 5 (1): August 1975 especially the article "Peristiwa Sedih di Kedah" [Mahsuri – a Kedah tragedy] by Dato' Wan Ibrahim Soloh pp. 30–40

author also defended Sultan Badlishah as supportive of the political awakening of the Malays by citing his approval for two Kedah royalty to take part in UMNO besides him opening the UMNO delegates meeting at Balai Besar in 1947. Haji Ibrahim seeks to show the sultan as "*seorang pejuang*" and he cites the close relationship between the palace and UMNO.[76] On examining the speech the sultan made on this occasion, one gets the feeling that he was lukewarm for Merdeka focusing instead on the necessary preparatory works prior to shouting "Merdeka." Equally important is the treatment of the Emergency and the failed Baling talks of 1955 between Malayan and Singapore leaders and the communists. This ushered in Merdeka in August 1957 with Malayans represented by the famous son of Kedah (Tunku Abdul Rahman) to see the end of British colonial rule. Sultan Badlishah passed away soon after, in 1958. Elsewhere in the text, one gets the impression of the animosity between the royal brothers Tunku Abdul Rahman and Sultan Badlishah. The other aspect of his reign is the personality of his chief minister Haji Mohamed Sheriff Osman (1948–57) who was responsible for sending bright Kedah youth for further studies abroad or locally (such as the Technical Institute in Kuala Lumpur) on various courses. Elsewhere we know of his negative response towards UMNO in its formative years and he was against the involvement of administrative officers in this fledgling political organisation that culminated in the controversy of the oath to the sultan and the state.[77] There is nothing on demography and the changing population landscape after 1945 that were taking place all over Kedah and which brought in important ramifications to the state.

The professional historians and production of state history

In reality not much attention has been directed towards state history by the professional historians although for various aspects of Kedah history some names do stand out notably R. Bonney, Sharom Ahmat, Cheah Boon Kheng, Mohd Isa Othman and Mahani Musa. More recently, Thow Eng Kee focussed on the 1888 Kulim disturbances (Kulim war) involving Chinese secret society members and its financial and political impact on the state. All these studies emanated from original research abroad or locally, utilising a variety of documentary materials notably those kept at the National Archives of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur or its branch in Alor

76 Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu, pp. 190–191

77 Mohd Isa Othman, Pengalaman Kedah & Perlis Zaman Penjajahan British, pp. 239–240

Setar) or at various repositories of colonial records in London (such as the Public Record Office/National Archives or the India Office Library & Records). Some were pioneers in working on these materials while others reworked them from different perspectives. Collectively, their works provide a solid basis for constructing a more acceptable state history of Kedah that extends to the end of the last century. Thus far only the works of Mohd Isa Othman bear the closest resemblance to a state history. Equally significant are the contributions by both graduate and undergraduate students (the historians in the making) whose research papers remain unpublished and inaccessible to the public. Sociologist Khoo Khay Jin has even ventured into the field of Kedah's social history and produced some thought-provoking studies, after patiently plumbing the depths of the National Archives in Kuala Lumpur in his research, providing useful references to both historians and the non-historians.[78] Others who have made significant contributions, are archaelogists Nik Hassan Shuhaimi,[79] Othman Mohd Yatim and Mohd Supian Sabtu, geographers Zaharah Mahmud and Osman Yaakub[80] and social scientists like Afifuddin Omar on the Kedah peasant economy before and after Merdeka.[81]

We begin with R. Bonney who started research on Kedah at the time when the History Department of the University of Malaya was gripped by the debates on centricities in the 1960s. These debates stirred much rethoric, and emotion, among local scholars although actual productions did not quite match the expectations. *Kedah, 1771–1821* is the first

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78 Khoo Khay Jin, "Tunku Kudin: A Scribe's Defence" in *JMBRAS* 63(1): 1990; and Khoo Khay Jin, "Kedah di antara Imperialisme dan Kolonialisme: 1880–1909" [Kedah between imperialism and colonialism: 1880-1909] in Cheah Boon Kheng & Abu Talib Ahmad (eds.), *Kolonialisme di Malaysia dan Negara-negara Lain* [Colonialism in Malaysia and other countries) (Petaling Jaya, Fajar Bakti: 1970)

79 Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman & Othman Mohd Yatim, *Warisan Lembah Bujang* [The legacy of the Bujang valley] (Bangi, Malaysian Archaeology Association: 1992)

80 See the invaluable collection of essays on Kedah in particular Zaharah Haji Mahmud, "The evolution of population and settlement in the state of Kedah" in Asmah Haji Omar (ed.), *Darulaman: Essays on Linguistics, Cultural and Socio-Economic Aspects of the Malaysian State of Kedah* (Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Malaya Press: 1979); and Mohamad Sukeri Khalid et. al. (eds.), *Kedah 100 Tahun, 1900-2000: Isu-Isu Politik dan Sosioekonomi* [Kedah 100 years, 1900–2000: Political and socioeconomic issues] (Sintok, Universiti Utara Malaysia Press: 2002). Osman Yaakub's article titled "Perubahan demografi dan sosial di negeri Kedah Darul Aman" [The demographic and social changes in Kedah Darul Aman] appears in this volume.

81 Afifuddin Haji Omar, *Pembangunan Ekonomi Kaum Tani* [Development of the peasant's economy] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1986)

respectable work in English published by a local historian in pursuance of these debates. Bonney's study was based mainly on the Straits Settlement Records (SSR) which attracted sporadic interests from local scholars. Bonney does have strong words for Francis Light whom he accused of playing a double game, being a cheat and of stabbing Sultan Abdullah in the back by giving false hopes and promises just to get hold of Penang island (more recent scholars like Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail have not changed that opinion much, and still depict Light as dabbling in a double game or "*tipu daya*" just to get Penang).[82] Penang, Bonney asserted, was neither leased, granted nor ceded to the British by any written treaty agreement. Instead Light was only granted permission for temporary occupation not dissimilar to the temporary occupation licence (TOL) given to those who had illegally occupied state lands. Hence the subsequent occupation of the island had breached international law as both Light and the EIC were unwilling to provide any form of military assistance as requested by Kedah against imagined or real enemies.[83] This issue came up again in the cession of a strip of land facing Penang that came to be known as Province Wellesley (Perai) in 1800. Until the Siamese invasion of 1821, Kedah had turned to the EIC for political and military protection, but her appeals were consistently rebuffed. As in most cases involving temporary occupation licences, the English managed to get formal occupation of Penang and Seberang Perai through various treaties culminating in the 1868 Anglo-Siamese treaty which was signed by the Thai government representing Kedah and the British consul general in Bangkok in which Britain consented to an annual payment of 10,000 dollars to Kedah in return for Kedah's recognition for its occupation of her former territories.[84]

The other equally important issue is the role of the Kedah aristocracy in placing the state closer to the Siamese orbit. On this aspect Bonney sees the keen competition for the throne after the death of Sultan Abdullah among his eight sons as crucial. He puts the blame squarely on Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin for taking "the most decisive step in Kedah's tributary relation with Siam" and became the first sultan who actually owed his position to the Siamese. He subsequently increased the value of

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82 Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, *Malaysia: Sejarah Kenegaraan dan Politik* [Malaysia: History of statehood and politics] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 2005) p. 280

83 R. Bonney, *Kedah 1771–1821: The Search for Security and Independence* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press: 1974) second impression

84 Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu*, p. 105

the *Bunga Mas dan Perak.*[85] After 1804 the Sultan might have regretted his overtures to Bangkok but the die had already been cast. Significantly this treatment differs from the court scribes or even the amateur historians, except Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof.[86] Mohd Isa Othman had taken a similar stand on the same issue but stopped short of passing any moral judgement on Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin.[87] In the mid-19th century Raja Abdullah of Perak turned to the British in his quest for the Perak throne and like Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin and the Siamese, Abdullah's relation with the British soured soon after 1874 that culminated in the murder of the British Resident Birch at Pasir Salak.

To Bonney, the invasion of 1821 was a complex issue, including the subsequent incorporation of Kedah as a full province of Siam. Bonney presents the standpoint of the Kedah rulers, although the full story of the EIC's refusal to provide assistance, and the British collusion with Siam at the expense of Kedah remains to be researched. Arch colonialist Frank Swettenham had severely criticised Light on this matter.

Another significant contribution comes from Dato' Dr. Sharom Ahmat, former professor of history at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Sharom's research covers two different periods of Kedah history from the late 19th century Kedah until the 1920s and utilises local documentary materials located in Alor Setar (the correspondence of Sultan Abdul Hamid) and colonial office documents (the CO 273 series) in London. This study covers much new ground besides reaffirming points raised by Wan Yahaya with regard to the state's finances during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid.

In his discussion of Kedah's sosio-economic conditions, Sharom had shown the state, prior to British colonial rule, as a well organised, stable and coherent entity in sharp contrast to the widely held view of the Malay states being in confusion and disorder. Kedah elites were also constantly aware of the Siamese factor, despite Siam's nominal rule, and sought to minimise Siamese intervention by preserving peace and stability. In fact since 1842 there existed no valid ground for the Siamese or even the British to intervene. Unlike the court scribes, Sharom depicted Sultan Abdul Hamid as one ruler who managed to control the country's

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85 R. Bonney, *Kedah 1771–1821: The Search for Security and Independence*, p. 112

86 See Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof, Haji, "Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Setul (Mambang Segara) 1808–1909 [The history of the Malay kingdom of Setul (Mambang Segara) 1808–1909] in *Kedah dari Segi Sejarah* [Kedah in history] 2: December 1987 p. 8

87 Mohd Isa Othman, *Politik Tradisional Kedah, 1681–1942* [Kedah traditional politics, 1681–1942] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1990)

economy prior to 1905 and was able to control his chiefs, although the post 1909 depiction of the sultan is something else.

Sharom also highlighted the successful attempts by the Kedah ruling class, unlike the other Malay states, in preserving the Malay identity of the state. Despite their antagonism to one another, these elites were united in resisting British encroachment on the autonomy of the state by British officials like W. G. Maxwell. Kedah's autonomy was subsequently upheld by the 1923 treaty with Britain.

On the economic aspect, Sharom rejected claims by British writers that Kedah's lack of development was due to her connection with Siam or for not being under British protection. Instead the slow economic development was shown to be the result of British colonial policy when it vetoed all investments in the mining or plantation sector even from British subjects.[88]

Sharom's study had a significant impact on later researchers like Mohd Isa Othman who went on to develop further some of the themes he had raised, especially the concept of loyalty to the state or parochial sentiments specific to Kedah.[89] His sources are mainly archival materials located in the National Archives of Malaysia at Kuala Lumpur and its Alor Setar branch which hitherto had not been fully utilised, notably the Kedah Secretariat (SUK) files. In his biggest study to date *Pengalaman Kedah & Perlis di zaman Penjajahan British* [The Kedah and Perlis experience under British colonialism] Mohd Isa had applied the framework of collaboration which is rarely done in Malaysian historiography to examine how the Kedah traditional elites adjusted to colonial rule after 1909 based on their, and their group's overall, understanding of possible benefits from such recourse.

From a primordial abstraction the concept of loyalty was appropriated by the ruling class and subsequently forced onto the *rakyat*. Henceforth loyalty was closely tied to the state, to the sultan and after 1909, the British colonial ruler. In this sense, the bureaucratic and administrative reformations that had taken place at the local and district levels were meant to ensure grassroot loyalty focussed on the raja and the colonial power. Parochial state sentiment was encouraged to suit various

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88 Sharom Ahmat, *Tradition and Change in a Malay State: A Study of the Economic and Political Development 1878–1923*, pp. 31–34

89 Mohd Isa Othman, *Pengalaman Kedah & Perlis Zaman Penjajahan British* (Kuala Lumpur, Utusan Publications: 2001); Mohd Isa Othman, *Pendudukan Jepun di Tanah Melayu 1942–45* (Tumpuan kepada Negeri Kedah) (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1992); and Mohd Isa Othman, *Politik Tradisional Kedah, 1681–1942* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1990)

ends and between 1909–23 and the subsequent period it served as a uniting bond for the Kedah elites besides ensuring that power remained in their hands. Thus the civil service in Kedah was restricted only to Malays from Kedah; other Malays were allowed in but they had to start initially as clerks or teachers.

During the British period, state parochialism became more entrenched among the collaborating elites who had their own reasons for doing so in the first place. They looked favourably on the British presence to ensure their dominance in both political and the economic spheres against new competitors, including other Malays who had benefitted from the "modern" educational system while those who had been marginalised by colonial rule such as the peasants were not in a position to mount any challenge unlike the situation in Kelantan or Terengganu.

Yet loyalty to the colonial ruler and the sultan did not remain untested, notably during the Japanese occupation and the Malayan Union period. The Japanese period saw the *rakyat*'s loyalty to the ruler diminished markedly due to the increasing political awareness of the Malays which is actually a continuation of developments since the 1930s. Increasingly, they questioned their loyalty to the colonial power who had failed to provide protection from the Japanese, and their ruler who switched patrons for personal gains.[90] Yet there were others who continued to remain loyal to Britain such as the Kedah State Secretary Haji Mohamed Sheriff Osman who continued to parrot the official policy line of prohibiting involvement of state officials in UMNO in 1946–48.

In an earlier study on Kedah, Mohd Isa had examined the domestic competition for power by focussing on the influential elites, notably the royal and non-royal aristocracy between 1681–1881.[91] This competition was to recur again and again in Kedah history in relation to succession to the throne. In the 17th and 18th centuries the contending elites solicited assistance from outsiders such as the Bugis, Siak, Minangkabau, Selangor and Perak. In the 19th century, this contest became more serious, since there were many more contenders with their equally persistent supporters. In this light, the Siamese invasion of 1821 was a result of internal competition among the royal pretenders who included the previous sultan's eight sons.

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90 See for instance the interesting discussion in Cheah Boon Kheng, "The erosion of ideological hegemony and royal power and the rise of post-war Malay nationalism, 1945–46" in *JSEAS* 19 (1): 1988 pp. 1–26

91 Mohd Isa Othman, *Politik Tradisional Kedah, 1681–1942* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1990)

During the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid conflicts among these elites revolved around various issues notably the throne, power and influence, economic and policy matters. Tunku Kudin, the former Raja Muda was one of the early challengers followed by Tunku Abdul Aziz and Tunku Mahmud who was president of the State Council after 1909. As a group, these elites suffered in terms of the loss of prestige during the Japanese occupation, and were denied whatever special treatments were accorded previously by the British rendering them closer to the *rakyat*. With Britain discredited by the Japanese, and Japan discredited itself by being the loser in the war, local elites sought other mechanisms to safeguard their interests. This was done through their membership in UMNO while others like Mohamed Sheriff Osman remained loyal to the colonial master.

Studies on Kedah have benefitted significantly from local interests in the history from below "movement" (subaltern history) despite its belated arrival in Malaysia. Mahani Musa, for instance, has undertaken research on Kedah Malay women from the end of the 19th century to the second world war which was based on archival documents located at the National Archives in Kuala Lumpur and Alor Setar, notably the files of the district Land Office and Estate Duty Office. Her study is an important contribution and adds considerably to our understanding of how Malay women adjusted to colonial rule, and sought to maximise benefits from it. Prior to 1909 they were equally active in the economic sphere and were given protection under traditional laws such as the Ku Din Ku Meh version of the Kedah laws.[92] Whether in the traditional period or British colonial rule Kedah Malay women possessed a dynamic of their own and took various measures to safeguard their economic (and with it social) interests against the male even their spouses![93]

Another significant item of research in the mould of history from below is the study on social banditry in rural Kedah during 1900–1929 by Cheah Boon Kheng, former professor of Universiti Sains Malaysia.[94]

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92 See also Mariyam Salim, (ed.), *Undang-Undang Kedah* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 2005)

93 Mahani Musa, *Sejarah dan Sosioekonomi Wanita Melayu Kedah, 1881–1940* [The history and socioeconomy of Kedah Malay women, 1881–1940] (Bangi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press: 2005); see also Mahani Musa, "Malay women in Kedah (1881–1940)" in *JMBRAS* 57 (1): 2004 pp. 1–22

94 Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Peasant Robbers of Kedah 1900–1929: Historical and Folk Perceptions* (Singapore, Oxford University Press: 1988); and also his "Jenayah-jenayah di sempadan Kedah-Thai di antara 1900–1920an" [Crime along the Thai-Kedah frontier 1900–1920s] in *Dokumentasi Konvensyen Sejarah Kedah* (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1991)

This study focuses on bandits like Salleh Tui, Awang Poh, Nayan, and Din Prum, by looking at what these bandits actually did, and what the rural Kedah peasants believed them to be doing. This is interesting, as Salleh had committed 70 murders while Nayan had stolen buffaloes, cattle, paddy, was involved in kidnapping and had raided the wealthy and agressive penghulus. Both met with violent deaths, Salleh Tui in 1909 and Nayan in 1921 and both were regarded as folk heroes. Cheah's study depends on both oral history and records on peasants found in the official correspondence of both British and Malay officers. Rural crimes were quite prevalent during 1900–1929 in the remote areas of Kubang Pasu, Pendang and Padang Terap, notably among the Sam-sam population that inhabit the frontier area between Kedah and Thailand. Nayan also operated in the Kota Setar and Kuala Muda districts while masquerading as a rubber tapper during the day. The widespread occurence of rural crime was due to a combination of factors including the laxity of Siamese overlordship, poor police patrols, the nature of the border geography, and socio-economic underdevelopment.

The study shows that the prevalent rural crime was part of an unoffcial self-help in which poor peasants helped themselves by taking from the rich for the sake of survival or redistributing wealth in the case of Salleh Tui. Its prevalence was also due to robbers being under the protection of influential local leaders and landlords, to paraphrase Cheah, "the politicians of the time." The situation only improved with closer interstate co-operation in the late 1920s. By then, the Kedah police had been put on a better footing to deal with various crimes in the state although in districts like Pendang crime continued well into the mid 1930s. Nevertheless Cheah's study has shown that "peasants and bandits do make history at the local level as equally interesting" despite Cheah being labelled a romantic by other historians in his interpretation of social banditry.

The Kedah State Museum, the State Library and state history

Two institutions within Kedah namely the State Museum and the State Library have been actively promoting state history on a rather systematic basis. This is not surprising for in the case of the State Museum, its early days (between 1957–1980) were characterised by the close link with the Kedah Historical Society (Malaysian Historical Society Kedah branch). In fact two notable individuals who dominated the Kedah Historical Society in this period namely Tunku Nong bin Tunku Mohd Jiwa and Dato' Haji

Wan Ibrahim Wan Soloh also ran the State Museum and saw to its rapid expansion.[95] After 1980, when the museum came under the jurisdiction of politicians, individuals like Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof continued the earlier tradition of active involvement in both entities. The museum also benefitted by appointing professional historians as consultants. The museum also undertook occasional publications besides organising exhibitions on a variety of themes (such as ghosts, between June – August 2002) to attract vistiors to the museum. The Kedah State Library, headed by a director who holds a doctorate in library science, has posted its version of Kedah history on its website *Mykedah.com*.

We begin with the kind of state history promoted by the Kedah State Museum, a sprawling complex located in Alor Setar's Bakar Bata area.[96] The museum was started in 1957 with a small building (Istana Pelamin) located behind the Balai Besar (Istana Pelamin) before it moved to a new building in 1961 and in the mid-1990s to the present 3 storey building. The Istana Pelamin premise was later converted into a Royal Museum.[97] The following discussion covers the new State Museum through the representation of exhibits, visuals and captions relating to Kedah history that span a period of almost 2000 years.

In certain ways, the museum reaffirms the *Al-Tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah's* view of Kedah history, at least until the early 20th century although it also emphasises other aspects of everyday life notably culture, the arts, festivals, folk games (*congkak*, buffalo fighting and cock fighting), and traditional musical instruments (*gendang*, *rebana*, violin, gong, accordion and the flute). At the entrance on the first floor there is a profile on Kedah covering all the 11 districts which stresses "Kedah had contributed well to the country especially its economy, culture and also the change of nation in Malaysian society (the last 6 words wrongly translated from '*penubuhan bangsa dalam masyarakat*'). For example the arrival of the Hindu-Buddhist culture from the 4th to the 15th century has given a new dimension to the historical roots of Malaysia especially to Kedah. Therefore this "Paddy granary state" (should be rice bowl state)

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95 *Ulang Tahun ke-36 Muzium Negeri Kedah Darul Aman dan Perletakan Batu Asas Bangunan Baru Muzium Negeri Kedah Darul Aman* [The 36th anniversary of the Kedah State Museum and the laying of the foundation stone for the new museum for Kedah Darul Aman] (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1993)

96 The discussion on this museum is part of an ongoing research on museums and memorials and the memory of the past in Malaysia and Singapore which was funded by a Universiti Sains Malaysia research grant (January 2003–June 2005) which I would like to acknowledge with gratitude.

97 *Ulang Tahun ke-36 Muzium Negeri Kedah Darul Aman*, pp. 10–11

become more attractive and fascinating." On the second floor there is a collection of *tepak sireh* (betel chewing paraphenalia) and its importance in Malay culture, the Tunku Habshah Sultan Abdul Hamid collection, and exhibits on the history of transportation in Kedah (rivers, elephant trails, roads, railways and cars). On the third floor are displayed Malay weapons and canons, a variety of Jawi manuscripts including a 105 year old copy of the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, land documents and titles from Kubang Pasu dated around the 1850s,[98] and copies of the handwritten Quran.

However it is the *Dewan Sejarah* [Hall of history] that is of interest to visitors like me. The tapestry begins with a brief introduction to the history of the state accompanied by pictures of historical places like the Kuala Kedah fort, Zahir mosque, Mahsuri tomb and the Baling talks of December 1955. Also added, are pictures of more contemporary edifices like the Alor Setar Telekom Tower, and the North-South Highway that more or less dissected the state into two different parts. The historical narrative starts with the Merong Mahawangsa period and a note on the origins of the word Kedah which first came into currency in 846 AD. There is much more information on early settlements in the Bujang valley which was very Indianised, besides settlement at other localities such as Kubang Pasu. Islam officially came to Kedah in 1136 (based on the *Al-Tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah*) and through Abdullah al-Yamani the then king Maharaja Derbar embraced Islam and assumed an Islamic name. Also shown are Islamic schools located in Yan and Kuala Kedah. Other exhibits include those relating to weight and measures, Kedah's earliest coins, the Bujang Valley's external trade, and Kedah's old administrative capitals.

Kedah-Thai relations are shown through a variety of exhibits including a picture of Rama II and a replica of the *Bunga Mas & Perak* which was sent to Bangkok before 1909. The museum highlights the different interpretations of the *Bunga Mas* with the Siamese and British considering it as a symbol of submission from the sender, while the Malay rulers saw it as a gift in securing alliance and friendship among neighbours. Equally interesting is the museum's depiction of Kedah-Bugis relations during the 18th century, the handing over of Penang on 11 August 1786 or the Kedah-Siam conflict of 1821. According to the museum, "relations with the British aroused Siamese anger and Siam sent

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98 For its transliteration see Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu*, pp. 87–89. The land title was issued which took place during the reign of Tunku Anom (the Raja of Kubang Pasu).

7,000 soldiers" to Kedah. One of the exhibits in this section is a flag from Langkawi used to rally the Malays in the war against the Siamese. This flag measures 180 cm by 90 cm interspersed with verses from the Quran against a red background.[99]

The period after 1909 focuses on the state's administration, economic development until 1941, and the development of education. On economic development there is information on rubber planting, paddy planting, Pekan Rabu (which still exists) and Pekan Melayu in Alor Setar, which is no longer there, unlike Pekan Cina which is still thriving. This is followed by the Japanese and Thai military interlude (1942–45) and the significance of this period for the advancement of nationalism among the Kedah Malays through Japan fostering anti-west sentiment and the formation of SEBERKAS – the co-operative society that also dabbled in politics.[100] The result of these awakenings was reflected in Malay opposition to the Malayan Union with rallies held in Alor Setar in 1946. There is very little condemnation of either Japanese or Thai military rule in this museum unlike the strong denunciation of Thai military rule at the Kota Bharu War Museum.

There is much more information on the post-war period with coverage on the emergency and the introduction of the identity card to curb the communist menace, the Baling talks of 1955 which was held at the Sekolah Rendah Tunku Putra, the birth of UMNO and the UMNO general assembly of 1947 which was held at the Balai Besar. One of the prominent Malay leaders in the immediate postwar period was Haji Hussein Che Dol who went on to form the Kedah Ulama Association, the Kedah Malay Association and a short stint in UMNO prior to forming PAS in Kedah.

The museum attempts to instil some measure of pride in the people of Kedah and the achievement of the state in relation to the nation. This is done by focusing on all the chief ministers between 1948-99 (there were eight of them plus Wan Muhammad Saman) and their contributions to the state. The other means is by highlighting eight individuals from Kedah who had attained a 'first' for the country. They include Tunku Abdul Rahman (the nation's first prime minister), Tun Mahathir Mohamed (first medical doctor to become prime minister), Dato' Dr Abdul Halim Ismail (first managing director of Bank Islam), Tan Sri Profesor Awang Had

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99 See the translation in Ibrahim Ismail, Haji, *Sejarah Kedah Sepintas Lalu*, pp. 76–77

100 See for instance Baharuddin Abd. Majid, "Pergerakan dan Perjuangan Seberkas, 1944–1956: Satu penilaian" [The Seberkas movement and its struggle, 1944–1956] in *Kedah dari segi Sejarah* [Kedah in history] 2: December 1987 pp. 20–24

Salleh (first vice chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia), Tan Sri Mohamad Jamil (first director of agriculture), Syed Abdul Rahman Syed Abdullah Al-Jaffre (first director of the Anti-Corruption Agency), Tunku Yaakob Sultan Abdul Hamid (first federal councillor), Profesor Ismail Hussein (first head of the national writers' organisation GAPENA), and Dato' Zakiah Hanum (first head of the National Archives of Malaysia).

The Kedah Museum Board had also published short studies on Kedah history including pamphlets, and, until 1993, there were sevem of them including one which went into a second printing.[101] The leading contributor in the pamphlet series is undoubtedly Dato' Haji Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof (popularly known as Pak Wan). I am attracted to two such pamphlets which he authored. One of them highlights the struggle of the Kedah Malays against a variety of foreign powers in three different periods. The main protagonists on the Kedah side are depicted as heroes and nationalists which means that Kedah nationalism had begun much earlier, in 1821 if not 1791. The first period starts with the Bugis invasion in 1771 and ends with the war against the English at Kuala Perai in 1791. The second starts with the Siamese invasion of 1821 and ends with the Siamese military withdrawal in 1841 while the third refers to the much celebrated struggles against the Malayan Union between 1945–47 which also affected other Malays in the peninsula.[102] Strangely the 1909 changeover from Siamese overlorship to British colonial rule did not result in any open resistance among the Kedah Malays; if there was, it was muted. Sharom, however, has taken note of elite resistance to Britain between 1909–1923 but stopped short of labelling these individuals as nationalists.

This account provides plenty of heroes, or in the above schemata, nationalists. They include royalty such as Tunku Kudin (Syed Zainal Abidin), Tunku Mohammad Saad (a nephew of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin), local leaders like Tok Madi from Yan and Dato' Pekerma Ali from Langkawi, religious leaders like Sheikh Abdul Kadir and his brother

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101 Notable ones include *Dokumentasi Konvensyen SejarahKedah* [Documentation of Kedah history convention] (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992), *The Sultan Was not Alone* compiled by Ismail Haji Salleh (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1989). and James F. Augustin, *Bygone Kedah* (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992). The first publication is a collection of papers presented at a major conference on Kedah studies held in Alor Setar in December 1981.

102 Wan Shamsudin Mohd Yusof, *Kedah Darul Aman dalam Sejarah Liku-Liku Perjuangan Menuju Kemerdekaan, 1791–1957* [Kedah Darul Aman in the struggles for independence, 1791–1957] (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992)

Sheikh Abdul Samad al-Palembangi while for the 20th century, there are many more names including Tunku Abdul Rahman (later the first prime minister after 1957), Azahari Taib, Senu Abdul Rahman, Khir Johari, Haji Hussein Che Dol and Mahathir Mohammad (later prime minister and Tun). Even reigning sultans were depicted as heroes, and indirectly as nationalists such as Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin who had planned to retake Kedah with assistance from Bruas and Siak and Sultan Badlishah who was depicted as a great supporter of UMNO.

The other pamphlet deals with a more general history, with brief coverage of the various periods of Kedah history, but much more on the reigns of selected rulers.[103] It begins with the prehistoric period followed by the Hindu-Buddhist period which was based in the Bujang Valley. Wan Shamsuddin accepted the importance of the latter as it shows "*betapa masyarakat Melayu di Lembah Bujang sudah memiliki kepakaran seni bina, seni ukir dan pahat, serta seni tulis di samping mahir dalam bidang perniagaan dan perdagangan.*"[104] The arrival of Islam in 1136, which is based on Muhammad Hassan's *Al-Tarikh Salasilah negeri Kedah* is preceded by Arab sailors and explorers who had stopped in Kedah such as Sulaiman (851 AD), Ibni Khordabeh (844-848 AD) and Mas'udi (943 AD). The account then highlights the various administrative centres of the sultanate beginning with Kota Bukit Meriam (1136-1236) in the Kuala Muda district, Kota Sungai Emas (1236–1323) also in the Kuala Muda district, Kota Siputih (1323–1626) in Kubang Pasu district, Kota Naga (1626–1654) also in the Kubang Pasu district, Kota Sena (1654–1664) in Perlis, Kota Indera Kayangan (1664–1687) also in Perlis, Kota Bukit Pinang (1687–1735) in the Kota Setar district and since 1735, Kota Setar/Alor Setar.

The author's treatment of selected rulers is of interest as only nine of the 28 rulers were discussed. Sultan Dhiauddin Mukaram Shah (1797–1804) was relegated as acting sultan: in an earlier article, his name was omitted from the list of Kedah rulers although he is now officially accepted as the 21st ruler.[105] The coverage on these sultans was based solely on the fact that all were based in Kota Setar/Alor Setar. The rulers were Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Adilin Muadzam Shah ll (1710–1778), Sultan Abdullah Mukarram Shah (1778–1797), Sultan Dhiauddin Mukarram Shah ll (1797–1804), Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Shah l

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103 Wan Shamsudin Mohd Yusof, *Kedah Darul Aman Sepanjang Jalan* [Kedah Darul Aman through the ages] (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1992)

104 Wan Shamsudin Mohd Yusof, *Kedah Darul Aman Sepanjang Jalan*, p. 2

105 See for instance *Kedah dari Segi Sejarah* [Kedah in History], vol. 10: July 1983 p. 5

(1804–1845), Sultan Zainal Rashid Muadzam Shah I (1845–1853), Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah (1853–1879), Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah (1882–1943), Sultan Badlishah (1943–1958) and Sultan Haji Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (since 1958). Some of the sultans were given brief treatment like Sultan Abdullah who was associated with the lease of Penang in 1786 or Sultan Muhammad Jiwa who encouraged agriculture by digging irrigation canals, introduced a new currency and instituted a new mode of land measurement. He also had to face an internal rebellion and the Bugis invasion of 1771 which pushed Kedah to seek security assistance from the EIC.

Much more lengthy treatment is given to Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Halim Shah who had to come to terms with onerous Siamese demands for labour and war materials, the Siamese invasion of 1821 and exile in Melaka which was recorded in his *syair* "Syair Duka Nestapa" [Ballad of Sadness]. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah, on the other hand, was depicted as responsible for bringing Kedah into the modern era notably through the construction of roads that link Alor Setar to the Thai border, and the entry of Chinese capital and labour necessitating the appointment of a Capitan Cina (Chinese kapitan). As for the other sultans, there is nothing much on them. Sultan Abdul Hamid was depicted as the "father of modern Kedah" as his long reign saw the construction of the 36-km long Wan Muhamad Saman canal from Alor Setar to Gurun which became a major catalyst in the expansion of rice production; Sultan Badlishah was portrayed as in sympathy with the political aspirations of the Malays by opening the UMNO meeting of July 1946 (held in Penang) or hosting the January 1947 meeting (held at the Balai Besar, Alor Setar). As for the reign of the present Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, the notable achievements include significant agricultural development in the MADA (Muda Area Development Authority) region, the development of Langkawi after 1987, when it attained free port status, and Kedah winning the Malaysia Cup after 40 years of trying.

A possible state history of Kedah?

The preceeding discussions have touched on some of the state histories that have been written on Kedah by the court scribes and amateur historians and their shortcomings. I have also touched on other studies by the professional historians that cover women, peasants, social banditry and other socio-economic aspects besides the usual political and

administrative studies.[106] Actually, there are many more studies on Kedah that have been undertaken by the non-historians, and these include those by geographers on Kedah population, tourism, investment,[107] the development of the peasant economy in central Kedah,[108] the linguists on Kedah dialects, and others on the arts and music that are peculiar to the state. Then there are the many unpublished studies which, are reasonably good, completed by local post-graduate students mainly in the field of history, geography, literature and Islamic studies.[109] All these point to the possibility of writing a "total history" of the state that encompasses politics, culture and everyday life spanning the last 800–900 years and stretches to the 1980s or early 1990s.

Perhaps the kind of total history envisaged is not quite in the mould of the Annales school[110] but it should take into account the widest possible coverage, not just the aristocracy, focussing on demography and population growth, health, the environment, and cultural aspects. It also means political history and "important" individuals are relegated to a less visible role in the narrative, and putting in more ordinary people. In short, the historical geography of Kedah, economic history, social history, cultural history and political history should be moulded into a grand

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106 For a brief survey of historical works on Kedah including by western writers see, Khoo Kay Kim, "Penulisan akademik sejarah Kedah Darulaman" [Academic writings on the history of Kedah Darulaman] in *Dokumentasi Konvensyen Sejarah Kedah* [Documentation of the Kedah history convention] (Alor Setar, Kedah Darul Aman State Museum Board: 1991)

107 See the essays in Mohamad Sukeri Khalid et. al., *Kedah 100 Tahun, 1900–2000: Isu-isu Politik dan Sosioekonomi* (Sintok, Universiti Utara Malaysia Press: 2002)

108 Afifudin Haji Omar, *Pembangunan Ekonomi Kaum Tani* [Development of the peasants' economy] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1986)

109 Some of the more important ones relating to Kedah that were completed at Universiti Sains Malaysia are Teh Koon Hoo, "Sejarah Sosioekonomi daerah Yan dari 1909 hingga 1957" [Socio-economic history of Yan district from 1909 to 1957] (unpublished MA thesis, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2003); Ng Gan Chee, "Distance and costs relationship in padi production: A case study in Kedah" (unpublished MA thesis, the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1978); Fadzillah Jamil @Mohd Jamil, "A history of the Malay trading community of Alor Setar" (Academic exercise, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1974); Faezah Sahid, "Perkembangan sosioekonomi Bandar Baharu 1909–1975" [The socio-economic development of Bandar Baharu 1909-1975) (Mini-thesis, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1988); and Zulkafli Abdul Ghaffar, "Gerakan mogok Petani di Baling Kedah pada November 1974: Satu tinjauan dari segi Sejarah [The November 1974 peasant demonstration in Balaing: A historical survey] (Mini-thesis, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1992).

110 Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution the Annales School, 1928–1989* (Cambridge, Polity Press: 1990)

narrative that utilises an array of studies that have been accomplished in the last 50 years. This multi disciplinary approach is the only means to get away from the imprint of the earlier court scribes and the present preoccupation with political history. It is equally necessary to tap the widest possible range of source materials including the Dutch materials compiled by Melaka officials. Scholars who have consulted these materials covering for the 17th and 18th centuries have commented highly on their usefulness in historical research. They make reference to Kedah, Ligor, Ujung Salang and Pattani and would shed much light on the social and economic affairs of these political entities.[111]

It would also be exciting to look at every day life during the 19th or 20th century including the arts and culture. Unlike the Annales school, there will still be some focus on politics and political history, which is unavavoidable, as politics dominated much of the 19th and 20th centuries. It would also focus on various "contentious issues" like the Islamisation of the state, its people, and their culture, whether this had begun in the 12th century or much later in the 15th century; on the start of colonialism in Kedah, whether in 1821 or 1909 and whether to look at Siam as a colonial power and Kedah's colonial period as beginning in 1821; the start of Kedah nationalism whether in 1821 (or earlier) or the 1930s. In short, there is a need to integrate existing studies into a more comprehensive state history giving attention to every day life and not just political structures and the elites.

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111 M. R. Fernando, *Murder Most Foul,* (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 2006); see also M.R. Fernando, "The lost archives of Melaka: Are they really lost?" in *JMBRAS* 78 (1): 2005 pp. 1–36; and M. R. Fernando, "Quantifying the Economic and Social History of Southeast Asia: A Need for New Evidence and Methods" in Abu Talib Ahmad & Tan Liok Ee (eds.), *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History* (Ohio, Ohio University Press: 2003)

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Re-Reading Adat Laws and Legal Texts as Sources of Malay Social Stability

Abu Talib Ahmad

Introduction

Few Malaysian historians have paid sufficient attention to legal texts, and legal texts have, therefore, remained the preserve of those specializing in literary or legal studies and philology. R. J. Wilkinson was one of the first scholars to have discussed Malay laws at the turn of the 20th century. This pro-Malay scholar-official was intrigued by Malay legal texts or what he called "digests," but, at the same time, he seemed to have misunderstood them, and underestimated their importance. He had asked his western readers not to take the Malay code (*undang-undang*) seriously: to him, the author of the "Melaka Maritime Code" (*Undang-UndangLaut Melaka*) was an extremely argumentative person who pushed his doctrines to absurd extremes.[1] To him, Malay laws like the *adat Temenggong* (patriarchal system), were autocratic and "brutalized" the people; the Islamic law (*hukum syarak*) put a premium on hypocrisy and only the democratic but primitive *adat Perpateh* (matrilineal system) was acceptable.[2] This view of Malay laws and legal texts has remained influential, although before colonial rule, these texts were referred to as laws in the Malay world and were found workable and upheld social stability.

One difficulty with these legal texts is the language in which they were written with its long-winded sentences devoid of paragraph or full stop and more literary than legalistic despite their use of legal terms like *hukum* (law), *fasal* (clause or article) and *saksi* (witness).[3] Some of these

1 R. J. Wilkinson, "Malay Law" in M. B. Hooker (ed.), *Readings in Malay Adat Laws* (Singapore, Singapore University Press: 1970) pp. 7–8. This article that appeared in 1908 is widely cited by scholars and researchers even in the present period.

2 According to Wilkinson, the "adat Perpateh (Minangkabau) may claim great merit as a system of law; it was just; it was humane, it tolerated no delay in criminal matters; it secured compensation for the injured; it never brutalized or degraded a first offender; it was understood by all and even went to childish extremes in its desire to explain itself clearly, and intelligibly to the very humblest intelligence in the community." R. J. Wilkinson, "Malay Law", pp 9–10

3 Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-Undang* [Legal literature] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1995)

texts have been transliterated and published,[4] and they do provide invaluable information, but still fail to attract the attention of students of history. These legal texts reveal the influence of both *adat* (customs) and Islam.

Before the advent of colonial rule, both *adat* and Islamic laws had already been enforced, with some measure of success, on Muslims as well as non-Muslims, on locals and on foreigners, in various aspects of daily life including trade and commerce.[5] One might also note that this was the period when the plural society, a term often associated with western colonial rule, had already evolved although not quite the kind succinctly described by John Furnivall.[6] Thus, since the time of the Melaka sultanate and other subsequent sultanates from 1511 such as Johor-Riau, Pahang, Kedah (which actually appeared much earlier than Melaka) and Perak, both *adat* and Islamic laws had proven to be workable, and provided a modicum of justice and the rule of law that led to some form of social stability in the Malay world until the mid-19th century, when western laws assumed greater ascendancy. Under colonial rule *adat* laws were still important; despite initial hesitancy, the colonial government duly recognized its importance. This importance did not diminish after the end of colonial rule.[7]

4 For five such texts see Mariyam Salim (ed.), *Undang-Undang Kedah* [The Kedah laws] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 2005); Mohamad Jajuli A. Rahman, *The Malay Law Text* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1995); Abdul Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Serangkai Warisan Sejarah* [A legacy of history] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1989); Abdullah Sani Usman, *Nilai Sastera, Ketatanegaraan & Undang-undang dalam Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh dan Bustanus Salatin* [Literary value, statecraft & laws as seen in the religious canon of Aceh and the Bustanus Salatin] (Bangi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press: 2005); and Yaakub Isa (transliterator & ed.), *Hukum Kanun Pahang: Teks zaman Pemerintahan Sultan Abdul Ghafar Mahayuddin Shah (1592–1614)*[The Pahang legal codes: the Sultan Abdul Ghafar Mahayuddin Shah (1592–1614) text] (Pekan, The Pahang Museum Board, 2003).

5 See for instance Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-undang Melaka*: *The Laws of Melaka* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff: 1976); Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, *The Malay Sultanate of Malacca: A Study of various aspects of Malacca in the 15th and 16th Centuries in Malaysian History translated* by D. J. Muzaffar Tate (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1992) chs. 9–10

6 John S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative study of Burma and Netherlands India* (New York, New York University Press: 1956)

7 See Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar (ed.), *Adat Melayu Serumpun* [The world of Malay adat] (Melaka, Melaka Museum Corporation: 2001); Ahmad Ibrahim & Ahilemah Joned, *Sistem Undang-Undang di Malaysia* [The Malaysian legal systems] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1992) second edition, second printing; M. B. Hooker, *Adat Laws in Modern Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press: 1978); M. B. Hooker, *Adat Laws in Modern Malaya: Land Tenure, Traditional Government and*

The following discussion touches on the diversity of *adat* in the Malay world, and includes discussion of the *Undang-Undang Melaka* (Melaka Laws) that combined both *adat* and Islamic elements and how it contributed towards social stability, and a scrutiny of the post-Melaka legal texts and the position of women within these texts.

Adat Laws in the Malay World: Their Diversity

Adat laws are basically composed of the customs and traditions of the indigenous people. It is defined as *adat* practices which have the force of law that have (1) a long history of usage from one generation to another, (2) societal recognition, and (3) possess the force of law to institute penalty on those who transgressed them.[8] *Adat* laws are now accepted as part of the corpus of the national laws in many parts of the Malay world that stretches from southern Thailand, Malaysia, and the Indonesian archipelago to the southern Philippines. Yet this type of law is still amenable to certain changes to suit societal need at a particular time.[9] This means that the *adat* laws, in a way, are very much alive and there is much truth in the contention that *adat* are the nearest equivalent of the English common law which is an integral part of English jurisprudence.

Adat laws are notable for their variety and diversity. In the Malaysia-Indonesia region during the colonial period experts divided the area into 19 *adat* areas (law circles) as follows: Acheh; Gayo, Alas and Batak lands; Minangkabau; south Sumatra; East Sumatra, Malaya and west Borneo; Bangka and Billiton; Borneo (except Malaysian west Borneo); Minahasa; Gorontalo; Toraja territory; south Celebes; Ternate

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Religion (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press: 1972); Barendter Har, *Hukum Adat dalam Polemik Ilmiah* [The adat laws in intellectual polemic] (Jakarta, Bhratara: 1973); Abdullah Sidek, *Pengantar Undang-undang Adat di Malaysia* [Introduction to adat laws in Malaysia] (Kuala Lumpur, University Malaya Press: 1975); and, Haji Mokhtar Haji Md. Dom, *Malaysian Customary Laws and Usage* (Kuala Lumpur, Federal Publications: 1979). In Malaysia the main sources of the country's laws are (1) written laws namely the Federal and States' Constitution, (2) decisions of the courts, (3) English laws, (4) Islamic laws (*hukum syarak)*, and (5) *adat* laws. Ahmad Ibrahim & Ahilemah Joned, *Sistem Undang-Undang di Malaysia*, p. 5

8 Nik Abdul Rashid Nik Abdul Majid, "Adat dan undang-undang' [Adat and the laws] in Abdul Latif Abu Bakar (ed.), *Adat Melayu Serumpun* [The world of Malay adat] (Melaka, Melaka Museum Board: 2001) pp. 27–49; see also Saidatul Nornis Haji Mahadi, "Undang-undang adat: Satu tafsiran awal terhadap indikator sosial Bajau" [Adat laws: A preliminary study of the social indicator of the Bajaus] in Sarim Mustajab et. al. (eds.), *Warisan Budaya Sabah: Etnisiti dan Masyarakat* [The cultural legacy of Sabah: Ethnicity and society] (Kota Kinabalu, University Malaysia Sabah Press: 2004) pp. 66–67

9 Ahmad Ibrahim and Ahilemah Joned, *Sistem Undang-Undang di Malaysia*, pp. 27–28

archipelago; Ambon Moluccas; New Guinea; Timor archipelago; Bali and Lombok; central and east Java; principalities of Jogjakarta and Surakarta; and west Java.[10] In these *adat* areas, for instance, Aceh and the Minangkabau heartland, *adat* coexisted with Islamic laws, with no apparent contradictions, as *adat* diehards seemed to believe. In Johore, the village of Jabi in Segamat district exhibits a mixture of both the *adat Temenggong* and the *adat Perpatih* as the area was settled by myriad migrants from Pagaruyung in Sumatra, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan and other parts of Johore since the 19th century: Outsiders might find this mixture bewildering but there seemed to be no apparent contradictions among the local population.[11] However at present divisions such as above, due to increasing modernization and migrations, might have less relevance especially in the urban areas.

Malaya, East Sumatra and west, or more correctly north, Borneo (to mean Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah), are identified as being in the same *adat* area based on the prevalence of the *adat Temenggong* and, to a certain extent, the *adat Perpatih* although in East Malaysia the indigenous peoples, or even the aboriginal groups within the Malay peninsula, do have their own *adat* laws that regulate social behavior and other matters of interest to that particular society such as that pertaining to land.[12] In the Malay peninsula the *adat Temenggong* held a dominant position compared to *adat Perpatih* which is confined to Negeri Sembilan (notably in five of the original districts of Negeri Sembilan namely Kuala Pilah, Jelebu, Jempol, Rembau dan Tampin) and the Naning area in Melaka although it is not uncommon to find legal texts that were influenced by both *adat* systems as in the case of Perak. In the popular mind differences between these *adats* are associated with the importance of either the male or female primogeniture. In a way, this kind of perception is quite erroneous. The *adat Perpatih* did not merely dwell on customs or customary practices,[13]

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10 M. B. Hooker, *Adat Laws in Indonesia*, p. 30 fn. 20

11 Rokiah Abu Bakar, "Kampung Jabi, Segamat" in Kassim Thukiman et. al. (eds.), *Menelusuri Sejarah Tempatan Johor* [Surveying Johore local history] (Johor Baharu, Johore Heritage Foundation: 2001)

12 See for instance A. J. N. Richards, *Sarawak land Law and Adat* (Kuching, Government Printing: 1961); Pangeran Osman bin O. K. K. Pangeran Haji Omar, *Dusun Customs in Putatan District* with Introduction by Danny Wong Tze Ken (Kota Kinabalu, Natural History Publications (Borneo): 2006); and G. C. Woolley, *Tuaran Adat: Some Customs of the Dusuns of Tuaran, West Coast Residency, North Borneo* with Introduction by Danny Wong Tze Ken (Kota Kinabalu, Natural History Publications (Borneo): 2006)

13 See for instance Jamaluddin Abdullah, *Adat Perpatih* [The adat perpatih] (Singapore, Geliga Limited: 1959). This popular publication seemed to be based from the Minangkabau chronicle or oral history or both.

for it actually encompassed things from the least significant to the most important including the laws governing the administration of the state. In this sense the *adat Perpatih* "is complete from the point of view of conduct, procedure and law or the constitution of the state".[14] Amir Syarifuddin has examined various aspects of the *adat Perpatih* including the different levels of the *adat*, their characteristics, the various laws that prop up the *adat Pepatih*, such as the Twenty Laws (*Undang-undang Duapuluh*), the matrilineal nature of the *adat Perpatih*, property inheritance and the relationship of the *adat Perpatih* with Islamic jurisprudence.[15]

The Minangkabau Adat laws

The Minangkabau chronicle, [*Tambo Minangkabau*], provides an absorbing account, often laced with myths, on the origins and history of the Minangkabau clan and more importantly, their customary laws. The three localities of Padang, Panjang, Pariangan, and Pagaruyung that are located in the Minangkabau heartland of the province of West Sumatra, and Palembang, located in East Sumatra, are identified as the source of the *adat Perpateh* and *adat Temenggong* respectively. However the Minangkabau cultural sphere is much wider as it also encompassed the western parts of Riau and Jambi province.

How they came to be known as they are today is not quite clear, although local folktales on their origins abound. According to Wilkinson, *adat Perpatih* managed to retain its original characteristics, but the *adat Temenggong* was subjected to Hindu influence from Java, although how this took place is a matter of conjecture. Both *adat* were transported to other parts of the Malay world, as a result of migration, resulting in the striking similarities in the *adat* of the Malay peninsula and Sumatra and even north Borneo and Brunei, which at one time claimed to be the successors to the Srivijayan tradition (in competition with Melaka), that was based on the *adat Temenggong*. Which of these *adat* first left the shores of Sumatra or whether one had influenced the other is difficult to answer. In the case of Malaya, most scholars were of the opinion that the *adat Temenggong* came first during the time of Srivijaya and after the

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14 Haji Mokhtar bin Haji Md. Dom, *Malaysian Customary Laws and Usage*, p. 1; see also Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim*, Sastera Undang-Undang* [Legal literature] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1995) chap 5

15 Amir Syarifuddin, *Pelaksanaan Hukum Kewarisan Islam dalam Lingkungan Adat Minangkabau* [The Implementation of Islamic inheritance law within the Minangkabauu adat (Jakarta, Gunung Agung: 1984) chs. 5-9

founding of Melaka, followed by the *adat Perpatih* during the 16th -18th centuries.[16] Both are represented by different sets of laws, namely the *Undang-Undang Melaka* (Laws of Melaka) and the *Undang-Undang Minangkabau* (Laws of Minangkabau). According to an expert on Malay traditional laws, all subsequent legal texts found in the peninsula originated from either these two laws or a mixture of both and *hukum syarak* which is theocratic in nature.[17] Wilkinson described all three systems as irreconcilable, which is correct to a certain extent, although, in the case of the Ninety Nine Laws of Perak, all three elements could also be found in a single legal text.

Scholars have observed that the *adat*isation of Islam, and the Islamisation of the *adat* since the 14th century: refer, in the case of the former, to a situation when *adat* is compatible with Islam and becomes the primary mode of articulation, while the latter, when *adat* is incompatible with Islam and Islam becomes the mode of articulation.[18] This observation might be correct for states that subscribed to the *adat Temenggong,* and maybe equally valid for most parts of Indonesia, except for the Minangkabau region. Scholars have noted the opposing positions between the local *adat* and Islamic laws in the Minangkau region especially with regard to property inheritance[19] although the *Tambo Minangkabau* which is the written source of the *adat Perpatih*, seeks to integrate *adat* laws with Islamic jurisprudence.[20]

In Negeri Sembilan, conflicts in the two systems usually revolved around the issue of land and its ownership.[21] Yet even in states that are identified with the *adat Temenggong, adat* or customs, which are still

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16 Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam* (Boulder, Westview Press: 1992) pp. 62–64

17 Liaw Yock Fang, *Sejarah Kesusasteraan Melayu Klasik* (History of classical Malay literature (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 1982) third edition p. 282; See also Abu Hassan Sham and Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-Undang*, ch. 5

18 Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam,* pp. 16–17; see also Ismail Hamid, *Peradaban Melayu dan Islam* [Malay civilization and Islam] (Petaling Jaya, Fajar Bakti Publisher: 1985)

19 M. B. Hooker, *Adat Laws in Modern Indonesia*, p. 92. Hooker depicts these systems as one (*adat*) claiming an exclusive jurisdiction and the other claiming to determine obligation as an element of social structure; one defining and attributing obligation in terms of the individual, and the other in terms of a wider grouping.

20 Edwar Djmaris, *Tambo Minangkabau: Suntingan Teks disertai Analisis Struktur* [Minangkabau chronicle: edited text and structural analysis] (Jakarta, Balai Pustaka: 1991) pp. 52–55; see also Mohd Shah bin Mohd Said al-Haj, *Tambo Alam Naning* [The Naning chronicle] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1996)

21 M. B. Hooker, *Adat Laws in Modern Malaya*, chapter 9–10

prevalent, and clearly in contradiction with Islamic tenets have been subjected to increasing attacks by religious scholars and individuals who want them eliminated.[22] In the former kingdom of Aceh, religious laws (*syarak*) co-existed with *adat* , and this is reflected in the popular saying "*syarak dengan adat bagaikan zat dengan sifat*" [religion and custom is like attribute and characteristic] Similarly , the appointments of office holders in the kingdom between the 15th and 19th centuries[23] right down to village chiefs were based on their knowledge of both religious and *adat* laws; these officers were required to uphold Islamic precepts as stated in the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Until the early second half of the 20th century, the *adat* Perpatih was still very much a part of the local society in Negeri Sembilan, Naning and parts of Sumatra that affected a whole set of social (and even political) relationships. . Yet the Minangkabu laws, as practised here, known as the Laws of Sungai Ujong, had departed significantly from the Minangkabau laws of Sumatra[24] which is based on the many versions of the Tambo *Minangkabau* (one scholar claimed there are 47 texts deposited in various libraries including Leiden, London and Jakarta).[25] The main story in the *Tambo Minangkabau* is meant to reinforce the position of *adat* and to integrate it with Islamic influence, to ensure the inheritance of property stays within the clan, and to strengthen the position of the *penghulu* [chieftain in this case] as the undisputed leader within Minangkabau society. Thus the position of the chief is dependant on the strength of the *adat* while a capable leader would be able to get public compliance to the *adat* laws. The chief also ensures that inherited properties stay within the clan and are used for the benefit of the clan.[26]

Unlike in Negeri Sembilan, the force of *adat* is much stronger in Sumatra as the individual who heads the *adat* system is also the foremost authority on Islamic and political matters within the locality. As outlined in the *Tambo Minangkabau* both *adat* and Islamic laws are given equal emphasis (as represented by the presence of the *adat* hall and mosque in the same locality) and require equal respect from the adherents of the *adat Perpatih*. It also shows the central figures in this chronicle as staunch

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22 See for instance discussion on this issue in Ismail Awang, *Adat Orang-orang Melayu yang Bertentangan dengan Aqidah Islam* [Malay adats that are in contradiction with Islamic tenets] (Kota Bharu, Pustaka Aman Press: 1983).

23 Abdullah Sani Usman, *Nilai Sastera, Ketatanegaraan dan Undang-undang dalam Kanun Syarak dan Bustanus Salatin*, pp. 26–43

24 Liaw Yock Fang, *Sejarah Kesusasteraan Melayu Klasik*, p. 278

25 Edwar Djamaris, *Tambo Minangkabau,* Introduction

26 Edwar Djamaris, *Tambo Minangkabau*, pp. 76–77

upholders of both the *adat* laws and Islamic precepts. Yet, to the outsider, there is the problem of reconciling the issue of property inheritance, which gives preference to the female line as stipulated by human laws, and the position of the males, in a similar situation, as provided for under Islamic (divine) law.

This primacy of the *adat* in Negeri Sembilan and Sumatra is exemplified by the Malay saying "Let the child perish, but traditions never!" (*Biar mati anak jangan mati adat*) among the *adat* diehards, which also reflects the kind of justice that the *adat* seeks to promote. In Negeri Sembilan there is a special person who is provided with a suitable position in his locality, or clan, or state, his concern being just "to learn, memorize and relay certain traditions or adat when the situation warrants it". In the words of a scholar from this state, "this tradition is always alive because all contemporary events that had taken place will become part of the existing local traditions to be passed on to the subsequent generations."[27] It was from these oral traditions, that British scholar-officials like Martin Lister, R. O. Winstedt, and E. N. Taylor, had written down and published on the *adat* and in the process quite often "wrongly described" the system.[28]

Yet things have changed much in Negeri Sembilan in the last 30–40 years especially in the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres that impinged significantly on the *adat Perpatih*.[29] In the first place, there is increasing migration of the *adat* adherents, both male and especially female, to neighbouring states like Selangor, Melaka and Johore, in search of a better economic life that is no longer based on land, while mainstream politicians have assumed greater say in matters pertaining to *adat* instead of the traditional chiefs. In the end, *adat Perpatih* tends to confine itself to matters like land inheritance and socio-cultural functions such as village or family feasts. The dominant position of women is also under

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27 Nadzan Haron, "Keterangan lisan sebagai sumber Sejarah" [Oral testimony as historical sources] in Badriyah Haji Salleh & Tan Liok Ee (eds.), *Alam Pensejarahan: Dari Pelbagai Perspektif* [The world of historiography: From various perspective] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1996) pp. 146–153

28 See the interesting discussion by an eminent and highly respected former mid-20th century colonial administrator J. M. Gullick, "D.O.'s and Dato's: Dialogue on the Adat Perpateh" in *JMBRAS* 73 (2): 2000 pp. 31–51

29 See the important discussion on this matter in Azizah Kassim, "Wanita dalam Masyarakat Adat Perpatih di Negeri Sembilan"[Women in the adat Perpatih society of Negeri Sembilan] in Tengku Alaudin Majid and Po Dharma, (eds.), *Adat Perpatih Melayu-Campa* [Adat Perpatih of the Malays and Chams] (Kuala Lumpur, Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism: 1994), pp. 73–86

threat due to the low value of *adat* lands (either in the form of fruit orchards or rubber land).

The patriarchal and matrilineal nature respectively of the *adat Temenggong* and *adat Perpatih has been briefly mentioned earlier*.[30] Scholars, especially women, have pointed out that, in both, the position of primary authority falls on the men although customarily and in the legal sense, women are far from being subservient. According to these scholars, Malay men and women learn in early childhood their respective domains of activity, women in the domestic sphere, and men in the public sphere. In other words their roles, as reiterated by these scholars, are determined by *adat*.[31]

Scholars, especially Wilkinson, have pointed out that the *adat Temenggong* is more autocratic and less democratic as it placed power and authority solely on the ruler (male), although, in practice, this was circumscribed by the practice of consultation (*musyawarah*) with the important chiefs whereas, in the *adat Perpatih,* dependence is made on collective responsibility with the ruler possessing sovereignty but authority and power have been somewhat limited.[32] In this sense, it is more democratic and less autocratic, although in the political sphere, the dominance of the male is not affected.

In the field of inheritance the *adat Temenggong* holds firmly to the principle of allowing male heirs to partake a larger share than the women while in the *adat Perpatih* all inheritance goes to the female heir, especially ancestral property. In other words, it is the women who actually own the rice fields, house plots and even the house itself. Yet the role of the male is not entirely excluded. Even within the clan considerable power is given to the mother's brother in the final distribution of inheritable land (*pesaka*) to the next generation of women. In fact one of the characters in the *Tambo Minangkabau* was an uncle of the two chief characters who was valued for his wisdom in various matters.[33] As pointed out by Wazir,[34] the situation has changed over the last 50 years or so with more and more property acquired during marriage being owned by men rather than women while Islamic law allows men to accumulate land more rapidly than women. Thus in the context of land succession, the

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30 See the discussion by R. J. Wilkinson, "Malay Law".

31 Raja Rohana Raja Mamat, *The Role and Status of Malay Women in Malaysia: Social and Legal Perspectives* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1991) p. 15

32 Raja Rohana Raja Mamat, *The Role and Status of Malay Women in Malaysia: Social and Legal Perspectives,* pp. 14–20

33 Edwar Djamaris, *Tambo Minangkabau*, pp. 62–63

34 Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*, p. 62

matrilineal system does not appear to protect the rights of women as effectively as before. As for holding public office, women still, as before, do not have the prestige of authority to do so and, as a result, males fill public offices (like *penghulu* or head of sub-district or clusters of villages and so forth).

Adat Laws and Social Stability: The *Undang-undang Melaka*

There is not much information on social conflicts in the Malay world during the pre-colonial period, other than wars or conquest of one state by another, which are described in many of the indigenous chronicles (*hikayat*). This would infer that the social rubrics of the existing society were very much held in place by the existing *adat* and Islamic laws. On the contrary it is quite conceivable that whatever conflicts arose were simply suppressed: it is quite possible that litigants believed the existing legal structure was inadequate or unresponsive to face this kind of situation. Wilkinson, who had served as resident of Negeri Sembilan has attested to the high number of complaints on *adat,* notably relating to property inheritance, that were deposited in the colonial district offices in that state during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For the 14th–16th centuries, the *Sejarah Melayu* gives glimpses of the social situation, including conflicts between the aristocracy and royalty, if one reads carefully between the lines.

The laws of the Melaka sultanate of the 15th and 16th centuries best exemplify the function of traditional *adat* laws with regard to social cohesion, which is also an example of *adat Temenggong* par excellence. It must be noted, that the Melakan concept of law differed considerably from our understanding of the same term; one local scholar summarized the law then as "any traditional element, which tends to control the individual to safeguard the order and harmony of society". Except for the *Undang-Undang Melaka* [one local scholar has termed it *Hukum Melayu Melaka* or the Canon of the Melaka Malays] and *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka,* the corpus of the laws were not in written form, but composed of traditional rules and regulations, formally established customs, ethics, norms and mores that had been developed with the passage of time. Scholar Liaw Yock Fang rightly contends that these laws represent the history of Malay political thought much in the same way literature does for the Japanese. These might be imperfect, but the idea, with regard to the laws of the state, shows the Malays wanted some form of order vis-à-vis the relationship between the rulers and subjects. They also wanted order

among the subjects, and other important activities in their daily life despite Wilkinson's claim of their being autocratic and brutalizing the common people.

Liaw Yock Fang has suggested that the *Undang-Undang Melaka* is actually a hybrid of many texts including the *Undang-Undang Melaka* proper (chapters 1–23), parts of the Maritime Laws of Melaka, Muslim Marriage Law, the Muslim Law of Sale and Procedure, the *Undang-Undang Negeri* (State Laws) and the *Undang-Undang Johor* (Johore Laws) which must be a later addition, although other scholars, like Abu Hassan Sham differ on the position of the *Undang-Undang Johor*.

Originally the *Undang-Undang Melaka* was composed of 19 chapters (articles) but these were later increased to 44 during the reign of Sultan Muzaffar Shah; the additions included those relating to Islamic jurisprudence and other matters. The *Undang-Undang Melaka* proper is the most important section and it reaffirms *adat* as "occupying an important place in the administration of justice in the country" i.e the prevalence of customary law.[35] These customs/*adat* were inherited from earlier kingdoms notably Srivijaya. It also considered Islamic jurisprudence and the divergence between the customary law and Islamic law. It was all these that managed to uphold the foundation of the Melaka state and its cosmopolitan society for more than 100 years until its demise in 1511.

The Maritime Law deals with people at sea, the recovery of boats, and weights and measures. According to Liaw these provisions seemed to be inadequate and necessitated the compilation of a separate and more elaborate *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* (The Maritime Laws of Melaka) dealing with sea voyages, and the duties of the ship's crews (discussed in another part of the essay). The Muslim Marriage Law contributed four chapters relating to guardianship, the option of rescission in marriage and divorce while the Muslim Law of Sale and Procedure contributed two chapters, which were added some time afterwards. They clearly show that "Muslim law was once the widely practiced law in the country". The *Undang-Undang Negeri* (parts of chapters 43 and 44), according to Liaw, is an adaptation of the *Undang-undang Melaka* proper for the use of local chiefs in some outlying areas of the sultanate that was copied and added to the main text. Hence, it repeats parts of the earlier provisions relating to the duty of the ruler and his close relationship with his minister, the killing of destructive animals, rape, robbery, gambling and debtors. This section might have been compiled at the beginning of the 16th century. As for the *Undang-Undang Johor* it did not belong to the *Undang-Undang*

35 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka: The Laws of Melaka* pp. 31–33

Melaka originally, and was possibly compiled in the late 18th century. As mentioned earlier, Abu Hassan Sham was of the opinion that these particular Johore laws were not part of the *Undang-Undang Melaka,* but one of the many versions of the 18th century Johore laws.

After 1511 the *Undang-Undang Melaka* was adapted and adopted in Kedah,[36] Pahang, Johore-Riau and Pontianak[37] whereas the mid-18th century Kelantan laws was a copy of the *Undang-Undang Melaka* except for the greater emphasis on Islamic influence.[38] The Melaka legacy was also evident in the laws of Brunei, which were dated 1709. The reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah (1424–44) is often credited with the compilation of the *Undang-Undang Melaka* while Sultan Muzaffar Shah (1445–58), with its final completion, although, as outlined above, the other sections were added at later dates. Many of these laws, including the *Undang-Undang Melaka* and *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka,* were also known by various other names, and scholars have pointed out the different versions that are known to have existed (no less than 44 in the case of the *Undang-Undang Melaka*[39]).

The *Undang-Undang Melaka* operated in a very hierarchical society that was also cosmopolitan in nature. In terms of its social composition Melaka society was made up of four classes, namely royalty, aristocracy, freemen and slaves.[40] Being highest in the pyramidal

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36 See Undang-Undang (Laws) dated 1784 with sections 1-23 copied from Undang-Undang Melaka with a few pages on marriage, divorce, adultery and commerce and conclude with the Melaka Maritime Law. See R. O. Winstedt, "Kedah Laws" in *JMBRAS* 6 (2): June 1928, pp. 1–2; 37–44. For a more reliable transliteration of the original Jawi text see Mariyam Salim (ed.), *Undang-undang Kedah* especially the fifth part of the Kedah laws entitled "Undang-undang Hijrah Seribu Seratus Sembilan Puluh Sembilan" [The 1199 Hejira laws] or the Undang-undang dated 1784 which was copied from the Melaka laws including the *Undang-Undang Melaka* and the Melaka Maritime laws.

37 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka: The Laws of Melaka,* p.1; Muhammad Yusoff Hashim*, The Malay Sultanate of Melaka*, p. 156

38 Hukum Kanun Adat Negeri dan Tahafus Kelantan (The Kelantan Laws) in Abdul Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Serangkai Warisan Sejarah* (Legacy of history) (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1989) pp. 53–89

39 These versions are divided into the following: the Undang-Undang Melaka proper with 19 manuscripts; the Achehnese versions with four manuscripts; the Pattani versions with five manuscripts; the "long versions (between 66–81 chapters) with five manuscripts; the Muslim and Johore Laws with four manuscripts and under the category of "short versions" (less than 29 chapters). See Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka: The Laws of Melaka,* pp. 9–15

40 Haron Daud, *Sejarah Melayu: Satu Kajian daripada Aspek Pensejarahan Budaya*, [The Malay Annals: A study from the aspect of cultural historiography] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1989) pp. 52–66

structure royalty was made up of the sultan/raja and his immediate families. Under the *adat Temenggong* the ruler was invested with absolute power and authority, and the existing laws, notably customary laws, guarantee just that. On the other hand the aristocracy consisted of officials of the state varying from those in exalted positions like the *Bendahara*, *Penghulu Bendahari*, *Laksamana*, *Shahbandar* (chief minister, treasurer, admiral and port officer) to a host of lesser officials including those at the local levels like the *penghulu* (head of a cluster of villages). Again the laws provided these officials with certain prerogatives proportionate to their positions and status, such as: the right to kill under certain conditions, or, making a slave of any one who stabbed a buffalo owned by these officials, whereas a similar crime against the buffalo belonging to a freeman only merited a fine.[41]

In the *Undang-Undang Melaka,* the *adat* was used to buttress the position and authority of the raja and his officials , who were provided with certain privileges under the law and *adat.*[42] This is reflected by the eminence the law gave to the position of the ruler and the important officials of the state. Offences committed by the subjects against the ruler merited the death penalty, and these offences included the exercise of royal order without authority, forging the royal seal, killing someone who was in the process of carrying out the ruler's commission (in the case of this official seducing the wife of someone, the aggrieved party could complain to the raja and it was at the raja's discretion to mete out the appropriate punishment to this official) and encroaching upon the royal prerogative by using five forbidden words namely *titah* (command), *patik* (I, me), *murka* (wrath), *kurnia* (royal grace) and *anugerah* (royal bounty). There was also the royal prohibition against the wearing of yellow attire, which was punishable by death,[43] or the use of gold on the handle of *kris* (traditional Malay weapon) except for the *Bendahara* and his family line. The killing of a royal slave was a grave offence with the offender subjected to a fine 49 times the value of the slave; if he evaded this punishment he would be liable to be put to death; if he was set free, then the person who had set him so would be liable to become a royal slave.

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41 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka: The laws of Melaka*, p. 113

42 See also the interesting discussion on this aspect in Haron Daud, *Sejarah Melayu: Satu Kajian daripada Aspek Pensejarahan Budaya*, chapters 2–4

43 The undated Kanun Law of Dato' Kota Star somewhat relaxed this yellow attire provision by allowing commoner bridegroom carried in procession to wear yellow cloth, cloth of gold colour and a large umbrella. See R. O. Winstedt, "Kedah Laws" p. 10; see also Mariyam Salim (ed.), *Undang-Undang Kedah,* p. xvi

There are other provisions in the law that provide a special position for the ruler. If a free man carried off the slave of a ruler, he, in turn, would become a slave; if a slave carried off a fellow slave (of the ruler) he, in turn, would be given 100 lashes. It is also within the customary law that children of the common people or even children of high dignitaries of the state do not wear gold anklets; only children of royal parents were allowed to do so. All those who have gold ornaments in their possession were not allowed to wear them. According to the *Undang-Undang Melaka* this prohibition was in accordance with the prohibitions made long before Melaka (in other words customs being adopted as customary laws).

The class of freemen was further divided into sub-groups namely traders and shopkeepers, labourers and artisans, especially those skilled in the arts and the making of weapons. These freemen were free to pick any job they wanted, to get married and to get on with their lives without much interference from royalty and aristocracy, except when their labour was required for various purposes including war and construction of palaces and so forth. At times, these demands could be onerous and detrimental to the people and their daily lives, although the *Sejarah Melayu* does not say as much.[44] There was a group within this class who were higher than the rest because of their wealth such as the Indian-Muslim merchants or, because of their knowledge of Islamic theology like the Arab teachers. Both categories were able to rise above the others and they freely mingled with the aristocracy. They were even accorded positions within the state's administrative hierarchy and allowed to marry women from aristocratic families.

The slaves were at the bottom of the social structure but were certainly not the least important. On the contrary, they were an important determinant in the status of their master within the existing society. They performed a multitude of functions, including increasing the wealth of their master, and as bodyguards. Various studies have indicated the obscure origins of slavery in the Malay world; it is possible that this institution was already in the region before the coming of Indian influences and neither was it unique to Melaka. According to Muhammad Yusoff, slave owners included the ruler, members of the royal family, the aristocracy, and various officials, the wealthy and moneylenders.

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44 In the case of Kelantan during the 1830s the unending demands of the palace on the local population was a cause of so much dissatisfaction that some people were willing to move to Singapore to be slaves to Abdullah Munshi even though such a move was punishable by death. See Abdullah Munshi bin Abdul Kadir, *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan dan ke Judah* [Abdullah Munshi's travels to Kelantan dan Jeddah] edited by Kassim Ahmad (Petaling Jaya, Fajar Bakti: 1981) pp. 71–72, 90. Henceforth cited as *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah.*

By the 15th century, slaves formed an important segment of Melaka society: during the time of Sultan Mansur Shah (1456–1477), there was even a *penghulu* who was in charge of registering all slaves. One senior official, Bendahara Tun Mutahir had so many of them that he could not even remember their faces! Because of his wealth, and the large number of slaves he owned, this high ranking official was the subject of much jealousy and was accused of seeking to surpass the ruler. He was subsequently executed. In Melaka there were three categories of slaves namely royal slaves (*hamba raja* or *budak raja* being the highest for this category), debt slavery which was redeemable on payment of the debt and the lowest category being ordinary slaves (*hamba abdi/sahaya*) which was actually a diverse group that included aboriginals. The *Undang-Undang Melaka* had a number of provisions not to treat royal slaves lightly including fellow slaves. The *Sejarah Melayu* put a similar emphasis on slavery. Melaka, during this period, was an extremely cosmopolitan trading city. One study estimated its population at 190,000 (but rather heavily fortified with 100,000 armed men) while 84 languages were spoken on its streets and thriving bazaars. Another study, , estimated the traders to number around 50,000.[45] Three areas of the city state that were densely populated were Upeh (the present Tranquerah) in the north, the area from Iler (Bandar Hilir) to Tanjopacer (Ujong Pasir) and the area around the Melaka estuary.[46] According to Muhammad Yusoff, the foreign elements were made up of 2 groups namely mercenaries and those involved in a variety of economic activities. Men from Java and Pasai made up the majority of the large mercenary group. The second group included peddlers, contractors, large-scale business operators (wealthy merchants who were actually quite powerful economically and politically towards the close of the 15th century), artisans and tin miners (mainly Chinese). In terms of ethnicity they were made up of Chinese, Tamils, Gujeratis, various ethnic groups from Arabia, Persians, Javanese, Burmese, Siamese, Ryukyu Islanders and others. We are not certain if these groups intermarried; probably many did, as attested by the presence of the Indo-Malay community or stayed for a long period in Melaka. But the existing laws were applicable to them as well. Foreigners who used certain prohibited words as proscribed by the *Undang-Undang Melaka* were liable to have their mouth pummeled (in contrast to the death penalty for the subjects of the ruler).

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45 L. F. F. R. Thomasz, "The Malay Sultanate of Melaka" in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Moden Era: Trade, Power and Belief* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press: 1993)

46 Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, *The Malay Sultanate of Malacca*, pp. 236–237

The *Undang-Undang Melaka* covers various aspects of "civil society" such as, customs (*adat*), regulations and attires of rulers and subjects; language of the rulers, funeral obsequies of subjects and dignitaries, homicide, the different categories of slaves, on runaway slaves, the seduction of girls and married women, rules governing discordance, orchards (*dusun*), land under cultivation/rice fields, buffaloes/oxen, family law, weights and measures, prohibition on usury, sale of land, bankruptcy, testimony of witnesses, the procedure and taking of an oath and unlawful intercourse (*zinah*).

The *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* (The Maritime Laws of Melaka) also covers a wide aspect, much more comprehensive than the provisions relating to maritime matters in the *Undang-Undang Melaka,* to include "anything that took place at sea (and on board ship/boat)".[47] The *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* states that the law was merely to maintain customs that had been in place since time immemorial (*adat yang dahulu kala*). Yet some of the provisions covered are similar, including the position and prestige of the captain, the commission of adultery on board ship by various parties such as free married man, slaves and unmarried persons, on debts and so forth. It also includes regulations on trading on board, rules of navigation, the jurisdiction of the captain and the responsibilities of members of the ship's complement such as the owner, the helmsmen, the reefer, the pilot and the boatswain. The punishment, as recommended by the law, also reflects a combination of Islamic and *adat* laws such as death for consensual sex between partners each married to another spouse, 100 lashes for unmarried partners and the requirement for them to marry, or to pay a fine if both or either one of them refused to marry. Equally serious was committing adultery with the wife of a crewman with mandatory death penalty for such an offence, and the crewman to be compensated with another wife.

There is also mention of the four crimes committed on board a ship punishable by the death penalty, namely, disloyalty to the captain, conspiracy to kill the captain, wearing a dagger while all other members were unarmed, and bad conduct. However the captain's decision on the death penalty was subjected to a judicial review to ascertain the justifiability of the decision, once the boat reached Melaka. If the sentence was found to be unjustified, the captain himself was liable to the death penalty or a hefty fine (almost 1 kg. of gold).[48]

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47 "The Maritime Laws of Malacca" edited by R. O. Winstedt & P. E. de Josselin de Jong *JMBRAS* 29 (3): 1956 pp. 28–49. The outline translation is located on pp. 51–57

48 Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, *The Malay Sultanate of Malacca*, p. 205

In many ways both the *Undang-Undang Melaka* and *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* reflect the kind of social problems that Melaka encountered with regard to slaves and the importance of slaves, rampant thefts and robberies at certain times and the promiscuous nature of the society that required strong measures to curb them. It seemed that promiscuity affected a wide spectrum of the social classes, across class, and within class. Apparently *adat* alone was insufficient to institute social stability, as pointed out by many scholars and there was the necessity of imposing harsher sentences to curb social ills affecting the city-state. Islamic laws especially in criminal matters were able to serve as a deterrent to these crimes. The provisions relating to slavery were meant to prevent social discord. The interplay of *adat* and Islamic laws allowed the judges a certain leeway with due consideration to the existing social situation. In family laws Islamic influences were dominant, but, in criminal laws, *adat* elements predominate although Islamic influences permeated through.

Thus, while *adat* prescribes a specific punishment for a certain crime, the law also provides an alternative penalty based on Islamic law. According to *adat,* a slave may kill a free man who had slapped him, and escaped punishment, but according to Islamic law, he who killed shall be killed.[49] The strong *adat* element in the *Undang-Undang Melaka* is manifested in the form of punishment meted out for certain wrongdoings, like adultery, and other sexual offences, although these were further buttressed by the emphasis on Islamic laws with regard to some of these offences.

Liaw has pointed out seven cases where the punishments in *adat* had not been influenced by Islamic law such as in homicide, offences against property, sexual offences, offences against the ruler, other regulations, agricultural law and slaves. In the case of sexual offences the Islamic punishments were stated in the various provisions of the law: it seemed that these were disregarded in favour of *adat* or simply implemented at the whims and fancies of the presiding judges. The *adat* also states the following circumstances when homicide was justifiable.

- Killing a paramour or trespasser
- Killing a person who runs amok or ruffian who could not be arrested
- Killing of a thief who could not be captured
- The privilege of the *Bendahara, Laksamana, Shahbandar* and the ships' captain to kill under certain circumstances

49 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka*, pp. 38–39

- To redress an insult whether it involved a freeman (if he slapped a slave and is stabbed to death, no offence was deemed to have been committed) or a slave (if a freeman was slapped by a slave and in return stabbed the slave to death, also no action could be taken). According to customary law, there was no offence committed. Yet the culprit could be killed within three days after which he could no longer be killed; if killed, the killer would be fined, as this was not in accordance with what the law accepts as "manly behavior". Yet the same law was aware of the Law of Allah that he who slapped shall be slapped or he who had killed shall be put to death.

Interestingly, the law allowed a person to hire a "champion" possibly a person who is good in self-defence (*pencak silat*) to kill or beat someone, if it was done with the knowledge of the judge. This was a rather strange provision but perhaps reflective of the kind of fair play customarily permissible at that time. In another provision (chapter 4) the *Undang-Undang Melaka* states that "people involved in killing one another, murder or stabbing or slashing or beating people or robbing or stealing others' properties or accusing people of lying to the judge, or forging and counterfeiting the royal seal or defying royal commands" were liable to be sentenced to death.[50] However the ruler reserved the right to grant a royal pardon for the offence of killing a human being.

The law was equally lax on sexual offences including adultery and rape. A man who had seduced a woman and had intercourse with her was required to marry her and pay a fine. In case of a married woman, she had only to prostrate herself before the husband and would then be granted a pardon. Similarly if a man seduced and raped someone's daughter, he was liable for a fine; if the girl was of marriageable age, the seducer would have to marry her and to bear all related expenses. If the victim was a slave, the offence only earned a fine. In case of rape the fine was increased, as force had been used on the woman. Alternatively, the judge could order the man to marry the woman. Similarly, sexual offence against a female slave only earned a light fine. On the contrary, the *Undang-Undang Melaka* seemed to champion the unfortunates, for it did mention "in the hope that people would become aware of the (helplessness) of the weak and the orphaned in every big country, village, rural district and the remotest parts of the country." These provisions were very liberal, as under Islamic law, the punishment varied between 80 lashes, if both man and woman were unmarried, and stoning to death, if both were married.[51]

50 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka*, p. 69
51 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka,* pp. 83–84

Interestingly another provision of the same law, which was added much later, provides a hefty punishment (80 lashes) for falsely accusing someone of unlawful intercourse in contrast to the *adat* provision of just a fine indicating inadequacy of the earlier punishment.

Elsewhere in the *Undang-Undang Melaka* (chapter 40), the law was much more specific on illicit sex, and advocated punishment in consonance with Islamic laws.[52] Another provision of the same law provided a stricter punishment on the crime of rape with the rapist to face the death penalty. His life was also at the mercy of the victim's family who could require him to marry the victim, to pay the costs of the wedding and to double up the value of the bridal gifts. "If the offender refuses to marry the girl he shall be beaten, abused and left alone". If the man's relatives decided to take revenge, then it became a criminal offence, which would be dealt by the state accordingly.[53] As mentioned earlier, these parts were later additions to the original text of the *Undang-Undang Melaka.*

The mixing of *adat* and Islamic laws is most evident in chapter 11 of the *Undang-Undang Melaka*, which covers people who steal and defile another's compound. If a property owner killed a thief at the place of the crime, no offence was recorded; offence was only recorded if he killed the thief some days after the crime, and hence liable to be prosecuted. The law also provided for the amputation of the hand (just one hand for one offence) of thieves who stole from a house while his cronies would be spared such punishment but still have to undergo extreme public humiliation namely placed on a white cow, adorned with hibiscus flowers, a dish cover on the head, face smeared with lime, charcoal and turmeric and carried around the country with the beat of a gong to announce the nature of the crime committed. If the stolen property was discovered it would be hung from the neck of the convict.

However, the stealing of agricultural products or cattle did not merit amputation of the hand but merely the payment of the cost of the animal and a fine. In Islamic law the punishment recommended was only the payment of the cost of the animal without the fine. Indicative of the importance of agriculture and farm animals the punishment for cattle theft under *adat* was more severe than those provided under Islamic law.

The difference between the two systems is most evident in chapter 14, regarding slander and denial which is quoted below in its entirety. This aspect of the law is clearly influenced by Hindu practices, which were prevalent in other parts of Southeast Asia. If a person accused another

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52 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka*, pp. 159–161

53 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka*, p. 167

person, and the latter denied it, both parties would be examined by the judge. In the absence of any witnesses both accuser and accused were brought face to face, and the judge would decide based on *adat* laws. According to customary law, both parties had to undergo trial by ordeal, by immersing their hands in boiling water, oil or tin. A verse of the Quran would be written on a potsherd, which would then be thrown into the boiling pot. The contending parties were required to retrieve the potsherd in one attempt and the one who failed to do so would be punished according to the prevailing law of the land including death, if the offence was serious, or a fine. The judge could also forgive him. This provision was very similar to those found in Konbaung laws in Burma.[54] Other Hindu influences were noticeable with regard to forced marriage, interest on pawning; the reversion to blood money to escape certain punishment, and the discrimination with regards to the nature of punishment for various classes of the society.[55] In reality, the trial by ordeal was un-Islamic; in Islamic law, both parties were only required to take the oath in the mosque with their hands touching the pulpit, an act which not many people are willing to do even in the present period.

The law also viewed seriously slander and wild accusations against citizens. Concerning the accusation of seizing another's wife, if the accused succeeded in pleading innocent, then the accuser would be sentenced to death, because the punishment for seizing another's wife was death. If the accuser were not sentenced to death, he would be fined. But according to the law of Allah, the accuser was ordered by the judge only to swear the oath and repent his deed.

Post-Melaka Legal Texts: Continuity and Change

By the 18th century the position of Islam had been well entrenched in Malay society, in terms of a belief system, and, to a certain extent, the state administration. There was even a manual on statecraft the *Taj Us-Salatin* (Crown of the rulers) that served as guidance for rulers. It was used widely for almost 350 years after Melaka to assist in he rulers' proper conduct based on Islamic history and precedence, that stretched as far back to the time of the Prophet and his companions. There was an

54 See The Wagaru Dhammathat [The Wagaru Code] in V. Sangermano, *A Description of the Burmese Empire compiled chiefly from Burmese Documents* translated by William Tandy, with introduction and notes by John Jardin (London, Susil Gupta: 1966); and Hiram Cox, *Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire*, introduction by D. G. E. Hall (London, Greg International: 1971) p. 14

55 Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-Undang*, pp. 59–61

equally important treatise on statesmanship called *Thamarat Al-Muhimmah* which exhorted rulers to administer their lands based on Islamic principles and with knowledge. Raja Ali Haji of Riau wrote this treatise.[56] Critics of early 19th century Malay society like Abdullah Munshi were peeved with the poor conduct of illiterate Malay rulers who only brought misrule and misery to their states and, in the process, discredited themselves in the eyes of God and enlightened fellow human beings. He even recommended royals like Tengku Temena of Kelantan to read and digest the *Taj Us-Salatin.*[57] Consequently the legal texts of Pahang, Kedah and Perak manifested significant changes in Islamic influence at a time when western economic, political and social influences were already intruding into various parts of the Malay world although the much later Johore and Kelantan legal texts remained true to the Melaka tradition. For instance for adultery and theft the Pahang laws, despite being a legacy of the *adat Temenggong*, provided a stiffer penalty in line with Islamic laws. The amputation of the hand was mandatory for theft (cut at the wrist) while a variety of penalties were imposed for adultery: 100 lashes for both if still unmarried or stoning and buried into the ground up to the waist if both or one were married. And so were other offences such as apostasy, robbery, rebellion, theft, consuming intoxicants, refusal to pay tithe and to undertake the mandatory prayers. In case of refusal to undertake prayers the transgressor had to repent three times and if he refused again, could be condemned to death.[58] Yet traditions were not entirely discounted, for, in many cases, how the death penalty was to be conducted was not stated in the law. A typical death penalty was: to have a sharp bamboo penetrate the anus right through the intestines. This was a very traditional form of punishment for "traitorous actions."[59] This kind of punishment was very gruesome and inhumane by any standards of human decency, but probably served its purpose at that time..

Having Islamic provisions in the legal texts is one thing but implementing them is something else. On reading the chronicles or contemporary observations one rarely encounters the strict implementation of Islamic laws in the Malay states, while folk stories (that had become the basis for many movies) show *hudud* (Islamic) laws being implemented by weak chiefs who were instigated by others with vested interests to settle

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56 Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-Undang*, pp. 173–189

57 *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*, p. 77

58 See *Hukum Kanun Pahang* articles 11 and 12 pp. 109–110, 14. This impressive but rather wieldy publication is available from the Pekan museum in Pahang. See also, Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-Undang*, pp. 63–65

59 *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*, p. 15

old scores or out of jealousy as in the case of the legendary Mahsuri of Langkawi who was wrongfully accused and improperly tried for the crime of adultery. It also reaffirmed that *adat* laws were still an integral part of indigenous jurisprudence[60] and quite often, as in the time of Melaka, this was given prominence. Even in the Islamic kingdom of Aceh, Islamic laws co-existed with the *adat* and customary practices with both given equal emphasis. It was only towards the end of the 19th century beginning with the modern Johore state laws (*Undang-Undang Tubuh Negeri Johore*) of 1895 that a departure from the Melaka mould became evident and, for the first time, we have a legal text that actually exhibited modern or western influences.[61]

As the precursor of the *adat Temenggong* the *Undang-Undang Melaka* had significant influence on subsequent laws that were followed by the other Malay states such as the Pahang laws which were compiled between 1592–1614, the Johore laws which were in use between 1683–1699, the Riau laws which were enforced in Riau during the mid and end of the 18th century, the Kedah laws and other laws like the Ninety Nine Laws of Perak.[62] In general the Melakan influence is most obvious in the earlier legal texts while the latter ones exhibited stronger Islamic influences, although the Johore laws and even the more recent Kelantan laws still adhered faithfully to the tradition of the *Undang-Undang Melaka*. In fact the Johore laws were very similar to the *Undang-Undang Melaka* in terms of its provisions or the position of Islam vis-à-vis *adat* that came into force in the Johore-Riau kingdom after the fall of Melaka.[63] Similarly, the Kelantan laws (*Hukum Kanun Negeri dan Tahfus Kelantan*) were already in use towards the middle of the 18th century, if not earlier, as there is a record of it being copied in 1168 Hijrah (approximately 1750) and recopied again in 1388 Hijrah (1899) by a court official named Umar bin Muhammad. The 1899 text, which faithfully sticks to the Undang-Undang Melaka, contained 19 articles although the last few pages refer to the 20th – 24th articles of the latter but this was not stated as such.[64]

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60 Liaw Yock Fang, *Sejarah Kesusasteraan Melayu Klasik*, pp. 282–283

61 Article 15 of this law specifically stated that the Sultan could not cede the state or any of its territory to any European power but this took place in October 1945 under the Malayan Union treaty signed by MacMichael and Sultan Ibrahim. This episode led to certain segments of the Johore Malays to call for the resignation of the Sultan. See Abdul Samad Ahmad, *Serangkai Warisan Sejarah*, p. xxi

62 Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-Undang*, ch. 2–3.

63 "J. R. Logan: A Translation of the Malayan laws of the Principality of Johore" in M. B. Hooker (ed.), *Readings in Malay Adat Laws* (Singapore, Singapore University Press: 1970) pp. 83–100

64 Abdul Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Serangkai Warisan Sejarah*, pp. 53–75

Like its well known predecessor the Kelantan laws cover procedures relating to royalty (such as dress code and the like which 19th century Malay social critics like Abdullah Munshi found extremely irksome), funeral obsequies of subjects and dignitaries, homicide, amok, on those who were allowed to take life, carrying away of slaves and daughters of other persons, theft, hiding a slave, on wild and baseless allegations, treatment of slaves, on hiring someone to kill, slap or humiliate others, on fruits in the orchards, on paddy land, on rent of land, on cattle, on those who were drowned at sea and a sea captain committing theft of slaves.

The preponderance of *adat* is evident through this particular text. In fact its preamble maintained the legacy of *adat* from earlier rulers who were known for their just and fair laws.[65] In other words the *adat* had proven its usefulness and relevance. Yet the same preamble also elevated the position of Islam by stating that rulers are like shepherds and "in the Hereafter they will be asked about their flocks" which was evidently influenced by the *Taj Us-Salatin* mentioned earlier. This meant that rulers must rule in fairness and in accordance with Islamic precepts. As rulers, the law provided them with various prerogatives and deserved the respect of the people of Kelantan and its territories. Yellow was forbidden for the commoners and so was a *keris* with golden handle. Like the *Undang-Undang Melaka* five words were prohibited from being used by the *rakyat* (people) not even royal slaves, except by royal prerogatives (*titah*, *patik*, *murka*, *kurnia* and *anugerah*) punishable by death. Yet there is no evidence to show that in implementing these provisions the Islamic influence was given precedence; just like Melaka, *adat* continued to be given wide latitude that rendered ineffectual the relevant provisions with regard to Islamic jurisprudence as found in the text.

A rather different situation is found in the Kedah laws, which was first discussed by Winstedt in 1928. These laws were actually a set of four different laws, namely the Port Laws of 1650, the Tembera (laws) of Dato' Sri Paduka Tuan dated 1667, the undated Hukum Kanun Kota Setar (Laws of Kota Setar) and the Undang-Undang (Laws) dated 1784 (the Malay version is Undang-undang Hijrah Seribu Seratus Sembilan Puluh Sembilan while the fifth section, which was not discussed by Winstedt, concerns the making of the *Bunga Mas*).[66] I will just highlight the changes

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65 The original Malay is quoted as "Adapun adat turun temurun daripada zaman raja yang tua-tua yang amat adil pada hukumnya."

66 R. O. Winstedt, "Kedah Laws" in *JMBRAS* , 6 (2): June 1928; Mariyam Salim (ed.), *Undang-Undang Kedah*, pp. 1–24; and Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-undang*, ch. 3

discernible in these texts in comparison to the laws of the Melaka sultanate.

The Port Laws contained 37 provisions relating to port regulations including sections on weights and measures and taxation. These indicated that Kedah did have an active trading relation with various parts of the region including the Dutch factories at Melaka and in India besides Jambi, Pattani, Perak, Karlinga and Gujerat in India. The influence of Islam is evident in many of the provisions such as chapter 27 which stipulated that "the harbour master and his police must inspect the market daily to prevent gaming, cock fighting, opium smoking, drinking spirits, unlawful sales and purchases and quarrels. In conjunction with the marshal (*bentara*) of the warden of the settlement, the harbour master and his police must arrest all persons who had violated Muhammadan law, slay those who resist, and seize unlawful property. Persons arrested are sentenced by the raja although the nature of the sentence was not stated in the text. No buffaloes were allowed to be slaughtered, except under the seal of the harbourmaster, who had to prove the identity of the beast and its owner. Buffalo thieves had to have the head of the beast hung from their necks, and be taken around by a crier with a gong, bellowing, "I am a buffalo thief! Behold me!" In the fasting month, whoever broke fast in the market before sunset would be arrested and forced to eat grass in front of the *balai* (hall) or beaten in the middle of the market. Another provision states that all weights and measures shall be uniform and in accordance with "the word of God as in the Quran" and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and other earlier prophets. According to this law, failure to conform to the correct weights and measures would only invite God's retribution on the people and the state.

The Laws of the Dato' Sri Paduka Tuan, which discusses matters relating to rice fields (*bendang*) and grazing animals (buffaloes), and their upkeep, was equally strong in its emphasis on Islamic precepts.[67] This 1667 law contained 16 provisions with the first three exhorting the people to abide by the Islamic precepts (*rukun Islam*). Article 1 states that "Thieves, robbers, cock fighters, opium smugglers, gamblers, worshippers of trees and rocks, drunkards, all these sins against Allah must be reported by the elders of a village to the headman. Failure on the part of the elders or of the headman to do so shall be punished." Article 2 requires the headman to order villagers to observe the five daily prayers, the fast and the Friday congregations. The recalcitrant would be brought to the mosque with a yoke around his neck. Article 3 stipulated that all

67 Mariyam Salim (ed.), *Undang-Undang Kedah*, pp. 17–24

land-owners must pay tithe (*zakat*). The law was equally strong on the need to follow the correct weights and measures and insisted on shop-keepers being honest in their dealings, by requiring "the Headman of every district to beat the gong ordering those who possessed weights and measures to bring them in to be officially tested to see if these conformed with those approved by the state. Anyone who possessed dishonest weights and measures would be hit on the head with them."

The Perak laws

Perak has three different sets of legal texts with a mixture of *adat Temenggong* (Undang-Undang Pahang), *adat Perpatih* (Undang-Undang Duabelas) and Islamic laws (Undang-Undang Sembilanpuluh Sembilan or the Ninety Nine Laws). Even in the Ninety Nine Laws there are glimpses of *adat Perpatih* influence especially in matters relating to women while local *adat* still had its relevance throughout the text. For instance the transgressions of *adat* incurred a heavy fine (law 96) and when the people were in the presence of the raja or chief, they had to observe proper *adat*; they must bow their head, they should not allow their eyes to wander, they must not look in the face of the raja or chief, their voice must not be raised and each man must regulate his behavior as required by custom" (law 24). The Ninety Nine Laws discussed a wide variety of matters which scholars grouped under four broad headings namely public laws, proprietary rights and duties, slavery, sorcery and miscellaneous, and relations of the sexes.[68] Also touched on, were the opening of agricultural lands and economic activities and there were many more details on marriage and divorce compared to previous legal texts.[69] As in other legal texts, it also stipulated clearly the prerequisites for holding of offices of the state including raja, and other lesser officials. At the local level, (*mukim*) there were seven important officials namely the judge, the *imam* (the head of the parish who also solemnized marriages), the *penghulu*, the reader, the *muezzin* (the person who called people to prayer), the medicine man (*pawang*) and the mid-wife who were collectively responsible for the wellbeing of the local community. The law also stated that it was customary for the chiefs of the country to support the raja, and to consider the welfare of the peasantry as both contribute towards prosperity and peace.

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68 "J. Rigby: The Ninety Nine Laws of Perak" in M. B. Hooker (ed.), *Readings in Malay Adat Laws*, pp 57–82

69 Liaw Yock Fang, *Sejarah Kesusasteraan Melayu Klasik*, pp. 283–284; Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-Undang*, pp. 147–173

The Islamic influence was manifested not just in the preamble, but throughout the text which was essentially a dialogue between a ruler and his minister which Hooker contends indicated a degree of relative sophistication compared to other traditional legal texts. Equally significant, was that a *kathi* must be familiar with the law of God and His Prophet, knowledgeable in the laws and customs of the country, have a good voice and be very well read, physically sound and possess a good appearance (law 79). Yet the Ninety Nine Laws were extremely lenient in their punishment, which reflected the influence of *adat* besides other influences including Hinduism as, at times, the punishment meted was in opposition to what was practiced in Islamic jurisprudence. Muslims who were found guilty of manslaughter shall not be put to death "for both victim and slayer would be lost dying the death of the unbelievers. Instead a heavy fine was recommended for the slayer and the crime would be absolved." Similarly the killing of others in an affray only merited the payment of blood money and a fine: "whatever fault men may have committed, if they are able to pay the proper fine to the raja, their sins shall be pardoned in this world with the help of this gold"(law 52). On illicit intercourse, if both parties admit their guilt, they would be allowed to marry plus the payment of a fine (law 50). Equally liberal and actually unIslamic was the provision that allowed marriage between stepbrother and stepsister (who had been breast fed by the same woman) or to allow a man to marry another woman who had shared the same breast feeder as his wife.[70] One must not also exclude the powerful influence of Sufism like the Naqsyanbandiah *tariqa*, which was popular among intellectuals of the Malay world including *kathis* until the mid-19th century.[71] A recent study claimed that since the 17th century Sufi *ulamaks* served as advisors to the various Malay courts but did very little to weed out un-Islamic customs and laws that survived to the 20th century.[72]

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70 Abu Hassan Sham & Mariyam Salim, *Sastera Undang-Undang*, p. 169

71 Syed Naguib a-Attas, *Some aspects of Sufism as understood and practiced among the Malays* (Singapore, Malaysian Sociological Research Institute: 1963); and Mahani Musa, "Buku catatan peribadi Sheikh Omar Basheer dengan rujukan terhadap Rusuhan di Pulau Pinang pada tahun 1867: Satu dokumen sejarah Pulau Pinang abad ke-19" [The diary of Sheikh Omar Basheer relating to the 1867 Penang Riots: A document for the history of Penang in the 19th century] in Abu Talib Ahmad & Cheah Boon Kheng (eds.), *Isu-Isu Pensejarahan (Esei Penghargaan kepada Dr. R. Suntharalingam)* [Issues in historiography (Essays in honour of Dr. R. Suntharalingam)] (Pulau Pinang, Universiti Sains Malaysia Press: 1995) p. 121

72 Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, *Islam di Alam Melayu* [Islam in the Malay world] (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1998); see also the discussion on the Malay-Indonesian networks of ulamaks during the 17th and 18th century based on the *hadiths*

An interesting aspect of the Ninety Nine Laws, was the position of women, which was a marked departure from the *adat Temenggong* tradition. The law stated that the husband had a strong duty to his wife. He needed to provide medicine in time of sickness, treatment during pregnancy, and meat, drink and apparels in accordance with his means, provision of a house to live in, and the land sowed to provide sustenance. If the wife was displeased with the failure to provide these provisions, the husband could not quarrel with her. Yet the wife had to maintain proper decorum and if she committed misconduct with another man, she would be subjected to three possible penalties namely divorce, death and expulsion from the *mukim* (sub-district). She was also entitled to marry her lover (law 66).

The laws allowed the wife certain grounds to file for a divorce, namely, the failure to receive from her husband either satisfaction for her feelings or nourishment for her body (law 54). In the case of a divorce taking place the husband had to provide maintenance for three months and the personal property to be equally divided: weapons and instruments of iron would go to the husband, while vessels of brass and household utensils would go to the wife. The wife also received the house or plantation, while the husband, all debts and dues. If the divorce was due to the wife's misconduct (such as adultery, neglect of service in bed and board, refusal to do charity works and to the Almighty), then she forfeited the above settlements but the husband still had to pay some money to her.

In the case of the husband having satisfied the wife with both physical/emotional and material requirements, the wife then was not entitled to ask for a divorce. If she persisted she would be thrown into the jungle and would have to stay there for seven days by herself. If she survived the ordeal and returned to the village, she would be carried round the mosque to serve as a lesson to others for what she had done! (law 41). If she committed adultery with another man, and was caught by the husband, the latter would be able to kill him without fear of prosecution and the woman's head would be shaved. If the case came up to the raja or chief, the adulterer was spared the death penalty, but the woman would have to leave her husband stripped of everything, while her seducer would be liable for all her debts. She also had to return the dowry to her husband while the seducer was heavily fined. Both were allowed to marry upon

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and *sufi tariqas* in Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Crows Nest, NSW & Honolulu, Allen & Unwin, University of Hawaii Press: 2004)

payment of this fine; failure to pay the fine would result in both thrown out of the village (law 67).

Yet the women also enjoyed a favourable position in property inheritance as provided by the Ninety Nine Laws, an aspect that was not found in the *Undang-undang Melaka.* In the division of the estate of the deceased person, the house and garden, crockery, kitchen utensils and beddings were given to the female children while implements of iron or weapons, paddy lands or mines would go to the sons. The debts and assets of the estate were divided as follows: a son took double a daughter's share while the remaining property had to be equally divided. In the case of unmarried children their shares were increased by 10 percent (law 33).

The position of *adat* laws in the post Melaka legal texts remained important and formed an integral part of the laws of the Malay world before colonial rule. Various aspects of it were later absorbed into the modern laws such as matters relating to land ownership. In fact the modern land laws of the Federated Malay States crystallize Malay practices that if a holder abandons the land, it reverts to the ruler of the state. On the other hand Islamic influence had become more prominent in the various legal texts that appeared after 1511.

Adat and the status of women

Various scholars have debated the issue of how *adat* actually affects the status of women. Even among women scholars and writers, there is a wide difference of viewpoints. As discussed earlier, traditional laws like the Ninety Nine Laws were actually favourable towards women compared to other laws, an aspect that is often overlooked by many, especially women scholars.

Many writers tend to view the negative impact of *adat* on the position of women.[73] This is more so under the *adat Temenggong* that upheld male supremacy in the public sphere while the women were banished to the domestic sphere. Under *adat Perpatih* women had a far more dominant economic role especially in property ownership and inheritance but not a political role, which was still restricted to the male. In the traditional agricultural society, in which this *adat* operated, daughters were more valued than sons and, in the past, families without daughters were allowed to adopt them after submitting to proper procedures. It is these daughters who later inherited the land, mainly fruit

73 See Raja Rohana Raja Mamat, *The Role and Status of Malay Women in Malaysia: Social and Legal Perspectives* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka: 1991)

orchards, and rubber lands, besides the ancestral home. The sale of these lands was governed by certain customary procedures such as restriction of sale to near relatives and conducted with the knowledge of the *adat* authorities. All these conditions rendered these lands very low economic value.

The position of women in this matrilineal system was considerable. In practice they were the ones to determine who worked the land, who stayed in the ancestral home and who could build houses on the heritable land. The system also put much restriction on the husband who was dependant on the wife, although the dominance of women was somewhat affected by the presence of Islam.[74] Interestingly, the influence of Islam is much emphasized in the *Tambo Minangkabau* with each of the stories begining with salutation to Allah, the Prophet Muhammad and the liberal inclusion of Arabic words in the texts, besides quotations from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet. The chronicle also sought to reconcile the *adat Perpatih* with Islamic precepts, something that is also being done by scholars like Amir Syarifuddin[75] and others earlier, like Hamka and Taufik Abdullah. One way, is to institute a compromise as proposed by *ulamaks*, intellectuals and *adat* proponents in 1952 at Bukittinggi in which properties inherited for generations from the mother's side stay within the ambit of the *adat Perpatih* while property under "harta sepencarian" (property earned by both husband and wife) are passed on in accordance with Islamic law of inheritance. This consensus was further reaffirmed in 1968 during a seminar on Minangkabau *adat* laws, which was well attended by a broad diversity of Minangkabau intellectuals.[76]

Islam also diminished women's economic power, as, under Islam, marriage became polygamous. The personal status of women was unaffected by her marriage. She could still retain her rightful property, could sue or be sued. The wife is also entitled to one fourth of inherited property upon the death of her husband if the couple have no child or one eighth if there are children, both male and female. However, this amount is certainly insufficient for subsistence. *Adat* plays an important regulatory role, notably *adat Perpatih*. As mentioned earlier, the dominant position of women is under increasing threat due to the rapid changes in

74 Azizah Kassim, "Wanita dalam adat Perpatih di Negeri Sembilan" pp. 76–83

75 Amir Syarifuddin, *Pelaksanaan Hukum Kewarisan Islam dalam Lingkungan Adat Minangkabau* [The implementation of Islamic inheritance law within the Minangkabau adat] (Jakarta, Gunung Agung: 1984)

76 Amir Syarifuddin, *Perlaksanaan Hukum Kewarisan Islam dalam Lingkungan Adat Minangkabau*, pp. 288–289

the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres with *adat* losing its grip among its traditional adherents.

Other scholars were less pessimistic in their evaluation of *adat* and its impact on Malay women. Wazir Jahan Karim in her historical survey of the issue, and based on extensive field work in the Seberang Perai area of Penang state came up with the view that "throughout history Malay culture, in *adat*, has ensured women a position of equality to men and that *adat* reconstruction of gender regularly attempts to redefine and reaffirm women's social contribution". She also echoed the view that, historically, Malay women were not passive receivers of authority; instead they were active participants even in the political process and demonstrated a fair amount of competence and control in political decision-making.[77]

Other historical studies more or less reaffirmed Wazir's contention with regards to the political role of women, including political intrigues and as the real power behind the throne.[78] Looking at states like Kedah and Kelantan, we tend to get a rather mixed picture of Malay women during the pre-colonial period. In both states, the *adat Temenggong* predominates which means the perpetuation of male dominance in the public sphere, including minor positions at the local level. Yet the women were not entirely left out. In Kedah, for instance, Malay women were found to be heavily involved in the economic sector before and after the coming of British colonial rule (1909). They were never strictly confined to the domestic sphere, but were also active income earners and wealth accumulators who contributed money to the family. What makes the case of Kedah before 1909 much more striking, is that all these were recognized in a particular version of the Kedah laws, the Ku Din Ku Meh version, which according to an expert on the subject, was a significant departure from other versions of the *Temenggong* laws including the *Undang-Undang Melaka*.[79]

The case of Kelantan before the 20th century is similarly interesting. As mentioned earlier, its laws were an exact replica of the *Undang-Undang Melaka*, which ensured male dominance in the public sphere.[80] There is no provision that recognized the economic role of women similar to the Kedah laws; yet it did not prevent the women of Kelantan from being active in the economic sphere, something that had attracted

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77 Wazir Jahan Karim, *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*, pp. 219–220

78 Cheah Boon Kheng, "Power behind the throne: The role of Queens and court ladies in Malay History" *JMBRAS* 66 (1): 1993

79 Mahani Musa, "Malay Women in Kedah (1881–1940)" in *JMBRAS* 77 (1): 2004 pp. 1–22

80 Abdul Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Serangkai Warisan Sejarah*, pp. 53–89

perceptive observers like Abdullah Munshi in the 1830s. Abdullah was known for his scathing remarks on the Malays including the "unproductiveness of the men of the east coast," i.e Kelantan, Terengganu and east Pahang.[81] Various aspects of the Kelantan society did not fail to attract Abdullah's attention including the dominant position of women in commerce and petty trading in the main markets of Kota Bharu and Terengganu and other smaller markets. Abdullah also recorded their unsavoury activities in prostitution, which seemed to be quite prevalent. According to Abdullah prostitution was not something that was frowned upon in Kelantan society[82] save perhaps by religious teachers. In the political sphere, Kelantan was also notable for having women as heads of the state who had to face constant incursions from Siam.[83] That women were allowed to rule, albeit not for a lengthy period, is something that did not occur in the other Malay states and reminds one of the case of Japan before the solidification of Buddhist influences.

Conclusion

R. J. Wilkinson, the noted British scholar official who studied the Malay legal systems misread the importance of the Malay legal texts in the daily life of the Malays before colonial rule. *Adat* laws formed an integral part of indigenous jurisprudence in the Malay world since the time of the Melaka sultanate and until the present time. Historically, it was found to be workable and able to institute a modicum of social stability in a society that was pluralistic and hierarchical. *Adat* laws have also been subjected to change as a result of rapid modernization, the diminishing importance of agricultural lands, as in Negeri Sembilan, and the increasing globalization of the Malay world with diminishing respect among the younger generation for *adat* and *adat* laws. As for the position of women within the *adat* systems, we find that Kedah and the *adat Perpatih* give prominence to the role of women in the traditional society thus making women a dominant force in the traditional economy. As for Perak, one could not say that the Ninety Nine Laws were autocratic and repressive to women. In Kelantan the legal texts provided no similar provision yet the women's dominance in the economic sector was undisputed. However this dominance, as indicated within the *adat Perpatih* was eroded by rapid

81 *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*, chapter 2–8

82 *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*, p. 58

83 See for instance Rahmat Saripan, *Kelantan 1776–1842: Suatu Kajian Perkembangan Politik Melayu Tradisional* [Kelantan, 1776–1842: A study of the development of Malay traditional politics] (Bangi, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press: 1974)

development in the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres which resulted in the diminishing importance of ancestral lands to even the adherents of the *adat Perpatih*. Increased awareness of Islamic teachings and precepts will also, in the long run, affect the position of un-Islamic customs and customary laws within Malay society.

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Syair as a Historical Source: The *Syair Tantangan Singapura*, a nineteenth century text

Badriyah Haji Salleh

I
Introduction: *Syair* as A Historical Source

Syair originates from an Arab-Persian word, which means poetry. According to Harun Mat Piah, a Malay *syair* is the reflection of the life of the Malays enriched with various colours and hues that describe their lives. It is considered as the property of the community that gives birth to the people's collective taste and creativity.[1] *Syair* is written in stanzas, each consisting of 4 lines (or pairs of corresponding lines), and the sound of the last syllable of the last word in each line rhymes with the next.[2] Through *syair,* people write about what they think, believe, feel, see, taste, enjoy or suffer. They describe everyday events as well as stories of the past. *Syair* was said to have been introduced to the Malay world by Hamzah Fansuri through his essays on Sufism which were largely based on his vast knowledge of Arab-Persian *syair,* and he adapted them to suit the existing poetry of Nusantara.[3] This genre of *syair* became popular from the second half of the 16th century in Acheh, and its influence spread to the rest of the Malay world.

There are several types of *syair* – all narrating stories on romance, history, religion, allegories, advice and puzzles.[4] In this essay the term syair is used in its singular and plural sense, depending on the context. Of these, *syair* on history seems to be very popular. The earliest *syair* on history that has been discovered, is perhaps, *Syair Perang Mengkasar*[5] written by Encik Amin in the late 1660's. It narrates in great detail the

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1 Harun Mat Piah, 1989. *Puisi Melayu Tradisional: Satu Pembicaraan Genre dan Fungsi* pp 209–82, quoted from Abdul Rahman Kaeh, 1992. *Syair Madhi. Citra Melayu Nusantara.* Kuala Lumpur, Perpustakaan Negara, p 4.

2 For more information on the structure of a *syair,* see Arena Wati, 1989. *Syair Pangeran Syarif.* Bangi, Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, pp 12–15.

3 Abdul Rahman Kaeh, *op.cit* p.4

4 *Ibid.,* p. 6.

5 Skinner, C., (ed), 1963. *Sjaer Perang Mengkasar,* BKI, 40, The Hague.

events of the war between the Malays of Makassar and the Dutch, and written with an historical objectivity uncommon among Malay traditional historical writings of the period.[6] The same event inspired another historical *syair* to be composed, *Syair Sipelman* (referring to Admiral Cornelius Speelman, the head of the Dutch army in the war).[7] There are a number of other historical *syair,* such as, *Syair Perang Menteng, Syair Perang Banjarmasin, Syair Perang Aceh, Syair Pangeran Sharif Hasim, Syair Musuh Kelantan, Syair Maulana, Syair Silambari, Syair Perang China di Montirado, Syair Emup, Syair Perang Wangkang, Syair Pelayaran Engku Putri, Syair Raja Haji, Syair Raja Kecil Di Siak, Syair Tawarikh Zainu'l Abidin III, Syair Sultan Abu Bakar, Syair Sultan Mahmud di Lingga,* and others.

What makes history written in *syair* different from the other traditional prose forms, such as, the *hikayat,* genealogy, and the like, is that *syair* has little or none of the myths and legends that are typical of traditional Malay histories. This prompted Hooykaas to conclude that the historical contents of a *syair,* are more correct.[8] However, the aesthetic features of the style are accentuated as *syair* are written with an audience in mind and are read (rather sung) with a distinct melody. The aim of the *syair* chroniclers was not only to give an account of what had happened, but also to present it in such a way as to delight the hearts and imagination of the perspective patrons and audiences.[9]

In using *syair* as a historical source one must be aware of some of their shortcomings. For example, it has to be first verified that the original text, which was hand written in *Jawi,* is the genuine copy. This can be achieved by working together with philologists, scholars in literature or linguistics, for they often make a thorough study of such manuscripts, including determining the originality of the texts. Secondly, chroniclers, who obviously put in their sentiments and world-views in their composition, compose *syair*. Thus the *syair* might contain the authors' prejudices about the subjects they wrote about. Such a situation could be aggravated if copyists of *syair,* during the process of duplicating the texts, add their own views to the original piece. But this also exists in other historical sources, as Frankel correctly noted,

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6 Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, 1988. *Persejarahan Melayu Nusantara.* Kula Lumpur, Teks Publishing Sdn. Bhd., p.400.

7 See, Cordex-Orientalis No. 1626, quoted from Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, n.7.

8 C. Hooykaas, 1967. *Perintis Sastera,* Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, p 110.

9 C. Skinner, 1963. *op.cit.*, p.7.

> "Even the most scrupulous honesty on the part of the historian cannot prevent his viewpoint from colouring the historical picture…"[10]

It is the responsibility of the historian to interpret his sources by verifying them with other primary sources. According to Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, writings in poetry have their own 'reality' and 'subjectivity'. Hence, the historian must determine his own viewpoint.[11]

The writing of history in *syair* remained popular in traditional Malay writing as it continued to appear interspersed within the writing of *hikayat* and other prose forms of writing. For example, *Misa Melayu,* a history of Perak in the 18th century written by Raja Chulan, was written in prose form but contains 475 stanzas of *syair*.[12] Another example is *Salasilah Melayu dan Bugis,* a history of Malay and Bugis rule in the Malay world.[13]

A large number of *syair* still focus on great people and great events. Many of the above *syair* are about wars and sultans or their families, written by them or by those close to them. Raden Anom Zainal Abidin, for example, wrote *Syair Mokumoku*. She was the sister-in-law of Puteri Banialam, daughter of Sultan Khalifatullah Inayah Syah of Bangkahulu, the central figure about whom the *syair* was written.[14] *Syair Pangeran Syarif* is another *syair* that chronicled life in Pontianak and was written by the sultan of Matan in 1895 when the latter was at this west Kalimantan capital for nine weeks.[15] *Syair Duka Nestapa,* is a Kedah *syair* which was written by Sultan Ahmad Taju'l-din (Tajuddin) II during his exile in Melaka between 1822–1841. It expresses the sultan's misery and depression during this period.[16]

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10 See C. Frankel, "Explanation and interpretation in history", in P. Gardiner (ed), 1962. *Theories in History.* New York, pp 408–427, quoted in Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, *op.cit.,* p 59.

11 Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, *Ibid.*

12 Raja Chulan, 1966. *Misa Melayu.* Singapore, Pustaka Antara, pp116-184.

13 Mohd Yusof Md Nor, 1984. *Salasilah Melayu dan Bugis.* Petaling Jaya, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, pp 33–38, 40–42, 50, 52, 59–66, 68, 75–86, 97–98, 101–108, 115–118, 136–152, 180–188, 209, 224–225, 238–241, 261–279.

14 J. Kathirithamby-Wells and Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, 1985. *The Syair Mukomuko: Some Historical Aspects of a Nineteenth Century Sumatran Court Chronicle.* Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS, p 23

15 Arena Wati, 1989. *Syair Pangeran Syarif.* Bangi, Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

16 During a seminar held in Alor Star, the capital of Kedah, on 9 May 2006, questions were raised about the whereabout of this syair.

The themes of *syair* move from the sultans and life at the istana *and* other personalities and wars, to the common people. There were *syair* written by and about some *Peranakan* families, such as, *Syair Baba Kong Sit,* and *Sjair Kawin Tan Tik Tjoe.*[17] Other *syair* that describe common events that took place in the town were also written, such as Abdullah Munshi's *Syair Singapura Terbakar, Syair Singapura Dimakan Api, Syair Kampung Gelam Dimakan Api,* and other anonymous *syair,* a number of which were also written in and about Singapore, such as *Syair Kampung Boyan Dimakan Api* and *Syair Bah Singapura.*

This paper aims to study three short *syair*, written about and in Singapore in the 1830's. It is believed that a contemporary of Abdullah Munshi wrote them. All the three *syair* were grouped under one title called *Syair Tantangan Singapura Abad Kesembilan Belas* (Protest Syair about Singapore in the 19th century). The first *syair* in the group is entitled, "*Syair Dagang Berjual Beli"* (Syair on Trading), the second is, "*Syair Potong Gaji"* (Syair on Wage Cut) and the third is, "*Syair Tenku Perabu di Negeri Singapura Adanya"*(Syair Tenku Perabu in the Country of Singapore). A person called Tuan Simi wrote the first two syair but the third author is anonymous.

II

Syair Tantangan Singapura Abad Kesembilan Belas

(Protest Syair about Singapore in the 19th Century)

Prof. Muhammad Haji Salleh discovered this syair[18] during his research on Malay ethno-poetry at the National Library in Paris in 1986. The original *syair* was written in *Jawi,* which he had transliterated into the Romanized form and published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Kuala Lumpur in 1994. Although it was common in the early 19th century to have manuscripts copied several times by scribes, *Syair Tantangan Singapura Abad Kesembilan Belas* (thenceforth *Syair Tantangan*) does not seem to have any duplicate anywhere else. Thus it is rare and is very valuable. The original copy still remains at the National Library in Paris.

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17 Mentioned in Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, *Persejarahan Melayu Nusantara, op.cit.,* p 51.

18 Muhammad Haji Salleh is a Professor in Malay Literature. He has served in several universities in Malaysia, such as Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in Bangi. He had also served as a Fulbright Hays visiting professor, held the Tun Abdul Razak Chair at the Ohio State University, and Chair in the Malay Studies at the University in Leiden. Currently he is a professor in the School of Humanities in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

The Malay word *Tantangan* has three meanings: "protest" (from the Malay root word "*tantang*"), "challenge" (also from the word "tantang") and "concerning about" (from the word "*tentang*").[19] All these meanings can be used together without changing the intention of the authors of the *syair* since the contents demonstrate the authors' displeasure at events that were happening around them. They were some of the earliest forms of protest, the first two were directed at the British and traders, the third was at the family of Sultan Hussein Muhammad Syah, the sultan of Singapore installed by Stamford Raffles.

The three *syair* must have been first written in the early 1830's but were brought together under one title in 1841.[20] Professor Muhammad was convinced that the copy that is kept at the National Library in Paris was made from the original text. They were considered as "dark" *syair* since they contain messages of discontent.[21] During this time, it was uncommon for anyone within the Malay society to write, and distribute any protest openly. .. Complaints were often presented in allegories and satires, such as found in *Sejarah Melayu.*[22] Perhaps that could be one of the reasons why such "dark" *syair* were not circulated widely. But it could also be the beginning of an era when the people began to have the courage to criticize. Abdullah Munshi was known to be the earliest Malay to openly criticize in writing some of the weaknesses in the Malay society of his day.[23] But the discovery of this *syair* proves that he was not alone. In fact *Syair Tantangan* was written in 1833 four years earlier than Abdullah's *Hikayat Pelayaran Abdullah.*[24] Obviously the authors of the *syair* must have been Abdullah's contemporaries. But Abdullah's writing was circulated probably because Abdullah did not criticize the British, the people then in power. In fact he idolized them, especially Stamford Raffles whom he described as "… solicitous of the feelings of others, and open- handed with the poor. He spoke in smiles. He took the most active

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19 See, *Kamus Dewan,* 1970, comp. by Teuku Iskandar. Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. 1188.

20 Muhammad Haji Salleh, *op.cit.,* p 6.

21 Ibid*.,* p 3.

22 See the story about *Puteri Gunung Ledang* (the Ledang Mountain Princess), an allegory on Sultan Mansur Syah's sexual prowess, and the fight between warriors, Hang Kasturi and Hang Tuah, a satire on courage and deception, in *Sejarah Melayu. The Malay Annals,* MS Raffles no 18, Cheah Boon Kheng (comp.) and transliterated by Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS, pp 187 and 161–163 respectively.

23 See, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, 1967. *The Voyage of Abdullah: being an account of his experiences on a voyage from Singapore to Kelantan in AD 1838. Kesah Pelayaran Abdullah,* trans. By A.E.Coope. Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press.

24 Muhammad Haji Salleh, *op.cit.,* p 6.

interest in historical research. Whatever he found to do he adopted no half measures, but saw it through to the end."[25] And of Mrs. Raffles, Abdullah said, " Mr. Raffles' wife was unlike that of ordinary women. She shared her husband's charm, the modesty and prudence in everything that she did. She spoke in a friendly and courteous manner alike to the rich and the poor."[26] On the other hand, Abdullah was critical of the Malay society. About the wives of rich Malays, he said, "…for it is the custom of Malay women, when they have become the wives of important people, to grow more conceited and lazy, becoming haughtier and haughtier in manner and magnifying their own importance in every word they utter."[27]

The authors of *Syair Tantangan* criticized the two authorities in Singapore, the British as well as the sultan. This was a transitional period when the Malays were just beginning to adjust to the new changes that were taking place in Singapore. It was hardly two decades since the British took over the administration of the island. With the introduction of the free port policy, traders from the surrounding archipelago, and from India, China and Europe began to throng the fast growing port. In 1834, the population was estimated to be 26,329, a three-fold increase from ten years before.[28] The authors of the *syair* were probably participants in some of the economic activities, particularly that of trading and merchandising for they seemed to be familiar with these events. The people had to compete and jostle with each other; most of them were transients in Singapore. According to John Crawfurd, "The ingredients of its population were very heterogeneous, and composed of no fewer than fifteen nationalities". [29] Such a situation might not have been completely new to the Malays who had for hundreds of years been exposed to foreigners on their shores. But the British administration was new and baffling to the authors. In the first stanza of the second *syair* the author noted,

Bahawa ini suatu khabar
Yang sangat sekali susah dan sukar
Gurnor Jineral raja yang besar
Perintahnya sekarang jauh bertukar.[30]

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25 Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, 1970. *The Hikayat Abdullah.* An annotated translation by A.H.Hill. Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, p 75.

26 *Ibid.,* p 80.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Charles Burton Buckley,1984, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times In Singapore.* With an introduction by C.M.Turnbull. Singapore, Oxford University Press, p 241.

29 John Crawfurd, 1971, *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands and Adjacent Islands.* New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 400.

30 *Syair Potong Gaji,* stanza 1.

(That this is the news
Which is completely difficult and complicated
The Governor General is a great ruler
His rule is now far different).

Obviously the British rule was different from that of the traditional Malay administration. The people were used to rule by their rajas or nobilities, which in style and regulations was politically and economically hierarchical. Under the *laissez-faire* policy of the British administration, however, capitalists played a very important role. And the authors of the *syair* who could just be ordinary Malay or Bugis traders or workers were baffled by what was going on around them.

Akan halnya kita Bugis dan Melayu
Harapkan orang putih juga selalu.[31]
(About us Bugis and Malays
Often dependent too on the white men)

The common Malays used to be economically dependent on their rulers or elite since land and trade were traditionally in their hands. But now for the first time, under the British, Malays began to work on their own or for wages in this port city, together with Chinese and Indian immigrants whose employers need not be Malays or the traditional leaders.

The third *Syair Tantangan* was specially directed at Sultan Hussein and his family. The author of this *syair* was anonymous, and from the style of writing, was not the same as the one who wrote the first and second. But obviously he was disgusted with what was going on in the palace, for he wrote,

Dari halnya sultan raja yang asli
Gagap dan buta lalai dan tuli
Beberapa disembahkan ke bawah duli
Sedikit pun tidak baginda peduli.[32]

(About the raja, the actual sultan
Stammering and blind, forgetful and deaf
Several times it was presented to his majesty
not one bit did he pay any heed).

Singapore was a new city that was bustling with activities. The people were aware that the British were in charge and the sultan and Temenggung

31 *Syair Dagang Berjual Beli,* stanza 48.
32 *Syair Tenku Perabu,* stanza 7

only played a very minor role. However, their social life remained of interest to the Malay commoner who observed and listened to stories and gossip about them. It was one of these stories that became the subject of the chronicler's criticism in the third *syair.*

1. Syair Dagang Berjual Beli Dikarang oleh Tuan Simi di Negeri Singapura (Syair On Trading Composed by Tuan Simi in the Country of Singapore)

Syair Dagang Berjual Beli (thenceforth *Syair Dagang*) is the first *syair* in *Syair Tantangan.* It consists of 56 stanzas altogether. It was composed by Tuan (Mr.) Simi who could be a Bugis or Malay living and working in the heart of an alarming and disturbing Singapore. Events that were taking place around him must have impacted him very strongly and prompted him to pen his thoughts and feelings in the form popular at the time, that is, the *syair.* The idea to write must have come when he was contemplating on the verandah (*pabean*)[33] of his house, the place where Malay men normally spent their time when they were entertaining guests or resting. He must also have been a knowledgeable man, for information that he wrote about was factual. He began to chronicle what he saw, knew and experienced.

Syair dikarang di dalam pabean
Didengar dilihat semata sekalian[34]

(The *syair* is composed on the verandah
To be heard and seen by all and sundry)

Syair Dagang therefore, is a good historical source on the socio-economic history of Singapore Malay society in the 1830's through the eyes of a common man. It voiced Tuan Simi's anxiety and anger about the changes that were fast taking place around him as the result of British rule. These changes had dislocated the Malay society. He highlighted several issues, viz., deteriorating social and moral values, corruption, fraudulent trading, communal conflicts and injustices.

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33 Owners of houses in the town were required by the British to construct verandahs (*pabean*) for the sake of uniformity. It must have a certain depth, and must be open at all times. See, Charles Burton Buckley, op.cit., p. 84.

34 *Syair Dagang Berjual Beli,* stanza 1.

Trade clearly started to boom in Singapore in the first three decades of the nineteenth century after the British took over the administration. As early as 1826, the House of Lords in London was told that its trade had increased enormously from 8,468,000 dollars in 1822 to 15,773,000 dollars in 1824.[35] Tuan Simi might not know the exact value of the Singapore trade; most probably he was not exposed to such information. However, he must have observed the presence of a few thousand crafts, foreign and native, that docked and traded in the harbour.[36] People were free to compete in these new economic opportunities, including the Malays themselves. The accumulation of wealth through trade dominated the life of the people. To his chagrin, Malays had thus become very materialistic. Even religious leaders whom the society looked up to, had become rapacious and greedy. They had trivialized their spiritual and moral values for pecuniary gains. The *imam* and the *haji,* who were supposed to be religious beacons of the Malay society, turned towards corruption.

Imam pun khabarnya mengambil upah
Pada yang bercerai kahwin dan nikah
Hukum yang senang menjadi payah
Jalan yang benar pun boleh disalah[37]

(It is said even the imam imposes charges
Upon divorce, marriage and betrothal
Making simple laws difficult
The right path wrong)

They accepted bribes for marriages and divorce and created difficulties and obstacles so their favours would be sought and given in exchange for some fee. The Quran and book on Islamic jurisprudence were manipulated to suit their greed.

Apabila sudah mendapat suab
Sebarang syoal boleh dijawab
Quran dan fiqh duduk diadap
Begitu begini mencarikan sebab[38]

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35 Charles Burton Buckley, *op.cit.,* p71.
36 In 1821 Raffles reported that there were 2889 vessels that entered the Singapore harbour, 383 belonged to Europeans and the rest to natives. Thay had a total tonnage of 161,000 tons. See, Charles Burton Buckley, *ibid.,* p 79.
37 *Syair Dagang.,* stanza 4
38 *Ibid.,* stanza 5

(After having received the bribe
Any issue can be solved
By citing the Quran and book on jurisprudence
This and that can be excused).

The *haji* (man who had performed his pilgrimage in Mekah) whom the Malay society then highly respected, were also involved in trade, and had no qualms in swearing or taking an oath but blatantly lied and cheated for pecuniary gains.

Haji-haji pun banyak berjual beli
Menipu bersumpah berani sekali
Bicara berdakwa tidak yang khali
Berulang di polis beberapa kali.[39]

(Even many haji are indulging in trade
Cheating and making false oaths without qualms
Prosecuting and making up charges
Without let up to the police)

Tuan Simi who lived within the community must have known and observed the phenomenon taking place rampantly, for in his *syair*, he warned the people from falling victim against such manipulations.[40] He chronicled his dejection and frustration that "*ringgit*" (dollars) had then become the rule of the day.[41]

Also under the scrutiny of the author were the methods of trading in Singapore. According to him, most of the goods in Singapore belonged to the white man, but Chinese and Indian traders only transacted them. He was not totally wrong in his judgment, for according to a report, European goods were in constant demand and all the goods had come by circuitous routes and carried by free ships (country traders).[42] In the city Chinese and Indian traders were very actively involved doing businesses with the Europeans. Tuan Simi described them as being very scrupulous and daring. On the other hand, Malay and Bugis traders were naïve and timid.[43] The latter often transacted their goods on a verbal understanding, and very often some unscrupulous Chinese or Indian traders would swindle them. Verbal exchanges and fights would take place involving

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39 *Ibid.,* stanza 6
40 *Syai Dagang,* stanza 7–10.
41 *Ibid.,* stanza 10.
42 Charles Burton Buckley, *op.cit.,* p 79.
43 *Syair Dagang,* stanza 11–21.

other traders including Europeans and the police. Such eventuality would bring them to court, where the injured parties hoped they could get back their goods or capital, but were often disappointed . According to Tuan Simi the plaintiffs often found the court proceedings cumbersome and expensive. Even the police would very often advise them to withdraw their cases, which, according to the police, would be better for the well being of both defendant and plaintiff.[44] However, Tuan Simi could not help being cynical about this. According to him the police were more interested in closing the case than providing justice. And he wrote:

Tuan polis pun suka akan-akan tertawa
Katanya, "Selamatlah tidak kecewa
Pergilah nakhoda dengan Cina berdua
Putuslah sudah bicara dan dakwa."[45]

(The police chief appeared happy and smiling
He said, "Good luck no regrets
So be gone both ship captain and Chinese
End your litigation and accusation")

Having known of such incidents, Tuan Simi felt that Malay and Bugis traders were often misled. The British, whom they had often depended on, and thought to be fair in their judgment, were actually hypocrites. The Europeans, who virtually only indulged in trade, worked together with the Chinese and Indians who were quick to please them.[46]

The *syair* chronicler, Tuan Simi, continued to denounce the British authorities in Singapore in his second *syair*.

2. *Syair Potong Gaji Dikarang oleh Tuan Simi* (Syair Wage Cut composed by Tuan Simi)

This *syair,* which consists of 38 stanzas, voiced the anger and frustration of the author towards the British administration and company (East India Company). He felt the British had created chaos among the people of his community, especially economically. Coincidently during the same period an anti-British war was taking place in Naning in Melaka. Dol Said, the Penghulu or headman, who refused to pay the stipulated taxes

44 *Ibid.,* stanza 21–44.
45 *Ibid.,* stanza 44
46 *Ibid.,* stanza 48–56.

imposed by the British, was the leader.[47] Could Tuan Simi who composed *Syair Potong Gaji* have been influenced by the anti-British sentiments of the Naning people? But unlike Abdullah Munshi who hailed from Melaka and had accepted and admired the British, Tuan Simi denounced them through his *syair.* And unlike Dol Said who was Malay chief who had to defend his territory or position against the colonialists, Tuan Simi was an ordinary Malay, who was concerned about his community. Graphically and emotionally Tuan Simi described his anger and feelings towards the British, thus:

Mendatangkan perintah dari Benggala
Di atas kita sekalian segala
Selaku api yang amat menyala
Membakarkan hati tidak berkala.[48]

(Came a directive from Bengal
Upon everyone of us
As fire that is blazing strongly
Burning the hearts without occasion)

Tuan Simi knew that the most powerful person in the British administration was the Governor General of the East India Company who resided in and ruled the British Empire from Bengal. He was the one who determined the administration in Singapore and had caused turmoil and hardships among the people, especially the Malays. The word "kita" (the 3rd word in the 2nd line of the *syair* above) connotes the second person in the plural form, which includes the author himself. This means that British rule affected him too. He described British rule as a blazing fire that scorched his heart constantly. It also affected the people whom he likened to boats that were hit by storm and were thrown helter-skelter, completely broken.

Seumpama ribut taufan yang menyala
Kilat dan petir bersama segala
Meniup kapal-kapal perahu-perahu segala
Berhayutan tiada ketahuan hala.[49]

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47 Haji Buyong Adil, 1985. *Perjuangan Orang Melayu Menentang Penjajahan.* Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, pp 137–150.
48 *Syair Potong Gaji,* stanza 4.
49 *Ibid.,* stanza 6

(Like a storm that is blazing
Lightning and thunder came together
Blowing ships and all crafts
helter-skelter)

Tuan Simi continued to pen down his frustration in the following *syair:*

Kebanyakan yang patah kemudi dan dayung
temberang dan bubutnya bagai dirancang
tali kelat putus tidak tersambung
hanya yang tinggal topang dan agong.[50]

(The rudders and oars snapped
along with lanyard and cables as if planned
The rigging cords broke off and hung loose
only the poles and balusters stood intact)

Comparing parts of the boat as parts of life, the chronicler felt that colonial economy had completely destroyed their lives. Malays were familiar with sea faring, and their lives were commonly attached to it. Thus if rudders (*kemudi*) and oars (*dayung*) were broken, the boat (life) would be left at the mercy of the waves. It was worsened by the facts that even the lanyards, cables and cords were destroyed. No ray of hope could be expected from any one, including their chiefs,[51] who were not bothered at all about their plight. The chronicler reminisced the past when people used to enjoy some affluence.[52] Now they even lost their dignity[53] and became destitute.[54] The situation worsened when their wages were cut.[55] The chronicler suggested that people should fight,[56] but knew that it was impossible because they had lost their courage. He himself had become despondent.[57] Desperation must have prompted the chronicler to reverse his attitude towards the British and the company whom he began to turn to for relief,[58] pleading that their wages be improved and their plight be heard.[59] However, he remained cynical and sarcastic until the end of his *syair*.

50 *Ibid.,* stanza 7
51 *Ibid.,* stanza 13.
52 *Ibid.,* stanza 14
53 *Ibid.,* stanza 16
54 *Ibid.,* stanza 16–21.
55 *Ibid.,* stanza 15
56 *Ibid.,* stanza22–23.
57 *Ibid.,* stanza 34
58 *Ibid.,* stanza 24–28.
59 *Ibid.,* stanza 29–36.

Kepada yang patut kami mengadu
permaklumkan perihal hati yang sedu
kita laksana buburnya madu
sebarang yang dapat datang menyudu.[60]

(To the proper authority we beseech
take note of the misery in our hearts
we are like porridge of honey
anyone can come to feed on us)

3. *Syair Tenku Perabu Di Negeri Singapura Adanya* (This is Syair Tenku Perabu in the Country of Singapore)

The author of the third *syair* is anonymous. Apart from it being a "dark" *syair*, protesting against events that took place in Sultan Hussein's family, it was still quite common that writers were rather reluctant to reveal their names to the public. Many writers of Malay classical literary works were anonymous. In the 19th century only a few writers broke the norm, for example, Munshi Abdullah, , Raja Haji Ahmad and Raja Ali Haji and now we know of Tuan Simi, the *syair* chronicler.

Syair Tenku Perabu Di Negeri Singapura Adanya (thenceforth *Syair Tenku Perabu*) is about a scandal concerning the Malay royal family. The chronicler could be a person who lived in the palace, a relative of the sultan or a commoner who came to know about the scandal. The way it was described in a rather detailed account, could mean that the chronicler was quite close to the informer. We can only guess how much was truth, and how much was gossip and exaggeration. This can also explain the omission of the name of the author of the *syair.*

The scandal, however, must have been serious enough to warrant even Abdullah's attention in his *Hikayat,*[61] although he felt it "was not fitting or seemly that I should mention in this book," but he presented a substantial account. The story in *Syair Tenku Perabu* is related more dramatically than in Abdullah's *Hikayat,* but both could complement one another to produce a more comprehensive picture. Like Tuan Simi, the author of this *syair* must have been Abdullah's contemporary. *Syair Tenku Perabu* was rewritten together with the previous two *syair* in *Syair Tantangan* in 1841. The scandal described in this *syair* must have been a very serious affair since Sultan Hussein was said to be affected greatly by

60 *Ibid.,* stanza 37
61 Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat, op.cit.,* pp 264–276.

it and decided to move to Melaka from Singapore in 1834 with his family because of it.[62] Sultan Hussein whom Abdullah said, "indeed lost all sense of responsibility to the world", died the following year and was buried near the Tranquerah mosque in Melaka.

The scandal in the *syair* was about an affair between the wife of the sultan, Tengku Perabu, and an Indian commoner, Abdul Kadir or Tambi, who had gained the favour and trust of Sultan Hussein and resided together with the royal family at Istana Kampong Gelam in Singapore. According to Abdullah, Abdul Kadir behaved like one of the family, causing resentment among the Malay chiefs who considered it most improper. He further thought "the disgraceful and unsavoury tales about the sultan and Abdul Kadir" worsened the situation.[63] But A.H. Hill in his introduction on *The Hikayat Abdullah,* thought that it was the sultan's son who had created the scandal.[64] However, the author of *Syair Tenku Perabu,* who composed the 171 stanzas, believed the scandal was the affair between Tengku Perabu and Abdul Kadir. Whatever the truth was, both Abdullah and the chronicler agreed that all the people (in Singapore and Melaka) knew about the disgrace that was taking place in the *istana.*

Tengku Perabu was the third wife of the sultan. Apart from the appearance of her name in the genealogy prepared by Winstedt in his *History of Johore,*[65] there is no other information about her except that she had borne the sultan several children, including three sons, Tengku Jalil, Tengku Ali and Tengku Jaafar. Tengku Ali later succeeded his father as Sultan of Singapore till his death in 1877.

The chronicler described Tengku Perabu as a charming lady, who must have been quite pretty, cheerful and soft-spoken. But she used these charms to get whatever she wanted from the sultan, including the impossible, and got away with it. For he said,

> i*steri baginda perempuan yang permai*
> *kucing dan tikus boleh didamai.*[66]
>
> (the king's wife was so charming
> she could even pacify the cat and the mouse)

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62 *Ibid.,* p 267
63 *Ibid.,* p 265.
64 *Ibid.,* p 16
65 R.O.Winstedt, 1979, *A History of Johore (1365-1895).*Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS, p.121.
66 *Syair Tenku Perabu,* stanza 8

The Malay proverb "cat and mouse" in the above stanza has the same meaning as the English proverb "cat and dog". Even the sultan must have been very smitten by her, for he followed all her wishes.

Menurutkan kehendak bicaranya isteri
jadilah baginda meninggalkan negeri
membawa putera remaja puteri
diumpati orang kanan dan kiri.[67]

(Giving in to the wishes and desires of his wife
his majesty leaves the country
bringing with him the young prince and princess
as gossip spread among the public right and left)

Several people, especially the Malay chiefs, had counseled the sultan about the affair, but to their chagrin, the latter refused to believe any of what was said.[68] This prompted some people to write about the affair between the sultan's wife and Tambi (a nickname for Abdul Kadir, the Indian man) and pasted it at the gate of the city,[69] causing a lot of commotion among the people.

The *syair* went further, stating that as the result of the affair, the queen became four months pregnant. A foreign midwife was then called to abort the child.[70] When the queen was convalescing, Tambi frequently visited her in her room, which to the *istana* (palace) and the Malays was very unbecoming. Their rendezvous in secret places at the *istana* was well known to the servants.[71] Raja Katijah, who from the title "Raja" that is attached to the name must have been a relative of the royal family, warned Tengku Perabu about the palace gossip.[72] But instead, the angry queen whose secrets were discovered and wished to protect herself drove Raja Khatijah out of the *istana*. Raja Khatijah returned to Riau where she told the people there about the scandal.[73] Similarly when the queen knew that Tengku Abdul Jalil, the eldest son, had also discovered her affair, she accused him of misconduct and later suggested to the sultan, that he be sent away to Pahang to be "refined". Although the sultan was full of regrets, he agreed to send his son away.[74]

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67 *Ibid.,* stanza 9
68 *Ibid.,* stanza7
69 *Ibid.,* stanza 11–12
70 *Ibid.,* stanza 13–15
71 *Ibid.,* stanza 16–18
72 *Ibid.,* stanza 19
73 *Ibid.,* stanza 21–23.
74 *Ibid.,* stanza 24–32.

After this, Tengku Perabu and her lover became more daring in their behaviour towards each other. She blatantly drove away those whom she felt were antagonistic towards them, and ordered them out of the *istana.*[75]

Among those driven out from the *istana* were Tengku Yahaya, probably another relative, and Encik Abu whom Abdullah mentioned as the man trusted by the sultan like his own minister of state.[76] They went to Teluk Belanga seeking help from an Engku Cik, a Malay chief. The latter could no longer contain his anger, especially towards the queen's lover. Obviously the Malays could not act against the sultan's wife, for they still honoured the Malay sultanate as they did before. They only wished to kill the Indian lover for the terrible shame that he had caused. However, for fear of British retribution, they went to the British to consult them.[77] Abdullah in his *Hikayat,* gave a more detailed account. He said the Malay chiefs informed the Acting Governor Bonham, of their plan saying that, "It has brought shame upon all of us and if the sultan does not get rid of him you must not think it wrong of us to court his (Abdul Kadir's) death."[78]

In the meantime, the queen who feared for Abdul Kadir's life, succeeded in smuggling him out of the *istana* by disguising him as a woman.[79] With the help of others Abdul Kadir safely reached Melaka. There he wrote long letters to Tengku Perabu cajoling her, the sultan and family, to join him there.[80] The sultan, who all this while had allowed Abdul Kadir to manage his affairs, was lost without him, "like an old hen who has lost her young".[81] Eventually the queen succeeded in persuading the sultan and the family to move to Melaka.[82] Abdul Kadir welcomed them with much enthusiasm. They lived temporarily in Bandar Hilir but later moved to Ujong Pasir, not far from Pulau Besar where they often went for entertainment.[83]

For fear that she would be accused of being un-islamic because of her disgraceful conduct with Abdul Kadir, Tengku Perabu then schemed to marry off Abdul Kadir with Si Andak (Tengku Andak) her daughter, so that she could consider her lover as her son-in-law.[84] Under this guise she

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75 *Ibid.,* stanza 33–35
76 Abdullah Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat, op.cit.,* p 155.
77 *Syair Tenku Perabu,* stanza 36-42
78 Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat, op.cit.,* p 265.
79 *Syair Tenku Perabu,* stanza 48–51.
80 *Ibid.,* stanza 52–69.
81 Abdullah Abdul Kadir, *The Hikayat, op.cit.,* p 267.
82 *Syair Tenku Perabu,* stanza 75–100
83 *Ibid.,* stanza 102–111
84 *Ibid.,* stanza 112–115

could continue to live together in the same *istana.* The *syair* chronicler described this as:

Apabila sudah kujadikan menantu
aku pun boleh menumpang di situ
anakku tuma aku nan kutu
di manakan tahu orang-orang di situ[85]

(When I have made him son-in-law
I can also lean upon him
As a louse like my daughter baby louse[86]
no one will ever know)

But it would be improper for a princess to marry a commoner. So Tengku Perabu had him conferred with the title of Tungku Muda, which enabled him to be treated by the Malay community like a member of the royal family.[87] However, this caused resentment among the people. One of them became vengeful and stabbed Abdul Kadir with a *keris,* but fortunately it was not fatal.[88]

The *syair* then turned to Tengku Jalil, the son who was sent away to Pahang. He came back to Singapore and met with the Governor and Resident who told him of the incident in Melaka. Tengku Jalil then decided to visit his father in Melaka where Tengku Perabu reluctantly welcomed him. The latter then surreptitiously advised Tengku Jalil to accept Abdul Kadir as a member of the family since he was married to Tengku Jalil's sister.[89] The *syair,* however, did not provide us with Tengku Jalil's response, instead the author completed his composition by adding a separate batch of 9 stanzas stressing his own personal prejudices against Indian Muslims (*Keling*) as a whole.

What is interesting is that while Abdullah in his *Hikayat* blamed the sultan as the main antagonist in the scandal, the *syair* chronicler considered Tengku Perabu, the queen, as the culprit. Obviously both knew about the scandal from other sources, most likely from third persons. The Malay society in Melaka and Singapore, of which Abdullah and the syair chronicler were members, might also have different perceptions about the

85 *Ibid.,* stanza 116
86 A common insect found in the hair of a person and lives by sucking blood. In the Malay language it carries a proverbial meaning of a person who has no aim and responsibilities in life.
87 *Syair Tenku Perabu,* stanza 120–123
88 *Ibid.,* stanza 124–129
89 *Ibid.,* stanza 130–162

royal family, which was fast losing its influence. Some, like Abdullah, who was enthralled by the westerners, were critical of the sultan, while the others, like the *syair* chronicler, preferred to hang on to the values of the past and would still be reluctant to criticize the sultan. Would it not be better or easier then for the latter group of people, like the writer of the *syair,* to blame the lesser important members of the sultanate, i.e., the wife, as the antagonist?

III
Conclusion

Apart from the accounts of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir about 19th century Malay society, it is very rare that we can find historical sources on socio-economic history through the eyes of a common man. It is even more important and interesting that the chronicler of *Syair Tantangan Singapura Abad Kesembilan Belas* had a different version of the royal scandal from that of Abdullah. The chronicler was critical of western domination, while Abdullah was not. *Syair Tantangan,* which comprised three different *syair,* is clearly a protest (dark) *syair.* The first two *syair* are on the changing economic scene in Singapore, but the last is on changing social values. Both were the results of western colonialism.

Syair Dagang and Syair Potong Gaji, voiced the trauma of Tuan Simi, a common man, who was facing a transition from his traditional past to the new capitalistic world. To him the world had turned upside down. He felt oppressed, depressed and finally became melancholic. Having written in poetic form, the chronicler revealed his inner thoughts. He railed against western (British) domination, which had destroyed the moral values of his society.

The third *syair,* for obvious reasons, was written anonymously and was a protest against the moral behaviour of the sultan, his family and a foreign race. He strongly disapproved of the foreigner's race and his presence within the Malay royal household, namely, that of the *Keling* or Jawi Pekan, a term he used in the additional stanzas of the *syair.*[90] *Keling* or *Jawi Pekan* is a term used for a person who is born from a mixed marriage between a Malay and an Indian Muslim. In the 1930's, about a hundred years later, a similar criticism and controversy of the *Keling* or *Jawi Pekan* emerged within the Malay community in the Straits Settlements, in the conflict between the *Jawi Pekan* or the DKK (abbreviation for *Darah Keturunan Keling or* descendants of those of the *Keling*

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90 *Ibid,* stanza 5 in the additional *syair.*

blood) and those who called themselves or *Melayu Jati* or "pure" Malays.[91]

As traditional *syair* were normally written by contemporary writers of Malay society, they constitute important primary sources to historians. However, they should be used with other primary sources to verify the events *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, or as they actually happened.

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91 See, W.R. Roff, 1980. *The Origin of Malay Nationalism.* Kuala Lumpur, Penerbit Universiti Malaya, p 220–221.

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New Theories and Challenges in Malaysian History

Cheah Boon Kheng

Introduction

In this paper I shall discuss new theories and debates in historiography (i.e. historical writing), which present challenges to Malaysian historians in the transmission of historical knowledge. The new theories and debates occur within the current three main schools of modern historiography: (a) the Rankean/ reconstructionist or empiricist/objective; (b) the constructionist/analytical; and (c) the post-modernist/deconstructionist.[1] In Malaysian historiography, the three schools have their proponents. The third – the postmodernist - presents the greatest challenge to the other two. At the outset, let me state my position. I believe in the use of theory, which is tied up with understanding the past. We study history to explain the past, to make the past intelligible to the present. In the study and writing of history there is a dialogue between the past and the present. The past presents difficulties because it is no longer with us, so we attempt to recapture, create or represent the past.[2]

In writing history it is difficult to divorce the historian from the need to convey meaning through the creation of a context derived from the use of facts or evidence. When a historian writes history, he/she unavoidably imposes himself/herself on the past, whether through collecting the evidence for its true meaning, or, more obviously, through the creation, writing and use of social theories. Evidence is there for the historian to infer meaning from and thus create historical knowledge.

Is it possible for a historian to recover the past accurately and reconstruct it? How does the historian capture historical truth? The three schools of historians basically differ on how the historian can *recover and represent the past*. It is this objective alone, which determines whether theory is a useful tool to the historian in conveying the past meaningfully. I intend to discuss the views and approaches of the three different schools

1 For a fuller description of these approaches to historical knowledge, see Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History,* Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p.18.

2 Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, Granta Books, London, 1997, p.9.

on this issue, in order to show how historians go about their work of trying to explain the past to the present-day world in which they live.

In short, we should ask, *how can the reality of the past be known to us?* Or, *how accurate can be its representation?*

Modern Historiography in Malaysian universities

Modern or Western 'scientific' historical writing was first introduced in the University of Malaya in Singapore in the early 1950s. Since then, most historians studying and teaching history at Malaysian and Singaporean universities have been trained in the Western tradition, and in Western methods of research and historical writing. The struggle for the recovery of indigenous or autonomous history began only in the late 1950s and in the 1960s and received a big boost in the debates on Euro-centric versus Asia-centric types of historical writing. It began really in the period after Malaya's independence in 1957. Autonomous indigenous history had centuries-old origins in Asia and in Southeast Asia, but it had been virtually abandoned due to the influence of Western scholarship. Yet within current Malaysian indigenous or autonomous history the Western influence is still strong. We cannot ignore this influence. In this age of globalization we need to be aware of the latest developments in historical writing taking place in the West, and, in particular, the challenges and issues posed by the latest school of postmodern theories.

(a) The Reconstructionist or objective/empiricist school of history

The Western tradition of 'scientific' or' objective' history-writing began with the nineteenth century German historian, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), who is regarded as the father of modern historiography with his emphasis on knowing history *as it actually happened*. The act of formulating and selecting a topic for a thesis, then observing, collecting and verifying the historical facts in the archives; the citation of sources to verify the facts in the text and in footnotes; and the seminar system – these historical practices were all first popularized by Ranke and his contemporaries, and later spread to Europe and the rest of the world. They constitute a major part of the *historical discipline,* as we understand it today. Although he wrote no manual on 'how to do history', many of Ranke's methods have been imitated all over the world, and are still used in our Malaysian universities today. However, some of his methods have come into question recently.

Ranke's methodology is based on empiricism, which rests solely on experience. This constitutes a theory in itself. Like science, Ranke argues, history is a study of the real world, is factual, objective, not speculative. It rejects all *a priori* knowledge, is verifiable, anti-hypothetical, neutral. He has argued that truthful meaning can be directly inferred from primary sources of evidence. Empiricist historians believe that the past (like the present) is real. Because of their experience of the real world, they believe they can understand *real* experiences of the past deductively. Historians should therefore investigate documents, ask questions based on the records of the past, enquire about the motives of those who wrote them, and the ways in which they relate to other documents. As fellow human beings, historians can understand what people of the past went through, because human experiences are universal. We should *deduce,* draw or infer from the documentary evidence to correspond with the events. This emphasis on knowledge through interpretation of the written text, is called *hermeneutic*. The evidence is then organized in a chronologically sequential order. The content is focused or narrated into a single coherent *story* or *narrative*. History is then something linear – a chronology of facts that tell a story, which makes sense.

The empiricist historian believes his descriptive-objective-narrative story is a rational, impartial, 'scientific' and 'truthful' reconstruction of the past. He believes that through this procedure, he is able to recover, and reconstruct the past accurately.

Ranke's own works[3] focused purely on a coherent narrative history of the elites in Europe and on aspects of diplomacy, government and politics. But specialization in the historical knowledge of Europe since his times has expanded vastly into other areas. Nevertheless, his uncompromising stress on objectivity, his demand for archival research and his use of archival sources to provide information on attitudes and feelings of the peoples in the period he studied must, however, be seen as highly influential.

Ranke also held that we should study the past for its own sake and respect the uniqueness of each age, that is, seek to understand a period *on its own terms* and study its own set of values. In other words, we must not be subjective and must try to understand the past as the people who lived in it felt and understood it and not use the standards of our age to judge the past. The empiricist historian rejects any relativism in history – that is, using standards of right and wrong, good and bad. No theories of knowledge should be used to explain the past, either.

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3 Among Ranke's well-known works are *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Nations* (1824) and *History of the Popes* (1834).

Only after **recreating** or **reconstructing** events of the past "*as they actually happened,"* argues the Rankean, could the historian move from the particular to the general and make comments, or interpretations/ generalizations. And the proper place for this is usually at the 'conclusion' of his study.

Rankean influence in Malaysian history

Early examples of the Rankean influence in Malaysian history are the Euro-centric works of British colonial historians like Richard Winstedt, R.J. Wilkinson, Hugh Clifford and others. While they were informative, chronological, narrative, well written and interesting, they suffered from a lack of footnotes and bibliographies and inadequate acknowledgement of sources, so that the reader had difficulties in checking what they wrote. Improved versions of Rankean-type Malaya-centric works in the reconstructionist mode appeared only after Malaya's independence in 1957. These included K.G. Tregonning,'s *Under Chartered Company Rule* (1958), and after the formation of Malaysia in 1963, W.R. Roff's *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (1967), Khoo Kay Kim's *The Western Malay States, 1850–1873* (1972) and Barbara Watson Andaya's *Perak: The Abode of Grace: A Study of an Eighteenth Century Malay States* (1979). They were all written in the objective-descriptive and narrative style.

Ranke's approach to reconstructionist history was not without flaws. "Ranke himself," says British historian John Warren, "has been criticized for overstating the possibility of objectivity, and that his own objectivity can be called into question, since he wrote from a conservative, pro-Prussian viewpoint."[4] He was extremely fastidious about his sources. He preferred only first-hand information (such as state correspondence, minutes, diplomatic dispatches, etc.), which he regarded as 'primary sources', rather than contemporary sources written later after an event (such as memoirs, published books, newspaper reports), which he regarded as 'secondary sources'. Today historians would be less fastidious, and have little hesitation in using both types of sources in reconstructing the past.

4 John Warren, *History and the Historians,* Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1999, p.57.

The Critics

The major criticism leveled by both constructionist and post-modernist historians against Ranke's version of objectivity is that it is inadequate as it is not comprehensive and fails to include any analysis of the events presented in a descriptive-narrative mode. The deconstructionist critics especially claim that the empiricist historian overlooks the authorial voice, the language of the text he uses and the subjective role of the historian himself. The empiricist historian, they argue, needs to acknowledge the difficulties in reading and interpreting the pre-existing materials in the evidence, and the problems of writing up the past, so that the role, thoughts and style of the writer, his interpretations, values and the subjective use of language all will affect the 'reality' that he purports to present. Constructionist historians, on the other hand, say such a descriptive-narrative mode fails to analyze social structures and give a *fuller* explanation to individuals and events, and focus too much on story telling rather than on social groups or classes. In fact, they argue that the true concerns or interests of the Rankean empiricist-descriptive-narrative model are in the role of elites or individuals in politics, war, and diplomacy. They neglect other social groups like women, the workers and the peasants.

Could we gain genuine and 'truthful' historical descriptions by simply following the empiricist historian's narrative? The deconstructionists argue that, unlike the pure scientist, or the chemist who puts two elements together in a chemical liquid in a test-tube and produce the same result each time in his experiment, the historian cannot recover and reproduce the events of the *past* like the scientist. What he achieves is a *partial* representation, merely by *describing* and *narrating* it on selective evidence, in a language of his own and in which many things are left out, as he/she is incapable of 'capturing' everything. Other historians would then come along to do further research and add other parts to his/her interpretation. This means that the full or *real truth* or *veracity* of that subject, or event, is unknowable immediately but unfolds intermittently over time. No historian 's account is definitive, final, absolute or totally truthful, the deconstructionists argue, otherwise why would so many historians resort to writing again and again on the same subject, ask the deconstructionists. Isn't the object of historical research stated to be 'to fill in the gaps' in historical knowledge? Isn't this still the basis for the vast majority of PhD theses in history today? These facts alone should alert us to the realization that no historian can write a definitive account, as, whatever he/she writes today on a subject, can be improved on in the future by someone else on that same subject, so that the 'truth' or 'historical reality' presented on one

topic is not exhaustive, or absolute and is only provisional. The deconstrutionist Hayden White, therefore, concludes, "…there is no such thing as a *single* correct view of any object under study but… there are *many* correct views, each requiring its own style of representation."[5]

Is history in the Rankean empiricist mode then a science? In 1903 a supporter of this view, J.B. Bury, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University, declared, "History is a science, no less and no more… History is not a branch of literature…"[6] However, its critics say it is not a science in the strong sense that it can frame general laws or predict the future, like meteorology. Ranke's admission about history being a science was accompanied by an admission that it was also an art. Ranke wrote, "History is a science in collecting, finding, penetrating; it is an art because it recreates and portrays that which it has found and recognized. Other sciences are satisfied simply with recording what has been found; history requires the ability to *recreate*."[7] British historian Richard J. Evans, agrees, "To search for a truly 'scientific' history is to pursue a mirage…History is not only a science in the weak sense of the word, it is, or can be, an art that in skilful hands… can be presented in a literary form and language that achieves comparability with other literary works of art and is widely recognized as such."[8]

This means that the reconstructionists have conceded at least two points: (a) it is not a science in the full sense of the word; and (b) it is an art or literary form that uses language to *reconstruct* the past. In other words, the *constructionists* and *deconstructionists* have won some minor points in their arguments. The constructionists, on the other hand, do not totally reject history as a science, but they argue that their own methods are more comprehensive and more 'scientific' than the reconstructionsts'. Let us now look at the constructionists' position.

(b) The Constructionist/analytical school

Some of the constructionists' arguments have been presented above. So let us discuss how their methodologies differ from the reconstructionists. They believe that their approaches present a more comprehensive and closer representation of historical reality than the reconstructionsts.

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5 Hayden White, 'The Burden of History' in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism,* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p.47.

6 Cited in Evans, *In Defence of History*, *op.cit.,* p.23.

7 Cited in Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, p.101.

8 Evans, *op.cit.,* p.74.

Like the reconstructionists, they use the narrative or chronological mode, but they resort also to statistics, model-construction and analysis and theories in the social sciences which are lacking in the reconstructionists' work. The Constructionist/analytical School of historians, like the Rankeans, had been concerned to make their methods as 'scientific' as possible. It was a group of French historians, working on the journal *Annales* in the 1930s, who first began using statistics to prove certain events or phenomena in the past, by measuring the high costs of living, population decline, or famines due to drought or the fall of agricultural production due to wars. This 'quantitative revolution', as it has been called, was first visible in the field of economic history, especially in the study of prices. From the economic sphere it spread to social history, especially the history of population. Finally, in the third generation of French historians, the new trend of historical writing moved towards cultural history – the history of religion and the history of mentalities.[9]

Influenced by earlier French philosophers like Auguste Comte (1798–1857), and German philosophers and historians like Karl Marx (1818–1883), they believe that social behaviour was governed by certain principles or 'laws', so that the past could be explained only when the evidence is placed within a pre-existing explanatory framework that allows for general patterns of behaviour, and singular events are seen as part of a discernible *pattern*. They believe that thereby they have developed more ways to reconstruct the past by combining Ranke's *reconstructionism* (narrative single event history) and social theory *constructionism*.[10] But most constructionists use social science theories and models to tease or seek out the facts and to ***construct*** or ***create anew*** the 'hidden layers' of historical reality.

Constructionists argue that questioning the evidence, using an a priori theoretical framework, arrives at historical facts. The British economic historian, John Hicks, believes that 'ideas can be used by historians to order their material, so that the general course of history can be fitted into place'.[11] Other constructionists argue, "Without concepts and categories like class, gender, race, nation, city and so forth, the complexities of the past would be inexplicable, remaining at the level of lists of

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9 Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1919–89,* Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 53.

10 Munslow, *Deconstructing History,* p.23.

11 Cited by E.J. Hobsbawm, "From Social History to the History of Society," in *Historical Studies Today,* ed. Felix Gilbert and Stephen R. Graubard, W.W. Norton, New York, 1972, p.24. The quotation is taken from Hicks' book, *A Theory of Economic History*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969, pp.2–3.

events and time charts."[12] Another historian M.I. Finley argued, "The familiar fear of *a priorism* is misplaced: any hypothesis can be modified, adjusted or discarded when necessary. Without one, there can be no explanation; there can be only reportage and crude taxonomy, antiquarianism in its narrowest sense."[13] The British theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking, explains that a scientific theory is merely a model or a set of rules that relate to observations that we make. "It's an idea existing only in our minds and does not have any other reality (whatever that may mean). Whether it is a good theory or not, depends on whether some evidence may turn up to prove that it is or isn't, but everyone may have learned a great deal from considering it, testing it, and having to change it or discard it. It may lead to something more accurate," says his biographer, summarizing his words.[14]

British historian Alun Munslow explains further, "For such practitioners, constructionist model-making is not taken necessarily to involve fitting events into a preconceived pattern. For all these historians, as with those of the Modernisation School, the imposition of an explanatory framework does not diminish human agency, intentionality, or choice in the past, but rather enriches our understanding of it."[15]

History is not just about events, it is about many other aspects of the past as well, constructionist historians argue, and that applies not just to political history, economic history, cultural, or intellectual history, but to psychological history, history of mentalities, and geo-history as well.

The pervasive influence of the social sciences in French historiography in the inter-war years of the 20th century really marked the early years in the writing of social history, especially among the French historians working on the journal *Annales* such as Marc Bloc and Lucien Febvre, who were pioneers in studying the collective mentalities of mobs and rioters. Bloch studied the myths of people in Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries, who believed in the divine healing powers of kings. By raising questions, and examining the documents of the past within their theoretical framework, these historians made history not only interesting, but far more 'extensive' and 'relevant' than the objective-empiricists ever did before. In the post-war period other *Annales* historians embarked on new approaches, Fernand Braudel on 'geo-history' and 'total history,' and

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12 Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History,* Routledge, London, 1997, p. 47.

13 M.I. Finley, *Ancient History: Evidence and Models,* Penguin Books: New York, 1987, p. 66.

14 See Kitty Ferguson, *Stephen Hawking: Quest for a Theory of Everything,* Bantam Books, London, 1992, p. 18.

15 Munslow, *Ibid., p. 23.*

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, studied the impact of the economy on everyday life of the French peasantry in the 16th and 17th centuries. Braudel's personal achievement was to combine the study of ***la longue duree*** (the long view) with that of the complex interaction between the environment, economy, society, politics, culture and events.[16] He became famous with his three-volume history of how the Mediterranean Sea impacted on European social and political life in the 16th century, entitled, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II.*[17]

Evaluating the *Annales* group's achievements, British historian Alun Munslow remarks:

> "….the *Annales* school in France developed the constructionist tradition of marrying inductive inference from factual evidence with deduction (deductive inference) based upon more general prior sociological generalizations about the socio-economic and politico-cultural structures of society. For its adherents, this development added greatly to the explanatory power of history."[18]

In the 1960s British historians came under their influence and began importing theories from anthropology, social theory and statistics in the writing of history. Social sciences, they believed, were refining the historian's conceptual apparatus and research strategies. At the same time, the American econometric historian Robert Fogel, advanced the view that with the use of the computer, 'scientific history' rested on mathematical models that could be rigorously tested by quantitative means. He applied it not only to individuals, but to groups, and tested general hypotheses. The British school of demographic historians led by Peter Laslett at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom then demonstrated the study of statistical evidence and demography on pre-industrial families, marriage and general patterns of population growth.

Marxist theory had been influential not only in the writing of Soviet and other communist state histories, but also in non-communist countries where historians were themselves communist or non-communist. These different Marxist groups have demonstrated that there are different practitioners of Marx's ideas on historiography. Marx viewed human society

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16 Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution,* p.42.

17 Braudel's 'total history' influence within the field of Southeast Asian history is best seen in the two volumes of Professor Anthony J.S. Reid's work, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680,* Yale University, New Haven, Conn. 1988 and 1993, in which Reid shows how the maritime environment affected the human societies in the region.

18 *Ibid.,*, p.48.

and change as being determined by iron-cast 'laws' like the economic framework of labour, wealth (capital), production and class struggle. He held that human history evolved only through five phases – slave, feudal, industrial, socialist and communist. Marx's base-superstructure model, therefore, had the status of natural laws.

However, in the 1950s, the well-known group of British Marxist historians of Christopher Hill, E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, among others, applied Marx's theories to historiography liberally and in an independent manner from the Soviet historians. In 1956 many intellectuals and some of these historians left the British Communist Party. Although Eric Hobsbawm did not leave the party, he nevertheless defended the group by saying they had refused to reduce history to a simple economic or 'class interest' determinism, or to devalue politics and ideology. Hill, Thompson and others, however, continued to subscribe to Marx's theory of class struggle in society, but were at pains to stress and demonstrate in their works that their analysis of class was not limited to economics alone. They admitted that other factors like culture, language and religion, which Marx had not considered, were equally important.[19] It was E.P. Thompson, who coined a new approach to history writing, 'History from Below,' in which he urged modern historiography to give a favourable slant to the 'underdogs' such as the workers, the peasantry and marginalized groups. This later led to other alternative forms of history, 'Subaltern History,' inspired by the ideas of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. 'Subaltern History' has privileged marginalized groups in India and the Third World and became a historiographical movement in the 1980s led by the Indian historian, Ranajit Guha.

Acknowledging the great contributions of the British Marxist historians as well as others in the use of theory in history, British historian Richard J. Evans, who is not a Marxist, has written:

> "Theory of whatever kind, whether it is a general set of theses about how human societies are structured and human beings behave, or whether it is a limited proposition about, say, the carnivalesque in history, or the nature of human communication within a pre-industrial village, derives from the historian's present, not from the historian's sources. It is vital for the historian to use it.
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> "Without anthropological theory developed in the study of African rural society in the twentieth century, for example, the

19 Warren, *History and the Historians,* pp.91–95.

> history of European witchcraft in the seventeenth century would not have made the huge leaps in understanding it has achieved in the last twenty-five years, gains which have only now come about …. Without Marxist theory, urban and labour history would be enormously impoverished, and a major, influential classic such as E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* would never have been written. Without modern economic theory, historians would have no understanding of industrialization, and would not have known how to read or use the quantitative and other evidence it generated."[20]

The Critics

Let us now consider the criticisms of the constructionist/analytical approach made by the reconstructionists and the deconstructionists. The former believe that the imposition of theories and models meant that the constructionists are deterministic, while the deconstructionists argue that like the reconstructionists, the constructionists also use narrative to explain the past and thereby fail to appreciate the power of language in narration to effect meaning.

Although the deconstructionists use critical theory, they claim their theories are grounded in the structures of linguistics, art and cultures, and in literary styles and expressions, based on the role of language in creating all knowledge, not just historical knowledge. They argue that the constructionist approach merely rests on a framework of politics, economics and social structures and constitute the difference between different ways of viewing the past, and cannot capture the accuracy of the total vision, which in the end is impossible to achieve anyway. They believe '*reality*' is an illusion, the invention of the writer, that is, the historian. As far as the deconstructionist is concerned, the constructionist historian was merely inventing or re-inventing the past every time he or she wrote about it, just like the reconstructionist historian but was not aware of it. The fact that constructionist historians adopted new approaches every now and then– such as new methodologies in social history, geo-history, or total history, 'history from below' or 'subaltern history' and so on – indicated that previous approaches had failed satisfactorily to complete or achieve total *reality* and solve all historical problems, and that the vision of 'historical

20 Evans, *In Defence of History, op.cit.,* p.83.

reality' is elusive and keeps shifting. The same has happened with other new waves of historical theory and practice over time.

On the other hand, the reconstructionist historians argue that the constructionist notion of social theory providing facts that produce the reality of historical life offered the *possible* rather than the *real* nature of society. The British empiricist/reconstructionist historian Lawrence Stone has claimed that the constructionists' claim to writing 'scientific history', especially the Marxists, *Annales* and the cliometric and other 'scientific explanations of historical change' merely ushered in 'revisionism with a vengeance'. The Marxist and *Annales* historians focused on the 'material conditions of the masses' and relegated the major historical movements associated with the elites in Europe, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the rise of the modern state to the sidelines.[21] Furthermore, in studying groups and societies, the constructionists have ignored the study of individual people (personalities) and events, which are equally important. It would appear that, like the reconstructionists, the constructionists neglected or ignored certain social groups or classes of people in society.

Another British empiricist/reconstructionist Geoffrey Elton has charged that theory in history turns the historian into its slave:
"The theory directs the selection of evidence and infuses predestined meaning into it. All questions are so framed as to produce support for the theory, and all answers are predetermined by it. Historians captured by theory may tell you that they test their constructs by empirical research, but they do nothing of the sort; they use empirical research to prove the truth of the framework, never to disprove it… Adherents of theory do not allow facts to disturb them but instead try to deride the whole notion that there are facts independent of the observer."[22]

Finally, although the constructionists claim their methodologies were 'scientific', and used models, frameworks and patterns, like the reconstructionists, they could not predict the future, say the deconstructionists. These historians have failed to predict revolutions, or the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989-1991. British historian Paul Kennedy, (not a Marxist), tried to prove in his book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) that there was a pattern in modern history according to which wealthy states created empires but eventually overstretched their resources and declined. He predicted the decline of the United States, but instead it was the Soviet Union, which

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21 Munslow, *Deconstructing History,* p.88.
22 Munslow, *Deconstructing History,* p.87.

collapsed. His work has since been discredited.[23] In the 1930s British historian Arnold Toynbee published in thirteen volumes his *A Study of History.* He had attempted to draw a series of general laws according to which civilizations rose, developed and collapsed. Many empiricist historians attacked the work as unhistorical, especially as Toynbee also indulged in moral judgments. Toynbee's work enjoyed only a brief period of popularity, but soon met with widespread skepticism.[24]

In this debate British historian E.H. Carr's position appears rather ambivalent, as he seemed quite sympathetic to both the constructionist and the deconstructionist's positions. He believed, like the deconstructionist, that the historian is bound by the age in which he lives and that the historian achieves understanding of the past, only through the eyes of the present. The reason, he asserts, is that the historian belongs not to the past but to the present.[25] The very act of the historian observing, collecting and verifying the facts, and then interpreting them, (and here he seemed in agreement with the constructionist), is itself governed by the historian's *a priori* beliefs about the past. Agreeing further with what seemed to be the deconstructionist position, Carr added that the best way of studying history is to study historians and their works, finding support from another historian, M. Oakeshott. 'History,' says M. Oakeshott, 'is the historian's experience. It is 'made' by nobody save the historian: to write history is the only way of making it.'[26]

On this convenient note, which focuses on the deconstructionist historian as the inventor of history, a favourite claim of deconstructionists, let us move to the deconstructionist school's approach.

(c) The Deconstructionist School of History

The deconstructionist begins by asking the question which we had mentioned beforehand: Why does history keep on changing? "The first answer," explains Munslow, "is the post-modern condition in which we live and which confronts the inadequacy of the modernist empirical method; the second, flowing directly from this, is the realization that history is a constituted narrative discourse written by the historian in the here and now. Every historical interpretation is just one more in a long chain of interpretations, each one usually claiming to be closer to the reality of the

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23 See the discussion of Paul Kennedy in Evans, *In Defence of History,* pp.61–62.
24 Evans, *In Defence of History,* p.54.
25 E.H. Carr, *What is History?,* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1980, p.25
26 Carr, *ibid.,* p.22.

past, but each one merely another reinscription of the same events, with each successive description being the production of the historian's imposition…."[27]

It follows from this, says another British postmodern-deconstructionist Keith Jenkins, that when we study history, we are not studying the past, but what historians have constructed about the past.[28] In teaching undergraduate and graduate students alike, university historians' primary aim has been to get them to adopt a critical and questioning attitude to the books and articles they read and these usually were books and articles written by historians, including the historian- lecturers themselves. An English expression goes, "I read history at Oxford." This means that the person studied history at Oxford University.

For the deconstructionist, history is based on the linguistic turn, in which the *written* historical narrative is the formal *re-presentation* of historical content. This means that language "constitutes and represents rather than transparently corresponds to reality, that there is no ultimate knowable historical truth".[29] The deconstructionists believe there is *no* stable/knowable reality '*out there'* that we can access accurately. Deconstruction specializes in locating the "gaps, silences, metaphors and secrets within the text, but would deny that it reflects the author's meaning" because according to Jacques Derrida, the father of "deconstruction" theory, once he has written his text, the author no longer has any control over it; it is the reader who takes over.[30] The reader is free to interpret it anyway he/she likes. In most cases, the author is usually not around to challenge or question the reader. So here there is a further twist to the post-modern, deconstructionist argument. The historian, as author, once he has written his text or book, has lost control of it. Since 'truth' is unattainable because of the slippery nature of language, the 'truth' in his book or article can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

How this is argued is as follows. Deconstructionists say that there is no difference between history and fiction, i.e., between a history book based on research and a historical novel. This argument evolved from '*new historicism'* in the 1980s in the United States, in the field of literary studies. The movement's aim was to study and understand literary works within their historical context, i.e. the relationship of text to context including their associative connections with the institutions of society and

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27 Munslow, *Deconstructing History,* pp.34–35.
28 Evans, *In Defence of History,* p.97.
29 Munslow, *Deconstructing History,* p.25.
30 Warren, *History and the Historians*, p.125.

the historical events that might have influenced their production. Consequently, *new historicism* began to challenge the conventions underpinning the representation of factual as well as fictional texts. "The deconstruction of history means no longer repressing the importance of *writing* history or, more radically, being willing to view the past as well as our existence in the present as *texts* to be read," says Munslow.[31] Since history is a form of literature, there is no distinction between historical writing and fiction; in postmodernist terms, language is the creator of reality.[32] Each different text can create its own '*truth-effect'* or *realistic effect'*.[33] Deconstructionists believe there is no single truth, but only 'multiple truths'.

Good examples of post-modern decontructionist historical writing, which have captured the attention of not only specialists, but also the general reading public, are now numerous. They include Natalie Zemon Davies' *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (1985) and Simon Schama's *Dead Certainties* (1992). The first was so impressive that it was turned into a highly successful film. In her book Davies turns a 16th century story of a French peasant into a major work of romance, mixing factual evidence and imagination. In Schama's book, he reconstructs the death of General James Wolfe at the battle of Quebec (Canada) in 1759 and re-invents and links his death with the descendants of people involved in a murder in 1849. Both books were criticized by constructionist and reconstructionist historians for taking too many liberties, especially with their imagination but were best-sellers in the West.

Another well-known post-modern historian is the late French historian-philosopher Michel Foucault, who has written works on the history of madness and asylums in the West, on Western sexuality, and on prisons. The titles of his major books are: *Madness and Civilization* (1961); *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963); *History of Sexuality* (1976) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977). His works have been described by his critics as a-historical, i.e. they do not follow chronology in the fullest sense of the word. For instance, he would start discussing events in the 17th century, then jump to events in the mid-18th or 19th century and then suddenly bring the reader into the modern period, although the theme would remain consistent throughout. In *The Birth of the Clinic* he shows how modern medicine created new categories

31 *Ibid.,* p.32.
32 Warren, *History and the Historians,* p.124.
33 Munslow, *Deconstructing History,* p.61.

of sickness, deviance or madness over periods of time. Those who threaten the system were labeled sick, deviant or mad and rendered powerless. Foucault thus sees truth in relative terms – "in other words, depending on different needs, different power relationships, different perspectives, rather than absolute, eternal, timeless."[34]

Deconstructionists adopt a *relativistic* approach to history by arguing that the *present* is equally important as the *past* in the writing of history. They, therefore, tend to say that the present look at the past differently. A historian formulates a thesis in the present-day about the past, goes looking for evidence and discovers facts to support the thesis. The historian's work does not begin at the archive's door, they say, it begins long before. So why should not any theory, whether social theory or literary theory or linguistic theory, be used to guide a historian to look for the facts?

What determines a historian to select a particular topic or thesis? Surely contemporary values decide what is interesting or important for research, so does this not negate the empiricist-objective historian's argument that only the material evidence of the past in the archives, not present-day values, should determine what is written in history?. The deconstructionist Hayden White has distinguished between 'events' and 'facts', arguing that the former is 'real happenings' while the latter is 'linguistic entities,' which are inevitably subject to change as our attitudes to what are facts change.[35] As for Ranke's distinction between primary and secondary sources, the deconstructionist Keith Jenkins says it is the reader who invests documents and history books alike with meanings; otherwise, there is no meaning.[36]

The post-modern situation we live in today, repeat the deconstructionists, decide that the present can influence the past. Deconstructionists in support of their position on relativism, that is, the relationship between the past and the present, and how the past is interpreted through the present, have cited the view of the Italian thinker Benedetto Croce, that all history is contemporary history:

"The practical requirements which underlie every historical judgment give to all history the character of 'contemporary history' because, however remote in time events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate".[37]

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34 Warren, *History and the Historians,* p.119.
35 Warren, *History and the Historians,* p.124.
36 Keith Jenkins, *Rethinking History*, London, 1991, pp.47–48.
37 Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty,* Gateway edition, Chicago, 1970, p.19

Croce has argued that historians were guided in their judgment as to what documents and events were important in the past, and what were unimportant, by their present concerns. "All history was thus written, consciously or unconsciously, from the perspective of the present. Ideas and theories in the historian's own time are what allow a reading of a document in such a way that may be contrary to the purposes of the people who wrote it."[38] The empiricist historian, who believes that historians should reject present-day concerns when he researches the past, and merely engage in a dialogue with the past, is merely deceiving himself. He can no more escape from the past than from the present. All history thus has a present-day purpose and inspiration.

Two British historians, R.G. Collingwood and E.H. Carr, seem to be in agreement with the views of Benedetto Croce that the present-day historian's interpretations of the past are based on his present-day values. Collingwood argues further, 'the past which a historian studies is not a dead past, but a past which in some sense is still living in the present.' But a past act is dead, i.e. meaningless to the historian, unless he can understand the thought of the person who wrote it. Hence, for Collingwood, 'all history is the history of thought' and 'history is the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying.'[39]

Besides their differences in technicalities, the objective-empiricist reconstructionists and the constructionists reject the relativism of the postmodern deconstructionist historian. By denying the claim that there is no objective reality of the past, and that all versions are equally valid, they say this argument means that there is no way of judging a historical work as 'true' or 'untrue'. Postmodernism will encourage the spread of many-voiced history, as people of all types write local, national, regional histories – whatever meets their needs, but what they cannot do then is to claim it as 'true'. Postmodernism thus ignores completely what may well be the basic human need for historical explanation.[40] "Why, after all, if all theories are equally valid, should we believe postmodernist theories of history rather than other theories?" asks Richard J. Evans.[41] In claiming that they developed a better method of analyzing texts, they themselves could not privilege one theory over another.

What it means is that postmodernism can be used to justify or rewrite anything.

Their critics further argue that the postmodernist-deconstructionist argument that language is a way of communicating reality is open to

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38 Evans, *In Defence of History, op.cit.,* p.83.
39 Carr, *What is History?,* pp.21–22.
40 Warren, *History and the Historians*, p.127.

challenge, as it is similar to other all-embracing theories that postmodernists denounce. Take, for instance, those postmodernist historians who have denied the truth of the Holocaust and the reality of the mass murders of six million Jews at the Nazi gas chambers in Auschwitz and other camps during the Second World War. Thereby they have misrepresented, neglected or trivialized the Holocaust. Criticizing this rejection of the Holocaust, British historian Richard J. Evans says,

"There is, in fact, a massive, carefully empirical literature on the Nazi extermination of the Jews. Clearly, to regard it as fictional, unreal, or no nearer to historical reality, than, say the work of the 'revisionists' who deny that Auschwitz ever happened at all, is simply wrong…. It trivializes murder to see it as a text."[42]

In March 2003 a British postmodernist-deconstructionist historian David Irving was jailed in Austria for denying the existence of gas chambers at the Auschwitz concentration camp, although during the trial he softened his tone by saying that he no longer questioned the facts. But a week after his conviction, he insisted that there was no evidence of a mass extermination of Jews in Nazi Germany during World War II.[43]

For reconstructionist as well as constructionist historians, this denial of the Holocaust is regarded as an 'extremist' position in the face of acceptable morality and common sense. Surely anyone confronted with the wealth of evidence that Auschwitz was a death camp would accept it as true, and not accept what neo-Nazis claim that the genocide of six million Jews never took place. If despite the evidence such views persist, what will future post-modernist historians say about the recent massacres in Rwanda and Dafur (in Sudan) and in Srebrenica in Yugolavia, which have occurred in our lifetime?

For both the objective-reconstructionists and the constructionists, the past does speak through the sources, and truth is recoverable and knowable, despite the deconstructionists' disclaimer that truth is unknowable. They argue that the deconstructionists attempt to get their sources right is indicated by their use of footnotes and bibliographical references to enable the reader to check the sources on which a historian's statement is made whether they support it or not. This means that interpretations, despite the disclaimer of the deconstructionists, argues Evans, "can really

41 Evans, *op.cit.,* p.231.

42 Evans, *In Defence of History,* p.124.

43 See the report, "Jailed British historian Irving questions Holocaust, again," 29th March 2006, in the Google website http://www.ejpress.org/article/news/eastern_europe/6528. On his conviction earlier, see *The Star* (Malaysia), 23rd March 2006.

be tested and confirmed or falsified by an appeal to the evidence; and some of the time at least, it really is possible to prove that one side is right and the other is wrong."[44]

The three streams in Malaysian History

After presenting the arguments and positions of the three schools of thought in modern historiography, let's look at some examples of historical works in Malaysian history, which have been influenced by the three categories we have been discussing.

The majority of historians in Malaysian history straddle two camps – the Rankean objective-empiricist school and the constructionist school. Very few have taken to writing in the deconstructionist mode. Many senior Malaysian historians have been trained in the Rankean School and believe strongly in its tenets of objectivity. However, there are some historians and others in the social sciences, who have adopted the constructionist-analytical approach. Their influence on students is considerable, so that many younger Malaysian historians are becoming interested in the techniques or views of the constructionist-analytical school. Nevertheless, despite this influence, the conventional (Rankean) approach of narrating 'how things really (or actually) happened' is still dominant in Malaysia today.

Let me focus on the views and approaches of Datuk Professor Emeritus Khoo Kay Kim, the doyen of Malaysian historians, and a few other historians on the writing of Malaysian history. As both Carr and Oakeshott have stated, there is no better way to learn about historical research and historical writing than from historians themselves. Khoo is the author of the well-known work, *The Western Malay States, 1850–1873* (Oxford University Press: Kuala Lumpur, 1972), which is based on his M.A. thesis. It has been translated into Malay, reprinted several times and is used as a standard reference for teaching university courses on Malaysian history. It is, indeed, an excellent study — of the impact of commercial development in the Straits Settlements on Malay society and politics in the western peninsular states of Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Perak. Its time period: the third quarter of the nineteenth century, just prior to British intervention in 1874. The work achieves a high-level of objectivity largely due to the detailed descriptive-empiricist methodology, but there is a discernible level of analysis and the use of social theory as well, as I intend to show.

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44 Evans, *In Defence of History,* p.128.

It is a study that economic historians have welcomed as an excellent piece of socio-economic history. Chapter One entitled 'Topography and Polity' is really a study in 'geo-history' of how the environment of rivers, lands and hills in the western peninsular Malay states affected the economic life of the Malays and their political systems. On page15 Khoo adopts the social anthropologist J.M. Gullick's theory of 'traditional Malay society' — that it was composed of two main divisions – a ruling class and a subject class, with the *Yang di-Pertuan Besar* occupying the apex of the political system. In other words, Khoo has borrowed a social anthropological theory to describe the social structures of Malay society. In Chapter Three, Khoo describes a class of European and Chinese merchants or entrepreneurs who played a crucial role in Malay peninsular trade just prior to British intervention. Minute biographical details of these merchants merely contribute to a thick description of each particular class or social group – which is exactly what constructionist-analytical historians do.

Considering the fact that the book was published in 1971, Khoo had then just emerged as a rising young star in the History Department at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. He was the first lecturer to teach a Malaysian history course in Malay in 1967.[45] A study of Khoo's role and thoughts at this period would throw much light on the development of his subsequent writing career as a historian. In 1968, in an article, he said that writing Malaysian history from the Malaysian point of view did not oblige one to adopt a condemnatory attitude towards the British. On the contrary, he believed that Malaysian historians should look at "various factors, external and internal, social, political and economic, perhaps even psychological" to see how these "interact to produce our present society and [to see] where precisely has the pattern of traditional society been transformed." This is exactly the perspective of constructionist-analytical historians. Khoo urged Malaysian historians to reject conventional chronological types of history, such as those written by the colonial historian Richard Winstedt, and employ instead the "analytical tools of the social scientist to write social and economic history," as done by Wong Lin Ken, J.M. Gullick and W.R. Roff.[46] Clearly, Khoo himself had followed this approach in his book, *The Western Malay States, 1850–1873*. Roff, who also taught at the same history department, in an

45 See Cheah Boon Kheng, "The New Road to Malaysian History at Pantai Valley," *The Straits Times,* 28 September, 1969, p.9.

46 See Khoo Kay Kim, "Recent advances in the Study and Writing of Malaysian History," *Peninjau Sejarah,* 3(1), 1968: pp.1–12.

article in the same journal, similarly encouraged Malaysian historians to write "sociological and analytical history."[47] However, both Khoo and Roff wrote their well-known works in the descriptive-objective style. Roff in his book *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* never once defined the term or theory of 'nationalism'. In their articles in *Peninjau Sejarah* both Khoo and Roff seemed to support the constructionist-analytical school of historians who were then in the ascendancy.

In 1978, however, Khoo indicated a slight shift in his position on social history when he reviewed the work of Dr Lee Poh Ping (later a professor at the Faculty of Economics and Public Administration at Universiti Malaya). He reviewed Dr Lee's book entitled *Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore* in the *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.[48] Lee had his early training in the History Department at Universiti Malaya and his book was based on his doctoral thesis done at the department of politics and government at Cornell University. Oxford University Press published it in 1978. Khoo observed that, unlike conventional history, which relied heavily on description-narration, Lee's approach was socio-political and praised his book as "an extremely interesting piece of work". Lee, influenced by the American political scientist Barrington Moore Jr. had used social science theory and imposed two models for 19th century Chinese society in Singapore. According to him, it comprised the following – an *older* Chinese society (the gambier and pepper society) and a *newer* Chinese society (the free trade society). Khoo, however, disputed the existence of these two models, and went on to show that there was neither an older or new society, as both Chinese planters and traders emerged about the same time. Khoo then went on to make the following remarks at the end of his review:

"His bold approach to historiography is very commendable. He has shown the conventional historian how history can be viewed more sophisticatedly. Young historians should be encouraged to emulate his work but it should be emphasized, at the same time, that the historian must zealously retain his traditional concern for empirical data. Description and analysis are complementary. Description without analysis makes a piece of historical writing nothing more than a boring compilation of meaningless details. On the other hand, analysis not based on concrete data

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47 William R. Roff, "Social History and Its Materials in Malaysia," *Peninjau Sejarah,* 3(1), (1968), pp.13–20.

48 See the book review by Khoo Kay Kim in JMBRAS, Vol.51,Part 2 (December 1978), pp.153–158.

degenerates into mere intellectual calisthenics with no serious concern for reality."[49]

In this article, Khoo appears to imply that Lee had misinterpreted his data and therefore had challenged him by attempting to demolish his theory or model. Is Khoo's version right and Lee's wrong? Are we nearer to the historical truth? Another historian (the late Professor Wong Lin Ken of the National University of Singapore) also came out in another journal (*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*) at about the same time to criticize Lee's book for misreading the statistical data on Chinese trade in 19th century Singapore. It would seem that two senior historians had weighed in on his work, had attacked it so strongly and conveyed the impression that it was badly flawed. This is an occupational risk that every historian faces once his work is published. However, if we look objectively at the controversy that the book aroused, Lee's study had, indeed, made an important contribution. By presenting his version or interpretation, he had opened historians' minds to thinking more about what kind of Chinese society existed in Singapore in the 19th century. Lee was the first scholar to undertake such a study. As M.I. Finley and other constructionist-analytical historians had argued, a theory can be tested, and if it is "bad", it could be discarded, but everyone would have learnt something in the process from this use of theory. Since no historical work is definitive, who can say whether a young historian will not emerge later to debate the issue further and present his own research evidence and challenge either Khoo's or Lee's version? Is there a finality or closure to their judgment?

Did Khoo's review-article indicate that he now had doubts about the writing of social history? Indeed, in 1992, Khoo seemed to have had second thoughts about the benefits of this social science approach. In an article in the journal *Kajian Malaysia*, Khoo took issue with a group of younger Malaysian historians and others who chose to forsake "conventional history" (a la the Rankean mode) by using theories and following trends in Europe and America. Khoo suggested that historians should first gather more descriptive data in a "conventional way" before becoming preoccupied with theories or following other trends in European historiography.[50]

His comments also appeared to be an oblique critique of the Australian deconstructionist historian Anthony Milner. *Kajian Malaysia* in its previous issue had carried an article by Milner entitled "Post Modern

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49 *Ibid.,* p.158.

50 See Khoo Kay Kim, "Malaysian Historiography: A Further Look," in *Kajian Malaysia*, 10 (1) 1992: pp.37–62.

Perspectives on Malay Biography," in which Milner praised the traditional Malay method of writing biography as involving the structuring of lives "as portions and perhaps as encapsulations of Malay nationalism or Islamic ethos."[51] Milner is the only historian of Malaysian history to have attempted the writing of a full-length book in the deconstructionist mode. That book, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere*[52] presents several Malay literary texts not as sources of historical information but as rival representations of ideas about individualism, identity, ethnicity, religion, science and society. Consequently, Milner does not verify the "events" and regards "facts" as merely "linguistic entities", so that his readings appear as textual and linguistic constructions.[53]

In 1993 Khoo jointly ran a weekly column, "History Alive," in *The Sunday Star* with Ranjit Singh Malhi, in which both discussed controversial issues in Malaysian historiography. The earlier articles focused particularly on the nature of pre-colonial Malay society, and discussed whether it was "feudal," or whether pre-colonial Malays were traders or peasant farmers. Both commented on the works of British colonial historians and in one article declared that pre-colonial Malay society was not "feudal" or "agricultural", but "maritime and trading in nature".[54] This invited a rejoinder from another historian, the late Muzaffar Tate (also known as D.J.M. Tate), who wrote that he was one of those who believed that "agriculture has for centuries played a very important part in the life of Malay communities and that in common with the other traditional inhabitants of this region agriculture forms one of the basic characteristics of Malay culture and society". Tate also remarked that, "no society, of course, started off as peasants. We all began as hunters, then farmers, then traders."[55]

What was interesting about this controversy was not the specific issues discussed but the way the historians conceptualized, classified and generalized about the pre-colonial Malay society in the mould of the constructionist-analytical historians, using social science theory. Although

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51 A.C. Milner, "Post-Modern Perspectives on Malay biography," in *Kajian Malaysia*, 9(2) 1991: pp.24–38.

52 Published by Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994.

53 See my review of his book in *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol.56 No.1 (February 1997), pp.263–265 and also in *The New Straits Times*, 27th February 1997, p.9.

54 See Khoo Kay Kim and Ranjit Singh Malhi, "Malays were traders not peasant farmers," *The Sunday Star,* 28 March 1993, and "Little Evidence that Malays Tilled the Land," *The Sunday Star, 6 June 1993.*

55 See Tate's rejoinder in *The Sunday Star,* 20 May 1993.

Khoo had earlier moved to a Rankean objective-descriptive historian's approach, yet in holding the view that pre-colonial Malay society was "not agricultural, but maritime and trading in nature," he had adopted a generalization and a pattern of pre-colonial Malay society and himself was putting forward a theory which was open to challenge by Tate.

What this controversy shows is that historians find it difficult to avoid using theory or inventing general abstractions and terms to cover entire social systems and entire eras of human society. Sure, they will use the empirical evidence to support the theory, like Lee Poh Peng did, but in such cases both the evidence and the theory must correspond with each other. This is what the constructionist-analytical historians argue they do. It is difficult to believe that given his earlier enthusiasm in social history and his use of social theory in the writing of 19th century Malaysian history that Khoo himself is not a constructionist-analytical historian at heart.

Conclusion

From my account of historians and their works above, one can see how different categories of historians have addressed themselves on how to study history, do research and write about it and how they seek to achieve accuracy and establish historical truth. Each generation of historians is confronted by a new generation of historians in turn. The history books and articles they write are the products of their own times.

In the debates presented above the significance of theory is undeniable, but historians disagree on how it should be used. Theory is important because it relates the past to the present, and makes history relevant. Both the constructionist-analytical historian and the deconstructionist/postmodernist historian are right in arguing that conventional-narrative history's approach is inadequate because it is unable to analyze and cover all aspects of human history which are complex. Its use of narrative is an acceptable mode, which is even adopted by the other two groups; only in research and in the compilation of detailed data are its methods 'scientific', but its methods are not comprehensive. The narrative mode is most appropriate for describing events, the activities and lives of individuals, but not for social groups, organizations, economic structures, or the environment. For such studies, theory is essential. In fact, all three groups admit and accept that narrative is an art, a form of literature, but not many in the latter two groups would admit to the deconstructionists' need for "linguistic skills" in reading texts.

If the social sciences had been turned by the constructionist-analytical historian into a mere instrument of knowledge because of their exclusive concentration on the present, abstracted from the past, history on the reconstructionists' part has been reduced to a pile of "antiquarian erudition" because of its historians' failure to connect the past to the present. The call of the present cannot be ignored. In this sense, the constructionists and deconstructionist's arguments about the present imposing itself on the past is difficult to refute. The present can only be represented through theory.

Post-modernism poses the greatest challenge to historians because it threatens to dismantle and demolish the discipline of history itself. While it uses theories, it challenges and undermines all theories as well. Its aim is anarchic, destructive. It is bent on destroying every belief system. These reasons make me hesitate in accepting its argument that there is no difference between history and fiction. I believe there is a difference, and that, in the research and writing of history, it is possible to present the past as a "reality", even though this "reality" may not satisfy everybody, whether it is in the form of a "single truth" or "multiple truths".

However, not everything in post-modernism is bad. Its "linguistic" methodologies in the reading of texts are extremely innovative, stimulating and instructive. They help historians today to read texts better than they did previously. The challenges of post-modern deconstructionism and even constructionism must be met. Malaysian historians must begin to confront these challenges. We need to resist what is stale and useless, and accept what is useful and relevant. We need to change with the times. The wind of change is blowing strongly in our direction. In many universities in the West today, most history departments have closed down and their place taken up with cultural studies.[56] In all Malaysian universities except at Universiti Malaya the process of absorbing history departments into schools of social sciences or schools of humanities has resulted in down-grading the history discipline to a mere unit or section. As British historian Lawrence Stone has declared, the postmodernist challenge has thrown the historical profession "into a crisis of self-confidence about what it is doing and how it is doing it."[57] Will history survive as a discipline? I hope it will.

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56 See the interesting study on the threat to the history discipline by Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History,* Encounter Books, San Francisco, 1996.

57 Lawrence Stone, "History and Post-Modernism," *Past and Present,* 131 (1991), pp.217–218.

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Writing Marginalized Groups into Malaysian Social History

Haryati Hasan and Hamidin Abd Hamid

Introduction

This paper argues in support of the writing of social history, which does not constitute the main stream of Malaysian historiography. Its subject matter is the role played by Malay trishaw riders in Kota Bharu, Kelantan between the 1960s and 1980s as the 'middlemen' or pimps of prostitutes. The role of trishaw riders as actors in Malaysian history writing is seldom highlighted. This paper will first attempt to highlight the importance of social history in Malaysia and, secondly, examine the role of marginalized groups as actors in history.

Malaysian history is very much an elite-dominated history, Rankean in its approach and subject matter. After nearly 50 years of independence it is high time for Malaysian historians to be more revisionist, to revisit history at the level of the lower strata of society, such as peasants and workers, and make it more representative of the common people's experiences. Malaysian historians are still very reluctant to write on contemporary society or on social issues affecting the lives of the economically backward class of people.

The Rankean conventional approach is heavily reliant on the archives for research and ignores analysis, interpretation, and non-conventional sources like statistics and oral accounts. The social science approach to history in research can tease out more evidence from a wider range of sources and offer to the historian valuable insights, and a wider scope of interpretation. This approach should not be left only to social scientists and political scientists. Interviews and oral testimonies, for instance, are important sources in social history to supplement the knowledge, which is sometimes not provided by documents and other archival sources.

This paper draws its data and information on the trishaw riders and prostitutes in Kelantan from official papers, especially the reports of the Socio-Economic Research Unit in the Prime Minister's Department, as well as those from the Kelantan Chief Minister's Office, and the offices of the Police Department and the Legal Adviser.

In 1990, a group of scholars produced a book, *The Underside of Malaysian History*, which discussed and highlighted the importance of neglected groups in Malaysian history. The poor and marginalized groups such as prostitutes, plantation workers were the core subjects of the book. It was an attempt "to make present-day Malaysians conscious of the enormous contribution of their unheralded forbears."[1] To what extent it succeeded in raising Malaysian consciousness on "alternative history" is debatable, but what is important, is its implied criticism of the omission of neglected groups in the writing of Malaysian history. A prominent Malaysian historian, however, has criticized the book as being 'too clinical' and argued that the contributors still examined the marginalized groups from the official point of view instead of from that of the marginalized people involved.[2]

In defense of the book and its contributors, it needs to be stated that the origins, type or nature of the sources do not necessarily reflect the views of the essay writers, but more importantly, it is their interpretation and their framework of analysis that defines the 'view' of the writers. True, the problem of the sources in writing Malaysian social history cannot be ignored. However, despite using the official sources, the contributors have argued against the general view that it was nearly impossible to write Malaysian social history, especially about marginalized groups, because of the lack of relevant sources. They successfully showed that even with official sources one could write about marginalized groups in Malaysian history.

What is essential, is the framework of analysis or the 'theoretical framework' to discuss and analyze the subject and the themes. This is something that needs to be addressed more often because the Rankean conventional historian cannot claim that the past only belongs to him/her. We need to use other disciplines, and their theoretical framework, to study and understand the past better. Writing Malaysian social history is not the same as writing Malaysian political history. The failure to recognize that each branch of history has its own distinctive methodology and approaches only delimits the range of methodologies and approaches to be used by historians in understanding our past better.

The role of trishaw riders is the subject of an essay; chapter six, in *The Underside of Malaysian History* but the essay centers its discussion

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1 P.J. Rimmer & Lisa M. Allen (eds.), *The Underside of Malaysian History, Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990, p. xiii.

2 Khoo Kay Kim, 'Malaysian Historiography: A Further Look," in Conference Paper, International of Asia Historian Association, University of Hong Kong, 24–26 Jun 1991, p. 14.

on the transportation problems in Singapore.[3] Our paper differs from it by focusing not only on the socio-economic background of the Malay trishaw riders in Kota Bahru as a social group, but, also, as the 'middlemen' in the network of prostitution in Kelantan.

The setting

Kelantan consists of 5,713 square miles or 11.2 per cent of the total area of Peninsula Malaysia. In 1970 its total population was estimated at 684,312 persons of whom 92.8 per cent were Malays, 5.4 per cent Chinese and the rest represented by the census as 'others'.[4] The major economic activities in the state are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Kelantan: Division of Labour According to Sector in 1970

Type of Work	All Ethnics		Malay	
	Percentage	%	Percentage	%
1. Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery	167,133	70.5	158,287	78.0
2. Mining & Quary	244	0.1	198	0.1
3. Industrial	18,617	7.7	15,828	7.8
4. Construction	3,804	1.6	3,227	1.6
5. Water, electricity services	689	0.3	607	0.3
6. Communication/Transportation	6,802	2.8	6,420	3.1
	237,607	100	203,295	100

Source: Syed Husin Ali, *Kemiskinan dan Kelaparan Tanah di Kelantan*, Petaling Jaya: Karangkraf Sdn. Bhd., 1978, p. 25.

3 See P.J. Rimmer, 'Hackney Carriage Syces and Rikisha Pullers in Singapore: A Colonial Registrar's Perspective on Public Transport, 1892–1923', in P.J. Rimmer & Lisa M. Allen (eds.), *The Underside of Malaysian History, Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990, pp. 129–160.

4 R. Chander, *Banci Penduduk dan Perumahan Malaysia 1970: Jadual-Jadual Asas Penduduk Bahagian VIII –Kelantan*, Jil. 1., Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 1976, p. 105.

Agriculture involved 70.5 per cent of the population, of which rice was the main cash crop. However, more than half of the rice cultivators did not own land, see Table 2.

TABLE 2: Ownership of Paddy field among peasant in Kelantan 1973

Type of ownership		No.	%
1.	Self ownership	14,000	25
2.	Half renting	30,000	55
3.	Full renting	11,200	20
	Total	55,200	100

Source: Syed Husin Ali, *Kemiskinan dan Kelaparan Tanah di Kelantan*, Petaling Jaya: Karangkraf Sdn. Bhd., 1978, p. 32.

The government labeled the trishaw riders as 'poor' in the 1970 census. In 1970 and in 1980, trishaw- pedaling was still a prevalent occupation in several states in Malaysia such as in Penang, Perak, Johor Terengganu, Kelantan, and the federal territory of Kuala Lumpur. However, as the public mode of transportation was rapidly developed several cities such as Kuala Lumpur and Penang started to impose a quota system to limit the number of trishaws operating in the cities. In addition, the city administration seemed to believe that the trishaw vehicle was the main obstacle to the modern traffic system, besides being inefficient, and involved unnecessary use of manpower. While several cities began to reduce the number of trishaws operating in its municipalities, the municipal authorities in Kota Bahru, however, did not take action to reduce the number of trishaw riders in the town as they felt it did not pose any problem at that time.[5]

Trishaws and their riders in Kelantan

Nearly all the trishaw riders in Kelantan in 1970 and 1980 were Malays. However, there were a few Chinese trishaw riders who operated in Kota Bahru streets such as Lorong Che Kadir or Lorong Tuar, but most were

5 Pejabat Menteri Besar Kelantan, MB, KN (0), 307, 'Kajian Sosio Ekonomi Penarik Beca di Kelantan, p.1.

opium addicts.[6] A government-conducted survey in 1976 under the Prime Minister's Department shows that most trishaw riders in Kelantan were more than 30s years old (87 per cent). The literacy rate among them was very low. In an interview, 47.3 per cent of those interviewed (400) admitted that they never went to school. Only 11.4 per cent of the riders interviewed finished their primary education, and 0.4 per cent obtained the Lower Certification of Education at secondary school. However, despite their low standard of living, the trishaw riders in Kelantan had big families - 6.67 per cent of the respondents in the studies conducted in the 1980s by the Prime Minister Department showed that they had more than five in their family while 29 per cent had less than four in a family. At the same time, 70 per cent of the trishaw riders in Kelantan during this period were full-time trishaw riders. Only 21 per cent of the respondents worked as seasonal trishaw riders while five per cent worked on a daily rate and two per cent took on the job of trishaw rider as an additional job to get more money to support their families.[7]

The law governing trishaws and trishaw riders

Trishaw was a non-motorized mode of transportation, dependent on the pedaling power of the rider's legs and physical strength. In Kota Bahru town, the local authorities imposed a license system on the use of a trishaw, while in the villages, more leniency was allowed, and not many trishaw riders paid for any licenses to operate. However, with the enforcement of the licensing system, the village trishaw riders could not operate in the vicinity of the town, as they were not licensed to do so. Each local council imposed a license in a form of a plate with different colours. The colour of a plate not only indicated which local council produced the license but, importantly, indicated the areas where the trishaw could operate. The trishaw licensed by one local council could only enter the area of another local Council to drop off passengers but could not pick up passengers where he was not licensed to operate. In 1978, there were 3,689 licensed trishaws in the whole of Kelantan, while almost the same

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6 Oral History Interview with Dato' Nik Osman (not a real name), 13th June, 2001 in Kota Bharu Kelantan. See Haryati Hasan, 'Wanita Kelantan dan Pelacuran: Satu Kes Kajian di Kota Bharu, 1950an–1970an', Ph.D. thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, 2004, p. 117.

7 *Pejabat Perdana Menteri*, PPPM 1976/Jld. 1., 'Kajian Sosio-Ekonomi Penarik Beca', Kuala Lumpur: Unit Penyelidikan Sosio-Ekonomi, Jabatan Perdana Menteri, 1976. The study conducted interviewed 800 respondents, which was estimated 20% out of estimated 4,000 trishaw riders in Kelantan at that time.

number operated without a license. Therefore, the government agencies involved in the studies of the trishaw riders estimated that the total number of the trishaws operating in Kelantan was probably almost double from the licensed ones to about 6,000 to 7,000. In Kota Bharu alone, the government estimated that nearly 4,000 trishaws (licensed and unlicensed) operated in the 1970s.[8]

While providing services for short distances as a mode of transportation at considerably low charges, trishaws also contributed significantly to the economy of the trishaw riders' families. It is estimated nearly 7,000 families were economically dependent on the trishaw as their means of support. Trishaw rider families were considered among the poorest families in Kelantan, as the majority of the trishaw riders in Kota Bharu originated from the under-developed rural areas and were of peasant background. While some of the riders owned the trishaws quite a big number rented the vehicles from Chinese traders in the town. The average rental for a trishaw was between RM1.20 and RM1.40 per day depending on the condition of the machine itself. The average take-home income of the trishaw rider was about RM3.50 to RM 4.50 per day after deducting the rental for the vehicle.[9] In another government study, the average monthly income of the trishaw rider per family was given as RM 214.60, which was clearly below the national income of RM514.00 for the poverty line. While the low income clearly influenced the socio-economic lives of the trishaw riders their standard of living was also strongly characterized by their large family size and their habitation in squatter areas with no permanent water and electricity supplies. Nearly a quarter of the trishaw riders in the government studies in 1978 admitted that their children did not attend school due to economic reasons.[10]

Trishaw Riders as the Middlemen

Within the prostitution network in Kota Bahru, the customer who required the services of a prostitute, could get it directly from the prostitute[11] or

8 *Pejabat Perdana Menteri*, 'Kajian Sosio-Ekonomi Penarik Beca di Kelantan dan Trengganu', Kajian Awal, Kuala Lumpur: Unit Penyelidikan Sosio-Ekonomi dan Perancang Am, Jabatan Perdana Menteri, Ogos 1976.

9 *Pejabat Menteri Besar Kelantan*, MB. KN (0) 307, 'Kajian Sosio-Ekonomi Penarik Beca di Kelantan.

10 *Pejabat Perdana Menteri*, PPPM/KB/0052/9, 'Kajian Terhadap Penarik Beca di Kelantan/Trengganu, Unit Penyelidikan Sosio-Ekonomi, Jabatan Perdana Menteri, Kuala Lumpur, 1978.

11 In Kelantan, the prostitutes were called 'Ore Buje'. See Haryati Hasan, Wanita Kelantan dan Pelacuran', p. 11. Rosemary Firth refers to 'Orang Bujang' or 'Ore Buje' as follows:

through the services of the middleman, who would know the status, or 'class' of the prostitute[12] and the places where they operate.[13]

Generally, in Kelantan in the 1970s and 1980s, the prostitutes' 'middlemen' or pimps were known as 'Pak Na' or 'Mak Ndor' or 'Ibu Ayam' (whether male or female). They could be divided into three categories, namely – the professional, the semi-professional and the volunteer.[14] In the Kelantan prostitution network, the professional middlemen were also the owners of brothels.

TABLE 3: Prostitution Houses

No.	Place	Middlemen
1.	496, Lorong Che Kadir	San Chang Chim
2.	455, Lorong Che Kadir	Che Kadir Abdullah
3.	4223, Jalan Pengkalan Chepa	
4.	1265, Dalam Kubu/Belakang Kota	Minah Binti Daud /Mak Su Minah
5.	2991, Jalan Pintu Pong	Lijah Yusuf
6.	5559, Kampung Baharu	Zaharah Senik

Sources: *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai*, SR 35/41, 'Minutes of the Contingent Anti-Crime Committee, 2 October 1965, p. 2.

Table 3 shows the famous prostitution houses in Kota Bharu in the 1960s that continuously operated into the 1970s and 80s. All of the prostitution houses mentioned in the table were operated in the centre of Kota Bharu township except No. 4223, Jalan Pengkalan Chepa which actually was at the border of the township. However, the six brothels stated in Table 3 did not represent the actual number of prostitution houses for Kota Bharu. The Kelantan police, in fact, had identified at least 83 places in the

'…it is from the ranks of the *bujang*-generally young divorcees-that the semi-professional prostitutes are drawn. Some *bujang* seem to lead chaste lives, others have merely occasional intrigues; others, again, live mainly on men, getting 50 cents, $1 or even $2 or $3 for a night with a man'. See Rosemary Firth, *Housekeeping Among Malay Peasants*, London: Athlone Press, 1966, p. 45.

12 In Kelantan, prostitutes are classified into three categories: first class, second class, and third class. See Haryati Hasan, Wanita Kelantan dan Pelacuran', pp. 104–12.

13 *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai*, SR, 35/41, 'Brothel and Prostitution in Kelantan: Kertas Kerja Polis Di Raja Malaysia Kelantan', 4 Disember 1968, p. 7.

14 See Haryati Hasan, Wanita Kelantan dan Pelacuran', pp. 179–197.

town, which were used as prostitution houses.[15] The local authority also identified that 75 per cent of prostitutes in Kota Bharu operated in budget hotels and in private houses.[16]

In some of the established places for prostitution such as Biaritz Park, the shop owners and employees were involved in arranging the business transactions between the prostitute and her customer. The shop owners normally would go a long way to please a customer if he were a businessman, or a government official, or if the customer was an enforcement officer checking on his premises.[17]

Houses that usually provided prostitutes' services in Kota Bharu were located in slum areas.[18] For this reason, they could only be reached by the customers through the services of the trishaw riders who would transport their customers in and out of the prostitution houses. These slum houses were not connected by public transport and could hardly be reached by a car up to their doorway. Prostitution houses located in Jalan Pengkalan Chepa[19] and "Mak Su Minah" prostitution houses in Belakang Kota[20] were known to use the services of trishaw riders to transport their

15 These included 3 hotels, 2 boathouses, 11 temporary dwellings, 9 permanent homes, 7 trafficking centres, and 51 other 'makeshift structures'. See *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai*, *SR 35/41*, 'Brothel and Prostitution in Kelantan: Kertas Kerja Polis Di Raja Malaysia Kelantan', 4 Disember 1968, p. 7.

16 *Pejabat Polis Kontinjen Kelantan*, *PR 35/41 (1)*, 'Half-Yearly Return On Vice', 30 Jun 1970, p. 7.

17 Biaritz Park, an entertainment park situated in Hulu Kota Bharu, was identified as one of the sites for prostitution. *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Brothel and Prostitution in Kelantan: Kertas Kerja Polis Di Raja Malaysia Kelantan', 4 Disember 1968, p. 7. Another police report dated 2 October 1965 notes that 'there are about 113 prostitutes in Kota Bharu town, which is about the only place in the state where this trade is noticed. Of this number, about 70, including those from Biaritz Park, have their own homes where "friends" visit them'. See, *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Minutes of the Contingent Anti-Crime Committee Meeting', 2 Oktober 1965, pp.1–2.

18 Ibid.

19 *Pejabat Polis Kontinjen Kelantan, PR 35/41 (1),* 'Half-Yearly Return On Vice', 30 Jun 1970; *Pejabat Polis Kontinjen Kelantan, PR 35/41 (1),* 'Perempuan Bawah Umur di Selamatkan dari Rumah Pelacuran', 27 May 1974; *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Minutes of the Contingent Anti-Crime Committee Meeting', 2 Oktober 1965; *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the Contingent Planning Committee on Brothels and Prostitution', 19 Disember 1968; *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Mencegah Pelacuran Minit Perancangan Jawatankuasa Kontinjen no. 7', 7 September 1969; *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Pelacur-Perancangan Jawatankuasa Kontinjen no. 8', 12 Oktober 1969 and *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*,'Pelacuran-Perancangan Kelantan Kontinjen no. 10', 5 April 1970.

20 The famous prostitute in that prostitution house was called Munah Red Hair and was known for her beauty. Her daughter and granddaughter also followed her footsteps and were involved in prostitution activities. Oral History Interview with Pak Chik Mail (not a real name), 17 July 2003 in Kota Bharu.

customers. Both prostitution houses, according to a police report, used the same trishaw riders group as their "middlemen," or pimps — the "Said Chepek Group" led by Said bin Salleh.[21]

Generally, the trishaw riders who worked for the prostitution houses operated, not as individuals, but as a group and were led by a leader. The group consisted of three to five riders. A police report identified at least 16 trishaw riders who were in four groups who were involved in prostitution activities as middlemen. Normally, each group would be identified by their leader's name. Each group served more than one particular prostitution house.[22] Trishaw riders' groups were identified as middlemen for all the six prostitution houses cited in Table 3 above and also to other established prostitution houses in Kota Bharu.

The role of the trishaw riders as the middlemen in the prostitution network in Kota Bharu was especially important for first time customers who were searching the services of a prostitute but who had no idea where to look for one. It would be the trishaw rider whose role it was to provide the customer not only with the transportation service but also 'advice' on the best prostitutes available dependent on the financial ability of the customer. As 'Pak Ndor'- the pimp - the trishaw rider would normally be paid by the customer and also by prostitution houses for his services.[23]

The role of trishaw riders as pimps was even more vital for prostitutes who did not operate in the prostitution houses. Such independent prostitutes would conduct their businesses in rented premises on a private basis.[24] In this type of operation the 'Pak Ndor's' role was more important for the prostitutes as he was their main source of getting customers, and they were normally the only middlemen between the prostitutes and their customers.

Some trishaw riders worked for the prostitution houses as part time middlemen, while others solicited customers for prostitutes voluntarily.[25] They could be classified as "volunteer" middlemen as their services were mostly based on long friendship with the prostitutes. As volunteer middlemen, they would not ask for payment from the customers for their services but would be paid for their volunteer services normally in the

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21 *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Brothel and Prostitution in Kelantan: Kertas Kerja Polis Di Raja Malaysia Kelantan', 4 Disember 1968, p. 7.

22 Ibid.

23 *Mingguan Kota Bharu,* 'Rahsia Pelacuran di Kota Bharu', 20 Ogos 1966, p. 7.

24 *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Minutes of the Contingent Anti-Crime Committee Meeting', 2 Oktober 1965, p. 2.

25 Haryati Hasan, 'Wanita Kelantan dan Pelacuran', p. 195.

form of free sex with the prostitutes.[26] This mutual type of arrangement was something the independent prostitute would welcome as she did not need to look for customers and would usually oblige the trishaw rider.[27]

The police authorities in Kota Bahru were aware of the role played by the trishaw riders as the middlemen in the town's prostitution network. The police vice squad would seek out the owners of the trishaw licenses and if they had enough evidence of their involvement in prostitution these owners would be charged and, if convicted, the Kota Bharu Municipal Council would revoke their trishaw license. Usually these trishaw owners would be summoned first to the police station to be warned that their activities were under investigation and advised to stop their involvement with the prostitution activities. These trishaw owners were usually charged under a municipal byelaw, which refers to them as 'Ibu Ayam' – the pimp – in prostitution activities.[28]

Conclusion

The role of the Malay trishaw riders as pimps of the prostitution network in Kota Bahru has been presented in this essay to show how they formed part of a sub-culture in the Malay society of Kota Bahru town in Kelantan in the 1970s and 1980s. These trishaw riders and the prostitutes they served were part of the displaced Malay peasant class who because of their poverty were forced to migrate to the towns to look for work to support themselves and their families. A social history of Kota Bahru town would be incomplete without including an account of their lives, hardships and struggles. That is the underside of Malaysian social history that until the present time has hardly attracted the attention of any Malaysian historian.

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26 Oral History Interview with Pak Chik Mat Nor (not a real name), 17 July 2002 in Kota Bharu.

27 Oral History Interview with Pak Ya (not a real name), 17 July 2003 in Kota Bharu.

28 *Pejabat Polis Kuala Krai, SR 35/41*, 'Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the Contingent Planning Committee on Brothels and Prostitution', 19 Disember 1968, p. 3.

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Interviews

Several Interviews were conducted in Kota Bahru with trishaw riders and local authority officials between 13 Jun 2001 and 17 July 2003.

The Gerschenkron Advantage: New directions for forging ahead in Malaysian Economic History

Loh Wei Leng

Introduction

The main agenda of economic history[1] is to understand the function of economies in the past, seemingly a task for a person trained in the discipline of economics, rather than in history. However, as an adequate understanding of past economies requires locating the particular economy under scrutiny within the context of a relevant era and area, it would necessitate a familiarity with matters beyond the specialization of economic history into other fields in history, such as social, cultural or political history.

And, even though there is recognition that temporal and spatial dimensions are pre-requisites in the analysis of any economic history topic – that is to say, the context of a time or period and a place or specific geographical region, which does not involve special knowledge of the economy – it cannot be denied that the branch of economic history draws heavily on the allied social science discipline of economics. This is amply illustrated when we turn to look at historical factors of causation (an enduring concern of not just economic historians but also of historians in general), as applied to specific themes or subjects.

The themes of economic change and development[2] and their negative manifestations, economic downturns and depressions, are among the major topics[3], which preoccupy every generation of economic historians who seek to identify sources of such phenomena. If one takes a look

1 Cf. D.C. North, "Structure and Performance: The Task of Economic History", *Journal of Economic Literature*, XVI, 3, 1978: 963–978.

2 See for example the titles of some classic works which are much cited, from K. Polyani, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time,* Boston: Beacon, 1944, through W.A. Lewis, *Growth and Fluctuations 1870–1913*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978 to D.S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor*, London: Abacus, 1998.

3 For other themes and subjects on the rise in the past 10 years, 1991–2000, see R. Whaples, "The Supply and Demand of Economic History: Recent Trends in the Journal of Economic History", *Journal of Economic History,* 62, 2, June 2002: 524–525, noting current developments "especially a recent push toward examining political, cultural and institutional questions, and increased attention to business cycles and depressions, labor markets and migration, and standards of living and health…"

at the main schools of thought[4] in economic history, the mainstream neoclassical and the alternative Marxist approach, it will be seen that they essentially offer different explanations and analytical frameworks to address these pertinent issues.

While that may be so, nonetheless, there is continual reworking and adaptation of existing theories with new ideas and, often, new evidence constantly emerging which any serious scholar cannot afford to ignore. To do so, would mean that one is always behind the current state of the art, not drawing on the latest findings of one's peers. The result - one's work does not deal with issues which are at the forefront of the field. Worse still, one's analysis of a particular topic under examination is bereft of possible insights which can be brought to bear on one's research and, ultimately, on the final product, be it a journal article or a monograph.

The main argument of the paper is that, as a late developer[5], Malaysian economic history has the advantage of being in a position to draw on work done elsewhere, not only to catch up but it also has the possibility and potential to forge ahead. This is in line with what the well-known Russian-born, Harvard economic historian, Alexander Gerschenkron[6] wrote in 1952, in the era when newly independent nations – comparatively less developed – sought to close the gap with the industrialized nations of the west, their former colonial masters. Gerschenkron's view was that, due to the coexistence of advanced and backward countries, the latter could skip several stages, which the former had to go through, by adopting their advanced technology. Indeed, as his research shows, "Germany thus had derived full advantages from being a relatively late arrival in the field of industrial development…from having been

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4 For more on the approaches of the main schools of thought, see the relevant chapters in J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History,* Revised 3rd ed., London and New York: Longman, 2002 and P. Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing,* Cambridge*:* Polity Press, 1991.

5 See Qasim Ahmad's survey of "The Other Histories…" in Malaysian historiography in 2000 where he finds that "…Malaysian historical writing is in no danger of being submerged by the new genre. The traditional areas of political and economic history as well as the history of the elites still dominate the academic scene." His reference to "new genre" is to new history while mention of traditional economic history notes that new economic history has not yet made its mark in Malaysian economic history.

6 Gerschenkron's standing among the academy is shown through the annual award by the Economic History Association (America) of the Alexander Gerschenkron prize for the best dissertation in non-American economic history. The Association awards seven prizes annually for different types of publications and for teaching.

preceded by England"[7], the latter also described as "The First Industrial Nation" (P. Mathias 1969).

This essay begins by looking at the fortunes of economic history in the west, thereafter to ascertain their impact on Malaysian economic history. Subsequent sections will then identify some relevant fields of history to provide the requisite context for Malaysian economic history and questions and approaches to historical writing that arise from those branches of history.

Trajectory of Economic History

From its beginnings around the turn of the twentieth century, economic history has established a firm niche within the larger discipline of history. Its emergence as a major area of specialization within history owes its beginnings to 'New History', itself emerging in the west, undergoing momentous socio-economic transformation associated with the Industrial Revolution in the long 19th century. History as it was practiced then, is known as Rankean history, after the German historian, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886). The focus was on national history, the state and its institutional apparatus, and rulers and leaders – essentially political history with the narrative of events as the preferred method in the writing of history. There was an obvious need for a broader approach, one which could provide an understanding of the socio-economic changes which had a powerful impact on the lives of many.

New History, which is usually associated with the French Annales School produced a journal, *Annales: d'histoire economiques* in 1929, later renamed *Annales: economies, societies, civilizations*. Its initial title announced the focus of the new history on matters economic, energetically promoted by the first editors and founders, Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. Subsequently, when Fernand Braudel took over as editor in 1956, as its later title indicated, the scope of history had broadened dramatically to encompass what Febvre recommended, a 'total history', emphatically stressing that history is more than just political history, as economy, society and culture are just as worthy of attention. In fact, this merely reflected the vast expansion of history with the major specializations of history, namely economic, social and cultural history fragmenting into a whole range of new branches.

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7 The pagination is from Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic backwardness in historical perspective: a book of essays,* Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962, p.16. This is a collection of essays which includes his 1952 essay of the same title.

In addition to the appearance of many new sub-fields within economic history, some examples being labour history, urban and rural history to agricultural and industrial history, economic history itself underwent a transformation and spawned 'new economic history'. New economic history borrowed concepts and methodologies from economics employing economic theory as the source for generalizations and quantitative methods and statistical techniques for historical analysis. In the 1960s and 1970s, economic history became the "hottest trend in history" (P. Coclanis and D. Carlton 2001), earning the rubric, 'the cliometric revolution'. Indeed, writing in 1971 and reviewing the field, N. B. Harte opines that it "has become one of the most productive fields on the academic map."

This upward trend for economic history had such a downturn in the mid-1980s that some practitioners in the US, charting the course of economic history as a field, termed its fall as "The crisis in economic history" (P. Coclanis and D. Carlton 2001). This is in spite of the fact that in October 1993, the Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to Robert William Fogel and Douglass Cecil North `for having renewed research in economic history' as pioneers of the 'new economic history' or 'cliometrics'. This disenchantment with economic history in its modern quantitative form has been attributed to a number of factors. They include an "overselling of the method…[which] promised more insights than their research was able to deliver", the so-called 'cultural turn' of the 1980s coupled with demographic changes as in the change in the profession to include more female and minority practitioners who prefer the in-depth micro studies seeking to capture the many stories yet to be told, influenced no doubt by the post-modernist assault on history.

To what extent does Malaysian economic history follow the trajectory of the West? Has Malaysian economic history encountered a similar rise and fall to that experienced in the West? Regarding the employment of economic theories and quantitative methods in Malaysian economic history, there is little evidence of theory and method in the form found in the major economic history journals in the west.[8] This is because, unlike the situation in the west where economists 'took over' the field, Malaysian economists have not been drawn to history so that one would be hard

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8 See for example articles appearing in two of the most prominent and longstanding economic history journals, namely the *Economic History Review* and *Journal of Economic History* since the advent and dominance of quantitative history from the late 1960s. The *Economic History Review* was first issued in 1927 while the *Journal of Economic History* first appeared in 1941.

pressed to find economic history articles which utilize the theories and sophisticated statistical techniques employed by the cliometrically inclined economic historians of the west since the 1960s. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the use of quantitative data in conjunction with qualitative assessments in Malaysian economic history is not only on an increase but is now an established practice.[9]

What then are the themes, topics and approaches, which have been employed in the writing of Malaysian economic history over the past half century or so? To ascertain past and present historiographical trends, one would need to take a look at the major works. As there is available a number of bibliographical surveys, notably those by Wong Lin Ken written in 1965 and 1979, this essay does not intend to replicate his review of the literature up to 1965.[10] This means, then, that the historiography on the period post 1965 has not been covered. However, based on the historian's convention of according more weight to documentary evidence as opposed to other types of primary material such as that gathered via interviews (the oral history route, especially pertinent for the recent past), with archives imposing a limit of thirty to fifty years for the opening of primary material to the researcher, the post 1965 era is much more the domain of economists and other social scientists, with fewer historical studies on the last quarter of the 20th century.[11] In addition, in 2000, John Drabble commented on published research since 1979, that, notwithstanding the new writing on Malaysian history in the last two decades, "from the standpoint of the economic historian the situation is to a large extent as Wong described it", namely that the economic history of Malaysia is limited in its coverage, in terms of its temporal, spatial and sectoral focus, and that it is short on the application of the analytical tools of economics - which was noted above. That is to say, there are more publications on the 19th century, with less on the late, post and pre-colonial periods; more written on the Peninsula as opposed to Sabah and Sarawak; and more attention paid to the key primary commodities, tin and rubber (agricultural sector).

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9 See the tables and figures in the most recent publication on Malaysian economic history by J.H. Drabble, *An Economic History of Malaysia, c. 1800-1990*. London: Macmillan, 2000.

10 Wong Lin Ken, "The Economic History of Malaysia: A Bibliographic Essay". *Journal of Economic History.* 25, 1965: 244–62; Wong Lin Ken, "Twentieth-Century Malayan Economic History: A Select Bibliographic Survey". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 10, 1, 1979: 1–24.

11 This will be discussed further below in subsequent paragraphs which touch on the major post-independence themes and policies, namely industrialization and the new economic policy.

Rather than providing a fuller account of the current status of the field, the intent here is to identify the questions which have been addressed in some of the major studies on the economic history of Malaysia, paying more attention to additions to the literature on Malaysian economic history appearing in the 1980s and 1990s.[12] To what extent have they been concerned with the main issues in economic history, namely economic change and growth? What were the contributions of the different economic activities, the role of the different actors, particularly state, business and labour, towards the development of the economy? In addition to the dominant theme, what are the other topics which have been taken up in Malaysian economic history?

Beginning with general histories before moving on to the main sectors, thereafter the histories of states or regions will be touched on, paying heed to the periods receiving greater coverage. Before historian Drabble's *An Economic History of Malaysia, c. 1800–1990* (2000), earlier mainstream efforts approximating a general economic history were by economists, Lim Chong Yah (*Economic Development of Modern Malaya,* 1967), David Lim (*Economic Growth and Development in West Malaysia, 1947–1970*, 1974) and geographer, P.P. Courtenay (*A Geography of Trade and Development in Malaya,* 1972). Courtenay's treatment is from 1786 to the 1960s while Lim Chong Yah's is mainly from World War I to 1960 with David Lim's from post World War II up till 1970. For an explanation as to why this is so, that historians have not ventured where others have taken the plunge, I need only echo Wong Lin Ken's sentiments that, until there are sufficient detailed studies on the different parts of the economy, it is actually premature to write a general history (1979: 1). Indeed, the titles of the three works just cited inform us of their focus, choosing not to write *An Economic History* but to concentrate on *Economic Development, Economic Growth* and the relationship between *Trade and Development*. However, subsequently, the feasibility of embarking on a general economic history is substantiated by a close examination of the bibliography in Drabble's *An Economic History* which lists the growth in publications on myriad aspects of the economy since 1979.

In his monograph, Drabble sought to redress the previous neglect of Sabah and Sarawak by writers who missed out these states when purportedly addressing Malaysia. "The task for the present study, then, is to give an historical account of how the national economy of Malaysia emerged out of the geographically disparate territories in the Peninsula and northern Borneo…set in the analytical framework of the onset of modern

12 See the bibliography in Drabble's *An Economic History*, 2000.

economic growth" (2000: 2). By choosing to draw on Simon Kuznets's well-regarded *Modern Economic Growth: Rate, Structure and Spread* (1966), Drabble takes on the lead supplied by the economic discipline to economic historians.

As for general economic history from a Marxist perspective, K.S. Jomo's *A Question of Class: Capital, the State and Uneven Development in Malaya* (1988) is the main work[13] utilizing class analysis to explain processes of economic change. Tracing class formation during the colonial era into post-colonial times with the rise of 'statist capitalists', this approach is an alternative to the mainstream focus on ethnic divisions shaping economic policies and development outcomes. Other more specific efforts, which merit mention, are those which look at the relationship between class and ethnicity (M.R. Stenson 1980 and Hua Wu Yin 1983) and the relationship between class and gender (Cecilia Ng 1999).

Regarding research on the primary sector, agriculture and mining, besides the many studies on what came to be the twin pillars of the immediate post–independence economy, namely tin and rubber, some other activities in this category of primary commodity production have had their share of attention, e.g. rice cultivation (Amarjit Kaur 1992, R.D. Hill 1977, 1983). Here, other than the interest in understanding the contribution of a particular economic activity towards the performance of the broader economy (for example, to what extent is primary commodity production an essential prerequisite to improving economic performance**),** what are the other topics which also have been given prominence?

For a picture of how the rubber and tin industries functioned and developed, or for that matter, for a depiction of the broader agricultural sector, the earlier works, which have become the standard references, can be relied on.[14] Invariably, they not only discuss the organization, financing and marketing of a particular industry, they also touch on the various aspects relevant towards an adequate understanding, for instance, of the

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13 There are articles adopting non-mainstream approaches; some examples, Rajah Rasiah, "Class, ethnicity and economic development in Malaysia" (1997) and Hing Ai Yun, "Capitalist Development, Class and Race" (1984) or a monograph such as Shaharil Talib, *After Its Own Image: The Trengganu Experience 1881–1941* (1984) which has a narrower focus, namely on the ruling class in the state of Trengganu.

14 On the 'must read' list for tin are Wong Lin Ken (1965) and Yip Yat Hoong (1969); for rubber are J.H. Drabble (1973) and C. Barlow (1978). See Wong Lin Ken's 1979 bibliographic survey for a discussion of these works and the literature on other more specialized topics such as the inter-war international restriction schemes for rubber and tin. As for the agricultural sector, essential reading are J.C. Jackson (1968) and Lim Teck Ghee (1976 and 1977).

role of the main actors, producers big and small, the state and its policies towards the industry. The latter is usually an exploration of the relationship between policy and performance, which can, of course, be the sole focus of monographs and articles. Worthy of note are discussions on the outcomes of colonial policy. These include Barlow on the institutional and policy implications of economic change on the rubber industry (1985), topics such as 'the ethnic division of labour' (Paul Kratoska 1982, Lim Teck Ghee 1984), Malay Reservations (Paul Kratoska 1983), and also, the other side of the coin, on reactions to colonial policy (Nonini, 1992).

In an open economy such as Malaysia's, from its antecedents in earlier periods, the port polities of the early historic/classical era, notably Kedah in the first millennium and the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th century, trade has been a key economic activity alongside the subsistence base for the majority of the populace. Hence, it is not surprising to find that, by the 19th century, when quantitative data becomes increasingly more available, the tertiary sector (particularly trade and its ancillary activities, shipping, insurance and finance) accounted for a larger share of the economy than the secondary sector, with manufacturing really taking off in the post-independence period. This is why, before the post-colonial era, one finds more studies on commerce in the literature and considerably fewer efforts on industry. In fact, research on the secondary sector came into its own, when compared with the previous attention accorded to the primary and tertiary sectors, in line with industrial development as one of the strategies to achieve economic growth in the 1960s. During this post World War II decolonization era, the goal of becoming an industrial nation was a pre-occupation of many post-colonial states, Malaysia included. An examination of the theme of industrialization will reveal that economists dominate the writing post 1979.[15]

Turning to the spatial dimension, more publications on Sabah and Sarawak have become available from the 1980s, as have some state histories.[16] From their titles, it would appear that development continues to be a recurring subject in most of these publications. This also applies to some of the writing on the different factors of production, that of capital or

15 Cf. the following list of studies on industrialization which does not include one by a historian: Rokiah Alavi (1996), Ali Anuwar (1992), P.C. Athukorala and J. Menon (1996), A. Bowie (1991), H. Brookfield (1994), Fong Chan Onn (1986), L. Hoffman and S.E. Tan (1980), K.S. Jomo, ed. (1993), T.G. McGee et al. (1986), D. Spinanger (1986).

16 See the following: Amarjit Kaur (1998), D. Chew (1990), R.A. Cramb & R.H.W. Reece, eds., (1988), Sharom Ahmat (1984), Shaharil Talib (1984). It has to be noted that not all state histories focus on the economy, as in B.W. Andaya's work on Perak (1979) or L.Y. Andaya's history of Johor (1975).

business and labour, albeit with a slightly different emphasis, i.e. on the distribution of the gains from growth and development.[17] On the latter topic, the racial riots of 1969 resulted in the New Economic Policy (NEP), which became the *leitmotiv* of economic development policies since then (Jomo 1990: 144). Understandably, this has spawned many efforts, mainly by economists and other social scientists, assessing the impact of the redistribution thrust of the NEP meant to eliminate inter-ethnic economic imbalances.[18]

Overall, not surprisingly, the writing on Malaysian economic history is largely similar to that found in J. T. Lindblad's survey (based on an analysis of twelve issues of "an authoritative journal in the region", namely the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*) on the recent historiographical trends in the economic history of Southeast Asia.

> The articles on pre-colonial times have retained their traditional focus on shipping connections but there appears to be a new emphasis on economic expansion in articles concerning the colonial period….the link with economic growth is even stronger for the post-colonial period…A common denominator among economic historians working on Southeast Asia seems to be the fascination with the dynamics of economic growth, both the origins of growth and its long-run impact (1995: 160–161).

As Malaysia is an integral component of the Southeast Asian region, it would indeed be odd to find a very different historiographical trajectory.

As for the turn to cultural approaches, back to the narrative mode, insofar as the narrative as the norm of 'old history', this has been very much a part of the tradition of Malaysian historical writing, having never really retreated from the scene. However, there is little evidence of Malaysian economic historians borrowing from cultural anthropology, which serves as the philosophical foundation of the post-modernist perspective.

With regard to post-modernism, which began in the west some 20 plus years ago, its main thrust is that there is no one truth, if objective knowledge exists at all. This is because reality and knowledge are seen to be socially or culturally constructed. When we refer to 'social construction', society determining what is knowledge as opposed to myth, we are really referring to the process whereby the elite via the scholar determines

17 See a few examples, K.S. Jomo, (1988), B.N. Ghosh & Muhammad Syukri Salleh, eds. (1999) and P.J. Rimmer & L.M. Allen, eds., (1990).

18 See for example Snodgrass (1980), Gomez and Jomo (1997), Shari (2000) and Rasiah and Shari (2001). Their bibliographies supply ample references to the literature on the new economic policy and related issues of its impact on the economy and the populace.

what is knowledge, what is to know, what is to document. How this can impact upon the historical discipline is if a historian were to subject the national narrative to a critical examination. Post-modernism challenges the sole national narrative as the most appropriate reflection of past realities. For, as can be observed, more often than not, minority perspectives are rarely part of the national narrative. For instance, before the advent of women's history or gender history, women's roles, life experiences or contributions to society were hardly mentioned in national histories.

And, even though history as a discipline has long been aware that a given interpretation, at worst, incorporates the agenda of the writer, at best, reflects the writer's cultural background, post-modernism's contribution is its timely reminder that we should take note of the role of the individual or individuals in the construction of histories, especially the national narratives. As historians carry out their task of trying to determine which of the current major interpretations on the particular topic under scrutiny is the most acceptable and nearest to reality, and taking heed of E.H. Carr's warning, in his classic *What is History?* (1961) that "no existing interpretation is wholly objective", historians should continue to uncover and present the various versions of the past. If historians are to remain true to the academic endeavour of constantly revising previous interpretations in light of new information gathered or of undertaking a re-reading of evidence previously assembled as a result of being prompted by new questions and issues raised, historians should not only be open to but should also welcome the post-modernist call to consider and incorporate the many stories and voices in addition to that of the elites' in their reconstruction of the past.

As for the post-modernist influence on Malaysian economic history, except for the more critical stance adopted, particularly by those challenging mainstream views, data found in official documents are seldom questioned[19] and are yet to be closely inspected as to their likely use in support of specific policies. There is an obvious need to be more sensitive to these implications in future work.

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19 A notable exception is a recent study by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute, February 2006, which was of the view that bumiputra corporate equity ownership could be as high as 45% and not 18.9% as stated in government statistics.

Contextualising Malaysian Economic History: The Global and Regional Approach

In this paper, I will only address two branches of history which I find to be of utmost importance to Malaysian economic history – world history (and a sub-field within it, imperial history) and Southeast Asian history. This is not to say that no other fields in history (such as political or socio-cultural history) can also be of significance, which in certain instances and circumstances may take precedence. An example of political events with wide-ranging impact are world wars, as in the First and Second World Wars in this century which shaped the destinies of societies in all spheres of life, including of course the economic.

In addition, what requires to be emphasized, as well, is that each sub-field within economic history – business history, maritime history, labour history or peasant history to name but a few – has its own body of literature, which, needless to say, has to be considered in the process of mapping out the research agenda of those engaged in their selected specialized sub-field.

With these two not inconsequential caveats, I will now proceed to touch briefly on the branch of history known as world history. To those who have had firsthand experience of both man-made and natural disasters, namely the 1997 Asian crisis and the SARS outbreak as examples of the former and the 2004 tsunami, an exemplar of the latter, it is all too obvious that the external and foreign dimension cannot be disregarded.

The importance of the external dimension for economic history stems from the very nature of the subject of economics. As the main components of the economy are production, exchange and consumption, with economic history looking at how these requisite constituent parts of the economy functioned in the past, by virtue of the need to deal with any surplus production beyond subsistence, the exchange or trade function comes into play. When surplus production is more than what the domestic economy can absorb, foreign markets are the next logical step. In other words, ever since human beings developed the technology to produce surpluses, foreign trade has been a necessary option.

World history specialists[20] invariably share a common conviction, that global processes and exchanges have contributed to shape the trajectory of component parts – from continents and regions to nations.

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20 Besides Immanuel Wallerstein and Andre Gunder Frank, two others whose works should be on the 'must read' list are Jeremy Bentley and J.L. Abu-Lughod.

Examples from the proto-historical or classical periods and the early modern era confirm the practice of historians of those periods taking a broader perspective, with a much wider canvas. Even as historians are studying specific areas, congruent with today's nation-states, the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, namely Afro-Eurasia, formed the backdrop. As a short-hand, one needs only to invoke the imagery of the Silk Road and Spice Route for the former periods and the Ming Voyages and the European Voyages of Discovery for the later early modern era to see how area studies cannot avoid taking into account the influence of matters foreign on local developments.

More specifically, world historians provide evidence of how large-scale external processes – especially those of empire-building, mass migrations, and long-distance trade – had significant repercussions on the development of local communities, individual societies and regions. The burning question, which is currently being debated, is the issue of the previous Eurocentric bias in historical writing, as in the reference to the Afro-Eurasian world. In fact, the world-system approach within world history, popularized by Immanuel Wallerstein and Andre Gunder Frank, is based on the idea that nations do not exist in isolation but develop in the context of a larger system, as part of a region, which has an effect on the direction and rate of change of component societies of that region.

A by-product of the interest in world history is research on the binary growth paths of east versus west. This has produced an emerging recognition that before the modern era, there has been vigorous Asian trade, with the European role not as dominant as previously thought. Other than according Asian history its due - at the minimum, examining its own internal rhythms, at the maximum, challenging the entrenched historiography, which locates 'the rise of the west' from the early modern era, there are those who identify China as the dominant force in Eurasia up till the 19th century. They contend that only with the advent of industrial technology has the west surged to the front. This can be taken as a clarion call to Asian history specialists (including scholars of Southeast Asian and Malaysian history) to revisit intra-Asian dynamics as among the driving forces in shaping their own histories.

A sub-set of world history, imperial history, which has a huge literature,[21] is of relevance to the writing of Malaysian economic history. The colonial era is one with comparatively vast documentation, particularly in quantitative terms, hence lending it to cliometric types of analyses

21 See the annual bibliography in the Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History on books and articles published in English in a given year.

More importantly, it has a considerable impact on the post-colonial state and economy, deserving attention for those seeking to understand the historical bases for shaping contemporary realities. Recent scholarship on colonialism, on how empires function, and responses to the colonial experience, can serve to provide clues as to the questions worthy of further attention.

As one writer states, "the debate appears to be by no means over" (Booth 2004, 1) referring to questions of costs and benefits, to the ruler and the ruled, i.e. to the colonial powers and those living in their colonial territories, which continue to rage. What is now required, is a more nuanced assessment beyond the earlier criticisms employing terms such as 'exploitative' 'predatory' and 'extractive' to policies in different periods of colonial rule, against a backdrop of significant changes in the international environment, as well as "ever-changing demands from a range of vested interests, both in the metropole and locally" (Booth 2004, 17).

Turning to the Southeast Asian region, this, too, provides the necessary context within which Malaysian economic history must be located. A cursory survey of recent writing of Southeast Asian history will show that world history specialists and Southeast Asian historians share similar concerns. A few examples should suffice to substantiate the fact that many are moving in the same intellectual direction. The first is with regard to efforts to explore the applicability of Fernand Braudel's Mediterranean model for this and other regions by a number of leading practitioners of world history and Southeast Asian history.[22] Related to this is ongoing work to subject some of Braudel's key concepts to critical appraisal to ascertain their utility. Analytical tools such as *la longue durée*, a long-term view, has assisted in the investigation of intra-Asian trade, via the maritime route through Southeast Asia, which was found to be very active in the early modern epoch.

In the 1960s, Southeast Asian historians attempted writing autonomous histories, going back to its ancient classical kingdoms to identify cultural patterns before the entry of Europeans into Asia in the early modern period. This is much like the research by world historians mentioned above, on the growth patterns of Asia, versus that of Europe.

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22 See for instance the bibliography in Heather Sutherland, "Southeast Asian history and the Mediterranean analogy," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* 34, 1, 2003: 1–20, which mentions the writing of both groups of historians. Among some names worthy of note are Anthony Reid, whose two volumes have been inspired by Braudel; Denys Lombard recommending the study of Southeast Asian seas along the lines of the Mediterranean; R. Bin Wong, who advocates a 'Chinese Mediterranean' comprising South China and Southeast Asia.

That work is essentially questioning the dominant paradigm privileging the west, the path taken by Southeast Asian historians of writing autonomous histories to recover local viewpoints, relatively in short supply in the earlier historiography on the region.

If Malaysian economic historians are equally inspired to explore such issues, we are in for a treat, as future research can provide very different scenarios than what is presently available.

Conclusion

Having begun with Gerschenkron, it seems only apt to close with some of his observations.

> Modern historians realize full well that comprehension of the past – and that perforce means the past itself – changes perpetually with the historian's emphasis, interest and point of view….Historical research consists essentially in application to empirical material of various sets of empirically derived hypothetical generalizations and in testing the closeness of the resulting fit…All that can be achieved is an extraction from the vast storehouse of the past of sets of intelligent questions that may be addressed to current materials. The importance of this contribution should not be exaggerated. But it should not be underrated either. (1962, 5-6)

Gerschenkron shares the view of many practitioners of, not just economic history, but also of history in general, of the imprint of the times on what may be deemed relevant questions to address. He also concurs with the general notion, backed by his research, that there are lessons for the present from previous experiences. Adapting and applying this reasoning to historical writing on Malaysian economic history, historians would do well to draw on the available literature, which would invariably address issues and ideas currently in vogue. In other words, rather than 'reinventing the wheel', after subjecting the recent concerns of the branches of history of relevance to economic history to close inquiry, Malaysian economic historians would not be blindly following the lead of others, but would be taking advantage of the received wisdom to add to the new questions which historians elsewhere are presently investigating.

To recapitulate, the first part of the essay indicated that there is much to draw from the existing historical literature in general, and from current economic history in particular, for Malaysian economic historians to consider. From 'new history', already more than a century old, a multitude of sub-fields within economic history (including 'new economic history') beckons. If there is recognition that 'total history' is an objective worthy of pursuit, then the whole range of sub-fields in economic history

should and can be further explored. In fact, if one is true to the notion of 'total history', this is very much in line with the post-modernist approach of not privileging the elite construction of history. By the same token, alternative analytical frameworks, such as class or gender perspectives, may provide more satisfactory explanations to some questions.

And, to reiterate the findings of both Wong Lin Ken in 1979 and Drabble in 2000, that the economic history of Malaysia is limited in its coverage, there is plenty of room for more work on the late, post and pre-colonial periods, on Sabah and Sarawak and on other commodities besides tin and rubber. While much has been added in the 1980s and 1990s, business history, maritime history, labour history, peasant history, industrial history, rural and urban history, gender and women's history have but a few efforts in their respective sub-fields to their credit. In addition, with reference to themes and topics on the rise elsewhere, namely, political, cultural and institutional questions, business cycles and depressions, labour markets and migration, and standards of living and health, they merit attention whether it is towards understanding the functioning of economies in the past or the factors of causation, of economic change and development.

With reference to the second part of the essay, living in times where the globalization process is a given, it follows that to ignore the external context is to have but a partial picture. Indeed, with more research on the various questions and issues, on the different fields and utilizing available analytical tools identified above, Malaysian economic history has the possibility and potential to forge ahead, to contribute to a richer and more complete picture of the past.

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Highlighting Malay Women In Malaysian Historiography

Mahani Musa

Introduction

In the 1970s the omission of women in contemporary historical narratives was first raised by women's liberation movements in the United States. The discussions among the leading feminists subsequently led to a new trend in intellectual discourse and to attempts to write women's history. Undeniably the change in focus in historical research in the United States from political history to social and demographic history and the re-conceptualisation of "history from above" to "history from below" provided more space for women to be highlighted on the historical stage.[1] Undeniably, gender studies are much more developed in the West, notably the United States, with the involvement of both female and male scholars as well as by non-specialists.[2] In Malaysia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia there is little attempt to write women's history, although Malaysian cultural anthropologists have already blazed the trail in gender studies. Anthropological studies deepened our understanding of women's issues, as the discipline ventured into areas that are seen as *female-friendly* such as the family, the domestic economy, *adat* (Malay customs) and religion, education and health. Following the studies by foreign scholars, like Barbara E. Ward and Ester Boserup,[3] there are now many more collaborative studies on the women of Southeast Asia.[4] University of Hawaii's

1 See, Tan Liok Ee 1996. "Wanita dan Penulisan Sejarah: Batasan dan Potensi Perspektif Gender." In Badriyah Haji Salleh & Tan Liok Ee (eds.), *Alam Pensejarahan Dari Pelbagai Perspektif,* Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, pp. 88–101.

2 Two interesting studies are James Reed 1978. *From Private Vice to the Public Virtue: the Birth Control Movement and American Society Since 1830*, New York: Basic Books; and Allan M. Brant 1985. *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880*, London: Oxford University Press.

3 Barbara E. Ward, (ed.) 1965, *Women in the New Asia: The Changing Social Roles of Men and Women in South-EastAsia*, Paris: UNESCO. Researchers from the discipline of sociology and anthropology contributed all essays in this volume. See also Ester Boserup, 1970, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, New York: St. Martin's Press.

4 See for instance, Penny Van Esterik (ed). 1996. *Women of Southeast Asia*, Illinois: Northern Illinois University, Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

Barbara Andaya in her introduction to the volume of essays, *Other Pasts,* which she edited, says anthropologists through the sophistry of their theoretical work have been invaluable in promoting a wider consideration of gender – especially the "cultural system of practices and symbols" through which the roles assigned to men and women are historically produced, contested and negotiated, while scholars in literature and philopsophy have managed to incorporate poststructuralist ideas to enable us to understand how different cultures "encode, impart and regulate ideas about gender."[5]

Women's studies

In Malaysia and the rest of Southeast Asia, women's studies have elicited little interest due to a variety of factors. In the case of women's history, the lack of sources is a vexing impediment. In Europe social history writing became a possibility because of the availability of the relevant documentary materials like village records, school and church records, correspondence and memoirs. In Southeast Asia pre-colonial records are difficult to locate, while colonial records do not provide much information on women except perhaps in areas of public health, such as in cases of prostitution and venereal diseases. For feminist writers in Malaysia, the paucity of women's studies and the lack of sources on women's history are very much related to the current understanding of what constitute "national history" in Malaysia. Very often, national history excludes or marginalizes women, because of its focus on issues like inter-state diplomacy, political leadership and warfare in which men play the dominant roles.

The available documentary material, always refers more to the men. During colonial times, for instance, attention was directed towards the relationship between colonial officials and the sultans and the chiefs. In other words, the available information, actually emphasised male activities, while women were left out, or, at best, appeared as minor functionaries to the stories about men.[6]

The above observation is generally valid for Southeast Asia. After the end of the Second World War and with more new nation states attempting to write their own national history, the main focus was still on the nationalist movements and the struggles against western colonialism which was dominated by men. Even when the issue of centricities in

5 Barbara Watson Andaya, 2000, *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia,* Hawai'i: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, p. 5.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

historical writings were first raised in the 1950s,[7] political issues dominated Malayan historiography, while stories on women continued to be marginalised in the national narrative. By the 1970s there were attempts to intensify research on social history in Malaysia (to include women) as a result of the impact of the ideas of the *New Social Historian* that had been popular in the West since the 1950s,[8] yet the writings on women have taken a very long time to appear. The call to widen the writings on Southeast Asian history to encompass both space and into the margins had found a new torch bearer in Thai historian, Thongchai Winichakul, who made the call in a Conference on Southeast Asian Hsitoriography organised by the History Section, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang in 1999. In his keynote address, Thongchai called on Southeast Asian historians to write the history at the interstices and margins and this, even though he did not mention it, would also include women's history.[9]

In Malaysia, the focus on women's studies is rather limited, and very much determined by the types of documentary materials and their availability to researchers. The early studies on women's political movement by both Lenore Manderson and Virginia H. Dancz, for instance, were entirely dependant on official government records kept at the

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7 In 1958, K. G. Treggoning, a lecturer at the University of Malaya appealed to historians to approach Malayan history with the following call "Asia, not the European in Asia, must be our theme" in his response to the Euro-centric bias in Southeast Asian History. For further discussion, see, Cheah Boon Kheng, 1997, "Writing Indigenous History in Malaysia: A Survey on Approaches and Problems," *Crossroads,* 10 (2), pp. 33–81.

8 New Social Historians appeared in response to the over emphasis of the history from above. In Malaysia, this trend, according to historian Badriyah Haji Salleh (who equates this with history from below) became more prevalent in the 1970s when history undergraduates in local universities were encouraged to undertake micro history or local history. In the 1980s historians began to study protest movements by those at the bottom levels of society, or those associated with social problems such as gender, class and race. Badriyah Haji Salleh. 1996. "Sejarah dari Bawah: Sejarah Rakyat Dalam Masyarakat Melayu Tradisional," in Badriyah Haji Salleh & Tan Liok Ee (eds.), *Alam Pensejarahan: Dari Pelbagai Perspektif,*, p.156.

9 The call to write history at the interstices and margins to counter the rigidity of the writing of national histories according to Thongchai Winichakul involves silencing, suppressing or excluding certain pasts from becoming part of the national narrative: these are pushed out to the margins of the national. So the task of the local historians is to pick up the stories at the margins and interstices as these, in their own way, contribute to the national narrative. Thongchai Winichakul 2003. "Writing at the Interstices: Southeast Asian Historians and Postnational Histories in Southeast Asia," in Abu Talib Ahmad & Tan Liok Ee (eds.). *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History*, Athens: Ohio University Press, p. 12.

National Archives of Malaysia at Kuala Lumpur, and records of political parties, besides interviews of women political leaders who were still alive at the time.[10] In fact the availability of similar documentary material made studies on women's involvement in politics in the 20th century and especially after 1945 more popular among university undergraduates than women's roles in the traditional period (i.e. before colonialism).

Women's autonomy

The above statement would give the impression that it is rather difficult to undertake research on women before colonial rule although there are already attempts to do so. The issue relating to the autonomy of women in Southeast Asia has attracted many scholars, but with contradictory views on the subject. Anthony Reid's historical study on the role of the female in Southeast Asia has shown that, since the 16th and 17th century, Southeast Asian women have been involved in a variety of economic activities like paddy cultivation and commerce. They were also rulers in their own right. This means that women did enjoy a certain power in both the political and economic spheres, in a way not unlike the menfolk. This pattern had not changed with the arrival of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity into the region. That is why, unlike China, India or the Middle East the birth of daughters was never frowned upon by Southeast Asian societies.[11]

However, to Penny van Esterik, the issue of the Southeast Asian women enjoying high status requires further research, as this generalization was unsubstantiated by any firm documentation. In her introduction to the book, *Women of Southeast Asia* which she edited, van Esterik warned scholars interested in women's studies that "if this generalization is not valid, then it must be corrected or revised before it becomes an unquestioned assumption about Southeast Asia."[12] Buddhism, for example, as stressed by one of the contributors in the same volume, was responsible for a certain orientation towards economic behaviour which was also linked to a social pattern of sex roles. A. Thomas Kirsch in discussing the relevant Buddhist values and the economic orientation of Thai women, cautioned readers not to view this

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10 See, Lenore Manderson 1980. *Women, Politics and Change: The Kaum Ibu UMNO Malaysia, 1945–1972,* Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press; Virginia H. Dancz 1987. *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia,* Singapore: Oxford University Press.

11 Anthony Reid 1988. "Female Roles in Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia," *Modern Asia Studies*, 22(3), pp. 629–645.

12 Penny Van Esterik, *Women of Southeast Asia*, see the introduction.

as an instance of high status and equality, without relating them to religious goals and values within Thai society. In Buddhism, because men could achieve the highest position in religion, their relationship to Buddhist norms and values is more intense. A man's major merit-making act as stressed in Buddhism is to be ordained into the *sangha,* which in a sense is a flight from the worldly present and from a particular relationship. On the other hand, the women's merit-making act is the "provision" of a son for ordination. This means that a woman's merit-mobility is tied to her role as wife-mother, and to a particular relationship. Because women are inextricably linked to the world in this way, the intensity of their relationship and their sensitivity to Buddhist values and norms is qualitatively different from that of the men. The different relationship of Thai men and women to Buddhist roles, norms, and values shed much light as to why Thai women are more actively involved in economic activities in comparison to the men, hence their diligence in merit-making. As claimed by Kirsch, one possible explanation for this is that the women's requirement for merit is more than the men.[13]

In the Malaysian context, it is appropriate to highlight a number of studies relating to the issue of autonomy for Malay women. Although he did not specificly touch on the issue of autonomy, Cheah Boon Kheng has examined traditional texts like the *Sejarah Melayu*, *Tuhfat Al-Nafis, Bustanus Salatin, Hikayat Patani,* and he concludes that the royal women in the palaces of the Malay world like Melaka, Acheh, Pattani and Johor-Riau in the 16th and 17th centuries had never kept themselves aloof from palace affairs.[14] A similar role was also played by women in other Southeast Asian countries. In the case of Melaka, the royal women were involved in political intrigues *behind the throne,* while in Vietnam, as discussed by O. Wolters, palace women used their influence to determine and enhance the ruling dynasty.[15]

On the other hand, Wazir Jahan Karim, using history and anthropology in her study, focused on ideology to reconstruct men-women relationship, and found that Malay women enjoyed similar rights with men; this was achieved through *adat* and not through Islam. In her study based on stories of court ladies in the *Sejarah Melayu*, Wazir stressed that, compared to Islam, *adat* accorded more space for Malay women to enjoy

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13 A. Thomas Kirsch, 1996, "Buddhism, Sex-Roles and the Thai Economy," in Penny Van Esterik (ed.), *Women in Southeast Asia*, p. 21.

14 Cheah Boon Kheng, 1993, "Power Behind the Throne: The Role of Queens and Court Ladies in Malay History," *JMBRAS,* 66(1), pp. 1–21.

15 O.W. Wolters, 1999, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (revised edition), New York: SEAP Publications, pp. 234–235.

equal rights with the men. *Adat* continued to redefine and reaffirm women's social contribution as seen through the present-day women of Mawang village in Seberang Perai, Penang.[16]

However, Wazir's views were criticised by Ruzy Suliza Hashim who adopted an interdiciplinary approach to study the presence of women in the *Sejarah Melayu*. Through the lens of feminist dialogics, and the use of the exchange theory and Islamic theology, Ruzy came to the conclusion that the three approved conditions - mute, consenting and dissenting – assigned to court ladies in the *Sejarah Melayu* were the work of patriarchs in the Malay courts to justify their gender roles. Any women who betrayed their designated role were considered "abnormal", dangerous and perhaps not sexually appealing by court officials**.** Since Malay court chronicles were written by men on orders of the royalty and with their deep-seated misconceptions, it is difficult to accept these writings as an accurate depiction of women's lives in traditional Malay society. With these constraints, Ruzy argues that Wazir's view of *adat* rather than Islam that accords more autonomy to women is debatable. Ruzy points out that in Islamic teachings as cited in the Quran, the proper implementation of Islam, rather than *adat*, provides women with more power in relation to men in traditional Malay society.[17]

These conflicting views arose as a result of the conflict between the ideal and and the reality in Malay society. Wazir, however, saw various impediments in the implementation of the Islamic way of life, in which Islam should have accorded justice to women but instead had become a constraint. As a result *adat* became the main vehicle for women to enjoy a small measure of power or family autonomy. On the other hand, Ruzy stresses that the actual Islamic way would have accorded certain rights and space for women if it was strictly adhered to. The problem is, to what extent were Islamic laws strictly followed in Melaka and in the other Malay states? This is the main issue – whether we should see the regulations as mandated by Islam or how society modified them for its needs, as both courses of action actually produced different results.

Anthropological research by Carol Laderman in Merchang, Trengganu from 1975 to 1977, for instance, had found that Malay women in this state *do* have some degree of economic and personal autonomy. On the other hand, they would suffer considerably when the husband took

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16 Wazir Jahan Karim, 1992, *Women & Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*, Boulder: Westview Press.

17 Ruzy Suliza Hashim, 2003, *Out of the Shadows: Women in Malay Court Narratives*, Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, p. 20 & 229.

more than one wife. As Islam permits a man to have four wives at one time, the practice is difficult to control even though existing religious law requires the husband to treat each wife equally. Laderman, through interviews with numerous affected women, found not a single one of them was happy with their predicament, both in the economic sense and in sexual relationship. The wives complained of the husband's unfair treatment when each woman had to share the material wealth that otherwise would have benefitted a single beneficiary. Thus the Islamic way was seen as the mechanisms by which women were kept in, or restored to, their place.[18]

Other researchers see the advent of colonialism and capitalism as responsible for destroying the advantages of relative economic autonomy Malay women possessed since the traditional period. Boserup's classic study, which sees colonialism as responsible for marginalising women in all aspects of life, power and influence had a significant role in subsequent women's studies in Southeast Asia including Malaysia. Among them is the study by Marie-Andree Couillard who argues the existence of gender relationship or what she termed "relative autonomy of the individuals" in pre-colonial Malay society on the reason that Malay women during this period were actively involved in food production.[19] Consequently, Couillard stresses that Malay women enjoyed the fruits of their labour, in fact they possessed a certain dominance within the family especially in the upbringing of the children. This relative autonomy, however, was threatened with the advent of colonial rule through the introduction of the division of labour. Since then, there has existed job differentiation – those with paid labour were the domain of the male while the unpaid domestic chores increasingly became a female domain.

Couillard's study was roundly criticised by Khoo Kay Jin, a sociologist who formerly taught at the School of Social Sciences in Universiti Sains Malaysia. According to Khoo, she erred when she suggested that women had lost their autonomy they had enjoyed in pre-colonial times, citing as evidence for this past autonomy data from studies conducted in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1970s. In fact Couillard made too many generalisations in her arguments. One of them, Khoo pointed out,

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18 Carol Laderman, 1996, "Putting Malay Women in Their Place," in Penny Van Esterik., *Women of Southeast Asia*, p. 75.

19 Marie-Andree Couillard, 1990, "The Pangs and Pitfalls of Development for Malay Women: From the Rule of the Domestic Sphere to Its Downfall," *Kajian Malaysia*, 8(1), pp. 68–92. Another study, which was influenced by Boserup is Glen Chandler et.al 1988. *Development and Displacement: Women in Southeast Asia*, Australia: Center of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University.

was Couillard's notion that women had enjoyed individual appropriation of the product of their labour. According to Khoo, there appears to be a misinterpretation of the term "individual" which means an "individual unit of production" rather than to the "individual" meaning "person". For instance, the agricultural unit of production of the peninsular Malays especially rice production was, and still is, a household practice. Thus, the relationship of gender to production has to be analysed within this context. Men and women do not individually enter into production but rather men and women were bound in a determinate relationship called the household to undertake production. Similarly, individual men and women did not appropriate the product of their labour; instead it was the household.[20]

Khoo's critique actually had opened a new potential and new questions for women's studies in Malaysia. Khoo's emphasis on the household as the context would explain gender relations not only in agricultural production but also in land matters and wealth inheritance. Lands for cultivation were jointly worked by the husband and wife with either the husband and/or wife owning the land. In the case of widowed or divorced women who had no male children or relatives willing to work the land, the land would most likely have been leased out on a share-cropping basis. The produce of the land was never enjoyed by individual women as claimed by Couillard but the household which later used it for family/household expenses.

Khoo had also suggested the inheritance process as a possible area for gender studies. Usually Malay women owned the land through inheritance with the property divided according to Muslim law of *faraid* (male-female ratio of 2:1) besides *adat*. Under *adat*, the inheritance is usually shared equally although, depending on certain situations, it could favour both female and male heirs. This led to a number of questions. Is the mode of division indifferent to the value and type of property? Who is most likely to initiate division and the type of division and what kind of conflict would emerge during such division? This, to Khoo, needs further research. Overall, Couillard's finding that land titles are now in the hands of the men indicating that land registration had penalised women is unacceptable to Khoo.

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20 Khoo Kay Jin, 1990, "Some Reflections on Couillard's The Pangs and Pitfalls of Development for Malay Women: From the Rule of the Domestic Sphere to Its Downfall," *Kajian Malaysia*, 8(2), pp. 103–123.

Research work on women

This debate actually highligted the problem of inadequate research including archival research although there is no shortage of anthropological research on contemporary women in this country.[21] Consequently, anthropologists, despite their theories and analysis, tend to make generalizations regarding Malay women as in the case of Couillard. Events or developments that took place in one locality were taken as representative of women's development in general. In this regard, the women of Kedah, as in Couillard's study, were accepted to be representative of Malay women in this country. Whereas in reality, what had taken place in Kedah is quite different from the situation in Kelantan, Terengganu or Johore. This could only be verified once the historical data is found in the archives and carefully scrutinised.

Aware that women studies are an important aspect of national development, many scholars have come forward to pioneer academic research in the field. This has led to the publication of bibliographies on women's studies to assist research organisations like the National Library, and the Centre for National Population Control.[22] Others have begun to publish memoirs of women political leaders which represent an attempt to put women onto the centre stage of the national political movement. There is nothing unusual in the publication of these memoirs, as the involvement of women in politics is often seen as the yard stick for social development in a particular country. Its publication also made it possible to bring in new perspectives in women's studies. Studies that are too dependent on official documents and political party files, as those undertaken by both Manderson and Dancz, quite often concluded that the involvement of women in national politics in this country was due to, and a product of, the male leadership. These memoirs, instead, show that the factors that led some women to be involved in national politics were their maturity and a high level of awareness to fight for the nation and to defend its independence. It was this awareness that motivated Malay women political leaders, beginning with their attempts to gain more knowledge even if this meant going abroad or to voice their views within the party

21 Rosnah Ismail (ed.), 2003, *Wanita dan Pembangunan di Sabah: Fasa ll.* Kota Kinabalu: Universiti Malaysia Sabah; and Rosnah Ismail (ed.) 2004. *Wanita dan Pembangunan di Sabah: Fasa lll* . Kota Kinabalu: Universiti Malaysia Sabah.

22 See, for instance, *Bibliografi Wanita Malaysia* 1990. Kuala Lumpur: National Population and Family Development Board, Prime Minister's Department. This bibliography, which encompasses economic development, family, fertility, health, history, women association and other aspects, is based mainly on government publications, research reports, seminar papers, articles in journals and magazines, and university theses.

even at the risk of expulsion as happened to Khatijah Sidek who was sacked from UMNO in 1956.[23]

The efforts by the National Archives of Malaysia to embark on an oral history project had also contributed much in accumulating data on women in this country. Those women, who were seen to have contributed in a significant manner to the nation before or after the second world war, were interviewed by the National Archives. Until 1991 a total of 29 women have been interviewed including 2 English ladies who had at one time lived in Malaysia with their husbands who were senior colonial officials.[24] Interestingly these interviews do not cover only those women who were actively involved in national policies but women from various fields including those in the arts and the education sector. These could be viewed as the efforts of the National Archives to break the over emphasis on the political aspect, and to open serious research into a wider area that touched on women. Indirectly, these efforts shed new light on women such as the case of Rosna bt. Mahyuddin, who made a name as the first Malay woman sent to Japan to pursue education from 1942 to 1944 at the tender age of 11.[25]

Although efforts to expand data on the history of Malay women have been undertaken, yet compared to Chinese women, the writing on the socio-economic condition of Malay women before and after the second world war is very sparse. In comparison, there is much more data on the socio-economic history of Chinese women in the government files as Chinese women had been openly involved in the economic sector for a long time. Studies by Lai Ah Eng, James F. Warren, and George Hick at least provide a picture of the lives and economic activities of Chinese women including prostitution and as sex slaves during the Japanese occupation. Most interesting is that these scholars were able to consult documentary materials which had eluded an earlier generation of historians. Warren, for instance, utilised records of the coroners, magistrates, hospitals and even mental hospitals to study prostitution in

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23 See, *Memoir Khatijah Sidek: Puteri Kesatria Bangsa* 1995. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia; Aishah Ghani 1992. *Memoir Seorang Pejuang*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Nik Safiah Karim & Rokiah Talib (peny.) 2003. *Tan Sri Fatimah: Potret Seorang Pemimpin*, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications. Memoirs of those women from the left had also been published, for instance, Shamsiah Fakeh 2004. *Memoir Shamsiah Fakeh: Dari AWAS ke Rejimen ke-10*, Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia; *Serikandi Suriani Abdullah* 2005. Petaling Jaya: SIRD.

24 Azliza Hj. Ismail 1991. *Katalog Wawancara Sejarah Lisan Arkib Negara Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Arkib Negara Malaysia.

25 *S.L 171 Rosna Mahyuddin*, Kuala Lumpur: Arkib Negara Malaysia.

Singapore between 1870 and 1940.[26] Then, there are minor studies presented in the form of articles and student theses covering the migration of Chinese women, prostitution, *mui tsai* and the black and white *amahs* (domestic servants).[27] Comparatively, there are even fewer studies on Indian women. Other than the study by Dancz who also touches on the involvement of Indian women in Malayan politics, scattered data on them could be found in a few theses completed at the various institutions of higher learning.[28]

Early phase of socio-economic activities of Malay women

The involvement of Malay women in economic activities has been recorded as early as the 15th century by both Chinese and Portuguese sources. The Chinese *Hai Yu* for instance, mentions Malay women dabbling as sellers in the night market along the throughfares of Melaka. This observation was supported by Tomé Pires who wrote that the commercial activities of women contributed significantly to the Melaka treasury through their payment of taxes to Malay chiefs who controlled these throughfares.[29]

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26 Lai Ah Eng 1986. *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya,* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; James Francis Warren 1993. *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore 1870–1940*, Singapore: Oxford University Press; George Hick 1995. *The Comfort Women: Sex Slaves of the Japanese Imperial Forces*, Singapore: Heinemann Asia.

27 See, for instance, Chin Yoon Fong 1984. "Chinese Female Immigrants to Malaya in the 19th and 20th Centuries," in Muhammad Abu Bakar, Amarjit Kaur and Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali (eds.), *Historia*, Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Historical Society, pp. 357–371; Ooi Keat Gin 1992. "Domestic Servants Par Excellence: The Black and White Amahs of Malaya and Singapore with special reference to Penang," *JMBRAS*, Vol. 65 (2), pp. 69–84. Some of the academic exercises and thesis relating to women completed in the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia are Woo Siew Ing, 1988, "Dasar-dasar Pentadbiran British terhadap masalah Mui Tsai di Tanah Melayu, 1900-1949," academic exercise, School of Humanities, USM; Ting Sing Chung 2000. "Sejarah Wanita Cina di Pulau Pinang, 1900–1957: Perubahan dan Kesinambungan," MA thesis, USM; Tan Geck Choon, 2004, "Perubahan Persepsi Masyarakat Cina dan Pemerintah Kolonial Terhadap Status Pelacur Imigran Cina di Pulau Pinang, 1880–1941," MA theses, USM.

28 See, for instance, Nisha Bhatt, 1999, "Sejarah Sosio-Ekonomi Pekerja Wanita Estet di Tanah Melayu, 1900–1957," M.A. thesis, School of Humanities, USM; Sarojini Appathurai 1971. "Socio-Economic Aspects of Women Plantation Workers: A Case Study of Women Workers of Ladang Tengah (Kelang)," M.A. thesis, Universiti Malaya.

29 See, A. Cortasao (ed.) 1944. *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires,* London: Hakluyt Society, p. 274; Geoff Wade 1997. "Melaka in Ming Dynasty Texts," *JMBRAS*, 80 (1), p. 55.

Traditional Malay sources like the *Undang-Undang Melaka* and *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* highlighted the roles of the Malay women in the economy of the Melaka sultanate in the agricultural sphere, or in commerce.[30] In the shipping trade, for instance, wives or female slaves provided crucial assistance in the preparation of food on board the ship during voyages, assisted the ship's master in trading at the various ports of destination, and also slaves met the sexual needs of the men. In fact to control unsavoury activities on board, the *Undang-Undang Melaka* had strict rules regarding adultery on board involving the crew and wives of passengers or female slaves who were attending to their master. That the presence of wives or female slaves on board were deemed as crucial during voyages is stated in the *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* which laid down that "a new wife should be provided" to any crew if the latter's wife was found guilty of adultery on board ship. This was done to ensure that "he stays on as the ship's crew."[31] Nevertheless the rights of the wife who follows her husband on voyages were well looked after. In case of divorce taking place on board ship, the husband had to return the dowry (with interest) to the wife.[32]

However the rapid development of commerce had a significant impact on marriage patterns. In Melaka the vibrant and widespread commercial activities resulted in marriages being no longer localised (among or with locals); instead intermarriages between foreign traders and local women or among the various foreign groups of different racial stock were on the increase although actual data is scanty. This means that mixed marriages or "temporary" marriages became an integral characteristic of a port polity enjoying vibrant growth like Melaka. Muslim traders who came to Melaka without their wives tended to marry local commoners. Both the *Sejarah Melayu* and Tomé Pires' journal have noted that Melaka rulers had married commoners, daughters of their chiefs and daughters of foreigners. For strategic purposes and to enhance religious links the Melaka rulers also undertook to marry off their sisters or female relatives to foreign rulers. Yet there is no evidence that these foreign women were accepted into royalty. even though they managed to provide sons who were eligible to become royalty.[33] In other words,

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30 Khasnor Johan, 1999, "Undang-Undang Melaka: Reflections on Melaka Society in Fifteenth-Century Malacca," *JMBRAS*, 72(2), p. 147.

31 R. O. Winstedt & Josselin de P. E. Jong (eds.) 1956. "The Maritime Laws of Malacca," *JMBRAS*, 29(3), fasal 2.

32 Cortesao, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, p. 267.

33 Muhammad Yusoff Hashim 1989. *Kesultanan Melayu Melaka: Kajian Beberapa Aspek tentang Melaka pada Abad ke-15 dan Abad ke-16 dalam Sejarah Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. 300.

foreign wives of sultans were not allowed the social mobility enjoyed by the nobility of local origin.

As recorded by Tomé Pires, the Muslims in Melaka encouraged their daughters to marry non-Muslims because of the many possible benefits accruable from such marriages.[34] Other than the religious aspect of merit making (*pahala*), marriage with a rich non-Muslim foreign trader could improve the economic condition of the wife's family. Similarly the non-Muslim foreigner would also derive certain benefits, including his acceptance into the local society. According to the *Undang-Undang Melaka*, the Melaka rulers tried to ensure that such mixed marriages took place in an amicable manner without disturbing existing social harmony. Thus, from the viewpoint of customary practices of marriage, both locals and foreigners were subjected to the same norm. A father could only give his daughter in marriage upon the coming of age of the latter usually at the age of 15, the age of puberty.[35] Nevertheless, it is rather strange that the *Undang-Undang Melaka* did not provide any reference to divorce, an aspect that was later incorporated in the Temenggong laws of the later Malay states.

Status and heirarchy within traditional Malay society influenced the position of women, who were placed behind the men and bound to the existing social structures in whatever activities they undertook. Obviously the royal women possessed much more opportunities in socio -economic activities. Status also affected other aspects, for instance, punishment for certain crimes were not the same for the lower class of women who had committed similar offences. A married woman was also treated differently from an unmarried girl. The *Undang-Undang Melaka,* for instance, stipulated a fine of 10¼ tahil for the offence of disturbing another man's wife, and a fine of 2¼ tahil if the victim was an unmarried girl. The fine was further reduced to five emas if the victim was a female slave.

Status was also evident for the slave categories. For the offence of raping a virgin female slave, the offender was to be fined 10 emas and required to provide a pair of *baju* (perhaps the baju kurung) and cloth. If the victim was a divorcee, the fine was five emas but without the *baju* and cloth.[36] Based on the fines imposed it is evident that wives were put on a higher level followed by virgin freewoman, divorcee, married female slave, virgin female slave and divorcee female slave. The status of the wife of a freeman is higher than that of a virgin who is a daughter of a

34 Cortaseo, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, p. 243.

35 Liaw Yock Fang (ed.) 1976. *Undang-Undang Melaka*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, fasal 25.1.

36 Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang-Undang Melaka*, fasal 12.1, 15.5, 15.6.

freeman due possibly to the difficulty of finding a new life partner as it is most likely that women who were raped would be eventually divorced. As for virgins, they could marry the offender so as to maintain her dignity. The tendency for the offender to marry their victims seemed common, based on article 43.5 of the *Undang-Undang Melaka* which stipulated that, if the rapist refused to marry his victim, he would be beaten, his reputation irreparably suffered, and he would be ostracised. In a society that valued dignity and status, such physical punishment would inflict considerable shame on the offender who would most likely try to avoid this fate.

In later centuries royal women were still involved in commercial activities. In the mid-18th century, the consort of the Selangor Crown Prince, for instance, dabbled in the tin trade and other commodities like rice, and cloth. She also traded with English trader Francis Light who was at that time based in Ujung Salang (Junk Ceylon). Another Malay lady who traded with Light during this time was Siti Sabariah Cahaya Alam who hailed from Kedah.[37] There is no information on the background of this woman but it is possible that she was from the nobility. This assumption is based on her involvement in commerce and the fact that she possessed her own seal which was beyond the reach of the commoners. The relationship between Siti Sabariah and Light was quite close as they used such terms as "adinda-kekanda" (brother/sister) in their correspondence. Besides possession of her own chop, Siti Sabariah also owned ships and there were captains who were in her pay who were responsible for running her business. Another Malay lady who was involved in the local trade in Kedah was Long Fatimah who hailed from Perlis Indera Kayangan. This lady was able to compete with males and was in trading contact with one Captain Scott who was based in Ujung Salang.[38]

In Perak, the biggest trader of debt bondsmen in 1878 were women. Similarly, in Kedah the royal women were the major owners of debt bondsmen. Che Manjalara, the sixth wife of Sultan Abdul Hamid, was one of them. This favourite wife of the sultan was also a shrewd entrepreneur and one with vision. She fully utilised her position as the sultan's wife to strengthen her economic interests. Besides properties that she had inherited from her late father and a recipient of "*ampun kurnia*" (royal

37 Annabel Teh Gallop, 1994, *The Legacy of the Malay Letters/Warisan Warkah Melayu*, London: British Library, pp. 130 & 201.

38 Ahmad Jelani Halimi 2006. "Surat-Surat Perdagangan Kedah-Inggeris Pada Suku Akhir Abad ke-18," in Mahani Musa & Ahmad Jelani Halimi, (eds.) *Warisan Mahawangsa Kedah*, Kedah: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia Cawangan Kedah, pp. 13–27.

grants) from the sultan in the form of lands and houses in Alor Setar, Che Manjalara strove to increase her wealth by dabbling in various trades and tried to own as many houses so as to let them out. She managed to anticipate that the new linkage between Kedah and the British would bring economic development to the state. Before the arrival of the British, Alor Setar was only a big village surrounded by jungles with two stone roads linking its northern section with the southern part. Che Manjalara later constructed a road on her land in Alor Setar, which was named Jalan Baharu and is now the busiest thoroughfare in the town. She also constructed commercial premises and a wet market in Alor Setar. This market was later forced to close down; according to her son, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman who was Malaysia's first prime minister, the Kedah government was not happy with the way it had developed.[39] Yet this market and the commercial premises proved her shrewdness in commecial dealings and in accumulating wealth. This wealth became an asset to be inherited by her off spring, both male and female.

The involvement of commoners in socio-economic aspects was not a new phenomenon following the entry of capitalism into Kedah. Nor were the women marginalised by the advent of colonialism. There was, in fact, a continuity in their involvement from the traditional period, with new emphasis and new challenges. With the introduction of labour and wages, for instance, women had to attune themselves to these changes and to find a role in the pursuit of wealth. Unfortunately their efforts in the agricultural sphere or their family roles were never recorded in the state's job census as these jobs did not quite fit into the colonial definition of paid work. For instance, the 1911 census recorded 105,883 out of 185,223 Malay women in the Federated Malay States as the "unemployed" category. While Malay women often referred themselves as "housewives" when asked about their occupation, Vlieland, who was the Superintendent of Census 1931, regarded a large number of the adult female population as solely engaged in household duties, and therefore did not think it worth while to express percentages of the total female population employed in different industries.[40] His census report failed to capture adequately the real situation in Malaya at the time with regard to women's labour. In the first half of the 19th century when Kelantanese men refused to undertake economic activities, the women had to play this role. This was reported by

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39 Kua Kia Soong 2002. *K. Das & The Tunku Tapes*. Kuala Lumpur: Strategic Info Research Development (SIRD), p. 42.

40 C. A. Vlieland 1932. *A Report on the 1931 Census and on Certain Problems of Vital Statistics*, London, p. 98.

Malay writer,Munshi Abdullah, during his visit to the east coast in 1837–38.[41]

Malay women in Kelantan and Terengganu

The women of Kelantan and Terengganu might differ from their Thai counterparts, whose involvement in petty trading and other economic activities was viewed by Kirsch as part of their merit-making. Instead Abdullah found the women were forced to work and to undertake petty trading at the markets, and an assortment of jobs to the extent of neglecting their families as the men simply refused to work. In Kelantan, the same pattern was observed later by British colonial officials like Hugh Clifford who had visited the state at the end of the 19th century and W. A. Graham, the British Financial Advisor who was appointed by the Siamese government in the early part of the 20th century. The Kelantanese women were not only active in commercial activities but were also very sociable - they were never shy to talk to strangers, a behaviour which was not the norm for Malay women at the time.[42] Munshi Abdullah also reported the involvement of Kelantanese women in prostitution. Although contemporary studies of Malay women's involvement in prostitution in Kelantan in the 1950's–1970's were due to the high rates of divorce and the lack of education,[43] the incidence of prostitution in Kelantan in the early 19th century as reported by Munshi Abdullah might have been due to the commercial links between Kelantan and the Straits Settlements, notably Singapore, which brought merchants and sailors to Kelantanese ports and this had an impact on the rise of prostitution in the state.[44] According to Abdullah the women waited eagerly for the arrival of trading ships so as to ply their trade; Abdullah felt that such activities were not customarily frowned upon in this east coast state.

Perhaps one might question Abdullah's observation which was made during a short visit to the state, although documentary sources like

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41 See Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi 1981. *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* (second edition with introduction by Kassim Ahmad), Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti.

42 See, W. A. Graham 1908. *Kelantan: A State of the Malay Peninsula*, Glassgow: James Maclehose & Sons, pp. 24–25; Hugh Clifford 1989. *In Court and Kampong* (revised edition), Singapore: Graham Bash, p. 17.

43 Haryati Hasan 2005. "Malay Women and Prostitution in Kota Bharu, Kelantan, 1950s–1970's," *JMBRAS,* 78(1), pp. 97–120.

44 For further discussion on the trade link between the Malay states in the east coast Malay Peninsular and Singapore since the early 19th century, see Wong Lin Ken 1960. "The Trade of Singapore, 1919–1969," *JMBRAS,* 33(4), pp. 78–80.

police reports, reports of the Social and Welfare Departments, and reports of the Kelantan Council of Religious Affairs attested to the fact that prostitution in Kelantan continued to exist even through the mid-20th century.[45] This development caused considerable concern within Kelantan society especially among the *ulama* (religious officials), and may have led to the drafting of *Hukum Maksiat di Kelantan* (the Law to Control Vice in Kelantan) by an ulama probably at the end of the 19th century or early 20th century. Scholars believe this was an attempt to control the state's rampant prostitution and other immoral activities among Muslims in the state.[46] The author of *Hukum Maksiat di Kelantan* viewed the sultan as the "father of all sinners" due to his failure to look after the welfare of the people. The religious aristocracy also did not escape his disparaging remarks for their failure to give proper advice to the sultan, who was allowed to indulge his whims and fancies. Some of the more widespread sins included *main muda* (cavorting between males and females), and prostitution. Prostitution continued to attract comments from Kelantan society as indicated in local magazines like *Kenchana* which was published in Kota Bharu in 1930.[47]

Kelantan women were a significant force in the state's economic development. In 1966 British anthropologist Rosemary Firth reported on their independent status in economic activities and that divorce was never seen as a major catastrophe by these women.[48] Their entreprenurial characteristics continue through the present period; in fact the bulk of the trading activities in the state's town and rural markets are still undertaken by women. Kelantan Land Office files reveal evidence that before the Second World War Kelantan women were actively involved in agriculture especially in paddy cultivation.[49]

In the other Malay states like Kedah, Malay women were also the main cultivators of paddy. In Kedah in 1925 the British administration

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45 See, Haryati Hassan, "Malay Women and Prostitution in Kota Bharu, Kelantan."

46 See, Jelani Harun 2002. "Hukum Maksiat di Kelantan: Peranan Ulama dalam Menasihati Pemerintah Negeri." Paper presented at the Workshop on Malay Manuscript II, Akademik Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya.

47 See, for instance, an article entitled "Ikthiar Tambahkan Mutu Kaum Ibu [the efforts to improve the quality of mother] by Wok bt. Abdullah which was published in *Kenchana*, no. 5, 1930. This article urged the Kelantan women and the state government to provide assistance to upgrade the quality of lives of women so as to deter them from immoral activities.

48 Rosemary Firth 1966. *Housekeeping Among Malay Peasants*, London: Athlone Press, pp. 29–30.

49 The Pasir Putih Land Office files (LOPP), for instance, contain regular reports of women in land application and agriculture.

created the post of a Lady Medical Officer just to look after the health of Malay mothers in that state. This was meant to ensure that the food supply was not disrupted through a break in the supply of local labour. Hence there was a need to look after the health of these mothers who would be producing future labourers for the state. Malay women during the colonial period, as well as in the pre-colonial period (pre-1909), actively applied to the state for land and took legal measures to ensure their wealth would not fall into the hands of others. Official records in the archives in the state capital, Alor Star, show that Malay women often sent petitions to the district Land Office and the State Secretariat, besides taking their husbands or members of the upper class to court on matters concerning land and property. In a society that was very much under the influence of both Islamic laws and *adat* laws, Malay women managed to inherit considerable wealth. This means that their socio-economic history could be scrutinised through the records of the Stamp Office which have attracted little attention from the advocates of gender studies.[50]

A socio-economic history of Malay Women in Kedah

In Kedah, women of the nobility were not only involved in commerce, and in politics, but were also involved in diplomacy. There is evidence to indicate that a woman emissary was appointed to lead an official delegation abroad in 1771.[51] A few notable aristocratic ladies like Wan Masheran, Tunku Hajar, Cik Manjalara and Wan Fatimah (Perlis) had respectively made their impact on Kedah palace politics in the 19th century, a role that has already been studied by some scholars.[52] Less is

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50 Khoo Kay Jin first highlighted the importance of the Stamp Office records as a historical source in a paper at a conference organized by the History Section, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia in 1992. See, Khoo Kay Jin, 1992, "The Stamp Office Record of Kedah: A Neglected Data Base," paper presented at the Conference on Issues in Historiography, organised by the History Section, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

51 In his bid to obtain support and protection from the East India Company, Sultan Muhammad Jiwa of Kedah reportedly sent a woman in March 1771 as his personal emissary to meet English merchants at Acheh. In April 1771, this emissary returned to Kedah with Francis Light, who brought along two armed vessels, powder, arms and thirty sepoys. For more details on this episode, see R. Bonney 1971. *Kedah 1771–1821: The Search for Security and Independence*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, pp. 32–35.

52 See, for instance, Cheah Boon Kheng 1993. "Power Behind the Throne: The Role of Queens and Court Ladies in Malay History," *JMBRAS*, 66(1), pp. 1–21; see Julie Tang Su Chin, 2002, *Sejarah Kerajaan Perlis 1841-1957*, MBRAS, Monograph No. 32; and Mohammad Isa Othman 1990. *Politik Tradisional Kedah 1681-1942*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

known, however, about the involvement of the aristocratic ladies in the state's economic activities as their high status opened far more opportunities for them than commoner women, to be involved in commerce and in the accumulation of wealth.

While this was so, the commoner women exceeded them in making the major contributions to the expansion of the Kedah economy. This was specifically mentioned in a version of the Kedah laws called the *Undang-Undang Kedah A. H. 1311/1893.* It was copied later by Ku Din Ku Meh or Ku Baharuddin Ku Meh, the Alor Setar Prison Superintendent who was despatched to Setul in 1897 by Sultan Abdul Hamid to act as assistant administrator. Sultan Abdul Hamid was appointed the provincial governor as Kedah was then under the overlordship of Siam following the Siamese territorial adjustment in the wake of the Thesaphiban system implemented by Rama V (King Chulalongkorn). *Undang-Undang Kedah A. H. 1311/1893* (the Ku Din Ku Meh version) was believed to have been in use since the 17th century during the reign of Sultan Rijaluddin Muhammad Syah (r. 1625-1652). This law continued to be in use until the 19th century. This version of the Kedah laws was much broader in its scope than the version of Kedah laws, also known as *Undang-Undang Kedah,* which was studied by British scholar R.O. Winstedt. While certain sections of both versions appear to be similar, their interpretations differ. Sections relating to the collection of taxes (*ripai*), regulations on relationship between master and debt bondsmen, the *nobat* tax, and articles regarding women as part of the labour force are not found in Winstedt's version.[53]

In the context of Malaysian historiography, the *Undang-Undang Kedah A. H. 1311/1893* is one of the few patriarchal Temenggong laws that actually recognised the role of women in economic development in a particular state, something that is not even mentioned, in the *Undang-Undang Melaka* which is the main source of patriarchal Temenggong laws in the post Melaka period. Similarly this aspect is not prominent in the matriarchal Adat Perpatih laws although these laws as seen in the *Tambo Minangkabau* and *Tamboh Alam Naning,* pay much more attention to the rights of women with regard to inheritance.[54] Similarly, the *Nineteen Nine Laws of Perak* provides safeguards for the welfare of women including

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53 Khoo Kay Jin 1999. "Undang-Undang Kedah dengan tumpuan khusus kepada pengawalan hak milik tanah," In *Masyarakat Malaysia Abad ke-19*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

54 See, Edwar Djamaris 1991. *Tambo Minangkabau*, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka; Mohd. Shah bin Mohd. Said Al-Haj 1996. *Tambo Alam Naning*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

their inheritance right but these laws do not recognise women from the socio-economic aspect.[55]

The recognition of women's labour appears in article 16 of the *Undang-Undang Kedah* 1311/1893 which relates to marriage and the division of wealth in case of divorce or the death of either the husband or wife. This concern towards the welfare of women, in the thinking of the lawmakers, is believed to have started when Shaikh Abu Bakar was appointed the state Kadi in the early 19th century. It was he who reminded judges to be fair to women in matters relating to the common wealth or jointly owned property (*harta sepencarian*). He issued this reminder as he had observed that the women were very diligent in all spheres of economic activities compared to the men. Consequently, he authorised that a fair division of the common wealth in case of divorce or death of the husband had to be made to prevent the surviving women and her children becoming victimised.[56]

The *Undang-Undang Kedah 1311/1893* also directed its attention towards marriage, matrimonial conficts and divorce, based on Islam and *adat* laws. It laid down articles relating to the dowry (*mas kahwin*), to the guardian who gives the woman in marriage (*wali*), the issuance of a reminder (in which is recorded the date of marriage, total marriage expenses and the dowry). These articles are to assist the judge dispensing justice in case of matrimonial differences, divorce (a situation in which the wife could ask for divorce and *fasakh*) and the division of the common wealth. This particular law differs from the other Temenggong laws when it discusses incest (*sumbang mahram*) which seemed to be quite prevalent at the time, and hence the inclusion of its provision.

In the 20th century, the socio-economic history of Kedah's Malay women could be gleaned from government annual reports and files of the State Secretariat, land office, district office, the courts, the Stamp Office, and the Estate Duty Office. The 1911, 1921 and 1931 population census reports also indicate continuity in the involvement of aristocratic women in the agricultural sector notably in paddy cultivation. The district office files serve as a general index to survey the involvement of Malay women in agricultural activities including those from the royal family. The records reveal the persistence of women in making applications relating to the acreage of the land requested, the age of the applicants and the

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55 For further discussion, see J. Rigby 1970. "The Ninety-Nine Laws of Perak," in M. B. Hooker (ed.) *Readings in Malay Adat Laws*, Singapore: Singapore University Press.

56 K/PU 1 *Undang-Undang Kedah* A. H. 1311 (1893) Ku Din Ku Meh, Kuala Lumpur: Arkib Negara Malaysia.

regularity of such application made by the same individual. The Baling Land Office records for the period 1928-29, for instance, received 84 applications for state lands from Malay women, for various purposes. In 1930 the applications increased to 197 and to 360 in the period 1932-1934. A similar phenomenon was observable in the land offices of Kubang Pasu, Padang Terap and other districts.[57]

The presence of women at the land office for grant making purposes was raised by the State Council at its meeting of August 1, 1927. The government had received numerous complaints about the land office being crowded with women who came to settle their land grants and brought along their children. These incidents were unavoidable since there was no one at home who could look after the little ones. To overcome this problem, the state government allowed the procedure for a change of names in land grants to be done by representatives who were certified by the penghulu.[58] This rendered the presence of women at the land office unnecessary. Land was important to the women as a household necessity – a place where they could build a dwelling on and use for cultivation, or to be sold in time of need and to be passed on as inheritance.

The State Secretariat (SUK) files also reveal controversies over land applications involving women from the royal family as, under the Land Revenue Exemptions Enactment, these women were allowed to own lands. Under this enactment, the children and grandchildren of the sultan were each entitled to 500 *relong* of land, which was exempted from land tax.[59] Such privileges were often misused, by selling the land to Chinese interests often at inflated prices, or for speculative purposes. The royal women, like the royal males, were accorded the same privilege in land application through the royal channel on the assumption that they possessed adequate capital for its development. Due to misuse, the state government froze all land applications from Tunku Hajar Tunku Abdul Jalil following her sale of 200 *relong* agricultural lands in the Mukim of Teloi Kiri to a Chinese man. The land was approved to her by the state on 7 May 1925.[60] The State Secretariat files also provide glimpses of the government position on land applications by royalty approved by the State

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57 These files are available at the National Archives of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur and at the Kedah Branch in Alor Merah, Alor Setar.

58 Kedah State Secretariat *SUK Kedah 375/46 British Adviser, Kedah, 3.2.1346 Raises question of attendance of women at land Offices for receiving new titles.*

59 High Commisioner Office Kedah *HCO Kedah 1078/1917 System by which Tungkus are permitted to take up land.*

60 *SUK Kedah 1667/1349 Directors of Lands, 30 July 1930. Tunku Hajar bt. Tunku Abdul Jalil applies for state land in Mukim Ayer Putehm Kota Setar, for rubber cultivation.*

Council headed by the Raja Muda. Applications for land by members of royalty who failed to abide by the state regulations were routinely rejected. They also were given a stern warning by the state government.

Land and wealth in Kedah

As land was an important asset, Malay women viewed seriously problems relating to land applications and ownership. They sent petitions to the land office, and the Office of the State Secretary, to file claims with the court (including against royalty) if they could not get satisfactory solutions to their problems. Petitions were submitted in relation to family inherited wealth, jointly owned property (*harta sepencarian*), problems of land boundary, claims for the same property among eligible heirs, and trespassing or cheating (*penipuan*) with regards lands owned by the family and heirs. Although it is not possible to trace the outcomes of these cases it shows the length that Malay women would go to, to safeguard their interests as far as wealth ownership was concerned to prevent them from falling into the hands of others.

Inheritance of wealth rarely managed to hold the attention of researchers even though this aspect was an important indicator of gender relationship and the contributions of women to socio-economic aspects. Besides the Islamic procedure or *faraid*, the division of wealth among the Malays was also based on *adat* (customs). Division through *faraid* did not allow women to have much inherited wealth as the ratio of 1:2 for daughters would ostensibly change, depending on the number of surviving sons of the deceased. Despite the legal drawbacks, the records of the Stamp Office and Estate Duty Office indicate Malay women, especially the royal women, had left behind sizeable amounts of wealth. It is also possible to use these records to identify the socio-economic strength of Malay women. Their royal positions afforded many royal women the opportunity to accumulate wealth through inheritance, *ampun kurnia*, and also through individual purchases. One notable case, refers to Che Manjalara, Sultan Abdul Hamid's favourite consort. Based on the records of the Stamp Office, she had left behind wealth in various forms officially estimated at $59,649.00 and accumulated debts of $35,345.07. After deductions including burial expenses of $1,250.00, her heritable wealth was $23,053.93. Information from the Stamp Office also disclosed the kind of life these royal ladies had led, and for a few, they depended heavily on money lenders or *chettiyars*. One chettiyar, Mutukarpen, who was based in Pekan Cina, regularly extended loans to Che Manjalara. The biggest loan she had ever obtained from him was in 1935/36 for the

amount of $28,860.00. At the time of her death in 1941 $4,329.00 of the loan was still outstanding.[61]

From the Stamp Office records it is also possible to determine why chettiyars readily extended loans to the royal ladies because the chettiyars could apply to the state government to deduct payments from the monthly royal allowance. Another was the high value of land mortgaged by these royal ladies. In the case of money owed by Che Manjalara to Mutukarpen, the value of the land mortgaged was officially estimated at more than $50,000 based on the existing market price. It included one lot located in Kampung Baharu, Alor Setar which was valued at $35,000. Also mortgaged were 59 relongs of paddy land located in Alor Malai valued at $5,960.00 by the Kedah Land Office. As she would be leaving behind sizeable debts and wealth, Che Manjalara was shrewd enough to make preparations to avoid possible conflicts among her heirs. In October 1940 she made her will and named her daughter Tunku Habshah, to be accorded the power of attorney to divide her wealth.

The Stamp Office records also show that not all royal ladies had left much wealth and at times the plight of wives of officials were much better such as the case of Che Sufiah bt. Ibrahim who was the second wife of Che Muhammad Ariffin, the sultan's private secretary. Che Sufiah died on 29 January 1936. Application to obtain the power of attorney over her wealth was made by her brother-in-law, Che Muhammad Hassan bin Kerani Muhammad Arshad who also happened to be the author of the famed *Al-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah,* a Kedah official history written in 1928. Most of Che Sufiah's wealth was inherited from her late husband which totalled $97,000. This amount was later divided among her husband's first wife and the sons of Che Muhammad Ariffin. After deductions each of the sons received $24,000 while Che Sufiah, the first wife and daughters of the deceased received $12,000 each.[62]

An examination of files relating to inherited properties of commoner women also throw much light on the socio-economic positions of women commoners. Some of them lived in poverty while the shrewd ones managed to live in luxury by the standards of the time. The files also enable us to detect how the Malay women commoners derived their wealth through inheritance, and joint property (*harta sepencarian*) and those purchased on their own. These files also portray Malay women who actually developed the lands they owned. The file relating to the inherited

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61 Stamp Office Kedah *SO 120/60 High Court Administration No. 43/60 Estate of Yang Teramat Mulia Che Manjalara bt. Long Nara.*

62 *SO 72/58 High Court Administration No. 24/58 Estate of Che Sufiah bt. Ibrahim.*

wealth of Balkis binti Hasan, shows her shrewdness and seriousness in diversifying her income. She traded in jewellery on a credit basis and rented out her lands.[63] Her list of properties included an automobile, which was beyond the reach of most people at that time.

As an important contributor to the household economy, women did not take lightly problems relating to inheritance. Malay women made their wills to ensure fairness in the distribution of wealth. Women wrote petitions to the state government with regards property claims by surviving heirs. They always supported their cases with the relevant evidence. The second wife of Haji Dahaman bin Penghulu Hasan, who was known as Eshah, tried to claim her right with regards the common property (*harta sepencarian*) on the death of her husband. She had to face Haji Dahaman's son who was also making a similar claim in February 1945. As the common property was not included in the list of inheritable properties issued by the Kedah Stamp Office, Eshah applied to the High Court to have it included as these properties were obtained after her marriage to her late husband. They had lived as husband and wife for about 40 years. In this claim, Eshah meticulously listed down the common properties she had held with her late husband. In the end she secured what she had claimed for.[64]

Besides having to contend with the challenges of male heirs, Malay women did not hesitate to take their husbands or members of the royalty to court in matters pertaining to inheritance and the division of properties. One such case involving a commoner and royalty took place in 1922. The commoner woman, Jah bt Ngah Man, had taken Che Manjalara to court regarding her "*surat hebah*" (letter of announcement) through which all her properties were deposited with Che Manjalara. Jah made her report on 24 September 1922 after she was chased out of Che Manjalara's residence due to a disagreement over a sale agreement pertaining to certain plots of land in Jitra, the Mukim of Naga and Titi Gajah (the last two places are located in the Kota Setar district) which was originally given within the *"surat hebah"* to Che Manjalara in 1921. Che Manjalara had refused to return these properties despite a claim made by Jah and her son.

In her reply to the goverment dated 16 January 1923 Che Manjalara held the view that the *"surat hebah"* was valid as Jah had made it voluntarily and was agreed to by her sons and heirs. This meant, claimed Che Manjalara, the claimant had no inherent right to ask for the return of

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63 *SO 83/55 High Court Administration No. 14/55 Estate of Balkis bt. Haji Hassan.*

64 *SO 50/87 High Court Administration No. 9/87 Estate of Haji Dahaman alias Haji Abd. Rahman bin Penghulu Hassan.*

these properties. This also meant that the contested properties would become the property of Che Manjalara which would be inheritable by her heirs upon her death.[65] As conciliation failed to settle the issue the government allowed Jah to file her claims in court. Unfortunately I have not been able to trace the conclusion of this case in the files of both the court and the State Secretariat records. Nevertheless this case shows that Malay women were willing to go the extra mile to overcome their fear of royalty to safeguard their interests.

Despite the courage they showed to safeguard their wealth by writing petitions and filing claims with the court, Malay women often became victims in matters relating to properties and inheritable wealth. They also lost valuable lands to chettiyars when they failed to settle loans. Loans were procured for every day needs when the paddy harvests failed, for making marriage feasts, and for funerals. Quite often these loans were obtained with land as collateral; when repayment could not be met in time, the chettiyars would make a report to the government asking permission to bring the matter to court. Thus the State Council, besides managing the affairs of state administration, had to contend with the debts problems of these Malay women. At times the government received applications to change land titles (*pindah nama*) to money lenders to settle existing debts, for government loans in order to settle outstanding debts, and from debtors to divide the properties of a deceased person to pay up outstanding debts. Malay women too were involved in these cases. One extraordinary request involved a royal woman who requested her royal allowance be continued even after her death to enable her heirs to pay all outstanding debts.[66] The government rejected all these applications as it was beyond the prerogative of the state to undertake such matters.

The State Secretariat files indicate that the Kedah government took a serious view with regards to debts owed by the royal women. Besides affecting the prestige of royalty, especially those who were in the government service, the royal women continued to be trapped in debts as they were illiterate. As a result, they became easily the victims of dishonest practices, such as loans given without any written agreement or witnesses. Creditors tended to allow loans to drag on for a lengthy period to enable them to collect high interest rates. Tunku Ibrahim, the acting sultan, in June 1923, had expressed the opinion that royal women were prone to manipulations by creditors because they were illiterate. To

65 *SUK Kedah 320/1341, Jah bt. Ngah Man, Titi Gajah 24 September 1922. Petition against Che Manjalara regarding her property.*

66 *SUK Kedah 807/1344. That her [Tunku Meriyam bt. Tunku Dia-udin] pension be continued for a period of two years after her death.*

him, there was not much point in increasing the monthly deductions from the royal allowance as this would not deter the royal women from borrowing from unscrupulous chettiyars.[67]

Similar fears were expressed by the male royals as they too were often taken to court since they had stood as guarantors. The height of this fear was the signing of a petition on 17 April 1929 by 5 male royals who appealed to the government to frame suitable regulations to safeguard the interest of royal women from debt problems.[68] Such debts caused much hardship on the royal women and their families which had to settle debts incurred by wives or daughters. The petition also alleged that these debts affected the quality of work of those serving the government. In such cases the husband or father would not be able to give his heart and soul to his job and had to endure unspeakable shame. To overcome these problems, the petition suggested the government impose certain conditions in any loan transaction, such as making it mandatory to have the signature of either the husband or male relatives (for those unmarried women), in all future loan agreements. .

This petition received a favourable response from both the State Council and the British Advisor. For the British Advisor, any regulations to control debts among royal women would only drive away bona fide lenders including those from royalty. As acting sultan, and president of the State Council, Tunku Ibrahim believed only education and knowledge could solve the woes of debt among royal women. In short, the government did not see making more regulations and laws as the most effective answer to solve the debt problems. Instead he was convinced that only education and awareness among the women could alleviate the problem of debts.[69]

The annual Education and Medical Reports of Kedah/Perlis for the years before 1942 provide some interesting information on the attitudes of the Malay commoners, the British advisors, the state government, and the challenges and problems they encountered in their attempts to increase the number of girls in schools or to get more Malay mothers to visit government hospitals/clinics in Kedah. On the other hand we have the commoner Malays notably village heads and penghulus who petitioned the government to open up more girls' schools. Unfortunately the government refused to respond favourably to these petitions and to open

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67 *SUK Kedah 2427/1341 Debt of Tunku Ishshah bt. Raja Muda*

68 *SUK Kedah 3069/1347 That some kind of official order be issued protecting the female members of the Kedah Ruling House from incurring debt.*

69 *Ibid.*

up more schools for girls because in their view it was the males who were the breadwinners and education was meant more for them.

Conclusion

The case of Kedah has shown the potential for studies of the socio-economic history of Malay women through a meticulous scrutiny of a variety of official documents presently deposited in the local archives. The state archives in Kelantan also present a rich variety of official documents, like annual reports, medical reports, reports of the religious establishment Majlis Agama Islam Kelantan (MAIK) and Land Office reports yielding evidence on the roles of women, similar to those in Kedah. A similar pattern seems to exist in the Johore state archives. As Radin Fernando's recent study on Dutch Melaka archives indicates, there is documentary material on the role of Malay women, especially in the court cases which he has highlighted.[70]

I believe there is still a wealth of documentary sources available for women's history for the other states in Malaysia waiting to be uncovered at the National Archives in Kuala Lumpur and at its various state branches. It is only when women's history for all the states is known that a more comprehensive women's history in Malaysia can be attempted, without risking the pitfalls of generalisations.

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70 Radin Fernando 2006. *Murder Most Foul: A Panorama of Social Life in Melaka from the 1780s to the 1820s*. Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, Monograph no. 38.

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Writing on Orang Asli[1] into Malaysian History

Nik Haslinda Nik Hussain

Introduction

Malaysian historiography, since independence from colonial rule, has paid greater attention to local society, which previously had been a neglected subject. There clearly exists now a new perception of history. History, as an academic discipline, has become more inclusive than exclusive, and there is no limit to the questions that can be raised in Malaysian history. Of course, whether all questions can be answered depends largely on the material available to the historian. For this purpose, the history of Orang Asli, including its problems and challenges, needs to be examined in the context of the larger Malaysian historiography.

This study calls for a new perspective of historical writing on Orang Asli by looking at their development in Malaysia from the end of the 19th century until the 1960's. This paper briefly surveys the changes that have taken place in the Orang Asli's lives, relationships, and contacts with other communities in the 11 peninsular states since British rule.[2] The Orang Asli have endured slavery,[3] economic exploitation, and forced conversion to new religions, as a result of their contacts with the outside world. Their

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1 The Malaysian government prefers the Malay term "Orang Asli" (meaning 'original people') to the earlier colonial term "aborigine." The latter, in common with other names formerly given to the Orang Asli, is considered to have derogatory connotations. See report in *The Straits Time*, June 10, 1967; Iskandar Carey, *Orang Asli: The Aboriginal Tribes of Peninsular Malaysia*, Oxford University Press, 1967: Iskandar Carey, *The Orang Asli in Malaya,* seed 2, (1), 1961; Federation of Malaya, "The Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance," no. 3 of 1954, Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer; Ministry of the Interior, *Statement of Policy Regarding The Administration of The Aborigine People of the Federation of Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur; and P.D.R. Williams-Hunt, *An Introduction to the Malayan Aborigines,* Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, 1961.

2 *Statement of Policy Regarding the Administration of the Aborigine Peoples of the Federation of Malaya,* Kuala Lumpur: Department of Information, Federation of Malaya, 1961; and Iskandar Yusof Carey, *The Malayan Orang Asli and Their Future*, Kuala Lumpur, 1961.

3 C.O 3285/2479. 03, Strait Settlements Correspondence Respecting Slavery in the Protected Malay States, 1882.

relationship with government was initially established only on security grounds. The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), which came about due to the communist insurrection, changed the offhand attitude of the government towards this group. Thereafter, the government made efforts to wean them from the communist insurgents and to expose them to modernization, so that they would come over to the government side.

Thinking about, and writing Orang Asli history, leads us to a deeper and better understanding of their problems in Malaysia. They are a group in trouble. I fear that their problems will accelerate if we lose all humanistic perspectives and provide development which benefit only a few and adversely affect these original *pribumi* (sons of the soil) of Malaysia. Malaysia needs an Orang Asli history to fill a gap that will provide a more detailed and consistent picture of their social organization, economic activities, and religious beliefs and practices, than has so far been attempted. Such a history must try to give a general description of Orang Asli history from a socio-structural point of view. I would like to begin by discussing their marginalized role in recent years.

In the history of the non-Malay indigenous peoples, the term "Orang Asli" has not been given due attention. Although it is used in the Malaysian Constitution, the real interpretation of the term 'Orang Asli; is not easy. It is especially difficult to identify the "indigenous characteristics" that uniquely differentiate them from the other indigenous groups. Even the varied Orang Asli groups and cultures are not uniform. In reality, their different social forms, languages, ecological environment, and customs, are more visible than the implicit uniformity of the term's meaning. The term "Orang Asli" was not their choice, but one imposed upon them. In any in-depth analysis, one would find that there has never been any awareness within the Orang Asli that they desired the term "Orang Asli".

To the general public in Malaysia, the Orang Asli is usually pictured exclusively as jungle dwellers. This is not their true condition. Some 40 per cent of the Orang Asli in fact live in jungle fringes adjacent to Malay or Chinese villages, while only smaller groups live in deep jungles that are almost inaccessible. It may seem surprising that, for many years, the Department of Orang Asli Affairs in West Malaysia lacked information about their numbers, groups or areas of distribution.

We may divide the Orang Asli, irrespective of their tribal or ethnic allegiances, into four separate categories. The first group is *the jungle communities*. That is, the people who still live in deep jungle, perhaps several days' walk from the nearest Malay village. This group has been least affected by change. Their members are geographically isolated, and

they have few contacts with the outside world, and, on the whole, they still follow their traditional way of life.

The second group is *the border communities*. These Orang Asli villagers live in the jungle but establish contacts with outsiders with whom they trade. They usually live in areas which are only a few hours' walk from the nearest main road. They sell their jungle produce to outsiders, especially to Chinese middlemen. They therefore have more cash, and buy consumer goods such as Malay-type clothes, radio transistor sets, battery-operated torches, and canned foods.

The third group comprises *Orang Asli* who are outside the jungle but live in their own villages close to *urban areas* accessible by car and near to Malay villages. These people have been considerably affected by social change, brought about by the Department for Orang Asli Affairs under its rural development schemes.

The last group is that of Orang Asli, especially in Johor, which may be regarded as almost integrated within the Malay community. They are Muslims, who have close contact with their Malay neighbours, and lead a more or less Malay way of life. Nevertheless, they cannot be said to have been completely assimilated. They still cherish some of their traditional customs, and in the great majority of cases, they only marry members of their own tribe.[4]

The Orang Asli are not easy to enumerate in the ordinary way. They object on superstitious grounds to giving their personal names; they do not know their ages; and they have no professions. In the 1931 aboriginal census in Plus Valley, conducted by J.E. Kempe, District Officer (D.O) of Kuala Lumpur, the number of adults and children of each sex was given as: 515 men, 552 women, 548 boys and 421 girls.[5] But these statistics refer to a single valley where all the aborigines represented one tribe only. There are no reliable figures relating to the total Orang Asli population. Amongst the many difficulties that stand in the way of an accurate census are how to regard settled Orang Asli who, on account of their adopted way of life, are considered and recorded as Malays, and those who still lead the nomadic way of life.

In 1952, the Adviser on Aborigines, Federation of Malaya made the following tentative estimates.

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4 Iskandar Carey, "The Orang Asli and Social Change," *Federation Museums Journal*, Museums Department, States of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, volume XIII, new series for 1968, p. 58.

5 Iskandar Carey, *Orang Asli: The Aboriginal Tribes of Peninsular Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976.

TABLE 1 Orang Asli Population, 1957 (Tentative Estimates)[6]

No.	*State*	*Total*
1.	Johor	2,400
2.	Kedah	149*
3.	Kelantan	10,000
4.	Malacca	200
5.	Negeri Sembilan	1,400
6.	Pahang	50,000
7.	Perak	15,000
8.	Selangor	3,000
9.	Terengganu	161
10.	Singapore	1,000
	Total	82,000

Source: P.R.D. William-Hunt, *An Introduction to Malayan Aborigines*, Kuala Lumpur, 1952.
Note: *No estimate suggested. Figures quoted are from 1947 census returns.

In 1965, the Department's census of the Orang Asli population (table 2), showed that there were 45,895 people. A determined effort was made by all staff of Department to get results and figures as accurately as possible. Another census, carried out by Department for Orang Asli Affairs in 1969, revealed that there were about 53,000 Orang Asli in West Malaysia (table 3). This figure represents a considerable increase when compared to previous census figures, which is probably due to a fall in the infant mortality rate made possible by modern medical services.[7] Most of the Orang Asli were found in the northern parts of the country, with the States of Pahang, Perak, and Kelantan accounting for more than 35,000 Orang Asli. The remainder was distributed in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Johore, with smaller numbers in Malacca, Kedah and Terengganu.

6 The proportions of the three groups are approximately: Negritos 10 % (i.e. approximately 10,000), Senoi 60 % ((i.e. approximately 60,000) and Proto-Malays 30 % ((i.e. approximately 30,000).

7 The total number of Orang Asli in 1960 was about 44,000. The years up to 1969 therefore witnessed an increase of about 9,000 people, or twenty per cent of the 1960 Orang Asli population. According to the census done in 1974, the average number of people in each group was about 64,000.

The Orang Asli reside in their ancestral areas in all states of the Peninsula except in Perlis and Penang. They are found — in the interior, in rural areas near settled villages, along the coastal areas, and on the fringes of town and developed areas.

TABLE 2: Census of Orang Asli, West Malaysia, 1965

State	*Negrito*	*Senoi*	*Proto-Malays*	*Total*
Kedah	76	-	-	76
Perak	810	14,233	-	15,043
Kelantan	412	3,834	15	4,261
Terengganu	-	177	-	177
Pahang	149	7,349	8,349	15,870
Selangor	-	1,271	2,956	4,227
Negeri Sembilan	-	-	2,577	2,577
Malacca	-	-	331	331
Johore	-	-	3,333	3,333
TOTAL	1,447	26,864	17,584	45,895

Source: Department for Orang Asli Affairs in 1965.

TABLE 3: The Orang Asli Population 1969

State	*Negrito*	*Senoi*	*Proto-Malays*	*Total*
Kedah	100	-	-	100
Perak	900	15,800	-	16,700
Kelantan	650	4,100	-	4,750
Terengganu	20	180	-	200
Pahang	150	9,000	10,350	19,500
Selangor	-	1,270	3,290	4,560
Negeri Sembilan	-	-	3,120	3,120
Melaka	-	-	400	400
Johor	-	-	3,670	3,670
Total	1,820	30,370	20,830	**53,000**

Source: Iskandar Carey, *The Aboriginal Tribes of Peninsular Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976.
Note: All figures rounded-off to the nearest ten.

Based on table 3, out of 53,000 Orang Asli in this country, about 1,800 are classified as Negritos, over 30,000 Senoi and nearly 21,000 as Proto-Malays. In spite of a significant increase in numbers over the last nine years or so, the Orang Asli still constitute an extremely small segment of the population in peninsular Malaysia. In fact, they make up only about 0.75 per cent of the total population. The Senoi are the largest ethnic group, constituting 57 per cent of the Orang Asli population. The Proto-Malays numbering 20,830, form about 40 per cent of the total while the remaining three per cent consist of the Negritos who form the smallest segment of the population. Not all of the Orang Asli are jungle dwellers, as shown more or less by their geographical distribution.[8]

There are nineteen Orang Asli tribes, but they can be regrouped into three main categories. Namely, the Negrito, the Senoi (Sakai) and the Proto-Malays. The first and smallest are the Negritos, who number only about 2000 persons. They are the oldest inhabitants of this country, and the only Orang Asli who follow a completely nomadic way of life. Physically they are small, dark, chocolate-brown, but never darker than this. They have rather rounded faces with flat wide noses and thick, partly averted lips and are woolly-haired. In their general physical appearance, this group closely resembles certain Negroid groups in Africa. The Negritos are mainly found in the north of West Malaysia, in the states of Kedah, Pahang, Perak, Terengganu and Kelantan.

The Negritos are referred to by Malays as Semang or Pangan. They comprise such tribes as Jehai, Hatog, Lanoh, Kensiu, the Kintak, the Semaq Jeram, the Mendraq, and the Bateq. Names such as Jehai have no known meaning today, but others, such as *Semaq Jeram*, are made up of an aboriginal word for mankind, for example Semaq, followed by a place name, for example Jeram. The term Negritos is, of course, a European one, being derived from the Spanish diminutive of *Negro.* The Spaniards first use the term to describe the pygmy-like inhabitants whom they encountered in the Philippines.

The Negritos are less "mixed," racially speaking, than the Senoi or Orang Asli Proto-Malays. Most of them are short in stature.[9] The

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8 Iskandar Carey, *The Aboriginal Tribes of Peninsular Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976.

9 However, some negrito groups living close to other Orang Asli hill tribes have mixed with them, intermarrying and thus producing an intermediate racial type. An example of this may be seen in areas of north-east Perak and west Kelantan where intermarriage between Negritos and members of the Ple-Senoi group has produced a Negrito-type people with longer wavy hair, increased stature, and lighter skin colour. See, David R. Hughes, *The Peoples of Malaya*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press Ltd.

majority of the 10,000 Negritos of Malaya live a simple nomadic life in the forests. They are true nomads in the sense that they normally do not have any building or more permanent shelters. They move about in a group, which would comprise about half a dozen family units. Some of them are purely hunters and collectors of forest produce, whilst others also plant small patches of ground with such crops as tapioca and bananas. They traverse a typical nomadic cycle which might range from northern Kelantan, through northern Perak to south Thailand, and back again, recognizing no state or national boundaries.

Traditionally, Negritos are largely gatherers and hunters. They have well-defined territories over which they claim hereditary communal rights of hunting, fishing and gathering. As they move, they hunt small animals and gather wild roots and tubers. Their rights are communal except in respect of fruit trees which belong to the person who first discovered or planted them. Occasionally, they find jobs for a few months in remote Malay or Thai villages. They do not normally make any attempt at cultivation. Socially and economically they are the most "primitive" of the Malaysian Orang Asli. The Department of Orang Asli Affairs finds it difficult to get them to adopt a more settled way of life. In 1965 the Department initiated a housing and economic development programme among a group of Kensiu in Baling, Kedah, but it met with only limited success.

The next and the largest category, is that of the Senoi, with about 30,000 people. The Senoi peoples are slightly taller than the Negritos, and usually of a somewhat slimmer build. They have wavy hair, as opposed to the tight curls of the Negrito. The Senoi are referred to by Malays as Sakai, but the term is considered to be derogatory by the Senoi people themselves. The word "Senoi" means "man" in the language of the three main groups that come within this category. The names of the tribes of this Orang Asli division are Ple, Temer, Che Wong, Jah Hut, Mah Meri (Ma Betisek) and Semai. Some of these Senoi groups are very large, for example, the Semai Senoi group is believed to consist of over 12,000 individuals. A Senoi group usually has between fifty and a hundred persons under the leadership of a hereditary headman. The Senoi stay in one place for several years and then move and cultivate their fields in a new location, when the fertility of the soil has become exhausted. But they always stay in their own river-valleys, within well-defined boundaries. They are not nomads in any real sense. The Senoi traditional swiddeners,[10] inhabit a

10 "Swidden" is a recently revived English dialect word for impermanent fire-cleared fields which are cropped for shorter periods in years than they are followed (Conklin, 1957, p.

well-defined territory. Within the ancestral territory they exercise rights of hunting, fishing, gathering and cultivation. Individual rights exist to fruit trees and swidden, which are cleared and are used by individual members of the tribe.[11] On the other hand, this group will occupy a river valley, moving along it in a year, and felling more and more trees to make room for each season's new *ladang* (cultivation patch).

The majority of the Senoi are shifting cultivators. The Senoi groups practice variable cultivation of some kind, often combining it with more permanent kinds of agriculture such as rubber growing and rice cultivation. Some Senoi (of Semai communities) have settled down to a way of life corresponding to that of the kampung Malays. Some divide their time between their own *ladang* and labour on nearby estates belonging to Chinese or Malay farmers. Out of an estimated total of 60,000 Senoi, however, probably 40,000 or more practice some kind of shifting agriculture, and this is, in essence, the main way of life of this group of Orang Asli.

The Malays call the Proto-Malays Jakun. Again, this term is one which is not appreciated by the Proto-Malays themselves. Some of the tribes within this division are the Temoq, Jakun, Orang Hulu, Orang Kanaq, Semaq Semang, Orang Seletar, Desin Dolaq, Orang Kallang, Orang Selat and the Semelai. There are many groups of Proto-Malays in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Johor and Pahang who appear to have no distinctive group names. Many of these groups have settled down to what might be termed a typical Malay kampung way of life, cultivating rice, rubber trees and fruit trees, and owning buffaloes. The nomadic sea-life of many of the other groups, however, is indicated by their names, for example, Orang Selat, Orang Kallang, Orang Seletar and Desin Dolaq or "Sea People. " Some of these groups are very small: the Orang Kanaq group, for example, was said to number only 34 in 1952.[12] There are, however other types of Proto-Malays, who have had extensive contact with other communities living along rivers and coasts. These contacts have ensured that the Proto-Malays are, comparatively speaking, the most advanced of the three Orang Asli groups in Malaya. In fact, they have

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1–2).I use it here in accordance with current anthropological usage as a less value-loaded term for what still often goes under the name of "shifting cultivation" or " slash-and-burn agriculture.'

11 The land use and concepts of Proto-Malays are essentially similar to the Senoi. Many Orang Asli, not like rural Malays, have established permanent settlements and practice settled agriculture.

12 David R. Hughes, *The Peoples of Malaya*, p. 15.

become integrated into the Malay population, having been converted to Islam and having adopted a settled and conventional existence.[13]

Proto-Malay groups generally live in one-family huts, unlike the larger and communal huts of the Senoi, and these huts resemble the usual rural Malay type of house, being roofed with atap and built up on stilts. Many Proto-Malays are sea-people, who, until the Emergency restricted their movements, lived entirely on their boats, wandering from place to place, fishing for a living and catching crabs and shellfish. Because of the Emergency, most of these people today live settled lives on coastal estuaries, gaining a livelihood from fishing, and from cutting mangrove wood, which they sell for firewood or for charcoal-making.

The generally accepted theory is that the earliest representatives of West Malaysia's present-day inhabitants are the Negritos, who are thought to have come to this country about 25,000 years ago. The ancestors of the other group of Orang Asli came in later waves of migration: one, the Senoi, about 8,000 years ago and the other, the Proto-Malays, about 4,000 years ago. In actual fact, very little is known about the places where these people originally came from or for that matter the exact dates of the postulated migrations. In addition, substantial inter-marriages have subsequently taken place between the main groups of Orang Asli, making attempts to distinguish their ethnic groupings difficult. More recently linguistic and mt DNA work has thrown further light on the possible origins of the Orang Asli.[14]

The division of Orang Alsli communities is based on ethnography. However, the majority of the names are given arbitrarily. Ethnologically there is no concrete evidence to state that the names used today refer to the history of a particular community's migration or the connection with other communities outside Peninsular Malaysia. Archaeological studies have not been able to determine their correct origin. Nevertheless, rough guidelines can be used to classify the communities. A Negrito for example, has curly hair and darker skin tone than a Proto-Malay who usually has straight hair and Malay-like physical features. However, the accurate comparison can be made from the point of tradition and language. There are 12 languages used in a community of 20 ethnic groups. Each language uses a lot of the Malayo-Polynesian terminology and language structure although the original language of the Senoi and Negrito was Mon-Khmer.

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13 P.J. Begbie, The Malay Peninsula, *Embracing Its History, Manners and Customs of Inhabitant, Natural History, etc. From its Earliest Record*, Madras: Vepery Mission Pree, 1883, pp. 8–9.

14 See Stephen Oppenheimer, *Eden in the East,* Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998, esp. Chaps 4 & 7.

The Orang Asli: An Analysis of their Marginalized Role

Studies of Orang Asli were first done by Western researchers in the 19th century.[15] In the colonial period, researchers also introduced ideas that changed the Orang Asli way of life. This was how the Orang Asli were introduced to the outside world.[16] Prior to World War II, little was done by the government for the Orang Asli tribes. There was no Federal or State Department responsible for their administration and welfare. There was, however, within the F.M.S Museums Department a post of "Field Ethnographer" whose task was mainly to conduct research. In December 1939 the Field Ethnographer was also appointed "Protector of Aborigines" for Perak state, an appointment which had existed in that state since 1902, but which had previously only been filled sporadically and on a part-time basis. The 1939 appointment in Perak had been made as a result of the passing of the Perak Aboriginal Tribes Enactment in that year (No. 3 of 1939). This was the first legislation to protect the Orang Asli before the war.

Friendly contacts made by Chinese traders with Orang Asli before the war became invaluable during the Japanese occupation. Soon, an increasing number of Orang Asli came into open contact with various groups of outsiders. During the war and also during the Malayan Emergency they became targets of Communist propaganda, which was particularly effective coming from men they trusted and whom they had known for years. Members of the communist-led predominantly-Chinese Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army carefully nurtured friendships with the Orang Asli, and it seems that they even went as far as to protect the jungle peoples from the attacks of bandits and Japanese troops.[17]

In return, the Orang Asli aided the communist forces by providing porters, guides, food and intelligence on Japanese movements if the latter should venture into deep jungle.[18] H.D. Noone, a man of considerable influence with many Orang Asli groups during Japanese-occupied Malaya, worked with the Orang Asli. Noone died in the early 1940's and

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15 K.M. Endicott, *Batek Negrito Religion,* Oxford, 1979.

16 This may be defined as their belief that natural forces such as thunder, lightning and rain, and also physical features such as unusual rock formations or very large trees, are dwelling places of one or more spirits, deities, or other supernatural beings.

17 Williams Hunt, *Notes on Administration,* p. 11.

18 A British officer has written an excellent account of life in the jungle during the Japanese occupation. E. Spenser Chapman, The Jungle is Neutral, New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc.1949.

his body was never recovered, but it's quite probable that he encouraged the Orang Asli to assist all those who were engaged in anti-Japanese activities. The war in Malaya and the subsequent Japanese occupation of the country thus had a relatively slight impact on the Orang Asli. They saw occasional armed bands of Chinese and Europeans and, less frequently, groups of Japanese soldiers, but these few contacts could have done very little to disturb the broad mass of the Orang Asli. The most significant developments involved the exposure of the Orang Asli to propaganda of the Malayan Communist Party (M.C.P.) and the cementing of old and the creation of new friendships between members of the Party and many Orang Asli headmen.

As the guerilla forces made considerable use of Orang Asli, they must be recognized as the first organization to take any active interest in their welfare. After the occupation, the colonial government in 1949 appointed first a "welfare Officer Aborigines," and then a "Protector of Aborigines," at federal level in the Department of Social Welfare. In the following year, this title was again changed to "Adviser on Aborigines," and in 1952 his department was transferred to the portfolio of the Member for Home Affairs. At federal level the department had a staff of only 11 persons. At state level there was a protector of aborigines in Pahang, and part time protectors in Perak and Kelantan.

When the Emergency broke out in 1948 and the former Malayan People Anti-Japanese Army guerrillas became the combat troops of the Malayan Communist Party, they resumed their previous relationship with the Orang Asli. In a remarkably short time, (and against no government opposition in this field), the guerrillas achieved a firm hold over the vast majority of people in the deep jungle. When the government realized that the Orang Asli had become an important factor in the emergency, they first pursued the ill-advised policy of resettling them in areas out of reach. This resulted not only in a drop in their morale but also in hundreds of deaths, making them very anti-government. Moreover, the threat of resettlement drove others further into the arms of the M.C.P. Far from achieving the results hoped for, this policy succeeded only in strengthening the grip of the party over the deep jungle communities. At this stage, the communists did not have any real intention of living in the deep jungles, and the Orang Asli were accordingly of little importance to them. In 1951, in accordance with the "Briggs Plan" the government regrouped the various Chinese squatter communities and resettled them in a large number of 'new villages'. These villages consisted of newly constructed dwelling houses, provided with sanitary and other elementary facilities. Each village was surrounded by a barbed wire fence and guarded at night by soldiers or

police. The basic aim of this policy was to deny food supplies and other help to the communist guerrillas. As food supplies became more difficult to obtain, the terrorists tried to remedy this by getting food from the more accessible groups of Orang Asli. The success of resettling the Chinese led the authorities to believe that much the same tactics could be used with the Orang Asli in order to prevent them from supporting the communists. It was hoped that the majority of the jungle communities could be persuaded or forced to leave their natural environment and enter resettlement camps for the duration of the Emergency.[16]

Clearly, the Communists were the first into the field, finding the Orang Asli of great assistance during the Japanese occupation and cultivated their assistance and support during the Emergency, and, by 1952/1953, it is believed had succeed in dominating most of those in the deep jungle (estimated at some 30,000 people). The Government came in only some ten years after the communists, and then only as an emergency measure. After an initial disastrous blunder in attempting to bring them out of the jungle, the government eventually pursued the policy of giving them protection and administration in their own habitat. The Adviser on Aborigines' plan to gain control of them, and thus deny them to the Communists was adopted in 1953, resulting in an expansion of the Department of Aborigines.[17]

While the government was putting into effect its misguided plans for aborigine resettlement in early 1950's, the communists were successfully increasing and consolidating their influence with the jungle peoples. By 1953 the hill population in the territory between Negeri Sembilan and Pahang, and at Malaya's border with Thailand was dominated by guerrilla forces of the M.C.P. The government maintained that there were only approximately 6,000 Orang Asli under communist control at the end of 1953 but this is almost certainly a miscalculation.[18] The Orang Asli assisted their old friends in much the same manner as they had done

16 *Federation of Malaya Annual Report, 1951*, Kuala Lumpur: 1952: *Federation of Malaya Annual Report, 1952*, Kuala Lumpur: 1953; *Federation of Malaya Annual Report, 1953*, Kuala Lumpur: 1954. See, "Police Role in the Emergency," *Malayan Police Magazine*, vol. XXVI, no. 3, September 1960, p.163.

17 Protection and administration were taken to them in their own areas instead of bringing them out from the jungle. To implement this policy the Department of Aborigines was greatly expanded and became responsible for their Emergency Administration. By the end of 1957 there were Protectors and Assistant Protectors in all states expect Penang, Malacca, Kedah, Perlis, and Terengganu, and total complement of 251 persons. See, REF: AD/54/48 (confidential) Department of Aborigines Federation of Malaya, 10 April 1958.

18 Federation of Malaya Annual Report, 1954, Kuala Lumpur, 1955, p. 254.

during the Japanese occupation. It is certain, however, that the communists were able this time to organize the Orang Asli to a far greater degree than they had done before. This is not to say that the jungle communities were completely deceived by or committed to communist views. There is no doubt that the Orang Asli "sat on the fence" as much as they could and avoided giving offence to either side whenever this was possible.

What we know about the Orang Asli is that they lived in the jungles, and practiced nomadic living, keeping their customs and taboos, especially in the remote areas of Perak and Pahang. However, by 1948, when the emergency laws were enforced, and the 'shooting war' started the tranquility in the jungle was jeopardized.

As they spread communist thinking to the Orang Asli, Noone estimated that the Orang Asli not under the government's care and control, were only about 250 – they were the "hostile aborigines" in the whole of Malaya by mid 1958.[19] This was undoubtedly an understatement. Noone, however, made it clear that great care was needed to prevent the future)imposition of communist influence over the Orang Asli.

The British Government started to worry. The influence of the communists and their links with the Orang Asli had to be stopped. In the opinion of the government, only the Orang Asli themselves could achieve this. A successful experiment was undertaken in the second half of the 1956 when a military unit was formed, composed of Orang Asli, despite protests that the jungle communities did not produce "fighting men." The unit existed in embryo by the end of the year.

Lieutenant Colonel R.O.D. Noone, who was also the Orang Asli Advisor to the Department of Orang Asli Welfare (JOA), was directed to establish and lead an armed corps of 40 Orang Asli youths. The unit was formally founded and named the Senoi Pra'aq Corps (SPC). This special unit was established on May 1956 in Kuala Lumpur, divided into four sections, and was named Senoi Pra'aq or 'fighting people'. "Senoi" is the word used by both Temiar and Semai to describe themselves, as opposed to other people, and "Pra'aq" is a corruption of the Malay for "war" (perang). The latter word is generally understood to mean "fighting" or "to fight" in Temiar and Semai and the term Senoi Pra'aq Corps is probably best translated as "fighting aborigines." The Senoi Pra'aq Corps received initial training with 22 Special Air Service Regiment, after which they served with various Commonwealth and Malaysian units. The Orang Asli troops immediately proved their worth and were invaluable for purposes of liaison between the Security Forces and jungle communities

19 *Report in The Malayan Monthly*, June, 1958.

in general. They have been widely acclaimed as excellent trackers and the units rapidly came to be "the eyes and ears of the Security Forces."[23]

They were given a salary, just like other security forces, and the head of every section was an experienced officer from JOA. This corps was camped at the Orang Asli Welfare Research Centre Camp, Batu 12, Gombak, Kuala Lumpur. Interestingly, the members of the Senoi Pra'aq Corps, who were loyal to the government, were previously captured by the security forces or surrendered through JOA. Therefore, their experience and expertise in jungle warfare cannot be belittled.

The Senoi Pra'aq Corps received basic army, firearm handling, and jungle warfare training, from the 22nd corps of the Special Air Services Regiment. They also joined the army in the enemy hunting operation and scouted for communist hideouts in the remote areas. They were also responsible for scouting and ransacking the remote jungles where the enemies were believed to have made camp; interacting and influencing the Orang Asli that were still not under the government's care, to support and inform the government of the communist activities; patrolling so that the enemies were unable to get their food supply from the Orang Asli and helped the JOA to carry out the administration in the Orang Asli villages. The efficiency, cooperation and success shown by the Senoi Pra'aq Corps have earned them the Red Beret of Special Air Services Regiment. The beret is their proud symbol and it is still worn today.

In January 1958, from four sections and 40 men, the Senoi Pra'aq Corps was expanded into four squadrons with 256 men. On 15 March 1959, the 22nd Corps of Special Air Services Regiment returned to Britain, and the responsibility to guard the remote jungle of Perak was handed to the Senoi Pra'aq Corps. In 1960, the Senoi Pra'aq Corps was put under the Ministry of Internal Affairs without any modification to the administrative and membership system. Their camp was moved to Wadieburn, Setapak. Later, it was moved to Lam Tung Camp, Jalan Maxwell, Kuala Lumpur. Since its establishment in the early 1950's, there were several huge achievements by the Senoi Pra'aq Corps. From 1957 to 1959, they were successful in killing, arresting and capturing the communists in a few operations in the remote areas of Perak, Kelantan and Pahang. In 1963, the Senoi Pra'aq Corps joined the Forrest Rangers in the Lam Tung operation starting from Grik, Perak to Banang Setar and Betong, Thailand.

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[23] Quoted in *The Malayan Monthly,* June 1958. There is little doubt that Orang Asli make fine soldiers ideally suited for jungle warfare; none would quarrel with the contention that they are the only government troops capable of fighting the remnants of the guerrilla forces on their own terms.

The role played by Senoi Pra'aq Corps was very important to wipe out the Communist Party of Malaya's effort in expanding their influence and communist ideology to the Orang Asli in the remote areas. The Senoi Pra'aq Corps were vital to the government as the mediator of the armed forces and the Orang Asli. In recognizing this, the Senoi Pra'aq was expanded as a battalion on September 1, 1974. The Orang Asli are proud of the Senoi Pra'aq Corps because they were willing to sacrifice for national sovereignty. They were acknowledged as brave and disciplined. However, they were more famously known in their skillful enemy scouting and jungle combat. Their pride was shared by the Malaysian Royal Police and the citizens of this nation. The Senoi Peraq Corps or 'fighting people' was one of the Jungle Ranger corps that has proved its success and excellence for four decades in fighting the communists.

How about their future? The surrender of the Communist Party of Malaya on December 2, 1989 was seen as the end of the Senoi Pra'aq Corp's crowning achievement. Although the Senoi Pra'aq Corps have retained their usual operations and skills, they nevertheless lack the real challenges faced in the early days of their establishment. Now the Senoi Pra'aq Corps is camped in the third Battalion, a new formation from the merging of the 19th Battalion in Kroh, Pengkalan Hulu and 20th Battalion in Bidor, since September 1, 1994. The merger was made to streamline their ability especially in the tracking combat as well as preserving their unique skills.

Currently the new function of Senoi Peraq has changed just like PGA. Among its new responsibilities are:

1. Shifting the responsibility of PGA from the jungle to the border temporary camp.
2. Assisting in General duties.
3. Establishing PORU (reserve unit) and training in multi-fields.
4. Assisting in fighting drug trafficking and addiction.
5. Assisting in conducting road blocks to prevent crime and controlling illegal immigrants and refugees.

In addition, the Senoi Pra'aq Corps was also responsible to patrol the Malaysia-Thailand border. The Senoi Pra'raq was once honoured with the Red Beret of the 22nd corps of Special Air Service Regiment due to their achievements. They will always be remembered for their ability to move quickly in thick jungle, survival skills, unique talent in detecting enemy's tracks, bravery in combat, and loyalty to the leader.

Conclusion

From the above outline one can see that political expediency and military strategy had profound effects on the Orang Asli during the Japanese occupation and the emergency period. After centuries of relative isolation they experienced considerable and often brutal contact with warring factions of outsiders. Despite unfortunate episodes and bitter experiences, the armed struggle of emergency brought much benefit to the jungle communities. At the present time, the vast majority of the Orang Asli actively support the government. This is not due so much to the impact of the emergency, but rather to what happened after it came to an end. The government of independent Malaysia did not lose its interest in the Orang Asli, but on the contrary, its assistance to the Orang Asli has greatly increased. This means that, the government, which formerly ignored and neglected them, now takes an active and extensive interest in Orang Asli welfare and development. In any event, the relationship between the Orang Asli and other communities is not as one-sided as it might appear at first glance. It is true that the jungle communities are now receiving large and increasing amounts of aid but other sections of Malaysian society should not be allowed to forget the critical problem created in the past as a result of neglecting the jungle peoples. The Malaysian government, fully aware of its obligations and cognizant of the strategic value of the jungle communities, is now pressing ahead with plans aimed at bringing the Orang Asli to a position where they can enjoy and participate in modern Malaysian life, although controversy exists over whether their lot has improved in the last fifty years.

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Many Malayas: Placing Malaysia in a Historical Context

Paul H. Kratoska

Introduction

In the early 1970s a Malaysian public figure, an academic but not a historian told me that the country needed a glorious history, an account of the past that would generate a nationalistic sense of pride. It didn't matter, he added, whether that history was true.

The idea of inventing a past, glorious or otherwise, has no place in the discipline of history, which is based on gathering and evaluating factual information and drawing conclusions that are firmly grounded in those facts. Nonetheless, I found the proposition extremely interesting. It reflects a belief commonly held in Malaysia that the value of history lies in the contribution it can make to an understanding of the present. It also raises intriguing questions.

First, just what sort of history could be considered glorious? A glorious past sounds like stories of heroes performing valiant actions, but it could equally be based on distinguished scholarship, humanitarian achievements, or simply the honour and dignity of a people. Second, just how might Malaysia benefit from a glorious past? Assuming that heroes were identified, would Malaysians develop a sense of pride based on the past actions of others who happened to have lived in the same country? Would the existence of such people make Malaysia a more worthwhile place in which to live? And is pride, which is, after all, one of the Seven Deadly Sins, even a desirable sentiment to cultivate? Third, to what extent are existing histories of Malaysia already skewed, or untrue?

Before considering these issues, a more basic question should be answered: what constitutes the history of Malaysia? What are the boundaries of the subject matter? What information is relevant and what not? In short, what is "Malaysia"? History is about concrete things – events, persons, ideas, polities, or very often places. Like Britain or the United States or France, Malaysia represents three things at once: a territory (the country), a political and administrative apparatus that controls public affairs (the state), and a group of people who are citizens or permanent residents (the nation). Malaysia – properly the Federation of Malaysia –

came into existence through a constitution adopted in 1963, when the Federation of Malaya (comprising a group of states in the lower reaches of the Malay Peninsula) joined with Sarawak and Sabah and Singapore to form a new country. What, then, is the history of Malaysia prior to 1963, before Malaysia even existed?

Most historians simply treat past events in the lower Malay Peninsula and northern Borneo as the history of Malaysia. Similarly, past events in Pattani are handled as part of the history of Thailand, and events in Sumatra and the Riau Archipelago as part of Indonesia's history. Peninsular West Malaysia was formerly known as Malaya, and before 1963 was home to the Federation of Malaya, the Malayan Union, Japanese Malai, British Malaya, and a changing set of states (including the Melaka Sultanate) that recede back to a time known only through archaeological remains. One purpose of the present chapter is to argue that this way of handling Malaysia's history is unsatisfactory because the entities concerned were different in many important ways from modern Malaysia, and cannot be understood by treating them as though they were the same. The borders of Malaysia, its state structures, and its civic identities follow models created by the British in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When these elements are applied to events that preceded British rule, they misrepresent the past and distort the processes that led to the creation of Malaysia.

An invented past

Malaysian school textbooks present the country's major institutions as having Malay rather than British origins. The Form Five history textbook claims that the basic institutions of the modern Malaysian political system can be traced to traditional arrangements in various Malay sultanates that pre-dated British rule (referred to as the heritage of the sultanates, or *warisan kesultanan Melayu*): a written constitution to Johor, the cabinet system to Kelantan, the constitutional monarchy wherein Islam occupies a special position to Trengganu, and the principle of democracy and a federal concept to Negri Sembilan.[1] The textbook omits basic information not only about the British, but also about non-Malay citizens and permanent residents, and even about the Malays, many of whom are descended from people who were once residents of Sumatra or Borneo or other islands in the Indonesian archipelago. This version of the past supports a

[1] Ramlah binti Adam *et al., Sejarah Tingkatan 5* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2003), pp. 65–67, 80–88.

claim to Malay dominance (*ketuanan Melayu*) that is at odds with the historic accommodation among the races of the Peninsula achieved during the transition from colonialism to independence.

Because history is used to justify government policies in Malaysia, a falsified past has important ramifications. Omitting certain communities from Malaysian history has the effect of calling into question their role in contemporary affairs, something that is both dangerous and counterproductive. Every country has a multi-"racial" or multi-ethnic society, some to a greater extent than others. The most successful places by any measure (economic prosperity, cultural achievement, social welfare) are those that draw on the talents of all their people. Malaysia has a richer ethnic mix and a more spectacular set of cultural traditions than most countries, and any history that does not recognize this diversity will not engage readers because it does not reflect reality. More seriously, when such accounts contribute to the exclusion of certain groups from participation in contemporary affairs, there may be slight short-term benefits for one group or another, but the long-term consequences will certainly be harmful to the country.

British Malaya

The image of British Malaya as a place of trading and financial institutions, mines and plantations, and rice fields and fisheries, all overseen by British officials, is deeply entrenched. British Malaya has been privileged in accounts of Malaysia's past because the country's modern history was written in the first instance by colonial officials describing their own activities or those of the Malay monarchies they controlled, and subsequently by local and foreign scholars building on this foundation on the basis of British documents that positioned events within colonial political boundaries.

Nationalist histories, which might be expected to provide an alternative to colonial accounts, have been particularly culpable in their failure to produce a different understanding of the past. While post-independence researchers challenged colonial histories in various ways – by reading British sources against the grain, by drawing on non-Western source materials, by adopting Weberian or Marxist or Foucaultian frames of reference, by studying social rather than political history, or by writing "history from below" – they retained British Malaya as their starting point and frame of reference. The centrality of the British administration, the colonial export economy, and relations with London, continues to be widely accepted. Likewise, Western models that emphasize democratic ideals of law and

order, administrative and economic rationality, scientific method, the beliefs of world religions and the importance of modernization and development, are presented in a positive light, while traditional authority as wielded by the Malay Sultans and aristocracy, patronage, customary practices relating to disease or agriculture, and belief in local spirits, are viewed as feudal, corrupt, unscientific or superstitious relics of the past that have no place in the modern world. Instead of raising questions about an imported frame of reference that favours what are essentially Western values and priorities, nationalist histories have challenged observations suggesting that local people failed to meet those standards.

"British Malaya", a term of convenience that had no official or legal standing, was described as follows in a book on the Malay world published by a writer named Ashley Gibson in the 1920s,

> "British Malaya," roughly, is that part of our Oriental Empire which fills the southeast corner of Asia on the map. Strictly, it includes the Straits Settlements and so much of the Malay Peninsula as is under British influence, likewise the British possessions in Borneo … also the Cocos or Keeling Islands and Christmas Island.[2]

The comment that Malaya was "part of our Oriental Empire" is an important element of this definition. Until the transition to independence got underway during the final years of British rule, Britain handled Malaya as a segment of its vast overseas territories and not as an incipient independent country. The appropriate model for understanding colonial Malaya is not the nation-state, with its implied uniformity and republicanism, but rather the empire, a political entity embracing many different peoples and states and administrative systems.

British Malaya is generally understood to mean "Malaya, which was British", but it might, as the Gibson quote suggests, also be understood as "the portion of Malaya or of the Malay world controlled by Britain". In any case it came to an end with independence for the Federation of Malaya in 1957. Standard chronologies of modern Malayan history generally feature the following events:

1786 - The founding of Penang
1819 - The founding of Singapore
1855 - The end of the British East India Company
1874 - The British Treaty with Perak launches British intervention in

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2 Ashley Gibson, The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago (London: J.M. Dent, 1928), pp. 4–5.

the Malay States
1909 - The transfer of Four Malay States from Siam to Britain
1941 - The Japanese Invasion
1945 - The End of the Pacific War
1946 - The formation of the Malayan Union
1947 - The formation of the Federation of Malaya
1957 - Independence for the Federation of Malaya
1963 - Formation of the Federation of Malaysia

Most of these dates are landmarks for the British rather than for the people of Malaya. If the history of Malaysia is to be a record of the people of Malaya rather than the story of its colonial past, something different is needed.

Another reason for seeking an alternative chronology or periodization is that these dates mark political milestones. While it has often been used as a framework for historical accounts dealing with the economy, culture or society of the peninsula, this chronology is not appropriate for such topics. Historians group events in periods to show dominant tendencies (for example, the age of absolutism, the age of revolution), and a political time frame is the wrong tool for examining non-political events, which have different patterns of change over time.

A Malayan Malaya

British Malaya is just one of many Malayas that can be identified in the history of the Malay Peninsula and its environs. Although often associated with the lower Malay Peninsula, "Malaya" was part of other configurations with chronologies and periodizations and geographies that are not congruent with those of British Malaya. The remainder of this chapter considers some of these other Malayas, and the processes through which British Malaya became the foundation of modern Malaysia.

The Political Configurations of "Malaya"

In the Malay Peninsula, and across much of the region, indigenous states rose and fell according to economic circumstances and the strength or weakness of their respective rulers. The British administration stabilized political affairs in the peninsula, treating fluctuating borders and shifting power as an aberration from what they envisioned as an underlying structure based on a model derived from the Melaka Sultanate. Under this model, each state had a ruler supported by several levels of aristocracy, a

fixed territory, and customary laws. A pattern of recurring political change inherent in the old order was largely eliminated in the new, and by preventing such changes the British profoundly altered the established political system. For example, in the 1870s the Raja of Larut was probably on the verge of creating a breakaway state based on the Larut River and the tin revenues of Taiping. Britain intervened in the affairs of Perak to put an end to disorders that threatened the state as they understood it, and, in doing so, suppressed any separatist tendencies. The British claimed that their action preserved the traditional order, but an attempt by a subordinate ruler to form a separate state when conditions seemed favourable was very much a part of the region's political culture. Within British Malaya, and modern Malaysia, a number of circumstances reflect an older political order, such as the position of Muar as part of Johor, the existence of Perlis as a separate state ruled by a Raja rather than a Sultan, the structures and political culture of the group of states that make up the Negri Sembilan, and the complex issue of who ruled Singapore in 1819. None of these situations fits Britain's model of state, but all can be explained within the context of the local political order.

Another example is the decision of the British administration to secure control of the four northernmost states of Malaysia in order to create a buffer zone between Siam and the port of Penang and the tin-producing areas of the West Coast. The acquisition appears to meet a nationalist goal by bringing the Malay portion of the peninsula under a common administration, but this was not the objective, as can be seen from the fact that there was no attempt to incorporate the Malay population that remained under Thai rule following the transfer. The four states that became British protectorates in 1909 simply provided a buffer zone separating the economically valuable territories of Penang and Perak from Siam. Another British scheme contemplated building a railway to link Penang with Rangoon along the west coast of the peninsula, and annexing the territories through which the line would run. Such measures reflect imperial rather than nationalist thinking.

Colonial rule brought fundamental political changes to the Malay world in the Peninsula, southern Siam, Sumatra, Borneo and elsewhere. One was a shift from a political order based on groups of people bound to rulers through patron-client ties to one based on territorial states with boundaries that defined the extent of a ruler's authority. Another was a change from a society where power was derived from control over manpower to one where power depended on relations with central authority. The introduction of western-style bureaucracies and civil service structures provided an alternative to the aristocracy as a channel for

people to obtain services and gain access to authority, and new legislation preventing the aristocracy from controlling manpower through traditional means such as forced labour and debt bondage greatly reduced their control of manpower, and their political influence. These survive as basic principles of modern Malaysia and Indonesia, but the broader Malayan configurations described below also made important contributions.

The Geography of "Malaya"

According to European principles, there was a geographical integrity to British Malaya. The peninsula formed a triangular territorial unit defined by natural features – the sea on the east and the Straits of Melaka on the west, and in the north a zone of mountain and jungle where the population was relatively sparse. Internally, the same logic governed many of the borders established by the British, which tended to follow waterways or other natural features. European political theory in the early twentieth century considered it important that, as the economic geographer L.W. Lyde put the matter in 1915, "the racial unit should as far as possible coincide with a geographical unit". Lyde emphasized the importance of "natural" frontiers based on topographical features, suggesting that, by concentrating the full use of resources and sheltering a distinctive population, "the frontier became a definitely racial agent, so that we may call a natural frontier also a national one."[3] The use of seas and rivers as borders in Malaya reflected the Western concern with natural features as boundaries for human populations.

This principle was very different from those governing political divisions in the Malay world, where states were defined by their centres and not their borders, and populations by their loyalties and not their ethnic characteristics. The ethnographer J.R. Logan wrote in 1851: "Malay kingdoms are agglomerations of river settlements, and I doubt if a single instance can be found where a river district is politically divided by the river."[4] Because geographical features did not conform to local ideas of boundaries, their use resulted in the creation of administrative and political units without historical roots.

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3 Lyde, a Professor of Economic Geography at University College, London, made these remarks in a talk delivered before the Royal Geographical Society in 1915. See L.W. Lyde, "Types of Political Frontiers in Europe", The Geographical Journal 45, 2 [Feb. 1915], pp. 126, 128.

4 James R. Logan, "Notes at Pinang, Kidah & ca.", Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia 5 (1851), p. 62.

The unity of the Peninsula on maps was illusory. A mass of mountain and jungle that could be traversed only with considerable difficulty separated the east coast of the Peninsula from the west, and contact between the two sides of the peninsula was limited. Because people depended on water transport, rivers and seas (particularly the Straits of Melaka) joined rather than divided the lands of the region. Land transport was poorly developed, but from the west coast of the Peninsula it was easy to cross to Sumatra. It was more difficult and much more time consuming to reach the east coast, which involved a voyage of several days around the southern tip of the Peninsula.

Borders established by the British through treaties with the Siamese and with the Dutch cut through established social and cultural groupings. Kelantan had links with Pattani to the north, Kedah and Penang with Phuket and northern Sumatra, Negri Sembilan with the Minangkabau areas of Sumatra, and Johor with the Riau Archipelago.[5] Colonial boundaries served to regulate the affairs of the Western powers but at least until the 1930s they remained highly permeable to local populations, with goods and people moving freely throughout much of the region. After the war they became more firmly fixed and imbued with the rhetoric of nationalism: the territory based on arbitrary boundaries drawn by foreign powers to regulate their own affairs was now the inalienable heritage of the nation, for which people should be willing to sacrifice their lives if the need arose.

Economic activities in the peninsula gave rise to other configurations. It is possible to identify maritime-, agricultural-, mining-, and forest-based Malayas that are not contiguous with the political boundaries of British Malaya, and studies of these subjects are best done in appropriate geographical contexts. Territories that reflect British paradigms do little to elucidate aspects of peninsular history that go beyond the story of British rule.

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5 See Jennifer W. Cushman, *Family and State: The Formation of a Sino-Thai Tin-Mining Dynasty, 1797–1932* (ed. Craig. J. Reynolds) (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991); Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press and New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); P.E. de Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan; Socio-political Structure in Indonesia (*Jakarta: Bhratara, 1960); Leonard Y. Andaya, *Kingdom of Johore,* 1641–1728 (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975) and Carl Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: the Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore*, *1784-1885* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979).

The Peoples of "Malaya"

The focal areas of British Malaya were the Straits Settlements – commercial centres that were the seat of colonial administrative power – and the west coast states of Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan and Johor, where tin mining and plantations generated exports and considerable wealth. From the standpoint of the British, the rest of the peninsula was of secondary importance, areas where economic activity was muted and the British presence limited.

What might be called Malay Malaya had different focal points that lay in the states of Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Johor, where the Malay population was in the majority and Malay rulers retained substantial authority. These regions had small-scale agriculture and attracted relatively few immigrants. Malay Malaya extended beyond the territory under British rule, embracing Malay-Muslim regions of southern Siam, the east coast of Sumatra and the Riau Archipelago. The boundaries of British Malaya truncated this Malaya cultural zone.

The various socio-cultural communities that made up the Malayan population all extended beyond the confines of the Malay Peninsula. "Bangsa Malaysia" (the Malaysian nation), a concept that came into common use in the 1990s, is by definition coterminous with Malaysia. However, "bangsa Melayu" (Malays), "bangsa Cina" (Chinese) and "bangsa India" (Indians) were not congruent with British Malaya. These terms combine place of origin, culture, physical appearance and other elements, and their limits are imprecise.

The words Malay, Malayan and Malaysian have been applied to a broad group of peoples living in the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos.[6] Malaysia, before the word was appropriated by the Federation of Malaysia, referred to the Malay World.[7] Defining the word "Malay" has been surprisingly difficult. When the colonial administration restricted the ability of plantation interests to acquire "ancestral lands" in 1913 by passing a Malay Reservations Act, the law had to define who was a "Malay", and the government produced the following formulation: "a person belonging to any Malayan race who habitually speaks the Malay language or any Malayan language and professes the Moslem religion".[8] In the 1921 census the Malays were one of six "main racial divisions"

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6 See, for example, Rafael Palma, The Pride of the Malay Race: A Biography of Jose Rizal (tr. Roman Ozaeta) (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1949).

7 See, for example, Rupert Emerson, *Malaysia; A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), which both deals with the Peninsula and the Netherlands Indies.

(along with Europeans, Eurasians, Chinese, Indians and "Others"). The Superintendent of the Census wrote, "linguistically, ethnically and ethnologically the Malays of British Malaya and the Malays of Jambi, Kampar, Siak, Menangkabau and the other districts of Sumatra are one race", and applied the term "Malay" to "all Peninsular Malays and all Sumatran Malays, except Achinese, Korinchi and Mendeling".[9] In 1931, the compiler of that year's census explained that , for census purposes, the word "race" was used, "for lack of a better term, to cover a complex set of ideas of which race, in the strict or scientific sense, is only one small element". It was "a judicious blend, for practical ends, of the ideas of geographic and ethnographic origin, political allegiance, and racial and social affinities and sympathies". The 1931 census departed from earlier practice by distinguishing between peninsular Malays and "the politically alien immigrant", a category that included Malays from Sumatra. Enumerators now used the term "Malaysian" to refer to "all indigenous peoples of the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago", and restricted the term Malay to "those Malaysians (excluding aboriginals) who belong to British Malaya".[10]

Apart from distinguishing "peninsular Malays" from immigrant Malays, the British sometimes differentiated between maritime and non-maritime Malays. However, they consistently treated the residents of northeast Malaya, northwest Malaya and Johor as a single people. Since there are substantial differences in dialect and cultural practices among these regions, the idea that these distinctions are of no significance surely deserves further consideration.[11]

The terms "bangsa Cina" (Chinese race) and "orang Cina" (Chinese person) are in common use in Malaysia but the category includes people who differ from each other in significant ways. Immigrants from China came from various locations in southern China. Virtually all were Han Chinese, and indistinguishable on the basis of physical appearance, but differences in speech group and place of origin created distinct communi-

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9 J.E. Nathan, The Census of British Malaya, 1921, pp. 70–72. C.A. Vlieland, *British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census and on Certain Problems of Vital Statistics,* p. 73.

10 *British Malaya: A Report on the 1931 Census,* p. 75. The link between Sumatran and peninsular Malays was not entirely abandoned, for "the children and later descendants of the original immigrants" were treated as Malays "when definitely so returned". However, the Superintendent of the Census considered it best "to maintain the rule that individuals born outside British Malaya should not be classed with the native Malay". This, he said was "an illustration of the inclusion of the idea of political status amongst the census criteria of race".

11 One publication that does explore some of these issues is Timothy P. Barnard's edited volume *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity across Boundaries* (Singapre: Singapore University Press, 2004).

ties. The British, seeking a word for these groupings, adapted the term "tribe" for the purpose. Immigrants from southern China moved regularly in and out of the Peninsula, creating a community that existed in both places until the Japanese Occupation and the Communist takeover in China, and people moving between the Chinese mainland and Malaya remained part of this community. Chinese Malaya was concentrated in cities and towns along with tin mining regions on the west coast. In this case, too, the community extended into southern Siam, to Medan (Deli) and other urban areas on the west coast of Sumatra, and to the Riau Archipelago.

Similarly, the dimensions of Indian Malaya (which might better be broken down into sub-categories such as Tamil Malaya and Sikh Malaya) had its own geography and did not coincide with the boundaries of British Malaya. The term "bangsa India" is applied to a diverse population. The main components of the Indian community, referring to people who came to the Peninsula from British India, were Tamils – dark-skinned Dravidian Hindus from the south, and Sikhs – lighter-skinned non-Hindu Punjabis from the north. There were also significant numbers of Indian Muslims and others who did not belong to either category. Here, too, the communities in the Malay Peninsula retained strong links with homeland areas in south Asia until independence, and in many cases long after.

The chronology outlined above includes some dates that are relevant for an account of the people of Malaya, and some that are not. A better foundation would be built around immigration patterns, shifts in birth and death statistics, internal migration, the balance between urban and rural areas, changing ethnic patterns, and so on.

The Economy of "Malaya

Much of the economic activity in the Malay Peninsula was part of much broader systems of production and trade that embraced much of Asia and points beyond. The peninsula, and the Melaka Straits, were a major centre for trade, and, over the centuries, a number of commercial centres flourished there, notably at Kedah, Melaka, Johor and Pattani, and later at Penang and Singapore. However, these places were nodes in regional economic networks and for much of modern history had scant interaction with the states of the Peninsula. Arguably there was no distinct "Malayan" economy until the 1930s, when tariff barriers began to be created.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Malaya figured in at least six overlapping trading networks:

(1) India (spices and cotton goods)
(2) Southern China (sea produce, medicines, assorted manufactured items)
(3) The Indonesian archipelago ("Straits produce")
(4) Mainland Southeast Asia (rice)
(5) The British Empire (manufactures and industrial raw materials such as rubber and tin), and
(6) The United States (also manufactures and industrial raw materials).

Each network was distinctive, whether in terms of scope, trade goods, finance, or trading methods. The economy of Malaya is generally discussed within a national context (such as the tin industry of Malaya, the rubber industry of Malaya), but the production and processing of tin defined an economic zone that extended from southern Siam down the west coast of the Malay Peninsula to the islands of Banka and Billiton, while plantation development took place in a zone that spanned the Straits of Melaka, embracing lands on the east coast of Sumatra and the west coast of the peninsula. The mining and plantation industries created configurations, that included territories within British Malaya, but stretched well beyond .

Each of the six trade networks described above has its own chronology, as do the various commodities produced in Malaya. Using periodizations, or geographical configurations, based on politics to discuss trade or economic activity in agriculture (sugar, pepper, gambier, rice, rubber, oil palm, coconuts), in extraction and processing of raw materials (tin, iron, petroleum), in banking and finance and the activities of agency houses, in labour supply, or in overall economic cycles, does little to improve understanding of these subjects.

A Malaysian Malaysia

The transition from Malaya to Malaysia is a key stage in the country's past, and histories that treat Malaysia as an entity that existed before the British came to the region cannot explain this change. The Malay states began to become a unitary and self-sufficient entity during the 1930s, and this development established the priority of British Malaya over alternative configurations. The colonial administration responded to the Depression by taking a more active role in economic affairs in ways that made Malaya a discrete economic entity. It limited immigration, repatriated unemployed workers, introduced protectionist tariffs, and tried to reduce dependence on imported rice by constructing new irrigation works

and creating incentives to promote rice cultivation within British Malaya. Midway through the decade the administration adopted policies designed to create permanently domiciled Indian and Chinese workforces, anticipating a time when the flow of workers into and out of the territory would come to an end.[12] What might be called Malaysian Malaya began to take shape after 1945, and claimed legitimacy to the exclusion of alternative Malayas. It excluded the Malays of Pattani and Sumatra and Riau and southern Borneo, who were drawn into other emerging states, and embraced non-Malays resident in the peninsula who opted to become citizens and make the new state their permanent home.

These measures changed the Malay Peninsula from an element within various regional and imperial networks, into a self-contained unit, and eventually into a nation state. The process was slow, and because the changes were designed to deal with immediate issues ,their long-term implications were not immediately apparent. However, for the post-war generation of leaders the clear lesson of the Depression and the war years seemed to be that Malaya should be self-sufficient, and both colonial and national governments overrode considerations of comparative advantage, opting for relatively uneconomic development programmes that fulfilled strategic or social rather than economic objectives.

By 1957, when Malaya became independent, the social, political and economic arrangements that had prevailed earlier had been modified in ways that prepared the territory to be an independent sovereign state. The civil service had undergone a process of "Malayanization" that involved the replacement of foreign officials with local, and the decision-making process had shifted from the Colonial Office to parliamentary institutions and political parties in the Peninsula. Much of the apparatus of colonial rule – the laws, the courts, the police, the civil service – remained intact, and the new government used these institutions to create a uniform and centrally controlled administration. Similar processes were taking place in newly independent states across the region, and borders that once offered few impediments to local movements of people and merchandise now became rigid barriers that could only be penetrated with the intervention of the state: tariffs regulated the flow of trade, and goods required documentation and customs clearances, laws pertaining to citizenship and immigration forced people to produce passports to enter or leave a

12 For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Paul H. Kratoska, "Imperial Unity Versus Local Autonomy: British Malaya and the Depression of the 1930", in Peter Boomgaard and Ian Brown, eds*., Weathering the Storm: The Economies of Southeast Asia in the 1930s Depression* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000), pp. 271–94.

country, and the movement and use of currency followed national borders. Immigrants or the descendents of immigrants who met certain criteria, acquired Malayan citizenship, giving them political standing and the right to own land and engage in economic activity. Citizenship cut across social and political groupings to create a concept of nationality based on civil status within the territorial state rather than shared social and cultural characteristics, and became the basis of a new nationality, subject to special provisions to protect and promote the interests of the Malay population.

In Malaysia and elsewhere, these changes, and efforts to achieve self-sufficiency through state planning and government intervention in economic affairs, greatly reduced the reach and viability of the regional economy that had characterised Southeast Asia in the early twentieth century, and disrupted imperial and regional economic and social networks that had operated for decades and in some cases for centuries. The post-war administration emphasised self-sufficiency, and adopted policies designed to serve local rather than imperial interests. Imperial linkages were in many instances artificial contrivances and their disappearance was inevitable as the imperial powers in the West lost control of their colonial territories. The destruction of regional networks was a different matter. Regional linkages owed their existence to geography and comparative advantage, and reflected natural flows of goods or services sanctioned by custom and historical experience. Their disappearance was a victory for national parochialism over the logic of regionalism, and in the decades that followed much effort went into changes necessitated by this shift.

Asian trade networks focusing on India and China fell victim to government policies designed to lessen the economic power of immigrant communities, to ensure that supplies of food and other necessities were available in adequate quantities and at reasonable prices, and to increase Malay participation in economic affairs. International controls over trade and production remained in place during the period of post-war reconstruction, and the Malayan government, like many others in the region, adopted central economic planning during the 1950s, and turned away from regional linkages in favour of local autonomy based on import substitution as a means of reducing dependence on outside supplies and building self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

Does Malaysia need a glorious past? Do stories of historical figures who do not lie, cheat or steal, who face danger and even death courageously, who perform valiant actions, inspire young people to do the same? Malaysian history textbooks are cast in a heroic mode. They feature artists' imaginary conceptions of figures from the past, some of them impossibly muscled mythic figures displaying steely determination that are reminiscent of Soviet-era statuary or cartoon superheroes, others, refined images of scholars or teachers engaged in high-minded nationalist or religious activity. Like similar images found in textbooks around the world, these drawings have little to do with the real people they purport to represent. The reality, as shown in Cheah Boon Kheng's book about the rebel leader To' Janggut in Kelantan, was often very different. The authentic To' Janggut was involved in complex and somewhat sordid machinations and the details of his uprising are murky and contested.[13] None of this appears in textbook accounts, and photographs reveal that his physical appearance bore no resemblance to drawings that have been used to illustrate the story. The reality of Malaysian history, like the reality of the history of any other country, is that it consists of the activities of ordinary people earning a living, feeding their families, raising and educating their children, seeking amusement, falling ill and getting well, and as a rule avoiding the government whenever possible. Some of these ordinary people do exceptional things, but turning them into superhuman figures is a disservice to them and to the country.

Even if the heroic images were accurate, are the messages they convey good for a nation? Heroism is often associated with single-minded dedication to achieving goals, and people who compromise and accept imperfect outcomes are rarely hailed as heroes. The basic lesson of history is that ordinary people need to find ways of living and prospering together without the intervention of heroes riding magnificent white stallions. When such men or women appear, carnage often follows in their wake and the damage can last for many generations. Instilling a sense of pride in one's country is a goal of textbooks in many parts of the world. However, pride is potentially a dangerous sentiment because it can so easily produce a sense of superiority, as happened in Germany in the 1930s. When, as in some Malaysian textbooks, it is based on a set of arbitrary borders drawn by a foreign power, inaccurate data, and temporal categories that obscure rather than clarify the past, it is impossible to

[13] Cheah Boon Kheng, *To' Janggut: Legends, Histories, and Perceptions of the 1915 Rebellion in Kelantan* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006).

justify, and if it impedes interethnic or regional cooperation it will certainly be counterproductive. Southeast Asia, as a whole, would derive more benefit from economic activity across the region based on comparative advantage than from nationalistic policies that create competition within the region and attempt to make territories with limited natural and human resources self-sufficient.

It is clear that the falsification of the past creates bad history, but why should this be a matter of concern?

The writing of history is, or should be, a serious matter. Historians record the strengths and triumphs of leaders and of nations, but they also record their weaknesses and failures. The lessons to be learned from success are significant, but the lessons to be learned from failure are even more so.

The idea of a glorious past is closely tied to an outmoded approach to history. When accounts of the past served to legitimate the power and authority of kings and religious prelates, historians needed to show key figures as somehow superior to ordinary mortals and therefore deserving of their special position. Historians today deal with a far broader range of topics, looking at the lives of ordinary people and at such non-traditional subjects as disease, clothing, sugar and so on. They deal with the lives of farmers and fishermen and tradesmen and women and children and many others, along with farms, forests, rivers, volcanoes, weather, and just about anything else for which information can be located. History has become far more interesting as a result, although many school textbooks remain tedious exercises in hagiography, turning people into objects as unreal and artificial as fashion models, and setting goals that are neither attainable nor desirable.

The past provides a validation for the present, an understanding of ongoing processes that can be improved or rectified, and, to a limited extent, a way to anticipate the future. Subjects such as environmental degradation or global warming can only be understood by comparing data over time, but information about forests or glaciers or variations in weather patterns must be viewed in a chronological sequence for critical changes to become apparent. History is not a science and historical accounts will always be contested, but the falsification of history denies a country the possibility of reaping the benefits that can come from an understanding of the past.

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Writing the History of the Chinese in Malaysia: New Directions and bridging the gaps between two linguistic spheres

Danny Wong Tze Ken

Introduction

Chinese presence in the Malay waters can be traced back to the second century CE. However, the Chinese community in Malaysia only emerged in large numbers in the 19th century at a time when Chinese began emigrating from southeastern China to various parts of *Nanyang* (Southeast Asia) and beyond. While some of the Chinese were merchants, the majority were labourers and artisans. The former were usually concentrated in the towns, while the latter were scattered in various mines and plantations.

From these humble beginnings, the Chinese community in Malaysia has grown to more than five million in 2000, making up about 26 per cent of the total population of Malaysia. The Chinese have transformed themselves from immigrants or sojourners to settlers, partaking initially in the political struggles of their home country and later in their newly-adopted country, first, independent Malaya, and later Malaysia, eventually becoming her citizens. The Chinese in Malaysia have also broken away from their previous occupational patterns—merchants, labourers and mining workers—to participate in almost every type of occupation available, and hold administrative jobs such as government servants, security and defence personnel and government ministers.

The origins of this community and its transformation have attracted the attention of scholars, who have studied the community from various angles, including their histories, clans, and different geographical settlements. Many accounts have been published.

This paper will trace the evolution of the research and writing on Malaysian Chinese history, the problems confronted by researchers, and offer some suggestions on possible directions for future research. It will argue that, despite the considerable progress made over the years in the writing of Malaysian Chinese history, gaps remain to be filled. There is a

need to move beyond the conventional survey approach to examine the historical progress of the community in a more meaningful manner, to place the history of the community in the larger framework of Malaysian history. There is also a need to venture into new areas that have not previously received sufficient attention.[1]

From General Survey to Micro Studies

The field of study on the Chinese in Malaysia owes its beginnings to British scholar-administrators such as Victor Purcell whose two volumes, *Chinese in Malaya* (1948) and *Chinese in Southeast Asia,* (1951) provided much of the preliminary investigative framework.[2] Purcell adopted a survey approach and paved the way for further such research by tracing the origins and evolution of the Chinese communities in Malaya and British Borneo (in his Southeast Asia volume).

In 1967, Huang Rao brought out the first comprehensive history in Chinese of the Chinese in Malaysia. Drawing almost exclusively from sources written in Chinese, his study also included the history of the Chinese in Singapore. The volume was recently revised and republished under the same title.[3] Huang's book covers the community's history in each of the states; he also includes a chapter on Brunei. Even though the text was meant to be a historical survey, it includes many details that are not found in other works, particularly those written in English.

It took almost twenty years before a new general history of the Chinese in Malaysia was undertaken. In 1984, a group of scholars led by Lim Chooi Kwa and Loh Cheng Sun produced *History of the Chinese in Malaysia*, again in Chinese.[4] The collection covers a wide range of topics, and while the book was supposed to cover the entire country, its focus was (as in most general works published in Malaysia) on peninsular West Malaysia. The research work was poor, it ignored the Chinese in East

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1 This writer would like to thank several people for their generosity in sharing information relating to the topic and providing insights that helped to shape this paper, especially Dr Lee Kam Hing for his unpublished paper on the writings of the history of the Chinese in Malaysia.

2 Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1948 and *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1951.

3 Huang Rao, *Xing Ma Hua Ren Shi* (The History of the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore), Kuala Lumpur: Ming Jian Chu Ban She, 1967.

4 Lim Chooi Kwa and Loh Cheng Sun (eds), *Ma Lai Xi Ya Hua Ren Shi* (History of the Chinese in Malaysia), Petaling Jaya: Federation of Alumni of Taiwan Universities, Malaysia, 1984.

Malaysia, its influence was limited and hence its publication is not well known outside the Chinese language circle.

In 1994, a new group of Malaysian Chinese scholars, again led by Lim Chooi Kwa, started to work again in Chinese on a general history of the Chinese in Malaysia. When it was completed four years later, it comprised three volumes tracing the community's history through various themes. Entitled, *A New History of the Chinese in Malaysia*, the editors echo the need to revise history and that such history should be written by the local Chinese.[5] Unlike the first volume, it gave coverage to East Malaysia, incorporated a reasonable amount of information on the history of the Chinese in Sabah and Sarawak, and several East Malaysians contributed to the volume.

Like the 1984 volume, the 1994 edition covered a wide spectrum of themes such as education, society, literature, politics, demography, New Villages, religion and newspapers. However, like the 1984 effort, the *New History* also suffered from a lack of readership. Its sudden withdrawal from the market effectively doomed the volumes into obscurity. Scholars in the field only refer to the volumes occasionally.[6]

Almost parallel to Lim Chooi Kwa and his colleagues' efforts was the attempt by University of Malaya scholars, Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee Beng, to bring out another survey volume on the history of the Chinese in Malaysia, but this time in English.[7] Like Lim and his colleagues, Lee and Tan took note of the fact that the **last** such survey volume was Purcell's 1948 work. (Apparently they ignored the three volumes produced by Lim and his colleagues.) The editors remarked that the Chinese community had undergone changes and been greatly transformed, requiring a new survey to re-examine its development and progress against the background of changes that had taken place since Purcell's pioneering work. However, the editors were frank enough to admit that "The list of topics covered in this book is not exhaustive … Hopefully, what have been left out may be taken up by others."[8] The new volume was not a book of general history, but a collection of essays on

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5 Lim Chooi Kwa et al. (eds), *A New History of the Chinese in Malaysia*, 3 vols, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Chinese Assembly Hall, 1994. [In Chinese] The need to revise and update history is discussed in the "Introduction" in Volume I, pp. xix–xxi.

6 The sponsor, the Malaysian Chinese Assembly Hall, the single largest Chinese organization in the country took offence at some of the passages in the books and asked for them to be withdrawn from circulation shortly after they were published.

7 Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee Beng, *The Chinese in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 2000.

8 Ibid., p. xxix.

various aspects of Malaysian Chinese society, such as their religion and culture. Most of the contributors used a historical survey approach. Two chapters, each dealing with the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, were not well integrated with those dealing with the larger Chinese community in West Malaysia.

There is no doubt that the volumes of Lim, Tan and Lee are major contributions to the study of the Chinese in Malaysia. While both teams of scholars set out with the noble intention of providing new and fresh perspectives towards understanding the past development of the Chinese community in Malaysia, there are obvious differences in their approach and coverage.

They differ mainly in the composition of the scholars involved. Lim's team was made up almost entirely of those who had been writing exclusively in the Chinese language, whereas Tan and Lee's contributors were mainly English-educated. The only exception was Yen Ching-Hwang, who was a bi-lingual contributor to all three earlier survey histories.

This language gap inevitably resulted in the emergence of two lines of thought and approaches to the study of Malaysian Chinese history. Gaps exist not only in terms of language, but also in approach and the sources consulted. While both groups emphasize changes that had taken place within the community, they differ in their emphasis and area of specialization. Studies written in the Chinese language tend to be more culture-inclined, whereas those written in English usually focus on the development and transformation of the community in relation to the larger framework, including the state. Those written in Chinese are rich in detail and anecdotes, while those in English are more general and broad in their themes.

In terms of sources consulted, those written in the Chinese language draw evidence from vernacular documents, including materials published by the various Chinese organizations and newspapers, while those in English are more inclined to rely on official documents in English and Malay. This inevitably reflects the different ways in which the subject is treated, and partly stems from the background of the two language groups. There are, however, a number of professional historians who were trained in the Chinese-medium Nanyang University in the 1960s and who had their further education in Taiwan or in Hong Kong (e.g. at the Chinese University of Hong Kong). This latter group of people, while belonging to the Chinese language group, are compatible with their English language-based counterparts in their approaches and methods.

The differences between the two groups are not confined to the languages they employ, but also to their approach and usage of sources. Contributors to the Lee and Tan volume tended almost to neglect materials written in the Chinese language, while writers contributing to the Lim volumes were more comfortable with Chinese and hence depended greatly on sources written in Chinese.

In his foreword to the Lee and Tan volume, *The Chinese in Malaysia*, Wang Gungwu took note of Lim's volumes and the two groups' different approaches. He urged each group to consult the other's texts and urged extra efforts by those not trained in the Chinese language to use Chinese language sources.

The differences between these two most recent survey works point towards a continuing divide that has split the study of the history of the Chinese in Malaysia into two main streams of approach and thought.

The Themes Explored

Links with China

There is a category of studies on the history of the Chinese in Malaysia, which is focused mainly on Chinese local clan and dialect sub-groups. The first category covers the historical links of Malaysian Chinese with China, individuals and their involvement in politics (including the periods of the two World Wars), biographies, economic activities, social affairs (including religious practices) and social and cultural organisations. The second category covers the local histories of the Chinese of different geographical localities, including some of the smaller towns in Malaysia as well as the histories of the various clan and dialect groups found in different localities. This paper will highlight several notable works in these two categories.

Among those who were pioneers in the study of the historical links between the Chinese and China is Wang Gungwu. Wang began to examine the relations between China and Malacca and, in the process, revealed the role played by the imperial eunuch Yin Ch'ing.[9] While Wang expanded his interests to examine Chinese roles and involvement in the new political process, Yen Ching-Hwang examined the actual links between the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore with a China that was undergoing great political upheavals. Yen's study on the involvement of the Chinese

9 Wang Gungwu, "The Opening of Relations between China and Malacca (1403–1405)", in J. S. Bastin and R. Roolvink (eds), *Malaya and Indonesia Studies: Essays Presented to Sir Richard Winstedt*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

in *Nanyang* (including Malaya and Singapore) in the 1911 Revolution in China remains a classic today.[10] Malaysian Chinese links with China were re-kindled prior to and during World War II. Those who contributed enormously to such studies include Stephen Leong and Hsu Yun Tsiao.[11] Japanese scholars like Yoji Akashi also contributed to the understanding of this event, particularly in examining the Malayan Chinese contributions to the Chinese war efforts.[12] Akashi's works deal with earlier diplomatic links between China and the Chinese in Malaysia, while Yen Ching Hwang studied the efforts of the Manchu Government to garner support from the Chinese immigrants in Malaya and Singapore. Another Japanese scholar, Fujio Hara traces the change in post-war Malaysian Chinese's links with China and the issue of identity.[13] In Sarawak Lau Tze Zheng worked on the history of the Chinese Consulate in British Borneo, highlighting the Chinese Government's ties with the Chinese community there.[14]

Political History

Malaysian Chinese involvement in politics has been a more popular subject for historical research. Among the pioneers again in this area is Wang Gungwu, who, during his tenure at the Department of History, University of Malaya, devoted much attention to the different groups of Chinese who involved themselves in Malaysian politics and their roles

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10 Yen Ching-Hwang, *The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution with Special Reference to Singapore and Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976 and "Overseas Chinese Nationalism in Malaya and Singapore, 1877–1912", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1982.

11 Stephen Leong Mun Yoon, "The Malayan Overseas Chinese and the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1941)", *Proceedings of the Asian Studies Association of Australia National Conference, Vol. 2*, Sydney: 1978; see also Chua Ser Koon and Hsu Yun-Ts'iao (eds.), *Malayan Chinese Resistance to Japan 1937–1945: Selected Source Materials*, Singapore: Cultural and Historical Publishing House Pte. Ltd., 1984. [Articles in Chinese and English].

12 Yoji Akashi, *The Nanyang Chinese Salvation Movement 1937–1941*, Lawrence: Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1970 and "The Nanyang Chinese Anti-Japanese and Boycott Movement, 1908–1928: A Study of Nanyang Chinese Nationalists", *Journal of South Seas Society*, Vol. 23, No. 1 & 2, 1968.

13 Fujio Hara, *Malayan Chinese and China: Conversion in Identity Consciousness, 1945–1957*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003.

14 Yen Ching Hwang, "Ch'ing's Protection of the returned Chinese after 1893, with special reference to the Chinese in Southeast Asia", *Review of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. XV, 1985 and Lau Tze Zheng, *History of the Chinese Consulate in Borneo*, Sibu: Chinese Writers' Association, 1998. [In Chinese]

and relationships with the British and Malay elites. He conducted several studies during the crucial early stages of nation-building of the new Malayan and Malaysia nation.[15] Later scholars, including Oong Hak Ching, focusedheir studies on the role of the Chinese during the period immediately after the War and in the attainment of independence in 1957.[16] However, little research has been done on the roles of the Chinese in Sabah and Sarawak in the formation of the Malaysian federation in 1963, an exception being Edwin Lee's *The Towkays of Sabah*.[17]

Non-Chinese scholars like Mohamed Noordin Sopiee assisted in studying the Chinese role in the separation of Singapore from Malaysia, while Gordon Means examined the role and performance of Chinese political parties. Even though both scholars were political scientists, they were able to provide insights into the interplay of Chinese group interests and politics in Malaysia.[18] The Chinese political party, the Malaysian Chinese Association, attracted the attention of Heng Pek Khoon,[19] and also Stephen Leong who wrote an early history of MCA for the party's seminar in 1979.[20] James Chin and Danny Wong have done studies on Sabah and Sarawak's Chinese political parties, which are more localized and reflective of the second category of studies on the history of the Chinese in Malaysia.[21]

Other scholars studied the Chinese involvement in the Malayan communist movement. Cheah Boon Kheng's *Red Star over Malaya* has

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15 See Wang Gungwu, "Traditional Leadership in a New Nation: The Chinese in Malaya and Singapore", in S. Takdir Alisjahbana, Xavier S. Thani Nayagam and Wang Gungwu (eds), *The Cultural Problems of Malaysia in the Context of Southeast Asia*, Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Society of Orientalists, 1965 and "Chinese Politics in Malaya", *The China Quarterly*, No. 43, 1970.

16 Oong Hak Ching, *Chinese Politics in Malaya 1942–55: The Dynamics of British Policy,* Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press, 2000.

17 Edwin Lee, *The Towkays of Sabah*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976.

18 Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1976; Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics*, London: University of London Press, 1970 and *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, London: Oxford University Press, 1991.

19 Heng Pek Khoon, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia: A History of the Malaysian Chinese Association*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992.

20 Stephen Leong, "The MCA in Malaysian Politics: A Brief History", Paper presented at the MCA Political Seminar on the Future of the Chinese Community in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 6 May 1979.

21 James Chin Ung-Ho, *Chinese Politics in Sarawak: A Study of the Sarawak United Peoples' Party*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997 and Danny Wong Tze Ken, "Weaker Kingmakers? Chinese Politics in Sabah under Mahathir", in Bridget Welsh (ed.), *Reflections, the Mahathir Years*, and Washington DC: Southeast Asian Studies Program, John Hopkins University, 2004, pp. 199–209.

provided us with much valuable information, and remains one of the standard references on the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Japanese scholar Hara Fujio studied the Chinese leadership of the Malayan Communist Party. [22] Of late, especially since the end of the MCP's armed struggle in 1989, there has emerged a new genre of literature, consisting mainly of memoirs and reminiscences by former members of the MCP, which will be discussed later.[23]

Biography

Closely related to studies of political history are biographies and auto-biographies of the Chinese. This genre is quite rich, although most are not in the strictest sense of being full biographies. The compilation of biographical data on individuals, in the format of Who's Who, started much earlier. A recent study in a similar format is the *Biographical Dictionary of the Chinese in Malaysia* by Lee Kam Hing and Chow Mun Seong,[24] which was preceded earlier by a five-volume series of biographies of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, which is dominated by those from Malaya and Singapore.[25]

Full-fledged biographies of Chinese political figures in Malaysia have been brought out. Alice Scott-Ross' biography on the founder of the Malayan Chinese Association, Tun Sir Tan Cheng Lock is the pioneering work in this genre. This was followed by a political biography of Tan's son, former minister and Malaysian Chinese Association leader Tun Tan Siew Sin. It was the subject of a master's thesis by Chin Hon Min.[26] The

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22 Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983 and Hara Fujio, "Leaders of the Malayan Communist Party during the Anti-Japanese War", Paper presented at the International Malaysian Studies Conference, 2–4 August 1999.

23 See Liu Jianquan (ed), *Qing Shan Bu Lao: Ma Gong De Li Chen* (Green Mountain Would Not Whither: The Struggle of the MCP), Petaling Jaya: Sin Chew Jit Poh, 2004 .and Ying Minqin, *Di Shi Zhi Dui Yu Li: Jing Ji Man Tu de Ma Lai Ya Min Zu Dou Zheng Shi* (History of the Struggle of the People of Malaya), Kuala Lumpur: Ce Lue Zi Xin Yan Jiu Zhong Xin, 2005.

24 Lee Kam Hing and Chow Mun Seong, *Biographical Dictionary of the Chinese in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications and Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Malaya, 1997.

25 Xu Xian Shan, *Nan Yang Min Ren Ji Zhuan* (Famous Chinese Personalities in Southeast Asia) *5* vols*,* Penang: Nanyang Min Shi Zuan Xin Guan, 1939. [In Chinese]

26 Alice Scott-Ross, *Tun Dato' Sir Cheng Lock Tan: A Personal Profile by his daughter*, Singapore: Scott-Ross, 1990 and Chin Hon Min, "Tun Tan Siew Sin: Kegiatan dalam Politik dan Ekonomi Malaysia", MA Thesis, Department of History, University of Malaya, 1993.

Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society published two biographies on Chinese personalities of Kuala Lumpur, Yap Ah Loy and Chan Wing.[27] Several other scholars have of course, studied Yap Ah Loy, especially his role as the founder of Kuala Lumpur.[28] A more recent study on Yap Ah Loy is Chen Yachai's compilation of short articles on the man and his links with Kuala Lumpur,[29] focusing on Yap's life and his role in the Malay civil war, from his humble beginnings in Negeri Sembilan to his founding of Kuala Lumpur. Also included in the collection of essays is Sharon Carstens' article on Yap originally published in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*.

Patricia Lim Pui Huen has written a biography of her grandfather Wong Ah Fook, the pioneer who made an important contribution to the development of early modern Johor state.[30] It is a painstaking work of research based on both official and family records.

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt at writing biographies of Chinese personalities in Malaysia is the three-volume compilation of Chinese biographies written by a group of Malaysian and Taiwanese scholars. Led by Lim Chooi Kwa and his colleagues, the work was published first by Academia Sinica in Taipei, and a later Malaysian edition by the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies in Kuala Lumpur. Each volume focuses on selected Chinese personalities in politics, business and culture (especially education).[31]

A new two-volume collection of biographies entitled *Sons of Malaysia: Stories of Famous Personalities of Malaysia* was published in 2006.[32] Aimed at "instilling the quality of courage and hard work among

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27 S. M. Middlebrook, *Yap Ah Loy, 1837–1885*, Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 1983 and Chan King Nui, *From Poor Migrant to Millionaire: Chan Wing, 1873–1947*, Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 1997.

28 Sharon A. Carstens, "From Myth to History: Yap Ah Loy and the Heroic Past of Chinese Malaysians", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, 1988. From the Chinese perspective, see Li Yelin, *Ji Long Po Kai Tu Zhe de Zu Ji: Jia Bi Dan Ye Ya Lai de Yi Sheng* (Yap Ah Loy: The Pioneer of Kuala Lumpur), Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, 1997 and Liu Chong Han, *Ji Long Po Jia Bi Dan Ye Ya Lai* (Yap Ah Loy, Chinese Kapitan of Kuala Lumpur), Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Chinese Assembly Hall, 1998. [both in Chinese].

29 Chen Yachai (ed.), *Yap Ah Loy Meeting Kuala Lumpur*, Kuala Lumpur: The Association of Kwong Tong Cemetery Management, 2006.

30 P. Lim Pui Huen, *Wong Ah Fook: Immigrant, Builder and Entrepreneur*, Singapore: Times Editions, 2002.

31 Lim Chooi Kwa, Ho Kai Leong and Hou Kok Chung (eds), *Malaysian Chinese History and Personalities,* 3 vols, Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2001. The collection was republished in Kuala Lumpur by the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies in 2003.

32 Wang Hong (ed), *Stories of Famous Personalities of Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Novum Organum, 2006.

the younger generation", the book provides short biographies of personalities who have contributed to the history and development of Malaysia. It includes biographies of the five prime ministers of Malaysia from Tunku Abdul Rahman to Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, followed by the stories of ten Chinese personalities, starting from Yap Ah Loy, the founder of Kuala Lumpur, to Yeoh Tiong Lay, the modern-day property developer. It includes the biography of Chin Peng, "The Secretary General of the MCP Who Cannot Return".[33]

History of Different Localities

Offshoots of the survey, are the histories of the Chinese in different localities. Some of the works are broad in coverage, focusing on the Chinese in a defined geographical district or state, or in smaller settlements. Han Sin Fong's 1975 work is on the the Chinese in Sabah and their occupational patterns. Danny Wong's more comprehensive history of the community before 1946 was published in 1998. On the dialect groups, Han Sin Fong has done a study on the Hainanese of Sabah, Zhang Delai on the Hakka in Sabah and Tan Chee Beng on the Northern Chinese found on the west coast of Sabah.[34] Seah Soo Lin's micro study on the Chinese community in the railway town of Beaufort (Sabah) traces their work on the railway and how they helped to establish the township in 1898.[35]

On the Sarawak Chinese, Tien Ju K'ang pioneering work done in 1953, was republished in 1997, while John Chin's *The Sarawak Chinese* appeared in 1981 and Daniel Chew's *Chinese Pioneers on the Sarawak Frontiers*, in 1990.[36] Paul Yong's study on the Chinese miners of Bau provided insight on the early interactions between the Chinese and the

33 Ibid., pp. 70–77.

34 Han Sin Fong, *The Chinese in Sabah, East Malaysia*, Taipei: The Chinese Association for Folklore, 1975; Danny Wong Tze Ken, *The Transformation of an Immigrant Society*, London: Asean Academic Press, 1998; Han Sin Fong, "The Hainanese of Sabah", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 1975; Zhang Delai, *The Hakkas in Sabah*, Kota Kinabalu: Sabah Theological College, 2002.[In English and Chinese] and Tan Chee Beng, "The Northern Chinese of Sabah, Malaysia: Origins and Some Sociocultural Aspects", *Asian Culture*, Vol. 21, 1997.

35 Seah Soo Lin, *Bao Fo Hua Ren Shi* (The Chinese in Beaufort), Kota Kinabalu: Capital Printing, 1995.

36 Tien Ju-K'ang, *The Chinese of Sarawak*, London: Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1953; republished under the same title by the Research and Resource Centre Committee, Sarawak United People's Party in 1997; John Chin, *The Sarawak Chinese*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981 and Daniel Chew, *Chinese Pioneers on the Sarawak Frontier, 1841–1941*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990.

ruling Brooke family.[37] Daniel Chew's work also touches on the Hakka gold miners in Bau.

On the Malay peninsula, the Foochow of Sitiawan in Perak state have been studied as a distinctive community who were brought in by the Methodist missionary society. See Gong Wei Ai's 1977 study, which looked into the community's migration process, and more recently, a detailed study by Shih Toong Siong.[38] Tan Chuan Hin's *Kampar One Hundred Years, 1886–1986* (written in Chinese)[39] presents the Chinese version of the history and development of a town.

Chin Soong Kead's *History of the Chinese in Negeri Sembilan*, published in Chinese in 2003,[40] traces the history of the Hakka miners from the 19th century to the years immediately prior to World War II when the community had become settlers in the state. Chin's work also provides insights into the lives of the Kapitan Cina (Chinese chiefs) of early Negeri Sembilan, including the legendary Seng Ming Lee. Utilising a combination of local non-official sources as well as published works in English, Chin's work is a fine example of how such bi-lingual sources can result in a well-written work.

In his account on the development of Taiping town in Perak, Khoo Kay Kim provides insights into the contributions made by the Chinese community, among others. Lee Eng Kew has written about the Chinese contributions in that town, entitled *The Chinese Historical Figures of Taiping*, which covers the life stories of 87 Chinese personalities of Taiping, from the days when the town was still known as Larut in the 1860s, up to the year 2000. It is based on research data from Chinese families as well as from epigraphic materials found in cemeteries and Chinese temples. Lee's second volume on Taiping narrates the town's life during the Japanese occupation and its aftermath.[41]

On the Chinese in Penang, Teoh Shiaw Kuan has made an enormous contribution by producing three works on the community, including their

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37 Paul Yong, *A Dream of Freedom: the Early Sarawak Chinese*, Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1991.

38 Gong Wei Ai, "Sejarah Pemindahan Orang Foochow ke Sitiawan", *Paper on Chinese Studies,* No. 1, University of Malaya, 1977 and Shih Toong Siong, *The Foochows of Sitiawan: A Historical Perspective*, Sitiawan: Persatuan Kutien Daerah Manjung, 2004.

39 Tan Chuan Hin, *Jin Bao 100 Nian, 1886–1986* (Kampar 100 Years 1886–1986), Kampar: The Big Thumb, 2001.

40 Chin Soong Kead, *Shen Mei Lan Zhou Hua Ren Shi Hua* (History of the Chinese in Negeri Sembilan), Kuala Lumpur: Mentor Publishing Sdn Bhd, 2003.

41 Lee Eng Kew, *Re Ben Shou: Tai Pin Re Ji San Nian Pa Ge Yue* (Japanese Occupation at Taiping for Three Years and Eight Months), Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information Research Development, 2006.

leaders and their religious practices.[42] What makes Teoh's works important is his ability to draw on sources from both official and vernacular (non-official) sources. Despite not being a professional historian, Teoh's work is the most authoritative on the Chinese in Penang. A recent study on the Penang Po Leung Kuk, a pre-war home for the rehabilitation of wayward women and children, provides some glimpses of the welfare of Chinese women in early Penang.[43]

Historical Linkages

Of late, there have been some attempts by historians to investigate the historical linkages that existed between Chinese from different localities within the country and those beyond the defined geo-political boundaries. Jennifer Cushman's pioneering study on the Khaw family of Penang's links with Chinese business networks in Thailand paved the way for further research on such linkages.[44] Such studies are gaining popularity among historians as they find further links between the Chinese from different localities that transcended the existing political boundaries. China's Wu Xiaoan and Malaysia's Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian have picked up where Cushman left off.[45] There are many possibilities for historians to pursue such a line of research by looking, for instance, into trans-border links between the Chinese in Sabah and the southern Philippines, and those in Medan, and Kuching and the Straits Settlements territories of Singapore, Malacca and Penang.

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42 Teoh Shiaw Kuan, *Bing Lang Yu Hua Re Shi Hua* (Historical Anecdotes of the Chinese in Penang), Penang: Prometheus Enterprises, 2002; *Bing Lang Yu Hua Ren Shi Hua Xu Bien* (Historical Anecdotes of the Chinese in Penang II), Penang: Nan Yang Tian Ye Yan Jiu Shi, 2003, and *Sun Zhong Shan yu bi Neng Hui Yi* (Penang Conference and the 911 Chinese Revolution: How Dr. Sun Yat Sen Plotted to Change Chinese History), Penang: Nan Yang Tian Ye Yan Jiu Shi, 2004.

43 Neil Khor Jin Keong and Khoo Keat Siew, *The Penang Po Leung Kuk: Chinese Women, Prostitution and a Welfare Organization*, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2004.

44 Jennifer Cushman, "Siamese State Trade and the Chinese Go-Between", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1981.

45 Wu Xiaoan, *Chinese Business in the Making of a Malay State, 1882–1941: Kedah and Penang*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003; see also Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, "Chinese Immigrant Communities in Western Seaboard of Siam and Penang Area during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, a Preliminary Comparison", Paper presented at Shared Histories Conference, Penang, 30 July–3 August 2003.

World War II

Since the end of the war, there has been a steady flow of literature concerning the Chinese community and their involvement in the war. Chua Ser Koon and Hsu Yun-Ts'iao's compilation of Chinese documents on the Malaysian Chinese community's involvement in the war is by far the largest work available.[46] The volume provides an overview of the anti-Japanese activities in Malaya and the fund-raising campaigns started in Malaya and Singapore to collect money for the China Relief Fund and the British Empire Spitfire Fund. Other papers deal with various aspects of the war, including the Japanese defeat of the British forces in Singapore and the three and half years of Japanese Occupation. The text conveys the general impression that members of the Chinese community were clearly victims of atrocities committed by members of the Japanese Army, particularly the *Kempeitai* (the military police).

Other general works on the war include Lee Yelin's *History of the Pacific War*, and Loke Pooi Choon's latest study on the Japanese cruelties towards the Chinese community in Malaysia. Loke's main volume is entitled *Malaya under Japanese Administration: Tragic Stories of Three Years and Eight Months*,[47] is a mine of information on the war as seen mainly from the Chinese point of view. These include the Chinese massacres, Japanese torture methods, and the heroic exploits of Lim Boo Seng. An interesting section deals with the question of memory and memorial, which is a fresh contribution that allows insights into how the war is being remembered by the Chinese of various generations in Malaysia.

Chen Jian's *Malayan Chinese Anti-Japanese Campaigns* provides an overview of anti-Japanese activities in pre-war and wartime Malaya, the Japanese response in extracting a $500,000 financial contribution from the Chinese, followed by the response of the Chinese in the form of militant resistance by anti-Japanese guerrillas. The text, though short, provides a useful framework for further work on the issue.[48]

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46 Chua Ser Koon and Hsu Yun-Ts'iao (eds.), *Malayan Chinese Resistance to Japan 1937–1945: Selected Source Materials*, Singapore: Cultural & Historical Publishing House Pte. Ltd., 1984. [Mainly in Chinese and partially English]

47 Loke Pooi Choon, *Malaya under Japanese Administration: Tragic Stories of Three Years and Eight Months*, Kuala Lumpur: Lupeichun Japan Education Centre, 2005.

48 Chen Jian, *Malayan Chinese Anti-Japanese Campaigns*, Petaling Jaya: Gerakbudaya Enterprise, 2004.

Other works on Chinese anti-Japanese struggles are Lee Eng Kew's study on the Japanese Occupation in Taiping;[49] Shan Ru-hong's *The War in the South: The Story of Negeri Sembilan's Guerrillas*;[50] and Sia Yuk Tet's study on the Kinabalu Guerrillas in Sabah.[51] Shan's work is a translated version of his earlier work in Chinese. Written from the author's personal involvement as a guerrilla leader, it reveals the operations of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) in Negeri Sembilan state. The work also highlights many episodes of Japanese atrocities. Sia Yuk Tet's work narrates the story of the Chinese-led Kinabalu Guerrillas who launched an uprising against the Japanese Army in Jesselton (present-day Kota Kinabalu) in October 1943. He provides a Chinese perspective of the incident different from the version previously narrated in English by a former colonial administrator.[52]

These works on the war inevitably emphasize the sufferings inflicted upon the Chinese community by the Japanese occupation Army, and on the contributions of the Chinese in fighting the Japanese Army. This is an important event in Chinese Malaysian history. The younger generations of Chinese are now able to learn more about the exploits of the MPAJA against the Japanese;, they are seen as heroic and even patriotic, but their contributions are conspicuously absent from the official 'national' narrative. Even the story of the Kinabalu Guerrillas has been deleted from the national history textbook.

Leftist Writers Challenge the National Narrative

Despite the existence of a language divide among Chinese writers writing on the Chinese in Malaysia, both groups are at least consistent in projecting the contribution of the community to the historical development of the country and the role played by the Chinese in helping to shape the nation-state of Malaysia.

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49 Lee Eng Kew, *Ri Ben Shou: Tai Pin Re Ji San Nian Pa Ge Yue* (Japanese Occupation at Taiping for Three Years and Eight Months), Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information Research Development, 2006.

50 Shan Ru-hong, *Shen Mei Lan Kang Ri Yu Ji Zhan Zheng Huei Yi Lu* (Memoirs of the Negeri Sembilan Anti-Japanese Guerrillas), Hong Kong: Nan Dao, 1999. The book was later translated into English as *The War in South, The Story of Negeri Sembilan's Guerrillas*, Bangkok: Mental Health Publication, 2003.

51 Sia Yuk Tet, *Shen Shan Yu Ji Dui Kang Di Shi* (History of the Anti-Japanese Kinabalu Guerrillas), Tawau: Tawau Daily Publication, 1978.

52 For many years the work of Maxwell Hall was the standard reference on the Kinabalu Guerrillas. The text differs slightly from Sia's by relying more on the accounts provided by former government servants, and lacks Chinese views. See Maxwell Hall, *Kinabalu Guerrillas*, Kuching: Borneo Literature Bureau, 1949.

A new genre of historical works on the Chinese in Malaysia provides glimpses of a group of Chinese (as well as of non-Chinese) who have been marginalized by the mainstream (or even national) history, the left-wing and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Historians and writers in this group emerged mainly from 1989 when the Malayan Communist Party ended its 39-year armed struggle and signed a peace agreement with the Malaysian Government and the military commanders of southern Thailand. The end of the Communist threat to the security of the country was followed by new government policies that reversed the security measures introduced prior to 1989, including the easing of personal travel to China by Malaysians. More importantly, control of literature relating to communism was relaxed. The first publications that emerged following this 'thaw' in censorship were works by former members of the Tenth Regiment of the MCP. Published initially in Hong Kong, these memoirs were written by Abdullah CD, the chairman of the MCP and his Chinese wife, Suriani Abdullah.[53] Even though these early publications do not directly concern the Chinese, they nevertheless marked a watershed in encouraging other former party members to write their memoirs.

Soon their works were followed by the publication of Chin Peng's political autobiography in Singapore in 2002. This helped to open a floodgate for other former members of the MCP to publish their personal and even collective memoirs or autobiographies. Of course, from the Chinese side, Shan Ru-hong's war memoir on the MPAJA's fight against the Japanese Army in Negeri Sembilan had appeared earlier in 1999[54] to accord recognition to the MPAJA guerrillas as freedom fighters against the Japanese Army.

In Kajang, to commemorate members of the MPAJA and of the MCP who died fighting British security forces in Kajang, the Committee of the Families of the Martyrs of Kajang published a book. It lists 241 names of individuals belonging to the MCP forces in Kajang who died fighting security forces during the Emergency. Brief bio data are provided wherever possible, and the book is definitely a very useful repository

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53 Abdullah CD, *Perang Anti-British dan Perdamaian*, Hong Kong: Nan Dao Publisher, 1998; Abdullah CD, *Darurat dan Kemerdekaan, 1948–1998*, Hong Kong: Nan Dao, 1998 and Suriani Abdullah, *Rejimen ke-10 dan Kemerdekaan*, Hong Kong: Nan Dao Publisher, 1999.

54 Shan Ru-hong, *Shen Mei Lan Kang Ri Yu Ji Zhan Zheng Huei Yi Lu* (Memoirs of the Negeri Sembilan Anti-Japanese Guerrillas), Hong Kong: Nan Dao, 1999. The book was later being translated into English as *The War in South, The Story of Negeri Sembilan's Guerrillas*, Bangkok: Mental Health Publication, 2003.

of information for anyone working on the history of the Communist Party in Selangor. Like all the writings of this genre, the book provides an alternative version to the official history of the nation. The MPAJA and the MCP are seen as fighting to free the country from British Imperialism, while hardly any reference is made to their continued fighting beyond 1957 after the country had obtained its independence and the British colonial masters had left the scene.

One work, though, tries to offer an explanation on why members of the MPAJA and, later, the MCP continued their armed struggle despite Malaya having gained her independence in 1957 and formed a larger Malaysian federation in 1963. Zhang Zuo, the commander of the Sixth Independence Regiment, in his memoir entitled *My Half Century* discusses the notion of freedom as understood by the MPAJA and MCP members like him. For Zhang, the independence achieved by the country in 1957 as well as the creation of Malaysia were achieved mainly through the dedicated struggle of the MCP.[55] Thus, the entire premise of his memoir justifies the struggle and contributions of the MPAJA and the MCP to defeating British Neo-Imperialism which persisted after independence and, hence, contributing to the independence of the nation.

This genre of literature also contains biographical information on former members of the MPAJA and the MCP. *Ji Qing Shui Yue* (Passionate Years) is one such collection of reminiscences and short memoirs of members of the MCP who were exiled from Malaya and sent to China during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960).[56] After Chin Peng published his memoir, a group of journalists from the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* interviewed him and published the transcripts of his interview together with their interview with the then Inspector General of Police and other documents highlighting the MCP's case and including profiles of MCP personalities.[57]

In Sarawak where the Communist Party of Kalimantan Utara (Northern Kalimantan Communist Party) attracted Chinese involvement during the 1960s and early 1970s, writings of a similar nature have also appeared, mainly to commemorate those who took part in the struggle against the Government. Tien Rong (Tien Yin Chen)'s *Struggle in the Jungle* is about the struggle of the Communist Party in Sarawak whose

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55 Zhang Zuo, *Wo De Pan Shi J* (My Half-Century), Kuala Lumpur: Zhang Yuan, 2005, pp. 4–6.

56 Peng Guoqiang (comp.), *Ji Qing Shui Yue* (Passionate Years), Hong Kong: JIan Zen Chu Ban She, 2005.

57 Liu Jianquan (ed), *Qing Shan Bu Lao: Ma Gong De Li Chen* (Green Mountain Would Not Whither: The Struggle of the MCP), Petaling Jaya: Sin Chew Jit Poh, 2004.

entire membership was Chinese.[58] The study traces the origins and aspirations of the party, its expansion and how the struggle later collapsed. The first comprehensive study on the party, it presents the disgruntled voices of a section of the Chinese community who were disillusioned with the politics and development of their state.

Since 2000, more works have been published on the reminiscences and memoirs of former members of the Sarawak Communist Party. Like their MCP counterparts in West Malaysia, this group of people had believed their actions were right and just.[59] They attempt to justify their struggle and 'sacrifices'. Just like their West Malaysian counterparts, they referred to their dead as "heroes and martyrs".

Published almost entirely in Chinese, these works have been inaccessible to the larger Malaysian public who can only read in either English or Malay. Since they reach out to a smaller circle of readers, their impact is minimal. Nevertheless, this genre over the last six to seven years has definitely contributed to the emergence of alternative views with regard to the status of the MPAJA and the MCP in the broader history of the country. Hence, it is not surprising to hear dissenting views expressed by an opposition politician who regarded the MCP members as the real freedom fighters who were more nationalistic than Tunku Abdul Rahman, the founding father of the nation.[60]

This genre poses a serious challenge to the current national narrative, particularly in claiming legitimacy for the MCP's struggle and its contribution to nationalism and in the use of terms to describe the MCP guerrillas as 'true or real freedom fighters' and '*Lie Xi'* or Martyrs to describe members of the MCP who were killed by security forces.

Less-travelled Paths

Since Purcell's pioneering studies on the Chinese in Malaysia were published more than fifty years ago, such studies have continued to grow

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58 Tien Rong, *Shen Lin Li De Do Zen* (Struggle in the Forest), Hong Kong: East and West Cultural Publishing, 1990.

59 *Wang Shi* (Former Times), Sibu: Sibu Friendship Committee, 2000; *Lin Zhong Lie Qi* (Hunting in the Jungle), Sibu: Sibu Friendship Committee, 2000; *Yu-yu Shui Yue Huo Dang Nian* (Living through the Years), Sibu: Sibu Friendship Committee, 2001 and *Feng Yu Nian Dai* (Challenging Years), Sibu: Sibu Friendship Committee, 2002.

60 This was the opinion of Ronnie Liu, the opposition DAP (Democratic Action Party) Central Committee member. Liu's opinion, expressed through a media statement on the internet, caused an uproar among the pro-establishment politicians, who demanded a public apology from him. See *Sunday Star*, 11 September 2005.

and draw more attention from scholars in extending their focus on to other aspects, such as inter-ethnic relations, Sino-native (hybrid) communities, the indigenised or *Peranakan* Chinese, changing Chinese identities and Chinese business networks.

While most of these aspects are real to the community, they have not yet attracted sufficient attention from historians. This can be partly attributed to the historian's approach and need for documented evidence (especially official documents. The very nature of these topics involves the methodologies of other study disciplines, especially sociology and anthropology. Historians, therefore, need to think outside of their 'box'—to embrace a multi-disciplinary approach, or learn to borrow some of the methodologies from other disciplines to help enhance their research on the history of the Chinese in Malaysia.

Historians need to venture beyond the official sources. The lack of official documents in most of these less-studied topics has hindered historians from pursuing such research. Private papers, clan minutes, and temple memorials are some examples of non-official sources in researching these new subjects.[61] This is an approach that has been mainly adopted by semi-scholars or *min quan xue ze* (folk-scholars) researching on local history. Unable or unwilling to access written sources in archives, they turned to materials more accessible to them for their construction of their local history in the form of epigraphic materials found in temples, tombstones, or family (privately)-held documents.

Conclusion

This survey on the historiography of the Chinese in Malaysia does not claim to be exhaustive. Its aim has been to reveal that there has been a great deal of research on the topic and to show that the field is still growing and that research is being carried out by scholars both inside and outside the country.

For the Malaysian Chinese, research into their own history has become a more urgent goal as the community ponders upon its collective future and their falling numbers in the country's total population. In order to make studies of Chinese contributions to Malaysia meaningful, scholars and students alike should be bold enough to venture beyond the existing boundaries and explore new areas.

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61 For the case of Sabah, see Danny Wong Tze Ken, "Historical Sources on Sabah: Some Recent Observations", *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah*, No. 30, 2002. Even though it is a general work, many instances and examples were drawn from the study of the Chinese community.

As indicated by the survey, the historical writings on the Chinese in Malaysia are broadly divided into two groups of linguistic spheres or schools of authors. Seldom does one find a scholar who is comfortable with both spheres, let alone willing to engage and comprehend writings in both languages. Unless attempts are made to bridge the gaps, Chinese Malaysian knowledge of their history will remain inadequate, if not lopsided. The field needs more bi-lingual scholars to draw data and coordinate the findings of both sides to bridge the gaps in order to produce a more comprehensive, researched-based history of the Chinese community in Malaysia.

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