

CHINESE BUSINESS
IN THE MAKING OF
A MALAY STATE,
1882–1941

Kedah and Penang

Wu Xiao An

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CHINESE BUSINESS IN THE
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This book examines how Chinese family and business networks, focused around activities such as revenue farming, including opium, the rice trade, and pawnbroking, and related legal and labour organizational activities, were highly influential in the process of state formation in Malaya. It shows how Chinese family and business networks were flexible and dynamic, and were closely interlocked with economic and social structures, around which governments and states developed. It considers the crucial role of wealth and power in the process of regional interaction, and challenges accepted views of Chinese ethnicity and migration.

Wu Xiao An received his PhD from the University of Amsterdam. He taught at Xiamen University (1991–3) and was awarded fellowships at the University of Amsterdam (1993–9), the National University of Singapore (2000–1) and Kyoto University (2002). His research interests include the modern history of Southeast Asia and the Chinese overseas. Currently, Dr Wu is Associate Professor in the Department of History, Peking University

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FOREWORD

Wu Xiao An's study of Chinese families in Kedah is a welcome breath of fresh air in the sometimes over-heated atmosphere of Overseas Chinese studies. It is also a sign of the growing maturity of this field. Once authors tended to focus on over-essentialized ideas of the 'Bamboo Network', which could be seen as either a positive extension of an immutable culture, or else an alien element in the body politic of emerging nations. Now, as soundly based empirical studies accumulate, the complexity of the interactions between newcomers, sojourners and settlers is becoming increasingly understood.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the field. With his careful collection of data from archives, libraries and interviews in a number of countries, Dr Wu has reminded us of both the limitations and the possibilities of research which questions the usual categories. In particular, in an approach that is increasingly relevant, he shows the limitations of a geographical field of study that is defined by the borders of the modern nation state. By examining linkages between China, Penang, Kedah and Singapore, we are reminded of the centrality of networks in shaping societies, particularly in periods of economic change and political integration. At the same time, his study shows yet again that any retrospective ethnizing of standard historical narratives, by according privileged status to any particular group, gravely distorts the past. This is particularly so in maritime Southeast Asia, where mobility and the rise and fall of polities, ports and settlements are central themes.

From studies like this, the reader can gain new insights into the nature of ethnicity, the ways in which it can be both situational and opportunistic, on the one hand, and, on the other, an enduring and useful source of social capital. The book is also an important contribution to the histories of diaspora communities in the modern period, and of entrepreneurship in Malaysia. Dr Wu's detailed reconstruction of family histories is yet more evidence of the ways in which this approach, so ably used by, for example, the later Jennifer Cushman, can fruitfully explore the intricate links between institutional and individual change. In societies where personal

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relationships remain crucial, such a point of departure can expose both the flexibility of emerging institutions, but also the potential they offer for people to break out of the limitations imposed by socially sanctioned ties of personal dependency. The use of the law and the press are typical examples, well presented here by Dr Wu.

I myself had the pleasure of working with the author as he carried out the research which finally produced this book and, as is so often the case, supervision seemed to entail more learning than teaching. In the case of Dr Wu, this was particularly rewarding, as the commitment and energy with which he seized every opportunity to expand his horizons and focus his inquiries was admirable. His successful completion of his PhD at the University of Amsterdam was another example of how productive and worthwhile exchange programmes, such as that between Amsterdam and Xiamen, can be.

It is to be hoped that the combination of extensive archive research and interviewing which typified this book will be further used, both by Dr Wu and others, to expand our knowledge of Southeast Asian history. We need to know more, not just about Chinese immigrant and business networks, but also about those of other diaspora communities who have done so much to shape the history of the region. In the early modern era, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, traders and adventurers moved through Southeast Asia, bringing with them their commodities, values and institutions. This applies to the Portuguese, the 'Kojas, Klings and Chulias' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as it does to Malay and Bugis in both earlier and later times. The massive immigration of Indonesians to Malaysia, in both large organized groups, and small individual moves, has barely been documented. Whether such migrants came as sailors, warriors, or farmers opening new agricultural land, or refugees from political repression (from West Sumatra in the 1920s, or Aceh in more recent decades), or as part of labour recruitment schemes for workers or maids, their contribution to the development of Malaysia deserves documentation and analysis.

In terms of both subject and methodology, this book will be widely appreciated both because of the richness of its detail and the sharpness of its focus. It should take its place in the growing stream of related works, including those being published in this series, and as such contribute to our appreciation of the richness and variety of the historical experience of Southeast Asia.

Heather Sutherland

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Needless to say, I bear full responsibility for the shortcomings in this study.

Wu Xiao An
Kyoto, March 2002

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BKI</i>	<i>Bijdragen tot de taal-, land-en volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indie</i>
<i>CSSR</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>CO</i>	Colonial Office Files
<i>FO</i>	Foreign Office Files
<i>HCO</i>	High Commissioner's Office Files
<i>KAR</i>	<i>Kedah Annual Report</i>
<i>Legco</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council</i>
<i>JAS</i>	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
<i>JIA</i>	<i>Journal of the Indian Archipelago</i>
<i>JMBRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSEAH</i>	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian History</i>
<i>JSEAS</i>	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of the Siam Society</i>
<i>JSSS</i>	<i>Journal of the South Seas Society</i>
<i>MBRAS</i>	The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
<i>PGSC</i>	<i>Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle</i>
<i>PSP</i>	<i>Pinang Sin Pao</i>
<i>RIMA</i>	<i>Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs</i>
<i>SC</i>	The Sultan's Correspondence of Kedah
<i>SE</i>	<i>Straits Echo</i>
<i>SFP</i>	<i>Singapore Free Press</i>
<i>SIPC</i>	<i>Straits Independence and Penang Chronicle</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Straits Times</i>
<i>SUK/K</i>	Kedah Secretariat Files

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to link Chinese business networks and family studies to a larger framework, considering issues of the state, region, ethnicity, migration and Southeast Asian ‘modernization’. Through a detailed analysis of the core activities of the Chinese community, such as revenue farming, the rice trade, economic competition, multi-ethnic legal conflict and the pawnbroking business, this study addresses two interlocking themes: first, business network formation in the region; and second, the functional interaction between the networks and the state. By focusing on a cluster of prominent Chinese families, which constituted a cohesive Penang–Kedah Chinese business community, the dynamic historical process of Chinese business network formation will be examined by tracing the interplay of state, region and ethnicity chronologically.

In the introduction, I believe my task is, first, to justify my project by setting it in a wider academic scene; and second, to guide my readers by clarifying how I shall proceed in undertaking such an ambitious exercise. Briefly, I shall formulate this introduction in four parts: perspective: region and ethnicity; theme: business networks; point of entry: family; and, finally, structure: the book.

Perspective: region and ethnicity

It has been mainly in the decades after the Second World War that a new generation of scholars has been trying to find an effective solution to a great dilemma: to construct the identity and integrity of Southeast Asia as a region and as a field of studies on the one hand, and to grapple with a series of problems arising from the underdevelopment of the study, lack of sources, the heterogeneity of the region and the danger of lapsing into the niches of stereotyped Eurocentrism, Sinology and Indology on the other. This is a problem of perspective and approach, both in generating the regional shape as a whole and in the many detailed empirical constituent studies. It is an intellectual dilemma rooted in an ideological and methodological issue

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between the decolonization of Southeast Asia from outside and the unavailability of a substitute paradigm from within.

Against this background, in rewriting modern Southeast Asian history, several overlapping and complementary alternatives have emerged. Most typical are the 'autonomous' perspective,¹ the 'structural' history,² the 'local or sub-regional' approach,³ and deconstructing the 'Orientalist' ideology.⁴ All of the above intellectual proposals aim at reconstructing Southeast Asian historiography, leading towards a theme of relationships: between continuity and change, between conflict and accommodation, between centre and periphery, and between generalization and heterogeneity. Following these perspectives, approaches and themes, for decades many Southeast Asian historical studies have been largely content to fill in the blanks by providing detailed local studies. But there has been no attempt to test the framework, or to initiate theoretical innovations. It is not surprising that, as McVey notes: 'Though much praised, his [Smail's] urgings have seldom been implemented by Southeast Asianists, nor have efforts to broaden the version of other fields.'⁵

I shall clarify three points that might be very relevant to the debate: region, ethnicity and Southeast Asian transformation. Corresponding to these three elements are place, people and time respectively. Behind them are also parameters, such as institutions and interactions, or politics, economy and culture. Each element is not a separate entity, but a set of interactions and relationships. Region implies a locality and its surrounding worlds; ethnicity suggests a community and its counterparts; while Southeast Asian transformation reveals a historical background and process of change and continuity. In the following, I shall show how these three interwoven and interactive elements coalesce to address and shape the most important features of Southeast Asian histories and societies.

In this context, 'region' suggests a strategy and a technique, in synthesizing effort towards Southeast Asian history in general and many detailed empirical studies in particular. Considering the heterogeneity and fragmentation of Southeast Asia, it is believed that only after enough local and regional studies have been made can these synthesizing efforts really become effective. Regarding empirical investigation, region encompasses a manageable laboratory and an analytical unit – local state and society – in examining the dynamics of intra-regional relationships, external impact and internal adjustment. More importantly, region reflects a much-neglected historical reality, representing an arena of transcending political and administrative boundaries, crossed by transnational linkage and mobility.

Owing to historical circumstances, at least in maritime Southeast Asia, there was no one central administration or unitary national economic centre during the colonial period. In fact, many Malay states functioned autonomously in their respective supra-national, geo-economic and geo-

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Map 1.1 South China and maritime Southeast Asia.

political regions, rather than under a single central administration and economic system. A constellation of such socio-economic regions can be identified. For example, Riau–Singapore–Johor was one geo-economic region, while Penang–Kedah and surrounding states, Java and neighbouring areas, the Sulu zone, Celebes (Makassar) and its neighbouring areas were all examples of similar zones. At present, such groupings are re-emerging as ASEAN ‘growth triangles’ and becoming main bases for ASEAN regional economic co-operation. Reassessments of Southeast Asian history require

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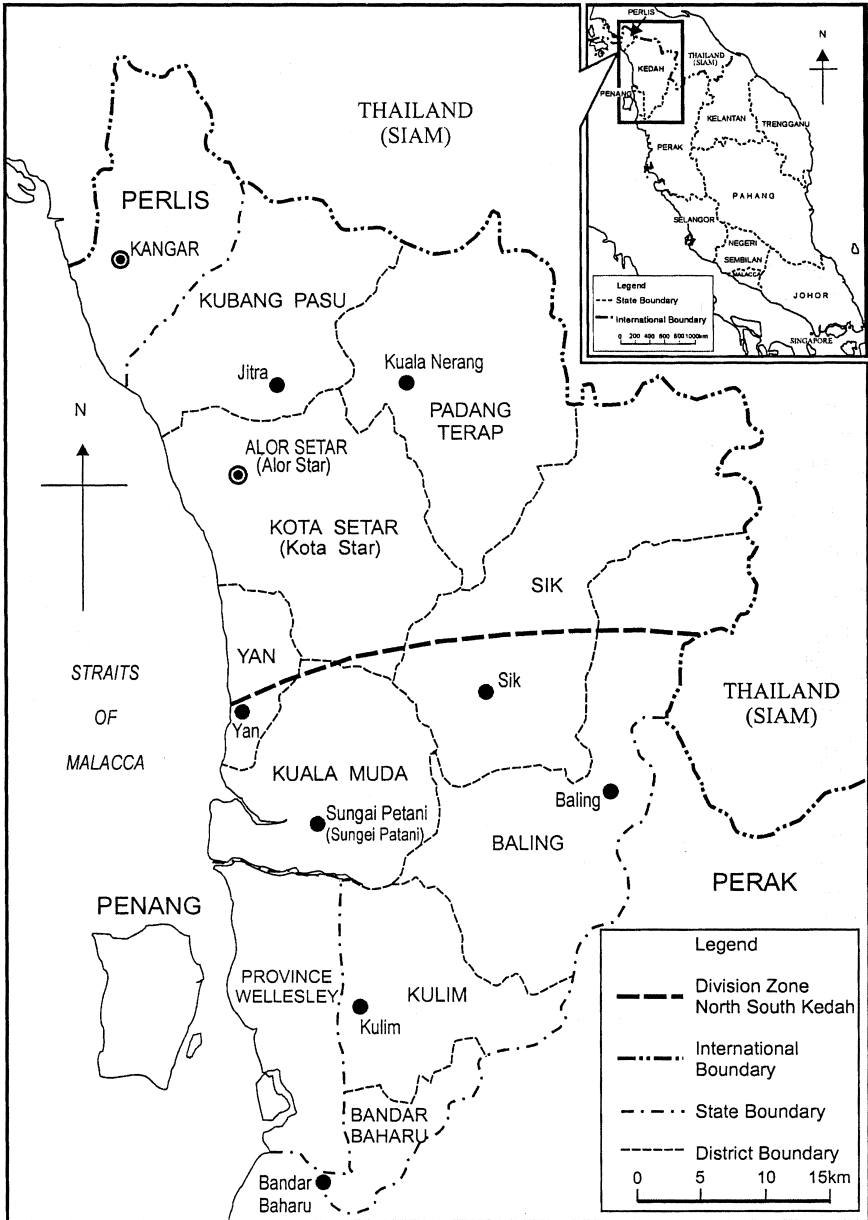
recognition of the roles and identities of these wider zones and of sub-state localities.⁶

Interesting as this may be, it is far from enough. Regions must also be identified and located in relation to people and time. This exercise should include reference to the elements of ethnicity and Southeast Asian transformation. The period and place under study was experiencing a great transformation, a process of the building up of a new society, economy and political system, in which all ethnicities – the Europeans, indigenous, and immigrants alike – were always present and played important roles. They were all players in the process, whose roles should be properly recognized. In the rapid transformation, a syncretic society was created based on the interaction of all elements, rather than being the creation of a single element such as ‘colonial’, or an ‘immigrant’, or a ‘Malay’ economy or society.

This is one of the most striking features of multi-ethnic polities and economies in Southeast Asia: incarnated in the ‘strange company’ assembled in VOC Batavia, combining mixed interactions of Chinese settlers, Mestizo women and the Dutch,⁷ in ‘conjoint communities’ with an essence of commercial collaboration between immigrants and colonialists,⁸ in an ‘Ali-baba’ alliance between immigrant Chinese and indigenous power-holders,⁹ and in the much discussed conflict and accommodation in the colonial–indigenous encounters.

If the flexible interaction of ethnicities and regions was perhaps the most striking feature of the Southeast Asian colonial transformation, how did this work at the specific level of the Malay state, Kedah – our central empirical investigation in this book? This was no exception. For geopolitical and geo-economic reasons, Kedah was politically weakened by the regional circumstances, that is, its triangular relationship with the British and Siam. In name, Kedah tried to maintain its traditional relationship with Siam. But economically, Kedah was in fact closely incorporated into the networks of the British settlement of Penang. Hence, both state and region were characterized by a division into political and economic spheres dominated by different ethnicities: political power was divided in the British settlement of Penang and the Malay sultanate of Kedah, which stood in between a vested Chinese economic power and a Siamese suzerainty over Kedah. This ‘ethnicized’ character shaped the historical reality of Chinese regional business networks, moving between the British settlement of Penang and the Malay sultanate of Kedah. The interactions of these multi-ethnicities and multi-states in the region therefore revealed new dimensions of economic integration and conflict, ethnic accommodation and political hegemony, as well as the immigrant localization and business networks.

Ethnic communities provided their own particular and familiar resources, but these were by definition limited. An ability to access a



Map 1.2 Kedah.

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variety of sources of wealth, influence and power within the fluid and expanding economic and political environment was essential to real success. This study of Kedah demonstrates how the main players pursued their various aims through many-stranded and opportunistic strategic alliances. The British claimed they were the guardians of the immigrant Chinese in Kedah, but their purpose was to promote their own political and commercial aims. Malay rulers needed all of them – British, Siamese and Chinese – to maintain their political position and economic development, playing the British and the Siamese off against each other and manipulating Chinese rivalries. While Chinese business legitimacy and power were recognized by the British, and acquiesced in by Malays, their political-legal identity was still undefined, not only because of their immigrant position, but also because of their displaced political frontiers, a vague political identity between China and Southeast Asia intensified by their frequent regional mobility.

Returning to the issue, given the crucial importance of a research perspective encompassing the local state and the wider region, and simultaneously taking account of a more sophisticated and balanced approach to multi-ethnic and multi-polity Southeast Asia, is it not possible to combine both by sharply focusing on the immigrant Chinese, in order to reconstruct that real historical process?

Two central questions should be taken into account in ‘rewriting’ Southeast Asian history. First, if the immigrant Chinese did play a very important role in Southeast Asia’s socio-economic transformation, what was the interaction and mutual influence between the process of making the state and region and the formation of the immigrant Chinese communities? Second, if Chinese economic activities crossed boundaries, dealing with different states rather than just a single one, how did different state politics and economies influence, and were influenced by, Chinese business?

It accordingly involves a double rethinking: Southeast Asian history, even Southeast Asian studies as whole, should recognize the deep-rooted role of the Southeast Asian Chinese, and conversely, studies of Southeast Asian Chinese should be embedded in a larger context, looking at multi-faceted and multi-ethnic interactions, rather than compartmentalizing Chinese within their own narrow community. Although the important historical role of the immigrant Chinese has rightly been recognized in recent Southeast Asian literature,¹⁰ still it has remained ‘among the most understudied aspects of a generally understudied sub-discipline’, as Anthony Reid notes.¹¹

Linking up with such current theoretical interests, this study focuses on Chinese business networks and power relationships in the making of the Malay state of Kedah, and its wider region in the sixty years between 1882 and 1941. People and their economic activities are fundamental to my

project, rather than the colonial or international relations maintained by the political centres. In other words, instead of examining grand structures from above and outside, here I have adopted a perspective from below and inside: that of the people and locality. So, the Chinese are studied in Kedah, and Kedah in the Penang-centred region of the northern Straits of Malacca. With the central focus on the mobile Chinese and their businesses, I shall broaden my investigation to the wider geo-economic and geo-political arenas of northern Sumatra, southern Siam and the British settlement of Penang.

Theme: business networks

There is at present a flood of publications on ethnic Chinese businesses, often, with a few notable exceptions, of uncertain quality. There are descriptions of the transnational 'spirit of Chinese capitalism',¹² 'Southeast Asian capitalists',¹³ 'merchant princes of the East',¹⁴ the 'bamboo network',¹⁵ the 'Chinese diaspora',¹⁶ 'ungrounded empire'¹⁷ and the prominent Asian 'trading minorities', including the networks of Indian money-lenders, Arabs, petty traders in Java and along the Thai–Malaysian border and the small-scale, long-distance trade in Eastern Indonesia and on the Nepalese–Tibetan frontier.¹⁸ This new post-Cold War literature rightly recognizes the need to reassess the long-neglected but important role of Chinese capitalism, after the protracted eclipse imposed by political–ideological controversy. These works are predominantly social science studies, focusing on the contemporary period, and as yet there have been few historical studies. We need to ask what is the historical process of such business network formation, from which it is possible to abstract continuity?

The current debate is clouded by too many stereotyped theoretical interpretations and prescriptions. The grand theoretical discourses, speculative generalizations and long literature reviews contrast starkly with the too-loosely-structured, narrow micro-level case studies, and superficial empirical descriptions. Many are now calling for more historical and empirical depth, a comparative perspective and a large, solid framework. The combined structural, institutional and historical factors associated with business development need to be treated more seriously and even-handedly. The scope of the investigation should go beyond any separate Chinese community and limited geographical perspective.¹⁹

Departing from those discussions, in my project Chinese business networks would not be treated as an undefined, abstract and overly flexible concept. They are defined, framed and traced in relation to the state, region and ethnicity. By tracing the Chinese family business networks, it aims to show how its formation was closely related to the making of a local Malay state and the development of the region. The history of the family

business network was in fact illustrated as a miniature of local and regional history. Hence, Chinese business networks will be examined through a detailed analysis of their core activities and institutions, such as revenue farming, the opium and rice trades, economic and legal struggles and the like. The dynamic historical process of the formation of Chinese business networks will be examined chronologically in the context of the interplay of the state, region and ethnicity. In a nutshell, what I emphasize is the historical process of Chinese business network formation, in which the shaping interaction of state, region and ethnicity can be examined.

Let me briefly present several classic images of business networks, a pattern of structural configuration in which business networks are usually delineated by specific labels, such as ‘trading hierarchy’, ‘trading zones’, ‘trading ethnicity’, or ‘trading minority’, or ‘diaspora’, a recent popular term.

When dealing with early Asian ‘trading hierarchies’, Van Leur described a three-tiered hierarchy. At the top level were ‘the mighty of the earth, the rulers, the princes and the high officials, the nobles and the military officers’. At the middle level were ‘great merchant gentlemen’, whose activities combined ‘merchandise trade with money investment and money trade, “bankers” and “capitalist”’. The basic layer consisted of ‘pedlars’.²⁰ The great merchant gentlemen allied to the mighty top group who exercised social and political power, while concomitantly providing pedlars with financial capital. The pedlars were the basic carriers of trade.²¹

Unlike Van Leur, Fernand Braudel believed that ‘at the top of the pyramid were the proud ranks of those who “understood finance”’. At the lower level of the hierarchy were ‘the trading proletariat’, consisting of a multitude of pedlars, street-criers, travelling market folks, hawkers, shopkeepers, *blattiers* and *regrattier* (corn-chandlers and cheap victuallers). To these can be added all the professions created by the trading community and very largely dependent on it: cashiers, book-keepers, factors, commissioners, brokers of all kinds, carters, sailors, errand-boys, packers, porters, heavy-goods workers, etc. Looking beyond this internal structure, Braudel still acknowledged that the trading community was encompassed within the larger community of society, or ‘a society within a society’.²²

Braudel tried to extrapolate the dynamics of trading networks. He treated ‘merchants’ as a central base point of trading networks and emphasized the inherent nature of business ‘communications’, ‘co-operation’ and ‘connections’ underlying the ‘interested parties’.²³ But, when Braudel tried to place trading networks in history, they were also conceptualized in relation to ethnicity and region. Thus, business ‘connections and co-operation’ seemed to be converted into ‘solidarity’ transcending business. ‘Solidarity between merchants was in some ways solidarity within a class’ and within a race.²⁴

In approaching the rural Chinese social structure, Skinner has mapped

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the excellent 'marketing networks'. He distinguishes two dimensions in Chinese marketing systems. The first is the marketing structure as a spatial and economic system – the standard marketing system, the intermediate marketing system and central marketing system – forms an integral and interlocking network, which 'articulates and unites the little local economies centred on each market town into, first, regional economic structures and eventually into a single society-wide economy'.²⁵ The second dimension is marketing structures as social systems, which link the Chinese peasantry into a larger and open marketing community of social interactions. The interclass relationships were also hierarchical and structural: the gentry as a buffer and a broker between the peasantry and the bureaucratic elite, the petty traders between the peasantry and the merchants in higher-level central places. Marketing systems, therefore, provide a strategic nexus in studying the dynamics of Chinese social structure and social transformation.

More recently, efforts have been made in Germany to study the sociology of minority business networks in Southeast Asia. According to Evers:

Trading networks are social processes of exchange in the sense that social interaction takes place between persons with the primary purpose of exchanging goods over more or less greater geographical distances.²⁶

This concept has been advanced by Menkhoff, who bases his data collecting on Evers' model while attempting to elaborate on it. Menkhoff argues that the term 'trading network' refers to:

The merchants' commercial and social connections or ties to trading partners abroad, the evolution and cultivation of trading arrangements and other social relations (local or international) which may facilitate commercial connections.²⁷

All these structural patterns suggest the multi-faceted aspects of business networks centred on a particular locus of businesspeople and business. They highlight a functional pattern of business characterization in terms of micro-level trading networks, of trading hierarchy, of trading minority and of diaspora. Based on these sociological configurations of business networks, would historians be able to examine the historical development of such business networks, not only in terms of structural characterization, but also in terms of their opportunistic and strategic activities and interactions of businessmen, in the context of other important forces, such as history and politics? More importantly, could Chinese business network formation be related to interacting processes of colonialism, ethnicity,

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politics and Southeast Asian transformation? Specifically, could a case study of Chinese business network formation be treated as a miniature reproduction of the evolutionary process of Southeast Asian society and history as a whole? By asking these questions, I am reverting to my argument that the important historical roles of Southeast Asian Chinese should be reassessed as an indispensable and inseparable element in shaping Southeast Asian history and society, like that of the other communities comprised of Europeans or the indigenous people.

My reflections on these basic overlapping and interconnected factors and concepts are as follows.

Region: as an organizing concept, the region is treated here in terms of the activities of social actors and the coherence of these activities. A reading of the literature concerned leads to a recognition of the feasibility and integrity of the wider geo-economic and geo-political region. It is not my intention to study the region as such, but to demonstrate the significance of Chinese regional networks. As described above (pp. 4-6), in the period both Kedah state and the Kedah Chinese had close linkages with the Straits Settlements (particularly with Penang), Thailand and other Malay states. Chinese activities were framed mainly in this geo-economic and geo-political region, so I shall focus on these social actors and their interactions; the identification of arenas will help delineate the region.

Chinese business networks: here these are related to the region, on the assumption that the formation of a business network helps to define a particular integral geo-economic and geo-political region, and vice versa. The second consideration is that the ethnic approach to business networks falls short in explaining Chinese economic success. It must relate to other socio-historical and political factors and treat them as a whole. While emphasizing the overall environment in which the business networks functioned, I shall not neglect business behaviour, strategy and structure. Methodologically, 'merchants', 'markets' and 'commodities' are three aspects that could be used for the analysis of Chinese business networks. As far as the research project is concerned, 'merchant' refers to the Chinese traders both in Kedah and Penang; 'market' will be treated mainly in relation to the region comprising Kedah, Penang, Perak, Perlis and the southern Siamese states; while the rice and opium trades will be chosen as case studies for the analysis of the 'commodity' aspect of the trading network. So, the Chinese business network, regional network and rice or opium networks are overlapping basic dimensions of the research.

The state: the nature of the state is quite complicated. Was it colonial, local or mixed? Moreover, beyond the state boundary lay several different but interacting states. The dual-level interaction of the state is relevant: one is within the Malay sultanate of Kedah; the other is its regional interaction with other states such as the British colonial and the Siamese states. Kedah experienced a historical power shift from the Sultan to the state

council in the period under study, so, in my project, the Sultan and the state council of Kedah are recognized as the respective tangible manifestation of the state in the different periods. Before 1909, the exercise of the state authority by the Sultan coincided with the tripartite state interaction: Thai suzerainty, Malay rule and British influence. After 1909, the state council of Kedah was embedded in a colonial state, but remained a relatively independent political entity, with strong Malay characteristics, staffed mainly by Malays. With respect to external affairs, its nature was absolutely colonial, subject to British strategic interests in Southeast Asia in general and those in British Malaya in particular. But, in exercising internal affairs, even for relations with other Malay states, it could be autonomous. As far as the Chinese are concerned, the nature of the state is reflected in the difference between Penang Chinese as British subjects and the position of the Kedah Chinese. Influenced by the divergent nature of the states (British and Malay), the legal and political status of the Chinese was different, generating issues which even escalated into a regional power conflict (see Chapters 5 and 8).

Ethnicity: the various states – British, Siamese and Malay – were characterized by multi-ethnic fluidity and openness to international influence.²⁸ Ethnicity comprises several levels and several dimensions, depending on its relations with ‘race’, culture, society, state, context and strategy. The debate is usually between the primordialist and situationalist approaches, or those who choose to emphasize the ‘plural society’ mode or interest groups. It depends on how ethnicity is located and which aspect is highlighted. In recent years, some scholars treated ethnicity as a composite term. Brown sees it as ideology. He locates the individual within a defined ethnic community and then locates that community within the nation-state system. So, he treats ethnicity as both a ‘psychological ideology’ (primordialist nature) and a ‘political ideology’ (instrumental nature).²⁹ In order not to be misled, as I have already said, ethnic relations here will be studied from the point of view of socio-economic practice, rather than from an assumption of knowledge of how ethnicity works. In doing so, it is hoped that, on the basis of these case studies, a historical dimension of ethnicity can contribute to the debate on current ethnic relations. I am aware of the complexity of this issue, and do not subscribe to a simple primordial view. One of my aims is to clarify the creation, maintenance and use of ethnicity in Kedah.

Point of entry: family

As argued above (pp. 6–11), if the aim is to approach a local and regional history through Chinese business networks, then here, through the family, the purpose is to identify and delineate the Chinese business networks. I shall further illustrate this by asking three interlocked

questions: why is family important as a methodological approach in general? How does the choice of a family approach reflect the historical reality of Southeast Asian Chinese business administration? Why were such Chinese families as that of Lim Leng Cheak and Choong Cheng Kean so important in particular?

Two practical considerations shape the choice. First, to transcend the political and administrative boundaries of the state, an alternative social or economic institution is essential. Such institution should have the capacity to act regionally, while also being an influential player in the mainstream of socio-economic affairs. Second, in the case of Southeast Asia, this characterization is typically applied to the Chinese. Chinese coolies were highly mobile, but their details are almost invisible in the sources, although their roles and contributions are assumed to be significant. This large number of coolies was ineluctably linked to Chinese *towkays*, who organized their economic activities and participated in the mainstream of socio-economic competition essentially along the lines of a family estate. It was these Chinese *towkays* and their family estates that featured the underlying form of Southeast Asian Chinese enterprise. Therefore, elite families take centre stage, providing a better framework to transcend administrative boundaries as required by our regional perspective. Reconstructing their business networks gives an insight into the dominant socio-economic reality in Southeast Asian history.

The family approach has been recognized in the scholarship on local and regional history. In Latin American Studies, for several decades, the elite family approach has been crucial for a better understanding of modern Latin American national and political history. Because of the relative vacuum of socio-political structures, these notable families formed the pivot around which Latin American history moved from the late colonial period through the early years of the twentieth century.³⁰ In an excellent work on a Chinese pioneer family in Taiwan, the American historian, Meskill, follows Wu-feng Lins' family development from 1729 to 1895 as a unique lens through which to see a broader local history and consider the wider question of the Chinese gentry.³¹ More recently, a few new Southeast Asian-oriented family studies, notably Cushman's on the Khaw family in the Sino-Thai linkage³² and McCoy's on Philippine political elites,³³ have emerged. At this juncture I might need to repeat that what I am emphasizing here is a family approach to local and regional history, or national history, rather than the history of separate families as such. So, in my discussion, I have not included a few other good family history studies, such as those on the Oei family in Semarang and the Han family in East Java.³⁴ Nor have I included many anthropological and sociological studies carried out in Southeast Asia using a conventional family approach.

Embedded in the wider framework, in the project, family is used as an entry point, as an organizational unit, or as a 'zoom lens', in order to trace

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the dynamic Chinese economic activities, to contextualize the functional interplay between community, society, state and region, and to delineate the wider local and regional history. As a ‘zoom lens’, the family approach could provide an excellent means to achieve what Freedman called for, over thirty years ago. To borrow a brilliant methodological statement:

Trying to study the Overseas Chinese a man must find his anthropological prejudices corroded away. He must be mobile. He must learn to contain his impatience when he cannot see all his subjects acting out their many roles. He must be content with fragmentary direct observation. He must adjust his vision so that he may see behaviour and ideas within the framework not only of the immediate locality but also of the society from which the migrants have come, of the largest territorial settlement within which they find themselves, and of the non-Chinese society in which they are embedded.³⁵

Turning to Lang’s classic study, by definition, the term ‘family’ generally refers to the economic family, i.e. a unit consisting of members related to each other by blood, marriage or adoption and having a common budget and common property.³⁶ Specifically, in this project, it refers to ‘the immigrant Chinese business family’. In the Southeast Asian context, the immigrant Chinese business family has at least four historical dimensions: (1) as immigrant Chinese related to their society of origin, the Chinese were imprinted by traditional peasant society and Confucian culture, and can be called ‘cultural Chinese’; (2) as immigrant Chinese related to their counterpart community in the host society, the Chinese were redefined by the outside community of Malays, Indians and British, as ‘ethnic Chinese’; (3) as immigrant Chinese related to the different economic activities and relationship, the Chinese were thrown into the colonial capitalist market, a world away from the subsistence agricultural economy in their homeland and they came to Southeast Asia as wage labourers. They can here be called ‘business Chinese’; (4) as immigrant Chinese with a relative lack of social institutional integration into the host society by the state, the Chinese were ‘strangers’ to the host community, or ‘sojourners’ to themselves. The overlapping historical dimensions suggest that, for the immigrant Chinese, the family as a basic socio-economic unit was pregnant with significance. Hence, family business is the main concern of the investigation.

I shall contextualize the family: first, in the different hierarchical levels of community, cross community, local state and wider region; second, in relation to the different community of the British, Malays and Indians; and third, in the historical process of the colonial socio-economic and political transformation. In terms of time, space and arena, the so-called ‘immigrant

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Chinese business family' is identified according to three principles: first, laying the emphasis on the locality, the Chinese family must have had strong business connections with or in Kedah; second, laying the emphasis on the wider region, the Chinese family business in Kedah must have had a wider regional context and function; and third, laying the emphasis on business, these Chinese must have been important in at least one of Kedah's economic spheres, e.g. opium farming, rice milling or pawn-broking. Therefore, here 'the immigrant Chinese business family' could be a Kedah-based, prominent Chinese businessman who could be from Kedah or from Penang. If he was from Kedah itself, his Kedah-based business should have a regional connection with Penang or other places. If he was from Penang, the Kedah-based business should at least be one of the most important parts or hinterlands in his business empire. In short, the regional landscape of Chinese families' business activities coincided with their economic significance in the sector of opium and rice.

Having adopted these principles, I focus upon a cluster of Chinese families, forming an integral Chinese business community scattered across Penang and Kedah. They were the families of Lim Leng Cheak, Choong Cheng Kean, Phuah (Lim) Hin Leong, Tan Ah Yu, Chong Sin Yew, Lim Boon Haw and Lim Lean Teng. Actually, all these families were related to each other, either in co-operation or in competition. All could be identified in the three main worlds of China, Kedah and Penang (and beyond), allowing the researcher to visit their home villages, to trace family tombs and to check other records. Although their common identity is a combination of the business concern and kinship and clan association that bound them together in communal socio-economic and political life, that linkage does not necessarily coincide with one particular village or neighbourhood in their home country. Also they were widely distributed within the Penang and Kedah Chinese business communities, Straits and *singkeh* Chinese, and first generation and second generation. This coverage allows us to present a long-term process which saw continuity and change in terms of leadership and business at the communal level on the one hand, and of the wider colonial Southeast Asian political and economic development on the other.

It was these mobile Chinese business families that played a leading role in the formation of the regional business networks, represented a wider business community around them, and reshaped the configuration of the local power politics. They provide not only the feasibility of empirical depth, but also the possibility of obtaining a better understanding of the multi-ethnic polity and economic competition. Therefore, the business family is approached not only as a miniature of local and regional history, but also as a parameter of studying how each influenced the other's development.

The structure of the book

In order for the reader to understand the structure of the book, I will discuss the research process briefly, involving the path chosen and the way in which reconstructions were organized.

The dissertation research was conducted in the Netherlands, Great Britain, South China, Malaysia, Singapore and the United States. Besides library research, I have systemically consulted Colonial Office Files (CO 273 1882–1919) and Foreign Office Files (FO 422 1882–1939) concerning Kedah at the imperial level, the High Commissioner's Office Files (HCO 1896–1941) at the regional level, and the Sultan of Kedah's Correspondence (1882–1924) and Kedah Secretariat Files (1905–41) at the local level. To locate everyday activities of the families, I have looked through the complete newspaper collection of the *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle* (1882–1941), the *Straits Echo* (1903–41), the *Penang Sin Pao* (1896–1941), the *Straits Independence and Penang Chronicle* (1889–96) and others. I have also checked the relevant family records and conducted interviews. I have looked through the complete collection of the *Straits/Malayan Directory* (1880s–1941), the *Proceedings of Legislative Council* and *Malayan Agricultural Journal* (1910s–41), the *Annual Report of Kedah* (1906–39) and other such publications. Such a long detour is required by the nature of the research, involving many different elements and hence different levels of fact-seeking.

I divide the period 1882–1941 into two phases, drawing a line at the year 1909, which signals the following transitions: economically, from the revenue farming system dominated by the Chinese to a colonial capitalist economy controlled by the state; politically, from Siamese rule to British rule, and the transfer of power relations from the Sultan to the state council; in addition, that time was marked by the large influx and subsequent dominance of Western capital, and the emergence of a Kedah Chinese community independent of Penang community.

The book consists in total of ten chapters. It is accordingly divided into three parts, plus an Introduction and a Conclusion.

The first part comprises Chapter 2. It provides a wider background for people and place: Chinese migration from South China to Southeast Asia and Chinese social organization and economic function juxtaposed with historical development in Kedah state.

The second part includes Chapters 3 to 6. It focuses on the first period 1882–1909, which coincides with: politically, Siamese suzerainty, economically, prosperity of revenue farms and the first generation of family business. I select four loci as entries of investigation: the British consulate, the opium farm, Penang Lim and Kedah Choong families, and the Kulim disturbances. All these state-transcending institutions coalesce to present one cohesive picture of multi-ethnic and multi-state politics and economy in general, and Chinese business networks in the region in particular.

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The third part comprises Chapters 7 to 9. It focuses on the second period 1909–41. It deals with the process of transformation, a process of continuity and change, affected by the fluctuating circumstances of British colonial rule and the large influx of Western capital. It traces how the British–Malay–Siamese political power struggle shifted from the British consulate institution to the British–Malay legal order conflict, how the process of the demise of revenue farms shaped Chinese resistance and their alliance with the old Malay elites, how the old, established revenue farming families expanded into the new prosperous sector of the rice-milling business and how their family business functioned under the second generation in terms of decline and florescence. Beyond these core families and their controlling arenas (opium farms and the rice-milling sector), to elaborate on the typification of Chinese business networks in the region, I cover the new business sector of pawnbroking. Ideally I should delve into the rubber sector, but I have refrained from trying to explore the process of family business expanding into that sector. After an initial attempt it was decided that, as the sources and facts are so fragmented, it would be better to relinquish the attempt in order to maintain the cohesion of the entire presentation.

Using the detailed empirical studies as a basis, in the conclusion, I return to the larger issues discussed in the introduction, such as ethnicity and region, family and state, business networks and immigrant economy and Southeast Asian transformation.

2

SETTINGS

In this chapter, two essential elements – people and place – will be set in their wider contexts. First, the Chinese community will be located in no less than three geographical settings: South China, Southeast Asia and Kedah; and second, Kedah will be placed in the framework of its regional interaction with the surrounding powers.

The Chinese community

The Chinese community in Southeast Asia has always been dynamic, involving the different worlds of the home towns and of the host societies. Therefore, a combined characterization of the Chinese community in these worlds is essential for a better understanding of their dynamics.

South China

Overwhelmingly, Southeast Asian Chinese have come from the coastal provinces of southern China, with Fujian and Guangdong being the most famous *qiaoxiang* or ‘home towns’. The integral process of China’s, especially South China’s, interaction with Southeast Asia can be reconstructed from the third century before the Christian era to the Second World War.¹

Two factors account for the formation of the *qiaoxiang*. The first of these was geomorphological. The largely mountainous terrain isolated eastern Guangdong and southern Fujian from Central China. Ready access to the sea compensated for the weak interaction with Central China and encouraged many people to engage in mercantile activities and fishing. A close socio-economic linkage with Southeast Asia was hence shaped.² The other factor was assuredly in the form of population pressure, poverty, starvation, war, natural disasters and the like. While irrigated rice fields were the most common form of agriculture and rice the staple food, this rice cultivation was not uniformly important in the regional economy. The rural areas around the coastal port cities of Canton, Swatow, Amoy and Fuzhou particularly were greatly influenced

by a flourishing foreign trade, which served to tie the Fujian and Guangdong peasantry to the greater economic world.³ This strengthened a motivation of migration that was inherent in the superstitions of the local people. Whenever there was a disaster, such as sickness, a lack of sons, or some other kind of misfortune, the peasantry concluded that their geomancy must be wrong. This belief led individual men, families or even whole villages to go off to seek a living elsewhere.⁴ The ‘push’ in southern China was counterbalanced by the ‘pull’ in Southeast Asia. The attraction of new lands in which to settle increased with commercial contact, advancing in leaps and bounds when the great socio-economic transformation of the area began under European colonial capitalism.

Hueidang (triads), ‘pirates’ and coolie labour were the most important factors shaping the circumstances of both Chinese migration and the rise of the new Chinese wealthy class. *Hueidang*, in its narrowest sense, refers to the triads or secret societies. More generally, the term refers to political refugees, particularly those forced into exile after the large-scale failed rebellions. There were four main rebellions or major political disruptions in Chinese history: Huang Chao rebellion (878–84) during the Tang dynasty (618–907); the Mongolian invasion of Central China (1279–1368); the Manchurian take over of the Ming regime (1644–1911); and the Taiping rebellion (1851–64). The aftermath of these four events were characterized by hordes of refugees, many of whom sought a new future in Southeast Asia.

‘Pirates’ and ‘piracy’ are vexed issues that are far from clear-cut. The Chinese government issued an edict prohibiting overseas trade and migration in the Ming dynasty. Hence trade between the Chinese coast and Southeast Asia was dominated by what are loosely termed ‘pirates’. Two types of ‘pirates’ can be identified. One was based in Taiwan, raiding the Fujian and Zhejiang coasts, spreading out over the Philippines, Sulu and Northeast Borneo. The other was based in Southeast Asia, raiding the Fujian and Guangdong coasts, and spreading their operations over Hong Kong, Annam, the east coast of the Malay Peninsula and Siam. These ‘pirates’ were very important links between China and Southeast Asia.

The third important factor was coolie labour. Having orchestrated two Opium Wars (1840–2, 1858–60), the Western powers forced the Qing government to open several of the most important coastal ports to foreign trade and to follow a free migration policy. This marked the beginning of the large-scale influx of coolie labour into Southeast Asia. Even more importantly, this coolie trade witnessed a very interesting transformation in the roles of the *hueidang* and ‘pirates’. The ‘pirates’ became the *towkays* and headmen of secret societies, while ‘piracy’ was transformed into coolie trade as well as other agricultural and mining enterprises. The coolie trade served a dual, self-reinforcing purpose. It provided important sources of capital accumulation, and the essential labour forces required to give

impetus to this economic development. The secret societies provided effective socio-economic organization and political control.⁵

The specific economic role and large-scale immigration characterize Nanyang Chinese history. Carl Trocki treats the history of the Nanyang Chinese mainly as a modern process of socio-economic interaction through substantial trading and migration from the early seventeenth century. He characterizes three outstanding trends in his periodization: the Chinese junk trade, the coolie trade and Chinese interaction with the European colonial systems. Accordingly Trocki sets out five periods of Nanyang Chinese history: the first three periods (1630–1830) began with the growth of the Xiamen (Amoy) trading networks, and covered the establishment of the *kongsi* settlements and growth of junk trade throughout Southeast Asia. The other two periods (1830–1910) signalled the decline of the junk trade and the absorption of Chinese coolies, and finished with the disempowerment of popular Chinese socio-economic structures and with their integration into the global colonial capitalist system.⁶

It was during the last two periods (1830–1910) that our Chinese actors and their ancestors emigrated to Southeast Asia. The Penang–Kedah Chinese community's homeland was mainly either in southern Fujian, centred on Amoy, or in eastern Guangdong, centred on Swatow. This corresponds generally to the region of emigrant communities that Chen Ta covered in his survey. It includes the long strip of territory commencing at Chao An (formerly Chao Chou), passing through Swatow, on the Guangdong border and through Amoy, terminating at Chuan Chou in southern Fujian. Chen selected three emigrant areas for his intensive investigation, of which two, X (northeast of Amoy) and Y (the sea coast of San Du, Hai Chen), are closely connected to the Chinese community, which is the subject of this book.⁷ Physically, our core Chinese community can be identified with two villages in Anqi county (represented in this book by Phuah Hin Leong, Lim Boon Har); several villages at Lim Dong (Lim Leng Cheak), Xiayang (Choong Cheng Kean) and Xinlin (Tan Ah Yu, Chong Sin Yew) around Amoy; and a small village around Swatow (Lim Lean Teng).

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian Chinese societies were essentially commercial and capitalist, and the majority of immigrants were wage labourers. This was in contrast to the agrarian societies in *qiaoxiang* and the resulting peasant identities of the immigrants.

In the nineteenth century, an unprecedented socio-economic development, based on cash crop planting and tin mining activities, was taking place in parts of Southeast Asia. In this process, the Chinese were transformed into urban, commercially oriented workers, or into miners and

planters. They were generally divided into two major groups of *'shang'* (the merchant class) and *'kung'* (the working class), while British–Malay officialdom formed *'shih'* (the scholar–officials) and the Malay peasantry were the *'nung'* (peasants), to borrow from Wang Gungwu.⁸ This was a time in which a colonial institutional framework was in the making, riven with conflicts and accommodations between Western colonialism and indigenous regimes. With respect to the Chinese, the process involved the fundamental issue of how the economic *'shang'* and *'kung'* classes of the immigrants could be incorporated into the framework of the political colonial and indigenous *'shih'* class. I summarize below the patterns of their socio-economic and political organizations and structures.

Three typical institutions formed the main social organizations and leadership of the Chinese communities; namely, the *kapitan* system, the secret societies and the *kongsi* system.

The Chinese *kapitan* system was a 'legitimate' Chinese communal headmen system recognized in the Portuguese, Dutch and English colonial settlements as well as in the Malay states. The *kapitans*, who were men of power and wealth, were officially vested with certain executive, administrative and even judicial powers within their own communities. It was essentially an intermediary system; a link between the immigrant Chinese communities and the colonial and indigenous authorities, a product of the indirect rule which most authorities found easiest to maintain. Its origin, duration and structure varied in different parts of Southeast Asia. The first Chinese *kapitan* was appointed in Portuguese Malacca in 1511 and one took office in Dutch Batavia in 1619. In the Netherlands Indies, a hierarchical structure evolved around the Chinese *kapitan* system: ranking below the *kapitan* there were majors, lieutenants and even sergeants. This practice persisted to the end of the nineteenth century throughout most of Southeast Asia, and was still extant at the beginning of the twentieth century in some Malay states, such as Kedah.⁹

Running parallel with the 'legitimate' Chinese *kapitan* system were the so-called 'secret societies', an overall term encompassing all putatively 'illicit' Chinese organizations in Southeast Asia. Two outstanding features of such organizations were the secretive and coercive aspects, based on a highly ritual 'hui' (namely, the triads or societies). Inextricably related to the two grand structural elements of immigrant identity and Southeast Asian transition, Chinese secret societies are the predominant socio-historical phenomenon in Southeast Asia. They were forms of internal Chinese government in larger local Southeast Asian settings. For this reason, secret societies are not treated here as disparate elements on their own, or as 'criminal gangs', 'primitive rebels' or 'mutual aid' societies with particular ritual and brotherhood ties in relation to national politics. Instead, they will be revealed as functioning as new creations of Chinese internal political form, co-existing alongside the colonial and indigenous

states and part of a historical process in line with Southeast Asian political development.¹⁰

The term *kongsi* loosely referred to any association of the Chinese, ranging from a business partnership to governments in West Borneo, secret societies and clan associations. Turning to the Chinese interpretation of the word, Wang Tai Peng defines *kongsi* as a form of open government in the early modern Southeast Asian Chinese societies of the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, based on extended partnerships and brotherhoods. This characterizes two important economic and political functions of the *kongsi*, in comparison to either the *kapitan* system or the secret societies.¹¹

These social organizations provided overlapping, complementary but differentiated forms of leadership for immigrants in the host societies. The *kapitan* system was an official and legitimate institution representing the community to the colonial and local government and other communities. In contrast, the secret societies were hidden autonomous governments to guide immigrants within their own community and were based on different kinship, clan and dialect brotherhood ties. The *kongsi* system created a public office, open government and economic entities founded on extended partnerships and brotherhoods. The *kapitan* could also be the headman of a secret society or of a *kongsi*. But the headmen of the secret societies or *kongsi* would not necessarily be the *kapitan*. The *kapitan* system was an ineffective control mechanism riddled with inherent weaknesses, owing to clan and dialect heterogeneity; the solution to shoring up this weakness was provided by the secret societies. The *kongsi* could also be the headquarters of the secret societies or the *kapitan*. The headmen of all three institutions were closely involved in their social groups and were actually the key actors in economic and commercial life. The wealthy *towkays* had no choice but to work through these institutions in the stage prior to the closing years of the nineteenth century, when these institutions were dominant.

The *kapitan* was officially abolished in the Straits Settlements in 1825. Its decline in British Malaya corresponded to the rising fortunes of the secret societies. As the government was aware of their vital role, these secret societies were tolerated by the British colonial government until 1869. In 1877, a British officer, the first protector of Chinese, was appointed on behalf of the government with responsibility to deal with Chinese issues. The secret societies were officially banned in 1890. This transposition coincided with the change in function of the Chinese *kongsi* at the end of the nineteenth century when they were transformed from being an autonomous political organization into socio-cultural *hui-kuan*, a public place for cultivating cultural and emotional, nostalgic ties. Both changes were incontrovertibly related to the increasing impact of the Western political establishment.

Behind the *kapitan* system, secret societies and *kongsi* loomed the important *towkays* whose wealth supported and maintained the power of

these institutions. The wealthy *towkays* were revenue farmers, tin miners, plantation proprietors and shop-keepers. Prior to the late nineteenth century, wealthy *towkays* were also the headmen of these three main institutions of control. Towards the very end of the nineteenth century, independent groups of wealthy *towkay* evolved out of the headmen of the *kapitan* system, secret societies and *kongsi* institutions. The suppression of the secret societies by the government authorities, and the erosion of the public economic and political functions of the *kongsi* by the *towkays*, undermined the legitimacy of these earlier powerful institutions. These changing dynamics of Chinese social organization marked the point at which the wealthy *towkays* and their families became one of the most important socio-economic elements in the Southeast Asian transition. They stood fairly and squarely at the centre of Southeast Asian Chinese socio-economic life. The stable colonial political and legal framework regulated economic competition and protected their economic interests. The *kongsis* were still important social organizations (e.g. clan associations), but financially they were dependent on the wealthy *towkays*. The *towkays* and their family estates played dominant roles in the public arenas of temple, school, *hui-kuan*, chamber of commerce and various clubs – the main public spheres of immigrant communities.

The first generation of our Chinese actors, who began to assume prominence in the 1880s, functioned in the transitional period of the suppression of the secret societies and the erosion of the political function of the *kongsi*. Still very much part of their Chinese world, they also maintained a close connection with the *kapitans*, the secret societies and the *kongsi*, which were still influential in the transitional period of the 1880s and 1890s. After the demise of this first generation, the *kapitans*, secret societies and *kongsi* were no longer dominant in the mainstream of the Southeast Asian Chinese communities, although in many ways they did not relinquish the field entirely. The *towkays*' rise as a wealthy new group in the Penang–Kedah area coincided with the broad historical shifts of the late nineteenth century. This progress could also be viewed as a natural development of the expansion of capital from the Straits Settlements into the hinterland of the Malay Peninsula. The breakthrough in integration between Kedah and Penang was manifested in the joint opium farm, the development of the Kulim district and, later, the rubber planting fever. These all provided great opportunities for the formation of a substantial Penang–Kedah Chinese community.

Kedah and the region

Interaction between people and their environment is, of its very nature, reciprocal, each influencing the other. Following the introduction of people – the Chinese community – now it is time to set them in a place,

Kedah, and in the wider region in which the Chinese community operated. The trajectories of Kedah's historical development are closely linked to the profile of the Chinese community.

Historical geography

Kedah today is one of the smaller states in the northwestern Malay Peninsula, with an area of only 5,870 square kilometres. Kedah's strategic position at the junction of the Straits of Malacca, the Malay Peninsula and the Isthmus of Kra made it a key element in the power struggle between the Western colonial and regional powers. Before the establishment of Penang and Singapore, Kedah had been an entrepôt port state on the trade route between West and East, India and China. By land, it linked Nakorn Si'thammarat, Singora, Patani and Trengganu via Siam and Burma to the Bay of Bengal. By sea, it connected the ports of peninsular Siam, the western Malay states, northern Sumatra and China. Trade and fluctuations of power shaped its historical vicissitudes and political misfortunes in its interactions with neighbouring regional and Western colonial powers.

Situated in such a strategically sensitive spot, the political map of Kedah had necessarily changed over time.¹² Pulau Teliborn, Terutau, Situl, Perlis, Penang, Province Wellesley and the district bordering Kerian in Perak were part of the territory of Kedah. The Island of Penang and Province of Wellesley on the Peninsula were ceded to the British in 1786 and 1800 respectively. In 1821, the Siamese invaded Kedah and Kedah was divided into four parts: Kedah proper, Situl, Perlis and Kubang Pasu. Later Kubang Pasu was restored to Kedah, but the position of Perlis and Situl continued to be territorially problematic. By the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, Pulau Teliborn, Terutau and Situl were recognized as Siamese territory, and Perlis became a state under British rule independent of Kedah, while the conflict over the Kerian issue between the governments of Kedah and Perak was only settled in the 1910s. When this was done, the political map of Kedah was finally settled.

Political and economic structure

Prior to colonial rule, many parallel polities existed, either in alliance or in rivalry in the Malay world. This Malay world displayed some cultural conformity in terms of shared language, literature, religion and lifestyle, but conversely it was also characterized by political fragmentation in terms of the lack of clearly defined governmental or legal structures, undefined territorial boundaries, migrating subjects and shifting allegiances. The most typical pattern of settlements centred on the coasts and rivers. The sultanate, district and village (*mukim*) consisted of three main institutions providing political and social control. The apex of each Malay state was

the ruler, called either the *Yang di-Pertuan* ('He who is made lord'), the *raja* (Hindu ruler), or the Sultan (Arabic ruler), whose role was to 'symbolize and to some extent to preserve the unity of the state'. The key institution was the district chief who 'had control of an area, generally a side valley, or a stretch of the valley of the main river of the state, and all the people in it'. While the village community 'consisted of one or more groups of kinsfolk whose identity as groups was often marked by residence in separate homesteads'. The headman of a village was called a *penghulu*. He was a member of a prolific, wealthy and prominent family group and might well be linked with higher authorities.¹³ This is a 'decentralized system of local government by district chiefs. The Sultan exercised little real power.'¹⁴ But Milner tries to understand the 'perceptions of their political motivation' from the perspective of Malay political culture. Contrary to Gullick's conclusion, Milner argues:

The raja is not only the 'key institution' but the only institution, and the role he plays in the lives of his subjects is as much moral and religious as political . . . Political life could be subsumed under one term: men considered themselves to be living not in states or under governments, but in a *kerajaan*, in the 'condition of having a raja'.¹⁵

Kedah's political structure in the late nineteenth century was essentially based on the traditional Malay pattern, namely, on that of the Malacca sultanate. However, in contrast to other Malay states, the Sultan's administration was centralized, and the internal socio-political order was highly stable. Unlike the situation in other Malay states, royal family members held most chieftainships in Kedah. The district chieftain's share of the revenue was smaller than in other areas. Most sources of revenue were farmed out to the Chinese, over which the Sultan maintained absolute control. Missing out financially, the district chieftains' power was further weakened by the Sultan's control over the other main group of officials. In Kedah, all the *penghulu* were appointed by the Sultan, rather than by the district chieftains as in other west coast states.¹⁶ The most valuable districts in Kedah in economic terms were Kota Star, Kuala Muda and Kulim. Kota Star, the centre of the rice production area, fell automatically in the royal district, directly controlled by the Sultan. Kuala Muda was another rice district, under the authority of Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Sultan's uncle and closest advisor. Kulim, the only substantial tin district in the state with the largest Chinese population, was placed under Tunku Mohammed Saad, another uncle of the Sultan.¹⁷

The economic structure in Kedah exhibited the following features. First, subsistence economy was predominant and rice cultivation was the basic economic activity (preponderantly for the Malays). Corresponding

to this subsistence economy were the institutions of *kerah* (compulsory labour) and slavery (particularly debt-slavery), through which the Sultan secured the services of his people. The tin mining and other commercial planting were of a complementary nature, in contrast to the situation in the other western Malay states. Second, immigrant Chinese played the most important role in the state revenue collecting. Most revenues from the major economic activities in Kedah were leased out to the Chinese revenue farmers. Third, Kedah's linkage with Penang was one of the most essential elements in the maintenance of the state economy. Penang provided a very important market and channel, not only for Kedah's agricultural suppliers, but also for capital accumulation.¹⁸

In the nineteenth century, whilst Kedah was politically an independent state, albeit under the suzerainty of Siam, commercially it was a mere dependency of Penang.¹⁹ Most of the revenue farmers in Kedah were either prominent Penang merchants or associates of these merchants. In order to do business in Kedah, these merchants appointed their representative there, usually a local Chinese resident.²⁰ Many prominent Penang Chinese merchants established large enterprises in Kedah. Put simply, the revenue farming system was the whole basis for Kedah government revenue, and these farms were almost entirely in the hands of the Chinese. The Chinese revenue farmers were involved in opium, gambling, spirits, pawnbroking, rice and paddy, customs, ferry, poultry, tin, timber, cattle, pig, egg, markets – covering almost every aspect of Kedah's economy. Besides securing revenue farms, the Chinese opened plantations and mines, erected mills and engaged in commerce. The first British advisor to Kedah, Hart, also admitted, 'Kedah owes her prosperity to a large extent to Chinese enterprise'.²¹

After Kedah was placed under the British colonial rule in 1909, both the political and economic structures were subject to radical changes. Politically, with Kelantan, Perlis, Trengganu and Johor, Kedah fell under the Unfederated Malay States (UMS), with British indirect rule exercised through a system of British advisors. The state council took over the Sultan's power and the latter was reduced to being a symbolic sovereign ruler. Behind the state council was the British advisor, who actually directed the administration of the Kedah government and acted as liaison between Kedah and the high commissioner's office in Singapore. Economically, forced labour and debt-slavery were formally abolished in order to meet the requirements of the new liberal market economy.²² The Chinese revenue monopoly was destroyed and gradually taxation was put under the aegis of the state. Rubber and other commercial crops played an important role in state revenue, and Kedah was not dethroned from its traditional position as the premier rice planting state in Malay Peninsula. The Chinese were pioneers in rubber planting in Kedah, their ownership of estates being the most important impetus in this agricultural venture, at

least before 1921.²³ But in the ownership of large estate (of 100 *relongs* and over), the Europeans had the dominant interest.²⁴ Compared with the predominant tin mining and rubber planting economy in the Federated Malay States and the subsistence paddy economy in the UMS, Kedah's socio-economic structure [together with that of Johor] is categorized as 'midway between the Federation on the one hand and Kelantan and Trengganu on the other'.²⁵

Brief history

Kedah had been a weak Malay sultanate, surrounded by stronger regional power-holders and European colonial powers. Trade flows and power balancing were the two most striking elements that shaped Kedah's regional interaction and hence its historical development.

Kedah was a prosperous trade entrepôt when its foundations were laid in the fourth century. But Kedah's prosperity was soon overshadowed by the rapid rise of the major maritime trading empire, Srivijaya, at the end of the seventh century.²⁶ Srivijayan influence advanced from the city-states of East Sumatra to the isthmian region of the Malay Peninsula, from the small trading ports to the kingdom of Sunda in western Java and the islands of the intervening seas.²⁷ Under Srivijaya, Kedah attained its apogee as the peninsular node of the Srivijayan thalassocracy.²⁸ But the glory of Srivijaya had waned by the early eleventh century.²⁹ Facing political facts, Kedah had accepted Siam as overlord by the end of the thirteenth century.³⁰

During the fifteenth century, two important elements shaped Kedah's development, namely, the rise of Malacca and the conversion to Islam. The rise of Malacca signalled a new impetus to the propagation of Islam in Southeast Asia. It also replaced Srivijaya as the regional political and commercial centre, being strong enough to withstand Siamese expansion into the Malay Peninsula. Islam as a political instrument of great potential value was viewed shrewdly by the Malacca dynasty to promote their political and commercial interests.³¹ The same considerations drove a *raja* of Kedah to pay a visit to Malacca in 1474 to obtain the honour of the ceremonial royal band.³² Kedah's hopes were soon dashed as, by 1511, Malacca had fallen into the hands of the Portuguese.

The European presence was a watershed in the sense that it marked the creation of new economic and political entities centred on respective European powers. The power hierarchy hence would be that of the new European colonial powers, traditional regional Southeast Asian powers and small local states. The entrenched rivalries between political and economic centres placed small local states in great uncertainty as to their political fortunes, in the meantime shaping their active strategy of playing one against the other. The rivalries were intensified by frequent internal

dynastic feuds.³³ The process of interaction and adaptation was therefore far from uncomplicated.

The lease of Penang by Kedah to the British in 1786 was the active response of a weak state to counter incursions by dangerous neighbouring centres. Potential danger to Kedah threatened from three directions: the expected Burmese invasion of Siam (the Ava dynasty), the imminent Siamese invasion of Kedah and the Bugis-dominated sultanate of Selangor. The aim of the lease was 'to secure and insure Kedah's permanent independence' by obtaining British military and naval assistance.³⁴ While, for the British, their strategic considerations were to deal with the defence of the Indian empire and the protection of the trade route to China. Hence, the establishment of the British base in Penang had great implications. First, from then on the British would be an important factor in the regional politics touching upon Kedah affairs, which pertinently gave Kedah some flexibility in dealing with its external relations. Second, it greatly changed the economic development of Kedah. This marked the transformation of Kedah from a trade-oriented economy, as an important local or even regional entrepôt, into an agrarian economy (rice-producing) as a food supply base for Penang. In turn, Kedah later became an investment target for Penang's commercial capital (mainly Chinese). This ensured that Kedah was a relatively prosperous state in the early decades of the twentieth century, setting it apart from the other Unfederated Malay States, such as Kelantan and Trengganu.

Bold as it was, Kedah's initiative did not change its position structurally in regional politics, or completely realize its expected aims. Kedah's hope of political and economic reinforcement was diluted by international and regional power struggles. In the south, a political alliance was made between the British and Dutch, a rapprochement between these rivals forced by the Napoleonic War in Europe. The British occupied the Dutch possessions of Malacca (1795), Sumatra and Java (1811) in order to resist the French. After the end of the Napoleonic war, the British and Dutch negotiated the return of the former Dutch possessions and the division of spheres of influence. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 defined the political map and reconfirmed the British presence and trade privileges in the Straits of Malacca. In the north, Kedah's position was influenced by the conflicts between the British and Burmese on the one hand and the Siamese and the Burmese on the other. The common enemy, Burma, drove the British and Siamese into a compromise concerning the western Malay states. Though they undeniably did try to get Burmese help, before it could arrive, Kedah was faced with an imminent Siamese invasion.

The Siamese invasions of Kedah in 1821 may be seen as a punishment for Kedah's challenge of its authority. In the two decades between 1821-42, Kedah's impact upon its traditional political centre, Siam, came from two sides. First, the Siamese rule had been seriously challenged by

the Kedah Malays in three uprisings of 1828–9, 1831–2 and 1838–9 respectively.³⁵ In a diplomatic balancing act, the Sultan turned not only to Penang but also to Burma, and applied secretly to the Ava dynasty for assistance against its traditional enemy, the Siamese. The exiled Kedah Sultan (who had escaped from Kedah to Penang after the Siamese invasion, then from Penang to Province Wellesley, to Malacca, to Perak) unequivocally indicated his determination to restore Kedah's territory. This situation forced the Siamese to re-examine their policy in Kedah. The other determining factor in Kedah–Siam relations was linked to the British. If the Siamese invasion of Kedah was a strong reaction to that state's challenge and claim to its independence, for the British, this invasion meant a disregard of Britain's presence in the region. Of course, this related to other British involvements in the region, such as its interests in Burma and North Sumatra. But, by 1826, the situation was quite different: the Treaty of London (1824) defined the interests of Great Britain and the Netherlands, and the Anglo–Burmese War (1824–6) was coming to an end. Now, the time was ripe for them to make some arrangements to adjust regional politics. The Treaty of Burney, which set a framework not only for Anglo–Siamese relations, but also for future Anglo–Kedah relations and Siamese–Kedah relations, was signed in 1826. The later settlements of Kedah, 1839–41, also fell within this framework, which set a new stage for Thai–Malay tributary relations in the period prior to 1882.

The Chinese in Kedah

Having sketched the general characteristics of the Chinese in Southeast Asia and the development of Kedah, it is time to turn attention to the specific local background of the Chinese. In doing this it is most important to emphasize the significant role of the Penang Chinese community in the Kedah economy. This will be discussed in detail throughout the book. However, in order to have the main actors properly located, this is the appropriate place to introduce the local background of the Chinese community in Kedah.

The Chinese connection with the Malay Peninsula was almost as long-standing as that with India.³⁶ The link can be traced back at least to the seventh century AD. Although they were there, little is known about the Chinese in Kedah during this time. A European record mentions that, in 1751, Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Abidin Syad (1741–78) [of Kedah] 'would not permit the widow of a Frenchman to go away, but made up matters so well, that she married a Chinese Christian'.³⁷ It was said that there were around 60 Chinese families in Kedah when Francis Light occupied Penang in 1786.³⁸ A *Kapitan China* of Kedah paid a visit to Captain Light in Penang with a present of fishing nets shortly after Light's arrival on the island. This *kapitan* was Koh Lay Huan, whose descendants played a leading role in the Penang–Kedah Chinese community for generations.³⁹ Koh Lay Huan, better

known as Chewan in official documents, was from Zhang Zhou, in Fujian province.⁴⁰ There is another important point mentioned by Light:

Tuanka [*towkay*] China is an old fox. He has little to do with the government, but being rich, and having married a daughter of the old King, he bears a considerable sway in their Becharas or Council.⁴¹

It is also clear that the Chinese settlement in Province Wellesley must have spilled over into Kedah from an early date. Before the British acquired Province Wellesley in 1800, the Chinese had already settled on the coast of Kedah at Batu Kawan, opposite the most southerly part of Penang Island.⁴²

There are no figures for the Chinese population in Kedah in the nineteenth century. Strangely, in 1839, Newbold did not mention the Chinese in Kedah, but confined himself to describing that Kedah's population 'consists chiefly of Siamese, Samsams, Malays, and Semangs'.⁴³ But it is clear that, demographically speaking, unlike the Thais and the Indians, the Chinese were not important before the mid-nineteenth century. The most important component of the population of the state were the indigenous Kedah Malays, comprising at least 90 per cent of the total population at the close of the century. The most important minority groups during the nineteenth century were the Thais and the Samsams.

The significant influx of the Chinese into Kedah proper is a phenomenon of the post-1860 period, but the number must still have been small.⁴⁴ The Kedah Malay records of the 1880s make frequent references to Chinese, and particularly to those in the district of Kulim, a southern border town where the Malay authorities estimated the number of Chinese to be around 6,000.⁴⁵ From Swettenham's confidential report of 1889, it is known that in Kedah there are 'a few thousands of Chinese, [...] about 70,000 Malays and about 200 Tamils'.⁴⁶ While in the first annual report of Kedah in 1905-6, G.C. Hart only noted 'there is also a very considerable Chinese element, principally in the mining districts'.⁴⁷

The largest influx of Chinese immigrants into Kedah came during the period 1900-25. The most spectacular period for the growth of Chinese population was, not unexpectedly, in the decade of 1911-21. The high rate of increase can be attributed to two factors: one was internal to Kedah itself, namely the extension of rubber cultivation; the other lay outside Kedah, namely the moving of a large proportion of these Chinese immigrants from the Federated Malay States to the Unfederated Malay States. Beginning in the late 1920s, there was a trend for the number of fresh immigrants to decline. In the decade of 1921-31, there was an abrupt fall in the rate of increase of the Chinese population. This was the immediate result of a decline in the number of immigrants as the movement to set up

large-scale rubber cultivation in southern Kedah lost impetus after the 1921 depression in the rubber-growing industry. The slightly inflated rate of increase for the decade of 1931–47 was partly the outcome of the longer period it covered.

In Kedah, there are four large Chinese dialect groups present: Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese and Hakka. These four covered over 91 per cent of the total Chinese community in Kedah. The other dialect groups are Hailam, Huichew, Kuangsai and a number of very small groups. The Teochews had formed the largest single dialect group since the early days of Chinese immigration to the state. In time, their relative position within the overall community gradually decreased with the expansion in the number of speakers from other dialect groups, especially the Hokkien, Hakka and Cantonese. The explanation for the predominance of the Teochews in Kedah is the simple fact that the state is contiguous with the British settlement of Province Wellesley, an agricultural plantation area and large colony of Teochews. All Chinese dialect groups in the pioneering years in Kedah were engaged in agricultural occupations.⁴⁸ However, the main Chinese actors in this book are all members of the Hokkien business families, although the Teochew community is also touched upon (in the role of the influential *towkay* Lim Lean Teng, see Chapter 9). This was because Kedah was greatly influenced by the Penang Chinese community, in which the Hokkiens played a dominant role.

Kedah was an agricultural state. The level of urbanization was relatively low, being largely a phenomenon of the nineteenth century that accompanied the rubber planting and the large influx of immigrant labour. Except for the primary ‘town’, Alor Star, urbanization developed mainly in the southern districts where immigrant settlement predominated. In the towns the Chinese formed nearly half and the Malays about one-third of the population. This was similar to the situation in Johor and Perlis, but different from what was found in the Straits Settlements (SS) and Federated Malay States (FMS), where the Chinese formed two-thirds to three-quarters of the urban population. The largest Chinese population was concentrated in three districts: Kota Star (North Kedah), Kuala Muda and Kulim (South Kedah). The second largest Chinese districts were four in number: Kubang Pasu, Baling, Bandar Bahru and Yan. This distribution corresponded to the economic pattern of these districts: Chinese settlement was always concentrated in the areas of commerce, tin mining and rubber planting.

To sum up, the Chinese community in Kedah actually involved two elements: one was a Kedah Chinese element, i.e. those Chinese who were Kedah residents but depended on the Chinese community in Penang; the other was a Penang element, i.e. the Chinese who were Penang residents but played a leading role in the Kedah economy. As this book progresses, it will show how this Chinese community interacted in the local and regional contexts.

NETWORKING REGIONAL INTERACTIONS, 1882–9

The 1880s marked the beginning of a transition. This period was a prelude to the imminent great Southeast Asian socio-economic transformation of the early twentieth century, a transition during which British colonialism consolidated its political establishment on the Malay Peninsula, an essential preparation for the influx of Western capital on a large scale, and therefore a golden era for Chinese capital and capitalists. Following the commercial penetration of Straits Chinese capital, the British political establishment in the Federated Malay States was being promoted, while the Unfederated Malay States, including Kedah, were still under Siamese supremacy. The economy was left in the hands of the Chinese through the revenue farming system, bolstered by the large influx of Chinese labour into the tin mines and contributing to the growing development of cash agricultural activities such as sugar, tapioca and coconut plantations.

In the arenas of the region, there was an active manifestation of the different states of the British, Siamese and Malays. Physically the interaction of states centred on the Penang–Kedah axis, while the political spheres were embodied in such metropolitan areas as Singapore, Bangkok and London. Running parallel to Kedah's unique and contradictory position between British Penang and Siamese Bangkok were three main issues: the British consulate, the opium farm and Chinese business. Fundamental to all three issues were the immigrant Chinese. It was the very role of Chinese business that highlighted the multi-ethnic fluidity of states. In other words, Chinese economic activities shaped British–Siamese–Malay power politics, shaped the regional business networks and shaped the landscape of the multi-interactions of the state, region and ethnicity.

Central to all these interactions was the opium issue. Opium brought in maximum revenue to the state and maximum profit to Chinese *towkays*. The British and Malays depended mainly on Chinese opium farmers who provided the largest part of the revenue. The Chinese *towkays* depended mainly on opium for capital accumulation, which in turn benefited state and society through Chinese investment in the industry and commerce. The Chinese coolies depended mainly on opium for their daily portion of

comfort. Hence, opium underpinned the economic system and upheld the social order. Opium institutionalized the Kedah–Penang interactions, legitimized Chinese regional business networks, polarized the family–state relationships and complicated the regional multi-ethnic politics. Opium confirmed the ‘ethnicizing’ of the society, with the economy – the farm – being dominated by the Chinese, while politics revolved around the competition and conflict between the British settlement of Penang and the Malay state of Kedah.

To contextualize the process, the following loci are identified: the British consulate, the opium farm, the Chinese family and the linkage town of Kulim. These formed the fundamental frontiers for Penang–Kedah interactions. The aim is to show how each locus was related to the fundamental issue of opium, how each locus helped to address the Chinese business networks and power relations.

The British consulate and regional power politics

The British consulate was a special arrangement to provide the British authorities in Penang with an expedient mechanism for the promotion of their trading interests in the Siamese western Malay states (mainly Kedah). Taking into account the other two main British political movements, it is not difficult to understand this. The first move was political intervention in the later Federated Malay States of Perak, Selangor, Pahang and Negri Sembilan. Since the mid-1870s, the British had placed these four Federated Malay States under their protection through the imposition of the British Resident system. The second political move was the signing of a new treaty between Britain and Johor in 1885, by which the British recognized Temenggong Abu Bakar as the Sultan of Johor for their part, whereas Johor accepted British control over its foreign affairs.¹ As for the remaining Malay states of Kedah, Perlis, Trengganu and Kelantan, in name they remained under Siamese suzerainty, indubitably a political complication. Their economies were generally insignificant to the British. However, Kedah seemed an exception because its economy was well tied in to that of British Penang.

The establishment of a British consulate in Kedah in the 1880s hence suggests another model of British expansion, which was related to the instrumental role of Chinese commercial penetration.² The whole scheme was actually initiated by the local British authorities in Penang. The main argument was to protect British subjects, the majority of whom were Chinese, but also included some Malays.³ It had been the practice that the resident councillor in Penang referred any complaint lodged by a British subject to the Siamese consul at the port. From there it was passed on to the British minister and consul general in Bangkok, and through him to the Siamese government. After long inquiry in the locality, the instructions

finally reached the local Malay rulers through the Siamese government. The very complicated bureaucratic procedures were compounded by the physical difficulty of communication by land between Bangkok and the western Malay states. British subjects and local colonial officials complained to the British minister in Bangkok of ‘oppression at the hands of the local rajahs’, or of ‘inability to obtain redress for private wrongs . . . by persons under the jurisdiction of those rajahs’.⁴ However, for the Penang local authorities, protecting the interests of British subjects was just a pretext. Its real motive was to place the western Siamese Malay states (particularly Kedah) under its effective influence.

In 1886, following discussions between the British minister resident in Bangkok and the governor in Singapore it was agreed that direct communication with the local rajah should be sought. It was proposed that a government agent with consular power be appointed in Kedah.⁵ The idea had got support from the Colonial Office who undertook to seek the Foreign Office’s approval.⁶ The Foreign Office had no objection to such an appointment, provided that the cost could be charged to the colonial funds.⁷ The British resident minister in Bangkok was then instructed to proceed to deal with the Siamese government. In March 1888, the Foreign Office concurred that responsibility for the appointment of a consul in Kedah should be given to the resident councillor of Penang. The consular districts included the Siamese Malay states on the western coast of the Malay Peninsular, including Kedah, Situl, Perlis, Phuket and so forth.⁸

To gauge the reaction of the Penang local press towards this appointment, it will be enough to cite the comment made by the *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle* (henceforth abbreviated as *PGSC*):

The creation of this post must be a source of considerable congratulation to all of our readers who are conversant with the affairs of the Malay Peninsula . . . It is only a tardy acknowledgement of responsibilities . . . where British ‘prestige’ was at stake, and where, as in the case of Kedah, we had distinct liabilities to meet.⁹

Having assumed consular rank in the meantime, the British resident councillor in Penang usually paid periodical seasonal visits to the western Siamese Malay states to fulfil his consular duty. This will be dealt with in the following chapters.

Incorporating the Kedah opium farm

Running parallel to the political institution of the consular system in managing Penang–Kedah interactions was the economic institution of the opium farm. The economic institution referred to an arrangement by

which the Kedah opium farm should be incorporated into the Penang opium farm. The reconstruction of the economic institution indicates just how closely it was related to the consular system. Each system supported and facilitated the other.

Opium contraband

Two different opium farm systems operated in the Malay Peninsula. In the Straits Settlements, opium was farmed out to Chinese, usually called opium farmers, at a fixed price for a period of three years. The farmer thereby had the monopoly to deal with raw opium and manufacture it into a preparation ready for smoking, called *chandu*. The government supervised the opium processing and fixed the wholesale and retail prices. Both the farmer and consumers were highly taxed, their contribution providing a mainstay of the local revenue. In the Federated Malay States, the areas were divided into the coast farm where there were no mines, and the inland farm, which included the mines and all the hinterland. The coast farm was let and worked on the same system as the Straits Settlements, but the retail price was much lower than in the Straits Settlements. The inland farmers were mine-owners and other large *towkays*, who imported their own opium after paying the government duty, manufactured it into *chandu* and sold it to their own employees after paying licensing fees.¹⁰

Opium, as a government monopoly, was imported into the Straits Settlements and then shipped to the Malay states.¹¹ As the retail price in Straits Settlements was higher than that in neighbouring Malay states, reflecting the different levels of socio-economic development, the exported opium supply was manufactured and resold back in the Straits Settlements. It had been a chronic problem to the government there, as the farmers frequently complained and bemoaned a great loss of revenue. A local colonial official argued:

The greater ... the amount ... the smuggler could deal, the greater risk he would venture on, and the greater his profits. Profit to him would mean loss to the farmer and reduced revenue to the government.¹²

Two patterns of opium smuggling can be distinguished. One was long-distance contraband, brought in from outside Southeast Asia, from such places as Turkey, Persia, British India and southern China, and then sold at considerable discount rates. The other was local smuggling from areas surrounding the Straits Settlements, where Johor and the Dutch possessions in the south, Kedah and Sumatra in the north, became the headquarters of an enormous illicit traffic.

The contradiction between the British general free trade policy and

opium as a government monopoly, the co-existence of various political entities (British, Dutch and indigenous), the geo-economic linkages mixed with the rival Chinese networks, all contributed to the prevalence of smuggling.¹³ In the nineteenth century in the Dutch colony of Java, at least half of the opium consumption was officially illegal. Chinese *towkays* brought in wholesale opium from Turkey, India and Singapore through the intermediary services of locally based trading houses. Through delivery networks centred in Bali, opium was then trans-shipped to Java, Celebes, Riau, Sumatra and Borneo. The Chinese-dominated opium smuggling networks were models of multi-ethnic collaboration involving native officials, not to mention European and Eurasian participation.¹⁴ In the regions of Penang and Kedah, such smuggling activities had been part of the local scene. In 1824 a rival Cantonese syndicate began to challenge a long-term Hokkien monopoly that also controlled the revenue farms of Kedah. The strategy was based on engaging in extensive smuggling rackets based in Kedah.¹⁵ In Singapore and Johor, periodical conflicts of interest also arose from opium smuggling. Since the 1840s, Johor had become a base for smuggling opium into Singapore. To check this situation, arrangements were reached several times for the two farms to be merged into one and the same Singapore farm. But it seems that the prevalence of smuggling led to another split before long.¹⁶

Structural change

A structural change in the 1880s should also be taken into account. With the new openness of the colonial economy, the colonial government intensified its control over Chinese society in general and the farming system in particular. Encouraged by the prospect of economic prosperity, the government raised the price of retail *chandu*; and stimulated by the deliberate government cultivation of internal Chinese competition, the rent of the opium suddenly soared. The restructuring of the opium farm in the 1880s, like another restructuring in early 1900s (see Chapter 5, pp. 96-100), drove many opium farmers to bankruptcy and generated a long process of bargaining between farmers and government. In Singapore, two outside farmers, Koh Seang Tat and Chew Sin Yong, both from Penang, were deliberately brought in to secure the 1880-2 and 1883-5 opium farms.¹⁷ The colonial authorities were happy that the annual rent had suddenly risen from \$400,000 in 1879 to \$600,000 in 1881, a net increase of \$200,000, or 50 per cent. In 1883-5, there was another huge rise, a net increase of \$360,000, or 52 per cent. The inevitable upshot of this restructuring scheme was a heavy loss to the farmers, and the natural consequence was a big upswing in the smuggling activities of the local rival syndicates.¹⁸ In Penang, the colonial authorities were again pleased by the fact that, in 1888, the same Chew Sin Yong came back to secure the

Penang farm (1889-91) at a monthly rent of \$95,050, an increase of \$25,050 over the previous term (1886-8). But, over a period of 15 months in 1889-90, Chew Sin Yong claimed a loss of \$420,650, posing a great financial problem to the government. The government was forced to reduce the monthly rent from \$95,050 to \$67,000 from October 1890 to 1891.¹⁹

When they found themselves bankrupt, the farmers either requested a reduction in the revenue or pressed the government to check the smuggling by placing the neighbouring Malay states under Straits Settlements' control. Even without actually having to declare themselves bankrupt, the farmers might still have claimed a heavy loss, if they saw any chance of a reduction. The real economics of the farms was hence a finely balanced competition and a division between the government and the farmers in terms of revenue (to the former) and profits (to the latter), each trying to maximize their share. Although there was a fixed annual rent, exceptions did occur, once there were such problems as too high tender prices, bad economic conditions and especially smuggling. In turn, once there were possibilities for reductions, it is impossible to rule out that all these issues might have been used and exaggerated by the farmers. To raise the rent, the government encouraged strong competition among rival Chinese farmers. In counter moves, the farmers either formed a ring before the auction or reported a heavy loss afterwards and requested a reduction in the monthly rent payment. Whatever recourse was taken, the best justification was always the widespread smuggling. Smuggling formed a focus for these different sorts of competition, between the rival Chinese farmers, between the parallel neighbouring governments and between the government and the farmers.

Coinciding with this restructuring of Chinese competition and the opium economy was the reorganization of the opium farm to comply with the political and economic geography. The government secured higher tenders from farmers, as a condition for which farmers requested the government should secure the neighbouring farms in order to avoid smuggling. These structural changes in the opium farms set in place a new and relatively stable framework for the next few decades (until 1909, when the government took them over). The regional reorganization of opium farms was arranged so that the Singapore opium farmers should in the meantime tender for the Johor farm, the Malacca opium farmers for the Negri Sembilan farm and the Penang opium farmers for the Perak and Kedah farms. The arrangement posed no problem in Negri Sembilan, as it was a Federated Malay State under British protection. In Johor, a memorandum of understanding was reached in 1885 between the government of the Straits Settlements and the so-called 'independent state' of Johor.²⁰ But for Kedah, the issue seemed more complicated.

The Kedah opium farm

From the mid-1880s on, the Sultan of Kedah and the British authorities in Penang held frequent discussions on placing the Kedah opium farm under Penang's control. But the negotiations progressed at a snail's pace. The Kedah opium farm included: (i) the Kuala Muda, Sungei Daun and Bagan Samah farms; (ii) the Kulim farm; and (iii) the Langkawi farm. The first two farms were the objects of the discussions for the possible placement under Penang's control. The Langkawi farm was never incorporated into the Penang farm, as it was a royal gift from the Sultan to his mother and managed by Choong Cheng Kean (see pp. 44-9 in this chapter). Upon the British request for the incorporation of the Kedah opium farm, the Sultan of Kedah did his utmost to put forward objections from the beginning of the negotiations sometime in 1887. The Sultan was concerned that Kedah would lose a source of revenue by placing the Kedah opium farm under the control of the Penang farm. Their path strewn with obstacles, the incorporation negotiations between the Sultan and the British resident councillor in Penang bumped along painfully.

In 1888, Maxwell, the resident councillor, wrote to the Sultan asking for his agreement on linking the Kuala Muda opium farm with the Penang syndicate. The Sultan agreed that opium farm tenders for Penang and Kuala Muda should be invited simultaneously.²¹ Striving to keep control, the Sultan insisted on two conditions: first, the Kuala Muda farm could only be held in the names of residents of Kedah; second, if the tender of Penang farmers was lower than others for the Kuala Muda farm, the Penang farmers must compensate the balance. Considering Kedah was under Siamese suzerainty, the Sultan skilfully cautioned that any mistaken decision could cause Siamese dissatisfaction.²² In September, the tender for the opium farm in Kuala Muda 1889-91 opened: the highest bid was \$27,400, made by Leko, the representative of the Penang farmer, Chew Sin Yong; while Choong Cheng Kean's bid was \$27,200. Choong Cheng Kean was a Kedah resident, and one of the closest friends of the Sultan and the royal family (see pp. 48-9). Leko's tender was higher than Cheng Kean's by only \$200. The Sultan instructed the Siamese consul in Penang to call both parties in for a settlement.²³ On behalf of the Penang farmer, the resident councillor in Penang wrote to the Sultan, asking him to lease the Kuala Muda farm to Leko. But the Sultan turned a deaf ear to this, explaining that Leko's tender had arrived later, after the noon deadline.²⁴

In June 1889, resident councillor Kynnersley wrote to the Sultan, asking Kedah to hand over the Sungei Daun and Bagan Samah opium farms to Penang. But the Sultan replied that he could not comply. The Sultan explained: (i) if the whole Kedah opium farm continued to be placed under the Penang opium farm, it would arouse more complaints from the

Chinese community in Kedah; (ii) he had already leased the Sungei Daun and Bagan Samah opium farms to the Kedah farmer and he could not renege on this contract.²⁵ In October 1889, Kynnersley raised this issue again, but the Sultan stood firm.²⁶ The attitude of the Sultan could be explained by Swettenham's report:

He [the Sultan] said this was the first he had heard about the farms, and if he had been communicated with and the position explained to him before the colony's farms were let, he would have been glad to make any fair arrangement for simultaneous letting. He seemed, however, a little afraid lest Kedah should suffer by a mutual arrangement which would benefit the Penang farmers and Penang revenues at his expense.²⁷

In a nutshell, in the dawn of a new era, the formation of the Penang-Kedah opium farm assumed a role as a part of the fundamental framework and as an object of regional political and economic interaction. These issues will be highlighted in later chapters, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chinese business networks: the Penang Lim family

The Chinese business networks justified the legitimacy of the political institution of the consulate system and the economic institution of the opium farm. Being at the centre of colonial-dominant economic life, the Chinese business networks encompassed all the interests of the Chinese, British and Malay communities. Therefore, they formed a sharp focus in the game in which Chinese were involved between the British and Malays, Malays between the British and Siamese, and British surrounded by the Siamese, Malays and Chinese.

Two patterns of Chinese family business networks have been identified: one was that of the Penang Chinese family Lim Leng Cheak; the other of the Kedah Chinese family Choong Cheng Kean. These two family business networks complemented each other in the dynamic process of integrating Kedah into the regional system. Each family network not only exemplified the whole Penang community and the whole Kedah community respectively, but also reflected the Sultan's conscious strategy of using different sets of communication systems in his regional interaction. More documentation and evidence to support this contention will be introduced in the following chapters. To set the general scene here, I will concentrate on the Penang Chinese family of Lim Leng Cheak. The Penang Lim family exemplified the pattern by which the Penang Chinese business community penetrated into a hinterland Malay state and, in turn, by which an upcountry Malay Sultan secured the capital, services and markets of the

former. This is no more than a setting of the scene. The performance of the family will be discussed at length in later chapters.

Family background

Lim Leng Cheak was one of the most important Penang Chinese *towkays* with large business concerns in Kedah. He was born in humble circumstances in Penang in 1850. His father was Lim It Kim (died in 1873), who emigrated to Penang from the coastal village of Sandu, in the vicinity of Xiamen (Amoy) in Fujian province, the earliest place from which these Chinese emigrated to Southeast Asia.²⁸ The leading members of the Penang Chinese community, like the Khoo, Lim, Tan, Ong, Cheah and Yeoh clans, came mainly from the villages in this area.



Plate 3.1 Lim Leng Cheak.



Plate 3.2 Tan Say Seang Neoh, the wife of Lim Leng Cheak.

It is said that Lim Leng Cheak's father made a fortune quite early. It was even said that Lim It Kim's wife – Lim Leng Cheak's mother – came from a Thai noble family. She was the daughter of a local Thai chieftain.²⁹ My research confirms the view that Lim Leng Cheak's father had made some money. Evidence suggests that Lim Leng Cheak's family was at least not poor, even if it were not very wealthy.³⁰ However, this does not exclude the possibility that the family legend of a local Thai chieftain ancestor was created after Lim Leng Cheak had become a wealthy Chinese *towkay*.

Lim Leng Cheak had at least seven wives, distributed between Kedah, Penang, Ipoh, southern Siam and Kuala Lumpur, which might be related

geographically to his business activities.³¹ I have no information about most of them, except for one secondary wife, Leow Thye Hai. She died on 3 May 1938 at the age of 63, and left behind four sons and four daughters.³² Lim Leng Cheak's chief wife was Tan Say Seang. Tan Say Seang 'was something of a planter and miner in her younger days, and spent a good deal of time on her estates and mines in Kedah'.³³ She was a very generous Chinese lady, who was ranked at number three as Hokkien top donor in Penang for more than half a century between 1850 and 1910.³⁴ Tan Say Seang became an ardent Buddhist after the death of her husband. She made pilgrimages to all the well-known Buddhist shrines in Siam, Burma, Ceylon and China and did a lot of work for charities there. In Penang itself, Tan Say Seang was entirely responsible for the building of the Perak Road Temple. She was also one of the main donors for the building of the Kek Lok Si Temple at Ayer Itam.³⁵

The family business network

Lim Leng Cheak's business extended tentacles from Penang to Sumatra, Kedah, Perak, Singapore, and even to Ceylon and Burma. His business involved shipping, trading, farming, milling, mining and planting. This encompassed the pepper trade, rice and sugar milling, opium and spirit farms, and coffee, coconut and tapioca plantations. In order to obtain a clear picture of his regional networks, I shall in the following section concentrate on three aspects of his business life: (1) as a shipowner; (2) as a rice miller, tin miner and planter; and (3) as a revenue farmer.

As a shipowner: Lim Leng Cheak began work as a clerk in a mercantile office in Penang. A few years later he launched his own business career by opening a general store. Through careful management, he was able to save a little capital and went to northern Sumatra, where he entered into a

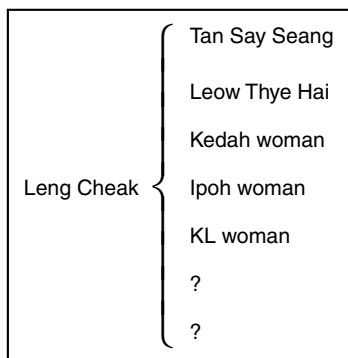


Figure 3.1 Wives of Lim Leng Cheak.

partnership with another Chinese merchant.³⁶ With his business partner, whose name is not available, Lim Leng Cheak was engaged in the profitable pepper trade between Sumatra and Penang. Later the partnership ran a fleet of steam ships between the same ports. In 1879, Lim Leng Cheak took over the entire concern when his partner retired from the business. At this time, he started to assert himself as an important business lobbyist. In late 1879, a group of British and Chinese merchants, who were interested in the trade between Penang and Sumatra, joined together to lodge a complaint against the Netherlands Indies government. They protested that privileges which were not enjoyed by British ships, such as those belonging to ‘Messrs Leng Cheak & Co.’, had been conceded to Dutch vessels and their cargoes in Aceh, an important port in north Sumatra. V. Krieger proposed and Lim Leng Cheak seconded that the minutes of evidence be printed for circulation together with the report.³⁷

Rice was very scarce and expensive on the coast of Sumatra, enabling Lim Leng Cheak to make a profit of \$10,000 by selling 3,000 bags of rice on one trip.³⁸ Extracts from the logs of Lim Leng Cheak’s steamers, the *Cornelia* and the *Eleanor*, in 1879 illustrate his trade in Aceh and his networks which penetrated into local society:

The British steamer *Cornelia* sailed for Olehleh on 8 August 1879 – to obtain pass for 9 or 10 different open ports on the North and East Coast of Acheen [Aceh] for which she had cargo of 3,000 bags Rice, some Piece Goods and 25 Buffaloes. There were passengers on board 44 Achinese &c. Arrived at Olehleh 9.30 p.m. [on the] 10th . . . Next morning on delivery of ships papers and request for Pass for Junkaboya, Pedir, Ayer Laboe, Somalangan, Passangan, Klampang Dua, Telluk Samoi, Kertie and Edie. The Harbour Master declared these Ports under blockade and that no pass could be issued . . . Captain Reid then called upon the Governor but was again referred to the harbour master. By the harbour master’s attendants on 12 August after various efforts to meet him, the captain and supercargo were ordered away. On that day the passengers were all landed for inspection.³⁹

In the 1880s, Lim Leng Cheak had at least four steamers: the *Cornelia*, the *Eleanor*, the *Washi*, and the *Rosa*. In February 1885, hoping to expand his business connection with northern Sumatra, Lim Leng Cheak and eight other key Penang Chinese traders, including Khoo Thean Teik, the famous head of a secret society, petitioned the secretary of state for the colony. They urged the British government to protect the Penang trade with Aceh.⁴⁰ Shipping not only brought Lim Leng Cheak the opportunity to rub shoulders with Western merchants and the local community in northern Sumatra, it also linked him to other important shipowners in

Penang, such as the Khaw family, Lee Phee Yeow and Chuah Yu Kay (see Chapter 4).

As a rice miller, miner and planter: If the transition from petty clerk to an owner of general store marked the beginning of Lim Leng Cheak's business career, the business transactions in northern Sumatra laid a solid foundation for his even greater future success in Kedah. From the 1880s, Lim Leng Cheak extended his business concerns from northern Sumatra in the south to Kedah in the north, where he began to diversify his investments in rice milling and tapioca planting. As one of the pioneer rice millers in northern Malaya, he was responsible for introducing the first rice mill in Penang under the Khie Heng Bee, in partnership with Phuah Hin Leong, Chuah Yu Kay, Cheah Joo Jin and Cheah Ewe Ghee. In Kedah, Lim Leng Cheak was on very cordial terms with the Sultan, Abdul Hamid Shah. In 1888, the Sultan granted him a 20-year monopoly as an inducement, when he established a rice mill in Alor Star. These will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

As a revenue farmer: Lim Leng Cheak was one of the important revenue farmers attached to a dominant Penang interest group who also monopolized the Singapore opium farms in the 1880s. This group had great interests in mining, planting, shipping and revenue farming. They were led by the prominent Baba Chinese, Koh Seang Tat, whose family had been influential since the founding of Penang; other important members included Lee Phee Yeow, Ong Beng Teik, Khoo Thean Teik and, of course, the Khaw family. It is impossible to document the whole list of revenue farms run by Lim Leng Cheak. However, through a case illustration taken from the southern border town of Kulim in Kedah, it is possible to trace a picture of Lim Leng Cheak's business career in this field.

Most of Lim Leng Cheak's revenue farms in Kedah were concentrated in the Kulim district. Lim Leng Cheak's business ring in Kulim involved secret society headmen, revenue farmers and Chinese *kapitans*, from both Kulim and Penang. The Kulim Chinese *kapitan* in the period under study was Chiu Ah Cheoh, also named Chiu Cheoh Yuen. Chiu was a Cantonese, from the Tai-shan district. He was a carpenter, whose professional knowledge was useful in opening up the Kulim jungle and subsequently in building houses. In 1880, he founded a temple called Lu Pan Ku Miao, or the Old Temple of Lu Pan, the patron saint of Chinese carpenters and the building trade. This temple was recorded as '*kongsi*' by the Kedah authorities, which suggested that it also functioned as the headquarters of a triad society, and that Chiu Ah Cheoh was one of its leaders.⁴¹ Chiu Ah Cheoh was closely involved in the opium, spirit, tin and pawnbroking farms in Kulim and he actually acted as Lim Leng Cheak's (and his partner Ong Beng Teik's) agent in Kulim. In 1889, some Chinese from Siam approached the Sultan of Kedah, offering to tender for the Kulim farms,

Table 3.1 A list of Captain Chiu Ah Cheoh's farms, 1889–91

<i>Farm</i>	<i>Annual rent (\$)</i>
Opium farm Kulim	28,600
Tin farm Kulim	10,200
Spirit farm Kulim	2,600
Pawnbroking farm Kulim	1,440
Timber farm Kulim	400
Opium farm Krian	4,600

Source: SC, no. 2.

but the Sultan declined their offer. The Sultan said for many years he had granted the Kulim opium, spirit and tin farms to Chiu Ah Cheoh, the agent of the Penang *towkays* Lim Leng Cheak and Ong Beng Teik⁴², for an annual rent of \$18,000.

There is no doubt that Lim Leng Cheak, Ong Beng Teik and Chiu Ah Cheoh controlled most of the Kulim revenue farms in the 1880s and early 1890s. Unfortunately it has proved impossible to find any personal details about Ong Beng Teik. He must have been one of the most prominent Chinese *towkays* in Penang during the late nineteenth century, and was probably related as either a brother or a cousin to Ong Boon Teik, a leading Penang merchant who was deeply involved in the secret society and Malay politics in Perak in 1870s.⁴³ As a representative of the Ong clan, Ong Beng Teik was a trustee of the Hokkien Cemetery between 1886–92.⁴⁴ He was also one of directors of the famous Penang Khean Guan Insurance Co.⁴⁵ Indubitably Ong Beng Teik was the partner of Lim Leng Cheak; they joined together to manager the Kulim opium farm in the 1880s. By linking up with Lim Leng Cheak, he also joined Koh Seang Tat in making a successful tender for the Singapore opium farm 1889–91.⁴⁶ My field investigation has also confirmed the fact that the secret society, Chinese *kapitan* and revenue farmer interacted to shape the profile of politics and economy in Kulim.⁴⁷

Chinese business networks: the Kedah Choong family

From a Penang perspective, what has been said in this chapter has served as an introduction to Lim Leng Cheak's family business networks in Kedah and the region. In the following section, a Kedah perspective is adopted to bring in another Chinese family, that of Choong Cheng Kean.

Choong Cheng Kean was the most important Kedah Chinese businessman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike Lim Leng Cheak, who was British Chinese in Penang, the case of Choong Cheng Kean as Kedah Chinese representative discloses another dimension in the

complex interactions between Penang–Kedah, Chinese–Malay, Kedah Chinese and Penang Chinese. Even more importantly, Choong Cheng Kean was actually the Sultan’s own Kedah agent whose job was to deal with the Penang business community. By exercising control over their own Kedah Chinese agent, the Sultan effectively protected his own interests. Hence, in the regional Penang–Kedah linkage, the Sultan developed two important complementary communication channels: one was Lim Leng Cheak from Penang; the other was Choong Cheng Kean from Kedah. In turn Choong Cheng Kean acted as a bridge between the Penang business community and the Kedah authorities. The Penang–Kedah opium linkage was manifested in the very role of Choong Cheng Kean, who had monopolized the Kedah opium farm at least during the late 1880s–1909 (with the exception of Kulim by Lim Leng Cheak before 1894). If the Lim Leng Cheak case provides a typical example of the Chinese regional business mobility from Penang to Kedah, then the Choong Cheng Kean case suggests mobility from Kedah to Penang.

Family background

Choong Cheng Kean was born on 16 June 1857, at Xiang Lu village, in the suburbs of Xiamen (Amoy), a neighbouring village to Lim Leng Cheak’s hometown. His father was Choong Chuo; his mother was named Wang Neoh (or Ong in Hokkien).⁴⁸ Choong Cheng Kean came from a poor family, in which he was the only son.⁴⁹ Choong Cheng Kean came to Southeast Asia at the age of 19, which suggests it occurred around the mid-1870s.⁵⁰ This is confirmed by the stone inscription in the family temple in China, which was established by his donation in 1907. It states that after 30 years in Nanyang, Cheng Kean came back to his home village. He worked first as a shop assistant in Tongkah, southern Siam, but before long he emigrated to Kedah. It was said that Cheng Kean was helped in establishing his business by his father-in-law, when Cheng Kean arrived in Kedah.⁵¹ In around 1881, Cheng Kean married Lim Gek Kee, a local Chinese woman in Alor Star, Kedah, although he was engaged to a girl in China. Like other classic stories, it was said that Lim Gek Kee sold her jewellery to help Cheng Kean to start a business.⁵²

In short, Cheng Kean was born in China, emigrated to southern Siam, made his mark in Kedah, and then moved to settle in Penang, later paying several visits back to China. This mobility was clearly reflected in his family life, in which at least four women were closely related to Cheng Kean. The first of these was Teoh Khuan Neoh. She was his wife in China, probably the girl to whom he had been engaged. This lady adopted several children and lived with Cheng Kean’s parents. The second was Lim Gek Kee from Kedah, whom we have mentioned above. She was the principal wife. She had two sons by Cheng Kean, Choong Lye Hock and Choong



Plate 3.3 Choong Cheng Kean. This photo is still kept in his home village in South China.

Lye Hin, who continued to carry on the family business after Cheng Kean's death. The third was Lim Gaik Teen Neoh, from Tongkah, Siam. She was said to have married Cheng Kean according to Chinese custom in about 1900. This might be related to the fact that not only had Cheng Kean initially emigrated to Tongkah; he also had a business there (for example, a pawnbroking shop). This lady moved to Penang with Cheng Kean in 1901. Her son by Cheng Kean was Choong Lye Teong. The fourth lady was Ong Ee Gaik Neoh, also from Kedah. She had been attached to Cheng Kean since 1890.

As a *singkeh* Chinese, Cheng Kean maintained a strong linkage with his home village. After his success, Cheng Kean went back to China at least



Plate 3.4 Choong Cheng Kean's home in South China. This house was built by Cheng Kean himself and is now occupied by his relatives.

four times. The first time was probably around 1894. Cheng Kean took his principal Kedah wife, Lim Gek Kee, with him too.⁵³ He built a magnificent house during the visit. The date and the owner were inscribed in the stone column at his home in China, which still exists. The second time was in 1907 when he built a Choong clan temple. The third time was 1912 or 1913 for a four-month stay.⁵⁴ The last visit was in the Chinese eighth month of 1915. He went to see his mother who was advancing in years. His Kedah secondary wife, Ong Ee Gaik, accompanied him on all three of these occasions.⁵⁵ They stayed in China for six months and returned to Penang on the

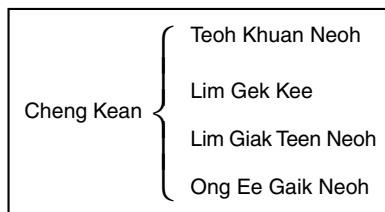


Figure 3.2 Wives of Choong Cheng Kean.

twenty-ninth of the Chinese first moon 1916. He caught a cold during the rainy season in China. On his return, Cheng Kean was already very ill, and died on 23 June 1916. But he had already built a solid business foundation for the next generation, who have continued to prosper down to the present fifth generation.

Cheng Kean and the royal family

‘A tall, strong, regular man, healthy, capable, hard-working and quiet-living,’ Dr Hoops, the Kedah State Surgeon from 1906 and acting British advisor, described Choong Cheng Kean.⁵⁶ ‘He was a very successful man of business, powerful[ly] built, strong, energetic and abstemious. He had made most of his money in Kedah,’ a British Judge named Woodward wrote.⁵⁷ Sharom described him as: ‘Lim [Choong] Cheng Kean, one of the biggest revenue farm operators in Kedah who, in previous years, had tremendous influence over the Sultan’.⁵⁸ How did such a *singkeh* Chinese as Choong Cheng Kean come to build his powerful economic empire in Kedah, where Malays comprised more than 90 per cent of the population in the late nineteenth century, and Chinese did not enjoy the same advantage of tin mining and cash crop planting activities in northern Kedah as did their fellow Chinese in the other Malay states?

We have already mentioned that Cheng Kean received help from his father-in-law. There is also a legend concerning his connection with the Malay royal family, transmitted from generation to generation in the Choong clan in Penang, which explains how Cheng Kean came to make his mark in Kedah. After he emigrated there, it is said that Cheng Kean found work as an assistant in a grocery store (*kedai runcit*). Cheng Kean’s boss was a friend of the younger brother of the Sultan. This prince frequented the grocery store to chat and drink with his old friend. He noted that Cheng Kean was a good man so he rallied to Cheng Kean’s side when the latter was in need of help.

One fateful day Cheng Kean’s luck turned, setting him on the path to prosperity. On the eve of the Chinese New Year, Cheng Kean was out on his daily routine of carrying water for his boss. His pole struck down a traditional Chinese lamp that was considered a significant omen, as, to many Chinese, the lamp actually symbolized prosperity and good health for the family. Cheng Kean’s boss sacked him and threw him out of his home. The prince happened to come to the grocery store and pleaded with his friend to spare Cheng Kean, but to no avail. The prince took pity on Cheng Kean and offered him a job as gardener at his mansion. Cheng Kean worked conscientiously for his new boss. The prince took a liking to Cheng Kean and encouraged him to set up his own grocery store. After two years, the prince gave him some capital to start his own business. Cheng Kean did so and became successful. The prince then gave him

another challenge, granting him the monopoly to manage the opium and gambling farms in Kedah. This prince was the *raja muda* Tunku Abdul Aziz, who actually administered the state after the Sultan fell ill in 1895.⁵⁹

The Sultan invariably insisted that the Kedah farms must be held in the names of residents of Kedah. This might have stemmed from considerations of security because most prominent Chinese businessmen were British subjects, who could easily escape the control of the Sultan by turning to the British whenever necessary. This was reflected in the linking of the Kedah opium farm to the Penang farm, which involved both Cheng Kean and Lim Leng Cheak (see pp. 37–8), and is quite evident in his reasons for letting the Kedah paddy farm as well. When discussing leasing the Kota Star paddy farm to a British subject in Penang, for example, the Sultan was very hesitant and reluctant. The Sultan argued that the Kedah paddy farm was usually granted to Chinese from Kedah who also had family there, as there were no major means for these Chinese to make a living in Kedah except by renting a paddy farm. The paddy farm was never granted to people from another state. In June 1889, when the Siamese consul in Penang wrote to the Sultan asking that the name of Lim Leng Cheak be added to the list of these tendering, the Sultan still insisted that Lim Leng Cheak should select his favourite person from Kedah and tender for the farm in that person's name.⁶⁰ This was also in the interests of Kedah Chinese. The Kedah Chinese would not allow people from other states to come to Kedah to secure farming contracts.⁶¹

As a close friend of the Sultan and the biggest farmer in Kedah, Cheng Kean enjoyed the privilege of monopolized trade with Penang, including the arms trade. The arms trade was a royal monopoly and its merchants were not allowed to trade freely in Kedah. During the paddy harvest season, when people needed rifles to ensure the security of their paddy (from birds, for example), a limited number of people were issued with a licence, and only they were allowed to buy arms in the shop of Loh Leng Kwee who was believed to be an important partner of Cheng Kean.⁶² Many times, Cheng Kean also collected rifles and ammunition and paid the bill for the Sultan's arms trade with Penang.⁶³

The 1888 Kulim disturbance

In the Penang–Kedah axis, the political, economic and social mechanisms of the British consulate, the opium farm and the Chinese business networks have been introduced. In order to reconstruct the mentality of each of the ethnicities behind these institutions – British, Malays and Chinese – now the lens has to be shifted to another important arena, the border town of Kulim. Through the specific lens of the Chinese disturbance, we can see how the regional drama between Kedah and Penang unfolded on the stage of Kulim.

In most, if not all, cases, Chinese disturbances in British Malaya were a result of a number of factors. These included conflicts organized through secret societies, aligned along speech groups, featured in *Bang* politics,⁶⁴ ignited by economic recession, related to the conditions of migration, or cultural and moral differentiation between colonial state and Chinese migrants, but embedded in the inherent competition in the spheres of either the excise economy of opium, gambling, spirits, or the production economy of tin, gambier and pepper.⁶⁵ The process of competition between the rival factions was essentially a process of shifting control over the economic resources, or a process of 'monopolization and demonopolization', to borrow from the sociologists.⁶⁶ In the Southeast Asian historical context, these disturbances reveal at least two outstanding interlocking characterizations: the Chinese immigrant political economy and the Southeast Asian transition. The first characterization hints at how the Chinese organized their socio-political institutions and economic enterprises and competition. The second characterization strongly implies the historical circumstances of how, and hence explains the reasons why, these overlapping socio-political institutions and economic enterprises worked.

In my studies of the three Chinese disturbances in Kulim (c. 1888-1908), the emphasis is placed on the regional perspective of how the internal Chinese competition between different rival groups overlapped the institutional power politics between the British and Malays. Put another way, I am trying to show how and why Chinese disturbances were incorporated into the local and regional power politics. Hence, I pay more attention to the inter-play of different actors between the British, Malays and Chinese. In this chapter, the first case to be presented is that of the 1888 Kulim disturbance. So as not to upset the chronological sequence, the other two disturbances have been assigned to Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

The background

Kulim is situated in southern Kedah. To the south, it bordered on the British territory of Province Wellesley.⁶⁷ It was close to the Kuala Muda district to the north, and Krian district to the south.⁶⁸ The growth of the Kulim settlement dated back to the 1840s, and was lent impetus by the tin mines there. The first Chinese to come to Kulim were around 400 tin miners, who arrived there from Penang in 1850.⁶⁹ It was in the late 1870s and early 1880s that Kulim started to develop into an important tin mining and tapioca planting district. Kulim hence became the most important Chinese town in Kedah with a population which ranged from 6,000 to 8,000 in the period under study. The Huichews and Teochews were two main dialect groups. The majority of the Huichews were tin miners, while the Teochews tended to be tapioca planters. It seems that Huichews played the more important role before the late 1880s. They

ceded leadership to the Teochews in the aftermath of the 1888 disturbance.

The 1888 Kulim disturbance boiled down to a fight between Huichews and Teochews, or between tin miners and planters. Quite apart from this, it can also be seen as an internal faction conflict within a Chinese secret society, as both Huichew and Teochew belonged to the same Ghee Hin Society. The economic slump provided the fuel to set off its outbreak. As the local press suggested, the elements of a disturbance were ready and waiting among the large number of unemployed miners. Owing to the drop in the price of tin, some of the miners were in difficulties, and a large number of coolies had recently been discharged without notice. It was asserted that, consequently, the miners had attacked and looted some *kongsis*.⁷⁰ However, the immediate cause was a quarrel over a prostitute in a brothel between a Huichew and a Teochew on 25 May, such brothels being usual meeting points for the Chinese immigrants after work time, along with opium dens and gambling houses.⁷¹

The 1888 Kulim disturbance

This quarrel in the brothel grew more serious the next day. The miners, who were all Ghee Hins, took sides and occasionally exacerbated the strife.⁷² On 3 June, a number of Teochews attacked the Huichews, but were driven back. One or two men were killed, with three or four wounded. Three different sources referred to the same incident, but each disclosed an interesting aspect. The colonial source said that it was Tunku Mohammed Saad and *Penghulu* Elang, the local Malay officials, who made every effort to restore the peace.⁷³ The Sultan's correspondence mentioned that on 3 June the Chinese headmen from Kulim were summoned to Penang and reported to the Sultan's uncle, Tunku Yacob, the Siamese consul, Neubronner and their Penang headman.⁷⁴ While the *PGSC* disclosed that Low Chu, the principal headman of the Ghee Hins at Kulim, called the parties before him and tried to mediate between them, but they were too excited to give in to each other.⁷⁵ As a result, the Huichews organized a counter-attack on the Teochews. Tunku Mohammed Saad and *Penghulu* Elang tried to halt them by having their men fire into the air, but to no effect. The Teochews at the mines of Cheah Teik Tai and Ng Siang Hok tried to defend themselves behind hastily improvised earthworks, but they were driven back. Some twenty or thirty were killed. Some other Teochew mining premises were burned and many Teochew huts on outlying plantations were destroyed. No Teochews were left in Kulim. They had all fled back to the British territory, Province Wellesley.⁷⁶

It seems that the Kedah authorities were not in a position to deal satisfactorily with the affair in the initial stage. But the subsequent reaction of the Kedah authorities was inexorable. On 3 June, in Penang, the Sultan's

uncle, Tunku Yacob, was informed by the Chinese headman that it was likely there would be more fighting in Kulim. Tunku Yacob immediately turned to the chiefs in the Kuala Muda and Krian districts, calling for more armed forces to reinforce Kulim.⁷⁷ On the morning of 5 June, Tunku Yacob left Kuala Muda for Kulim with a contingent of Malays, taking with him 50 rifles; and in the meantime a large number of armed Malays also left Krian on his order. A number of rifles were also sent to Kulim from Penang.⁷⁸ The next day, the Sultan himself went to Kulim by way of Penang with a party of armed Malays and Sikhs. Therefore the armed forces engaged in Kulim suddenly amounted to about 1,000 strong.⁷⁹ Kulim was once again under strong control by the Kedah authorities. On 11 June, the Sultan returned to Penang to watch the situation in Kulim, leaving his uncle, Tunku Yacob, there to disarm the Huichews and to arrest their headmen.

The reaction of Penang

Crucial to the Kulim Chinese community was its linkage to Penang. The bulk of the capital and most merchants in Kulim were linked to Penang. The Penang community was therefore closely involved in Kulim Chinese and Malay politics. On 11 June, the acting resident councillor, W.E. Maxwell, went to Kulim from Bukit Mertajam accompanied by the assistant protector of Chinese and chief inspector of police. This inspection convinced Maxwell that the disturbance posed a danger to the peace of the British territory. Maxwell took every possible precaution to prevent the disturbance from spreading into British territory. The resident councillor first issued orders that police posts should be established immediately at three places on the frontier, where there were cart roads leading into Kedah territory. Second, he commanded that the roads should be blocked and a passport system adopted in conjunction with the Kedah authorities.⁸⁰ More importantly, on the advice of the Penang resident councillor, on 14 June Governor Smith issued a proclamation prohibiting the export of arms and ammunition to the state of Kedah for six months.⁸¹

Even before the Kulim disturbance, the Sultan had already been confronted with pressure from Penang. Around April 1888, the planters in Province Wellesley petitioned the governor, Clementi Smith, and were granted an interview with him in Penang. The planters on the British side asserted that all deserters, mostly Klings or Chinese, escaped from the estates in Province Wellesley into Kulim, and it was difficult and dangerous to arrest them in Kulim even with a letter from the Straits authorities.⁸² They also complained of the criminal social environment:

Kulim is infested with bad characters who as thieves, cattle lifters, gang robbers, kidnappers or crimps, are more or less implicated in

most of the crimes committed on the boundary of Province Wellesley . . . there are simple reasons for interfering and trying to get things put on a more satisfactory basis.⁸³

In reply, the governor assured that the Sultan of Kedah was to give all assistance within his power to the Straits government. Probably as a result of the British negotiations, in early April 1888 the Sultan wrote to Bangkok stating that, because of the large number of Chinese in Kulim, he was preparing to employ paid police there. The Sultan particularly told Bangkok that he would like to buy Gatling guns and other modern armaments in case of Chinese disturbances in Kulim.⁸⁴

Knowing the significance of Kulim to both Penang and Kedah, the Chinese *towkays* manipulated the Kulim disturbances to serve their own interests. The Penang community seemed to jump at this opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the Kedah government. In its issue of 19 June, the *PGSC* published two letters dealing with the disturbance, its causes and effects, economic as well as political. The *PGSC* commented that:

Together they form a very complete picture of lawless disturbance on one side and imbecility on the other. One great lesson this outbreak teaches, namely how much better off people are under British rule, than under the rule of a government like that of Kedah.⁸⁵

In defending itself, the Kedah government displayed an active and flexible diplomatic skill, probably through the intervention of the Siamese consul Neubronner. A letter was addressed to the editor of the *PGSC* signed by 'one interested in the welfare of Kulim', who had obviously been instructed by the Kedah authorities. It convincingly refuted any accusation against the Kedah government, arguing that the Kedah authorities, consciously and deliberately, had acted with tact and caution, well aware that Kulim was so close to British territory. Hence it was stated: 'the policy of the Kedah government is to restore order in the place without bloodshed if possible'. It argued that, so far, 15 principal Huichews had been arrested and sent to Alor Star, and an order had been issued to the Huichews to surrender their arms. It continued by asking, 'your informants did not surely expect that the Kedah government would have shot or krissed every Hui Chew as soon as the armed Malays entered Kulim?'⁸⁶

However, efforts in Penang to defame the Kedah authorities continued. For example, some Chinese, who had lost a large amount of their property and had been driven out of Kulim during the disturbances, were summoned to Kedah by the authorities. It was reported that on arriving in Kedah they were immediately put in prison. They were only released on a

bail of \$70,000 paid by the Kedah residents, rather than by Chinese residents in Penang.⁸⁷ Again on behalf of the Kedah government, this was refuted in a letter to the editor of the *PGSC*. The fact of the matter was, it stated, that when the Teochews arrived in Kedah and the Huichews brought counter charges against them, the Kedah government had to take notice of this matter. Accordingly the men were summoned before the Kedah court, and informed of the charges made against them by the Huichews. They were told that they would be allowed to return to Penang on bail.⁸⁸ The Sultan seemed highly conscious of these sentiments: 'Other people had been critical of us as a result of the Kulim riots,' he noted.⁸⁹

The Sultan's considerations

Kedah's problem was, first, how to absorb Chinese energy while in the meantime placing them under effective native control so as not to jeopardize the region's stability; and second, how to maintain Kulim's economic development while not leading to political difficulties with the British, or with Siam. Highly conscious of the complex situation, the Sultan was afraid that any element of instability would be seen as ineffectual government by Kedah, and seized on as a reason for potential interference by Siam and the British. These issues were clearly reflected in the following measures taken by the Sultan after the 1888 Kulim disturbance.

The first measure was the punishment of the leaders of the disturbance to restore confidence in the Kedah government. Fifteen leading Huichews were arrested and sent to Alor Star for trial. Three were sentenced to death, the other 12 were sentenced to life imprisonment, among them Low Chu and Chu Ah Yu, who were put in chains.⁹⁰ Penang was also asked to assist in the arrest of the other Teochew headmen who had escaped there.⁹¹ Particular care was taken to ensure that the sentences were carried out in Kulim, where the disturbance had taken place.⁹² It is interesting to cite the following report:

All of the Kulim rioters . . . received their sentences with tears in their eyes, while the three who were condemned to death, said something about their hope that their prosecutors would meet the same fate for falsely charging them. . . . There were about 2,000 persons present. Most of them were Malays, who shouted with joy, while the celestial looked on quietly as if they were considerably afraid.⁹³

This was not the whole story. The Sultan showed caution and flexibility, taking the sentiments of the Penang merchant community into account. The number one Huichew headman, Low Chu, was originally sentenced to death, but his conviction was eventually commuted to life imprisonment in

chains. Later, in response to petitions from Chinese merchants in Penang, the Sultan decided to release him in 1893.⁹⁴

The second measure was compensation for the loss suffered by Penang *towkays* and repayment of the delayed coolie wages, two crucial points in maintaining the economy and hence the social order in Kedah. The Penang Chinese *towkays*, Cheah Teik Tai and Ooi Yu Sia, claimed compensation through the British resident councillor in Penang. The Sultan had to tread carefully with them, not only to entice them back to Kedah as soon as possible to do business, but also to avoid creating problems with the British authorities. The matter of the unpaid coolie wages threatened to develop into another disturbance if not dealt with promptly, as they complained to the Siamese consul that they had received no wages from the *towkay* for several months. Both compensation for losses suffered and money for the coolie wages were raised by the auction of Low Chu's mines and properties.⁹⁵

The third step was to reinforce the police in Kulim. Following the disturbance, the Sultan wrote to Bangkok, requesting a build up of arms in Kulim, although he had just received a new arms supplement.⁹⁶ Through the Siamese consul, Neubronner, the Sultan was also negotiating to appoint an English officer (named Mitchell) as police inspector in charge of Kulim.⁹⁷ The Sultan disclosed that he 'did not think a Malay would have sufficient authority over the Chinese miners'.⁹⁸ One source revealed that it was, in fact, at the request of the authorities in Penang that the Sultan stationed a European officer as chief of the police in Kulim.⁹⁹ In this, security was not his sole preoccupation; his move was also directly related to the boost in state revenue, which was best illustrated by the establishment of a new gambling farm in Kulim. With an increase in the strength of the police force, a new gambling farm in Kulim was farmed out to a Chinese merchant in Penang and brought extra revenue of \$12,000 per annum to Kedah.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Cutting across the political, administrative and ethnic boundaries in the area were the British consulate, opium farm, Chinese family business networks and the border town of Kulim. All were sites of multi-ethnic interaction, setting up a framework for regional politics and Chinese business networks. What these mechanisms disclose is a theme of linked business and politics, colonial hegemony and local accommodation. All these loci conspire to show how interpenetrated and interdependent were the spheres of influence of British colonialism, Chinese entrepreneurs and the Malay Sultan of Kedah and his court. This pattern of multi-ethnic interactions and interdependence will continue to emerge in the following chapters.

The British and Chinese found the consular system very effective; the British used it to promote their commercial and political interests without breaking up the current arrangement concerning the position of Unfederated Malay States. The Chinese themselves had also secured an institutional framework to promote business. The Sultan of Kedah had managed to protect his own interests through two parallel, complementary but different Chinese family business networks, one from Penang and one from Kedah. The border town of Kulim assumed the position of a Chinese 'special zone' for the Penang-Kedah interactions such as the opium farm. The shaping of the alliance was strategic rather than primordial. The strategy contributed to the fact that the axis of British-Malay or Penang-Kedah interaction centred on the third part, that is, the economic role of the immigrant Chinese. Also, all the interests of both British and Malays were manifested in and achieved through the roles of the Chinese. The Siamese element no doubt enriched the British-Malay experience. Therefore, for their own interests, both the British and Malays had to deal with the Siamese or the Chinese. They needed to use the Siamese or Chinese as a pretext and a justification in their dealings with each other, while keeping their true agenda carefully concealed in the background. The internal differentiations in the Chinese community intensified these competing situations.

FAMILY AND STATE, 1889–95

Having just provided the wider framework and mechanism of regional interactions, in this chapter I will focus on a case study of family and state. The family and state relationship was essentially one of reciprocity in business and politics. It had at least four interlocking characteristics – the ‘personalized’, the ‘ethnicized’, the ‘institutionalized’ and the ‘appropriated’. The ‘personalized’ means not only that the state economy depended on a few Chinese families, but also that this relationship was cultivated primarily through, and largely maintained by, patron–client connections. The ‘personalized’ state power of the Sultan, royal family and a few Malays could be viewed as the fundamental political and economic system in Kedah. The ‘ethnicized’ indicates that it was a Chinese–Malay economy. The Chinese managed Kedah’s economic administration under Malay political control. A close examination shows these ‘personalized’ and ‘ethnicized’ relationships were fairly formal and institutionalized. They were legitimized through the ‘personalized’ state polity vested in the Sultan and royal family. They were also ‘institutionalized’ through the revenue farming system. Under that system, the revenue farms were granted in exchange for a fixed amount of state revenue to be paid by the Chinese farmers for the expenditure of the Sultan and his court. The Sultan also granted some less-important farms to his cronies and subordinate officers in lieu of salary. The farms were re-farmed to and managed by the Chinese for a fixed payment of revenue. All of these Kedah Chinese farmers had close financial connections with Penang. They were agents of Penang Chinese capital. The two sets of revenue farming systems comprised the whole source of state revenue.

Consequently, Chinese business and power relationship could not confine themselves to the micro-level of the family firm as such, but transcended the grander boundaries of state, region and ethnicity. Behind the family facade were rich capitalists, influential business lobbyists, powerful interest groups, the local press, the wider community followers, the Siamese consul, a legitimate Malay state and the British authorities. In between British Penang and the Malay sultanate of Kedah, according to

circumstances and family business needs, resources could be mobilized to play off one against the other. Therefore, access to resources such as capital, labour, knowledge and contacts were ‘appropriated’ by certain leading families, and in turn these families ‘appropriated’ total leadership of the Chinese community and a monopoly of representation to the local state and society.

The years 1889–95 were a transitional period for inaugurating the mechanism of incorporating the Kedah opium farm (except Langkawi) into the Penang framework (see Chapter 3, pp. 33–8). In the process of that transformation, the Lim family’s challenge to the joint institution was the most important topic. This period witnessed the overwhelming performance of the Penang Lim family in the forefront, while the Kedah Choong family was still in ascendance and perhaps partially overshadowed by the former’s prosperity. By focusing on the Penang Lim family and opium politics, this chapter will attempt to show how the interests of family and state coincided with each other. The dual identity of the Penang Chinese family of Lim Leng Cheak in both Kedah and Penang provided a unique advantage in securing power resources from both sides whenever the need arose. The historical dynamics of multi-ethnic politics and economy in the region are therefore best understood in the case of Lim Leng Cheak.

Family business networks and power relations

Various classic images show that some prominent Chinese played an important role between the colonial power and indigenous state. Between Southeast Asia and the later Qing government in China, Thio Tiau Siat occupied a special position by acting as consul general in Singapore (1890) and first Chinese vice-consul in Penang (1893).¹ In the western Malay states, the Straits Chinese merchants and miners increasingly exerted a significant influence prior to the British expansion.² In the Siamese outer provinces of the nineteenth century, there were various cases of prominent Chinese families being appointed as governors, including scions of the Lim family in Phuket, the Wu family in Songkhla and the Khaw family in Ranong.³ Likewise, Tan Kim Ching, a leading Chinese businessman from Singapore, played an active role in the Malay states and southern Siam.⁴ He was the trusted advisor of the Sultan of Kedah, governor of Kra and Kraburi in southern Siam, plus consul general and special commissioner for Siam in the Straits Settlements.⁵ Another example can be found in the Koh family in Penang, who originally came from Kedah and had close connections with the British and Malay governments.⁶

In Lim Leng Cheak’s case, the image was a bit of different; in the eyes of the British, Lim Leng Cheak was a troublemaker. He dared to stand up and challenge the British arrangement of opium farms, to defend the interests of

Kedah state and to influence local colonial politics. As with many other Chinese political brokers, however, three outstanding features were important, namely: as Straits Chinese, as British subject and as business tycoon. As Straits Chinese, he had a language advantage and experience in dealing with the colonial and indigenous powers. As a British subject, he had the privilege of making use of colonial political and legal frameworks. As a business tycoon, he had close connections with the European business lobbyists, indigenous elite and Indian moneylenders. Of course, he also had a solid foundation within the Chinese community in terms of capital and labour. Now, let's see how the drama was performed at different levels.

Family prominence

The sources available indicate that Lim Leng Cheak seemed to reach the apex of his business career during 1889-94. In his capacity as a planter, he had large coffee, tapioca and coconut estates in Kulim. His tapioca plantation in Kulim was one of the largest in the region. He had 2,000 acres under tapioca cultivation in 1891, employing Tamils, Chinese, Javanese and Patani Malays, about 1,000 together.⁷ His mills and estates in Kedah were frequently cited as models and visited by the British resident councillor and consul during his seasonal tours.⁸ In addition, Lim Leng Cheak had a large number of landholdings in Kedah. One of his landed properties in Kulim covered 14,000 *relongs*.⁹

Lim's position as an important shipowner in Penang was even more consolidated. In 1892, he had three steamers,¹⁰ two of which carried over 400 tons and the other about 100 tons. They went to Tongkah, Rangoon and the east coast of Sumatra. They carried provisions, coconuts and sundry goods to Rangoon, and rice and piece-goods to Sumatra.¹¹ They imported large quantities of paddy and prepared both white and parboiled rice in their mills. These products were supplied to the estates in Kedah, Province Wellesley and the Federated Malay States. They were also exported to Ceylon, India and Mauritius. Sugar they sold locally, but tapioca they sent to London, Le Havre and many other European ports.¹² During this period, the largest shipowner in Penang was Lee Phee Yeow of Messrs Chong Moh & Co., with whom Lim Leng Cheak also had solid ties. Lee Phee Yeow went into bankruptcy in October 1893.¹³ After this deal, there were two prominent Chinese shipowners in Penang, namely Lim Leng Cheak and Chuah Yu Kay.¹⁴

This period also witnessed Lim Leng Cheak's rice milling business expansion. In 1893, he started another rice mill in Penang. According to the report:

It has a big barbecue as large as the drying ground at Hultsdorf mills, Colombo, while the mill building ... is over 150 feet by

about 45 feet deep . . . [The family firm] can easily turn out 30,000 bags of rice a month.¹⁵

Even the FMS government was interested in utilizing Lim Leng Cheak's experience in Kedah to encourage the Malay peasants in rice cultivation. E.W. Birch, the secretary to the Perak government, reported:

I feel very strongly that the Perak government would do well to get in a capitalist to start a good mill, and to pay the people a fair price for their paddy. One, Leng Chiak [Cheak] a very business-like Chinaman in Penang did enter into negotiation with the Perak government last year, but nothing came of it . . . at this moment he will not be able to do so, but he promised me in Penang, when I sent for him to see whether he could approach the government early next year. He wants protection, and if he will give good prices for the grain, I think it would be well to give him the inducement he asks for.¹⁶

W.E. Maxwell, then the colonial secretary, also suggested that the Penang resident councillor, in his capacity of British consul for the western Siamese Malay states, be called on for a report into the working of this system in Kedah.¹⁷ I can find no evidence to explain why Lim Leng Cheak did not take up the challenge offered by Perak to establish his rice milling empire there.

Business lobbyist

In 1889, on behalf of the syndicate formed to build a railway, a deputation travelled to meet the governor Smith in Penang fort. By building a railway line from Prai, through Bukit Materjam, to Kulim, this scheme aimed to open up the tin mining and agricultural resources in these areas to the Penang network. Except for the only Chinese, Lim Leng Cheak, the deputation consisted entirely of influential Europeans.¹⁸ In 1893, on the currency issue, Lim Leng Cheak was nominated to go to Singapore to give evidence on behalf of the Penang Chinese planters and producers.¹⁹ His position in the Penang horserace circle might have been particularly meaningful. The patrons of the Penang horse races were the most important local figures, such as the officer administrating the government, the Sultan of Kedah, the Sultan of Johor, the Sultan of Deli, the resident general of FMS, the resident councillor and others of that ilk. The committee and stewards consisted mostly of prominent Europeans. Among the stewards were only two Chinese. One was Khoo Guat Cheng; the other was Lim Leng Cheak.²⁰

As an important business lobbyist, Lim Leng Cheak's role was best exemplified in the elections of the municipal commissioners. In the 1890-2 election of municipal commissioner, Lim Leng Cheak joined M.A.

Noordin in nominating Huttenbach as a candidate and helped him to win the election. Huttenbach had been a resident of Penang since around 1872. He was a senior partner in Huttenbach Bros. & Co. and Huttenbach, Liebert & Co. and played an important role in the Penang Chamber of Commerce.²¹ The evidence shows that Lim Leng Cheak had business dealings with Huttenbach. It was found that Lim Leng Cheak arranged the business transactions between Huttenbach and the Sultan of Kedah in the purchase of furniture and Japanese appliances.²²

But this alliance also ran into heavy seas when the representative failed to meet the lobbyist's expectations. In December 1892, Lim Leng Cheak intended to repropose and renominate Huttenbach in the forthcoming municipal elections. As luck would have it, this coincided with a proposal submitted by Lim Leng Cheak and his interest group, who asked the commissioners for approval for the transfer of the street light contract to a company which had good connections with Lim Leng Cheak and his group. A petition headed by M.A. Noordin and Lim Leng Cheak was also submitted. Lim Leng Cheak and Noordin instructed Huttenbach to try to get it passed by the board legally. But the municipal board refused to grant the transfer, giving as its reason that it objected to the particular form of the so-called company. The upshot was that rumours were circulated that Huttenbach's firm might break up the contract by paying the stipulated penalty. Huttenbach was very annoyed. In his public letter to Noordin and Lim Leng Cheak, Huttenbach complained: 'It could scarcely be expected that I should pay a penalty because I am willing to represent you.' Huttenbach then declared that were he renominated this would be against his will.²³

Eventually, at the repeated and urgent request of Lim Leng Cheak and another leading Chinese, Koh Seang Tat, a great-grandson of *Kapitan* Koh Lay Huan, was asked to stand for the forthcoming nomination. Koh was actually the leader of Lim Leng Cheak's interest group and had been a municipal commissioner (1888-91) once earlier. This time he was proposed by Lim Leng Cheak, and seconded by Mohomed Ariff, a wealthy Penang Malay businessman.²⁴ One Penang newspaper commented:

[In the last term election] Mr. Huttenbach polled 409 votes when he was proposed by Mr Lim Leng Cheak, and now that the latter proposes Mr Tat it becomes his duty to help him with all the energy and tact that he displayed in working for Mr Huttenbach.²⁵

On 10 January, the leading electors of all nationalities came forward to give Koh Seang Tat hearty support. Koh was elected as the bankers and leading European merchants voted for him, as did all the leading Muslims and Chinese.²⁶

The Sultan and Lim Leng Cheak

'Leng Cheak, indeed, was so close to the Sultan that he could be considered an integral part of the state machinery,' said Khoo Khay Jin.²⁷ Three elements shaped the Chinese-Malay alliance. First, as mentioned, the Sultan depended heavily on Lim Leng Cheak for revenue and investment. Second, the Sultan relied on Lim Leng Cheak to access Penang finance. Finally, the Sultan needed Lim Leng Cheak's position in Penang, and the double identity he shared between Penang and Kedah, to push Kedah interests.

As a manager, state treasurer and capitalist to the Sultan, Lim Leng Cheak played an ineluctable role in Kedah politics. He arranged the Sultan's affairs and maintained the latter's houses in Penang. He went shopping for the Sultan, even for small items of stationery,²⁸ fruit,²⁹ as well as coffee cups, napkins and tablecloths,³⁰ and a rifle, to mention just a few purchases.³¹ He escorted the Siamese official missions from Bangkok.³² He sometimes attended the horse races on behalf of the Sultan.³³ He acted as the middleman for the Sultan and royal family when they wanted to secure the *chettiar* or European loans in Penang.³⁴ He took care of most of the Sultan's bills.³⁵ He ran the Sultan's private steamer, the *Good Luck*, from hiring the captain and engineer to assuming responsibility for repair and maintenance.³⁶ In return, Lim Leng Cheak was granted the rice milling monopoly in the whole of Kedah for twenty years. He obtained large tracts of land free of land rents. Constantly bolstered by the Sultan's strong support, he had secured many Siamese loans. By acting as both the state agent and manager for Kedah's economic administration, Lim Leng Cheak consolidated and expanded his family empire.

The Sultan was not simply a private friend of Lim Leng Cheak either. There can be no doubt that the Sultan consciously used the latter's energy as an influential capitalist to develop his country. Many times, the Sultan managed to secure loans from Bangkok for Lim Leng Cheak, for which the Sultan himself stood surety.³⁷ Lim Leng Cheak once found himself in difficulties and had been asked to pay up by a bank. In his letter to Bangkok requesting a loan of \$50,000 for Lim Leng Cheak, the Sultan said his friend 'was doing business in a big way in Kedah'. He was recommended as 'a good man' whose loan proposal was endorsed by the British resident councillor.³⁸ To help Lim's business in Kedah, the Sultan also secured another large Siamese loan of \$100,000. The Sultan even offered to draw up a statement of debt jointly in his name and that of Lim Leng Cheak.³⁹

Political agent for Kedah

Lim Leng Cheak performed well as a political agent in the debate over the maladministration of Kedah. The first rumbles of this were heard in 1887

when some Penang businessmen complained that British subjects were ill-treated by the Kedah authorities and that the Siamese governors were eating up the country, and so on. In 1890, more negative statements regarding affairs of Kedah appeared in the *SIPC*.⁴⁰ Influenced by such reports, even in British India, *The Calcutta Statesman* reported that Indian coolies, unfortunate British subjects, were being enticed away to the Dutch settlements or Siamese Kedah on an enormous scale by criminals. The Straits government was urged to make a representation on the subject.⁴¹

On behalf of Kedah, Lim Leng Cheak came forward to refute these allegations. In his letter to the editor of the *PGSC* in January 1890, he described that what the *SIPC* had reported as 'a lot of ridiculous nonsense'. He said there was 'no foundation' whatever for most of the statements it made.⁴² He took the example of his personal experience to argue that the Kedah government treated British subjects very well. He wrote:

I, and those employed by me, have received FAIR PLAY throughout. I have thousands of acres of land under tapioca, pepper and coffee cultivation in Kedah; and owing to the kind encouragement . . . from the Rajah and others, I have considerable business transactions in Kedah for many years now, and all that I can say is last year [I] put up a large rice mill at Alor Star . . . I have now over \$200,000 invested in Kedah.⁴³

In particular, he mentioned that British subjects in Kedah 'have always had far more consideration shown them than the ryots of the country'. People should have no second thoughts about 'investing in lands and mines in Kedah specially'. He argued:

In a few years' time, Kedah, under its present administration, will make a tremendous stride forward, and probably, may yet compete with some of the native states under the British protection.⁴⁴

After Lim's letter was published in the *PGSC*, the *SIPC* was not at all pleased. After devoting one or two columns in its issues to attacking Lim Leng Cheak for his temerity, it took another shot at him in subsequent editions. The *SIPC* alleged Lim Leng Cheak 'has been made a cat's-paw to plead the cause of Kedah informia pauperis'.⁴⁵ In the next long leading article, the *SIPC* called Lim Leng Cheak [and the Sultan] 'the Siamese twins'. They stated that Lim Leng Cheak had every reason to pose himself as 'champion of Kedah for favours received and for favours expected'. They mentioned the ways in which Lim Leng Cheak secured the rice mill monopoly in Kedah. They disclosed that during the lifetime of the late

Sultan, many feelers had been thrown out for obtaining a concession for establishing a rice mill in Kedah, but the late Sultan turned them all down reasoning that his people would suffer under such a monopoly.⁴⁶ Hence it is not difficult to see why Lim Leng Cheak came forward to protest against the accusations of the *SIPC*, not as an ordinary businessman but as a Kedah political agent.

The Kedah opium farm, 1892-4

The coincidence of the interests between the Sultan and Lim Leng Cheak was best reflected in the tender for Kedah opium farm (1892-4). The Chinese farmers' manipulations were a fundamental element in shaping the opium-based political economy and British-Malay-Chinese interactions. In these complex conflicts, two main camps emerged: those of the British Straits government and the Penang opium farmer on the one hand, and the Kedah Malay government and the Kedah Chinese farmers on the other. The British colonial power politics and the active resistance and eventual accommodation of the Malays, were intensified by the manoeuvres of the competing Chinese opium farmers.

The tender for Kedah opium farm

The tender for the Kedah farm (1892-4), i.e. Kuala Muda, Kulim and Bagan Samah farms, was opened on 15 August 1891. The contest was whittled down to the Penang farmers against the Kulim farmer, Lim Leng Cheak. Lim Leng Cheak had held the Kulim opium farm for six years previous to this letting. His tender for the Kulim opium farm was the highest. The Penang opium and spirit syndicate for 1892-4 comprised Chew Sin Yong, Ng Ah Thye, Chew Thean Poh, Chan Lye Kum and two others who were not in Penang. The Penang opium farmers were also the holders of the opium farms of Kedah proper, Kuala Muda and Bagan Samah.⁴⁷ Their tendering for the next term of the Penang farm was \$71,000 a month, an excess of \$4,000 per month, or \$48,000 per annum, over the current rental.⁴⁸ But their tender for Kedah opium farm was lower than those of other parties by \$2,800 per annum. As soon as they knew their bid was lower than that of their rivals, Penang farmers turned to Neubronner, soliciting his recommendation.⁴⁹ Two days later, Skinner, the Penang resident councillor, sent for the Penang farmers. In the presence of Neubronner and Lim Leng Cheak, Skinner stated that on behalf of the Penang farmers, he would secure the Kedah opium farms from the Sultan at the highest offer, i.e. \$51,000. The Penang farmers were pleased and accepted this new arrangement.

A few days later, Neubronner sent for the Penang farmers, where they met Wan Mah, the chief minister of Kedah. Wan Mah told the Penang

farmers that if they desired to have those Kedah farms, they should give Lim Leng Cheak a share in the Penang farm. But the Penang farmers refused.⁵⁰ They turned to the resident councillor instead, urging him to do his utmost to secure the three Kedah farms.⁵¹ On 14 September, the Sultan of Kedah, accompanied by the Siamese consul, convened an interview with the resident councillor and the parties concerned. The resident councillor asked if the Penang syndicate would give Lim Leng Cheak one twenty-sixth share in the Penang farm, in return for their share in Lim Leng Cheak's Kulim farm.⁵² But that was not still accepted by the Penang farmers.⁵³ The Sultan then closed the bidding by accepting Lim Leng Cheak's offer for the Kulim farm. In addition, the Sultan had also given him the Kuala Muda and Bagan Samah farms. In his letter to the resident councillor, the Sultan explained, now that the Penang farmers did not choose to meet Lim Leng Cheak's requirement, it was not fair for him to ask Lim Leng Cheak to let Penang farmers have a share in the Kulim farm.⁵⁴ This was most interesting, because Lim Leng Cheak did not tender for the other two opium farms. Another important point is that the lease of the whole Kedah opium farm to Lim Leng Cheak came when Lim ran into great capital difficulties and had asked the Sultan to write to Bangkok for a loan.⁵⁵

With such a controversial outcome, of course a battle of words then followed. The Penang farmers argued that it was to 'be regretted that the claims of one individual on private and other grounds should be allowed to interfere with the decision of a public question'.⁵⁶ They threatened:

If the decision of so important a question between two governments . . . [is] to depend upon what one government may consider necessary to urge, in favour of an individual in whom that power may be interested in private and personal grounds . . . both the governments and the whole community would eventually suffer most seriously.⁵⁷

This was because the government had to devise other means for introducing fresh taxes and imposts in order to meet deficit revenue of the Colony, and the poorer classes would be crushed and ruined. They maintained:

[The Sultan of Kedah] has not 'acted perfectly straightforwardly' towards this government or the Penang farmers . . . and it was not, to say the least of it, right on the part [of the Sultan] to make over the Bagan Samah and Kuala Muda farms to Lim Leng Cheak, who had never tendered for them.⁵⁸

In his own defence, Lim Leng Cheak argued that he had not only 'spent any profits . . . in developing the resources of the district', but also

'invested largely from his private means, thus raising the sultan's revenue from that district alone by 500 per cent'. The Sultan of Kedah was quite right

in renting his farms to a man who is doing all he possibly can for the advancement of the state of Kedah by investing large sums of money in various districts, at tremendous risk in the beginning; introducing steam machinery for milling rice, etc., etc.; thus giving employment to thousands of people, many of whom would otherwise have thrown in their lot with bad characters and given our police no end of trouble on the frontier.⁵⁹

And there the matter rested.

Negotiation and compromise

As the situation turned out, Penang farmers were not only unable to secure the Kulim farm, but lost the other two Kedah farms as well. The lease of the Kuala Muda and Bagan Samah opium farms was supposed to expire on 3 November 1891. Lim Leng Cheak took them over from the current farmer, Choong Cheng Kean, the representative of Penang farm. To resolve the matter, actually before the expiry date of the two farms' leases, the Penang farmers appealed to Trotter, then the acting resident councillor, urging that another effort be made to obtain the two farms of Bagan Samah and Kuala Muda.⁶⁰ To justify their request, two months after Lim Leng Cheak had entered on his contract, the Penang farmers lodged a complaint that *chandu* smuggling was rife between Kedah and Penang. Trotter then brought the matter to the Sultan. The Sultan was prevailed upon to use his influence with Lim Leng Cheak to yield up the Bagan Samah and Kuala Muda farms. An agreement was eventually arranged where Lim Leng Cheak handed over these two Kedah farms for a consideration of \$18,000, payable in instalments of \$1,500 per month.⁶¹

On 18 December 1891, the Sultan informed Trotter that he had already asked Neubronner to rescind the grant to Lim Leng Cheak, and that he had also instructed Lim Leng Cheak to stop all sub-lease farm activities. However, Lim Leng Cheak was unwilling to return the grant to the Sultan unless the compensation of \$18,000 was paid by Chew Sin Yong. The Sultan shrewdly implied that on his part he could not force Lim Leng Cheak to return the grant, because as a British subject Lim Leng Cheak would certainly turn to Trotter for help. In return, the Sultan hoped that Trotter could guarantee the compensation.⁶² At this point, Lim Leng Cheak submitted a new request that his *chandu* manufactured at Kuala Muda and Bagan Samah farms could be sold to Chew Sin Yong at the going price on the Penang market, rather than be taken back to Kulim.⁶³

Discussion of this issue continued in the Sultan's next communications to Neubronner and Trotter. So that Kuala Muda and Bagan Samah farms could be handed over on 1 January 1892, the Sultan requested that Chew Sin Yong would sign a debt bond contract for the \$18,000 he owed Lim Leng Cheak.⁶⁴ After all these issues were settled, the Sultan then issued a new grant to Loh Leng Kwee and Choong Cheng Kean, the Kedah representatives of the Penang opium farm.⁶⁵

The 1893 opium disturbance

The first brief mention of the 1893 disturbance was by C.S. Wong, who wrote:

About 600 Chinese assembled before the farm, clamouring for *chandu*, and when the demand was not immediately attended to, tore down the farmer's licence signboard . . . This disturbance was reported in an English newspaper under the caption of 'Riots Again Imminent', indicating that riots were not uncommon in that upcountry village.⁶⁶

However, if placed in the wider context, the 1893 disturbance is essentially a continuation of the conflict between the Kulim Chinese farmers and Kedah government opposed to the Penang opium farmers and the British authorities. It stemmed from the restriction on the Kulim opium import imposed by the Penang authorities. The Lim family networks again stood at the centre of the opium disturbance. Behind the scenes, there was feverish manoeuvring between British, Malays and Chinese farmers. All the Malay authorities, from the Sultan down to the local district officer, the *penghulu*, the commissioner of police, aided and abetted by the Siamese consul, supported Lim Leng Cheak in his conflict with the Penang opium farmers and the British authorities. The newspapers in Penang and the Chinese coolies in Kulim, respectively, were mobilized, if not manipulated, to pressure the Penang authorities to supply more opium to Kulim. Moreover, its repercussions continued to be felt both in the resulting libel case and in the political movement set in motion against Governor Smith.

The Sultan and the Kulim opium crisis

As referred to earlier (pp. 66-7), the Kedah opium farms in Kuala Muda and Bagan Samah were handed over to Choong Cheng Kean, the representative of the Penang opium farm in Kedah, while Lim Leng Cheak still held on to the Kulim opium farm. Having secured the lease, the Penang opium farmers started to impose restriction on the opium supply to Kulim at a quota of one chest per 800 persons. Hence the crux of

the matter was how many Chinese there were in Kulim. This figure would provide the basis on which the calculation for how many chests of opium would be supplied to Kulim would be made. Three censuses were conducted in Kulim during the first half of 1893, quite apart from any such exercises instigated by the Penang farmers.

As early as 6 December 1892, resident councillor Skinner asked the Sultan to conduct a census. As it happened, Skinner had already conducted a census in Kulim before the Sultan was even informed. Expressing his dissatisfaction with Skinner's action, the Sultan asked Neubronner whether both of them could secure support from the Siamese government, allowing Kedah to import opium through the Siamese territory, rather than through the British settlement of Penang.⁶⁷ On 20 December, the Sultan was informed that Kulim should be supplied with five chests per month, as there were 4,000 adult Chinese in Kulim according to the Penang farmers' census. In consultation with Lim Leng Cheak, the Sultan requested Skinner to allow Kulim at least a six-chest quota. The Sultan was adamant that there would certainly be more Chinese than the Penang farmer's tally, if another census were held.⁶⁸ When the Sultan's own census was published, it turned out that there were about 7,000 adult males in Kulim, rather than 4,000. On the counterattack, the Penang opium farmers questioned its authenticity. So the Penang resident councillor asked the Sultan to specify the census, breaking it down in terms of the racial origin and accurate numbers for each settlement in Kulim. Then the Sultan offered to order a second census.⁶⁹

In May, at the request of the Penang opium farmers, the British authorities in Penang exerted a much stricter policy of restriction on the Kulim opium farmer. An order was given to the effect that opium exports to Kulim were to be limited to three chests per month. Prior to his official trip to Bangkok, the Sultan turned to governor Smith, complaining of this unfair policy of restriction, biased to the detriment of Kulim. The Sultan argued that the report of the second census in Kulim had been forwarded to Skinner through Neubronner, and the result showed that there were over 8,000 adult people in Kulim, of whom 7,343 were Chinese. Therefore a three-chest per month quota was by no means enough. The Sultan hoped that this problem could be discussed after he returned from Bangkok.⁷⁰

The situation in Kulim worsened in June. Many urgent reports from Kulim describing the opium crisis and intimating an imminent Chinese disturbance reached the ears of the Sultan and of the British authorities in Penang. On 3 June, Tunku Mohammed Saad, the district officer in Kulim, reported to Tunku Yacob that many coolies had become embroiled in fights and refused to work because of the insufficient opium supply. Tunku Yacob immediately contacted Neubronner, asking him to negotiate urgently with the Penang farmer, Chew Sin Yong, and the resident councillor, Skinner. Neubronner was requested to procure one or two more

chests of opium to be exported to Kulim as a stop-gap before the Sultan returned from Bangkok.⁷¹ While on the way back from Bangkok, the Sultan stopped in Singapore and discussed the Kulim opium restriction with governor Smith. The Sultan argued that as all illegal opium shops on the Kulim side had already been cracked down on before he went to Bangkok, there was no need to continue the policy of restriction. The Sultan warned that the possibility of a large-scale Chinese coolie riot in Kulim could not be ruled out should the situation remain unchanged.

Although two census results proved that the Penang farmers' census was incorrect, diplomatically, the Sultan requested that the governor send an English officer to conduct a joint third census with the Kedah government.⁷² As a friendly gesture, the Sultan informed Penang that an order had been issued to the Kulim district officer, prohibiting any illegal opium dealings on his side of the Kulim border.⁷³ On the other hand, the Sultan was faced with pressure from Lim Leng Cheak, who claimed to have incurred a loss of \$703.33 per month since May. He had thus asked for the reduction in the monthly rent of the opium farm.⁷⁴ To ease the exigency of the situation, on 24 June, the Sultan asked governor Smith to urge resident councillor Skinner to conduct a third census as soon as possible.⁷⁵ The Sultan once again warned that failure to do so would have a disastrous effect on both Penang and Kedah, as all opium in Kulim had been used up and, consequently, brawls had been rife among the coolies, and many had taken to their heels and left Kulim.⁷⁶ On the instructions of governor Smith, Skinner eventually agreed to conduct a joint third census on 13 July.⁷⁷ The exact result of this census is no longer known, but it was reported that the number of Chinese coolies amounted to between 5,600 and 5,700, while the census was still in progress.⁷⁸ There was still no end in sight to the opium crisis.

The Kulim authorities and the Penang press

So far the frequent interplay behind the scenes between the Sultan of Kedah, the resident councillor in Penang and the governor in Singapore have held the limelight. Every effort had been made by the Sultan to procure an extra opium supply. We now shift focus to the other interesting manipulations assayed by the local Malay regime in Kulim district, revealed in the Penang press, and exposed by the Chinese coolie disturbance. It was B.E. Mitchell, the Kulim commissioner, A.D. Neubronner, the Siamese consul and A. Kennedy, the editor of the *PGSC*, who first sounded public alarm bells about the nature of the disturbance in Kulim. Like the Sultan, they joined together in alliance with Lim Leng Cheak, keeping up a steady stream of messages to the public and the British Penang authorities, intimating that the Kulim opium crisis was urgent and a Chinese coolie disturbance was on the way! Interestingly, what was

made known to the public through these people was, to a great extent, what the Sultan had often already told the governor in Singapore and the resident councillor in Penang. Many arguments, and even whole sentences, were very similar to those in the Sultan's correspondence. This gives cause to suspect that 'directors' behind the scene deliberately orchestrated their performance: the Sultan, the Kulim farmer, Lim Leng Cheak, and others.

Emerging from the shadows, in which it had been brewing since July, the Kulim opium crisis had become the subject of public discussion. The *PGSC* obviously stood by the Sultan and Lim Leng Cheak, taking position against the other parties, namely the Penang opium farmers and the British Straits government. In its issue of 4 July, the *PGSC* strongly criticized the opium farm in the Straits Settlements and Protected Native States as 'an abominable and disgraceful' system. It warned of the possible serious consequences of imposing a three-chest restriction policy on the Kulim farm:

Anyone who knows Chinese labourers knows that opium is a part of their food . . . If they cannot get opium they will riot, leave their work, and desert the country; and this is what the conduct of the opium farmers of Penang, backed up by the Singapore government, will surely bring about in the territory of our good friend and neighbour the Sultan of Kedah.⁷⁹

On 7 July, the *PGSC* published another long article in its first edition. It referred back to the history of the case, digging up facts about the last leasing and the politics of the opium farm (term 1892–4), the figures of the consumption of opium by the Kulim farm over the last six years (Table 4.1), and the three censuses. It concluded its argument by asking:

Table 4.1 Quantities of opium imported by Lim Leng Cheak, 1888–93 (unit: chest)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Per month</i>
1888	59	5
1889	56	4.7
1890	42	3.5
1891	60	5
1892	61	5
1893 (Jan.)	5	5
1893 (Feb.)	5	5
1893 (Mar.)	6	6
1893 (Apr.)	5	5

Source: *PGSC*, 7 July 1893.

Note:

All figures are from the original source.

If the import of opium into Kulim is to be restricted; the British subjects who have invested their money in mining, agricultural, or manufacturing enterprises will be heavy losers; the port of Penang will lose so much trade; our friend and neighbour H.H. the Sultan of Kedah will suffer in his revenue; and the spirit of free trade . . . will be interfered with.⁸⁰

This criticism continued on 7 August with comments to the effect that:

There is nothing to be gained by concealing the fact that he [governor Smith] has neither treated Kedah nor its suzerain Siam with justice or courtesy; and such a course of conduct as he has adopted is not very dissimilar to that of France on a large scale. It is altogether unworthy of an English governor.⁸¹

To echo the criticism of the *PGSC*, the local Kulim authorities kept sounding the alarm about the opium crisis and the threat of imminent riots. On the evening of 26 July, Mitchell, the commissioner of police in Kulim, arrived in Penang in the company of Khoo Teng Lye, Lim Leng Cheak's resident agent in Kulim. Under instructions from Tunku Mohammed Saad, Mitchell reported to Neubronner that there were only 30 *tahils* of *chandu* left in the Kulim. If no opium were received in time for the next day's consumption, he stated, there would be riots among the coolies in the mines and on the plantations. Neubronner at once wrote to resident councillor Skinner reporting this urgent situation, which had brought to him by Mitchell and Khoo Teng Lye, post haste. Skinner at once instructed the Penang farmers to permit the export of one chest. Owing to the urgency of the case, it was said that Mitchell and Khoo Teng Lye borrowed ten balls of opium, even before the one chest was transported to Kulim, taking them back as personal luggage on the same evening.⁸² Despite these somewhat ineffectual efforts, a few days later, the Chinese coolie disturbance so long predicted finally broke out. On the afternoon of 4 August, a crowd of about 600 Chinese assembled before the Kulim farm, clamouring to buy *chandu*. Only upon the arrival of a chest of opium at about 6 p.m. did the crowd disperse. The farm's licence plate was removed by the coolies and thrown down near the police station.⁸³ This was the story that was reported by the local Penang press and, a few days later, taken up by a Singapore press, as mentioned earlier (p. 67).

At this point, the *PGSC* stepped up the pressure and warned:

The farm [Kulim] will be out of opium again tomorrow, when it is feared that further riots will take place. More Sikhs and police are asked for to guard the farm.⁸⁴

But it was denied both by Brockman, the district officer of Bukit Mertajam, and by Gibbes, a British cadet, who were then at Kulim. Pushed into a tight corner, in defence of its statement, in its coming issue, the *PGSC* published the translation of Malay letters from both the Kulim sergeant of police, Ibrahim, and the district officer, Tunku Mohammed Saad.⁸⁵ On the 14th, in the face of the conflicting statements from officials in both states, the *PGSC* continued to comment that the British officers' statement were dubious, in the sense that they were not continuously resident at Kulim, nor were they responsible in any way for law and order in Kulim and had not had any experience of the large bodies of Chinese coolies there. It argued:

The premonitory signs of a riot are not always assemblages which visitors . . . will readily take notice of. Indeed the first signs are generally evident only to people knowing each *kongsi* house, and consist of a cessation of work and the coolies remaining within their *kongsi* houses.⁸⁶

This was in stark contrast to Tunku Mohammed Saad who knew his district very well and had experience of the 1888 Kulim riots. Therefore, the *PGSC* suggested, Tunku Saad's fear of further rioting was quite natural.⁸⁷ In fact, the *PGSC* observed that Chinese coolies were effectively under the control of Chinese *towkays*. Hence, the repeated emphasis on imminence of Chinese coolie riots in Kulim seemed to assume a greater significance, which will be dealt with later (pp. 107-12).

The following event proved that the opium crisis was far from over. Wan Ahmat, assistant to Tunku Mohammed Saad, came to Penang on the 16th. Bearing a letter from Tunku Mohammed Saad, Wan Ahmat stated that there was very little *chandu* left in the farm and asked for an immediate supply of extra opium. Meanwhile, it was said that Kulim opium farmer Lim Leng Cheak had also received a telegram from Mitchell of Kulim, to the effect that the farm there had been forced to close owing to there being no more *chandu* to sell. Lim Leng Cheak then urgently requested the Penang farm to supply him with 100 *tahils* of *chandu*. As the resident councillor was out of town, nothing could be done to relieve the exigency of the Kulim farm for the moment. Needless to say, the *PGSC* again criticized this policy.⁸⁸ News on the issue seemed to peter out, as attention now turned to the libel case instigated by the Kulim farmer Lim Leng Cheak.

The libel case

The libel case was paradoxically both a product and a continuation of the Kulim opium disturbance. The alleged libel was contained in an article

that appeared in F.C. Berger's newspaper, the *SIPC*, in the issue of 12 August 1893. In that article, the *SIPC* disclosed two sensational charges about the Kulim disturbance. The first was that Lim Leng Cheak had been engaged in extensive *chandu* smuggling from Kulim to Penang and Province Wellesley, and by these means had been making huge profits. The current general outcry arose from the fact that Lim Leng Cheak's illicit profits had begun to dwindle owing to the imposition of opium restriction. Second, it accused Lim Leng Cheak of instigating his Kulim farm employees to foment riots. Even more gravely, it alleged that Lim Leng Cheak indeed embarked upon a general course of agitation against the Straits government. It stated that the Kulim farm had become:

an entrepôt for contraband, and a hotbed for agitation, disturbance and riots . . . It is high time . . . that a stop should be put to this Chinese gentleman's doings, and that he should be told, in polite but stern language, that we won't have any of it, and that he will be held responsible for any breach of the peace that may occur in Kulim at his instigation.⁸⁹

To put it in perspective, how did this libellous article come to be published in the *SIPC*? After the *PGSC* published several statements criticizing the opium restriction, two lengthy letters, obviously from the other party in the conflict, the Penang opium farm, were delivered with a request for publication in the *PGSC*. These letters were signed 'A lover of truth' and were full of assertions contradicting the statements in the *PGSC*. They were also 'full of impertinence' about the *PGSC*.⁹⁰ But the *PGSC* refused to publish them and a statement was made that it was editorial policy only to take notice of responsible letters signed by the Penang farm manager himself.⁹¹ Both of these letters then appeared in Berger's newspaper, the *SIPC*, in an article signed 'One who knows'. Although they were signed thus, a brief note was enclosed signed by Oong Siah Wong, sub-manager of the Penang farm, to the effect that 'I guarantee and am responsible for all the statements appearing in the letter'.⁹²

In mid-August 1893, Lim Leng Cheak brought an action against Francois Charles Berger, the proprietor of the *SIPC*. The amount of damages claimed by Lim Leng Cheak was \$5,000.⁹³ The libel case was heard in Penang in December. Interestingly, upon the case being called, Berger's counsel, Murrison Allan, applied for a postponement of the hearing in order to procure the attendance of certain Kulim and Kedah officials and officials from Province Wellesley. But Lim Leng Cheak opposed the application and the court declined to grant it.⁹⁴ Agreement was then reached that Berger should publish an apology in his newspaper and pay Lim Leng Cheak \$50 damages. Berger did publish a so-called apology in the issue of 16 December. But Lim Leng Cheak was not satisfied, regarding the

'apology' as an aggravation of the libel. The libel case was again brought to the attention of the Supreme Court. It took almost a year before this case came to trial in September 1894. Berger was sent to prison for one year, charged with debt in relation to the costs of the libel case with Lim Leng Cheak.⁹⁵

Berger was simply a victim caught up in the opium politics. Behind the libel case lurked a number of other murky details. First, it was said that resident councillor Skinner had been subpoenaed with his permission to prove Berger's case; and Skinner had given his promise to produce the necessary documents in his possession for that purpose. But Skinner changed his mind at the last minute. Second, Mitchell, Neubronner and A. Kennedy were the first to sound the alarm about the nature of the Kulim riots. They were also subpoenaed to give their evidence by the *SIPC*. But none of them were called in support of Berger. Third, the libellous article in the *SIPC* was based on letters handed in by the Penang opium farmers with a written undertaking signed by Oong Siah Wong, the sub-manager of the Penang farm. But strangely, the action was taken against the *SIPC*, rather than the writer or writers of the letters referred to. Fourth, even more strangely, the *SIPC* fought for the Penang opium farm, but when the Penang farmer, Chew Sin Yong, was called to give his evidence, he flatly refused to take the stand. The *SIPC* therefore even had to subpoena him, but Chew Sin Yong was never put into the box. Last but not least, according to Berger, Lim Leng Cheak told him that he did not feel either libelled or aggrieved by the incriminating article. But he had been forced to take action in the matter by some friends who wished to ruin the *SIPC* and revenge themselves upon its editor for the part he played in opposing their agitation for 'Home Rule for Penang'.⁹⁶ Obviously, there was a powerful interest group or alliance behind Lim Leng Cheak, and this will be the subject of the next section.

The Penang 1893 petition

Coincidental with the 1893 Kulim opium crisis, a political move had been gaining momentum in Penang. The governor in Singapore, Cecil Clementi Smith, was due to retire in October 1893. Not pleased by this prospect, in the meantime, Smith had forwarded three memorials to London from the colony, requesting that his governor's term of office be extended. This tactic was initiated by the Singapore Chinese merchants led by Tan Jiak Kim rallying in support to the interests of the opium farmers.⁹⁷ The Penang opium farmers were asked to send similar memorials to London to exert more pressure.

However, the Penang farmers and the Kulim farmer, Lim Leng Cheak, were on opposite sides of the fence. Refusing to be used as a doormat, Lim Leng Cheak played a prominent part in setting up a counter-petition.

Lim Leng Cheak's group, represented by Lee Phee Yeow, Koh Seang Tat, Lim Leng Cheak and their ilk, had secured more than 3,000 signatures. Out of the 54 principal firms of Penang traders in *the Singapore and Straits Directory*, 17 signatures were on the counter-petition.⁹⁸ It should be remembered that Lee Phee Yeow, Koh Seang Tat, Ong Boon Teik, Ong Beng Teik and Lim Leng Cheak all belonged to the same interest group. All of them were very important business power-brokers in the Penang Chinese community between 1870s and 1890s, representing the Hokkien community. For example, Koh Seang Tat's influence could be measured by the 1888 libel case, in which he showed he could defy even the power of the acting resident councillor, W.E. Maxwell, by manipulating one local newspaper, *The Penang Herald*. In that manoeuvre, Lee Phee Yeow and Lim Leng Cheak were also closely involved.⁹⁹ In relation to the nomination of Koh Seang Tat as the municipal commissioner in 1892 (see pp. 60-1), there is no need to look further to find the closely interlocking connections between these 'big men'.¹⁰⁰ It does not lie within the scope of the discussion to try to discover the extent to which the Penang petition movement made an impact on the premature end to Smith's term of office in August 1893. But this incident shows that these Chinese business lobbies were closely involved in local politics and economy.

The opium allies and their motives

The 1893 Kulim opium crisis, disturbances and politics have now all been subjected to scrutiny. It has been possible to witness the interesting interplay between the following four groups of actors: (1) the Kedah Malay authorities, including the Sultan and members of the royal family, the Kulim district officer, the police commissioner and the Siamese consul; (2) the *PGSC* and other elements of the European community in Penang; (3) Lim Leng Cheak's business and political alliance in the Penang Chinese community; (4) and the Kulim Chinese coolies. This passes over the covert interaction between the Kulim Chinese *kapitan* and other actors, on the part of the Kulim farmer, Lim Leng Cheak, but it can be convincingly argued that they took part for the same business interests.

Top priority for the Kedah Malay authorities was that, if there were no opium, the monthly rents from the farmer would fall, producing big cuts in revenue.¹⁰¹ The pro-Lim position adopted by the *PGSC* in the opium crisis cannot be explained simply by the free press principles it claimed to espouse. Its proprietor, James Young Kennedy, a member of the Legislative Council, had close connections with Koh Seang Tat, the leading figure in Lim Leng Cheak's group. This can be gauged by the fact that, in 1888, Kennedy had stood by Koh Seang Tat in the latter's legal action against the resident councillor, W.E. Maxwell. Prominent among other supporters were municipal commissioner Huttenbach and the famous legal

counsel, D. Logan. Evidence indicates that some eminent figures in the European community in Penang, through Chinese middlemen such as Lim Leng Cheak, were closely involved in Kedah affairs financially. For example, in 1891, through the agency of Choong Cheng Kean, the Sultan asked the Siamese consul to help to repay his debt of \$9,000 to Logan.¹⁰² Again in reply to Lim Leng Cheak's letter of June 1892, the Sultan asked Lim Leng Cheak to borrow \$17,000 for his trip to Bangkok; \$10,000 from D. Logan, the remaining \$7,000 from the *chettiers*.¹⁰³ It is not difficult to infer that there were also Europeans arrayed behind Lim Leng Cheak. Turning to the plight of the Chinese coolies, to them opium was like a basic food for daily consumption. They did not want to see an unavailability of opium supply, like the British didn't want the coolie riots. Making use of such a mentality, for Lim Leng Cheak and his alliance, the stratagem was that, if there were no opium, there would be coolie riots. Chinese coolies hence became one important pawn to be moved into play against the Penang opium restriction policy.

After the 1892-4 Kedah opium farm dispute and the subsequent Kulim opium crisis, the Kedah farm was entirely at the mercy of the Penang farm. When the Kedah opium farm was put up for auction in February 1894, there were no tenders, as people were not certain of how much opium they could get from Penang.¹⁰⁴ After 1895, it was arranged that the whole Kedah opium farm (excluding Langkawi) would be placed under the Penang opium syndicate.

Conclusion

Focusing on the machinations around the leasing of the 1892-4 opium farms, it has been possible to discuss how the Chinese-Malay political and economic alliance shaped regional political and economic competition. As the Chinese revenue farmers controlled the dominant economic resources of both British and Malay governments, the contest over the opium farms between Chinese farmers developed into competition between the two governments. Behind each group of Chinese farmers stood the British and Malay governments, the official bodies with whom the Chinese farmers first had to settle their revenue contracts, creating an alliance against their common rivals. Based on the terms of the contract, each government provided their Chinese farmers with legitimacy in these opium politics. On behalf of their respective competing farmers, each government dealt with the other, having previously obtained their contractor's understanding. Capital shaped the alliance, crossing political and ethnic boundaries. Since both groups of competing Chinese farmers came from the same Penang political and commercial community, both could mobilize their own resources from British factions, while they allied respectively with different ethnic states. In Lim Leng Cheak's case, by standing between two

communities, both Penang (British) and Kedah (Malay), the Lim family could secure power resources from both sides to justify their own interests, using the press machine to address the public in the name of defending the interests of a weak Malay state at the mercy of the powerful British Penang authorities. This was the same strategy that the British had followed at an earlier date with regard to the British consulate and opium farm issues. Family, state and region crosscut and coincided with the frontiers of ethnicity, politics and economy, shaping alliances based on business, contracts, strategy and opportunism.

AN OLD FRAMEWORK AND A NEW DEVELOPMENT, 1895–1905

A new wave of global Western imperialist expansion and struggle for hegemony was in full swing in the years between 1895 and 1905. Prominent in the Southeast Asian battlefield was the Anglo-French rivalry, in which, owing to its own unique geographic situation, Siam found itself being a buffer between British Burma and French Indo-China, and hence maintained its symbolic independence. However, the southern Siamese Malay states, including Kedah, were secured by the British to obviate the penetration of any third power by the secret Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1897. In the other parts of Malay Peninsula, British expansion was expressed in the booming export economy and the consolidation of colonial control through the construction of a modern administration, a network of communications and transport infrastructure.

The opium farm continued to be the most important issue in Penang–Kedah relations. The British wanted to control the Kedah opium farm so as to check smuggling and guarantee revenue, so they allied themselves with the Penang opium farm. Kedah was still dissatisfied with the British opium arrangement, under which Kedah was placed at an economic disadvantage. This discontent simmered for a while, but then the latent internal competition within the rival Chinese groups generated a tense conflict between the two governments. This conflict spread to politics in Penang. Centring on opium, politics in Penang was determined by competition between the factions within the local British community, the press circles and the rival Chinese farmers who ranged themselves behind the British and Malays respectively. All the repercussions of these frictions were mirrored in the debate that raged in the pages of the newspapers.

One important new development in the early 1900s was the issue of the appointment of a Siamese financial advisor and a British resident consul in Kedah. This was triggered off by a debt crisis that had driven the Kedah government into bankruptcy (with a debt of more than two million dollars). The Sultan was very sick and the *raja muda* had taken over the administration. It was the latter who initiated the securing of a loan from the Siamese government. Siam was worried about that loan, insisting on restructuring

the Kedah administration and that a Siamese financial advisor be appointed. The local British colonial authorities were apprehensive about the expansion of Siamese influence in Kedah, and did everything in their power to promote the establishment of a British resident consulate in Kedah.

Chinese business, concentrated in the hands of just a few Chinese families, continued to be the focal point of British–Malay interactions. The British had to rely on Chinese family business networks to channel their political and economic influence and interests; likewise, the state of Kedah needed the Chinese in terms of revenues and in its interaction with Penang. Hence, regionally, this decade was characterized by a stabilization of the Penang–Kedah opium farm and a promotion of the resident British consulate. At the level of Chinese community, it saw a changing of Chinese family roles in the opium institution. The Choong family had replaced the Lim family as the sole agent of the Penang–Kedah opium institution. In the meantime, the Kedah Choong family had integrated into the Penang community by moving to and making their home in Penang (for information on the Choong family, see pp. 44–9, 85–94). Their arch rivals, the Penang Lim family, had been out of the game since the 1892–4 opium crisis and resultant conflict. Checkmated in the opium game, the Lim family nevertheless continued to maintain their other important business interests in Kedah, successfully operating as the sole monopolist in rice milling in the state, and also remaining important farmers of other revenues and planters. The business was managed by the second generation of the Lim family. In the space of a decade, the second generation again challenged these Penang–Kedah opium interests.

The resident British consulate

Nothing less than placing Kedah under exclusive British control was the aim of British policy. This involved two tactics: to secure privileged rights for British enterprises and, conversely, to exclude foreign ones. The strategy to achieve this would be: at the top level, to strengthen British control over the Siamese government; and at the local level, to establish a resident British consulate. They were, in fact, two interlocked chains: one forged to manoeuvre the Siamese government so as to be able to control the Siamese Malay states; and the other to appoint a resident British consul to watch over British interests on the spot.¹

Regional politics

As early as October 1901, the local colonial authorities had argued: ‘The presence of British consuls would have the great advantage of acting as a check on the Siamese officials in their dealings with the Malays.’² They

found justification in a recent order issued to its tributary Malay states by the Siamese government, saying that, in future, no concessions were to be granted by the rajas to British subjects, or to Europeans generally. The high commissioner, Swettenham, urgently contacted London with this 'very serious matter'.³ The British minister in Bangkok was then instructed to report on the exact nature and date of this Siamese order.⁴ It was found that the Siamese instruction was in accordance with the Secret Agreement of 1897. And it was the only security against the granting of concessions to foreigners by Malay chiefs.⁵ However, the Penang businessmen still complained of the trouble caused by this procedure, as nothing could be done before their applications were confirmed.⁶

One new development was that, due to Kedah's current debt crisis, Siam was prepared to send a resident or advisor to Kedah. In December 1904, the Siamese government had unofficially raised this question to the Sultan of Kedah. At the request of the Colonial Office, Beckett, British minister in Bangkok, was instructed to 'do all in his power to discourage the idea'.⁷ Governor Anderson was maintaining that Kedah was well capable of managing its own affairs and that there was absolutely no need for Siamese intervention at the present moment. As he later put it, 'if we have objected to Siamese interference in Kedah it was on the ground that the condition of Kedah was better than the condition of P[h]uket under Siam'.⁸ Anderson hoped:

His Majesty's government will oppose the suggestion by all means ... as [a] resident would be as disastrous to the interests of Kedah as to British interests in the Peninsula.⁹

Anderson urged that the appointment of a resident British consul should be made at an early date. In order not to afford the Siamese government a pretext for pressing the appointment of an advisor in Kedah, he suggested that the consul's headquarters could be either at Tongkah or Penang, even though he considered that the consul should spend most of his time in Kedah.¹⁰ Anderson disclosed his concern:

The opium farm business will be a source of trouble in the event of a Siamese advisor being sent to Kedah as it will be difficult to arrange for the holding of both Penang and Kedah farms by the same person as has been done [before].¹¹

In March 1905, the *raja muda* of Kedah had arrived in Bangkok with minutes of a meeting of Kedah officials and letters from both the Sultan himself and from the Sultan's mother. The *raja muda* had an interview with Prince Damrong and made three requests: a Siamese loan of about 2 million dollars; the appointment of a Siamese financial advisor; and the

establishment of a state council.¹² Contrary to the picture Anderson had tried to present, all of these indicated that the Kedah administration was plagued by many serious problems. Anderson was then very annoyed and turned his attack on the *raja muda*:

How far the state of the Kedah finances is due to the conduct of His Highness the Sultan and how far to that of the *raja muda* and the other members of the court cabal . . . it is impossible to say. The actual direction of affairs has been for a long time in the hands of the *raja muda*, who is by no means above suspicion.¹³

In view of the Kedah financial crisis, it would be more expedient for London to give consent to the appointment of a Siamese advisor without objection. Nevertheless, Anderson insisted that the British should secure assurances from the Siamese government on three points: first, the Kedah government should be left in the hands of the local authorities; second, the advisor and his assistant must be of British nationality; and third, the appointment and removal of the Siamese advisor should be subject to British approval.¹⁴ The Siamese government accepted the first two assurances, but had reservations about the third one.¹⁵ However, Damrong assured that the Siamese government would inform the British legation in Bangkok of any important measures contingent to Kedah, including the unofficial consultation on the subject of the appointment and removal of the financial advisor.¹⁶

The German presence in the region was also a strong argument for the extension of British influence. Local British colonial officials were afraid that the real aim of the Siamese was to 'bring in Germany as a supporter against the pressure of France or England'.¹⁷ British apprehension sprang from at least two causes. One was the German interest in the Langkawi Islands. Langkawi was an archipelago 60 miles north of Penang, consisting of numerous islands of great value to any maritime power as a supply base and a coaling station. It was said that Germany was approaching the Sultan of Kedah for the purchase of the Langkawi Islands. In January 1903, Swettenham advised that London should recognize 'the importance of shutting every foreign power out of the Langkawi Islands'.¹⁸ The British concern also stemmed from two German mining concessions in Kedah. The first one referred to a tin mining lease in Kuala Muda by an Italian named Cerruti, who was backed by two firms in Penang, one of which had German connections. The second one was the application of a German named Kaulfuss, for the similar lease in the same district, Kuala Muda.¹⁹ Anderson urged that the British minister in Bangkok firmly oppose these applications. Again, Anderson attributed the encouragement given by the local Kedah authorities to the applicants to the lack of a resident British consul and pressed that such an appointment should be made at an early date.²⁰

Appointment of resident consul

The appointment of a resident British consul in Kedah then became a high-priority point on the agenda. Indeed the Colonial Office had consulted Swettenham about this possibility in October 1901. But Swettenham had been afraid that the appointment of a British consul would be likely to lead to similar appointments by other powers. In February 1902, the Foreign Office informed the Colonial Office that the British minister in Bangkok was not apprehensive that such an action would necessarily be imitated by the other powers.²¹ Anderson was asked to submit a detailed plan, including such matters as the salaries and suitable candidates for consul.²²

As the Straits people attached importance to the presence of a resident consul, the Colonial Office was afraid that it would give the Foreign Office a further reason to bolster the proposal that the Straits government should pay the costs.²³ In February 1904, the Colonial Office suggested that the matter of appointing a consulate in Kedah might be set aside until the new high commissioner, Anderson, had arrived in the Malay Peninsula and had had the opportunity of discussing the details on the spot.²⁴ In October 1904, the Foreign Office suggested that a candidate with knowledge of the Siamese language should be selected. But Anderson argued that ability in the Malay language would be more useful than Siamese, and strongly recommended Meadow Frost as a candidate.²⁵ In November 1905, Frost was appointed the first British resident consul to Kedah and the western Malay states.²⁶

Chinese–Malay legal disputes

The economic integrity of the region contrasted with the political fragmentation of the state and the ethnic symbiosis of the spheres – that was one of the most profound characteristics in the Penang–Kedah interaction. By focusing on the resident consulate, we have seen the wider regional politics from the British perspective. Now, from the Chinese perspective, I shall continue to illustrate its dynamics by focusing on Tan Ah Yu's case.

As the Chinese in Kedah were divided into British and non-British subjects, the administration of justice was such that British subjects fell under the jurisdiction of the British consular court, and non-British subjects came under the jurisdiction of the Kedah government. In the nineteenth century, the Qing government in China had been weak. Unable to provide sufficient protection for overseas Chinese, the government itself was seemingly at the mercy of Western imperialism.²⁷ Many Chinese turned to the Western powers for consular protection. This was a mutual exchange. The Western powers used the Chinese as an instrument to promote their inter-

ests, while the Chinese made grateful use of the extraterritoriality privileges, such as consular jurisdiction, tax exemption and other protection. Such mentality was best reflected in Tan Ah Yu's petition to King Edward VII:

That he [Tan Ah Yu] had carried on business in the state of Kedah for the last 15 years during which time he has had great dealings with the natives there and most of them being high officials of the state, and owing to the government not having admitted him to be of British nationality, Your Majesty's petitioner has experienced great difficulty to recover the money due by them, for the majority of his debtors, who are Kedah subjects, on learning that the government had declined to entertain his claim had refused payment to your Majesty' petitioner.²⁸

Tan Ah Yu's case

Tan Ah Yu was stated to be a British subject, born at Bukit Mertajam in Province Wellesley. He accompanied his father, Tan Ah Kew, to Kedah in the mid-1880s. After five or six years, he established a goldsmith's shop as well as dabbling in tin mining. Sometime in 1902, he and some other Chinese traders in Kedah petitioned the government of Kedah, asking for a reduction in the high rate of duties and taxes on timber and jungle produce. He also made a complaint with the government against one local Kedah district officer, Mohammed Ariffin of Bagan Samah, for his refusal to grant mining land applications. Tan accused Ariffin of taking large bribes in the discharge of his duty. Two weeks later, the Kedah official, Tuan Teh, was sent to Bagan Samah by the Sultan to make enquiries about the petition. Tan Ah Yu, who was then in Kedah, was asked to come to Bagan Samah to explain matters. But Tan Ah Yu refused on the ground that he had to go to Perlis on special business.²⁹ It was then concluded that Tan Ah Yu had made a false complaint. The Sultan accordingly ordered a warrant for his arrest. Tan Ah Yu fled to Penang, and his shop and property in Kedah were seized by order of the court.³⁰ This initiated a lawsuit between Tan Ah Yu and the Sultan, which lasted at least 7 years.

Not deterred in pursuing his dispute with the Sultan of Kedah, Tan Ah Yu appealed to the acting British consul, Birch. In October 1902, Birch brought Tan Ah Yu's claim to the notice of Archer, of the British legation in Bangkok. Birch expressed the opinion that the Sultan of Kedah had decided the matter somewhat arbitrarily and the Siamese government should be requested to intervene. Archer then brought the case to the attention of Prince Damrong, urging the Siamese government to force the government of Kedah to restore the property and pay compensation.

Prince Damrong replied to Archer, saying that the action of the government of Kedah had been taken without knowledge of the fact that Tan Ah Yu claimed British protection, but that the Siamese Ministry of the Interior had now instructed the Kedah government to restore Tan Ah Yu's property.³¹ On 4 June 1903, Tan Ah Yu was also informed of this decision.³² Up to this stage, under British pressure, the Siamese and Kedah governments had been cautious in their handling of this case and felt obliged to give in to Tan Ah Yu. In the event, the *raja muda* sent certain articles of jewellery, but Tan Ah Yu refused to accept these on the grounds that there was a great deal more in his shop in Kedah when it was seized.³³ In turn, Tan Ah Yu claimed that he had been deprived of a monthly profit of \$400 and had suffered damages amounting to \$15,000 as a consequence of the stoppage of work at his tin mines and the seizure of the jewellery.

British subject or Chinese national?

Shortly after this, Birch left Penang and C.W.S. Kynnersley was appointed as acting British consul. Owing to Tan Ah Yu's refusal to accept the 'incomplete' restitution of his property, in July 1903, an enquiry took place at the British consulate in Kedah in the presence of Tunku Aziz, the *raja muda*, Mitchell, the commissioner of police, and other Kedah officials as well as Tan Ah Yu himself.³⁴ In August, Kynnersley referred a memorial by Tan Ah Yu back to Paget, the British minister in Bangkok, complaining that the Kedah authorities had offered to restore only a portion of the property seized and enclosing a list of the property claimed by the plaintiff. The upshot was that Paget wrote to the Siamese government, representing that:

The Kedah government, having placed themselves in the wrong by the seizure of the goods of a British subject, that government should now restore all the jewellery taken by the police, or its value, and should make reparation for the losses suffered by Tan Ah Yu on account of the stoppage of his mines.³⁵

The Siamese government was no longer content to listen passively to the British demands. Prince Damrong instructed Giles, the director of the Provincial Revenue Department, who was in Phuket at that time, to proceed to Penang and investigate Tan Ah Yu's case in consultation with the British consul. Giles carried special instructions to look into Tan Ah Yu's nationality. Accordingly an enquiry was made in the Kedah court records. The Kedah government had found a statement made in court in the year 1890 by Tan Ah Yu himself to the effect that he had been born in China.³⁶ It now appeared that Tan Ah Yu was not entitled to registration

as a British subject. In February 1904, Birch had to inform Paget that he had been unable to find evidence to support Tan Ah Yu's claim to be a British subject.³⁷ Birch also formally addressed Tan Ah Yu's lawyer stating that he was unable to assist Tan Ah Yu or recognize him as a British subject.³⁸ In Bangkok, Prince Damrong decided that there was no longer any need for the Siamese government to burden Paget with any more details of Tan Ah Yu's case.³⁹

The implications

Tan Ah Yu was indeed registered in the presence of all the Kedah officials by the former British consul, Skinner, in 1897. At that time, none of the Kedah officials had raised any objection to, or made any mention of, his identification.⁴⁰ In fact, his British nationality had only recently been accepted by the government of Kedah. And Tan Ah Yu was still in possession of the certificate stating he was a British subject, signed by the present British consul, Birch. In his efforts to prove his claim, Tan Ah Yu had to expend a great deal of time and lodge many petitions. There is no need to go into all of this in detail.⁴¹ Tan Ah Yu's case serves to illustrate how in the specific regional context, a Chinese–Malay dispute evolved and developed into a series of complicated interplays between the British, the Siamese, the Kedah native authorities and the Chinese. The nature of Chinese–Malay disputes changed accordingly. The legal controversy was transposed into a political one. The most ironic point is that the issue now became whether Tan Ah Yu was a British subject or not, rather than whether he was innocent or not from the judicial point of view.

The prominence of the Kedah Choong family

In Chapter 3, the scene was set for the two most important Chinese families: the Penang Lim family and Kedah Choong family (see pp. 38–44 and pp. 44–9). The interaction between family and state, centring on the Lim family of Penang, has been discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Now the spotlight turns to the Choong family of Kedah. At the beginning of this chapter, it was said that, as a result of opium politics, the period 1890–5 witnessed significant changes in the position of the two most important Chinese families in their relationship to the Kedah opium farm. Following the withdrawal of the Penang Lim family from the Kedah opium farm in 1894, the Kedah Choong family took their place. As agent for both the Sultan and the Penang farmer, the Choong family now had the whole Kedah opium farm under their sole control, whereas previously, this had been shared with their rivals, the Penang Lim Leng Cheak. Riding on a wave, this period witnessed the rise to prominence of the Kedah Choong family and the expansion of their business, which was comprised of

networks characterized by three segments: their Kedah-based business, the opium agency and their integration into the Penang community.

Family and state

A lack of source material has prevented the contextualization of the family business activities in Kedah. However, the network is clearly illustrated in Tables 5.1, 5.2 and Figure 5.1, which indicate that the Choong family dominated the state economy, their influence penetrating almost every district in Kedah. As the biggest revenue farmer, Cheng Kean was the de facto state treasurer of Kedah, assuming a similar role to that Lim Leng Cheak had performed for the Sultan in Penang. Particularly, after the Sultan had fallen out with Lim Leng Cheak in 1894 over the paddy farm, the former depended much more on Cheng Kean in his routine dealings with the Penang community (see Chapter 4). Cheng Kean's role can be divided into three separate functions.

The Sultan's personal manager: Cheng Kean certainly seemed to have played an important part in the Sultan's routine communications with the Siamese consul,⁴² the Penang agent, Lim Leng Cheak and other members of the Chinese community,⁴³ and even with the British resident councillor. Many of the Sultan's letters to Penang passed through Choong Cheng Kean's hand. Cheng Kean's most important role involved the opium farm. As he was the Kedah opium farmer, there was absolutely no way that Cheng Kean could not be involved, in the sense of acting as a representative of Kedah, in the state economic administration, the Kedah–Penang economic linkage and even the political relationship.

The Sultan's treasurer: Cheng Kean's role in this respect can be divided into two parts. One was simply to pay bills for the Sultan and the other members of the royal family. Two examples will suffice. In 1892, Cheng Kean was asked by the Sultan to go to Penang to deal with settling Tunku Rahman's debt bill of \$600.⁴⁴ In 1895, the Sultan asked Cheng Kean to give the Siamese consul \$1,000 for the payment of the cost of cleaning the Kerian River.⁴⁵ Apart from paying bills, like Lim Leng Cheak, Cheng Kean also had the task of securing loans from the Penang community.⁴⁶ As manager, Cheng Kean's other role was to organize the Sultan's horse-racing activities in Penang. Here he had also taken over the role of Lim Leng Cheak. For example, in July 1897, races were to be held in Penang. The Sultans of Johor and Kedah were expected to arrive and present cups for the race.⁴⁷ It was reported that Choong Cheng Kean's Penang partners, Lim Kek Chuan and Chuah Yu Kay, had made arrangements to prepare Choong Cheng Kean's country residence, in Scotland Road, for the Sultan's use.⁴⁸ I believe that there may have been many of this kind of business connection between Cheng Kean and other important members of the Malay elite. For example, the tapioca farm in Kulim and Karangan

was applied for in the name of Wan Mohd Saman, the uncle of the Sultan. But Wan Mohd Saman's name was later replaced by that of Cheng Kean, a move approved by the *raja muda*.⁴⁹

Business partner: A typical example of such partnership between the Sultan and Cheng Kean was in the shipping business. There had been a strong competition on the Kedah run, which was shown by the fact that there was an increase in the number of passengers sailing between these two states.⁵⁰ It was reported that two steamers, owned by Leng Cheak & Co., generally carried 'a great many more passengers than they are licensed to', even exceeding 50 per cent above the limit.⁵¹ Cheng Kean and the Sultan joined forces and bought a 49-ton steamer, the *Leong Ho*, and put it on the Penang–Kedah run in September. In the local press, this joint venture was deliberately declared in the form of a notification, more than an advertisement.⁵² Seen in the light of the later strong competition between the Sultan and Cheng Kean's jointly owned *Leong Ho* and Leng Cheak's steamers, such partnership and notification obviously reflected Cheng Kean's active strategy, by which he aimed to cope with the strong competition from Penang. No doubt as a weapon in this competition, the fares suddenly went down. In November 1901, the passage to and from Kedah had already been reduced from \$1 to 20 cents, and freight for cattle from \$1.25 to 50 cents per head.⁵³

Family and region

'In the former days it was the practice for Chinese to open a shop in Penang, where they would live to avoid squeezing by the Kedah officials, and trade with Kedah,' a Penang Justice explained in delivering judgement

Table 5.1 The Kedah opium farmers, 1895–1909

<i>Date</i>	<i>Annual rent</i>	<i>Farmers</i>
1892–4	\$44,000	Chew Sin Yong Choong Cheng Kean
1895–7	\$103,000	Gan Hong Kee Choong Cheng Kean
1898–1900	\$125,000	Lim Kek Chuan Choong Cheng Kean
1901–3	\$212,400	Lim Kek Chuan Choong Cheng Kean
1904–6	\$516,000	Lim Kek Chuan Choong Cheng Kean
1907–9	\$462,000	Lim Kek Chuan Choong Cheng Kean

Sources: PGSC 1892–1909; SE 1903–9; SC 1882–1909.

Table 5.2 Select revenue farms in Kedah under Cheng Kean's name, 1897–1909 (including opium farms which were shared with the Penang farmer Lim Kek Chuan)

Type of farm	Area	Term		Period	Annual rent \$
		Y	M		
Opium	Whole State	3	1	1898–1900	125,000
Opium	Whole State	3		1901–3	212,400
Opium	Whole State	3	1	1904–6	516,000
Opium	Whole State	3		1907–9	462,000
Gambling	Kota Star	6		1897–1903	25,000
Gambling	Sala	4	9	–	250
Gambling	Singkir	4	1	1900–4	600
Tin	Kulim, Bandar and Karangan	5		1898–1903	7,200
Tapioca	Kulim and Karangan	6		1900–6	7,000
Pig	Kota Star	3		1900–3	2,100
Customs	Kota Star	6		1908–14	46,000
Pawnbroking	Kota Star	6		1908–14	8,000
General farm	Langkawi	6		1904–10	7,000
Fish and fowl export duty	Langkawi	–		–	–
Customs	Langkawi	–		–	–
Customs	Kuala Muda and Merbok	2	7	1908–11	19,000
Pawnbroking	Kuala Muda and Merbok	6		1908–14	1,000
Gambling	Kuala Muda and Merbok	2	2	1908–10	34,000
Spirit	Kuala Muda and Merbok	2	2	1908–10	10,000
Pawnbroking	Kulim	6		1909–15	2,000
General farm	Krian	6		1907–13	10,000
Tapioca export duty	Kuala Muda and Merbok	2	7	1908–11	7,000

Sources: SC 1882–1915, KAR 1905–15 and Sharom 1984.

in a case of banishment, in which a Chinese claimed to be a British subject.⁵⁴ Almost every important Kedah Chinese businessman, after they had made their fortune in Kedah, went to Penang and became Penang Chinese.

Cheng Kean is a case in point. Around 1900, he left Kedah, moving to and settling down permanently in Penang. Cheng Kean's first wife, Lim Gek Kee, their two sons, Choong Lye Hock and Choong Lye Hin, and their families also joined him to live in Penang where Cheng Kean certainly had two dwellings. At the time of his death in 1916, the first wife,

AN OLD FRAMEWORK AND A NEW DEVELOPMENT

1880–2 <i>Chop</i> 'Ban Bee'		
Cheah Chen Eok Lee Chin Chuan	Gan Kim Swee Khoo Thean Poh	Cheah Tek Soon
1883–5 <i>Chop</i> 'Ban Bee'		
Cheah Chen Eok Lee Chin Chuan	Gan Kim Swee Khoo Thean Poh	Cheah Tek Soon
1886–8 <i>Chop</i> 'Ban Bee'		
Cheah Chen Eok Lee Chin Chuan	Gan Kim Swee Ng Ah Thye	Cheah Tek Soon
1889–September 1890		
Chew Sin Yong		Chan Lye Kum
October 1890–December 1891		
Ng Ah Thye	Khoo Thean Poh	Lim Ah Kie
1892–4		
Chew Sin Yong		Chan Lye Kum
1895–7 <i>Chop</i> 'Ban Hong Bee'		
Gan Hong Kee Cheah Seang Geok Lim Kek Chuan Ho Tiang Wan	Khoo Chew Eng Yeow Ooi Gark Tay Hee Hoon Gunn Tong Eng	Gan Ngoh Bee Khaw Joo Ghee Thio Tiau Siat
1898–1900 <i>Chop</i> 'Ban Gi Bee'		
Gan Ngoh Bee Lim Kek Chuan Tay Hee Hoon	Ho Tiang Wan Khaw Joo Ghee Yeo Boon Chit	Yeow Ooi Gark Thio Tiau Siat
1901–3 <i>Chop</i> 'Ban Lian Bee'		
Gan Ngoh Bee Cheah Choon Seng Lim Kek Chuan	Thio Tiau Siat Yeow Ooi Gaik Ho Tiang Wan	Yeo Boon Chit Khaw Sim Bee
1904–December 1904 the same as last term		
1905–6 <i>Chop</i> 'Ban Chin Bee'		
Gan Ngoh Bee Gan Teong Tat Thio Jian Siat	Chung Thye Phin Kam Teik Sean Yeo Boon Chit	Wong Choo Keng Khoo Cheow Teong Choong Cheng Kean
1907–9		
Lim Kek Chuan Yeow Ooi Gark Goh Boon Keng Lim Eow Hong Ho Tiang Wan Goh Teik Chee Quah Beng Kee	Yeo Boon Chit Cheah Tatto Cheah Kid Geok Chew Cheow Teong Lim Mah Chye Lim Seng Hooi H Jessen	Tan Khean Hock Leong Fee Lim Soo Ghee Choong Cheng Kean Lee Teng See Lim Cheng Teik

Figure 5.1 Penang opium syndicate, 1880–1909.

Source: *Singapore and Straits Directory*, issues 1882–1909.

Lim Gek Kee, their younger son, Lye Hin, and his family lived at the family house, No. 145 Acheen Street. The elder son, Lye Hock, and his family lived separately at No. 43 Malay Street.⁵⁵ His Tongkah secondary wife, Lim Gaik Teen, also came to Penang in 1902–3, when her son, Lye Teong, was born. Lim Gaik Teen first lived in Maxwell Road for a little over seven years before she moved to No. 180 Burma Road. When his Tongkah secondary wife was living in Maxwell Road, Cheng Kean lived sometimes with her, and sometimes elsewhere with his first wife or with his Kedah secondary wife.⁵⁶ While his Kedah secondary wife, Ong Ee Gaik, formerly lived in Acheen Street in Cheng Kean's house, her permanent residence was in Alor Star, occupying one of his houses in Kedah.⁵⁷ For the maintenance of his regional business and social connections, after he moved to Penang, Cheng Kean was in the habit of going to Kedah frequently. He went once, sometimes twice a month. Each time Cheng Kean stayed there for about a week.⁵⁸



Plate 5.1 Choong Lye Hock, the eldest son of Choong Cheng Kean.



Plate 5.2 Lim Liew Saik Neoh, the wife of Choong Lye Hock.

Although Cheng Kean moved to Penang, Kedah business was still his main concern. His close involvement in Kedah was clearly reflected in the fact that he continued to secure the Kedah opium farm (until 1909), and also that he did not relinquish his leading role in the Kedah Chinese community. In 1901, joining with other prominent Chinese *towkays*, Cheng Kean initiated the establishment of the 'Fu Shou Gong' (the palace of felicity and longevity) in Alor Star, the predecessor of the Kedah Hokkien Association. A stone inscription written in the name of Choong Cheng Kean, which still exists today, leaves no doubt about his credit.⁵⁹ In Kedah, there was a leading organization called 'The Chinese Merchant Club' for the Chinese business community, the headquarters of Kedah

opium farm.⁶⁰ For many years Cheng Kean had been elected as its president.

Family and the Penang community

Through his strong position in the Penang–Kedah linkage, Cheng Kean mixed intensively with the Penang business community. The evidence suggests that, as early as the 1880s, Cheng Kean already had financial channels with Penang. In the discussion about placing the Kedah opium farms under the control of the Penang syndicate held between the Sultan and the resident councillor, the Sultan mentioned that Cheng Kean's capital came from Jenik [or Gunny], probably an Indian businessman in Penang.⁶¹ His period as the Kedah agent for the Penang–Kedah opium syndicate gave Cheng Kean a splendid opportunity to cultivate a long-term relationship with the Penang elite. In 1900, when the family of Lim Hua Chiam, a powerful Chinese secret society headman in Penang, was celebrating the birth of a new baby boy, a magnificent ceremony was held. On the list of about 200 people who came to offer their congratulations, Cheng Kean's name was only twelfth from the top.⁶² In partnership with the Penang *towkay* Lim Kek Chuan, Cheng Kean held the lease of the Kedah opium farm for 15 years, 1895–1909. When the group of opium farmers formed their own social club, the Penang Literary Association in 1901, Lim Kek Chuan was president and the treasurer was Gan Ngoh Bee. Committee members included Foo Choo Choon, Chuah Yu Kay, and Cheng Kean, all of whom were among the most prominent members of the Chinese elite in Penang.⁶³ However, unlike their high profile in the Kedah Chinese community, at that time Cheng Kean's family kept relatively quiet in local community politics in Penang.

For many years the Kedah Chinese had been the agents for the Penang Chinese business community. This is an indisputable fact, but almost nothing of the detail is known. At this point, by focusing on a case study of the Choong–Lim [Phuah] family business co-operation, the dual roles and their strategy, which both Penang and Kedah Chinese adopted, will to some extent be revealed. Before business co-operation between the Choong family and the Lim [Phuah] family is discussed, I would like to turn back for a moment to the Lim Leng Cheak family, because during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, these three families played the most important role in the Kedah economy in general and the Penang–Kedah rice milling industry in particular. In the 1890s, there were two rice mills in Penang, which processed the Kedah paddy. One belonged to Lim Hin Leong; the other was the property of Lim Leng Cheak. Mention has already been made of the fact that the Sultan and Lim Leng Cheak had a falling-out in 1894. This was caused by the Kedah famine and by the subsequent lease of the Kedah paddy farm to Lim Hin Leong.

Taking these into account, it was no coincidence that Choong Cheng Kean had maintained a close business connection with Lim Hin Leong since 1895. In that year, Cheng Kean, Lim Hin Leong and several other businessmen joined forces to open three branches in Penang and other places under the names of *Chop* 'Jin Leong Bee', 'Cheng Nam Bee' and 'Jin Nam Hin'.⁶⁴

In Kedah itself, evidence also indicates that these two families had a partnership in the paddy business. It might well be around the mid-1890s that the Lim Hin Leong family joined Choong Cheng Kean to open a paddy shop, *Chop* 'Ban Heng Bee', and a cloth shop, *Chop* 'Ban Wah', in Alor Star. This partnership lasted some 16 years, only being dissolved in 1911, which coincided with the fact that Cheng Kean had his own two rice mills in Penang.⁶⁵ The paddy shop 'Ban Heng Bee' later developed into a large rice mill in Alor Star. In addition to their rice and cloth businesses, the Choong family also worked together with the Lim Hin Leong family to secure revenue farms in Kedah. For example, Cheng Kean secured the pawnbroking farms in Kota Star, Kuala Muda and Kulim for six years starting from 1908.⁶⁶ The lease was in the name of Cheng Kean, but actually it was undertaken in partnership with Lim Cheng Teik, the eldest son of Lim Hin Leong.⁶⁷ This long-term, close family business co-operation was also reflected in other important social activities such as marriage ceremonies.⁶⁸

In common with the Baba Chinese *towkays*, such an important *singkeh* Chinese *towkay* as Cheng Kean also had to have close relationships with the European power-brokers through hidden partnerships or other links. These long-term relationships are yet another indication of how central the Chinese businessman was to local trading networks and resources. The functional relationship with the professional legal institutions suggests that even *singkeh* Chinese *towkays* knew how to employ the so-called Western legal practice to protect their interests. The network (Table 5.3) was only one select part of the Choong family connections with the European power-brokers, which arose from the case of the disputed will. All the signs point to the supposition that there was much closer open and covert business co-operation with other ethnic communities.

The challenge by the Penang Lim family

As the whole Kedah opium farm had been placed under the Penang opium farm since 1895, Lim Leng Cheak turned his attention to Singapore, where he was a director of the Singapore opium farm, 1898–1900. Lim Leng Cheak's business in Kedah continued but was conducted mainly by his eldest son-in-law, Goh Boon Keng, who later ran the business together with Lim's eldest son, Lim Eow Hong. The second generation was also characterized by a business alliance between the Kedah state and

Table 5.3 Select relationships between Cheng Kean and European community

<i>Name</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Relationship</i>
H.G. Gomes	Had been practising medicine in Kedah for over 36 years	Knew Cheng Kean about 33 years. Met Cheng Kean frequently in Kedah, treated him from time to time and frequently visited his house. Had some properties in Cheng Kean's name: a brick house in Alor Star and some property near Alor Star. Claimed that, in his last talk with Cheng Kean in 1916, Cheng Kean even asked after the Sultan's health. Also asked him how Chepin [Ariffin], the government secretary and Cheng Kean's personal friend, was.
A.L. Hoops	State Surgeon, Kedah, from 1906; acting advisor during Hart's absence	Claimed he knew Cheng Kean very well from 1906-15; attended Cheng Kean some time prior to 1911; Cheng Kean came to say goodbye to him before going to China in 1915.
T. Gawthorne	Advocate and solicitor, Penang, from 1889.	Knew Cheng Kean for over 20 years, having done professional work him before; also knew his sons, Lye Hock and Lye Hin, quite well; drew up Cheng Kean's second will.
Messrs Logan and Ross	Advocate and solicitor, Penang, from 1874.	Knew Cheng Kean professionally for a long time (at least 10 years); drew up Cheng Kean's first will in 1912.
W.H.N. Bright	Practised medicine in Penang from 1905-6	Attended to Cheng Kean professionally 1911-16

Source: SE, issues in 1918.

the Lim family, making a united front against the challenge of the opium institution.

The second generation

Somewhere in the mid-1890s, Lim Leng Cheak's eldest son-in-law, Goh Boon Keng, began to assume the role of chief business assistant. He was

the fourth son of the late Goh Ooo Bee, a merchant of Penang, who died around 1890. Born in 1872, Goh Boon Keng was English-educated at the Penang Free School. After finishing school, he entered the Mercantile Bank and obtained financial training. Three years later he entered the service of Messrs Behn Meyer and Co. In 1894, he married Lim Kwee Sean, the eldest daughter of Lim Leng Cheak. Two years later, Goh Boon Keng started out, with his own money, as a general revenue farmer.⁶⁹ There is reason to believe that this must have been done with the help of his father-in-law and under the name of Lim Leng Cheak's family business, Leng Cheak & Co. For example, in December 1897, Goh Boon Keng was sent to Ceylon by Lim Leng Cheak to open up the rice trade between Penang and Colombo. His activities were reported in a long leading article in the *Times of Ceylon*:

Mr Goh Boon Keng is a young Chinaman in partnership with his father-in-law, Mr Leng Cheak, a wealthy ship-owner and planter, and proprietor of three rice mills at Penang.⁷⁰

As a representative of the Lim Leng Cheak family business, at one time Goh Boon Keng was said to run some twenty customs, opium, gambling and other farms in Penang, Kedah, Perlis, Situl, Perak, Negri Sembilan and Selangor.⁷¹ Goh Boon Keng was appointed as one of three executors and trustees in Lim Leng Cheak's last will dated 30 March 1900. The other two were Lim Leng Cheak's brother, Lim Phee Cheak, and his eldest son, Lim Eow Hong.⁷² After Lim Leng Cheak died in February 1901, Goh Boon Keng continued to work at Leng Cheak & Co. In 1902, as the most important revenue farmer in the district of Kuala Muda and Merbok, Goh Boon Keng arranged the biggest loan, no less than \$234,000, for the Sultan of Kedah from a Penang *chettiar*. Goh Boon Keng was asked by the Sultan to stand as guarantor for him.⁷³ As a representative of the Lim Leng Cheak family business, Goh Boon Keng played an important role in the establishment of the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1903. He was one of the committee members who were responsible for drafting the rules and regulations for the Chamber of Commerce.⁷⁴ But Goh Boon Keng only served one term. In 1904, Lim Eow Hong, the eldest son of Lim Leng Cheak, took his place on the committee.

At almost the same time as Goh Boon Keng was finding his feet, Lim Eow Hong, the eldest son of Lim Leng Cheak, assumed the responsibilities incumbent on the chief assistant in his family business. As Lim Eow Hong later went bankrupt in 1924, his business activities are so little known. Lim Eow Hong was born in Penang in 1878 and was educated at the Free School (English) and a Chinese school. He became an assistant to his father at the age of 17, which suggests that this might have been around 1895. Four years later, Lim Eow Hong was appointed manager.⁷⁵ In his



Plate 5.3 Lim Eow Hong, the eldest son of Lim Leng Cheak.

note of his official tour in 1900, the resident councillor and consul for the Siamese Malay states, C.W.S. Kynnersley, wrote: ‘another Chinaman has opened up a sugar estate on the banks of the river below Alor Star.’⁷⁶ This was a reference to Lim Eow Hong.

The Kedah opium farm, 1904–6

If the great change-over in the opium farms in the late 1880s fuelled murderous competition, then another change in the early 1900s created a similar confrontation (see Chapter 3, pp. 33–8; Chapter 4, pp. 64–76). Very interestingly, the second generation of the Lim family, after remain-



Plate 5.4 Lim Eow Thoon, the second son of Lim Leng Cheak.

ing on the sidelines for a decade, again joined forces with the Sultan to initiate this challenge.

Compared to the way things were done prior to 1903, the tenders for the 1904–6 opium farm revealed some significant changes of circumstance. First, the Straits government was anxious to raise revenues by deliberately instigating a fierce Chinese competition.⁷⁷ Second, in order to increase revenue, starting from 1 January 1904, the Straits government was prepared to raise the price of retail *chandu* from \$2.20 per *tahil* to \$3.00, or by nearly 40 per cent.⁷⁸ As a result, the opium farms for the term 1904–6 were let at rents that greatly exceeded those for the prior period: namely by 107.5 per cent in Singapore, 81 per cent in Penang and 62 per cent in

Malacca. Third, in the Penang–Kedah opium arrangement, Kedah had been a victim and incurred a great loss of revenue. According to the *raja muda*, during the 1900–3 term, Kedah lost revenue at a rate of no less than \$20,000 a month, or \$750,000.⁷⁹ And Kedah found itself in particular financial difficulty at the time of the 1904–6 opium farm tender. The need to raise revenue and the grievance born of linking the Kedah opium farm system into the Penang syndicate formed a cogent rallying point in Lim Eow Hong's challenge to the Penang farm.

The tender for the 1904–6 opium farms witnessed a scandal centred on the bargaining and the deal clinched between the Penang farmers and Straits government. The calling for tenders was not really serious, as it was no more than an attempt for the government to take the pulse of the farming community and find out what the value of the farm might be.⁸⁰ With this mission, in May 1903, Hare, the secretary for Chinese affairs in the FMS, was sent to Penang by governor Swettenham to conduct negotiations. Hare arranged a syndicate, which consisted of Gan Ngoh Bee, the current farmer, Foo Choo Choon, a big Perak *towkay*, and other rich Chinese in Penang and the FMS, to tender for the farms. The current Penang opium farmer, Gan Ngoh Bee, launched proceedings by mentioning the sum of \$185,000 per month. In consultations with Singapore, Hare returned to Penang and informed Gan Ngoh Bee that the government was prepared to let the Penang farms to him, provided that (i) Gan Ngoh Bee admitted Foo Choo Choon as a partner therein; and (ii) the monthly rent was raised to \$190,000. As a reciprocal gesture, the Straits government would endeavour to secure the Kedah farm for the syndicate for \$20,000 per month.⁸¹ On 22 June 1903, an agreement was reached between Hare on the one side and the farmers Gan Ngoh Bee and Foo Choo Choon on the other.⁸²

An active manoeuvre was also initiated on the side of Kedah. Prior to all this, the Sultan of Kedah had already agreed to let the Kedah farm to Chung Thye Phin for \$25,000 a month and the Sultan had duly informed the Straits government and the Siamese consul of this understanding in writing.⁸³ These two private agreements concerning the Penang and Kedah farms were exposed to the public in a blaze of righteous indignation in the local newspaper.⁸⁴ On 2 July, the public tenders were declared open. There were eight tenders. The highest tender was made by Chung Thye Phin for the Penang farm at \$260,000 per month. All the other tenders were higher than Gan Ngoh Bee's offer of \$190,000. As Chung Thye Phin had no previous experience of working a farm, the government had reservations about his capability. The jockeying to bring the experienced farmer, Gan Ngoh Bee, into the syndicate, while in the meantime pressing Gan to bid a higher tender than his original offer, triggered off a constant stream of negotiations and deals between the government and Gan Ngoh Bee. Finally, an understanding was reached on the terms that: (i) the govern-

ment cut the Penang opium farm from the \$260,000 per month tendered by Chung Thye Phin to \$220,000 (later reduced to \$217,000), and agreed that the syndicate could have both the Penang and Kedah farms at an overall price of \$260,000 per month;⁸⁵ (ii) Gan Ngoh Bee could have half the farm, but the other half should go to Chung Thye Phin, whose tender was the highest; and (iii) the government would undertake to secure the Kedah farm on behalf of the Penang syndicate at \$40,000 per month with one-to-three months' deposits.⁸⁶

Conflict and compromise

Far from being cut and dried, the Straits government could not come to an arrangement with the Kedah government. The Sultan of Kedah insisted that he would prefer to grant the tender to Lim Eow Hong, whose bid for the Kedah farm was the highest at \$43,000 per month. Not only was his bid the highest, Lim Eow Hong had also offered a six-month rent deposit to the Sultan. At the end of July, governor Swettenham arrived in Penang to intervene. In his interview with the *raja muda*, Swettenham pressed Kedah to accept the Penang farmer's terms at \$40,000 per month. As an exchange, Swettenham undertook to guarantee that the Sultan of Kedah would receive three months' rent deposit, twice as much as the Penang farmers had initially offered. Swettenham also met the Penang farmer, Gan Ngoh Bee, who flatly declined to raise his offer of \$40,000, but reluctantly consented to pay three months' deposit.⁸⁷ The *raja muda* then communicated Swettenham's offer to the Sultan. The Sultan still refused the governor's terms and instructed the *raja muda* to execute the lease contract with Lim Eow Hong.⁸⁸ The *raja muda* immediately informed Kynnersley, the Penang resident councillor, of the Kedah government's decision. In order not to give the Penang farmers and Straits government any reason to object, the *raja muda* reiterated that their interests had been safeguarded in the contract with Lim Eow Hong. To prove his point, Lim Eow Hong even bound himself to give the Penang farmers, should the latter so wish it, a one-third share in the venture. Lim Eow Hong had also expressed his willingness, should it be so desired, to maintain a representative of the Penang farm to watch over the Penang farmers' interests.⁸⁹

To change the situation, under instructions from Swettenham, Kynnersley hurriedly went to see the Penang farmer, Gan Ngoh Bee. The Straits government gave an undertaking to Gan Ngoh Bee that the Sultan would be paid the extra \$3,000 a month from the Colonial Treasury, so that it would equal the sum of \$43,000 offered by Lim Eow Hong. Eager for its pound of flesh, the government pressed Gan Ngoh Bee to pay six months' rent in advance.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Kynnersley officially wrote to the *raja muda*, informing him that Gan Ngoh Bee would be prepared to offer the same terms as those of Lim Eow Hong. Kynnersley was instructed to

threaten that if the Sultan did not accept these terms, 'the friendly relations . . . between Kedah and this government will be seriously impaired'.⁹¹ At Swettenham's request, the *raja muda* went back to Kedah at once and saw the Sultan himself and personally explained the situation. Discretion being the greater part of valour, the Kedah government was forced to revoke the contract with Lim Eow Hong and accept the proposal of the Straits government. But the *raja muda* did not hesitate to express to Kynnersley the Kedah government's reluctance, regret and concern about the future tender, in which Kedah became a victim again.⁹²

What did Lim Eow Hong think of this? It is significant that the *SE*, of which Lim Eow Hong and Goh Boon Keng were both on the board of directors, nevertheless reported that the *raja muda* had settled the lease of Kedah farm with Lim Eow Hong, and the details would be supplied later and so forth.⁹³ But this was denied a few days later by the *PGSC*.⁹⁴ This suggests that the dispute had still not been settled. It is certain that with Lim Eow Hong joining the tender, Kedah was strengthened in its negotiations with the British and Penang farmers. On the other hand, Lim Eow Hong was prepared to 'make it worth the while of the Malay state officials to secure for them these monopolies and the possibilities of large gains from smuggling'.⁹⁵

Conclusion

The British–Malay–Chinese interactions continued to centre on the three loci of the British consul, the opium farm and the Chinese family business networks. But, as in the flux of all social processes, the landscape had been changing. The British consul was promoted to become a resident; the opium farm was made subordinate to the Penang networks; and the Choong family replaced the Lim family as the sole agent in the whole of Kedah for the Penang opium farmers. The process of transition was not smooth, but fraught with conflict, negotiations, resistance and compromise. The competition cannot be judged simply in black and white terms. The result could be regarded as a triumph for British hegemony, but it also bore the clear imprint of Malay active manoeuvres. The Malays, in their turn, did not lose out as Chinese competition increased the amounts offered for the farm.

Chinese representation of both the British and Malay political and economic interests in Kedah formed the fundamental interface for these multi-ethnic encounters. The manipulation of the Chinese roles by both the British and Malays hence became a fundamental strategy in shaping the regional power struggle. Precisely the same mentality could also be attributed to the Chinese with regard to their dealings with the British and the Malays. The British claimed to be guardians of the immigrant Chinese in Kedah, but they primarily manipulated issues to tie in with their own

aims. They actively pressed the Siamese and Malays on behalf of Tan Ah Yu, but they betrayed him just as readily later. The Kedah Choong family maintained its main business base in Kedah and a long-term close relationship with the Sultan, but they decided to move and settle down in British Penang. The Sultan was aware of the acute competition between the two prominent Chinese families, but found co-operation with both of them useful. The Sultan's business relationship with Lim Leng Cheak broke down in 1894, but he allied with Lim's eldest son, Lim Eow Hong, in the tender for the Kedah opium farm in 1903. He originally granted the Kedah opium farm to Lim Eow Hong, but he gave in to British pressure and withdrew the offer. Such was the unique, subtle and even contradictory mentality of the British, the Malays and the Chinese. This was perhaps one of the fundamental historical circumstances for the making of Kedah and the region.

TRANSITION, 1905–9

The early 1900s witnessed the replacement of the traditional Siamese–Malay tributary system with a new Siamese advisor system in Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis. By the Anglo-Siamese arrangement, three Englishmen were appointed in the Siamese Malay states: they were W.A. Graham to Kelantan (1903), C.G. Hart to Kedah (1905) and A. Duke to Perlis (1907).¹ Alongside the Siamese advisor in Kedah was a British resident consul. This arrangement, which was based on a nicely judged balance of compromise and competition, suited both the British and Siamese governments.

The establishment of the state council with the Siamese financial advisor clearly indicated that its top priority should focus on rationalizing the economic administration and streamlining the bureaucratic machinery. But the appointment of the resident British consul, whose mission was to promote the British interests that were mainly manifest in British Chinese, undermined the central aims of the Kedah government. The idiosyncratic relationship between the sets of governments (the British versus the Malay or Siamese) in Kedah was complicated even more by the active manoeuvres indulged in by the Chinese businessmen. Therefore, developments in Kedah were characterized by continued Chinese business co-operation with the Malays, but with political reliance to the British. This British alliance with the Chinese delayed the state council's efforts to break up the Chinese revenue farming monopolies.

The role of the British consul

Kedah had two governments: one was Malay, the other British. The British consulate was in fact a small British government within the Kedah government. With regard to British subjects, the British consul exerted the same power as, or even more power than, the Kedah state council, represented mainly by the *raja muda* and the financial advisor. Whenever they had complaints against the Kedah government, Chinese businessmen turned to the British consul. Two classes of British subjects were identi-

fied. One referred to persons who had lived in Kedah for many years but who, as long as the consul had office in Penang, did not take the trouble to present themselves to him. The others were persons who were newly arrived in Kedah. Although the first class could not produce passports or certificates of nationality, the British consul still claimed that they had a perfect right to be registered all the same. In the case of Sikhs and Tamils who were obviously British subjects, the consul merely demanded the usual signed declaration of nationality. In the case of Chinese and Malays, where nationality was often doubtful, in addition to the declaration, he was required an affidavit by a credible witness that the applicant had been born in British territory.²

In January 1906, Frost, the first and only British resident consul, arrived in Kedah. It was clearly stipulated that on payment of a small fee British subjects would be registered at the British consul's office under the following regulations. First, all British subjects must be registered every year, and unless so registered they could not claim the consul's protection. Second, unless he so wished, a British subject could not be sued in the Kedah courts. Conversely, if he desired to take action against a Kedah subject, he had to do so in the Kedah court. If he did not get justice there, he could complain to the consul who would investigate his case. Third, no British subject could be arrested without a warrant from the consul. Fourth, the estate of a British subject had to be administered by the consul, and anyone desiring to receive letters of administration to the estate of a British subject could apply to the consul.³ In 1906, there were about 1,600 registered British subjects in Kedah. This did not include many others 'who have never taken the trouble to go to Penang and register'.⁴ In addition, there were many other British subjects whose principal place of residence was Kedah (Tamils and Malays), but who had never registered at all.⁵

Consul Frost usually had two lists he could consult: one was a list of Chinese registered with his consulate; the other was a list of Chinese registered with the Kedah authorities. In all cases concerning British subjects, it had been the practice for the Kedah court to send all the evidence and a draft decision to the resident councillor in Penang, who acted as a consul at that time. The consul then either approved the judgement of the Kedah court or suggested any alteration which he thought fitting. Most of these cases were commercial in nature, mainly land disputes.⁶ In 1906, the Kedah state council was drafting a new Land Act. One important point for foreigners was that the landowner had to waive all his extra-territorial rights with regard to the land, and agree to be subject to the land laws of Kedah.⁷ Even Frost thought they were 'good laws and suitable to the country'.⁸ But the Foreign Office pointed out that this surrender of his right to extra-territorial jurisdiction by any British subject only become effective with the consent of His Majesty's government and in pursuance

of an agreement between Britain and Siam.⁹ The British minister in Bangkok was then instructed to 'ignore the Enactment until His Majesty's Legation have been furnished officially with the text by the Siamese'.¹⁰ Even when the Kedah government decided to raise all rents on land according to the new land law of 1906, they met resistance from the British consul. In February 1908, certain estate owners at Kulim, Straits-born planters in Province Wellesley, complained to Frost that the Kedah government had broken the contract by raising the land rent from 25 cents to 50 cents per *relong*. Even though Frost himself thought that it was 'an absurdly small rent', he still approached Tunku Mahmud, the president of the Kedah state council, on behalf of these estate owners.¹¹ Frost's explanation for his action was that he could not stand the Kedah government's faithless behaviour in 'raising revenue at the expense of uninfluential *riats* or foreign traders'.¹²

The British resident consul was ready to protect the British subjects, whether their requests were reasonable or not. In land concessions, tax or duty reduction, and jurisdiction, or other matters of that ilk, British subjects enjoyed preferential treatment and privileges in Kedah and southern Siam.¹³ Hence, it was not difficult to explain why Penang Chinese had obtained from Kedah all sorts of concessions, such as rent-free estates, where their produce was not subject to export duty.¹⁴ Penang Chinese planters in Kulim in particular had hitherto been practically exempt from all taxation of any sort.¹⁵ A typical example was the case of Lim Eow Hong, the eldest son of Lim Leng Cheak, as indicated earlier. He owned large tracts of land in Kedah on which arrears in land rent had accrued for eleven years prior to 1906. The total amount he owed had accumulated to \$56,000. In June 1906, Lim Eow Hong came to Frost for help, but even Frost thought Lim Eow Hong 'had better pay up'.¹⁶ Nothing if not persistent, after a lapse of five months, Lim Eow Hong came to Frost again. Frost went with him to the office of the *raja muda* and financial advisor Hart in the afternoon. In the end, the Kedah government had to waive a certain claim to interest and allowed Lim Eow Hong to pay up at the lower rate. He was to pay only \$42,000 instead of \$56,000.¹⁷ Another example of British pressure occurred in 1907. The Kedah government attempted to impose an extra tax of half a cent on poultry to cover medical inspection. Twelve Kedah Chinese traders (British subjects) complained to Frost and the Kedah government was forced to rescind it.¹⁸

There is yet another interesting story. In January 1906, a Chinese businessman, Tan Kim Su, complained to Frost that a warrant had been issued against him in the Kuala Muda district. He asked Frost whether it was a government warrant or one issued at the insistence of a private individual. On inquiry, Frost found that a warrant for Tan Kim Su's arrest had been issued at the instigation of the Kedah Chinese *kapitan* named Giok Chi, accused of being involved in a secret society. Giok Chi was employed by

the Kedah government to find out about the secret societies, which were active at Kuala Muda and had caused trouble in Penang.¹⁹ Tan Kim Su's case was tried in the consular court in February. The evidence against him was a book, which according to Frost looked like a forgery. Interestingly, the *Kapitan China* telegraphed that he was ill and never put in an appearance. Tan Kim Su was subsequently discharged and in his turn now claimed compensation. As result of this case, Frost happily reported, 'a great number [of] Chinese shop keepers came and registered as subjects'.²⁰ Two Chinese, named Tan Hong and Kang Keng, who had registered in the British consulate, were even found to be Siamese subjects. In November 1906, it was the same Tan Kim Su who complained again that he had been charged duty at Kuala Muda on his tin ore, on which he had already paid duty in Rahman. Frost again asked the Kedah government to let his ore be exempt at Kuala Muda.²¹ These cases, chosen at random, show how the British promoted their trade and commerce in the region, under what circumstances the Penang Chinese conducted their businesses in Kedah, and why they formed close regional business networks.

Family and consul

In Chapters 4 and 5 there was a discussion of the Lim family's alliance with the Sultan to challenge the British economic institution of the opium farm. This alliance strategy showed great flexibility and a fair dose of opportunism. Despite their ties with the Sultan, like other prominent Chinese families, the Lim family also turned to the British whenever they had complaints against the Malay government.

The western Siamese Malay states were still one of the main territories of the Lim family's dominant business activities. For example, in June 1906, the tenders for the various farms in Situl were opened in the presence of the governor of Situl, the Siamese consul, Neubronner, and the financial advisor, Hart. Goh Boon Keng had secured the principal farms for a term of four years at the following prices: i) spirit and opium farm for \$75,100 per annum; ii) pawnbroking, gambling and duty on paddy and rice farms for \$31,200 per annum; and iii) salt duty farm for \$3,080 per annum. The Situl people were only able to secure the remaining small farms such as those for buffaloes and hides, gambier, tobacco and Chinese tobacco.²² There are very good reasons to believe that these three main farms were still actually run under the influence of the Lim Leng Cheak family estate. On the Penang jury list of 1906, it was noted that Goh Boon Keng was from Leng Cheak & Co.²³ Goh Boon Keng also offered the highest tender for the Perlis opium farm in March 1907. Goh's tender was \$23,600 per annum, while the other two from Choong Cheng Kean and Khan Say were \$21,840 p.a. and \$21,000 p.a. respectively.²⁴ In conjunction with his brother-in-law, Lim Eow Hong, Goh Boon Keng was a partner in the

Penang opium and spirit syndicate 1907-9.²⁵ However, thereafter, any mention of his activities in the Penang business community is rare; this may have coincided with his break from the Lim Leng Cheak family business.²⁶

Like his father, Lim Leng Cheak, Lim Eow Hong had been used by the British and Malay authorities as a good example of healthy development in the state in the context of Penang-Kedah linkage. In the first annual report of Kedah, it was stated:

The town of Kulim is the centre of the tin mining industry in Kedah as well as a centre for large Chinese tapioca estates ... Some excellent estates remain, notably that of Mr Lim Eow Hong situated some four or five miles from the town.²⁷

Lim Eow Hong's significant influence could also be seen in the fact that the British consul Frost went to Penang to consult Lim Eow Hong first, when there was a Chinese anti-taxation disturbance in Kulim in 1908.²⁸ This period also saw Lim Eow Hong's wide involvement in the main Chinese business interests in Penang, the FMS and Siamese states. In the most popular man competition in the SS and the FMS, sponsored by the *SE* in 1908, the 30-year-old Lim Eow Hong came second to 48-year-old Foo Choo Choon, the tin king of Perak. It was reported:

Lim Eow Hong ... is a wealthy miller and shipowner and, though a young man ... earned the respect and esteem of all who ever came in contact with him. Besides his vast interests in Penang, he has extensive business dealings with the Federated Malay States and the Siamese Western Provinces, and it is no exaggeration to say that his friends and supporters are as numerous in these countries as in Penang.²⁹

Previously in this chapter (pp. 102-5), the role of the British consul in the protection of the British subjects in Kedah, particularly concerning the land rent dispute between Lim Eow Hong and the Kedah government, was the main subject of discussion. At this point it is appropriate to mention the British role in Lim Eow Hong's dispute with the Kedah government over the Kota Star gaming farm and Kulim spirit farm. These two farms were let to Lim Eow Hong for six years in advance. The agreement had been signed many years before. The Sultan had promised Lim Eow Hong the lease of these farms when the present holders' titles expired in 1910 and 1911 respectively, provided that Lim Eow Hong lends a sum of money to the Kedah government. But the cash was not paid for some reason or other, and the late *raja muda* accepted pro-note in exchange. When the note fell due in 1908, Lim Eow Hong did not pay

straight away, and the Kedah government informed Lim Eow Hong that they had cancelled the farm contracts. Lim Eow Hong then paid the money with the interest on the arrears, but the Kedah government still insisted on cancelling the contract.

In June 1908, Lim Eow Hong complained to Frost. Frost had not had an 'opportunity of seeing the financial advisor yet, but [thought] there would appear to be something in the claim'.³⁰ In August, Lim Eow Hong again appealed to Frost. With his intervention, the Kedah government finally climbed down after consulting its lawyer.³¹ But the matter was not settled yet, as the Kedah government notified Lim Eow Hong that the contracts would be very much modified, which was greatly to Lim Eow Hong's disadvantage, and that no compensation would be offered. In September, Lim Eow Hong went to see Frost again about the dispute with the Kedah government. Frost held that 'the Kedah government attempted to break faith very badly with the farmers and will certainly have to climb down in the end'.³² This issue continued to be the subject of communications between Frost and the British minister in Bangkok in October. Frost insisted that the Kedah government should be absolutely bound:

Either to fulfil their contract entered [into] by the Sultan, or else to compensate the prospective farmer . . . I can only hope that the government will reconsider their present intentions.³³

There the issue rested until the British took over Kedah in 1909, which will be examined in the following chapter.

The 1908 Kulim riot

From a comparative perspective, as shown in the Chapters 3 and 4, if the 1888 riots were mainly Chinese internal conflicts but with a wider economic and regional background, and the 1893 disturbance was caused by an opium confrontation with the Penang farmers and British authorities, then the 1908 uproar was caused by anti-taxation concerns and directed against the Kedah government. All of these disturbances presented an in-depth historical and thematic perspective of Chinese economic resistance and power relations in the transitional period prior to the imposition of British colonial rule in Kedah in 1909.

In a wider context, the 1908 disturbance was not an exception to South-east Asian history. In Thailand, the 1910 Bangkok Chinese strike was very similar to the Kulim 1908 anti-tax disturbance in terms of organizational means and underlying mentality.³⁴ In the Philippines, the 'claims of excessive . . . taxation were among the most important complaints of the Philippine Chinese' in the nineteenth century.³⁵ In West Sumatra, a new taxation law introduced by the Dutch led to a widespread anti-tax rebellion among

Table 6.1 The family directorship in the main business groups of Penang, 1907–10

<i>Name of business</i>	<i>Family director</i>	<i>Other directors</i>	
Penang opium and spirit farm, 1907–9	Goh Boon Keng Lim Eow Hong	Lim Kek Chuan Ho Tiang Wan Cheah Kid Geok Cheah Chen Eok Yeo Boon Chit Leong Fee Chan Kang Choon Thio Tiau Siat	Yeow Ooi Gark Cheah Tatto Chew Cheow Teong Lim Mah Chye Tan Kheam Hock Lim Soo Chee Ong Hung Chong
Eastern Shipping Co.	Lim Eow Hong	Khaw Sim Bee Khaw Joo Choe Foo Choo Choon Lim Soo Chee Cheah Tat Jin Choong Cheng Kean Goh Teik Chee Lim Cheng Teik H. Jessen	Khaw Joo Tok Ong Hun Chong Yeoh Seng Lee Cheah Choo Yew Yeo Cheng Seng Lee Teng See Lim Seng Hooi Quah Beng Kee
Penang Khean Guan Insurance	Goh Boon Keng	Khaw Joo Tok Khaw Joo Choe Quah Beng Kee Chung Thye Phin	Khaw Sim Bee Khaw Joo Ghee Cheah Choo Yew Yeoh Wee Gark
Criterion Press	Lim Eow Hong Goh Boon Keng	Foo Choo Choon Lim Seng Hooi Yeow Guan Soek	Lim Soo Chee Quah Beng Kee
Great Eastern Insurance	Lim Eow Hong	Lim Seng Hooi Quah Beng Kee	Lim Cheng Teik

Sources: Wright 1908; Pongsupath 1990; Cushman 1991; *Singapore and Straits Directory*, different issues.

Islamic peasants in 1908.³⁶ On the same theme, in another Malay state, Trengganu, the Ulu peasants rose up to create a disturbance in 1928 in resistance to a new extra tax burden imposed by the British.³⁷ In all these cases, the rebellions were suppressed and taxes were forcibly implemented. But in the 1908 Kulim disturbance, the Kedah government was forced to withdraw the new tax and give in to the Chinese demand. How and why was there such a different result?

The background

The trouble in Kulim arose from a new customs farm – a government monopoly to collect 3 per cent import and export duties in Kulim – farmed

out for \$4,400 per annum to a Hokkien Chinese in Alor Star named Lim Chee Chay. The new tax was to be levied from May.³⁸ To add insult to injury, no tenders had been called for the farm before it was let out to Lim Chee Chay. Therefore the people in Kulim considered themselves aggrieved, as they would have been willing to pay three times that amount, and said that, even then, there would have been a good profit for the farmer.³⁹ Taking first things first, the farmer Lim Chee Chay appeared to have been personally distasteful to the planters, who were mostly Teochews.

The time also seemed to be inopportune for a new customs duty, as trade was generally slack. Since the beginning of 1908, the price of tin had fallen alarmingly. Most tin miners were badly affected. Prices, not only of tin but also of most other products, were very low. Many shopkeepers in Kulim at the time had been doing badly. Many were in debt to *chettians* in Bukit Mertajam and Penang as well as in arrears with rent payments. So they were not slow to join the boycott and left the town with a good excuse.⁴⁰ Moreover, owing to its close linkage with the British Penang, the Chinese in Kulim had a long tradition of resisting any attempt by the Kedah government to impose taxes. As early as 1900, the Kedah government had issued notices to the effect that all produce grown in the state would be subject to a tax of 3 per cent on export, and a licence would have to be obtained by the exporters at Kulim before any produce could be traded. As a result, in May 1900, about 400 Chinese squatters assembled at Kulim to express their grievance against the new tax. They joined many others including Malay gardeners to submit a formal complaint to the *raja muda*, and the Kedah government eventually abandoned the duty altogether.⁴¹

When these circumstances are recalled, it should come as no surprise that the 1908 attempt to impose higher taxation erupted into a disturbance. Matters were even more complicated as the disturbance in Kulim was also influenced by the secret societies. According to Frost, the British consul, it was said that the Kulim planters formed a secret society with its headquarters at Bukit Mertajam and they had long had everything their own way in Kulim.⁴² This is about as far as the evidence goes. How far the secret societies were involved in the disturbance is difficult to document because of a lack of sources.

The outbreak

On 2 April 1908, the news that the Kedah government had just instituted a new duty of 3 per cent became public knowledge. The Criterion Press Ltd in Penang, controlled by the Chinese business community, made this known in its English newspaper, the *SE*, and the Chinese newspaper, the *PSP*, respectively. Both newspapers simultaneously warned the

government to be prepared for trouble when the duty was enforced. Trouble was foreshadowed by the fact that many families were being sent away from Kulim to safety in the British territory of Bukit Mertajam and that many gaming farms in Kulim were raided.⁴³ In the next issue, the *SE* published a long lead article and again warned the Kedah government of the possible adverse effects, not just in terms of trouble in Kulim, but also affecting the inward flow of capital and the driving out of labourers. It argued that, for the present, the Kedah government could not afford to do without its Chinese labour and capital.⁴⁴

Events turned out exactly the way the *SE* and the *PSP* forecasted. At the end of April, as the time for the enforcement of the new tax was approaching, a crowd of between 300 and 400 Chinese coolies waited on the Malay district officer and demanded to know what the government intended to do about the matter. The district officer communicated with the central authorities and despatched his assistant district officer to Alor Star for instructions. As a result, on 28 April, 16 more Sikh policemen, led by the commissioner of land, Tuan Syed Mansur, left Alor Star for Kulim.⁴⁵ However, a boycott was further declared in the whole town of Kulim upon the enforcement of the new duty on 3 May. Anonymous notices were posted up around the town, threatening vengeance against the farmer, Lim Chee Chay, should he dare to collect the duties and against any person who would submit to him. Suitably intimidated, almost all shopkeepers had closed their shops and fled to Bukit Mertajam.⁴⁶ Business in Kulim was practically at a standstill. The customs farmer was unable to procure a house to carry out his business, as nobody in Kulim was willing or dared to rent one to him. Lim Chee Chay and the *Kapitan China* were hidden in the house of the district officer with a body of policemen posted outside to protect them from the fury of the populace.⁴⁷

The Kedah government was shocked by the trouble in Kulim. The Siamese advisor, Hart, the president of the state council, Tunku Mahmud, and the *Kapitan China* of Alor Star, bolstered by a number of Sikh policemen, came to Kulim to investigate matters. On 6 May, the British consul, Frost, also travelled to Kulim. Two choices now lay before the Kedah government: one was to use buckshot to enforce the collection of the duty; the other was to withdraw the tax and to give in to the Chinese. Looking back on the options available to deal with the Kulim Chinese taxation disturbance, it was interesting to note that two opposite views were developed in the two main Penang newspapers the *PGSC* and the *SE*.⁴⁸ The *PGSC* had been advising the Kedah government to take a strong line. The *PGSC* held that 'now that the law has been defied, the Kedah government has no alternative but to maintain a firm attitude',⁴⁹ the *SE* argued that, while this firm policy could work with savages who 'cannot retaliate effectually', when imposed on Chinese shopkeepers and coolie mine workers, it would only have disastrous results for Kedah. It urged that the

Kedah government should at once rescind or at least postpone the new duty.⁵⁰ If the government was prepared to rescind the new duty, it was said that the Kulim Chinese *towkays* had offered to pay the government a year's rent raised by subscriptions among themselves.⁵¹ After negotiations, the Kedah government decided to suspend the new customs duty and the one-week trouble in Kulim was over.

The implications

The 1908 Kulim disturbance revealed tactics of both passive and active resistance by the Kulim Chinese in their efforts to thwart the enforcement of the new government customs duty. Passive, in the sense that a boycott was instituted, and repeated warnings of trouble, disturbances or even revolt were voiced, or threatened with lurid exaggeration. But none of these subversive plots were ever put into practice and there was no direct confrontational show of violence towards the government. Active, in the sense that the anti-taxation movement was well-organized and deliberately planned, with clear aims, a flexible strategy and alternative manoeuvres. As before, it bore testimony to the joint complicity of Chinese *towkays*, coolie labour, the local press and the secret societies.

It was generally believed that the disturbance was not altogether spontaneous, but could have been engineered by ringleaders and Chinese *towkays*. The Chinese *towkays* not only contrived to impose their stratagems on the Penang press, but also manipulated Chinese coolie labour to serve their own interests. As in the 1888 and 1893 disturbances in Kulim, Chinese coolie labour was mobilized, both to justify the anti-taxation disturbance and to press the Kedah authorities to compromise. The coolie labourers seemed to listen readily to their *towkays*. It was reported that the Chinese mining coolies said that they had already reached a co-operation agreement with the planters. They would rise in revolt immediately they had received the order from their *towkays*.⁵² The ironic point was that, according to the Siamese advisor Hart, 'not a single one of the coolies . . . understood what the tax meant'.⁵³

The Kedah authorities, although they had been aware that the disturbance was engineered by the Chinese *towkays*, still settled down to negotiate with the latter, and ultimately withdrew the duty. It was simply being realistic, no doubt because Kedah badly needed Chinese labour and capital for its economic development. In order to save face, the Kedah government warned the people in Kulim that if any further opposition were engineered, strong measures would be taken to enforce the law, pertinently letting it be known it would act against the ringleaders and not the coolies.⁵⁴ A unique role played by the commissioner of police, Ben Mitchell, should be noted. When he retired in 1910 after 21 years' service, he recalled that when there were disturbances, the fault did not always lie

with the miners; the ball could also be placed in the court of the Kedah government. After eulogizing his own part in acting as mediator between the Kedah government and the Chinese, and the advice he tendered when asked by the Chinese, he disclosed that he had often gone to the leading Chinese Tan Ah Choy and Tan Ah Wong for advice. This had always been given most freely, and he had always received assistance from the Chinese.⁵⁵

In the case of Kulim, there was a recurring pattern discussed in previous chapters: the Chinese–Malay (government) confrontation was complicated and weighted in favour of the Chinese by the inter-state competition. Unlike Sumatra and Trengganu, the British colonial state was a spectator at the events in Kulim, not a direct part of the conflict. And the Chinese were also highly mobile, not being constitutional subjects of the Kedah government. The Chinese could readily mobilize the British political, media and other resources in Penang because of the close links and their British subject status. Given the finely balanced situation, it is no coincidence that such economic disturbances were strongly influenced by the political background in the region. There is no doubt that the Chinese in Kulim took advantage of this regional power play. It is no wonder either that the 1908 anti-taxation movement was a final chapter in this colonial power game. After Kedah's transfer to the British in 1909, Kulim was relegated to being a backwater politically as well as economically. Thereafter no more Chinese trouble was heard of in Kulim; and its economic position was overshadowed by the imminent rise of Sungei Patani, a new town in central Kedah, completely in the grip of the rubber-planting fever.

Conclusion

By focusing on the short-term function of the British resident consular office, it has been possible to discuss how the consul represented Chinese interests to the Malay government, and how the Chinese channelled their complaints against the Malay state through it. It implies that in the regional context of British–Malay–Siamese power politics, the British could be both used and depended on by the Chinese to protect them against the Malay government. Considering the role that the consul played in the revenue farming system particularly, the British actually stood by the Chinese farmers in obtaining the reversal of the Kedah government decision. This was achieved against the background of the ongoing decline in the revenue farming system, because of the political consideration that the Chinese were British subjects, while Kedah was off the British political map (namely being under Siamese suzerainty). This attitude also shaped the Chinese power play in the 1908 tax disturbance. Ironically, after 1909, it was the same British who tried to cancel the Chinese revenue monopolies (see Chapter 7, pp. 118–27). All this gives reason to believe that,

against this regional background, multi-ethnic encounters provided political resources for one ethnicity to play against another. Put another way, unlike the domestic ethnic politics in the modern nation-state, historical ethnic power relations here were mainly channelled through the international and regional political competition.

CONFRONTATION AND ACCOMMODATION, 1909–18

The British take-over of Kedah from Siam in 1909 ushered in an important epoch of transition, affecting the interactions of the three major ethnic groups: the British, Malays and Chinese. The British reconstructed Kedah as a modern bureaucratic state and triggered off a great socio-economic transformation. The British officials and the Malay elite made attempts to reach political accommodation, but were soon locked in a power struggle within the administration. At the same time, as the British attempted to revamp the Kedah judicial system, a clash of legal systems inevitably followed, intensified by British–Chinese economic competition and the decline of the revenue farming system.

Kedah was placed on a more liberalized, more institutional and more market-oriented basis; and it no longer needed to rely excessively on the Chinese revenue farmers or on a few prominent Chinese families for its revenue. The role of the few prominent Chinese families in relation to the Kedah state was henceforward reduced to bowing to the new situation. Their power as state agents partially reverted to the state, and was partially shared by Western capital and by other more recently arisen Chinese business competitors. In the resultant process of resistance and accommodation, the Chinese revenue farmers adopted at least three strategies. First, they made an alliance with the Sultan and royal family to protect their interests. Second, they turned to the British officials in Penang and Singapore for assistance as they had done before; but it was made increasingly clear that they could no longer rely on the British. Third, they adapted to the changing situations by re-channelling their capital into planting and other new economic activities. Hence, this did not sound the death knell of these prominent Chinese families. Quite apart from their entrenched position, the old-established Chinese families maintained and expanded their economic domains such as rice milling. They shrewdly made attempts to form another new economic monopoly. The Rice Combine, which aimed at monopolizing the local rice milling and trading networks in northern Malaya, was the result of these efforts.

The British–Malay legal conflict

The formation of the colonial legal order was a historical process, a process of alternating conflict and accommodation resulting in divided arenas of interference and non-interference, but yet occurring in one overall, if not integrated, colonial–political framework.¹ In the case of Kedah, this process involved not only the interactions of the colonial rulers and the indigenous elites, it also permeated regional business interactions, participated in by the Chinese and Western business communities. It was more than a contest between Western civilization and Eastern civilization, a test of strength between the Malays and non-Malays, between Muslim culture and interests and non-Muslim culture and interests.

The judicial system in Kedah

Before the British take-over in 1909, the laws of Kedah were Islamic laws administered by the courts of the religious judges or *kathis*, whose jurisdiction was increasingly being limited to matters connected only with marriage or religion.² Until ‘the Court Enactment 1339’ was passed, the only judges in Kedah (except the legal advisor) were Malays, who knew no English and lacked any kind of legal training.³ The judiciary consisted of the magistrate’s court, the high court, and the court of the state council. In addition, there was a religious court, i.e. the *shariah* court, whose functioning under British rule had dwindled into insignificance. The state council had the authority to make, carry out and interpret the laws. It also functioned as the final court of appeal. Below the state council was the high court, which exercised a jurisdiction corresponding to that of the Supreme Court in a British Colony. The high court was composed of Malay judges and, after 1916, they were joined by a European judge, who could not sit alone but who had to sit with a Malay judge in all cases of importance or difficulty. Below the high court was the magistrate’s court, consisting of three classes – the court of a magistrate of the first class; the court of a magistrate of the second class; and the court of a magistrate of the third class. All the magistrates were Malay officers.⁴

The Kedah judiciary was heavily Malay-centric in terms of personnel, religion and autonomy. Of the five members of the state council, four were Malays. The Malay members had shown that they did not necessarily follow the advisor’s opinion given on an appeal. In the case of the magistrate’s court, the magistrates were all Malays. The compulsory language of the court was Malay. There were no English–Malay interpreters attached to the Kedah courts and a European party had to present his case as best as he could in Malay, or through an interpreter who commanded only a smattering of English. But, owing to the close connection between Kedah and Penang, legal documents and correspondence in English were

constantly being produced as exhibits at the hearing of cases. They were required to be translated into Malay. This requirement resulted in difficulties in practice and irregularities in procedure, and also, to put it mildly, a waste of time and money. In addition to all of this, British counsels from the SS and the FMS were excluded from the Kedah courts.⁵

The Malay administration of the Kedah courts was incompatible with the rapid growth of Kedah's social and economic development. The British and Straits merchant community complained that the Kedah courts could not be relied upon to protect their interests and meet the legal requirements of the modern state. They urged the British officials to reform the Kedah judicial system bringing it into line with Western judicial principles and practice. They argued:

The state has developed rapidly and the development promises to continue. The material development has been due to the efforts of Chinese, mostly British subjects, and Europeans, and in the majority of cases in the high court the litigants are not Malay.⁶

High commissioner Young spelled out plainly to the regent of Kedah:

Owing to the development of the country and to the growth of large non-Malay interests . . . it is absolutely necessary to revise the system as regards the high court and appeals from the high court.⁷

Obviously feeling at a disadvantage under the weight of tradition, the Penang merchant community was also vocal in its criticism of the Kedah judicial system and called for its reform. The Penang newspaper, the *SE*, commented:

In all the courts the work doubled [owing to the heavy load of transliteration and translation], though the advisor can assign no special reason for this. One day . . . an attempt will be made to get lawyers with European qualifications admitted to practice in the Kedah courts.⁸

Almost a year later with the situation still unchanged, it felt compelled to say:

As regards the administration of justice [in Kedah] there can be no indulgence towards shortcomings. A free, independent, impartial, incorruptible and efficient judiciary there absolutely must be wherever there is British control.⁹

A legal advisor and a European judge

In 1909, the British decided to terminate the function of the British consul. The British agreed that the Kedah courts had jurisdiction over persons of all nationalities, including those who were British subjects. The inhabitants in Kedah may be considered in all respects British subjects, but the situation was anomalous as there was still an actual difference between British subjects and non-British (mainly Malays) subjects, those who were actually British born and non-British born.¹⁰ 'The Courts Enactment of 1339' clearly defined that the term 'British subject' should be deemed not to include any Malay, Chinese or Indian born in Kedah.¹¹ British subjects were protected by their right to require that a European officer sit with a Malay magistrate hearing any case concerning them, and by the presence of a European judge on the high court bench and the British advisor in the state council.¹²

Given the fact that the number of British subjects had grown considerably, in January 1916 the advisor asked the state council if Forbes, the legal advisor, might be allowed to assist him in hearing court cases in relation to British subjects. Acquiescing to this request, the state council then authorized Forbes to sit with a Kedah magistrate in place of the advisor and hear cases in which British subjects were involved. Forbes was granted the same jurisdiction as the chief magistrate of Alor Star in criminal and civil cases.¹³ In May, the advisor proposed that a European judge should be appointed to supervise the courts and to sit with a Malay judge, thereby usurping the present court of appeal. But this request fell on deaf ears as far as the Malay members of the state council were concerned. Only following the intervention of the high commissioner did the state council give in.¹⁴ Then 'the Courts Enactment 1334 (1916)' came into force, by which a European judge was appointed on the bench of the high court to sit with a Malay judge in all important cases.¹⁵

It was soon discovered that the European judge and the Malay chief justice found it difficult to achieve unanimity in cases. This disagreement originated essentially from the conflict of principle between Malay and non-Malay interests, between the Kedah legal system and the Penang legal system. One peculiar consequence of this failure to achieve consensus was their separate decisions on the case of Barker & Co. versus Ng Pak Siew and Goon Fook Ngi. Barker & Co. had been appointed receivers of the Kwong Hong On estate by the Penang court, and this order had subsequently been approved by the high court of Kedah. However, a large part of the land had actually been a part of the Kwong Hong On estate. The owner, Ng Pak San, had died years ago. His heirs, Ng Pak Siew and Goon Fook Ngi, appeared before the chief justice and were then granted letters of administration to Ng Pak San's estate. Thus both Barker & Co. and these two men had been granted an administration order in respect of the

same property. When Barker & Co. heard of what had happened, they brought an action in Kedah to request the administration order repealed. But the European judge and the chief justice saw this matter in very different terms and submitted their decisions to the state council separately.¹⁶ Although the state council upheld the European judge, this was only a lull in the proceedings and this British and Malay controversy continued unabated. Its progress will be one of the themes of the next chapter.

The Malay sultanate, *ampun kurnia*, and Chinese

The British–Malay legal confrontation coincided with another showdown that originated from the state’s ongoing efforts to break up the Chinese revenue farms. As the economic privileges of the traditional Malay elite were managed by the Chinese, the attempts to dismantle the economic supremacy of the Chinese involved political confrontation with the traditional Malay elite.

The Chinese–Malay economy

In the introduction to Chapter 4, the relationships between the Chinese families and the state were characterized as the ‘personalized’, the ‘ethnized’, the ‘institutionalized’ and the ‘appropriated’. These characteristics were manifest in the alliance between the Sultan and his cronies and the Chinese revenue farmers in their resistance to the British policy of terminating their economic privileges.

By acting as the legal agent and manager both for the Kedah state and for members of the Malay elite, the Chinese revenue farmers formed the core linkage between capital and labour, between production and market, between Malay peasants and immigrant labour, and between Kedah and Penang (the entrepôt to the outside world). This was a two-way circulation system: Chinese revenue farmers channelled the Malay agricultural subsistence economy into the commercial cash-crop economy, the immigrant commercial and industrial production into the outside market, and the local revenue into the state’s treasury or into the hands of the Malay elite. On the other hand, by acting as the supplier of consumer goods to both Malays and immigrant labour, such commodities as opium, foreign luxury articles and other necessities, the state revenue, coolie wages and Malay peasants’ earnings were re-channelled into the hands of Chinese revenue farmers. As the large increase in state revenue depended on the prosperity brought by the colonial cash-crop economy and the large influx of the immigrant labour, Chinese energy and management, through the marriage of Chinese capital and labour, local resources and regimes, then became essential to the maintenance of the Malay state and society. Until the British take-over in 1909, this Chinese–Malay political economy was so

important that there was no other force with sufficient impetus to come near to usurping the role of the Chinese. Hence, it was inevitable that any efforts of the state council to rationalize the revenue resources would meet with their joint resistance. The state council wisely adopted a moderate policy by compensating the economic losses of the Malay elite in exchange for their concession and acquiescence. Nevertheless, some serious political confrontations inexorably developed between these parties.

The case of Che Ariffin

The combination of power and capital not only bore witness to a clear ethnic identity, but also exposed how the Malay elite accumulated their wealth. Such an example of a less typical British-Malay partnership occurred between the Siamese advisor, G.C. Hart, a Briton, and the late *raja muda*, Tunku Aziz. They were partners in a pioneering rubber estate of 2,250 *relongs* at Tanjong Pow, each having a half share. This partnership was kept highly confidential and was knowingly concealed from the Siamese government.¹⁷ There were far more cases of Chinese-Malay partnerships. A typical example of one such was the joint property investment of a prominent Chinese *towkay*, Lim Thean Kee, and a powerful Malay state councillor. It all began in 1914, when the state surgeon recommended that the state council purchase the house of Lim Thean Kee, which was occupied as his living quarters by Pearson, the medical officer at Alor Star. In the British advisor's opinion, the cost was 'too large', while the state council would not agree to pay less as one council member was a partner. In the end, the British advisor had to agree to pay extra money.¹⁸ The Malay state councillor may have been either Tunku Mahmud, the president of the state council, or Che Ariffin, the secretary to the government.¹⁹

Che Ariffin was one of seven children of Muhammad Arshad and Fatimah, whose ancestors originally came from the Middle Eastern region of North Yemen.²⁰ As he was about 52 years old when he died on 18 August 1918, Che Ariffin must have been born in around 1866. He had a long period of service with the Kedah government, probably starting his career in the mid-1880s.²¹ In his early days, he had very close ties with the Sultan and was made *penghulu* of several *mukims* in Kedah. He had acted as secretary to the Sultan for a long time. But, as he was instrumental in the negotiation of the Siamese loan to Kedah, he should also be on good terms with the *raja muda*, who was in fact in charge of the government. When the state council was installed in July 1905, he was appointed as a member of the council. While the British took over in 1909, he was borrowed to assist in the work of the president of the state council, Tunku Mahmud. He was then officially transferred and appointed as secretary to the government, while his former position as secretary to the Sultan was taken over by Mohammed Murad.²² During Maxwell's period as advisor,

he was one of the most influential officials and inspired confidence in the other state officials, European and Malay alike. In him, Maxwell had a very useful co-worker. It was largely thanks to the co-operation between the two that during the time of the Kedah–British constitutional conflict many delicate problems were settled amicably. In passing it is interesting to note that he was a British subject and had applied for and received a certificate to that effect from the British consul, Meadow Frost.²³ In 1917, he retired on a handsome pension of \$4,000 per annum.²⁴

Che Ariffin's business involved revenue farming, mining, agriculture, housing and landed properties. His whole family had revenue farms or land grants in the form of *ampun kurnia*. *Ampun kurnia* was a royal grant from the Sultan to his loyal officials, which was either in the form of land grants or rights to collect customs, ferry or market duties, and so forth. It was '[in] lieu of salary, or allowance, or pension as the case might be: for it was easy to assign away sources of revenue, and extremely awkward to make monthly cash payments however small,' as the British advisor noted.²⁵ His father, Krani Muhammed Arshad, for example, had secured the port dues farm from the Sultan.²⁶ His brother Muhammad Yusuff, or Haji Puteh, held *ampun kurnia* for the fishing stakes licences, the right of licensing and charging fees for all fishing stakes in the waters of the state.²⁷ His other brother, Che Hassan, was also awarded a rent-free land grant by the Sultan.²⁸ The actual number of *ampun kurnia* that Che Ariffin himself held is not known, but at least two can be identified with certainty. One was the Krian market farm that allowed him to collect market tolls; the other was a guano farm in the name of Che Pin.²⁹ Along the one street in Alor Star, Che Ariffin had at least fifteen shops. He had also managed to acquire a fair number of estates.³⁰ Che Ariffin was reported as 'a man of considerable private means with large landed interests in the state'.³¹ He had 'a very big estate, being the richest Malay [in Kedah]' so that 'a big sum will go to the state exchequer as an estate duty'.³²

By way of illustrative material to elucidate the Chinese–Malay economy, the Kota Star oil-store farm would be the best example. A partnership for the oil-store farm was formed between two Penang Chinese, Kam Teik Sean and Tan Chong Keat, and a Kedah Chinese Chew Eng Seng in Alor Star. As an *ampun kurnia*, the annual rent of \$500 was paid to Che Ariffin. According to Maxwell, the British advisor, the said farm was supposed to be cancelled upon the death of Che Ariffin.³³ As Che Ariffin died in August 1918, an informal private note from Maxwell, who had been transferred to the high commissioner's office in Singapore as the acting secretary, led the state council to decide that the farm would be cancelled on 5 October 1918.³⁴ However, Chew Eng Seng and Tan Chong Keat, the partners of the late Kam Teik Sean, refused to take this lying down and went to their solicitors in Penang. The solicitors lodged a complaint given the fact that: (i) the lease of the oil-store farm

had been granted to the late Kam Teik Sean, not to Che Ariffin; and (ii) the said lease was for a fixed period of seventeen years, not within the lifetime of Che Ariffin. The original document was sealed by the *raja muda*, Tunku Abdul Aziz.³⁵ After the acting British advisor, G.A. Hall, pointed out Maxwell's mistake, Maxwell was forced to admit that what he had written before had been under a misapprehension, as he had not been aware that the *raja muda* had granted the lease.³⁶ This first intimation implies that a deal must have been involved behind the cancellation of the *ampun kurnia* between Che Ariffin and Maxwell, who had needed each other badly during the British-Malay constitutional conflict (1911-14), to promote their respective family and political interests.

The case of Wan Ahmad

If Che Ariffin was successful as a power broker who could always adjust himself to the changing situation, by contrast, Wan Ahmad was a victim of the British-Malay conflict, particularly of the British efforts to contain the Sultan's influence. The issue of Wan Ahmad was not an isolated event but inextricably linked to the constitutional issue in Kedah. As the Sultan had appeared to be 'obstructive' to the state council, the British had been looking for every opportunity at best to dethrone him or at least to take him out of the running by creating a regency, which would act for the Sultan in dealing with the affairs of state.

Three principal male courtiers had tremendous influence upon the Sultan after 1910, namely Wan Ahmad (or Wan Mat), Che Man Tajar and *Penghulu* Ismail. Wan Mat had long been a personal attendant of the Sultan, and the Sultan took him to London to attend the coronation in 1910. The Sultan had an inordinate affection for him, handing over to him control of his private property, entrusting him with the care of the regalia and certain state jewellery, giving him the key to the seals of the state, granting him a contract for the supply of food to the Sultan's private table and empowering him to buy a gift to be paid from the privy purse.³⁷ Wan Mat had land and *ampun kurnia* dealings with the Chinese, which the state council was most anxious to cancel. Sensing the threat to his privileges, Wan Mat turned to the Sultan for support and the Sultan's intervention created enormous problems for the state council.

The Wan Mat issue originated from two transactions with Chinese businessmen: one was a land concession; the other was the brick farm at Kuala Muda. In May 1911, the Sultan granted a concession of 6,000 *relongs* of land to Wan Mat free of rent. Frost, the acting advisor, and Tunku Mahmud, president of the state council, went to see the Sultan and requested that he cancelled this concession. But the Sultan adamantly refused. Frost turned to the high commissioner, Arthur Young, to intervene.³⁸ The Sultan then had to agree that the concession could be

cancelled if the land had not yet been sold. But when Tunku Mahmud asked Wan Mat to return the document, Wan Mat replied that he had given it to a Chinese merchant, Lee Peng Wat in Penang, against which he had received an advance of \$3,000. Armed with this information, Frost and Tunku Mahmud went to see the Sultan accordingly.³⁹ The Sultan still insisted that the grant should stand and that he would write to the high commissioner. In his letter to the high commissioner, the Sultan requested that this royal gift to Wan Mat be approved instead of being cancelled.⁴⁰ In May 1912, the acting advisor, Frost, accompanied by Tunku Mahmud and Tunku Ibrahim, went to Singapore and had an interview with the high commissioner, Arthur Young, to discuss the subject. At Frost's request, Young proposed that the concession should be cancelled and \$3,000 would be refunded to Lee Peng Wat by the government first, and then recovered by deductions made from Wan Mat's pension. But the Sultan argued that, while the cancellation of the grant could be effected, it would be impossible to carry out the proposal with regard to Wan Mat's pension deductions. The Sultan disclosed that Wan Mat's pension was \$80 per month, out of which Wan Mat had to repay to the *chettians* loan instalments of \$60 per month, leaving him a balance of only \$20 in his hand.⁴¹

Meanwhile, Wan Mat had his hands full with another case concerning the brick farm at Kuala Muda. This was an *ampun kurnia* granted to Wan Mat and Tuan Man by the Sultan. In November 1909, the state council decided to repeal the grant on the expiration of the stated period. The government would pay Wan Mat and Tuan Man \$50 each a month as compensation. But somewhat precipitously Wan Mat had already re-leased this farm for a further term to another Chinese, named Yap Bian, from whom he got an advance of \$1,000. The situation was even more complicated as rumour had it that Wan Mat had obtained the Sultan's signature to grant permission to that document.⁴² In the presence of the acting advisor, Frost, and the secretary to the government, Che Ariffin, Wan Mat undertook to refund Yap Bian's money within ten days. But when the district officer of Kuala Muda was asked to recover the Sultan's grant from Yap Bian and forward it to Alor Star, it was found that Yap Bian did not have the grant and Wan Mat had not complied with the stipulation that he should refund Yap Bian the money within ten days.⁴³

Returning to the land concession case, in March 1913 the state council decided to lend Wan Mat \$3,000 provided that this would be repaid by a monthly deduction from his state pension and security in the form of a land title should be produced. However, after the loan was made, it was found that Wan Mat had already deposited the titles with the *chettiar* for a loan. Wan Mat was hence prosecuted for fraud and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment.⁴⁴ Demonstrating his personal loyalty to his courtier, the Sultan sent a letter to the state council, stating that he pardoned Wan Mat, but the state council rejected the Sultan's request.⁴⁵ Moreover, in

joining Tunku Mahmud, Che Ariffin, Frost and the British advisor, W.G. Maxwell, took this opportunity to send a long confidential despatch to the high commissioner, asking for his acquiescence in appointing a regent to act for the Sultan.⁴⁶ Wan Mat's case was henceforth transformed into a British constitutional movement to remove the Sultan.

The demise of the revenue farms

Contemporaneous with the process of rapid socio-economic transformation, new opportunities for making huge profits also came within the grasp of the Chinese farmers. The state was unwilling to see Chinese farmers monopolize such profits. But the state could also not afford to lose the main revenue resources it derived from the Chinese in one fell swoop. Hence, in the initial stages of restructuring the bureaucratic machinery, the state council exhibited flexibility, pragmatism and opportunism. Whenever it deemed it necessary, the state tried to maximize the revenue resources by remedying the terms of the contract, by splitting up the farms and then calling for separate tenders for the parts. The state also conducted negotiations with a few prominent Chinese families. The following section will show how this process was achieved through the use of several case studies concerning both the main revenue farms and the dominant Chinese farmers.

The Kota Star gaming farm and Kulim spirit farm, 1910-16

In the Siamese era, political factors had driven the British and the Chinese into an alliance in their joint aspirations to play a major role in Kedah affairs. But then the British discovered that this alliance had shifted to include Western capital (mainly British), which regarded the Chinese businesses as rivals in the mounting economic competition. In contrast to the previous British attitude (see Chapter 6), a change of British policy was reflected in the continued interactions between the state council and Lim Eow Hong.

An agreement concerning these two farms was reached in June 1909 before the British took over Kedah. By that agreement, Lim Eow Hong was to make an instalment of \$10,000 as security on 6 September. But after the payment fell due, the promised instalment had not yet been paid. The state treasurer was then instructed not to accept the payment pending orders from the state council. One week later, Lim Eow Hong came to pay the money with an excuse that the date had slipped his mind as no reminder had been sent to him. The state council took this opportunity to modify the terms of the contract to the advantage of the government. Under the new terms, it was stipulated that: (i) Lim Eow Hong still had to pay a rent of \$55,000 a year for the gaming farm and \$14,000 for the Kulim

spirit farm; and (ii) the number of the gaming houses was reduced from 30 to 11. Under the old farm contract, there had been gaming houses in every little village. But the state council decided to abolish these and to allow gaming houses only in the towns and big villages.⁴⁷ Lim Eow Hong was hence deprived of a great number of profitable sources. Therefore, Tan Kong Puah, the agent of Lim Eow Hong's gaming farm, applied for permission to open a gaming house on Wan Muhammad Saman's canal. He expanded his request by asking that a police station be placed there. On behalf of Lim Eow Hong, Tan Kong Puah offered to pay their salaries for as long as Lim Eow Hong held the farm. But the state council turned down this proposal.⁴⁸ As a further whittling away at his profits, the farmer also lost the right to issue a pass for a small fee to any private person to manage a public gaming table in a private house. In response, Tan Kong Puah petitioned the state council for permission to issue passes at a reasonable charge. This once again was given the thumbs down.⁴⁹

This new government policy, which was designed to benefit the state, was also applied to Lim Eow Hong's Kulim gaming farm. When the Kulim gaming farm was due to expire in November 1911, the state council decided to change the system by: (i) reducing the number of public gaming houses in Kulim from eleven to six; (ii) permitting no one other than a Chinese to play in the gaming houses; and (iii) letting separate farms in respect of the six towns.⁵⁰ In order to discourage what it regarded as a regrettable natural tendency of people in Kedah to gamble, the state council decided to draft an enactment to prevent anyone, including the gaming farmers, from importing playing cards into the state without permission from the police.⁵¹ Even the British advisor admitted that the gaming farmers, for example those in Kulim, would certainly lose money.⁵² So, when the Kota Star gaming contract expired in 1916, Lim Eow Hong lost the tender.⁵³

Coming back to Lim Eow Hong's Kulim spirit farm, the same strong challenge from the state was found to be greatly to his disadvantage. The Kulim spirit farm contract expired on 21 November 1910, while according to his contract Lim Eow Hong was supposed to receive the farm on 18 March 1911. There was therefore an interval of three months between the two farm contracts. However, the state council decided to request Lim Eow Hong to take over the Kulim spirit farm three months earlier, and a fresh farm contract was to be drawn up accordingly.⁵⁴ Under the terms of his original contract, Lim Eow Hong had the sole right to import and retail liquors in his farm district and could charge whatever price he liked for them. Long correspondence was exchanged between the state council and Lim Eow Hong concerning the alteration of the terms. After pressuring Lim Eow Hong, in the end, the state council forced him to agree to a new contract, under which: (i) Lim Eow Hong had the right to charge import duties at the same rate as those in force in Alor Star, or similar to those in

the Colony, but anyone else might be allowed to import what he liked for his own consumption on payment of the duty to the farmer; and (ii) his rights as the sole retailer still remained the same as before, but any person might be allowed to retail beer.⁵⁵ These harbingers of the winds of change no doubt accelerated the decline of the Chinese family business empire.

The rice mill monopoly, 1912–15

As mentioned earlier, in 1888 the Sultan of Kedah had granted Lim Leng Cheak the exclusive privilege of working a steam-powered rice mill in the Kota Star district for a period of 20 years. This privilege was later extended by five years by the *raja muda*, and later again for another 10 years by the Sultan.⁵⁶ With this agreement firmly in place, no one had been tempted to open a rival rice mill in Kedah up to 1911. Now changing situations combined to accelerate the government's cancellation of the family monopoly. The first of these was directly related to the establishment of the Penang Rice Combine in 1912, which secured a monopoly in the local and regional rice trading market. And Lim Leng Cheak's heirs, the brothers Lim Eow Hong and Lim Eow Thoon, were among the most important members in the Combine (see pp. 127–33). This was of course in conflict with the Kedah's interests as a premier paddy-producing state. The second was part of the ongoing British effort to reformulate its policy with the aim of creating a colonial free market economy by destroying monopolies and encouraging competition.

The Sultan's grant of 1888 had not only circumscribed the powers of the state council, it had also failed to meet the requirements of the Kedah rice economy. According to the milling grant, the state council had to consult Lim Eow Hong (the owner of the rice mill) before approving any other new application. Actually, in 1913, there were already a number of applications for the establishment of a rice mill, which were encouraged by the government. In March, a Chinese named Lim Gan applied to be allowed to build a steam-powered rice mill in the *mukim* of Kubang Rotan.⁵⁷ In June, An Ah Yap from Alor Star applied for permission to open a machine-operated rice mill at Tandop.⁵⁸ In November, Lim Au applied to erect a small steam rice mill on the banks of the Sungei Jerlun.⁵⁹ All signs had shown that Lim Eow Hong was unable to build up new mills in these places. The state council decided to grant all of these applications.

The more serious challenge to Lim Eow Hong's privilege came from the competition offered by a Kedah Chinese, Lim Thean Kee, when he threw down the gauntlet. Happy to have in its compass a strategy to fight against the Rice Combine, the state council not only encouraged the other Chinese competitors, it also began to challenge the Lim Eow Hong's privileges directly. First and foremost, it was argued that the Sultan's document had not received the approval of the Siamese government. Second, according to

the grant of 1888, if the output of the paddy in the country increased and if, consequently, Lim Leng Cheak should fail to build enough steam-powered mills to deal with the increase, the document in question would become null and void. The annual report of the harbour master (1912-13) did indicate a huge increase of paddy output. Accordingly, the state council concluded that one mill could not deal adequately with such an excess of paddy, and in consequence decided that Lim Eow Hong should start to build the second mill immediately. Lim was asked to reply within one month, otherwise, the monopoly document would thereupon be regarded null and void.⁶⁰ Lim Eow Hong replied that he was willing to put up the second mill, and asked for 12 months to import machinery from Europe. But only six months was granted.⁶¹ After the six months had elapsed, however, Lim Eow Hong had still failed to start building the second mill. In March 1915, the state council took this opportunity to cancel the rice mill monopoly ahead of schedule.⁶¹

The export duty on the paddy farm

Under the changing economic situations, financial considerations were clearly important with regard to the export duty on the paddy farm. The rampant competition between the government and the Chinese millers centred on where the new marginal revenue should go. Owing to the large influx of immigrant labour, the paddy export from Kedah had experienced a large increase, but the export duty on paddy and rice in Kedah had been fixed by the Treaty of 1869 and had been maintained at that rate ever since, i.e. paddy was \$4 per *koyan* and rice \$8 per *koyan*. The state council decided to raise the duty as from 1912, but the right of collecting export duty was already leased to the Penang farmer Lim Cheng Teik, the eldest son of pioneering miller, Phuah Hin Leong, and a partner of Choong Cheng Kean. At first it was intended that the government should collect all the duty itself and pay the farmer his due proportion. This plan foundered on the vociferous objection of Lim Cheng Teik. Later an agreement was reached to the effect that: (i) the state council would allow Lim Cheng Teik to collect the duty himself, but the duty in excess of the amount fixed in the old farm contract should be handed over to government; (ii) the farmer should appoint Malay clerks and keep all accounts in Malay at every place; and (iii) all clerks and revenue officials should be selected and placed under the control of the harbour master, and others in a similar vein.⁶³ The export duty was raised to \$5 per *koyan* paddy and \$10 per *koyan* rice. The rate was raised by \$1 and \$2 respectively.⁶⁴ However, owing to the failure of the paddy harvest, the government imposed an export restriction policy for the whole of 1912. As a result, there was absolute prohibition on export for five months. It caused the farmer, Lim Cheng Teik, to suffer a great loss. This led to a serious dispute between

Lim Cheng Teik and the Kedah government over their respective revenues. After the intervention of the high commissioner, the state council acceded to Lim Cheng Teik's request for a remission of the farm rent for five months.⁶⁵

The Rice Combine, 1913-18

Although the government took over the most important opium sector from Chinese revenue farmers, it still had to depend on the Chinese community and their trading networks for the maintenance of opium sales and consumption. Meanwhile, a new Chinese enterprising industry, namely the rice milling industry, began to prosper in line with the rubber boom and the large immigrant wave. The importance of the rice milling economy to the government lay in its central position in the whole political and economic strategy. Just as labour was the mainstay of the colonial rubber and tin economy, so was rice the mainstay of labour in Malaya. Cheap rice meant cheap food; cheap food meant cheap labour. In its turn, cheap labour meant cheap production costs, more profits and continued economic prosperity to serve the interests of the rubber planters, tin miners and the government. The rice milling business therefore provided the arena for an intensive showdown between the colonial government and the Chinese millers, when the latter intended to monopolize the market and control the price.

Co-operation and monopoly

The Malay Peninsula was one of the most important rice markets, with imports comprising over 60 per cent of its total consumption prior to the Second World War. Internationally, rice was imported from Siam, Burma and Indo-China, and re-exported from Singapore to the Netherlands Indies, from Hong Kong and then re-exported to Japan and the Philippines, as well as to Mainland China. Regionally, Singapore, Penang and Kuala Lumpur were the three distribution centres.

With respect to the local rice milling business, the millers dealt mainly in milling local rice, but they were greatly influenced by the changing world rice situation. The rice mills were situated in or near the large rice-producing districts of Kedah, Province Wellesley, Penang and northern Perak. Apart from their own local paddy, Penang and Perak depended mainly on Kedah for their paddy supply. While in Kedah, the rice millers were concentrated in the northern areas centred on the Kota Star district. The rice and paddy trade route moved from the west to the east, and finally turned south to Penang and to the southern state of Perak.

Centred on the axis of the Penang-Kedah milling community, there had been a functional hierarchy, which was controlled by a few of the

interrelated Penang Chinese families mentioned previously. These Penang Chinese families formed a top layer of the Chinese rice millers' pyramid. They were the Phuah (Lim) Hin Leong family, the Lim Leng Cheak family and the Choong Cheng Kean family. These families' control over the rice milling networks continued through the second generation, namely the brothers Lim Cheng Teik and Lim Cheng Law, of the Phuah (Lim) Hin Leong family; the brothers Lim Eow Hong and Lim Eow Thoon, of the Lim Leng Cheak family; and the brothers Choong Lye Hock and Choong Lye Hin, of the Choong Cheng Kean family. The rice milling business history of north Malaya before the Second World War is basically their family history.

The paddy for the Chinese rice mills came mainly from the local market, but that market was quite limited. Usually the mills did not run full-time throughout the year. They worked about 20 days a month, sometimes they worked only half-time. The dearth in the paddy supply market contrasted sharply with the surplus production capacity of the rice mills. This yawning gap made it imperative for the Chinese millers to attempt to control and co-ordinate the whole regional rice milling market. To avoid competition and reduce risk, unceasing efforts had been made to form a combine. As early as in 1909, four Penang rice mills formed a rice-milling ring under the corporate name 'Tai Chuan Co.'. They were Phuah Hin Leong's Khie Heng Bee, Lim Leng Cheak's Chip Hong Bee, and Chuah Yu Kay's Sin Khie Bee, joined by another mill, Joo Cheang Co.⁶⁶ Not much more information is known about this ring. The 'Tai Chuan Co.' may have been the predecessor of the regional milling organization, 'the Rice Milling Agency', which was formally opened in January 1913. There were altogether seven mills in 'the Rice Combine': four in Penang, one in Kedah, one at Parit Buntar (Perak) and one at Prai, Province Wellesley.⁶⁷ Its Chinese name was 'Tai Yu Co.' with a starting capital of \$1,000,000, which was divided into 20 shares.

The partnership agreement of the Rice Combine covered the five years

Table 7.1 The Penang families controlling the regional milling industry, 1880s-1941

<i>Number</i>	<i>The first generation</i>	<i>The second generation</i>
1	Lim Hin Leong	Lim Cheng Teik Lim Cheng Law
2	Lim Leng Cheak	Lim Eow Hong Lim Eow Thoon
3	Choong Cheng Kean	Choong Lye Hock Choong Lye Hin

Table 7.2 The mills controlled by Rice Milling Co., 1913

<i>Mill</i>	<i>Principal owner</i>	<i>Place</i>
Chip Hong Bee	Lim Eow Thoon	Penang
Khie Heng Bee	Lim Cheng Teik	Penang
Ban Hock Bee	Choong Lye Hock	Penang
Joo Cheang & Co.	Khoo Sin Hoh	Penang
Chip Bee	Lim Eow Hong	Alor Star/Kedah
Kwong Mee	–	Prai/P. Wellesley
Kwong Jin	Heah Swee Lee	Parit Bundar/Perak
	Leong Fee	

from 1913 to 1918. During this period, in an attempt at rationalization, the Combine also closed three mills – one in Penang and the other two in Province Wellesley. For a time, the Combine worked the other four at a large profit. But with the erection of a second mill in Krian and another mill in Alor Star, profits began to fall. Two of the Penang mills had been put out of action by fire.⁶⁸ The older mill, Khie Heng Bee, was burned down in February 1918.⁶⁹ The other mill may have been Lim Eow Thoon's Chip Hong Bee, as its name disappeared from the press about this time. Therefore, until the end of 1918, there were eight large rice mills all operating in the region. In 1918, the partnership agreement terminated and the partners carried on the business independently until 1919.

Conflict and compromise

The other face of the Rice Combine revealed an ongoing process of internal conflict and compromise, reflected in their endless negotiations, quarrels and legal disputes.⁷⁰ In fact, outside the Combine, there were three other rice mills, which belonged to the same families as those involved in the milling syndicate. These mills were Choong Lye Hin's 'Ban Hin Bee', Lim Cheng Law's 'Cheng Law & Co.' in Penang, and the 'Kwong Hin Mill' in Parit Buntar (Perak). This arrangement might have been a strategy to appease public opinion and the government, as the Combine generated intense public debate in the local newspapers.⁷¹ To quote one observation: 'It would appear to be a sort of family arrangement to work for mutual profit while keeping up a semblance of competition.'⁷²

However, the internal conflict within the Chinese milling community did exist and was intense indeed. In January 1912, the rice millers were approached to form a Combine. The idea was the brainchild of Lim Eow Thoon, the second son of the late Lim Leng Cheak and the owner of a large rice mill in Penang. But, owing to the reservations of the other

millers, the negotiations took a long time before the final agreement was reached. Lim Eow Thoon turned first of all to Lim Cheng Teik, the owner of the 'Khie Heng Bee' rice mill in Penang. Lim Cheng Teik agreed that his rice mill should join the syndicate on the condition that Lim Eow Thoon put the matter before the other millers and obtain their understanding first.⁷³ Lim Eow Thoon did obtain the other millers' support to lease their mills and informed Lim Cheng Teik of the results of his inquiries.⁷⁴ On 11 April 1912, an understanding was reached between Lim Cheng Teik and Lim Eow Thoon.⁷⁵ After this, Lim Eow Thoon obtained the options on the remaining six mills.

No sooner did the deal seem nicely rounded off, when disputes arose. Lim Cheng Teik complained that the rents of some of the mills were too high.⁷⁶ In June, a meeting of the representatives of the mills was held, at which the question of Lim Eow Thoon's commission from the syndicate was also discussed. Lim Eow Thoon himself was not present. Subsequently Lim Cheng Teik told him that they agreed to pay him \$2,000 a month for a period of ten years, or as long as the syndicate lasted. But the condition was that Lim Eow Thoon should get their rents reduced, in the case of 'Kwong Jin' by \$1,000 and 'Kwong Mee' by \$500. Accepting the challenge, Lim Eow Thoon grasped the nettle, and successfully managed to have the rents reduced. Then, on 10 July, Lim Cheng Teik and Lim Eow Thoon signed three documents related to the formation of the Combine and the rights and responsibilities of each party.⁷⁷ But the matter was far from finished. The owners of the other three rice mills, namely 'Chop Chip Bee', 'Chip Hong Bee', and 'Joo Cheang', refused to sign the said document except upon an increase of \$250 per month of their respective rents as mentioned therein. Further negotiations needed to be held before 20 August.⁷⁸ Lim Eow Thoon eventually managed to secure the signatures of the other rice millers. But then Lim Cheng Teik changed his mind and refused to carry out his agreement of the 10 July. Therefore, the syndicate could not be set up, because this was a natural condition of the agreement

Table 7.3 The options of rice mills by Lim Eow Thoon

<i>Name of mills</i>	<i>Monthly rent (\$)</i>
Joo Cheang	3,000
Kwong Mee	4,000
Kwong Jin	6,000
Ban Hock Bee	3,500
Chip Hong Bee	2,500
Chip Bee	4,500

Note:

'Options' refers to the right to choose which rice mill to rent, as well as the rent on the mill itself.

between the mill owners that, if all did not come in, then the scheme would fall through. Thwarted in his ambitions, Lim Eow Thoon sued Lim Cheng Teik and his brother-in-law, Chual Chooi Ghee. The damages claimed amounted altogether to \$660,000. This was the situation before the Rice Combine was formally established in January 1913.⁷⁹

The state and the Combine

Strong reactions to the Combine came from three sides: the British administration in Malaya and the local Kedah government, the rubber planters and the tin miners. All of them stood for the same interests – the maintenance of a large, low-cost labour force. They thought that the Combine would attempt to monopolize the market and control the supplies and prices. The local newspapers were lavish in their criticisms of the Combine during 1912–13. The Kedah government's reaction seemed to be particularly vehement, for the wealth of Kedah depended on its rice fields. The state council declared:

This Combine may bring trouble upon the country, because the rice mills can arbitrarily fix both the purchase price of paddy and the selling price of rice; and all competition in the rice trade will be stopped.⁸⁰

To research this matter, the state council appointed a committee consisting of the advisor, the secretary to government, the state engineer and the superintendent. Several measures were taken to oppose the Combine. One was to declare the Combine to be an illegal body in Kedah. But the objection to this proposal was that similar legislation in other states had proved to be practically useless. Another was to assist some Kedah Chinese mills to enter into competition with the Combine. In 1914, Lim Thean Kee, a prominent Chinese in Kedah, was encouraged to build a rice mill at Alor Star with a government loan of \$125,000. The state council imposed eight conditions, including that of having nothing to do with the Combine. Maxwell, the British advisor to Kedah, noted:

This man proposes to open a ricemill at Alor Star to compete with the Rice Combine. Such an enterprise is deserving of all encouragement from the government.⁸¹

However, repudiating the loan terms, Lim Thean Kee made fresh counter proposals. And in view of an expected fall in the revenue next year, the state council had to reject his application.⁸² The third was that the government should build and manage a mill, or even a number of mills. The state council invited J. Reid from Rangoon, a managing partner in a very large

rice mill there, to visit Alor Star and report on this matter. In 1914, Reid submitted a detailed report, recommending the construction of a government mill.⁸³ The council mulled over the report for a long time.⁸⁴ In 1918, the British advisor in Kedah was informed by the high commissioner that he should advise the state council to take over the project at once and manage the Alor Star rice mill. The legislation was then passed giving the government power to take over the mill. The scheme was estimated to cost \$368,600 and would take 18 months to complete. But the problem was how to get access to the experienced management and trading networks, particularly because if the object was 'to reduce the cost of rice to the consumer, the most detailed elaboration is required', as the British advisor reported.⁸⁵ This scheme was hence put aside.

To enhance the paddy price and depress the rice price, the government's other effort was to break the Chinese rice millers' financial ties with the Malay peasantry. This refers to the very common practice of the advance sale system of paddy, known as '*paddy kunca*'. The majority of the paddy planters had fallen into the clutches of Chinese paddy dealers, to whom they were in serious debt. At the beginning of every planting season, through paddy dealers, the rice miller advanced loans to most of the Malay cultivators. The miller would provide the cash loans in exchange for paddy at harvest time. The practice was heavily criticized for its exploitative nature. The cultivators were required to pay back their loan to the miller in paddy at a price under the market rates, and at exorbitant interest rates.⁸⁶

However, the '*paddy kunca*' system raises complicated questions. For the Malays, it was essentially an answer of sorts to the social issue of poverty. For the Chinese miller, it was primarily an economic issue, through which the miller not only guaranteed the supply market of paddy producers, but also made a profit as a capitalist. The British, however, saw it much more as a socio-political issue rather than a purely economic one.⁸⁷ Therefore, the government's policy after 1909 was basically centred on the rivalry with Chinese rice millers for the control of the Malay peasantry. The government loan scheme in 1910-16 and the Credit Society for paddy planters in the late 1910s were both aimed at destroying the intermediary hold of the Chinese over the Malay peasantry. It was claimed that its object was to 'keep the Malay paddy planters out of indebtedness to the Chinese paddy dealers', to 'release them from the clutches of the "Rice Combine"'.⁸⁸ All these efforts failed in the end, although earlier the government had boasted of their great success. Even the British district officer in Perak thought the government loan scheme was 'a failure although it . . . gave some temporary relief'. The most serious defect was its fixed time for repayment at the harvest. This exacerbated the paddy market situation, as the paddy planters had to repay their loans in paddy crop simultaneously to the government, Chinese paddy dealers and the

chettians.⁸⁹ Many reports indicated that the Malay paddy planters were unable to repay their government loans even by selling their cattle.⁹⁰ A number of the Malay paddy planters were prosecuted for that reason.⁹¹

Conclusion

After 1909, the political and economic system in Kedah was reconstructed on the basis of a new colonial political and economic order. All the former institutions of the British consulate, the revenue farms and Chinese family businesses accordingly underwent great transformations. This led to the struggle for control over the local society, people and resources, not only between the traditional Malay elite and the modern British administrators in the state apparatus, but also between the Chinese revenue farmers and the state council.

The family and state, or Malay-Chinese, relationships changed with the alteration of the British-Malay political relationships. In their political and economic interactions with the Malays, Chinese businesses could no longer enjoy British protection as they had previously. The boot was now on the other foot, and the British joined the Malays and shared power with them to create a modern state. This state became stronger than it had been before; and the Chinese family business's role in relation to the state was greatly diminished. In part they had to cede their influence in facing the challenge of the modern state, and they were now also confronted with competition from both Western capital and rival Chinese businesses. The modern state had been transformed into a state consisting of the British and the Malays in partnership, with the Chinese excluded. The long and difficult process of evolving a new power mechanism was being created. The British, however, did not have it all their own way as some of their schemes met with active Malay resistance. The Malays were divided into the old traditional elite centred on the Sultan and the new elite centred on the president of the state council, Tunku Mahmud. The British found Chinese understanding in their political-legal conflict with the Malays. The Chinese found common economic interests with the old Malay elite in their struggle against the British administrators' effort to destroy the *ampun kurnia* system. Both the British administrators and the Malay elite on the state council undertook to break up and reclaim the Chinese revenue monopolies. They shared the same interests in waging a war against the Penang Chinese Rice Combine for the sake of the welfare of the Kedah state.

ANOTHER ROUND OF ADJUSTMENT, 1918–28

By gradually building up the modern bureaucratic machinery, and by eliminating the intermediary roles of the Chinese revenue farmers, the ruling British–Malay partnership set up the framework of the multi-ethnic political, legal and economic order in the years between 1919 and 1928. The British–Malay legal institution was refined even more in the ‘Kedah’s Courts Enactment 1339’. The British made concessions to Malay autonomy in negotiations over the issue of Kedah’s constitutional status and these were formally ratified in the Anglo-Kedah Treaty of 1923. The economic system was deregulated by the lifting of Chinese monopolies, and liberalized through the introduction of a market-oriented policy allowing for economic power to be shared between Western and Chinese capital. These changes led to the rise within the ranks of the Penang–Kedah Chinese business community of the second generation of the old established Chinese families such as Lim Leng Cheak, Choong Cheng Kean and Phuah (Lim) Hin Leong. The *singkeh* Chinese, Lim Boon Haw, also emerged on the stage to play a leading role. To suit these circumstances, the Chinese rice milling ring changed tack and developed a new form, the Central Milling Agency, leading to a change in the leadership.

The British–Malay legal showdown

In November 1918, the most important British business lobby, the Kedah Planters Association, passed a resolution and submitted copies of it to the high commissioner, the regent of Kedah and the British advisor. The resolution was that:

The present system of appeal in Kedah is out of date and no longer suited to the requirements of the state . . . There is therefore urgent need for the constitution of the court of appeal, that is, an appeal from the high court to Johor court of appeal.¹

The Johor court of appeal had been instituted a few years earlier. It was

composed of judges of the SS and judicial commissioners of the FMS, who sat in Johor as a court of appeal. Solicitors and advocates from the SS and the FMS could appear before it. The language used at the court of appeal was, of course, English.²

The Kedah Malay authorities found themselves in a cleft stick. If they were to follow Johor's step, they would have to surrender even more of their independence. They feared that this would inevitably be followed by changes to the constitution of Kedah, which would facilitate the displacement of Malay officers. Therefore, the state council did not agree with this proposal and preferred to make no alteration. Considering the incompatibility between the duties of the legal advisor and those of a judge, however, the state council was further of the opinion that if separate officers were to be appointed as legal advisor and as European judge, the state council would then be able to obtain the advice of the legal advisor on any appeal.³ The regent proposed to the high commissioner that a second officer be sent to Kedah to fill one of these posts. While high commissioner Young undertook to send a second officer when the exigencies of the service permitted, he also stressed that the state council itself was the executive body and the legislature, as well as the final court of appeal. It seemed to him that there was a serious defect in the judicial system of Kedah, and he suggested that steps should be taken to remedy it. Standing his ground, the regent replied that he did not wish this question to be raised.⁴ With some tact, the British bided their time and waited for a good opportunity.

This opportunity came in the form of the retirement of the state treasurer, leaving a vacancy for the Malay chief justice to be transferred without any infringement on his dignity. At the suggestion of the legal advisor, Gibson, the incumbent advisor Hall alerted the high commissioner of this opportunity for a reform of the Kedah judicial system. In June 1919, high commissioner Young wrote to the regent, putting down three main points considered to be necessary for an adjustment to the legal system: (i) reconstruction of the high court constitution; (ii) the establishment of a court of appeal composed of judges of the colony itself or judicial commissioners of the FMS; and (iii) the opening of the Kedah courts to counsel and adoption of some form of civil law.⁵ Digging in its heels, the state council replied that there was no way at present to meet their requirements.⁶ In reply, the regent made another proposal. He agreed to the establishment of the appeal court consisting of judges borrowed from the Colony and to the appearance of counsel before such a court but, standing his ground, refused to change the high court's constitution.

Wary of an encroachment on their powers, the Malay members of the state council were unwilling to accept Young's entire scheme on the grounds that they saw it as a proposal to do away with Malays as judges

and to replace them with a purely English judiciary. So when McArthur arrived in Kedah to succeed Hall as the advisor in July, he found 'that something like an impasse existed'.⁷ Motivated by political considerations, McArthur wrote privately to Young asking for permission to prepare a modified scheme. On receiving the high commissioner's go-ahead, McArthur asked the help of the legal advisor, Gibson, to assist him in preparing a draft, on which in fact 'the Courts Enactment 1339' was based. After protracted negotiations and discussions, a compromise was finally reached. In February 1921, 'The Courts Enactment 1339' was passed and brought into force as from 8 September 1921.

'The Courts Enactment 1339' was responsible for tremendous transformation of the legal order in a traditional Malay-Muslim state. 'This is indeed a notable achievement in the history of Kedah,' the new high commissioner, L.N. Guillemard, wrote.⁸ The Penang newspaper, the *SE*, commented that it was 'the most important milestone in the history of Kedah'.⁹ It was a historical event for 'forward Kedah'.¹⁰ First, it established a new court of appeal and abrogated the rights of the state council as the final court of appeal. The court could sit not only in Kedah but also, if need be, in Penang. Second, it clearly divided the different interests of the Muslim community and non-Muslim community and endowed the European judge with more authority. Immediately below the court of appeal was the high court, which was now divided into a first division and a second division. The understanding was that the British judge should be a judge of the first division, while a Malay judge should be the judge of the second division.¹¹ Third, it allowed for more professionally qualified legal practitioners to play their part in legal proceedings. The judges of the first division had to be Malayan civil servants of not less than ten years' standing, or barristers who had exercised judicial functions for not less than two years, and also passed the examination entitling them to be called to the Bar. Their appointments were subject to the high commissioner's approval.

In contrast to its counterpart Johor, the new Kedah Courts Enactment retained the office of the legal advisor who also acted as the European judge.¹² Moreover, for European judges, the court of appeal in Kedah was a periodic rather a regular part of call. And the Malays insisted that counsel should be excluded from the Kedah high court. This situation continued until 1928, when the judges of appeal court did their best to press for the judicial house in Kedah to be put in order.¹³ In August 1931, the four judges (including the Kedah judge) met informally during the sitting of the Kedah court of appeal. They passed the two resolutions stating that qualified professional lawyers should be admitted to practice in Kedah.¹⁴ By this stage, it could be said that the judicial system in Kedah was being transformed to virtually the same lines as that prevailing in the SS and the FMS.

A historic Chinese intestate case

Running parallel to the British–Malay political and legal conflict was the controversy of the cause célèbre of a Chinese intestate case. Reverting for a moment to a similar instance at an earlier date, while the Chinese–Malay legal dispute in the Tan Ah Yu case in the Siamese period (see Chapter 5, pp. 82–5) had developed into an interplay of four-sided power politics between the British, the Siamese, the Malays and the Chinese, then the legal dispute within a Chinese family in the Chong Sin Yew case presented another new triangular legal conflict and dilemma in the encounter between the British, the Malays and the Chinese.

So far any discussion of the laws concerning the Chinese in Southeast Asia has been confined to the bilateral interaction between the colonial state and the Chinese society, ignoring one significant element of interlocking interstate and inter-ethnic encounters.¹⁵ They fail to recognize that Chinese business mobility across state boundaries complicated the legal issues because of its cross-cutting of different legal systems, and linking it to the wider context of colonial power struggle. The implications of the Chong Sin Yew case lies in the fact that, for the first time, it laid bare the bones of the legal controversy between British law, Muslim law and Chinese customary law, revealed to the light of day in the dispute about the Chinese property inheritance in Kedah. The root of this dilemma lay partly in the volatile relationship between the Chinese immigrants and the native state and society, and partly in the nature of their physical and business movement, which was regional or transnational. Therefore, the intestate legal dispute between interstate Chinese essentially developed into a divergence between the British-ruled Penang and Malay-ruled Kedah entities, stemming from the political and legal heterogeneity of the various states in the Malay Peninsula.

Chong Sin Yew

Chong Sin Yew, also called Chong Ah Yew by his Hokkien native fellows, was one of the few important Kedah Chinese businessmen during the period of the 1880s–1900s. He was born in Tongan county (near Xiamen) in Fujian, China. The exact date of his birth is not known, but there is evidence that he came to Kedah when he was 17 years old, which means the time he emigrated to Kedah would probably be around the 1880s. At the beginning of his stay, he worked as a coolie. Later on after saving money and with a friend's help, he started a paddy dealer's store, and his business did well. He extended his interests to the revenue farms, a coconut plantation, house property and a rice mill.¹⁶ As his career expanded he became an influential revenue farmer in Kedah. In the tender for the 1907–9 Kedah opium farm, he was one of the five who put in a bid

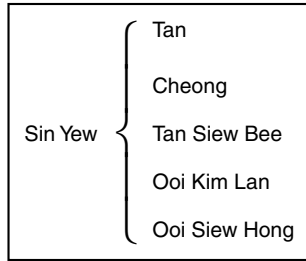


Figure 8.1 Wives of Chong Sin Yew.

for it.¹⁷ Besides opium farms he had plenty of other irons in the fire, with wide-ranging business interests in Kedah.

Chong Sin Yew had at least five wives, of whom three were deceased and two were still alive at the time of the intestacy case. There seem to be no other details of Chong Ah Yew's three deceased wives. By his former first wife, Chong Sin Yew had three daughters, namely Chye Kee, Chye Han and Chye Sim, of whom only Chye Kee was alive at the time of the court case, the other two had predeceased Chong Sin Yew.¹⁸ He married his fourth wife, Ooi Siew Hong, in Kedah when she was 17 years old. Originally called Seah Liew, quite prosaically she was bought by Chong Ah Yew to be a servant, as well as to be a sexual partner, as reported.¹⁹ It is believed that Chong Sin Yew bought her through her natural brother, Ng Ah Pow.²⁰ After some time, the name Seah Liew was changed to Siew Hong. This relationship was entered into around 1905. Chong Sin Yew had four children by Ooi Siew Hong. Only the eldest son, Chong Kim Poh, was alive (13 years old in 1920) at the time of the court case; the other three had died.²¹

Chong Sin Yew was said to have married Ooi Kim Lan according to Chinese custom arranged by Ooi Kim Lan's uncle. While two or three months before, he had also married Ooi Siew Hong.²² The ceremonies for both marriages took place around 1910, although they had been living together before that. It was about this time that Chong Sin Yew moved to Penang to live. After occupying a number of houses, he ultimately bought a house at No. 28, Green Hall, Penang, where he resided for five or six years until his death on 22 August 1919.

The intestate case

Chong Sin Yew died in Penang without any valid witnessed will, but left the bulk of his property in Kedah, which was worth about \$350,000, while

Ooi Siew Hong	=	First widow
Ooi Kim Lan	=	Second widow
Chong Kim Poh	=	Son by Ooi Siew Hong
Chong Chye Kee	=	Daughter by a predeceased wife
Chong Choon Poh	=	Adopted son
Chong Peng Yiat	=	Adopted daughter

Figure 8.2 The claimed heirs to Chong Sin Yew's property.

the estate in Penang was relatively small, worth only about \$25,000. Very soon after his death, his two widows quarrelled over the inheritance of his property. As Chong Sin Yew died intestate and as his physical and business assets were spread across the two states of Penang and Kedah, the legal dispute in essence involved the conflict and contradiction of the different judicial systems of each state: should it be subject to the British law in the Colony, or the Muslim law in Kedah, or the Chinese customary law in Mainland China?

Chong Sin Yew made his fortune in Kedah, spent most of his time in Kedah, most of his business interests were in Kedah, and he frequently visited Kedah, even after moving to Penang. One party argued that the case should follow Kedah law, particularly as it dealt largely with the Kedah estate. But the other party countered that Chong had moved to Penang a decade ago, he had bought a house there and he had died there. Therefore the division of his estate should follow the British law in force in the Straits Settlements. To cloud the issue even further, it was observed that Chong had been born in China, and as an immigrant Chinese, it seemed that the Chinese customary law would be the most appropriate system to apply to his estate.

Kedah law or British law?

In the Kedah courts, the secondary wife, Ooi Kim Lan, appeared to have stolen a march on the other parties and succeeded in getting herself appointed as interim receiver of the estate by the Malay chief justice. In October 1919, W.S. Gibson, the legal advisor and European judge, heard the application made by Ooi Kim Lan to be appointed administratrix. Sitting with the Malay chief justice, Gibson held that, according to Kedah law, the will never having been executed, there was intestacy. He assumed that, as the plaintiffs were not Muslim, distribution according to the Kedah

law meant distribution according to Chinese custom. By Chinese customary law, the property should go to the only natural son, Chong Kim Poh, while the two widows, the married daughter and the adopted children would get nothing. Bowing to what seemed overwhelming odds, Ooi Kim Lan suggested that there should be a joint grant to the two widows. Gibson held that this was the most natural solution to the question, failing which an outsider and independent person should be appointed receiver manager. Gibson adjourned the case to enable the parties to come to an agreement on these lines. This proved a forlorn hope; no agreement could be reached between the parties, who maintained their own points of view adamantly. Therefore, in March 1920, two partners of the Penang firm of Messrs A.A. Anthony & Company were appointed to administer the Kedah estate, and the appointment of Ooi Kim Lan as interim receiver was rescinded.²³ This was just the prelude to many petitions from and disputes among the family.

The first shot was fired in 1920 when the other widow, Ooi Siew Hong, and the married daughter, Chong Chye Kee, petitioned the Kedah high court. They asked that the division of Chong Sin Yew's estate should be made in accordance with either British law or Muslim law, and not according to Chinese custom. They made a number of points. First, according to the law in force in the Straits Settlements, she was entitled to a one-sixth share of the Penang estate absolutely. Second, although the deceased was born in China, he came to Penang many years ago, when he was 17 years old. He never returned to China and was domiciled in Penang when he died. Hence he should not properly be considered a Chinese subject. Third, if the estate in Kedah was distributed according to Chinese law, the wishes of the deceased as set out in his will would be defeated.²⁴ A petition was also filed by the married daughter, Chong Chye Kee, framed in similar terms to that of Ooi Siew Hong.

The next move was up to Ooi Kim Lan who was not going to be left behind and also petitioned the high court in Kedah. She applied to have a rubber estate belonging to the Chong Sin Yew estate freed from incumbrances, and that she be appointed the guardian and trustee of the adopted son, Chong Choon Poh, during his minority. The Kedah high court upheld that Chong Sin Yew had married Ooi Siew Hong in Kedah, and his daughter had been born in Kedah. The deceased had been resident in Penang for only a short time and even then frequently travelled back and forth to Kedah. The Kedah high court thus refused to apply any British law to the distribution of the estate. The division of the property should be made according to Chinese custom. Chinese custom allows a 'gift' to be given to the daughters, but it is uncertain in regard to provision for widows. As a compromise, the court decided that the property should be distributed thus: 10 per cent to each widow, 5 per cent to each daughter and the balance to the two sons in equal shares.²⁵

Chinese law or British law?

The appeals were lodged by the widow, Ooi Siew Hong, and married daughter, Chong Chye Kee. They argued that Chong Sin Yew was domiciled in Penang and British law should prevail. This matter was brought into the state council in 1921. The state council referred the case back to the high court, ordering it to collect evidence as to Chinese customs relating to the matter under dispute and the true domicile of Chong Sin Yew. A report was then compiled by the registrar of the high court and was submitted to the state council. Deliberating on Chinese customs, the expert witnesses agreed that the whole of the estate should go to the only legitimate son, Chong Kim Poh, while the widows, the married daughter and adopted children should be excluded from the inheritance.²⁶ As to the deceased's domicile, the report pointed out that the evidence showed that Chong Sin Yew had been domiciled in Penang and had died there. Before the state council took these appeals further into consideration, arrangements were being made to establish the new court of appeal in Kedah. Therefore the case could be transferred there in August 1922.

One important development, relevant to the discussion, occurred in the Penang. The married daughter, Chong Chye Kee, brought a suit before the Penang Supreme Court, in which the Penang administrator's plaintiffs (Khoo Teow Chong, the husband of the Chong Chye Kee) challenged the Kedah administrator's defendants (A.A. Anthony and Co.). It is not essential to go into details of these court proceedings.²⁷ Justice Barrett-Lennard declared that Chong Sin Yew had been domiciled in Penang. He also judged that the moveable property of Chong Sin Yew, both within and without the jurisdiction of the courts of the Colony, should be distributed according to the law of the Colony.²⁸ This judgement flatly contradicted that given by the Kedah high court. Therefore, like the Tan Ah Yu case cited earlier, the legal proceedings increasingly developed into a political wrangle involving two different states.

The outcome

As just mentioned, with the passing of the 'Kedah Courts Enactment 1339' in 1921, Chong Sin Yew's case was transferred to the newly established court of appeal. The first assembly of the full court of appeal was inaugurated in Alor Star on 1 June 1922, but only criminal appeals were heard on that occasion. The civil appeal was first heard at the second assembly of the full court of appeal. Chong Sin Yew's case was the first and only civil case heard on this occasion.²⁹ At the August session, the court decided to postpone the proceedings based on the objections raised by Justice Barrett that all the parties were not represented at the hearing.³⁰ In February and March 1923, Chong Sin Yew's case was heard in Penang.³¹ At the sitting,

the court of appeal decided that, according to Kedah law, the will left by Chong Sin Yew was not a valid document. But as to the issue of whether there was any law extant in Kedah for regulating the succession to the estate of an intestate Chinese, the court reserved its judgement until 18 June 1923. On that date the three judges held that the British law in the Colony should be followed in the case. That is to say, one-third shares should be distributed to the natural son, Chong Kim Poh; one-third shares to the married daughter, Chong Chye Kee; one-sixth shares to widow, Ooi Siew Hong; and one-sixth shares to the widow, Ooi Kim Lan. The adopted children would get nothing. This, in fact, upheld the judgement delivered by the supreme court of Penang.³²

It was not surprising that the court of appeal should have delivered this final judgement. The court of appeal essentially had to decide which law should be followed. As in Tan Ah Yu's case, it was a political rather than a purely legal issue, which involved the colonial hegemonic struggle between the British and the Malays. Cogently it provides an example of how the ethnicity issue was used individually by the British, the Chinese and the Malays to justify their respective interests. The Penang members of the Chinese family turned to the British to protect their own interests. The Kedah members of the family turned to the Chinese customary law and to the Kedah Muslim law in their bid to challenge the Penang laws. While the two different groups of Chinese were battling each other, the British seized the advantage of the Chinese intestate case to enforce their legal order upon Kedah.

The rise and decline of the Chinese business elite

'The history of the great merchant families is . . . every bit as valuable as the history of princely dynasties in the study of political fluctuations,' Braudel aptly observed.³³ In a departure from the traditional Western proverbial three-generation cycle – from rags to riches to ruin – the Chinese family firm's evolution is projected by four stages of development: emergent, centralized, segmented and disintegrative.³⁴ Taking account of a cluster of recent historical studies on the Southeast Asian Chinese community, however, a pattern can be seen which shows their rise and decline coincided with the structural changes in politics and economy.

In a comparison between the western and Chinese communities, this overall Southeast Asian economic structural change is attributed to their difference in the 'institutional structure of capital'.³⁵ Looking at southern Siam, the seeds of the decline of the Khaw family in the early twentieth century were sown in both the external structural forces and the microcosm of family administration (see also Chapter 1, pp. 12-13); Chapter 4, pp. 58-9).³⁶ Turning to Penang during the inter-war period, alongside the structural shifting of economic power oscillating between the British

and the Chinese was the differentiation within the Chinese business community itself: the decline of the old established Chinese elite – mainly the revenue farmers and Straits Chinese – and the rise of the new elite, a class of *nouveau riche* based on the rubber economy.³⁷ While in Java and Sumatra, the decline of the old-established *peranakan* Chinese elite and the emergence of the new *totok* Chinese economic power were set in motion by the grand political structural forces, the impact of the Japanese Occupation and the subsequent Indonesian Revolution.³⁸ Bearing these structural forces and structural changes in mind, and recalling the foregoing discussions in previous chapters (5 and 7), a better understanding emerges of the dynamics of the rise and decline of the Chinese family business.

The decline of the Lim Leng Cheak family

Although here the spotlight is on the dramatic decade 1918–27, it is necessary to review some of the history touched on earlier. The founding father, Lim Leng Cheak, died in 1901, and after his demise the family business continued to expand in the 1900s, at least superficially (see Chapter 5, pp. 93–100). Under the terms of the will of Lim Leng Cheak, the estate was divided into 20 shares. His widow, Tan Say Seang, was to receive 8/20 and the four sons 3/20 each.³⁹ The four daughters were provided with money legacies of \$30,000 each.⁴⁰ The fourth son, Lim Eow Teng, died on 4 July 1916, and although he had been married he left no issue.⁴¹ Therefore, the shares were divided into seventeen shares instead of twenty, and distributed among the widow Tan Say Seang and the three sons, Lim Eow Hong, Lim Eow Thoon and Lim Eow Hooi. The will stipulated that its provisions should come into effect only when the youngest son had attained the age of 21. The widow Tan Say Seang, the eldest son Lim Eow Hong, the eldest son-in-law Goh Boon Keng and the deceased's brother Lim Phee Cheak were appointed his executors and trustees. However, during their lifetime, Goh Boon Keng and Lim Phee Cheak took no active part in the administration of the will.⁴² As the widow, Tan Say Seang, was illiterate, while the other sons were minors, Lim Eow Hong was appointed to manage the estate on her behalf during the period prior to 1918.⁴³

The family business had found itself in financial hot water, which led the matriarch, Tan Say Seang, to lose confidence in the management of her eldest son Lim Eow Hong. As their executive manager, it was said that Lim Eow Hong had been playing 'ducks and drakes' with the estate, and also had been misappropriating certain estate property, to say nothing about overdrawing his share.⁴⁴ Up to the year 1918, it was estimated that Lim Eow Hong had overdrawn sums on the estate amounting to between \$300,000 and \$500,000, a sum in excess of his own shares.⁴⁵ The situation was getting even worse due to Lim Eow Hong's personality and human

failings; he was so addicted to gambling that he lost a steamer overnight.⁴⁶ Under these circumstances, at the invitation of his mother Tan Say Seang, the second son, Lim Eow Thoon, returned to Penang to join the *Chop Chit Lee*, the managing firm of the estate. Lim Eow Thoon had been engaged in the rice business in Kuala Lumpur and had happened to fail in business just at the crucial moment. He moved back to Penang as a 'watch-dog' to keep an eye on his elder brother, Lim Eow Hong. Although Lim Eow Hong still remained as trustee and had initially been the only one empowered to sign cheques and other documents, that authority had since been revoked.⁴⁷

Owing to the slump in prices of rubber and tapioca in the 1920s, many businessmen found themselves short of the money to carry on their businesses. Their troubles were exacerbated with the tight financial market. The *chettiers* were calling for repayment of their loans. Forced into a tight corner, a great many Chinese businessmen, including such prominent *towkays* as Lim Boon Haw, Lim Cheng Teik and Lim Thean Kee, had turned to the state council for financial assistance.⁴⁸ Lim Eow Hong's loan application was for \$400,000, but this was refused on the advice of the British advisor.⁴⁹ To cover the money needed for estate maintenance and drawings against the estate by the beneficiaries, the sum of \$90,000 was raised from T.S. Saminathan *chettiar* by taking out two mortgages. Both mortgages were on the Kulim rubber estate, registered under the name of Lim Eow Hong.⁵⁰ Despite these contingencies, the business continued to flounder because everybody in fact had been drawing a great amount of money from the estate.

The estate of Lim Leng Cheak was due for distribution in February 1922 by the will, just at a point when the business which was at a turning point. Lim Seng Hooi, a leading figure in the Hokkien community and vice-president of the *Lim kongsi*, was subsequently called in for advice.⁵¹ His opinion was that, owing to the general slump, any sale then would have meant the virtual sacrifice of the estate on the altar of necessity. Seeing the sense of this, it was agreed by all beneficiaries to postpone the sale and distribution of the estate.⁵² Just at this critical moment, one new crucial development for the family business appeared on the horizon.⁵³ In February 1924, Lim Eow Hong was served adjudication orders. The order were rescinded and annulled a few days later on the application of the petitioning creditor. It was hoped that it would benefit the general body of creditors if the bankrupt party was allowed to carry on business. However, on 11 July 1924, Lim Eow Hong was declared bankrupt and hopelessly insolvent. In September 1924, the assistant official assignee moved the court for an order that Lim Eow Hong be sentenced for a term of imprisonment.⁵⁴ An order of the Supreme Court Penang directed that the real estate of Lim Leng Cheak should be sold.

When Lim Eow Hong was declared bankrupt, the family joined forces

to save the estate. Tan Say Seang and Lim Eow Hooi assigned the whole amount of their shares to Lim Eow Thoon in June 1925.⁵⁵ Then a lawsuit was instituted in which the mother, Tan Say Seang, and the brothers, Lim Eow Thoon and Lim Eow Hooi, were the plaintiffs, and Lim Eow Hong was the defendant. Their claim was for a declaration that Lim Eow Thoon was now the sole owner of the estate, that the defendant be discharged from being a trustee and an injunction be brought to restrain him from interfering in the business.⁵⁶ Down but apparently not out, Lim Eow Hong replied with a counter-claim.⁵⁷ This case did not come to court but, with the approval of the court, was referred to the arbitration of Lim Boon Haw and Lim Seng Hooi, the president and vice-president of the *Lim kongsi* respectively.⁵⁸ A settlement was reached in November 1926. Lim Eow Thoon was to return to his mother for the cancellation of the deed by which she transferred her share to him. Lim Eow Thoon also offered to accept \$450,000 as his share from the estate.⁵⁹ This move left the sole ownership to the mother, Tan Say Seang. Although the matter seemed settled, less than a year later, in September 1927, the Lim Leng Cheak family was in court again. This time, it was the brother, Lim Eow Hooi, who was at loggerheads with Lim Eow Thoon. The smouldering seeds of discontent burst out into another family dispute.⁶⁰

The rise of Lim Boon Haw

The decline of Lim Leng Cheak's family coincided with the rise of Lim Boon Haw. Like the Lim Leng Cheak and the Choong Cheng Kean families, Kedah had been the main base for Lim Boon Haw's career, although he had spent some of his life either in Sumatra or in southern Siam, and was domiciled in Penang. As a *singkeh* Chinese, Lim Boon Haw was born in the village of Anqi County, Fujian province (b. 6-12-1864; d. 8-1-1933).⁶¹ He arrived in Penang in May 1883, where he became a naturalized British subject 14 years later.

Lim Boon Haw's business was run under the Chop Sin Ban Guan in Penang. The business involved revenue farming, tin mining, planting and trading. It was also a family concern run in partnership with his brother, Lim Boon Aw, and managed by his adopted son, Lim Seng Tiew. They had three branches named Ban Hin Guan (Tongkah, Siam), Ban Guan Soon (Teluk Anson, Perak) and Ban Seng Guan (Kulim, Kedah).⁶² Prior to the mid-1910s, the tin mining and the revenue farming were probably his main business interests. His Ban Guan Hin tin mine in Tongkah was said to be the largest of its kind in that area of Siamese territory.⁶³ His involvement in revenue farming could be seen in his tender for the gambling farm in Alor Star in 1916, although in this instance his tender was not accepted.⁶⁴

The *SE* described Lim Boon Haw as, 'Quiet, unassuming and kind by nature, he was very liked by his wide circle of friends who held him in the

highest esteem.⁶⁵ Lim Boon Haw was well connected with the other members of the Penang business community; evidence of this can be derived from his partnership with some influential Penang Chinese leaders such as Heah Swee Lee, Lim Seng Hooi and Lim Soon Poe. They carried on a joint business as licensed auctioneers and rubber dealers in Penang until October 1918, when the partnership was dissolved and sold out.⁶⁶ While his rubber estates and house properties in the emerging but important town of Sungei Patani in Kedah consolidated his position in the Chinese business community, his rise to prominence was related to several events that occurred in 1919. The first was the rice shortage in May, which saw him perform charitable work by buying up highly priced Siamese and Burmese rice and distributing it to the poor, either free of charge or at a much reduced price. The second could be measured by his leading position in the Penang business community. He was the president of the famous *Lim kongsi*, trustee of the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce, the Penang Chinese Town Hall and the An Koi (Anqi) Association. His career continued through the 1920s. Unfortunately, owing to a lack of sources, it is impossible to contextualize his business activities during this period. However, some of these activities may be adduced from the court records on his bankruptcy in the early 1930s (see Chapter 9).

The rice milling business, 1919–28

So far, we have studied the changing landscape of regional politics and economy in general, and the Chinese business community in particular. Following the same path, it is possible to see how these changes were manifested in the sector of the rice milling business. Compared to the situation in the period 1909–18 (see Chapter 7, pp. 127–33), in the history of the Chinese rice milling community and its interactions with the state, this later period witnessed: changes in organization, membership and networks; the change of status from the Rice Combine to the Central Milling Agency; the subsequent withdrawal of several old established Penang families; the continual economic showdowns with the Penang and Kedah governments; and a new challenge launched by the Kedah Chinese community.

The development of the rice milling industry

Three types of milling networks coexisted in the 1920s. They were the Central Milling Agency, the Kedah local mills and the government mills.⁶⁷ The Central Milling Agency was the Penang Chinese controlling ring. The government mills were designed to compete with those of the Chinese. The picture was far from cut and dried. Between the Penang Chinese-controlled mills and the Kedah Chinese mills, there was a whole complex of overlapping relationships of competition and co-operation.

The Central Milling Agency: This was a continuation of the Chinese monopoly in the regional milling and trading networks. In 1918, the partnership agreement of the Rice Combine terminated and the partners then carried on their businesses independently. In September 1919, the partners entered into a supplementary agreement and changed the name to the Central Milling Agency with capital of \$1,650,000 and control of seven mills. The administration of the Central Milling Agency experienced a radical change. One former key member, Lim Eow Thoon, was no longer a partner.⁶⁸ Another important member, Lim Cheng Teik, resigned in 1919 to take up the management of the government mill at Bagan Serai, Perak, because of the parlous situation in the wake of his mill fire. The Choong brothers, Lye Hock and Lye Hin, began to assume more important roles in the milling ring, although there were other new members, such as Lim Cheng Law. However, in 1923, Lim Cheng Law had dropped out of the board of directors. His mill, Cheng Law & Co., disappeared from the registration in the directory in 1925.⁶⁹ This might be related to the fact that most mills in Penang had to be closed owing to a lack of supply during the first half of 1926.⁷⁰

The development of the Kedah milling industry: This was the first period of the enormous growth in the Kedah rice milling industry following the cancellation of the Lim Leng Cheak's mill monopoly.⁷¹ In 1919, there were three large steam-powered mills in Kedah, two at Alor Star, and one at Kuala Muda. They were the Ban Hin Mill, the Kubang Rotan Mill and the Joo Hin Mill. The two large mills, Ban Hin and Kubang Rotan, supplied roughly 80 per cent of all the milled rice in Kedah.⁷² Taking the food control years, 1919-21, the most conspicuous growth was the development of the hand mills and rice trading shops.

The government mills: To break up the Chinese Rice Combine, the British colonial authorities attempted to establish government mills. After a long period of preparation, these efforts came to fruition in the paddy-producing district of Krian, Perak in 1919. Two mills were built: one at Bagan Serai and the other at Kuala Kurau. The Bagan Serai Mill was an undertaking constructed from the ground up by the government, while the Kuala Kurau Mill was formerly owned and worked by Chinese. As from 1 September 1924, the Kuala Kurau Mill was taken over by the government, but after 1926, this same mill had to be closed down because of lack of paddy supply.⁷³

The relationship between the Kedah Chinese milling community and the Penang Chinese milling community was paradoxical, both overlapping and conflicting with each other. The Kedah Chinese mills had formed one of the important chains of the Penang Chinese regional trading networks. The Penang milling community depended on Kedah state and Kedah Chinese agents for the paddy supplies, while, conversely the Kedah state and the Kedah Chinese milling community also could not do without the

Penang Chinese trading networks. By the expedients of holding the rice export duty farm, by establishing a branch mill and by advancing their agents, the Penang-controlling milling community had maintained a very close connection with Kedah Chinese milling community.⁷⁴ Even 'the Rice Millers and Paddy Dealers Association' (founded in 1931) in Kedah had some connections, albeit more tenuous, with the Penang-controlling millers.⁷⁵

Out of these overlapping networks inevitably emerged competition between the Kedah Chinese community and the Penang Chinese community. This was especially conspicuous in the case of the small mills, which were so numerous that they proved to be beyond the control of the Penang milling community. But it was not restricted to this group. It was also noticeable in the large and medium-sized mills in Kedah, whose interests were not always identical to those of the Penang milling community, whose competitive voice will be heard in the subsequent section of this chapter. The whole rice mill scenario also suggests that an independent Kedah Chinese community of Penang network had started to take shape. This trend coincided with the fact that the Penang Chinese were gradually dropping out of direct involvement in Kedah state politics and Chinese community affairs after the 1910s. It also fell within the time frame of the first growth period in the Kedah milling industry, starting from 1915, a venture which was encouraged by Kedah government policy as an important attempt to break up the rice combine and protect its own state interests.

State and Chinese millers

The interaction between the state and the Chinese millers centred on one irreconcilable issue: price control. As business was business, the Chinese millers tried to boost the price of rice and depress the price of paddy. This was exactly the opposite of what the state set out to achieve; it felt honour-

Table 8.1 Mills controlled by the Central Milling Agency, 1920

<i>Mill</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Place</i>
Ban Hock Bee	Choong Lye Hock	Penang
Cheng Law & Co.	Lim Cheng Law	Penang
Ban Hin Bee	Choong Lye Hin	Penang
Ban Hin	—	Alor Star/Kedah
Kong Foh	—	Kuala Kurau/Perak
Kwang Hang	Tan Lo Heong ⁷⁶	Parit Bundar/Perak
Kong Mee	—	Prai/P. Wellesley

Source: The Singapore and Straits Directory, 1920.

Table 8.2 Rice milling and trading numbers in Kedah, 1919-21

<i>Item</i>	<i>1919</i>	<i>1920</i>	<i>1921</i>
Steam mill	3	3	3
Hand mill	125	165	171
Wholesale	7	19	32
Retail	106	113	117

Sources: SUK/K 743/1338; SUK/K 350/1339; SUK/K 326/1340: *Annual Report on Food Control* for the years 1338, 1339 and 1340 (1919, 1920 and 1921).

bound to depress the price of rice and boost the price of paddy. Taking the common sense view, the Chinese millers organized themselves as regional milling networks to co-ordinate the milling and trading market, and to reduce competition and maximize the profit. Determined to compete with the Chinese millers, the state carried out a series of measures such as establishing the government mills, encouraging internal Chinese competition, setting up a credit society for the Malay peasantry and initiating the co-operative movement.

The colonial government's policy on paddy cultivation was determined by two main interrelated factors: the availability of cheap rice on the international market, juxtaposed against the continued prosperity of the rubber and tin mining economy. Two schools of thought emerged. One held that rice production should be encouraged by all possible means so as to reduce dependence on outside sources of supply. The other maintained that agricultural prosperity had been built on a foundation of exports of rubber and tin, and that in view of the cheap cost on the international rice market, large-scale efforts and expenditure could possibly lead to a loss of prosperity.⁷⁷ The government policy prior to 1930 generally espoused the latter view. The elements that influenced the price of rice and paddy were hence subject to the fluctuations of the international rubber and tin markets in general and the rice market in particular. The situation was also greatly influenced by natural and political conditions, including the weather, pests, cattle disease and war. Under normal circumstances, the price of paddy depended on two main factors: one was the cost of the rice imported into Malaya; the other was the abundance of local crops that influenced the supplies of paddy to the mills in Kedah and Penang. Hence, central to the issue of the price and export duty was the interaction between the state and the Chinese millers. This had been subject to the interchanges between the government's administrative and political intervention on the one hand, and the competition and free play of market forces on the other, with each influencing the other.

The government rice milling policy had two targets: one was related to the Penang Rice Combine, the other with the Chinese rice millers in

general. For the sake of the former, the Kedah government cultivated internal Chinese competition by encouraging the Kedah Chinese milling industry. In the competition with the Penang Chinese community, it attempted to play the Kedah Chinese as a pawn in a pattern of strategy. This was a continuation of the Sultan's strategy in his dealings with the rival Penang Chinese, Lim Leng Cheak, and Kedah Chinese, Choong Cheng Kean, discussed at some length in earlier chapters. When the Penang Rice Combine was set up, the Kedah government also attempted to approach the Kedah Chinese *towkay*, Lim Thean Kee, to compete with them for financial support from the government (see Chapter 7, pp. 125-6. 131-2). However, when it came to dealing with the Malay paddy farmers, the government found it had inherited conflicting interests, which is best seen in its policy on the issue of the export duty. The different and changing rates of the export duty on paddy and rice are the best reflection of this. These reveal more clearly than anything else the different interests between the Kedah Chinese millers and the Penang Chinese millers, and the changing government policy and strategy towards the rice millers in response to the changing situations. With the expiry of the rental agreement on the rice and paddy farm – and, indeed, on the farm itself – at the end of 1918 (see Chapter 7, pp. 126-7), the government decided to do away with this system and to collect the export duty itself. Seizing the opportunity for a spring clean, the government also abolished the system of collecting by measure and introduced a system of collecting by weight. The duty was increased with the rice-paddy ratio of 2.5:1. During the food control period in 1919-21, it was decided that no paddy could be exported without special permission from the state council. Even this was actively discouraged, as a duty of 100 per cent would be charged if such special permission were obtained.⁷⁸ When food control was lifted in 1921, the old 1919 rate was resumed. The rate was 20 cents per picul on paddy and 50 cents per picul on rice.

The difference in paddy and rice duty constituted a serious setback to the Kedah rice millers in their competition with the millers in the SS and the FMS. Responding to the petition of the Kedah rice millers in March 1923, the government approved of a reduction of duty by 10 cents, lowering the rate to 40 cents.⁷⁹ When the Kedah rice millers had repeatedly petitioned to reduce the export duty for the same reason in 1924, the government refused their claims, putting forward the argument that its duty rate was 'substantially fair'.⁸⁰ The maintenance of a higher duty on rice rather than on paddy continued to place Kedah rice millers at a disadvantage when they tried to compete with outside millers on equal terms. In 1927, the Kedah rice millers again petitioned Tunku Ibrahim, regent of Kedah, to reduce the rice export duty. At the current rate, it was estimated that the export duty for 100 picul of paddy was \$20.00, while the total export duty on rice and the by-products from 100 picul of paddy amounted

to \$29.22. This suggests that the rice millers in Kedah were paying about \$10 more to export rice and by-products manufactured from 100 picul of paddy than to export paddy itself for milling by millers outside Kedah. But, after consulting with the Perak government mills, the state council still did not change its policy.⁸¹

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined two sets of developments. One theme follows the legal conflict at the macro-level between the British and the Malays, and, at the micro-level centred on the intestacy case of Chong Sin Yew. The micro-level conflict was set within a wider background of the macro-level case study, while the latter has provided a solid empirical foundation for a better understanding of the macro-level power struggle. The other set of developments includes the rise and decline of the Chinese business community and their new field of economic competition in the case of rice milling networks. These two sets of developments formed the topics of agenda in the Kedah political and socio-economic arenas in the period 1919-28.

A NEW PROFILE OF COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS, 1928–41

After two decades, the modern state bureaucratic machinery was constructed and the socio-economic transformation was engineered. The initial political and legal confrontation between the British–Malay state and Chinese entrepreneurs gradually gave way to internal co-ordination and stability. However, this pleasing situation short-lived. The worldwide Great Depression now influenced the state agenda and there was a shadow cast by events leading to the impending Second World War.

A new profile of the Chinese business elite

The fluctuations in the world economy and the Chinese family business administration brought changes in the profile of the Chinese business elite. In the case of the most important Penang–Kedah Chinese business communities, many of their members, like the Lim Leng Cheak and the Lim Boon Haw families, were driven into bankruptcy. A new Chinese business elite, the Lim Lean Teng family, rose to prominence and took the place of the Lim Boon Haw family; the Choong family continued to prosper in the 1930s.

The collapse of the Lim Leng Cheak family

In 1926, the widow of Lim Leng Cheak, Tan Say Seang, became the sole owner of her deceased husband's estate and took over all the debts and liabilities. But a change at the helm did not mean the family's financial difficulties were over. Matters were in a sorry state indeed. The family had been entangled in a series of court cases, and the estate was being pressed by the *chettiers*. For instance, in 1926, the eldest son Lim Eow Hong was sued in Kedah for the recovery of a debt. A whole piece of land, with an area of 1,495 *relongs*, a property registered under Lim Eow Hong's name in Kulim, was announced as being put up for public auction.¹ These debts were again taken over and paid by the mother of the defendant, Tan Say Seang, who later applied for prospecting rights on the land titles.² In 1927,

to satisfy his financial demand, T.S. Ramanathan *chettiar* obtained an order from the court of second division in Kedah to sell the rubber estate belonging to the said Tan Say Seang. Although Tan Say Seang managed to apply for one month's stay of sale, however, this was revoked at the Kedah appeal court.³

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, almost everybody seemed to be in great financial difficulties. In the same year, the family's close friend and partner, Lim Boon Haw, sued Lim Eow Thoon and Tan Say Seang for a debt.⁴ In 1931, the family business lurched into another critical stage. In a civil suit, the brothers Cheah Tatto and Cheah Tat Jin sued Lim Eow Thoon, although Cheah Tat Jin was a son-in-law of Lim Leng Cheak.⁵ In this suit, judgement was made in favour of the Cheah brothers for \$135,720 plus further interest. Lim Eow Thoon was forced to put his Seh Lim estate up for sale, which was bought by Cheah Tatto and Cheah Tat Jin.⁶ In the middle of these hard times, the elderly matriarch passed away.

The Lim family business empire was in decline and the times of the grand executive managers, such as Goh Boon Keng and Lim Eow Hong, had passed. Yet, as an important established elite, the prominent Chinese business families had already made their mark within the local Penang Chinese community. The family business continued to be carried on by the newcomer, Lim Eow Thoon. The changing profile of the family management is clearly reflected in the new breed of representatives of the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce for the period 1903–41. In 1927, Lim Eow Thoon was appointed as municipal commissioner on the nomination of the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA).⁷ Nominated by the SCBA, Lim Eow Thoon was re-elected as municipal commissioner for another term (1930–2). In December 1932, Heah Joo Seang succeeded Lim Eow Thoon as the president of the SCBA, Penang. They were both nominated as candidates for the SCBA in the election for the new municipal commissioner. Lim Eow Thoon was defeated, with Heah Joo Seang elected by a majority of twenty-one votes.⁸ Lim Eow Thoon was not down for long and soon secured the nomination of the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce and continued to be municipal commissioner for a third term (1932–5).⁹ In 1941, Lim Eow Thoon was elected as vice-president of the Chinese Chamber.

A further important change in the family business took place. As mentioned earlier, the mother, Tan Say Seang, died on 19 September 1930,¹⁰ and the brother, Lim Eow Hooi, died in October 1932.¹¹ After he retired from business because of bankruptcy, the eldest brother Lim Eow Hong was employed by the Ban Tin Lam in charge of the insurance department. He seemed to have had many irons in the fire. Besides working for the Ban Tin Lam, he was also employed as manager on the late Lim Boon Haw's estate. In 1931, Lim Eow Hong was granted a discharge from his

bankruptcy. Perhaps he had dreams of restoring the family fortune as, in early 1938, Lim Eow Hong was suspected of being involved in one of the biggest rubber smuggling cases in local history. Lim Eow Hong was the principal accused, although he was later acquitted due to lack of evidence.¹²

The bankruptcy of Lim Boon Haw

In parallel with the decline of the Lim Leng Cheak family, the prosperous era of the Lim Boon Haw family in the Penang–Kedah Chinese business community was also drawing to a close. After the death of its founding father in 1933, the Lim Boon Haw estate was declared bankrupt and his children found themselves immediately faced with a court case. An examination of this case revealed the involvement of close Chinese business partnerships and organizations, as the parties involved included the clan association, the Lim *kongsi*, which actually functioned as an economic organization, a conduit to accumulate capital and a place to cultivate the partnership. Criss-crossing these Chinese social organizations, and inextricably linked to them, were the Chinese business networks. These business networks, under the cover of the clan association, the Lim *kongsi*, involved many elite Chinese families in the Penang–Kedah community, such as the Lim Leng Cheak family, the Phuah (Lim) Hin Leong family, the Lim Boon Haw family and the Lim Seng Hooi family.

Lim Boon Haw and Lim Seng Hooi were president and vice-president of the Lim *kongsi* respectively. They were also business partners. Both men had been associated for many years in building up a rubber estate in Kedah. Lim Seng Hooi had a share with Lim Boon Haw in the Ban Thye Lee estate.¹³ About the end of May 1928, Lim Seng Hooi transferred his interests in the rubber estate to Lim Boon Haw.¹⁴ Several years later, disputes arose between them owing to differences over financial matters. Relations deteriorated badly and, in 1931, there was a protracted lawsuit between them. Lim Seng Hooi sued Lim Boon Haw for a loan. The action did not end until June 1932. It was finally settled and Lim Boon Haw gave two charges for sixteen thousand dollars for part of his land in Kedah to Lim Seng Hooi.¹⁵ Subsequently, the interest fell into arrears and Lim Seng Hooi sued Lim Boon Haw to secure the money again at the end of 1932, but Lim Seng Hooi did not take any action to enforce the charges by taking recourse in the Kedah land laws. With the matter still unsettled, Lim Boon Haw died, leaving a will and several executors. The upshot was another long lawsuit between Lim Boon Haw's sons and Lim Seng Hooi in 1934.

Far more than just a Chinese social organization, the Lim *kongsi* was also an economic association with shareholdings in some estates. After its establishment in 1866, the Lim *kongsi* seemed to have extended its links to

all Lim associations across the places of origin.¹⁶ One point that is cogent to recall in this context is that Lim Boon Haw was the president of the Lim *kongsi* before his death, and at the same time he was indebted to the Lim *kongsi* to the tune of \$400,000.¹⁷ The trustees decided to apply for a receiver to be appointed to administer the Lim Boon Haw estate. But certain *chettiar* creditors of Lim Boon Haw in Kedah appeared and opposed the application for a receiver to be appointed, for they wanted a share too, as did the executors of Lim's will. The whole of it was secured by charges under the Kedah property. This pretty kettle of fish later on ensured there was a plethora of disputes over the receivership of Lim Boon Haw estate.

Within the Lim *kongsi* itself, there was a storm of quarrels over his estate. In February 1933, there were two actions brought against Lim Seng Hooi by a public officer of the Lim *kongsi*, because Lim Seng Hooi had also been the vice-president of the Lim *kongsi*. One claim was for \$135,000, and another was for \$17,102. The matter was settled by an agreement approved by the court.¹⁸ Pressure was also brought to bear by Lim Cheng Teik, a trustee of the Lim *kongsi* and the eldest son of Phuah (Lim) Hin Leong. Soon after Lim Boon Haw's death, Lim Cheng Teik threatened to take steps with regard to the Penang property. When Lim Seng Hooi applied for a receivership, at a trustees' meeting Lim Eow Thoon proposed that, as probate had already been applied for and the mortgages of the Sungei Pasir land did not affect the *kongsi*, Lim Seng Hooi had better withdraw the application. The matter did not rest there but the whole history was complicated because the executors of Lim Boon Haw started quarrelling among themselves. According to the terms of Lim Boon Haw's will, any disputes among the executors should be referred to the Lim *kongsi*. This really set the cat among the pigeons.

The rise of Lim Lean Teng

The rise of the new manager, Lim Lean Teng, in the late 1920s and early 1930s coincided with the collapse of the old Chinese elite members, Lim Leng Cheak and Lim Boon Haw. Lim Lean Teng was from a poor family. He was born in 1870 in Luyan Commune, Huilai County, Guangdong province. Lim had a long family history in China before he arrived in Penang. He had to finish his schooling at 16 years of age and become a farmer. In the following year, he married a woman named Chen, who was his first wife in China. After his father's early death, he became the main prop of his large family. He was engaged in the sugar business, and it was probably from this job that he gained the business experience that was to stand him in good stead in his later career.

In 1893, when he was 23 years old, he went to Penang entirely on his own initiative without any relative there to assist him. Some time later, he

turned up in Kedah with an introduction from some native kinsmen. First he worked as an agricultural coolie. After about ten years' hard work, he started his own business as a poultry farmer in Lunas, Kedah.¹⁹ From then on, his situation began to improve slowly but very surely. In 1904, he married a woman named Guo and established a new family in Malaya. Lim's good fortune in business really began to get off the ground after 1905, when the state council was established and Kedah began to develop in the direction of large-scale exploitation of land for commercial planting. In that year, he began planting tapioca with a business registered under the name of the Thye Hong estate. His partner was Lim Jia Yoo, a kinsman from the neighbouring county of Jie Yang. Two years later, they applied for another 150 acres of land from the government to plant more tapioca and made a great profit. Later, he set up the Thye Fong Tapioca Mill, and the tapioca plantation was expanded to an area of 400 acres. The mill was very prosperous and brought in fantastic profits within three years. By the 1910s, Lim Lean Teng was already an owner of several large rubber and tapioca estates, in addition to liquor distilleries in Kedah.

Lim Lean Teng's business covered the whole gamut of available areas for investments – rubber, coconuts, tapioca planting, rice milling, a liquor distillery, barshop, groceries, shipping and later landed properties. In 1916, he established a new market at Sungei Jalan. Seeing the importance of transportation, he had in the meantime bought a ship from Hong Kong to give him a good hold on the route between Penang and Sungei Jalan. Another new ship later joined the first to transport the produce from his own estates between Sungei Patani and Penang. As his businesses expanded, he set up a headquarters in Penang where the produce of all his estates was collected. In 1917, in partnership with a friend, he opened a rice mill at Alor Star. Before the end of the First World War, he had established a number of other companies. With all his diligence by then, Lim Lean Teng had become a prominent Chinese businessman in northern Malaya. This period of two decades, particularly the second one, was in fact a golden era in his business career.

Lim's main focus was still on rubber planting. He differed from the other Chinese planters, who went bankrupt, as he was able to pull through the two economic recessions in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1920s, he sold one of the main plantations to British investors for \$520,000. In 1922, the Thye Cheng estate was developed amounting to 3,000 acres. The next year, he bought the Thye Rong estate valued at \$120,000. Ten years later, he sold it for \$840,000, a profit of \$720,000. In the late 1920s, realizing the importance of regulating rubber planting in northern Malaya, he organized the Asiatic Planters Association, of which he was the chairman. In 1934, he initiated a Malayan Teochew Association and became its president. He was also the president of the Lim *kongsi* and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Penang in 1941. In 1938 he was appointed a

justice of the peace in Kedah. Two years later, he was appointed a justice of the peace in Penang, which is an indication of his close connections with these two places. In Malaya, it is unusual that anyone could be a justice of the peace of two states. Lim Lean Teng's meteoric rise as a leading merchant in the Penang–Kedah Chinese community was legitimized in his election as a chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1941.²⁰

The changing profile of the rice milling business

Owing to the mushrooming of many small rice mills and the onset of the Great Depression, the rice business at the regional level began to flounder in the early 1930s. There had been no formal control ring for some time, following the collapse of the Central Milling Agency. However, it was not a headless chicken, as the firm that was actually controlling the Penang–Kedah Chinese rice milling ring was Messrs Hock Hin Bros. of the Choong family.²¹ With the exception of one idle mill, Lim Cheng Teik's Khie Heng Bee in Penang, only two working mills were left, Ban Hock Bee and Ban Hin Bee. The two mills both belonged to the Choong brothers, Lye Hock and Lye Hin.²² Besides these, the Choong brothers had two other two large mills in the Krian district, one in Nibong Tebal and the other at Parit Buntar. The mills competed for business with two government mills, one in Bagan Serai and one in Kuala Kurau.²³ In 1934, the daily capacity of all mills run by the Choong family equalled the total amount produced by all the 14 large and medium-sized mills in the state of Kedah.²⁴ Around this time or slightly later, the Choong brothers also built another large mill named Ban Heng Bee in Alor Star, Kedah. In 1938, the rice millers in Kedah, Penang and Province Wellesley were again formally amalgamated into a company with a capital of \$500,000. The primary object was 'to buy paddy economically and to sell rice at a moderate and fair profit'.²⁵ The Choong family's control over the regional milling networks and trading market was reflected in its influence upon rice and paddy price fluctuations. For instance, in May 1939, owing to the family agent's feverish buying, there was a sudden jump in the prices of paddy and rice in the state of Kedah. The family bought up the paddy locally and stored it at its Kedah rice mill, Ban Heng Bee. Within a week, the price of white and parboiled rice per bag jumped from \$5.50 to \$6.20, an increase of 70 cents; a picul of paddy from \$2.00 to \$2.20, an increase of 20 cents.²⁶

Against this tendency to amalgamate was the steady rise in the number of small rice mills at the local state level of Kedah.²⁷ In the period 1937–9, the number of the rice mills in Kedah increased annually from 131.25 per cent to 144.40 per cent. In 1938, for example, most of the new rice mills, which sprang out of the ground like mushrooms, were of small capacity. This contrasted with the number of large and medium-sized mills, which remained unchanged.²⁸ Up to June 1940, in addition to the large and

medium-sized mills, there were more than 60 small rice mills scattered over the greater part of the state. In terms of geography, the controlling rice millers were concentrated in the Kota Star district, and the small rice mills emerged in the surrounding districts, such as Yan, Baling and Kuala Muda.²⁹ In terms of ethnic composition, quite a few Malays began to be involved in the small rice milling business. The rapid development of the rice milling industry in Kedah was accordingly reflected in the structural change of its paddy and rice exports. For a long time, Kedah had been exporting much more paddy than rice to Penang and to the FMS. In the normal years (i.e., years without war or natural disasters) prior to 1922, for example, 15 per cent was exported as rice and the remaining 85 per cent as paddy.³⁰ But, from at least 1930 on, the export of rice outweighed that of paddy.

The substantial increase of rice mills in Kedah was attributed to the government policies of trying to break the Chinese monopoly and of promoting the welfare of the Malay peasants. In 1935, the government established a Co-operative Rice Mill. However, that mill failed within a few years and it worked for only 88 days of the year. The British advisor to Kedah, Hall, admitted that its failure had to be laid at the door of the price-cutting strategy of the Chinese businessmen, sustained over a long period and facilitated by large capital support.³¹ This shows that, despite the government's efforts, the situation remained unchanged and most Malay peasants continued to be indebted to Chinese paddy dealers, a fact that was confirmed in 1938 by the local Malay agricultural official, Tunku Yaacob.³² As long as the government could not solve the problem at the

Table 9.1 Rice mills belonging to the Choong family, 1930s

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place</i>
Ban Hock Bee	Penang
Ban Hin Bee	Penang
Ban Heng Bee	Alor Star/Kedah
Ban Kean Bee	Parit Bundar/Perak
Ban Eng Bee	Nibong Tebal/P. Wellesley

Table 9.2 The number of rice mills in Kedah, 1937-9

<i>Year</i>	<i>Mill</i>	<i>Increase (%)</i>
1937	16	100
1938	37	131.25
1939	89	140

Source: The Malayan Agricultural Journal, XXVII, March 1939, 3, 99-105; XXVIII, April 1940, 4, 164-70.

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Table 9.3 List of rice mills in Kedah in 1939 (until January)

<i>Number</i>	<i>Mill</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Storage capacity (bag)</i>	<i>Milling capacity (bag per 12 hrs)</i>
1-16*	1. Ban Heng Bee	Kota Star	50,000	300
	2. Ghee Seng	„	70,000	240
	3. Kwong Soon	„	30,000	200
	4. Thean Seng	„	15,000	140
	5. Hup Soon Hang	„	25,000	130
	6. Thean Peng	„	20,000	120-30
	7. Ban Seng Hin	„	40,000	120
	8. Chip Seng	„	30,000	120
	9. Hock Hoe Seng	„	20,000	90-100
	10. Chin Guan Leong	„	20,000	100
	11. Hoe Seng	„	10,000	160
	12. Ban Chuan Leong	„	25,000	100
	13. Ban Chuan Lee	„	14,000	90
	14. Seng Lee	Kubang Pasu	10,000	70
	15. Seng Joo Seng	Kuala Muda	120,000	170
	16. Lim Hock Soon	Kuala Muda	8,000	48
17-38**	17. Chin Soon Bee	Alor Star	10,000	70
	18. Siang Bee	„	11,000	80
	19. Chuan Hang Bee	„	10,000	80
	20. Haji Abu Bakar & Son	Alor Star	negligible	16
	21. Kwong Moh Foong	Yan	8,000	30
	22. Ban Lee & Co.	„	10,000	20
	23. Mohamed Saad	Kubang Pasu	negligible	20
	24. Hock Chuan Lee	„	„	16
	25. Ooi Cheng Siang	„	„	16
	26. Hock Soo & Co.	„	„	20
	27. Hock Tien Hin	„	100	20
	28. Soo Bak Sik	„	500	20
	29. Kim Wan	„	200	20
	30. H. Jaafar bin H. Salleh Co-operative	Kuala Muda	1,500	16
	31. Chin Hang	„	8,000	48
	32. Kim Tai Lee	„	400	7
	33. Mohamed Sajak	Baling	100	22
	34. Haji Yacob bin Ludin	„	300	22
	35. Ban Song Hin	„	40,000	120
	36. Lian Taik	„	20,000	90
	37. Co-operative Rice Mill	Kota Star	800	17
	38. Badlishah Mill	„	1,000	30

Sources: SUK/K 2982/1356; SUK/K 3381/1357.

Note:

* = rice mills at the end of 1937. But Thean Seng mill (no. 4) did exist in 1938.

** = new rice mills erected during 1938.

root of Malay poverty, the financial ties between the Chinese paddy dealers and the Malay paddy planters could not be broken. It did not end there because, as long as the Malay participation in the colonial economy continued to be marginalized, the issue of Malay poverty could not be solved. In fact, what the British were concerned about was their colonial strategic interest, with people running a poor second.

The pawnbroking business in the 1930s

While concentrating on a few Chinese elite families, our discussion has so far ranged over the overlapping family business networks, the opium networks and the rice milling networks, which were inextricably intertwined with the changing interactions of the state, the region and ethnicity. At this point it is enlightening to take a look at the petty Chinese financial sector, namely the pawnbroking business networks, to continue to demonstrate how important the family, ethnicity and region are related to the Southeast Asian socio-economic transformation in general and the formation of the Chinese regional business networks in particular, at all levels. The scope of the focus will be the whole pawnbroking business sector in Kedah in the 1930s.

Pawnbroking is a form of money-lending, specializing in short-term, small loans in exchange for acceptable collateral and oriented towards the poor and the working class. Pawnshops were and are scattered all over Southeast Asian cities and towns (except for Laos). In British Malaya, alongside the Western banks and the Indian moneylenders, Chinese pawnshops (plus the postal exchange) formed one of the three main props of the colonial financial system, each having their respective niches in different sectors of the economy and society. Pawnbrokers are almost always Chinese, and are closely linked to other important economic activities, such as gambling, opium trading, goldsmithery, second-hand shops, as well as a range of other petty trades and commerce. Customers ranged from poor peasants, Indian and Chinese coolies, to small- and middle-scale businessmen. The importance of pawnshop credit is its role in the transition from a barter economy to a money economy, by its function of turning people's goods into cash. It is therefore one of the most important wheels that kept and keeps the society and economy functioning, as Furnivall argues, 'the pawnshop [in Java as in Burma] is not, as in Europe, merely the poor man's bank'.³³ Like the native Malay states, the indigenous elites in Java, for example, regularly visited Chinese pawnshops.

The pawnbroking business in Kedah

At the beginning of the farming system, the pawnbroking monopoly was included in the opium farm.³⁴ Later, it was merged into what is known as

the 'general farm', which included the spirits, gambling and toddy farms. It worked on the principle that the more opium was smoked, the more spirits and toddy were drunk, the more gambling was indulged in, the more articles were likely to be pawned.³⁵ In the FMS, it was resolved in September 1907 that the abolition of the pawnbroking farms and the change to pawnshops, which were licensed separately, were desirable moves.³⁶ 'The Pawnbrokers Enactment 1908' was accordingly passed.³⁷ In Kedah, there were only a few large pawnbroking farms, each covering a whole district of its own, such as the Kulim pawnbroking farm, the Kuala Muda and Merbok pawnbroking farm and the Alor Star pawnbroking farm. In 1914, the leases of these pawnbroking farms expired and the state council decided to follow the same policy pursued in the SS and the FMS to subdivide the pawnbroking farms and to call for separate tenders.³⁸ In 1924, the change from the old system of letting farms with the exclusive right to the new system of the issue of licences was introduced in 'the Pawnbrokers Enactment 1343'. This is the Malay date giving the Hijrah year: 1343=1924/5 (in the European calendar), a difference of 581/2 years.

The main effect of this was to make pawnbroking without a licence an offence in Kedah. These changes brought the law of Kedah more into line with that of the SS and the FMS.³⁹ The terms fell into two types: one was for two years; the other was for three years. All the terms of the pawnbroking farm in Kedah were standardized for the period of two years in the 1930s. The machinery of the administration was constituted clearly. The secretary to the government was responsible for calling for tenders. The superintendent of pawnshops was appointed to conduct prosecutions for any offence committed. The protector of the Chinese was announced in the official gazette as superintendent of pawnshops, as was the case in the SS and the FMS.⁴⁰

The pawnbroking business was indispensable to the socio-economic life of Kedah. The customers were mainly, from largest to smallest, the Indian coolies, Malay peasants and Chinese labourers. As the Chinese monopolized the pawnshops, the pawn tickets were written only in Chinese, which made it difficult for Malays and Indians to know what sum was stated on them and what the date for redemption was. This problem was brought to the notice of 'the Kedah Planters' Association', the most powerful lobby of the European planters. In 1926, 'the Kedah Planters' Association' brought pressure to bear on the British advisor to end this practice.⁴¹ In 1935, allegations were made in the Penang newspaper about the closing of pawnshops at Alor Star on certain days. The under-secretary to the state council forwarded it to the protector of Chinese in Kedah, for further investigation. It was found that the Alor Star pawnshops had closed on only four days in the first eight months of 1935. In the opinion of the protector of Chinese, the number of these public holidays could not be deemed excessive. Yet, he recognized that 'their irregularity was inconvenient to the non-Chinese

population which formed a large part of the pawnshop clientele'. Hence, he suggested that the pawnshops be required to exhibit a permanent notice (in Malay, Chinese and Tamil) stating definitely on which days they would be closed for business during the year.⁴²

The pawnbrokers were persons engaged in short-term (six to eight months) and small loans (maximum \$250 in case of Kedah) in exchange for the pledge of valuable articles. According to a pawn ticket issued by the Poh Leong Pawnshop at Bagan Serai in 1932, it is known that there were three classes of authorized interests rate of pledges: (i) on any sum not exceeding \$10, five cents per dollar per month; (ii) on any sum not exceeding \$50, four cents per dollar per month; and (iii) on any exceeding \$50, three cents per dollar per month. Hence, the authorized interests rates were 60 per cent, 48 per cent, and 36 per cent respectively. This seems clear enough, but the main controversial point between the pawnbroker and the pawned was not the interest rate itself, but how it was calculated and the subsequent redemption of pledges. This controversy was also related to the fragmentary nature of the pawnbroking rules. The Colony Law of 1898 provided that, in certain cases, unredeemed pledges could be auctioned and would be redeemable until auctioned, even though the term had expired. In the FMS there was no provision for the auctioning of pledges. The term was for six months, but by offering more interest, the pawned could demand an extension of three months.

In Kedah, before 'the Pawnbrokers Enactment of 1343' was passed, there was no provision for the auctioning of pledges and the term was for eight months, but in practice it was often six. According to Section 14 of 'the Pawnbrokers Enactment 1343', it was stated that the term six or eight months (as the case may be) was from the actual date of pawning. The pawnbrokers could charge interest at so much per month or part of the month. This seemed clear enough but the pawnbrokers had taken this to mean that for all their purposes part of a month was counted as a whole. For instance, there was a complaint lodged against a pawnshop at Alor Star. A Chinese named Wong Sew pawned articles valued at a total of \$85 at the Ban Yuen Pawnshop. He pawned on 27/4/1350, but when he went to redeem his articles on 19/12/1350, the Ban Yuen Pawnshop refused to surrender them. The Ban Yeun Pawnshop argued that it was the nine months according to the Muslim calendar, while Wong Sew argued that it was eight months less nine days between 27/4 and 19/12/1350.⁴³

The protector of Chinese held that the Ban Yuen Pawnshop was legally entitled to ask for nine months but not to refuse redemption. This official accordingly recommended the rule be altered. To take an extreme case, if a man pawned an article on the last day of the month and redeemed it the first of the next, he would be charged two months' interest on an eight-month loan, and he could only escape paying nine months' interest on an eight months loan if he pawned on the first of the month. The protector of

Chinese suggested that making a limit of 14 days would rectify the problem. So, an Amendment was passed in 1932. It stated:

If an article is pawned on 25th Muharam [11 June] and is redeemed on 5th Safar [21 June], the pawnbroker is entitled to interests for one month only; if an article is pawned on 25th Muharam [11 June] and redeemed on 27th Safar [13 July], the pawnbroker is entitled to two months' interests.⁴⁴

In many cases, the complaints about the interest rate served to arouse what could be described, not putting too fine a point on it, as strong emotions along ethnic lines. For instance, at Yan there were more than 70 Malay signatures in the complaint lodged against a pawnshop there in 1932.⁴⁵ At Kuala Ketil, there was the similar case of Malays complaining about the pawnshop.⁴⁶ Investigations were duly set in motion but it was discovered that the pawnbroker had charged his rate of interest in accordance with the rules and had in no way overstepped the mark.

Pawnbroking business networks

Like the opium, rice milling and family business networks, each pawnshop in the different districts of Kedah was not a separate entity, but formed part of an integral network, monopolized by the Chinese and cemented by capital and kinship. The communal, ethnic and regional networks in one business sector showcase the historical trajectory of the Southeast Asian state formation and its socio-economic transformation. Like the history of the opium farm, when the state took over the management of the opium administration, the essence of revenue sources and sale networks remained the same. The large coolie labour force formed its clientele, and the form of the extensive Chinese opium business networks could not be changed simply by state policy and a stroke of the pen. What did change radically was the division of the revenue between the state and the Chinese, which was now to the advantage of the former and to the disadvantage of the latter. It was the same with pawnbroking. The essential Chinese capital and sophisticated pawnbroking experience and management built up over an extensive period of time could not be replaced by the new state policy. To a great extent, like the rice milling networks, the Chinese pawnbroking networks resembled the old-established revenue farming monopolies under a new guise. These new Chinese business monopolies emerged from their relatively subsidiary position in the whole colonial economy in relation to the dominant sectors, namely rubber and tin. So these sectors were left in the hands of the Chinese. The pawnbroking business networks were distinguished by the following characteristics.

First, the pawnbroking business was not confined to people from Kedah, be they Chinese or otherwise. It was open to all businessmen who had a sound financial position and good experience, no matter where they came from. The pawnbrokers from outside Kedah, especially those in Penang and in Province Wellesley, in fact, played a very important role in the Kedah economy. With the exception of the Kedah pawnbrokers who might have had some financial connections with Penang, the Penang pawnbrokers alone constituted 47.4 per cent of those engaged in the business (including those in Province Wellesley). And these Penang tenderers were usually old-established pawnbrokers. The Penang pawnbrokers controlled the large pawnshops in the main districts such as Kota Star, Kuala Muda and Kulim. The regional mobility of Chinese business and the influence of geo-political and geo-economic elements met each other in this ethnic business sector.

Second, within these Penang–Kedah pawnbroking business networks, several main family groups dominated the tenders and areas of distribution of pawnshops in each district. These dominant family groups had

Table 9.4 District distribution of pawnshops in Kedah, 1931–42

<i>District</i>	<i>1931–3</i>	<i>1934–5</i>	<i>1935–6</i>	<i>1938–9</i>	<i>1939–40</i>	<i>1941–2</i>
Kota Star	3	3	3	3	4	4
Kuala Muda	6	4	4	4	4	4
Baling	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kulim	4	4	3	4	4	4
Bandar Bahru	2	2	2	2	2	2
Kubang Pasu	1	1	1	1	1	1
Yan	1	1	1	1	1	1
Langkawi	0	0	0	1	1	1
Padang Terap	0	0	0	1	1	1
Total	19	17	16	19	20	20

Source: SUK/K Files 1350–61.

Table 9.5 The place of origin of Kedah pawnbroking tenderers, 1941–2

<i>Place</i>	<i>Tenderers</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>	<i>Accepted</i>
Kedah	33	47.8	10
Penang	16	23.2	7
Province Wellesley	13	18.8	2
Kuala Lumpur	2	2.9	0
Perak	3	4.4	0
Perlis	2	2.9	0
Total	69	100	19

Source: SUK/K 1764/1359 *Tenders for Pawnbroking Farms* 1360 and 1361.

Table 9.6 The profile of the Kedah pawnbroking farm tenderers, 1938–9

No.	Place	Name	Standing	Experience	Networks
1	Alor Star-East	Ng Swee Kam	Owned one oil mill in Penang; has five shop-houses in Penang and about 400 relongs of rubber estate in Kulim	About 20 years' experience in pawnbroking; pawnbroker of Penang, Papan, Lahat and Tronoh	Penang
2	Do	Fong Yat Yin	Partner with Ham Sin in two goldsmith shops in Alor Star and two in Penang	Formerly licensee of pawnshops in Baling, Alor Star and Jitra	Penang, Kinship
3	Alor Star-West	Mooi Fook Seng	Claimed to be financially related to Ng Swee Kam (see no. 1), but this was denied by the latter	In the habit of going about tendering for pawnshops with the object of reselling any tender	Living in Singapore
4	Do	Ng Wah Cheng	Had six shop-houses in Penang	Has been in pawnbroking business for about 10 years; owner of pawnshops in Alor Star-West, Patani under different terms; partner in the Sungei Bakap pawnshop	Penang, Kedah
5	Kuala Kedah	Chee Choo	Manager of a goldsmiths <i>chop</i> Seong Yik Loong and proprietor of <i>chop</i> Seong Goon, Alor Star; had rubber and coconut estates at Alor Star	Licensee of Kuala Kedah pawnshops several terms	Kedah

Table 9.6 Continued

No.	Place	Name	Standing	Experience	Networks
6	Do	See no. 4			Penang, Kedah
7	Sungei Patani	Ng Hok Peng alias Ng Chong Chin	The second eldest son Ng Boon Yeong (the eldest son was adopted), who was a well-known Penang millionaire pawnbroker and money-lender	Managed all his father's estate; also in charge of the Bagan Dalam pawnshop	Penang, Kedah
8	Do	Tang Siew	The brother-in-law of Ng Hok Peng (see no. 7), his wife being the daughter of Ng Boon Yeong, who financed the business	The holder of the Sungei Patani pawnshop	Penang, Kinship
9	Gurun	Soo Hoo Kim	The eldest brother of Soo Hoo Yit, the pawnbroker in Kulim and Lunas; owner of several shop-houses in Bagan Serai and Penang; father (dead) was pawnbroker of Bagan Serai and a millionaire	Owned pawnshop at Balik Pulau; had about 15 years' pawnbroking experience; was previously pawnbroker in Penang, Nebong Tebal and Kepala Batas	Penang, Perak, Kinship
10	Do	Ng Hok Soon	The eldest son (adopted) of Ng Boon Yeong (nos 7 and 8), whose power of attorney was his second son, Ng Hok Peng; the business would be financed by Ng Boon Yeong		Penang, Kinship

Table 9.6 Continued

<i>No.</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Standing</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>Networks</i>
11	Kota Kuala Muda	Ng See Foong	Owner of a second-hand goods and goldsmith's shop in Alor Star; had share in Sun Sun Press Co. in Penang	Had 25 years' pawnbroking experience; previous pawnbroker of Tanjung Rambutan	Penang
12	Bedong	Ng Choon Sang	Cousin of Ng Swee Kam; said to be worth about \$50,000		Kinship
13	Do	Fong Goon Chee	Had 30 relongs of rubber estate at Lunas and five shop-houses and a bungalow in Penang; said to be worth about \$120,000	Previous pawnbroker at Kulim and at Lunas; owner of Kepala Batas pawnshop	Penang
14	Baling	Boon Wah Poi	Had two shop-houses in Penang; owner of Mayfair, dealers in photographic materials; suitable for a small pawnshop	Partner in Bedong pawnshop under the name of his cousin, Boon Koon Yee; father Boon Loon Kim used to be a pawnbroker	Penang, Kinship
15	Do	See nos 10 and 16			Penang, Kinship, Partnership
16	Kuala Ketil	Ng Choon Sang	Had two shop-houses at Kuala Ketil; said to be worth about \$50,000	At the time, the holder of Kuala Ketil pawnshop in partnership with Ng Hok Soon (see no. 10); the partner in Serdang pawnshop with Ng Lai Hok	Partnership, Kinship

Table 9.6 Continued

No.	Place	Name	Standing	Experience	Networks
17	Do	Fong Yan Seng	Employed in Seong Goon, goldsmiths in Gurun, which was owned by Leong Seng Tang, the highest tender for Padang Serai pawnshop; was not known to have any considerable property himself	Had been employed by Fong Weng Chee (see no. 29) and Fong Yat Yin (no. 2) in their pawnshops; was likely to be financed by them	Penang, Kinship
18	Kulim	Soo Hoo Yit	Had five shop-houses in Bagan Serai and more than ten in Penang; the sole executor and trustee of his father's estate; worth over \$250,000	At the time, the holder of Kulim pawnshop; also the owner of the Lunas pawnshop and the Kong Loon pawnshop at Bagan Serai; had over 12 years' experience in pawnbroking; father was the millionaire Bagan Serai pawnbroker	Penang, Kinship
19	Do	Fong Goon Chee	See no. 13		Penang
20	Lunas	Soo Hoo Yit	See no. 18		Penang, Kinship
21	Do	Chin Chee Keng	Had no property of his own; claimed that he would take in partners to finance the business if his tender was successful	Formerly employed in Kulim and Lunas pawnshops	Partnership

Table 9.6 Continued

No.	Place	Name	Standing	Experience	Networks
22	Padang Serai	Leong Seng Tang	Had goldsmiths shop at Gurun and Padang Serai under the name of Seong Goon	Had about 20 years' experience; had a share in Ban Goon pawnshop, Alor Star-West; was pawnbroker of Padang Serai before	Partnership
23	Do	Soo Too Kun	A nephew of Soo Hoo Yit who financed him (see no. 20)	The present holder of Padang Serai pawnshop	Kinship
24	Bandar Bahru	Soo Hoo Kim	See no. 9		Penang, Perak, Kinship
25	Do	Chang Kang Meng	Owner of the <i>chop</i> Thin Woh, a second-hand goods and goldsmiths shop in Nebong Tebal; had 50 relongs of rubber estate at Junjong; said to be worth about \$40,000	Previously had the concession for several terms	Penang
26	Serdang	Ng Choon Sang and Ng Lai Hok	See no. 16		Partnership, Kinship
27	Do	Wong Teng Poon	Had a larger share in the pawnshops at Kangsar and Arau; said to be worth about \$30,000	Had several years' experience in the business	Perlis
28	Jitra	Soo Hoo Kim	See no. 9		

Table 9.6 Continued

No.	Place	Name	Standing	Experience	Networks
29	Do	Fong Weng Chee	The brother of Fong Yat Yin (see no. 2); said to be worth about \$100,000	The present holder of Jitra pawnshop	Kinship
30	Yan	Boon Koon Yee	A partner in the <i>chop</i> Goon Seng, Lunas, a second-hand goods shop	Was pawnbroker for three terms at Bedong and for one term at Yan	Partnership
31	Do	Soo Hoo Kim	See no. 9		Penang, Perak, Kinship

Source: SUK/JK 2667/1355, 'Pawnbroking Farms 1356 & 1357'.

Table 9.7 Select groups in the Kedah pawnbroking business networks, 1935–42

Group	Members	Kedah pawnshop	Network	Term
A	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pong Yet Yin 2. Pong Yit Hong, alias Pong Weng Chee 3. Ham Sin 4. Ham Yuen Sow (Ham Wor) 5. Pong Cheong Lim 6. Pong Yet Man 7. Pong Goon Chee 	<p>Alor Star-East, Alor Star-West, Baling, Padang Serai, Yan, Jitra, Junjong, Kota Kuala Muda, Kulim</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pong Yet Yin was the partner of Ham Sin in two goldsmiths shops in Alor Star and two in Penang. 2. Pong Yit Hong, alias Pong Weng Chee, was the brother of Pong Yet Yin. 3. Ham Sin was the partner of Pong Yit Yin, cashier of Seong Yit Loong, goldsmiths shop in Alor Star, and Man Yuen pawnshop, Alor Star West; at the time, the holder of Yan pawnshop financed by his father, Ham Yuen Sow (Ham Wor) of Seong Loong, a goldsmiths shop in Penang, and by Chee Choo, at the time, holder of Kuala Kedah. 4. Ham Yuen Sow (Ham Wor) is the father of Ham Sin, said to be the real holder of Kuala Kitil pawnshop, in partnership with Pong Yet Yin, Ham Sin and Pong Yet Hong. 	1935–6

Table 9.7 Continued

Group Members	Kedah pawnshop	Network	Term
B	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ng Swee Kam 2. Ng Choon Sang 3. Ng Lai Hok 4. Ng Hok Soon 5. Ng Hok Peng 6. Tang Siew 	<p>Alor Star-East, Bedong, Kuala Ketil, Sungei Patani, Gurun, Serdang</p>	1938–9
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Pong Cheong Lim was, at the time, holder of Kota Kuala Muda pawnshop; had about ten years' pawnbroking experience. He was the son of Fong Foo Foong, a money-lender living in Penang, and nephew of Fong Goon Chee, a pawnbroker at Kulim and at Lunas. 6. Fong Yet Man was the manager of the Kota Kuala Muda pawnshop and Junjong pawnshop. 	
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ng Swee Kam was the pawnbroker of Chulia Street, Penang, Papan, Lahat and Tronoh; had five shop-houses in Penang, about 400 <i>relongs</i> of rubber estates in Kulim; owner of the Sun Wo Loong Oil Mill in Penang; 2. Ng Choon Sang was a cousin of Ng Swee Kam and partner of Ng Hok Soon in Kuala Ketil pawnshop. 3. Ng Lai Hok was the partner of Ng Choon Sang in the Serdang pawnshop. 	

Table 9.7 Continued

<i>Group</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Kedah pawnshop</i>	<i>Network</i>	<i>Term</i>
			<p>4. Ng Hok Peng was the second eldest son of Ng Boon Yeong, the well-known Penang millionaire pawnbroker and money-lender.</p> <p>5. Tang Siew was the brother-in-law of Ng Hok Peng, his wife being the daughter of Ng Boon Yeong.</p> <p>6. Ng Hok Soon was the eldest (adopted) son of Ng Boon Yeong, whose power of attorney was his second son Ng Hok Peng.</p>	
C	<p>1. Chin Kok Poey</p> <p>2. Chin Kok Kew</p> <p>3. Chee Yao Kong</p> <p>4. Chee Kah Fang</p> <p>5. Chee Cham</p>	<p>Sungei Patani, Gurun, Bedong, Baling, Yan</p>	<p>1. Chin Kok Poey and Chin Kok Kew were brothers.</p> <p>2. Chin Kok Poey had a \$15,000 share in Chee Kah Fang's pawnshops.</p> <p>3. Chee Yao Kong was the eldest son of Chee Kah Fang.</p> <p>4. Chee Cham was the second son of Chee Kah Fang who financed his business.</p>	<p>1938–40</p>
D	<p>1. Soo Hoo Yit</p> <p>2. Soo Hoo Kim</p> <p>3. Soo Too Kun</p>	<p>Kulim, Lunas, Padang Serai, Bandar Bahru</p>	<p>1. Soo Hoo Yit was the son of Soo Hong, the millionaire Bagan Serai pawnbroker.</p> <p>2. Soo Hoo Kim was the eldest brother of Soo Hoo Yit.</p>	<p>1938–9, 1939–40</p>

Table 9.7 Continued

Group	Members	Kedah pawnshop	Network	Term
E*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fong Goon Chee 2. Fong Poh Leng, alias Fong Yew Boon 3. Fong Weng Chee 4. Fong Yit Fung 	<p>Kulim, Kuala Ketil, Serdang, Lunas, Jitra, Gurun, Kota Sarang Semat</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Soo Too Kun was a nephew of Soo Hoo Yit. 1. Fong Goon Chee was, at one time, the holder of the Kulim pawnshop and the Kuala Ketil pawnshop; he had five shop-houses in Penang; 2. Fong Weng Chee was the eldest son of Fong Goon Chee; he had ten years' experience in the pawnbroking business; the holder of the Kuala Ketil pawnshop; the manager of the Gurun pawnshop in which his father had a big share. 3. Fong Poh Leng, alias Fong Yew Boon, was the second son of Fong Goon Chee; he was the holder of the Lunas pawnshop for two terms and a shareholder in the Kuala Ketil pawnshop. 4. Fong Yit Fung was the brother of Fong Weng Chee and was the holder of the Baling pawnshop before that. 	<p>1939–40, 1941–2</p>

Source: SUK/K 2200/1353, 2667/1355, 2121/1357 and 1764/1359.

Note:

Group A is probably the same as group E due to a spelling mistake by the protector of Chinese in Kedah, or a strategic mistake by the Chinese tenderers.

controlling interests in pawnbroking businesses both within the boundaries of Kedah and outside the state. The competition primarily centred on, and was determined by, these main family groups. This is evident in their strategy with regard to the pawnbroking tenders. Each main family group used a different name and person to tender for a different pawnshop. But these tenderers were, in fact, closely related to each other.

Third, these families had usually had a long-time experience of the pawnbroking business when they were engaged as goldsmiths, second-hand dealers, or running household goods shops, or something of that ilk. The pawnbrokers, second-handed dealers and goldsmiths were a fairly tight-knit ring and did not compete with one another.

Conclusion

Among the Penang–Kedah Chinese business community, the old established Penang Lim Leng Cheak and Lim Boon Haw families were retreating off the stage and into the wings. Their place was in the process of being assumed by another new Chinese grandee, Lim Lean Teng, who was rising to prominence. Their decline and his rise were typical for the Chinese family business, but not necessarily in an absolute sense, as the long-standing prominent Choong family continued to be prosperous. The traditional Penang Chinese monopoly – the rice milling business – was also facing a big change. The Choong family remained the sole ringleader in the region, while the old Penang milling community was undermined by the rising, rival Kedah Chinese rice milling community. The Penang capital and business community was still significant in Kedah. This was indicated by their strong participation in the business sector of pawnbroking. Chinese business groups from Penang maintained an integral pawnbroking business network throughout the whole state of Kedah, dominated by a few families. But another great change for the whole Chinese community seemed inevitable with the imminent Japanese Occupation and the post-war reconstruction of Malaya. This is another story waiting to be written.

CONCLUSION

In this concluding part, I believe readers will expect me to explore and clarify two general points. First, building on the basis of detailed findings, what insights can be generalized which help to present a cohesive and clear-cut picture? Second, what were the driving forces in shaping the historical dynamics of Chinese business networks in the region c. 1882–1941? I simplify my discussions by emphasizing three structural features: multi-ethnic and cross-state interaction, Chinese family business networks and the Southeast Asian transformation. I shall show how these three points are related to each other.

Ethnicity and region

This study confirms that the rewriting of Southeast Asian history should consider not only the transitory Europeans and the permanent local inhabitants; it should also recognize the important role of the immigrants, Chinese and Indians, as well. Each element was an integral part of one multi-ethnic interaction, without which our view of Southeast Asian history would be unbalanced and incomplete. In the case discussed in this book, the Chinese moved into Kedah and there they played a fundamental role in conjunction with the Europeans and the Malays, giving specific form to the Southeast Asian economic transformation and the building of the colonial state. As the region was incorporated into imperial political systems and a global economy, the Chinese in Kedah, like many others in Southeast Asia, were in turn transformed by the crucial role they played. The specific roles, niches, strategies and solutions did much to shape not only the new state and economy, but also ethnic identity. Two profiles of multi-ethnic interactions are presented here to elucidate this point.

The first phase, 1882–1909

During this period, Chinese economic activities were dominant in the local and regional landscape, forming a most important locus of multi-ethnic

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and cross-state interaction. The British, Malays and Chinese all needed and used each other. Alliances were frequently changing, strategically and opportunistically.

The British had a powerful empire, but at the local colonial level, this empire was understaffed. To expand their colonial interests, it was essential that they had free and privileged access to the trade and commerce in the western Siamese Malay states, to the exclusion of other third-party powers. They needed Chinese capital, trading networks and labour to promote British commercial and industrial interests, and to secure revenue for the maintenance of government and society. Socio-political stability and order was an absolute requisite to guarantee this economic development. But the British were confronted with a series of difficulties. They had to handle the political and legal issues raised by the presence of the Chinese, who were British subjects, through the intercession of the Siamese and Malay rulers, and in their attempts met active resistance from the Sultan of Kedah. They were obsessed by Chinese secret societies, the threat of labour disturbances and disruptive illicit economic activities such as smuggling. Confronted by a monopolistic ring of revenue farmers, they stimulated strong internal Chinese economic competition in order to raise revenue, but they also had to face demands from the powerful British Chinese in support of the Sultan and their personal business, which was intimately connected to his rule. The government depended on Chinese farmers for the revenue so much that they had to give in to the Chinese request for a reduction in the monthly rent. The long and the short of it was that the British needed to create an institutional framework to deal with these complex issues. Hence, the British promoted Chinese interests by setting up a British consulate in the western Siamese Malay states and then forcibly incorporated the Kedah opium farm into the Penang Chinese opium syndicate, and kept up pressure on the Sultan to grant privileged concessions to Chinese business.

The Malay state of Kedah had legitimate rights over land and other natural resources, but lacked the capital, market and technology to develop these. More importantly, it was a weak state caught between the British and the Siamese. The Kedah elite needed British political influence to stop the Siamese government from attempting further interference in the state's internal autonomy, hence the frequent socio-economic interaction with British Penang. But Kedah was also afraid and wary of the British, who could possibly intervene too deeply in its affairs. Chinese capital, energy and labour were essential to the development of the state, to the management of its revenue, and to the advance of its state interests through the lobbying of influential British Chinese. This caused a dilemma with Kedah being extremely apprehensive of the pleas of Straits Chinese to the British. Therefore, it used local Kedah Chinese as its agents in dealing with the Penang Chinese. Kedah also needed the Siamese as a

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counterbalance in dealing with British Penang, in order to maintain its security and independence. Kedah could not afford to alienate any of these disparate actors. Kedah had shown very sophisticated and balanced political skills in juggling active interaction with the Chinese, British Penang, Siamese Bangkok and even Singapore, on issues such as the status of British subjects and the joint tender for the Kedah–Penang opium farm.

The Chinese were immigrants occupying a position between the British and the Malays, strangers in both the colonial and indigenous regimes. They needed the British to provide the legal and political frameworks for their business interests in the region, but they also could not do without Malay power that allowed them privileged access to economic resources, patronized their business in Kedah, as well as being an asset in internal Chinese competition. Generally the Chinese tried to please both the British and Malays and cultivated good personal relationships. The Chinese did their best to transcend the institutional barriers within both the British and Malay regimes, in order to cultivate personal, informal and powerful ties. But, the Chinese could not expect much from either regime and, inescapably caught up in these alien circumstances, they were both opportunistic and pragmatic. They would rise against either British or Malay as circumstances required, and when facing a confrontation with the Malays, the Chinese turned to the British for protection, playing the card of their status as British subjects. They changed their tune when their interests conflicted with those of the British. Then they allied themselves with the Malay regime. In other words, for the promotion of their business, the Chinese needed the British at the institutional level, while at the informal level they needed the Malays. Positioned between the British and Malays, they could play one against the other depending on the circumstances. They were also aware of their own advantages: they could play important cards like their access to capital, management, labour, social organization, the press, European power-brokers and their legal position as British subjects. They understood that the Chinese capital, labour and business networks were essential to both British and Malays. So the Chinese challenged the British many times when the latter tried to place the Kedah opium farm under the control of the Penang farm. They also refused to accept Kedah's unilateral termination of their revenue farm contracts by turning to the British consul. They were closely involved in Kedah political affairs, often openly expressing their views through the Penang-based press. They initiated the labour disturbances to put pressure on both the British and Malays, for different purposes. But they were also aware of the limitations of playing these cards. They trod very carefully and were supremely flexible. In the hands of opportunistic Chinese *towkays*, British, Malays and Chinese coolies could be potentially effective instruments depending on the circumstances.

All these goals and strategies relate to one fundamental point: this was

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a period of transition, one in the process of building up new systems, at the beginning of British overall colonial control in the Malay Peninsula and of the Western capital influx of the early twentieth century. Such a transition gave the Chinese a unique historical opportunity to play the field between British colonialism and a Malay sultanate, enabling them to create relationships and opportunities which shaped the emerging new systems.

The second phase, 1909–41

Regional and political fragmentation during this period was, to some extent, diluted when Kedah was transferred to British colonial rule, so that the British resident councillor in Penang and the British advisor in Kedah could now co-ordinate with each other under instructions from the high commissioner in Singapore. Economic integration was consolidated even more, taking advantage of the expanding Chinese business networks and the growing influence of Western capital. But fragmentation and conflict remained: between Penang and Kedah, between British and Malay, between Kedah Chinese and Penang Chinese, and between the Chinese on the one hand and the British and Malays on the other. In this phase, the conflict essentially centred on the restructuring of the old political and socio-economic order to fit into a new colonial reality.

Three aspects of multi-ethnic and cross-state interactions have been presented: the judicial conflict; the demise of revenue farming; and rice milling. Again, shifting alliances were typical of the situation. In the transformation of the legal order, it was British and Chinese interests that coincided, bound by a mutual interest in politics and business. As the death knell of the revenue farming system sounded, Chinese farmers and the old Malay elite joined together, under the *ampun kurnia* system, in a relationship between business manager (Chinese) and rent-seeker (Malay). In coping with the Chinese rice combine, the British and Malays reached a consensus, linked by mutual concern over the paddy price, a matter that concerned miners, planters and the Malay peasantry.

In the final analysis, two structural elements – colonialism and migration – contributed to the dynamic interaction between ethnicity and region. What the new immigrant Chinese element brought to Southeast Asia was not just their active participation in the steady socio-economic transformation, but also the changes they made to what had previously been a bilateral encounter between Western colonialism and the indigenous society, adding another ethnic dimension. Political and economic competition were increasingly reorganized to accommodate the interests of new, large immigrant communities, on the way marginalizing indigenous economic participation and, by doing so, deflecting potential direct tension between Western colonialism and the indigenous society. In their turn,

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historical processes eventually embedded the immigrant element into Southeast Asian societies: this was not recognized in the colonial context, but developed into a reality acknowledged in contemporary Southeast Asia.

The striking paradox between political fragmentation and economic integration expressed in the contrast and the symbiosis between British (Penang) and Malays (Kedah) explains how this regional and ethnic interaction came to exhibit such fluid and complex features. Because of contemporary international power relations, the Malay state of Kedah was balanced between British Penang and Siamese Bangkok, its foreign affairs subject to British–Siamese negotiations. Kedah did not accept this situation lying down, but actively tried to manipulate both these power-holders. Because of their regional business networks, the Chinese operated between Malay Kedah and British Penang, their business subject to the rhythms of British–Malay power politics. But neither were the Chinese passive. They also did their best to influence both. In view of the situation, the British sought to manipulate the Chinese and the Malays by promoting Chinese business networks and then jumping into the breach to mediate their conflicts with the Malays, thereby neatly expanding their own colonial interests. Finally, the Malays found themselves between the British and Chinese, manipulating their economic competition (e.g. opium farms) and taking advantage of other quarrels to the advantage of Kedah.

Different aspects and dimensions of the states were dominated by different groups, who asked different things of the states and often operated discreetly in their complementary spheres. Conflict emerged when groups interacted, states competed and interests interlocked. Indigenous Malays were politically over-ruled by British colonialism, but were dubious of colonial sovereignty; immigrant Chinese economic activities were approved of by British colonialism and acquiesced to by the Malays, but the socio-political status of the Chinese was undefined. British colonialism gave the immigrant Chinese economic legitimacy, but deprived the indigenous Malay of political power over immigrant Chinese.

Such divisions of spheres of domination made the multi-ethnic and cross-state interaction more complex, flexible and interconnecting. Indubitably for the Malays, political weakness was a problem; but they could exploit the situation, so that a semblance of ‘independence’ was maintained and their economy could develop. For the British, Siamese suzerainty was a barrier; but through the British consulate and Chinese business networks, their political and economic interests were secured in Kedah. For the Chinese, their vague political identity and lack of protection from the Chinese government in China was a cause for anxiety; but because their energy and expertise was needed by all, and by falling back on the bastion of their own social organizations and networks, they had no trouble promoting their regional business networks.

CONCLUSION

Political fragmentation and multi-ethnic politics fuelled confrontation and accommodation. This is illustrated by the establishment of the British consulate (1880s–1909) and legal conflicts (1909–30s), specifically the cases of Tan Ah Yu (1890s–1900s) and Chong Sin Yew (1919–20s), by the opium politics of Chinese, British and Malays, and third, by the three Kulim Chinese disturbances (1888–1908). Polycentric and multi-ethnic alliances were typical. In the case of the British consulate and Tan Ah Yu, for example, the political contest was a three-sided game between British, Siamese and Malays. In the opium farm issue, British, Chinese and Malay economic competition was the central point. In the Kulim disturbances, one integrated Chinese regional business network and two parallel states (British versus Malay) were involved. British, Malays and Chinese were all instrumental in each other's strategy.

In contrast to this political fragmentation, economic integration was demonstrable in the regional economic arrangement of opium farms, in Kulim's position in the tin and planting economy, in Kedah's role as supplier to the Penang market, in Chinese business networks such as opium, rice milling and pawnbroking, and in the frequent mobility of capital, commodities and labour. This dynamic interaction was consolidated and shaped by, and then also manifested in, the Chinese business networks.

Hence, the region was, first of all, a political arena for British and Malays, and a fruitful terrain for the Chinese who served them both. The British used Chinese capital, labour and business networks as their political and commercial agents to justify their involvement in Malay politics. The Sultan of Kedah used the same Chinese capital, labour and business networks to open up his own country, and to deal with the British political community in Penang. Finally, the Chinese used British political influence and institutions to secure more commercial privileges from the Sultan, and guarantee their business security and, while they were doing this, also manipulated the Malay elite to the same end.

Chinese family business networks

Chinese business networks and power relationships are not simple, isolated business or communal matters, but involve larger political, socio-economic and historical processes. All structural elements of region, ethnicity and state are manifested in Chinese family business networks. My research findings contrast with and contradict several classic, but one-faceted, images of the Chinese diaspora in the current literature that see the Chinese as the 'middle-man' in the colonial society; or as an immigrant community 'marginalized' in relation to the dominant society; or as a 'bamboo network' of international business defined by 'Chineseness'. All three images compartmentalize the Chinese, implying fixed boundaries and static structures, underestimating interactions with the host government, society and

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economy of the countries in which they were residents. They imply that all Chinese are simply and irrevocably 'Chinese', tending to exaggerate their transnational networks, social isolation and sojourning mentality.

The first step is to clarify the overall long-term development of the Penang–Kedah Chinese community (c. 1882–1941). Taken as a whole, the Penang–Kedah Chinese community was, in essence, based on the revenue farming system (opium), planting (rubber and other crops) and commercial industry (rice milling). Two points should be made clear. First, the changing profile reflected the changing political and economic situations. The first generation (based on opium farms and rice milling) of the Lim Leng Cheak, Choong Cheng Kean and Phuah (Lim) Hin Leong families provided a solid business foundation for the second generation, who continued to be prominent in the Penang–Kedah community. In time, their leading roles were appropriated by the rise of the two *singkeh* Chinese families, that of Lim Boon Haw in the 1920s and of Lim Lean Teng in the 1930s (based on rubber planting). Second, this leading Penang–Kedah Chinese network was eventually incorporated into a single Penang Chinese community and became an integral part of it. Put another way, since the early twentieth century, these leading Penang–Kedah Chinese had all become recognized as Penang Chinese, even though they had originally lived and risen to prominence in Kedah. They also withdrew from their close involvement in Kedah's affairs and concentrated their socio-political interests in the Penang community. Because their business dealings with the Kedah authorities were based mainly on the new legal and political framework, Kedah was reduced to the state of being just the main business base. Kedah business provided these families with very important linkages during the formation of the Penang–Kedah Chinese community, but the centre of their activities moved to Penang.

It is cogent to look at the two most important overlapping but complementary and competing family business networks, both active in the two most typical businesses of opium farming and rice milling: the Penang Lim family and the Kedah Choong family.

In the first phase (1882–1909), two factors, namely Chinese economic domination based on revenue farming and Siamese suzerainty, played an important role in shaping their role. As the most important opium farmers, both families were well connected to the state authorities in Kedah and their commercial activities were fundamental to the state economy. Both provide examples of the typical mobility between Penang and Kedah, as the Penang Lim family was closely linked to Kedah, and the Kedah Choong family had close ties with Penang. The Lim family moved capital and business to Kedah from Penang; while the Choong family shifted capital and business from Kedah to Penang. This mobility pattern which emerges from Kedah is confirmed by the actors of other Kedah families such as those of Chong Sin Yew and Lim Lean Teng.

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Family and state relationships under Siamese suzerainty have been characterized as 'ethnicized', 'personalized', 'institutionalized' and 'appropriated', as I have indicated (see Chapter 4, pp. 57–8). 'Ethnicized' suggests a multi-ethnic interaction between the British, Malays and Chinese in which specific niches were seen as appropriate to certain groups. 'Personalized' suggests that not only were the institutional roles of the states transcended by or manifested in a few prominent families, but also these few families indeed monopolized the interaction with the state. 'Institutionalized' suggests these 'ethnicized' and 'personalized' interactions were channelled through and then locked into a framework, such as those of the revenue farms, Chinese *kapitan* and other institutions. While 'appropriated' refers to the way in which certain families used their manifold access to resources such as capital, labour, knowledge and contacts to assume total leadership and seize a monopoly on representation. These characteristics were related to international and regional politics, to the British colonial establishment, to their economic penetration into the Siamese Malay states and to Southeast Asian socio-economic development.

In the post-1909 period, family and state relationships underwent another important change, which coincided with the changing multi-ethnic and cross-state interaction (see pp. 176–9). The appropriated relationship weakened with the replacement of the Chinese revenue farming system, compounded by the introduction of government management and Western capital domination under British colonial rule, creating conditions in which such families no longer provided the central political agents and negotiating partners for the state. Despite this, the family remained the core unit for the organization of Chinese economic activities. This was manifested both in the demise of revenue farming monopolies and in the emergence of the rice milling business networks. The Chinese dominated the rice milling business and trading networks, in which Penang, Kedah, Perak and Province Wellesley formed an integral chain. At the top level of the milling hierarchy were a few Penang Chinese families, who had formerly been prominent revenue farmers. Within the Chinese milling networks, there were overlapping and conflicting interests, also contending with strong economic competition between the state and the Chinese millers. This was essentially a competition between state and capital, which was transformed into one between the British and the Chinese, and the Chinese and the Malays. As the rice business involved the poles of both British strategic economic and political interests and the Malay peasantry, this economic struggle acquired a strong political hue. However, the essential economic nature of this contest could not be changed, determined as it was by the international and local rice market, finance, management and trading networks. As long as the government could not replace these core Chinese businessmen, it had to depend on

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Chinese capital, management and networks. The relationship was characterized by alternating conflict and compromise, dependence and co-operation.

From a Penang perspective, the Lim family history exemplifies this complexity. They were ethnic Chinese, British subjects, business lobbyists, revenue farmers, rice millers, state managers and political agents for Kedah. They were people with access to capital, labour, networks and coercion, and using secret societies, Chinese *kapitans*, European power-brokers, Indian *chettiar* money-lenders and other personal patrons. The Lim family history was, in fact, an important part of overlapping Penang–Kedah interactions and of British–Malay or Chinese–Malay relationships.

The Lim family history (1882–1941) shows that the family business grew out of the prosperity of the revenue farming system (1880s–1909), which set a solid basis for embedding the family in the dominant local society and economy. This period coincided with Chinese control of local business networks, centred on the large-scale influx of immigrants, the opening up of colonial Malaya, the relatively weak position of Western capital on the economic front and politically with the transition to modern state machinery and British control over the whole peninsula. Under the impact, and meeting the challenge, of both the modern state structure and Western capital, the family business switched to rubber and other agricultural industries. Despite the death of the founding father, it continued to develop through the second generation. But, before long, there were family disputes. The family business was on the decline and the waning of their enterprising spirit was intensified by the global economic slump in the early 1920s and 1930s.

From a Kedah perspective, the Choong family provides a complementary picture of Chinese regional business networks, but again indicates the importance of the combined perspective of region, locality and ethnicity. The most salient point is that it is impossible to study the Kedah Chinese business networks and power relations without reference to the setting. The Choong story suggests that their interaction with the local Malay state and with the regional Penang community were the two fundamental props in the formation of the family empire and power base, each consolidating the other. This was illustrated particularly by their business mobility and their dual bases in Kedah and Penang. The Choong family history also illustrates how Chinese–Malay ethnic interactions were complicated by British–Malay power politics, not only in terms of British Penang, but also in direct internal dealings with the British advisor after 1909.

Both the Lim and Choong family case studies represent similar patterns of Chinese regional business networks, and they also reveal an important dimension of their interaction. The overlapping and even competing networks of the Penang and Kedah Chinese led to the Kedah Chinese later

developing their own identity independent of the Penang community. This independent Kedah community consisted of small to middle landlords, petty traders and shopkeepers, while the very prominent Kedah Chinese were incorporated into the Penang community, which has been touched on earlier. Each family developed their respective alliances within the Chinese and other communities. Hence, competition involving the Lim–Choong family was not only between different interest groups, or between Penang Chinese and Kedah Chinese, but also involved the whole Chinese community.

Immigrant economy and Southeast Asian transformation

If the historical account reveals that the study of Chinese business networks cannot be isolated from ethnicity, state and region, then it is necessary to go a step further and ask: how can the Chinese case help to answer general issues about an immigrant political economy and the Southeast Asian transformation? I believe this is an issue fundamental to the historical dynamics of Chinese business networks and power relations in Southeast Asia.

The sociologist Paul Siu, when dealing with Chinese laundrymen in Chicago, perhaps first coined the term ‘immigrant economy’. It is a ‘new social invention by these different ethnic groups in America as ways and means to struggle for existence in the symbiotic level of the community life’, of which the Greek ice-cream parlour, the Italian fruit stand, the Jewish clothing store and the Chinese laundrymen are some characteristic examples. As Siu pointed out, the significance of the Chinese laundry as a ‘form of immigrant economy’ lay in the situation in which laundrymen became ‘isolated’.¹ Likewise, Emily Honig, a historian, confirmed this in the study of ‘Subei people’ in Shanghai. ‘Subei people’ represented both an immigrant community and an underclass. As an immigrant community, the idea of Subei as a place and Subei people as a social category emerged only in conjunction with the development of Jiangnan and Shanghai, the dominant society and elite. In turn, their employment pattern as an underclass consolidated the Subei people’s social and economic status in Shanghai as a marginalized category.² Both Siu and Honig seem to imply that the creation of an immigrant economy and social category should be examined as part of a process of two-way interaction between the immigrant community and mainstream society.

The picture changes when the focus is moved to Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. In Hong Kong, as Wong Siu-lun shows, the Shanghai immigrant presented a contrast: they were soon incorporated in the local mainstream society and economy in Hong Kong. Emigrant Shanghainese were elite and capitalists, who were ‘well equipped to compete in the field of manufacture, and . . . possess[ed] useful industrial skills and valuable resources

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in financial, productive, managerial, and marketing activities'.³ Because of the radical political change in Mainland China, in the late 1940s they moved to Hong Kong as so-called refugees. But the ranks of the emigrant Shanghainese soon became 'the prime movers of the process of industrialization' in 1950s and 1960s Hong Kong.⁴ This is not only because their own background as wealthy and experienced capitalists differed from the labour immigrants in Chicago and Subei, but also because the larger process of Hong Kong industrialization in the 1950s and 1960s provided a historical opportunity for their business take-off. Of course, this was related to the contrast between Shanghai and Hong Kong in the pre-communist days, where in the Far East the former was a sort of a great cosmopolitan centre while the latter was a small village.

In contrast, in Southeast Asia, most Chinese were poor, illiterate peasants prior to the migration. Both the immigrant community and its economic role were significant in terms of their size and impact, and the Chinese were crucial in shaping the expanding economy and emerging new society. Unlike the situations described by Siu or Honig, the Chinese were not immigrants who created specific niches and connections within an existing dominant structure. In reality, they were a major force in shaping regional economies and societies, and were in turn shaped by them.

Taking British Malaya as a whole, if rubber and tin were the two main props of the colonial economy, then rice and opium were the two main means of sustaining labour, which required both. This indispensable immigrant labour force was the mainstay of colonial production, and also provided a huge new profitable market for consumption. For a long time Chinese capital dominated the mainstream local economy, such as tin, opium, shipping and other commerce, both in production and consumption. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Western capital took control over production (tin and rubber), but the consumption sector was still left to the Chinese. The government still depended on both the immigrant community and trading networks for opium sales and consumption. Meanwhile, a new rice milling industry prospered in the wake of the rubber boom, as it was indispensable in feeding another large immigrant wave. The social and economic impacts of these changes extended far beyond the actual enclaves of mine and plantation, stimulating rice production (in areas such as Kedah) and extending the web of commerce – and Chinese networks – in many areas of the peninsula.

The substantial roles played by these Southeast Asian Chinese engendered another extreme in creating an immigrant identity, which also derives from the conventional emphasis on the Southeast Asian Chinese as 'immigrants'. I do not deny the fact that the Chinese were immigrants. What I argue here is that, by manipulation of and emphasis on their immigrant identity, the major players in Southeast Asian Chinese business activities are often seen as intrusion by outsiders who are staging an entry

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into a legitimate 'Malay' or a 'colonial' economy, and do no more than merely link these existing spheres. This distorts the images of the Chinese in history, comparable to the way in which the images of the indigenous people are not visualized in Euro-centric Southeast Asian history, and ignores the fact that the British Malayan, and subsequently the Malaysian, economies were created by the interaction of Chinese, Malays, Indians, British and other Westerners. This distortion denies the legitimacy of the Chinese economic role through a manipulation of the idea of immigrant identity and roles, emphasizing the primordial aspect of ethnicity. This emphasis obscures the functioning of ethnicity in concrete historical contexts. This can lead to a paradoxical application of the same primordialism in two extremely different examples of immigrant economies: those of 'Chinese laundrymen' in Chicago and 'Subei people' in Shanghai on the one hand and Southeast Asian 'Chinese' on the other.

The emphasis here falls on the process, that of shaping Chinese communities and hence of shaping Chinese identities in Southeast Asian societies and histories. This is in essence related to the fundamental issue of Southeast Asian transformation. The Southeast Asian transformation not only encompasses the political process of colonial conquest, power struggles and bureaucratic reconstruction, but also refers to structural socio-economic change. It was essentially a transformation of tropical agrarian Southeast Asian societies, with a limited if active involvement in trade, turning them into colonial commercial and capitalist societies with a simultaneous large influx of immigrant labour, which engulfed the indigenous peasantry, who became increasingly marginalized. At the same time, immigrant Chinese peasants were transformed into labourers and capitalists. The point is that the immigrant community actively participated, and in fact played a pioneering role, in this transformation. To sum up, it is the Southeast Asian transformation that triggered a larger process of integrating the Chinese into local societies and economies.

The different stages of this Southeast Asian transformation and regional politics determined the various profiles of the political economy. In the initial stage of colonialism, Chinese economic dominance, expressed in the prosperity of secret societies and revenue farms, won them a significant degree of political influence and social control. For example, the case study of the three Kulim Chinese disturbances in Kedah, c. 1888–1908, involved all the essential elements of the Southeast Asian transformation, such as labour, capital, secret societies and regional power politics, extending across state and ethnic boundaries. All these elements – wider economic competition, personal and internal conflicts – were manifested then through the manoeuvres of Chinese *towkays* and riots by Chinese coolies. While overt political power was British and Malay, the huge and valuable resources of immigrant labour and capital gave Chinese leaders great influence.

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These ambiguities also created legal dilemmas and political conflicts in multi-ethnic encounters. The study of British–Malay–Chinese legal disputes, contextualized in terms of institutional formation and power struggles, trace institutionalization first through the establishment of a British consulate, and then, after 1909, through the transformation of the traditional Malay judicial system into a modern western judiciary. The specific case study of Tan Ah Yu and Chong Sin Yew shows how Chinese immigrant cases were closely related to wider struggles, British–Siamese–Malay power politics and local Malay state formation. It also suggests that, historically, the Chinese–Malay ethnic encounter was not confined to the local state level of Kedah itself, but involved and developed into wider and more complicated interplays between the British, Siamese, Malays and Chinese. This also illustrates important aspects of immigrant Chinese localization and transnationalization.

GLOSSARY

- ampun kurnia** royal grants
- bang** a Chinese dialect group organization
- baba** straits-born Chinese
- chop** a shop trademark of Chinese business followed by the name of the firm
- chandu** cooked opium for smoking
- estate** an agricultural production unit defined officially in Malaya as a holding of over 100 acres
- farm** a revenue monopoly in colonial Southeast Asia, usually leased to the Chinese for a fixed period in exchange for fixed rent to the government
- FMS** Federated Malay States, the Malay states under the British resident system, made up of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang
- hokkien** people from Fujian; or dialect in south Fujian
- haji** title given to a muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca
- hui** a society, possibly a secret society or triad
- kapitan** head of the Chinese community in the early colonial Southeast Asia, appointed by the authorities
- kerah** corvee labour
- kongsi** a Chinese partnership, company, secret society, association, or other share-holding socio-economic organization
- koyan** a measure of paddy equivalent to 40 pikuls
- kuala** river-mouth, estuary
- kung** working class
- mukim** village, district
- paddy** unhusked rice, a term from the Malay 'padi'
- paddy kunca** type of credit system
- parboiled rice** steamed rice
- penghulu** a head of mukim
- peranakan** Indonesia-born and acculturated Chinese
- pikul** a measure of capacity, equivalent to 100 catties, about 62.5 kilogrammes or 133 pounds
- qiaoxiang** hometowns of overseas Chinese
- raja** title of a ruler
- raja muda** heir presumptive

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- relong** area measure approximately equivalent to two-thirds of an acre
- resident** the top British official in one of the Federated Malay States
- resident councilor** the top British official in one of the Straits Settlements
- samsam** Malays mixed with Siamese
- shih** gentry
- singkeh** a newly arrived Chinese immigrant
- SS** Straits Settlements, the British colonies made up of Singapore, Penang and Malacca
- Sultan** Arabian term for a ruler
- sungei** river
- tahil** a weight equivalent to 1.3 ounces or 1 tahil = 39 gm
- temenggong** title of Malay court official
- towkay** a Chinese businessman
- toddy** a powerful alcoholic beverage derived from the coconut palm and usually drunk by Indian labourers, sold by farms or government monopolies in British Malaya
- triad** Chinese secret society, the union of heaven, earth and man
- totok** China-born and less acculturated Chinese in relation to peranakan Chinese in Indonesia
- tunku** prince
- UMS** Unfederated Malay States, the Malay states under the British advisor, made up of Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, Perlis and Johor

NOTES

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1 See van Leur 1955; Smail 1961; Sears 1993.
- 2 Benda 1962: 106–38; 1972; Legge 1976: 388–404; McVey 1978: 1–31.
- 3 Wolters 1982, 1994.
- 4 Sutherland 1989: 97–128; 1994a: 785–804; 1994b: 103–8; 1995: 133–46.
- 5 McVey 1995: 8.
- 6 For methodological discussion, see van den Muijzenberg *et al.* 1982; Sutherland 1985: 124–34. For examples of such an exercise, see Trocki 1979; Warren 1981; Cushman 1991; Sutherland’s Java Seas programme, which consists of five individual PhD projects.
- 7 Blussé 1986.
- 8 Dobbin 1996.
- 9 Sutherland 1995; Twang Peck Yang 1998.
- 10 See Trocki 1990; Rush 1990; Cushman 1991; Butcher and Dicks 1993; R. Brown 1994; Fukuda 1995.
- 11 Reid 1996: ix.
- 12 Redding 1990.
- 13 McVey 1992a.
- 14 Hodder 1996.
- 15 Weidenbaum and Hughes 1996.
- 16 Lever-Tracy *et al.* 1996.
- 17 Ong and Nonini 1997.
- 18 Evers 1988; Menkhoff 1993; Jamann 1994; Evers and Schrader 1994; Dobbin 1996.
- 19 Godley 1996; Chan and Mackie 1997; Heidhues 1997.
- 20 Van Leur 1955: 201, 205, 214.
- 21 *Ibid.* 204, 220.
- 22 Braudel 1985: 376–8.
- 23 *Ibid.* 149–50.
- 24 *Ibid.* 138, 153–4.
- 25 Skinner 1964: 31; 1965: 195–228, 363–99.
- 26 Evers 1988.
- 27 Menkhoff 1993: 35–43, 89–130.
- 28 Sutherland 1997.
- 29 D. Brown 1994: xi–xxi, 1–32.
- 30 Balmori *et al.* 1984.
- 31 Meskill 1979.

- 32 Cushman 1991.
- 33 McCoy 1993.
- 34 Yoshihara 1989; Salmon 1991.
- 35 Freedman 1979: 383–4.
- 36 Lang 1946: 13.

2 SETTINGS

- 1 For classic studies, see Wen Xiong-fei 1929; Wang Gungwu 1992. For an excellent recent study, see Reid 1996: 15–49.
- 2 Chen Ta 1940: 29.
- 3 Freedman 1965: 10–18.
- 4 Freedman 1966: 12. However, Freedman failed to formulate his explanation in more detail. His economic discussion seems particularly to have been weakened by his great concern with the family, kinship and lineage. This is compensated by Chen Ta's discussion of the socio-economic situations of both non-emigrant and emigrant community. See Chen Ta 1940: 58–85.
- 5 Campbell 1923: 1–25; Wen Xiong-fei 1929: 34–231.
- 6 Trocki 1990: 30–5.
- 7 Chen Ta 1940: 6.
- 8 Wang Gungwu 1992: 236–50. However, Yen Ching-hwang set out a modified three-class paradigm, i.e. '*shang*', '*shih*' (educated elite) and '*kung*'. The middle '*shih*' class consisted of clerks in foreign firms, junior government officers, interpreters, schoolteachers and professionals. See Yen Ching-hwang 1983: 1–24.
- 9 See C.S. Wong 1963; Purcell 1965: 270, 395–6, 398, 414–16, 431–5; Sadka 1968: 25–6; Heidhues 1974: 45–8; Mak Lau Fong 1981: 26–7. For specific case studies, see Chan Gaik Gnok 1982; Carstens 1988.
- 10 See Comber 1957, 1959; Blythe 1969; Vaughan 1879; Mak Lau Fong 1981; Ownby and Heidhues 1992.
- 11 See Heidhues 1992: 68–88; Wang Tai Peng 1994; Yuan Bingling 1998.
- 12 Anderson 1824: 126; Crawford 1828: 27–8; 1856: 361; Newbold 1839: 2–3.
- 13 Gullick 1965: 35, 44, 95.
- 14 Ibid. 2–3.
- 15 Milner 1982, 1995.
- 16 Allen 1968: 54–94; Sharom 1970b: 115–28; Levis 1975: 36–43.
- 17 Sharom 1970b: 115–28.
- 18 Zaharah 1966: 32–62; Sharom 1970a: 1–24.
- 19 CO 273/311, Memorandum on the Present Condition of Affairs in Kedah by Warren D. Barnes, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Singapore, 21 January 1905.
- 20 Khoo Kay Jin 1993: 125–41.
- 21 *KAR*, September 1906–February 1908, p. 3.
- 22 Sharom 1984: 130–7.
- 23 *KAR*, January 1910–January 1911, Appendix D; Jackson 1968: 266.
- 24 According to the Kedah Planters Association, for example in 1936 Europeans had 89 estates with an area of 173,546 *relongs*, while Asians had 200 estates with an area of 69,769 *relongs*.
- 25 Rubber planting economy played an important role in Johor and Kedah, although they were under UMS. See Emerson 1964: 242.
- 26 Wolters 1967: 229–53; Coedes 1968: 81–96; Hall 1981: 47–73.
- 27 Wheatley 1964: 84.
- 28 Wheatley 1964: 85; 1966: 280, 300; Coedes 1968: 142, 245. But according to

- Wolters, it is unlikely that Kedah had been of a great significance. See Wolters 1967: 236; 1970: 9.
- 29 Winstedt 1935: 26–7; Wheatley 1964: 86–94; 1966: 199–209, 281, 300; Wolters 1967: 251–2; 1970: 93; Coedes 1968: 142–3; Hall 1981: 68–9.
 - 30 Winstedt 1936: 155–6.
 - 31 Andaya 1975; Andaya 1979; Hall 1981: 229.
 - 32 They said this visit took place on the date of the conversion of the ruler of Kedah to Islam. See Winstedt 1936: 157; Coedes 1968: 246.
 - 33 For an excellent general discussion of that period, see Andaya 1992: 402–59.
 - 34 Tregonning 1965: 75–88; Bonney 1971: 52–78.
 - 35 Mills 1966: 129–74; Kobkua 1986: 33–48; 1988: 82–92; Osborn 1987.
 - 36 See Anderson 1824: 151–2; Wheatley 1961: 388; Cushman and Milner 1979: 1–47; Braddell 1980: 361–96.
 - 37 Lewis 1975: 39.
 - 38 Li Chang-fu 1935: 47.
 - 39 Purcell 1948: 115.
 - 40 C.S. Wong 1963: 1–26, 47–62.
 - 41 Tregonning 1965: 79.
 - 42 Purcell 1948: 66.
 - 43 Newbold 1839: 20.
 - 44 Zaharah 1979: 120–53.
 - 45 Sharom 1984: 7.
 - 46 CO 273/162, Resident of Perak to the Governor, Confidential, 6 November 1889.
 - 47 KAR, 1905–6, p. 5.
 - 48 Zaharah 1979: 140–1.

3 NETWORKING REGIONAL INTERACTIONS, 1882–9

- 1 Thio 1969: 95–115; Trocki 1979: 154–215.
- 2 CO 273/141/371, Appointment of an Agent at Kedah, 29 October 1886.
- 3 CO 273/150, Appointment of Consular Office in Kedah, 16 July 1887; FO 422/30, Acting Governor Sir F. Dickson to Lord Knutsford, 28 October 1890.
- 4 CO 273/141/371, H.B.M's Minister Resident and Consul General Bangkok to Sir F.A. Weld, 29 October 1886.
- 5 CO 273/141/371, The Governor of S.S. F.A. Weld to the Colonial Office, 12 November 1886; CO 273/150, Satow to the Foreign Office, 22 February 1887; CO 273/146/347, Consular Agent at Kedah, 22 August 1887.
- 6 CO 273/150, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 16 July 1887.
- 7 CO 273/150, Foreign Office: Establishment of a Consular Agency at Kedah, 16 November 1887.
- 8 CO 273/156, Foreign Office: British Consular Officer for Kedah, 16 March 1888; CO 273/156, Foreign Office to Colonial Office: Consul at Kedah, 16 April 1888; CO 273/156, Skinner as British Consul at Kedah, Foreign Office to E.B. Gould, 27 April 1888.
- 9 PGSC, 25 May 1888.
- 10 See Swettenham 1948: 253–5. The division was a reaction to the vehement objections by the miners who did not want to surrender their rights to opium farmers. They argued that the high price might otherwise cause serious disturbances.
- 11 Swettenham 1948: 254; CO 273/319, Memorandum upon returns of the import of opium into Federated Malay States, 19 November 1906.

- 12 CO 273/186/60, Memorandum on the Opium Traffic Straits Settlements by the Colonial Engineer, Major H.E. McCallum, 30 May 1892.
- 13 For the contraband trade in Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Tagliacozzo 1999.
- 14 Rush 1990: 65–82.
- 15 Wong Lin Ken 1964: 79–82; Turnbull 1972: 197–8.
- 16 Turnbull 1972: 196–8; Trocki 1979: 107, note 66; 1990: 95, 102, 111–12.
- 17 But they were absolutely not from within the same general financial clique, as Trocki speculates (1990: 168). Chew Sin Yong was Cantonese, while Koh Seang Tat was Hokkien. In the 1892–4 opium crisis, they had an interesting showdown. Chew Sin Yong was educated at the Penang Free School and was one of the few Chinese of his age who spoke English fluently. He died in Penang at the age of 53, leaving a widow, three sons and four daughters. See *PGSC*, 4 June 1886 and 22 October 1894.
- 18 Trocki 1990: 163, 167, 170–8.
- 19 CO 273/168, Penang Opium and Spirit Farm, confidential, 4 October 1890; CO 273/168/388, Opium and Spirit Farm, 4 October 1890; CO 273/169, Opium and Spirit Farm, confidential, 29 December 1890; *Legco.*, 1890, pp. B 82–9; Godley 1993: 91, 93, 95.
- 20 CO 882/4/44, Straits Settlements: Memorandum of an agreement between Her Majesty's Government of the Straits Settlements with the Government of the Independent State of Johor respecting the conditions under which the Opium Farms of Singapore and Johor may be let jointly instead of separately as heretofore. See also Trocki 1990: 191–4.
- 21 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to Resident Councillor, Penang, 2 Zulkaedah 1305 (10 July 1888).
- 22 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to Resident Councillor, Penang, 21 Zulkaedah 1305 (29 July 1888). See also no. 3, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor, Penang, 17 Zulhijjah 1305 (24 August 1888).
- 23 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, Penang, 5 Muharam 1306 (11 September 1888).
- 24 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, Penang, 17 Muharam 1306 (23 September 1888). See also no. 3, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor, Penang, 25 Muharam 1306 (1 October 1888).
- 25 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor, Penang, 18 Zulkaedah 1306 (16 July 1889).
- 26 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor, Penang, 17 Safar 1307 (12 October 1889).
- 27 FO 422/30, Swettenham to the Governor of the Straits Settlements, 6 November 1889.
- 28 In December 1995, I visited Lim It Kim's village and checked his family history. There is little information about his family in China, in contrast to the good results of the research about *singkeh* Chinese, I have conducted in other villages of Guandong and Fujian Provinces.
- 29 Teoh Shiau Kuan 1986: 85–131.
- 30 This is reflected in two of his donations. In 1856, Lim It Kim donated \$12 to the Pulau Tikus Hokkien Cemetery. In early 1863, he also contributed \$10 to the restoration of Guang Fu Temple. At that time, the donations represented a considerable sum of money. See Wolfwang and Chen Tieh Fan 1985: H 1.2.5 and H 1.24.5.
- 31 Information from Teoh Shiau Kuan, a local historian in Penang, 25 January 1997.

- 32 *SE*, 7 May 1938.
- 33 *SE*, 20 September 1930.
- 34 Lin Bo Ai 1923: vol. 1, p. 33; Mak Lau Fong 1995: 171.
- 35 *SE*, 20 September 1930.
- 36 Wright and Cartwright 1908: 82.
- 37 *PGSC*, 28 November 1879.
- 38 The Chamber of Commerce of Penang 1879: 12–13.
- 39 The Chamber of Commerce of Penang 1879: 12; see also CO 273/108.
- 40 CO 273/133, Memorial from Merchants and Traders in Penang for Trade with Acheen, 27 February 1885; *PGSC*, 11 November 1887.
- 41 C.S. Wong 1963: 56–7; Cheng Siak Kim 1993: 470–1.
- 42 *SC*, no. 2, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 28 Muharam 1306 (4 October 1888).
- 43 Khoo Kay Kim 1972: 204–5, 209, 210–11, 222.
- 44 Seiji 1974: 53, 66, 163.
- 45 *PGSC*, 5 July 1889.
- 46 *PGSC*, 7 September 1888.
- 47 On 26 January 1997, the researcher visited the earliest Chinese temple at Bukit Mertajam (founded in 1886) under the guidance of Tan Kim Hong, a local historian in Penang. Information on Lim Leng Cheak's linkage is to be found on the stone inscriptions in the temple. The list of the donors shows that the first three were Huang Chen Qing (\$465), Lim Leng Cheak and Ong Beng Teik (\$400) and Low Chew (\$100). Following these were Chiu Cheoh Yuen (i.e. Chinese Captain Chiu Ah Cheoh) (\$30) and others. Huang Chen Qing might have been the most influential Huichew in Penang. Among the total of about 265 people on the list, around 65 people are marked by the same character 'ho', which meant 'the triad society'.
- 48 Under the guidance of Lin Si Chong, the great-grandson-in-law of Choong Cheng Kean, I visited Choong Cheng Kean's father's tomb on 12 January 1996, when I conducted my fieldwork in his native village in China. As his father's tombstone had been stolen, there is little information concerning him. As for his mother, we visited her tomb, which is maintained well by her descendants in China. His mother died in 1920, four years after Choong Cheng Kean died in 1916.
- 49 Information from Ong Choo Suat, Penang, who had an interview with her mother, who was the grand-daughter of Choong Cheng Kean, on 16 August 1977.
- 50 Lim Bo Ai 1923: vol. 2, part 1, p. 81.
- 51 Interview Khoo Salmah Nasution, Penang, 28 March 1996. But, it is impossible to identify who was his father-in-law.
- 52 Information from Ong Choo Suat's mother, Penang, 16 August 1977.
- 53 Information from Ong Choo Suat's mother, Penang, 16 August 1977.
- 54 *PGSC*, 8 February 1818.
- 55 *PGSC*, 5 February 1918.
- 56 *PGSC*, 31 January 1918.
- 57 *SE*, 10 December 1918.
- 58 Sharom 1984: 117.
- 59 Interview with Choong Wah Thean and Choong Chin Guan, Penang, 1 May 1996.
- 60 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, Penang, 9 Syawal 1306 (8 June 1889). However, Lim Leng Cheak got this farm two years later for an annual rent of \$25,000. The Sultan needed money badly to travel to Bangkok. See

- SC, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 19 Rabiulakhir 1308 (1 December 1890).
- 61 SC, no. 5, the Sultan to Resident Perak Swettenham, 15 Zulkaedah 1308 (21 June 1891).
- 62 Loh Leng Kwee is believed to have been an important silent partner in Cheng Kean's opium farm in Kedah. But we do not have much information about him. See SC, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 27 Jamadilawal 1309 (28 December 1891); PGSC, 8 April 1892; SC, no. 3, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 2 Rabiulawal 1307 (26 October 1889); SC, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 26 Rabiulakhir 1308 (8 December 1890).
- 63 See SC, no. 3, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 29 Safar 1307 (24 October 1889). See also SC, no. 5, 10 Rejab 1312 (6 January 1895).
- 64 Khoo Kay Kim 1972: 111–225; Cheng Lim-Keak 1985; Yen Ching-hwang 1986: 110–28; Mak Lau Fong 1995.
- 65 Lee Poh Ping 1978: 1–84; Cushman 1989: 1–15; 1991: 37–44; Trocki 1990: 82–116; Ownby and Mary 1992: 89–119.
- 66 Mak Lau Fong 1981: 40–53.
- 67 Now it is only two or three miles owing to the improvement of transport system.
- 68 See Anderson 1824: 171; Tropping 1850: 43–4; Logan 1851: 53–65.
- 69 Cheng Lim-Keak 1973: 35–6. This paper is mainly based on his MA thesis at Victoria University in Wellington in 1969.
- 70 PGSC, 8, 12 and 15 June 1888.
- 71 Cheng Lim-Keak's statement that it took place in 1883 does not seem to be accurate, but it was also used by Thow Eng Kee. See Cheng Lim-Keak 1973: 38–9; Thow Eng Kee 1995: 16–17.
- 72 PGSC, 19 June 1888.
- 73 CO 273/153/170, the Acting Resident Councillor Penang to the Colonial Secretary, 12 June 1888; PGSC, 15 June 1888.
- 74 SC, no. 2, the Sultan to Bangkok, 6 Syawal 1305 (15 June 1888) and 15 Syawal 1305 (24 June 1888).
- 75 PGSC, 19 June 1888.
- 76 CO 273/153/170, the Acting Resident Councillor Penang to the Colonial Secretary, 12 June 1888; PGSC, 15 June 1888.
- 77 SC, no. 2, the Sultan to Bangkok, 6 Syawal 1305 (15 June 1888).
- 78 PGSC, 8 June 1888.
- 79 PGSC stated there was 1,500 Malays and Sikhs on 12 June, while it said the number was about 1,000 on 15 June. It should have been around 1,000 according to the colonial source. See PGSC, 12 and 15 June 1888; CO 273/153/170, the Acting Resident Councillor Penang to the Colonial Secretary, 12 June 1888.
- 80 CO 273/153/170, the Acting Resident Councillor to the Colonial Secretary, 12 June 1888.
- 81 CO 273/153/170, Smith to the Colonial Office, 15 June 1888.
- 82 PGSC, 13 and 24 April 1888.
- 83 PGSC, 27 April 1888.
- 84 SC, no. 2, the Sultan to Bangkok, 24 Rejab 1305 (5 April 1888).
- 85 PGSC, 19 June 1888.
- 86 PGSC, 22 June 1888.
- 87 PGSC, 20 July 1888.
- 88 PGSC, 24 July 1888.
- 89 SC, no. 5, the Sultan to Tunku Mohammed Saad, 15 Rabiulawal 1306 (19 November 1888).

- 90 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, no date indicated.
- 91 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor Penang, 4 Syawal 1305 (13 June 1888).
- 92 *PGSC*, 15 and 18 January 1889.
- 93 *PGSC*, 29 January 1889.
- 94 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to Siamese Consul, 7 Zulhijjah 1307 (24 July 1890).
- 95 The competition between Cheah Yew Ghee and his friends, and Lim Leng Cheak, Lee Chin Tuan and friends was keen. Low Chu's principal mines were purchased by Cheah Yew Ghee for \$32,735. See *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 19 Syakban 1306 (20 April 1889); the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 26 Ramadan 1306 (28 May 1889); the Sultan to Resident Councillor Penang, 10 Zulkaedah 1306 (8 July 1889); the Sultan to Siamese consul, 27 Zulkaedah 1306 (25 July 1889); *PGSC*, 12 March 1889.
- 96 *SC*, no. 2, the Sultan to Bangkok, 15 Syawal 1305 (24 June 1888).
- 97 Mitchell came to Kulim on a 3-year contract, with a monthly salary of \$150, uniforms, a horse allowance, a furnished house, etc. Mitchell had been working in Kedah for about 20 years until the British took over Kedah in 1909. See *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 19 Rejab 1307 (10 March 1890) and 10 Syakban (31 March 1890).
- 98 CO 273/162, Resident of Perak to the Governor, 6 November 1889. The same report is also available in FO 422/30, under the same title.
- 99 *PGSC*, 7 July 1893.
- 100 *PGSC*, 11 and 14 March 1890.

4 FAMILY AND STATE, 1889–95

- 1 Godley 1981.
- 2 Khoo Kay Kim 1972.
- 3 Skinner 1957; Cushman 1991.
- 4 Khoo Kay Kim 1972: 87, 216–17.
- 5 Cowan 1961: 57; Song 1967: 92.
- 6 Khoo Kay Kim 1972: 209.
- 7 *Legco* 1891, 101 Evid.
- 8 *SIPC*, 23 July, 1 October 1892.
- 9 Around 1908, this large holding of 14,000 *relongs* was later transferred by his son Lim Eow Hong to the Bukit Mertajam Rubber Co. Ltd of western capital. For details of these land titles and areas, see HCO 2536/1915, Land Tax due to the government on Large Holdings.
- 10 The three steamers were the *Cornelia*, the *Washi*, and the *Sportsman*. See *SIPC*, 20 July 1892; Cushman 1991: 60.
- 11 *Legco* 1892, pp. c. 488-c. 489.
- 12 Wright and Cartwright 1908: 820.
- 13 The steamers the *Deli*, the *Taw Tong*, the *Mary Austin* and the *Langkat* were sold for the sum of \$45,000. See *SFP*, 11 October 1893.
- 14 According to Wright, Chuah Yu Kay died in 1894 in a tragic accident. But in February 1895, it was reported that 'Chuah Eu [Yu] Kay, the enterprising manager of the Kong Hock S.S. Co. . . . bought another ship the s.s. *Vidar*'. So, we agreed with Feldwick that Chuah Yu Kay died in 1900. His only son, Chuah Kee Ee succeeded to and maintained the Kong Hock Steamship Company until 1902. See *Straits Maritime Journal & General News*, 8 February 1895; Wright and Cartwright 1908: 824; *PGSC*, 12 June 1902; Feldwick 1917.
- 15 *PGSC*, 13 December 1897.

- 16 *PGSC*, 30 May 1893.
- 17 *Legco*, 1893, p. c. 176.
- 18 *PGSC*, 26 July 1889; Chuleeporn 1990: 269, 271–2.
- 19 *PGSC*, 10 August 1893.
- 20 Khoo Guat Cheng was the son of an old and wealthy Penang merchant Khoo Soon Hong, who died in 1895 at the age of 82. His father was Baba Chinese. Khoo Guat Cheng and his brothers were proprietors of the well-known and popular firm of ‘Guat Cheng Bros.’, of Beach Street. See *The Straits Maritime Journal & General News*, 18 January 1895.
- 21 *Legco*, 1892, p. c. 455.
- 22 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 17 Rabiulakhir 1310 (7 November 1982).
- 23 *SIPC*, 21 December 1892.
- 24 *PGSC*, 30 December 1892.
- 25 *PGSC*, 3 January 1893.
- 26 *PGSC*, 11 January 1893.
- 27 Khoo Khay Jin 1988: 14.
- 28 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 25 Syakban 1307 (15 April 1890).
- 29 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 22 Ramadan 1307 (11 May 1890).
- 30 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 10 Rabiulakhir 1309 (12 November 1891).
- 31 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 16 Safar 1309 (20 September 1891).
- 32 *PGSC*, 10 January 1890.
- 33 *SC*, no. 5, 23 Zulhijjah 1308 (29 July 1891).
- 34 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 25 Zulkaedah 1309 (20 June 1892).
- 35 See *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 4 Safar 1309 (8 September 1891); 5 Safar 1309 (9 September 1309); and 18 Syawal 1309 (15 May 1892).
- 36 The Sultan depended on *Good Luck* for his travel between Kedah and Penang, and even to Singapore and Bangkok for his regular official visits. Thus the issue of *Good Luck* had been a routine subject for the communication between Lim Leng Cheak and the Sultan. See *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 16 Jamadilakhir 1309 (16 January 1892), 26 Rejab 1309 (24 February 1892), 11 Ramadan 1309 (8 April 1892), 25 Rabiulakhir 1309 (15 November 1892) and 7 Jamadilakhir 1310 (26 December 1892).
- 37 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Siamese Consul, Penang, 22 Syawal 1308 (30 May 1891).
- 38 *SC*, no. 2, the Sultan to Bangkok, 4 Rabiulawal 1309 (7 October 1891).
- 39 *SC*, no. 2, the Sultan to Bangkok, 28 Jamadilakhir 1309 (28 January 1892).
- 40 *PGSC*, 2 August 1887; 5 August 1887; *SIPC*, 4 and 11 January 1890.
- 41 *PGSC*, 14 January 1890.
- 42 *PGSC*, 10 January 1890.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *PGSC*, 10 January 1890.
- 45 *SIPC*, 11 January 1890.
- 46 *SIPC*, 15 January 1890.
- 47 *PGSC*, 19 September 1891.
- 48 *PGSC*, 22 August 1891.
- 49 *PGSC*, 26 November 1891.
- 50 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor Penang, 17 Muharam 1309 (22 August 1891); *PGSC*, 26 November 1891.
- 51 *PGSC*, 26 November 1891.
- 52 *PGSC*, 15 September 1891.

- 53 *PGSC*, 19 September 1891.
- 54 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor, Penang, 24 Safar 1309 (28 September 1891).
- 55 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, Penang, 21 Safar 1309 (25 September 1891).
- 56 *PGSC*, 26 November 1891.
- 57 *PGSC*, 26 September 1891.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 *PGSC*, 3 October 1891.
- 60 *PGSC*, 26 November 1891.
- 61 *PGSC*, 12 December 1891 and 7 July 1893.
- 62 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor Penang, 17 Jamadilawal 1309 (18 December 1891).
- 63 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 23 Jamadilawal 1309 (24 December 1891).
- 64 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 27 Jamadilawal 1309 (28 December 1891).
- 65 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Chew Sin Yong, 29 Rejab 1309 (27 February 1892).
- 66 C.S. Wong 1963: 59; Zaharah 1966: 280–1. Both of them used the source from *SFP*, Weekly Edition, 10 August, 1893. However, *SFP* based its report on that in *PGSC*. See *SFP*, 9 August 1893.
- 67 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor Penang, 23 Jamadilawal 1310 (12 December 1892); the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 23 Jamadilawal 1310 (12 December 1892).
- 68 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor Penang, 8 Jamadilakhir 1310 (27 December 1892).
- 69 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor Penang, 28 Ramadan 1310 (14 April 1893).
- 70 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor Penang and Governor in Singapore, 22 Syawal 1310 (8 May 1893).
- 71 *SC*, no. 5, Tunku Yacob to the Siamese Consul, 19 Zulkaedah 1310 (3 June 1893).
- 72 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to Skinner, 4 Zulhijjah 1310 (18 June 1893).
- 73 *SC*, no. 5, Tunku Yacob to the Resident Councillor Penang, 5 Zulhijjah 1310 (19 June 1893).
- 74 According to the Sultan, the monthly rent of Kulim opium farm was \$2,383.33, but the actual monthly proceeds were only \$1,680 from the sale of three chests of opium.
- 75 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Governor in Singapore, 21 Zulhijjah 1310 (24 June 1893).
- 76 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor Penang, 16 Zulhijjah 1310 (30 June 1893).
- 77 *SC*, no. 5, Raja Muda to the Resident Councillor Penang, 27 Zulhijjah 1310 (11 July 1893).
- 78 *PGSC*, 8 August 1893.
- 79 *PGSC*, 4 July 1893.
- 80 *PGSC*, 7 July 1893.
- 81 *PGSC*, 7 August 1893.
- 82 *PGSC*, 27 July 1893.
- 83 *PGSC*, 5 August 1893.
- 84 *PGSC*, 8 August 1893.
- 85 *PGSC*, 10 August 1893.

- 86 *PGSC*, 14 August 1893.
 87 *Ibid.*
 88 *PGSC*, 17 August 1893.
 89 *SIPC*, 12 August 1893. The whole text of the article is also available in *PGSC*, 21 September 1894; and in *SIPC*, 6 October 1894.
 90 *PGSC*, 22 September 1894.
 91 *PGSC*, 31 July 1893.
 92 *PGSC*, 22 September 1894.
 93 *PGSC*, 19 August 1893.
 94 *PGSC*, 15 December 1893.
 95 The total costs amounted to \$4,860. To give a historical sense of how much it is, it is enough to point out that the average monthly wage of a coolie was just \$3.00–4.00. See *PGSC*, 13 and 22 September 1894.
 96 *SIPC*, 13 October 1894.
 97 CO 273/186/57, 'Petition from Chinese in Singapore'.
 98 CO 273/186, 'Petition of Chinese in Penang', 13 and 14 March 1893; CO 273/188/213, 'Chinese Petition from Penang', 7 July 1893; CO 273/188/224, 'Petition from Penang', 18 July 1893.
 99 For details, see *PGSC*, 30 November 1888 and 4 December 1888.
 100 This group was also deeply involved in Kedah affairs. In July 1895, at the invitation of the Sultan of Kedah, a number of Europeans and others of similar rank were entertained by the raja muda, Wan Mat (the prime minister) on the Sultan's steamer the *Good Luck*. Separate invitations were sent to the Chinese, among them Lee Phee Yeow, Lim Leng Cheak and Cheah Tek Soon. See *PGSC*, 6 July 1895.
 101 SC, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 10 Safar 1311 (22 August 1893).
 102 SC, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 17 Jamadilawal 1309 (18 December 1891).
 103 SC, no. 5, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, no date indicated.
 104 *PGSC*, 28 February and 12 July 1894.

5 AN OLD FRAMEWORK AND A NEW DEVELOPMENT, 1895–1905

- 1 FO 422/54, Archer to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Bangkok, 26 March and 17 April 1901.
 2 FO 422/56, Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 7 February 1902.
 3 CO 273/274, Brown to Swettenham, Penang, 30 December 1901; Swettenham to Colonial Office, 30 December 1901.
 4 FO 422/56, Colonial to Foreign Office, 1 February 1902; The Marquess of Lansdowne to Tower, 8 February 1902; Tower to Marquess of Lansdowne, 11 February 1902.
 5 FO 422/56, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 13 February 1902.
 6 *SE*, 29 August 1903.
 7 FO 422/58, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 27 December 1904; FO 422/59, Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 2 January 1905.
 8 CO 273/321, Robbery on the Kedah Border.
 9 FO 422/59, Anderson to Lyttelton, 30 November 1904.
 10 CO 273/311, Siamese Advisor in Kedah: Anderson to Paget, 13 February 1905.
 11 CO 273/308/64, Anderson to Lyttelton, 16 February 1905.
 12 CO 273/314, Paget to Lansdowne, 31 March 1905.
 13 CO 273/311, Anderson to Lyttelton, 20 April 1905.

- 14 FO 422/59, Anderson to Colonial Office, 29 March 1905; CO 273/311, Paget to Anderson, 5 April 1905.
- 15 CO 273/315, Paget to the Marquess of Lansdowne, 21 June 1905.
- 16 CO 273/315, Prince Damrong to Paget, 19 July 1905; Paget to the Marquess of Lansdowne, 20 July 1905.
- 17 CO 273/330, Telegram from Anderson to the Earl of Elgin, 7 January 1907.
- 18 CO 273/293, Swettenham to Colonial Office, 16 January 1903. For detailed discussion of German interests in the region, see also Tarek 1995.
- 19 FO 422/59, Beckett to Anderson, 28 November 1904.
- 20 FO 422/59, Anderson to Beckett, 30 November 1904; Anderson to Lettelton, 30 November 1904.
- 21 FO 422/56, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 13 February 1902.
- 22 FO 422/56, Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 3 April 1902.
- 23 CO 273/303, Consul at Kedah: Malcolm Duncan to Anderson, 15 August 1904.
- 24 FO 422/58, Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 16 February 1904.
- 25 FO 422/59, Anderson to Lyttelton, 6 December 1904; Colonial Office to Foreign Office, 6 January 1905; Anderson to Lyttelton, 25 January 1905. See also CO 273/311, telegram from Anderson to Lyttelton, 2 May 1905.
- 26 Frost had been serving in FMS since 1898. For more than two years he was acting district officer in Pahang and had exercised a strong influence over the Sultan of Pahang and his chiefs. He arrived in Kedah in January 1906 and worked on that capacity until July 1909. After the British took over Kedah in 1909, he was transferred to Perlis as British advisor.
- 27 For details, see Yen Ching-huang 1985. For a specific case study, on the Philippines, see Wickberg 1965: 209–36; on Singapore, see Lim How Seng 1995: 63–85.
- 28 CO 273/316, Tan Ah Yu's Petition to the King Edward VII, received on 13 November 1905.
- 29 CO 273/316, Tan Ah Yu's Petition to The Marquis of Lansdowne, 29 December 1904.
- 30 CO 273/315, Birch to Paget, 27 May 1905.
- 31 CO 273/315, Paget to The Marquess of Lansdowne, 9 June 1903.
- 32 CO 273/316, Kynnersley to Tan Ah Yu, 4 June 1903.
- 33 CO 273/316, Kynnersley to Messrs Farrer-Baynes and Shropshire, 27 August 1903.
- 34 CO 273/316, Tan Ah Yu's Petition to The Marquess of Lansdowne, 29 December 1904.
- 35 CO 273/315, Paget to The Marquess of Lansdowne, 9 June 1905.
- 36 CO 273/315, Birch to Paget, 27 May 1905.
- 37 CO 273/315, Birch to Paget, 18 February 1904.
- 38 CO 273/316, Birch to Messrs Presgrave and Matthews, 22 February 1904.
- 39 CO 273/315, Damrong to Paget, 11 March 1904.
- 40 CO 273/316, Petition of certain Penang traders to Anderson, 28 August 1904.
- 41 During 1904–5, on at least four occasions, Tan Ah Yu had petitioned Governor Anderson, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and the King Edward VII. On 30 March 1908, the Foreign Office informed the Colonial Office that Tan Ah Yu's case was closed with no result. See CO 273/343, Frost to Paget, 7 December 1907; Paget to Grey, 7 February 1908.
- 42 For example, see *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 17 Jamadilawal 1309 (18 December 1891), 27 Jamadilawal 1309 (28 December 1891), 18 Rabiulawal 1310 (9 October 1892), 14 Rejab 1312 (10 January 1895).
- 43 For example, when the Sultan asked Lim Leng Cheak to take care of repairs to

- his Penang house, the plans of the dome of the house were given to Cheng Kean to pass on to Lim Leng Cheak. See *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to Lim Leng Cheak, 16 Rabiulakhir 1307 (9 December 1889).
- 44 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 18 Rabiulawal 1310 (9 October 1892).
- 45 *SC*, no. 5, the Sultan to the Siamese Consul, 14 Rejab 1312 (10 January 1895).
- 46 For example, on behalf of the *raja muda*, Cheng Kean went to Penang for a loan of \$11,000. Lim Kek Chuan, one of Cheng Kean's partners, was asked to arrange this loan and act as the surety for the *raja muda* debt to Awang Titik. See *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to Lim Kek Chuan, 26 Rejab 1307 (17 March 1890).
- 47 *PGSC*, 26 July 1897.
- 48 *PGSC*, 23 July 1897.
- 49 *SC*, no. 7, *Raja Muda* to Wan Mohd Saman and Cheng Kean, 1 Jamadilakhir 1315 (27 September 1897).
- 50 *Straits Maritime Journal & General News*, 1 May 1895.
- 51 *SE*, 11 May 1906.
- 52 *PSP*, 10 September 1901.
- 53 *PGSC*, 18 November 1901.
- 54 *PGSC*, 6 May 1912.
- 55 *PGSC*, 6 February 1918.
- 56 *PGSC*, 1 February 1918.
- 57 *PGSC*, 5 February 1918.
- 58 *PGSC*, 5, 6 and 7 February 1918.
- 59 *Sin Chew Ji Bao*, 8 August 1980.
- 60 *SE*, 16 September 1910.
- 61 *SC*, no. 3, the Sultan to the Resident Councillor, Penang, 17 Safar 1307 (12 October 1889).
- 62 *PSP*, 30 July 1900.
- 63 Ooi 1967: 63.
- 64 *PSP*, 10 May 1897.
- 65 *PSP*, 11 January 1911.
- 66 Sharom 1984: appendix 6.
- 67 *PSP*, 17 October 1908.
- 68 For example, when Lim Cheng Teik's sister, Lim Saw Khim, married Ong Oh Leng in May 1906, there was a celebration. Among those present were Ong Hun Chong, Lim Teng Seang and Choong Lye Hock. At the marriage ceremony of Lim Leng Cheak's daughter, Lim Kwee Guan, there was no mention of the Choong family name among the present guests. See *SE*, 11 May 1906.
- 69 *PGSC*, Weekly Mail Edition, 18 February 1925.
- 70 *PGSC*, 13 December 1897.
- 71 *PGSC*, Weekly Mail Edition, 18 February 1925.
- 72 *SE*, 10 November 1926.
- 73 Sharom 1984: 49–50.
- 74 The other four committee members were Leong Lok Hing (later vice-President), Koh Cheng Sian (later elected as Secretary), Yeoh Phaik Tatt (later Treasurer) and Lim Seng Hooi.
- 75 Wright 1908: 820.
- 76 Kynnersley 1901: 65. Based on the tour, Sharom wrongly inferred it was established in 1900. See Sharom 1984: 22–3. In 1907, this sugar mill exported 4,250 baskets of unrefined sugar at £4,783, according to Frost's consular report for 1907. See *SE*, 17 July 1908.
- 77 CO 273/292/confidential, Swettendam to Colonial Office, 9 October 1903; CO 273/291/341, Swettendam to Colonial Office, 17 August 1903.

NOTES

- 78 CO 273/327, Memorandum upon the Effect on the Consumption in the Straits Settlements of the Increase in retail-price effected in 1904 by Warren Delabere Barnes, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, 25 February 1907.
- 79 CO 273/291/399, *Raja Muda* to Kynnersley, 13 August 1903.
- 80 Opium Commission Report, 1908, vol. 3, p. 931.
- 81 Opium Commission Report, 1908, vol. 2, pp. 934–5; *Legco*, 1905, p. c. 22; CO 273/319/461, Enclosure no. 1, Memorial of Gan Nghoh Bee, 6 December 1906.
- 82 For the contract, see Opium Commission Report, 1908, vol. 3, pp. 127–8, Appendix XXXVII.
- 83 *Legco*, 1905, pp. c. 22–3. In his letter to Governor John Anderson of 23 July 1904, Gan Nghoh Bee enclosed the Sultan's two letters as 'B1' and 'B2', but not printed in the paper.
- 84 *SE*, 25 June 1903.
- 85 CO 273/319/461, Governor Anderson to Colonial Office, 6 December 1906.
- 86 *Legco*, 1905, p. c. 23; Opium Commission Report, 1908, p. 531.
- 87 CO 273/291/341, Swettenham to Colonial Office, 17 August 1903.
- 88 CO 273/291/399, the Sultan to the Raja Muda, 10 Jamadilawal 1321 (4 August 1903).
- 89 CO 273/291/399, the Raja Muda to Kynnersley, 6 August 1903.
- 90 CO 273/291/341, Swettenham to Colonial Office, 17 August 1903.
- 91 CO 273/291/399, Kynnersley to the Raja Muda, 7 August 1903.
- 92 CO 273/291/399, the Raja Muda to Kynnersley, 13 August 1903.
- 93 *SE*, 19 August 1903.
- 94 *PGSC*, 24 August 1903.
- 95 CO 273/291/341, Swettenham to Colonial Office, 17 August 1903.

6 TRANSITION, 1905–9

- 1 For the detailed discussions, from a Siamese perspective, see Tej 1977; from a Malay perspective, see Kobkua 1988; from a British perspective, in 1969 Eunice Thio mentioned she would later publish vol. 2; this publication has not yet appeared.
- 2 HCO 513/1906, Registration of British Subjects in Saiburi and Phuket.
- 3 *SE*, 18 July 1906.
- 4 FO 422/60, Paget to Edward Grey, 16 February 1906.
- 5 FO 422/61, Frost to Beckett, 2 January 1907.
- 6 FO 422/60, Paget to Edward Grey, 16 February 1906.
- 7 Sharom 1984: Appendix 8.
- 8 FO 422/60, Frost To Beckett, 15 August 1906.
- 9 FO 422/61, Edward Grey to Beckett, 4 December 1906.
- 10 FO 422/61, Edward Grey to Paget, 3 April 1907.
- 11 HCO 504/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary for February 1908 and List of Registered Complaints.
- 12 HCO 1664/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for October 1908.
- 13 As early as the 1840s, a Tunku from Kedah was tried in Penang on a charge of piracy for capturing a couple of boats belonging to British subjects. Although he was honourably acquitted, he was banished to India for several years. *PGSC*, 27 August 1906.
- 14 HCO 1042/1906, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for July 1906.

- 15 HCO 812/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for April 1908.
- 16 HCO 844/1904, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for June 1906.
- 17 HCO 1554/1906, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for November 1906.
- 18 HCO 449/1907, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for March 1907.
- 19 FO 422/60, The Diary by M. Frost, Consul in Kedah, 3 and 28 January 1906; HCO 182/1906, British Consul Kedah: Diary for December 1905 and January 1906.
- 20 HCO 355/1906, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for February 1906.
- 21 HCO 1554/1906, British Consul Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for November 1906.
- 22 *SE*, 14 June 1906.
- 23 *Legco*, 1906, p. c. 301.
- 24 *SE*, 14 March 1907; *PSP*, 15 March 1907.
- 25 *SE*, 13 April 1911.
- 26 Goh Boon Keng died suddenly in February 1925.
- 27 *KAR*, September 1906–February 1908, p. 5.
- 28 HCO 932/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints in May 1908.
- 29 *SE*, 21 April 1908.
- 30 HCO 932/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of the Registered Complaints in May 1908.
- 31 CO 273/343, Frost to Beckett, 21 August 1908.
- 32 HCO 1517/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for September 1908.
- 33 CO 273/343, Frost to Beckett, 3 October 1908.
- 34 Skinner 1957: 162–4; Purcell 1965: 119–20.
- 35 Wickberg 1965: 146–69; Yen Ching-huang 1985: 160.
- 36 Williams 1960: 27–8; Yen Ching-huang 1985: 160; Young 1994.
- 37 Sutherland 1978: 72–83. On peasant resistance, see a cluster of excellent studies: Scott 1976; Lim Teck Ghee 1977; Adas 1981; Scott 1985; Cheah Boon Kheng 1988; Nonini 1992.
- 38 HCO 812/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for April 1908.
- 39 *PGSC*, 8 May 1908.
- 40 HCO 932/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints in May 1908.
- 41 Young 1994: 49–53; *PGSC*, 25 May and 6 June 1900.
- 42 HCO 812/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for April 1908. Also HCO 932/1908, British Consul, Kedah: Diary and List of Registered Complaints for May 1908.
- 43 *SE*, 2 April 1908; *PSP*, 2 April 1908.
- 44 *SE*, 3 April 1908; *PSP*, 4 April 1908.
- 45 *PGSC*, 5 April 1908.
- 46 *PSP*, 4 May 1908; *SE*, 15 May 1908.
- 47 *SE*, 6 May 1908; *PSP*, 6 May 1908.
- 48 The first Chinese newspaper in Penang was the *PSP*, which was founded in 1895. It paid more attention to Chinese home affairs. Some eight years later an

English newspaper, the *SE*, was established in 1903. The *SE* became the main voice for Chinese interests in Kedah.

- 49 *PGSC*, 5 and 8 May 1908.
- 50 *SE*, 6 May 1908.
- 51 *SE*, 7 May 1908.
- 52 *PSP*, 12 May 1908.
- 53 *SE*, 15 May 1908.
- 54 *PGSC*, 14 May 1908.
- 55 *SE*, 18 October, 23 and 29 November 1910.

7 CONFRONTATION AND ACCOMMODATION, 1909–18

- 1 British–Malay political confrontations in the period of transition has already been admirably elaborated on by Sharom Ahmat. Therefore, the focus here will be on the transformation of the legal order. See Sharom 1984: 142–72.
- 2 HCO 1970/1918, Memorandum on Admission of Counsel to Kedah Courts by W.S. Gibson.
- 3 Dates in Kedah are given according to the Muslim calendar. 1339 AH is the equivalent to the year 1920–1.
- 4 HCO 1970/1918, Memorandum on Present Judicial System in Kedah by W.S. Gibson.
- 5 CO 273/447/401, Kedah Enactments 9–10 of AH 1334.
- 6 HCO 1970/1918, Memorandum on Admission of Counsel to Kedah Courts by W.S. Gibson.
- 7 HCO 1970/1918, Arthur Young to the Regent of Kedah, 17 June 1919.
- 8 *SE*, 23 July 1915.
- 9 *SE*, 4 April 1916.
- 10 HCO 1530/1919, The Memorial of the Undersigned, Members of the Bar Committee, Penang to Governor and High Commissioner A.H. Young, 11 July 1919.
- 11 This, of course, is the Malay date giving the Hijrah year, and does not refer to the European calendar.
- 12 HCO 1970/1918, Memorandum on present judicial system in Kedah by W.S. Gibson.
- 13 CO 273/445/71, the Minutes of the Kedah State Council, 29 Safar 1334 (6 January 1916).
- 14 CO 273/446/240, the Minutes of the Kedah State Council, 5 Rejab 1334 (8 May 1916).
- 15 CO 273/447/401, Kedah Enactments 9–10 of AH 1334.
- 16 CO 273/472/161, the Minutes of Kedah State Council, 12 Jamadilakhir 1336 (26 March 1918).
- 17 HCO 1367/1910, Permit for a Rubber Plantation to Tunku Ibrahim Transferred to Mrs Hart.
- 18 HCO 284/1914, the Minutes of the State Council Kedah, 29 Syakban 1332 (23 July 1914).
- 19 It was disclosed that, in 1907, Lim Thean Kee built two houses for Tunku Mahmud at the cost of \$12,600 and it was Ariffin who took care of it. *SC*, no. 10, Mohd. Ariffin to Tunku Mahmud, 2 Syakban 1325.
- 20 The family tree of Che Ariffin, preserved in the Kedah State Arkib, Alor Star.
- 21 In 1916, it was reported that he had already served the government for 31 years. So, it should be in the mid-1880s. See *PGSC*, 12 August 1916.

NOTES

- 22 CO 273/386/243, the Minutes of the State Council Kedah, 12 Jamadilawal 1330 (28 April 1912).
- 23 *SE*, 20 August 1918.
- 24 CO 273/461/320, CO 273/461/334, CO 273/461/362 The Minutes of the State Council Kedah, 16 August, 6 September and 25 October 1917.
- 25 CO 273/400/466.
- 26 CO 273/373/251, the Minutes of State Council Kedah, 18 Rabiulakhir 1329 (18 April 1911).
- 27 HCO 269/1919, W.G. Maxwell to Acting British Advisor G.A. Hall, 15 October.
- 28 CO 273/384/27, the Minutes of State Council Kedah, 26 Zulkaedah 1329 (18 November 1911).
- 29 CO 273/399/309, the Minutes of State Council Kedah, 21 Jamadilawal 1331 (28 April 1913); Sharom 1984: 136.
- 30 Interview with Ariffin H.A. Rahman, who was the son-in-law of Che Ariffin, Alor Star, 20 December 1996.
- 31 *PGSC*, 12 September 1916.
- 32 *SE*, 20 August 1918. For further reference to his estate, see CO 273/386/402, CO 273/471/73, CO 273/472/168, CO 273/486/42, SUK/K 2628/1335.
- 33 *KAR*, 1909, p. 59.
- 34 CO 273/473/258, the minutes of State Council Kedah, 21 Zulkaedah 1336 (29 August 1918); HCO 269/1919, the British Advisor Kedah to the High Commissioner, 27 January 1919; SUK/K 1352/1327.
- 35 HCO 269/1919, Adams and Allan to the British Advisor Kedah, 24 September 1918.
- 36 HCO 269/1919, Kota Star Oil Farm, which includes: the petition from Tan Chong Keat and Chew Eng Seng, the lease grant from the *Raja Muda*, and the correspondence between the acting British advisor G.A. Hall, W.G. Maxwell. Messrs Adams and Allan, and the High Commissioner, etc.
- 37 For details, see CO 273/399, Confidential: Appointment of a Regent in Kedah.
- 38 HCO 313/1912, Frost to the High Commissioner, 27 February 1912.
- 39 HCO 313/1912, Tunku Mahmud to the High Commissioner, 18 Rabiulawal 1330 (6 April 1912).
- 40 HCO 313/1912, the Sultan to the High Commissioner, 14 Rabiulakhir 1330 (2 April 1912).
- 41 HCO 313/1912, Lee Peng Wat's Petition to the Sultan, 19 June 1912, Penang; the Sultan to the High Commissioner, 24 Rejab 1330 (9 July 1912).
- 42 CO 273/386/402, the Minutes of State Council Kedah, 24 Rejab 1330 (9 July 1912); HCO 313/1912, Tunku Mahmud to the High Commissioner, 28 Syakban 1330 (11 August 1912).
- 43 CO 273/387/529, the Minutes of State Council Kedah, 20 Ramadan 1330 (2 September 1912).
- 44 CO 273/399/225, the Minutes of State Council Kedah, 10 Rabiulakhir 1331 (19 March 1913); CO 273/399/309, the Minutes of State Council Kedah, 14 Jamadilawal 1331 (21 April 1913).
- 45 CO 273/399 Confidential, the Minutes of State Council Kedah, 16 Rabiulakhir 1331 (25 March 1913).
- 46 CO 273/399 Confidential, Appointment of a Regent in Kedah, 7 April 1913.
- 47 HCO 1608/1910, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 17 Ramadan 1328 (21 September 1910).
- 48 CO 273/374, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 2 Jamadilakhir 1329 (31 May 1911).

- 49 CO 273/374, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 7 Jamadilakhir 1329 (5 June 1911).
- 50 CO 273/375/445, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 5 Syakban 1329 (1 August 1911).
- 51 HCO 449/1913, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 23 Safar 1331 (1 February 1913).
- 52 HCO 1659/1914, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 8 Muharam 1333 (26 November 1914).
- 53 CO 273/446, the Minutes of State Council, 10 and 13 Syakban 1334 (12 and 15 June 1916).
- 54 CO 273/375/445, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 6 Syakban 1329 (2 August 1911).
- 55 HCO 1711/1910, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 8 Syawal 1328 (13 October 1910); CO 273/385/85, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 9 Safar 1330 (29 January 1912).
- 56 KAR, 1330 (1911–12), pp. 15–16.
- 57 CO 273/400, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 18 Rejab 1331 (23 June 1913) and 26 Syakban 1331 (31 July 1913); CO 273/410, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 17 Rabiulawal 1332 (12 February 1914).
- 58 CO 273/400, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 18 Rejab 1331 (23 June 1913) and 17 Ramadan 1331 (20 August 1913).
- 59 CO 273/401, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 23 Zulhijjah 1331 (22 November 1913).
- 60 CO 273/411, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 3 Rejab 1332 (28 May 1914).
- 61 CO 273/412, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 4 Zulkaedah 1332 (24 September 1914).
- 62 CO 273/426, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 13 Jamadilawal 1333 (29 March 1915).
- 63 CO 273/384, the Minutes of Kedah State Council Meetings, 21 Zulkaedah 1329 (13 November 1911), 8 Zulhijjah 1329 (30 November 1911).
- 64 CO 273/385, the Minutes of Kedah State Council Meetings, 13 Muharam 1330 (3 January 1912).
- 65 HCO 663/1912, Petition of Lim Cheng Teik, 7 May 1912; CO 273/387, the Minutes of Kedah State Council Meetings, 19 Syakban 1330 (4 March 1920).
- 66 PSP, 1 June 1909.
- 67 *The Malaya Tribute*, 3 February 1915.
- 68 PGSC, 10 February 1919.
- 69 For details, see PGSC, 6 February, 22 and 23 March, 3 April 1918.
- 70 It refers to the court case between Lim Eow Thoon and Lim Cheng Teik and his brother-in-law, Chual Chooi Ghee. The damages claimed amounted to \$660,000 in total.
- 71 For details, see PGSC, 29 December 1912, 14 and 15 January 1913; *The Malaya Tribute*, 3 February 1915.
- 72 HCO 880/1917, Maxwell's Memorandum on the Rice Mills.
- 73 SE, 10 December 1912.
- 74 PGSC, 11 December 1912.
- 75 For details, see SE, 10 December 1912.
- 76 SE, 10 December 1912.
- 77 For the text of document, see *ibid.*
- 78 SE, 12 December 1912.
- 79 The case was finally settled out of court. For details of the court case, see a series of reports in SE, 10–13 December 1912.

- 80 CO 273/398, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 21 Muharam 1331 (31 December 1912).
- 81 CO 273/411, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 27 Jamadilawal 1332 (23 April 1914).
- 82 CO 273/412, the Minutes of State Council Meeting, 20 Syawal 1332 (10 September 1914).
- 83 HCO 550/1914, Erection of a Government Rice Mill at Alor Star in Opposition to the Rice Combine's Mill.
- 84 HCO 1578/1915, Special Terms for Titles for Paddy Cultivation in Kedah; HCO 880/1917, Memorandum on the Erection of a Rice Mill.
- 85 HCO 600/1918, Proposal That Kedah Government Take Over and Manage the Alor Star Rice Mill.
- 86 The interest rate was rather high, in some cases up to 40 or 60 per cent in 1920.
- 87 A historical examination of the '*paddy kunca*' system suggests that it is not a simple black and white issue. For discussions, see *SIPC*, 15 January 1891 and 18 July 1894; *PGSC*, 24 January 1891; *Legco*, 1893, p. c. 176; SUK/K 2122/1346, Brief Report on Paddy in Kedah by H.W. Jack, 26 January 1928.
- 88 CO 273/411/311, the Minutes of the Kedah State Council Meetings, 27 Jamadilawal 1332 (23 April 1914); *KAR*, (November 1913–November 1914).
- 89 HCO 880/1917, Loans to Paddy Planters by R. Clayton, District Officer, Krian, Perak.
- 90 SUK/K 1377/1340, Postponement of Payment of Loans of Paddy Planters, by Assistant Advisor, Land Office, North Kedah, 11 March 1922; SUK/K 1325/1340, Saad B. Haji Ahmad, and Others, Padang Pusing: Ask for Time to Pay Their Loans to Government; SUK/K 1528/1340, Haji Hassan bin Haji Md. Salleh and Others, Pengkalan Kundur: Ask for Time to Pay their Loans to Government.
- 91 SUK/K 186/1343, Permission to Sue Debtors in Connection With Loans for Paddy Planting, Harbour Master, Alor Star, 11 Muharam 1343 (11 August 1924).

8 ANOTHER ROUND OF ADJUSTMENT, 1918–28

- 1 HCO 764/1921, Kedah Court Enactment.
- 2 *SE*, 14 October 1920.
- 3 CO 273/486/42, the Minutes of Kedah State Council Meeting, 19 Rabiulawal 1337 (23 December 1918).
- 4 HCO 1970/1918, Memorandum on Admission of Counsel to Kedah Courts by W.S. Gibson.
- 5 *Ibid*.
- 6 HCO 1530/1919, the Memorial of the Undersigned, Members of the Bar Committee, Penang, 11 July 1919; the British Advisor Kedah to the Secretary to the Bar Committee Penang, 22 September 1919. In 1921, a Singapore company, S.J. Judah and Co., enquired from the British advisor as to how to take the necessary legal procedures in recovering the debt owed by a well-known Kedah trader, Goh Soon Leong. The advisor replied that as there were no lawyers practising in Kedah, they should send an agent to prosecute Goh Soon Leong in Court. See SUK/K 2575/1339.
- 7 HCO 172/1919, M.S.H. McArthur to A. Young, 20 October 1919.
- 8 HCO 1017/1921, Passing by the Kedah Government of the Courts Enactment 1339.
- 9 *SE*, 31 May 1922.

- 10 *SE*, 1, 2 and 6 June 1922.
- 11 HCO 764/1921, Kedah Courts Enactment; CO 717/15/62, Kedah: Courts Enactment 1339. For the whole draft, see HCO 1970/1918.
- 12 In March 1922, W.H. Dinsmore arrived in Kedah to take up the appointment of legal advisor and European judge, taking the place of A.F. Robinson who was transferred to Penang. See *SE*, 7 March 1922.
- 13 *SE*, 15 February 1928.
- 14 SUK/K 1191/1350, Recommendation in Connection with the Kedah Court of Appeal, Chief Justice's Chambers, Singapore, 26 August 1931.
- 15 See, for example, Purcell 1948: 143; Hooker 1972; 1976: 124–46; 1978: 73–94; Freedman 1979: 93–160; Yong 1997: 126–48.
- 16 Lin Po Ai 1923: vol. 2, part 1, p. 207.
- 17 His tender was for \$396,000 per annum, second only to the bid by Choong Cheng Kean. *SE*, 5 September 1906.
- 18 *SE*, 28 January 1920.
- 19 *SE*, 5 February 1920.
- 20 *SE*, 2 February 1920.
- 21 *SE*, 28 January 1920.
- 22 *SE*, 5 February 1920.
- 23 Supplement to *PGSC*: Important Kedah Estate Case, 18 June 1923.
- 24 *SE*, 12 August 1922.
- 25 *Ibid.* See also Supplement to *PGSC*: Important Kedah Estate Case, 18 June 1923.
- 26 There were two expert witnesses consulted, as well as other general witnesses. One witness was Poh Eng Huah, who was one of the elders of the Hokkien Hoy Kuan (Hokkien Association) in Alor Star. He stated that the whole property should go to the son, Chong Kim Poh. The married daughter should get nothing. The second widow and adopted children were excluded from the inheritance. But due consideration could be given to granting the adopted children a reasonable share as a token act of grace only. The second expert witness was Khoo Eng Poh, who was a trustee and treasurer of the Seh Khoo *kongsi* and trustee of the Hokkien *kongsi* in Penang. He excluded the second widow, the married daughter and the adopted children unconditionally. The other witness left them to the mercy of the legitimate son, Chong Kim Poh, and the government for their generous consideration.
- 27 For details, see *SE*, 27 January 1920, 28 January 1920, 29 January 1920, 31 January 1920, 2 February 1920, 5 February 1920, 17 February 1920.
- 28 *SE*, 12 August 1922; Supplement to *PGSC*: Important Kedah Estate Case, 18 June 1923.
- 29 *SE*, 9 August 1922.
- 30 *SE*, 12 August 1922.
- 31 *PGSC*, 2 March 1923.
- 32 For the full judgement, see Supplement to *PGSC*: Important Kedah Estate Case, 18 June 1923.
- 33 Braudel 1985: 150.
- 34 Wong Siu-lun 1985: 50–71. On the literature of the debate on this subject, see two excellent review articles, McVey 1992b: 7–33; Mackie 1992: 41–64. For an up-dated critical discussion, see Hodder 1996.
- 35 R Brown 1994: 251–7.
- 36 Phuwadol 1986; Cushman 1991.
- 37 Ooi 1967; Chuleeporn 1990.
- 38 Twang Peck Yang 1987, 1998.

- 39 *PGSC*, 9 November 1925.
- 40 *SE*, 16 September 1927. It was said that \$5,000 instead of \$30,000 was given to each of his four daughters, see *SE*, 10 November 1926.
- 41 *SE*, 24 July 1916.
- 42 *SE*, 10 November 1926. In May 1906, a marriage took place between Cheah Tat Jin, second son of Cheah Chen Eok, and Lim Kwee Guan, a daughter of Lim Leng Cheak and another of his secondary wives (not Tan Say Seang). On behalf of his deceased brother, Lim Phee Cheak gave a dinner to celebrate the occasion. Lim Phee Cheak died on 29 May 1918, leaving behind only one son, Lim Chan Soo, one daughter and many grandchildren. See *SE*, 11 May 1906 and 30 May 1918.
- 43 For example, the second son, Lim Eow Thoon, was only 15 years old (born in 1886) when Lim Leng Cheak died in 1901. On 4 March 1904, Lim Eow Thoon married Goh Ewe Keong. The marriage celebration included his elder brother Lim Eow Hong and brother-in-law, Goh Boon Keng. See *SE*, 5 March 1904.
- 44 *SE*, 16 September 1927.
- 45 *PGSC*, 9 November 1925; *SE*, 10 November 1926.
- 46 Information is from the local historians in Penang, such as Tan Kim Hong and Teoh Shiao Kuan. However, Lim Eow Hong denied that his interests in horse-racing had anything to do with his bankruptcy. See *SE*, 7 April 1938.
- 47 *PGSC*, 9 November 1925; *SE*, 9 November 1925, 10 November 1926 and 16 September 1927.
- 48 See, for example, SUK/K38/1339, 471/1339, 835/1339, 955/1339, 958/1339, 1036/1339, 1060/1339, 1061/1339.
- 49 SUK/K 955/1339, Lim Eow Hong, Penang: Applies for a loan of \$400,000; HCO 1983/1920, Kedah: Applications by rich Chinese owners of large tapioca and rubber estates for large loans.
- 50 *SE*, 10 and 19 November 1926.
- 51 *SE*, 16 September 1927.
- 52 *SE*, 10 November 1926.
- 53 *SE*, 7 April 1938.
- 54 Straits Settlements: Annual Report of the Bankruptcy Department for the year 1924, pp. 31–3.
- 55 *SE*, 10 and 19 November 1926.
- 56 *SE*, 9 November 1925.
- 57 For details, see *PGSC*, 9 November 1925; *SE*, 13 November 1925.
- 58 *SE*, 17 November 1926; *PGSC*, 18 November 1926.
- 59 For the details of arbitration, see *SE*, 19 November 1926.
- 60 For details, see *SE*, 15 September 1927, 16 September 1927, 17 September 1927, 19 September 1927.
- 61 *SE*, 9 January 1933.
- 62 *Singapore and Straits Directory*, 1913–14.
- 63 *The Historical Personalities of Penang*, 1986, p. 93.
- 64 Among the eight tenderers was Lim Boon Haw, the others being Sim Yu Lam, Lim Thean Kee, Oo Hye Poh, Bonh Ah Sim, Chong Ah Yu, Lim Eow Hong and Ho Kim Teik. The highest tender for \$14,600 per annum was from Sin Yu Lam in Penang, but he later gave it up. CO 273/446, The Minutes of Kedah State Council, 10 and 13 Syakban 1334 (12 and 15 June 1916).
- 65 *SE*, 9 January 1933.
- 66 *PGSC*, 14 November 1918.
- 67 Besides, there were the traditional domestic mills run by native Malays and the small milling units run by the estates themselves. As for the small milling units

- used by the estates, in the 1920s they emerged and were encouraged by the government when imported rice was difficult to get and prices were higher. This was a supplement to the commercial mills, but functioned irregularly. For details, see H.W. Jack's articles in *Malayan Agricultural Journal*, vol. X, February 1922, no. 2, pp. 43–6; vol. XI, May, 1923, no. 5, pp. 103–19; vol. XI, June 1923, no. 6, pp. 139–69; July, August and September 1923, nos 7, 8 and 9, pp. 168–212; vol. XII, January 1924, no. 1, pp. 22–5; vol. XXI, December 1933, no. 12, pp. 667–73.
- 68 *SE*, 20 and 21 November 1922.
- 69 *The Singapore and Malaya Directory*, issues 1920–30. Another relevant development in 1925 was the bankruptcy of Madame Saw Imm (Mrs Lim Cheng Law), who was a dealer in jewellery and precious stones. A warrant was issued on 12 October 1925 for the arrest of the bankrupt. She was released on signing a bond for \$1,000 in one surety. See Straits Settlements: Annual Report of the Bankruptcy Department for the Year 1925.
- 70 SUK/K 2492/1344, Letter from the Chew Hang Bee to British Advisor Kedah, 8 June 1926; available also in Chuleeporn Pongsupath, 1990: 219.
- 71 See Penang rice miller Lim Cheng Law's article, 'Rice Milling in Malaya', in *PGSC*, centenary number 1833–1933.
- 72 SUK/K 930/1339, Paddy Harvest 1339.
- 73 Report of the Rice Cultivation Committee, vol. 1, p. 40; vol. 2, pp. 173–5; HCO 585/1918, Krian Rice Mills: government to take over control.
- 74 For example, Lim Leng Cheak had the mill monopoly in Kedah for about 30 years. Phuah Hin Leong had secured the Kedah Rice Export Farm for many terms. Choong Cheng Kean had a paddy shop named 'Ban Heng Bee' since the very early times of exploitation (probably in the late 1890s or earlier), and later developed it into the leading mill in Kedah. SUK/K 2429/1344, Application for export of paddy; SUK/K 1169/1349, Stocks of paddy in Kedah.
- 75 Its office was located at the Ban Heng Bee Rice Mill, Alor Star, belonging to the brothers Choong Lye Hock and Choong Lye Hin of Penang. The manager of the Ban Heng Bee, Oh Boon Soo, was its treasurer. Some committee members were closely related to the Choong family. See SUK/K 2544/1350, Registration of the Rice Millers and Paddy Dealers Association, 21 December 1931.
- 76 Tan Lo Heong (1881–1936), Teochew, was born in Province Wellesley. In 1899 he started planting rubber and then embarked on a mining career in 1923. The Kwang Hang Rice Mill was founded by him and later bought by the FMS government. See *SE*, 4 September 1936.
- 77 *The Malayan Agricultural Journal*, vol. XVIII, May 1930, no. 5, pp. 229–31.
- 78 SUK/K 1388/1338, the Minutes of Kedah State Council Meeting, 13 Jamadilakhir 1338 (4 March 1920).
- 79 SUK/K 1732/1341, Rice Millers in Kedah Ask that the Export Duty on Rice be Reduced, 19 March 1923.
- 80 SUK/K 21/1343, Rice Millers in Kedah: Reduction of the Export Duty on Rice, 4 and 9 August, 29 October, 25 November 1924.
- 81 SUK/K 535/1346, Kedah Rice Millers, Alor Star: Regarding Rate of Export Duty on Paddy and Rice, 15 August 1927.

9 A NEW PROFILE OF COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS, 1928–41

- 1 *Kedah Government Gazette*, 1926, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 3.
 2 SUK/K 369/1347.

- 3 *SE*, 24 August 1927.
- 4 *SE*, 17 April 1929.
- 5 Cheah Tat Jin married the daughter of another of Lim Leng Cheak's secondary wives.
- 6 SUK/K 2800/1350; SUK/K 3813/1350.
- 7 *PGSC*, 13 January 1927; *SE*, 13 January 1927.
- 8 *SE*, 3 and 7 December 1932; *PGSC*, Weekly Mail Edition, 9 December 1932.
- 9 *SE*, 30 December 1935.
- 10 *SE*, 20 September 1930.
- 11 Lim Eow Hooi was educated at Penang Free School and the Dollar Academy, Scotland. He had two sons, Lim Keng Teong and Lim Keng Hock, and two daughters. See *SE*, 10 October 1932.
- 12 For details, see *SE*, 30 March 1939, 1 April 1938, 2 April 1938, 4 April 1938, 7 April 1938, 8 April 1938, 9 April 1938, 11 April 1938, 20 April 1939.
- 13 *PGSC*, 28 June 1934.
- 14 *PGSC*, 2 July 1934.
- 15 *PGSC*, 29 June 1934.
- 16 *Xiamen Huaqiao Zhi* (A History of Overseas Chinese from Xiamen), 1991, 98.
- 17 *PGSC*, 2 July 1934.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Ooi 1967: 67.
- 20 After the Second World War, owing to the political developments in Malaya, Lim Leng Teng returned once to his native country and invested a good deal of money in transport and market construction. After spending one year there, he returned to Penang owing to illness. Lim died on 11 February 1963 at the age of 93. He had many children. Among them were Lim Teng Hin and Lim Teng Hoe who were landed proprietors and planters.
- 21 SUK/K 2427/1349, Report on the Present Position of the Market for Kedah Paddy and Rice, 22 Syakban 1349 (12 January 1931).
- 22 Taking Ban Hock Bee as an example, its premises and stock were estimated at two million dollars following a rice mill fire on May 1937. However, the damage amounted to \$45,000 and was covered by insurance. See *SE*, 6 May 1937.
- 23 Report of the Trade Commission, 1933–1934, vol. 2, Minutes of Evidence, part 1, pp. 359–65.
- 24 *PSP*, 31 July 1934.
- 25 *SE*, 16 February 1938.
- 26 *SE*, 6 May 1939.
- 27 SUK/K 3381/1357, Rice Mills in Kedah.
- 28 *KAP*, for the year 1357.
- 29 SUK/K 2112/1358, Regarding Small Rice Mills.
- 30 SUK/K 930/1339, Memorandum on Rice Position in 1922, by J.J. Fleury, Agent Food Controller, 15 December 1920.
- 31 SUK/K 571/1355, SUK/K 528/1356, Annual Report on the Co-operative Societies Department, Kedah for the Year 1354 and 1355.
- 32 SUK/K 3381/1357, Rice Mills in Kedah.
- 33 Furnivall 1934: 11.
- 34 In the Straits Settlements, the practice continued until 1888.
- 35 HCO 879/1907, Pawn-broking Farms, British Resident, Negri Sembilan, 22 May 1907.
- 36 HCO 1727/1908, Resident-General, F.M.S.: The Pawn-broking Farms.
- 37 HCO 66/1909, Federal Secretary, Kuala Lumpur: 'The Pawn-brokers Enactment 1908'.

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- 38 HCO 284/1914, The Minutes of Kedah State Council, 4 May and 13 August 1914.
- 39 SUK/K 1929/1342, Draft Pawnbrokers Enactment and Rules.
- 40 SUK/K 3933/1351, Gazetting of the Protector of Chinese as Superintendent of Pawnshops.
- 41 SUK/K 2490/1343, Ooi Pat Boon and Others, Alor Star: Pray that they are allowed to continue issuing pawn tickets in Chinese characters as hitherto done.
- 42 SUK/K 3217/1353, Under-Secretary to Govt, Alor Star: Re Closing of pawnshops at Alor Star on certain days.
- 43 SUK/K 4040/1350, Wong Sew, Alor Star: Complaint against the Pawnshop at Alor Star; SUK/K 2427/1350, Pong Beng Yee, Pawnbroker, Jitra: Re Calculation of interest on articles pawned.
- 44 SUK/K 1088/1351, Draft Amendment of Rules under the Pawnbrokers Enactment 1343.
- 45 SUK/K 3950/1350, Complaints against the Pawnshop at Yan.
- 46 SUK/K 3289/1351, Malays, Kuala Ketil: Complaints against the pawnshop at Kuala Ketil.

10 CONCLUSION

- 1 Siu 1987: xxxi, 1.
- 2 See Honig 1992.
- 3 Wong Siu-lun 1988: 42.
- 4 Ibid. 3–4.

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