THE UNDERSIDE OF MALAYSIAN HISTORY

Pullers, Prostitutes, Plantation Workers....

Edited by
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NOTE ON CURRENCY

Unless otherwise designated the dollar ($) sign refers to the Straits or Malayan dollar. Before 1906, the sterling value of the Straits or Malayan dollar varied. Afterwards, it was equal to 2s 4d. During the 1920s and 1930s the Malayan dollar was equivalent to US 58 cents. After 1939, it was equivalent to US 47 cents.

PREFACE

The Underside of Malaysian History deals with Malaysian (and Singaporean) social history, particularly from the late nineteenth century to the present. Specifically, the study concentrates on the everyday world of ordinary people, such as rubber smallholders, estate workers, agricultural squatters, railway workers, hackney carriage syces (drivers), rikisha pullers and prostitutes; it also examines the related physical and mental health problems of both them and their families. As such, it is a step towards a people's history designed to make present-day Malaysians conscious of the enormous contribution of their unheralded forbears.

The volume draws from papers given at a Colloquium on Malaysian Social and Economic History which was held at The Australian National University during the Queen's Birthday Weekend, 8-10 June 1985. The Colloquium, attended by thirty-six participants, was organised by Colin Barlow and Lenore Manderson under the auspices of the Malaysia Society, Asian Studies Association of Australia. It provided a forum for scholars from Australia, Malaysia and the United States of America to present research findings and work-in-progress on the economic and social history of Malaysia and Singapore; it also supplied an arena for questions and discussion. During the three days of the Colloquium seventeen papers were presented. As they were given by anthropologists, demographers, economic historians, historians, geographers, political scientists and sociologists a wide range of issues, sources and theoretical orientations was canvassed on a very broad subject. A measure of order was introduced to the proceedings through organising papers by topics progressing from macro-perspectives through entrepreneurs and business activities, rubber and tin, transport, medicine, and outsiders to other aspects. As Colin Barlow and Lenore Manderson were unable to edit this volume there was a danger that these papers would be dissipated across the academic firmament. Rather than let this happen we undertook the task of selecting and editing unpublished papers.

In editing the volume we narrowed its focus to concentrate on developing a peoples' history of Malaysia. As some of the original papers strayed too far from this central theme they were not suitable for inclusion. Others linked nicely together, and offered some new

perspectives on Malaysian social history. All authors of the selected papers were requested to address two matters: the relationship of their paper to Malaysian historiography (i.e.how do we write a history of subordinate individuals and groups who have left few, if any, records?); and to bring out the everyday lives of ordinary people. Further revisions were undertaken to meet the interesting and useful comments of an anonymous referee.

In producing this volume, we are indebted to Peter Grimshaw, Business Manager, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University for his encouragement and advice in getting this project underway. Specifically, we recognise the assistance of the Departments of Economics, Human Geography, and Pacific and Southeast Asian History, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra. This assistance has enabled us to include plates that were derived from several sources, including Lim Kheng Chye, Arkib Negara Malaysia, Malayan Railways (through the good offices of Abdul Rahim Osman, Deputy General Manager), the Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur, the National Archives, Singapore, the National Library of Singapore, and the Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia. Diagrams have also been taken from *The Malayan Medical Journal and Estate Sanitation* and illustrations from *Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History* and from *British Malaya*. It has not been possible to discover the copyright owners of this material.

Preparation of the manuscript has been undertaken by Carol McKenzie, Judith Robson and Peter Rimmer. Research assistance has been afforded by Barbara Banks; Christine Tabart also helped in checking references. Merv Commons and Keith Mitchell provided technical assistance. The staffs of the Menzies Library, The Australian National University, National Library, Canberra, the National Library, Singapore, the National University Library, Singapore, assisted in tracking down references. The figures have been drawn by Ian Heyward for the Cartographic Office, Department of Human Geography, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University. Finally, we would like to thank Patricia B.G. Tay, Editor/Manager of the Singapore University Press Pte Ltd for her forbearance in bringing this study to a successful conclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

Bravo Mat. *Straits Produce* tendered its thanks and congratulations to the Singapore Police after the manner in which they had handled some recent rather disturbing civil disturbances (*Source*: *Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

1.
The Underside of Malaysian History

PETER J. RIMMER, LENORE MANDERSON
& COLIN BARLOW

The Underside of Malaysian History provides detailed information on the feelings, knowledge and everyday world of ordinary people in the Malay Peninsula from the late nineteenth century to the present. There is a need to put this information about subordinate Malaysian individuals and groups into context because the details on rubber estate workers, rubber smallholders, ex-tin miners, small farmers, railway workers, rikisha pullers, hackney carriage syces (drivers), prostitutes and their related health problems and apparent idiosyncrasies are disparate in time and place. The best way of attempting this task is to answer a series of questions that may be raised in the reader's mind about this study of Malaysian social history. Why concentrate on writing a people's history? Having established that the particular focus is a worthwhile endeavour, more specific questions can be tackled: how do we write an authentic history of individuals and groups who have left few, if any, records; and how do we bring out the everyday lives of the people? Once these preliminaries are over a guide can be supplied to the chapters that follow. We are then in a position to consider the hardy perennial question: where do we go from here in the social history of Malaysia? Before dealing with these questions, it is pertinent to provide, for the reader unfamiliar with Malaysia, a brief outline of the salient geographical features and of the changes in political boundaries since the late nineteenth century.

THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The mountain-ribbed Malay Peninsula, at the cross-roads of Asia (Fig. 1.1), does not possess the key desiderata — 3-4 °C as the mean for the coldest month and 15.5 °C for the warmest — to qualify for the 'ideal' working environment established by Huntington (1915) in his *Civilisation and Climate*.[1] Its humid tropical rainforest climate,

1. For a more recent discussion of the Malaysian environment see Aiken *et al.*, 1982: 24-54.

distinguished by uniformly high temperatures of 30-31 °C and the absence of a dry season with all months having more than 6cm of precipitation, puts Kuala Lumpur in the distinctly 'muggy' corner of Taylor's 'comfort' (or 'discomfort') climograph (reproduced in Stamp, 1964: 78). Although daily temperatures of 25 °C are not excessively high 'the heat, together with slight air movement, intense light, and high relative and absolute humidity, produces an atmospheric condition with low cooling power' (Trewartha, 1954: 243). Although the influence of climate on working capacity has not been conclusively established, it is clear to Gunnar Myrdal (1968: 2136) that 'even the ordinary weather conditions ... are not only uncomfortable but have significant indirect effects on human health'. The deleterious effects of climate on agriculture through the leaching and erosion of soils once the natural canopy was removed was reflected in low yields in food crops and deficiencies in vitamins and minerals. 'Deficient nutrition in turn affects working capacity and weakens resistance to disease.' (Myrdal, 1968: 2136). Without the twin benefits of air conditioning and disease control Malaysia's warm and humid climate provided ideal conditions for micro-organisms to proliferate; working people, in particular, being well-suited to act as hosts and vectors of parasitic and infectious diseases. Not surprisingly, Asian manual labourers working in the sultry and oppressive heat were seen as less productive than their counterparts in cooler climes. Although there is no conclusive evidence of the effects of 'tropical' climate on the capacity and efficiency of labour, Asians were, nevertheless, thought more able than Europeans to cope with Malaysia's climatic stresses. Yet, Europeans, notably the British, were willing to brave these hazardous locales.

By the late nineteenth century, British imperial expansion and her trade-oriented economy had had a marked impact on the political geography of Southeast Asia (see, for example, Sadka, 1968; Khoo Kay Kim, 1972; Andaya and Andaya, 1982). Already, the Malay Peninsula was divided into three political units: the Straits Settlements, comprising Singapore, Penang and Malacca, that were acquired by Britain between 1786 and 1824; the Federated Malay States (Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang), rich in mineral resources and having agricultural potential, which came under British 'protection' in the 1870s and 1880s and amalgamated into a confederation between 1895 and 1941 with Kuala Lumpur as the capital; and the Unfederated Malay States, comprising Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Terengganu, which exchanged Siamese for

Figure 1.1 Southeast Asia showing location of Malaysia

British control in 1909, and Johor, which accepted British suzerainty in 1914 (Fig. 1.2).[2] These political entities became part of the independent Federation of Malaya in 1957 (i.e. coterminous with British Malaya). In 1963, they were joined by the two East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah in the Federation of Malaysia (strictly speaking, therefore, we use the term Malaya prior to 1963 and Malaysia afterwards). Apart from Singapore leaving the Federation to establish a separate republic in 1965 and the creation of the Federal Territory *(Wilayah Persekutuan)* in 1974, there has been no major change in state boundaries in West Malaysia since they were first detailed in the late nineteenth century.

British economic power was also etched on these political territories from the late nineteenth century. Capital's priority for

2. The Dindings at the mouth of the Perak River were retroceded from the Straits Settlements to Perak in 1935.

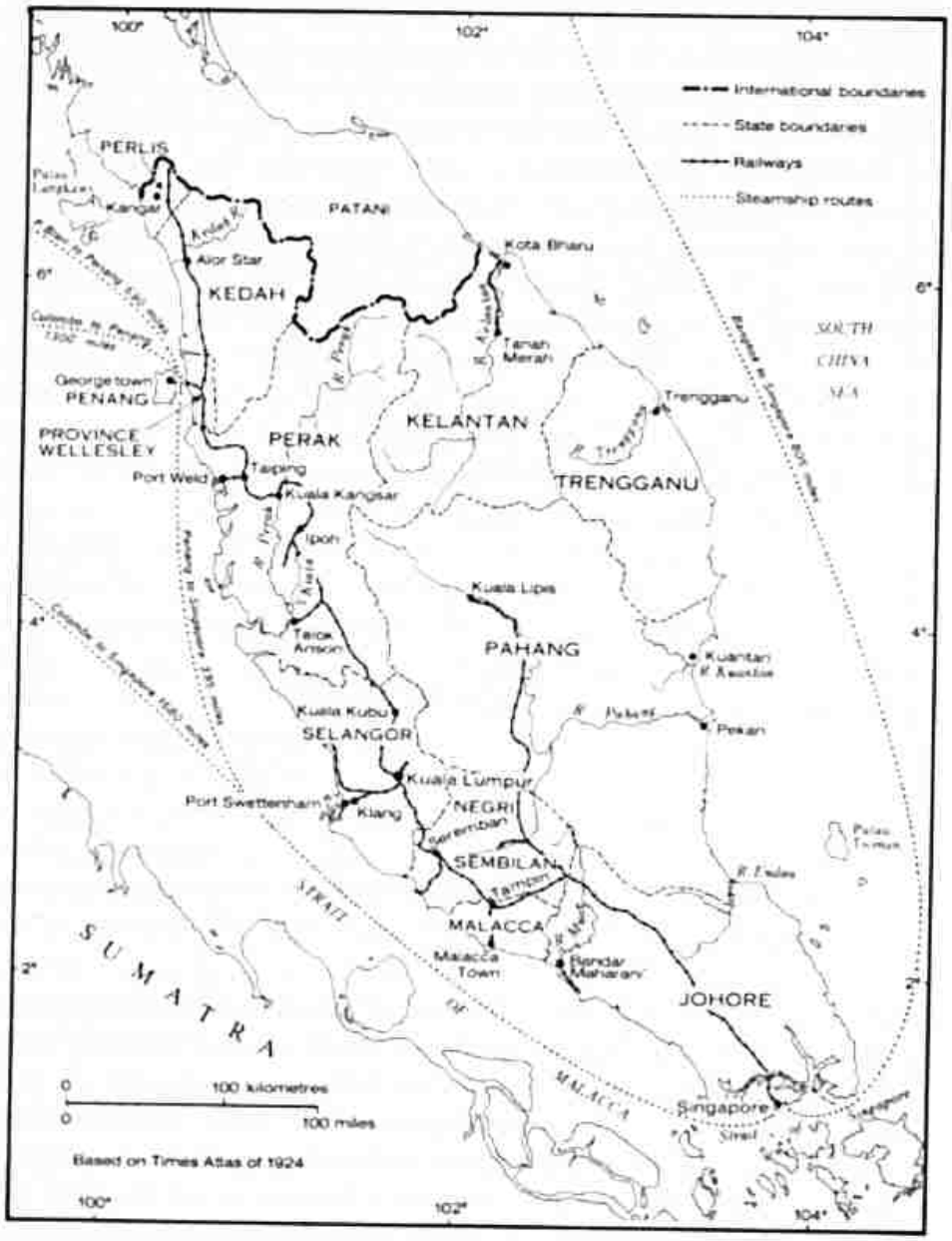


Figure 1.2 British Malaya in the early 1920s

mineral resources and agricultural potential produced the fundamental contrasts between the 'developed' west coast of Peninsular Malaysia and the 'underdeveloped' east coast. Commercial geographies have outlined the development of the twin props of the Malaysian economy — rubber and tin — and traced the penetrative railway lines tying production sites to the ports and the metropolitan country beyond. Historians have embellished this pic-

ture of international trade flows cascading down railway tracks and across steamship routes by charting the rise of the Straits British Agency Houses, the accommodation of merchant capital by colonial officials, the significant role of Chinese merchants, miners and planters (Jackson, 1968), and the impact of British policies on Malay politics (Mills, 1958; Chai, 1964). It is important to begin, however, by establishing some key geographical differences and underlining the importance of immigration in shaping the 'underlife' of colonial society.

Any study of the common people has to be conscious of their origins and of variations in their ethnic composition. In the 1820s Malaya had a population of 500,000, predominantly Malays; in 1957 it had a population of 7,725,000 comprising Malays, Chinese and Indians. A more detailed examination of the population of Malaya between 1911 and 1940 in Table 1.1 shows that the combined total of Chinese and Indians had outstripped the Malays by 1921. The population of Europeans, Eurasians and other communities never exceeded 3 per cent. Yet, this section of the community has attracted most attention from social historians. For instance, Butcher (1979) in *The British in Malaya 1880-1941* has produced a social history of the Europeans in Malaya — the way in which they lived, how their way of life was influenced by their dominant position in Malayan society and how, as a community, they changed over time (see also Allen, 1983). Paradoxically, the social history of those who laboured in this harsh environment to achieve the colonial power's political and economic goals, has not been brought fully into focus — a necessary step towards a valid assessment of Malaysian history.

In charting the history of the common people one has to be conscious of massive Chinese (Jones, 1966) and Indian labour immigration (Arasaratnam, 1970) following the consolidation of British hegemony during the early twentieth century (Table 1.2). Between 1786 and 1957, over 4,250,000 Indians entered Malaysia, largely from South India and some 3,000,000 departed; three-quarters of those in Malaya after the Second World War were not born there (Sandhu, 1969). In 1940, Lasker (1945), notes that there were over 2,358,000 overseas Chinese in Malaya. It was these two massive migrations that 'fuelled' the colonial estates, factories and government departments. With this brief reference to historical demography we can proceed to bring the ordinary people into sharper focus.

* * *

TABLE 1.1

POPULATION OF MALAYA, 1911-1940

	1911	1921	1931	1940
Malays	1,416,796	1,651,051	1,962,021	2,286,459
Chinese	915,883	1,174,777	1,709,392	2,358,335
Indians	267,159	471,666	624,009	748,829
Others	72,916	60,560	89,924	112,471
Total	2,673,754	3,358,054	4,385,346	5,504,095

Notes: 'Malays' include other Malaysians.
'Others' include Europeans, Eurasians and other communities.
Source: Parmer (1960: 275).

ORDINARY PEOPLE IN FOCUS

The decision to focus on the experiences of subordinate individuals and groups in Malaysia's social history from the late nineteenth century to the present was prompted by a relative neglect in previous historical practice. This approach to history owes its existence to implicit criticism of the 'stolid' Malaysian historiography that preceded it (cf. Sullivan, 1985: 78-93). Indeed, this study represents a departure from the traditional emphasis on colonial history preoccupied with British action, reaction and inaction to local happenings. In writing about political changes historians have primarily concentrated on what they considered to be the major themes in Malaysian life; invariably, these have been the visible terrain of society and dominant individuals and groups. Their preoccupation with the images of the overlife has resulted in them neglecting critical aspects of Malaysia's past by overlooking the roles of ordinary individuals and groups. This past, which has remained hidden or 'invisible', is forcing itself into popular consciousness. Following, but not slavishly copying, overseas developments reflected in Frazier's (1971) *Underside of American History*, Elise Boulding's (1976) *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time* and Hane Mikiso's (1982) *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts (sic): The Underside of Modern Japan*, interest has switched to the underside of Malaysian history — a move prompted by the need to re-examine the past in order to better comprehend, and grapple with, current issues and conflicts.

TABLE 1.2

SOUTH INDIAN DECK PASSENGER AND CHINESE ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES AT FIVE-YEARLY INTERVALS, 1911-1936

Year	South Indians			Chinese		
	Arrivals	Departures	Net	Arrivals	Departures	Net
1911	108,471	48,103	+60,368	269,854	n.a.	n.a.
1916	95,566	54,479	+41,087	183,399	61,630	+121,76
1921	95,220	55,481	-15,878	191,043	98,986	+92,057
1926	174,795	65,786	+109,009	348,593	120,308	+228,285
1931	19,692	101,347	-81,655	191,690	304,655	-112,965
1936	43,191	40,075	+ 3,166	282,299	206,498	+75,801

Note: The figures for South Indians refer to Penang only. Both sets of figures only have limited reliability but are useful for displaying general trends.
Source: Parmer (1960: 271).

The *Underside of Malaysian History* is modest in its intentions, as it has not tried to cover all fields of interest and major problems that concern Malaysian social history. At best, it provides an introduction to the wide and varied subject matter. Nevertheless, the *Underside of Malaysian History* is designed to assist in redressing the existing imbalance by contributing to a people's history of Malaysia — an essential part of the whole and one often neglected in standard narrative histories. The inclusion of the actual experiences of ordinary people in Malaysian history raises serious questions about the nature, priorities and costs of British capitalism, notably the extent to which they were squeezed (or indulged) by their political and economic masters. Much has been written on the credit side of the modernisation ledger. A turn to the debit side, however, reveals gross insensitivity towards the health and welfare of ordinary people. In a bid to redress the balance, subordinate individuals and communities are now seen as the unsung heroes of Malaysia's subsequent modernisation. Their unheard voices and unmentioned practices comprised the springboard on which Malaysia leapt from a feudal to a modern society. Although these people carried the burden and paid the cost of Malaysia's modernisation they were often deemed to be beneath the dignity of concern. Their lives were very

hard and, especially in the early years, they benefited from the small improvements in welfare introduced by the colonial authorities.

Family and working class histories offer an underside view. Nevertheless, these have been guilty of ignoring women. While the lives of working men may have been veiled in history, those of women have been almost entirely hidden (Manderson, 1980). Both in the domestic economy and in the paid workforce, where, for example, women worked as servants, labourers, miners, traders and birth attendants, they have remained largely invisible, their lives seemingly marginal to the mainstream of everyday life (Manderson, 1979, 1983; Abeyasekere, 1983). Since the roles and activities of individual women have not received attention, it is not surprising, also, that the importance of gender, in structuring social and economic relations in the Malaysian past has been a neglected field of enquiry.

RECLAIMING A PEOPLE'S HISTORY

Recognising this gap in Malaysian historiography is a sufficient reason for this volume on the underside of Malaysian history. The real problems begin, however, in trying to write a people's history — a 'mundane enterprise that reflects earthly interests and claims, that confronts ideologies and prejudice as they really are, that faithfully mirrors the complex weave of competition, struggle and cooperation within the shifting physical and social landscapes' of late nineteenth century and twentieth century Malaysia (Harvey, 1984: 7). Such a history (and geography) 'must have a popular base, be threaded into the fabric of everyday life with deep taproots into the well-being of popular consciousness' (Harvey, 1984: 7).

Few working people in advanced capitalist countries have ever been articulate enough to record their experiences and pass a useful judgement on it. As they lived and died unknown, it is difficult, as instanced by McKenna's (1980) study of British railway workers, to reclaim their history. Although Mayhew (1861), Booth (1902) and Stedman Jones (1971) provide useful contextual material on ordinary people in Britain, and Yokoyama Genno'suke's (1949) *Nihon no Kaso Shakai* [Japan's Lower Social Strata] on their Japanese counterparts, invariably recourse has to be made in these countries to autobiographies and diaries. These sources are rare commodities in Malaysia where most of the common people would have been illiterate (cf. Strand and Weiner, 1979).

A full analysis of individual experience and collective identity requires a study of regional settings or locales — the organisation of production, the prevailing sexual division of labour and ethnic and religious divisions — that have arisen from current and superseded socio-economic systems (see Thrift, 1983: 37-48). These locales provide the arenas within which the 'life paths' of individuals are shaped and intersect with others, and the sites where groups of ordinary Malaysian people are formed or transformed and come into conflicts with others over hegemonic relations (e.g. protests, strikes and violence). The degree of interaction between individuals and socialisation among groups is dependent upon institutional norms (i.e. home and workplace) and the work-related counter institutions that challenge the ruling orthodoxy. Only a small part of the concrete analysis necessary for reconstructing the regional history of the ordinary people in Malaysia, however, can be attempted here.

In reconstructing the everyday lives of the people, the authors have immersed themselves in a range of sources on colonial Malaya during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most authors have burrowed deeply into official records and have used them to highlight differences between the overside and underside of colonial life; there is, however, a dearth of indigenous sources championing a non-elite view. Nevertheless, the official records have been supplemented by oral history that provides insights into the lives of railway workers (Chapter 4) — the voices of human experience in the lower levels of Malaysian society. There are eyewitness accounts and the reminiscences of Asian (Low Ngiong Ing, 1974) and European participants (Peet, 1985). Maps and photographs can also do much to reveal the tenor of country and city life. Where the colonial facade has remained intact, there is evidence of patient fieldwork as authors have roamed the countryside and the streets to recreate the sights, sounds and smells of human experience in an earlier period.

A GUIDE TO THE COMMON PEOPLE

In examining the everyday lives of ordinary people in Malaysia this study is divided into three parts. *Part I* concentrates on those employed in the countryside — padi-cum-rubber smallholders (often described as farmers or peasants), rubber estate workers and ex-tin miners turned small farmers. *Part II* highlights subordinate individuals and groups in the cities, ranging from railway workers through hackney carriage syces and rikisha pullers to prostitutes.

Part III focuses on the health of ordinary people — housewives, children, vegetable gardeners, rice cultivators and workers — and their reactions to the new time and space forged by the colonial power.

The book is structured in this way so that the more familiar country dwellers — who have already attracted attention from social historians — are discussed before proceeding to consider the neglected subordinate individuals and groups in the cities. Once the latter have been examined we can proceed to explore health and the particular reaction of some Malays to the changes brought about by external pressures. It is important to begin, however, by establishing some key geographical differences and underlining the importance of immigration in shaping the 'underlife' of colonial society.

IN THE COUNTRYSIDE . . .

An early start on the history of ordinary rural people was made by Parmer's (1960) *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration* which examined the supply of plantation labour from India, China and Java (Table 1.3). Then, Lim Teck Ghee's (1977) *Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya 1874-1941* sought to record systematically the experiences of smallholder communities in terms of the effects of external pressures on their livelihood. Previously, Wong Lin Ken's (1965), *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914*, had centred attention on tin miners, though his focus was restricted in scope to the early parts of the twentieth century. Building on this base, the three chapters in *Part I* draw on official records to fill gaps and chart new directions in reclaiming the history of country dwellers; two of the chapters reflect an extension of earlier work (Drabble, 1973; Barlow, 1978) and the third is the harbinger of a larger work to come.

Chapter 2 by Colin Barlow examines the changing economic positions of estate and smallholding rubber workers between 1900 and 1980. While the average economic position of estate workers was clearly inferior to that of their smallholding counterparts during the early years, this situation was gradually reversed as the former captured some of the benefits arising from technological change, drawing upon their trade union power and the advantage of a more sympathetic government following Independence. Government assistance was also extended to smallholders, though their gains from technological change were considerably less on average — their incomes had to be spread more thinly in a labour-intensive ac-

TABLE 1.3

LABOURERS EMPLOYED IN ESTATES, MINES, FACTORIES AND GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, MALAYA, 1930-1938

Year	Indians	Chinese	Javanese	Others	Total
1930	270,594	119,799	14,472	23,309	428,444
1931	213,360	119,412	13,049	21,150	366,971
1932	178,598	105,110	12,026	21,505	317,329
1933	187,898	108,740	13,097	27,659	337,394
1934	229,129	131,303	15,677	33,239	409,348
1935	231,073	127,864	13,789	30,157	402,883
1936	204,477	146,094	12,723	23,022	386,317
1937	306,360	178,501	18,273	39,592	542,726
1938	277,095	144,336	13,885	34,677	469,993

Notes: Malaya here refers to the Federated Malay States, the Straits Settlements and the Unfederated States of Johor, Kedah and Kelantan. 'Others' include indigenous Malays.
Source: Parmer (1960: 274).

tivity and were more subject to price fluctuations. By the 1970s and 1980s two distinct groups of smallholders could be identified: 'progressive' farmers whose rubber incomes not only matched those of estate workers but were supplemented from other activities; and 'less progressive' farmers who were locked into conditions of poverty which government action failed to ameliorate. New official initiatives were deemed necessary to remedy the latter's plight. In writing this chapter, Barlow was conscious of the situations in other rubber producing countries — a theme also taken up by Drabble.

Chapter 3 by John Drabble outlines the increase in rubber smallholdings from the early years of the twentieth century by contrasting their growth with rubber estate developments in both Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. The latter are included by Drabble because of the community of interest between British and Dutch estate owners in combating what appeared to be permanent low-cost competition from rubber smallholders. Although a senior British official recommended that estate owners counter this thrust by taking advantage of technical developments (e.g. high-yielding

trees), the panic occasioned by the Great Depression of 1929-1932 and its aftermath led to the government acceding to pressures from estate interests by taking part in the International Rubber Regulation Agreement (IRRA) between 1934 and 1941 which exerted compulsory export control. The effect of official policies on rubber smallholders is discussed in terms of land tenure, export assessment under compulsory control and long-term restrictions on 'newplanting'; though contemporary Europeans were unable to consider these developments other than in terms of their estate experience. Further contrasts are made between rubber smallholders and Indian estate labour. Then the divergent interests of European officialdom and business groups are exposed before we centre attention on the other dominant rural labour battalion — the tin miners.

Chapter 4 by Loh Kok Wah charts more unfamiliar terrain by examining the transformation of tin mine coolies into agricultural squatters within the Kinta Valley in Perak. The popular view has been that the squatter problem was a direct consequence of the Japanese Occupation. Establishing beyond doubt that it originated in the 1890s, Loh traces its roots to changes in the nature of the tin mining industry and varying government attitudes to the agriculturalists. Between the late nineteenth century and the mid-1910s, the squatter communities were an adjunct to the labour-intensive Chinese tin mining operations and small enough not to excite government interest. This benevolent neglect changed between 1910 and the late 1920s — government was forced to take a more active role when tin mining was mechanised by European interests as it squeezed out labour-intensive Chinese operations and, with increased immigration, resulted in growing numbers of agricultural squatters. Further government initiatives were introduced between 1920 and 1922 to overcome food shortages and mass unemployment. These ceased once rice was plentiful and fewer opportunities were available in the mines. There was a further expansion in the number of agricultural squatters during the period from the late 1920s until the outbreak of the Second World War. The Great Depression led to retrenchment in the tin mines and the government provided credit for squatters to expand their range of crops to include tobacco, tapioca and tubers; some refused to return to the mines after the Depression was over and cash-cropping became a family concern and a permanent feature of the Kinta District's economy. The net effect of some 60 years development, therefore, was an overall growth of squatting communities and consolidation

of cash cropping as an integral part of the Kinta District's economy by the late 1930s. This lasted until 1941 when the Malaysian countryside and cities were overrun by the Japanese — an Occupation that not only expanded squatting communities but dislocated city life.

IN THE CITIES . . .

Ordinary people in Southeast Asia's colonial cities have long been neglected by historians. The latter have preferred to concentrate their talents on rural pursuits, paying particular attention to peasant-based movements and opposition to colonial rule, rather than the urban labouring classes comprising railway workers, hackney carriage syces, rikisha pullers, hawkers and wharf coolies. This gap is now being filled by a growing recognition of the need to reconstruct the everyday experiences of the subordinate people under colonial rule in Southeast Asian cities. Following the leads of anthropologists, geographers, demographers and social historians studying colonial cities (see, for example, McGee, 1967), the upsurge of interest now promises to redress the rather belated studies of the urban labouring class. This growing interest is reflected in the three studies in *Part II*, two of which are focused on the largest city, Singapore, with its predominantly Chinese population (Table 1.4). We begin, however, with the railway workers spread through all levels of the urban hierarchy.

Chapter 5 by Amarjit Kaur focuses on railway workers in Malaya between 1880 and 1957 (see Kaur, 1985). It provides a much-needed antidote to the view that British engineers and surveyors were entirely responsible for the construction of the 'epoch-making innovation' between 1884 and 1931 that produced 'a radical alteration of economic geography with attendant internal migration and the building of new communities' (Baran and Sweezy, 1966: 219).[3] Kaur draws attention to the large force of labourers, semi-skilled and skilled workers and clerical staff that helped build and operate the system. During the initial phase of construction (1884-1896), when short latitudinal lines were built to mining areas on the west coast, workers were either Indians, obtained locally or indentured, or Chinese tin miners and Javanese labourers hired on a temporary

3. An analysis of the *Biographical Index of British Engineers in the 19th Century* (Bell, 1975) based on 3678 obituary notices in over forty contemporary engineering journals shows that 222 worked in India but few in Malaya (though 129 entries were classed as 'overseas' or 'colonial').

basis. Systematic government labour schemes to recruit Indian workers were used during the second phase of railway construction between 1897 and 1909, which was marked by the completion of the north-south trunk line connecting the latitudinal lines already in existence; it was part of an expansion program to relieve British investors of 'capital glut' (Hobsbawm, 1968: 90-92). During the final phase of construction between 1910 and 1931 there was a reduction in the predominance of Indian workers, as rising Malay consciousness led to repatriation; though this was less than anticipated as many were second generation and settled. In each phase Kaur highlights the trinity of low (and variable) wages, poor accommodation and long working hours. Although socially fragmented the predominantly Indian labour force developed class-based loyalties and actively sought better working conditions. Kaur attributes the apparent boldness of semi-skilled and skilled Indian railway workers to the fact that they enjoyed greater mobility than their estate counterparts and to their willingness to cooperate with the notoriously more militant Chinese in joint strike actions during the 1930s and 1950s to attain better working conditions; Chinese militancy is also a feature of the next chapter.

Chapter 6 by Peter Rimmer on hackney carriage syces and rikisha pullers in Singapore highlights the relationship between technological change and the labour process. Written before the publication of *Rikisha to Rapid Transit* (Rimmer, 1986a) and Warren's(1986) *Rickshaw Coolie*, the chapter draws upon the annual reports of the Hackney Carriage and Jinrikisha Department (and its successors) composed by its Registrar, Mr W.E. Hooper, between 1892 and 1923. After highlighting the traditional Chinese hearthlands of the pullers it reconstructs the spatial structure and segregation of colonial society in Singapore. No doubt, some unanswered questions about coolie life (and public transport) will surface from these explorations of the 'underside' of colonial Singapore — the veritable Capital of Cooliedom (see Rimmer, 1986b).

Chapter 7 by James Warren raises the issue of reconstructing and revaluing the underside of human experience by drawing further attention to the neglect of women in Malaysian history — not 'Great Women' but working women (see Manderson, 1980; Abeyasekere, 1983). He highlights the *Karayuki-san*, sold into prostitution from Japan to other areas of Asia. Conscious of the bourgeoning American feminist literature, Warren seeks a more complex view of the relationship between class and gender through an account of both the sexual division of labour between men and women within

TABLE 1.4

POPULATION OF SINGAPORE, 1871-1911

Year	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Europeans					
Male	1,528	2,207	4,312	2,619	4,709
Female	418	562	942	1,205	1,620
Total	1,946	2,769	5,254	3,824	3,824
Eurasians					
Male	1,063	1,509	4,312	2,619	2,257
Female	1,101	1,585	1,825	2,105	1,620
Total	2,164	3,094	3,589	3,824	4,671
Chinese					
Male	46,104	72,571	100,446	130,367	161,648
Female	7,468	14,195	21,462	33,674	57,929
Total	54,572	86,766	121,908	164,041	219,577
Malays					
Male	14,617	18,627	20,899	29,260	22,638
Female	11,531	14,475	15,093	15,820	19,294
Total	26,148	33,102	35,992	36,080	41,932
Indians					
Male	8,794	9,674	12,953	14,345	23,069
Female	1,960	2,264	3,082	3,478	4,701
Total	10,574	12,138	12,953	14,345	27,770
Others					
Male	1,242	835	956	1,269	1,786
Female	285	504	820	1,398	1,874
Total	1,527	1,339	1,776	2,667	3,660
Grand total					
Male	74,348	105,423	141,330	170,875	215,489
Female	22,763	33,785	43,224	57,680	87,852
Total	**97,111**	**139,208**	**184,554**	**228,555**	**303,321**

Source: Makepeace *et al.* (1921: 358-361).

the same social class, and ethnic differences between labouring women in the cities (cf. Warren, 1984a,b,c, 1985a,b). These factors highlight the role of urbanism in forging social stratification (see Evans, 1980). By invoking 'little-name history' — the prostitute Oichi who committed suicide at 55 Malabar Street in Singapore — Warren supplements earlier studies by Yamazaki Tomoko (1975, 1977). So overwhelming is this tragic vision of life that there is no attempt to capture the *Karayuki-san's* fleeting moments of joy to contrast work with leisure. Nevertheless, Oichi's life and death should lead us on to a more concerted effort to consider the common people's welfare.

IN SICKNESS AND HEALTH . . .

Official records of British Malaya ooze with vital statistics of diseases ranging from ankylstomiasis (hookworm) through dysentery, malaria and syphilis to yaws. These data cry out for imaginative treatment to reconstruct the relative well-being of ordinary people. Yet, this area is still largely uncharted, presumably because these records testify to the penetration of Western health care but say little about the indigenous delivery systems of the Malays, Chinese, Indians and *Orang Asli* (aborigines). Hence, we still must question how well Malaysia's hybrid health care and delivery system has served the ordinary people. In her study of the delivery of health services, Ooi Giok Ling (1982) has examined the attempt to redefine the position of non-orthodox medicine following greater colonial intervention in Malayan health affairs by the construction of hospitals to safeguard estate and mine labour supplies from the depredation of malaria; the effects of this legacy on post-colonial health care are also considered. In particular, she documents the origins and subsequent developments of Chinese medicine. However, there is scope, as the later chapters in *Part III* demonstrate, for: a more detailed analysis of the delivery of orthodox medicine; an assessment of the reliability of the historical sources upon which these studies have to be based; and a firmer theoretical base (see Manderson, 1987a).

Chapter 8 by Norman Parmer explores estate workers' health in the wake of the massive clearing of land to accommodate the expanding rubber industry in the 1920s. A critical analysis of vital statistics suggests that death and disease were understated for a variety of reasons. Statistics record the workers' proneness (in rank order) to malaria, hookworm, venereal disease, beri-beri and tuber-

culosis; infant mortality was also high. Parmer shows that the colonial power was not indifferent to the suffering as witnessed by the rural health schemes that followed the Report of the Estates Health Commission established in 1924. The implementation of the Report failed, however, when faced with the concerted opposition of the major European estate owners and the visiting medical practitioners. Government procrastination was an added impediment. Yet, as evidenced in the next chapter, government was not totally disinterested and sponsored other programs to tackle the major debilitating diseases — the cynics replying, no doubt, that the supply of labour to estates and mines had to be maintained at all costs.

Chapter 9 by Lenore Manderson is concerned with colonial perceptions of health and illness in early twentieth century Malaya. In particular, she is concerned with the way these perceptions, grounded in notions of racial strengths and vulnerabilities, contrasted the health of Europeans and non-Europeans and influenced expenditure on medical services and the direction of public health programs. The Europeans, according to colonial health commentators, were worn down in a climate that lacked temperature and seasonal variation and they experienced physical, mental and moral degeneration without regular sojourns in more temperate environments (i.e. a hill station or a return 'home'). Non-Europeans, immigrants and locals, were unhealthy as the result of carelessness, ignorance and unsanitary behaviour which suggested that improvements could be effected by health and sanitation programs, of which the ankylostomiasis (hookworm) program was one. Manderson describes this program in some detail and suggests that, though it served as a model for more general health and hygiene, the long-term effect was limited. Nevertheless, the campaign provided the colonial administration with a palpable demonstration of its responsibility to ordinary people. This suggests that the attempts to balance the colonial ledger with debits for ill-health and treatment of the mentally handicapped need, in turn, to be counterbalanced in the final assessment by such benevolent actions (that also include the construction of hospitals and institutions). However, as the next chapter emphasises the nature of the 'sickness' or 'madness' is clearly a matter of interpretation.

Chapter 10 by Robert Winzeler discusses phenomena usually described as 'culture-bound psychiatric syndromes'. This term has been used by Simons (1985) to refer to remarkable individual experiences and behaviours in particular people or locales which Western observers have considered to be psychopathological

(hence, the medical term 'syndrome'). Specifically, Winzeler examines the categories of *amok* (frenzied homicidal attack) and *latah* (excessively strong startle reaction) used by European observers to characterise the dangerous and dark side of the Malay character. In outlining the restricted occurrence of *amok* and *latah* in Malaysia, the author documents the problems of using historical sources to trace changes in the complexity of these types of 'culture-bound' phenomena and to determine to what extent they are either experiential (i.e. reflecting the material and social environment) or biological. A critical analysis of the records is inconclusive and Winzeler, with his emphasis on a full description of the cultural setting, ends with a suggested research agenda that takes us beyond the past debate recorded by Simons and Hughes (1985) in *The Culture Bound Syndromes: Folk Illnesses of Psychiatric and Anthropological Interest.*

Resume

Collectively, the nine chapters comprising micro-studies of individuals and small groups, contribute to an understanding of subordinate individuals and groups under colonial rule in Malaysia. But is that enough; should not we be charting future directions?

PEOPLE'S HISTORY ON THE MOVE

This study is not an end in itself. It is a contribution to the 'arduous task of creating a history of societies' that explains total social process and analyses 'the whole range of forces promoting change and transformation, stability and continuity...' (Nield and Blackman, 1976: 1). There is a pressing need to counterbalance social history's past preoccupation with comparisons of advanced capitalist countries by incorporating Malaysia and other peripheral capitalist countries into a global framework that goes beyond 'stages of growth' concepts. This objective could be achieved using comparative methods which concentrate on 'the social and political structures of Third World countries, on nationalist movements and mass mobilisations, on peasant societies and relations of production unknown, or unremembered, in Western Europe or North America' (Nield and Blackman, 1976: 2).

Several authors have already recognised the wider implications of their Malaysian work. Barlow (Chapter 2) and Drabble (Chapter 3) are conscious of parallels between the inter-war history of the

Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia), Thailand and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Winzeler (Chapter 10) has traced *amok* and *latah*-like occurrences not only in the Malay world but in other parts of the globe.

The scope for comparative work by other authors is, however, latent. Loh Kok Wah (Chapter 3), for instance, has the opportunity to forge links with ex-Chinese miners in other parts of the world (cf. Richardson's study of Chinese mine labour in the Transvaal). Admittedly, Rimmer (Chapter 6) sees the need for a comparative study of rikisha pullers in Japan, China, the Straits Settlements, Federated and Unfederated Malay States, and South Africa but this could be extended to encompass technological and organisational changes in other public transport settings. Kaur (Chapter 6), however, provides the basis for tracing connections between workers on the Malayan railways and their counterparts in India. Warren (Chapter 7), drawing heavily on American feminist literature, could, for instance, see women, and gender, against a backdrop of feminist scholarship that has occurred internationally — concurrently in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Parmer (Chapter 10) and Manderson (Chapter 11) raise the possibility of comparative health studies that also incorporate the role of traditional medicine (see Ooi Giok Ling, 1982). This broader canvass could be one way of tying these contributions to politics rather than political history — a connection that raises issues of political order and popular opposition (see Eley and Nield, 1980).

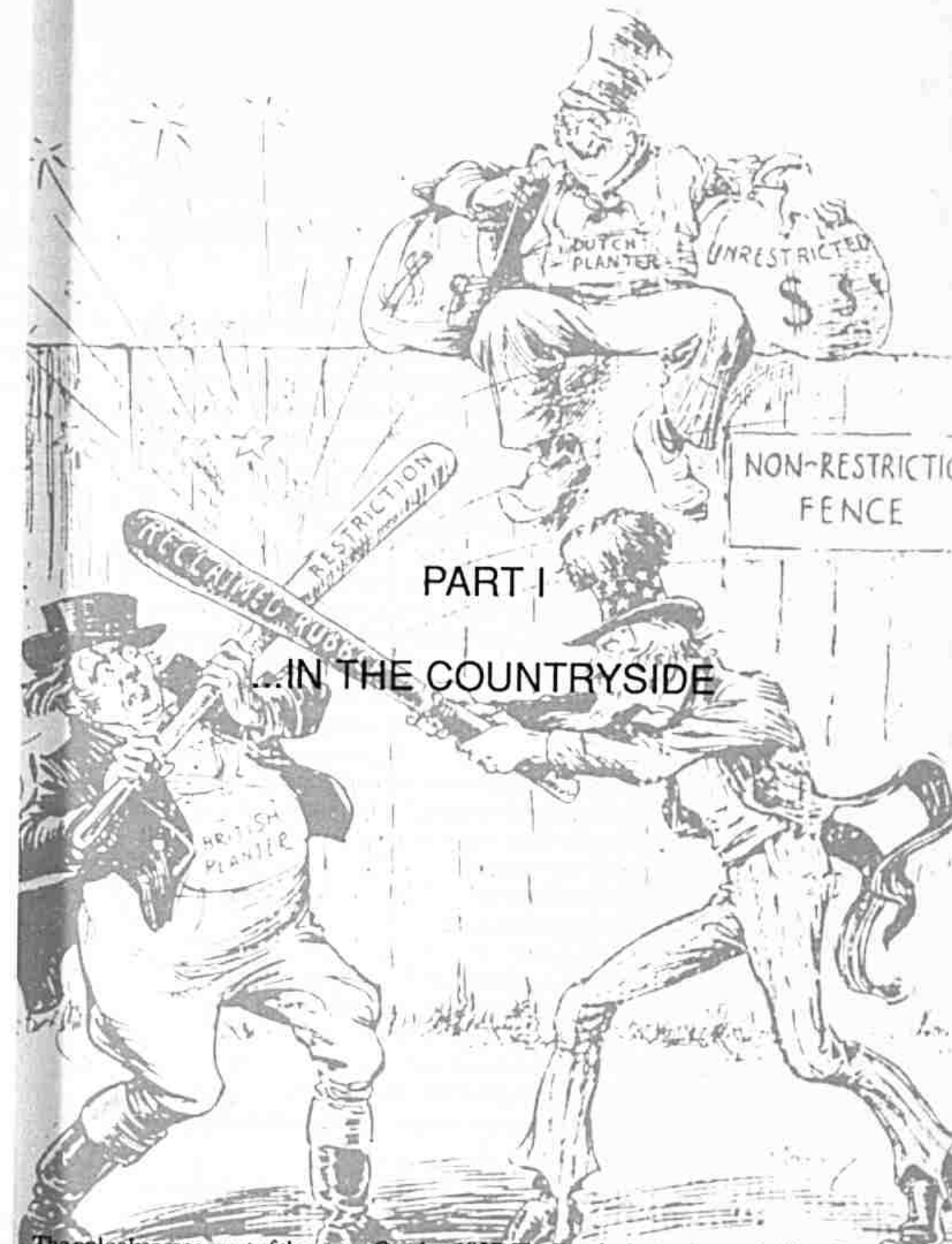
If these opportunities were realised, the resultant comparative studies would help broaden social history's base built upon the strength of British Marxist historiography, typified by Thompson (1963), Hobsbawm (1968), Stedman Jones (1971), and the French *Annales* School typified by Braudel (1973) (Nield and Blackman, 1976: 1). But the question then arises of whether the forms of social analysis appropriate to Western Europe and North America are apposite to the actions of subordinate individuals and groups in Malaysian space and time (Nield and Blackman, 1985; Eley *et al.*, 1985). Concepts and methods of European writing cannot claim to be universal to all periods and places; work on labour markets and social movements in Japan, for instance, may be more appropriate (see Sumiya Mikio and Taira Koji, 1979: 337-359). Certainly, further exploration along comparative lines, with a methodological underpinning relevant to the Southeast Asian context, would be welcome.

The studies of Malaysian social history in this book are generally light in tying their themes to social theory (Zeitlin, 1983). Yet they

make a positive contribution by providing real life scenarios which illustrate important and often contrasting aspects of the transition from primitive economy to capitalism in a major Southeast Asian state. Thus, they highlight the gross exploitation of labourers by the various agents of international capitalism working under the auspices of the colonial power, but show how agents of that power introduced welfare measures to assist labourers and their families. They denote too the resilience of the Malaysian people who suffered pain and privation through capitalist intrusion but then (with the help of government at later stages) exercised countervailing power through trade unions. The study shows too, how resourceful farmers took the technologies of foreign companies, and turned them to their own account in small capitalist enterprises selling rubber to international markets and vegetables to international centres.

These significant movements have all gained progressively more strength following their earliest beginnings in the colonial era. Trade unions and small cash crop farmers have become important social and economic institutions in modern Malaysia. The tradition of government assistance in social affairs has also developed strongly under impetus from vigorous grassroots democracy, being particularly evident in the New Economic Policy of the 1970s and 1980s.

Accordingly, we believe that the portrayals of various branches of economic and social activity presented in this volume help to illumine some significant aspects of a people's history of Malaysia. They are offered as a few more steps towards establishing the true nature of that history. As these studies of Malaysian history are also evocative of real life experiences they provide the descriptive base on which a people's history can be built into social theory — a springboard to a more general synthesis of social processes and the internationalisation of the historical debate.



PART I

...IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The onlooker sees most of the game, October 1927. The Dutch planter sits on the 'Non-Restriction Fence' and enjoys the spoils while the British planter uses the 'restriction' weapon against Uncle Jonathan's 'reclaimed rubber' weapon (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

2.
Changes in the Economic Position of Workers on Rubber Estates and Smallholdings in Peninsular Malaysia, 1910-1985

COLIN BARLOW

The expansion of the cultivation of natural rubber in British Malaya[1] from early this century was a signal event, remarkable both for its involvement of two parallel but very different subsectors — the estates and smallholdings — and for its rapidity (Table 2.1). The various factors underlying this expansion, which notably included the initially high price and profitability of rubber, have already been thoroughly analysed (Bauer, 1948a; Drabble, 1973; Lim Teck Ghee, 1977; Barlow, 1978). This chapter concentrates on one factor only — the workers involved — who are, nonetheless, crucial in such a labour-intensive crop. A similar division between estates and smallholdings was true of the less rapid development of rubber in Indonesia and Sri Lanka (Thee Kian Wie, 1977; de Silva, 1982), but not of the development in non-colonial Thailand which was almost exclusively based on smallholders. The division was also characteristic of other tropical crops in the early twentieth century, notably coconut, tea and sugar.

It is hard to imagine a more striking contrast in production units than that between rubber estates and rubber smallholdings, despite the basic attachment of both to the same crop with a single international commodity market. On the one hand, large scale estates of hundreds of hectares with their hierarchical organisation are themselves grouped into much bigger management units, with further downstream integration into processing and marketing. On the other hand, independent smallholdings of up to a few hectares are essentially family affairs with little direct economic interrelationship, which each juxtapose for their individual marketing purposes with a private trading and financial network involving small dealers at the village level. While the 'group' smallholdings which were established in Malaysia from the mid-1960s have a more

1. This territory became 'Malaya' with independence in 1957 and 'Malaysia' with the incorporation of Sabah and Sarawak in 1963.

TABLE 2.1
RUBBER IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1910-1980

Year	Estates						
	Total Output	Area	Yield	Workers[a]			
				Indian	Chinese	Malay[b]	Total
	'000 t	'000 planted	kg/mature ha	thous	thous	thous	thous
1910	n.a.	173[c]	n.a.	99	46	34	179
1920	n.a.	539[d]	(365)[e]	161	41	15	217
1930	238	763	424	154	42	9	205
1940	337	843	463	218	88	45	351
1950	382	795	541	149	77	55	281
1960	420	783	738	138	86	61	285
1970	621	647	1,140	94	70	62	226
1980	407	492	1,428	87	30	50[f]	167

Notes: a. For the Federated Malay States (FMS) only up to 1920, and for the FMS and Straits Settlements only in 1930.

b. Including Javanese and others. Javanese were about half the total, 'Malay' workers up to 1920, but 'others' were negligible.

c. Including 20,000 ha of the 'Asian' area (Figart, 1925) as estates.

d. Assuming (as in the verified statistics for 1922) that 39 per cent of the total planted rubber area was under smallholdings.

e. Average yields per mature hectare of 31 dollar and sterling companies covering 18,870 ha in 1919-1922.

f. Omitting some additional (unrecorded) Indonesian workers.

TABLE 2.1 (cont'd)

Year	Smallholdings			
	Total Output '000 t	Area '000 planted ha	Yield kg/mature ha	Workers '000 persons
1910	n.a.	46	n.a.	n.a.
1920	n.a.	344[a]	496	n.a.
1930	218	483	562	n.a.
1940	216	547	426	n.a.
1950	322	643	525	n.a.
1960	298	766[b]	521	329[c]
1970	595	1,077[b]	787	448[c]
1980	877	1,206[b]	1,103	499[c]

Notes: a. Assuming (as in the verified statistics for 1922) that 39 per cent of the total planted rubber area was under smallholdings.

b. Including both independent *and* group smallholdings. Thus the 1980 smallholding area contained 169,000 ha of group smallholdings in FELDA schemes, and a further 222,000 ha of group smallholdings in other developments. This left 815,000 ha of independent smallholdings.

c. Total Population Census figures for *all* rubber workers *less* estate rubber workers.

Sources: Malaya/Malaysia (1979 and 1983) for smallholding workers; Figart (1925) for estate yields in 1920; Barlow (1978) (quoting primary sources) for other figures; and Malaya/Malaysia (1932-1985).

centralised structure, this is a smaller subsector whose workers are not explicitly treated here.[2]

These great differences in production organisation naturally have important differentiating effects upon the workers involved. The traditional estate worker is essentially a regimented cog in a big machine, with little flexibility of action and a restricted social environment. Indeed, de Silva (1982) in a broader international context has described with much truth how 'labourers, brought from long distances, were cut off from the surrounding peasant economy and bound to the plantation by their conditions of employment, if not juridicially'. The 'captive' nature of the Malaysian Indian plantation worker's position has been analysed more specifically by Selvaratnam (1984). In contrast, the small independent rubber farmer, — often referred to by colonial administrators by the now derogatory term 'peasant' — has much more flexibility, especially if he controls his land. Being his own manager he conducts his production activities as he will. This generally more flexible living pattern allows him to undertake enterprises unconnected with rubber, and to make wider local contacts.

There can, however, be some advantages to the worker from being in the estate structure, and these became evident in the case of the Peninsular Malaysian rubber production industry in later years. They were notably in terms of the structure's ability to adopt and implement quickly new yield, quality and profit-increasing technologies, and through the worker's own ability in such circumstances to join with fellow workers in a trade union. Using the power of the latter, he was able to capture some of the technological gains for himself in higher wages. He was also able to improve these wages by restricting the number of his colleagues, and further to secure some protection from the instability of the rubber market (Fig. 2.1). Against this, the average Malaysian individual smallholder appeared over time to have grave problems with what had to be his own personal adoption and implementation of new

2. These group smallholdings notably included the schemes of the Federal Land Development Authority, some of which extended to blocks of one thousand or more hectares. They were all established under government auspices, and while based on individually farmed units, were provided with supervisors to transfer new technologies, considerable investment in establishing high-yielding rubber trees and complementary inputs, and central processing and marketing facilities. The group smallholdings covered about 190,000 hectares of planted rubber by 1970, and their total area had risen to 390,000 hectares by 1980 (when there were even larger extents of oil palm on group schemes). In this latter year there were 815,000 hectares of rubber under independent smallholdings. Using the relevant land:labour ratios of Table 2.3, it may be calculated that in 1970 and 1980 about 15 and 30 per cent of all smallholding rubber workers respectively were involved with group arrangements.

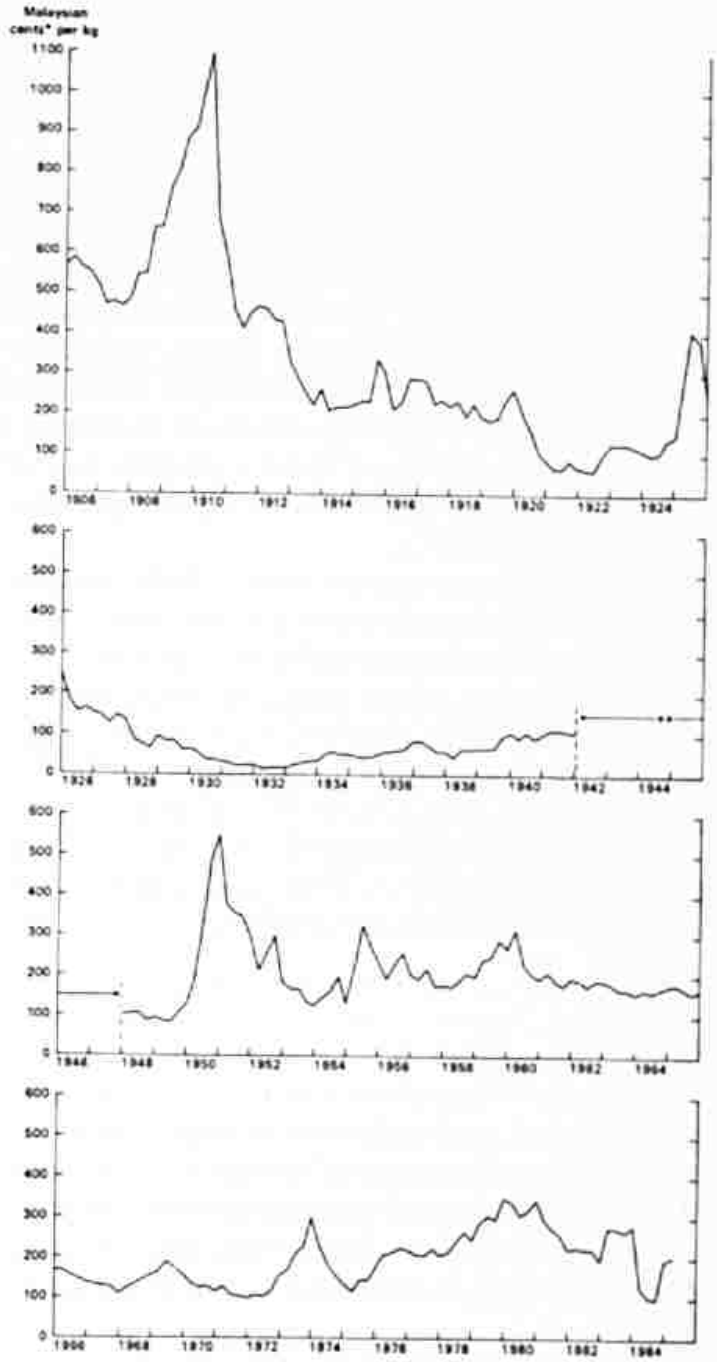


Figure 2.1 Average prices of RSSI rubber in London, 1906-1984

Notes: *At concurrent exchange rates, prices are nominal.
** No prices during Japanese occupation and it's aftermath.
Sources: Barlow (1978); International Rubber Study Group (1946-1985).

technology. He was involved in what came to be a much more labour-intensive operation, and was badly hit by rubber price fluctuations despite the availability of limited alternative activities. Thus, despite substantial government-organised assistance from the 1950s to counter these difficulties, what was initially the much superior earnings position of the typical smallholder share tapper over the typical estate worker became substantially inferior in later years (Table 2.2). The position of the land-owning smallholder, while much better than that of the share tapper, suffered a similar relative decline. This diverging contrast between rubber estate and smallholding workers did not really obtain in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, for while smallholders in those countries had arguably greater problems, the estate workers were largely prevented from effective trade union activity.[3]

The changing comparative experiences of Malaysian estate and smallholding workers are now reviewed at intervals, starting from the beginning years when the new industry was booming, and ending with the present when rubber is no longer king and its cultivation is in major decline. These experiences are reviewed at intervals (during the 1910s, between 1920 and 1940, between 1950 and 1970 and during the 1980s) to give successive snapshots of the dynamic process that occurred. Particular attention is given to the major subgroups within the two categories of workers, and to the influence on them of the various factors just mentioned.

THE 1910s

The first ten years of the century were times of very high rubber prices (Fig. 2.1) and of great extension in rubber area (Table 2.1), first on the predominantly expatriate estates, but very soon also on smallholdings, as ordinary rural people perceived the high cash income to be earned from a relatively simple agricultural technology. Applying this technology essentially involved using hand tools to

3. Estate workers all over Indonesia gained benefits (notably as payments in kind in a period of rapid inflation) during the Sukarno period of active trade unionism in the 1950s (Hindley, 1964), although all this ended with the suppression of the Communist Party in 1965. In the Soeharto era from 1967 to the present, trade union activity at estate level has been banned entirely (Stoler, 1985), and reviews of recent wage levels (Indonesia, 1978-1982; Barlow and Muharminto, 1982; Barlow and Thee Kian Wie, 1988) show that Outer Island earnings on estates and smallholdings are quite similar. In Sri Lanka, as in Malaysia, estate workers benefited from substantial trade union activity in the late 1930s. Yet although trade unions have continued in the postwar period, the disenfranchisement of most Tamil estate workers (the dominant group) from 1947 effectively removed any political influence from this quarter. Subsequently, estate workers have remained one of the most depressed segments of the rural community.

TABLE 2.2
RUBBER PRICES AND WORKERS' EARNINGS IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1920-1980

Year	Average RSSI price[a] M$/kg f.o.b	Earnings (1982 M$/month)[b] Manufacturing employees[c]	Estate rubber tappers[d]		Smallholding share tappers on 2 ha[e]	
1920	1.50	n.a.	77	(17)[f]	142	(31)[f]
1930	0.42	n.a.	61[g]	(9)	84	(12)
1940	0.83	n.a.	158	(22)	126	(18)
1950	2.38	n.a.	168	(62)	169	(62)
1960	2.39	305[h] (134)[f]	223	(98)	165	(73)
1970	1.24	381 (183)	242	(116)	119	(57)
1980	3.12	439[i] (439)	328	(328)	201	(201)

Notes: a. Nominal. On the London market in 1920, and on the Kuala Lumpur market in other years.

b. Using the following consumer price index (1982 = 100) as an inflator: 1920 = 22; 1930 = 14; 1940 = 14; 1950 = 37; 1960 = 44; 1970 = 48; 1982 = 100. All figures include value of perquisites.

c. Average earnings of a sample covering about 3/4 of the manufacturing workforce.

d. Male. Up to 1930 figures are for Indian tappers, and are medians of quoted daily ranges multiplied by 26 working days. From 1930, figures quoted monthly averages for all male tappers. Field workers earned 20-30% less.

e. Earnings assuming that 2 hectares are tapped with the average smallholding yields of Table 2.1, where under the *bagi dua* system the tapper gets 50% of the crop and receives the following proportions of the f.o.b. prices quoted in Table 2.1: 50% in 1920; 60% in 1930-1950; and 70% from 1960. (These increasing percentages reflect the increasing quality of the crop.)

f. Figures in brackets are nominal (actual) figures for the year shown.

g. Assuming an average of 13 working days per month in 1930, compared with 26 days in all other years.

h. Figure for 1962.

i. Figure for 1981.

Sources: Department of Statistics (1984) for manufacturing employees' earnings; Figart (1925); Parmer (1960); and other sources quotedby Barlow (1978) for estate rubber tapper's earnings, 1920-1940; and Malaya/Malaysia (1965-1985) for estate rubber tapper's earnings, 1950-1980.

clear the jungle or scrub, burn the cut material, contour steeper ground, and plant rubber seedlings after some minimal cultivation. Provided there was then some 'maintenance' of the interrow, the trees would come into tapping after about six years, reach their peak yield five years thereafter, and continue to give good economic outputs for up to two further decades.

The estate records of the boom years reveal what may only be described as an incredibly high rate of employment of labour per hectare (Table 2.3), although this had already been reduced somewhat with the decline in price from 1912 (Akers, 1914). As late as 1919, a group of sterling companies used an average of over 1,200 man days per hectare to plant and cultivate rubber trees to maturity (Figart, 1925). This huge labour input, which was complemented by a commensurately high management cost, compared to an estimated use of about 150 man days per hectare for development under similar conditions on smallholdings.[4] The estate excess seems to be explained largely by clean weeding and impeccable maintenance, contrasting with the more homespun approach of the small farmers. The labour employed in estate tapping in these early years also appears to have been much higher. With the disinclination of local Malays to undertake estate duties, the main recourse had to be to workers from South India and South China, and to a lesser extent from Java (Table 2.1).

The miserable working and living conditions for early Malaysian estate labourers, both in the clearing of jungle and in the cramped unsanitary lines where the Indian Tamils (but not the Chinese or Malays) lived, are already well documented (Jackson, 1961; Chapter 10). Thus on the admittedly low-lying Midlands estate near Klang, nearly half the population died over the three years 1910-1912, despite the supervised daily taking of quinine (Highlands and Lowlands Para Rubber Company, 1957). The average earnings of Tamil estate workers in these years altered little, remaining around an average of $17 per month through to 1920 and beyond (Table 2.2), although varying with health conditions. Earnings fluctuated

4. No recorded data are available on smallholding labour inputs of the time, although general accounts of conditions are available (ABFMS, 1912-1922; Whitford, 1931). However, Barlow and Muharminto (1982) studied smallholder rubber production 60 years later under the very similar circumstances of South Sumatra, where unselected seedling trees were being established after land clearing using traditional tools. Here, the average labour input for planting and maintaining rubber trees to maturity on a carefully recorded sample of 250 farms was 150 man days per hectare. Labour inputs in tapping were also much less than those on early estates. Comparisons of estimated labour, management, and capital inputs on Peninsular Malaysian estates and smallholdings over the years 1922-1978 have been made by Barlow and Jayasuriya (1984).

TABLE 2.3

OUTPUTS AND AREAS PER WORKER[a] ON ESTATES AND SMALLHOLDINGS IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA, 1910-1980

Year	Estates		Smallholdings[b]	
	Output per Worker tonnes	Area per Worker ha	Output per Worker tonnes	Area per Worker ha
1910	n.a.	1.0	n.a.	n.a.
1920	n.a.	2.5	n.a.	n.a.
1930	1.2	3.7	n.a.	n.a.
1940	1.0	2.4	n.a.	n.a.
1950	1.4	2.8	n.a.	n.a.
1960	1.5	2.8	0.9	2.3
1970	2.7	2.9	1.3	2.4
1980	3.0	3.0	1.8	2.4

Notes: a. Total outputs and total planted areas in each sector divided by total numbers of workers (Table 2.1).

b. Including both independent and group smallholdings.

Sources: International Rubber Study Group (1946-1985) for output data; and Table 2.1 for areas and number of workers.

much more for Chinese workers, who demanded higher rates when rubber prices were up and often switched to alternative employment when the market was down. The same was broadly true of Malay workers, although their rates were not as high.

While the low labour inputs in smallholding development were well reflected in what contemporary European observers considered 'slipshod' standards of maintenance and cultivation (ABFMS, 1912-1922), it is also clear that the unselected seedlings used in the first *stratum* rubber technology gave rubber yields as high as those secured from estates (Table 2.1; Bauer, 1948a).[5] There

5. Technologies are crudely but conveniently regarded here as proceeding to higher, more technically and economically efficient levels by successive 'strata', each of which represents the emergence of a new set of innovations (and their underlying production functions). In fact, the progress to higher levels tends to be continuous.

was little doubt that the continuing estate policies of 'clean weeding' encouraged the spread of disease, and that this combined with relatively lower tree planting densities tended to depress yields. On the other hand, the *quality* of smallholding rubber which was processed in primitive local facilities and sold to local Chinese traders, was generally much inferior to the output of estates, which was handled through central factory arrangements. It thus earned commensurately lower returns (Whitford, 1931). In the overall picture it may be judged that smallholdings at this stage were as economically viable as estates, to which they were to appear as a distinct 'threat' in the later inter-war depression (Chapter 3).

The living conditions and health of smallholders in this period were certainly far better than those of their resident estate worker counterparts. The Malays especially were used to the jungle fringes, where they had lived for generations and established commensurate lifestyles with an endemic equilibrium (Ooi Jin Bee, 1959). The Chinese smallholders were largely people with farming backgrounds, and careful of their health. The earnings of smallholders were also much better than those of estate workers. Based on what seem to be reasonable assumptions for the average conditions of the time, smallholding share tappers who received 50 per cent of the liquid rubber latex and all the scrap (the residue left behind after collecting the liquid latex) on the *bagi dua* ('for two') system would in 1920 have earned about $142 per month, almost double the returns of their estate counterparts (Table 2.2).[6] The smallholding owner-operators who farmed their holdings personally and constituted the majority of workers would have earned at least 150 per cent of the share tappers' return, although such earnings would then have included a reward to earlier investment in clearing and planting trees.

Even in these early years, the 'topography' of the estate and smallholding workforces was already established in patterns which have largely persisted. Thus, on estates, the dominant group of workers was the Indian Tamils (Table 2.1), who had largely come as assisted migrants under the Tamil Immigration Fund, and were entirely resident in provided quarters. This was the group of workers mentioned by de Silva (1982), disjoined from its native context and with an inward looking hierarchical and expatriate society,

6. The *bagi dua* system has changed little over time, although modern owners in labour-scarce Malaysia sometimes provide extra perquisites.

whose structure was vividly described fifty years later by Jain (1970). Until the late 1930s, at least, the Tamils appeared to form a pliable and docile group, relatively easy for management to exploit on minimum wage rates, and very much the archetype of cheap labour. Then there were the Chinese, who lived in nearby villages and were employed chiefly by contractors. These people were certainly good tappers, but were often too expensive for this purpose, and were employed mainly for the particularly difficult work of opening jungle and clearing. While sometimes exploited by contractors, they were never pliant workers, and would withhold their services if they thought themselves underpaid. Finally, the Malay and Javanese estate workers were also non-residents, being especially important in the 'peripheral' estate areas of Johore, Kelantan and Pahang, where they, like the Chinese, worked in groups clearing jungle. Their numbers declined after 1910 (Table 2.1) as they resorted to smallholding cultivation on land to which they had relatively easy access.

The topography of the smallholding workforce was also determined quite early in a pattern distinguishing the two main groups of Malays and Chinese, who tended to occupy their lands in racially separated blocks of holdings, albeit comprising relatively few farms in some instances. For the Malay farmers, rubber was an ideal means of transferring to commercial agriculture. Thus this new crop offered flexible management (trees could be tapped two or three times per week, or at longer intervals depending on the farmer's intentions); limited reliance on skill (yields improved with more skill in tapping but trees would give a fair yield from poor tapping); easy disposal of output (once coagulated and made into sheets the latex product could be sold easily to itinerant dealers); and a good cash potential (immediate cash return). Quite often the Malays secured help in opening their lands from autonomous Javanese migrants, who in a system still followed in Sumatra today would be fed, housed, and later receive a share of the trees they had helped establish (Tunku Shamsul Bahrin, 1967). The Chinese, in contrast, were largely tin mine and rubber estate workers who opened and then farmed their rubber blocks as part of a range of family activities. They were also more likely to be influenced by estate practices, which although not initially advantageous in production generally led to a better processed product. Even in these early years, Chinese-owned rubber lands tended to be more extensive than those of the Malays, who generally confined rubber planting to the clearing capabilities and needs of immediate families. Both Malay

and Chinese smallholders also employed distant family members and others as share tappers, who were nonetheless a minority of the total smallholder workforce.

Colonial government actions were important to these various groups of workers in different ways. The chief measure keeping the wages of the Indian estate labourer group at a constant and low level was undoubtedly labour supply control through the Tamil Immigration Fund, established in 1908, which paid for and arranged the sea passages of all independent and *kangany*-recruited labour from South India (this official body, active until 1917, was largely financed through employer contributions). There were also various ordinances intended to improve living conditions which had positive, albeit minor, effects (Parmer, 1960). In respect of smallholders, the major official action involved regulation of their land supply, most importantly through the Malay Reservations Enactment of 1913 which reflected the dominant 'custodial' attitude toward Malays, and which progressively reserved wide areas of land for them. Sometimes rubber cultivation in reserved areas was either prohibited or only allowed at higher rents, in line with the further policy of encouraging food crop production, (though generally prohibition was ignored). Government also rationed the land supply of all smallholders by periodically 'closing the books' at Land Offices, and this undoubtedly restricted smallholder expansion despite widespread illegal planting (Lim Teck Ghee, 1977; Drabble, 1978).

1920-1940

Between 1920 and 1940 the rubber industry entered years of depression and difficulty which were to have adverse effects on all workers, but especially the Indian Tamils. There was first a substantial price depression in the early 1920s (Fig. 2.1), which although followed by a considerable boom was then succeeded by an even more catastrophic drop in price from 1929. While some rubber was planted on both estates and smallholdings (Table 2.1) the rate of advance was far lower and largely in response to a few years of higher prices.

From the beginning of this period, the estates were forced by the threat of bankruptcy to economise drastically, and naturally did this through curtailing their most liberally used resources — labour and management. Paradoxically, however, and essentially because these resources had previously been wasted on unnecessarily in-

tensive cultivation, the yields of tapped areas were barely affected although some plantings were also taken out of cultivation. Total rubber production was thus maintained, but did not increase much (Malaya/Malaysia 1932-1985). The estate workforce dropped by about 30 per cent in the early 1920s, but recovered as rubber prices rose again. It fell drastically after 1929, when many workers were repatriated, but expanded once more as prices improved in the mid-1930s (see Table 2.1). Reflecting these changes, the area of rubber land per worker rose dramatically to 3.7 hectares in 1930, although it subsequently declined to its previous level (Table 2.3).

Side by side with these dramatic events, another less obtrusive but very significant change was also occurring. Earlier Indonesian work on the budgrafting of rubber at Bogor in 1916 had not only opened the way to second *stratum* technology, but had led to these trees being planted on Malaysian estates from the late 1920s (Barlow, 1985). Although the materials involved and the new cultivation practices accompanying them barely affected estate yields by 1940, their influence would be strongly felt in the post-war period.

The widespread retrenchments of the 1920s and 1930s caused great hardship to estate workers. While large numbers returned to India and China and the inward flow of immigrants was slowed (Saw Swee Hock, 1963), others stayed in the labour lines as unemployed persons, often in miserable conditions and dependent on the severely reduced band of wage earners. Conditions were worst following the massive dismissals in 1930, when even the previously recognised 'standard' wages of the remaining labourers were largely ignored (Parmer, 1960). Thus the nominal (actual) estate wage of remaining workers in 1930 had fallen to just over half that of 1920 (Table 2.2), although the difference expressed in dollars of 1982 was much less owing to a compensating decline in the cost of living.

These great difficulties were at last succeeded by improvement, however, and while this was occasioned partly by the slowly rising rubber price from the mid-1930s (Fig. 2.1), there were two important new factors at work. First, there was increasing political resistance by the Indian Government to the concept of worker immigration to Malaya and its accompanying problems. This culminated in 1938 with a ban on all assisted Indian immigration. Such assisted migration was never to be renewed. Although not immediately significant to wages, the subsequent expansion of the industry with its now restricted Indian labour force started to push up rates. Second, and in moves related to those of other labouring groups, the Indian workers in particular began at long last to join

trade unions, and to replace their previous meekness with a far more militant attitude toward employers. There were several strikes and violent confrontations (Stenson, 1970) which helped in securing considerably higher earnings for all workers (Table 2.2).

In one sense at least, the rubber smallholders were able to withstand the crises of the 1920s and 1930s more resiliently than the estate workers (or estates), for their connection with subsistence crops meant that these could be emphasised more as the cash economy weakened. While some smallholders with larger areas who had borrowed money for investment in planting were quite seriously affected, most operators did not have debts of this kind. Certainly, too, the production systems on rubber smallholdings were now increasingly perceived as a 'threat' by estate interests, which began to see that under first *stratum* technology the former were more viable economic units (Whitford, 1931; Chapter 5). Information on the number of workers on rubber smallholdings in this period is not available, but it is likely that when associated agriculture is included they increased with influxes of unemployed workers.

Significantly, however, and in vivid contrast to the estates, virtually no progress was made by smallholders in shifting to second *stratum* planting materials in the considerable new areas of rubber still being established (Table 2.1). Even at this early stage, very few smallholders could afford the substantial cost either of planting such materials or of following the improved practices needed to grow them satisfactorily (Malaya/Malaysia, 1932-1985). As long-term loans were basically unavailable in rural areas only a few wealthy Chinese businessmen-smallholders, who had access to capital from other sources, were able to afford the cost of getting the necessary budgrafts and applying the necessary fertilisers. This was a very basic difficulty which has haunted the smallholder scene ever since. The smallholders, however, did achieve some progressive enhancement of rubber quality through better processing, which began to be reflected in higher returns.

The earnings of smallholding share tappers during most of this period were probably superior to those of estate labourers. This was marginally so in the case of rubber alone (Table 2.2), but the returns from this crop would have been swelled substantially by the value of subsistence products. The smallholding workers improved their position far less in the late 1930s, however, and by 1940 had begun to fall well behind. In the smallholding subsector there was no substantially increased competition for labourers, whose numbers

were not limited by prohibitions on immigration or ethnic barriers, and whose ability to organise in disparate and isolated locations was negligible. The crop taken by share tappers accordingly remained at 50 per cent, with their level of returns being determined by the ruling price of rubber.

Government measures in this period were again of major importance for estate workers, notably in terms of the restriction on labour supply through the action in India. The colonial government also made further efforts to improve working conditions, although these had little real meaning during the years of retrenchment. For the smallholders the most significant official moves were those to restrict rubber output in an attempt to push up the international market price of this product (the Stevenson Scheme, 1922-1928, and the International Rubber Regulation Agreement, 1934-1942). In both cases output quotas were allocated in a manner which penalised smallholdings more severely than estates (Whittlesey, 1931; Bauer, 1948b; Lim Teck Ghee, 1977), and the associated prohibition of new planting in the second scheme cut off their investment in improved future livelihood. The disadvantages of these provisions outweighed any benefits springing from the higher prices generated by output curtailment. The planting restrictions had also been preceded by continued restraints on new land alienation for rubber in the 1920s, and by a complete ban in the Federated Malay States from 1930, again in the hope of encouraging food crop production (Whitford, 1931). While many small farmers once more circumvented such curbs by illegal expansions (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1934a:717/104/3352), there is no doubt that a giant wave of intentions to plant was held back, and that the new smallholding rubber areas (and cash returns) would otherwise have been far greater.

1950-1970

In the early 1950s, following the war and Communist Emergency, the Malaysian rubber industry began to move towards reconstruction. While 1950 and 1951 saw exceedingly high rubber prices during the Korean War (Fig. 2.1) and quite high yields from what were still predominantly unselected seedling trees (Table 2.1), it was now becoming apparent that smallholders in particular were beginning to suffer from over-aged trees needing replacement. This problem was energetically tackled by government from the mid-1950s, following the report of the 'Mudie' Mission of Enquiry into

the Rubber Industry (Malaya, 1954), and by 1970 nine-tenths of the 1950s' planted rubber on estates, and two-thirds of that on smallholdings, had been replaced at least once by high yielding trees (Barlow, 1978). The pace of change was quickened, and the atmosphere transformed, by the assumption in 1957 of Independence from Britain under the Alliance government comprising Malay, Chinese and Indian groups, and the continuation of this government in power from then until 1970 (and as the National Front up to the present day). In contrast to earlier colonial policies the official emphasis, which was much spurred by the grass-roots pressures exerted through the network of village-level branches of the United Malay National Organisation, the dominant partner in the Alliance government, was on development for the small farmers and rural landless. Replanting was but one of many measures adopted to this end.

For the estates which were still largely expatriate but dealt with fairly by an essentially conservative regime, the period was one of dramatic adoption of new technology. The potential for practical innovation of their hierarchical management, and the benefits of their access to capital in enabling investment in new trees and the necessary complementary inputs, now became very plain. The rapid improvement is reflected in average estate yields, which by 1970 were more than double their 1950 level (Table 2.1). In the process of change further savings were made in labour and supervision, while the share of capital inputs increased. Also the output of rubber per worker also almost doubled from 1950-1970, although the area of rubber land per worker changed relatively little (Table 2.3). This was also a period when, with the decline in rubber prices (Fig. 2.1), the higher profitability of oil palm, and its ability to replace rubber (and save labour) became increasingly apparent. The substantial reduction in estate rubber area (Table 2.1) was largely accounted for by changes to this crop.

The estate workers benefited from such technical change, despite the decline in rubber prices. The first Plantation Worker's Union of Negri Sembilan had been established in 1946 in the radically changed post-war political environment (Gamba, 1962). In 1954, following the further emergence of similar groups around the country, the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) was formed as the sole bargaining agency on behalf of Indian (and later other) plantation workers. After what developed into the most severe industrial action, a national go-slow in 1955, steady progress was made towards bettering the conditions of plantation workers.

The essentially right-wing but avowedly non-political leadership of the Union handled its relations with government astutely, and in an officially regulated process of bargaining with employers secured a widening range of benefits which much improved the lives of the workers concerned. Thus the Black and White Book (National Union of Plantation Workers, 1969), shows how workers moved from a 'black' position of a flat 70 cents per day and three days' paid holiday per year in 1946 to a 'white' position in 1965 of $3.55 per day, nineteen day's paid holidays, a fixed day of rest, a bonus in times of high rubber prices, and many other improvements. A further factor helping the Union was the 'cultural-racial' barrier to the entry into the estate workforce of outside labourers, where the Indian element particularly tended to resent the entry of other groups. The Union did not reflect this through overt objection but rather through implicit and, to a large extent, unconsciously exercised pressures. This barrier generally acted to maintain the levels of plantation earnings, which by 1970 had risen substantially despite the fall in rubber price (Table 2.2).

It was at this juncture that the basic difficulty of single-handed independent smallholders in coping with and benefiting from technical change became really apparent (Bauer, 1948a; Malaya, 1954). The provision, following the Mudie Report, of official grants to cover the costs of new planting materials and associated chemical inputs, was thus crucial in enabling the replanting that followed, and was made more effective by associated advice and inspection procedures. Much greater expenditures per hectare were made, and more detailed technical supervision provided for the large group smallholding schemes of the Federal Land Development Authority which, together with a range of other similar group arrangements, were instituted on a wide scale from the late 1950s and catered mainly for landless workers. The establishment of these group schemes chiefly accounted for the great increases in smallholding areas and numbers of workers from 1860 to 1980 (Table 2.1). The substantial productive employment created by these schemes would certainly have tended to enhance the general wage level in the rural community.

The technical improvements over this period in all smallholding sectors are reflected in the increased average yield (Table 2.1). The progress here was not as great as that on the estates, however, and the average productivity per worker on smallholdings was still less than half that on estates in 1970 (Table 2.3). Large areas of smallhold

ings also remained unimproved, and were now in much worse condition than in the early 1950s.

The independent owner-occupying smallholders who took advantage of the replanting grants with what was now a considerably more labour-intensive approach than estates (Barlow and Jayasuriya, 1984) may have slightly improved their earnings over this period. Yet the gains accruing to enhanced yields were largely cancelled out by the almost continuous price decline from 1960 to 1970 (Fig. 2.1). It is accordingly doubtful if such smallholders would have earned more than estate workers in 1970, and the share tappers working for them earned far less (Table 2.2). Those concerned with the large residual area of unimproved low-yielding rubber, however, would have had even poorer returns. Thus, Lee (1977) analysed the dramatic fall in rubber smallholders' revenues between 1957 and 1970, and indicated the poverty implications of this for the group with 'low-yielding' holdings. He estimated this group as involving over 35 per cent of rubber smallholding workers and particularly comprising the landless and those with small areas. More information about such poverty has been given through various field investigations including those of Fisk (1961), Bevan (1962), Ho (1967), Barlow and Chan (1969), and Selvadurai (1972). All workers on smallholdings also continued to be fully subject to price fluctuations, which obviously bore most severely on those at the poorest income levels.

The low-yielding farmers were mainly Malays, whose only other source of livelihood was limited areas of predominantly subsistence crops. Although the authors of the studies just quoted all saw replanting with high-yielding materials as a route towards improvement, it was recognised as difficult to follow even with the availability of replanting grants. This was essentially because of the severe revenue loss for such small operators during the immature period, although other factors such as lack of agreement amongst multiple owners, were also common (Ho, 1970). A growing trend towards polarisation in Malay peasant society, with serious poverty consequences for the poorer group, and inbuilt social features reinforcing the process, was accordingly seen by Swift (1967).

Some of the drastically changed post-Independence policies of the government towards rubber development in this period have already been described. Also, in respect of estate workers, official recognition of the Union as the legal representative of the workers, and the regulation of the bargaining process to ensure that estates recognised this position, greatly aided the Union in making its im-

portant gains. In the case of smallholders, the policies already outlined were accompanied by the widespread improvement of rural roads and other infrastructures in a new major thrust towards rural development (Ness, 1967), and by the further provision of extension programs and superior rubber processing facilities (Barlow, 1978). It was thus a tragedy that what was essentially a well-meaning and in many ways effective policy of promoting small farm growth proved unable to remedy the socio-economic problems of a substantial portion of the rural community. The severe interracial riots of 1969 heightened awareness of the poverty problem, however, and revised policies to tackle it were then formulated.

THE 1980s

The 1980s were years of decline for rubber, when the share of the industry in the national economy diminished steadily in the face of rapid expansions in manufacturing, services, and other elements, and when its area and output also remained static (Malaya/Malaysia, 1965-1985). Although the price of rubber, together with that of synthetic rubber substitutes, had improved greatly in conjunction with both the first and second 'oil shocks' in the early and late 1970s (Fig. 2.1), it had otherwise remained depressed, and, on average for the period from 1970 to the mid-1980s, had fallen in real terms. Against this, the burgeoning general economic development of Malaysia had led, by the late 1970s in particular, to a peninsula-wide 'labour shortage' and to consequent increases in real wages (Table 2.2). While the earnings of manufacturing employees did not rise so much as those of tappers, they were still higher in 1980, and would have been more attractive to rural dwellers despite higher urban living costs.

Thus, from the late 1970s in particular, there was a great movement of younger workers from rural to urban areas in search both of employment opportunities and of the changed lifestyles becoming open to them. At long last, in fact, the old segmentation of the Malaysian labour market with its divisions along racial and occupational lines was beginning to disappear, and workers in all fields could look realistically at other than traditional ways of earning their livelihoods. Also in the 1970s, oil palm had emerged with even greater strength as a more profitable (and less labour-intensive) plantation crop than rubber, and was accordingly being established on a wide scale throughout the Peninsula. The further decline in the estate rubber workforce by 1980 (Table 2.1) was largely ac-

counted for by transfer to this crop, although it should be noted that the official number would have been supplemented by Indonesians, who entered the peninsula illegally from the mid-1970s in response to very high wage rates compared with those back home. The continued expansion of the rubber smallholding workforce was entirely due to another increase in group smallholdings as part of the renewed efforts by government to eliminate rural poverty.

Within the situation of their shrinking rubber area, the estates continued their successful policy of capital-using technological improvement and the steady replacement of older trees. Their average annual yields of rubber per hectare and per worker continued to rise, although there was again little alteration in the ratio between workers and areas of land (Tables 2.1 and 2.3). The very substantial further rise in earnings of rubber estate workers, which increased by 36 per cent between 1970 and 1980 (Table 2.2), reflected not only the activities of the National Union of Plantation Workers but also the increasing tightness of the general labour market. Under these circumstances, the working conditions of plantation labour again improved substantially, and there was increasing concern by employers over the undermanning of rubber estate cultivation, at least according to conventional standards (Nayagam and Abdullah bin Sepien, 1981; United Planting Association of Malaysia, 1983).

Outputs per hectare and per worker on smallholdings in the 1970-1980 period actually rose considerably more than on estates (Tables 2.1 and 2.2), but it is important to note that these averages hid a growing polarisation between 'progressive' independent and group smallholders on the one hand, and 'less progressive' independent smallholders on the other (Malaysian Rubber Research and Development Board, 1983). The progressive independent smallholders, who it was estimated occupied about half the 815,000 hectares under independent rubber smallholdings in 1980, had replanted regularly with high-yielding materials, and were successfully using new technologies. The owner-operators of such holdings accordingly had earnings from rubber as high as those of estate workers. They were also characterised, as had been the Chinese forerunners of some of them in the early days of the industry, by a network of other agricultural and non-agricultural activities which often earned the families concerned at least as much again as rubber, and indeed gave total incomes at least as great as could be gained from wider employment in manufacturing or services. There is no doubt that, given the official assistance with replanting,

the units operated by such progressive smallholders were still economically viable. The operators involved were also beginning to move into oil palm in the early 1980s, particularly along the west coast where earlier investments in oil palm mills had made available spare processing capacity which could now be used by smallholders at relatively little cost. These smallholders tended to include more Chinese than Malays, and to comprise more younger farmers with a better asset base. The group smallholders, whose blocks had been new planted with high-yielding trees accompanied by appropriate complementary inputs and supervision from central management, were also securing very adequate yields.

In bleak contrast to these persons, the 'less progressive' smallholders had broadly failed to adjust to the new technologies, although the distinction between them and the 'progressive' group is not clear-cut. While some had managed to replant with high-yielding rubber, they had not used complementary inputs, and had thus secured relatively poor results. A substantial proportion were in the low-yielding group categorised by Lee (1977), and had not replanted at all; some of these had already abandoned their lands completely by the early 1980s. The poverty-stricken conditions of the less progressive group, whose owner-operators certainly earned far less from rubber than estate workers, were well documented by detailed studies during the 1970s (Gibbons, De Koninck and Ibrahim Hasan, 1980; Abu Asmara bin Haji; Mohamed, 1982; Rubber Industry Smallholders' Development Authority, 1983). For instance, 62 per cent of the 338,137 smallholders surveyed by the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority had a family *per capita* income in 1977 of less than $45 per month — the official poverty line in 1978. Many younger members of such families had already left to take up urban employment in the early 1980s, but the older people still remained behind in what was increasingly emerging as a poverty stricken segment of a rapidly growing national economy.

Under these conditions, the earnings of share tappers with the continuing *bagi dua* system could not compete with returns elsewhere, and the pool of active workers prepared to partake in such activity even on high-yielding holdings was quickly diminishing. One positive factor in this situation was the much stronger emergence from the 1970s of a group claiming to represent 'unorganised' farmers, the National Association of Smallholders. But although this group had already proved effective in procuring stronger representation in the various official bodies involved with

smallholders and in promoting a wider discussion of their problems, its suggestions for further government intervention and support did not appear likely to solve the problems of less progressive elements (Mohd Rashid Ahmad, 1984).

Polarisation, like that described for Malaysia, has not occurred to such a degree in the smallholding section of the rubber-producing countries where technical developments have been substantially less, and where there have been fewer employment opportunities and accompanying cash flows to reinforce the use of methods involving capital and skill. It should be mentioned, however, that similar polarisation has occurred in modern small farming in several other Southeast Asian contexts (see, for example, Smith, 1959; Hayami and Kikuchi, 1982).

The biggest single change in Malaysian government estate rubber policy in the 1980s was its buying out of most foreign interests — moves which began in the late 1970s. Yet, while the newly structured companies were 'expected to re-orient their policies in accordance with national aspirations' by the mid-1980s, neither the operation of the estates nor the workers themselves appeared to have been much affected by the change (Tun Ismail bin Mohamed Ali, 1984). The government also returned in a small way to its earlier policy of labour supply manipulation by regularising the position of the hitherto illegal Indonesian workers. Some of these persons were employed on plantations, and their presence would presumably have acted to depress the rise in wage rates. While no records of the number of such workers are publicly available, it is commonly agreed that the total employed in the rubber sector was at least 20-30,000 persons. Added to an officially recorded rubber estate workforce of 167,000 in 1980 (Table 2.1) this would certainly have affected estate wage levels.

On the smallholding side of rubber, and despite a considerably greater focus on eliminating poverty, the thrust of government policies in the rubber production phase had actually changed very little from the period up to 1970, continuing its emphasis on replanting grants, group smallholdings, and the improvement of infrastructures. There were also some special attempts to include less progressive independent elements in group arrangements and these notably included the 'mini-estates'. Here, contiguous blocks of abandoned old rubber parcels were redeveloped with new high-yielding trees and operated on behalf of the original owners by the Rubber Industry Smallholders' Development Authority. In practice, few of the owners or their families seem to have participated

in this development. The provision of improved rubber processing facilities also continued, and now involved the establishment of central factories to both enhance the quality of smallholders' rubber and improve competition for it. The government's main new policy initiative was its action from 1978 to reduce the rubber price fluctuations which had such adverse effects on low-income smallholders. This was done by participation in the buffer stock arrangements of the International Natural Rubber Agreement[7] which was a general measure affecting all classes of producers. The government further moved to raise domestic rubber prices in 1985 by cancelling much of the previous export duty. Despite all these measures, however, the less progressive independent rubber smallholders seemed to benefit little, remaining as a disadvantaged group for whom more direct methods of poverty alleviation had now become most appropriate. Such direct methods would involve special welfare measures and retraining programs to facilitate the transfer of people to new and more remunerative (but still relatively unskilled) occupations outside agriculture.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of the changing relative position of estate and independent smallholding workers in Malaysia broadly confirms the gradually enhanced advantage of the former, as they managed through Union activity to capture some benefits of the estate structure in terms of higher earnings for themselves. Against this, the overall economic progress of the independent smallholding structure was considerably less, and workers' earnings had to be spread more thinly in what became a relatively more labour-intensive system, as well as being more subject to price changes.

The study also indicates additional factors advantageous to workers in the estate subsector. First, the post-Independence government was prepared to recognise the Union and assign it a primary role in its bargaining with the employers. Secondly, the nature of the Malaysian rubber estate labour force with its distinct racial composition gave it certain 'natural barriers' to the entry of other workers, which reinforced the effects of the Union in this

7. The International Natural Rubber Agreement involved all the main producing and consuming countries, with purchases for (sales from) the rubber stock being made when prices were low (high). Price fluctuations may have been minimally reduced by this very expensive program, which was the subject of increasing disagreement by late 1985, and was particularly opposed within Malaysia by the National Association of Smallholders.

direction. Thirdly, the exceptionally rapid development of the wider national economy from the 1970s made for a much tighter, more remunerative, and less segmented labour market. While the particular effects of the Union and worker groups were likely to be less significant in this new situation, the growing shortage of labour gave it added bargaining power with employers who tended to favour more labour-intensive operations than were justified by the new wage: capital cost relationship.

It is further important to recognise the emergence of two distinct sub-groups amongst the smallholding workers. These broadly distinguished those who were enterprising, skilled, and knowledgeable enough to use modern technology and other opportunities to their economic advantage, and those who did not have these capabilities. Thus, the progressive owner-operating farmers were managing, after support from government replanting grants, to maintain their revenues from rubber quite well, and were also earning returns at least commensurate with those of estate workers when all activities were accounted for. In contrast, the less progressive owner-operating elements were locked into increasing poverty, where government action was needed to ease their transition to more remunerative unskilled employment outside their sector. Effective action was difficult, however, and various official measures had not been very successful.

In the expected Malaysian scenario of a shrinking rubber and agricultural sector with rising national wage levels, there is little doubt that the number of rubber workers will decline. The parallel involvement of estates and smallholdings and the two differing groups of workers seems likely to continue, however, since, given adjustments of the nature outlined in the chapter, both subsectors would appear able to remain economically viable under the changing economic circumstances. Yet with a much less segmented labour market, and with the movement out of rubber of less progressive elements, future relative wage levels are likely to be little different between the subsectors. Again, the great historical contrast between regimentation and more flexible independence will also be less marked, although elements of the comparison will persist.

It is also pertinent to examine the relevance of these Malaysian analyses to other rubber-producing countries. In respect of the comparison between estate and smallholding workers in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, it seems that without effective Union activity the latter

did not obtain any substantial wage advantage.[8] In addition, the smaller general economic development in these two countries as well as in Thailand meant that rubber workers' wages were not so subject to such outside pressures for increase.[9] In respect of polarisation between progressive and less progressive smallholders, this was not so marked in any of the other countries, owing to both the lesser technical development of smallholdings and lack of alternative opportunities encouraging a trend to more capital and management intensive production.

The position of rubber workers in Malaysia with its comparatively democratic system, distinctive ethnic relationships, and prosperous economy thus appears as almost unique. It is nonetheless interesting that the Malaysian rubber sector, in common with those in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, illustrates the positive feature of continued parallel viability on the part of estates and smallholdings with their different workers' living patterns. This feature gives some choice to workers in rural areas, and provides a wider institutional framework for long-term economic and social development.

8. Indeed, in Sri Lanka the racial distinctions of the Tamil estate labour force was turned against it (footnote 3).

9. While there were incipient signs of higher real earnings impelled by labour scarcity in the Indonesian Outer Islands in the early 1980s (Indonesia, 1978-1982), these were not yet of major significance.

3.
Politics of Survival: European Reactions in Malaya to Rubber Smallholders in the Inter-war Years[1]

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There is an extensive literature on the growth of primary-producing export industries in tropical countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The cultivation of rubber has attracted particular attention because it provides perhaps the outstanding example of an industry in which European-owned estates (predominantly in corporate ownership) operated alongside a very substantial Asian-owned sector, consisting principally of smallholdings (see Chapter 2). There were approximately 8 million acres (3.2 million ha) of rubber in Southeast Asia by 1940, of which nearly 7 million acres (2.8 million ha) were divided almost equally between Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. In the former smallholdings accounted for 39 per cent of the area planted, while in the latter they were in a majority at 54 per cent.[2] We shall focus on Malaya, but in order to give a satisfactory account of the period under consideration it is necessary also to take account of developments in the Netherlands East Indies.

The growth of the industry prior to the Second World War divides into two periods: the pioneer, or formative, stage between 1900 and 1920 with estates and smallholdings expanding largely unhindered in a free-market situation; and the second stage between 1921 and 1941 when the industry was caught up in the violent fluctuations of the international economy and had to operate under governmental restriction on exports of rubber for fourteen and a half out of these twenty years. A brief examination of the first of these periods will precede our main concern, the inter-war years in which Western interests, official and commercial, became increasingly aware and

1. The subject of this chapter forms part of a larger study being prepared for publication under the tentative title *Malayan Rubber Inter-War, 1922-1941*.

2. In Malaya holdings above 100 acres were estates, and those below were smallholdings. For certain administrative purposes the latter category was sometimes further divided into medium holdings (25-100 acres) and the 'true' smallholding (under 25 acres). There was no such classification in the Netherlands East Indies; holdings were either 'estate' or 'native'.

concerned about smallholding production as a factor in world markets. Fears were expressed that ultimately estates might not be able to compete, and that the industry would as a result 'go native' (see, for example Lockhart, 1936:204). The chapter will trace the emergence of this situation and how it was perceived by Westerners, was reflected in official policies and affected the livelihood of smallholders.

WESTERN PERCEPTIONS OF THE GROWTH OF SMALLHOLDINGS

Smallholder planting began in both Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies well before 1910, but acquired its main impetus in the second and third decades (Table 3.1). Malaya owed its initial lead to the relatively good accessibility of land resulting from the extensive road and rail network in the west coast regions (developed primarily to serve estates and mines). In the Netherlands East Indies the government gave priority in large land concessions to estates in Java and on the Sumatran east coast, thus smallholdings (or 'native rubber' as they were known) developed mainly in the less accessible parts of the Outer Islands (Jambi, Palembang and southwest Borneo). Thus, there was a marked contrast between the intermingling of estates and smallholdings in Malaya and their physical separation in the Netherlands East Indies (Barlow and Drabble, 1983). A further difference was that in Malaya the average smallholding size was 6.4 acres (2.6 ha) against about 2 acres (0.8 ha) in the Netherlands East Indies (Gehlsen, 1940:20). In the former country ownership was dispersed among Chinese, Indians (mostly in the 25-100 acre or 10-40 ha range) and Malays (under 25 acres or 10 ha), and in the latter it was almost exclusively in indigenous hands. A major characteristic of rubber was that substantial capital was not a *sine qua non* for entry into the industry. European estates, because of their size, management and labour structure, had to make a heavy investment. Smallholders needed little non-family labour, used seeds collected without cost from other properties, left ground conditions to natural cover, and used the bare minimum of equipment for harvesting and processing the rubber.

Outside a relatively small circle of European officials in Malaya, smallholder production up to about 1920 was regarded as a marginal factor hardly worthy of serious note. The first signs of a revision of opinion occur during the extended slump from 1920-1922. British companies, organised through the Rubber Growers

TABLE 3.1

SMALLHOLDINGS IN MALAYA AND NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES, 1900-1940

Year	Malaya	Netherlands East Indies
	acres	acres
1910	132,500	15,000
1920	810,000	272,500
1925	987,000	1,165,000
1930	1,207,500	1,822,500
1940	1,367,500	1,827,500

Source: Adapted from Barlow and Drabble (1983: Table 1).

Association in London, operated a voluntary scheme for restriction of output in 1920-1921. Its ultimate lapse was blamed largely on the lack of cooperation from other producers, notably the smallholders. British interests then turned to government and, after some equivocation, compulsory restriction of rubber exports was finally imposed in Malaya and Ceylon from 1 November 1922. The Dutch government had declined to introduce such a measure in the Netherlands East Indies, with the British speculating that this refusal stemmed partly from fear that it would cause political unrest among native producers there (Drabble, 1973).

The aim of the Stevenson restriction scheme, which operated for six years (1922-1928), was to keep off the market a proportion of the rubber which would otherwise have come up for sale, and thereby restore the price to profitable levels. It also sought to prevent the wide fluctuations which had characterised the earlier period. The machinery of the scheme will be examined in more detail in the next section. It is sufficient to note here that output became a controllable and therefore known quantity. Each producer, estate and smallholding, was allotted a Standard Production (SP) of which a specified amount, say 60 per cent, could be exported over a three month period. This quota was fixed in the light of prices in the preceding quarter. Producers in the Netherlands East Indies, as a result of the Dutch refusal to participate, were not subject to any such constraint over output (though a majority of British-owned

estates in the Netherlands East Indies, members of the Rubber Growers Association, agreed voluntarily to observe the restriction quotas). In the first two years of the scheme rubber prices rose slowly to just over one shilling per pound (0.45 kg). In 1925-1926 export quotas lagged behind a rapid escalation in demand and prices boomed to nearly five shillings per pound. These conditions prompted a burst of fresh investment in rubber cultivation in all the major producing countries. The attention of Westerners was caught particularly by the response of native producers in the Netherlands East Indies whose output by the mid-1920s was rapidly approaching the 100,000 ton (101,605 tonnes) mark against only 5400 tons (5490 tonnes) in 1921 (Figart, 1925: 278; Whitford, 1929: 93). As Table 3.1 shows, new planting activity by this group was unprecedented, with an estimated 500,000 acres (202,343 ha) going under rubber in just two years — 1925 and 1926.

To Western rubber interests (and this included Dutch companies) such explosive growth represented a factor which could possibly destabilise the market in the future when this vast acreage came into production. As early as February 1924 a meeting in Djokjakarta (Yogjakarta) between two European unofficial members of the Federal Council (Federated Malay States) and the Rubber Producers Association of Batavia had recognised the 'closely allied interests' of companies in countries such as the Netherlands East Indies, Malaya and Ceylon (FMS, 1924a). A further meeting in October 1924 in Batavia (Jakarta) resolved more explicitly that 'there exists a danger to the European rubber industry ... British and Dutch, and that is the D.E.I. (Dutch East Indies) native-grown rubber, exports of which have risen to a disquieting height' (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1924a: 717/34). The principal outcome was a decision to try to gauge the dimensions of this phenomenon by obtaining accurate data on area and output potential. In 1925 a Native Rubber Investigation Committee (NRIC) was set up in the Netherlands East Indies and published regular reports over the two following years (RGAB, 1926-1928).

After the boom of 1925-1926, rubber prices declined steadily again, despite a progressive tightening of restriction in British territories. Dissatisfaction with the scheme grew, not least because Malaya's position as the premier producer was being steadily eroded (from 51 per cent of world exports in 1920 down to 38 per cent in 1927) by developments in the Netherlands East Indies. Moreover, some stringent criticisms of the European estate sector of the industry were coming from official sources. Companies were

seen as having sheltered behind restriction instead of using the improved market conditions to develop more cost-effective economic practices. A particular critic was W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore (Great Britain, 1928:141), Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, who visited Ceylon, Malaya and Java in 1928 and reported:

> Native rubber production ... is the chief obstacle to all schemes of restriction ... and introduces an element of competition which is destined to put European estates, their high overhead charges and costly management, to an increasingly severe test... The only justification for the present complicated and expensive mechanism of directors, agent firms, visiting agents, managers and shareholders is the application of greater intelligence and skill than the native can reasonably be expected to acquire.

Ormsby-Gore envisaged that the main avenue through which this 'skill and intelligence' could be applied was for estates to gain a competitive edge by rapid adoption of technological advances, notably the high-yielding varieties of rubber trees capable of outputs per acre (0.4 ha) two to three times those of the trees currently in production. If this were done on a sufficiently wide scale, in five or six years estates could 'overshadow the menace of native rubber' (Great Britain, 1928:148). The general assumption among Europeans was that smallholders would not be able to adopt this innovation, at least in the short term; for example the economist J.W.F. Rowe (1931:80) considered that 'such scientific cultivation is not for this generation of natives, either in Malaya or in the N.E.I. (Netherlands East Indies), nor for the next'.

The question of technological innovation, however, was shelved in the Great Depression (1929-1932) which followed soon after the end of the Stevenson restriction scheme in October 1928. London prices over these years averaged only just above four pence per pound. The slump once again confronted the rubber industry with the problems of excess productive capacity, as the large areas of rubber planted in the 1925-1926 boom came to maturity at the same time that stocks surplus to immediate needs piled up in consuming countries — the outputs per acre of estates and smallholdings in Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies between 1929 and 1933 being shown in Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2

ESTIMATED ESTATE AND SMALLHOLDING OUTPUT, 1929-1933

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
Average London price (pence per lb)	10.3	5.9	3.1	2.3	3.2
			lbs per mature acre		
Malaya - estates	410	380	375	365	355
Malaya - smallholdings	480	460	445	385	465
N.E.I. - estates	380	375	395	345	365
N.E.I. - smallholdings	430	245	170	105	165

Source: Bauer (1948b:29).

In both countries estate managements enforced stringent economies, such as reduced wages and salaries, while at the same time keeping production levels as high as possible in order to bring down unit costs of production. In Malaya the productivity per acre of smallholdings between 1929 and 1931 — well above that of estates — caused great surprise among Europeans. The general conclusion was that the smallholders, once free of compulsory restriction, tended to over-tap their trees thus boosting output in the short run but ultimately facing decline due to lack of tappable bark (Carrie, 1930). In the Netherlands East Indies, on the other hand, native production decreased very sharply to just under 20 per cent of estimated potential in 1932. Westerners, however, could draw little reassurance from this trend, because natives in the Outer Islands were thought to be able to turn back temporarily to food crops when rubber prices were extremely low. Improved market conditions would very quickly lead to a revival in production. A report prepared for the Rubber Growers Association in 1929, based on visits to the main smallholder areas in the Netherlands East Indies, envisaged yields per acre of twice the estate average. In aggregate terms, given rubber prices around 1/6d per pound, native production by the mid-1930s could be in the region of 300,000 tons (304,814 tonnes), or four times the current level. Significantly the report commented that 'the possibilities of expansion of the planted area are almost unlimited' (Tayler and Stephens, 1929:91-97). Much

the same view was contained in a series of five reports written between 1928 and 1932 by Dr. H.N. Whitford for the Rubber Manufacturer's Association of America. In one instance he described Netherlands East Indies natives as 'quick marginal producers', capable of rapid response to changed market conditions (Whitford, 1932:5). Malayan smallholders were 'from the standpoint of costs ... the most efficient of all producers of rubber' (Whitford, 1932-1933:33). Whitford did not conclude from this that smallholdings should completely replace estates as suppliers of rubber to the world. On the contrary, Whitford (1932:9) urged estate owners to rationalise continually and to improve their business methods since 'in the struggle for existence, the survivors will be those who *reduce and maintain permanently* costs of production at levels so low as to discourage the output of Asiatic rubber in part or in full' (italics original). The cumulative effect on Western interests of this growing volume of material on smallholdings cannot but have increased their apprehension of this sector as an unpredictable and destabilising force in the market. By contrast estate production was thought to be a known and reliable quantity. Rowe's (1931:80) words illustrate this point:

> The ultimate interests of the consumer lie in the extension of the plantation system of production, and not with the native ... the plantation industry offers a better chance of cheap rubber in the future, and that alone is in the long run the criterion by which the two systems must be judged.

This is closely related to Rowe's view (cited earlier) that only European estates were capable of adopting the new technology of high-yielding trees.

Western estate managements, however, were more concerned during the slump with the immediate problems of survival rather than technological innovation. A re-imposition of compulsory restriction on exports was seen as vital, but requiring on this occasion the participation of the Dutch. The negotiation of an international agreement proved to be a very prolonged process, starting in 1930 and dragging on till early 1934, and involving much delicate Anglo-Dutch diplomacy. We shall look at this in more detail in the next section, but we may note that a central, perhaps the most crucial issue, was whether effective control of native growers in the

Netherlands East Indies was possible. Table 3.2 indicates that 1932 was the nadir for production by this group. In later years Mr. J.G. Hay, Managing Director of Guthrie & Co., one of the largest British agency houses in Malaya, remarked that this drop indicated 'the inability of native owners to produce regular and adequate supplies of rubber' (IRRC, 1935). In 1933 output began to recover as prices picked up somewhat, and by early 1934, Netherlands East Indies exports of native-grown rubber were running at an annual equivalent of 300,000 tons (305,000 tonnes), against a mere 61,000 tons (62,000 tonnes) in 1932 (Bauer, 1948b:102). The prospect of such a huge upsurge while prices were still unprofitable for many European estates, was largely instrumental in bringing about the imposition of restriction from June 1934.

The International Rubber Regulation Agreement (IRRA) operated until the outbreak of war in the Pacific. The signatories were the British, Dutch and French governments for their respective territories in South and Southeast Asia, together with India and Siam. The scheme was administered by an International Rubber Regulation Committee (IRRC) meeting in London. Control of exports was effected through a quota system not too dissimilar to the Stevenson scheme. Each country had a basic annual quota, and was represented on the Committee by a delegation whose size and voting power were determined by its share in the aggregate of country quotas. The Malayan and Netherlands East Indies delegations, including respectively the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee, were the largest, and entirely European in composition (except for Pangeran Ario Soejono for the Netherlands East Indies). Apart from some major problems in controlling the volume of native exports from the Netherlands East Indies during the first two years of the scheme (considered in the next section), the specific interests and role of smallholders were glossed over or simply set aside. For example, the International Rubber Regulation Committee meeting in September 1937 discussed the question of the 'fair and equitable' rubber price level 'reasonably remunerative to efficient producers' as compared to average costs of production. A non-voting member of the Advisory Panel of Manufacturers, representing consumer interests in the United States, United Kingdom and (until 1939) Germany, raised the question of whether smallholder costs should be included when such costs were being calculated. Delegates representing the Netherlands East Indies, North Borneo and French Indo-China argued that insufficient data existed on the smallholder sector, and that 'no useful purpose' could

be served by trying to combine native and European costs into a single figure. Their view was that since smallholders could not meet the total world demand for rubber, it was the costs of European estate producers which would 'necessarily determine' any price level (IRRC, 1937). Overall, under the International Rubber Regulation Agreement European interests achieved through administrative measures the direct control over smallholder production which they believed necessary to resist the 'swamping' effect so feared in the early 1930s.

OFFICIAL POLICIES TOWARDS SMALLHOLDERS

There are some interesting contrasts between the policies of the British and Dutch colonial governments towards smallholders in the formative period of the industry. In the Netherlands East Indies, as already noted, provided the ready access of estates to large areas of land was not hindered, the government was perfectly prepared to accept native participation in commercial agriculture. The two sectors thus developed physically apart, with little interaction. The Malayan administration would have liked a similar spatial separation, but for rather different reasons. Capitalistic estate-type ventures were seen as the main vehicle for commercial development of the country, while peasant (Malay) agriculturalists were expected to adhere to traditional foodstuff crops, notably rice. In the Federated Malay States from 1905 the policy was not to grant to smallholders prime rubber land with road frontage suitable for estate occupation (Drabble, 1973:72). But the force of the 1909-1910 boom swept aside attempts to maintain any rigid distinctions. Estates and smallholdings became inextricably intermingled, with the insatiable appetite of the former for more land (preferably already planted) introducing a speculative market which brought windfall profits to peasants. Officials in the Federated Malay States became increasingly concerned at sales of Malay 'ancestral' land to non-Malays lest this produce a class of indigenous landless 'vagabonds' (Drabble, 1973:73). The outcome was the Malay Reservations Enactment (1913), the underlying principle of which was to encourage the growth of largely self-sufficient communities as little dependent on commercial agriculture as possible. Malays were, however, not greatly attracted to these areas, and continued to plant rubber not primarily for speculative purposes (the land sales boom having subsided) but for its year-round earning potential. Again, this led officials to fear for the Malays' subsistence basis, and in 1917 the

Federated Malay States Rice Lands Enactment prohibited rubber on land suitable for wet-rice (*sawah*). It is apparent that at this stage government discouragement of smallholder rubber planting was prompted not by any fear of competition with the output from European estates, but rather because it did not accord with what were seen as the long-term interests of peasants. Plainly, in the eyes of the government, smallholders had no integral role in the industry; they were marginal, to be at best tolerated.

Malayan smallholders, not having any organisations such as the Rubber Growers Association to represent them, could not participate directly in the deliberations leading up to the imposition of the Stevenson scheme in November 1922. There was, indeed, little explicit concern with the implications of restriction for this sector of the industry. Serving Malayan Civil Service officers such as W.G. Maxwell, Chief Secretary Federated Malay States, considered that in the world depression, Malays for the most part were reaping the consequences of their earlier (and ill-advised) rush into rubber cultivation. Sir Frank Swettenham, a former High Commissioner and currently a rubber company director, justified compulsory restriction on the grounds that smallholders were natives who 'do not understand the situation' (cited in Drabble, 1973: 167n, 170n). The metropolitan government was finally prompted to impose restriction, not for the exclusive benefit of the estates, but on the supposition that Malaya and Ceylon (accounting for over 70 per cent of world output) would together have sufficient weight to restore prices to profitable levels.

The operation of restriction in Malaya has been the subject of much criticism, both at the time and since, as to the relative treatment of estates and smallholdings in the assessment of Standard Production. The central issue is that European producers, who were able to buttress their case with documentary records of previous production levels, received more liberal Standard Production assessments than smallholders, who lacked such records, despite the fact that an increasing amount of empirical evidence indicated that the latter had significantly higher yields per acre. This question of comparative yields involves technical detail which cannot be examined at length here. Suffice it to say that the present writer's findings support the case for under-assessment of holdings, though not to the extent that previous researchers have claimed (see Bauer, 1948b; Lim Teck Ghee, 1977; Drabble, 1978). The prime concern in this chapter is with the motivation underlying government policy. Was there a deliberate attempt to give European interests a com-

petitive edge over smallholdings, or was this the unintended by-product of the sketchy knowledge about the latter available to officials in the early 1920s? P.T. Bauer and Lim Teck Ghee are both strong critics of the scheme, and find a consistent bias against smallholders in its operations, though neither depicts this as a premeditated element. It is certainly possible to find some very prejudicial expressions of opinion about this group among the European planting community. In August 1923, for example, the manager of an estate in Malacca offered his services as a rubber restriction inspector 'with a view to cutting down the output of rubber from native holdings ... all of which are heavily overtapped' (JRR,123A/1923). The insistent theme, however, which emerges from official pronouncements was that restriction was beneficial to smallholders through immediately increased prices for rubber, as well as in the longer-term improvement in the standards of tapping and maintenance of holdings. If left without firm direction the smallholder tended, it was thought, to tap the trees excessively with no regard to conservation for the future. This point can be illustrated with an extract from a report written in 1924 (Selangor Secretariat, 5109/1925);

> If the present day standard of tapping of the smallholdings is not improved and the properties not managed more on European lines, I think it is highly probable that there will be a considerable falling off in yield in future years.

The deliberations leading up to the withdrawal of restriction at the end of 1928 were a replica of those at the inception of the scheme in that smallholding representatives were not included. The matter was delegated by the British Cabinet to one of its specialist advisory committees, the Committee of Civil Research, which in turn appointed a sub-committee on rubber restriction. This latter took evidence from over forty witnesses representing the Colonial Office, the colonial governments of Malaya and Ceylon, and British rubber interests. As evident in the minutes of the Sub-Committee on Rubber Restriction (SCRR, 1928:24 February, CAB 58/113) for February 1928, distinct differences of opinion emerged from these various groups. The officials generally showed scant respect for the wishes of estate interests. Sir Laurence Guillemard, High Commissioneer Federated Malay States, considered the entire industry to

be 'extraordinarily badly organised' while Sir Gilbert Grindle (Colonial Office) recommended a swift end to restriction; a 'surgical operation' as he termed it. Commercial witnesses on the other hand feared that such action would cause disruption to the rubber market and to labour supplies. They urged a gradual phasing out over three or four years. Neither group envisaged an integral role in the rubber industry for smallholders. Officials still deplored the fact that the Malay had ever taken up rubber growing, which had 'demoralised' him. On 7 March 1928, Mr William Duncan (representing the Association of British Malaya) accorded smallholders a more central role though only for the moment:

> [At] the bottom of the rubber industry what I think is fundamental is that we are in competition with native growers. That is the worst feature ... that the price of the commodity ... has a tendency to sag to what will give [the native] a livelihood (SCRR, 1928:7 March).

He thought that the quickest way to check the expansion of the smallholder sector was the complete abandonment of restriction, but drew back from such action as leading to too much loss (presumably to estates). Instead he advocated the retention of restriction for three years, during which time he assumed that the rubber price would sink gradually towards one shilling per pound. Duncan was confident that at this level smallholder output would decline substantially.

These varied views made little impression on the members of the sub-committee on Rubber Restriction — Sir Herbert Hambling (Chairman), Sir Sydney Chapman (Chief Economic Adviser to H.M. Government) and G.C. Upcott (Deputy Controller of Supply Services to the Treasury). Although disclaiming familiarity with the workings of the rubber industry, they were clearly from the outset disposed towards a swift end to restriction. On 2 April 1928, their final report recommended its removal after a six month period of notice, the main reason being that the Stevenson scheme was increasingly unable to protect British interests against developments in the Netherlands East Indies, where the 'chief danger' was the growth of native output (SCRR, 1928:2 April, CAB 58/5). Restriction ended on 31 October 1928.

Subsequent events brought a series of surprises to European in-

terests. The end of restriction did not produce the dislocation and rapid price falls predicted, while the figures for smallholding yields per acre in 1929 (see Table 3.2) were well above those of estates, especially in Malaya. This was initially explained away as a combination of 'flush' yields coupled with a return to heavy tapping practices, and likely to be only short-lived (Carrie, 1930). Netherlands East Indies smallholding yields dropped heavily in 1930, and even more so in the two following years. In the Malayan case, however, there was no really significant fall until 1932. A substantial recovery followed in 1933, with levels remaining consistently above those of estates. In 1931-1932 an official sample survey of Malayan smallholdings was carried out to ascertain whether owners were, in fact, tapping their trees to the point of exhaustion. The results indicated that while standards in many instances did not conform to best practice on estates, nonetheless 'the smallholder does not, in general, tap his trees indiscriminately but in such a manner as will ensure him the yield of rubber needed to fulfil his monthly requirements' (Meads, 1933: 37). The survey revealed that because smallholdings carried two to three times the average number of trees per acre as compared to estates, the reserves of tappable bark were sufficient for another seven and a half years at current rates of tapping; a most unexpected result. But the report was of a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive, nature and had no discernible impact on European attitudes or policy.

Basically the long-term future of the smallholder continued to be seen as depending on steady 'improvements' in techniques along estate-pattern lines. Another feature of Malayan government policy at this time was that smallholders found their customary avenue of expansion, the opening up of additional land, closed off to them. During the 1920s the premiums on new land grants for rubber had been raised, depending on location, to as much as $50 per acre ($125 per ha). District officers in the more populous areas reported dwindling reserves of suitable land, and in 1930 a ban was placed on further alienations for this crop. The prohibition affected estates as well, but the implications were less serious as large owners generally possessed undeveloped reserves from earlier acquisitions.

These considerations were for the moment overshadowed by the central concern in the depression years, namely a return to compulsory restriction of rubber exports. World demand tumbled from late 1929, just as the vast areas planted in the 1925-1926 boom reached productive age, so that surplus stocks piled up rapidly on the market. As compared to the 1920-1922 situation Europeans now

took the view that restriction needed to be much more comprehensive, including at least the Netherlands East Indies in addition to British territories. The formulation of such a scheme was, however, fraught with difficulties and required over four years (January 1930-May 1934) of very delicate Anglo-Dutch negotiations. The British adopted throughout a wait-and-see attitude because of fundamental doubts that the Dutch would prove both willing and able to control the output of Netherlands East Indies natives.

As with the Stevenson scheme, restriction was not something to be left to the colonial governments to decide, either in principle or in detail. The initial formulation of a scheme was put in the hands of British and Dutch delegations in the metropolitan countries, comprising official and commercial nominees. Discussions centred around the most appropriate method for effecting restriction of exports; whether by quotas or prohibitive taxes. The British were insistent that estates and smallholdings be treated equally from the outset of any scheme, and advocated the quota system (requiring assessment of each individual producer). Special taxes were said to suffer from the 'fatal political objection' that they would fall more heavily upon the native producer — this was the view of the Chairman of the Committee, Sir John Campbell, Economic and Financial Advisor to the Colonial Office (Great Britain Foreign Office, 1933: W14241/632/29 in FO 371/15751). The Dutch side wanted first an agreed scheme to cover the estate sector, to be followed by the gradual evolution of the means to restrict native output. Additionally, there were divisions in the Dutch ranks between those who preferred the quota system, despite the several months delay needed to make individual assessments, and those who saw taxation as the only way. For example, a conference of Netherlands East Indies provincial officials in Batavia in November 1933 was reported to be split between those from 'primitive' regions, such as Borneo, who favoured a tax, and those from more developed areas, like parts of east Sumatra, who regarded a quota assessment as feasible (Great Britain, Foreign Office, 1933: W14172/660/29,FO 371/17406). A meeting of the British and Dutch delegations in London in March 1932 had been told by the Head of the Agricultural Economics section, Buitenzorg, Java, that 'capital interests and native interests are here against each other and it is a question of colonial policy to choose a way out' (Great Britain, Foreign Office, n.d.: W3436/497/29, FO 371/16487).

It is worth noting too that on the British side, while Malayan officials perceived the smallholder as crucial to the problems facing

the industry, they were not very sympathetic to restriction as a panacea purely for the benefit of estate interests. This emerged clearly in a confidential despatch written by Sir Cecil Clementi, High Commissioner Federated Malay States, in 1932 which echoes the view put forward by Ormsby-Gore in his 1928 report (see above):

> ... it would seem ... that the aim of any rubber restriction scheme could only be to save for the European producer against the Asiatic smallholder as large a share of the rubber industry as possible ... We now know that rubber can and will be produced in as large quantities as the world requires it at a reasonable profit at any price between 4d to 6d a pound. If Europeans cannot do it in large areas under scientific management, Asiatics can and will do it in smallholdings (Great Britain, Colonial Office 1932b: 825/14).

In a despatch written a few days previously he had predicted that restriction would ruin Malayan smallholders with the 'political consequences which must inevitably ensue'. In contrast to the price range of 4d to 6d per pound mentioned by Clementi, it appeared, by the early 1930s, as though prices under free market conditions could not recover to a level high enough to cover the production costs of a majority of the European estates, plus a profit margin (a price in the region of 8d-9d per pound). Though the Anglo-Dutch negotiations were kept as secret as possible, by late 1933 rumours were circulating that the latter were resolving their internal divisions. The increased likelihood of restriction caused market prices to recover to around 4d per pound, rising sharply to 7.25d per pound in early 1934. What now worried Europeans deeply was the rapid response of smallholder production, especially in the Netherlands East Indies (see Table 3.2). In 1932, this group had produced only 61,000 tons (62,000 tonnes) (a mere 20 per cent of its potential) whereas, as we have seen, in early 1934 output was running at an annual equivalent of 300,000 tons (305,000 tonnes) (Bauer, 1948b:102). In other words it was approaching full potential at a price well below the level of around one shilling per pound at which Mr William Duncan, in 1928, had predicted a substantial decrease in output. Low market prices in themselves were clearly no permanent defence against smallholder competition; in fact they were quite the reverse.

The British and Dutch negotiators felt the pressure so keenly that

the final consultations were completed hurriedly. Hence the International Rubber Regulation Agreement was signed on 7 May 1934 so that the machinery of restriction could begin to operate from 1st June. At the first meeting of the International Rubber Regulation Committee the Chairman said that restriction had had to be introduced hastily since, had the high level of native exports 'been allowed to continue' the imposition of effective controls might well have become impossible (IRRC, 1934). The actual cutbacks in exports were brought in only gradually; indeed 100 per cent of quota was allowed in June/July, dropping progressively to 70 per cent by December. One of the major reasons for this was that the Dutch could not yet introduce individual assessment of Netherlands East Indies native producers. It was necessary for the first two years (1934-1936) to control exports through a special tax (Bauer, 1948b: 142-143). This brought the entire scheme to the point of breakdown because, despite progressive increases in the tax to a peak of 72 per cent of the market value, native rubber exports still threatened to exceed the share of the country quota. The British delegates to the International Rubber Regulation Committee objected strongly that the scheme was having to operate according to needs dictated by local difficulties in the Netherlands East Indies (IRRC, 1935). In a last-ditch compromise the Committee approved an increased quota allotment to native producers, about one-third of which was to consist of a transfer from the estate quota. This transfer never actually eventuated, but after 1936 the Dutch were able to introduce individual assessment, as in Malaya. Nonetheless, as Bauer (1948b: 142-143) has shown, the International Rubber Regulation Agreement did not achieve equity in levels of assessment as between estates and smallholdings.

As we saw in the previous section, the International Rubber Regulation Committee considered the question of the 'fair and equitable' price for rubber in relation to the 'efficient producer'. The issue was discussed at several meetings, but the Committee would never commit itself publicly to a precise figure (though unofficially members thought in terms of 8d-9d per pound) and was, therefore, unable to define 'efficient producer' except in the vaguest and most circular of terms. The official history of the International Rubber Regulation Agreement says only that:

> Efficient production is production at a reasonable profit, but profitability depends on price ... [and] it is impossible to define a

> price which will remunerate efficient producers until it is known what efficient production means (McFadyean, 1944: 145-146).

Nevertheless this same account suggests strongly that the Committee regarded the 'efficient producer' and the smallholder as two different entities. In discussing the level of prices and taxes necessary to control native exports from the Netherlands East Indies between 1934 and 1936, it is stated that:

> There was no reason *prima facie* why [this] price level ... which was determined by one set of circumstances, should coincide with the equitable price level for the efficient producer which was determined by an entirely different set of circumstances (McFadyean, 1944:99).

In addition to the restriction of exports, the International Rubber Regulation Agreement imposed a total ban on the planting of new areas of rubber, and some limitations on replanting obsolete trees. The first period of the Agreement expired in 1938 and it was extended for a further five years. In 1939-1940 a concession allowed new planting up to the equivalent of 5 per cent of the existing planted area, whilst replanting became unrestricted. Both these activities presented difficulties for smallholders, especially in Malaya. While the ban dating from 1930 on fresh land alienation for rubber (see previous section) was relaxed temporarily, the average smallholder found it hardly worthwhile to incur the outlay of time and money to apply for a minute portion of land (a quarter-acre or less). Many Malays simply sold their planting rights to the larger owners. Replanting was even less attractive since it was technically difficult (though not impossible) on very small areas, besides entailing substantial loss of income for five to seven years. The long-term implications of this situation for Malayan smallholders were that, lacking the resources to newplant or replant to any significant extent, they faced eventual elimination from the industry (Bauer, 1948b: 345). It is worth remarking that this has not in fact happened. Indeed since Merdeka the reverse has occurred, but the reasons for this lie outside the scope of this chapter.

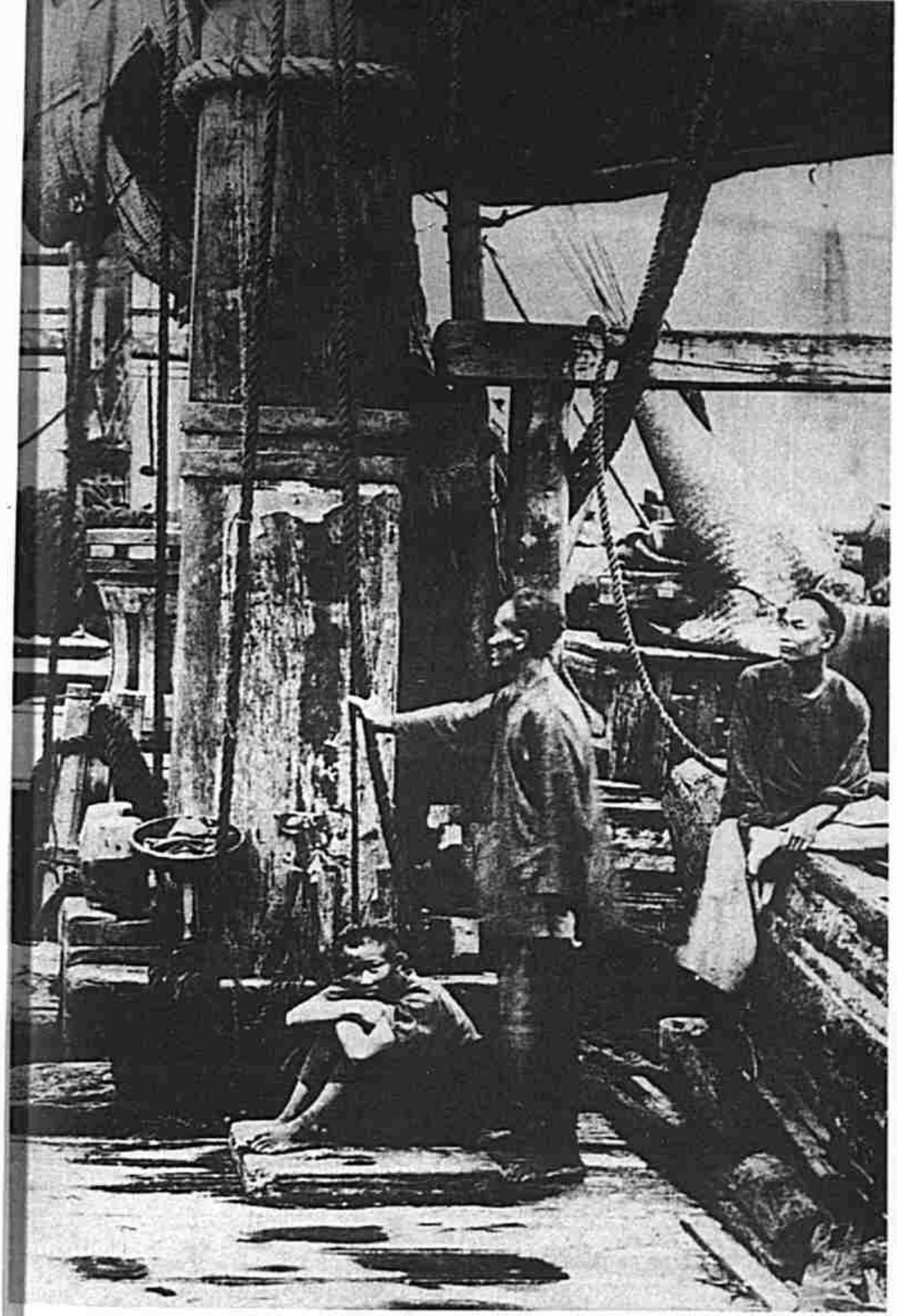

Plate 1. Migrants leaving China in search of a better life in the South Seas. Plate shows migrants aboard a junk (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 2. An overcrowded coolie ship *en route* to Singapore (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 3. Chinese labourers going to work (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 4. The Malays, Singapore (*Source*: Lim Kheng Chye).

Plate 5. Indian estate workers (*Source:* National Archives, Singapore).

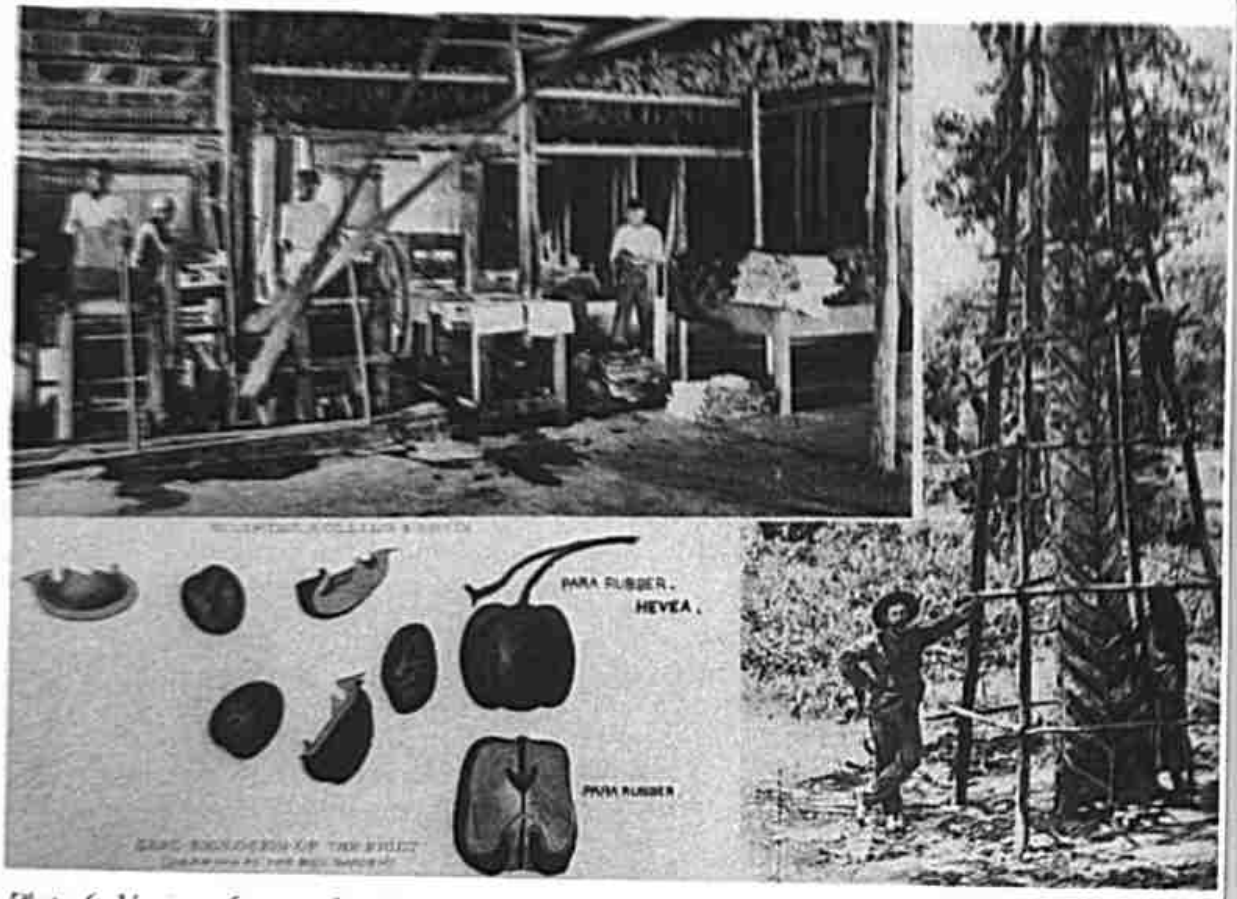

Plate 6. Various facets of rubber production. The photograph shows the explosion of the fru illustrated by a drawing from the Botanical Garden (bottom left), tapping (right), and washing rolling and drying (top left) (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 7. Cultivation of rubber on

Plate 8. Collecting latex from the rubber trees. A plate taken by M.S. Nakajima (*Source*: Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur).

Plate 9. Carrying pails of latex (*Source*: Lim Kheng Chye).

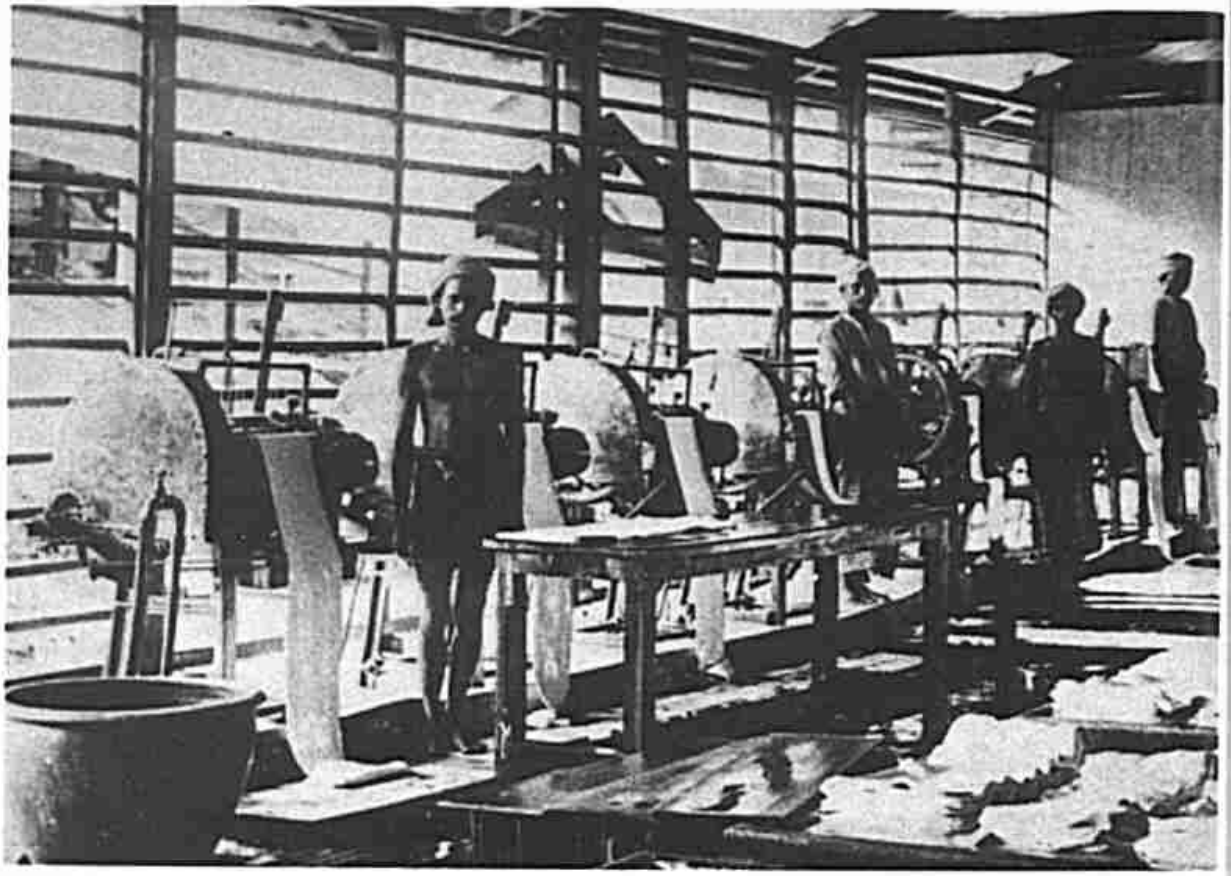

Plate 10. *Crêping* machinery on a rubber estate, Malaya (*Source*: Lim Kheng Chye).

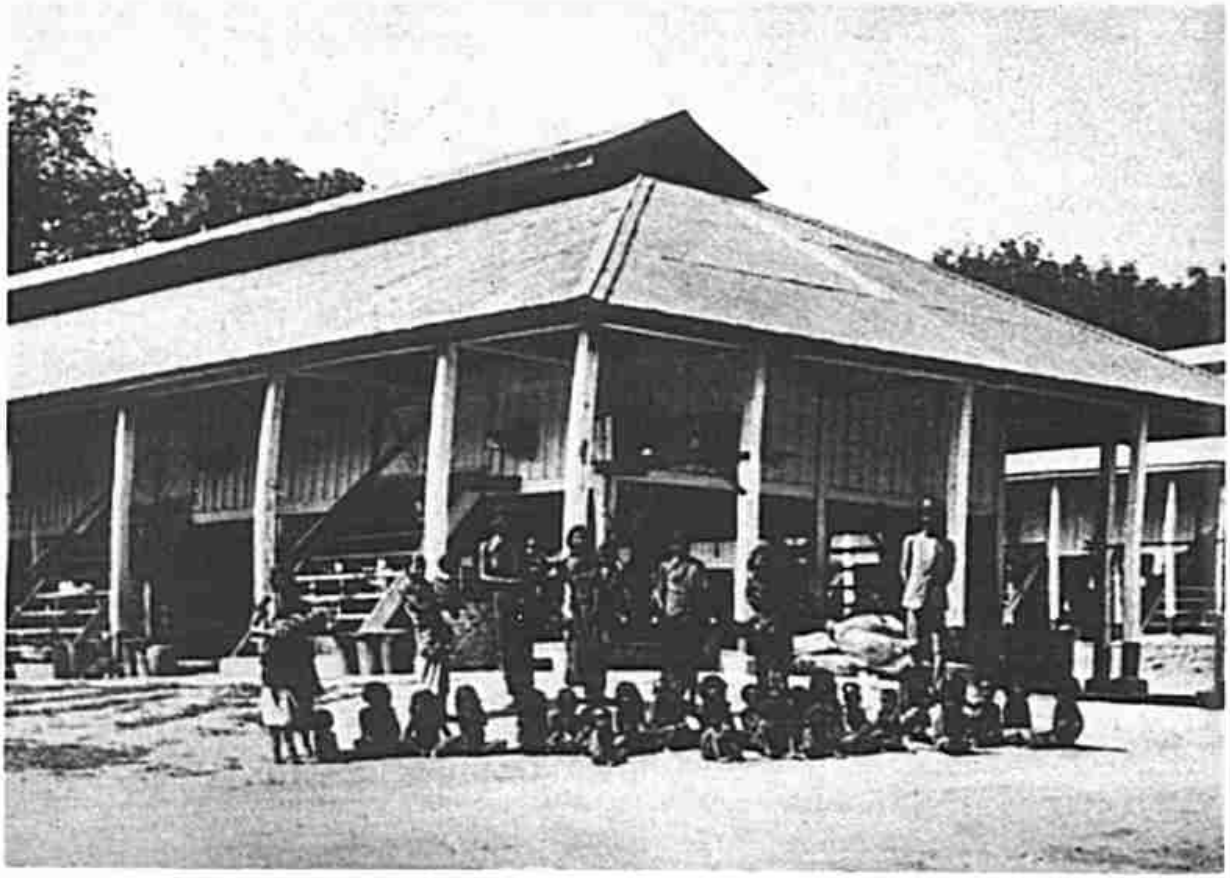

Plate 11. Workers on a rubber estate, Malaya (*Source*: Lim Kheng Chye).

Plate 12. Labour lines on a big estate in the 1960s. These were built in the late 1950s and were a big improvement on their predecessors. There were five families in each block (*Source*: Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia).

Plate 13. Independent smallholders delivering their latex at the collection station of a central processing factory in the mid-1970s. The buckets of latex are weighed and tipped into churns. At the factory they are made into high quality 'Standard Malaysian Rubber' (*Source*: Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia).

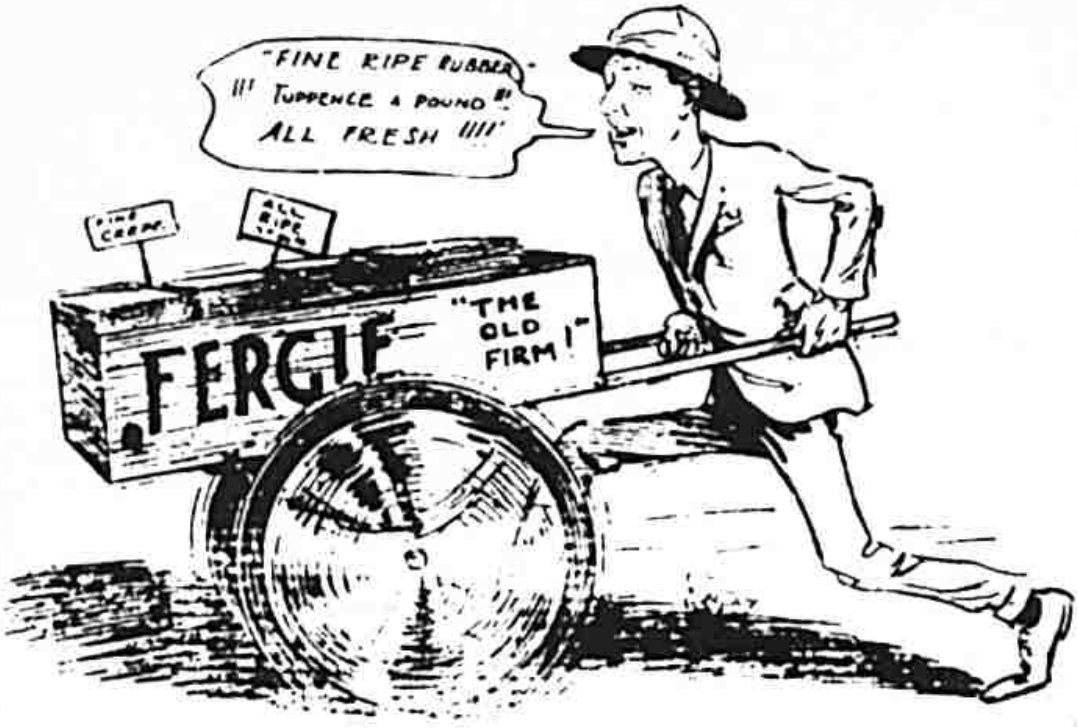

Plate 14. "Things we hope will never happen", July 1922 (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932 no pg).

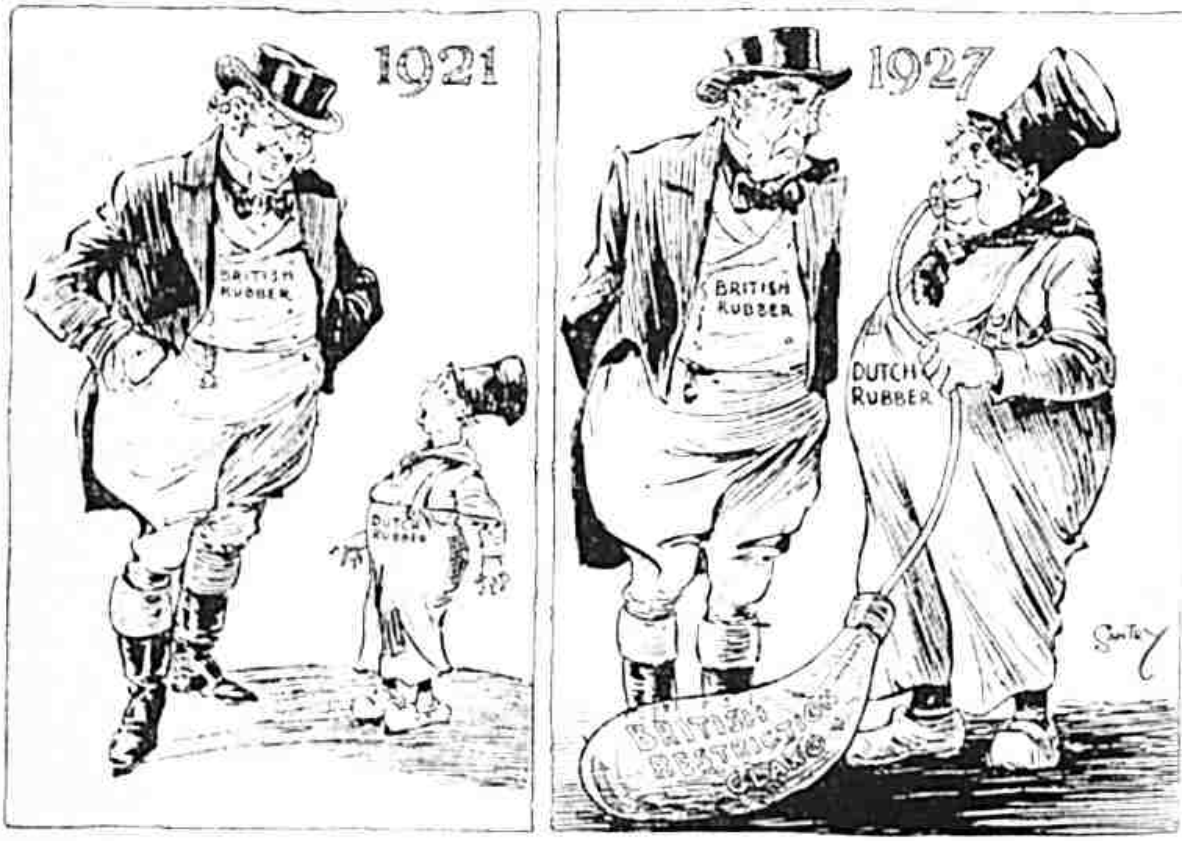

Plate 15. Triumphant success of restriction (for the Dutch!). *London* --- In the House of Commons at question time, Mr. Amery said the rubber production of the British Empire was 203,000 tons and of foreign countries 97,000, compared with 344,000 and 258,000 in 1927 --- Reuter (*Source: British Malaya*, July, 1928: 78).

TABLE 3.3

MALAYA: SMALLHOLDER RUBBER ESTIMATED NET ANNUAL RETURN PER ACRE, 1922-1939

Year	$		Year	$	
1922	85.50		1931	31.10	[32]
1923	88.50		1932	18.60	[19]
1924	80.50		1933	28.05	[36]
1925	213.50		1934	51.60	
1926	145.50		1935	36.30	
1927	113.50		1936	50.70	
1928	61.50		1937	87.90	
1929	150.70	[142]	1938	37.50	
1930	69.10	[69]	1939	51.50	

Notes: Figures in [ ] are Bauer's calculations. Lim's original table gives gross figures, from which I have deducted $4.50 (the mid-point of the range of cost of production given by him).

Sources: Adapted from Bauer (1948b:61) and Lim Teck Ghee (1977:258).

THE EFFECTS ON SMALLHOLDER LIVELIHOODS

By the early 1920s rubber producers had experienced extremes of boom and slump. But it was clear that, despite the severe fluctuations, estates and smallholders were staying with this crop unlike the pattern with earlier ventures in Malaya, for example, coffee, which were abandoned voluntarily when prices fell. For some fourteen years of the inter-war period exports were compulsorily limited to between two-thirds and three-quarters of the Standard Production allotment. Some commentators have highlighted the negative effects of restriction upon income. Bauer (1947:81-84) has estimated that, due to gross under-assessment, Malayan smallholders 'lost' the equivalent of £32 million under the Stevenson scheme, and £10 million under the International Rubber Regulation Agreement. From another angle Bauer calculated the comparative returns from rice and rubber cultivation during the depression years 1929-1933 (Bauer, 1948b: 61-62). He has been followed by Lim Teck Ghee (1977:258) who has constructed a similar series for the district of Krian (1922-1939). The figures involve a con-

siderable degree of estimation, and there is not the space here to debate their accuracy in detail. What is most relevant to our theme is not the comparison as such (rubber emerges as the superior earner throughout, even in the worst slump year, 1932), but, rather the estimates which can be constructed therefrom for net earnings from rubber (see Table 3.3).

The series derived from Lim gives an average return for 1922-1939 of approximately $78 per acre a year, or $6.50 per month. The average Malay holding was 4 acres, giving a monthly income of $26. The most comparable group for which we have wage data is rubber estate workers. Between 1924 and 1933 Indian male workers averaged around 48 cents per day, or $11.52 per month based on 24 days work (RGA, n.d.). If both husband and wife, and some of the children worked, then a family's aggregate income could approximate to that of the smallholder. Chinese estate workers, usually non-resident and employed on piece rates, could in prosperous times earn up to twice the Indian daily rate. To round out the picture we need data on costs of living, but these are very scarce. The Agent for the Government of India calculated in the mid-1920s that a married worker needed $12.30 a month (including provision for savings and return passages). Employers regarded this as far too generous and put the total at only about $9.50 a month (OVRIICM, 1924-1930). An economic survey of a Malay reservation in Selangor in 1934 put the monthly expenditure for a family of five at $11.26 (USDO, 531/1934), but the average holding size in this area was only 2.75 acres (1.11 ha). In contrast in Perlis, where there was hardly any smallholder rubber, undernourishment was reported widespread among rural families on incomes of $4-6 per month in 1935, (BAP, 1935: 622/1354). Figures from such disparate sources can be taken only as the broadest of indicators. They suggest that Malays with around 4 acres (1.62 ha) of rubber did better than Indian workers, depending on how much work was available in total to the latter. Research by Barlow (Chapter 2) on comparative earnings of estate workers and smallholding share tappers generally supports this picture. These, however, are only averages. As can be seen from Table 3.3 smallholder earnings were highly volatile from year to year. Look, for example, at the sharp fluctuations between 1925 and 1933. Estate wage rates also followed price changes but with some lag in time. Though Indian rates rose by nearly 60 per cent between 1924 and 1929, and fell by 50 per cent up to 1932, they nowhere near matched the suddenness and magnitude of the smallholder switchback. Malays with much less than the average

sized holding (those with one or two acres and even less) would have been much closer to the poverty line.

Other evidence confirms this picture of wide swings of fortune. At the beginning of the Stevenson scheme in 1922 District Officers in some areas, such as the Kinta District in Perak (see Chapter 4), faced groups of angry Malays protesting that their export allowances were inadequate for a livelihood. Government then gave them an extra allowance (DOG, 181/1922). Three years later the situation was transformed. During the boom of 1925-1926 an upsurge in conspicuous consumption was reported among native growers in the Netherlands East Indies (house-building, pilgrimages, motor cars, jewellery, better-quality clothes etc.) (Tayler and Stephens, 1929). This could apply to a considerable extent to Malaya, particularly in areas like Selangor where smallholders were most deeply committed to rubber as a source of livelihood. The prosperity general in the country is indicated by the United States Consul, Singapore, who estimated on 23 March 1927 that between Straits $10 million and $50 million in 'idle money' had accumulated by 1926, mainly in Chinese hands (cited in Whittlesey, 1931:117). Table 3.3 shows that the impact of the two restriction schemes on peasant incomes was variable; the Stevenson scheme produced wide fluctuations while the International Rubber Regulation Agreement smoothed these out, with the exception of 1937. This variability helps to put in perspective the finding by the late Michael Swift (1964:141) that historically rubber had not served as a major source of savings or capital accumulation among Malays. A further factor here was the increasing incidence of indebtedness among smallholders in the inter-war years, which government was not able to do very much to stem despite the introduction of institutions such as the cooperative societies.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

It may appear inappropriate, as part of the title of this chapter, to use the term 'politics' in a colonial context in which non-Europeans had no autonomous base from which to pursue *actively* their interests.[3] Nonetheless the inescapable fact of the existence of several million acres of smallholdings with owners running into the

3. Interestingly one non-colonial signatory of the International Rubber Regulation Agreement, Thailand, (whose rubber industry was entirely smallholdings) was able to wrest substantial concessions from the International Rubber Regulation Committee on the country quota allowance. Nor, in practice, could the ban on newplanting be enforced there (see Bauer, 1948b:109).

hundreds of thousands, obliged governments to recognise the political implications of restriction. Besides these internal considerations, there were the effects of international relationships between the countries controlling the producing areas, and between producers and consumers.

The element of competition between estates and smallholdings in the rubber industry reached its peak in the early 1930s. The prospects for the survival of many estates if values stayed around the 3d per pound mark for an extended period were not good. A survey of the annual accounts of 364 United Kingdom-registered companies in November 1930 suggested that owners of 75 per cent of the producing area could last for two years, while some 90 per cent would fail within three years (Bauer, 1948b:32n). This forecast proved unduly pessimistic. Relatively few companies put their properties on a care-and-maintenance basis during the worst of the slump in 1931-1932. Most kept up production and were able to effect major cuts in costs (although lagging behind the rapidity and extent of the price fall).[4] Only technical advance, such as the planting of high-yielding trees, could transform fundamentally the competitive position *vis-à-vis* smallholdings. However, this would have required substantial new investment over a long period of time (several decades). European interests wanted restriction because it led to a swift improvement in prices, at the same time holding back a large part of the smallholder output which would otherwise come forth. There is a detectable element, amounting almost to panic, about this reaction. It was rationalised, as we have seen, along the lines that since smallholders could not supply all the world's needs of rubber (Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies together accounted for about 40 per cent) the survival of the estate sector as it was then constituted was essential. This view reinforced the attitude among Europeans, which was as strong in 1940 as in 1920, who could not accept the individual smallholder producer as in any sense more efficient than the estate (for example, with long-term higher outputs per acre). Smallholdings were seen as a competitive threat because of their enormous area and productive potential in the *aggregate*. Yet even by the late 1930s neither was known with any certainty.[5] It was thought that comparable information on both

4. The average all-in cost of company members of the Rubber Growers Association and the average London rubber price stood at an index (1929=100) of 90 and 58 respectively at the end of 1930, and 40 and 25 by mid-1933 (Bauer, 1948b:365).

5. By 1941 the Dutch had surveyed 18.1 per cent of the Netherlands East Indies native area. An extrapolation of the results indicated a planted area of 3.2 million acres (1.29 million ha) compared to the 1.8 million acres (728,000 ha) which the International Rubber Regulation Committee had worked on. [Draft Report for Presentation to the Rubber Study Group (London), April 1946.]

area and production of estates was more reliable.

Smallholders stood to benefit from the higher prices under restriction just as did estates, though the principle of equity in assessment was not observed in practice under the International Rubber Regulation Agreement. Ultimately the more crucial issue for them was the closing off of access to further land, which in Malaya dated from 1930, and the restraints upon newplanting. The consequences of this policy, if made permanent, would have taken a generation or more to work out. Bauer (1948b:346) writing in 1947, calculated that the output from Malayan smallholdings would fall from around 300,000 tons (305,000 tonnes) to approximately 50,000 tons (50,800 tonnes) by 1965. The International Rubber Regulation Committee, if it perceived this possibility at all, was at best rather dismissive. A projection of post-war supply and demand for rubber, prepared in 1940, makes the comment that 'probably the governments concerned will see to it that the productive capacity of native rubber in their respective territories is not allowed to deteriorate' (IRRC, 1940).

The Western governments involved approached restriction from a broader viewpoint than did the estate interests. Of importance here was the fact that, in the case of British empire trade, rubber was the single most valuable export from the colonies. Between 1935 and 1937 it provided from one-fifth to one-quarter of total domestic exports from the colonies, and between 1937 and 1941 the aggregate value of rubber exports (US$590 million) almost equalled that of exports by domestic British industries to the United States of America (US$620 million) (IRRC, 1946). From this angle governments can be seen to have had a vested interest in the survival of the smallholder sector. In the particular case of Malaya this interest conformed to the generally conservative approach of the British towards peasant agriculture. Participation in the industry by Malays had to be accepted as a *fait accompli*, but the official policy was to promote only a very restricted degree of change such as the formation of cooperative selling societies. Anything which might give smallholdings an expansive impetus, for instance large scale land development, such as the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) schemes in the 1950s and 1960s, was simply not envisaged.

4.

From Tin Mine Coolies to Agricultural Squatters: Socio-Economic Change in the Kinta District during the Inter-war Years

LOH KOK WAH

In the early 1950s, more than 100,000 rural dwellers, accounting for one-third of the Kinta District's population, were resettled. Chiefly Chinese agricultural squatters, these 100,000 were relocated into 30 'new villages' and 214 other 'regroupment areas' around mines, estates and existing towns (Ooi Jin Bee, 1955). This process of resettlement was part of British counter-insurgency strategy against the Malayan Communist Party's uprising and was crucial in bringing the Emergency (1948-1960) to a close. Consequently, the Kinta District emerged as the area with the highest concentration of new villages in the country.

Why was there such a large number of rural Chinese squatters in the Kinta area in the early 1950s? The popular view is that the post-war squatter problem was a direct consequence of the Japanese occupation when mass urban-to-rural migration occurred — a view also given credence by Dobby (1952) and King (1954). This idea has been criticised, however, by Anthony Short (1975:174) who argues that 'the illegal occupation of land by Chinese farmers and their families was already becoming a problem before the war. All the Japanese occupation did was to accelerate a movement which was already gaining momentum'. The Perak Advisor on Chinese Affairs in 1947 similarly argued that the real cause of the post-war squatter situation was to be found in the 1930s slump and the immigration policy which was its outcome (cited by Short, 1975:203).

This chapter traces the emergence and development of the agricultural squatter communities from the 1890s to 1941. In essence, it argues that squatter agriculture was an integral part of the Kinta District's economy and that its emergence and development was directly related to the history of the tin mining industry in the Kinta Valley. Indeed, it was because of the success of the industry, which resulted in the District becoming the most productive alluvial tin mining region in the world since the 1900s, that such squatter communities emerged.

As the industry became increasingly mechanised — starting with the introduction of boilers and steam engines, hydraulic monitors and gravel pumps and, ultimately, the dredge — production rose rapidly (Table 4.1). Chinese domination of the industry faltered as an expanding colonial government rationalised its operations, by taking responsibility for revenue collection, establishing law and order in mining areas and asserting effective control over mining matters generally. Mechanisation and government intervention, coupled with the depletion of areas with easily-accessible rich tin deposits, resulted in important structural changes in the industry. These revolved around the emergence of capital-intensive mechanised production increasingly controlled by European mining interests. The corollary to this development was the demise of smaller labour-intensive mines owned by Chinese interests.

These different aspects of the history of the industry have been treated comprehensively in several works including those by Wong Lin Ken (1965) and Yip Yat Hoong (1969) (see also Fermor, 1939). There is little in these studies, however, that explains why such large numbers of squatters were found in the Kinta area in the immediate post-war period. This omission stems primarily from the fact that most of these studies are economic histories rather than social histories of the industry. While there is, therefore, much informed discussion of the various structural changes that occurred, very little is known about the people involved. This is especially true of the coolies, who contributed towards the success of tin mining in Malaysia. Admittedly, Wong Lin Ken (1965) does discuss the plight of the coolies but his account ends in 1914; their fate since then has not been examined. It is not known whether this gap in the history of mining is caused by the limitations of records hitherto consulted or the ideological orientations of the researchers concerned — the guiding forces behind their choices of research topics and the tools of investigation. These considerations, however, cannot be discussed here. Nevertheless, the structural changes that affected the lives of the ordinary coolies can be traced by consulting *local* (that is, District rather than Federal or State level) official records. Although the thoughts and feelings of the coolies are unrecorded — since the illiterate generally do not leave behind memoirs or diaries — it is still possible to discuss how the coolies as a group responded to changing circumstances. In this regard familiarity with sociological theory allows us to anticipate long-term trends, while observations of present-day events might help to explain the past by allowing us to use the available historical data more productively

TABLE 4.1

TIN PRODUCTION, PRICE AND EMPLOYMENT IN PERAK, 1910-1939

	Production	Price per *pikul* $	Employment no.
1910	421,344	77.51	91,165
1911	437,338	93.90	107,864
1912	477,238	103.30	118,409
1913	493,970	99.57	126,361
1914	479,758	73.44	96,740
1915	466,637	78.17	94,865
1916	457,666	87.53	82,534
1917	414,002	108.74	68,521
1918	386,131	150.62	78,621
1919	368,071	120.68	64,760
1920	368,105	150.67	50,622
1921	352,414	85.04	47,117
1922	366,408	80.64	45,726
1923	415,162	101.75	61,655
1924	500,119	124.19	63,794
1925	516,583	131.77	68,000
1926	515,794	144.60	70,287
1927	609,840	144.93	77,418
1928	689,976	114.18	68,499
1929	749,918	104.37	65,411
1930	700,510	72.89	50,876
1931	572,645	60.29	33,486
1932	289,834	69.76	23,736
1933	252,554	99.99	23,042
1934	374,186	114.41	31,550
1935	420,790	111.32	32,596
1936	655,838	100.39	44,284
1937	753,900	119.75	47,530
1938	419,294	95.43	30,641
1939	444,461	114.44	41,636
1940	822,629	129.92	52,606
1941	614,695[a]	135.51	47,514

Note: [a]January - September only.

Sources: FMS Mines Department, n.d.; FMS Chamber of Mines, n.d.; International Tin Council (1971).

(McVey, 1978). This is, in fact, the task attempted in this chapter. By focusing on the agricultural squatters the study attempts to complement the existing literature on the history of mining in the Kinta District.

THE EMERGENCE OF AGRICULTURAL SQUATTER COMMUNITIES, 1880-1929

The history of the agricultural squatter communities in the Kinta area, prior to the Second World War, may be divided into three distinct periods: the late nineteenth century to the mid-1910s; the mid-1910s to the late 1920s; and the late 1920s to the outbreak of the Second World War. The periods are characterised not only by changing socio-economic factors that affected the tin industry, but also by varying government attitudes *vis-à-vis* the agriculturalists. The net effect, however, was an overall growth of the squatter communities and a consolidation of cash-cropping as an integral part of the Kinta District's economy by the late 1930s.

Market gardening activities in the vicinity of Kinta District mining centres were mentioned in official reports by the late 1880s. In 1889 for instance, the District Officer noted that market gardeners cultivated and supplied fresh vegetables, meat and other food crops to the mining communities (PGG, 1890:190). Some years later after the Land Code 1898 had been gazetted, there was also mention of these gardeners in reference to the number of 'annual licences' issued for particular years. In 1904, for instance, the Chief Assistant District Officer of Ulu Kinta remarked that some 471 of 952 annual licences were issued for agricultural purposes, both vegetable gardening as well as *ladang* cultivation (KLOAR, 1904:4). During the early 1910s when increasing numbers of market gardeners were discovered, there were also comments in the Kinta Land Office (KLO) annual reports of difficulties in trying to collect annual licence fees from them (KLOAR, 1905:2, 1907:2, 1911:2). On some occasions, attempts to collect fees resulted in 'disturbances' which were, however, quickly put down when the government threatened the gardeners with eviction and/or demolition of their homes (KLO, 652/1908, 1106/1908). Finally, there were also infrequent reports of the 'insanitary and crowded' conditions under which market gardeners, rickshaw coolies and hawkers lived. In 1906, there were references to such settlements in the villages of Ampang, Jelapang, Tanjung Tualang and Sungei Siput (KLOAR, 1906:2).

Apart from these references to the market gardeners, however, there was little other mention of them in official records during the period from the 1880s to the 1900s. This relative lack of interest is not surprising considering that only limited numbers of people were involved, and the area they occupied accounted for only a small percentage of the Kinta Valley's land. In 1904 for instance, annual licences were issued for 500 acres (202 ha) as against almost 90,000 acres (36,421 ha) alienated for mining purposes (KLOAR, 1904:2). In terms of state revenue, again, the amounts that could be raised by way of annual licences compared most unfavourably with those collected from the tin industry and the revenue-farms (Butcher, 1983). Basically an appendage to the mining industry, in that the gardeners provided foodstuffs to the mining population, the attitude of the colonial government *vis-à-vis* these small groups of gardeners was basically one of tolerance and benevolent neglect.

The situation, however, changed considerably in the early 1910s. First, increasing numbers of market gardeners were being 'discovered'. In 1912, for instance, the Assistant District Officer in the annual report of the Ipoh Land Office (ILO) listed over 5000 of them, chiefly Chinese, in his *mukim* (ILOAR, 1912:1). The increase in numbers may be related to the structural changes, outlined earlier, taking place in the tin mining industry. Secondly, because of the demand for tin mining land, many miners began requesting the Kinta Land Office to help them in removing gardeners from their premises (KLOAR, 1909:2; KLO 20/1915, 86/1915, 1711/1915). Here again was a new kind of reference to the market gardeners. Finally, there was now increasing reference to this group of gardeners in official circles as 'squatters', that is, people who occupied land either without any form of legal document or with only a Temporary Occupation Licence, not a permanent title (ILOAR, 1911, KLO 296/1914, 86/1915, 412/1916, 2236/1916, 2248/1916).[1] These gardeners usually were served with summonses and subsequently fined.

At this point, clarification of the nature of the Temporary Occupation Licence is appropriate. As the name suggests, it is a temporary

1. At a conference of Perak District Officers in February 1937, the term 'squatter' was defined to include three forms of land occupation: (a) illegal occupation, that is without any form of title or licence whatsoever; (b) legal occupation of state land; and (c) legal occupation of land alienated for mining. The term 'legal' for (b) and (c) implied possession of a licence. (See copy of a Minute by the British Resident Perak 20.2.1937 En. 8A in Selangor Secretariat 17/1937.) According to the above definition, there may be both legal and illegal squatters. Both types were subject to much insecurity, as the legal squatters only held licences of a temporary nature — the Temporary Occupation Licence.

licence which has to be renewed annually. Where the plot of land involved was less than ten acres (4 ha) — which was usually the case for market gardens — the application process was a relatively simple one that essentially required registration with the District Office. In the mid-1910s, the annual fee charged was only two dollars per annum if the land was outside town limits. In theory, Temporary Occupation Licences were renewable if the licencees were 'satisfactory tenants' (i.e. maintaining their plot well, planting approved crops and investing in a home on the land in some instances). They could, in fact, be converted into a title under the *Mukim Register* (Selangor Secretariat, 1088/1922). In practice, however, Temporary Occupation Licences were withdrawn as often as they were renewed. In the case of Chinese in the Kinta District, their Temporary Occupation Licences have seldom been converted into titles through the *Mukim Register*, which generally was only used to register land held by Malays.

Why then, did this group of people not obtain a less precarious form of document than the Temporary Occupation Licence and why did their numbers continue to grow through the next two decades? Commenting on the matter in 1912, the Assistant District Officer of the Kinta Land Office suggested three reasons: the difficulty of obtaining land; ignorance of the procedure involved; and the small risk of eviction and freedom from control (KLOAR, 1912:1). All three reasons were probably correct to some extent in 1912. By the mid-1910s, however, the gardeners were certainly aware of the procedures involved, as increasing numbers of squatters were being summoned and then fined for illegal occupation of land (ILOAR, 1911:1; 1915:2; 1916:3-4). Similarly, as the Kinta Land Office developed a 'rent roll' of Temporary Occupation Licence holders and devised a new fee collection scheme the risk of discovery and eviction became obvious; this is reflected in increasing reference to the illegal occupation of land in official circles, the summonses issued and fines collected in the mid-1910s. The new scheme was first experimented with by the Ipoh Land Office in 1911 and then implemented for the rest of the district in 1913 (ILOAR, 1911; KLOAR, 1913:1, 1916:3-4).

There appear to have been three major reasons why there were so many squatters (including those who held Temporary Occupation Licences) from the mid-1910s on. First, as the Assistant District Officer mentioned in 1912, there was the difficulty in obtaining land which, in the case of the Kinta District, could not be alienated for agricultural purposes if it had any mining potential. This policy, in

effect, ruled out the possibility of acquiring substantial areas of land in the Kinta District. Even when land was available, preference was to be given to Perak Malays, not Chinese. This policy was clearly stated in 1924 but was generally being applied already in the pre-1920 period (PAR, 1924:6, 1927:2, 1928:2; KLOAR, 137/1920). The Kinta Land Office files contain many examples of Chinese applicants for land being rejected on these two grounds.

Secondly, the application process for a permanent title meant applying the Torrens System which was well-known to be a cumbersome and expensive process (Meek, 1949:38-43). An application first went through the Land Office which determined whether the land was available for alienation or not. In the case of Kinta District, the Mines Department had also to be consulted. Subsequently, the Survey Department was brought in to demarcate the area applied for with boundary stones. All these matters were coordinated at the level of the State Secretariat. Although the title finally obtained provided security in that the lease could be for as long as sixty years, the expenses involved were quite considerable. Apart from the annual rent of one to three dollars per acre (0.4 ha) — depending on whether the land was first, second or third class land — the applicant had also to pay survey fees (averaging about $41 for areas less than 5 acres (2.02 ha) in size, the cost of boundary stones, the certificate and a premium of five dollars per acre (0.4 ha) in the mid-1910s. These expenses had to be settled prior to issue of the lease. Considering the cumbersome and expensive processes involved, it is not surprising that the poor market gardener resorted to squatting, with or without a Temporary Occupation Licence. This point was noted by the Perak Resident himself (PAR, 1914:7) on at least one occasion (see Kratoska, 1985, for the expenses involved).

Finally, given the priorities of the government *vis-à-vis* the use of land in the Kinta District, the Temporary Occupation Licence was an extremely useful legal document that could be employed for the issuing of land for short-term purposes when needed — as during periods of slump when labour unrest threatened — and withdrawn when the land was required for other purposes. This strategy was used increasingly in the early 1920s and 1930s. In this sense, the increase in the number of squatters was fostered by the colonial government.

In contrast to the lack of official attention given to the Chinese agriculturalists in the Kinta area prior to the mid-1910s, the government began to encourage food production and, inadvertently, from 1916 to consider the problems of the area's agricultural squatters.

This change in attitude in official circles stemmed from a series of related but unexpected developments, namely, the outbreak of the First World War, and prolonged food shortages during 1917-1920 and the slump of 1920-1922. It is doubtful whether the structural changes to the local mining economy — increasing mechanisation, exhaustion of areas with rich tin deposits and the demise of the small Chinese miner — influenced the thinking of government in any direct way. Nevertheless, with hindsight, the official promotion of food-crop production at this time provided a welcome opportunity for both coolies, displaced from the mining industry, and newly-arrived Chinese immigrants to seek alternative livelihoods. Thus, government policies, together with changes in the mining industry and continued immigration, resulted in the emergence of additional and larger Chinese agricultural squatter communities throughout the Kinta District.

During the colonial period, Malaya produced approximately one-third of the rice its inhabitants consumed, enough to feed the indigenous Malay population, but not the Chinese and Indian immigrants as well. For this purpose, some two-thirds of Malaya's rice needs were imported, especially from Siam (Thailand) and Burma (see Cheng Siok Hwa, 1969; Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai, 1963; Kratoska, 1982; Lim Teck Ghee, 1977). With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, however, there were increasing difficulties in obtaining rice and other foodstuffs. This was noted by the Chief Secretary in an address to the British Residents as early as December 1916 (Hose, 1919:98). By May 1917, the High Commissioner himself further noted the 'inevitable restrictions on the importation of foodstuffs due to the demand of the War and to the progressive decrease in the amount of shipping that was available'. He suggested that it was the duty of all to observe the strictest economy, not only in the supplies imported from other countries, but in all foodstuffs. It was also the duty of all to increase local food supplies by growing rice, vegetables and other economic crops (Hose, 1919:99, KLO, 1535/1917).

In mid-1917 a Food Production Committee headed by E.S. Hose, the Director of Agriculture, was formed. After a series of meetings, it launched a program to boost food production. In 1918, the Food Production Enactment providing for the program was passed in the Federal Council (Hose, 1919; FMSPFC, 24 August 1917; ABFMS, 1917). To boost *padi* production selected seeds, advances, and a guaranteed minimum price were provided. An irrigation scheme was initiated in Lower Perak and the establishment of government

rice mills was proposed, resulting in the building of one in Krian. Restrictions on the growing of hill *padi* were lifted. Where land was no longer suitable for *padi* growing, the 'special *bendang* conditions' were removed to allow, in this case, food-crop cultivation instead (Hose, 1919:101-112).

Of more interest was the promotion of other food crops including tapioca, the growing of which had been disallowed until 1917 (KLO, 510/917, 1236/1917). All land-holdings, whether held on annual licences or permanent titles, used exclusively for the growing of vegetables, bananas and pineapples, were given 'rent holidays' for five years, and charged a dollar per annum an acre (0.4 ha) only thereafter. By 1920, free Temporary Occupation Licences had been issued for an area covering 4493 acres (1818 ha) mostly on alienated mining land (KLOAR, 1920:2). In this regard, a recommendation by a committee, initiated earlier by the Perak Resident, to increase the rates of premium and rent payable on small agricultural holdings, was shelved (KLO, 292/1917). On several occasions too, contrary to past practice, Temporary Occupation Licences were issued for large areas — over 100 acres (40 ha) — to estate and mine owners, and also to groups of people upon statutory declarations that they were meant for planting foodstuffs. In these cases, surveying and even inspection by Land Office officials were abandoned (KLO, 351/1919, 365/1919, 376/1919).

Another ruling required all landowners with more than 30 acres (12 ha) to cultivate foodstuffs within an area either: (a) equal to 3 per cent of the agricultural land; and (b) 5 per cent of mining lands. In the case of a landowner with more than ten labourers, he was required to cultivate 10 per cent of the land if it was greater than either of the above categories. These foodstuffs included *ragi* (popular with the Indians), *padi* or sweet potatoes (Hose, 1919:104-105). Those owners cultivating above the required area were given bonuses of $5 per acre ($12.36 per ha) plus a rent rebate for the total area planted with food crops. All former planting restrictions were lifted for five years, and squatters were granted temporary licences to plant vegetables and other food crops on abandoned mining land (Hose, 1919:99; KLO, 365/1919). Numerous plots of mining land were converted to agricultural purposes (KLO, 376/1919, 380/1919, 469/1919).

The setting up of 'food growing reserves' for cultivating vegetables and fruits outside the major towns was also recommended. To this end the Chief Secretary, E.L. Brockman, ordered all the Residents, who subsequently ordered their District Officers, to

make 'definite recommendations as [to] suitable areas' for food growing reserves, but with the understanding that 'these reserves would not be gazetted under the Land Enactment' (Selangor Secretariat 4263/1917; KLO, 139/1920). In the case of the Kinta District, some 383 acres (155 ha) of land in thirteen different parts of the District were suggested. The reserves, however, were not created until 1921 because of objections by the Warden of Mines. A general policy adopted at this time, however, was that 'no more licences should be issued for planting rubber on mining or kampung land or on land which had been given out for vegetable planting' (Selangor Secretariat, 4263/1917). The priority was clearly the production of food crops.

Other recommendations outlined in the Federated Malay States *Government Gazette* (FMSGG, 4 September 1917, Notification No. 2823) provided for the cultivation of food-crops on rich land between the *padi* planting seasons, along river banks, and on railway reserves (KLO, 1236/1917, 1350/1917; Hose, 1919:99). Throughout these years various seeds (*padi, ragi,* Italian and Bulrush millet, sorghum, and maize) were distributed, as were root crops (sweet potato cuttings and yams) and pulses (green and black *gram, dhall* and Java beans). Publications on the cultivation of various tropical and European vegetables, *ragi,* and dry land *padi* were also distributed. Posters in the vernacular languages were widely distributed to estate and mining labourers informing them of the benefits of planting food (Hose, 1919:101-111, 104-105; Spring and Milsum, 1918:362-373; Burkhill, 1917; Spring, 1917).

Despite the end of the War, the situation took a turn for the worse in 1919. Because of an influenza epidemic during the harvest season, the 1918-1919 rice crop was below expectations (PAR, 1919: 2). Moreover, not only had the price of Siamese rice increased owing to unusually high demands by Japan, Java and other countries but, in March, owing to famine conditions in India, the monthly supplies from Burma were reduced from 13,000 to 7000 tons. With the extra demand that these altered circumstance made upon Siam and Vietnam, Malaya was suddenly faced with the possibility of having an insufficient supply of rice at any price before the end of 1919 (Hose, 1919:104). In a secret memorandum to the Colonial Secretary in December 1919, the High Commissioner requested assurance that ample stocks (10,000 tons) of flour would be made available in the event of a shortage of rice occurring in 1920 (Selangor Secretariat, 5358/1919). Though rice became available from Burma the following year, unfortunately, as a result of the 1919 rice crop

failure in Siam, the Bangkok government banned exports in 1920 (Ingram, 1954: 56). Thus, the food shortage crisis in Malaya was once again prolonged. Fortunately, food production in Malaya began increasing according to the Federated Malay States *Government Gazette Supplement* (FMSGG, 7 October 1921). Wet rice cultivation in Perak, for instance, rose from 73,823 acres (29,875 ha) in 1917-1918 to 82,608 acres (33,430 ha) in 1919-1920: that for dry rice rose from 7828 (3168 ha) to 40,912 acres (16,557 ha). The figures for tapioca also increased over the same period (FMSPFC, 29 April 1919, App. 9). In the Kinta District alone, 3316 acres (1341ha) of estate land and approximately 6000 acres (2428 ha) of mining land were reportedly planted with *padi*, *ragi*, sweet potatoes and other mixed crops in 1919 (ABFMS, 1919: 376-377). These figures do not include Chinese vegetable gardens and smallholdings cultivating foodstuffs, the area of which was reportedly difficult to ascertain. According to an estimate by a railway official in 1919, however, as much as 328 *pikuls* of vegetables were being exported by rail out of four points in the Kinta District (Chemor, Tanjung Rambutan, Kampar and Siputeh) over a six-day period alone (KLO, 139/1920).

These local increases and the availability of Siamese rice in 1921 eased the situation but the authorities continued to promote food production for several more years. This was because of lowered wages and unemployment during the slump in late 1920 which in turn led to labour unrest. The year 1921 was reportedly the 'worst year' in the rubber industry's history to that date (see Chapters 4 and 5). Prices fell and new planting was curtailed. According to the Federated Malay States *Government Gazette Supplement* (FMSGG, 17 June 1921), tapping ceased altogether in many estates.

In 1922, the Stevenson Restriction Scheme was introduced. Under the scheme, producers were given a quota assessed on previous levels of production. Sales of rubber were carried out through coupons issued by the District and Land Offices. Although the price of rubber was controlled on the international market, estate labourers continued to be unemployed (Parmer, 1960:226-232; Lim Teck Ghee, 1977:139-179). It was the same for the mine workers. In places, such as Tambun, Papan and Tronoh in the Kinta District, mining activities ceased almost completely. From over 79,000 workers in 1918, the total employed in Perak tin mines dropped to less than 46,000 by 1922 (Table 4.1). These retrenched workers swelled the ranks of the unemployed.

The colonial government was clearly afraid that labour unrest would occur and worked to stabilise the price of tin. In 1919, food

Plate 16. The lifebelt that slipped, December 1927. At a luncheon given in his honour at Kuala Lumpur by the Asiatic Planters Association of Malaya, the High Commissioner (Sir Hugh Clifford, G.C.M.G., G.B.E.) said that restriction had undoubtedly saved the rubber industry in the same way as a life-belt saved a drowning man (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

Plate 17. Teaching Grannie how to lay eggs, July 1928. (Dedicated in humble awe to the Right Hon. Mr. Ormsby Gore who visited Malaya and the D.E.I.) (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

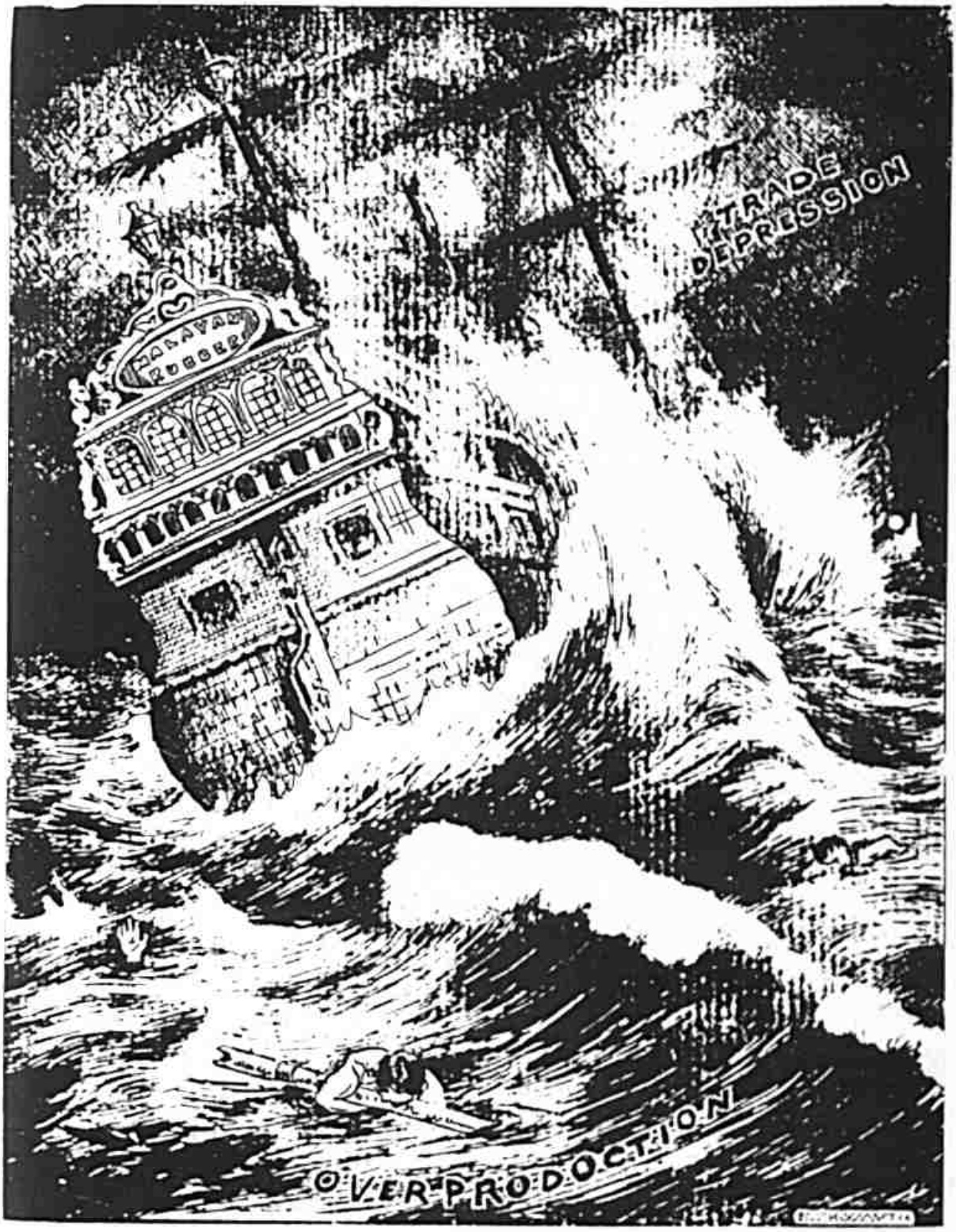

Plate 18. *"Sauve qui peut"*, October 1930. "His Excellency has decided that economic laws must be allowed to take their course". [Extract from official document (September 6th 1930). Announcing Government's rejection of the proposed re-introduction of rubber restriction]. The good ship Malayan Rubber is buffeted by a Trade Depression in a sea of overproduction; several hands have been lost overboard (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

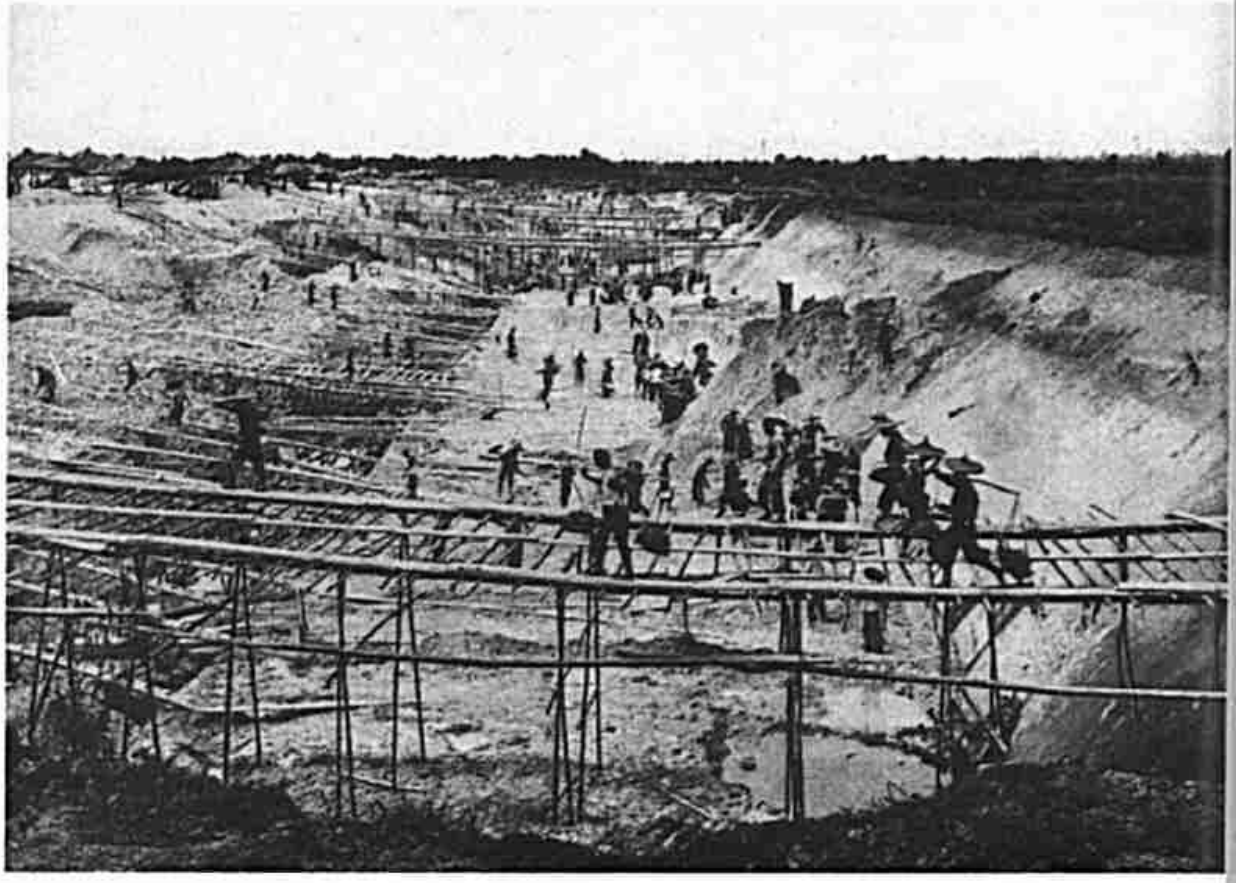

Plate 19. An open cast mine at Kemunting, Perak, 1904 (*Source*: Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur).

Plate 20. Tin mine at Kota, Taiping, Perak, 1904 (*Source*: Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur)

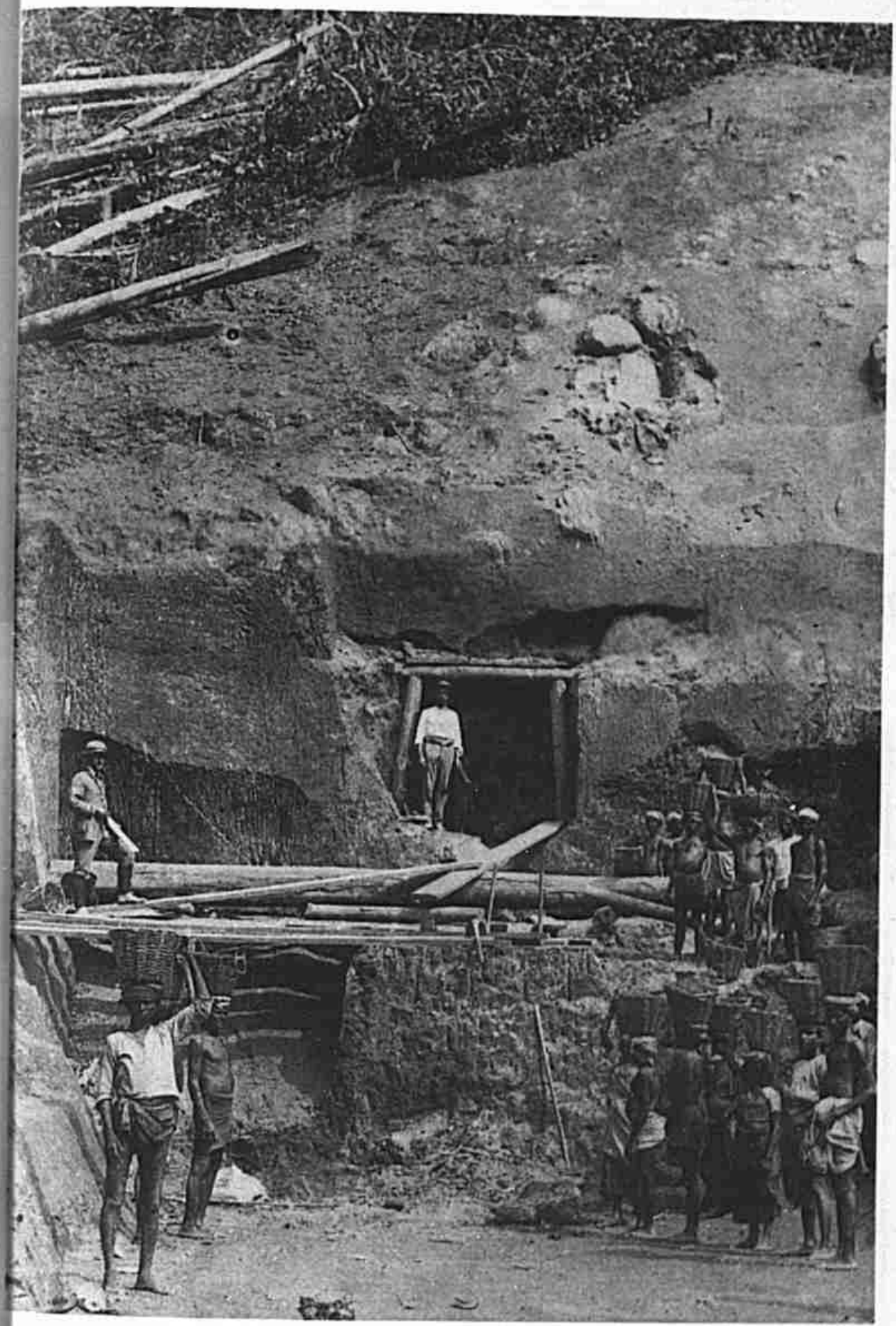

Plate 21. Making the railway tunnels at Bukit Berapit Pass
(*Source*: Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur).

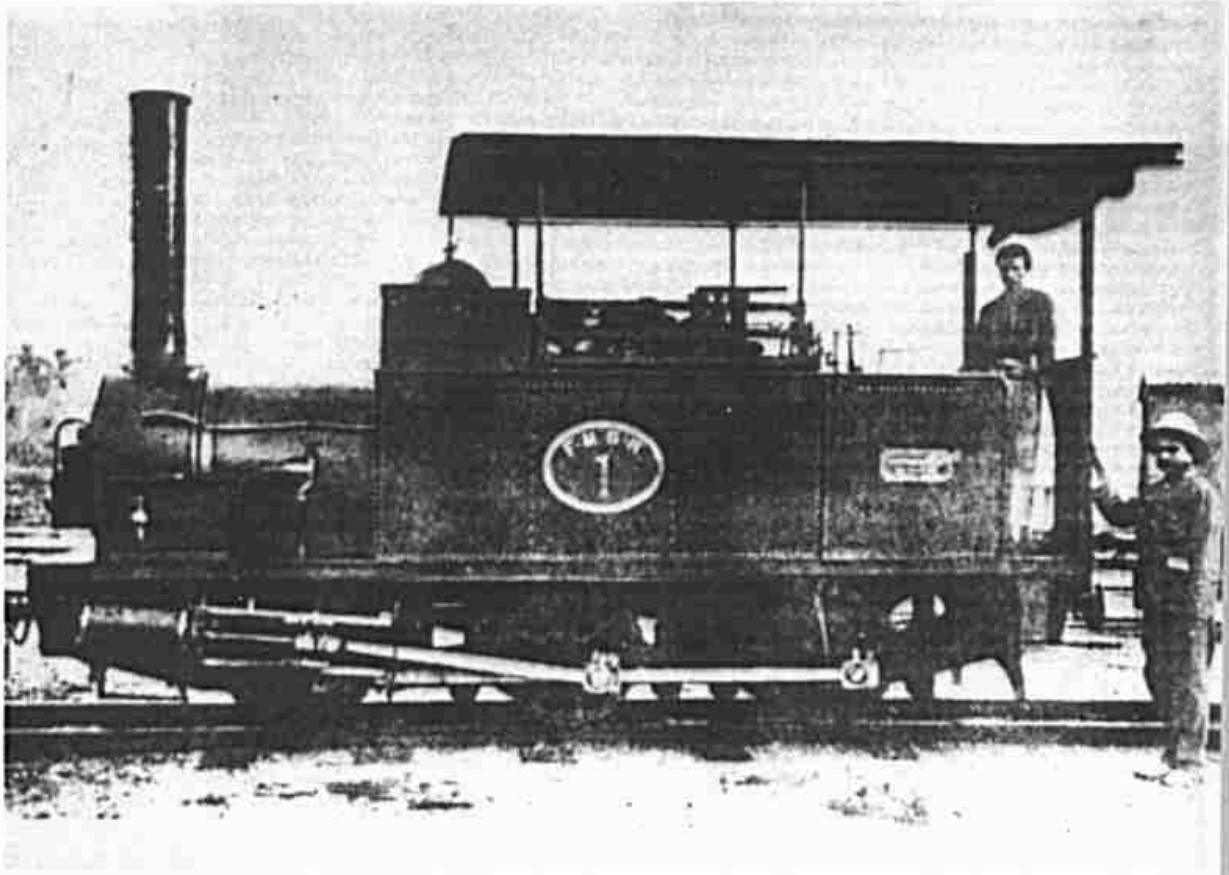

Plate 22. Federated Malay States Railways Locomotive No.1, built in 1881. From 1885, it ra between Taiping and Port Weld (*Source*: Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur).

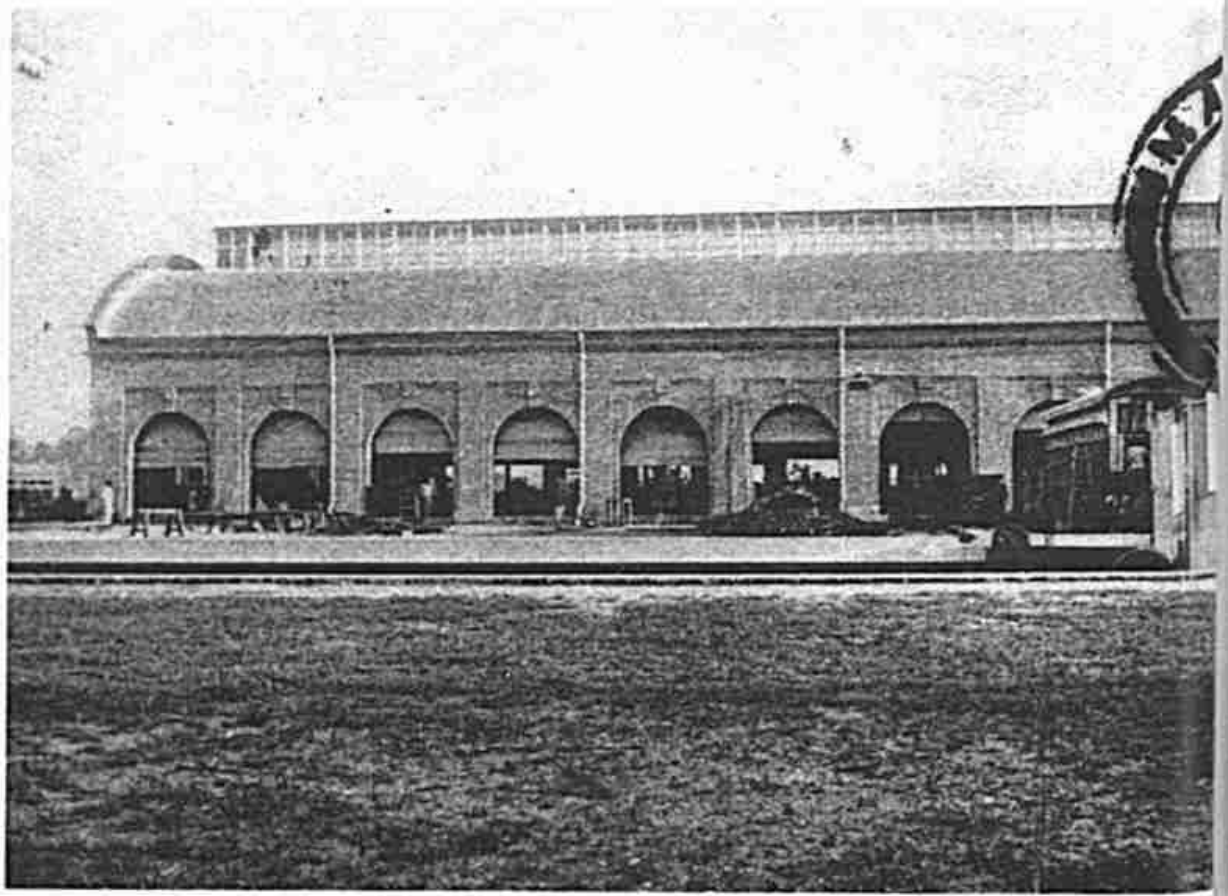

Plate 23. Central Railway Workshops established at Sentul, 5 km north of Kuala Lumpu between 1904 and 1906 (*Source*: Keretapi Tanah Melayu).

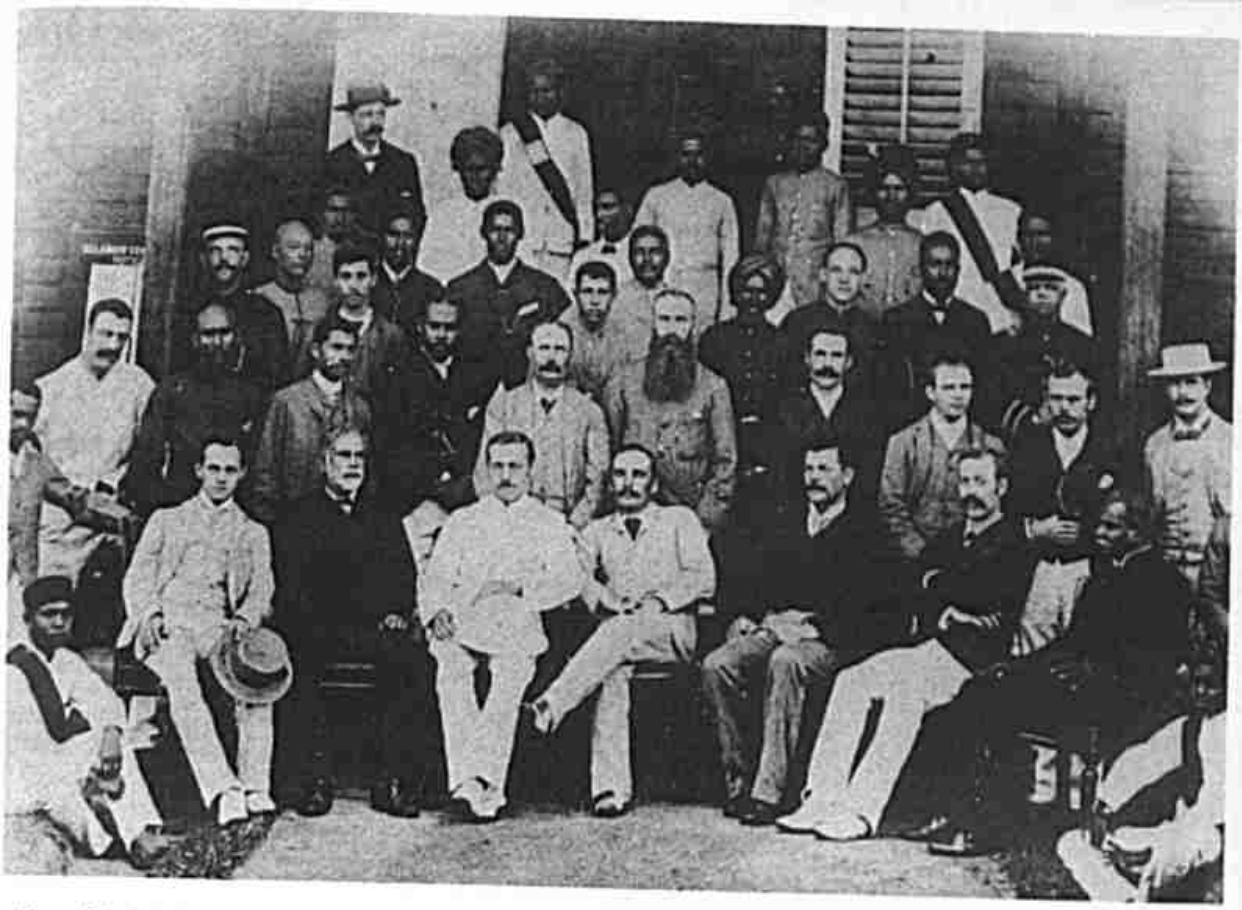

Plate 24. Mainline Staff --- Ulu Selangor Railway, 1893 (*Source*: Keretapi Tanah Melayu).

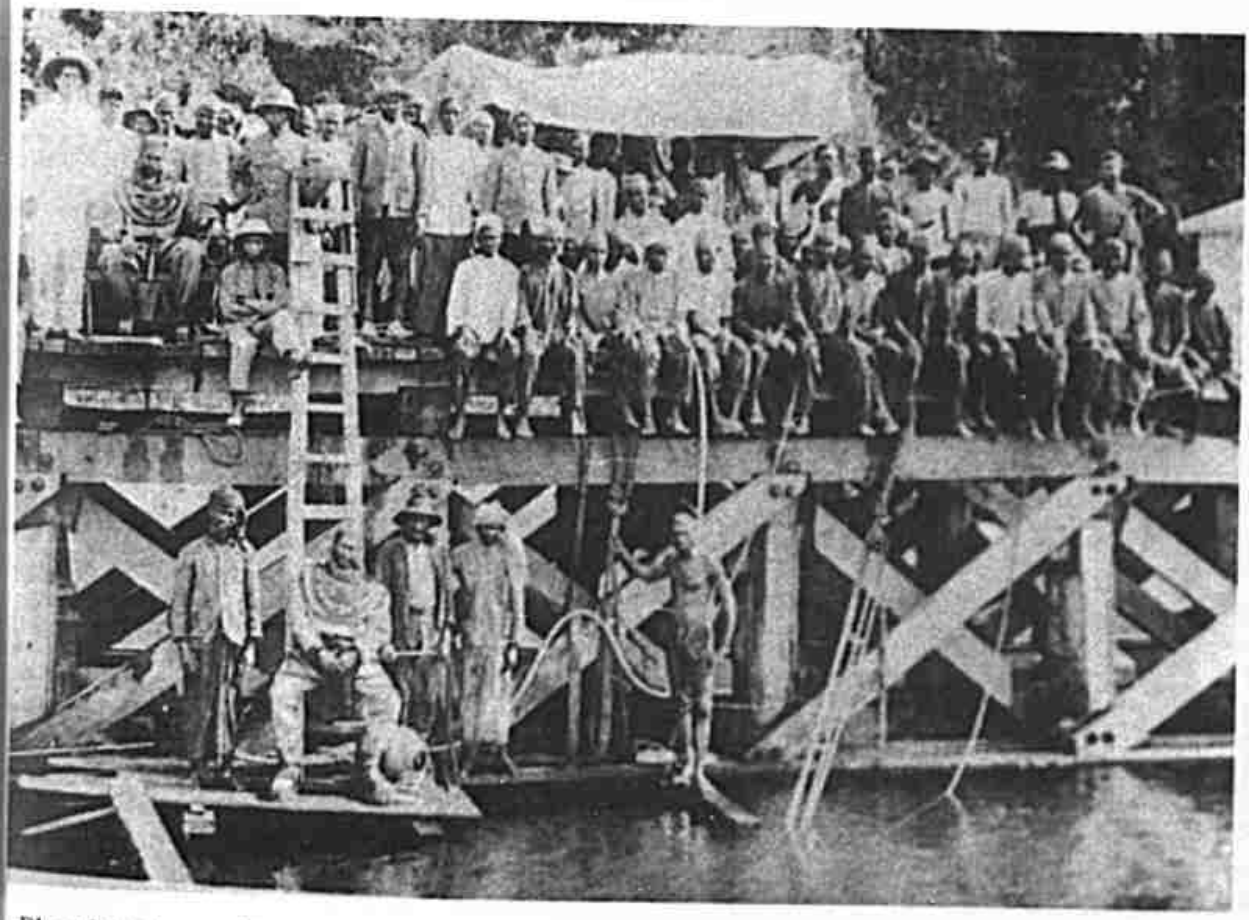

Plate 25. Group of Labourers Employed on Johor Wagon Ferry, 1908 (*Source*: Keretapi Tanah Melayu).

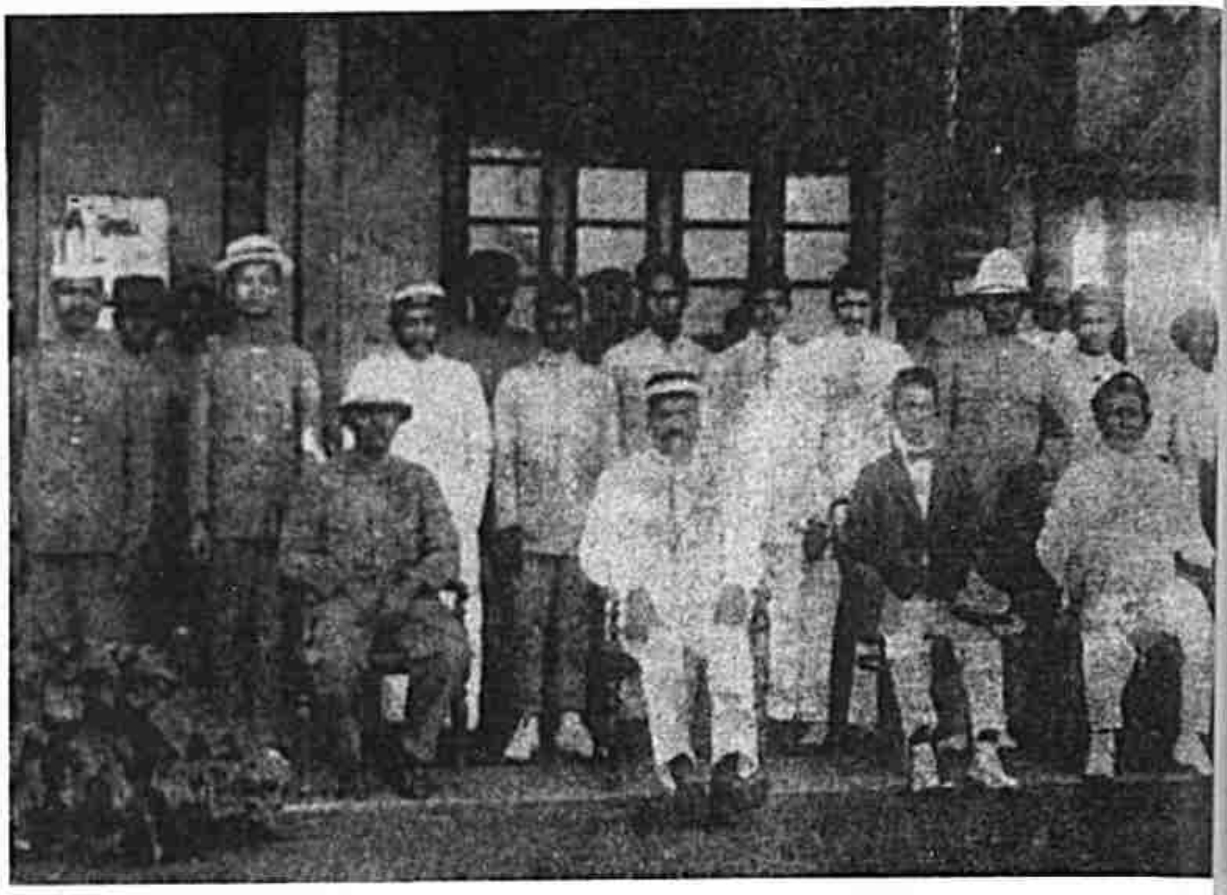

Plate 26. Kuala Lumpur Railway Staff, 1914 (*Source*: Keretapi Tanah Melayu).

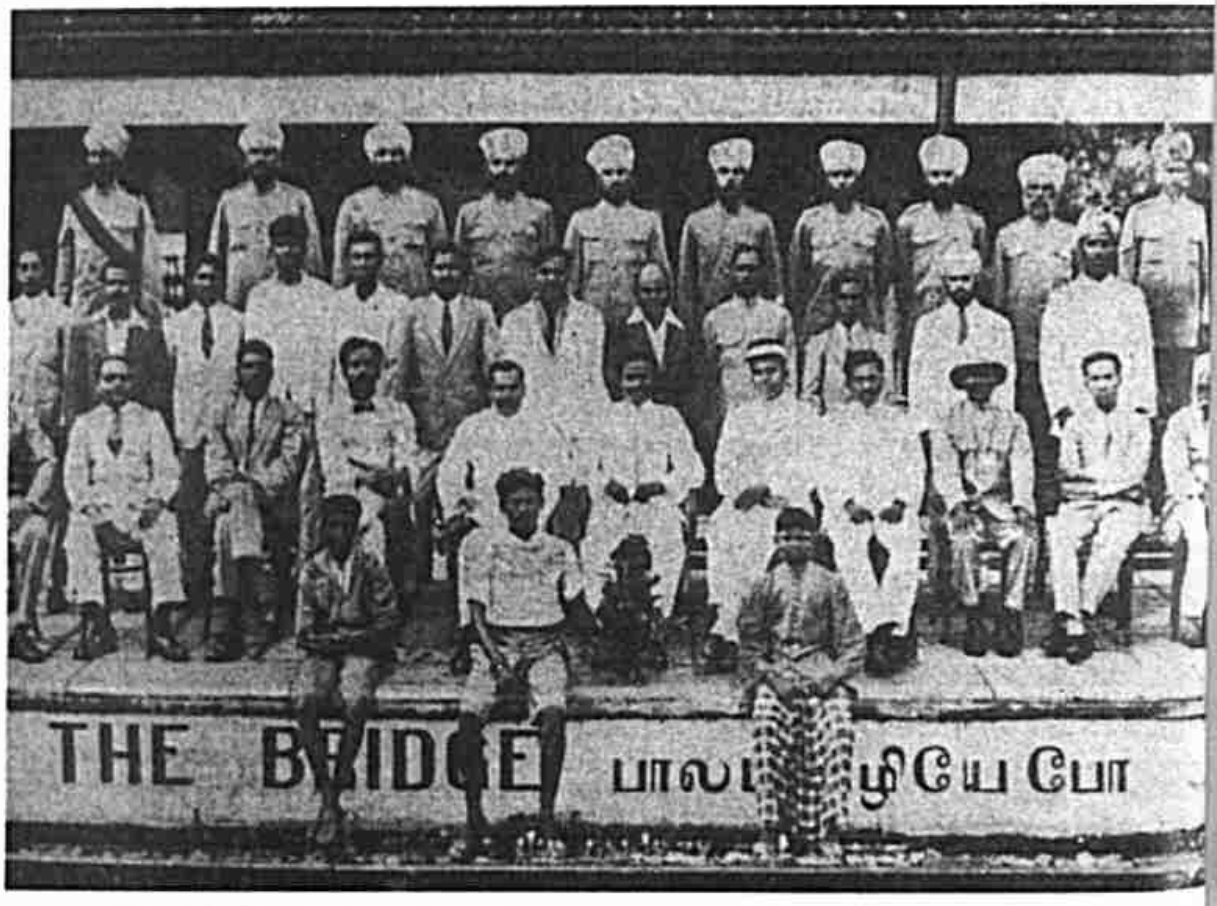

Plate 27. Seremban Railway Staff, 1925 (*Source*: Keretapi Tanah Melayu).

riots had occurred in several urban areas. These were later linked to the existence of an 'anarchist movement' which, in the Kinta Valley, was centred around Lahat, a mining town. Between 1921 and 1922, the anarchist movement was particularly active in the urban areas of the Kinta Valley (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1922:273/516, 1925a:717/41). Apart from this activity there was also an increase in gang robberies and serious thefts between 1919 and 1921 (see PAR, 1919, 1920, 1921; Blythe, 1969:319)

Faced with such 'disturbances' the government set up relief camps for 'destitutes and decrepits' and, more importantly, also encouraged the unemployed to engage in the cultivation of food crops (PAR, 1922:13, 1923:13). Since the Food Production Enactment of 1918 was still in force, free Temporary Occupation Licences were issued to those who did plant food crops (KLO, 16/1921). Despite opposition from the Warden of Mines, 'food reserves' amounting to 135 acres (55 ha) were designated in various points of the District. The reserves, however, were gazetted as 'public areas' and not under the Land Code in June 1921. Accordingly, the gardeners were issued Temporary Occupation Licences and not land titles (KLO, 139/1920; FMSPFC, 21 November 1922:866-867; DOG, 34/1922, 167/1923).

Apart from these 'food reserves' the unemployed also began to cultivate disused mining land for which Temporary Occupation Licences were similarly issued (KLO, 16/1921, 139/120). There was even a provision for these unemployed coolies to plant vegetables on land alienated for Malays to grow fruit trees, pending the maturity of these trees (FMSPFC, 21 November 1922:B66-7; Khoo Soo Hock, 1969:102). The total number of Chinese agriculturalists increased considerably. In 1921, it was estimated that there were already 13,000 Chinese market gardeners in Perak (Great Britain, 1922:115). Assuming that some of these gardeners had families, the total population of these agricultural squatter communities could have been in the region of 20-30,000.

Compared to the pre-1910 situation, the size of these agricultural squatter communities had certainly grown immensely. Equally important, however, these agricultural activities had helped dwellers in the Kinta Valley through a prolonged food shortage. Many of them were farmers prior to leaving China (Hall, 1889:5,10; Selangor Secretariat, 7299/1903, 1973/1911, 1522/1911). Faced with similar conditions of food shortages in Malaya their experiences in China eased their passage into farming again during the Depression in the 1930s.

Many of them returned to the tin mines which re-opened in 1923 when the price of tin started to rise again. In 1927, the Assistant District Officer of Ulu Kinta estimated that there were about 4000 houses occupied by Chinese vegetable gardeners farming about 5000 acres (2023 ha) of state land and land alienated for mining in his *mukim*. They could be found in the Tiger Lane area around Ipoh, in Pinji, Kantan and Chemor and the areas lying between Tanjung Rambutan and Chemor (KLO, 747/1927).

Likewise in 1929, the Chinese Sub-Inspector of Agriculture in Kinta, reported the 'discovery' of 100 acres (40 ha) of vegetable gardens, each of one to four acres (0.4-1.6 ha) along the Degong-Kampar Road. Other market gardens also were located around Batu Gajah on previously dredged areas belonging to mining companies, and in Kampung Pulai from where ten *pikuls* of fresh vegetables per day were distributed to Ipoh, Gopeng and Kampar (KLO, 659/1929). The Sub-Inspector, like the Assistant District Officer, noted that many of the residents in these communities were *full-time* farmers though a few also worked as casual labourers in the mines. Most had 'occupied the land for years, levelled and fertilised it, and have in some cases built substantial houses and planted permanent fruit trees' — a sense of permanency had set in (KLO, 747/1927). The fact that they were still on Temporary Occupation Licences was bemoaned by both officers and they recommended that the areas be reserved for between fifteen and twenty years for vegetable gardeners (KLO, 659/1929).

The setting-up of these reserves in the Kinta District, however, was generally considered of low priority by officials. With the re-opening of mines in late 1922 and the withdrawal of the Food Production Enactment on 1 June 1923, Temporary Occupation Licences were not renewed despite the fact that in many cases the squatters were probably 'satisfactory tenants' (see, for example, FMSPFC, 21 November 1922). This was especially true of those squatters on tin mining land. In 1923, Food Production Reserves, only recently set up, were also revoked (Selangor Secretariat, 2946/1922). In 1924, the British Resident categorically stated:

> The policy was definitely adopted that land administration in Kinta must be conducted primarily in the interests of tin mining and applications for permanent agricultural titles are to be given the most careful considerations *(sic)*... (PAR, 1924:6).

In 1927 and 1928, he further clarified:

> Agricultural land is ... so scarce in Kinta that applications for smallholdings have to be scrutinised much more carefully than in districts where it is abundant. Perak Malays are given prior considerations but even they have to be strictly rationed (PAR, 1927:2, 1928:2).

Thus, the Temporary Occupation Licence proved to be a most appropriate legal document, easily issued when needed and just as easily withdrawn when old priorities once again prevailed. Fortunately, tin prices were extremely favourable rising from $80.64 per pikul in 1922 to $144.93 in 1927. From almost 46,000 in 1922 the numbers employed in Perak mines rose to a new peak of over 77,000 in 1927 (see Table 4.1). In 1927, some 55,000 coolies were employed in the Kinta District. Clearly, this number was much lower than that of the early 1920s — a reflection of structural changes within the industry. As mechanisation proceeded and the small miner working with labour-intensive methods in open-cast mines disappeared from the scene, the tin mines, even in boom periods, could not absorb as many coolies as previously. Between 1913 and 1923 alone, the numbers employed in open-cast mines dropped from over 99,000 to under 13,000, while increases in employment only occurred in mines equipped with hydraulic or gravel pumps (from 16,000 to over 38,000) and on dredges (228 to 4370) (PAR, 1913:13, 1923:6).

The number of dredges in operation in Perak rose from one in 1913 to thirty-two in 1923 and to forty-eight in 1927, with twenty-four others either ordered or under construction (PAR, 1913:13, 1927:13). This raises a variety of questions. Was it because the tin mining industry was unable to maintain its previous recruitment rates of coolies that the government turned a blind eye to those squatters who farmed on *state*, in contrast to *mining*, land; was this why the Assistant District Officer, Kinta area, and the Sub-Inspector of Agriculture so easily 'discovered' the many vegetable gardeners in the late 1920s; and why were the gardeners not given security of land tenure when they were providing food for the local population? Before tackling these questions the subsequent consolidation of agricultural communities that emerged in many parts of the Kinta Valley in the late 1920s is discussed.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF CASH CROPPING IN THE 1930s

The third phase in the development of the Kinta Valley agricultural squatter communities was directly related to the world depression of the early 1930s (Khoo Kay Kim, 1977). As financial collapse occurred in the West resulting in a curtailment of industrial production and trade, the demand for tin dropped drastically. The average tin price fell from $104.37 per *pikul* in 1929 to $60.29 per *pikul* in 1931 (see Table 4.1).

In Malaya, mine owners either stopped production completely or retrenched their workers so as to maintain economic operations. The numbers retrenched were considerable (see Syed Noor Syed Abdullah, 1983 for a study of the Perak tin mining industry). Table 4.1 illustrates in detail the situation in Perak which was the worst hit (see Khoo Kay Kim, 1977, for a more general discussion of the effects of the depression in Malaysia). Between December 1929 and August 1932, the size of the Perak mining workforce was reduced from over 65,000 to under 22,000 men — barely a third of its size just three years before (PAR, 1932:15). Beginning from 1 March 1931, production quotas were also imposed. Through the International Tin Restriction Scheme, and then the modified Byrne Scheme which replaced it in July 1932, production was gradually brought down to 75 per cent below 1929 levels (see Yip Yat Hoong, 1969:179-214; Fermor, 1939:129-131). Despite the end of the Depression two other schemes to restrict production were in force during the rest of the 1930s.

Some retrenched workers moved to the urban areas in search of work and other forms of relief but found little of either. The Kinta Unemployment Relief Committee which the government set up in June 1930 provided jobs, at its peak, for a total of 2097 workers. By 1931, about one-and-a-half years after its formation, the Committee had become inactive (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1931a:717/81, 1933c:273/585). Other efforts coordinated by the Perak Chinese Chamber of Commerce provided free meals, housing materials and clothes to a few thousand destitute coolies initially, but the Chamber's funds soon dried up (Khoo Kay Kim, 1977:86-87). A significant increase in illegal hawking activities was also noted in official reports. Since it necessitated as little as two dollars initial capital according to one estimate, many unemployed coolies turned to this form of self-employment. Although 'in many cases hawking [was] the last resort and only outlet for the local unemployed', they were soon suppressed by authorities on the

grounds that the hawking business was 'unhygienic, causing obstruction to traffic and fostering bribery...' (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1933c:273/585; Khoo Kay Kim, 1977:83).

Other measures resorted to by the unemployed coolies in order to provide for themselves were: looting of shops for rice and other foodstuffs (which provoked harsh and effective government reaction); striking to protest against work stoppages (these efforts were largely organised by the Perak Tin Mining Workers' Union led by communists); and general crime (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1931a:717/81). In the last case, the police department reported a dramatic increase in murder, robbery, house-breaking, theft and the use of counterfeit coins. These types of criminal activities in 1930-1932 were almost double those of the previous five years (calculated from PAR, 1931:26, 1933:40).

On the whole however, none of the alternatives discussed above could provide for the tens of thousands in search of a means of livelihood. Yet, little labour unrest occurred. The key to this paradox was the 'exporting away' of the threat of labour unrest. Briefly, more than 50,000 Chinese from the Federated Malay States were repatriated back to China between 1930 and 1932 (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1933c:273/585; Parmer, 1960:236, 242). Of these, about 33,000 were from Perak. In 1933 the Perak Resident explained:

> The year has been one of the quietest on record. In spite of continued slump conditions, there have been no disorders or disturbances. The policy of free repatriation, found necessary in 1931 and 1932, appears to have led to the elimination of the unruly element, and the retention of the steadier and more settled type of labourer (PAR, 1933:58).

Apart from repatriation, the other outlet that helped to avert labour unrest, and which provided an alternative means of livelihood as well, was the promotion of agricultural production among the unemployed. As in the early twenties, once again temporary Food Production Reserves were established (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1930c:273/566; KLO, 795/1930). The cultivation of food-crops (including *padi*) by Chinese was recommended by the Department of Agriculture in old mining areas, particularly in Batang Padang (ARAFO Perak Central, 1929:12, 1931:2-3, 13-14). In certain areas like Tapah the cultivation of food crops was allowed

TABLE 4.2
NUMBER OF TYPES OF TEMPORARY OCCUPATION LICENCES ISSUED FOR KINTA DISTRICT, 1933

Category	Temporary Occupation Licences no.
Over State Land	
Within towns and villages	1,400
Within Malay Reservation (MR)	50
Outside Towns, Villages and MR	4,000
Over Mining Land	11,550
Total	**17,000**

Source: KLO, 695/1933.

along river banks (KLO, 398/1931). In all these cases Temporary Occupation Licences were liberally issued and fees were not collected for plots of less than one acre (0.4 ha) (KLO, 957/1933). Requests for reductions in licence fees were also approved (KLO, 743/1933, 957/1933). In 1931, more than 8200 Temporary Occupation Licences were issued in Ulu Kinta Mukim alone, 80 per cent, or some 6600 of them, for vegetable growing (PAR, 1931:35). In 1933, the estimated number of Temporary Occupation Licences in the District as a whole was 17,000, mostly for agricultural purposes (see Table 4.2 for a breakdown into different categories).

From Table 4.2 it can be seen that most of the Temporary Occupation Licences were issued for cultivation on mining land; probably because it had been abandoned, but also due to the numerous mining pools available on such land — water being necessary for gardening purposes. The evidence available also suggests that the area farmed by each licence holder was extremely small. In 1930, the total area cultivated with vegetables in Kinta District was only 686 acres (278 ha) which rose to 1900 acres (769 ha) in 1931 (ARAFO Perak South, 1931:30; FCP, 26 June 1930:B53). Yet, in 1931, some 6600 Temporary Occupation Licences were issued for vegetable growing in the Ulu Kinta *mukim* alone. The total number of Temporary Occupation Licences for vegetable growing in the Kinta District

would have been at least 8000, probably more. Taking this conservative estimate, the average size per vegetable plot in 1931 would be almost one quarter acre (0.1 ha) each. Those familiar with vegetable gardening will realise that a plot of this size is rather large to farm single-handed since intensive cultivation is demanded — an obvious point made to me during fieldwork in 1977-1978 (see Bunting and Milsum, 1930; Milsum and Grist, 1937). In fact, those who moved to the urban areas in search of jobs were probably single males without families. Who then cultivated the market gardens? It is my argument that coolies with families did so. They were probably the 'steadier and more settled type of labourer' that the Perak Resident referred to in his 1933 statement cited earlier.

The move to farming by these coolies with families is not difficult to explain. First, since in the urban areas well-paying jobs were scarce, it made good sense for those unemployed coolies with families to feed, house and clothe to turn to farming. As many Chinese immigrants to Malaya came from farming backgrounds it was not surprising that many of the wives of these coolies had been growing vegetables continuously since the early 1920s or even before, admittedly on a smaller scale, while their husbands worked in the mines. Given the relative accessibility to land and Temporary Occupation Licences during these years of depression, these coolies resorted to farming. In this way, food was ensured, shelter could easily be constructed, and the family — a burden in the urban areas during slump conditions — could be used to advantage for intensive cultivation on market gardens, especially if the children were adolescents.

Secondly, though demanding much hard work, market gardening does not require much initial capital. A few agricultural implements, such as the *changkul* and watering cans, are all that are necessary. Seeds and pulses were made available by the Department of Agriculture and so readily obtained. Most vegetables, such as brinjal, spinach, onions and mustard take only about thirty days to reach maturity. Long beans, 'lady's fingers' (*okra*), cucumber and various kinds of gourds usually take about forty days (Bunting and Milsum, 1930). This means that a poor farmer can achieve rapid returns on his labour.

Once a farmer accumulated enough capital, he usually began to rear livestock (poultry and pigs) and fish (in nearby disused mining pools) as well. Like fresh vegetables, fresh meat and fish also had a ready market in the urban areas. The rearing of livestock, in turn, complemented market gardening activities since pig and

poultry waste could be used as fertiliser for the vegetables (KLO, 393/1936, 907/1936; ARAFO Perak South, 1930:/20,39, 1937:9).[2] Moreover, the marketing of these perishables posed little problem because a comprehensive transport network was already in existence in the Kinta area. Most mines, including isolated ones, were often served by at least dirt tracks, while many mining towns were connected to the rest of the peninsula through roads and the railway system (see Chapter 5). Thus, once the vegetables, fruit, fish and livestock were transported to the mines and towns, they could be moved elsewhere quite quickly (Ooi Jin Bee, 1955:52-56).

Consequently, production increased rapidly. In 1930, 49,538 *pikuls*, and in 1931, 50,429 *pikuls* of vegetables were exported from the state (ARAFO Perak South, 1930:19, 1931:30). Thereafter, however, exports, like production in general, began to fall. One reason for this decline was low prices, but more important was the reduction in the number of Temporary Occupation Licences issued — a phenomenon discussed later.

Two other major crops which were intensively cultivated in the Kinta area during the thirties were tobacco and groundnuts. Although these were cash crops rather than food crops, their cultivation by the Chinese was also encouraged by the authorities — a significant departure from past practice in the Kinta District. Not only would such endeavours provide income for the unemployed, but the Perak Resident hoped that these agricultural activities would help to diversify the Kinta area's economy, and perhaps even stimulate its economic rehabilitation. Compared to vegetable gardening, however, the initial capital required to cultivate these crops was much higher. Accordingly, the authorities provided credit to retrenched mine workers in the Chemor area to help them cultivate tobacco (PTIDAC, 1933:90-98; KLO, 1013/1933). In 1932, 850 acres (344 ha) of tobacco were reported throughout Perak. By 1933, tobacco acreage had grown to 1600 acres (647 ha) — 1050 acres (425 ha) of which were in the Kinta area. In the late thirties tobacco occupied about 1500 acres (607 ha) of Perak (PAR, 1932:12, 1933:40,51, 1939:15; ARAFO Perak South, 1932:5, 1933:47).

Similarly, in Sungei Siput, and in Pusing and Kampar in the Kinta District, the authorities encouraged former coolies in the ex-

2. One aspect of market gardening is the cultivation of *derris* (tuba), principally on disused mining land, for use as a pesticide. Tuba cultivation became so important with the development of market gardening that large acreages of tuba began to be cultivated illegally. The area rose from 361 acres (146 ha) in 1930 to 2296 acres (929 ha) by 1937 (ARAFO Perak South, 1930:20, 1937:9).

perimental growing of groundnuts. In 1932, there were about 600 acres (243 ha) planted with groundnuts, and in 1933, 771 acres (312 ha). The experiment was so successful that groundnuts began to be processed for cooking oil. Machinery was installed in Pusing and Kampar for this purpose (PAR, 1932:39, 1933:13; KDAR, 1933).

Yet another crop intensively cultivated in Kinta was tapioca. Until 1934, government policy had been to discourage its cultivation. In 1927, a ruling was issued disallowing the cultivation of more than two crops of tapioca on land alienated for rubber and other crops. It was contended that tapioca caused soil depletion. Subsequently, in an important study released in 1933, it was argued that such a reputation was unjustified. The agriculturalists attributed soil exhaustion not to the crop itself but to the manner and method of cultivation. When grown in rotation with other crops, the experts argued, there might in fact be actual benefit to other crops, since tapioca cultivation demanded deeper and more thorough tillage (cf. Greenstreet and Lambourne, 1933 for a negative view; see KLO, 627/1927). With government encouragement, the area of tapioca increased rapidly from the mid-1930s onwards. Whereas in 1930 only 930 acres (376 ha) of tapioca holdings had been reported in the State of Perak, by 1935, the figure had almost doubled to 1748 acres (707 ha) (PAR, 1931:35, 1935:23). In early 1934, the price of tapioca was about $35-$40 per *pikul*. By the end of the year it had risen to $60 (Grist, 1950:2-22). Initially undertaken as a cash crop, along with rubber growing or in mixed farming rotating with other crops, such as tobacco, sugar cane and vegetables (and with tapioca refuse being used for pig feed), tapioca planting began to come into its own. In 1936 the area of tapioca holdings in Perak rose to 2835 acres (1147 ha); in 1937 to 5233 acres (2118 ha); in 1939 to 7287 acres (2948 ha) and by 1940, to 11,225 acres (4543 ha) — most of them being found in the northern Kinta District and Sungei Siput areas (PAR, 1936:23, 1937:28, 1939:16, 1940:17; ARAFO Perak South, 1937:9). For the most part, however, much of this cultivation was conducted without Temporary Occupation Licences on State Land and Forest Reserves. Although forestry had been 'a valuable form of relief work ... in Perak during the recent slump', the Acting Director of Forestry, Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States reported in 1940 that much damage had been done in consequence to Perak forests and soil (Selangor Secretariat, 914/1934). As with groundnuts, a tapioca processing industry also emerged in the area. In 1933, there were reportedly thirty small tapioca mills in the Kinta area, manufacturing tapioca flour and chips for local use as well as for export. In

1937, the industry was earning about $1.5 to $2 million (DAAR,1937:28).

Thus, the Kinta District emerged as an important cash-cropping area in the 1930s. The Great Depression had resulted in mass unemployment to which the Perak authorities responded by providing relief work, repatriation and promotion of agricultural production. According to the 1931 Census, the number of Chinese in Perak who listed market gardening as their major occupation was almost 18,000 (Great Britain, 1932). However by 1933, when the number of Temporary Occupation Licences issued for Kinta District alone reached an unprecedented 17,000, the total was probably higher. If we include the cash-croppers cultivating groundnuts, tobacco, tapioca and tuba (*derris*), and accept that most of the farmers were married with families, then the population of these Chinese agricultural squatter communities in the 1930s could have been in the region of 30,000 to 50,000. The last suggestion is not improbable.

The economic boom was reflected in a net increase of almost 403,000 Chinese men, almost 143,000 women and over 165,000 children as migrants into Malaysia between 1925 and 1929. This was a total increase of almost 711,000 Chinese (excluding natural births) over the five-year period (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1931c:273/572). With the effective end of the boom, the Immigration Restriction Ordinance was gazetted in the Straits Settlements in 1928. Clearly directed at Chinese immigration, it could be used to regulate and prohibit immigration in times of 'unemployment, economic distress' or when it was 'not in the public interest' to allow certain groups entry (Parmer, 1960:92). The ordinance, however, was not put into effect until 1930, when the world depression began to affect Malaya severely. Later, because of pressures from Malay groups who were against Chinese immigration (Roff, 1967:93,208) and the experience of mass unemployment during the Depression, the Aliens Ordinance 1933 was introduced (see Parmer, 1960:92-93).[3] It placed a quota on the entry of Chinese males into British Malaya but allowed the continued entry of an estimated 190,000

3. Compared to the Immigration Restriction Ordinance of 1928, the 1933 ordinance was considered more 'effective' by the authorities. Whereas the 1928 Ordinance was applicable only in times of emergency, the 1933 ruling was applicable at all times and could be put into effect immediately. Furthermore, the 1933 Ordinance not only regulated 'the admission of aliens in accordance with the political, social and economic needs...' of the authorities, but also provided for registration and control of aliens resident in Malaya; an alien being defined as 'any person not a British subject nor a subject of a British-protected or mandated territory'. As such, the ruling affected Chinese and Javanese, but not Indians (Parmer, 1960:92-93).

Chinese females between 1933-1938; restrictions, however, were imposed after 1938 (Blythe, 1947:103). These related developments resulted in an overall increase of Chinese in the Federated Malay States despite the repatriation of over 50,000 of them, virtually all males, between 1930 and 1938. T.E. Smith (1964:174-185) has highlighted this net increase as the turning point in the demographic pattern of the Chinese in Malaya.

Whereas in 1911 the ratio of Chinese women to men was only 241:1000, this changed to 384:1000 in 1921, and to 486:1000 by 1931. Furthermore, the proportion of children under fifteen years of age of the total Chinese population in Perak was also steadily rising from 11 per cent in 1911 to 20 per cent in 1921 to over 25 per cent by 1931. If families with children are considerably less mobile than single adults, then these figures point quite clearly to an increase in the degree of permanent settlement among the Chinese in Perak even by 1921. For this reason T.E. Smith has criticised Vlieland, the Superintendent of the 1931 Census, for continuing to maintain that the Chinese were 'mere sojourners'. In contrast, Smith (1964:175) argued that:

> Had the bulk of the Chinese immigrants been "mere sojourners" ... surely a larger number would have accepted the offer of repatriation. The tide of migration did admittedly swing during the depression and the number of emigrants exceeded the number of immigrants, but the great majority of the Chinese population endured the depression years in Malaya... Clearly there was a failure in 1931 to sift the growing statistical evidence pointing to an extension of permanent Chinese settlement in Malaya...

Such transformation of the demographic pattern among the Perak Chinese, resulting in an overall increase in the number of families, additionally contributed to the growth in size of the Kinta Valley agricultural squatter communities and to their consolidation. A sense of greater permanency developed.

In this regard, the occurrence of yet another recession in 1938, when the Perak authorities once again encouraged foodcrop production, must have further contributed to the growth of these communities — some 17,000 coolies being retrenched from the mines during the slump and, in Ulu Kinta Mukim alone, 11,000 Temporary Occupation Licences being issued (PAR, 1938:96; PCM,

7 December 1939:4,6). As war threatened, food production was further promoted between 1939 and 1941 (see, for example, PCM, 9 May 1939, 12 October 1949; DAAR, 1940:1-2). Thus, the squatter communities were encouraged. According to various Perak records, such communities could be found all over the Kinta District: in Sungei Trap, Blanja, Tanjung Tualang, Sungei Raia, Teja, Kampar, Bunga Tanjung, Malim Nawar, Kota Bharu; along the Gopeng Road, at the proposed site of the aerodrome, along the Jelapang Road, all near Ipoh; and in numerous 'mined-out' areas (see, for example, KLO, 593/1933, 1020/1933).

These agricultural communities had grown tremendously and transformed the Kinta area into an important food-supplying region — market gardening being second only to rice production as the source of foodstuffs in food deficient colonial Malaya (Milsum and Grist, 1937:47). Nevertheless, the Perak authorities still were reluctant to grant farmers security of tenure over the land they farmed. In fact, during 1934 to 1937 when tin prices started to rise again (see Table 4.1) and the mines re-opened, many Temporary Occupation Licences were withdrawn. New applications were rejected and pressure in the form of summonses, fines and, ultimately, eviction in some cases, was put upon those agriculturalists without a licence (see, for example, KLO, 695/1933). In November 1936 an amendment to the Land Code to facilitate the removal of squatters by police, and to deny these squatters any form of compensation, was also introduced — the amendment was temporarily shelved and not gazetted until 1939 because of the previous year's slump (FMSPFC, 4 and 6 November 1936:B106-10; PCM, 23 February 1938:8-10). Why was the government so reluctant to provide security of tenure to these squatters; and why did it encourage food production on certain occasions and withdraw Temporary Occupation Licences on others? There are several possible answers.

First, there was, of course, the policy enunciated clearly in the 1920s that no permanent titles should be issued to squatters on mining or potential mining land anywhere in the Kinta District. Although a resolution was passed at the Third Inter-Departmental Agriculture Conference in 1932 recommending that the government grant permanent titles to squatter farmers producing vegetables the 1920s policy remained. The resolution was subsequently adopted in Perak (Selangor Secretariat, 572/1933). At a meeting of all Perak District Officers held in 1933 the resolution was qualified by the ruling that it '[would] not apply to TOLS [Temporary Occupation Licences] over land held under mining leases'

(KLO, 695/1933). Because of this qualification, the resolution was effectively of no benefit to the Kinta Valley squatters because, as noted, some 11,500 of the 17,000 people who held Temporary Occupation Licences in 1933 did so over mining land, while another 4000 held licences over State Land with mining potential (KLO, 695/1933). As such there could be no solution to the Kinta area squatters' problem of insecurity of tenure.

Secondly, though this was probably not of primary consideration in the Kinta District, a general pro-Malay stance was clearly emerging in colonial administration policies from the 1930s onwards. This development was partly a result of increasing Malay assertiveness (Yeo Kim Wah, 1982:344-345; Roff, 1967). Thus, government publicly explained on several occasions that the Chinese squatters could not be given titles since it would encroach upon the Malay peasants' preserve of small-scale agriculture (Lim Teck Ghee, 1977:204-216). It was in line with this thrust that Malay Reservations were expanded in the 1920s and 1930s and the original Malay Reservations Enactment, 1913, was amended in 1933 to ensure the exclusion of non-Malays from land traditionally held by Malays (Kratoska, 1983:149-168). Under the circumstances, the granting of titles in large numbers to squatter Chinese was unlikely.

There was, however, a third unstated reason which might, in fact, be the most important explanation of all. This has to do with the overall nature of colonialism itself in British Malaya. In essence, the colonial state was pro-capital (see Lim Teck Ghee, 1984:28-66). In the case of the Kinta District, this bias was ultimately expressed in the form of the State's support for mining, indeed capital's interests, over squatter agricultural communities, essentially labour's interests. The structural tendency of such a bias was to reserve Kinta District land for mining purposes. Not only Chinese squatter but Malay peasant interests as well, were subjected to this overall priority, the creation of Malay Reservations notwithstanding (KLO, 242/1938).[4]

Viewed from this perspective, the reluctance of government to issue titles to squatters is not simply one of preserving land for mining, but for capital. The government's sponsorship of agricultural programs periodically in times of severe food shortages, economic slumps, and threats of labour unrest can be seen as attempts to ad-

4. Of the 463,360 acres (187,519 ha) in Kinta, only 3 per cent of the land was designated as Malay Reservations. Apart from Forest Reserves, the vast majority of land was alienated to European and Chinese capitalist interests for mining but also agricultural purposes.

just to changing socio-economic situations which threatened the viability of the colonial economy. Alternatively, recalling the pressure put upon squatters in post- slump times, the colonial state can also be viewed as actively intervening on behalf of capital in trying to make mining land unencumbered and perhaps even ensuring the availability of wage-labour for the re-opened tin mines. The former suggests a less rational and interventionalist colonial state than the latter. Whichever was the case, the Temporary Occupation Licence was a legal document which was manifestly appropriate to the colonial state, allowing promotion of cash-cropping in times of crisis and withdrawal once the crisis was over.

The contradiction in this situation was the increasing growth of the agricultural squatter communities. Spurred on by the policies and practices of the state during crises — the First World War, the food shortages at the end of the 1910s, the slump of the early 1920s, the Depression of the 1930s and, ultimately the Second World War in Malaya — food production and these communities came into their own. The increasingly familial pattern of the Perak Chinese population further contributed to the squatter communities' permanency. Collectively, these developments led to numerous squatters residing in the Kinta area during the immediate post-war period. Then, the tin mines faced a labour shortage problem too; a problem unresolved until resettlement and Emergency Regulations restricting farming outside the New Villages and regroupment areas returned the squatters to the mines in the early 1950s.

Acknowledgements

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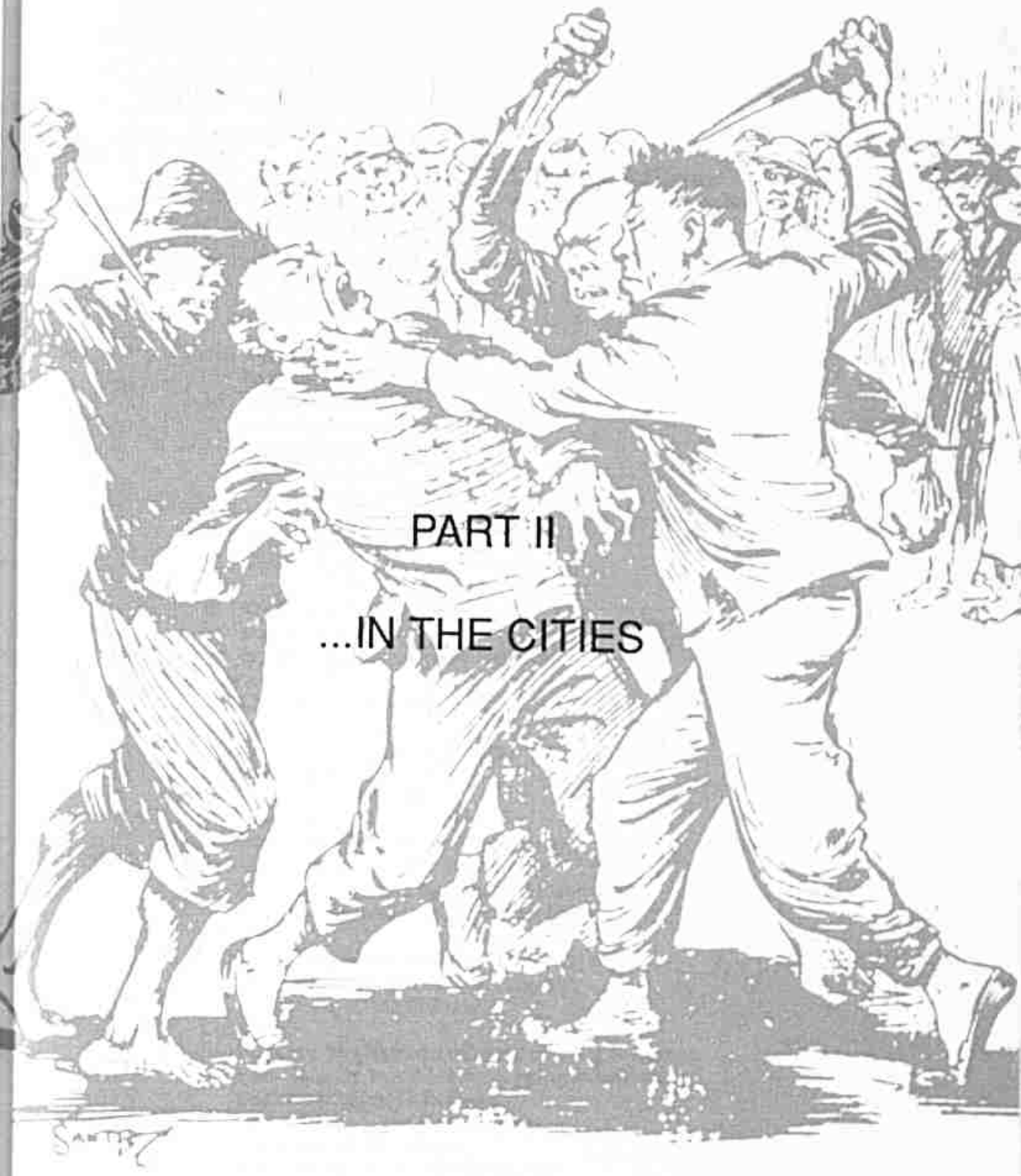

PART II

...IN THE CITIES

Our fellow citizens, October 1927. About this time there was a considerable amount of civil disturbance occurring in Singapore (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

5.
Working on the Railway: Indian Workers in Malaya, 1880-1957

AMARJIT KAUR

Poor Thamby Works on the Railway

With apologies to Ewan MacColl - 'Poor Paddy Works on the Railway'

In 1885, me khaki breeches I put on,
me khaki breeches I put on,
to work upon the railway,
the railway.
I'm weary of the railway
Poor Thamby works on the Railway.
In 1886, from Port Weld I moved to Klang,
and found myself a job to do
a working on the Railway.
Chorus: I was wearing
khaki breeches,
digging ditches,
pulling switches,
dodging hitches,
I was working on the Railway.
In 1903, I broke me shovel across my knee
and went to work for the company
on the Johore Government Railway.
Chorus:
In 1924, I landed on the Kelantan shore
me belly was empty
and me hands were raw with
working on the railway
the railway
I'm weary of the railway
Poor Thamby works on the Railway.
In 1925, when Ramasamy Muthusamy
he was alive, when Ramasamy Muthusamy
he was alive, and working on the Railway.
Chorus:
In 1936, I changed me trade from carrying cups,
changed me trade from carrying cups
to working on the Railway.
Chorus:
In 1942, poor Thamby was thinking of going to heaven
Poor Thamby was thinking of going to heaven,
and working on the Railway,
the Siam Railway
I'm weary of the railway
Poor Thamby works on the Railway.
Chrous:

Major economic changes resulted from the extension of British political hegemony in Malaya (i.e. present-day Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore). Vast areas of land were opened up for mining and agriculture and this was accompanied by large-scale immigration from China and India. The physical appearance of many areas in the countryside changed from tropical rainforest to plantations, smallholdings and mines, particularly in the western half of the Peninsula. A network of roads and railways facilitated the movement of goods from the inland producing centres to the chief ports. In addition, minor roads connected *kampungs* with trunk railway lines, and postal and communication facilities helped to establish order so that capitalist development by rail could take place.

The essence of the colonial economy was the manipulation of diverse Asian peoples in order to extract a limited range of agricultural and mineral products. While European capital concentrated on the exploitation of Indian and Chinese labour in agriculture and mining, the colonial government depended almost exclusively on cheap labour — mainly Indian — to build the physical infrastructure necessary to attract foreign investment. The prime beneficiaries were: British iron and steel concerns which made their profit out of contracts for railway equipment and material; British financial groups that took commissions on loans raised for railway development and on the various financial transactions involved in every large contract; and mining and rubber interests that obtained a substantial return, in the form of cheap transport, on whatever they contributed in taxation. Very few benefits accrued to labour which was not given due recognition.

In recent years, there have been several studies on mining and plantation workers but the contribution of labour in other sectors is relatively unknown. This chapter is the story of the railway workers in Malaya. The emphasis is on Indian labour which formed the largest component of the railway workforce. The chapter also deals with the emergence of class-based loyalties among the workers and the industrial action resorted to by them in order to improve their working conditions.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAILWAYS IN MALAYA

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Malay Peninsula was jungle-covered, sparsely populated and presented many obstacles for European investment in tin mining and agriculture. The importance of British political control to the growth and spread

of capitalism lay mainly in the policy of encouraging investment in mining and agriculture by providing the inducements and allowing the free entry of capital and labour necessary for its development. To quote Swettenham (PAR, 1894: 21-22):

> ... in the administration of a Malay State, revenue and prosperity follow the liberal but prudently-directed expenditure of public funds, especially when they are invested in high-class roads, in railways, telegraphs, waterworks, and everything likely to encourage trade and private enterprise... The Government cannot do the mining and the agriculture, but it can make it profitable for others to embark in such speculations by giving them every reasonable facility, and that we have tried to do.

A very important 'reasonable facility' was the provision of a good transport system, especially the railway. Between 1884 to 1931 (by which time approximately 1700 km of railway track had been laid), cumulative expenditure on railway construction amounted to more than $233 million (Kaur, 1985: 108, Appendix D). This great expenditure was possible because of the exploitation of labour.

Three phases of railway development may be distinguished, corresponding approximately to three stages in British political involvement in the peninsula. In the first period (1880-1896), short latitudinal lines were built in the western half of the peninsula to serve the tin mining areas. These lines linked the inland producing centres with a coastal port from which the ore was shipped to either Penang or Singapore for smelting. The localised nature of British economic penetration of the peninsula was compatible with the piecemeal development of the infrastructure. The second period of railway construction (1897-1909) was marked by the construction of a north-south trunk line which connected the original latitudinal lines. This process of railway amalgamation had its political counterpart in the consolidation of British rule in the four eastern states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang with the creation of the Federation in 1896. Railway development in the final stage (1910-1931) served the needs of commercial (plantation) agriculture, which was not confined to the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. Politically, this period signalled the greatest extension of British influence in the country with the establishment of protectorates over Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Per-

lis and Johore (see Kaur, 1985, for an account of railway development in Malaya).

Such an extensive railway program required a steady supply of labour for both construction and maintenance (Fig. 5.1). The British turned to India for this labour supply. Indians were preferred for two reasons: the British believed them to be passive and easily governed, and it was, therefore, more convenient to deal with them than with Chinese labour; it was also believed in some circles that an Indian influx should be encouraged to counterbalance the preponderance of the Chinese (see, for example, SSADR, 1887: C199). Initially, attempts were made to recruit Indian labour locally but it soon became evident that an overseas recruitment scheme was necessary to ensure a steady supply of labour. Furthermore, the consolidation of the Perak and Selangor railways in 1901 as the Federated Malay States Railways — the Malayan Railway from 1946 — required the employment of a stable and large labour force.

LABOUR RECRUITMENT AND THE MACHINERY AND PROCESS OF IMMIGRATION

When plans for a railroad from Taiping to Port Weld were mooted in 1882, the Perak Government commissioned the Ceylon Government to construct it. This was because the Perak government had no experienced railway engineers. Labour was also a problem. Although there were large numbers of Chinese workers in the vicinity, they preferred mining work and were reluctant to work on a regular basis. Also, Malays were unwilling to work for regular periods, especially during the planting season. Some attempts were made to recruit Indian labour locally but the problem of labour shortage persisted. Eventually, the Ceylon government sent over two divisions of Pioneer Corps to complete the line (PAR, 1881: 18, 1882-1883: 21, 26, 44-45, 47-48, 1884-1885: 15, 75-77; FMS Railways, 1935).

The Selangor government had a similar problem of labour shortage. Initially, it relied on Chinese and Indian labour recruited locally. Chinese labour, however, was temporary and, although the State Railway Engineer pressed for written agreements and the enforcement of mining regulations on these workers, the British Resident did not comply with his request (Selangor Secretariat, 1800/1885). Consequently, in 1886, it was decided to recruit both labourers from India and locally-based Indians. As railways had been constructed in most of the emigration districts, the Railway Engineer thought that the Indians residing there would have had

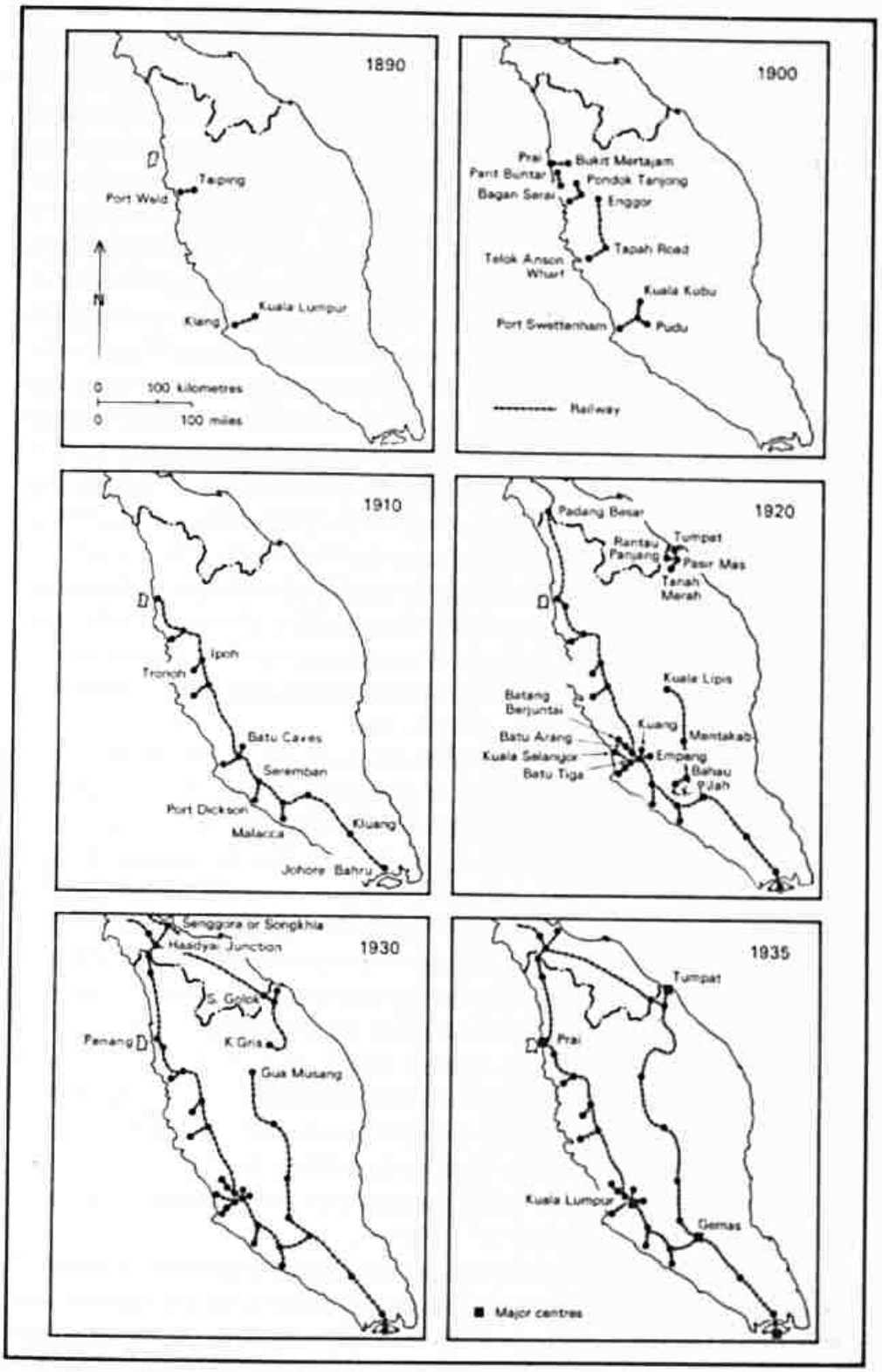

Figure 5.1 The development of the Malayan Railway system, 1885-1935

some experience of railway construction (Selangor Secretariat, 2616/1886). Javanese workers were also employed on railroad construction (in 1900, there were 500 of them) but the General Manager of the Railways was highly critical of their work and preferred to employ Indian labour (Selangor Secretariat, 5557/1903; see also 11/1890).

In the late nineteenth century, Indian workers came to Malaya under the indenture system. A prospective employer of labour under this system placed an order with a recruiting agent based in India for the supply of a stipulated number of labourers. The recruiting agent sent his subordinates into Indian villages and picked the required number of men. These men, on signing a contract, were deemed to be under 'indenture' to their employer for a fixed period — five years. They did not have the right, therefore, to change their employer or their employment. When their period of indenture was completed, they could be re-indentured for a further five years, or released from the indenture. Wages were fixed at the time of recruitment and were not subject to any change. The charges for recruiting and the expenses involved in the transport of labour were borne by the employer, and the wages were calculated after deducting this initial outlay (Kondapi, 1951: 8-29).

The indenture system of recruitment was governed by the India Act of 1877. The results were unsatisfactory, for both the planters and the government. The planting fraternity exerted pressure on the colonial government and, subsequently, the Act was repealed. From 1885, Indian immigration to Malaya was regulated by the Straits Settlements government under the *Indian Immigration Ordinance of 1884*. The new legislation's provisions enabled the Straits Immigration Agent to register and grant licences to recruiters sent to India to obtain South Indian workers on three-year contracts. The labourers were enlisted on agreed wages and transported to the Malay States at the expense of individual employers. At the end of their period of indenture, they could either settle in the state as 'free' labourers or return to India. This modified law failed to achieve the desired results and both planters and the government remained short of labour.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a parallel system of labour recruitment evolved for Malaya. This was the method of recruiting labour through a *kangany*, a person who was himself an immigrant working on the plantation or government project as a foreman or even as a labourer of some standing. The employer sent him to India at regular intervals provided with money, to go to his

village and district and recruit labourers among his own people. He was authorised to pay the passages and to meet all other expenses connected with the immigrants' departure for Malaya.

The main difference between the *kangany* system of recruitment and the indenture system was that in the case of the former, no contracts were signed and the workers were theoretically at liberty to leave their employer at any time. In practice, the labourer had to work off his loan to the employer who had recruited him.

Joint consultations between the Malay States and Straits Settlements governments and the United Planting Association of Malaya (representing planting interests) resulted in the forming of an Indian Immigration Committee in 1907. This Committee, which comprised government officials, planting and business interests now assumed the task of importing labour centrally for the needs of various official and private undertakings in Malaya. Subsequently, an Indian Immigration Fund was set up by the Committee to defray all the expenses involved in the import of labourers. The fund was made up of a rate paid by all employers of Indian labour in proportion to the amount of such labour used by them (see Sandhu, 1969; Parmer, 1960; and Arasaratnam, 1970, for the best accounts of Indian immigrants).

Where recruitment of labour in the Railway Department was concerned, records indicate that prior to 1910, indentured labour was employed. When indentured labour was abolished in 1910, 'vigorous recruiting by *kanganies*' was undertaken by the Railway Department and State Public Works Department (HCOFMS, 490/1910; Selangor Secretariat, 3702/1915). Thus, after 1910, Indian workers who were employed in the Railway Department were 'free' labourers. Jaffna Tamils also came to Malaya in search of employment as free labourers and were absorbed as tradesmen in the railways.

The early immigrant labour, coming through the indenture system, was predominantly male in its composition. When recruitment by the *kangany* method was adopted, more females were enlisted. The advantage of the *kangany* method was that greater care was taken in the selection of labourers. Furthermore, there was greater scope for the migration of women and families. The percentage of women employed on rubber estates was much greater than the percentage employed in the public works department and the railways. Nonetheless, there was a steady increase in Indian female employment in the railways during the period 1921-1947. The number of Indian women workers increased from 80 in 1921 to 244 in 1947.

TABLE 5.1
INDIAN RAILWAY WORKERS BY GENDER, 1921-1947

	1921		1931		1947	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Males	7,929	99	7,083	97.5	5,111	95.5
Females	80	1	178	2.5	244	4.5

Source: Compiled from Great Britain (1922, 1932, 1949).

These women were employed in the category of railway servants (unspecified) prior to the Second World War. After the War, a number of women — especially children of railway workers — were engaged as clerks. These were mainly of Indian (and Ceylon Tamil) and Chinese descent. When the accounts section was mechanised, more women were hired in the early 1950s as accounts clerks and gradually they came to dominate this section. All other departments were male strongholds. Table 5.1 below shows the changing composition of the Indian labour element.

The largest category of railway workers were labourers employed for construction and maintenance work. These were principally South Indian Tamils. Technical staff in the lower grades (surveyors, draughtsmen) and artisans (carpenters, blacksmiths, welders, fitters and the like) comprised Chinese, and also Tamils from South India and Ceylon. Other daily-rated staff, such as drivers, signalmen, pointsmen, lampmen and guards, consisted of South Indian and Jaffna Tamils. Station masters were invariably Jaffna Tamils. The clerical section was also monopolised by Jaffna Tamils and Malayalees. The Federated Malay States Railways were commonly called the 'Jaffna Railways' because of the preponderance of Jaffna Tamil administrative staff. North Indians predominated in the railway police department and were also popular for guard duties.

The size and composition of Chinese labour varied with the different stages of railway construction. Chinese workers were employed to do the initial earthwork for the railroad. They were hired locally as contract labour and were supervised by their own headmen. Consequently, their numbers fluctuated. In the 1920s and 1930s, many Chinese joined the clerical, mechanical and transpor-

tation sections. The foundry workers in the Sentul workshops were entirely Chinese who worked under their own contractors. Most of the Chinese workers were stationed at the Brickfields and Sentul workshops in Kuala Lumpur.

Javanese and Malay employment was initially seasonal. The Javanese were recruited as contract construction workers, while Malay labour was seasonally employed to fell the trees and clear the jungle as the railhead advanced in the different states. In the 1920s and 1930s, Malays entered the railway work force on a permanent basis and were concentrated in the traffic department.

Employment statistics are incomplete for the early years. In 1900, the Selangor Government Railway employed 900 Tamils and Telegus and 500 Javanese (Selangor Secretariat, 1746/1900). In 1903, the Federated Malay States Railways employed 5189 Indians (of whom 2021 were Jaffna Tamils, and 84 Sinhalese), 1078 Chinese and 278 Malays (*Hindu Organ*, 30 December 1903). By 1922, the major lines had been completed and there was a reduction in staff. This period was also marked by road-rail competition and a corresponding decline in railway revenues. Employment figures in 1922 were 2058 Indians, 288 Chinese, 107 Malays and 50 Eurasians (Selangor Secretariat, 3103/1922).

The ethnic composition of the railway workforce underwent some changes in the 1920s and 1930s, following the Great Depression and decentralisation proposals. The colonial government felt morally obliged to hire more Malays. At the same time it saw the need to safeguard administrative and technical efficiency. In the railway department, the problem was overcome by hiring Malays at a 'judicious' rate and giving them the required training and guidance. It was felt that the section most suited for Malay employment was the traffic section. Railway officials were instructed that the training of their staff, especially Malays, was an integral part of their duties. In 1923, selected Malay candidates were appointed as probationers at certain stations. The station masters under whom these probationers were trained were paid a bonus for each Malay candidate who succeeded in passing the qualifying examination for a station master within a period of 18 months. A training school was also set up to provide theoretical instruction and an apprenticeship system started for practical instruction. Although priority was given to Malays, the training school and the apprenticeship system were also open to children of railway employees (Selangor Secretariat, 3103/1922, 493/1932; FMSPFC, 1929:B90, 1931:B3; Yeo Kim Wah, 1982; Ghosh, 1977). Table 5.2 shows the ethnic composi-

tion of railway workers during the period 1932 to 1953 and reflects the change in colonial policy outlined above.

The Second World War and the Japanese Occupation had grave consequences for railway workers; many Chinese fled to the jungle. The livelihood of those remaining after the retreat of the British to Singapore and Malaya was threatened at a time of food shortages and rises in prices of essential commodities. Those living at wayside stations, where possible, turned to agriculture and livestock rearing. The Japanese hired a large number of workers at the pre-war rates to keep the railway functioning and exports moving. In addition to their wages, which were paid in Japanese currency (practically valueless at that time), they were also given rations of rice and cigarettes. Approximately 750 railway workers, mainly Indians, were taken to work on the Siam Railway project. The Death Railway took its toll of workers and one source puts the total number of Indian lives lost at over 60,000 (Malayan Railway, 1946: 2; Gamba, 1962: 13). Allied bombing of the Central and Sentul workshops in Kuala Lumpur also resulted in further war casualties and damage to property.

When the British returned in 1945, railway rehabilitation assumed top priority. Former railway workers were recalled and recruitment of Malays and locally-domiciled Indians and Chinese speeded up. Workers also returned from Siam to report for duty. There was an increase in the number of Malay and Chinese workers in 1946 while the total number of Indians declined slightly. The number of Indians dropped from 9253 in 1946 to 7819 in 1953 (Table 5.2). Most of them returned to India.

In 1956, prior to Independence, the British, who had agreed to the Malayanisation of the Railway Department, sent senior and technical personnel to Britain for training. Those in the lower grades were given local training. Thus, when the British granted Malaya independence in 1957, there was an adequate pool of Asians, consisting of Malays and domiciled Indians and Chinese to run the railway.

JOB CLASSIFICATION AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The railway workforce was characterised by a three-tier class structure identified with job classification — the managerial elite, the subordinate technical and clerical staff, and the railway workers. This class structure was based on differential wages (discussed in the following section) educational attainment and job classification.

TABLE 5.2
STAFF EMPLOYED BY THE FMS RAILWAYS — SELECTED YEARS

Department	Europeans				Eurasians			
	1932	1939	1946	1953	1932	1939	1946	1953
Management (including administration)	6	4	6	6	-	-	3	3
Engineering	39	20	21	22	12	10	14	13
Mechanical	22	17	17	21	17	29	35	135
Transportation	52	36	37	19	84	145	184	41
Accounts	12	9	6	5	3	8	10	12
Stores	6	4	4	3	2	2	-	3
Police	3	-	-	NA	2	1	1	NA
Health	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**141**	**90**	**91**	**76**	**120**	**195**	**247**	**207**

Department	Indians and Ceylonese				Chinese			
	1932	1939	1946	1953	1932	1939	1946	1953
Management (including administration)	25	15	13	15	6	3	6	8
Engineering	4,719	4,444	4,286	3,228	186	80	270	104
Mechanical	1,229	1,073	1,215	2,958	455	501	450	642
Transportation	3,803	3,469	3,359	1,318	398	378	344	190
Accounts	91	85	91	98	33	31	37	36
Stores	133	94	131	101	1	2	6	9
Police	250	12	11	NA	5	4	7	NA
Health	92	100	147	101	2	2	1	2
Total	**10,342**	**9,292**	**9,253**	**7,819**	**1,086**	**1,001**	**1,121**	**991**

Department	Malays				Total			
	1932	1939	1946	1953	1932	1939	1946	1953
Management (including administration)	7	6	11	14	44	28	39	46
Engineering	365	385	578	821	5,321	4,939	5,169	4,188
Mechanical	195	295	473	1,495	1,918	1,915	2,190	5,251
Transportation	693	1,024	1,293	1,078	5,030	5,052	5,217	2,646
Accounts	42	47	52	57	181	180	196	208
Stores	71	47	41	39	213	149	182	155
Police	157	5	3	NA	417	22	22	NA
Health	2	3	10	27	97	105	158	130
Total	**1,532**	**1,812**	**2,461**	**3,531**	**13,221**	**12,390**	**13,173**	**12,624**

The managerial elite, comprising mainly British staff, were paid on a monthly basis and had good salaries and accommodation. The subordinate technical and clerical staff, comprising mainly Jaffna Tamils, were also paid on a monthly basis and had reasonable accommodation. Together, these two groups ran the railway. The last *stratum* comprised skilled workers, semi-skilled workers and unskilled labourers. The skilled workers consisted of mechanics, fitters, sheet-metal workers, polishers, welders, blacksmiths and electricians, while the semi-skilled workers comprised plate-layers, signalmen, lampmen and pointsmen. The labourers maintained the railway tracks. This third group of railway employees was paid on a daily basis and housed in accommodation ranging from labour lines to barracks.

Since the duties of the first two *strata* are evident from their job classifications, only the duties of the third group will be discussed. The working hours of the first two *strata* were from seven in the morning to four in the evening with an hour off at noon for lunch. They also had a half-day off on Saturdays and a full-day off on Sundays. They worked at the main-line stations only and at the Central and Sentul Railway workshops. In the smaller wayside stations, the station master had only a pointsman and lampman to help him. The skilled and semi-skilled workers also worked from seven in the morning till four in the evening with an hour off for lunch at noon. They were stationed only at the Sentul and Central Workshops in Kuala Lumpur where they repaired and built coaches and maintained locomotives. As mentioned previously, the foundry workers were Chinese who worked under their own contractors and had little dealings with the Federated Malay States Railway Administration. They were not provided with accommodation and were paid piecework rates. They lived in shed-like accommodation near the workshops. Other workers were daily-rated and provided with accommodation near the workshops.

The most exploited group of workers was the unskilled labourers who maintained the railway tracks and grounds. A small number were based at each station and the workshops. The majority were stationed along the railway tracks throughout the country at three-mile (4.8 km) intervals. Their working hours were from seven in the morning until three in the afternoon with only a half-hour break for lunch. These labourers worked in groups of seven or eight — comprising the ganger (*mandore* or overseer), a keyman and five to six labourers. Their accommodation consisted of a labour line of seven to eight units (discussed in a later section) which was built

next to the track. Every morning (except Sundays), the labourers would be 'rounded up' (in the process some men were beaten as well), and, carrying all their tools such as jacks and lifting bars in baskets, they would walk up the track one-and-a-half miles (2.4 km) and then back to the other end, three miles (4.8 km) away.

There were two types of baskets — a Chinese and an Indian basket. The Chinese basket had two handles and was lifted by two persons. It was used by the Chinese labourers whenever they were employed on a contract basis to maintain the track. The Indian basket was larger and carried upon the heads of the labourers. Although many protested at the weight, the Indians were not given 'Chinese baskets'. The poor Indian worker therefore trudged along with his basket containing his tools on his head. He also carried a tiffin carrier and some well water. This water was never sufficient and he had to depend on drain water from the drains adjoining the tracks. The workers had no shelter while they worked. These coolies were provided with one facility deemed to be good for their souls — a small temple beside their labour lines. Thus all along the tracks dotting the countryside were little temples providing salvation for the coolies. Once a month, the labourers were given a day off (paid leave) to go to the nearest town to buy groceries and household goods and get a haircut. Apart from these monthly visits (by train) they lived in almost complete isolation, unless they happened to be near an estate. Language and religious barriers kept them apart from Malay rural folk. The working conditions of the lowest rung of workers — the unskilled labourers — were the worst and they were also paid the lowest wages.

WAGES

Remuneration depended upon job classification, skills and duties. The managerial elite and the subordinate technical and administrative staff were employed on a monthly basis, had Sundays off and also had paid medical leave. The workers, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled, were employed on a daily basis (they were paid once a month, though) calculated on twenty-four working days in a month and a nine-hour day. They were not paid for Sundays and holidays, and did not get paid medical leave.

While the minimum salary for the most junior British railway employee was $400 per month, the standard minimum wage for the labourer was a bare subsistence wage. According to one source, 'the wages ... [were] too low to bring about the moral and material

well-being of the labour class though they ... [were] sufficient to keep body and soul together' (Nair, 1937: 50). This minimum wage was based on the standard monthly budget of the labourer without taking into account the standard of living. It was based on the cost of rice which, obviously, was not the only commodity consumed by the workers. This minimum wage was inquired into and fixed by the Indian Immigration Committee which consisted of planters and heads of various government departments (Selangor Secretariat, 32/1945).[1] Labour interests were not represented. (The average monthly budget and the Indian Immigration Committee's budget are shown in Appendix Tables 1 and 2.)

Table 5.3 shows the ideal budget prepared by an Indian officer for 1925. Although these budgets had a provision for *dhoby* or laundry service, in reality the poor labourer could not afford to have his clothes cleaned by someone else. Very often, the labourers cut each other's hair as well. The basic diet of the labourer consisted of rice and lentils and occasionally dried fish. It is no wonder then that many of them suffered from malnutrition.

The majority of the illiterate labourers did not comprehend the currency in which they were paid. While those living in the towns could turn to their friends for help, those living along the track and wayside stations had no idea of the value of the currency and were often cheated by unscrupulous persons when they went shopping for their monthly groceries. The manner in which they were paid reveals their ignorance. At the end of the month, labourers went to the nearest station and lined up by the track. At each station a Federated Malay States Railways Inspector stepped out of the train and placed a cigarette tin containing his monthly wages in the worker's outstretched hands. The train then continued on its journey to the other stations.

Another form of wage control was the hiring of new workers. Although, theoretically, labour contracts were for a limited period, in practice the workers stayed on when their contracts expired. After the indenture system was abolished in 1910, there were no written contracts under the *kangany* system. The government capitalised on the workers' fears that they would be replaced by new immigrants (Selangor Secretariat, 337/1900).[2]

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1. The provisions of the Labour Code stipulated that a labourer was to be offered work on not less than 24 days in a month. Accordingly, for the purpose of ascertaining the daily wage, the total cost of the monthly budget was divided by 24.

2. 'It is easy for the arrival of the immigrant coolies to have a marked effect on the independences of the labour previously on the works, which enables us to hold a tight hand on them...' (Engineer, Selangor Government Railways to British Resident Selangor, 7 January 1900 in Selangor Secretariat, 337/1900).

TABLE 5.3
IDEAL BUDGET FOR 1925

Article	Quantity	Price $	Cost $
1. Rice	6 gantangs	.45	2.70
2. Salt	1½ cupaks	.06	.09
3. Chillies	1 kati	.28	.28
4. Coriander	1 cupak	.12	.12
5. Tamarind	1½ katies	.12	.18
6. Dhal	1 cupak	.13	.13
7. Green peas	2 cupaks	.24	.24
8. White beans	2 cupaks	.16	.32
9. Onions	2 katies	.12	.24
10. Garlic	-	-	.05
11. Cummin seed	-	-	.05
12. Mustard	-	-	.05
13. Pepper	¼ cupak	.24	.06
14. Turmeric	-	-	.06
15. Curry stuff	-	-	.10
16. Coconut oil	1 bottle	.30	.30
17. Kerosene & matches	-	-	.16
18. Betel and tobacco	-	-	1.00
19. Bar soap	-	-	.20
20. Pots and pans	-	-	.10
21. Salt fish	1 kati	.25	.25
22. Fresh fish	2 katies	.30	.30
23. Mutton	1 pound	.70	.70
24. Fowl	-	-	.50
25. Vegetables	-	-	.50
26. Potatoes	-	-	.12
27. Coffee	½ kati	.64	.32
28. Sugar	2 katies	.12	.24
29. Milk	2 tins	.28	.56
30. Mat and pillow	-	-	.05
31. Dobi	-	-	.20
32. Barber	-	-	.25
33. Festival oil	(average)		.20
34. Clothes	(monthly average)		.75
35. Gingilly oil	1 bottle	.32	.32
Sub-total			**11.68**
Passage to India	(monthly average)		1.05
20% of the cost of living support for dependents			2.33
10% savings			1.25
Grand total			**16.31**

Source: Nair (1937: 50).

When the Selangor Railway was opened in 1886-1887, railway labourers were paid between 18-20 cents per day (18 cents for the first year and 20 cents for the two following years), while platelayers and other semi-skilled workers were paid between 20-25 cents (20 cents for the first and 25 cents for the two following years) (Selangor Secretariat, 2616/1886). At the turn of the century, workers were paid as follows: men, first year 20 cents per day, second year 22 cents, third year 25 cents; women, first year 14 cents, second year 16 cents and third year 20 cents. Semi-skilled and skilled workers were paid about 5 to 10 cents more. Chinese labourers were paid between 40 cents to one dollar, while Javanese labour received the same rates as Indian labour (Selangor Secretariat 1746/1900).

In the 1920s, the Indian Immigration Committee fixed two different wage structures for all labourers in the country which were based on two types of areas. These were the 'key areas' — which were districts that were well located, where food prices were low and where health conditions were good; and the 'non-key areas' — which were the inaccessible areas in the interior, such as Ulu Kelantan, where labourers were reluctant to go, where food prices were higher and where conditions were relatively 'unhealthy'. Table 5.4 shows the minimum standard rates of pay for Indian labourers employed by the Way and Works Transportation and Mechanical Sub-department in 'key' and 'non-key' areas. Semi-skilled and skilled workers employed in the Central Workshops received higher wages than the labourers. Women were consistently paid less than their male colleagues.

Table 5.5 shows the salaries paid to the subordinate and clerical staff. Promotions from class to class, however, were dependent on vacancies and the number of appointments in each class were regulated by the percentages laid down in the employment scheme. In the 1930s, a knowledge of the Malay language became a prerequisite for promotion. Annual wage increases for this category of staff ranged from $5 to $10 per annum. Conversely, annual increases for the labouring staff ranged from 4 cents to 8 cents per annum (Spiller, 1926: 62).

During the Depression, the Federated Malay States Railways 'retrenched' (that is, dismissed) a large number of workers. In 1932, for example, 467 monthly paid workers and 1603 daily paid workers were laid off. In addition, the Federated Malay States government took advantage of the workers' fear of dismissal to reduce the wages of the daily paid staff by 15 per cent (euphemistically termed a 'levy'). The workers protested at the cut and, subsequently, the cut

TABLE 5.4
MINIMUM STANDARD PAY RATES (PER DIEM) FOR INDIAN LABOURERS EMPLOYED BY THE FMS RAILWAYS IN THE 1920s AND 1930s, SHOWING DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KEY AREAS (K) AND NON-KEY AREAS (NK)

Department	Male ¢	Female ¢
Way and Works Department -		
Perak (K)	40	32
Selangor (K)	40	32
Negeri Sembilan (K)	40	32
Pahang (NK)	47	32
Kedah (K)	40	32
Johore:		
Districts of Muar, Segamat and Johore Bahru town (K)	40	32
Other districts (NK)	47	37
Singapore Island (NK)	47	37
Province Wellesley (K)	40	32
Kelantan:		
Coast districts (K)	40	32
Ulu (NK)	47	37
Settlements of Penang and Malacca (K)	40	32
Mechanical Department -		
Selangor: Central Workshops	52	-
Transportation Department -		
Perak (K)	40	32
Selangor (except Central Workshops)(K)	40	32
Negeri Sembilan (K)	40	32
Pahang (NK)	47	37
Kelantan:		
Coast (K)	40	32
Ulu (NK)	47	37
Johore:		
Districts of Muar, Segamat and Johore Bahru town (K)	40	32
Other districts (NK)	47	37
Penang (K)	40	32
Province Wellesley (K)	40	32
Malacca (K)	40	32
Singapore (NK)	47	37

Source: FMSRAR (1932: 36).

TABLE 5.5
SALARY SCALES — SUBORDINATE STAFF, 1925

Appointment	Monthly Salary	
	Minimum	Maximum
	$	$
Yard foreman	80.00	180.00
Guards, passengers and goods	40.00	180.00
Signalmen	40.00	180.00
Clerks	40.00	180.00
Class III	40.00	95.00
Class II	100.00	140.00
Class I	150.00	210.00
Class Special	220.00	260.00
Supergrade appointment	325.00	375.00
Drivers	52.00	200.00

Source: Spiller (1926: 62).

was reduced to 10 per cent in March 1935. Normal wages were restored only in 1937 when trade improved again (FMSRAR, 1935: 39).

In 1939, the standing Labour Sub-Committee (Railways) was disbanded. Its functions were transferred to a Standing Labour Committee established by the Federated Malay States government. This Committee comprised the Controller of Labour (as Chairman), and representatives of the principal government departments that employed daily-rated workers. (The Federated Malay States Railways was represented by the Chief Mechanical Engineer.) The Committee advised the government on rates of pay and service conditions for artisans and labourers and, consequently, was important in determining the wage rates of the railway workers.

After the Second World War the British returned in 1946 and assumed that they could pay pre-war wage rates although the cost of living then was about 385 per cent above that of 1939. There was also a serious shortage of rice, textiles and non-controlled goods (Malayan Railway, 1946: 67). The Senior Officer (Labour) Civil Affairs, admitted that the standard wage of the Indian labourers ought to be more than $2 per day. Since he deemed this to be an impossible figure, 'the only other alternative ... [was] to reduce the cost of living and this ... [had to] start with the cost of the staple food, rice' (Selangor Secretariat, 132/1945).

The workers, who had become sufficiently politicised during the Japanese Occupation, downed their tools and agitated for increased wages and better working conditions. They were successful where most of their demands were concerned. In 1947, wages were revised. The new basic wages for government daily-rated employees (including railway employees) equalled the 1939 basic wages (plus normal increments) plus 54 cents (Malayan Railway, 1947: 54). By the time of Independence, no radical revisions had been made although new wage schemes were introduced which incorporated part of the cost of living allowance. The monthly-paid staff did not sympathise with the daily-paid employees' demands. As their material conditions were better they did not join in the strike.

MATERIAL CONDITIONS

These conditions are discussed in terms of housing, health and education. Then other social activities are examined.

Housing

The smooth functioning of the railways necessitated accommodating workers in labour lines along tracks, near stations or workshops. In fact, whole townships of railway workers grew up at the two main railway works — Sentul and Brickfields in Kuala Lumpur. These labour lines were occupied principally by Indians. Malays preferred to stay on in their villages and commute to their place of work. Since the Chinese mainly worked under a contract system, accommodation was not provided by the Federated Malay States Railways authorities. At the railway works, however, the workers lived in close proximity and had more contacts with one another both at the place of work and outside working hours.

The best accommodation was reserved for the managerial elite. It consisted of large spacious dwellings with big gardens. The clerical staff was housed in accommodation designated Class Eight or Class Nine, which consisted of housing blocks often lifted above the ground on piles, with room provided underneath for storage. The basic unit comprised two bedrooms, a hall, a kitchen and a bathroom and toilet. Skilled and semi-skilled labourers were housed in accommodation designated Class Nine or Class Ten. Their units consisted of one bedroom, a hall, a kitchen and a toilet-cum-bathroom. The labourers were housed in Class Eleven accommodation. In the urban areas, these consisted of cement barracks in

which each unit had a hall, a bedroom and kitchen only. Toilets and bathrooms were communal and were located behind the lines. Each 'barrack' consisted of seven to eight units. Along the tracks and wayside stations the barracks were often built of wood. They were not provided with piped water, nor electricity. Their water came from wells dug nearby by the workers. There was no proper drainage either.

Town accommodation standards were governed by the Sanitary Board's regulations on sanitation but government dwellings were exempt from inspection. Consequently, the labourers lived under unhygienic conditions. In the towns, they at least had a common water pipe and could grow some vegetables and flowers. Along the tracks, the barracks were located next to the tracks and the dirt and dust prohibited the cultivation of flowers and vegetables. Under these unhygienic conditions, it is not surprising that the workers succumbed to diseases like malaria and dysentery (cf. Chapter 7). The passing trains also carried diseases and infections. Lack of privacy and unhygienic conditions typified labourers' dwellings.

Health

In the towns, the Federated Malay States Railways built dispensaries near the main stations. Dispensaries were also provided at Brickfields and Sentul in Kuala Lumpur and were run by dressers or male nurses. In the rural areas, the railway authorities sent dressers on monthly visits to the barracks along the tracks and wayside stations. These monthly check-ups were inadequate, given the 'frontier' conditions under which the labourers worked and lived.

Education

The Federated Malay States Railways built only two schools before the Second World War for children of railway employees. These were at Bangsar in Kuala Lumpur (near the Central Workshops) and at Ipoh in Perak. In Sentul, mission schools were set up and patronised by children of railway employees. The railway schools were Tamil schools. English was only introduced as a subject after much agitation by the employees.

Other Social Activities

The railway employees had no recreational facilities. Railway institutes which provided sporting facilities only emerged prior to

the Second World War. Those living in towns had the advantage of town life, physical mobility and occasional entertainment. There were toddy shops run by the government near railway accommodation. For example, there were two toddy shops in Sentul and one in the Brickfields area. In the rural areas and at wayside stations, the employees obtained their toddy supplies from nearby estates. Toddy addiction was quite common, given the harsh conditions under which the workers lived. Toddy prices were regulated by the government. In the 1930s, the price of toddy was about 2 cents or 3 cents a pint. In the 1940s, the price rose to 10 cents a pint. By the 1950s, the price had risen to 40 cents a pint. Despite these price rises, addiction did not decrease.[3]

In general the housing of railway workers in close proximity contributed to the emergence of class loyalties and occupational identification. More than any other occupational group, the railway workers identified themselves with the state or national undertaking. These labour concentrations were also multi-racial and being located in towns gave greater mobility to the workers. Estate labour, by comparison, had little mobility because estates were isolated units and workers on one estate had virtually no contact with workers on other estates. Since the Indians comprised the largest percentage of railway workers, these concentrations became 'little Indias' and drew other Indians to the areas who opened restaurants and other service undertakings to cater to the railway workers' needs. Two such areas in Kuala Lumpur, appropriately near the Central and Sentul workshops, were Brickfields and Sentul. These labour concentrations fostered greater contacts among workers, and conditions were thus created which led to the development of organisation among them.

LABOUR UNREST AND INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION

Organisation and activity among railway workers for better service conditions was slow in developing. The paternalism of the Labour Department and the railway administration hindered such growth. Not surprisingly, given their concentration in a relatively 'closed' environment, Indian workers acquired some of the in-

3. In the Sentul area, missionaries were successful in many conversions to Christianity among the poor labourers. Even today, St Joseph's Church in Sentul has a large following of railway workers.

dustrial militancy of their Chinese colleagues. Consequently, they were prepared to shed their communal separateness for the common good of railway workers. This occurred in the workshops at Sentul and Brickfields. From these areas, unrest spread to other railway workers in the country and their united effort resulted in concessions being granted to them by the colonial authorities.

One of the first recorded incidents occurred in 1924 when workers at the Central Workshops went on strike for the reinstatement of the Saturday Concession. This concession consisted of a bonus payment to daily-paid workshop employees for a period of 8 hours on Saturdays for 6 hours' work. Introduced in the 1910s to encourage 'good time keeping' among the workers, it was withdrawn during the 1921-1922 slump on the understanding that it would be restored when trade recovered. When trade improved in 1924, however, the railway authorities did not keep their word. Consequently, the workshop employees downed tools in December 1924. The Federated Malay States Railways finally reinstated the Saturday concession in 1925 (Selangor Secretariat, 345/1932; FMSRBM, 1936).[4] Subsequently, in 1928 the Indian workers at the Central Workshops presented some demands to the railway administration with a strike threat. A conciliation committee was appointed and the issues were settled with the assistance of the Indian Agent (FMS Labour Department, 1928: 9). This tendency towards industrial action was set back by the Depression when termination of service was carried out extensively. As noted above, the wages of the daily-paid workers were reduced by 15 per cent in January 1932. Hardened by the depression conditions, the workers demonstrated for the removal of this 'levy' during the months of February, March and April. When the railway department refused to reconsider the issue, the daily-paid workers went on strike on 26 April 1932. The Federal government stepped in and promised to look into the workers' grievances, provided they resumed work. The men went back to work on 2 May 1932. Subsequently, the government decided that the 'levy' could not be reduced owing to the strained financial circumstances of the Federated Malay States. The impost was finally removed in January 1937 when railway revenues began to recover.

The Controller of Labour noted in 1937 that the modern Indian labourer was more aware of his rights and knew how to set about getting them (FMS Labour Department, 1937: 69). His words proved

4. The Saturday concession was discontinued in 1932 to cut down costs. It was restored following the 1936 strike.

true in 1939. By this time, agitators from outside were also going into estates and inciting workers to strike. Strike action by the Batu Arang colliery workers no doubt also influenced the railway workers. They therefore demanded improved working conditions. They were under the impression that the newly-formed Standing Labour Committee would look into their grievances. This Committee did introduce some changes in their service conditions but these were not acceptable to the workers. Consequently, in early 1939, workers in the mechanical engineering department at Sentul staged a sit-down strike. The railway administration kept the workshops open for other workers but were forced to close on 6 February 1939. Subsequently, on 14 February 1939, more than 1000 of the striking workers asked to be reinstated without loss of service. They were obliged to sign a declaration that the restoration of pre-strike service for gratuity earning purposes was dependent upon their future conduct. By 15 February the strikers had resumed their duties. On their part, the Federated Malay States government agreed to grant daily-rated paid annual leave. It was also arranged to close the Central Mechanical Engineering Workshop on appropriate festival days and public holidays (FMSRAR, 1939: 71). In 1940, the government passed the Trade Union Ordinance with the aim of promoting the growth of responsible united bodies that could effectively represent workers. The railway workers did not at this stage take advantage of this ordinance.

The Japanese invasion and occupation of Malaya were not without contradictions. While the Japanese administration caused considerable hardship to workers, it, at the same time, provided the political environment for the politicisation of all communities. Such politicisation emanated not only from the deteriorating material conditions but, for the Indians, also as a result of the activities of the Indian Independence League and its military arm, the Indian National Army. The anti-Western nature and wide appeal of the League inculcated a sense of unity. It had a lasting impact and the potential released during this time was to assist the Indian working class in the formation of radical trade union activities in the post-war period. The Chinese joined the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army and many Indians later joined them too. Thus, the Japanese Occupation period prepared the railway workers for collective action when the British returned.

Leadership was provided by the skilled and semi-skilled workers who were fairly well-educated and articulate. They regarded themselves as servants of the state and rose above ethnic loyalties to es-

tablish class consciousness. The fact that they worked and were housed in close proximity helped their cause. The influence of the more militant Chinese in the workshops was another factor. Labour in general was also restless and politicised when the British returned in 1945.

After the war too, the colonial government was more favourably disposed towards trade unions. A Trade Union Adviser, John Brazier, was appointed in 1945 to head a department to help foster the growth of compliant trade unions in Malaya. The railways representative was styled Labour and Welfare Officer, Railways. His appointment did not come too soon, for in early 1946, the railway workers decided to demand changes in their service conditions. This stemmed from the fact that the Federated Malay States Railways offered all monthly-salaried staff payment up to 31 March 1942, while daily-rated staff received payment for the last month they worked plus one additional month as a maximum payment up to 31 March 1942, depending on their length of service prior to the Japanese Occupation period.

At this time, the newly-formed Singapore General Labour Union had established itself as an organisation campaigning for economic reforms for workers. On the mainland, General Labour Unions were also established in many states, including Selangor. The railway workers were influenced by the General Labour Unions and were also susceptible to communist propaganda. Spurred on by other incidents of industrial action, the principally Indian railway workers at the Central Workshops submitted twelve demands to the British Military Administration on 10 January 1946 (*The Malaya Tribune* [Kuala Lumpur], 31 January 1946). These demands were:

(1) the payment of extra allowances as in 1941;
(2) the granting of full back pay for the period of the Japanese Occupation;
(3) the granting of adequate compensation for the life and property lost by them during the Royal Air Force raid on the workshops;
(4) the payment of war allowances as in 1941;
(5) a reform of the grade system;
(6) in view of the 'staggering high cost of living' there ought to be either a substantial increase in wages or alternatively essential foodstuffs and goods ought to be distributed through the railway authorities;
(7) the granting of increased gratuities at the termination of

service since they spent three-quarters of their life in the workshops. This gratuity was to be the same as in democratic countries. Furthermore, if a labourer died during service, his family was to be given full gratuity instead of the 50 per cent gratuity then given;

(8) the provision of full education to the labourer's children in the vernacular and English;

(9) equal treatment with the monthly-paid staff (in 1941, the monthly-paid staff had been given 3 months advance of pay before the British left). When the British Military Adminstration was set up, the monthly-paid staff were given 3 months pay in advance;

(10) labourers on medical leave to be given leave with full pay;

(11) unskilled workers to be promoted to semi-skilled grades after 5 years; and

(12) A 150 per cent increase in pay and pre-war rice rations be given while prices be pegged.

Subsequently, on 1 February 1946, 3500 railway workers went on strike. This was a follow-up to the general strike in Selangor when 60,000 labourers and merchants staged a one-day strike on 30 January 1946 in response to a call by the Pan-Malayan General Labour Union. The strikers from the Central Railway Workshops were soon joined by other railway workers throughout the country until a total of 12,000 railway workers all over Malaya were on strike. The strike lasted 62 days (*The Malaya Tribune* (Kuala Lumpur), 31 January 1946). During this period, Jawaharlal Nehru visited Malaya and was warmly received by the workers. There were rumours that the Malayan Union Government would ask him to offer his services for a settlement with the workers. In the meantime, the workers authorised the Selangor General Labour Unions to negotiate on their behalf (*The Malaya Tribune* (Kuala Lumpur), 5 February 1945). Eventually, Nehru's private secretary and brother-in-law, Huthee Singh, negotiated for a settlement and the workers resumed work on 2 April 1946 (*The Malaya Tribune* (Kuala Lumpur), 2 April 1946).

Among the concessions made by the Malayan Union Government, which replaced the British Military Administration in 1946 and the Malayan Railway Administration — the successor to the Federated Malay States Railways — were a 10 per cent increase in pay, 12 days fully paid leave annually (after twelve months of regular employment) and sick leave on full pay (after twelve months regular employment commencing on the fourth day of sickness). In addition, the Malayan Railway set up nineteen railway

canteens at the principal railway centres where meals were provided at controlled rates and where essential commodities and textiles were sold at controlled prices. Workers were also given extra *katis* of wheat flour per week. The Malayan Railway (1946: 64-66, 67-69) also agreed to re-open railway institutes for recreational facilities for the workers.

Subsequently, the Malayan Union Government established an Interim Joint-Council for settling future disputes and a Works Conciliation Committee was formed at Sentul to promote discussion between management and workers on a fortnightly basis. In other areas, the management held monthly meetings with railway staff. As a corollary to this, the Labour and Welfare Officer, Railways, helped the workers establish three railway trade unions, namely the Locomotive Enginemen's Trade Union, the Traffic Operating Trade Union and the All-Malayan Railway Workers' Union (Malayan Railway, 1946: 65).

The major demands of the workers were met but the issue of payment during the Japanese Occupation period remained unsettled. Consequently, in early August 1947, representatives of the All-Malayan Railway Workers' Union met the railway management to discuss some fifty-eight demands concerning daily-rated employees. Agreement was reached on most of the demands. With regard to a pay revision, the workers were informed that the issue would be taken up by the newly formed Wages Commission. When no progress appeared to have been made, the railway workers at Sentul went on strike on 27 August 1947. The strike, which ended on 22 September 1947, was settled as a result of negotiations between the railway management and the Pan-Malayan Council of General Workers. Some of the concessions that were granted included new basic wages for the various grades of government daily-rated employees that were equal to the 1939 basic wage (plus normal increments) plus 54 cents; new temporary allowances equal to 20 per cent of the new basic wage plus 50 cents per day. Furthermore, workers were granted three gazetted paid public holidays in addition to the twelve days paid annual leave (for daily-rated staff) or twenty-one days paid annual leave (for monthly rated staff). Gratuities were also revised. The Japanese Occupation period was recognised for pension purposes. Gratuities and retiring allowances which had previously been calculated excluding this period, were recomputed to include it (Malayan Railway, 1947: 54-56).

In addition, unskilled staff were promised training which would enable them to attain the status of semi-skilled staff. The manage-

ment also promised to grant scholarships to deserving candidates to upgrade their skills abroad in preparation for executive posting upon return. These scholarships were not confined to the Malays alone but were open to all 'locally-domiciled staff' (Malayan Railway, 1947: 57).

By 1955, there were ten trade unions representing the interests of the railway workers. The management started a policy of holding a Railway Trade Union Convention to which were invited all heads of the various railway departments and two representatives each from the trade unions. By 1955, the General Manager commented that relations between management and staff had improved and that matters in dispute were 'being settled in a spirit of mutual goodwill through the established processes of negotiation and arbitration'. He also reported that the militancy of the railway workers had become more moderate (Malayan Railway, 1955: 11).

Women workers also came of age in the 1950s. As noted previously, women were employed as clerks and in the mechanised accounting section dealing with the payrolls after the war. When the Accounting Staff Union was formed in the early 1950s, the majority of the unionists were women and they held key positions. In 1960 when the Railwaymen's Union of Malaya (an all-embracing union) was formed; the vice-president was a Malay woman and one of the committee members an Indian woman. They were to provide much moral support in the subsequent strike in 1962.

Thus in the period 1946-1957, the railway workers' prime achievement was their struggle to secure a steady improvement of wages and conditions of service. It was this struggle that brought the different railway unions together. Common interests united the Indian, Chinese and Malay workers in the railways as they shed their communal separateness to work for the common good. Unlike other trade unions, which were mainly ethnic-based, the railway unions were multi- racial in character. The leaders were mainly Indian and the workers' demands were economic in character rather than political. In 1960, all the different unions united to form the Railwaymen's Union of Malaya and this union currently plays a major role in the Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Service (CUEPACS).

CONCLUSION

Railway workers in Malaya during the period 1880-1957 passed through several stages. From being a largely docile force, labour

graduated to an articulate body, concerned with improving its service conditions. The railway workers were also more modern in outlook compared to the estate labour force because they were multi-ethnic and lived in multi-ethnic communities. By the time of Independence, they also became concerned with communal interests, given the political climate of the country, but they never lost their class-consciousness.

Acknowledgements

This chapter also drew on interviews with T.S. Xavier, S. Packirisamy, Mohd. bin Abbas and Ibrahim bin Mohd. Salleh.

TABLE 5A.1
A LABOURER'S SPECIMEN MONTHLY BUDGET

Article[a]		Amount	Price $	Cost $
1.	Rice	6 gantangs[b]	.24	1.44
2.	Salt	1½ cupaks[c]	.12	.03
3.	Chillies	½ kati[d]	.18	.09
4.	Coriander	¾ cupak	.09	.07
5.	Tamarind	1½ katies	.07	.11
6.	Dhal	1½ cupaks	.12	.18
7.	Green peas	1 cupak	.09	.09
8.	Onions	1 kati	.08	.08
9.	White beans	½ cupak	.12	.06
10.	Garlic	½ kati	.12	.06
11.	Thalippu[e]	½ cupak	.24	.06
12.	Pepper	¼ cupak	.28	.07
13.	Turmeric	¼ cupak	.16	.04
14.	Curry Masala	-	-	.02
15.	Kerosene oil	1 bottle	.11	.11
16.	Coconut oil	1 bottle	.14	.14
17.	Matches	2 boxes	.01	.02
18.	Betel nut & Tobacco	-	-	-
19.	Soap	10 pieces	.02	.20
20.	Pots, pans etc.	-	-	.20
21.	Salt fish	1 kati	.28	.28
22.	Mutton	1 kati	.40	.40
23.	Vegetables	-	-	.40
24.	Potatoes	1 kati	.09	.09
25.	Coffee	1 tin	.20	.20
26.	Sugar	1 kati	.05	.05
27.	Tin milk	1 tin	.23	.19
28.	Clothing	-	-	.20
29.	Mat and pillow	-	-	.05
30.	Dhoby	-	-	.20
31.	Barber	-	-	.20
32.	Gingelly oil	½ bottle	.32	.16
33.	Soap nuts	½ bottle	.12	.30
34.	Festivals	-	-	.30
Total				**5.73**

Notes: a. Other expenses included: 4 Vaishti or Kalli[f] - $1.30; 2 Upper cloths - $0.30; 2 Baniangs[g] - $0.30; and Thupptih[h] - $0.30.
b. Gantang is a volumetric measure approximately equal to 5 pounds.
c. Cupak is one quarter gantang.
d. Kati is 14 ozs.
e. Thalippu is a type of mixed spice.
f. Vaishti or kalli is a dhoti or sarung.
g. Bancang is a singlet or men's upper inner garment.
h. Thupptih is a towel.

Source: JAR (1932: 26).

TABLE 5A.2
INDIAN IMMIGRATION COMMITTEE'S BUDGET (TYPE B)

Article	Quantity	Price $	Cost $
1. Rice	5 gantangs	.45	2.25
2. Salt	1½ cupaks	.06	.03
3. Chillies	½ kati	.28	.14
4. Coriander	¾ cupak	.11	.08
5. Tamarind	1½ katies	.12	.18
6. Dhal	1 cupak	.13	.13
7. Green peas	1 cupak	.12	.12
8. White beans	½ cupak	.16	.08
9. Onions	1 cupak	.12	.12
10. Curry stuff	-	-	.26
11. Coconut oil	1 bottle	.30	.30
12. Kerosene and matches		-	.14
13. Betel and tobacco	-	-	.75
14. Bar soap 1 bar		.10	.10
15. Pots and pans	-	-	.10
16. Salt fish	-	-	.25
17. Mutton	½ lb.	.70	.35
18. Vegetables	-	-	.12
19. Potatoes	-	-	.12
20. Barber, festivals, clothes etc. (Monthly average)			.65 67
Total			7.00

Source: IIC (1925).

6.

Hackney Carriage Syces and Rikisha Pullers in Singapore: A Colonial Registrar's Perspective on Public Transport, 1892-1923

PETER J. RIMMER

Public transport in Singapore has experienced a series of imported technological changes since the settlement's inception in 1819. The switch from horse-drawn hackney carriage through jinrikisha, tram, motor hackney carriage, 'mosquito bus' and omnibus to rail rapid transit has been reasonably well documented (Rimmer, 1986a). Initial explorations of the resultant organisational changes have also been undertaken (Rimmer, 1986b). More theoretical questions about the nature of this technological dynamism as a reflection of changes in the labour process, however, remain to be considered. An hypothesis that has yet to receive much attention is the proposition that changes in transport technology generate changes in social relations.

Two key questions are raised in exploring this technological determinist assumption that particular labour processes take on specific technological forms. What has been the labour absorptive capacity of new technology; and what new patterns of social relations and methods of coordination and control have been engendered? Inevitably, these questions lead to a consideration of the differing mental conceptions of the world that produced the technology and organised the transport services (Harvey, 1982). An examination of these questions and their perceptual implications in relation to all of the technological changes that have occurred within public transport in Singapore is too formidable a task to be undertaken in this chapter. Attention, therefore, is concentrated on examining the technological determinist proposition in respect of the effects of the introduction of the jinrikisha on hackney carriages.

A major problem of dealing with hackney carriage syces (drivers) and jinrikisha pullers is that insider accounts are scarce. Few owners and pullers could read or write. Although illiterate they were not inarticulate. Yet, they rarely talked to people who were literate and had their point of view recorded. As a result, there are no 'written statements of what people were feeling — letters to the editor, posters, statements to reporters, autobiographies, constitutions,

petitions, and manifestoes' (Strand and Weiner, 1979: 140). We are, therefore, forced to 'deal with fragments of popular culture and the testimony of literate contempories' (see, for example, van Cuylenburg, 1982; Low Ngiong Ing, 1974; Peet, 1985), 'and his or her own explanation of popular intentions — intentions which form the realm of ... "mass fears, mass hopes, mass movements"' (Strand and Weiner, 1979: 140-141).

In this study we fall back upon the annual reports of W.E. Hooper, the Registrar of the Singapore Municipality's Hackney Carriage and Jinrikisha Department (and its successors) from 1892 to 1923. They provide us with historical evidence on technological change in public transport from a consistent source.[1] As Mr Hooper noted on his impending retirement:

> When I organised the Department in 1892 it was to control jinrikishas only which then numbered under 4,000. To-day there are 10,000 on the streets and besides the Department licenses bullock carts, hand carts, motor lorries motor hackney carriages and omnibuses (SMROVO, 1923: 4-B).

Admittedly, the reports are written from a colonialist's perspective and have to be matched against Warren's (1984a, 1985a, 1986) studies of rikisha pullers using oral histories and other evidence. Nevertheless, Mr Hooper's reports offer us a broad time span with which to search for evidence on aspects of the labour process that are relevant for testing the broad technological determinist argument.

Mr Hooper's reports can be distilled for information on social relations — social organisation and the social implications of the what, how and why of the creation of public transport services. Of course, they are particularly apposite for tracing variations in the nature of regulatory control in response to technological change. Before getting too deeply enmeshed in social relations, however, it

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1. Mr W.E. Hooper was born in Surrey, England, on 23 November 1858. In 1881, he came to Singapore to work for the commercial firm, A.L. Johnston & Co.(1819-1892); he was the last representative of the firm. In 1892, he was the inaugural Registrar of the Hackney Carriage and Jinrikisha Department. Under the new Municipal Ordinance in 1913 he became Registrar of the Vehicles Registration Office (later re-titled Registrar of Vehicles). In the course of his duties, he visited Shanghai during three months leave in 1903 to inspect the operations of the Jinrikisha Office (SMHCJD, 1904: 3). As testimony to 'management stretching' in municipal administration, Mr Hooper was also Superintendent of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Inspector of Prisons (1919). He retired on 31 April 1923 after thirty-one years service.

is perhaps preferable to begin by sifting his reports for evidence on changes in technology and variations in labour requirements.

THE MOVING FORCES OF SOCIETY

Public transport has been neglected in studies of technological change. Although a socially necessary activity it is not considered to be a productive force. The provision of public transport (and other services) has been characterised as unproductive. This interpretation, however, should not be a barrier to exploring hackney carriage and jinrikisha technologies as a means of charting the nature of technological change preliminary to examining their implications for employment.

Vehicles

On 17 February 1880, the jinrikisha was imported from Shanghai where it had first been shipped from Japan some six years earlier. Hitherto, the dominant form of public transport in Singapore had been the hackney carriage. The original horse and carriage had been imported from England during the 1820s. In 1840, Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell (1921: 331) reported that the returns of the Singapore Municipality showed 170 four-wheeled carriages and forty-four two-wheeled carriages, with 266 ponies. By the 1860s, the two-wheeled hackney carriage for hire supplemented the sedan chairs. This horsed vehicle, controlled by the police under the *Hackney Carriage Act 1867*, was more usually referred to as a hack-gharry or gharry (Hindi *gari*). In 1872, the Straits Settlements Blue Books recorded 542 persons paid taxes on hackney carriages; by 1879, the number had increased to 896 (SSBB, 1870-1919). When the first jinrikisha commenced operation there were 908 vehicles operating under the *Hackney Carriage Ordinance (No.V) 1879*.

After the introduction of the jinrikisha both second- and third-class hackney carriages declined in number in the face of keen competition (Table 6.1a). They also declined in quality as the vehicles presented for inspection had been in operation for many years and were below the desirable standard. The Java ponies also inspected at the same time were seldom seen again in the hackney carriage stands because inferior animals were substituted. An increase in fares in 1898 (principally the insertion of charges by time) did little to arrest the fall in hackney carriage numbers. In 1904, Mr Hooper was moved to comment:

TABLE 6. 1a
HACKNEY CARRIAGES IN SINGAPORE AT FIVE-YEARLY INTERVALS, 1880-1935

Date	1st Class[a]	2nd Class[b]	3rd Class[c]	Total
1880	-	-	-	908
1885	-	-	-	942
1890	-	-	-	724
1895	38	461	123	622
1900	39	484	-	523
1905	34	420	-	454
1910	64	122	19	377
1915[d]	191	229	48	468
1920	7	178	-	185
1925	-	-	-	82
1930	-	-	-	20
1935	-	-	-	8

Notes: a. The 1st Class carriages had no number-plates affixed and were kept at livery stables as they were not allowed to ply for hire on the streets.
b. From 1907 the 2nd Class carriages had rubber wheels.
c. From 1907 the 3rd Class carriages were the old 2nd Class carriages.
d. Included motor hackney carriages.

> There is no improvement in the quality of the majority of the gharries and the ponies plying for hire, notwithstanding the increased fares, which are higher than any neighbouring town (SMHCJD, 1905:2)

In 1905, these problems were aggravated by the 'competition of the (electric) trams' which precipitated the overall decline of hackney carriage numbers (the addition of rubber-tyred wheels in 1907 giving a temporary boost to second-class carriages) (SMHCJD, 1906: 2; 1908: 2). Before 1905, however, the 'decreases can only be accounted for by the keen competition of the Jinrikishas' (SMHCJD, 1901: 97).

TABLE 6.1b
JINRIKISHA IN SINGAPORE AT FIVE-YEARLY INTERVALS, 1880-1935

Date	1st Class[a]	2nd Class	Total	New
1880	-	-	-	n.a.
1885	-	-	3,092	n.a.
1890	-	-	3,675	n.a.
1895	-	-	5,606	2,063
1900	-	-	5,240	n.a.
1905	144	6,663	6,807	n.a.
1910	1,318	7,101	8,419	1,318
1915	269	4,722	7,416	2,694
1920	8,022	-	8,022	n.a.
1925	-	-	8,376	n.a.
1930	-	-	6,764	n.a.
1935	-	-	3,891	n.a.

Note: a. From 1904, 1st Class vehicles had rubber tyres.
Sources: SMHCD (1891); SMHCJD (1896, 1901, 1906, 1911); SMROVO (1916); SMROVO (1921); and SMVRD (1926, 1931, 1936).

As the task of controlling more than 1800 jinrikisha in the early 1880s was proving difficult, registration and supervision were suggested. This led to the introduction of the *Hackney Carriage Extension Act 1882* under which jinrikisha were classified as fourth-class carriages. At this time little was known or understood locally about the new type of vehicles. It was presumably never contemplated that the importation and trade in jinrikisha would increase to such an enormous extent, particularly after the steam tram commenced operations on 3 May 1886. Nevertheless, the jinrikisha remained the more popular mode of public transport and the fleet was continually augmented. As manifold abuses had arisen with the increasing number of jinrikisha it was recommended by the then Registrar that when the Municipality took over the control of the Hackney Department from the police a ceiling of 2500 units be imposed. The Municipal Commissioners argued, however, that 'special

legislation' was required to deal with the increasing number of jinrikisha (and their pullers).

In 1891, a Committee of Municipal Commissioners was set up to devise a *Scheme for the License, Control and Regulation of Jinrikishas*. Contrary to the earlier suggestion, the subsequent Report recommended that there should be no limit on the numbers of jinrikisha registered. Indeed, these vehicles could be either fourth-class, carrying one passenger and 'no goods', or fifth-class, with freedom to carry two passengers and some goods. An increase in tax from SS$1 to SS$12 a year was also proposed (the Chinese members of the Committee protested and added a rider to the Report). These changes were incorporated in the 'special legislation' — the *Jinrikisha Ordinance V*, of 1892. The 1891 Committee also recommended the establishment of a 'special Jinrikisha Department' and insisted that a 'competent Registrar, a man of proved character and beyond all suspicion of bribery must be appointed' (SMHCJD, 1897: 29).

Mr Hooper, in taking up this position, agreed with the 1891 Committee that there should be no limit to jinrikisha numbers. He was opposed to a system that 'practically makes a monopoly ... of the jinrikisha trade' (SMHCJD, 1902: 137). Once the previous ceiling had been reached and no more number plates were obtainable from the Municipal Commissioners:

> the number plates alone without any Jinrikisha were sold outside at various prices up to $30/40. Bribery, imitation numbers, thefts of number plates and Jinrikishas were rife. These were among the many difficulties I had to contend with when I was appointed Registrar... (SMHCJD, 1902: 137).

Although it was then thought that the tax rise would reduce jinrikisha numbers they increased steadily and were deemed responsible for the demise of the steam tramway in 1894 (Table 6.1b).

The new Registrar, however, was not preoccupied with the numbers of jinrikisha but was concerned about their quality. The prototype Japanese vehicles imported in the early 1880s had to be upgraded by substituting 'black American cloth' for back and seat covers, and black cloth for the vermin-prone, red baize on hood linings; English lamps had also been used in preference to the defective Japanese counterparts. There had been early attempts at import substitution. Invariably, the bodies of the locally-produced

vehicles were built of pinewood and were slightly heavier than their Japanese counterparts; their varnish also was of an inferior quality. There were even attempts at making jinrikisha from old packing cases but these needed constant repairs. Not surprisingly, Mr Hooper came down in favour of models from the Japanese assembly lines, though he recommended a more durable cloth than the 'American cloth' used hitherto for the inferior Japanese hoods and aprons (SMHCJD, 1898: 96). He demurred, however, on cloth lasting more than four months because of 'the filthy habits of the Chinese generally' (SMHCJD, 1897: 95).

When he took up his office Mr Hooper recognised that it would be a great hardship to compel all owners to present new Japanese jinrikisha. Prices had increased from $25 to $38 between 1892 and 1894 (SMHCJD, 1895: 30). Stocks of new vehicles, controlled almost exclusively by High Street Chinese dealers, were small. There was also a high demand for jinrikisha not only in Singapore but in the other Straits Settlements, Malacca and Penang, and the Malay States. It was, therefore, recognised that it would take some time to import them. Nevertheless, Mr Hooper was astonished that the remunerative import of jinrikisha had not attracted European merchants, particularly as competition would have upgraded the fleet (SMHCJD, 1895: 30).

The vehicles imported from Japan in the early 1890s, however, were referred to by their Japanese producers as third-class units. Only a small proportion were considered to be second-class and even these were at the cheaper end of the spectrum. These second- and third-class vehicles were not used in Japan but merely produced for export. As a means of improving the fleet Mr Hooper conceived the bold plan of tendering for a supply of 1000 units over a twelve-month period in the same way that jinrikisha lamps were purchased. These vehicles, built to approved Singaporean specifications, would be of a higher quality and lower cost than their contempories and readily bought by owners. Although nothing further was heard of this plan Mr Hooper did note, with some satisfaction, the increasing number of higher-quality imported jinrikisha from Japan (SMHCJD, 1899: 100).

In pursuing better-quality units, Mr Hooper recommended that the Municipal Commissioners encourage a syndicate in their proposition to import jinrikisha with rubber wheels by altering the classification of vehicles and fare structures (SMHCJD, 1903: 160). The Governor sanctioned changes to the *By-Laws and Schedule of Fares* to accommodate this proposition (SMHCJD, 1904: 2). Hither-

to, single-seater vehicles had been first-class and double-seater units second-class; there was no differentiation in fare. Under the amended arrangements rubber-tyred vehicles became first-class and iron-tyred units second-class. After a delay in importation the new vehicles came into operation in 1904 (SMHCJD, 1905: 2). As these silent jinrikisha became very popular a small bell was recommended by the Registrar (SMHCJD, 1905: 3).

The upgrading of the jinrikisha fleet was opportune as electric trams were introduced in Singapore during 1905 (*The Tramway and Railway World*, 1905). There was considerable speculation that the trams would run the jinrikisha off the streets. Although the breaking up of the roads to lay the rails did damage jinrikisha wheels it was the hackney carriages that felt the competition of the trams (SMHCJD, 1905: 3; 1906: 2). As the tram fares 'were too high, compared with 'rikishas carrying two passengers, to attract Native and Chinese ... a reduced scale was introduced' (SMHCJD, 1906: 3). Later, Mr Hooper was moved to observe that:

> I believe it is the first time electric trams have had to meet in competition large number of 'rikishas and instead of the trams running the 'rickishas *(sic)* off the streets, as predicted by some, the 'rikishas have continued to increase in numbers, whilst it remains to be seen whether the trams can be run profitably at the cheap fares now being charged (SMHCJD, 1908: 3).

No doubt, the expanding jinrikisha fleet prompted Mr Hooper to provide more elaborate statistics on vehicle numbers.

Averaged annual statistics between 1909 and 1913, as shown in Table 6.2, highlighted the growth in first-class rubber-tyred units. They masked, however, the greater use of vehicles during Chinese New Year. As the Municipal Commissioners decided in 1911 to abolish double-seaters within three years there could have been an ulterior motive behind the production of these detailed statistics. After 31 May 1916, no double jinrikishas were licensed. Where they were not replaced by a new unit they were converted by blocking the sides to conform to an inside measurement of two feet. In 1917, the number of rubber-tyred jinrikisha exceeded iron-tyred units for the first time. Although the price of the rubber-tyred jinrikisha increased from $130 in 1917 to $175 in 1919, the iron-tyred unit ceased to exist. An upsurge in locally-manufactured vehicles, however, oc-

TABLE 6.2
VARIATIONS IN THE NUMBER OF LICENSED VEHICLES RUNNING ON THE STREETS, 1909-1914

Date	Chinese New Year				Average			
	1st Class		2nd Class		1st Class		2nd Class	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
1909	-	-	-	-	1,229	15.9	6,489	84.1
1910	1,376	16.6	6,925	83.4	1,318	15.9	7,101	84.3
1911	1,566	16.8	7,730	83.2	1,542	17.5	7,259	82.5
1912	1,888	19.9	7,582	80.1	1,724	19.3	7,207	80.7
1913	2,055	22.3	7,152	77.7	2,237	27.0	6,062	73.0
1914	2,972	33.8	5,826	66.2	-	-	-	-

Sources: SMHCJD (1913:2); SMROVO (1914:2).

curred with the Japanese boycott in 1919, but these units disappeared once imports were resumed two years later. Although the cost of new units had increased to $180 with the prevailing high sea-freight rates, the resumption in trade with Japan was propitious as the jinrikisha had to withstand the threat of the Municipal omnibuses (SMROVO, 1922: 1-B).

In 1922, on the eve of Mr Hooper's retirement, the number of jinrikisha exceeded 10,000. This figure was never surpassed. In 1924, the Municipal Commissioners ceased the licensing of new jinrikisha as they exceeded the needs of the population (SMVRO, 1925: 1-B). Two years later, 'the Commissioners decided to allow one new jinrikisha to be licensed for every two old jinrikisha' (SMVRD, 1927: 3-B)(8). In 1929, a 15 per cent reduction in jinrikisha numbers was introduced. This reduction was aggravated for pullers by the decision to replace the ailing electric tramways with the popular trolley bus, and the growth of the seven-seater mosquito (or Ford) bus. The resort to loitering around bus stops and the carriage of forbidden articles (raw meat and fresh fish) in the wake of this escalating competition were tell-tale signs that the demand for jinrikisha was diminishing (SMVRD, 1932: 8-B). Although it was realised that it would take some time before the jinrikisha disappeared a further reduction of 15 per cent was implemented in 1931. By then, the hack-

ney carriage had also virtually disappeared, pushed into virtual oblivion by the rise of the second-class motor hackney carriage (SMVRO, 1924: 1B). Thus, Mr Hooper had presided over the full development of the jinrikisha and the demise of the hackney carriage. It now remains to explore the employment implications of these changes.

Labour

As the syces were licensed under the *Hackney Carriage Ordinance (No V) 1879* their numbers were recorded prior to Mr Hooper taking up his position. This Ordinance was unchanged after the Jinrikisha and Hackney Carriage Department was established. Thus, the declining numbers of syces were meticulously recorded over the next twenty-one years (Table 6.3). Although 'complaints against syces of extortion, and rudeness were numerous', Mr Hooper had no authority 'to deal with their licences in a summary way for certain offences' until 1903 (SMHCJD, 1906: 132, 1899: 102). Even then, Mr Hooper found 'many syces are very independent, complaints are frequent of men refusing to turn out of their stables unless promised excessive fares, especially at night time' (SMHCJD, 1905: 1). After 1913, the number of syces was bloated by drivers of motor cars (that were later licensed as second-class motor hackney carriages). In 1920, the syces were subsumed under the anonymous title of 'drivers'.

Precise figures on the number of jinrikisha pullers were available for a much shorter period than the syces. Before 1892, the number of rikisha pullers (or chair pullers, as they were referred to under the *Hackney Carriage Ordinance (No. V) 1882*) was recorded. In 1887 and 1888, for instance, there were 4828 and 4500 pullers respectively (SSADR, 1888, 1889). They were required under the Ordinance to be registered and wear a badge. Too much faith cannot be attached to these figures as the system in vogue required the jinrikisha owner to obtain a badge for the puller at the same time as the vehicle was licensed. Allegedly, the owners secured the temporary services of fit and able men to pass the licensing officer's test. Once in possession of the badge these men were paid off and any applicant able to pay the daily rental could obtain a licence and badge which were returnable with the vehicle. Although a photograph of each puller affixed to the licence was thought feasible it was eventually deemed impracticable because of the impermanent nature of the occupation (SMHCD, 1890: 7). Bearing these problems in mind, it was estimated

TABLE 6.3
EMPLOYMENT IN HACKNEY CARRIAGE, JINRIKISHA AND OTHER TRANSPORT ENTERPRISES AT FIVE-YEARLY INTERVALS, 1885-1939

Date			Tram		Bus	
	Syces	Pullers	Drivers	Conductors	Drivers	Conductors
1885	-	(4,000)	-	-	-	-
1890	-	(5,000)	-	-	-	-
1895	795	(12,000)	-	-	-	-
1900	630	(20,000)	-	-	-	-
1905	535	(20,000)	273		-	-
1910	364	(20,000)	158	208	-	-
1915	321	(20,000)	133	241	-	-
1920	-	(20,000)	350		-	-
1925	-	(14,000)	-	-	2,282	1,463
1930	-	-	-	-	2,330	1,094
1935	-	-	-	-	1,586	403
1939	-	-	-	-	1,654	478

Sources: SSAR (1886); SMHCD (1891); SMHCJD (1896, 1906, 1911); SMROVO (1916); SMROVO (1921); SMVRD (1926, 1931, 1936, 1940).

that there were 5000 pullers when Mr Hooper assumed office (SMHCD, 1889: 4).

An improvement in estimating the number of rikisha pullers was not forthcoming. According to the parameters laid down for Mr Hooper by the 1891 Committee, no licence should be required for a puller. Consequently, we have to rely on a series of estimates of the number of pullers. As pullers operated on a two-shift basis it can be assumed that the ratio of pullers to jinrikisha oscillated around 2.2. It is not known what rule-of-thumb Mr Hooper used but he estimated: 11/12,000 pullers in 1893 (SMHCJD, 1894: 22); 15,000 in 1897 (SMHCJD, 1898: 21); and 20,000 in 1904, 1908 and 1917 (SMHCJD 1905: 10, 1909: 2; SMVRO, 1918: 7). After his retirement, which more or less coincided with the peak in the number of pullers, there was a decline to an estimated 14,000 in 1927; this refuted rasher approximations that varied between 25,000 and 30,000 pullers (SMVRD, 1928: 5-B).

The assumption of a fixed ratio of men to vehicles, however, is dangerous because the flow of labour was sourced from Chinese emigration. In 1897, sickness in China led to emigration being restricted and a shortfall in pullers (SMHCJD, 1898: 95). There was also a falling off in emigrants 'when foolish reports were circulated and ... reached China that it was the intention of the Government to reduce the 'rikishas by half the number as soon as the trams started to run, and there were likely to be riots and coolies killed' (SMHCJD, 1906:2). Restrictions were also imposed on immigration into Singapore during 1913, 1914 and 1915 owing to quarantine regulations and the outbreak of the First World War. Although the restrictions on immigration were removed in 1916 a shortage was apparent during the following year. In 1919, Mr Hooper noted that:

> There is also at present a dearth of coolies, the men not coming down from China owing to high rates for passages, low exchange of Singapore currency and dear cost of living and so long as the demand exceeds the supply increased prices for all labour must be expected and will not be confined to jinrikisha pullers only (SMROVO, 1920: 2-E).

This problem must have been overcome because it was not mentioned as an issue after Mr Hooper returned from his fourteen-month-long leave in 1921. Soon after his retirement, the picture looked bleak for the jinrikisha men as witnessed by the growth in the number of drivers and conductors. It was unlikely, however, that many of the new jobs were taken up by ex-pullers.

Mr Hooper was conscious throughout his stint as Registrar that mere numbers could be misleading. His recurrent concern since the 1890s was that there was little improvement in the class of pullers employed. Although physically-weak pullers could be sidelined by the Registrar, in practice the owner could use any puller he could find. Consequently, unfit pullers (crippled, those suffering from sores or skin complaints) and *sinkehs* (newcomers) were used. The problems of employing newcomers to Singapore was aggravated by the practice of using lads who were 'too young and feeble' (SMHCJD, 1898: 96, 1902: 138). According to Mr Hooper's evidence to the fourth meeting of the Opium Commission in 1907, about 10

per cent of the pullers were debilitated by drug taking (Moore and Moore, 1969: 513-514).

The Registrar's comments on the quality of the opium-powered pullers, however, were remarkably restrained compared with the sweeping generalisations of Mr A.W.B. Hamilton, his immediate successor in the Vehicle Registration Office.

> There is a slight diminution in the number of decrepit and unfit pullers, at any rate as regards the more central portion of the Town ... their occupations immediately prior to taking up jinrikisha pulling have been as varied as the following: — Pig rearers, hawkers, road scavengers, rubber estate coolies, vegetable growers, domestic servants, sailors, actors, etc. in addition to a large number of sinkehs... There is nothing to be said in favour of allowing the employment in such a capacity of a host of vagrants, who find jinrikisha pulling in Singapore more profitable to starvation in China (SMVRD, 1926: 4-B).

As reported by Mr Hamilton, the suggestion for resolving the continued flood of *sinkeh* from China was to register and licence pullers — a step towards creating a jinrikisha-pulling profession. Although it could have provided more accurate data on puller numbers, it was contrary to Mr Hooper's opinion that licensing pullers would be ineffectual (SMHCJD, 1902: 138). Given this threatened break in policy, we concentrate on the social organisation of hackney carriage syces and jinrikisha pullers during Mr Hooper's period as Registrar.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

Attention is focused on the social relationships between human beings as they combine and cooperate in the creation of public transport services by hackney carriage or jinrikisha. Initially, interest is centred on the internal relationships within both the hackney carriage and jinrikisha industries. Then the differing participation of the Municipality in the creation of these public transport services is considered. Finally, an examination is made of what happened on the occasions when the social cooperation required to operate these transport systems was not forthcoming.

Internal Relationships

The social relations among the hackney carriage syces were relatively simple. In essence, a large number of Kling (Indian) coolies had obtained sufficient funds to cover the heavy expenditure required for the purchase of pony, harness and gharry. Notwithstanding their considerable liabilities, they seemed to be able to eke out a satisfactory living based in an area south of the Singapore River. As shown in Figure 6.1 it lay within Upper Cross Street (formerly Kling Street), New Bridge Road and Mosque Street — an area noted for its stables (*Chinatown: An Album of a Singapore Community*, 1983). Mr Hooper's predecessor in the Hackney Carriage Department had hoped that the jinrikisha business would be organised on a similar free-for-all basis. An examination of the social relations between pullers, owners and brokers shows that a different pattern of organisation emerged.

The ideal situation conceived by the framers of the *Hackney Carriage Extension Ordinance (No V) 1882* was one in which the puller became the *bona-fide* owner of the jinrikisha he drew. He would then have some inducement to take up pulling as a full-time occupation. An owner-puller was also expected to be more likely to keep his vehicle clean and in a fit state for hire. It was difficult to conceive 'why the hard-working and thrifty Chinese coolie should be unable to obtain sufficient funds for the purchase of a 'richsha *(sic)*' (SMHCD, 1891: 7).

Even before Mr Hooper became Registrar there was opposition to this version of granulated capitalism. As noted by the 1891 Committee with particular reference to the operation of the Ordinance of 1882:

> The idea ... that a number of industrious and respectable coolies would be tempted by the almost nominal tax of $1 a year to acquire each his own jinrikisha and stick to it as a puller, carefully selecting another licensed puller as his substitute when he happened to be tired or indisposed has proved almost a complete delusion, although doubtless it has occasionally been realised (SMHCJD, 1898: 27).

A major factor in Singapore militating against replicating the arrangements that persisted in the hackney carriage trade was kinship.

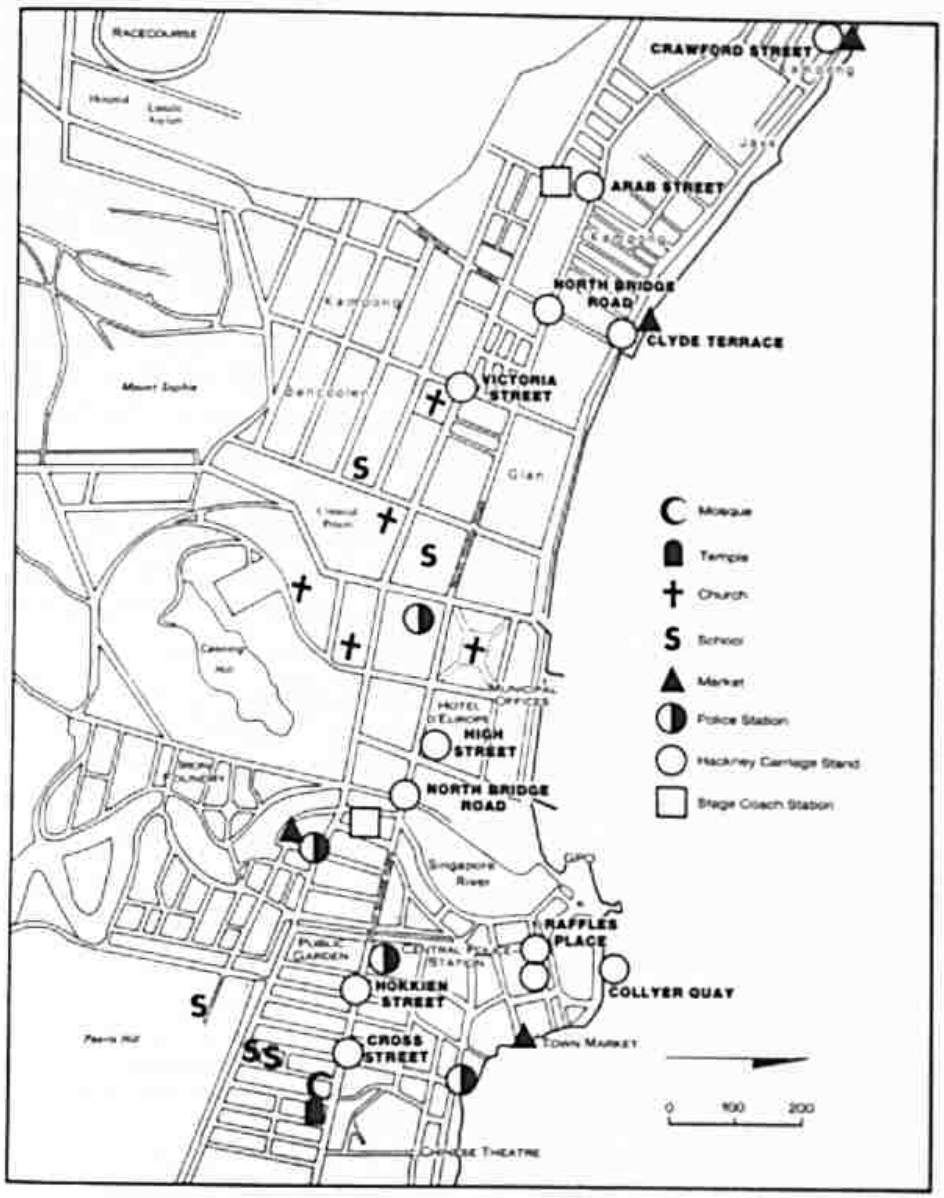

Figure 6.1 Singapore 1880 showing major hackney carriage stands on the eve of the introduction of the jinrikisha. (*Source:* based on information in SSD, 1881.)

Most of the early jinrikisha pullers were immigrants from China who lived in densely populated areas such as Sago Street and Banda Street, south of the Singapore River — an area notorious for its brothels (Fig. 6.2). As the jinrikisha industry developed the pullers were derived from particular dialect groups which Mr Hooper referred to as 'clans'. Since the 1890s the Hok Chia and Heng Wah clans from the province of Fukien in China had increased rapidly in the area north of the Singapore River centred on Victoria Street, Queen Street and Rochore Road (Fig. 6.2). Through their cheap labour they had driven out the 'Hokien, Macao and other Chinese from the trade' (SMHCJD, 1899: 102). By 1902, Mr Hooper estimated that there were not less than 15,000 'Foochow men' among an estimated 20,000 pullers and these belonged to the Heng Wah, Hock Chew, Hok Chia and Hwee Wah clans (SMHCJD, 1903: 161).[2] Not surprisingly, a Foochow interpreter was appointed to the Department and the Registrar pressed the Municipal Commissioners for a second position (SMHCJD, 1902: 15).[3] By 1909, the Hok Chia and Heng Wah pullers dominated the trade (SMHCJD, 1909: 2).

In July 1897, there was evidence that a secret society had been formed among the Hok Chew jinrikisha men. On 31 March 1899, three peons were charged with assisting a clan to monopolise the jinrikisha stand at Johnston's Pier (SMHCJD, 1900: 64). Although the Magistrates dismissed the particular case, Mr Hooper confirmed in his annual report in 1917 that the public stands, built in increasing numbers since 1893, were divided into clan districts instead of being free to all pullers to wait at (SMHCJD, 1918: 7). Consequently, when a puller left a passenger in another district he was afraid to stop there and so returned to his own district.

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2. When Mr Hooper referred to 'Foochow men' it is uncertain if he was talking about the city (i.e. treaty port) or the region. It was only the Hok Chew (not Hok Chia and Heng Wah) who came from Foochow city area (see Blythe, 1969; Comber, 1959). This distinction is borne out in Low Ngiong Ing's (1974: 73-74) reminiscences about his Singapore childhood. 'Most of the rickshaw-pullers were Hockchias and Hinghwas... The Foochow dialect was understood by most of them, though they had their own patois which, like my own , sounded uncouth in finicky Foochow ears... No insult could be greater than to call someone 'Cheena-bachia' — rickshaw puller, even if he was one. I was to know it for many a long year, in school and elsewhere, having Cheena-bachia spat at me. In vain did I protest that I was not a Hockchia but a Hockchiu, a Foochow.' Perhaps, like Mr Hooper, 'they could not or would not see the difference'.

3. According to *Harmsworth's New Atlas of the World* (Hammerton, c.1921: 270), Foochow, a port on the Min River, had no hackney carriages or jinrikisha, only sedan chairs. There were also no roads or railways. In 1932, *Fuzhou Luxing Zhinan* [The Guide to Foochow], however, noted that there were both jinrikisha and hackney carriages — horse and motor — offering services within both Foochow City and the island of Nantai and between the two (Zheng Bajia, 1934; see also Nippon Fukensho, 1938).

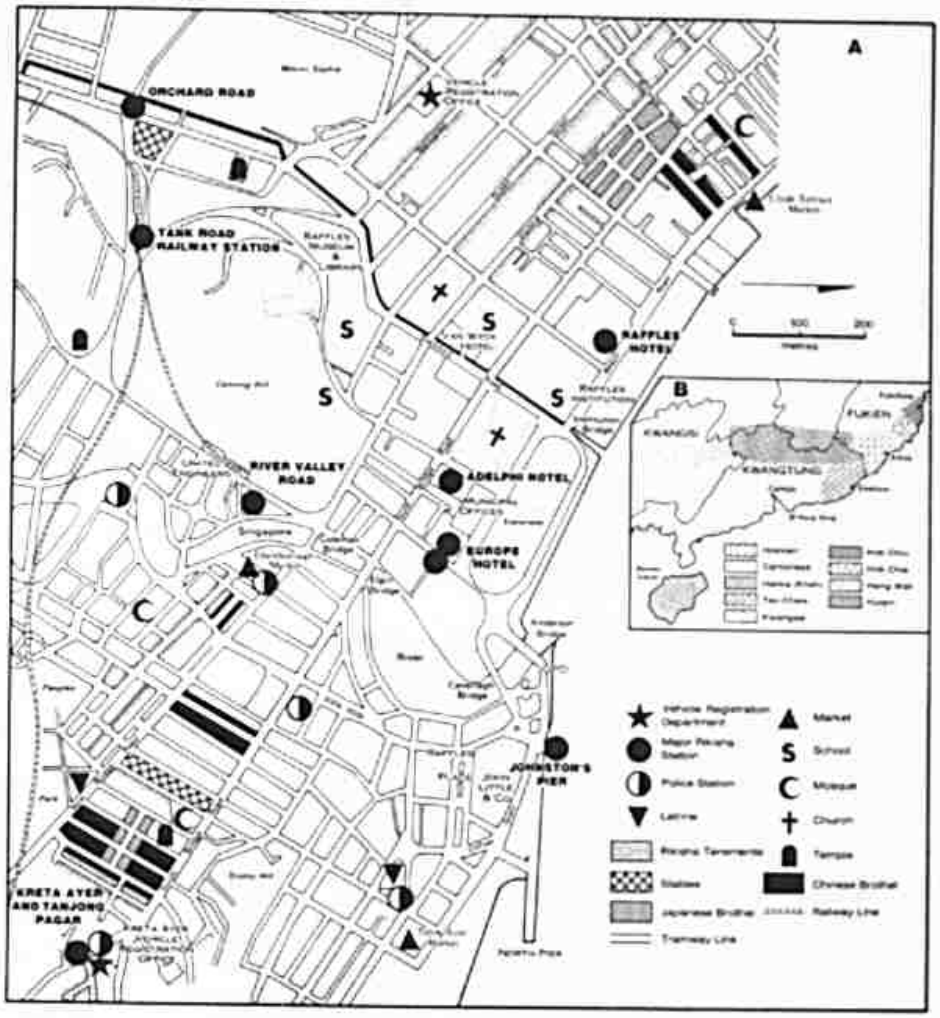

Fig. 6.2 Singapore 1917 showing major jinrikisha stands and other features of the transport landscape (the distribution of jinrikisha tenements and the location of brothels are taken from Warren, 1984a). Inset shows that immigrants to Singapore came from the three southern provinces of China — Kwangtung, Kwangsi and Fukien. (*Source*: based on Comber 1959.) Most jinrikisha pullers came from Kwangtung and Fukien provinces. Those from Fukien included the following dialect groups: Hokkien, Hok Chew, Hok Chia, and Heng Wah — the last three took up jinrikisha pulling. Their speech was so different from their southern Hokkien compatriots that they formed a separate community with a reputation for turbulence.

TABLE 6.4
THE DIVISION OF PUBLIC JINRIKISHA STANDS INTO CLAN DISTRICTS

Location	Clan[a]
Orchard Road	Heng Hua
River Valley Road	Hok Chia
Tank Road Railway Station	Hok Chia
Europe Hotel	
Outside	Hok Chia
Inside	Heng Hua
Raffles Hotel	Hok Chia[b]
Adelphi Hotel	Chin Kang
Johnston's Pier	Hui Wah
Tanjong Pagar and Kreta Ayer	Hui Wah
Bukit Timah Road	Cheow Ann

Notes: a. There were only a few Teo Chew, Cantonese and Hylam pullers employed.
b. Formerly Cheow Ann

Source: SMVRO (1918:7).

The practice had become so entrenched that public stands were divided up by pullers in a way Mr Hooper thought 'peculiar' to Singapore. For example, the Hok Chia clan controlled River Valley Road, Tank Road Railway Station; the Europe Hotel (outside) and Raffles Hotel were controlled by the Hok Chia; and Orchard Road and the Europe Hotel (inside) by the Heng Wah. As shown in Table 6.4, other stands were controlled by the Chin Kang, Hui Wah and the Cheow Ann respectively; it was also noted by Mr Hooper that there were few Teo Chew, Cantonese and Hailam pullers.

Pullers hired their vehicles from the owners. Most jinrikisha pullers worked for a specific *kongsi* or *kun* which supplied them the vehicles, cubicle or bunk space, lodging and wages. In 1892, the rental paid by pullers to owners had been 25 cents per day and 20 cents per night. By 1897, these figures had been reduced to 10 cents per day and 9 cents per night, being less than 50 per cent of those paid formerly (and the owner had to licence them every four months and present them in a good state of repair). There had, however,

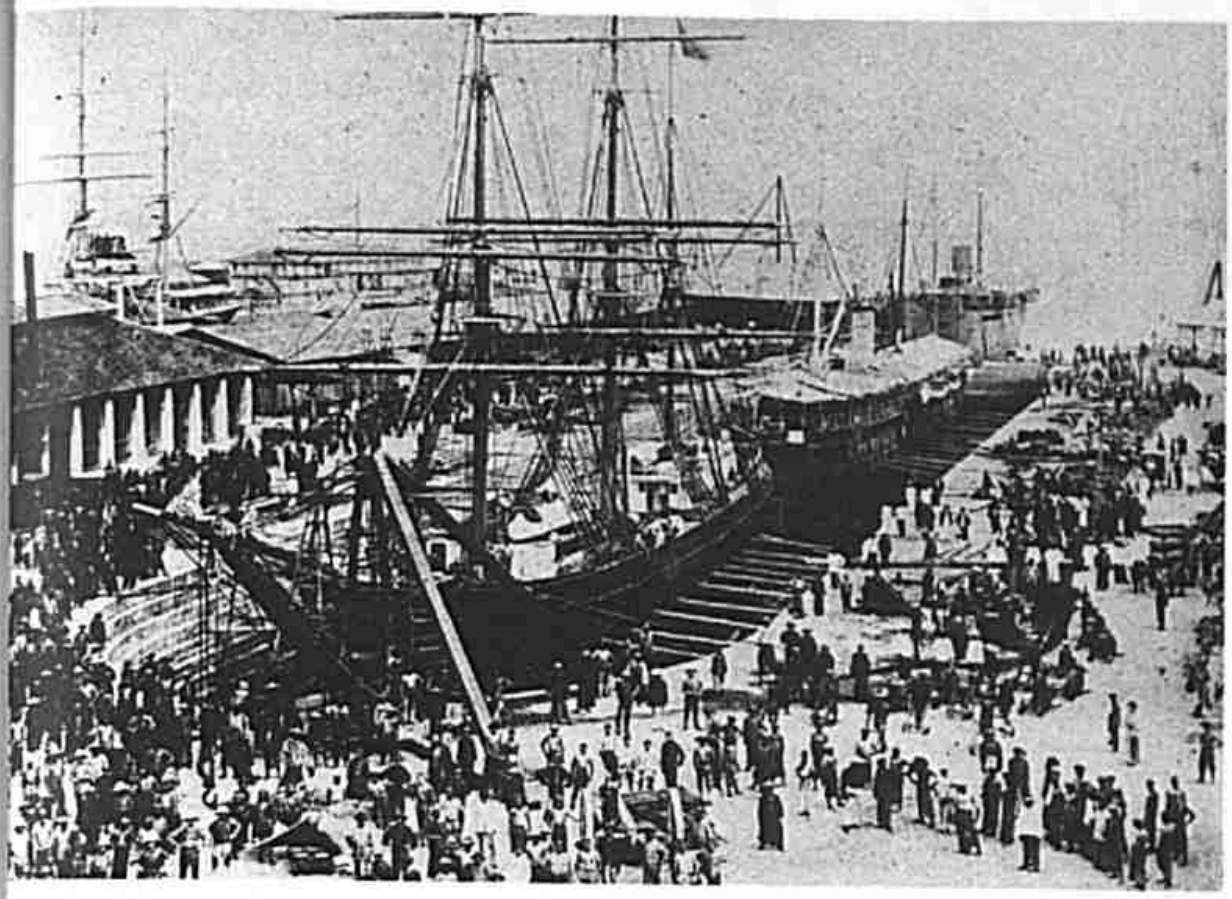

Plate 28. Tanjong Pagar Dock, Singapore 1892 (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 29. Views of Singapore at the beginning of the twentieth century (*Source*: Lim Kheng Chye).

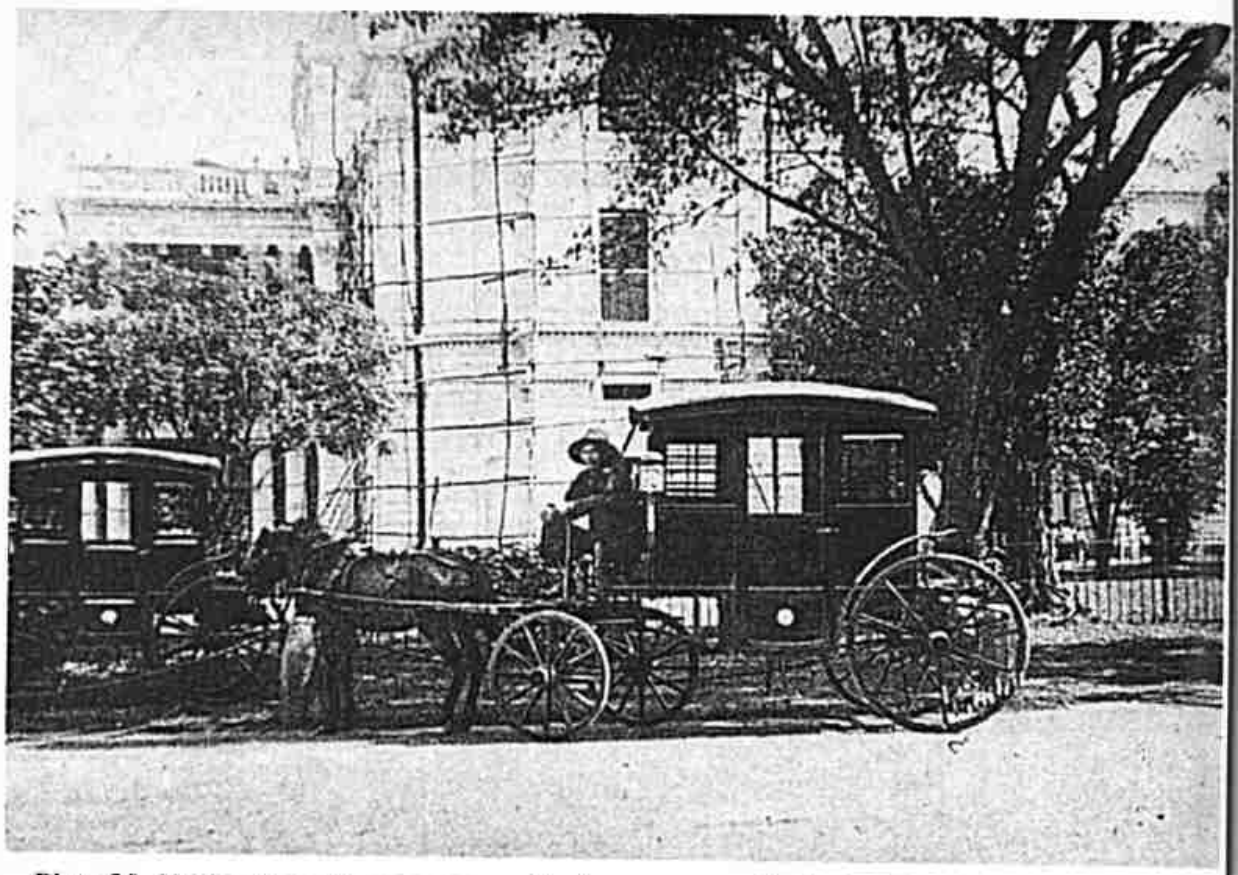

Plate 30. Hackney carriage or gharry. As they were available for hire their activities were concentrated in Singapore's business area (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 31. Jinrikisha stand, Singapore. Note the adjacent food stall (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 32. Hackney carriages at their stand at Tan Kim Seng Fountain, c. 1900. The fountain was built in 1882 at Fullerton Square to commemorate Tan Kim Seng's donation towards Singapore's waterworks (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 33. Jinrikisha station, Sago Lane, Singapore, 1920. The Plate highlights the problems occasioned by parked jinrikisha (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 34. Mr. W.E. Hooper, Magistrate, and Registrar of the Hackney Carriage and Jinrikisha Department under the Municipality of Singapore from 1892 to 1923.

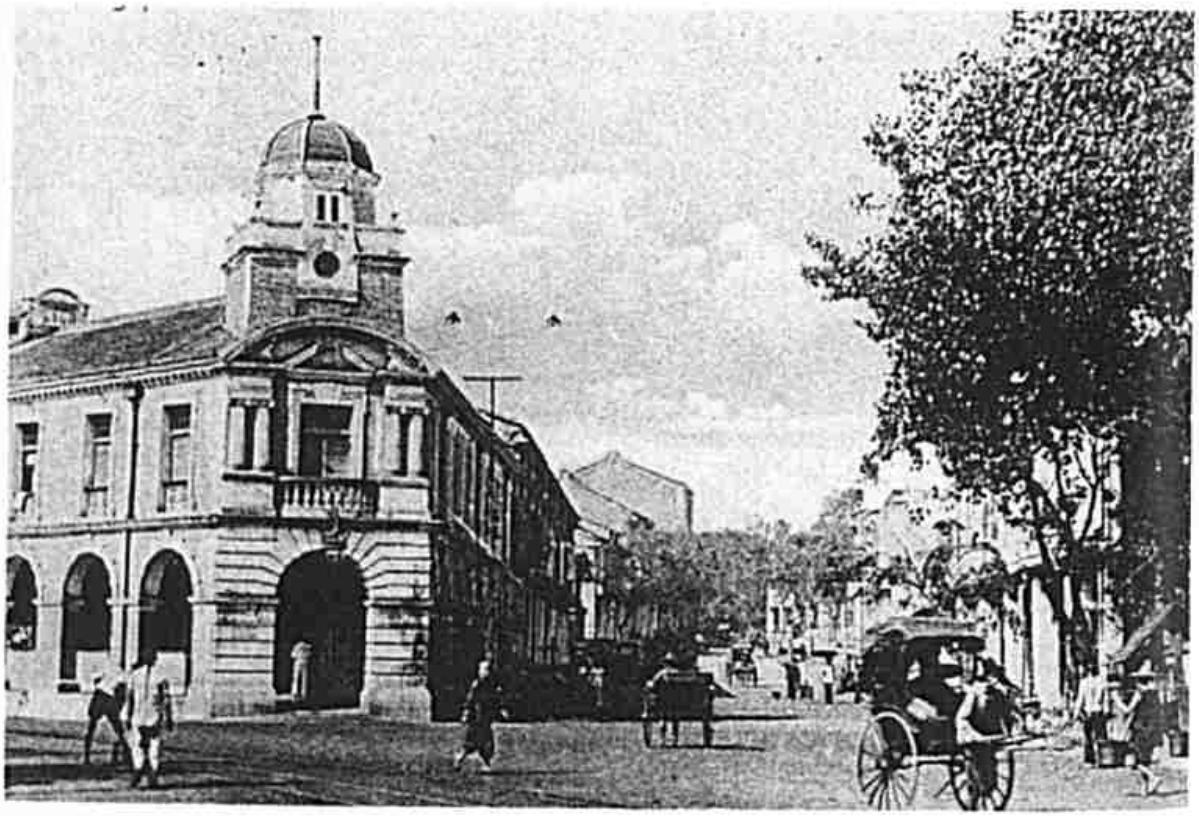

Plate 35. The Kreta Ayer Jinrikisha Branch Office c. 1906. This establishment was opened in 1904; it replaced an earlier building. It was used for licensing jinrikisha vehicles. It is situated at the junction of Tanjong Pagar, Neil and South Bridge Roads (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 36. Mosquito buses versus jinrikisha in South Bridge Road, Singapore, during the 1930s. The introduction of these converted sedans made life more hazardous for jinrikisha pullers (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 37. Trolley bus versus jinrikisha in Singapore during the early 1930s. As electric trams had not swept the jinrikisha from the streets the rejuvenated Singapore Traction Company introduced the trolley bus in 1929 (*Source*: Lim Kheng Chye).

Plate 38. The car of death, October 1924. The cartoonist creates the popular conception that mosquito buses were unsafe at any speed (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

Plate 39. Sago Street, Singapore, 1910. Jinrikisha men awaiting custom from restaurants and Chinese brothels. In 1901, there were fourteen brothels in the street at numbers 3, 5, 11, 13, 29, 31, 35, 51, 53, 55, 59, 63, 65 and 69 (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 40. Trengganu Street, Singapore, 1919. An area of Japanese brothels catering for a European clientele until the late 1920s. In 1930, the Straits Settlements Ordinance No.15, entitled Protection of Women and Children, brought prostitution under tight control (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 41. The Malay Street brothel district of Singapore in the 1920s. Before the total abolition of brothel prostitution in 1930, night life meant music and beer with the well-behaved Japanese prostitutes.

Plate 42. Kimono-clad *Karayuki-san* in Singapore pose against a studio backdrop in the 1890s.

TABLE 6.5
ESTIMATED COST OF OPERATING A FLEET OF JINRIKISHA IN SINGAPORE, 1892

Initial outlay		**$**
20 new jinrikisha	@ $25 each	500.00
20 pairs lamps	@ $1.60 per pair	32.00
Total		**532.00**
Annual earnings		
20 jinrikisha	@ $0.25 per 24 hours @ 24 days a month @ 12 months	
Total		**1,440.00**
Annual expenses		
20 jinrikisha		
Licence	@ $12 each	240.00
Rent	@ $0.30 per month	72.00
Repairs	@ $16.20 each[a]	324.00
Wages of one mandore	@ $10 per month	120.00
Interest on SS$532	@ 12 per cent	64.00
Total		**820.00**
Annual net profit		**620.00**

Note: a. Upon renewing licence every four months expenses should not exceed: hood $20.00; cushions $0.30; back cushion $0.40; carpet $0.20; and varnishing, painting and general repairs $2.50. Thus each jinrikisha cost $5.40 for each four months and $16.20 per annum.

Source: SMHCJD (1893: 13).

been an upsurge in hiring rates by 1904 (SMHCJD, 1905: 2). They varied, according to district and quality, from between 18 cents and 36 cents per day. The day-pullers had to return their vehicles by 2 p.m. and night-pullers by 6 a.m. If they failed to do so they had to pay double hire to the owners. When the first rubber-tyred vehicles were introduced in 1904 they were handled by one man who paid

the syndicate 45 cents per day and then sublet them. After this first-class units became more common. In 1905, they were hired, depending on district and quality, for between 50 cents and 60 cents per day compared with between 18 cents and 38 cents for second-class units. Monthly rates of $15 for first-class units and $6 were also offered in 1907 (SMHCJD, 1908: 2).

In 1892, the owners complained that the jinrikisha business was unprofitable. Mr Hooper disagreed. Even allowing liberally for repairs, a mandore and a twenty-four working day month, his calculations, given in Table 6.5, showed that an owner could more than recoup his whole capital within one year. Assuming ordinary care and maintenance the vehicle should last for three years. The root problem was that the poorer owners, who were constantly changing addresses and going to China, did not understand the regulations under which jinrikisha operated. Consequently, they registered their vehicles in the names of brokers who 'sweated them' (SMHCJD, 1893: 19). When the Legislative Council debated the regulation of jinrikisha in 1892 Mr Shelford highlighted the instance when certain pullers had petitioned the 1891 Committee that 'the Municipality should themselves *(sic)* become owners of the rikishas, and thus relieve them from the trickery and fraud' of the brokers (cited by Moore and Moore, 1969:471). As the 1891 Committee opted for market forces rather than incipient state capitalism brokering went unchecked.

The gang of brokers comprised small capitalists and the High Street Chinese traders controlling the importation and *de facto* ownership of jinrikisha. Their income was derived from charging the owner-pullers from $7.50 to $9 for each four-monthly licence though the tax was only $4. In addition to paying all repairs, the 'poor owners' had to pay the broker between 35 and 50 cents for appearing before the Registrar each time the vehicle was impounded — which was frequently since the owners were held responsible for certain street offences committed by pullers (i.e. the situation which occurs in most cases of gang labour). Part of the problem with brokering stemmed from the security clauses in the *Ordinance for the Regulation and Control of Jinrikisha* in 1891 which allowed the broker to pay $200 to stand security for 100 jinrikishas when the poor owner had to find $25 for a single jinrikisha. As 'good' owner-pullers would not tolerate these 'evil practices' they left for more remunerative employment as Mr Hooper noted that 'only ignorant sinkehs would tolerate the squeezing of brokers' (SMHCJD, 1893: 20).

The influential owners and brokers were drawn largely from the Hok Chia and Heng Wah clans who 'infested' an area north of the Singapore River in the neighbourhood of Victoria Street, Queen Street and Rochore Road. Invariably, they sent their representative to licence vehicles and:

> when taunted with their neglect in not presenting themselves at the Registration yard to attend to their own business, cooly reply "I have no leisure" (tada senang)!! The truth is that many of them are only nominally owners (SMHCJD, 1898: 24).

Not surprisingly, Mr Hooper sought to break the power of the brokers. He found them to be 'the curse of the trade' and at 'the bottom of all mischief and bribery' that was 'difficult to suppress' (SMHCJD, 1900: 102).

In the early years of his incumbency it looked as if Mr Hooper had succeeded in decentralising ownership. When he assumed office in 1892 there were 378 owners operating 3991 units an average of more than 10 each. By 1896, the average had been halved as there were 1432 owners operating 6761 units. Although this was cited as evidence of breaking the power of the brokers it was still thought necessary to promulgate the *Jinrikisha Ordinance of 1901* to abolish the security clause that forced the poor owners to use them.

Mr Hooper's victory, however, proved illusory. In 1905, he had to admit:

> The Jinrikishas are registered in names of 953 owners, most of them are brokers, the vehicles are not their property, only registered in their names for which they squeeze the coolies. Everything has been tried for years to get the coolies to register in their own names and save the brokers fees but without success (SMHCJD, 1906: 2).

Nevertheless, Mr Hooper was able to take solace in defeat as the brokers were very helpful to the Department. As registered owners they were required to produce a particular puller when requested to do so or face a fine. It was very rare for them not to locate the specific puller.

As their aversion to having jinrikisha registered in their own names persisted, little has been discovered about the 'real owners'. In the early 1900s Mr Hooper noted that they were not 'men of large capital' (SMHCJD, 1902: 130). They were, however, 'men who have resided sometime in Singapore and know a little Hokien' (SMHCJD, 1903: 161). Judging by the large number of new Japanese jinrikisha in operation they were making handsome profits as they cost $50 each. In 1910, puller ownership was facilitated by importers enabling them to buy them on small instalments (SMHCJD, 1910: 2). By 1916, their profits enabled them to make frequent visits to China and to buy new jinrikisha (SMROVO, 1916: 2). The profitability of the occupation, according to Mr Hooper's annual report in 1919, was confirmed by the number of jinrikisha purchased each year. Abolition of the two-seater jinrikisha, however, could have enhanced profitability as Mr Hooper considered that it led to pullers extorting higher fares (and incidentally increased the transport expenses of poor people). Indeed, the gross daily takings of the pullers were estimated to be at least $20,000 in 1919 (SMROVO, 1920: 1-E).[4]

The benefits to individual pullers could have been eroded by 'bilking' which persisted throughout Mr Hooper's tenure. Although fares were increasingly negotiated the pullers were often cheated as the passenger left without paying and could not be traced. Indeed, 'simple-minded pullers will even be induced to hand over hard won earnings to passengers, who deposit sham jewellery or bogus parcels' (SMHCJD, 1914: 3). The earnings of pullers could have been further eroded by the Malay peons set up to assist Mr Hooper as they had a reputation for petty bribery.

Municipal Government

Before examining the relationship between pullers and peons it should be highlighted that the licence fees, charges and fines paid by owners were derived from the earnings of pullers (cf. Forbes, 1981). As shown in Table 6.6, these returns were a direct source of wealth for the Municipal Government. The contribution of the jin-

4. Mr Hooper did not make any estimates of the daily returns to individual pullers. In 1927, however, 'a conservative estimate' was made which suggested that a jinrikisha 'out' for 24 hours earned $2.50. This wage compared with the 'extravagant wages' paid to omnibus drivers (S$4 a day, and even more). Conductors were paid $1.50 for a full day with food (SMVRD, 1928: 5-B - 6-B). The profits, however, were not that great that they could contemplate building the suggested ' model lodging house, for coolies upstairs and the ground floor to be used for keeping the rikishas' (SMHCJD, 1911: 3).

TABLE 6.6
RETURNS SHOWING TOTAL CASH RECEIVED BY THE DEPARTMENT AT TEN-YEARLY INTERVALS,1900-1920

	1900 $	1910 $	1920 $
Revenue			
Vehicles			
Hackney carriages	812	502	3,092[a]
Jinrikisha	77,656	101,192	94,692
Transfers[b]	944	627	450
Tram cars	-	840	840
Men			
Syces	819	473	1,408[a]
Tramway employees	-	839	700
Fines[b]	n.a.	10,896	9,473
Sundries	363	50,459	186,605
Total	80,594	165,828	297,260
Expenses	n.a.	44,769	n.a.
Profit	n.a.	121,060	n.a.

Notes: a. Includes motor hackney carriage returns; and
b. hackney carriages and jinrikisha.

Sources: SMHCJD (1901:100, 1911:5); SMROVO (1921: 1-E).

rikisha industry was so dominant that Mr Hooper was concerned in 1904 that if 'the trams do run the jinrikishas off the streets it will mean a great loss to Municipal revenue' (SMHCJD, 1905: 3). In his retrospective review, after twenty years in the Department, Mr Hooper also noted that 'the total revenue of the department, including taxes on all licensed vehicles, grew from $60,116 in 1893 to $116,403 in 1902 to $175,844, in 1912 and that 'the surplus to the credit of the Municipal Fund, after paying all expenses exceeds one and a half million dollars' (SMHCJD, 1913: 1).

Ostensibly, the justification for government intervention in public transport was to ensure that vehicles were clean and safe and relations between supplier and consumer were ordered by an agreed

set of fares. The need for controls over hackney carriages and the 'special legislation' governing jinrikisha were made more pressing by an unfortunate accident which 'H.E. the Governor met with on the Esplanade Road on the 14th June' 1901 (SMHCJD, 1902: 130). After injuries to the Governor's horse (and the Governor's pride) there was a brief flurry of activity to improve traffic management, with particular attention being paid to parked jinrikisha. Attempts at removing horse-powered and man-powered vehicles from the traffic stream during Mr Hooper's stay as Registrar, however, were muted. As we have seen, they were money spinners for the Municipal Government.

Hackney Carriages

Paradoxically, Mr Hooper had little say in the operation of hackney carriages. No attempt was made by the Municipal Commissioners to alter the *Hackney Carriage Ordinance 1879* when Mr Hooper assumed office. The syces were, therefore, unaffected by their incorporation into the new-styled Hackney Carriage and Jinrikisha Department. Consequently, all hackney carriages continued to be registered on a half-yearly schedule. Adherence to fixed registration dates allowed coach builders to charge higher rates for repairs, particularly at Chinese New Year.

Mr Hooper also had no power to suspend or revoke the licences of syces (or owners) 'for such offences as drunkenness, wilful misbehaviour, using abusive language and demanding extortionate fares' (SMHCJD, 1894: 22). (Chinese syces were much better behaved and it was the Kling and Jawi Peranakan syces that figured as the prime extortioners.) As the offending syces went unpunished, their conduct, particularly towards strangers, did not improve (as, apparently any Mail Steamer's agent was prepared to testify). Powers were not granted to the Registrar to deal in a summary way with offending syces until the *Amended Ordinance XXVIII*, of 1903.

Jinrikisha

'Special legislation' to meet the particular requirements of the jinrikisha was requested by Mr Hooper's predecessor because:

> So long as these vehicles are permitted to be used for the transport of live pigs, goats, poultry, fish manure, buckets of indigo dye,

> hog's wash and many other abominations which need not here be detailed, it is manifest that they cannot be kept clean and in a fit state for passenger traffic (SMHCD, 1891: 7).

This problem was compounded by jinrikisha pullers touting for hire, 'as the public encourage them, by engaging any passing 'rickisha and seldom trouble to call one waiting on the stand, consequently the coolies find that they can get more fares by crawling about' (SMHCJD, 1908: 1). It was to overcome these problems that Mr Hooper was armed with a staff of inspectors and peons when he established the 'special Jinrikisha Department'.

Much of the work was undertaken by the Malay peons appointed in 1892 to take over from the 'undermanned, inefficient and thoroughly corrupt staff of 8 native constables' (SMHCD, 1889: 5).

> It was originally proposed to employ 100 men, but the number was afterwards reduced to 60. They are stationed at three Depots, which are open from 4 a.m. till midnight, and the men are 4 hours on duty, 4 hours off duty and 4 hours on reserve (SMHCJD, 1893: 20).

The purpose of their appointment was to have men on duty day and night solely to deal with jinrikishas and their pullers. As such, their duties were distinct from those of police constables. They consisted of impounding jinrikisha if: unlicensed and plying for hire; licence had expired; in broken or unfit condition to ply; using false number plates; using defaced number plates; without proper fittings and lamps; carrying forbidden articles; puller physically unfit or in rags and all contraventions of the by-laws (SMVRO, 1918: 6). In 1917, there were fifty peons available. Only thirty-six, however, were rostered for street duty. These were divided into three complements of twelve men each. The remainder were engaged on station duty taking reports with eight Chinese peons assisting with the interpretation of statements into Malay (SMVRO, 1918: 6).

As shown in Table 6.7 the number of cases against jinrikisha tried before the Registry increased alarmingly from 7383 in 1893 to a veritable bonanza in 1896 when 29,601 cases were heard — a reflection of an increasing number of peons. Not surprisingly, the peons earned the ire of both owner and puller. Less strict supervision had

TABLE 6.7
RETURN OF CASES TRIED BEFORE THE REGISTRAR AT TEN-YEARLY INTERVALS, 1895-1915

Offence	1895[a]	1905[b]	1915[c]
Bad clothes	3,796	15	-
Behaving rudely	28	175	192
Endangering traffic	441	255	1,094
Employing unfit coolies	102	221	255
Loitering & obstruction	12,355	2,454	1.395
Refusing hire	-	474	152
Refusing fare	-	230	50
Soliciting in disorderly manner	2,393	856	1,376
Other	1,503	1,568	1,690
Total	20,618	6.248	6,204
Convicted	19,778	5,002	5,000

Notes: a. Cases heard by Registrar under 1892 Ordinance;
b. Cases heard by Registrar under 1902 Ordinance; and
c. Cases heard under 1913 Ordinance.

Sources: SMHCJD (1896, 1906); SMROVO (1916).

to be introduced to dissipate the bitter feeling. After 1896 the number of jinrikishas impounded were, in accordance with instructions, greatly reduced. The number of cases fluctuated thereafter until the new *Jinrikisha Ordinance 1 of 1900* came into force (SMHCJD, 1901: 98). Throughout the period loitering about the street and obstruction were the main offences.

As the pullers did not (or would not) understand that loitering and obstructing traffic were wrong, it was not surprising that they complained that the peons impounded their vehicles for no reason. 'In 19 out of 20 cases the coolie pleads "I was doing nothing wrong, if I don't walk about and look for fares how can I get food" and the impression in their minds is generally that they have been impounded as they have no cents to give the peon' (SMHCJD, 1898: 22).

TABLE 6.8

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PEONS AT FIVE-YEARLY INTERVALS, 1895-1920

Date	Strength	Resigned	Deserted	Dismissed	Died	Joined	Promoted
1895	54	5	16	5	2	26	0
1900	64	5	45	8	1	68	0
1905	59	4	22	14	1	33	0
1910	55.5	4	9	9	0	25	0
1915	51.8	0	3	10	1	8	0
1920	57	10	3	2	0	16	1

Sources: SMHCJD (1896, 1901, 1906, 1911); SMROVO (1916); SMROVO (1921).

Bribes and squeezing were the substance of another complaint against the peons. This matter was not disputed by Mr Hooper who felt that 'so long as Chinaman *(sic)* offer money, men of the class of peons will be found to accept it' (SMHCJD, 1898: 22). Although the Hackney Carriage and Jinrikisha Department were willing to prosecute a peon, the pullers were unwilling to provide the evidence necessary for a conviction. Invariably, the bribe was paid through a third party and recovered when the peon was off-duty. A peon was convicted on 7 May 1902, however, of extorting six cents from a puller; he was 'sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment' (SMHCJD, 1903: 161). The severity of the sentence caused consternation among the peons and prompted nine to desert.

The peons appeared to dislike the work. They resented having to work without proper authority because they had 'no powers of arrest ... and pullers who insult and abuse them go unpunished' (SMHCJD, 1898: 96). (A legal opinion in 1896 stated that the law gave the Registrar and his officials no power to summon an owner to produce his jinrikisha and puller.) Without legal teeth the peons deserted as soon as a better employment opportunity arose (Table 6.8). They deserted with such unfailing regularity that Mr Hooper suggested they be put on a fixed contract and punished for breaking it (SMHCJD, 1896: 69, 1897: 96). At one stage the Registrar recommended that the peons be re-engaged under the Police Force Ordinance.

An increase in pay from $7 to $8 per month (SMHCJD, 1896: 68), supplemented by a rice allowance (SMHCJD, 1899: 102), did bring more stability among the peons. These measures were not totally successful as they also had 'the very disagreeable duty of collecting dead rats' (SMHCJD, 1905: 4).[5] It was only when permission to join the subordinate Provident Fund was granted in 1907 that more stability was brought to the occupation. The prospect of one month's pay for each complete year of service, after ten years, led to dismissals and resignations outnumbering desertions. Nevertheless, Mr Hooper still reported in 1911 that petty bribery between puller and peon continued to give trouble (SMHCJD, 1911: 3). In extreme cases these oppositions and antagonisms erupted as strikes.

Strikes

After the general strike of hackney carriage syces on 16 January 1881 in opposition to the introduction of the jinrikisha, there were no recorded incidents for 18 years (Table 6.9). On 14 July 1899, the syces returned to stable on strike. According to Mr Hooper's report they did not give prior notice or reason. The relative quiescent state among syces contrasts with the turbulence in the jinrikisha industry.

On 8 January 1897, the first major jinrikisha strike commenced and lasted for four days. The Department's branch office in Beach Road was attacked, some jinrikisha smashed and a few syces assaulted. The following day a Proclamation under the *Preservation of Peace Ordinance, 1870* was placarded around town. Although not recorded by Mr Hooper, the organisers of the strike countered with circulars listing their grievances which were accompanied by graphic pen and ink illustrations. According to Song Ong Siang (1923: 295), they showed '(1) a ricksha broken by a heartless peon, (2) a ricksha peon beating a puller till the blood gushes out of his mouth, (3) a peon enforcing bribes and (4) a puller in despair throwing himself in the sea, while a ricksha peon stands unconcernedly by'.

A Special Committee was appointed by the Municipal Commissioners 'to inquire and report as to the causes of a strike among the Owners and Pullers of Licensed Jinrikishas, which occurred on Friday 8th January...'(SMHCJD, 1898: 23-25). It found that the strike

5. In 1904, Mr Hooper reported that the reduced rate of 2 cents for each rat compared with 3 cents previously did cause some grumbling among the peons (SMHCJD, 1905: 4).

was principally organised by owners and brokers belonging to the Hok Chew and Heng Wah clans who resided north of the Singapore River. They were conspicuous for the bad quality and condition of their vehicles presented for registration and were obdurate in re-submitting them in an unchanged condition (SMHCJD, 1898: 23). The aim of the demonstration, therefore, was to force the Department to be less strict in its scrutiny and the peons to be less zealous in apprehending pullers for loitering. Although a certain amount of bribery was prevalent among the peons it was agreed little could be done to check this 'inveterate bad habit which permeates all the lower classes in the East' (SMHCJD,1898: 27). Indeed, the Committee found that there was nothing in the conduct of the Department or its officials to justify the strike. Given the firm attitude of the authorities, the strike fizzled out. Its ringleader, Koh Chye of 345, Victoria Street was subsequently arrested and deported.

Another general strike was held in January 1901 because the owners resented being held responsible for the offences committed by the coolies they employed. It was organised among the Heng Wah and Hok Chia clans who resided in Queen Street, Victoria Street and neighbouring streets. Threats of smashing licensed vehicles were sufficient to drive the jinrikisha pullers from the streets. Apart from some stone throwing there was little disturbance which Mr Hooper thought surprising given that 'over 20,000 tough and ignorant coolies of the lowest classes were suddenly thrown out on the streets out of employment' (SMHCJD, 1902: 131). Warrants for deportation of the three ringleaders were sufficient to send the pullers back to work. Subsequently, the principal owner among the Heng Wahs, Lim Chong Hin, was banished for three years.

Legislative changes in 1903 brought about another strike. On this occasion it was not due to any grievance but was in anticipation of restraints and penalties the pullers would be subjected to under the *Amended Ordinance XXXII, of 1902*. As in 1901, this strike commenced among the Heng Wah and Hok Chew clans residing in Victoria Street and its environs. Threats of smashing jinrikisha were sufficient to get pullers to withdraw their services. Although considered by Makepeace and others (1921: 332) to be the most serious strike, Mr Hooper provided no evidence as to how it was resolved. Yet, it brought stability to the jinrikisha industry as there were no general strikes for 17 years.

Faction fights, however, were reported among the 'Teochew and Hokkens' in 1906 and Heng Wah and Hok Chew in 1917. Disturbances in 1919 also prevented jinrikisha operation. It was not until

TABLE 6.9

LIST OF TRANSPORT STRIKES IN SINGAPORE

Date	Details
5 September 1875	Hackney carriage strike
16 January 1881	General strike of hackney carriage syces
28 February 1893	Strike of hackney carriage syces
8 January 1897	Strike of jinrikisha owners (four days)
14 July 1899	Hackney carriage strike (three days)
21 August 1901	Strike among jinrikisha owners (two days)
15 January 1903	Strike among jinrikisha pullers (six days)
November 1906	Dispute between Teochew and Hokkens
July 1916	Faction fights between Heng Hua and Hok Chia
19 June 1919	Rikisha did not operate because of disturbance in city
3 March 1920	Strike of rikisha pullers (3 days)
September 1923	Clan fighting
December 1924	Bus strike
19 February 1935	Rikisha strike: disputes between owners and pullers over hiring rates centred in Duxton Road area (2 days)
22 October 1936	Strike by Singapore Traction Company workers (2 days)
7 July 1938	Strike by Singapore Traction Company workers (44 days)
4 October 1938	Strike of rikisha pullers (41 days)

Notes: Warren (pers. comm.) considers the 1897 and 1901 'strikes' to be lockouts. The withdrawal of services by pullers in 1903, 1919-1920, 1935 and 1938 were 'real strikes'. We adhere to Mr Hooper's definition in this study.

February 1920 that the next general strike occurred. Although the Municipal Commissioners had agreed to a fare increase in January 1920 the Governor-in-Council was slow in approving it. On 12 February 1920 notices were posted advising pullers not to go out and ply for hire. Although no violence or disorder was reported, Mr Hooper stated that the public were greatly inconvenienced (cf. accounts in *Singapore Free Press* reported by Warren, 1984a). According to the Registrar, the biggest losers were the pullers as their takings were estimated at $20,000 per day. The pullers' victory in raising fares from 5 cents to 7 cents per half mile, agreed to by the Governor-in-Council on 3 March 1920, was short-lived. On 1 September 1920, the Governor-in Council approved a reduction in fares from 7 to 6 cents per half mile (SMROVO, 1923: 1-B).

After Mr Hooper retired there was clan fighting between the Hok Chia and Heng Wah over the right to occupy the jinrikisha stands outside large hotels (see Blythe, 1969: 299). Disputes between owners and pullers over hiring rates also flared in 1935 which resulted in negotiations with representatives of the Rikisha Association (Table 6.9). Increases in hiring rates by owners were behind the final prolonged strike in 1938. Presumably, the strike represented a last ditch attempt to save a way of life and resist the regulatory forces accelerating the shrinkage of the industry. By then, strikes involving other organisations, notably the Singapore Traction Company, took precedence. Thus, we are left to reflect on the changes in social organisation brought about by the jinrikisha as but one of a series of technological changes that have coursed through public transport in Singapore.

Implications

A restructuring of social relationships accompanied the introduction of the jinrikisha in Singapore. Unlike the hackney carriage industry the new public transport system was fuelled by Coolieism — a system based on the importation of coolies as pullers. As Mr Hooper's annual reports reflected, the 'fine tuning' of this system prompted the resistance of pullers, owners and brokers against the Municipality before the superior force prevailed. Once this system was established it was subject to competition from less labour-intensive technologies. This phenomenon could lead us into considering what happened to the ex-jinrikisha pullers. It could also propel us into examining 'technological imperialism' and the relevance of modernisation and dependency theories in interpreting the process

of public transport development (Dick and Rimmer, 1986).

Of course, too much should not be read into the study of a single city. There is need for comparative work on the introduction of jinrikisha in African and other Asian cities (Rimmer, forthcoming). Nevertheless, this exploratory study on the social restructuring brought about by the introduction of the jinrikisha in Singapore challenges us to examine the implications of recurrent technological revolutions in public transport. In particular, it raises questions canvassed in general terms by Harvey (1982) as to why specific social relations are associated with particular public transport technologies; and how, given the oppositions and antagonisms, can the thrust, speed and form of technological revolutions create stable balanced growth? These grand questions are left unanswered.

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7.
Prostitution in Singapore Society and the *Karayuki-san*

JAMES F. WARREN

The stress in this book on the *experiences* of particular individuals or groups, such as plantation workers, prostitutes, small farmers, merchants and artisans, unmistakably sets the tone of this chapter, and, from the standpoint of social interpretation, presumes the *history of society*. The first part of the chapter discusses some problems related to researching and writing working class women's history in Southeast Asia with particular reference to overseas Japanese prostitutes — their life and society — in Singapore in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The second part examines briefly a range of issues pertaining to prostitution and Singapore society from lower class women's work as overseas prostitutes and their position in the labour force of a colonial economy to the *Karayuki-san's* role as deserted people in Japan's rural culture of the 1930s.[1] The emphasis then is on working class women's history in the *nan-shin* and not on those cast in the roles of wealthy upper class matriarchs or blue- stocking workers. This is a much neglected area of Southeast Asian history and, notwithstanding some pioneer work, a systematic study of it will be a product of the future.

WOMEN'S HISTORY AND SOCIAL HISTORY

My interest in working class women's history is related to the development and popularity of social history. When ordinary Southeast Asian people, rather than elites, are considered to be important subjects of historical study in their own right, then it is far more likely that women will be included. The pioneer work being done in the United States and Britain in this area has considerable

1. *Karayuki-san* was the word used traditionally by the Japanese of Amakusa and Shimbara, Kyushu island, to describe rural women who emigrated to Southeast Asia and the Pacific in search of a livelihood. The ideographs comprising *Karayuki-san* literally mean 'going to China', as Kyushu, the place where most of the women were from, was the part of Japan closest to China. *Karayuki-san* in common parlance nowadays has become a popular term for describing women from the poorest sectors of society during the Meiji period who lived abroad specifically as prostitutes (Yano Toru, 1979: 131-133).

relevance theoretically and methodologically for historians of Southeast Asia. The recent ascendancy of Southeast Asian social history in itself, however, cannot ensure that lower class women's experience is integrated into history, for several reasons.

First, the history of working class women's past encompasses areas which are usually perceived as the domain of political, economic, and even intellectual history, rather than social history — the current concern of the social interpretation of history with the lives of ordinary people as lived, however, is influencing developments in these fields. Secondly, it is wrong to assume that being poor has the same applications for women as for men in terms of objective structures and subjective experience, when this is not necessarily the case. Unfortunately, in Southeast Asian social history at the moment, we know precious little about placing ordinary women, ideas, events and behaviour in the precise context of an overall community at a particular period, let alone their transformation over time.

Historians ought to be criticised for conspicuously assuming an interpretive 'unity of interest' in the lives of ordinary Southeast Asian people in the family, working class life, and in patterns of social mobility, migration and urban history (Rapp, Ross and Bridenthal, 1979: 183-189). For instance, within the experience of overseas Chinese working class families of rickshaw pullers in Singapore there is an evocation of a darker and more literal version of the sojourning era, which is basic to my new interpretation of the history of that city, that seriously undermines the supposed 'unity of interest' within the family. There is new evidence of a tendency in certain instances towards considerable disagreement between husbands and wives on such matters as migration, birth control and family size, and likewise, disturbing inferences about child rearing, the place of women in the labour force and distinct standards of living within the family that led women to commit suicide (Warren, 1984a). Unless gender differences are taken into account, therefore, the findings of a social history may rest upon evidence and interpretation in which the author has little or no idea of the exact universe of lower class working women. Hence, under these circumstances, even the most eminent social historians may well continue the practice of writing ordinary women out of history by acting as 'professional magicians', making women disappear before our very eyes (Schmidt and Schmidt, 1976: 42).

Most of the respected historians of Southeast Asia in various ways either ignore lower class working women, or confine their presence

Plate 43. An opium smoker. Addicts who were jinrikisha pullers had an average working life of ten years (*Source*: Lim Kheng Chye).

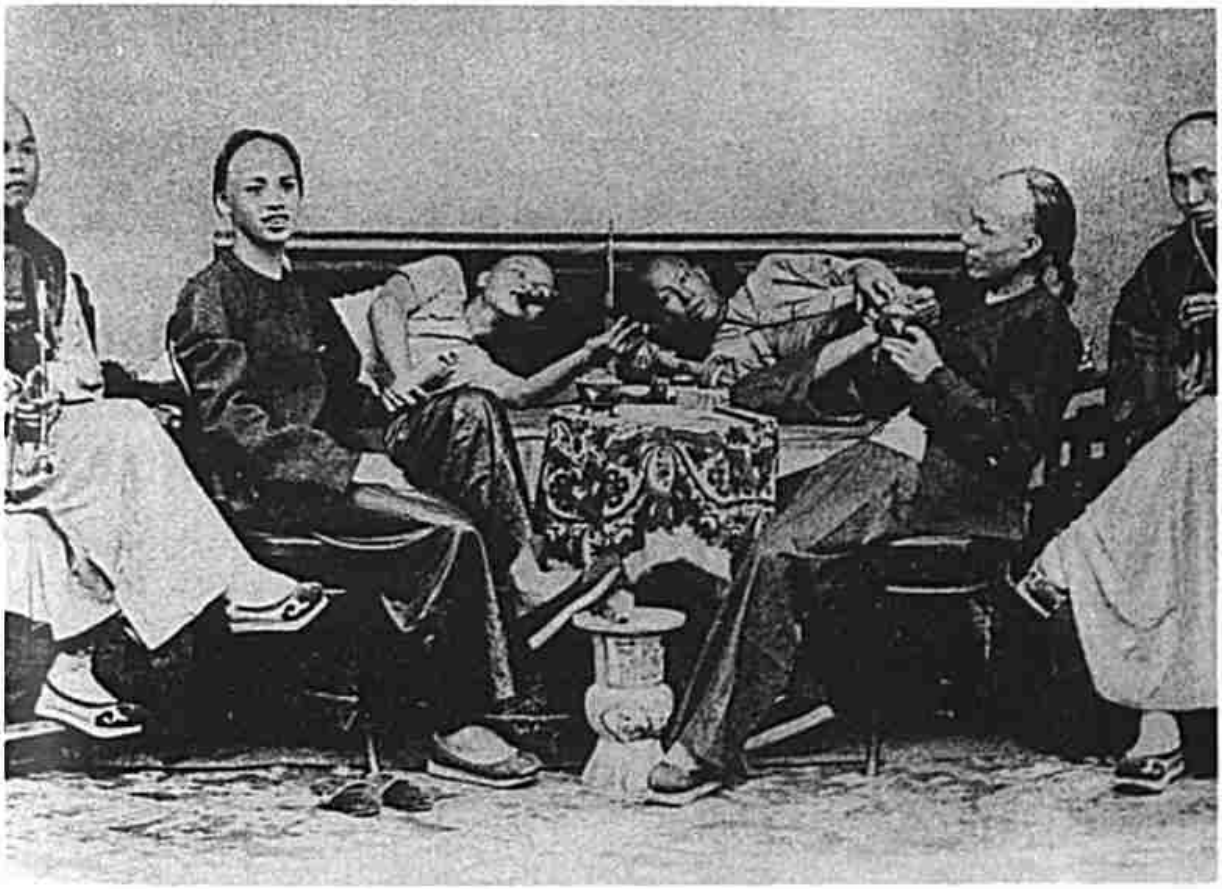

Plate 44. Opium smoking. With drinking, gambling and prostitution it was one of the four social evils that ruined the lives of early Chinese migrants to Singapore. Living in crowded cubicles meant that there was little alternative recreational activity (*Source*: Lim Kheng Chye).

Medical Hall Ltd.

SINGAPORE.

Tel. 117 **Telegrams "OBAT.'**

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to

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and

MINE

HOSPITALS

DRUGS.

—

HOSPITAL SUPPLIES.

—

TECHNICAL CHEMICALS

—

FORMALIN, LIQUID AMMONIA.

THE HOUSE

FOR

QUALITY, SERVICE, CORRECT PRICES.

Plate 45. Medical Hall Ltd, suppliers to Estate and Mine hospitals. This establishment was located near Tan Kim Seng Fountain, Singapore (*Source*: *The Malayan Medical Journal and Estate Sanitation*, vol. 1, 1926, 41).

Note: Section of earth, and the bored hole 20 feet deep and 16 inches in diameter.

A. Section of superstructure.

B. Section of cement slab 30 x 36 inches with a hole in the centre 10 to 12 x 5 1/2 to 6 inches. The edges of the slab hole are cut back to prevent soiling. The surface of the slab slopes toward the hole.

C. Concrete cylinder which is usually not necessary.

D. Bamboo basket to retain soft earth. In many places this basket is not needed.

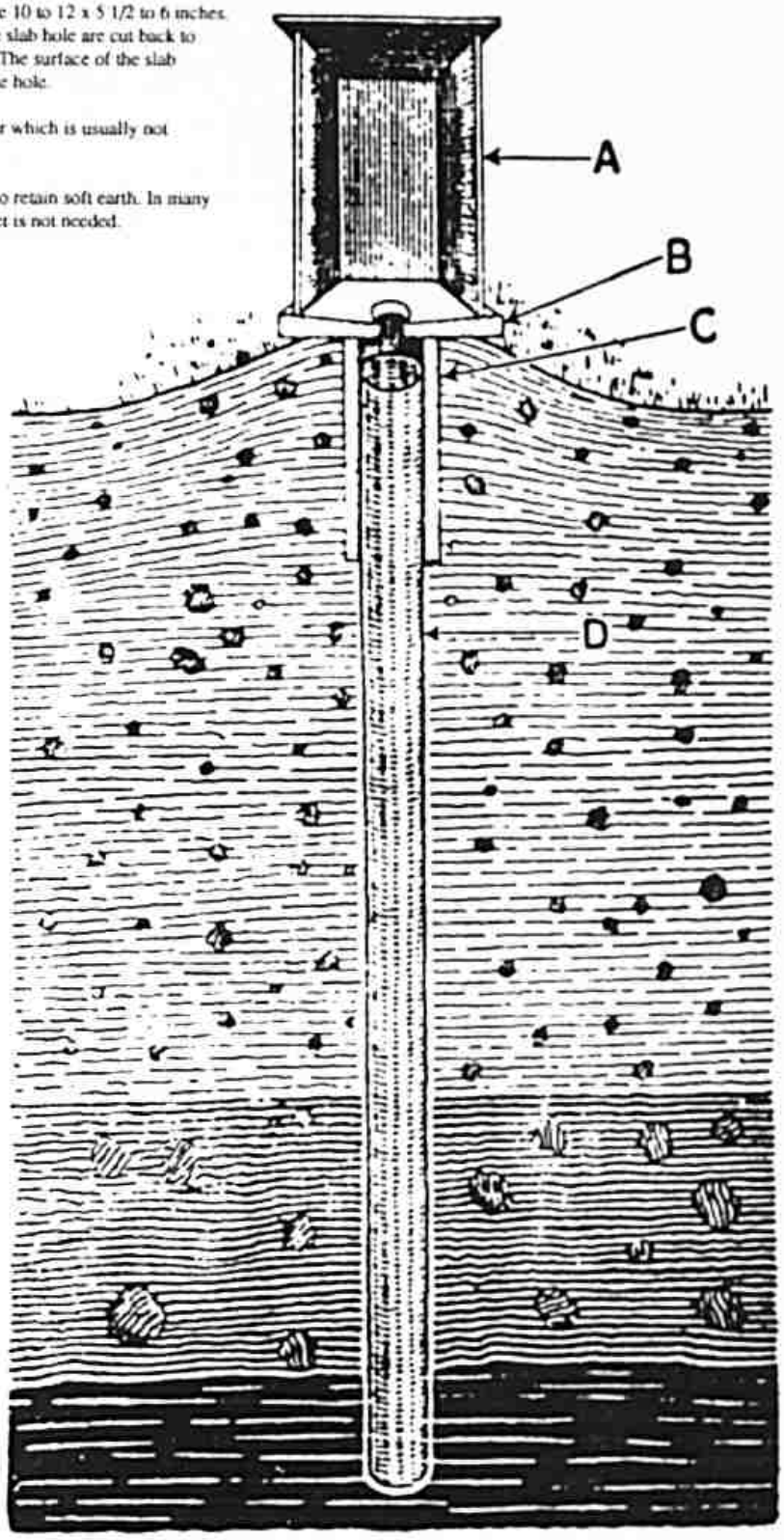


Plate 46. The tube latrine. Dr. Victor G. Heiser of the Rockefeller Foundation was responsible for the introduction of the bored-hole latrine in the Straits Settlements: it was an advance on the ordinarily dug pit latrine. His active participation and backing resulted in many other improvements (*Source*: *The Malayan Medical Journal and Estate Sanitation*, vol. 4, 1929, 50).

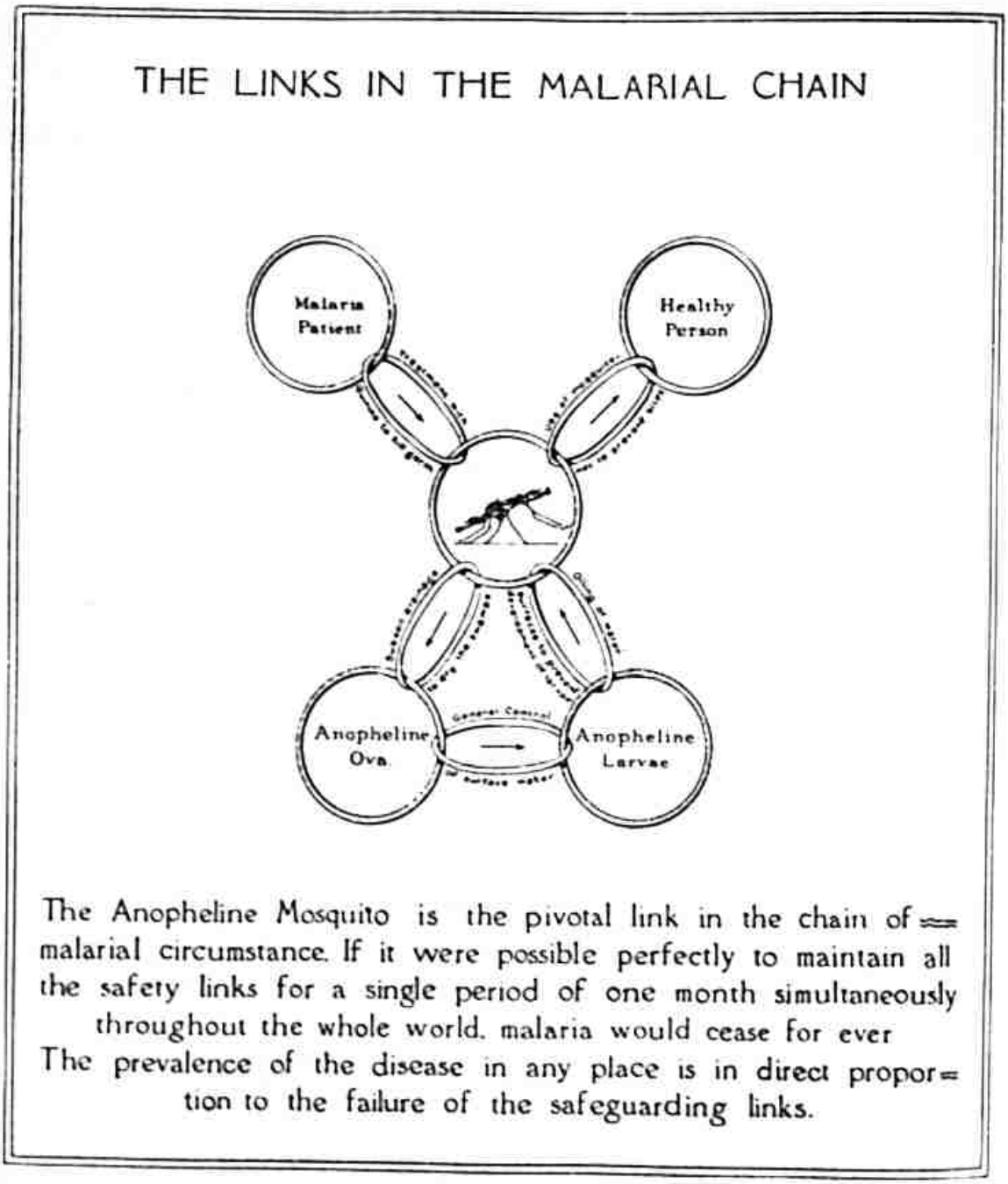
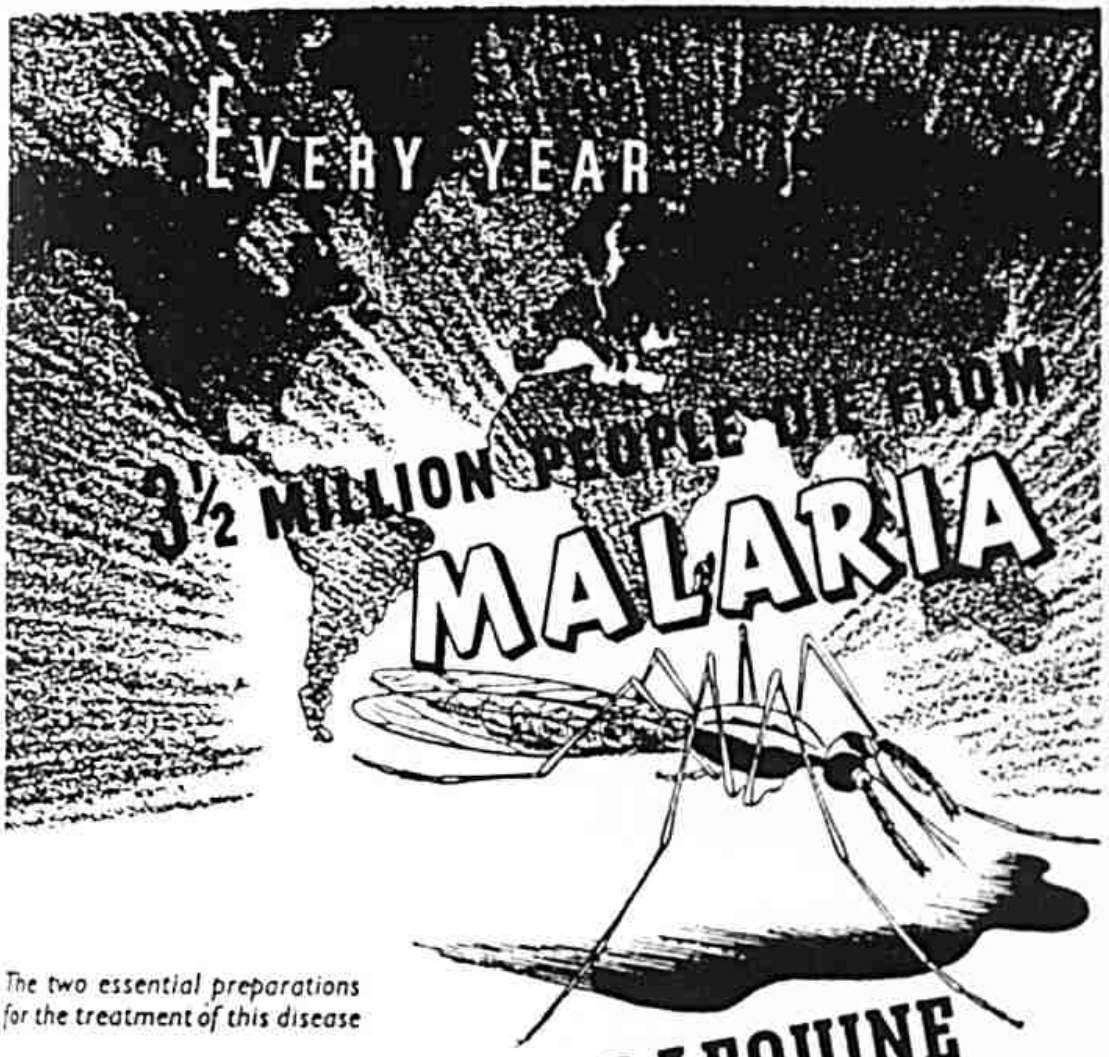


Plate 47. The links in the malarial chain. The malaria patient has to be treated with quinine to kill germs; the healthy person has to use a mosquito net to avoid bites; the anopheline ova have to be killed off by draining the swamps; the transformation of ova into larvae has to be prevented by control of surface water; and the oiling of water is necessary to prevent the development of larvae (*Source*: *The Malayan Medical Journal and Estate Sanitation*, vol. 2, 1927, 141).



The two essential preparations for the treatment of this disease

QUINACRINE TRADE MARK THE SYNTHETIC SCHIZONTOCIDE & **PRAEQUINE** TRADE MARK THE SYNTHETIC GAMETOCIDE

ARE NOW MADE IN BRITAIN

The combined therapy of QUINACRINE and PRAEQUINE offers considerable advantages over the old quinine method of treating malaria. The duration of treatment is shortened, relapses are fewer and the undesirable side effects of quinine are avoided. QUINACRINE is the schizontocidal agent given first to deal with the acute attack and PRAEQUINE is administered later to prevent relapse.

M♀B

PHARMACEUTICAL SPECIALITIES (MAY & BAKER) LTD., DAGENHAM, ENGLAND

Represented in Malaya by: Mr. S. M. BARNWELL, P.O. BOX 73, SINGAPORE.

Plate 48. An advertisement for Quinacrine and Praequine preparations for the treatment of malaria that appeared frequently in *The Malayan Medical Journal and Estate Sanitation.*

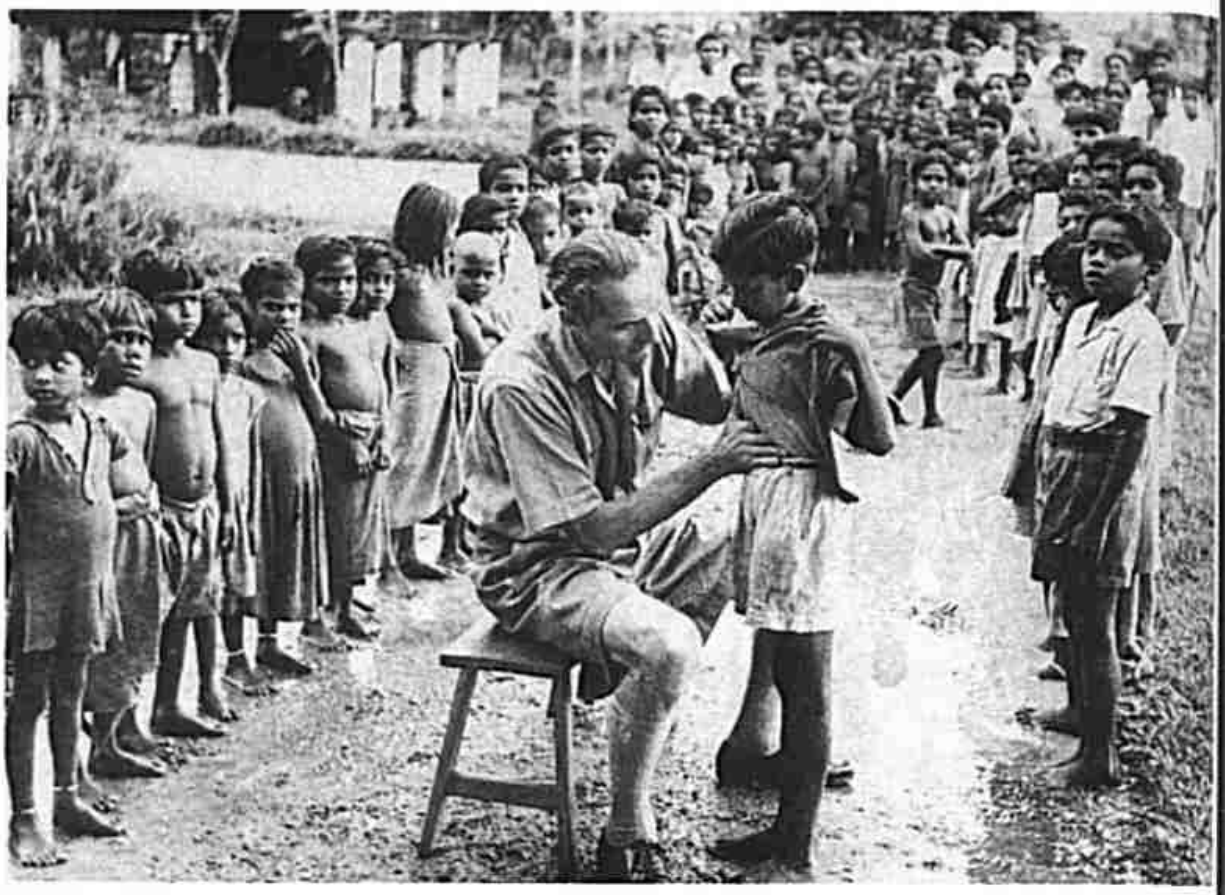


Plate 49. A medical inspection of estate children (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 50. Estate sanitation. Water supply was drawn from brick wells. Contamination was prevented by enclosing the wells within a barbed-wire fence. The water was drawn by a pump on Tremelbye Estate, Federated Malay States (*Source*: Arkib Negara Malaysia).

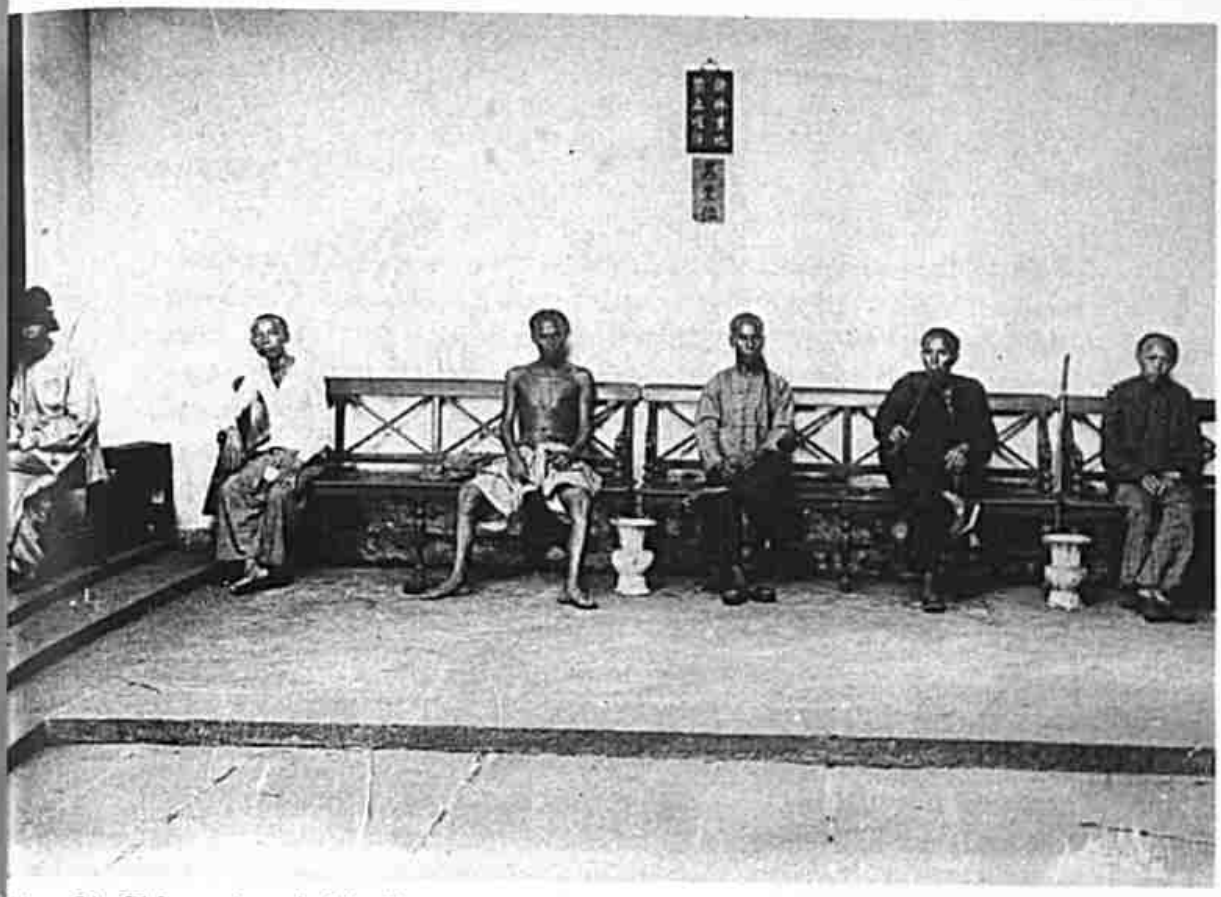


Plate 51. Chinese hospital in Singapore during the early twentieth century (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 52. Chinese funeral during the early twentieth century (*Source*: National Archives, Singapore).

Plate 53. A Singapore anachronism, October 1927. The provision of a properly equipped and organised ambulance service was long overdue (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

Plate 54. *Amok!* A cartoon illustrating Wachdin giving Kwin Hwa Liauw 'the priceless gift of silence' (*Source: British Malaya*, February 1931, 281).

in history to a very narrow sphere.[2] In the course of writing *Rickshaw Coolie* I recognised that ordinary women have hitherto been swept under the rug of Southeast Asian social and economic history as effectively as out of the political past (Warren, 1986). I myself am studying the larger context of a trilogy on overseas Chinese labour, Chinese and Japanese women, prostitutes, as wage earners and also seeking to explain why women's work in the servicing of labour power in the economy of colonial Singapore, and in the reproduction of labour power in the home in China and Japan, has remained invisible.[3]

Women's history has received increasing notoriety in the last few years as a new field of historical study. It has institutionalised itself and can lay claim to organisations, methodologies and a system of publications. The emergence of women's history as a recognised field of inquiry in the context of Southeast Asian history reflects certain trends and developments in the discipline itself; it is clear that our generation of historian's re-creation of the past insists that women's history is not simply an appendage of social history, and that information on lower class women cannot simply be thrust into the great lacunae left in the male account of ordinary everyday life of the Southeast Asian past.

IN SEARCH OF METHODOLOGY

Historians like Lerner (1976a) have fought continuously against formal recognition of the impression that ordinary women the world over have not had a significant past; a reality and subject not worth recording. Historians of Southeast Asia are starting to become aware of the problem and necessity to view the past through women's eyes too. To raise questions about the values and attitudes which historians have often brought to their interpretation of the Southeast Asian past unmistakably tells us about the methods by

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2. For example, Steinberg's (1971) edited book, *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History* — a landmark in the interpretation of Southeast Asian history — pays scant attention to women's role in history, or the impact of historical events on women's lives, especially peasant and labouring women. While 'women's history' has been neglected some pioneering attempts have been made to place women in Southeast Asian history (see Abeyasekere, 1983; Dobbin, 1980; Manderson, 1980; Grace, *et al.*, 1974; Owen, 1978; Taylor, 1983).

3. This chapter represents work in progress that is based on a trilogy I am currently researching and writing on the Chinese labouring classes in Singapore. The initial volume, *Rickshaw Coolie, A People's History of Singapore*, was published by Oxford University Press in 1986. The other two volumes are provisionally titled, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution and Singapore Society, A Social History* and *Chinese Suicide in Singapore, 1883-1939*.

which that history has been studied, and consequently written. Gerda Lerner, Renate Bridenthal and Joan Kelly-Gadol have provided an illuminating set of insights about historians' conceptual tools invested with power to exclude women, being geared towards revealing more about male rather than human experience (Bridenthal and Koonz, 1977). Lerner (1976b: 195) raised a key issue that will confront all Southeast Asian historians in the coming decade: 'What would history be like if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by the values they define?'

In their search for a new form of women's history these historians have emphasised methodology. Specifically, gender has been established as a category of analysis of the same order as class and race in the shaping and consideration of the past. Ruthlessly exposing the thinking and technique behind the dominant conventional writing of the past, stressing the gender variable in history, these historians in particular, are attempting to find new answers to the question 'what is history?' and new ways to *do* history so that the formative personal, intellectual and political experience of women's past, as well as men's past is revealed (Kelly-Gadol, 1976). Davis (1976: 90), the noted teacher and scholar of cultural and religious life in sixteenth century France, concurs:

> It seems to me that we should be interested in the history of both men and women, that we should not be working on only the subjected sex anymore than an historian of class can focus exclusively on peasants. Our goal is to understand the significance of the sexes, of gender groups in the historical past.

Almost by definition the category 'gender' challenges accepted interpretation — Lerner, Davis and other historians argue that only by objectively analysing the disparate experiences of men and women and their relationships can we make valid statements about the past and, not least, about human experience rather than male experience. For the Southeast Asian historian such a belief and application of a guideline is an attainable goal, but not without its revisionist consequences. This fundamental shift in emphasis and methodology has significant implications for Southeast Asian history as a discipline, for it necessarily entails a reassessment of accepted periodisation, subject matter and analysis. To find out what happened in Southeast Asian history to the *Karayuki-san* in Sin-

gapore is not enough without trying from the very start to reverse the nature of the periodisation — to make sure of the 'why'. Obviously, we must leave the 'why' alone until after we have gathered and arranged the facts in a temporal sequence; the major turning points in time illuminating such a gender-based history could be those which affected the environment of family and home, sexuality and family structure, childbirth, the advent of notions of political patriotism, pollution and taboo, given their significance in the *Karayuki-san's* lives. (On periodisation being revised see Kelly-Gadol, 1976: 812; Davis, 1976: 92-93.) This seemingly prefabricated kind of periodisation, however, has made some of the feminist historians wince because it can lead potentially to the isolation of women's history, rather than to the need to find a basis for reform in historical study and historical writing.

Instead of a purely gender-based periodisation, Kelly-Gadol suggests 'relational periodisation' — relating the history of women, such as the *Karayuki-san*, to that of men, such as the rickshaw pullers (see Chapter 6). Traditional periodisation can provide a pattern and meaning for the most important structural changes taking place in the society, but what counts is the *explicit* analysis of the relationship between each change, each development, for its impact on women, as well as men. Rearranging the relation in this way between the *dramatis personae* and the past, means inverting our sense of what constitutes a 'history' and historical advance (Kelly-Gadol, 1976: 810-812). Lerner is even more definite on this point about writing the history of relationships between women and men. Periodisation ought to be more than a 'trick of the trade', a heuristic device, she notes, and adds cogently, that 'relational periodisation' is as much a function of class as gender (Lerner, 1976a: 364). Here, too, I agree with Lerner.

In an effort to make historical methodology more relevant to the study of ordinary women, Southeast Asian historians must also revise the categories of analysis which have evolved for studying the history of the region. In Southeast Asian historiography, knowing how things happened, why they happened, and what an individual lived through has largely meant seeing man shaping his destiny. Now more than ever, when the historical categories relating to male forms of experience are so subject to question, women's historians are demanding a revision of concepts such as 'oppression'. As category of analysis for opening up women's history, the idea of 'oppression' is severely limiting (Davin, 1972). For example, the *Karayuki-san* in Southeast Asia might be pitied if the

concept of 'oppression' were to be used analytically drawing our attention to the undeniable social, political and legal injustices these women experienced as 'victims' at various times and in various places. In such a history a woman like Oichi would be rendered completely passive by virtue of circumstance or change, as if her life didn't matter at all. Oichi committed suicide at number 55 Malabar Street, Singapore, on 17 February 1906 (Coroner's Record, 1906).[4] What appears to have been passive acceptance of an evil or dangerous or mad situation ending in suicide may have been a rational choice, a way to autonomy, or at least a defiant statement about survival in a distant land. The framework of oppression ignores the fact that *women matter*; it disregards the persisting power of women, despite the constraints imposed upon them (Lougee, 1977: 648). Lerner (1975: 6) stresses this point:

> Essentially, treating women as victims of oppression once again places them in a male-defined framework: oppressed, victimised by standards and values established by men. The true history of women is the history of their ongoing functioning in this male-defined world, on their own terms.

This view and method tries to see the *Karayuki-san* as actors with power to affect their destiny, not simply the acted upon. It does not deny the significance of imposed constraints, but enables us, rather, to see women, such as the *Karayuki-san*, making history, or at least struggling to cope with it, and this, to me, is the real stuff of Southeast Asian social history. Within this conceptual framework, since the public sphere was men's sphere traditionally, and public life the subject matter of history, historians of Southeast Asia must also demand a revision of such concepts as women's 'submission', 'dependence', 'work', 'power', and 'status' (Davin, 1972: 217- 233).

The chief obstacle to the use of such categories in exploring women's past is that they are potentially 'alien' to women's lives

4. No. 82, Oichi, Certificate of Coroners View, Singapore, 17 February 1906. Osuji, another prostitute in the brothel at Number 55 Malabar Street, was sent as usual at 2 a.m. on 17 February 1906 to collect the money from the other women. When she came to Oichi's cubicle, Osuji found the door fastened on the inside and could get no answer to her call. She looked under the partition and saw Oichi hanging from her bedpost. On Oichi's table was found a suicide letter to Ofuku, the mistress of the house, which as translated by the authorities, thanked her for her kindness, told her not to worry about her death, and asked her to send a photo of herself to her sister in Japan.

and experience, and can only serve to reinforce the belief that women have not mattered in history. What repeated usage of these categories really shows is that historians have not been able to break through the meshes of the wrong words and wrong questions, looking in the wrong places — a male defined world. Women's history writing on Southeast Asia must come from inside the framework of experience of the women, showing what they have gone through (as overseas prostitutes in this case in the ports of Southeast Asia), exploring their consciousness and lifestyle, seeing how this would determine their attitudes toward life, work and death — their destiny: in other words, to have a head start — to begin with a technical vocabulary that expresses itself historically with a female norm of behaviour.

The attempts of women historians to comprehend the experience and consciousness of an individual, such as Oichi, and a social group, such as the *Karayuki-san*, are particularly acute because prostitutes and coolies have left few written records, even as a twentieth century phenomenon. Further, conceptual problems confront the historian who wishes to use informants or documentary sources to describe and analyse the social behaviour and the *mentalité* of ordinary women or groups. First-hand accounts of elderly informants are difficult to interpret since the historian (unlike the anthropologist) is often forced to carry on a dialogue with the dead, and cannot therefore verify an interpretation or hypothesis about the past and the reconstruction of a social world by simply talking to the living, whatever their insight or achievements.

Finding source material to piece together cultural landscapes in women's history in Southeast Asia is a difficult task, primarily because, like other socially subordinate groups, ordinary women have been by virtue of their role and responsibility largely inarticulate. The absence of a written record of ordinary women's lives is also partly a function of traditional definition of history: just as the realm of interpretation supposedly rests upon a complete analysis of politics, economics and formal religion, so only documents relating to such areas have been considered as historical raw materials. This fact concerning sources and interpretation has affected ordinary women's lives and perceptions differently from men, and it has also affected the history of the working man. Yet, at least in a variety of cultures in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the effects have been more severe for women. Sources that will enable us to draw conclusions about aspects of lower class women's society include rare letters or personal papers articulating moments

of change; photographs, travelogues, and official accounts that tell us about the context and underlying story of those critical turning-points; culturally significant episodes from reports on migration, poverty and prostitution and police and medical records; and sometimes legislation can be useful, providing that different sex and class context is signified. Similarly, certain types of empirical data, especially demographic records in series, can yield first rank details on marriage, childbirth, residential patterns and their reciprocal influences on the social and economic features of women's lives.

These source materials will provide us with invaluable information about ordinary Southeast Asian women. The subjective nature of these records is both their strength and weakness. That the material in the historical record may not be entirely representative of a given group, such as the Japanese overseas prostitute, is a legitimate criticism, yet its potentially personal nature makes it intrinsically useful for writing women's history from below. The true test of its validity, however, must lie in how the historian of society pieces it together (often from a variety of perspectives) to create a 'mosaic-like tableau', that indicates, most importantly, how a woman such as Oichi felt about her life and new circumstance in Southeast Asia. In an effort to reconstruct the universe of the *Karayuki-san*, or the cosmos of Oichi's life nestling in the macrocosm of that community, the historian must do original and meticulous work on such sources, building up a thorough picture of the lives of the women in the environment of family and home in Japan, and in the brothels of Southeast Asia. I myself have attempted to set out the detailed method of intensive presentation — 'thick description' — in *Rickshaw Coolie*: the evocation of the experience of what it meant to become a rickshaw puller receives exhaustive consideration: the agony of deadened limbs and the beads of sweat pouring down one's face in 100 degree Fahrenheit temperature, to keep pulling; the eyes rolling back uplifted through the haze of opium smoke to the dream of a warm hearth and home in China; and, the frantically protective arms of a younger puller gathering in the cold stiff body of an elderly infirm brother found hung.

To create a portrait of small-time life and the struggles of inarticulate women and men to survive, the historian of society has to take care with the small details of a person's face and the cultural artifact of an 'event'. Oichi's sudden death, in an unforgettably frightening sequence, which strikes the little brothel at 55, Malabar Street in Singapore and disturbs its universe, I feel is an example of just such an 'event' (Singapore, Coroners Court, 1906). The most

important insight gained from this method in my work as a historian and teacher of history — to see the past as alive — has been a new found sensitivity for such women and men of a forgotten past. I have always had this sense of empathy in my mind but such creativity was not seen as relevant in my training as a historian. For example, I had not fully realised how terrifying and back breaking an experience overseas prostitution was for many wretched young juveniles like Oichi, who were rounded up in poverty stricken rural Japan, transported to the *nanshin*, and shipped around from one brothel to another at times, like cattle (Morisaki Kazue, 1976; Yamazaki Tomoko, 1972; Yano Tooru, 1979).

The ultimate goal of this approach and method is not to shirk the realities of early twentieth century Singapore life, but rather to explore its unpleasant portrait of Oichi's life 'from the bottom up', indeed, to discover in the process the historical behaviour and consciousness of a *Karayuki-san*, which is in many ways as compelling as her human story. The micro-dynamic approach ensures an outlook for the writing of Southeast Asian history that focuses on the use of the social relations of the sexes (a history of the common humanity of men and women) to make ordinary women visible.[5] In order to gain a better understanding of ordinary Japanese and Chinese women's place in Singapore society and social change, the writing of social history has to move beyond a split vision of two socio-sexual spheres (a private domain and a public domain) in which neat distinctions of sex and work, sex and class, family and society, production and reproduction are seen to be tenable, to a unified 'double' vision in which such relations are seen to be simultaneous (Gadol-Kelly, 1979: 224-227; Bridenthal, 1976: 3-11). Such a historical framework thereby gives value to ordinary women's conceptions of the world they lived in, and of their place in it.

The difficulties that attend an analysis of the full emotional complexity of the historical situation of the *Karayuki-san* and the contradictions inherent in their lives — the exact combination of motives, pressures, values and feelings — perhaps, can be depicted only through a collective biographical form of presentation. This technique compels the social historian to pay close attention to the disparate experience, values and motives of a small group of individual women in diverse contexts and sequences of action, and

5. On the significance of microdynamism as an approach for this kind of history dealing with the individual experience of an overseas Japanese 'community' at a particular moment in time, as if under a microscope, see Warren, 1984b: 6-7.

to subsequently piece together and analyse in a convincing manner the pattern and meaning in their lives for the majority of the women.[6] A historical study of this kind not only involves an extension of the content and meaning of history, it also implies a revision of that content. If this process of reconsideration is taken to its logical disciplinary conclusions, then what emerges is Southeast Asia revised, with ordinary women and men as 'the measure of significance' (Lerner, 1976b: 196). One of the most promising aspects of this approach is that it offers a means of integrating women's history into social history. Historians of Southeast Asian society, however, will have to do more than merely pay attention to ordinary women's lives. I am finding that there are great difficulties in translating this personal vision of a people's history, embedded in structure and experience, into a method. I have not even found all the parameters by which to define this new kind of history as lived and written, so that most aspects of an ordinary woman's life, such as Oichi's, could be sketched in, problems of understanding social change and continuity over a long period understood, and the recreation of her woman's society in the past made a reality. The task, however, is clear. If social historians are to research and write about ordinary women in the Southeast Asian past — prostitutes, peasants, court dancers — they must first fashion a mode of presentation that integrates 'experience' (seeing the past of people as alive) with the techniques of micro-sociology and collective biography. Hence, the surprising result will surely be reconciliation of narration and analysis in our scrutiny of that past to understand the significance of the sexes.

PROSTITUTION IN SINGAPORE SOCIETY

In pursuing the suggested mode of presentation we briefly recreate the world of Oichi's Singapore, and examine the nature of the *Karayuki-san's* experience in the city, the causes and effects of prostitution and colonial policy and practice on their working and personal lives. Between 1887, when the average number of brothels registered was 225, and the second decade of this century the Chinese labouring population of Singapore exploded from 86,000 to nearly 316,000, the rapid increase in the 1890s in the number of

6. On the significance of prosopography as a technique for writing Southeast Asian Social History, see Warren, 1984b: 7-8, 1981: 237-251.

immigrating Chinese labourers was the single most important demographic and social development in Singapore's history. Many of these immigrants were driven out by periodic poor harvests, flood-caused famines in all parts of South China and by the rising price of rice. They were also forced out by local conditions of overpopulation and the policies of landlords. For many, survival meant escape from the impoverished domestic economy. Understandably, a multitude of *singkeh* left Fukien and Kwangtung in search of better prospects. They were indigent, barely knowing the written characters of their own language, but they carried with them the compass of culture, a will and a burning ambition. Their dream was one of hard work, a decent livelihood, and a return in some comfort to home and hearth in China (Warren, 1984a: 39).

The immigration of *singkeh* stamped an indelible image on Singapore. It was a coolie town, with a heterogeneous Chinese workforce, a disproportionate ratio of male to female, and an abnormal age structure. At the turn of the century Chinese males constituted over 72 per cent of the total population. Most of these men were either single or had left their wives and children behind. Alone, indebted, jobless on arrival, they accounted for almost all the able-bodied men of the working population. They were aged between 15 and 59. There were few women (except for prostitutes), children, or old men among the Singapore Chinese in this period. A far more noticeable feature of this population in the early part of the century was the rate of return to China (Warren, 1984a). *Singkeh* had come to do manual labour, to build, but not to stay. In the late 1890s only about 10 per cent of the Singapore Chinese were locally born. The average length of time spent in the city by those who immigrated was about seven years. Later, conditions were more favourable when compared to those in China, especially in the 1920s, and an increasing number of this immigrant transient community would settle in Singapore (Warren, 1984a: 40).

Despite spartan living conditions and a colonial government whose control reached into the most intimate aspects of the coolies' work-a-day lives, most of them — even those most left alone — managed to pursue their private passions. They found some solace in the four evils. The four evils were well known amongst the labouring classes of Singapore, and the four went together in the city. They were opium smoking, drinking, gambling and prostitution. In an overwhelming male society of poor immigrant Chinese labourers, prostitution was a basic phenomenon. Chinese and Japanese women like Oichi, in their thousands, occupied hundreds

of brothels in streets nearby the working class quarters to provide sexual gratification to a veritable army of immigrant labourers without wives and children. There was a definite relationship between the number of prostitutes and the size of the *singkeh* population; between the economic ascendancy of Singapore at the end of the nineteenth century and a notable increase in prostitution; and between the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Ordinances in 1887 in Singapore and the occupational distribution of venereal disease. What is most significant here is that the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases increased dramatically among prostitutes and coolies from the 1890s onwards and its tragic social significance is exhibited clearly in the Coroner's records by the phenomenon of suicide (Warren, 1985b).

In the period before the abolition of brothels in 1927, one of Singapore's foremost industries was prostitution, and camera-slung tourists, wealthy Chinese, drunken sailors and ordinary coolies were picked up by rickshaw pullers catering to the brothel trade and taken to the red light districts. Brothels were allowed in several sections of the city known as the 'district or quarter'. In 1898 the Chinese houses in Singapore were divided into public brothels, formerly registered under the Contagious Diseases Ordinance with the Chinese Protectorate, about 200 in number, with over 3,000 prostitutes, all Cantonese, and private or 'unregistered' brothels, about 150 in number, containing about 600 prostitutes, chiefly Teochiu.[7] For those visitors who wanted to get out of their hotels, offices, or warships amidst the smells and bustle of the city to visit the Japanese red light district, there were 109 brothels and 633 *Karayuki-san* to choose from in the vicinity of Hylam, Malabar, Malay and Bugis Streets in 1905 — the year just prior to Oichi's death (Straits Settlements, 1905).

Each of these districts with hundreds of brothels lining streets cheek by jowl had their loyal clients. During the first part of this century Europeans — diplomats, officials, and planters — favoured the discreet Japanese women of Malay and Malabar Streets (see Fig. 6.2). Foreign tourists, soldiers and, especially, Japanese sailors also sought their sexual favours as well as visiting the unregistered haunts of Malay and Eurasian women scattered in the sidelanes and alleys of the city. Rickshawmen made regular journeys to the brothels in Chin Hin Street, Fraser Street, Sago Street, Smith Street,

7. Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1898d: 882/6. Enclosure in No.227 Acting Governor, Sir J.H. Swettenham to Mr. Chamberlain, 5 August 1898.

Tan Quee Lan Street, and Upper Hokien Street. It was here that most of the pullers' time was spent in carrying Cantonese prostitutes to rendezvous with wealthy *towkays*, running errands for the women, such as the purchase of several additional paper packets of opium for a client, and pulling their ordinary customers, the large migrant coolie population, around the red light district meant exclusively for the Chinese, no matter how drunk they might be, or how poor (Straits Settlements, 1905).

In 1927 the red light districts were closed down by the colonial government and public brothels abolished. Traffickers and brothel keepers tried to carry on their business along other lines. Chinese and Japanese lodging houses and Chinese eating-houses were, to a far greater extent than before, used as brothels. The number of unlicensed lodging-houses was about three times that necessary for *bona-fide* business, in fact their main business was prostitution. The women connected with the lodging houses and 'sly prostitution' in the Depression years were Japanese, Chinese, Eurasian, Tamils, Javanese and Malays from the Peninsula.

THE KARAYUKI-SAN

It is against this background of economic growth under colonial rule and the changing structure of Singapore society that the social historian must cross over into the underside of 'modern' Japan, in order to show how its 'economic miracle' too, widened the gulf, economically and socially, for ordinary Japanese, but, especially for the poverty-stricken farmers and fishermen of Kyushu and the surrounding islands. If we are to see with fresh eyes the individual 'event' and meaning of the life and death of Oichi created by the tensions of changing social and economic circumstances, and the way of all *Karayuki-san* in their social and productive relationships, we must first see what 'modern' Japan looked like from the bottom up; a conception of what it was like to be a typical young daughter of a poor farm family scourged by back-breaking labour and famine in Kumamoto Prefecture, where the hilly, arid Amakusa Islands are located. Here I want to draw specific attention to the relationship between the impact of modernisation on a particular class of women in Japanese society, the economic geography of a particular place, Amakusa, and just one reason for emigration and their circumstance as *Karayuki-san* in Southeast Asia — spiralling poverty (Yamazaki Tomoko, 1975: 56-85).

Early in this century the daughters of poor rural families from

Amakusa Islands and Shimabara were sent into a life of juvenile prostitution in the ports of Southeast Asia (Morisaki Kazue, 1976; Yamazaki Tomoko, 1972; Yano Toru, 1979). The historical plight of young girls like Oichi who in the 1890s were forced to leave their Japanese homes, where parents were no longer able to support them, and settle in offshore cities and towns in Southeast Asia, where they often worked in brothels until they had enough money to return to their distant homeland, must be recounted by women's historians of Southeast Asia with the meticulous care an entomologist devotes to the collection and study of a rare insect, small, minute in size.

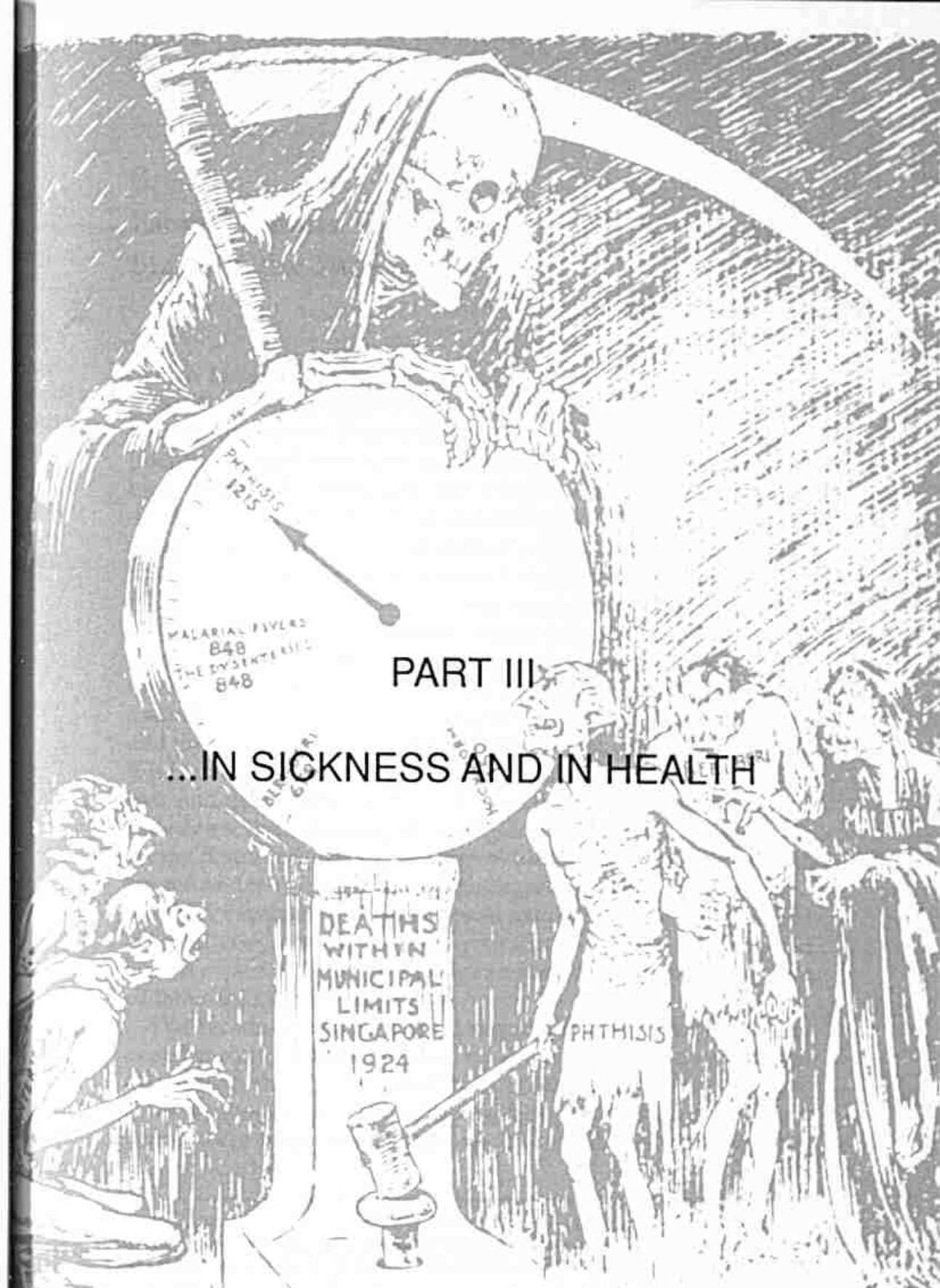
It is true that their story is immensely sad, for many were exploited as women, and as Japanese. Once back home after 1921, when a Japanese law abolished licensed prostitution in Singapore and elsewhere, they found that their own people and even their families now considered them an embarrassment, and rejected them. It is true that the lives of the *Karayuki-san* are the story of one of Japan's deserted people. But *Karayuki-san* who often spent their lives in bondage in urban settings like Singapore or Sandakan in order to contribute to the traditional 'family economy', providing for destitute farm families at home, who were too ashamed to take them back, were not victims through any real fault of their own; they were victims of circumstances over which they had no control: changing times in Japan, a new world that was being born in Singapore, values that no longer functioned for survival in the turn of the century places where they took jobs as prostitutes in the *nanshin*.

Recently, however, Japanese women's historians have begun to trace the lives of scores of these young women, many of whom were from outcast backgrounds, or simply so poor that their families sold them under duress into prostitution. As the lives of young, twentieth century rural women studied by Morisaki Kazue and Yamazaki Tomoko gradually unfolded for these historians, by using memoirs, fiction, official testimony, eyewitness accounts and personal recollections, they could follow in some instances a pathetic young peasant girl's progress from kidnapping to Singapore and Sandakan in her youth, through prostitution, to a humble but proud old woman living an isolated life in rural Japan of the 1970s (Yamazaki Tomoko, 1975: 54-55). Other undefeated elderly women also survived outside Japan, preferring the life of expatriates, and still live in poverty in places where they were first stationed as *Karayuki-san*.

In choosing prostitution and modern lower class Japanese women in Singapore society as my subject, I want to set the *Karayuki-san's* actions against the socio-political currents of their times both in Japan and Southeast Asia; their individual pursuits take on broader significance. I want to emphasise the dynamic nature of their struggle to find happiness or the factors which conditioned their failure, in contrast to the usual interpretation of these women as 'victims'. The experience of the *Karayuki-san* is not just the history of 'miserable women', the price Japan had to pay for its startling economic growth last century, and its thrust to colonise the South Seas (Yano Toru, 1979: 131-133). Temporally speaking, it is true that the factors which condition the experience of these women are part of a history that must link the agricultural poverty and the social costs of industrialisation in Japan with the rapid economic growth and urbanisation of Singapore — poor, picturesque, insanitary, and overcrowded. Yamazaki Tomoko (1972), however, has inadvertently demonstrated in the experience of Osaki's life in *Sandakan-Hachiban-Shokan*, by contrasting the past with the present in a series of flashbacks, that it is the creativity of the oppressed that must be studied, in other words their humanity — the *Karayuki-san* behaving as active agents seeking to cope with an emergent reality. As noted, the *experience* of these women shows that despite the extreme conditions of both rural poverty in Japan and a life of prostitution in the expanding towns of Southeast Asia, the wretchedness in their lives and circumstances could be mitigated by strategies that constituted an 'implicit philosophy', but, perhaps, in ways which some of us would find disturbing — witness the social cost of Oichi's death.

The state of the art of women's history, the search for an approach to write people's history in Southeast Asia, and the topic of prostitution in Singapore economy and society is an extremely complicated subject that requires moving on many fronts at once, perhaps too many. Let me try to write my way out, at least for now. In order to understand what the experience meant to be a juvenile prostitute from Japan, *Karayuki-san*, in Singapore at the beginning of this century, the historian of society must chronicle the rhythm of what was normal, describing the patterns and social networks of day to day life among the women in great detail. By the creative use of the technique of collective biography and a range of sources, telling us about what it was like to be an ordinary Japanese woman, the social historian will be able to capture and evoke a sector of the history of the Japanese population offshore whose outlook and experiences

have not been adequately represented. Through the promise of these variegated sources available about Singapore and Japan in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and this methodology I hope to break down the historiographical barriers surrounding our understanding of prostitution and the experience of the *Karayuki-san* in Singapore's past. It is the compellingly detailed examination of the structure of life of prostitutes at the micro-social level that will challenge our sense of the past and all that it implies in Singapore. The second volume of the proposed trilogy hopefully will put ordinary Japanese and Chinese women back into history without taking the economic, social and political forces out of it. Perhaps too, it might also raise questions of concern to social, labour and economic historians and sociologists and anthropologists of Southeast Asia, for re-appraising the whole idea of Southeast Asian history and its purpose.



PART III

...IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

The new champion. Sorrowfully dedicated to the thousands whose lives have been lost owing to bad housing conditions. A gauge of the deaths within municipal limits in Singapore during 1924 from hookworm, beri-beri, the dysenteries, malarial fevers and phthisis (*Source: Dream Awhile: Cartoons from "Straits Produce" Showing in Pictorial Form the Main Events in Local History*, 1932, no pg).

8.
Estate Workers' Health in the Federated Malay States in the 1920s

J. NORMAN PARMER

British Malaya was a very unhealthy place in the 1920s. A large majority of the population had malaria and hookworm and suffered from venereal disease as well. Tuberculosis, cholera, beri-beri, pneumonia and dysentery were common additional causes of illness and death. Influenza, the plague, typhus, leprosy, yaws, smallpox, and cerebro-spinal meningitis were also found and in some years afflicted large numbers of persons. Most of the common diseases were debilitating and slow to kill. Most were preventable.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the subject of estate workers' health in the Federated Malay States in the 1920s. Very little scholarship has been undertaken on any aspect of health and medicine in British Malaya. This may be partly due to an implicit assumption that British rule brought modern medicine to Malaysia and thereby health was improved. But the assumption is valid only if it is understood that British rule first made the incidence of disease and death very much worse than before. The clearing of land for estates, the expansion of mining and the construction of public works disturbed existing ecological balances, causing diseases to spread and multiply.[1] The large immigrant labour forces assembled for these capital investments lacked natural immune systems. The colonial government, the chief provider of medical services, also lacked experience and knowledge and as a consequence many tens of thousands of workers died.

The decade is valid as a period to study. The estate industry (composed mostly of rubber estates) by about 1920 was large and well established, the disruptions of the First World War were nearly past. It was a decade of considerable growth and prosperity, estate labour forces were large and expanding, the colonial government had

1. William H. McNeill (1976: 47) has observed '...disease-producing parasites were quite as successful as people in taking advantage of new opportunities for occupying novel ecological niches that opened up as a result of human actions that distorted natural patterns of plant and animal distribution'.

ample funds, Sir Laurence Guillemard, who was High Commissioner between 1920 and 1927, was determined to make up 'arrears', Sir George Maxwell, who served as Chief Secretary almost concurrently with Guillemard, pursued health issues with considerable vigour. The Great Depression beginning in 1929 served to terminate the period. Especially important is that the decade is the only time when initiatives in the style of Joseph Chamberlain and policies in the spirit of Frederick Lugard were attempted in British Malaya in regard to health matters. Efforts to improve health were more vigorously pursued in the 1920s than at any time before or after.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT DATA

Reliable, comprehensive and comparative data on the incidence of disease and death among workers are not available. The considerable data published by the government must be qualified by time, place and ethnic community. This is often difficult to do. The official data understate the incidence of both disease and death.

There is, for example, an Indian bias. Tamil-speaking immigrants from South India made up the majority of the labour force on European-owned estates. While health data were collected on Indian workers, thousands of Chinese workers were excluded from returns required of employers because most of them were employed through contractors. Chinese were said to be healthier than other workers and not in need of supervision. This judgement was, however, based on ignorance and was a rationalisation of the government's inability or unwillingness to extend protection to Chinese. A prominent planter in 1929 observed that Chinese workers were not as healthy as generally supposed (PAM, 1929: 36-39).

Mine employers were not made to report on workers' health and they steadfastly resisted occasional efforts to bring them within official purview. Workers' housing, water supply and sanitary conditions on most mines were poor. In June 1927, Sir Hugh Clifford, High Commissioner, Federal Malay States, observed: '...No machinery at present exists for obtaining health and death returns from mines in the same manner as estates. I am advised that such returns would be difficult to obtain...' (Dispatch, 1927).

There are other problems with data. Several thousand employers, most employing only a few labourers each, did not submit returns. The correctness of returns submitted is doubtful, some employers understating the incidence of disease and others regularly report-

ing 'nil'. The data are 'hospital biased' in that many statistics were collected at or were related to hospitals. But thousands of sick people were unable to get to a hospital or purposely stayed away. A sick estate worker and his illness might remain unreported unless he was admitted to hospital (FMS Commission, 1925: A12). Cause of death was in most cases not professionally determined. Toward the end of the decade, the method of testing for hookworms was found to miss as many as 50 per cent of cases.

DISEASE

Of the several major diseases, malaria was the most devastating. Commonly referred to as a 'curse' and a 'scourge', it killed more than 200,000 persons in the Federated Malay States in the dozen years before 1920 (FMS, 1920a) and nearly as many in the 1920s.[2] However, in the first years of the decade, the number of malarial deaths abated somewhat. They rose again in 1926 and 1927 and remained high in 1928 with the opening of new estate lands and a rise in the immigrant labour force. The high incidence of malaria deaths on estates prompted the establishment of the Labour Department in 1911 (Parmer, 1960: 130-132).

Preventing malaria by destroying and controlling the mosquito was an established principle by 1920, but many estate employers seemed little inclined to act. A Dr S.C. Howard, speaking in 1923 on the means of attracting South Indians to Malaya, observed that 'khadies, temples, and schools' were 'mere baubles when viewed through the fever, pain, and sweat of malaria, not to mention that mental haze and physical nausia *(sic)* occasioned by routine doses of quinine ...'. The suggestion of '...indifference to health matters is not entirely without foundation'. There is a feeling that '...all has been done that can ... be done ... malaria ... cannot be prevented and must therefore be endured' *(The Planter*, 1923: 57-58).

After malaria, ankylostomiasis or hookworm was the most serious of the parasites which infected estate workers and human beings generally. It lodges in intestines and feeds on the host's blood, producing anaemia. Although hookworm sometimes killed by itself, it more often contributed to deaths ascribed to other diseases. In the State of Perak in 1919, an estimated 70 per cent of persons dying from malaria also had hookworm (PAR, 1919). Estate workers

2. The population of the Federated Malay States in 1911 was placed at 1,045,947 and in 1920 at 1,351,541.

were accused of spreading hookworm by 'promiscuous defecation'. Barefoot workers became infected where latrines were lacking or were poorly constructed or simply not used. About half of Indian immigrants were infected on arrival in Malaya. But after a period of residence on estates, the incidence increased to between 75 per cent and 85 per cent. A survey by Rockefeller Foundation doctors in 1926 found that 77.3 per cent of all persons in rural areas of the Straits Settlements were infected with hookworms (PAM, 1926) and as many as 95 per cent of Malay schoolboys were infected (Straits Settlements, 1926).

Venereal disease was a serious problem and investigations at the beginning of the decade found that '...about 40 per cent of the European population have or have had venereal disease ... a figure approaching double that number would represent ... its prevalence among the native races...'. It was linked to prostitution. The explanation was that Malaya had an '...abnormal social complex which we have created for our economic needs... Our call is for manhood in its full vigor... Prostitution is merely a matter of demand and supply ... a natural sequel...' (Straits Settlements, 1921: B225). An official campaign to fight venereal disease was begun in 1922. By the end of the decade, fifty-nine treatment centres were operating in the Federated Malay States. Some 40,802 persons were treated in 1929, Chinese being the most frequent users of the centres (FMS, 1929a: 114).

Tuberculosis afflicted many persons. In 1920, it was observed that a 'regrettable increase of phthisis' was occurring among Malays who had taken up rubber planting because many had abandoned their attap houses for '...poorly designed, ill-ventilated and overcrowded wooden buildings' (FMS, 1920a: 3). It was a common practice to repatriate immigrant estate workers suspected of having tuberculosis. *The Straits Times* (14 June 1920: 8) observed that 'the disease is prevalent to an appalling extent' and the number of deaths would be much larger were it not that many sufferers '...returned to the countries whence they came as soon as a diagnosis ... had been established'. The Federated Malay States Principal Medical Officer (PMO) stated in 1923 that the chief means of combatting tuberculosis was sanitary education, sanitary measures and efforts to reduce overcrowding in 'cubicles' (Dispatch, 1923). That policy was maintained through the decade. In 1930, tuberculosis was the fourth most important cause of death (FMS, 1930: 194).

Beri-beri is a vitamin deficiency disease. Before, as well as after this was understood, preference for polished rice caused the deaths

of thousands of workers. In 1930, it was observed that: 'The Chinese labourer appears to exist on a very narrow margin of vitamin sufficiency and reacts immediately upon the withdrawal of this as, for example, where gardens attached to construction camps become temporarily flooded and the supply of fresh vegetables is cut off' (FMS, 1930: 195). Concerned estate employers asked the government in 1921 not to import polished rice. The government responded negatively saying that beri-beri was diminishing and prohibition would put upward pressure on wages by raising the cost-of-living. Employers acquiesced but urged that 'in the cause of humanity in general, and the labour forces on estates and mines...' the matter should be pursued further. It was suggested that the League of Nations be approached (PAM, 1922: 18-19).

Other health problems on estates included the health and safety of infants and children. A government medical officer in Perak in 1919 reported that a Tamil child had died of neglect and starvation. The case was unusual only in that the doctor sought an inquest, because, he said, '...of the number of cases of gross neglect ... which come to my knowledge...'. He had kept a list of Tamil children who had died in his district due to neglect. In little more than a year, he had collected about 150 names (PAM Letter, 1920: 6-15). Estate employers in Perak in 1919 declined to provide creches. In 1921, however, legislation enabled government to order an employer to establish a creche (Parmer, 1960: 121-122). How many employers were so ordered is not known.

Infant mortality was a serious problem. It averaged 195.62 annually in the ten years ending in 1920. This was due, said the Federated Malay States Senior Health Officer, to '...carelessness and ignorance on the part of the women' (FMS, 1920a: 29). The care of the newborn received much publicity in the 1920s and several Infant Welfare Centres were established in towns. Yet, infant mortality overall remained at nearly one in five through the decade (FMS, 1930: 204; Chapter 1). The Agent of the Government of India in Malaya observed in 1928 that 'high infant mortality on estates is a matter of grave concern to the Indian community' (India, 1928: 17).

THE ESTATES HEALTH COMMISSION

On 25 April 1924 a Commission on Estate Health was appointed by Sir Laurence Guillemard. Its work was intended to provide the basis to deal with the problems sketched above. The Commission's report, containing many candid observations, is a remarkable docu-

ment, and it launched the most ambitious scheme of rural health services that Malaysia attempted before the conclusion of British rule in 1957.

The immediate origin of the Commission lay with some of the government's medical and health officers. At the Far Eastern Association of Tropical Medicine meeting in Singapore in 1923, it was observed that the principles of malaria control were known and some 'striking results' had been obtained. But the malaria problem, would not be solved until '...the great majority of estates have been induced to apply [known control methods] successfully...'. An '...organisation specially designed to handle this problem over a comprehensive area...' was needed. Dr A.R. Wellington, Federated Malay States Senior Health Officer, who spoke often and vigorously on health questions, agreed. Since 1911, he had tried to get estates to join together to employ medical men, but only a few had heeded his advice. Dr A.L. Hoops, head of the Straits Settlements Medical Department, observed that the Malacca Agricultural Medical Board was a good example of the kind of organisation that had been suggested (*The Straits Times*, 8 September 1923: 9).

The Malacca Agricultural Medical Board was formed in 1919 in response to the government's intention to levy taxes to pay for development of health services in rural areas of the colony. Estate employers objected to the cost and instead obtained approval for their own scheme authored by Mr J.W. Campbell, a pioneer Malacca planter. The Malacca Agricultural Medical Board employed doctors and other staff who visited member estates. The cost was met by a per acre cess levied on members (FMS Commission, 1925: A27).

A stimulus, if not a model, was in force in Dutch-ruled Sumatra. There, preventive as well as curative medicine was systematically provided to some 11,000 workers by the Holland-American Plantation Company owned by the United States Rubber Company. Each worker was given an examination and purged of hookworms twice a year. Sick workers were treated in a central hospital of some 800 beds (*The Straits Times*, 10 September 1923: 3). Dr Wellington who had observed the scheme at first hand was very positive about it. Death rates of estate workers were said to be considerably lower than in Malaya.

A key figure was Chief Secretary Maxwell. A supporter of preventive medicine, he took numerous initiatives to improve health. Maxwell is almost certainly the individual responsible for the appointment of the Commission. His long memorandum which he made a part of the published report did much to clarify and give

direction to subsequent legislation (FMS Commission, 1925: Aiii-Ax).

The Commission was charged with making a 'full enquiry' into: (a) measures to be taken to improve the conditions of health and sanitation and for the prevention of disease on estates; (b) estate hospitals and nursing and medical attendants therein; and (c) the system of visiting estates by medical practitioners (FMS Commission, 1925: A37). The Commission was composed of seven men, including one Chinese and one Indian. Officials, employers and professional persons, they were conservative, respected and very experienced in estate labour matters. The Commission was hailed as the first attempt '...ever made to place the work of estate health, sanitation and treatment on a satisfactory and sound basis...' (FMS Medical Department, 1924: 9).

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission reported on 27 September 1925. It had met 17 times and had taken testimony directly or indirectly from 108 witnesses, including 51 estate labourers. The latter was an unusual, perhaps unique, feature. Together with appendices and memoranda of evidence, the Commission's Report came to 473 pages.

The Commission gave little space to encomiums. Health on some European-owned estates had improved. But overall the situation was not good. Of 1304 estates of 100 acres or more 167 had hospitals. Many were poorly equipped, and the persons in charge of 83 of them had no qualifications of any kind — it was common practice to put the estate clerk in charge of the hospital (FMS Commission, 1925: A58). Only two estates had resident doctors. About a third of the estates — with half of the estate labour force — were served by private doctors, called visiting medical practitioners. They numbered 44 out of a total of 106 doctors in private practice (FMS Commission, 1925: A19, A22). The Commission concluded that on too many European estates health measures and services were perfunctory, and that, with rare exception, 'Asiatic holdings' provided no medical or health services at all (FMS Commission, 1925: A19, A42).

Most estates were without hospitals. Rather than have this expense employers sent sick workers to 'absurdly' inexpensive government district hospitals of which there were 36 in 1924 (FMSAR, 1924: 26). The Commission concluded that workers preferred estate to government hospitals. Some feared the govern-

ment hospital because a friend or relative had died there. Others did not get the diet appropriate to their caste. Many disliked going long distances from home and being among strangers. Reports of staff abuse, of bribery and neglect were heard. There were difficulties in performing 'death rites' at government hospitals. The Commission said that workers' feelings and 'state of mind' must be considered and concluded that most cases could be treated in estate hospitals. Every estate should, thus, have its own hospital or alternatively belong to a group hospital — a facility used and maintained by several estates. Government hospitals should be 'reserved for special or surgical cases' and the per day charge should be raised from 30 cents to a more economic $1.00. The Controller of Labour should be able to compel an estate to establish a hospital or to join a group hospital (FMS Commission, 1925: Av, A5, A17-18, A42).

Visiting medical practitioners were the principal means of providing care to sick workers on estates. The Commission concluded that the visiting system must continue as it is 'the most practical and best suited'. But there were problems. Some practitioners were too distant to respond to emergencies. Some spent too much time travelling. There were overlapping jurisdictions. The amount of work undertaken was sometimes too great for adequate attention to be given to the sick, and the time spent on an estate was often in proportion to the size of the fee. Visits to estates were infrequent. More attention needed to be given to preventive medicine. Organisation and definition of duties was essential. Placed on a proper basis, the number of estates a doctor could visit would be greatly reduced, and the cost to the estate would rise (FMS Commission, 1925: A8, A20-22).[3]

The Commission observed that a government official is 'powerless' without the goodwill of the estate manager. The average manager is '...alive to the obvious economic advantages of a healthy labour force'. But, '...we are unable to record with anything but disfavour the attitude of many Directors of Company ... the first item of expenditure to be cut down is too often that of the hospital and the doctor'. Protests by managers are often ignored by directors, and many managers passively resist the orders of government medical and labour officers. Estate managers should also abandon their 'splendid isolation' in matters of health and cooperate more

3. A letter to *The Straits Times*, 2 January 1924 (p. 10) signed 'Planter' stated that the employment of VMP's by the 'average rubber estate seems to be a farce'. As matters stand, the VMP is encouraged to take on more estates than he can supervise, '...each estate meaning an extra $100 or so per month, and a visit of five minutes' duration is sufficient to satisfy the Government'.

with each other and the Medical Department (FMS Commission, 1925: 6-9, A13, A21).

The 'outstanding defect' was a lack of government doctors. The Health Branch of the Medical Department which was responsible for estate workers was much smaller than the Medical or Hospital Branch. In 1924, the latter had a total of 745 staff actually employed while the former had 42 (FMS Medical Department, 1924: 1). The Health Branch was authorised 16 officers, that is British or European doctors, but only five positions were filled (FMS Medical Department, 1924: 35). Supervision of estate health was entirely inadequate, said the Commission, and the Health Branch situation was 'clearly hopeless'. The Commission recommended 'with all the emphasis at our command' that the Health Branch be brought to full strength. Starting salaries, then at $440 per month, should be raised to $600 (FMS Commission, 1925: A16). The recommendation was not immediately accepted. But the Health Branch did subsequently grow, so that by the end of 1929 it had 95 positions filled of a total authorised staff of about 113. Vacancies were mostly in positions for Europeans of which 41 were authorised and 26 filled. The Hospital Branch grew at a less rapid rate, having an authorised staff of 962 at the end of 1928 (FMSAR, 1928: 1, 25, 1929: 1, 37).

The lack of doctors refers mostly to British or Europeans. Much of the Medical Department's work was actually performed by Asian doctors who were probably more numerous. They were graduates of the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore or of similar schools in India. They were paid lower salaries (except for a few 'prize' appointments) and were denied positions in which they might have white medical officers as subordinates. Most had the title of assistant surgeons (see staff lists in various annual reports of the Federated Malay States Medical Department).

The Commission's most important recommendation was for the establishment of a comprehensive health and medical scheme. Local health boards with legal powers would be established to oversee health and medical arrangements on all estates of more than 25 acres (10 ha). Each local board would be composed of a health officer and local employers. Projects developed by the local boards would be approved by a Central Health Board and paid for by an acreage cess levied on all estates not permitted to make their own medical arrangements. For example, an estate that did not employ a resident or visiting medical practitioner would have one assigned and paid for from health board funds; the Commission in its report

calls the local boards 'Medical Agricultural Committees' (FMS Commission, 1925: A38-41, A43).

THE ESTATES HEALTH BOARDS ENACTMENT

The Commission's report was published in February 1925. The Planters Association of Malaya did not like the Health Boards scheme. Criticisms focused on costs and the assumption of additional powers by the government. The London-based Rubber Growers Association, representative of company directors, angrily objected to the remarks about directors and opposed the exclusion of properties under 25 acres (10 ha) (PAM, 1925).

The government proposed to put the scheme into law in March 1926. The Planters Association of Malaya opposed the draft bill, however, and a spokesman said that it would 'be a mistake to push it through in view of the present feeling' (PFCFMS, 1926: B26). The draft bill included mining employers who objected vigorously. When the bill became law later in the year (FMS, 1926: 31-38) mining employers were largely relieved of responsibility and 'Practically all the amendments suggested by the Planters Association of Malaya...' had been accepted (PFCFMS, 1926: B26). Still, the Planters Association of Malaya found fault. For example, it declared that the lowest death rates for Indian workers were on estates. In other employment, rates were much higher. The new law would not '...materially improve the position...' of non-estate workers (PAMAR, 1927: 75).

Controversy over the Health Boards Enactment climaxed in an emotional meeting of the Planters Association of Malaya in August 1929. Visiting medical practitioners, some of whom believed that the Health Boards scheme was aimed at destroying their practices, were especially vocal. The government had promised not to alter satisfactory arrangements, but what was satisfactory was often a matter of disagreement. The spokesman for the Malaya Branch of the British Medical Association declared that Dr Wellington's standards were too high. Malaria was the only real problem. The labourers escaped tuberculosis because they lived 'a healthy outdoor life'. Latrines and water supply were 'constantly improving' so that dysentery and hookworm were 'gradually going'. An improving sex ratio will '...safeguard the position in the matter of venereal disease'. Estates were being made to give up an efficient, economical system for one that was untried, 'cumbersome' and administered by 'inexperienced authorities'. It was a 'costly and hope-

less proposition' (*The Straits Times*, 29 August 1929: 11; and PAM, 1929: 22-23, 26).

Much criticism focused on 'smallholdings', properties under 25 acres. These had long been a source of irritation to estate employers. Often contiguous with estates, they did not provide anti-malarial works and medical services but 'lured' away estate workers with higher pay. Death rates were high. Many were owned by Malays. The government was the Malay's 'guardian', and it had a 'duty to ... improve his health'. But the big estates were having to bear the cost. No less unfair was the exclusion of mining properties. There was much criticism of the scheme's administration. Administrators had played into the hands of the 'Indian agitator' and slandered the Planters Association of Malaya (PAM, 1929: 31-35).

The Administrator of the scheme, a former estate employer, responded firmly. Some of the planters' arguments, he said, were false and they knew it. The law had been amended to include smallholdings, and the estate industry was not expected to bear the whole cost. As to the 'claims of excessive health on estates', the low death rates which they had cited were erroneous. The truth was that the 'general estate position was not satisfactory' (PAM, 1929: 36-39; *The Planter*, 1929: 1-3; *The Straits Times*, 2 September 1929: 5).

The Planters Association of Malaya was not much chastened by these remarks and the meeting appears to have ended with emotions still high. A resolution was passed which called for a sub-committee to study the law, the government to convene a commission of inquiry, the abolition of the scheme and the expansion of government medical and health services (PAM, 1929: 26-31). An amended Health Boards Enactment subsequently became law.

August 1929 witnessed the onset of the worldwide economic depression which led to a drastic reduction in demand for Malaya's mine and estate production. Severe curtailment of expenditure resulted in many thousands of unemployed estate workers, many of whom returned to India or to China. On 7 October 1930, a deputation representing 'various rubber associations' met with Sir Cecil Clementi, who had become High Commissioner, to discuss the economic position of the estates. On the agenda was 'postponement of hospital schemes initiated under the Health Boards Enactment'. The High Commissioner replied to this point that:

> ...Government recognised the difficulties and was of the opinion that improvement schemes involving expenditures should, so far

> as is possible, be postponed, and that any suggestions for curtailing expenditure should receive sympathetic consideration. The Chairman of the Central Health Board would be so informed (FMS Letter, 1930).

The Health Boards scheme was effectively terminated by Clementi's action. A number of local boards had actually been formed and some of them had become active. Six doctors had been recruited from Great Britain and on arrival had been assigned to Tampin and Kuala Pilah in Negri Sembilan, only to be discharged at the end of 1930. As outlined in the Federated Malay States Annual Report for 1930 (FMSAR, 1930: 70) '...estate managers were notified that they were at liberty to make the best arrangements possible in the circumstances for the medical care of their labourers...'.

CONCLUSIONS

The effort to improve estate workers' health by the Estates Health Boards Enactment was a part of a larger, multifaceted government attack on a variety of health problems in the Federated Malay States in the 1920s. It was the most ambitious of several projects. It was the only one which confronted powerful economic interests and which placed much of the responsibility and cost on those interests. The effort failed, while other initiatives mostly survived. The work of the Estates Health Commission seems largely to have come to naught.

Estate employers had not sought the scheme. But many of them were concerned about health in the sense that sick or dying workers could threaten their labour supply and ability to make a profit. The estate industry was dependent on imported workers. The machinery that delivered workers to Malaya functioned marvellously well, but it was not immune from influences that could curtail the supply. Bad health was such an influence.

Most major estate employers were thus not opposed to efforts to improve workers' health, but they did object to the intended means and to the anticipated costs. Some of their concerns were valid. Health policy before about 1920 had not been consistent, and for a variety of reasons the Medical Department was not highly esteemed. The large, mostly British, estate employers were correct in their conviction that they were discriminated against in the enfor-

cement of laws affecting workers. Most Asian estate employers appeared beyond the administrative reach of government, and the exclusion of European and Chinese mining employers from much of the Health Boards scheme apparently could not be justified on any grounds that could be publicly stated. Smallholder inclusion was the result of estates employers' agitation. But, the sincerity of the government's intention to pursue health improvements on these properties was doubted.

The opposition of the visiting medical practitioners was a serious matter. Their incomes and their routines were threatened. The placing of initiatives and responsibilities on local boards appears to have been unwise. It seemed to pit estate managers against their bosses, company directors, in that managers were asked to devise health projects that would be paid for by taxes on the properties they managed. As an alternative to the Health Boards scheme, employers repeatedly asked the government to recruit for unfilled authorised positions in the Medical Department and otherwise to expand government health services. When at the end of the decade positions began to be filled, the popular *raison d'ëtre* for the scheme was weakened.

The scheme was in part defeated because the government moved very slowly in implementing the law. There were a number of reasons. It did not wish to upset too many employers too quickly, data needed to be collected before proceeding with specific projects, and the cost — the government's share — was probably a concern. People changed, too. Initiators and supporters of the scheme such as Maxwell and Wellington left Malaya on retirement or transfer. It is not incorrect to say that employers essentially outwaited the government until events resolved the matter.

Speculation on what might have happened if the Health Boards Enactment had survived the plea of financial stringency takes on special interest when it is realised that in 1928 a similar Health Board scheme was launched in the State of Kedah, outside the Federated Malay States. There, during 'the slump ... the whole weight of the planting industry's influence was thrown into a great effort to either smash the Board or reduce its activities to an absolute minimum' (Cross, 1938: 5). But with amendments to the law, administrative adjustments and some hardships, the Kedah scheme survived. Assessing the working of the scheme in 1938, a knowledgeable participant observed that in sharp contrast to conditions about 1920, Kedah estate workers were now among the most healthy in British Malaya — according to official data on disease and death — and

health services were delivered '...more efficiently and more economically...' than elsewhere in Malaya (Cross, 1938: 1-2).

What of workers' health? The Health Boards scheme in the Federated Malay States failed and had no positive effect on the incidence of disease and death. Disease did decline between 1930 and 1934. But this was ascribed primarily to the large reduction in the estate labour force. '...estate labourers whose health had been unsatisfactory were the first to be discharged and repatriated. It follows that improvement in health statistics must be accepted with certain reservations' (FMS, 1930: 35). Other health initiatives in the 1920s, not directed primarily at estate workers, appear to have been more successful. Yet, overall there seems to have been little measurable improvement in health. The estate labour force rose in number again in 1935 and the incidence of disease rose. Nearly 13,000 persons died in 1935 of malaria and 'fevers of unknown origin', accounting for nearly 40 per cent of all deaths in that year (FMSAR, 1935: 6). Hookworm, venereal disease and tuberculosis remained important causes of illness and death in the 1930s.

The Medical Department continued to work to improve health generally, and individual employers over time did provide better housing, water supply and latrines which in turn resulted in an improvement in workers' health. The introduction of cheap rubber footwear and the bored-hole latrine probably reduced the incidence of hookworm.

The Colonial Office seemed to take little interest in estate workers' health in Malaya, although health in the Empire was a major concern in the 1920s. This appeared to be true also of the High Commissioner, Sir Laurence Guillemard. The 'arrears' that he spoke of in 1920 appear not to have extended to workers' health. Of course, much of what he might have proposed in matters of health in the Federated Malay States was pre-empted by the quick initiatives of Chief Secretary Maxwell who soon became Guillemard's rival and bitter opponent (Yeo Kim Wah, 1981, 1982). Guillemard whose administration was strongly criticised on other grounds may have wished to avoid the censure of the estate industry.

The Health Boards scheme was an ambitious and praiseworthy attempt to cope with disease on estates by providing medical services, both preventive and curative, on a systematic and comprehensive basis. Had it succeeded many of the thousands of workers who died would have lived longer, and many a surviving worker would have led a less disease-ridden life.

9.
Race, Colonial Mentality and Public Health in Early Twentieth Century Malaya

LENORE MANDERSON

The published history of Malaysia remains largely political history, accounts of colonial rule and histories of indigenous states. Other kinds of history — economic, social, cultural — are relatively few. In part, this reflects the conventions of Western history and historiography, particularly a predominant intellectual concern with change that has led to an emphasis in written history on elites, on politics, and on shifts in power and authority that best capture the flux and passage of time which is the essence of historical perspective. The lives of ordinary men and women — peasants, labourers, fisherfolk, for example — superficially appear static, so little changed over time as to be of minimal interest to the historian. Evidential problems, however, also inhibit the writing of the histories of those without power. Subordinate peoples within colonial and indigenous society in Malaya, for example, typically possessed neither the literary skills nor the time to document their social circumstance and daily routine. The little information we have of them is buried in routine government documents, awaiting imaginative reading to reconstruct the material conditions and activities of their everyday lives.

This chapter offers little of the view from below, although it is concerned very much with the lives of ordinary people. While it examines perceptions of health and illness, hygiene and sanitation, together with policies and programs developed by the government to improve health, it gives only one side. The views of the colonial administrators of the people's health are represented; native notions of health and well-being, of themselves and of others, remain untold. The continuing support of Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaya for their own medical practitioners, herbalists, masseurs and midwives, and their general reluctant presentation to clinics and hospitals for Western medical care give us some idea of the wariness with which they regard Western invasions into matters of life and death. In contrast, their enthusiasm for certain kinds of treatment that were demonstrably effective, such as innoculations

and cures by injections for the treatment of yaws, indicate their readiness to accept those health measures that had proved successful. A fuller account of native understandings of health and illness remains a future task. In this chapter, the view from above remains a central concern; in particular, it explores the way in which elite beliefs about the health and hygiene of peoples of different racial origin shaped the development of health policies and programs in colonial Malaya.

During the period that Peninsular Malaya and Singapore were under British rule, there were several theories regarding the nature, cause, and prevalence of particular diseases and the factors that contributed to the general health status of the colony. These theories varied over time, and according to race, class and educational background. This chapter concentrates on colonial perceptions of health and illness particularly in the 1920s, when there was an increase in public health programs and in expenditure on medical services and preventive measures. Initially, I explore differences in the understanding of the colonial administration of the etiology and epidemiology of diseases among people of different races, and then suggest that health programs were designed with these views in mind. The campaign against ankylostomiasis (hookworm), conducted between 1926 and 1928, can be understood in this light. As a result of the campaign, thousands of people were temporarily rid of parasites, but its long-term impact — by concentrating on treating those infected — was of limited benefit. Against this, however, the campaign had an explicit educational purpose to teach people about hygiene, sanitation and related preventive medicine. Thus it served an important ideological function that explained the concentrated efforts of the campaigners: campaigns such as that mounted to control hookworm demonstrated the value of government health programs, hence of government itself (Manderson, 1987a).

Miasmatic theory, the belief that disease permeated the environment and was responsible for the prevalence and distribution of particular diseases, was current among colonial administrators until the late nineteenth century. Scientific research during this period, however, led to a clearer understanding of a number of infections and illnesses, including a number of 'tropical' diseases, and by the turn of the century germ theory had gained greater currency. The establishment of the Institute of Medical Research in Kuala Lumpur in 1900 contributed to this growth of knowledge. Funds and personnel were directed especially to improving the under-

standing of malaria and beri-beri, the two diseases which affected most savagely the labour forces of the rubber and tin industries.[1] While the etiology and epidemiology of both malaria and beri-beri required further research, and the exact cause of beri-beri was not established until 1926, sufficient was understood of both diseases by the early 1900s to allow the development and implementation of particular health care programs, including the establishment of Sanitary Boards and the commencement of large-scale drainage and oiling programs aimed specifically at controlling malaria.

Yet, despite increased scientific knowledge of diseases prevalent in the region, belief in the peculiar effects of the tropical climate, and of the particular vulnerabilities of different groups of people, remained. Distinctions were drawn by European commentators between expatriate and non-European immigrant and indigenous communities, with different theories used by them to explain the differential morbidity and mortality patterns of these groups. These notions of racial difference and the effects of climate were, of course, largely mythical; in general, variations in health status reflected the relative economic standing of different groups within the community.

EUROPEAN SENSIBILITIES

Generally, belief in 'miasma' had lost currency by the early twentieth century, but it was still argued that the tropical climate had a peculiarly debilitating effect on Europeans who were long-term residents in the tropics, and belief in the purported effect of the environment on Europeans reached a height as late as the 1930s. While there was some support in the nineteenth century for the belief that the region was simply not suited to European or even Chinese settlement (Murrhead, n.d.: ff. 402), most officials in the colonial government accepted that there was little which contra-indicated European immigration, and that to an extent Europeans enjoyed certain advantages over other peoples. In 1870, for example, Colonel R. Woolley (1870: ff 264-265) argued that:

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1. Arguably, Chai (1964: Chapter 6) overemphasises the importance of malaria and beri-beri as the major factors contributing to ill health in colonial Malaya; contemporary source material indicates the significance also of dysentery and diarrhoea to morbidity and mortality rates. However, in concentrating his chapter on institutional and research efforts to understand malaria and beri-beri, he accurately reflects the period in terms of perceptions of patterns of illness and the allocation of resources.

> in substituting European for Native Troops, the Colony will gain both physically and morally an immense accession of strength... As regards the important question of health, their *(sic)* is no comparison between that enjoyed by the European and Native Troops in the Straits. The latter deteriorate very perceptibly after the first or second year of Service, the men suffer considerably at certain seasons ... the only recourse is to send them back to the coast for a change of climate. The Europeans on the contrary as a rule enjoy excellent health.

Physical, mental and moral deterioration, however, was considered an inevitability for anyone who stayed. As Butcher (1979: 68-72) has already described, pamphleteers and government officials alike argued that four to five years was the maximum period before a return to a cold climate was essential to restore good health and prepare for a further period of service. As shown in Table 9.1, Europeans posted to the colony were advised to live temperately, if not abstemiously, with plenty of rest, moderate exercise, sensible dress (flannel vests and hats against the tropical sun), and bathing only at advised times (Great Britain, Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1886: 19-20; Great Britain, Emigration Information Office, 1900: 5). Writings at the turn of the century emphasised that although illness was not transmitted through the environment in accordance with miasmatic theory, still, continual exposure to the tropical climate predisposed people to infection and lowered their resistance to disease. Following this, even young men 'of little original power' as well as men of middle age 'became incapable of laborious duty after a time, and ... easily susceptible to the most common form of sickness' (Pahang, 1900: 260). Constant residence also affected mental health, leading to deterioration of the nervous system 'manifested by insomnia, irritability of temper, loss of memory and energy' (Fox, 1901: 1). By the mid-1920s, these ideas had been developed to distinguish the effects of climate according to age and sex. Men could withstand the effects of the tropics for four years, but women, because — according to a 1923 report — 'of their more highly strung nervous systems', needed to return to a cold climate after three years only (Great Britain, British Empire Exhibition, London 1924, 1923: 4-5). On the other hand, small children did not appear to suffer initially, but after the age of about six, became 'thin and anaemic' and needed to return to a temperate climate to avoid

TABLE 9.1

CARDINAL RULES FOR EUROPEANS TO MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH IN THE TROPICS

Adult Europeans should not come out to the Federated States before they are twenty years of age, and should make up their minds to conform from the first to the cardinal rules for the preservation of health.

These may be shortly summed up as follows:-

- Go to bed and get up early.
- Avoid all excesses in eating and drinking.
- Never go out between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. without wearing a sun hat.
- When possible, always wear flannel next to the skin.
- Take exercise regularly and moderately, but not to excess, if avoidable.
- Change clothes as soon as possible after exercise.
- Avoid bathing in the middle of the day, or more than twice a day. In the evening, and after exercise, a warm bath is better than a cold one.
- If doubtful about the purity of drinking water, always see for yourself that it is boiled, and do not take the servant's word for it. Filtering is often insufficient.
- When travelling, drink as little as possible during the heat of the day, and always avoid roadside stalls.
- The water of a young coconut is the best on these occasions, if obtainable.

Source: Great Britain, Emigration Information Office (1900: 5).

arrested physical and mental development. Continued residence in the colonies beyond these stated limited periods led to the tissues becoming lethargic, the muscles and brain losing vigour.

Perhaps the most detailed explanation of this theory was presented in a two-part article by Kenneth Black, Professor of Surgery at the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore (Black, 1933a,b). Butcher (1979) has already provided a competent

summary of this article, but it is worth repeating to highlight European perceptions of Asian ill-health. Black maintained that the physical, mental and moral strength of Europeans declined in the tropics. Climate, he argued, affected health directly and indirectly through diet, the incidence of disease, and mode of life. London, Black (1933a: 253) argued, was near to an ideal climate for a European, despite its 'slush and fog'; and England:

> comes nearer the ideal than almost any other country in the world ... Progress in the prevention and cure of tropical diseases had advanced enormously in the past twenty-five years, and, it may be argued, that Malaya is to be regarded as "healthy" ... (But) that there is actual physical and mental deterioration in all tropical countries is the accepted view ... When people go from a country with a superior [climate] to one with an inferior climate, their power of sustained work deteriorates sooner or later.

Black (1933b: 277-280) maintained that men became irritable, lost concentration and turned to alcohol; he suggested the higher suicide rate in Singapore, as compared with England and Wales, related to this process of deterioration, and that only those with a zealous commitment, such as missionaries, were able to withstand the possibility of debilitation.

NATIVE INDISPOSITIONS

The argument of the effect of climate on physical and mental health was used at times by colonial administrators to explain differences in the health status of Asians and Europeans. The Pahang Medical Report of 1900 (Pahang, 1900: 260), for example, commented that the general healthiness of the indigenous population was 'really remarkable', although climate contributed to their habitual indolence. Belief that prolonged heat and lack of seasonal variation in the climate resulted in physical and mental strain and inefficiency provided justification for European rule and explained the comparatively higher incidence of disease and infection among the indigenous and immigrant labour communities. Yet native morbidity and mortality rates were rarely attributed to the climate. Rather, European commentators understood the incidence and spread of disease among the peasantry and labourers as a composite

of a variety of factors, including inherited vulnerability and genetic predisposition, cultural predisposing factors (the particular habits and customs of various groups), and socio-economic circumstance. The priority of any of these factors varied according to the source, and the purpose for which an analysis of native ill-health was offered. High mortality rates among the Tamil population in Negri Sembilan at the end of the nineteenth century, for example, were attributed officially both to the 'inferior physique' of the labourers and their reluctance to spend money either on mosquito nets, as a prophylaxis against malaria, or on food (Negri Sembilan, 1899: 256); the low rate of malaria in Malacca was attributed to the fact that there labour was chiefly Chinese and supplemented by Malays (SSADR, 1924: 570).

A number of early documents suggested that the poor health of immigrant labour derived from injudicious selection at the point of emigration (e.g. Melliar Smith, 1894: para. 24; SSADR, 1890: 297; Selangor Secretariat, 3404/1904). Others maintained, however, that the major cause of illness related neither to the immigration of labourers of equivocal health status nor to the deterioration of their health as a result of poor conditions at their workplaces. Rather, the particular customs and habits of the various groups were to blame. Tamil dietary inadequacies, related to food preferences and their reported unwillingness to spend money on food, was mentioned often. In 1933, Cretch (1933: 37, 48) maintained that Tamil labourers 'spent as little as possible on food', only 50 per cent of that spent by Chinese, and were consequently badly nourished and of 'very poor physique'. Orde-Browne (1943: 101-102), in his report on the conditions of labour at the end of the decade, similarly drew attention to nutritional deficiencies among Tamils as a result of their inclination to 'economise at the expense of (their) stomach(s)' in contrast to the Chinese, better fed and 'in good condition and capable of sustained hard work'.

Various other factors compounded the effect of limited expenditure on foodstuffs. Dietary changes concomitant with urbanisation and the import of manufactured and highly refined foods reputedly led to a decline in the nutritional status of all non-European groups (SSADR, 1905: 706; Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1939e: 859/14/3550/18, 'Medical-Nutrition-Rice', 27). Alcohol consumption was reportedly a significant problem among Tamil labour, but also among other Indians and, increasingly, among Chinese: the risk of an increase in alcoholism was at times used as an argument against restrictions on opium consumption among Chinese

labourers and artisans (SSADR, 1905: 706, 1927: 635; Trengganu, 1938: 139: 18A). Commentators believed too in genetic differences. Cretch (1933: 44, 46) contrasted the Chinese, 'said to have an extraordinary resistance to disease and their life history bears evidence of racial robustness, a healthy active life and a normal life span' with the Tamils, guilty of 'wholesale in-breeding' due to village endogamy, 'physical degenerate', with poor resistance to disease, limited intelligence and powers of endurance, and a low expectation of life compared with other groups.

HOUSING AND SANITATION

Housing and sanitation were common themes in government discussions of the health of Malay, Chinese and Indian communities from the early twentieth century through to Federation. Commentaries pursued a variety of themes: that particular races were by nature insanitary and unhygienic; that Asian standards of health and hygiene were different from (and inferior to) those of Europeans; that Asians were ignorant of hygiene and sanitary measures; and, less frequently, that the conditions of existence of labourers were such that little better could be expected.

Housing and sanitation on rubber estates was under the surveillance of the Labour and Medical Departments of the colonial administration, and accordingly a minimum standard of housing, health care and sanitation was established, if not always observed, by estate owners and employers for their labourers. 'Away from rubber estates', Cretch (1933: 37) argued, 'the housing and sanitation of the Tamil is very bad. They appear to be naturally dirty both in regard to their person and habits'. Chinese *kongsi* (clan) houses on tin mines, in contrast, were 'airy, cool and comfortable' but even so, 'often overcrowded with poor drainage and sanitation ... for the most part the conditions under which they live are deplorable. If not subjected to any supervision their inherent laziness and filthy habits soon cause their dwellings to become most insanitary and repulsive' (Cretch, 1933: 42, 49). Malay housing was also 'cool, comparatively clean but dark, badly ventilated and often overcrowded', but considered by Europeans, such as Cretch (1933: 52), as insanitary because of the presence of livestock around the footings and the disposal of rubbish beneath the dwellings. Early reports too had commented on insanitary *kampungs* (villages), overcrowded houses and impure water supplies, prompting certain writers to

warn that the Malay population was being killed off (Birch, 1898: 19).

Urban areas, however, attracted the strongest public criticism and official concern. Poorly constructed dwellings with inadequate ventilation, chronic overcrowding, poor water supplies, lack of provisions for the disposal of night soil and garbage, in both the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States and in both smaller towns and major administrative and commercial centres, were considered to be central factors in explaining poor urban health. Conditions of urban life had attracted early censorship. In February 1907, a report was released by Dr W.J. Simpson, based on his visit to Singapore in July and August of the previous year, which drew attention to the over-development of land with buildings and the overcrowding of tenements, such that people lived in 'rabbit warrens, consisting of scores of cubicles where daylight never penetrates, and the air is always foul and germ laden' (*Straits Times*, 26 June 1907: 7). Government inaction led to a second report by a Commission of Inquiry 'into urban conditions' (established in 1918) which noted the irregularity of housing inspections and their unreliability in ensuring basic standards of hygiene. A further report was released in 1933. Conditions in other parts of Malaya were no better. Early reports of Kuala Lumpur refer to 'the notoriously dirty and filthy state of the town, and the habits of the people' (Selangor Secretariat, 427/1882), and highlight the small size of rooms within dwellings, the large number of occupants to rooms, the lack of clean water supplies and the inadequate provisions made for the disposal of household refuse and night soil. Frequently, for example, water supplies were polluted by leaking latrines: 'In some houses there is insufficient latrine accommodation one small closet in a corner of the kitchen being considered enough for 50 or 60 people ... (in some cases) the tubs had not been emptied at all for days and had even fallen to pieces where they stood' (Selangor Secretariat, 3080/1889). The health problems caused by urban conditions, which were held responsible for the generally high levels of morbidity and mortality, but also explicitly the high infant mortality rate and the high incidence of tuberculosis, remained a major matter of public concern in the 1920s and attracted frequent comment from the press and regular attention from associations such as the Straits Settlements Association (see, for example, *Straits Times*, 31 August 1925: 8; *Straits Times*, 9 October 1926: 9-10).

In some discussions of the differential morbidity rates in urban areas, it was implied that Asians were peculiarly vulnerable to dis-

eases, such as tuberculosis, and to infections, such as influenza, that might have led to more serious secondary infections (e.g. SSADR, 1926: 718, 1933: 1012; Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1928f: 36). The general consensus, however, was that the conditions alone were directly responsible for ill health. In 1925, Dr Hunter, for example, maintained that some 25 per cent of all deaths in Singapore could be attributed to poor housing and sanitation (*Straits Times*, 25 May 1926: 8). The point of departure for most was the allocation of blame for such conditions. Commercial self-interest and government inactivity were partial factors in maintaining into the 1920s the worst slums, 'filth(y) sodden dens with neither light nor clean air to destroy the constantly accumulating germs of deadly disease' (*Straits Times*, 6 February 1925: 8). Low rates of pay for urban workers was also offered as an explanation for the poor conditions: labourers did not have an income that would have allowed them to live in other than the overcrowded and insanitary cubicles (*Straits Times*, 11 February 1925: 10). In addition, there was an implication that the conditions of urban life were 'the standard of the East', unable to be rectified without revolutionary changes in the social structure that would overturn traditional class divisions and those of the colonial society (*Straits Times*, 2 August 1926: 8). Official documents referred, for example, to a Chinese love' of dark ill-ventilated cubicles (Selangor Secretariat, 1476/1907). Against this, however, it was argued that it was a responsibility of the colonial government to countervail such 'Asian standards':

> This town of Singapore is occupied for the most part by Asiatics, many of them densely ignorant on matters of sanitation and causation of disease, but responsibility is not on Asiatic shoulders ... the Imperial Government knows that an Asiatic population is incapable of governing itself as a British settlement should be governed... (*Straits Times*, 6 February 1925: 8).
>
> The fact must not be lost sight of that this Colony is British, that British views as to sanitation must prevail and that no Asiatic ideas of "good enough" or of apathy in regard to the ravages of disease can be allowed to override the British conception of what is right and necessary (*Straits Times*, 28 September 1925: 8).

The role of the government in educating the population in Western ideas of health and hygiene received considerable support,

but it was clear to many contemporary analysts of urban ill-health that socio-economic conditions and the architecture of the towns needed also to be changed in order to reduce the morbidity rates. In consequence, only particular aspects of urban health received government attention — the infant mortality rates being one of the most dramatic. Here, despite the association of early infant death with housing and sanitation, other measures could be taken: maternal and child health clinics were established, home visiting of newborn infants was instituted, ante-natal care encouraged, traditional midwives registered and gradually replaced by midwives with Western nursing training (Manderson, 1987b). The general improvement of urban health, however, remained problematic. By contrast, problems of health, hygiene and sanitation in rural areas were considered in many respects easier to attack and, in consequence, a number of public health programs of the 1920s were directed towards the rural population.

PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS IN THE 1920s

As noted, the frequent comments on the insanitary living conditions of people of all races in Malaya were regarded primarily as a result of either different and lower standards compared with Europeans, or of ignorance of acceptable (European) standards of hygiene. Early reports also suggested some intransigence. Sinclair (1889), for example, suggested that Chinese had 'an inherent spirit to evade the laws especially of sanitation' and that the relative cleanliness of Malay compounds was related, at least in part, to the strict Islamic sanitary requirements. This perception, like others commonly held, insisted on the fault of those under criticism; Gerrard (1913: 18) was one of the few to suggest, in contrast, that insanitary conditions were not the fault of coolie labour: 'At present they are blamed as altogether bestial *(sic)*; they have no opportunity of being otherwise unless the European places every convenience within their reach'.

Early public health measures were directed at controlling the spread of disease, and, in the process, the programs served both economic and ideological purposes. This was explicated at the end of the nineteenth century by the Residency Surgeon of Negri Sembilan:

> (No) reduction in the general mortality can be expected until the Government have gained the conviction that public sanitation is

> no measure of secondary importance, but in itself a prime object; and one which, if thoroughly dealt with in accordance with the scientific knowledge of the day, will result in as real an economic gain to the country as other administrative measures, which may appear more immediately profitable.
>
> I urge the Government, now as always, to meet the sanitary problems of the State with a liberal expenditure. The distribution of quinine and other medicaments through the country, and, above all, the provision, in every village accessible to a pipe, of a supply of drinking water, will result in an annual saving of lives, which will vindicate the value of Western Government more effectually than any other operation for the development of the State. For, to the general population, a mile of water-pipe will probably bring more blessing than many miles of rail (Negri Sembilan, 1897: 22).

At this stage, however, sanitation work in rural areas was haphazard and provoked criticism that villages were excluded from programs, and that road and other public works programs took soil with little regard to the consequent effects on drainage (Negri Sembilan, 1899: 259). Requests to the government to increase expenditure on drainage, clearing of land, and the provision of pure water were frequent (Negri Sembilan, 1900: 225).

Efforts to improve rural health and to limit disease through better sanitation and controls on housing, water supply and drainage increased from the turn of the century. Legislative and administrative arrangements facilitated the extension of this work. In 1910, a health branch was established in the government medical department of the Federated Malay States to deal with the health of estate labourers. A special enactment, the Estate Labour (Protection of Health) Enactment, was introduced, subsequently incorporated into the Labour Code. Similar provisions were embodied in the Labour Ordinance, 1920, with subsequent legislation to provide for 'sufficient and proper' housing accommodation, supply of potable water, sanitary arrangements, hospital accommodation and equipment, medical attention and treatment, including diets in hospitals, and a supply of medicines of quality. Tin mines were not controlled as strictly as the estates but there were certain expectations of housing and sanitation and the mines were subject to sporadic inspection by government sanitary officers. *Kampongs* were again the general responsibility of health officers and sanitary inspectors

employed by health branches of the medical departments and the Sanitary Boards of the Straits Settlements and Malay States.

People who supported improvements to housing and sanitation as a supplement to basic anti-malarial work being undertaken in rural areas, argued for the cost-effectiveness of such programs: Gerrard (1913: xii), for example, argued that badly housed and fed labour would result in poor workers in the short term and 'labour troubles' in the long term. Until the 1920s, most sanitation work was directed to those sectors of the population in direct contact with the colonial economy and whose labour was imperative for commercial development. But by this time improved statistics highlighted morbidity and mortality rates in the *kampongs*, on estates and in mines, and constant reports of the poor health of both the Malays and immigrant labour indicated the need to include these groups in future preventive medicine measures.

A number of major public health programs were initiated in the mid-1920s. Some were extensions of earlier smaller-scale efforts, others new programs. Increased efforts were made to reach populations peripheral to the major centres of health care through the expansion of outdoor clinics, travelling dispensaries and, in Perak and Pahang, through floating dispensaries along the main waterways of the states. Programs included the expansion of maternal and child health work, the inception of the venereal disease campaign in 1925, the yaws campaign, increased efforts to control beri-beri in the Federated Malay States, and the hookworm campaign. Health work included house-to-house inspection; village scavenging (rubbish removal); the removal and disposal of night soil; control of piggeries, cattlesheds and dairies; supervision of markets; survey of sites and building plans; the sanitary inspection of police stations, rubber estates and factories; control of water supplies; and the sanitary control of schools. Often, this work was long overdue. Many estates had neglected basic health measures during the rubber recession after the First World War and villages showed signs of 'sanitary neglect'; flies bred close to shops; mosquito breeding places were common; well water was contaminated; and night soil was either left in open cesspits, dumped in swamps on estates, or used as manure (SSADR, 1923: 93-94).

Much of the work done under the various public health programs was practical but it was supplemented by substantial educational activities. Lectures, lantern slide shows, posters, pamphlets in all vernacular languages, and displays at agricultural and horticultural

shows on such subjects as malaria, hookworm, social hygiene (venereal disease), yaws, beri-beri, trachoma, leprosy, and general health and hygiene measures were used in order to explain government activity in preventive medicine and to encourage people to undertake preventive work themselves. Education gained importance as administrators came to the view that the major barrier to much ill-health in the colony was a consequence of native ignorance:

> Tropical medicine differs from the general medicine of temperate climates chiefly in this, that the principal diseases which it sets out to combat have a definitely known cause, or causes, and are for the most part preventable by definite known means (Waugh-Scott, 1925: 10).

'FILTH DISEASES' AND THE HOOKWORM CAMPAIGN

The campaign against ankylostomiasis provided an ideal opportunity for education in preventive medicine, 'an ideal object lesson ... clearly understandable by all' (SSADR, 1928: 468). Ankylostomiasis (hookworm) was widespread throughout the rural population in Malaya, and was, according to a number of sources, a major contributory factor in the poor health status of those residing in infested areas. The exact level of infestation was not known, and medical reports suggested that registered deaths from 'filth diseases' under-represented the true incidence, particularly given Malay reluctance to attend hospitals for treatment. The 1926 Medical Department Report of the Straits Settlements estimated that 21 per cent of all hospital admissions were for bowel diseases, including worm infestations; 18.5 per cent of deaths in hospitals were from these causes (SSADR, 1928: 468). Data collected after the implementation of the hookworm campaign indicated extraordinary high levels of infection, depending on age, race, and region. In Penang in 1927, for example, 85 per cent of Malays were infected by hookworm; almost 66 per cent of all males and 49 per cent of females afflicted. In rural areas only, 94 per cent of Malays were infected, compared with 55 per cent of Indians and almost 82 per cent of Chinese examined (SSADR, 1929: 863-864). Data from Malacca the previous year gave even higher levels of infestation for all races, with school children and the elderly the worst afflicted (SSADR, 1928: 482); in Kedah, in 1938, it was estimated that at least 80 per

cent of all outpatients suffered from worms (Carson, 1940: 7). District officers constantly mentioned the prevalence of parasitic infection, including hookworm, roundworm and whipworm, and one was to suggest that this provided a partial explanation of Malay 'laziness':

> It is often said ... that the Kelantan Malay is extraordinarily lazy ... I have come to the conclusion that this apparent laziness is due in most cases to chronic infections, especially malaria and hookworm disease. It is astonishing the change that thorough quinine and thymol treatment makes in so many of these supposedly lazy people. They brighten up wonderfully, and become alert both mentally and physically (Kelantan, 1918: 32).

The hookworm campaign was part of a larger Rural Sanitation Campaign, instituted following recommendations from a survey on hookworm infection, general sanitary conditions, and organised health work. The survey was undertaken in all settlements and their provinces by Drs M.E. Barnes and P.F. Russell of the Rockefeller Foundation, who were invited by the Straits Settlement Government for this purpose. It is possible, however, that the focus of their enquiry was influenced too by public health work in the United States at the time: Julius Rosenwald of Sears had set up his own foundation with funds from his business empire to undertake hookworm eradication, the control of venereal disease, and primary education in the southern United States in the mid-1920s, and personnel, if not funds, moved frequently between the Julius Rosenwald Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation (C. Hetler, pers. comm.). Barnes and Russell completed their survey in September 1925. Their report, released 31 December, recommended:

(a) Organisation of the health and medical services into distinct divisions;
(b) Improved methods of securing accurate diagnoses as to the cause of death;
(c) Public Health Nursing, Maternity, and Child Welfare Work developed and extended to rural areas;
(d) An adequate anti-venereal disease program;
(e) Conservancy extensively developed by the general introduction of standard types of latrines, organisation of adequate sanitary inspection, and increased attention to soil sanitation

on estates and at schools;

(f) Provision for the administration of anti-hookworm treatment on a wide scale, both for the general and estate populations; and provision for the examination and treatment of immigrants passing through the quarantine station at Singapore;

(g) Greater emphasis given to laboratory work in the dispensaries and smaller hospitals; and

(h) The development of an effective public health education (SSADR, 1930: 765-766).

The campaign that followed was a joint venture between the Government and the Foundation, with a total shared budget of US$108,000 over the three-year period from 1926-1928. Work began in Malacca, where infestation was the heaviest, then in 1927 was extended to Penang, and in the final year to Singapore. During the period some 1500 lectures were delivered to 80,000 people; 56,000 people were treated for intestinal worms. Reportedly, every village in Malacca and the Northern Settlement was visited by campaign staff. Posters were prepared and distributed in schools and estates; pamphlets were prepared in *jawi*, Tamil, Mandarin and English and some 39,000 distributed in the first year of the campaign; special exhibits were arranged at horticultural shows; films were screened in support of the public lecture program; poster and essay competitions were held in schools. In addition, efforts were made to encourage people to wear shoes, under the slogan of 'Better Shoes than Shrouds'; Tan Kah Kee agreed, following consultation with the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, to produce particular shoes to retail at a low price and donated 2000 pairs for free distribution to schoolchildren (SSADR, 1930: 771).

This public education campaign was directed at 'educating the humble folk who at present accept these diseases as the unescapable evils of life, and who only want elementary instruction in preventive measures to banish hookworm themselves' (*Straits Times*, 24 January 1927: 8):

> The chief reason why in such a campaign as this hookworm disease is given special emphasis, is because this disease is an excellent text for public health lessons. It is so common, so simple to explain, so easily cured and above all so completely preventable that even the most illiterate coolie can understand it and thus obtains his first idea of Preventive Medicine. Moreover, hookworm

> disease of itself is important, the direct cause of much disease, the indirect cause of far more deaths than is commonly realised. It, therefore, has considerable propaganda value (Straits Settlements, 1930: 769).

Published reports argued that such a campaign would educate people about appropriate measures of sanitation and hygiene, and about the values of Western medicine; and that subsequent health programs would be the more effective as a result of the demonstration of the efficacy of Western medical ideas and treatment in this instance. Indeed, actual treatment was considered part of the educative process, 'propaganda amongst the uneducated consisting of the mass treatment itself' (Straits Settlements, 1929: 849):

> There is considerable educational or psychological value in mass antihelminthic treatment by the demonstration of the actual removal of worms in large numbers. Particularly roundworms but, after the lectures, also hookworms in a stool make a real impression on the minds of the people. In a country where sanitary latrines are so rare, where a sanitary conscience is non-existent in the general public, where ignorance, illiteracy and superstition are universal among all but the governing class and the schoolchildren, and where autocratic methods of administration have never been in vogue, it is a question whether the control of soil pollution could ever be accomplished without at least one preliminary mass-treatment campaign. Worms in a bottle have little persuasive appeal to the average Malayan individual beyond perhaps helping to induce him to take some medicine. But worms in his own bowel movement stir the imagination of even the most sceptical person and frequently arouse enough antipathy to these parasites to lessen materially his resistance to the idea of spending money and labour for a sanitary latrine (Straits Settlements, 1930: 777-778).

In effect, the hookworm campaign became primarily a forum for mass education on hygiene and sanitation. Despite the phenomenal number of treatments — 56,000 people, of whom some two-thirds were Malay — the government was always doubtful of the long-term effectiveness of the campaign as a means of controlling

ankylostomiasis; at best the treatment purged individuals of current infestations. But mass therapy without soil sanitation was, the government argued, like 'bailing with a sieve', and universal use of latrines was the only real way to control hookworm (SSADR, 1930: 778). In this respect, little success had been achieved by the end of the three-year campaign period. In *kampongs*, where infestation appeared to be especially serious, 'not much progress' had been made and, whilst 800 pit latrines had been built by Malays in Malacca under the supervision of campaign staff, still nearly 70 per cent of villages lacked latrines, sanitary or not. On estates, surveillance was possible to ensure the provision of sanitary latrines, but again, by the end of the campaign period the facilities were often left unused and evasion of them by the coolies was not atypical (SSADR, 1930: 779). Village and municipal night soil disposal was still problematic (in Malacca and Penang it was dumped at sea); only government offices and housing and schools were universally fitted with sanitary latrines making it possible 'without embarassment to urge private individuals to build latrines' (SSADR, 1930). The exhortation had always to be general, of course: while the government wrote at length about the particular toilet habits, fear of pollution (ritual and actual), and belief in 'sickness producing odors' amongst various ethnic groups in the colonies (SSADR, 1930: 778-779), direct confrontation of native toilet habits was not easy. In addition, Rockefeller enthusiasm appears to have carried the program along for the three-year campaign period. Without continued external funding, the program lost its priority: the Government was not prepared to commit substantial recurrent expenditure to undertake soil sanitation and to maintain and erect more latrines, and instead, it turned back to other public health issues.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion provides a sketch of the campaign against ankylostomiasis that was conducted in the Straits Settlements. As noted, there was some cynicism at the time regarding its efficacy: 'A year or two hence the hookworm and roundworm infection rates will doubtless be not much, if any, less than before the present mass treatments' (SSADR, 1929: 855). Further, there were suggestions that the campaign might be responsible for spreading rather than controlling infestation, as a result of 'mass diarrhoea' following treatment to people living in areas without adequate sanitary arrangements. In addition, the health of a number of people was

placed in greater jeopardy as a result of the treatment, although only two deaths were directly linked to the administration of carbon tetrachloride (SSADR, 1929: 853-854). Precautions were taken, including giving calcium to those patients considered possibly vulnerable to toxemia, and by excluding from treatment, unless in a hospital, children under the age of ten, Tamil coolie labour and those suffering from ascaris infestation. Finally, there was administrative concern that the high profile of the campaign might suggest that hookworm was a more serious public health problem than other infections, in particular malaria (SSADR, 1929: 851). As a result, within newly-established health centres, considerable attention was given to emphasising the greater danger of malaria.

But the hookworm campaign fulfilled a function that may not have been achieved by increased efforts against malaria. It gave considerable opportunities for emphasising native hygiene and sanitary behaviour in a direct and personal fashion: footwear and the use of latrines being the most obvious examples. Malaria, by contrast, affected all communities, and its spread was related to economic development rather than to injudicious native practice. Further, while testing Rockefeller Foundation notions of public health, the hookworm campaign provided an opportunity to demonstrate government action in the field of preventive medicine. The statistics were impressively grand: hundreds of thousands of stools examined, millions of worms sieved and counted to determine levels of infestation, and displayed as part of the public education campaign.

Finally, the hookworm campaign illustrates the way that health programs were developed in both a cultural and a political context. As discussed above, colonial administrators stressed the importance of racial background in assessing the effect on people's health of tropical residence, and in maintaining good health. Notions of racially different vulnerabilities allowed a measure of inactivity by the government during the early colonial period. By the 1920s however, when government was expected, both within the colony and internationally, to provide social services, these beliefs had been refined. While the equivocal health of many Europeans remained attributable to the climate of the tropics, the health of immigrant workers and the local peasantry was considered the result largely of native insanitary practice, whether as a consequence of ignorance, custom or wilfulness. Accordingly, government intervention was possible and desirable; the successes of particular health campaigns providing public evidence of the benefits of colonial rule

(Manderson, 1987a). Simultaneously, the hookworm campaign, as a case study of a public health campaign, however, raises several questions. The discussion of the people's health status within the colony, highlighted that health problems and the associated environmental issues of hygiene and sanitation were as serious in urban as in rural areas. Why then, were most public health care programs, excepting those related to maternal and child health, undertaken in the countryside?

An understanding of the political economy of health in colonial Malaya provides a partial answer. In common with other colonies (e.g. Lasker, 1977; Parahoo, 1986; Turshen, 1977), Malaysia had an urban-centred, hospital-based health care system. The best curative medical care was available to the elite in the towns; elementary preventive care was offered to those on the margins of the colonial economy (Manderson, 1987a). In general, despite recurrent costs, preventive health measures were cheaper than curative medical services, requiring fewer scientifically-medically trained staff and fewer facilities. Simultaneously, many of the health programs mounted in rural Malaysia directly responded to the needs of the colonial economy. The control of malaria, for example, maintained the health of plantation labour while containing the disease, the spread of which was a consequence of the development of the plantation sector. Further, health work in rural areas was often rudimentary, and rural health was regarded as a matter of increased surveillance both of individuals and their environment. Drains were put down, latrines built, pools oiled, children weighed. These were routine procedures. They were far less expensive than those that might have been required to tackle urban ill health. The health problems of the city were almost always associated with the urban landscape. Addressing urban ill health, therefore, implied both radical redevelopment of the cities and a restructuring of the economy. The countryside could be colonised through sanitation work and preventive health campaigns; the cities would have to be rebuilt.

"Why hookworm?", of course, is a different question. As argued, the counting of stools and worms allowed for an impressive numerical, demonstration of government health efforts. But there was also a pragmatic side. As outlined, the campaign was funded partly by the Rockefeller Foundation, and Foundation sponsorship was specifically for a campaign against hookworm, not for a campaign against any other disease or health problem. The hookworm campaign in the Straits Settlements was one of several sponsored by the Foundation, that included the pioneer program in the

southern United States of America, and one in Java that began around the same time as that in Malaya (Hull, 1986). Elsewhere in Malaya (and in Indonesia, for that matter), without Rockefeller interest, hookworm did not enjoy pre-eminent status as a public health problem.

The information about the campaign against hookworm, like that for other public health campaigns and health programs, is derived from official sources. Published documents are concerned primarily with recording the scope and success of the campaign; unpublished documents, while concerned with the mechanics of health work, have a similar perspective. These sources offer us no information about the way in which the people who were the subjects of the campaign — mainly Malay peasants and their children — felt about it. They are lost in the government telling, objectified and reduced as the statistics of examined stools; their history is still hidden. Were people willing participants in the hookworm campaign? If not, what kind of coercion was used to ensure their participation; how did they understand ankylostomiasis; what effect did they think that dosing would have; did they understand European pre-occupation with soil sanitation and latrines and how did they view the collection of stools and the counting of worms? If the people were bemused, perhaps amused, by apparent European fascination with excreta, we remain, again, still ignorant. And if there was resistance to the surveillance and control that was part of the hookworm campaign, we know nothing of it: the unused latrines are the only evidence of the lack of success of the educational side of the campaign. Like others, this episode in Malaysian social history is incomplete: the view from below — the underside of history — remains to be written.

10.
Malayan *Amok* and *Latah* as 'History Bound' Syndromes

ROBERT L. WINZELER

Observations about certain behavioural patterns thought to be characteristic of Malayan societies (including Javanese and other Western Indonesian peoples) are an important part of the European record of Southeast Asia. Knowledge about such patterns has strongly affected European attitudes toward Malayans over a long period of time. This has been especially true in the case of *amok*, about which Europeans have been writing for five centuries or more. Having entered the English language from Malay at least as early as the eighteenth century, the term *'amok'* is well known to mean a frenzied homicidal attack (Crawfurd, 1850; Yule and Burnell, 1886). *Amok*, as an element in Malay warfare practices, or as the outcome of an apparently sudden change in the behaviour of a friendly and peaceful acquaintance or trusted servant, came to epitomise the enigmatic and dangerous side of Malay nature. So one may read in European novels, stories and accounts of the Malayan world.

A second behavioural pattern has also affected European thought about Malays, though to a lesser extent and over a lesser period. This is *latah*, which is a 'hyper-startle' reaction occurring commonly in two forms. In one, a *latah* person upon being startled would exclaim a word or phrase, often a tabooed reference to the genitals, and sometimes strike out or throw an object held in the hand. In the other, the reaction to being startled or to some other form of provocation is a more or less complete, more or less prolonged, loss of control over verbal and behavioural actions. Lacking such control the *latah* person will follow commands given by others or imitate movements, utterances or sounds of another person or of some other external source. When adequately provoked a severely afflicted *latah* person would, it was observed, disrobe or eat faeces upon command, or sing a song in imitation of another person. As with *amok*, *latah* fascinated Europeans partly because it appeared to involve an inversion of usual Malay norms of behaviour which emphasised dignity, poise, reserve and the control of emotion. For this reason, once *latah* became known to Europeans in the latter part of

the nineteenth century, it was thought to be linked in some way with *amok* — a notion that still seems to survive.[1]

The literature on *amok* and *latah* raises various historical and historiographic issues, not the least of which is whether the two practices have undergone definite changes over time. Specifically, if it is possible or likely that the two patterns have changed, how much can be learned about such changes from the available sources? The question, moreover, is not merely whether incidences of *amok* and *latah* have declined over time. Rather it is whether *amok* and *latah* have undergone more complex patterns of change. Arguments that both *latah* and *amok* are, in effect, 'history bound' syndromes have been made by Teoh Jin-Inn (1972) and Westermeyer (1973) in regard to *amok*, and by H.B.M. Murphy (1973), in regard to both *amok* and *latah*. Such arguments, especially regarding *latah*, have also been rejected by other current analysts (Kenny, 1978, 1983; Simons, 1980, 1983a,b,c). This chapter discusses the arguments as to how and why *latah* and *amok* show a definite pattern of historical development, and evaluates the evidence on which those arguments rest.

AMOK

European accounts of *amok* go back many years, at least to the fifteenth century (Yule and Burnell, 1886). Indeed, it was a topic that few writers failed to mention in works on Malaya or the Indies. Marsden (1811: 211), Crawfurd (1820, I: 66-72), Raffles (1817, I: 250), Newbold (1839, II: 185-186), Vaughan (1857), Wallace (1869: 134), McNair (1878: 213-217), Swettenham (1896: 38-43), Clifford (1897: 79-95) and Wheeler (1928: 217-219), among others, all dealt with *amok* in popular accounts. Such accounts often included anecdotes about *amok* attacks, generally speculated about causes, sometimes discussed punishments, and commonly made observations about the frequency of *amok* in various regions.

The most famous case in British Malaya during the nineteenth

1. Both *latah* and *amok* are among the most famous instances of what anthropologists and transcultural psychiatrists call culture-bound syndromes — that is, behavioural aberrations with highly restricted distributions throughout the world (Yap Pow Meng, 1969). *Latah*, for example, occurs among various Malayan (Malays, Javanese, Iban) and other Southeast Asian peoples, including Thais, Burmese, and at least some Philippine groups. But it (or something very much like it) also occurs among the Ainu of Japan, a number of Central Asian peoples; the Lapps and, apparently, among a number of African groups (Yap Pow Meng, 1969; Aberle, 1952; Simons, 1980). The distribution of *amok* and *latah*, and hence the extent to which they are really 'culture-bound' patterns, is a matter of confusion and controversy (Geertz, 1968; Kenny, 1978, 1983; Simons, 1980, 1983a,b,c). This is not the problem with which I am presently concerned, though it is related to it.

century was that of Sunan, a Penang Malay who was captured alive after killing eight persons and quickly brought to trial before Judge William Norris in 1846. The issue of his mental state was raised at the trial, though not necessarily as a matter of insanity. It was noted that he had been grieving for his child who had died a short time before; and that Sunan himself claimed no memory of having attacked anyone; and further that the killing had been indiscriminate. Nonetheless, he was convicted, sentenced to be hanged and then to have his body 'cut into pieces and cast into the sea or into a ditch or scattered upon the ground'. A summary of the case, including the statement made by Judge Norris in sentencing Sunan, was published a few years later in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*. Both because of the severity of the sentence and of the remarks made by Norris in passing sentence, the case was often cited by later writers, several of whom quoted Norris at length.

About this time, efforts were being made, however, to analyse *amok* in psychiatric terms. In a report, the physician Oxley (1849) attempted to establish criteria by which *amok* cases could be judged with regard to sanity by legal authorities. At least some cases, he argued, involved temporary insanity due, almost always, to a severe physical malady. Such efforts were continued in papers published by Ellis (1893) and Gimlette (1901), both of whom were doctors who had dealt with *amok* cases. Ellis (1893) provided a very clear description of what came to be known as the 'classic' or 'true' *amok*.

> ... they remember that they were depressed, that they were upset, that they suffered from grief, in fact, that their affective nature was at fault. Many speak of having seen everything red, of having been giddy, or of their eyes having been turned inward, but then comes the blank. In a few hours to a few days after the *Amok* these afflicted individuals go back to their normal state, passing through a stage of sullenness and apathy, into which they are liable to relapse...

Gimlette (1901: 197), in turn, specified the symptoms of true *amok* as follows:

> (1) A sudden paroxysmal homicide in the male, with evident loss of self control; (2) a prodromal period of mental depression; (3) a fixed idea to persist in reckless homicide without any motive; and (4) a subsequent loss of memory for the acts committed at the time.

The descriptions and interpretations of *amok* that were written in the nineteenth century and in the earlier decades of the twentieth century dealt with what was believed to be a long-established pattern. It was assumed the pattern could be explained by certain traditional features of Malay (or Malayan) society and culture, having deep roots in the Malayan character. It was also thought that with modernisation *amok* would decline or die out, and that in some regions this, in fact, occurred.

Several papers written in 1970 and after argue that actual developments have been more complicated, that *amok* in some form has continued to occur, but that the pattern has changed. A paper by Westermeyer (1973: 874) on grenade *amok*s in Laos and Thailand, argues for their relevance to the *amok* pattern. He notes a change from the traditional use of bladed weapons to that of hand grenades as the means of attack. He also argues that *amok* violence is epidemic in nature; that it waxes and wanes over time in relation to various disturbing events or conditions and is spread from one population to another.

Another paper, by Teoh Jin-Inn (1972: 345) on Malaysia, also seeks to show that *amok*, which is defined as 'senselessly killing or injuring relatives or others', has not died out. Using the *Straits Times* as his source of data, Teoh found that a total of 189 *'amok'* attacks had taken place between 1935 and 1970, and that there had been a substantial increase during this time. From a review of the older literature he then argues that three changes have taken place since the nineteenth century. The first is that overall the frequency has declined — even though it increased over the period of his own study. The second is that the epidemiology has changed. While previously Chinese and Indians only rarely ran *amok*, it became very common for them to do so — more common, in fact, for the Chinese than for Malays. The third is that the causes of *amok* have altered. In the nineteenth century, physical illnesses were often reported to be the cause. By the turn of the century these were replaced by psychological maladies, such as *depression* and *insanity* (italics original) (Teoh Jin-Inn, 1972: 348-349).

The validity of the conclusions drawn by these two studies regarding historical changes, however, is affected by the criteria of *amok* used in each. In Westermeyer's study of the grenade *amok* the definition is so general and the criteria so inexact that it has little bearing on the Malayan problem. It is not clear whether the cases Westermeyer reports meet any of the criteria of *amok* set out by Gimlette. For example, the matter of amnesia is not discussed; nor is that of motive, except that it is apparent in several of the cases mentioned that the attack was prompted by an argument or was an act of deliberate hostility involving a clearly focused motive. Grenade attacks do not appear to be *amoks* at all in the classic Malayan sense.

This is also the problem with Teoh's study. He begins by asserting that in Malaysia: 'The recognition of *amok* is made by the public and the police alike, since the manifestations are so commonly known, and no one has any difficulty in recognising a case' (Teoh Jin-Inn, 1972: 345). He thus accepted anything that was reported as *amok* by the newspapers, which meant any apparently 'senseless' attack upon others. If he had adhered to more exact criteria, it is possible that he would not have found the changes which he reported.[2]

This brings us to Murphy's (1973) study, which is by far the most ambitious and comprehensive attempt yet made to trace and explain a pattern of change in the history of *amok* in the Malay world. Murphy seeks to trace a series of changes from the earliest period in the fifteenth century onward. For purposes of brevity, it is convenient to pick up the argument at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

At this time, Murphy (1973: 3) argues, the main cause of *amok* appears to have been social in nature, especially the loss of honour. However, within a few decades the main frustration had become somatic instead of social, 'disease instead of insult'. Further, identification with the act was denied, the impulse being attributed to the devil, which is symbolised by the characteristic of *mata gelap*,

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2. In fact, two slightly later reports of Malaysian *amok* indicate he would not. One of these is Carr and Tan Eng Kong's (1976: 1295-1396) study of 21 Malay and non-Malay men confined in a Malaysian mental hospital for reported *amok* attacks. On closer examination, they found that only ten met the classic criteria, and that all of these 'true *amoks*' were Malays. The other is Karl Schmidt's analysis of *amok* in Sarawak based records of both Malay and non-Malay reported *amoks* (Schmidt, Hill and Guthrie, 1977). His conclusion was also that none of the possible Chinese cases met the criteria. Although Chinese had attacked others in various psychotic states, there had been no narrowing of the perceptual field that is the rule in true *amok*, nor in some cases, had other classic features of *amok*, including amnesia or prodromal brooding been present (Schmidt, Hill and Guthrie, 1977: 273).

(which Murphy, 1973 interprets to mean fighting with the eyes closed, when in fact it almost certainly means not that, but amnesia).

A second change which took place at this time was a transient rise in the incidence of *amok*. Murphy (1973: 37) arrives at this latter conclusion in a way which is typical of his use of limited evidence:

> Since Oxley had less than ten years to make these observations, since the Singapore adult male Malay community at this time must have numbered fewer than 5,000, and since most *amok*-runners traditionally did not survive to be interrogated, we have for the first time the means of making a rough estimate of the incidence of the condition. It could not have been less than 1 per 1,000 adult males per annum, and might easily have been twice or thrice that number. Some twenty years later the famous naturalist Alfred Wallace states that in the port of Makassar in Celebes, 'there are said to be one or two a month on average, and five, ten or twenty persons are sometimes killed or wounded at one of them [Wallace, 1869: 273].' If we give Makassar a population of 20,000, which is not unlikely for that time, the resultant rate is similar, and there is no doubt that this frequency was causing much alarm... In the mid-19th Century, therefore, we have evidence for a rise in the incidence of the condition.

Murphy goes on to suggest that in the Straits Settlements at least, the rise in the incidence of *amok* in the first half of the nineteenth century was followed by a decline in the second half. In support of this assertion he quotes Swettenham's (1900: 253) turn-of-the-century observation that there had been 'not more than three real cases of *amok* in the last 15 years for the whole of the Straits Settlements, despite the marked increase in population there'.

Murphy, however, maintains also that during this period the nature of *amok* varied from one region to another. In areas that were remote from European settlement (and, therefore, European observation, which Murphy does not note), the practice was linked with slavery, warfare or politics, and could still be regarded as a form of suicide. In rural Java and Sumatra, where slavery had been suppressed, frustration continued to be a cause of *amok*, but the frustra-

tion arose within the family. On the other hand, in coastal regions where European settlement was extensive, while *amok* continued, it was coming to be caused by psychopathological factors rather than social ones, a change that was complete by the end of the century (Murphy, 1973: 38). By the 1920s Murphy feels the character had changed once again. For a while it appeared that there was a connection with malaria and syphilis, but by the 1930s the evidence suggests that *amok* had become due more to chronic pathologies, including schizophrenia or organic brain syndrome. Further, following the attack, the individual did not appear to recover his sanity as had been reported to be the case by earlier observers.

In a final concluding statement on the overall historical development of *amok*, Murphy (1973: 41) argues that it '... has shown a marked shift from being a consciously motivated form of behaviour to being a dissociation reaction and probably a further shift from a dissociative reaction in an otherwise sane individual to an episode in a course of a longer mental disorder'.

Murphy's purpose is not only to trace the pattern of development of *amok* but to explain it as well. The essence of his argument here is that the changes that have taken place in *amok* reflect the evolving pattern of influence by European colonial powers. In its original conscious form, *amok* was an approved form of social control which restricted the abuses of the power of the Malayan ruling sector. As such, it was supported by proverbs and tales of warriors and heroes. 'In tale after tale one reads of the courtier, the emissary, the debtor, the vassal, the slave threatening to run *amok* if traditional customs of fair dealing were abandoned by some superior, and the threat was no empty one' (Murphy, 1973: 48). Change occurred when it became apparent that less drastic forms of social control were available in European-dominated settlements, which made *amok* both unnecessary and repulsive. It was at this stage, Murphy suggests, that *amok* became a pathological syndrome rooted in sickness or domestic troubles that would have formerly been insufficient causes. It was at this stage as well that the act of *amok* became dissociated from consciousness.

Perhaps the first and most important point to be made about such an interpretation of *amok* is that it rests upon the assumption that the changes which are noted in the long record of European accounts represent 'real' changes in the nature and frequency of *amok*. Murphy does not accept everything that earlier observers wrote about *amok* at face value (the matter of the role of opium, for example), but he seems to accept a large part as a literal guide to what

occurred. The problem, however, is that the literature is limited and subject to significant bias. In order to understand the manner and extent to which this is the case it is useful to consider the record of existing information as consisting of several distinct, interrelated parts.

The first of these is the more or less factual descriptive accounts of actual *amok* attacks and of the disposition of the attackers. This part of the record is very meagre in that it may be safely assumed only a small portion of *amok* attacks in previous periods were actually noted in written accounts. Before the present century the total number of such accounts was probably not more than several dozen, of which only a fraction were cases which involved the capture and interrogation of the attacker. Nor can we be certain that the relatively few surviving *pengamok* were typical of the larger number who did not survive. Perhaps the surviving ones were, for whatever reason, less frenzied or determined not to be taken alive than those who were in fact killed directly.

The second part of the record is the Malayan cultural view of *amok*, including its nature and causes. This part of the record is even more incomplete. Murphy makes reference to the concept of *amok* presented in traditional Malay literature and proverbs, though without regard to provenance or period, as deliberate and heroic. In the mid-nineteenth century, based upon his substantial knowledge of Malay language and literature, Crawfurd (1850: 185) offered much the same view, which continued to be extensively cited until the beginning of the twentieth century. On the other hand, we have the very recent and convincing observation of Carr and Tan Eng Kong (1976: 1296) that among present-day Malay policemen and medical personnel *amok* is regarded as a form of insanity, from which they then derive the more general conclusion that this constitutes the 'Malay cultural view'. But for the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the present, there is little or nothing in the form of direct, convincing evidence of how Malays, Javanese, Bugis or other Malayan peoples themselves regarded *amok*.

This brings us to the last and by far the most heavily-relied upon part of the record, which comprises observations, generalisations, and conclusions offered over the centuries by Europeans on the nature, causes and frequency of *amok*. This is much more substantial than the other parts, though it is hardly complete. Murphy (1973: 36) himself asserts that little of note was written about *amok* in the

eighteenth century. Nonetheless, the major problem here is not so much the amount of information but its quality or reliability.

In evaluating the reliability of European writings on *amok* — especially regarding the matter of frequency — it needs to be kept in mind that *amok* was a political issue and not merely a matter of medical and legal interest or of ethnological curiosity. Observations about the cause and frequency of *amok* tended to focus not only upon its Malayan character, but also upon its social, political and religious context, about which Europeans tended to have well-developed, sometimes highly emotional, and often negative views.

This is most clearly illustrated in the controversy surrounding the famous care of Sunan, the Malay who was tried and sentenced to be hanged and then dismembered, all within a few days of having gone *amok* in Penang in 1846. The controversy included the publication of the text of the sentence, along with a critical editorial article by Logan (1849a,b) in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia* in 1849, both of which continued to be discussed or alluded to in articles on *amok* for the next half-century (Ellis, 1893: 327-330; Swettenham, 1900: 240-245). Judge Norris (1849: 460-462) stated in sentencing that the harsh punishment was warranted, not only by the atrocity of the crime, but also by his observation that incidents of *amok* were *'very common'* and they were *'Mahommedan crimes'*. It was, therefore, necessary to set an example, especially to other 'Mahommedans'. Logan's (1849a: 463-467) critique was liberal and humane, but it was in its own way equally political. After initially referring to both the intemperate rapidity with which the trial and execution had been carried out, he quickly turned to his own solution to the problem of *amok*. This was to persuade the Malays to give up carrying weapons, and to eradicate piracy, which had led to both a callousness about human life and a need to carry weapons everywhere. If, therefore, measures were taken to get the Malay rulers to stop supporting piracy and to deal directly with it by military action, then *amok* would become a rare occurrence.

The politicising of the matter of *amok*, however, had both begun well before the trial of Sunan and involved issues other than piracy and Islam. Indeed, it was linked in one way or another by various observers to most of the favourite social and political issues of the time, including opium, slavery, and oppression. For example, in his *History of Sumatra*, Marsden (1811: 820) asserted that *amok* was rare on the West Coast of Sumatra (not above once in two or three years), but very common in Java, and that it was remarkable that while perpetrators of *amok* captured alive were tortured to the utmost ex-

tent in Batavia (Java), they were humanely and expeditiously executed in Bencoolen (in Sumatra). This theme was continued by Raffles (1817, I: 250), who argued more emphatically that it was Dutch oppression, especially of native slaves, which caused the high incidence of *amok* in Java. The counterpart to the argument that *amok* was very common where Dutch policies (or traditional Malay piracy or political conditions) prevailed was that where British law and order and civilising influences had been adequately established, *amok* was becoming, or had become, rare. The point here is not that such claims should be regarded as worthless, it is rather that in the absence of any sort of factual evidence, it is difficult to know how much of them to discount.

LATAH

The literature on *latah* is of much more recent origin than that of *amok* (see Winzeler, 1984, for a detailed review). Insofar as European accounts are concerned, the earliest known appears in a report by J.R. Logan published in 1849, and it is an unlikely instance. *Latah* had, however, become known to Europeans by the 1860s when it was clearly identified by van Leent (1867) in Jakarta. By the 1880s, references to *latah* and descriptions of it in both Malaya and Java were common. For Java, the naturalist Henry Forbes (1885: 69) provided descriptive and analytical notes on 'that curious cerebral affection called by the natives *latah*'. He reported that it was confined chiefly to women, but that he had also seen a man affected, and that it was caused by shock or excitement. It involved a loss of control of will, an imitation of whatever was seen or heard at the time, and the calling out of the name of the thing that excited the reaction: 'Heh-in-heh, matjan!' (tiger), *'burong besar'* (great bird) ... he did not, however, mention obscene outbursts. Forbes found that *latah* was fairly common, at least among the Javanese with whom he had contact: his own *'boy'* (italics original) became *latah* at the sight of a caterpillar, as did his host's maid when she unexpectedly met a large lizard. As was common among European observers over the next several decades, Forbes provided anecdotal material on *latah* attacks which he instigated. For example, in one instance he provoked a servant into eating a piece of soap, and in another he caused the same person to tear off her clothes by flicking a caterpillar onto her dress.

For Malaya, on the other hand, O'Brien's reports (1883: 148-151) are the most comprehensive and those most extensively cited by

later writers. O'Brien identified many of the basic features of *latah* and attempted a classification of subtypes, an enduring preoccupation of *latah* scholars. He noted that it was more common among women than men but rare among younger women. Then he described and illustrated a number of classes of *latah*, the most vivid of which concerned a Malay man he had seen standing on a river bank as he (O'Brien) put off downstream in a boat. When he waved the man waved back and continued to do so, and when he whistled a tune, the man did this also. O'Brien's Malay companions then remarked that the man was very *latah*.

In addition to the early European accounts, however, at least several references to *latah* have been found in Malay literature, (one cited by Wilkinson [1901, II: 60] in the first edition of his dictionary) indicating that the term at least is almost certainly older than the first known European report of the pattern. Murphy (1973: 43) has argued that such references do not necessarily mean that the full behavioural pattern of *latah* was present in earlier periods, and that the earliest known European descriptions constitute an accurate indication of the beginning of *latah* in the Malay world. This claim has been challenged by Kenny (1978: 213), who suggests that Europeans might have simply found it unremarkable in the period before medical psychology had developed.

For my own part, I find this possibility unlikely for several reasons. While *latah* is not as dramatic as *amok*, and while it is certainly less dangerous, it is nonetheless a behavioural pattern which is not likely to have been overlooked or found unremarkable if it had been witnessed. For certain other areas of the world, records of *latah*-like reactions were made in earlier periods — as early as the seventeenth century for the Scandinavian Lapps and as early as the eighteenth century for various Siberian tribal peoples.[3] Further, Europeans had long been describing Malay behavioural patterns and temperament, which were regarded as unique within Asia. Descriptions of Malay character were standard in European accounts of the Malay world from Marsden's (1811) *History of Sumatra* onward. That Marsden, Crawfurd, Raffles, Newbold, Logan, Vaughan and others did not take note of *latah* suggests that it did not occur widely before the middle of the nineteenth century. I find this possibility to be the most interesting facet of the history of *latah*. However, even if it is so, explaining it is a different matter.

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3. See Collinder's (1949: 222-223) review of Tornaeus' 1648 *Manuale Lapponicum* and Czaplicka's (1914: 313-314) discussion of Pallas' 1788 account of various Siberian peoples.

It is Murphy's (1976: 11-12) contention that the development of *latah* in the Malayan world from the middle of the last century to the present has had the characteristics of an epidemic disease (see also Murphy, 1973). From the existing accounts, both medical and other, he infers many things. One is that *latah* had definite points of origin in centres of European power and influence. That it spread from these centres to more traditional rural populations in more remote areas, by which time it had begun to decline in the regions where it had begun. Another is that while its symptoms remained relatively stable, *latah* underwent other epidemilogical changes of the sort that often mark the history of contagious diseases. In Java it began and remained a female disorder, but in Malaya it changed from being equally a male and female disorder in the nineteenth century to being a mainly female one in the twentieth century. There was also a change in the status of the persons who were prone to become *latah*. In the early period, educated and higher-class individuals were as prone as were those of lower orders, and *latah* persons were apt to be intellectually superior. In later periods, however, *latah* became most typical of lower status, less intelligent persons, especially household servants.[4]

The argument Murphy (1973: 48) offers to account for this pattern of development is as follows: Although the changes undergone are similar to those of an infectious disease, there is no evidence of a disease organism or other physical cause. The causes rather are social and psychological, and related specifically to the development of the relationship between Europeans and native Malayans. When *latah* first began there was no prior model of conscious behaviour that was really similar. But there was a widespread tradition of children submitting themselves to a 'dissociated hyper-suggestibility state' for the amusement of others (Murphy, 1973: 48). So hyper-suggestibility, an essential dimension of *latah*, was already present. This tendency was reinforced when Europeans began to become dominant figures in the Malayan world. The Malayans were best able to cope with this new relationship by attempting to learn from Europeans by rote and to imitate them, (which is why, Murphy suggests, Europeans preferred Malays or Javanese as servants and companions to Chinese or Indians, even though the latter were harder working). *Latah*, therefore, represents

4. The present discussion concerns Murphy's explanation of the changes he sees in the *latah* pattern, not of the overall causes of *latah*, which he argues in his 1976 paper, are multiple.

a pathological over-development of the Malayan tendency to hyper-suggestibility, to rote-learning and to imitation of those regarded as superiors. It became pathological because the need to learn new customs quickly became oppressive and created resentment which was expressed in the *latah* person's use of obscene words (Murphy, 1973: 49).

It is here, in Murphy's view, that the causes of *latah* become intertwined with those of one phase of *amok*. In the mid-nineteenth century pressure to adapt, frustration, and resentment, all of which derived from the intensification of European colonial domination, led to both the increase in *amok* evident at this time and to the onset of *latah*. As Malayans became more successful at adapting to the European influence in realistic terms, *latah*, like *amok*, began to decline in these centres. Murphy (1973: 51) also thus relates *latah* to other common native reactions, such as Melanesian cargo cults. Both are linked to European domination and rapid social change, and both go through a definite cycle of development.

Murphy's general interpretation of *latah* is a matter of controversy. It has been challenged both by Simons (1980, 1983a,b,c) and by Kenny (1978, 1983) who has, like Murphy, used existing accounts to construct a very different interpretation of *latah*. Both Simons and Kenny, who are themselves in strong disagreement with one another about *latah*, appear to favour what might be called a 'traditional' position, in opposition to Murphy's 'transitional' one.[5] For my own part I have various questions about Murphy's interpretation, but wish to point out that, as with *amok*, the existing literature on *latah* is severely limited in terms of the sort of plausible inferences that can be drawn from it. The nineteenth century accounts of *latah* do not reflect the kinds of bias that were present in the earlier accounts of *amok*. Most notably *latah* was neither a political nor a medico-legal matter. The British did not regard *latah* as having anything to do with Islam, opium, Dutch cruelty, Malay piracy or the oppression of traditional Malay political regimes or class systems, which they, at one time or another, had thought caused *amok*, and which may well have led to distortions in estimates of its frequency in areas which they did not control. Nor are there comparable problems of definition or conceptualisation with

5. That is both — though Kenny more than Simons — interpret *latah* in terms of cultural (Kenny) or social (Simons) forces which are inherent rather than a consequence of change. Murphy (1976, 1982, 1983) himself does not exclude inherent or traditional factors, especially in his later discussions.

latah and *amok*. The criteria by which both Malays and outside observers distinguished *latah* are relatively obvious and easily observed, unlike the case of *amok*, for which the criteria include motive and interior mental states.

On the other hand, there are other substantial problems, especially concerning generalisations about the frequency of *latah* among different Malayan groups, among different classes, and among men as opposed to women. It seems obvious that the sources of information which earlier individuals who wrote about *latah* had at their disposal were very limited. Yet this has not deterred later analysts from using their assertions as accurate evidence. To take one example, both Murphy and one of his critics (Kenny) accept the observation made by Swettenham at the turn of the century that *latah* was especially characteristic of the Ambonese. How did Swettenham (1900: 66, 68-69) know that the Ambonese were especially prone to *latah*? All that he said was that two of his policemen who were both *latah* were also from Ambon!

Let us take the far more important and frequent assertion that *latah* was especially common among servants. It is, of course, possible that this was the case, but it is even more likely that Europeans were simply more apt to have become aware of *latah* among servants than among the general population. More generally, virtually everything that was said about the incidence of *latah* among various groups or categories is suspect on such grounds (see Winzeler, 1984, for a more detailed account).

It was presumably this problem which prompted van Loon (1924: 308-310) in the early 1920s to attempt the only sort of survey of the distribution of *latah* carried out prior to the 1960s, when one was done in Sarawak by Karl Schmidt (Schmidt, Hill and Guthrie, 1977). Yet van Loon's survey, which involved circulating a questionnaire to 600 European-trained doctors throughout the Netherland's Indies, is more noteworthy for the effort it made than for the results it obtained. These results, which Murphy cites, included finding that *latah* was much more common among town-dwelling Indonesians than among rural villagers, and much more common among Javanese than among other ethnic groups. No allowance was made for the great likelihood that fewer rural people than town dwellers would have ever visited European-trained doctors, that must European doctors would have lived in towns and hence had less general knowledge of rural areas, or that there were far more European-trained doctors (as well as far more people), in Java than elsewhere (van Loon, 1924: 308-310; Winzeler, 1984: 89-90).

Then there is the matter of the relative frequency of *latah* among men and women, which is an important element both in Murphy's and other explanations of *latah*. Murphy's (1973: 45-46) argument is that in the nineteenth century, Malayan men were as apt to have been *latah* as women, and that only subsequently did it become an affliction of women. Perhaps, but I would not feel confident in drawing such inferences from the existing sources. It is true that the individual instances of *latah* which were discussed in the nineteenth century, accounts of O'Brien (1883), Swettenham (1900 orig. 1896) and Clifford (1898) were all male. But it should be kept in mind that such men, who were among the pioneer empire builders of Malaya, were probably much more exposed to Malay males than females. They were surrounded by male household servants, bearers, boatmen and policemen, and it was among the ranks of these men that instances of *latah* were seen.

And if the nineteenth century accounts of *latah* in Malaya probably over-emphasised the proportion of *latah* men, the twentieth century ones may have done the opposite. The latter accounts, unlike those of the late nineteenth century, were written mainly by medical doctors, whose *latah* cases seem to have been patients as well as household servants, many of whom in both cases were likely to have been women. It is thus possible that once the Clifford-Swettenham male servant-companion phase of British colonial administration was past, Malay male *latah* became less visible to Europeans. If my own field-research experience concerning *latah* in Kelantan can be generalised to earlier times and places, this was so. In contemporary Kelantan at least, *latah* clearly carries more stigma for a man than a woman. Men, therefore, make more effort to suppress *latah* than do women. They are less willing to talk about their own *latah* and they are less apt to be provoked or teased by people around them than are women. In any case, certainly no one in the past would have possessed specific information on the sex ratio of *latah* in Malaya. Nor did anyone claim to be offering more than impressions or generalisations.

CONCLUSION

From the record so far the possibility that either *amok* or *latah* has undergone a definite, complex pattern of change remains a matter of speculation. Neither an anthropologist nor a historian is likely to deny that some such set of changes could have taken place. After all, much has altered in the Malay world over the past 100 years in

particular, and it would be surprising if there were no psychopathological consequences. The problem is how to demonstrate plausibly and explain a specific pattern of development. So far the studies that have sought to do so deserve more credit for addressing the issue and provoking interest in it than for providing a convincing demonstration of what really occurred and why.

This raises the question of what new lines of inquiry might be pursued. In regard to *latah*, I have been engaged in anthropological fieldwork in Kelantan and Sarawak which is focused on whether the phenomenon is more characteristic of 'traditional rural' populations or of 'marginal-urban' ones. Yet, I doubt that a great deal can really be learned about past changes through anthropological fieldwork. Nor is there probably much more to be learned from earlier written sources, at least regarding *latah* in Malaysia. *Latah* was not, for example, a *legal* or *judicial* issue except in those apparently rare instances in which a *latah* person injured another upon being startled. Nor was it a focus of medical record keeping. It was not, except rarely, something from which a person (accidentally) died; and it was not really defined by either Malayan culture or Western medicine as a treatable affliction. It is possible that more can be learned about the existence of *latah* before the latter part of the nineteenth century, especially from Dutch sources, and perhaps also from Malayan texts.

With regard to *amok*, on the other hand, it is likely that there is much more to be found and used. Court and administrative records, which do not appear to have been studied, are likely sources for the periods in which they were available. Much more use could be made of Malay *hikayat* and other such indigenous texts of varying age and region to determine whether or how indigenous views of *amok* have changed over time. So far as recent studies are concerned, the history of *amok* and *latah* has attracted the attention of psychiatrists and anthropologists. A historian wanting to search and analyse both European records and native texts could probably make a considerable contribution. The present chapter might be best regarded as a suggestion that this be attempted.

GLOSSARY

Bagi dua	A system of sharing land. Although it literally implies a division of costs, profits and losses on an equal share basis between owner and farmer it may, in practice, involve other arrangements.
Bendang	Wet rice field
Changkul	Hoe or heavy mattock used for digging
Cupak (*or Chupak*)	1.14 litres (i.e. 1 quart)
Dhall (*or Dhal*)	Indian pulse (i.e. split peas or lentils)
Dhoby (*Hindi*)	Term for laundry
Gantang	4.55 litres (i.e. 1 gallon)
Gharry (*or gari*) (*Hindi*)	A small, horse-drawn carriage that plied for hire; it was also referred to as 'hackney'
Gram	Chick-pea (A kind of pulse used for horses)
Jawi (*Malay*)	Malay language written in Perso-Arabic script (also used in Mecca to refer to those from Malay-Indonesian archipelago)
Jinrikisha (*Japanese*)	A small lightweight, two-wheeled vehicle with a removable hood which can be pulled by one man and can carry one or two passengers (*jin* = man; *riki* = power; and *sha* = carriage)
Kampung (*or Kampong*) (*Malay*)	A village or a compound of houses usually under the control of an important official
Kangany (*or Kagani*) (*Tamil*)	Indian labour recruiter; also refers to foreman or labourer of some standing
Karayuki-san (*Japanese*)	A term that literally means a person going abroad. Initially, it was applied to the people of northern Kyushu who went overseas to work. Eventually, it was used primarily to refer to girls who were sold abroad to work in the brothels of Southeast Asia.
Kati (*Malayo-Japanese*)	A measure of weight which has varied over time and between places but which is now fixed at 604.8 grams (1.3 lbs)
Khadies	Literally, hand-spun cotton used for handwoven cotton cloth

Kongsi (*Hokkien, Hakka, Teochiu*)	Chinese partnership or association of any kind. Primarily used to refer to Chinese guild or secret Cantonese societies, but also used to describe a syndicate
Kun	Depot or station
Ladang (*Malay*)	Term for tall coarse grass but used as a regional word for hoe or digging stick agriculture in which the occupancy of the land for crop production is interrupted by lengthy rest periods and is allowed to revert to secondary forest
Merdeka (*Malay*)	Freedom, or independence
Mandore	The term for a supervisor or foreman (presumably of Indian origin)
Mukim (*Malay*)	Administrative district around a common mosque; territorial subdivision
Nanshin (*Japanese*)	Southward advance or direction
Padi	Wet rice agriculture; the term also refers to rice as a plant, in the ear and as unhusked grain
Pikul (*Malay*)	A measure of weight, about 60.5 kilograms (133.3lbs); it also represents 100 *katis* (see *kati*)
Peon	A 'native constable' (a term of Indian origin); also applied to office-messenger or attendant
Ragi	A staple food grain in South India used as leaven or yeast
Sawah	An embanked rice field in which water, derived from either natural precipitation or a supplementary source, is impounded; it is the key to permanent cultivation in humid tropical environments
Singkeh (*or Sinkeh*) (*Hokkien, Teochiu*)	Literally a 'new man'; a recent Chinese immigrant
Syce (*Hindi*)	A groom, rider or hack-gharry driver (see *gharry*)
Toddy (*Hindi*)	An intoxicating beverage made from various species of palm
Towkay (*Hokkien*)	Head of family or business; used colloquially to refer to owner of property, business or wealth

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