Chinese family business networks in the making of a Malay state: Kedah and the region c. 1882-1941

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Chapter 1
Settings

In this chapter, two essential elements—people and place—will be set in their wider contexts. Firstly, the Chinese community will be located in no less than three geographical settings: South China, Southeast Asia, and Kedah; and secondly, Kedah will be placed in the framework of its regional interaction with the surrounding powers. A structural overview rather than a detailed description has been opted for, as it is believed to be the most functional here.

1 The Chinese Community

The Chinese community in Southeast Asia has always been dynamic rather than static, involving the different worlds of the hometowns and of the host societies. Therefore, a combined characterization of the Chinese community in these worlds is essential to achieve a better understanding of the dynamics of this Southeast Asian minority.

South China: qiaoxiang

Overwhelmingly, Southeast Asian Chinese, or Nanyang Chinese as people usually call them, have come from the coastal provinces of southern China, with Fukien and Kwangtung being the most famous qiaoxiang or "hometowns" of the overseas Chinese.¹ In the period when most Chinese emigrated to Southeast Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the economic structure of the qiaoxiang was essentially agrarian, and Chinese immigrants were predominantly peasants. Any history of Southeast Asian Chinese must consider the integral process of China's, especially South China's, interaction with the countries to its south. This historical process can be clearly reconstructed from the third century before the Christian era to World War Two.²

Two geo-economic factors account for the formation of the qiaoxiang according to a classic sociological survey conducted in the 1930s. The first of these was geomorphological. The largely mountainous terrain which isolates eastern Kwangtung and southern Fukien from Central China, limiting the area of cultivable land, compelled people to make their living in ways other than by farming what Nature had taken with one hand, she gave back with another. Ready access to the sea compensated for the weak interaction with Central China and encouraged many people to engage in mercantile activities and fishing. This combination of factors shaped the most important socio-economic linkage with Southeast Asia.³ Powerful though they were, the reasons for migration were not all purely economic. Economic elements there assuredly were in the form of population pressure, poverty, starvation, and natural

¹ Nanyang literally means the South Seas.
disasters and the like. This pressure was rooted in the general economic framework of the Fukien and Kwangtung qiaoxiang which was characterized by a complex of agricultural and commercial institutions, as described by Freedman. While in Fukien and Kwangtung irrigated rice-fields were the most common form of agriculture and rice the staple food, this rice cultivation was not uniformly important in the regional economy. The rural areas around the coastal port cities of Canton, Swatow, Amoy, and Fuzhou particularly were greatly influenced by a flourishing foreign trade, which served to tie the Fukien and Kwangtung peasantry to the greater economic world.\(^4\) This economic element strengthened a motivation to migrate which was inherent in the superstitions of the local people. Whenever there was a disaster or a socio-economic problem, such as sickness, a lack of sons, or some other kind of misfortune, the peasantry concluded that their geomancy must be wrong. This belief led individual men, families, or even whole villages to go off to seek a living elsewhere. The upshot was that "migration has been a constant feature of Southern Chinese society", as Freedman argues.\(^5\)

The non-economic elements refer mainly to war and the subsequent flow of political refugees which this upheaval causes. Apart from war, it has to be said that the "pushing" force in South China, was counterbalanced by a "pulling" force in Southeast Asia where sparsely populated countries were waiting to be developed. This attraction of new lands to settle increased with commercial contact, going ahead by leaps and bounds when the great socio-economic transformation of the area began under European global colonial capitalism. This required a large labour force and so there were hopes of making a fortune there for the poor peasantry.\(^6\) Most historians would agree that these were three indispensable elements which affected this process.

Hueidang(triads), "pirates", and coolie labour were the most important factors shaping the circumstances of both Chinese migration and the rise of the new Chinese wealthy class, as one pioneering Nanyang Chinese historian Wen Xiong-fei has cogently argued.

Hueidang, in its narrowest sense, refers to the triads or secret societies. More generally, the term refers to political refugees, particularly those forced into exile after the large-scale failed rebellions. There were four main rebellions or major political disruptions in Chinese history: Huang Chao rebellion (878-884) during the Tang dynasty (618-907); the Mongolian invasion of Central China (1279-1368); the Manchurian take over of the Ming regime (1644-1912); and the Taiping rebellion (1851-1864). The aftermath of each these four events was characterized by hordes of refugees, many of whom sought a new future in Southeast Asia.

"Pirates" and "piracy" are vexed issues which are far from clear-cut. Chinese government issued an edict prohibiting overseas trade and migration in the Ming dynasty. Official trade


\(^5\) Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung*, The Athlone Press, University of London, 1966, p.12. However, Freedman failed to formulate his explanation in more detail. His economic discussion seems particularly to have been weakened by his great concern with the family, kinship, and lineage. However, this is compensated by Chen Ta’s discussion of the socio-economic situations of both non-emigrant community and emigrant community. See Chen Ta, 1940, chapter IV, pp.58-85.

came to a halt and officially no one was allowed to go abroad. Hence trade between the Chinese coast and Southeast Asia was dominated by what are loosely termed "pirates". Thwarted in their efforts to make a living, the Southeast Chinese coastal merchants joined Japanese pirates in resisting the government’s supposedly water-tight ban on overseas trade. Two types of "pirates" can be identified: one type was based on Taiwan, raiding the Fukien and Zhejian coasts, and spreading out over the Philippines, Sulu, and Northeast Borneo; the other was based in Southeast Asia, raiding the Fukien and Kwangtung coasts, and spreading their operations over Hong Kong, Annam, the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, and Siam. These "pirates" were very important carriers of the linkage between China and Southeast Asia.

The third important factor in Chinese expansion into Southeast Asia was coolie labour, which supplied a crying need for manpower to develop underpopulated areas. Having orchestrated two Opium Wars (1840-42, 1858-60), the Western powers forced the Ching government to open several of the most important coastal ports to foreign trade and to follow a free migration policy. This marked the beginning of the large-scale influx of coolie labour into Southeast Asia. Even more importantly, according to Wen, this coolie trade witnessed a very interesting transformation in the roles of the *hueidang* and "pirates". The "pirates" became the *towkays* and headmen of secret societies, while "piracy" was transformed into coolie trade as well as other agricultural and mining enterprises. The coolie trade served a dual, self-reinforcing purpose. It provided important sources of capital accumulation, and the essential labour forces required to give impetus to this economic development. The secret societies provided effective socio-economic organization and political control.\(^7\)

It is the specific combination of economic role and large-scale immigration that characterizes Nanyang Chinese history and colours China’s relationship with Southeast Asia. Carl Trocki treats the history of the Nanyang Chinese mainly as a modern process of socio-economic interaction through substantial trading and migration from the early seventeenth century. This process was greatly promoted by the European colonial commercial expansion and capitalist development in Southeast Asia. Basing himself on studies by Cushman (1975), Wang (1979), and Ng (1983), Trocki characterizes three outstanding trends in his periodization, the Chinese junk trade, the coolie trade, and Chinese interaction with the European colonial systems. Accordingly Trocki sets out five periods of Nanyang Chinese history: the first three periods (1630-1830) began with the growth of the Xiamen (Amoy) trading networks, and covered the establishment of the *kongsi* settlements and growth of junk trade throughout Southeast Asia. The other two periods (1830-1910) signalled the decline of the junk trade and the absorption of Chinese coolies, and finished with the disempowerment of popular Chinese socio-economic structures and with their integration into the global colonial capitalist system.\(^8\)

It was during the last two periods (1830-1910) of Trocki’s division that our Chinese actors and their ancestors emigrated to Southeast Asia. Our Penang-Kedah Chinese community’s homeland was mainly either in southern Fukien, centred on Amoy, or in eastern Kwangtung, centred on Swatow. This corresponds generally to the region of emigrant communities which

\(^7\) Wen Xiong-fei, 1929, pp.34-231. For the discussion of Chinese coolie traffic in British Malaya, see also Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire*, 1923, pp.1-25.

\(^8\) Trocki, 1990, pp.30-35.
Chen Ta covered in his survey. It includes the long strip of territory commencing at Chao An (formerly Chao Chou), passing through Swatow, on the Kwangtung border, and through Amoy, and terminating at Chuan Chou in southern Fukien. Chen selected three emigrant areas for his intensive investigation, of which two, X (northeast of Amoy) and Y (the sea coast of San Du, Hai Chen), are closely connected to the Chinese community which is the subject of this thesis. Physically, our core Chinese community can be identified with two villages in Anqi county (represented in this thesis by Phual Hin Leong, Lim Boon Har); several villages at Lim Dong (Lim Leng Cheak), Xiayang (Choong Cheng Kean), and Xinlin (Tan Ah Yu, Chong Sin Yew) around Amoy; and a small village around Swatow in Kwangtung (Lim Lean Teng).

**Southeast Asia: general context**

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

In economic terms, an unprecedented socio-economic development, based on cash-crop planting and tin mining activities, was taking place in parts of Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century. In this process, the Chinese as immigrants had no access to land. They were transformed into urban, commercially oriented men, or into miners and planters, who were a world away from the original cultivators they had been in the agrarian rural village societies in China. They were generally divided into two major groups of "Shang" (the merchant class) and "Kung" (the working class), while British-Malay officialdom formed "Shih" (the scholar-officials) and the Malay peasantry were the "Nung" (peasants), to borrow from Wang Gungwu. This was a time in which the colonial establishments were trying to transform the indigenous institutions. A colonial framework was in the making, riven with conflicts and accommodations between Western colonialism and indigenous regimes. With respect to the Chinese, the process involved the fundamental issue of how the economic "Shang" and "Kung" classes of the immigrants could be incorporated into the framework of the political colonial and indigenous "Shih" class. It was actually an issue of how to manage these large immigrant Chinese communities politically. In order to gain a long-term perspective on how this immigrant society functioned in Southeast Asia under these circumstances, I summarize below the patterns of their socio-economic and political organizations and structures.

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9 Chen Ta, 1940, p.6.

10 Wang Gungwu, "Traditional Leadership in a New Nation: The Chinese in Malaya and Singapore", in Wang Gungwu, 1992, pp.236-50. However, Yen Ching-hwang set out a modified three-class paradigm i.e. "Shang", "Shih" (educated elite), and "Kung". The middle "Shih" class consisted of clerks in foreign firms, junior government officers, interpreters, school teachers, and professionals. Yen further subdivided the "Shang" class into capitalists and general merchants and the "Kung" class into artisans and general workers. Therefore, the class structure of the overseas Chinese could be described that "At the apex of the class hierarchy in the overseas Chinese society of this period was a small group of 'capitalists', and in descending order were a large group of general merchants, a small middle class, a small group of 'artisans' and a large group of general workers". See Yen Ching-hwang, Class Structure and Social Mobility in the Chinese Community in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911, pp.1-24, working paper No.10, Centre for Asian Studies, University of Adelaide, 1983.
Social organization and leadership: three typical institutions formed the main social organizations and leadership of the Chinese communities, namely: the kapitan system; the secret societies; and the kongsi system.

Chinese kapitan system was a "legitimate" Chinese communal headmen system recognized in the Portuguese, Dutch, and English colonial settlements as well as in the Malay states. The kapitans, who were men of power and wealth, were officially vested with certain executive, administrative, and even judicial powers within their own communities. It was essentially an intermediary system; a link between the immigrant Chinese communities and the colonial and indigenous authorities, a product of the indirect rule which most authorities found easiest to maintain. Its origin, duration, and structure varied in different places in Southeast Asia. The first Chinese kapitan was appointed in Portuguese Malacca in 1511 and one took office in Dutch Batavia in 1619. In the Netherlands Indies, a hierarchical structure evolved around the Chinese kapitan system: ranking below the kapitan there were majors, lieutenants, and even sergeants. This practice persisted to the end of the nineteenth century throughout most of Southeast Asia, and was still extant at the beginning of the twentieth century in some Malay states like Kedah.\(^{11}\)

Running parallel with the "legitimate" Chinese kapitan system were the so-called "secret societies", an overall term encompassing all putatively "illicit" Chinese organizations in Southeast Asia. Two outstanding features of such organizations were the "secret" and the "coercive" based on a highly ritual "hui" (namely the triads or societies). Inextricably related to the two grand structural elements of immigrant identity and Southeast Asian transition, Chinese secret societies are the predominant socio-historical phenomenon in Southeast Asia. They were forms of internal Chinese government in larger local Southeast Asian settings. For this reason, secret societies are not treated here as disparate elements on their own, or as "criminal gangs", "primitive rebels", or "mutual aid" societies with particular ritual and brotherhood ties in relation to national politics. Instead, they will be revealed as functioning as new creations of Chinese internal political form, co-existing alongside the colonial and indigenous states, and part of a historical process in line with Southeast Asian political development.\(^{12}\)


The word *kongsi* is used loosely by colonial governments to mean any association of the Chinese, ranging from a business partnership to governments in West Borneo, secret societies, and clan associations. Turning to the Chinese interpretation of the word, Wang Tai Peng’s defines *kongsi* as a form of open government in the early modern Southeast Asia Chinese societies of the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, based on extended partnerships and brotherhoods. This characterizes two important economic and political functions of the *kongsi*, in comparison to either the *kapitan* system or the secret societies.¹³

These social organizations provided overlapping, complementary but differentiated forms of leadership for immigrants in the host societies. The *kapitan* system was an official and legitimate institution representing the community to the colonial and local government and other communities. In contrast, the secret societies were hidden autonomous governments to guide immigrants within their own community and were based on different kinship, clanship, and dialect brotherhood ties. The *kongsi* system created a public office, open government, and economic entities founded on extended partnerships and brotherhoods. The *kapitan* could also be the headman of a secret society or of a *kongsi*. But the headmen of the secret societies or *kongsi* would not necessarily be the *kapitan*. The *kapitan* system was an ineffective control mechanism riddled with inherent weaknesses, owing to clan and dialect heterogeneity; the solution to shoring up this weakness was provided by the secret societies. The *kongsi* could also be the headquarters of the secret societies or the *kapitan*. The headmen of all three institutions were closely involved in their social groups and were actually the key actors in economic and commercial life. The wealthy *towkays* had no choice but to work through these institutions in the stage prior to the closing years of the nineteenth century, when these institutions were dominant. The *kapitan* was officially abolished in the Straits Settlements in 1825. Its decline in British Malaya corresponded to the rising fortunes of the secret societies. As the government was aware of their vital role, these secret societies were tolerated by the British colonial government until 1869. In 1877, a British officer, the first Protector of Chinese, was appointed on behalf of government and his responsibility was to deal with Chinese issues. The secret societies were officially banned in 1890. This transposition coincided with the change in function of the Chinese *kongsi* at the end of the nineteenth century when they were transformed from being an autonomous political organization into socio-cultural *hui-kuan*, a public place for cultivating cultural and emotional, nostalgic ties. Both changes were incontrovertibly related to the increasing impact of the Western political establishment.

(2) **Dynamics:** Behind the *kapitan* system, secret societies, and *kongsi* loomed the important *towkays* whose wealth supported and maintained the power of these institutions. The wealthy *towkays* were revenue farmers, tin-miners, plantation proprietors, and shop-keepers. Prior to the late nineteenth century, wealthy *towkays* were also the headmen of the these three main control institutions. Towards the very end of the nineteenth century, independent groups of wealthy *towkay* evolved out of the headmen of the *kapitan* system, secret societies, and *kongsi*

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institutions. The suppression of the secret societies by the government authorities and the erosion of the public economic and political functions of the kongsi by the towkays undermined the legitimacy of these earlier powerful institutions. Bowing to the changing circumstances, the illegal, coercive aspect of competition inherent in the secret societies and the kongsi began to give way to free market principles and a colonial politico-legal framework. However, the old coercive methods persisted for a long time, although in order to survive they went underground. These changing dynamics of Chinese social organization were related politically to the gradual consolidation of the British establishment in the British Malaya. Economically, they were linked to the boom in tin mining and later in rubber planting. This marked the point at which the wealthy towkays and their families became one of the most important socio-economic elements in the Southeast Asian transition. They stood fairly and squarely at the centre of Southeast Asian Chinese socio-economic life. The stable colonial political and legal framework regulated economic competition and protected their economic interests. Kongsi were still important social organizations (eg. clan associations), but financially they were dependent on the wealthy towkays. The towkays and their family estates played dominant roles in the public arenas of temple, school, hui-kuan, chamber of commerce, and various clubs - the main public spheres of immigrant communities.

The first generation of our Chinese actors, who began to assume prominence in the 1880s, functioned in the transitional period of the suppression of the secret societies and the erosion of the political function of the kongsi. They belonged to the emerging group of independent rich towkays who built up a solid business foundation for the second generation. Still very much part of their Chinese world, they also maintained a close connection with the kapitans, the secret societies, and the kongsi, which were still influential in the transitional period of 1880s and 1890s. After the demise of this first generation, these institutions retired behind the curtain of the Southeast Asian Chinese socio-economic and political life. The kapitans, secret societies, and kongsi were no longer dominant in the mainstream of the Southeast Asian Chinese communities, although in many ways they did not relinquish the field entirely. The towkays’ rise as a wealthy new group in the Penang-Kedah area coincided with the broad historical shifts in the late nineteenth century. Although economically there had been routine interaction between Kedah and Penang through the Penang Chinese community since 1786, it was only after the 1880s that substantial progress in development had been achieved. In addition to the above-mentioned political and economic changes in the last years of the nineteenth century, this progress could also be viewed as a natural development of the expansion of capital into the hinterland of the Malay Peninsula, following the capital accumulation which had been in progress in the Straits Settlements for almost one century. The breakthrough in integration between Kedah and Penang was manifested in the joint opium farm, the development of the Kulim district, and later the rubber planting fever. These all provided great opportunities for the formation of a substantial Penang-Kedah Chinese community.
Interaction between people and their environment is of its very nature reciprocal, each influencing the other. Following the introduction of people - the Chinese community - now it is time to set them in a place, Kedah, and in the wider region in which the Chinese community operated. The trajectories of Kedah's historical development are closely linked to the profile of the Chinese community.

**Historical Geography**

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

Situated in such a strategically sensitive spot, the political map of Kedah had necessarily changed over time. In the final analysis, according to the most reliable assessment, Kedah stretched from the southern fringes of the Sungei Trang basin to the southern fringes of the Sungei Kerian basin, in a north-south direction, and from the sea coast to the watershed formed by the Main Range, in an east-west direction. Pulau Teliborn, Terutau, Situl, Perlis, Penang, Province Wellesley, and the district bordering Kerian in Perak were part of the territory of Kedah. The Island of Penang and Province of Wellesley on the Peninsula were ceded to the British in 1786 and in 1800 respectively. In 1821, the Siamese invaded Kedah and Kedah was divided into four parts: Kedah proper, Setul ruled by Tunku Bisun, Perlis ruled by Sayid Husain Jamalu’d-din, and Kubang Pasu ruled by Tunku Annum. Later Kubang Pasu was restored to Kedah, but the position of Perlis and Situl continued to be territorially

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14 In 1824, John Anderson wrote that except for the current territory, Kedah included Salang or Junk Ceylon, Traang (Trang), Setool (Situl), Lingow (Ligor), Purlis (Perlis) and Krian etc, which are now under Thailand, Perlis and Perak. T.J. Newbold in 1839 wrote that "Quedah [Kedah] extends from the Trang river in 70° 20' N. to the Krian, in 50° 10' N., which separates it from Perak. The Trang formerly divided it from Siam. Internally, the chain of mountains, running down the middle of the peninsula, which is here about 130 miles broad, constitutes its boundary, with the state of Patani on the opposite coast; on the west it is bounded by Province Wellesley and the seas". However, Newbold’s calculation of the area is wrong. He said that its average length and breadth is 150 miles by 30, giving a superficial area of 4,500 square miles, with a population of 21,000. This was probably taken by John Crawford who said that "Queda [Kedah] [is] the name of the most northerly of the Malay states on the western side of the Peninsula of Malacca. This is the Portuguese orthography of the name,...and which...has been continued by other European nations. The world signified in Malay 'an elephant trap'. Queda [Kedah] is bounded to the north by the Siamese territory of Ligor, to the east by the Malay state of Patani, to the southern state of Perak, and to the west by the sea, and partially by the continental portion of the British territory annexed to Penang". While in 1828, Crawford described geography of Kedah in rather general terms which is not identical to his statement in 1856. See John Anderson, 1824, p.126.; T.J. Newbold, British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca, 1839, reprint in 1971, Kuala Lumpur, Vol.II, pp.2-3.; John Crawford, 1828, pp.27-8, 1856, p.361.

By the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, Pulau Teliborn, Terutau, and Situl were recognized as Siamese territory, and Perlis became a state under British rule independent of Kedah in 1909, while the conflict over the Kerian issue between the governments of Kedah and Perak was only settled in the 1910s. When this was done, the political map of Kedah was finally settled.

**Political and Economic Structure**

Many parallel polities existed either in alliance or in rivalry in the Malay world before the Western colonial powers placed them under their spheres of influence in the mid-1870s. This Malay world displayed some cultural conformity in terms of sharing language, literature, religion, and life-style, but conversely it was also characterized by political fragmentation in terms of the lack of clearly defined governmental or legal structures, undefined territorial boundaries, migrating subjects, and shifting allegiances. The most typical pattern of settlements in these Malay areas centred on the coasts and rivers. From the perspective of modern functionalist anthropology, Gullick treats the indigenous Malay political system prior to colonial rule as a "working system of social control". He argues that, the sultanate, district, and village (mukim) consisted of three main institutions providing political and social control. The apex of each Malay state was the ruler called either the Yang di-Pertuan (He who is made lord), the raja (Hindu ruler), or the sultan (Arabic ruler), whose role was to "symbolize and to some extent to preserve the unity of the State". The key institution was the district chief who "had control of an area, generally a side valley, or a stretch of the valley of the main river of the State, and all the people in it". While the village community "consisted of one or more groups of kinsfolk whose identity as groups was often marked by residence in separate homesteads". The headman of a village was called a penghulu. He was a member of a prolific, wealthy, and prominent family group and might well be linked with higher authorities.16 Gullick argues, this is a "decentralized system of local government by district chiefs. The sultan exercised little real power".17

Milner tries to understand the "perceptions of their political motivation" from the perspective of Malay political culture. Contrary to Gullick’s conclusion, Milner argues that "The Raja is not only the 'key institution' but the only institution, and the role he plays in the lives of his subjects is as much moral and religious as political". He coins the term "the kerajaan system". He summarizes this as follows: "political life could be subsumed under one term: men considered themselves to be living not in states or under governments, but in a kerajaan, in the 'condition of having a raja'."18

As far as Kedah is concerned, there was a mixture of the characteristics presented by Gullick and Milner. Its political structure in the late nineteenth century was essentially based on the traditional Malay pattern, in other words, on that of the Malacca sultanate. However, in contrast to other Malay states the sultan’s administration was centralized, and the internal

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socio-political order was highly stable. Several elements can be adduced to explain this difference. Unlike the situation in other Malay states, most of the important district chieftainships were held by royal family members in Kedah. The district chieftain’s share of the revenue was smaller than in other areas. Kedah was a mainly agricultural state and most sources of revenue were farmed out to the Chinese. The sultan maintained absolute control over the farms. Missing out financially, the district chieftains’ power was further weakened by the sultan’s control over the other main group of officials, as in Kedah all the penghulu were appointed by the sultan who would issue a surat kuasa (letter of authorization) with the sultan’s signature and seal, rather than by the district chieftains as in other west coast states. In the period from 1882-1905, for example, tremendous power was exercised by the chief minister, Wan Mohammed Saman bin Wan Ismail, through whom the sultan administered state affairs. When the sultan fell seriously ill after 1895, it was Wan Mat (as he was popularly known) who conducted the affairs of state with the help of the raja muda, Tengku Abdul Aziz, the sultan’s younger brother. The only other powerful person was the sultan’s private secretary, Muhammad Arrifin, who handled all the correspondence for the sultan. The most valuable districts in Kedah in economic terms were Kota Star, Kuala Muda, and Kulim. Kota Star, the centre of the rice production area fell automatically in the royal district, directly controlled by the sultan. Kuala Muda was another rice district, under the authority of Tengku Abdul Rahman, the sultan’s uncle and closest advisor. Kulim, the only substantial tin district in the state with the largest Chinese population, was placed under Tengku Mohammed Saad, another uncle of the sultan.

The economic structure in Kedah exhibited the following features. Firstly, subsistence economy was predominant and rice cultivation was the basic economic activity for the people in Kedah (preponderantly for the Malays). Corresponding to this subsistence economy were the institutions of kerah (compulsory labour) and slavery (particularly debt-slavery), through which the sultan secured the services of his people. The tin mining and other commercial planting were of a complementary nature, in contrast to the situation in the other western Malay states. Secondly, immigrant Chinese played the most important role in the state revenue collecting. Most revenue from the major economic activities in Kedah were leased out to the Chinese revenue farmers. Thirdly, Kedah’s linkage with Penang was one of the most essential elements in the maintenance of the state economy. Penang provided a very important market and channel, not only for Kedah’s agricultural suppliers, but also for capital accumulation. Fourthly, the sultan maintained absolute control over the economic resources of Kedah.

In the nineteenth century, whilst Kedah was politically an independent state albeit under the suzerainty of Siam, commercially it was a mere dependency of Penang. Every dollar of capital

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invested in it came from Penang and all its Chinese traders were connected with Penang firms. 22 Most of the revenue farmers in Kedah were either prominent Penang merchants or associates of these merchants. In order to do business in Kedah, these merchants appointed their representative there, usually a local Chinese resident. 23 Many prominent Penang Chinese merchants established very large enterprises in Kedah, which became an important part of the Chinese economic empire in this region.

The long and short of it was that the revenue farming system was the whole basis for Kedah State revenue, and these farms were almost entirely in the hands of the Chinese. The Chinese revenue farmers were involved in opium, gambling, spirits, pawnbroking, rice and paddy, customs, ferry, poultry, tin, timber, cattle, pig, egg, markets...covering almost every aspect of Kedah’s economy. Besides securing the farming of port dues and other monopolies, the Chinese opened plantations and mines, erected mills, and engaged in commerce, with the result that the trade, which without their enterprise would have been forever restricted to the export of the surplus paddy and cattle raised in the country, now formed a very considerable state asset. The first British advisor to Kedah, Hart, also admitted "Kedah owes her prosperity to a large extent to Chinese enterprise". 24

After Kedah was placed under the British colonial rule in 1909, both the political and economic structures were subject to radical changes. Politically, with Kelantan, Perlis, Trengganu, and Johor, Kedah fell under the Unfederated Malay States (UMS), with British indirect rule exercised through a system of British advisors. The state council took over the sultan’s power and the latter was reduced to being a symbolic sovereign ruler. Behind the state council was the British advisor, who actually directed the administration of the Kedah government and acted as liaison between Kedah and the High Commissioner’s Office in Singapore. Economically, forced labour and debt-slavery were formally abolished in order to meet the requirements of the new liberal market economy. 25 The Chinese revenue monopoly was destroyed and gradually taxation put under the aegis of the state. Rubber and other commercial crops played an important role in state revenue, and Kedah was not dethroned from its traditional position as the premier rice planting state in Malay Peninsula. The Chinese were pioneers in rubber planting in Kedah, their ownership of estates being the most important impetus in this agricultural venture, at least before 1921. 26 But in the ownership of large estate (of 100 relongs and over), the Europeans had the dominant interest. 27 Compared with the predominant tin mining and rubber planting economy in the Federated


23 Khoo Kay Jin, "Revenue Farming and State Centralization in Nineteenth-Century Kedah", in Butcher & Dicks eds., 1993, pp.125-41.

24 KAR, Sept.1906-Feb.1908, p.3.

25 For the discussion, see Sharom Ahmat, Tradition and Change in a Malay State, MBRAS, 1984, pp.130-37.


27 According to Kedah Planters Association, for example in 1936 European has 89 estates with an area of 173,546 relongs while Asiatic has 200 estates with an area of 69,769 relongs. See appendix Table 10.
Malay States and the subsistence paddy economy in the UMS, Emerson categorizes Kedah's socio-economic structure [together with that of Johor] as "midway between the Federation on the one hand and Kelantan and Trengganu on the other". There will be detailed discussions of this in the following chapters.

**Brief History**

Kedah had been a weak Malay sultanate, surrounded by stronger regional power-holders and European colonial powers. Regional interaction was the primary factor which to a great extent shaped Kedah's historical development. Trade flows and power balancing were the two most striking elements in these wider contexts. In order to illustrate this pattern and theme, Kedah's history prior to 1882 is divided into the three following phases.

1. **Indians, Arab, Siamese, and Chinese Prior to 1511**
   It was said that Kedah was a prosperous trade entrepot when its foundations were laid in the fourth century. But Kedah's prosperity was soon overshadowed by the rapid rise of the major maritime trading empire, Srivijaya, at the end of the seventh century. If the emergence of Kedah on the north coast of the Malay Peninsula can be attributed to its strategic position as a landfall port for the Bay of Bengal, then, the rise of Srivijaya in the south-east Sumatra resulted from the expansion of Indonesian trade with China. The expansion of the Chinese trade was helped by circumstances facilitating communications between the markets in China and Western Asia, such as those in the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, and also West Pakistan. Another contributory factor can be accounted as an indirect consequence of the dismemberment of the first dominant Indianized kingdom of Funan on mainland Southeast Asia. Situated on the main international trade route, shipping, trading, and mastery of the Straits of Malacca were the three main interlocking elements for the formation of Srivijaya's maritime power. The occupation of the most strategic points and recourse to manpower were the main considerations in the maintenance and expansion of its maritime commercial hegemony. In pursuit of these sources of political and economic power Srivijayan influence advanced from the city-states of East Sumatra to the isthmian region of the Malay Peninsula, from the small trading ports around the rest of the Malay coast to the kingdom of Sunda in western Java and the islands of the intervening seas. It was in this period of its political and economic expansion that Kedah fell under the sphere of Srivijayan influence. Wolters places the Srivijayan conquest of Kedah in AD 695 at the latest, and perhaps even a few years earlier, based on a Chinese travel account by I-Ching, a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim. I-Ching described his voyage in 671 from Canton to Palembang, the residence of the Srivijayan ruler at the time. He states that Kedah on the western coast of the southern Malay Peninsula was a dependency of Srivijaya. Under Srivijaya, Kedah attained its apogee as the peninsular

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28 Rubber planting economy played an important role in Johor and Kedah, although they were under UMS. See Rupert Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*, Kuala Lumpur, 1964, p.242.


30 Paul Wheatley, 1964, p.84.

node of the Srivijayan thalassocracy. This is supported by Arab and Chinese sources. Kedah was also one of the main ports of call for Arab traders voyaging to China.

So far, most scholars assume that the glory of Srivijaya, the Venice of the East, had waned by the early eleventh century. It was certainly not without its challengers. It faced an initial invasion by the Javanese who resented the Srivijayan trade monopoly as early as in 922. Soon after the threat from Java was temporarily averted by its destructive counter-attack on the eastern Javanese kraton in 1016, Srivijaya experienced another, more important challenge from the Tamil Cola kingdom in South India, which was also prepared to contest the maritime supremacy of the Bay of Bengal with Srivijaya, possibly because Srivijaya restricted Indian communications with the Archipelago and China, or possibly, but more controversially, because of the Cola king’s strong desire for conquest. In the thirteenth century, the modern Siamese became masters of the Menam valley and Ligor, while Tenasserim and Tavoy also became tributaries of the Siamese kingdom of which Sukhothai was the capital. In the regional power vacuum left by the withdrawal, temporary or permanent, of Srivijaya, the Siamese came into conflict with the Malays. Facing political facts, Kedah had turned to accept Siam as overlord by the end of the thirteenth century.

During the 15th century, two important elements shaped Kedah’s development: one was the rise of Malacca and the other was the conversion to Islam. The rise of Malacca signalled a new impetus to the propagation of Islam in the Southeast Asia. It also replaced Srivijaya as the regional political and commercial centre, being strong enough to withstand Siamese expansion into the Malay peninsula. Islam as a political instrument of great potential value was used shrewdly by the Malacca dynasty to promote their political and commercial interests. "By adopting the religion officially it secured admittance to what Van Leur has described as 'the unity of Islam' with its assurance of powerful allies, and its expansive ardour. Thus, as Malacca established overlordship over the states of the Peninsula and of the east coast of Sumatra across the Straits, so Islam penetrated them. It was a political weapon against Buddhist Siam; still more it supplied the Malacca empire with a cohesive force which enabled it to hold together...". The same considerations drove a raja of Kedah to pay a visit to

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32 Paul Wheatley, 1964, p.85; Wheatley, 1966, p.280, 300. See also Coedes, p.142, 245. But according to Wolters it is unlikely that Kedah had been a great significance. Instead, "The early seventh century may have seen the beginning of Kedah's uneasy career as a minor trading centre". See O.W. Wolters, 1967, p.236; O.W. Wolters, 1970, p.9.

33 Wheatley, 1964, pp.70-71.


Malacca in 1474 to obtain the honour of the ceremonial royal band. Kedah’s hopes, whatever they may have been were soon dashed, as before long the Malacca empire had fallen into the hands of the Portuguese in 1511. Kedah was consequently forced to turn again to Siam as overlord and protector.

(2) Portuguese and Aceh, Dutch and Bugis 1511-1786
The European presence in Southeast Asia was a watershed in its historical development in the sense that it marked the creating of new economic and political entities centred on respective European powers. It also brought a new, most important element into the Southeast Asian political landscape. The power hierarchy hence would be that of the new European colonial powers, traditional regional Southeast Asian powers, and small local states. The entrenched rivalries between political and economic centres placed small local states in great uncertainty as to their political fortunes, in the meantime shaping their active strategy of playing one against the other. The rivalries were intensified by frequent internal dynastic feuds. The process of interaction and adaptation was therefore far from uncomplicated.

In the sixteenth century, the main powers surrounding Kedah were the Portuguese, the traditional regional power Siam, and the newly emerging maritime centre of Aceh in North Sumatra. The Siamese claimed overlordship over Kedah, but their protection and suzerainty were symbolic rather than substantial, hampered by the tyranny of distance. With the Siamese out of the race, the major rivalry in the Straits of Malacca was between the Portuguese and Aceh. After the fall of Malacca in 1511, the Portuguese monopolized the vital spice trade in the Straits of Malacca. The Portuguese trading monopoly drove merchants to seek another market, leading to the rise of Aceh. The rapidly rising power of Aceh replaced Malacca as the dominant regional power centre and put Aceh in a position to challenge the Portuguese trading hegemony.

Aceh had reached the peak of its greatness in the early seventeenth century under Sultan Iskandar Muda. Taking advantage of the incipient Portuguese decline in that period, he extended his control over more distant coastal regions of Sumatra, as well as over the mainland states of Kedah, Perak, Johor, and Pahang.

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37 They said this visit took place on the date of the conversion of the ruler of Kedah to Islam. More prosaically, considering that Malacca had just helped Pahang to resist Ligor, probably Kedah also anticipated to secure support from the powerful Malacca against Siamese aggression. See Winstedt, 1936, p.157; Coedes, 1968, p.246.

38 For an excellent general discussion of that period, see Barbara Watson Andaya, "Political Development Between the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries", pp.402-459, in Nicholas Tarling ed. 1992, Cambridge University Press, Volume one.


40 In 1537 and 1546, Aceh made two attacks upon the Portuguese. In 1568, Aceh made another great attack on Malacca forcing the Portuguese to seek Johor’s aid. Although Aceh was beaten off again by the Portuguese, in retaliation the Acchinese fleet sailed up the Johor river and burnt a number of villages. See Hall, 1981, pp.367-8.
The Portuguese and Acehinese prominence in the sixteenth century were usurped by the Dutch and Johor in the seventeenth century. To grab the monopoly of the pepper and tin trades, especially prominent in the west coast peninsular states from Kedah down to Singapore, the Dutch wanted to secure a collecting centre in Kedah. Wise in the ways of fluctuating power Kedah also exhibited a flexible and pragmatic attitude towards its newly rising neighbouring power. In 1641, the Portuguese were defeated by the Dutch and the Dutch captured Malacca. Kedah was soon asked to enter into a trade agreement with the Dutch East India Company by which it would send suppliers to Malacca. Well aware of how matters stood, the sultan reacted very quickly by welcoming about 300 invalid Dutch soldiers to recuperate at Pulau Langkawi and Kedah and by granting permission for supplies to be sent to Malacca. These friendly overtures by Kedah may have been motivated in the hope of being able to call on Dutch assistance should the Siamese bring pressure to bear. However, in 1652 Kedah seemed to reverse its policy of friendship towards the Dutch when the new sultan, Muhiyu’d-din Shah, came to the throne. In retaliation, the Dutch resorted to a blockade but the Malays managed to elude the Dutch warship.

The eighteenth century has often been called the Bugis century in Malay history. Again, it was trade and power that drove the Bugis into securing control over the waters surrounding Java, Sumatra, and the Peninsula. The dominant people in South Celebes in the seventeenth century, well-known as warlike maritime traders, the Bugis had established themselves as the paramount power in the Malay world by the early eighteenth century. Inevitably the Bugis played a crucial role in Kedah politics, an enterprise in which they were helped by the internal dynastic quarrel against the regional background of the power struggle. In the course of the eighteenth century, the Bugis waged three Kedah wars. So the way was open for the Bugis to take control over Kedah and secure an ample share of its revenue drawn from its extensive trade with Bengal, Surat, and Sumatra. This is the situation which leads Winstedt to argue that it were the Bugis whom the sultan of Kedah feared and hated and that was the real reason that Penang was leased to the British in 1786.

(3) British, Burmese, Siamese, and Dutch 1786-1882
To some extent, the lease of Pulau Pinang by Kedah to the British in 1786 was the active response of a weak state to counter incursions by dangerous neighbouring centres. Prior to 1786, potential danger to Kedah threatened from three directions: one threat came from the constantly expected Burmese invasion of Siam (the Ava dynasty), the always imminent Siamese invasion of Kedah, while the third menace came from the Bugis-dominated sultanate

41 R. Bonney, 1971, p.17.
43 From 1654 until 1657, the Dutch Malacca opened a factory for trade in tin, gold, and elephants. But in 1658, the Malays killed nine of the crew of the yacht the "Hoorn", and another blockade was started by the Dutch. See Winstedt, 1936, pp.161-176; Winstedt, 1988, p.130.
of Selangor. In a word, the aim of the lease was "to secure and insure Kedah's permanent independence" by obtaining British military and naval assistance. This was a gift from the gods for the British, who for strategic considerations to do with the defence of the Indian empire and the protection of the trade route to China, were looking for a port of call in the Straits of Malacca.

In the history of Kedah, the establishment of the British base in Penang in 1786 had great implications. Firstly, from then on the British would be an important factor in the regional politics touching upon Kedah affairs, which to some extent complicated regional politics, but pertinently gave Kedah some flexibility in dealing with its external relations. Secondly, it greatly changed the economic development of Kedah. This marked the transformation of Kedah from a trade-oriented economy as an important local or even regional entrepot into an agrarian economy (rice-producing) as a food supplying base for Penang. It inexorably integrated Kedah into regional economic developments, in which Penang was the main market and link for the Kedah economy. In turn, Kedah later became an investment target for Penang's commercial capital (mainly Chinese). This ensured that Kedah was a relatively prosperous state in the early decades of the twentieth century, setting it apart from the other Unfederated Malay States, such as Kelantan and Trengganu.

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

The Siamese invasions of Kedah in the period 1821-1842 may be seen as a punishment for the challenge Kedah offered its authority. The grafting of the "Spheres of Influence" by the big external powers in Southeast Asia was then still in its initial stages. The principal concerns of the British were economic and strategic i.e. trade and commerce, and protecting these particularly given the strategic position of the Malay Peninsula on the West-East long-distance trade route. Politically, Britain's foothold in the Peninsula was still not strong. Its political relations with Siam to the north and with the Netherlands to the south had not yet been properly defined. So, although British local government in Penang supported Kedah against Siam, it had to subordinate local interests to regional and international considerations.

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At the regional political level, since the British presence in the Peninsula had changed the balance of power in the region, it took time and accommodation on the part of the big powers to redefine their interests. If the Siamese invasion of Kedah in 1821 was a strong reaction to that state’s challenge and claim to its independence; for the British, this invasion meant a disregard of Britain’s presence in the region. Of course, this related to other British involvements in the region, such as its interests in Burma and North Sumatra. But by 1826, the situation was quite different: the Treaty of London (1824) defined the interests of Great Britain and the Netherlands, and the Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) was coming to an end. Now, the time was ripe for them to make some arrangements to adjust regional politics. The Treaty of Burney, which set a framework not only for Anglo-Siamese relations, but also for future Anglo-Kedah relations and Siamese-Kedah relations, was signed in 1826. The later settlements of Kedah 1839-1841 also fell within this framework.

In the two decades between 1821-1842, Kedah’s impact upon its traditional political centre, Siam, came from two sides. Firstly, it was from Kedah itself: between 1821-1839 Siamese rule had been seriously challenged by the Kedah Malays in three uprisings of 1828-9, 1831-2, and 1838-9 respectively. The Tengku Den uprising of 1831-2 swept everything before it, forcing the Siamese governor to flee back to Siamese territory. Only by mobilizing a wholly Siamese force from Nakorn, and with the help of a British naval blockade of the waters between the mainland and Penang, did the Siamese manage to restore their position in Kedah. The 1838-9 attempt to challenge the Siamese occupation of Kedah was even more impressive than that of 1831-2. Tengku Mohammed Saad and his men managed to regain Kedah and conduct an offensive campaign right up to Songkhla before the Siamese had time to recover from their initial shock and rally forces to suppress the uprising. In a diplomatic balancing act, the sultan turned not only to Penang but also to Burma, and applied secretly to the Ava dynasty for assistance against its traditional enemy, the Siamese. The exiled Kedah sultan, who had escaped from Kedah to Penang after the Siamese invasion, then from Penang to Province Wellesley, to Malacca, to Perak... unequivocally indicated his determination to restore Kedah’s territory and his refusal to accept the Anglo-Siamese arrangement. This situation made the Siamese acutely aware of their weakness and forced them to re-examine their policy in Kedah.

The other determining factor in Kedah-Siam relation was the British. As noted, at this stage, British policy was twofold. They wanted to secure their economic and strategic interests in Siam and in the region as a whole, but meanwhile did not want to jeopardize their commercial rights in Kedah. They wanted to check Siam, but not at the cost of helping to restore the sultan of Kedah to power. The significance of Kedah to the British lay in three point: it was a food supply base; it was a buffer state between Penang and the southern provinces of Siam proper; and it was a stake for British bargaining with the Siamese concerning British commercial and political interests in the region. There is nothing strange about the fact that


the British officials in Penang were very sympathetic towards the ex-sultan and Malay attempts to regain control over their state, but this did not impede them from co-operating with Siam in the military blockade to thwart Kedah's attempted restoration. These were the circumstances under which the 1839-1841 settlements were reached. These required that the Siamese be withdrawn from Kedah. This set a new stage for Thai-Malay tributary relations in the period between the 1840s and the 1880s. This was the political framework in the region prior to 1882.

3 The Chinese In Kedah

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

The Chinese connection with the Malay Peninsula was almost as long-standing as that with India. Chinese records are indisputably among the main sources for early Malay history. The link can be traced back at least to the seventh century AD. From these early times there had always been a Chinese element in Kedah, and it was these people who later provided leadership for the Chinese community in Penang in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were there but little is known about the Chinese in Kedah during these centuries. A European record mentions that in 1751 Sultan Muhammad Jiwa Abidin Syad (1741-1778) [of Kedah] "would not permit the widow of a Frenchman to go away, but made up matters so well, that she married a Chinese Christian". It was said that there were around sixty Chinese families in Kedah when Francis Light occupied Penang. A Kapitän China of Kedah paid a visit to Captain Light in Penang with a present of fishing-nets shortly after Light's arrival on the island in 1786. This kapitän was Koh Lay Huan, whose

49 At the close of the seventh century Chieh-Cha (the Chinese name for Kedah) was the point of departure for vessels setting out to cross the Bay of Bengal and also the port where pilgrims boarded Srivijayan Ships for the voyage down the Straits of Malacca. An eminent Chinese monk, I-Ching, stayed some time in Chich-Cha (Kedah) in AD 672 and one of the pilgrims died in Kedah. "Chu-fan Chih" tells us that ships traded annually between Malabar and Chi-te (Kedah). "Hai-lu" describes that, there are Fukien and Kwangtung people who come here (Chi-te) to trade. And also in his two volumes, "Oriental Commerce" (1813, London), William Milburn gives the impression that Kedah's trade was mainly with Chinese. John Anderson tells, prior to the occupation of Prince of Wales Island, Kedah was a place for commerce trade ...". There was also a large Junk annually from China, the exports consisted of Beech de Mer, Rathans, Dammar, Tortoise Shell, Deer Skin and Sinews, Bullock and Battaloe, Hides and Horns, and various other commodities. See Anderson, 1824, pp.151-52; Wheatley, 1961, p. 388; Cushman & Milner, Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Chinese Accounts of the Malay Peninsula, JMBRAS, Vol. 52, part 1, No.255, 1979, pp.1-47; Roland Braddell, A Study of Ancient Times In the Malay Peninsula and The Straits of Malacca, MBRAS, 1980, Part Four: Langkasuka and Kedah: Chinese Names: Sea Routes: Lang-Ya-Hsiu: Chieh-Ch’a: Chia-Tan: Kedah: Marco Polo, pp.361-96.


descendants played a leading role in the Penang-Kedah Chinese community for generations.\textsuperscript{52} Koh Lay Huan was better known as Chewan in official documents from Zhang Zhou, in Fukien province.\textsuperscript{53} There is another important point mentioned by Light that "Tuanka [towkay] China is an old fox. He has little to do with the government, but being rich, and having married a daughter of the old King, he bears a considerable sway in their Becharas or Council".\textsuperscript{54} It is also clear that the Chinese settlement in Province Wellesley must have spilled over into Kedah from an early date. Province Wellesley was acquired by the British in 1800, but prior to that date the Chinese had already settled on the coast of Kedah at Batu Kawan, opposite the most southerly part of Penang Island.\textsuperscript{55}

There are no figures for the Chinese population in Kedah in the nineteenth century. Strangely, in 1839 Newbold did not mention the Chinese in Kedah, but confines himself to describing that Kedah's population "consists chiefly of Siamese, Samsams, Malays, and Semangs".\textsuperscript{56} But one point is clear, demographically speaking, unlike the Thais and the Indians, the Chinese were never important before the mid-nineteenth century. In fact it would seem that Kedah remained unaffected by demographic changes until the beginning of the twentieth century. The most important component of the population of the state were the indigenous Kedah Malays, comprising at least 90% of the total population at the close of the century. The most important minority groups during the nineteenth century were the Thais and the Samsams.

The significant influx of the Chinese into Kedah proper is a phenomenon of the post-1860 period, but the number must still have been small.\textsuperscript{57} The Kedah Malay records of the 1880s make frequent references to Chinese, and particularly to those in the district of Kulim, a southern border town where the Malay authorities estimated the number of Chinese to be around 6000.\textsuperscript{58} From Swettenham's confidential report of 1889, it is known that in Kedah there are "a few thousands of Chinese ", [...] "about 70,000 Malays and about 200 Tamils".\textsuperscript{59} While in the first annual report of Kedah in 1905-1906, G. C. Hart only noted "there is also a very considerable Chinese element, principally in the mining districts".\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{52} Victor Purcell, The Chinese in Malaya, 1967, p.115.
\textsuperscript{53} C.S. Wong, 1964, pp.1-26 (on Kapitan history in Penang), 47-62 (in Kedah).
\textsuperscript{55} Purcell, 1967, p.66.
\textsuperscript{58} Sharom, 1984, p.7.
\textsuperscript{59} CO 273/162, Resident of Perak to the Governor, Confidential, Taipeng, 6 November 1889.
\textsuperscript{60} KAR, Sept. 1905-Aug. 1906, p.5.
The largest influx of Chinese immigrants into Kedah came during the period 1900-1925. The most spectacular period for the growth of Chinese population was not unexpectedly in the intercensal decade of 1911-1921. The high rate of increase can be attributed to two factors: one was internal to Kedah itself, namely the extension of rubber cultivation; the other lay outside Kedah, namely the moving of a large proportion of these Chinese immigrants from the Federated Malay States to the Unfederated Malay States. Beginning in the late 1920s, there was a trend for the number of fresh immigrants to decline. In the intercensal decade of 1921-1931, there was an abrupt fall in the rate of increase of the Chinese population. This was the immediate result of a decline in the number of immigrants as the movement to set up large-scale rubber cultivation in southern Kedah lost impetus after the 1921 depression in the rubber-growing industry. The slightly inflated rate of increase for the intercensal decade of 1931-1947 was partly the outcome of the longer period it covered (for demographic details, see Appendix).

In Kedah, there are four large Chinese dialect groups present: Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese, and Khek (Hakka). These four covered over 91% of the total Chinese community in Kedah. The other dialect groups are Hailam, Huichew, Kuangsai, and a number of very small groups. The Teochews had formed the largest single dialect group since the early days of Chinese immigration to the state. In time, their relative position within the overall community gradually decreased with the expansion in the number of speakers from other dialect groups, especially the Hokkien, Khek, and Cantonese. The explanation for the predominance of the Teochews in Kedah is the simple fact that the state is contiguous with the British settlement of Province Wellesley, an agricultural plantation area which had a large colony of Teochews. All Chinese dialect groups in the pioneering years in Kedah were engaged in agricultural occupations.61 However, the main Chinese actors in this thesis are all numbers of the Hokkien business families, although the Teochew community is also touched upon [in the role of the influential towkay Lim Lean Teng, see Chapter 8]. This was because Kedah was greatly influenced by the Penang Chinese community, in which the Hokkiens played a dominant role.

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

61 Zaharah, 1979, pp.140-41.
At this point, readers may have realized that Chinese community in Kedah actually involved two elements: one was a Kedah Chinese element, i.e. those Chinese who were Kedah residents but depended on the Chinese community in Penang; the other was a Penang element, i.e. the Chinese who were Penang residents but played a leading role in the Kedah economy. As this thesis progresses it will show how this Chinese community interacted in the local and regional contexts.