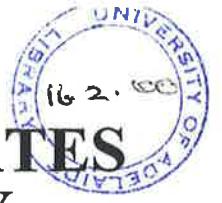


THE NORTHERN MALAY STATES IN MALAYSIAN HISTORY



By Terry Hewton

VOLUME 1

(Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Adelaide in 1997.)

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This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Libraries, being available for photocopying and loan.

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ABSTRACT

The four northernmost states to the east and west of the upward jutting portion of Perak on peninsular Malaysia - Kedah, Perlis, Trengganu, and Kelantan - have generally suffered a neglect in the source materials on Malaysia. Most of the scholarly attention has been focussed on the more export orientated tin and rubber producing states to the south. Yet these same sources carry the feeling that the four states - the Northern Malay States (NMS) as they have come to be known - are and have long been, somehow very different in their character and development. Without stating it explicitly and fully these same sources, considered collectively, convey an impression of distinctiveness in this way. This impression - that the colonial and independence history of Malaysia suggests not only the very great importance of these states in the wider national history but also a distinctive character in them which sets them apart from other states on the peninsula - is stated or implied in these sources but generally not highlighted and at best only superficially explained. I have set out in this thesis to closely examine this impression in order to give some shape and definition to this distinctive character to the four states.

Part of this perception of uniqueness in the four states is anchored in a partial exploration and understanding of the way the states have posed serious problems for colonial and independence governments in Malaya/Malaysia. In 1946 the northern states resisted attempts to draw them into the Malayan Union. In the 1950s and 1960s the NMS contained the main electoral power base for PAS, as it is now called - a radical Islamic party which, for a time, threatened the supremacy of UMNO, the dominant party in the Federation. PAS continues as a strong force in Malaysian politics to the present day. In 1974 and 1980 peasant disturbances in Kedah were a further source of anxiety for the Malaysian government. The four states have a greater concentration of rural poverty and have therefore, in recent times, been a special target for various sustained and well planned economic and social reforms. The civil unrest in the north - the peasant disturbances referred to above - has meant that the reforms have been partly motivated by a concern that continuing poverty in the area will undermine the stability of the Federation.

It is especially these developments which strongly suggest a uniqueness in the social make up of the four states - a uniqueness which has hitherto had only limited recognition in the scholarship.

This is in large measure a matter of neglect. While there are some excellent studies of particular states there has been little attempt to understand the historical development of the NMS as a whole within the wider context of Malaysian history. A reading of the sources reveals that a perception of the differing nature of the NMS does not go much beyond a recognition of the racial homogeneity of the states - their populations are predominantly Malay with relatively few Chinese, Indian and other races - and the fact that they were, until 1909, under the suzerainty of Siam. They are seen as backward and undeveloped in their nature and peripheral to the main developments in colonial and empirical terms taking place to the south.

This thesis explores the historical origins of the distinctive and problematic nature of the NMS suggested by the recent history of Malaysia by examining the way in which colonial influences have altered their basic social character. In so looking at the way in which these influences operated to transform their old societies into new ones I focus on two main aspects:

(1) The way in which colonial influences altered the way in which NMS society was organized around production as the key to understanding the essential character of the new society which had come into existence in recognizable form by 1942. This will entail strong scrutiny of the changing social relations at the productive base of those societies since, in the end, it is the contest for a share in the productive wealth emanating from that base that in large measure determines the essential character of any society - those in the NMS included.



(2) The wider - macro - manifestation of the changing social relations referred to above.

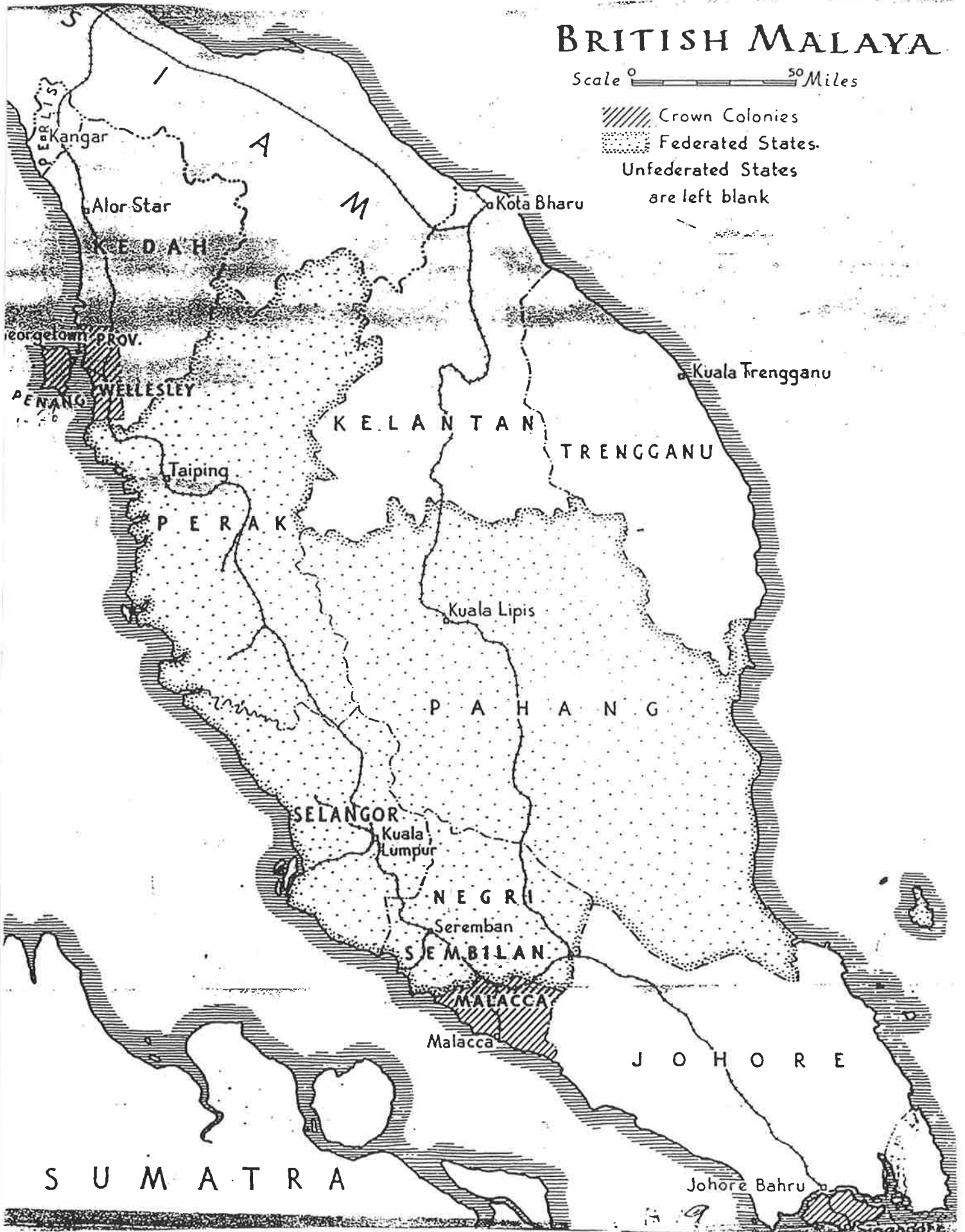
MAPS

THE NORTHERN MALAY STATES 1937.

BRITISH MALAYA.

Scale 0 ————— 50 Miles

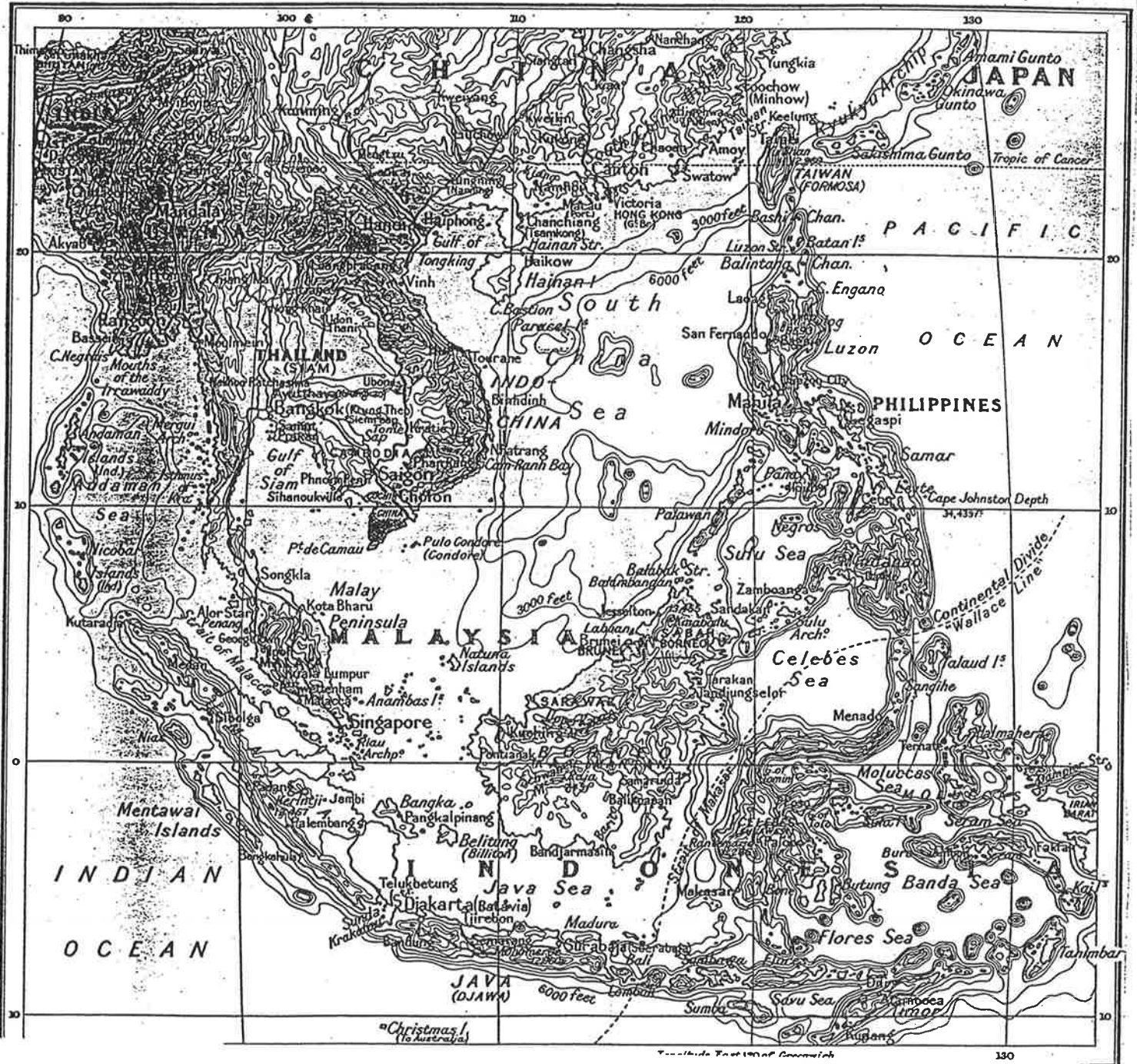
-  Crown Colonies
-  Federated States.
- Unfederated States are left blank



(From Emerson, *Malaysia*, p. 113.)

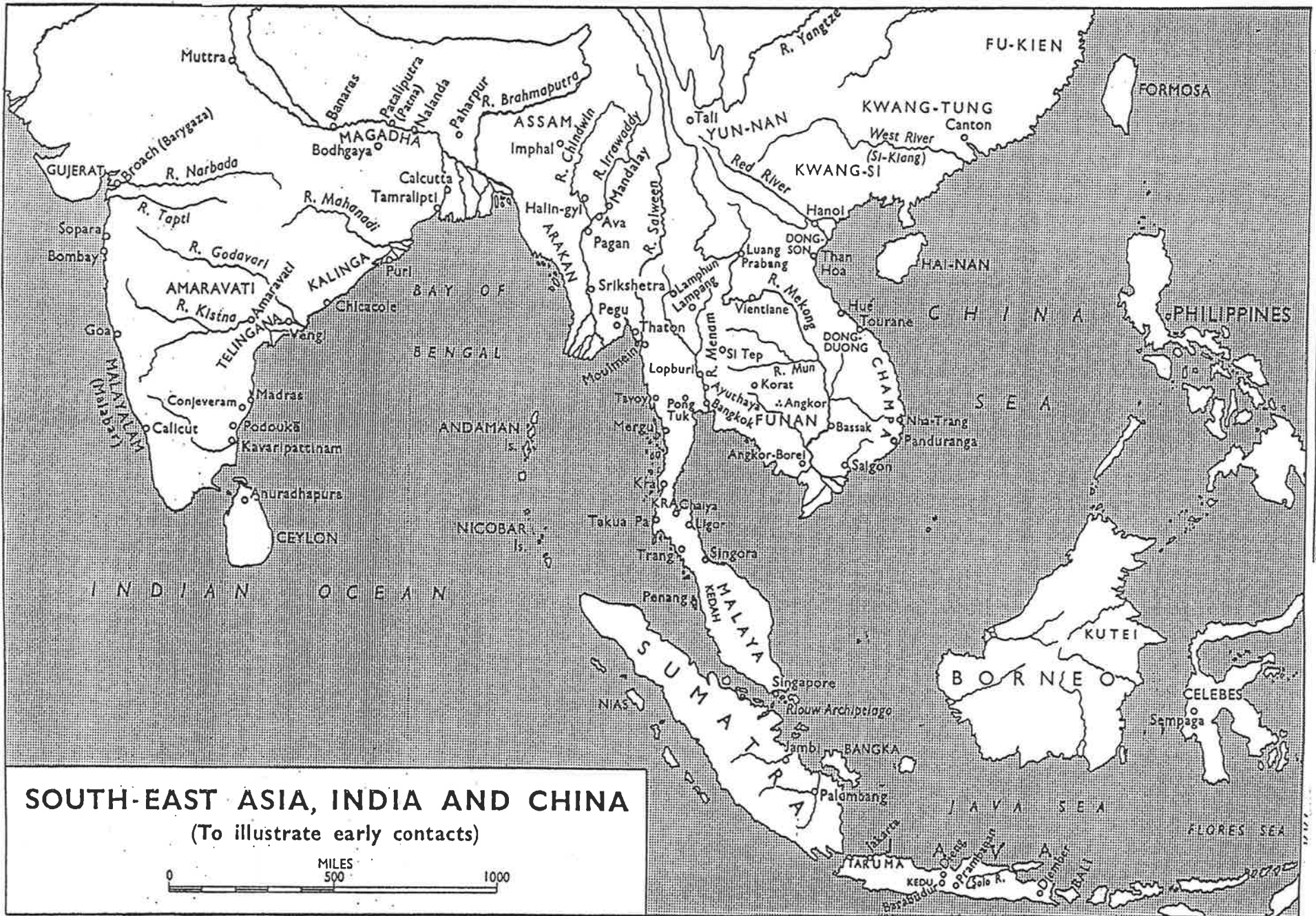
PENINSULAR MALAYSIA IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

SOUTH-EAST ASIA



(Taken from Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, p. 930)

**PENINSULAR MALAYSIA: ITS STRATEGIC LOCATION IN
RELATION TO SOUTH AND EAST ASIA.**

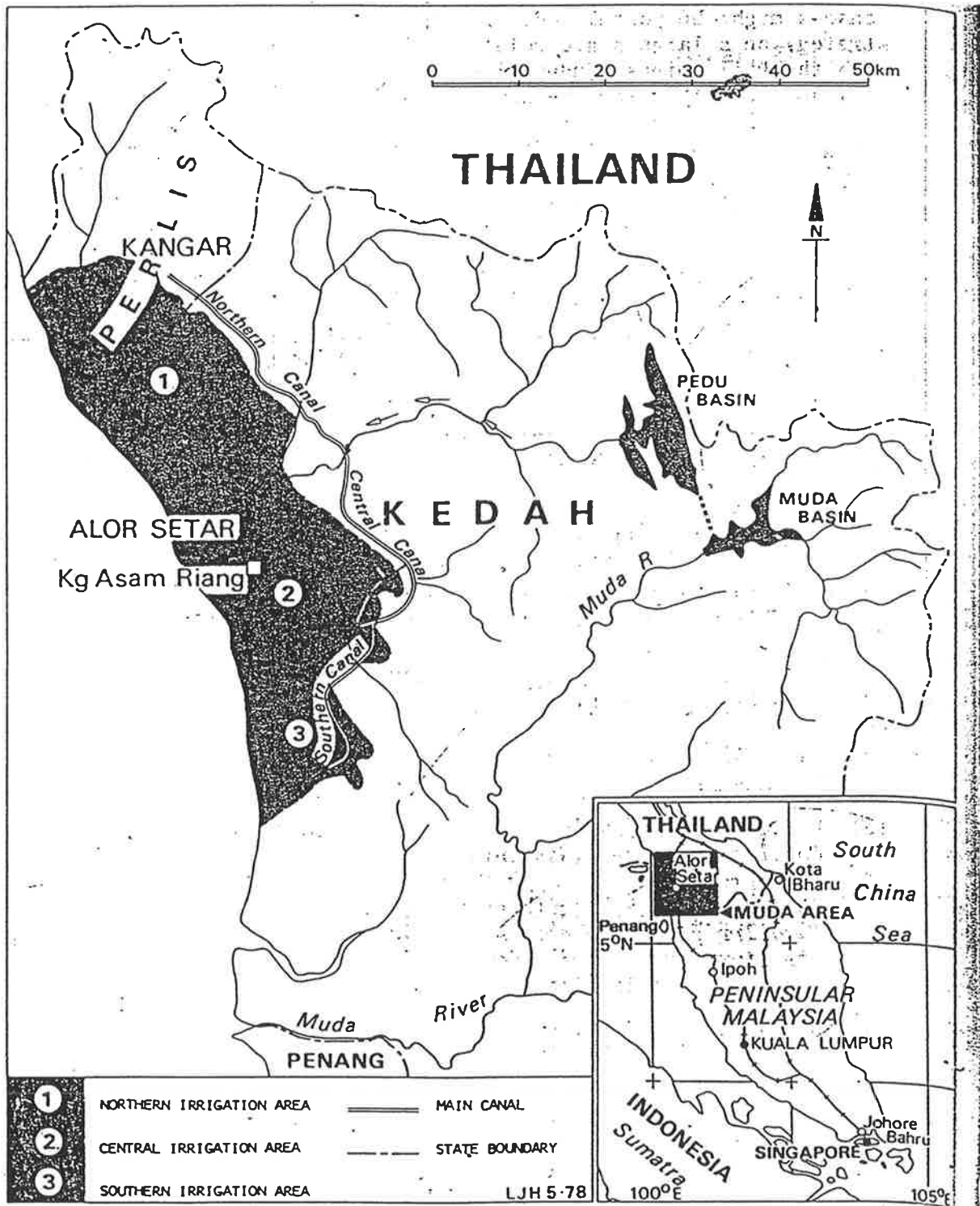


(Taken from Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, p. 13.)

SOUTH-EAST ASIA, INDIA AND CHINA

(To illustrate early contacts)

THE MUDA IRRIGATION PROJECT.



(Taken from Barnard, "The Modernization of Agriculture", p. 48.)

ABBREVIATIONS

Northern Malay States - NMS.

Federated Malay States - FMS.

Unfederated Malay States - UMS.

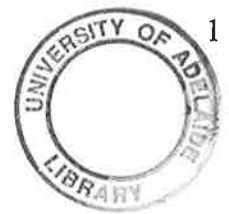
Far Eastern Economic Review - FEER.

Persatuan Islam Sa-Tanah Melayu
(Pan Malayan Islamic Party)/Partai
Islam Se Malaysia(Party Islam) - PAS.

United Malays National Organization - UMNO.

Barisan Nasional - NF.

Malayan Civil Service - MCS



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION.

The Northern Malay States in Malaysian Historiography

It is not so much that the character of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu - the four northern states of the Malayasian peninsular usually referred to as the Northern Malay States(NMS) - has been misunderstood but that little attempt to understand their historical development as a whole in the wider context of Malaysian history has been made at all. Thus a reading of the sources reveals that a perception of their differing nature does not go much beyond a recognition of their racial homogeneity - their populations are predominantly Malay with relatively few Chinese and Indians - and the fact that they were until 1909, under the suzerainty of Siam. This is surprising since the colonial and Independence history of Malaysia does suggest not only the importance of these states but also a distinctive character which sets them apart in certain crucial respects from the rest of the peninsular.

These four states are, as indicated on the first map in this thesis above, located to the north west and north east on the peninsular that extends south from what is now Thailand(formerly Siam) into the Strait of Malacca in the direction of what is now Indonesia. Within the period of this study this peninsular was known as Malaya until the formation of the Malaysian federation in 1963 and is now known as West Malaysia or Peninsular Malaysia. Between 1874(the year the British established themselves in Malaya) and 1909(the year that presence was extended to cover all states in Malaya) the four states fell outside the formal British governmental sphere of influence. Instead they continued under the aegis of the Siamese and were seen as belonging with a wider group of states known as the Siamese Malay States. These states were known as such because, while they were under the suzerainty of Siam, they had a high proportion of Malay inhabitants. These Siamese Malay states were located to the north of the five states which were the main and earlier focus of British endeavour on the peninsular - Perak, Pahang, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Johore - and extended onto the Isthmus of Kra, the narrow neck of land to the south of Bangkok and north of the Malayan peninsular. After the transfer of power over them from Siam to Britain in

1909 the NMS remained for decades on the periphery of the main thrust of British colonial activity. Constitutionally they remained separate within the wider British colonial state on the peninsula; they were, together with Johore, known as the Unfederated Malay States (UMS) distinct from the rest which were called the Federated Malay States (FMS).

The NMS have posed serious problems for colonial and independence governments which are stated or implied in the sources but generally not highlighted and only superficially explained. In the immediate pre World War II period, these northern states resisted the attempts of British authorities to draw them into the Malayan Union and beyond that the Malayan Federation. From the late 1950s they have contained the main electoral base of a radical Islamic party threatening, for a time, the supremacy of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) - the conservative Malay political party which has led successive Malayan and Malaysian governments since Independence. The four states have the greater concentration of rural poverty and have therefore, in recent years, been a special target for government economic reforms out of a concern that tensions due to poverty and ethnicity will destabilize Malaysia. Whereas the major source of social cleavage in the federation appears to have been strongly ethnic in nature nonetheless recent outbursts of non-racial social conflict invite re-thinking on the general question of the nature and causes of social tension on the peninsula. The most notable recent instances of this kind of conflict occurred in particular localities in Kedah in 1974 and 1980 respectively. It is these aspects of the recent history of Malaysia that are, in particular, strongly suggestive of distinctive social change in the area and a distinctive role for the Northern Malay States in the wider context of Malaysian society and politics.

The conventional commentaries on Malaysian society and history, while allowing often indirectly that the NMS have been a significant focus for forces affecting the wider Malayan and Malaysian social formation remain generally unable to explain the differing social and political behaviour of NMS Malays. When they do confront the issue they generally do so incidentally dismissing what they see as the aberrant behaviour of Malays to the north as attributable to a parochial, backward and fundamentally religious outlook and

behaviour with little or no further examination.¹ True, the sources tend to convey an impression of the NMS as being somehow outside the mainstream of Malayan social and political life (though decreasingly so) throughout the colonial period, and remote or least to a degree removed from the hub of political and administrative life centred in Kuala Lumpur in the Independence period. But they do not appear to attach any particular significance to this in any fundamental social sense and certainly do not explore this only dimly perceived notion of the differing nature of these states.

The earliest systematic accounts of the NMS in English were exploratory and scientific in nature and, while providing much useful factual information, do not elucidate the social organization of those states in any depth. Thus Clifford on one occasion, and Skeat and Laidlaw on another, recorded at some length in academic articles the results of their respective expeditions into the northern Malay states around the turn of the nineteenth century.⁽²⁾ Wright and Reid, in a chapter on the unfederated states of Malaya in a book published in 1912, do recognize the northern states as being different but only in a limited sense.⁽³⁾ Their perception of the uniqueness of these states is very much tied up in the minds of the two authors with the latter day formal inclusion of the four states into the British Malayan colonial state. Echoing the imperial concern of the day they point out the importance of the states as new acquisitions to the colony as an important step towards an all British Malaya and stress the importance of the Anglo-Siamese agreement of 1909 which effected the transfer of the

¹ Clive Kessler makes this point in his study of Kelantan.

Clive Kessler, Islam and Politics in a Malay State(London, 1978), pp 32-35.

See my discussion of Kessler on Kelantan in this thesis below.

² Sir H. Clifford, "Expedition to Trengganu and Kelantan", JMBRAS, XXXIV, 1, (1961) pp. 1 - 62.

W.W.Skeat and F.F. Laidlaw, "The Cambridge University Expedition to the North-Eastern Malay States and to Upper Perak, 1899-1900", JMBRAS, XXVI, 1V, (1953), pp. 1 - 174.

³ Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, The Malay Peninsular A Record of British Progress in the Middle East(London, 1912), 'Chapter X1 The Non-Federated States'pp.166-197.

states as 'an instrument of Imperial expansion and consolidation'.⁽⁴⁾

Wright and Reid emphasize in their chapter what they see as the prior and existing economic backwardness and the uncivilized social customs of the Northern Malay States while at the same time highlighting the early signs and future promise of economic and social development in the region under British guidance.⁽⁵⁾ The authors are clearly impressed by the novelty of four states newly exposed to a formal colonial presence and point out that until shortly before the time of their own account the Northern Malay States had been 'terra incognita to the European' and that it was the exploratory writing of Clifford and others which had begun opening up these states to view to interested observers outside the states.⁽⁶⁾ Within this narrow imperial and colonial perspective then and on the limited source materials available to them - scientific explorative descriptions of the kind written by Clifford and the few annual reports written by colonial officials to 1912 - Wright and Reid have written a superficial, descriptive account of the Northern Malay States. It is an account which, although no doubt informative enough for the readership at which it was directed at the time, does not look in any depth at the way in which those state societies were constituted and organized. The strong impression given in their chapter is that the differing nature of the four states is to be understood principally in the negative sense that they had not, by 1912, come sufficiently under what they saw as the progressive and civilizing influence of the British colonial presence - that the differing nature of the states stemmed not so much from factors intrinsic to the states themselves but rather from a delayed British colonization of the area. In sum then, although Wright and Reid have in their chapter certainly indicated some important

⁴ Ibid., p.166. The Anglo Siamese agreement is dealt with in more detail in Chapter IV of this thesis below.

⁵ Up until 1909, these states record the author, 'remained, as it were in a back-water while the tide of healthy commercialism ... swept over the other parts of the peninsular.'

Ibid.

They also quote Clifford at length on the 'Dantesque horrors' of debtor's prisons in Trengganu.

Ibid., pp.181-182.

⁶ Ibid., pp.167-168.

differences between the NMS and those to the south they have not gone very far towards indicating the fundamental distinctiveness of those states in the wider peninsular context to the year 1912.

Winstedt writing in 1923 under the chapter heading 'The Unfederated Malay States' simply catalogued the northern states and Johore separately describing their essential down to earth characteristics - early history, geographic features and the like - but without addressing himself to the relationship between those states and the federated Malay states.⁷ The overall impression he conveys is one of the Northern Malay States as a colonial hinterland well off-side from the main Malayan colonial concerns of the day. Winstedt writes in a vein which implies that to him the states are curiosities but no more.

Emerson too, a decade or so later in 1937, saw little that was inherently and importantly distinctive about these northern states. He described them as a residual portion of British Malaya sharing some common characteristics with each other. He did not see them as together constituting any particular regional unity. Their commonality, he wrote, did not extend much beyond the shared features of racial homogeneity, lesser economic productivity than the states in the Federation and Johore, and stubborn opposition to being drawn too closely with the other states on the peninsular into a wider British Malayan colonial state.⁽⁸⁾ He connected up the ethnographic composition of the FMS and Johore on the one hand, and the NMS on the other, with their respective degrees of economic productivity. He correlated what he saw as the lesser economic productivity of the NMS with the preponderance of Malays and lack of immigrant races in them. He drew attention to what he regarded as an important fact for the peninsular as a whole: 'the higher the degree of economic life in any area the larger is the alien element in the population as compared with the native.'⁽⁹⁾ While he did not develop any explanation for the correlation his inference is clear enough: the Malays - the natives - were

⁷ R.O. Winstedt(ed.), Malaya the Straits Settlements and Unfederated Malay States(London, 1923), pp. 249-260.

⁸ Rupert Emerson, Malaysia: a Study in Direct and Indirect Rule(Kuala Lumpur, 1937: reprinted 1964). pp.194-197.

⁹ Emerson, Malaysia, p.197.

less enterprising and hard working than the Chinese, Indians and British; the greater concentration of natives to the north had therefore resulted in lower economic productivity in those states. Emerson, then, was unable to go beyond limited conclusions based on a cursory look at the four states.

Even Allen, whose more recent pioneering scholarship encouraging us to look at north Malaya and Malaya generally from the bottom up, is caught between an emphasis on the obvious and most striking features of north Malaya as a whole and the beginnings of an understanding of the class relations determining the shape of particular states to the north on the peninsular. Thus, in an article published in 1968 Allen emphasizes the problem confronting the British in north Malaya from 1909 of 'a purified and revitalized form of Islam which, at least in Trengganu, seemed to contain the possible threat of a jihad waged by a proud and independent-minded peasantry.'⁽¹⁰⁾ In this Allen echoes the British colonial concern with, as they perceived it, a dangerously chauvinist Islam - a perception which as we shall see below served to blinker the understanding of Colonial officials and the scholars whose thinking they have influenced of the real and underlying economic and social causes of discontent in the NMS and the effect of this on Anglo-Malay relations there. Even where in another article in the same year Allen does recognize a ground swell of a more secular peasant resistance to British rule in north Malaya his primary concern remains that of highlighting the myth of a totally quiescent peasantry and he is not able to fully explore the economic and social tensions giving rise to this tension in the northern region in general.⁽¹¹⁾ Certainly Allen has set himself a more limited task in his articles on particular states in north Malaya and the points they make are valid enough as far as they go. Though they represent a significant step in the right direction on their own they still leave us well short of a through-going understanding of NMS distinctiveness.

More recently still Wheelwright refers to 'the North-east area[of Malaya] ...[as] extremely backward and poor consisting mainly of Malay peasants engaged in

¹⁰ J. de V. Allen, 'The Elephant and the Mousedeer - A New Version: Anglo-Kedah Relations, 1905-1915', JMBRAS, 41,i,(1968) p.55.

¹¹ J. de V., Allen, 'The Kelantan Rising of 1915: some thoughts on the concept of resistance in British Malayan history', JMBRAS, 9, ii, (1968), pp. 241-257, *passim*.

subsistence agriculture.⁽¹²⁾ In similar vein Kamlin reports, without closer examination, that 'the poverty and economic backwardness' of Trengganu 'are usually attributed partly to a lack of natural wealth and partly to an insular outlook nurtured over the centuries by a paucity of contact with the outside world.'¹³ Both Wheelwright and Kamlin then illustrate the fact that the broad and superficial characterization of the Northern Malay States as ignorant, isolated and poverty stricken is still very much a feature of modern Malaysian scholarship.

Kessler, whose own work on the rise of radical Islam as a political force in Kelantan does come to grips with fundamental social change in that state throughout the colonial and independence periods, in delineating the parameters of, and his approach to, the subject criticizes earlier attempts to explain that radical Islamic political success, confined as it was then mainly to Kelantan, in terms of specifically East Coast Malay social and cultural characteristics:

They sought answers [to the east coast success of radical Islam] in the special characteristics, real and imputed, of 'the predominantly Malay and deeply Islamic East coast where education and customs have maintained a strongly Islamic character.'¹⁴

Explanations were sought, according to Kessler, in terms of the allegedly archaic political power of Islam and the motivating force of 'a religiously inspired Malay racialism'.⁽¹⁵⁾ Gullick, in a general account of Malayan society and history, saw the political success of radical Islam as being due to 'the support which it receives from the Islamic village clergy' and that politically organized radical Islam served "'as a political rallying cry" to influence "credulous Malay villagers"⁽¹⁶⁾ Kessler notes the fact that Gullick subsequently revised his opinion in a book published in 1969 on Malaysia but without freeing himself entirely from his

¹² E. L. Wheelwright, Radical Political Economy Collected Essays(Sydney, 1976), p. 348.

¹³ M. Kamlin, "History, Politics, and Electioneering: The Case of Trengganu", Department of History, University of Malaya(Kuala Lumpur, 1977), p. 8.

¹⁴ Kessler, Islam and Politics, p 32.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.33. Kessler cites J.M.Gullick, Malaya(London, 1964) pp.138-139.

misconceptions on the subject. According to Kessler in that later edition Gullick did recognize politically organized radical Islam as the "voice of protest of the Malay peasantry" but still maintained that this appeal was based on "xenophobia and religious prejudice".⁽¹⁷⁾ Since Kessler's book Gullick has revised his book on Malaysia. In this book Gullick acknowledges the cogency of Kessler's analysis for Kelantan but not without lingering reservations on the truth or falsity of Kessler's conclusions and the applicability of his argument beyond Kelantan.⁽¹⁸⁾ Clearly then Kessler's study, as one of the very few major studies attempting to come to grips with distinctive social change in north Malaya, has not wholly won over mainstream Malaysian scholarship to his approach and point of view and to some extent this gives us the measure of the myopia in perception of the NMS which persists in the writings on Malaysia to the present day.

Certainly past authorship on Malaya and Malaysia has been limited by a lack of information on the NMS. Here and there the secondary sources express a sense of puzzlement and frustration at an inability to fully examine and comprehend the place of those states in Malayan and Malaysian affairs. In 1937 Emerson wrote of the incorporation of the northern states into an expanded British colonial Malayan state in 1909 in these terms: 'The establishment of British control over the four northern Malay States by the treaty of 1909 with Siam rounded out the British sphere in Malaya in what appears to be a permanent fashion, although the adjoining territory across the Siamese border also contains Malays and Malay States. Why these latter did not also come under British protection in 1909 is as obscure as many aspects of the history, prior to 1909, of the four which did. No account or documentation of the transfer from Siam to Britain, beyond the treaty itself, seems to have

¹⁷ Ibid. Kessler cites J.M.Gullick, Malaysia(London, 1969) p.213.

Over the many years - decades - that he has been writing on Malaysia Gullick has adapted his perspective to some degree on particular issues though it is probably fair to say that his basic perception of what society is and how it works has remained unaltered. See my discussion below in this chapter, and in the chapter below, on Gullick's perception of traditional Malay society over a wide time span of his interest and writing on the subject. My discussion there focuses on the two books(Indigenous Political Systems and the more recent Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century)dealing with this subject. Both are cited in full below.

appeared, and the historian of this area is left with scraps of information which frequently fail to piece together into a consistent whole.¹⁹

Still, though the sources are often troubled by their inability to fully account for the NMS they do not appear to have pressed their enquiries very far.

Our limited understanding of the NMS is partly the result, then, of a neglect of the area in the secondary sources. To this point in time the main emphasis in Malaysian scholarship has been on the development of the southern and central states of the peninsula. This is perhaps understandable since the major concern of British capital has been located to the south of the peninsular while north Malaya has featured only marginally in the process of direct colonial exploitation. It is this neglect of the NMS in the studies - not just the histories - and a failure of approach and perspective within Malaysian historiography as we shall see, that has meant much of the history of Malaysia has appeared disjointed and incomprehensible. Bedlington, Bailey and others for example made only passing reference to what were then recent peasant disturbances in the NMS in a way which made them appear incidental to the mainstream of Malaysian history - not as they are, a vital clue to the inner dynamic of social change in Malayan and Malaysian history.²⁰ Likewise the reasons offered for the

¹⁹ Emerson, Malaysia, pp. 220-221.

²⁰ It is to the Baling and Sik disturbance in the late 1970s that both Bedlington and Bailey refer. The Alor Star disturbances in the early 1980s occurred after their books were published.

Stanley S. Bedlington, Malaysia and Singapore The Building of New States(London, 1978), pp 194-196.

The fact that Bedlington is dismissive of the meaning and significance of these disturbances can be clearly seen as a matter of his perspective. He does acknowledge the dramatic dimension of the disturbance: 'In November 1974 some twelve thousand Malay peasants in Baling, Kedah, demonstrated ..., and this was followed by student rioting and violence on several university and college campuses.' Having done this, however, he then proceeds to attribute the cause of the peasant reaction to the over optimistic statements on rubber growing on the part of the government - statements which, he claims, 'may have created in the Malay peasantry too heavy a reliance on the government's ability to improve their lot, diluting in the process the self confidence and self reliance needed to promote a sense of being able to manipulate the environment for themselves and for their own improvement - for ultimately if the Malaysian economy is ever to be put into ethnic balance, the Malays need to demonstrate, to their own community and to others, their capacity to participate and to compete on equal terms with the non-Malay sectors of society.'

Ibid., pp. 195,196.

Conner Bailey, Broker, Mediator, Patron, and Kinsman: An Historical Analysis of Key Leadership Roles in a Rural Malaysian District(Ohio University, Center for International Studies, Papers for International Studies, South East Asia Series No. 38, 1976) pp. 2-8.

unprecedented Malay resistance to the Malayan Union proposals in the immediate post World War II period are well short of being wholly convincing on the limited perspective of the conventional histories.²¹ There are many other examples and these are dealt with in the main text of my thesis below.

The post World War II period has seen an awakening of interest in the nature of the social transformation of countries within and at the periphery of the sphere of European colonial expansion. This interest arose from an initial scholarly concern in the 1950s with poverty, and the failure of economic development and its causes in the disadvantaged countries of the world. In particular it was the idea of a causal connection between the wealth and exploitive tendencies of capitalist countries at the metropolis and the poverty of countries at the periphery of the colonial sphere that became the focus of much scholarly writing in the decades following the war. This concern to understand the process of economic disadvantage at the colonial periphery - a concern which was often humane and moralistic in its outlook and inspiration - led scholars to seek ways of achieving an adequate theoretical conceptualization of economic development and poverty producing lack of such economic development and a suitable empirical methodology for understanding these phenomena.

In the post war period scholars and others with a stake in the 'Third World' as it came to be known have sought answers to a wide range of related questions. Given that widespread poverty has been an obvious feature of the Third World how is this poverty to be described and accounted for in terms of the social and economic structures within which that poverty is located? That is to say, given that the Third World economies have appeared in some sense 'underdeveloped' - 'backward' - the terminology itself begs the question as to how such economic inadequacy is to be characterized - can Third World economies be distinguished collectively and individually from those in the rest of the world on the basis of an understanding of feudalism and capitalism in the European context? Have the Third World economies in some Rostovian sense, been evolving in stages corresponding to - which can be likened to - those which have been occurring in European countries and countries whose

²¹ Discussed in full in Chapter 7 in this thesis below.

culture and society is predominantly of European origin?⁽²²⁾ Would Third World countries have become capitalist without contact with western powers according to some internal dynamic indigenous to themselves? What effect has capitalism based in Europe had on the economy and economic change in Third World countries? Has European capitalism re-created itself or set in train a process of such re-creation of itself in the Third World periphery? In the alternative has the Third World seen the emergence of a process of production under western capitalist influence which is distinct and which can not be characterized as either capitalist or semi-capitalist on the one hand nor feudal or semi-feudal on the other? In a more practical vein academics and policy makers interested in the Third World have sought to discover whether it is possible to artificially induce economic development along a capitalist path - to create the conditions for 'economic take off' in the western capitalist sense. These questions and others in similar vein still indicate the broad field of enquiry which has produced the theory and approach which has, in a very general way, influenced my approach to this study of the NMS.

Early development studies concentrated on the link between colonial countries in the colonial metropolis and those at the periphery in very broad terms. Thus Frank and Wallerstein in their pioneering studies thought in terms of a single world capitalist colonial system in which centre and periphery were linked in exploitive relationship. Within this system as it was perceived by Frank for the Latin American context, surplus was extracted upwards and outwards away from colonized populations and their countries towards the colonial metropolis to the advantage of the former and the disadvantage of the latter.⁽²³⁾ In a

²² Rostow defined and analyzed what he saw as five stages of economic growth which all societies go through.

Walt Whitman Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth A Non-Communist Manifesto(Cambridge, 1962), passim.

This summary of the developing scholarly interest in development issues in the Third World is drawn from McEachern's account in a volume produced by a number of academics in the early nineteen eighties in the first instance and a wider reading of the theoretical and other materials on the subject.

Doug McEachern, "Capitalism and Colonial Production: An Introduction", in Hamza Alavi and others, Capitalism and Colonial Production(London,1982), pp.1 - 21.

²³ Andre Gunder Frank, Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil(New York, 1969), passim.

Andre Gunder Frank, Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution(New York, 1969)

criticism of Frank, Laclau sought to elucidate what he saw as his - Frank's - conceptual misconceptions to further advance the debate by opening the way for a closer look at the way in which the mode of production in Latin American societies had been changing under capitalist influences. In so doing he was unable to pin down himself in an intellectually rigorous manner the meaning of 'mode of production' as the focus for an understanding of how and why colonial transformation takes place.⁽²⁴⁾ Following Laclau's effort, in ways which need not detain us here, scholars have sought to be more specific about the process of colonial transformation by focussing more closely upon identifying characteristics of particular modes of production - on the distinctive features which make one social productive system different from another - in the countries undergoing change.

The period after the Second World War has also seen the burgeoning of the academic disciplines described collectively as the social sciences. One result of this has been a broader multi disciplinary and an increasingly interdisciplinary exploration of Third World societies, past and present. Whilst our understanding of these societies has benefited in many ways from the pooling of new information, perspectives and methodologies by historians,

passim and especially pp 3-17.

Wallerstein developed his ideas in a series of volumes entitled The Modern World System. In these volumes - the first announces four stages to the study of one volume each - he sought to 'analyze the determining elements of the modern world system' as this was developing around core states and those existing on their periphery. He did so on the synoptic view suggested by the series title. He outlined the whole project in the early part of the first volume. The first and second volumes were aimed at dealing with "the origins of the world-system, still only a European world system", over a total period of 1450 to 1815. The third aimed at dealing with the "conversion of the world-economy into global enterprise" in the 1815 to 1917 period, while the fourth sought to "deal with the consolidation of this capitalist world economy from 1917 to [the volume's] present, and the particular 'revolutionary' tensions this consolidation ha[d] provoked."

Immanuel Wallerstein, The Modern World System 1 Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century(New York, 1974), pp. 10,11. passim.

See Doug McEachern's summary of scholarly enquiry into the nature of colonial transformation.

McEachern, 'Capitalism and Colonial Production', pp. 1 - 3.

²⁴ The observation made on Laclau's study by McEachern.

Ibid., p1.

E. Laclau, "Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America", New Left Review, No. 61. (1961) passim.

political scientists, economists, anthropologists and sociologists problems of approach and perspective remain. When the studies have focussed upon the question of how societies undergoing colonial transformation are to be characterized the argument between contending views has been at worst tortuous and hair splitting serving to blur rather than sharpen our awareness of the nature of society and social change in the Third World.⁽²⁵⁾ In this

²⁵ I have formed this impression from a reading of the preliminary remarks in a number of academic studies on the mode of production issue in the developing world written in the later nineteen seventies and early nineteen eighties:

Peter Mayer, "The Penetration of Capitalism in a South Indian District", paper labeled 'Draft only: not for attribution'(1978).

Peter Mayer, "Capitalism, Colonialism and India", paper presented at the Third National Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Griffith University, Brisbane, 24-29 August, 1980.

Doug McEachern, "The Mode of Production in India", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 6, 1V, (1976).

Doug McEachern, "Part Five: Colonialism and the Creation of Capitalism", 8 typed sheets behind a covering sheet labeled, "Colonialism and Colonial Modes of Production", (1978).

Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: a Critique of Neo-Smithing Marxism", New Left Review, No. 104.

Hamza Alavi, "India and the Colonial Mode of Production", The Socialist Register, (1975).

Henry Bernstein, "Notes on Capital and Peasantry", Rope, No 10, (September/December, 1977).

Harriet Friedman, "Peasants and Simple Commodity Producers: Analytical Distinctions", Paper for discussion 4 May, 1979, Peasants Seminar, Centre of International and Area Studies, University of London.

Roger Knight, paper draft entitled "The Organisation of Agricultural Production in the Pasisir in the Early Nineteenth Century", (1980?).

There was clearly within this group of scholars a manifest frustration with the passage of the debate at that time. This frustration could be seen in the comments of one of them in a non-attributable paper. Referring to a particular aspect of the mode of production debate in its application to a particular country this scholar wrote: 'This significant debate has lost its forward momentum, which is regrettable, for it is potentially an extraordinary line of enquiry. There seem to me to be a number of reasons why this has occurred, but at the root of them all is the high level of abstraction at which the argument has been conducted. As is so often the case, there has been little or no attempt to utilize the theoretical concepts in the study of concrete historical contexts and thus little work to make the concepts operational or to test them against the complexities of events.'

An example of a source operating on a high level of abstraction in this way can be seen in Harriet Friedmann, 'Peasants and Simple Commodity Producers: Analytical Distinctions'.

The same kind of difficulty in scholarly approach in the sources is indicated briefly in the joint preface to Alavi, and others, Capitalism and Colonial Production. A lack of precision, the preface said, in the earliest scholarship exploring the link between colonialism and capitalism 'provided scope for a subsequent debate about class and mode of production which sought to

scholarship the desire to refine the terminology has become more important than understanding and describing, in terms comprehensible to a wider scholarly community, the urgent realities of economic and social life in the Third World. Definition is followed by counter definition in successive series of semantic refinements and, by this process, the endeavour to establish a universal, or at least common understanding of concepts and terms has been elevated to the level of theoretical debate on Third World issues in itself instead of remaining, as it should, a necessary preliminary to substantive theoretical and empirical examination of new and disadvantaged societies undergoing change. To be sure the issues raised in attempting to come to grips with the character of societies coming under the influence of capitalism are difficult and the stronger reason for the current lack of understanding of, or even confusion over, this process lies in the attempt to devise a universal social typology based on the productive process before sufficient contemporary and historical case studies have been established. Thus by and large the debate centring on the changing mode of production in Third World societies, is not at present anchored on a wider contemporary and historical understanding of particular cases and this has led to an over dependence on theoretical constructs - constructs which have already been confounded as new case studies have emerged and which will no doubt founder further as more empirical evidence of Third World society comes to light.

More recently new and constructive approaches to the issue of economic and social transformation in the Third World have been having an impact. Kessler's anthropological work on radical Islam in the Malayan/Malayasian context is consciously pathfinding in its endeavour to detach itself from pre Vietnam war scholarly paradigms for understanding

be more precise about the nature and significance of the changes engendered by imperialism or colonial subjugation. Unfortunately, this concern rapidly degenerated, being followed by numerous, simple schemes of 'conceptual clarification' (which frequently concealed the many complexities of historical development), the proliferation of real and imagined modes of production and the development of a fascinating intellectual game whose object was the description of the ways in which non-capitalist and capitalist modes of production 'articulated with one another'.

The general purpose and value of this book are outlined in the text immediately above. It should be noted that many of the ideas expressed by the academics in papers cited above appeared in more developed form in this published volume.

Since the time of the debate referred to here scholarly interest in the modes of production issue seems, no doubt as a result of the declining fortunes of the left in general and left wing scholarship in particular, to have run out of steam.

society and social change in the Third World towards a holistic perception of the way in which a politically organized Islamic appeal was able to successfully address itself to the material condition of the peasantry in a particular state of Malaya and then Malaysia.⁽²⁶⁾ On a narrower thematic focus but covering a much wider geographic area a recent combined effort by several scholars - Alavi, Burns, Knight, Mayer and McEachern in a recent published book entitled Capitalism and Colonial Production - has sought to clarify the modes of production issue by identifying and describing distinctive pre-colonial and colonial modes of production in particular countries - an approach which adds much to our understanding of the changing nature of Third World society by anchoring its conclusions firmly on particular case studies and thereby adopting a more empirically sound approach to this question.²⁷

Our lack of understanding is also a product of the prevailing social and historical perspective in the sources. The way in which bias operates in the sources is dealt with as it arises more fully in the text of the thesis below. But it is useful to sketch in the broad bias here so that we can see in general terms how it affects our understanding of the social development of the four states over time as we read about it in these sources.

In referring to bias in the sources in this way I have in mind a range of primary and secondary sources originating from the time of the earliest British contact with the peninsula - the officials who authored the annual reports for the four states in the three decades or so prior

²⁶ Kessler, outlining the emergence of, and developments within, the so-called policy sciences in their concern for the Third World, examines the way in which this scholarship, attuned as it has been to the needs of metropolitan and periphery governments within the colonial and neo-colonial systems, has adopted a self-serving and apologist understanding of societies coming under western modernizing influences. With the American experience very much in mind he traces the post World War 11 trends in Third World scholarship indicating that the early post war paradigms for understanding the nature and direction of those societies was built around a belief in 'development' and modernization along western capitalist lines and that when the failure of 'development' and modernization programmes became apparent and the tide began to turn against America in Vietnam in a way revealing the bankruptcy of the American and western presence and influence in the Third World, a new approach emerged around a concern for the peasant's need for a meaningful existence in an abstract rather than a concrete sense.

Kessler, Islam and Politics, pp 17-21.

²⁷ Alavi and others, Capitalism and Colonial Production, passim.

The approach referred to in the text is exemplified by the geographic specificity of Peter Mayer, one of the contributors to that book, who refers to 'Mirasi production' and Mugham production' as terms identifying the pre-colonial productive process in two Indian provincial districts.

Peter Mayer, "South India, North India", pp. 85-100.

to the Japanese occupation, Skeat and Laidlaw's recollections of the northeastern peninsular around the turn of the last century, the published impressions of Wright and Read of the Unfederated Malay States a decade or so into this century, and Winstedt(1923) and Emerson(1937) on the four states in the decades leading up to the war and the occupation, for example.²⁸

The conservative histories I refer to are premised on a usually implicit deep seated belief in liberalism, especially economic liberalism - in a laissez-faire role for the state as overseer of the economy and society. Correspondingly, they imply a belief in the desirability of continuing and unlimited expansion of economic enterprise, particularly the expansion of metropolitan enterprise, into the colonial periphery. These sources imply a belief in, and approval of, what they regard as civilized progress, especially of the humanitarian kind.

These then are the overlapping ingredient assumptions (assumptions often tempered by an underlying or overt sympathy with a largely religiously inspired colonial humanitarian reformation) constituting, with varying emphasis from author to author, the mainly implicit capitalist ideology evident in the bulk of some materials in Malaysian historiography. These assumptions, while shared by mainstream commentaries throughout the full period of Malaysian historiography, are more obvious in the earlier colonial sources than in the more recent writings on Malaysian society and history.

Embodied in or associated with these broad biases on how society works and how it should operate are equally implicit notions of why and how society changes. Thus the bulk of the histories envisage a social progression through time from one relatively static, structured and harmonious state of affairs to another. These states of structured harmony are seen as being separated by periods of social conflict. During these periods of conflict the forces of progress - spiritual and (especially in the more recent histories) material progress in the liberal capitalist sense - are perceived as triumphing over the forces of reaction to bring about a new and static social order. Thus society is seen as moving from one crisis to another in which the

²⁸ Skeat and Laidlaw, "The Cambridge University Expedition".

Wright and Read, A Record of British Progress.

Winstedt, Malaya.

Emerson, Malaysia.

periods of conflict and static social stability are marked by 'turning points' punctuating major social change in human history. Such histories are characterized by a concern with the changing nature of the larger structures and institutions of society and the neglect or at least underemphasis on the fate of individuals and smaller groups which collectively represent the real substance of all human history. The bulk of Malaysian history is, then, with a significant number of mainly recent notable exceptions - Kessler and Allen among them - very much history from the top. The secondary sources do not, by and large, connect the ordinary and most basic economic concerns of ordinary individuals with the larger group social changes occurring throughout Malaysian history. Thus we know a lot about the thoughts feelings and actions of top British colonial officials and prominent ethnic local figures in Malayan and Malaysian politics and administration and the institutions that they operated in and influenced but far too little about the effect of these personalities and institutions on the local population at the grass roots level.

In general the sources in Malaysian historiography are inclined towards a perception of very structured society in which the component parts are defined principally in terms of their function, a function directed at some overall social purpose. Thus, in pre-colonial times we are told the Malay aristocracy functioned to provide leadership and to organize Malay society, however remotely and, in return, as the sources would have it, the Malay populace complimented this elite function by labouring beyond their own subsistence to render service to their overlords in support of the edifice of the Malay polity in general. It is a mechanistic perception in which the component parts of society - classes, political parties, religious groups and so on complement each other, even when in opposition to one another, within an overall social harmony. That is to say these component parts to the social structure are somehow balanced against one another and are not, on this perception, opposed to one another in any really fundamental social sense.²⁹ They do not recognize, let alone examine, the inevitable conflicts which arise as individuals and groups in society seek to satisfy their basic needs and wants - to provide themselves with food, shelter, clothing and beyond that material luxuries -

²⁹ See for example Gullick's Indigenous Political Systems for an example of this kind of perception. I discuss Gullick's functionalist approach in the chapter of this thesis immediately below. It should be noted here, as I point out elsewhere in this thesis, that Gullick's general social perception seems to be markedly different in his later published writing.

conflicts which are in their essentials as old as human society and a strong driving force in all human history. Thus, while examining the temporary macro conflicts in society little or no attempt is made to think much beyond the particular historical circumstances of the period or era in order to place particular events within the total context of essential human social history. It is in this sense that the earlier mainstream writings on Malaysian society and history do not address directly the more fundamental issues that Malaysian history offers.

While the expansion of British liberal capitalism into Malaya may have brought some measure of progress in the British imperial reformist sense it allowed at the same time much hardship for the populace - a hardship generally recognized though much under emphasized in the sources. Clearly, then, the problem with many mainstream sources is that they exhibit a certain Whiggishness in their belief that British Malayan history, and British imperial history in general, is very much the story of British humanitarian and economic liberalism triumphing over the pre existing reactionary polity and wider society to produce a replica of British good society and government - that they imposed an ordered progression on Malayan colonial history that did not previously exist.³⁰ The problem lies in the fact that this perception has blinded them to the real effect of European colonial and post colonial influence on the peninsular. Believing in an ordered and progressive social change and seeing the

³⁰ This kind of perspective is to be found in Richard Allen's 1968 account of the impact of colonial rule in Malaysian history. Consider the following passage for example:

Yet in the last resort to process of British expansion in Asia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was governed less by particular events or people than by a whole trend of circumstance. However resourceful the man on the spot, however hesitant or positive the policies of government, both tended to be the unconscious instrument of forces which were transforming western society. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europeans had conquered vigorous and flourishing Asian nations essentially through the possession of superior weapons. There had been no great disparity in strength and it was often a close call. By the late eighteenth century, however, the Industrial Revolution had started in Britain and through it Europe multiplied her strength. Yet by this time Asian society had largely lost the dynamic impulses of the past. This disparity of power between east and west was further accentuated in the case of Malaya by the partial disintegration of the states of the Peninsular through constant civil strife and anarchy. In this new phase, the west was bound to make a fresh and disturbing impact on the east. Europe was destined to transform the still largely static and traditional societies of Asia and introduce to them the ferment of ideas accompanying modern economic and political life. This could have occurred in many ways. In practice it was affected in most case by colonization, or by economic and political dictation. The process was sometimes harsh, arbitrary, unethical. Yet many of the sweeping changes it brought were beneficial and necessary. It was in any case the inevitable prelude to the eventual emancipation of the Asian peoples from those who had imposed their will on them.

mainspring of social change to be located much more at the top than the bottom of society their perspective is one of a submissive populace on the peninsular passively fulfilling a function dictated by their masters and their own perception of their place in the pre-colonial, colonial and Independence scheme of things. They do not perceive a lower ranking Malay populace held in place principally by a coercion from the top - a coercion which did produce a reaction at the lower levels - a reaction resulting in tension between rulers and ruled - a tension which was mainly, though very importantly not always, latent, but which was ever present.

Certainly there has, in the post colonial scholarship, been a marked shift in perspective. This shift is indicated, for example, in the work of Wilson's 1958 study of the economics of padi production in northern Malaya and Michael Swift's sociological examination of the peasant economy and society on the peninsula.³¹ Both Wilson and Swift drew attention to an evident concentration of wealth - a socio economic differentiation - within the Malay community on the peninsular. In 1976 Michael Stenson as we shall see in more detail in my penultimate chapter, departed from the then prevailing perception of ethnic tension per se as the main source of social conflict drawing attention to the integration between class and race factors as the key to understanding conflict as a driving force on the peninsular.³² Allen and Kessler, too as we have seen, offered a better understanding of the changes occurring at the base level in NMS society in colonial and post colonial times.³³

Other valuable examples of texts focussing on the base level are Scott's localized anthropological work on Kedah and Shaharil Talib's historical examination of Trengganu

³¹ M. G. Swift, "Economic Concentration and Malay Society", in Maurice Freedman(ed), Social Organization Essays Presented to Raymond Firth(London, 1967).

T. B. Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production in North Malaya(Malaya, Ministry of Agriculture Bulletin No. 103)(Kuala Lumpur, 1958).

³² Michael Stenson, "Class and Race in West Malaysia" , Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Vol. 8, No. 2, (1976).

³³ Allen, "Elephant and Mousedeer".

Allen, "Kelantan Rising".

Kessler, Islam and Politics.

social change over six decades from 1881.³⁴ Scott's study is focussed on the last two years of the nineteen seventies, and, while localized in its emphasis, places the village which the focus of this in its wider national context. Talib's book is a revised version of his PhD thesis on the same subject written under the name of Leslie Robert.³⁵ The book is a condensed and refined version of the thesis argument and content. It offers a perceptive class analysis of Trengganu social development under colonial influences.³⁶ The published version is the more accessible and more easily read in general. In the thesis, however, the argument is more fully developed and appears in bolder relief. I have therefore found it useful to read the two together for the fuller appreciation of Talib's excellent study on the subject.³⁷ Also valuable as a grass roots study is a slim volume by Chandra Muzaffar offering an insight into the phenomenon of resurgent Islam in Malaysia.³⁸ Muzaffar interprets this phenomenon against the wider context of class relations in the federation coming up with the conclusion that Malaysia's Islamic resurgence has major shortcomings impeding the nation in its way forward.³⁹

While the post colonial period has seen the emergence of a new perspective in later years the conservatism of outlook of earlier writers referred to above remains an influence within the scholarship, both directly and indirectly: directly in the sense that, their bias aside, they continue to be of much value as sources of information (and, in the case of the academic writers like Winstedt and Emerson, examples of fine scholarship) that are read, and will continue to be read, by contemporary observers of and writers on Malaysia; and indirectly

³⁴ James C Scott, Weapons of the Weak Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven, 1985).

Shaharil Talib, After Its Own Image The Trengganu Experience 1881-1941 (Singapore, 1984).

³⁵ Leslie R Robert, "Malay Ruling Class and British Empire: The Case of Trengganu 1881-1941", Unpublished thesis, Monash University, 1977.

³⁶ Marred only by some confusion in terminology arising from the perspective he has on the main point of social cleavage giving rise to the state's 1928 rising as I indicate in my thesis below. This is a minor difficulty and in no way undermines the study as a major contribution to our understanding of this disturbance as something arising directly from the colonial experience of the Trengganu Malays. I have relied strongly on Talib in my own discussion of the rising in Chapter 6.

³⁷ And to make reference to both in my thesis. It was the thesis that I read first and my initial response to his study was based on this.

³⁸ Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia (Petaling Jaya, 1987).

³⁹ Chandra Muzaffar, Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia (Petaling Jaya, 1987)

through the effect they have on these observers - observers who in turn influence our developing understanding of Malaysian society and how it works.

While not all scholars in the post colonial period have wanted to focus on the base level in Malayan and Malaysian society - Bonney's 1971 book on Kedah stands today as a very effective piece of top-down history writing - it is fair to say that, at least to 1980, the balance in perspective had shifted strongly in favour of an examination of the fundamental dynamics of Malaysian society - a perspective and approach well exemplified by Funston's synoptic review of social and political change in Malaysia to that year.⁴⁰ In recent years the scholarship seems to have shown less interest in the issue of fundamental social change in Malaysia's past and present.⁴¹

⁴⁰ R. Bonney, Kedah 1771 -1821 The Search for Security and Independence(London, 1971).

N. J. Funston, Malay Politics in Malaysia A Study of the United Malays National Organization and Party Islam(Kuala Lumpur, 1980).

⁴¹ While the interest does seem to have waned with the changing climate of the times it is certainly still there. For example of the seventeen or so papers listed on the Malaysia Society Seventh Colloquium(1991) programme there were four dealing with aspects of fundamental social change in Malaysia to some degree. There was one(by Leng Hin Seak and Manjit S Bhatia)that sought, or promised to seek out(only the abstract appeared at the gathering itself), the class basis of Dr. Mahatir's political strategy in the nineteen nineties. Philip Eldridge presented a very interesting, if necessarily somewhat guarded, paper on the relationship between non-government organizations(NGOs) and social movements in Malaysia. A paper on health care for plantation workers in Malaysia by Ramachandran concluded that the "priority of the capital and management sectors in the industry is not the welfare of the workers but the maximization of profits" and that "therefore the workers' basic needs, health and welfare receives little attention in management's agenda". And a paper on a conservative perspective by Perumal offered a challenge, on a mathematical economic approach, to studies concluding that Malaysia's New Economic Policy(discussed in full in my chapter 8 below) failed in that "the poor lost while rich gained as a result of economic growth in the country".

Leng Hin Seak and Manjit S. Bhatia, "The Makings of the Crisis of the Mahathir State in Contemporary Malaysia: Some Considerations".

Philip Eldridge, "Reflections on Non - Government Organizations and Social Movements in Malaysia", passim.

Selvakumaran Ramachandran, "The Status of Health Care and the Health Delivery System in Malaysian Plantations", p.20, passim.

M. Perumal, "Welfare and Economic Growth in Peninsular Malaysia", p.1, passim.

All papers prepared for the Seventh Malaysia Colloquium, University of Melbourne, 4 - 6 October, 1991.

A current reading list for undergraduates studying the history of South East Asia from the early nineteenth century at London's School of Oriental and African Studies, while it does not include any indication of major new published ground breaking research on the social fundamentals in Malaysian society, does include several earlier studies exemplifying the

Recent decades have, then, seen the emergence and growth of alternative scholarship which does seek to examine the totality of Malayan and Malaysian society as it has been changing through time. Clearly these scholastic advances indicate that conventional scholarship can not have it all its own way and that, as new facts giving us a more complete picture of Malaysian society, and alternative perspectives cogently and lucidly argued emerge, considerable reinterpretation of Malaysian history, both in its particular aspects and as a whole, is warranted.

There is a strong Eurocentric perspective in the sources. This is not surprising since most of the histories of Malaya and Malaysia have a perspective anchored in an understanding of social change in the European context. Thus there is a very strong tendency to see peninsular society throughout the period of my study very much in terms of what are seen as the structures and mechanisms of European, especially English, society. This is especially evident where the sources come to describe the pre-colonial economy and society; in particular here it is the notion of European medieval land tenure which has been projected into the pre-colonial Malayan setting. Certainly there are some obvious parallels between European feudal society and pre-colonial society in Malaya, but there were important differences too and it is important not to overdraw these parallels. In the writings on Malaysian history and society generally then to a varying extent - greater in the earlier

progressive social awareness of the kind indicated by me in the text above. For example students are referred to two major pieces of writing by Michael Stenson (I refer to his "class and race" study above and below in this thesis). And there is reference to a recent study by Gullick of Malay society in the late nineteenth century which focuses on changes in Malay society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - the period immediately following the cut-off point of his earlier study of Malay society on the peninsula. Curiously, notwithstanding the more progressive social perspective of Gullick's later writing on Malaysia for the later period (referred to in my penultimate chapter above) his 1987 volume, while it does acknowledge more recent scholarship since his initial work, remains nonetheless still basically tied to the functionalist perceptions he began with. See my discussion of both the earlier and later study in my chapter 11 below.

The Stenson and Gullick references on the list are these:

M.R. Stenson, Repression and Revolt. The Origins of the 1948 Communist Insurrection in Malaya and Singapore (Ohio, 1969).

M.R. Stenson, "The Ethnic and Urban Bases of Communist Revolt in Malaya" in John Wilson Lewis (ed), Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia (Stanford, 1974).

J.M. Gullick, Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century (Singapore, 1987).

Lecture programme and reading list for this SOAS course current for the 1995 academic year.

writings and less in those appearing later - there exists an all pervading ethnocentricity of outlook which has to be guarded against if we are to understand the real nature of society and social change throughout the period of my study. Certainly a degree of Eurocentricity is inevitable where we are applying notions of society and social change formed with the European example very much in mind and this thesis is no exception in this regard. Terms such as 'Malay aristocracy', 'court historian' and the like have a meaning which is instantly recognizable and are used necessarily for ease of communication in the writings on Malaysia. However, as far as is possible I shall try to limit the Eurocentricity of my own approach in my endeavour to cut through to the reality of Malayan and Malaysian society as it has been changing through time.

Malaysian colonial and post colonial historiography is unexceptional in that its mainstream writing has tended to support and perpetuate the system within which it operated. At its crudest we see colonial officials with a strong vested interest in the colonial system recording their observations of Malayan society in ways tending in the general direction of ideological support for that system. Thus the Advisers in their reports submitted annually to the Colonial Office in London were under some pressure not only to imply an acceptance of the general worthiness of a British presence in Malaya but to put, for the sake of their careers within the colonial service, the best possible complexion on their implementation of Colonial Office policy in the particular states they administered. In this sense these reports were not detached, though they purported to be so, and were self serving both for the Colonial Official who wrote them and the Colonial Office bureaucrats who wanted to hear that Colonial Office policy was achieving a smooth implementation in the Malayan colony. Certainly Colonial Office officials in England and abroad in Malaya were broadly disposed to accept the colonial system without question before career considerations come into play; but undoubtedly a narrower careerism clearly served to intensify a pro-colonial establishment bias which resulted in the rendering of social observations by colonial officials assisting the perpetuation of the colonial establishment within which these same operated and which they represented in the Malayan colony. Later historians, relying on the historical and primary observations of the men on the spot without question - or without sufficient scepticism and discrimination - have served to perpetuate the notion of a broadly efficacious moral and humane British economic and administrative presence in Malaya in a way providing both a retrospective legitimization

of the colonial and neo-colonial systems operating on the peninsular down to the present day.

The Malaysian history sources have revealed a tendency to separate the objective and subjective aspects of human existence and to overemphasize one or the other aspect in a way which fails to convey the totality of the human and social condition as it has existed in Malaya and Malaysia throughout our period. Thus an early tendency in the scholarship - the travelogue-descriptions of Clifford, Skeat and Laidlaw around the turn of the nineteenth century, and Wright and Read in 1912 for example - was to look at the more mundane aspects of Malayan social life without attempting to account with any thoroughness for the thoughts and feelings motivating social integration in that society.⁴² One resultant effect of this has been the treatment of the Malays - 'the natives' - as curiosities whose behaviour, partly because it was not immediately explicable in terms of the norms of western behavioural motivation, is at worst uncivilized and always somehow less than civilized in the western European, especially English, sense of that word.⁽⁴³⁾ Where the sources do turn to the thoughts and desires of the Malays they tend to perceive this internal aspect of Malay life in ethnocentric terms in two broadly alternative ways. On the one hand they often attribute something like a European world view to the Malays. Thus feelings of feudal loyalty on the part of the peasantry towards landlord and Sultan, and in the economic sphere an attitude inclining towards enterprise and cunning - an attitude which in the colonial accounts looks very much like the protestant ethic - are seen as major ingredients in the Malay outlook on the world. In the alternative the earlier sources portray the Malay world view, especially that world view in its strongly Islamic aspect, as being traditional, backward, unenlightened and

⁴² Clifford, "Expedition", passim.

Skeat and Laidlaw, "Cambridge Expedition", passim. Further points are made on the historiographic aspects of the writings of these scholars as the need arises in the earlier part of my main thesis argument below.

⁴³ Something of this approach can be seen in the summary to Wright and Read's Chapter X1 entitled 'The Non-Federated States':

'The unfederated area largely a *terra incognita* [italics in the original]-Kelantan-Physical characteristics-The inhabitants-Their love of sport-The ruling prince-Trengganu-Physical characteristics-Native manufactures-Agriculture and mining-The fishing industry-The Baginda or conqueror-His evil influence-Dantesque horrors-The reigning Sultan-Kedah-Its trade-Native irrigation system-Rubber development and regulations-Mining-Constitution-Debt bondage-The reigning Sultan-Perlis-Johore-Physical characteristics-Planting development-Sultan Ibrahim, K.C.M.G.' ...

Wright and Read, Malay Peninsular, p. 166.

unenterprising; in short, non-western and unprogressive. Either way the Malay world view as seen by colonial scholarship is assumed and not explored and the major thrust of earlier Malay studies emphasizes the external aspects of Malay culture without attempting to cope in any thorough and systematic way with the inward motivational causes of that behaviour.

In recent decades much of the scholarship on Malaya and Malaysia has come to look more closely at the state of mind of the Malays which in a different way distorts the changing realities of Malay life under the impact of outside influences. A strong feature of the post World War II writings on the Third World has been an subjectivism in the portrayal of peasant social existence. On this view the scholarship sees peasant behaviour as not so much a response to his objective circumstance but rather as something arising from his mental state which is in itself in broad terms the major causal factor explaining why they behave as they do. On this approach a section of the scholarship has sought to internalize peasant problems without looking very closely at the physical hardship experienced in the rural sphere in the areas of former and continued colonial exploitation. Clearly then this interest in subjective states of awareness within the scholarship looking at the way in which old and new societies interact with one another has tipped the balance referred to earlier between the objective and subjective aspects of social reality in the other direction towards an over emphasis on mental states as the key to peasant social behaviour. Thus in the Malaysian historical context this scholarship picks up the prior concern of colonial observers with feelings of loyalty and respect on the part of the Malay peasantry towards their leaders and seeks, in the new terminology of the social sciences, particularly sociology and anthropology, to examine with greater sophistication and in greater detail the thoughts and feelings that, so the argument goes, keeps the peasantry in place in the traditional and modern social order. Conner Bailey's study of leadership roles in rural Malaysia prepared under the auspices of the Center for International Studies is in line with this general tendency in perceiving social trauma in the rural sphere as stemming more from the interference to the rural Malay world view - the Malay notions of right and wrong, correct and incorrect behaviour resulting from structural changes at the village level effected by colonial and Independence governments, than from any change in the material circumstances of the villagers.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Bailey, Broker, Mediator, Patron, Kinsman, passim. See my discussion of Bailey below in this thesis.

The same kind of peasant world view centred development approach to the Third World is reflected in Roger's account of the politicization of the Malay peasantry in the post World War II period up to 1975.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Generalizing for Malaysia and beyond on the very narrow basis of Sungai Raya, a rubber producing community and the Malaysian state of Johore within which this community is placed, Rogers finds in effect that the adoption of a new capitalist meaning to Malay peasant life was a vital ingredient in the politicization of the Malay peasantry, a politicization which in general terms can strengthen national integration but which when occurring rapidly as in the Malayan/Malaysian case, can be nationally disintegrative in its effect.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The tendency to internalize peasant hardship as a motive for political behaviour is very strong in Rogers. In his view Malay peasant political behaviour increasingly being directed into the wider national sphere, was spurred on not so much by any objective hardship in any absolute sense but by the rising material expectations and a strong sense of inter-ethnic economic inequalities that came with the new consumer orientated world view.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Rogers accords the peasant politicization behind radical Islamic party politics only scant mention in his article, acknowledging only in passing the threat posed to national unity by this, a threat stemming in part, as Rogers perceives it, from the kind of raised socio-economic expectation he believes he has observed in Sungai Raya.⁴⁸

This subjectivism in the recent writings on the Malay peasantry is not by any means universal. Elsewhere in the modern Malaysian scholarship on the subject a balance in focus between the subjective and objective dimensions of the peasant is maintained. A notable example is Scott's major anthropological study of peasant life in the Muda region in Kedah - a study focussing on both dimensions in developing an understanding of everyday peasant resistance to exploitation.⁴⁹

M.L.⁴⁵Rogers, 'The Politicization of Malay Villagers: National Integration or Disintegration', Comparative Politics, 7, ii, (1975), passim.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.206, 207, 212-214, 223-225.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.212-214, 223-225.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 224-225.

⁴⁹ James C Scott, Weapons of the Weak Everyday Forms of Peasant Existence(New Haven, 1985).

The Northern Malay States: an Alternative Approach and Perspective.

Before closing this introductory chapter it will be helpful for me to set out briefly my own theoretical and methodological approach in more positive terms, and to define a little more closely the parameters of my topic. I follow Kessler in regarding the ideal and material factors of the peasant's existence as aspects of the same reality and reject, in my own writing any notion of the peasant world view as a separate, major behavioural causational factor in itself. Peasant behaviour is principally a direct response to his need to fulfill his economic needs and beyond that to provide himself with luxuries and it is their inherent cultural religious and cultural values which serve to shape their response to their economic circumstances. My rejection of the overly subjective approach is not only a matter of my own perception of human motivation in the process of social change. There is a pragmatic aspect as well. Ascertaining how the peasant perceives his world is a difficult exercise indeed and whereas the observable reaction of the peasant to his economic circumstances in a broad sense seems clear enough the precise way in which culturally inherited values - religious Islamic values for example - help to shape that reaction is by no means easy to pin down in any empirical social scientific sense and the sources - even Kessler has difficulty - do not do this very convincingly.⁽⁵⁰⁾

It is clear from a reading of the scholarship on the Third World that, where the focus is on the mode of production as the essential feature of society and social change, that term has a very specific, though varying depending on the author, meaning. 'Mode of production' does not simply mean 'method of production' as the plain meaning of the phrase would suggest, but carries specific analytical and conceptual connotations as well. It is indeed the meaning of the

The book aims to give due emphasis to everyday peasant resistance to hardship, as opposed to the more dramatic forms of protest that Scott feels had captured the imagination of the scholarship at that time as part of a wider fascination with wars of liberation stimulated largely by the Vietnam War. The book is particularly valuable in the Malaysian context where, in comparison with the peasantry elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the peasantry has appeared quiescent. As I indicate elsewhere in this thesis this quiescence is not all that it seems. Scott's book serves as a strong reinforcement of the reality that we can not assume that because Malaysia has no peasant war of liberation in its history that the peasantry were acquiescent in accepting exploitation without resistance. While the study is focused on a particular area Scott does seek to firmly anchor his local study in its wider Malaysian social context. The everyday peasant resistance described in the book has both an overt behavioural and a subjective symbolic component.

⁵⁰ Kessler's difficulty in arguing the role of Islamic ideology as a vehicle for peasant protest at material hardship is discussed in chapter VII below.

term, both in the abstract and as a pointer to how society works in specific geographic locations, which has occupied much space in scholarly writings and which has at worst produced the hair splitting arguments and debates referred to above.

My thesis is not intended as a contribution to the theoretical debate on the mode of production. I have not made a thorough and exhaustive study of the scholarship in this area; I do not purport to in any sense be a latter day participant in the mode of production debate.⁵¹ My interest in them is anchored in the means it offers for understanding the essential inner dynamic of society and social change on the Malayan peninsular over the last couple of centuries. My thinking on social change in the NMS context has been influenced in a general kind of way by the scholarly contributions to our understanding of 'mode of production'. In particular I have in mind McEachern's summary of the meaning and significance of the term in his introduction to Capitalism and Colonial Production. Writing on behalf of his co-authors to the volume, McEachern states:

For our purposes, it is sufficient to recognize that the term "mode of production" refers to those relations that exist at the heart of a given society, identifies the major classes of that society and indicates the inherent logic of the relations and conflicts between those classes. In all societies we may identify means of production, direct producers and a relevant class of non-producers that combine in a process of social production. Production is also surplus production and surplus extraction; that is, the process of production also constitutes a process of class exploitation. The relations generated in the production process assume a different character in societies dominated by different modes of production. The problem is to suggest the different character of these relevant direct producers and non-producers and the forms of relationships between them.⁵²

'[T]he concepts of modes of production' are, McEachern also points out, 'abstract in character and express the essence of historical situations'.⁵³ It is McEachern's conceptualization in his introductory statement and that of his co-authors as they follow it through their particular case studies that has acted as a pointer for my own approach in arriving at an understanding of basic social change in north Malaya/Malaysia. In line with this I set out in this thesis to examine the way in which individuals and groups have combined in

⁵¹ The mode of production debate referred to above in this chapter as exemplified by the scholarship of those who followed Frank and Wallerstein - Alavi, Friedman and others (cited by me in this chapter above). 'Latter day' in the sense that, in so far as I am aware, the debate has to a considerable degree given way to other scholarly concerns.

⁵² McEachern, Introduction to Capitalism and Colonial Production, p.5.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 4.

and around the process of production in the Northern Malay States and the way in which the basic social relationships arising from that production have been reflected in the wider society and social change on the peninsular throughout the period of my study. My concern was to examine the way outside western economic and political influences altered the productive process in the Northern Malay States as the key to understanding the nature of essential social change in the region in the wider pre-colonial, colonial and Independence contexts.

It was initially my intention in this thesis to spell out - to describe - the nature of fundamental economic and wider social change in the four states from the time of the earliest European contact - to demonstrate how a distinctive economy and society had developed there up to as close as possible to the present. I wanted to show how these fundamental - at core economic - social changes were the basis for a true understanding of the unique character of the NMS in their wider colonial and later independent national context. My intention was to do so in a definitive way.

My hypothesis in so doing was this: that it was the intrusion of outside European influences which had a very strong effect in altering the direction, pace and intensity of social transformation in the NMS; that furthermore it was the presence of European and Asian traders that set in train this transformation from the time of their earliest presence on the peninsular; and that it was essentially this incursion that triggered a uniqueness in the social make up of the four states - a uniqueness which has had a strong and clear manifestation in the colonial and independence periods to a degree not fully recognized in the sources to date. The scope of such an undertaking however proved too difficult and a more limited objective proved necessary. What I found was that the sources available to me do not allow a comprehensive, definitive, description of social change in the north.

The sources, then, do not allow for a complete testing of the hypothesis, and, as a consequence, our knowledge of the process of social transformation in the four states is uneven. Thus, while the East India Company documents held at Blackfriars in London (see below in this chapter for a discussion of these documents) do allow us quite a good idea of how merchants were operating on the peninsular - what commodities were being traded in what quantities and so on - they give little or no idea of the economic and social effects of these transactions. Neither do the available English language sources enable us to gauge,

beyond the most obvious structural features, what pre-colonial, that is to say pre any European contact - society was like - what its finer identifying features were. Other sources, however - the annual reports prepared by the British administration on the peninsula for example - do give a very good idea of not only how the British operated in Malaya, but the social effect of this administration and all that came with it.

In sum, what the sources do allow us to see is this. It was the penetration of merchants into the northern peninsular region which set in motion distinctive modern social change there - a social change which was re-enforced by the later colonial administrative presence. There were several important features to that transformation which lie at the heart of the distinctiveness of the Northern Malay States in Malaysian history. Throughout the period the basic relationship of northern Malay peasant agriculturalists to land - the main means of production - was fundamentally altered. Land occupancy as a juristic right on the western model of land tenure and land ownership (as opposed to recognition of de-facto occupancy of land), was introduced. Land became a commodity. It was largely as a result of these changes that the basic relationship of those involved in the productive process to land became fundamentally different. With the commoditization of land relations between the various groups involved in the productive process - peasants, money lenders, bulk purchasers of produce, government officials and the like - was altered in basic and important ways. A related development saw the peasant producer pushed and induced into greater commodity production - in particular rice and later rubber production. The fact that the peasant was becoming increasingly drawn into commodity production altered the nature and significance of existing production relations and entailed the peasant coming into contact with more diverse and often more distant groups of people in the productive process. One consequence of the changing significance of land in the productive process and the commoditization of the product in the northern Malay context was the separation of a significant number of the northern Malay peasantry from the land. Landlordism and tenancy thus became significant features in the northern Malay rural economy - a development which meant that a significant number of northern Malay peasant agriculturalists came to exist in a new relationship with landowners on the basis of a modern land tenurial system.

Certainly all this entailed some important structural changes in the NMS economy and society. But the degree to which structural change occurred should not be overstated. It is

important to understand that colonial and Independence governments by-and-large sought to keep Malay society in its traditional state and have generally shied away from making changes to the traditional Malay social order. As a consequence its outer morphology remained little changed throughout the period. Nonetheless, as I have indicated, while NMS peasant society may have looked the same significant and basic changes did occur in the way in which the major groups in that society interrelated with one another. The point is that outside influences altered the inherent logic of the productive process in the four states in a way which produced new contradictions within that process and a new contentiousness for the various groups involved in it. One result of this was new kinds of tension between groups involved in production - a tension which was always latent and which throughout the period of my study broke out into open opposition and sometimes physical conflict. It is this change to the process of production that embodied the essential history of the Northern Malay States throughout the period of my study and indicates the fundamental nature of their distinctiveness in Malaysian history. It is a process which, while not so visible to us for the period between the first European contact and 1909, can clearly be seen in the later decades of its development.

It is important to stress at this juncture that since the peasant agriculturalists in the NMS made up the largest group in the region and have continued throughout the period to be the productive mainstay of the states economies, their role in the productive process is the main focus of this thesis. However, non-peasant groups, though less significant in numerical terms, performed a vital role in the productive process and exercised an influence out of proportion to their numbers. It is important then to maintain a broader view of the composition of those involved in the productive process in the NMS to include not only the peasants as the primary producing mainstay of the economy but traditional power holders, money lenders, bulk handlers, shop keepers and the like in the local rural environment. Also, colonial government officials, politicians, entrepreneur and others operating at a broader level within the four states. And remotely though still very importantly, politicians, bureaucrats, entrepreneur and others in England as well. It was these groups and others which, across the full period of this study, were contending for a share in the productive wealth of the region. It is in the social relations arising from small scale agricultural production that the essential character of the four states mainly lies. To be sure, small scale peasant agriculture was not the only kind of

economically productive activity in the four states. The functioning of the Duff Development Company for example with its large scale commercial operation was markedly different from the small scale peasant enterprise which characterized the NMS economies. However such large scale extractive enterprise was, unlike the situation which prevailed to the south on the peninsular, of relatively little importance in the northern states and had no dominant effect in determining the overall character of those societies.

Throughout the period of my study it has been the tension between producers and non-producers which is most noticeable and which appears to have been the major formative influence on society and social change within the region. The evidence clearly indicates then that, to a very large extent the modern history of the NMS is the story of the working out of this basic conflict - a working out of the tension between rulers and ruled, between direct producers and those appropriating their surplus, in the specific historical conditions of pre-colonial, colonial and then independent Malaya and Malaysia and it is essential to understand this conflict since it has remained a central basic feature of the history of the NMS and the relationship between those states and the wider colonial and then independent state within which it was placed. We must comprehend this central conflict relationship if we are to understand why NMS history has taken the course that it has.

I use the terms 'surplus' and 'surplus extraction' here and throughout the thesis in a very general sense. In so doing I have in mind a feature common to all societies and which I am drawing attention to here for the NMS. By 'surplus' I mean the wealth created by direct producers beyond that needed to maintain and reproduce themselves and which is appropriated - extracted - by individuals and groups having more power in an hierarchical society in support of themselves in that superordinate position. Thus, the surplus extraction I have in mind when I use the term in the NMS context is the social function fundamental to any society since the division of labour. That surplus, as we shall see, could be extracted in a number of forms in the NMS throughout the period of this study: it could be demanded in the form of forced labour; in the form of seized produce; in kind in the form of an uneven share of produce obtained on an unequal exchange; and, increasingly in the later part of the colonial period of this study, in the form of cash. And the way in which it was extracted in the NMS throughout the period of this study varied in place and time. Both the method and form of surplus extraction - whether by say the earlier direct seizing produce or by the later imposing

of monetary taxes through the instrumentality of colonial government agency - is strong factor in deciding the nature of social relations between all those involved in production and especially those between direct producers and those siphoning off some of the value of that production for themselves. In the NMS throughout the period of this study, as is the case with any society at any time, the latter relationship was a strong basic influence, which, together with a multiplicity of other factors, determined the basic character of those state societies.

My initial intention of a 'before' and 'after', pre-colonial mode of production to colonial one approach, proved not possible on the available sources. In so doing I wanted to start by describing the traditional mode of production in the four states as it existed untouched by any colonial influence at all and then to move on to make the contrast with a description of the mode of production as it had come to be by 1942, after the contact with the colonial influences. The trouble in so doing was that the earlier recorded impressions of Malay society in the four states upon which I sought to rely - the writings of Clifford, Skeat and Laidlaw, in particular - although they purported to describe a traditional culture, may have been, given the fact of its significant and long-lived exposure to European influence by the time they came to make their observations, really describing a society undergoing significant change. The same problem existed in seeking to extrapolate from Gullick's excellent account of traditional Malay society as a means of understanding what NMS society was like before the impact of European influence. Gullick's study is a scrutiny of traditional Malay society in the western Malay states (Perak, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan) as it had come to be by 1874, the year Britain assumed control of them. The problem for me in relying on Gullick was twofold: there was the question of the degree to which his study based mainly on the four states to the south was a guide to traditional Malay society in the NMS - the degree and extent to which traditional Malay society was the same everywhere on the peninsular; and there was the matter of the degree to which all the states on the peninsular including those at the focus of his study had been altered by the very considerable colonial commercial influences that had been in operation on the peninsular in the decades leading up to 1874.⁵⁴ Certainly we can say that for

⁵⁴ Certainly, as I have indicated in a footnote above in this chapter, Gullick has, in a subsequent work, gone some of the way towards acknowledging this limitation in his earlier study - the one to which I now refer. Curiously, however, he does not develop on this, choosing instead to leave his Indigenous Political Systems to stand as a 'zero point' for the later study.

the most part the outward morphology of the traditional Malay society described by Clifford, Skeat and Laidlaw, Gullick and others must have been as described for a long time. This is, surely, the very great value of these observations - that they give us the broad picture in this way. But for our purpose here it is fair to ask how far changes - changes beneath the surface of that morphology - subtle but very significant fundamental changes in social relations as colonial commerce began to have its effect on local production - were occurring in the four northern states and to the south on the peninsular at the time the recorded participant observations of Clifford, Skeat, Laidlaw and others - observations relied upon by Gullick - were made. In sum, to borrow Gullick's phrase in a much later piece of writing, the question is whether his 1958 study really did mark the 'zero point' in social development he had in mind at the time.⁵⁵

The doubt as to whether 1874 is a valid dividing point in time between pre and colonial Malay society is strongly suggested by Khoo Kay Kim in his excellent study of the political effects of commercial development on Malaya in the third quarter of the last century.⁵⁶ Khoo Kay Kim concludes that 'traditional Malay society' in the three western Malay states (Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan) of his study 'experienced more profoundly than it had ever done before, at least since it came into contact with Islam several hundred years previously, the pressure of extraneous forces which steered it towards a new course of development'.⁵⁷ He acknowledges that 'it was customary to consider the year 1874 [the year of British intervention in these states] as the all important watershed in the history of the peninsular' and urges readers to see the significance of that year 'in proper perspective'.⁵⁸ The preceding quarter century - the period of his study - should not 'be seen merely as a prelude' to British intervention. 'It is important in other respects', he says, 'for both the emergence of a plural

Gullick, Malay Society, pp. v-vii (Preface), 1-19 (Introduction), passim.

⁵⁵ Gullick uses the term in the preface to his 1987 study of Malay society. See my discussion of this volume in footnotes above in this chapter and the chapter immediately following.

Gullick, Malay Society, p v.

⁵⁶ Khoo Kay Kim, The Western Malay States 1850-1873: The Effects of Commercial Development on Malay Politics (Kuala Lumpur, 1972).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

society and the general structure of Malaysia's present economy had their origins in that eventful period of the nineteenth century'.⁵⁹

While Khoo Kay Kim drew attention in the early nineteen seventies to significant social change in the western Malay states in the decades leading up to 1874 he did so only in very general terms and did not describe it. Some ten years later Peter Burns developed on this broad idea of fundamental social change on the peninsular by the eighteen seventies by showing how a capitalist mode of production existed in the tin producing states of Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong by 1874.⁶⁰ Beyond this Burns identifies elements of the new mode of production as being 'in evidence throughout the West Coast Malay states by the 1870s'.⁶¹ He gave examples: 'commodity production in agriculture especially rice in Kedah, gambier and pepper in the Straits Settlements and Johore, sugar in Province Wellesley'.⁶² The emergence of features of the new mode of production had, he wrote, been long in evidence on the peninsular before 1874: 'labourers with no control over the means of production had existed in agriculture and mining from the end of the 18th century. Merchants seeking outlets in production, or seeking to control production, have a continuing presence in the history of the Straits Settlements'.⁶³ But it was, he wrote, in the three tin producing states that the transition from one mode of production to another was strongest. Clearly, then, Khoo Kay Kim and Burns are at variance with Gullick's view that these states were 'at zero point' prior to 1874. While his study, as his title suggest, is about the politics arising from the deep seated economic and wider social changes he sees as occurring at this time, not the changes themselves, it nonetheless signals the need for caution in interpreting Gullick's work as a description of a purely traditional Malay economy and society.⁶⁴ While Khoo Kay Kim and Burns are focussed on the three western states which were subject to much stronger colonial

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 227.

⁶⁰ Peter Burns, "Capitalism and the Malay States", in Alavi and others, Capitalism and Colonial Production, passim.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 175.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Burns describes Khoo Kay Kim's focus in these terms.

Burns, "Capitalism and the Malay States", p. 160.

commercial influence than was the case in the four northern states their work nonetheless invites consideration of the strong possibility that the NMS were, under the lesser but still very significant colonial influence there, also in transition well before any formal British intervention there.

The problem is that we don't have much choice but to rely on sources 'tainted' by colonial modernity in this way for the traditional period of Malay society. Even if we wanted to discard Gullick's description of indigenous Malay society at the relatively late period of time in favour of a scrutiny of that society for an earlier period the sources, or at least the English language sources, are't likely to allow us to do so effectively. For example, the observations of Winstedt on the early history of Malay society on the peninsular, excellent as they are on the terms on which they were offered, have the limitation that they were focussed on the distant past well before the period of European penetration with all the difficulties for us that this implies.⁶⁵ His description is too fragmented - too piecemeal - (the sources of information are simply too thin for it to be otherwise) - to provide the kind of coherent and comprehensive description needed to make the 'before' and 'after' comparison. Where Winstedt comes forward in time in his description of traditional Malay society to the period of European contact the question remains, as with Skeat, Laidlaw, and Clifford, whether the society being described is really traditional in the purest sense or one already in the early stages of modern transformation.⁶⁶ Likewise modern scholarship such as that of David Wong on traditional Malay land tenure, necessarily relies heavily on colonial scholarship focussed on a Malay society already under European influence and, arguably, in a state of early transition.⁶⁷

Mindful of this difficulty as it applies to the NMS my chapters 2 and 3 therefore have the more limited objective of pegging the mode of production and wider society around this as it had come to be by 1909 - a mode of production clearly well down the path of colonial modernization by then - leaving open the question of how 'traditional' that society was at that time. What is needed for an even better understanding of how NMS society came to develop

⁶⁵ Richard Winstedt, The Malays A Cultural History(London, 1961).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ David S. Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings in the Malay States(Singapore, 1975).

the basic character it had by 1942 and retains to the present day is a preliminary study allowing a definitive understanding of how a pre-colonial, non-European influenced mode of production operated in the four states. Certainly the degree to which it is possible to identify the essential characteristics of the NMS so far back in time is unclear. Such a study is needed however if we are to fully understand the transition from the old society to the new there. It may well be that a closer scrutiny of indigenous sources and archeological evidence will take us a long way towards completing our understanding of social transformation in the four states in this way at some point in the future.

Forward in time from 1909 in this thesis there is much less of a source problem. I found there was enough secondary and primary source material available to me to sufficiently describe the main features and contemporary significance of over one and a half centuries of social change in chapters 4 to 8. Recent economic and political developments in West Malaysia - the electoral successes of the radical Islamic political party PAS and the race riots on the peninsular of 1969 for example - have been the subject of some considerable scholarly attention in recent decades. That scholarship has sought out the underlying causes of such developments and give clear pointers for us in exploring the social transformation on the peninsular in general and the NMS in particular from 1909 to 1980. In so doing I have relied very much on Kessler's account of the earlier PAS successes in Kelantan and Funston's book on the NMS in the wider context of Malaysian history.⁶⁸ Stenson's "Class and Race" observations in relation to the 1969 race riots have helped me strongly in my approach and understanding of this topic and the related one of the New Economic Policy (NEP) implemented by the Malaysian government in response to the riots.⁶⁹ Both topics are dealt with by me in my chapter 8 below. Three studies - an article by Rosemary Barnard, the book by James C Scott, and an official Malaysian government report authored by Afifuddin Haji Omar - have proved especially useful for me in describing economic and social change in the Muda region of Kedah in my penultimate thesis chapter.⁷⁰ In their focus on the developmental

⁶⁸ Kessler, Islam and Politics.

Funston, Malay Politics.

⁶⁹ Michael Stenson, "Class and Race".

⁷⁰ Afifuddin Haji Omar, Some organizational Aspects of Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Growth Linkages In the Development of the Muda Region (Agricultural Division, Muda

Muda project in the nineteen seventies in that state all three sources help us to understand the effect of the NEP on the NMS in the independence period. The limited access that tends to apply to official primary documentation for recent decades and the physical limitations for me - the difficulty of distance and travel - have meant that a definitive grasp of many important post 1957 aspects of the topic have remained beyond my grasp. As time passes and documents, both official and private, become available, these gaps in our understanding of the NMS in the contemporary Malaysian context will no doubt be filled.

Framed in these terms then the broad aim of this thesis is to elucidate the historical origins of the distinctive and problematic nature of the Northern Malay States indicated in the recent history of Malaysia. I have sought to do so by examining the way in which colonial and post colonial influences have affected the economy and society in these states from the base upwards within the context of the wider Malayan and Malaysian society throughout the period. My basic contention is that colonial influences had a profound impact on the basics of the four state societies. My main argument is that these influences had a strong impact on the way in which individuals and groups sought to meet their material needs through production and the social relations that hinged on this - in short, the mode of production - and that in so doing altered the basic character of NMS society. It was these colonial influences - principally colonial enterprise especially merchant enterprise, operating latterly in concert with and under the auspices of, colonial state authorities, and that state authority in its own right - that altered the way in which these state societies were organized around production.

In particular it is the effect of these influences at the economic base in these state societies which holds the key to our understanding of that distinctiveness and which is therefore a main focus of this study. While I have been able to hypothesize what the effect of colonial influences over the entire period of their operation - the earliest changes to the economy and society in the four states must have started with the first European contacts in the sixteenth century - I am only able to tackle these changes in a definitive sense for the later

Agricultural Development Authority, Kedah, 1977).

Rosemary Banard, "The Modernization of Agriculture in a Kedah Village 1967-1978", Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs, Vol. 13, No. 2, (1979).

Scott, Weapons of the Weak.

period of the social transformation - for the period 1909 onwards.

It is clear that by World War 11 the NMS economy and society was fundamentally different in a number of important ways. By 1945 the four states had a social organisation which was driven by a significantly altered logic from that which was in play in 1909. It is this basic social organisation which has continued into the post war period to 1980, and beyond this to the present day.

The NMS: the SE Asian Context.

It is important to make it clear here that, in exploring the emergence of new kinds of production relations throughout the period to the north on the peninsular the case is being made for evident class tensions emerging within the context of the changing mode of production and not for widespread and sustained peasant revolt in the region. Clearly the Northern Malay States and West Malaysia as a whole differed from other countries in the Southeast Asian region - Vietnam, Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines for example - in this respect: whereas in the latter countries major peasant rebellions have marked themselves as an important feature of their histories Malaya has seen only isolated outbreaks of peasant rebelliousness which were very localized and on a much smaller scale and which have appeared only a minor feature of that country's history. It is this relative absence of strong peasant resistance that has fostered a belief in the quiescence of the Malay peasantry in the conventional interpretations of Malaysian history. The recent Kedah disturbances in particular however invite a reconsideration of this interpretation.⁽⁷¹⁾ These disturbances,

71 The most notable statement of this challenge is that by Stenson and is dealt with more fully below in this thesis.

Stenson, 'Class and Race', passim.

In rejecting the perception of 'British observers' that the raayat were 'passive and uncompromising' by nature Dianne Lewis, in her study of Kedah in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (referred to by me at some length in the penultimate chapter of this thesis), says:

...[T]his proves to wide of the mark in Kedah. There is considerable evidence that the village people were very quick to complain to the district chief, or the Sultan himself, when they felt themselves injured. Many of these complaints were directed against the penghulu, who do not seem on the whole to have been very able.

Dianne Lewis, "Kedah - The Development of a Malay State in the 18th and 19th Centuries" (typescript held in the University of Malaya Library. It is, I think, a paper. I read it in 1990. I have no other bibliographic details), p. 3.

occurring within the decades when peasant support for a radical Islamic challenge to the political status quo was strongly manifest suggest, from the point of view of established authority on the peninsular, a 'late developing peasant problem' and clearly invite a re-think of the nature of basic social organization and the sources of social conflict on the peninsular in general, and the NMS in particular.⁷² It is especially the need for a closer scrutiny of the relations between producer and non-producer in the four states that is strongly suggested by these contentious developments. Malaysia stands apart not as a country without peasant rebellion but rather as one in which peasant rebelliousness in the colonial and neo-colonial context has been developing slowly in comparison with the level of peasant contention in neighbouring countries.⁷³

The contrasting reactions of the West Malaysian peasantry with the peasantry elsewhere in Southeast Asia can be understood in terms of the differing importance of peasant surplus to the Malayan colonial economy in the wider Southeast Asian context. Whereas peasant surpluses were critical to the colonial economy in Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia they were not in Malaya. For Malaya as a whole then it was the productive relations between the colonial state apparatus and immigrant labour in the developing extractive and plantation economies which was of central importance to the economy and

⁷² The phrase used by Adelaide academic historian Dr. Peter Burns.

Peter Burns, "Peasantry and National Integration in Peninsular Malaysia: A Case of a Late-Developing peasant Problem", (Centre for Asian Studies, Working Paper No. 13, 1982).

In the paper he outlined the differing importance of peasant surpluses in the differing localities on the peninsular.

A more recent account of the differing importance of the surplus is to be found in his chapter contribution to Capitalism and Colonial Production.

Peter Burns, "Capitalism and the Malay States" in Alavi and others, Capitalism and Colonial Production, p. 174.

⁷³ An interesting slant on this is provided by Scott in his study of a village in the Muda district of Kedah. Scott advances the view that the scholarship in this area had become preoccupied with peasant wars of liberation - with peasant resistance on a dramatic scale. What was needed, he said, was a proper appreciation of lesser - everyday - forms of peasant resistance to exploitation. His own work is a detailed description of just such resistance for the locality of his study.

His approach matches comfortably, then, with a country which has not seen the dramatic resistance experienced elsewhere in South East Asia and where the temptation has been for observers to see inactivity - quiescence - as a characteristic of the Malay peasantry. Scott's work serves a useful purpose then as a counterweight to this view.

politics of the peninsular. The Malayan peasantry was under much less pressure than those of other southeast Asian economies to produce for a colonial export economy and so the relations between the colonial elite in Malaya and the peasant were therefore less contentious.

An important distinction has existed, too, between the importance of peasant surplus in north and south Malaya. Whereas the four northern states (and more specifically the Malay elites who ran them under the auspices of British authority) were dependent upon peasant surplus for their support this was not the case to the south where large scale commercialized tin extraction and later plantation agriculture, mainly rubber growing, provided most of the funds needed to sustain the state. In these enterprises Malays were considered unsuitable to use as a labour force and immigrant ethnic labour was imported in their stead. In Johore, where large scale capitalist enterprise was a later development on that occurring in the tin producing states immediately to Johore's north, a state dependency on peasant surplus continued until the late nineteenth century when the rubber industry became established. In Perak, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, and later Johore it was the ethnic immigrant (mainly Chinese and Indian) labour that sustained the export economy focussed there. There was no large scale export economy in the NMS and so the question of labour supply for substantial export production was never an issue. At no time was the peasantry on the peninsular - whether in the north or the south - coopted into large scale production for export.

Indirectly, however, the NMS peasantry was being drawn into production in support of the colonial state and its export economy on the peninsular. Throughout the 1909 to 1945 period the NMS peasantry - and especially that in Kedah and Perlis - came under increasing pressure to produce the rice needed by Malaya as a whole - to produce the staple needed to sustain the wider colonial state. These states, and to a lesser extent Kelantan and Trengganu as well, came increasingly to produce the rice needed to feed the labouring population in the export economy. As such they came to be regarded as the granary of the peninsular as a whole. This was, for the NMS peasantry involved, pressure of a lesser order from that being experienced by peasants elsewhere in SE Asia, but pressure nonetheless and did, as we shall see, have contentious consequences.

To sum up, then, in broad terms it was the productive relations between the colonial elite and the direct producers on whom that elite depended for the maintenance of its social position that lay at the heart of NMS society. In the south it was the relations between a

colonial elite and immigrant labour in the tin and rubber export economies which was central: of secondary though still very great importance were the relations existing between a colonial elite and the peasantry. In the four states to the north on the peninsular, however, it was the productive relationship between the colonial elite and the peasantry - the raayat of whom they were a part - that was central. As a result the economic demands on the NMS Malay peasantry were stronger than in the south since they had a much stronger supportive role as the basis of the state economies unlike the situation which prevailed in the south. It is this fact which largely accounts for the differing, stronger response of the peasantry there to the intrusion of colonial influences into their domain and goes a long way towards accounting for the differing political behaviour of the northern state Malays. It is basically for this reason that Northern Malay State politics was and is based on a response to class tensions in the countryside to a much greater extent than has been the case to the south where the differing productive relations gave rise to differing political responses and a differing society. Not only have class tensions within the rural community appeared stronger in the NMS for the reason stated here but those tensions have, because the region has an ethnic homogeneity not found in the south, been more visible in a way explained in this thesis below.

We can see then in very broad and fundamental terms the reason for a 'late developing peasant problem' in West Malaysia focussed as that is to the north of the peninsular. At the same time it is important to stress that while the strong peasant oppositionist tendencies revealed in the Kedah disturbances and the popular support in the northern states for politically organized radical Islam are comparatively recent occurrences and the peasant problem has been late developing in that sense class tensions have certainly been manifest in the Northern Malay States over a much longer period of time. Earlier examples of such tension are very much in evidence most notably in the form of peasant revolts against colonial rule in Kelantan and Trengganu in the early decades of this century. Thus while the NMS peasantry have not appeared strongly problematic for state authority until comparatively recently the earlier revolts did manifest class tensions in a way creating some difficulty for colonial state administration at the time and are clearly indicative of the existence of a latent class tension in general and a tension between producers and non-producers in particular within the context of a modernizing mode of production from the earliest years of formal colonial rule. The Kelantan and Trengganu risings highlight then certain central aspects to the

changing nature of the mode of production in the northern Malay states for the earlier period of formal colonial rule and this assists us to chart the strength of the economic and social changes occurring in these states at the particular times in the pre war period. It is because the changes to the mode of production in the four states and the modern pressures that this carried for the peasantry took until 1942 to become generalized and well established that the stronger peasant resistance to established authority emerged in the post war period. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia the fact that the peasantry provided the bulk of the labour for the colonial export economy from the outset of a formal colonial presence hastened and intensified the change to the pre-colonial mode of production so that class tensions which were an integral part of this change were manifest in those countries well before World War II. Thus whereas major peasant uprisings had occurred in Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia and Burma well before the war the northern Malay peasantry had, in the pre-war period registered their protest principally with two small scale risings which were quickly and relatively easily dealt with by colonial authorities.

In sum then because colonial influences had less impact on the Malayan peasantry not directly involved in the colonial export economy than was the case with peasantry elsewhere in Southeast Asia under strong pressure to labour in support of a colonial export market changes to the Malay economy and society on the peninsular in general were longer in the making. Thus the Malay peasantry, while not quiescent, were less rebellious because class tensions were taking longer to build to an intensity where they would break out in the form of major overt resistance to established authority. Within this broad relativity there was a differential effect of colonial influence on the peasant community on the peninsular, that influence being stronger in the four states to the north than it was in those to the south and it is for this reason the emerging peasant problem on the peninsular has been largely focussed there.

As I have indicated, my intention in this thesis was to present a synoptic view of social change in the NMS from the period of the earliest penetration of colonial influence into the region to the present day. I wanted to focus on the way in which colonial trade, production and administration altered the mode of production in the NMS and to demonstrate how this process constitutes the essential history of those states in the wider Malayan/Malaysian context.

Partly because I found a very uneven accessibility to sources I have needed to scale down this academic exercise. What we can see clearly on the English language and other sources available to me is the way in which the mode of production was changing in certain of its essentials between 1909 and 1942 - the years coinciding with a formal British presence in the four states. It is these years which saw a major social transformation in the four states. While we know that the British presence in 1909 was superimposed upon a society that must have been in marked transition from the earliest European contact we are not in a position to engage in a thorough going definitive exploration of the nature and character of that change in its earliest period. We can extrapolate from more general studies on the make up of society on the peninsular in the pre-1909 period and it is possible on this basis, and on the basis of other fragmented evidence in the sources, to sketch in quite a good picture of what NMS society was like - had come to be - by 1909.

It is this sketch in the next two chapters which will form the starting point - the benchmark - for a closer examination of social change in the four states for the 1909 - 1942 period in my Chapter 5. Chapter 5 will examine the way in which the operation of the colonial state in the north served to reinforce social changes already in train there and to add a new impetus and character to those changes. As a preliminary to this Chapter 4 describes the process whereby the colonial state expanded onto the peninsular from a measure of control over the central tin and rubber producing states to include the NMS and Johore as well.

The first of the two benchmark chapters - Chapter 2 - will describe in general terms the main features of the NMS economy and society as these existed in dynamic form, and insofar as they can be ascertained so far back in time with so little evidence, in 1909. Chapter 2 makes general reference to trade in very general terms in order to establish its role within the wider context of the other pre 1909 social features of the four states. However, since trade and traders were, before the presence of colonial officials on the peninsular the trigger for, and the driving influence behind, social change in the four states I have dealt with its social impact there more fully in a separate chapter - Chapter 3. In that chapter I focus on the operation and effect of trade as a stimulus for marked social change during a later period of time - the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - in order to indicate something of the changes occurring in the NMS at the time the British established a formal presence in them. Thus, while Chapter 2 seeks to describe the main elements of a changing NMS society to around the

last quarter of the nineteenth century, Chapter 3 focusses more on the closing decades of last century and the opening years of this one, with considerable overlap in time between the two chapters. Chapter 3 describes how traders and trade operated in the NMS prior to 1909. While it is the effect of this on the economy and society in those states that really interests us the sources which give us such a good idea of how trade operated are largely silent on the matter of the social effect of this trade. Certainly the social effect of this trade is of vital importance to our understanding of the way in which the traditional mode of production began to change in the pre-1909 period. While it is difficult for the practical reasons stated to describe the pre-1909 social changes it is necessary to attempt some sort of sketching in of the main outlines of these changes in order to place us in a position to gauge the social changes which followed 1909 and which are the main focus of this thesis. Both Chapters 3 and 4 are descriptive of the twin aspects - trade and colonial government - coming to bear in producing major social transformation in the four states in the lead up to 1909 and during the formal colonial period to 1957.

It is in chapters 2 - 5, then, that I argue that by around 1942 modern influences had produced a recognisably different and distinctive NMS society fundamentally different from that in operation in 1909. It is these earlier thesis chapters which are concerned with the operation and effect of wider colonial historical factors in bringing about a modern society in the northern states. It is chapters 3 to 5 which show that it was at base the way that outside individuals and organizations emanating from the colonial metropolis influenced the process of production in the northern Malay states, in a way which fundamentally altered that process, as a major causational factor producing distinctive social change there.

Clearly the modernizing influences described in these early chapters of my thesis, in their effect of changing the context and purpose of production and in producing new kinds of productive relations, brought into play modern tensions between the various groups coming together in the productive process as these competed with each other for a share of the wealth produced in the region. In chapter 6 and 7 I examine some notable instances of the overt expression of this tension. The examples chosen - the Kelantan and Trengganu risings and the conflict surrounding the Malayan Union proposal - involved significant opposition on the part of the northern state Malays to particular aspects of British colonial rule. It is opposition given expression at the base level of northern Malay society which clearly exposes the myth of a

totally quiescent peasantry submissive to the dictates of their new colonial masters. It is in these chapters in particular then that, following the lead of Allen and others I seek out more realistic perception of northern Malay state peasant reaction to his changing colonial circumstances.⁷⁴ While the peasant reaction to colonial circumstances is an important and central aspect in the overall picture of colonial social conflict my focus in these chapters extends to a wider examination of the role of all the main social groups involved in these disputes. The chapters caution the need to be wary of adopting too narrow and superficial an interpretation of these conflicts in terms of a bilateral confrontation involving British officialdom on the one hand and an undifferentiated Malay response to certain of its policies on the other. Likewise we need to be wary of perceiving the Malay response to the Malayan Union proposals as a strong indicator of an emerging sense of Malay national identity without examining how the more tangible and short term motivations of the Malay population - concerns which are so clearly evident in the two risings - came to be directed towards achieving the very abstract goal of preserving a Malay national identity and integrity in the year immediately following World War II. In brief then my resistance chapters urge the need for a broader and deeper appreciation of the nature and causes of the Malay reaction against British rule. I argue accordingly that the Malay opposition to colonial policy so sharply manifest in the NMS was at base an expression of the tensions and pressures engendered by the changes to the way in which society was organized around production in them.

Chapter 8 is the title chapter and examines the distinctive and problematic nature of the Northern Malay States in the modern Malayan and Malaysian context in the light of the changes explored in the chapters above. It is this chapter which focusses on the 'late developing peasant problem' as it has appeared to central government in Malaya/Malaysia. It explores contemporary society and social change in the four northern states in the wider Malaysian context to 1980 as an expression, ultimately, of the basic contradictions contained within the dominant modern rural mode of production in those northern states to that year.

A Practical Approach to the Sources.

Before closing the chapter a brief word in more practical vein on the source materials will further assist the reader in understanding my approach to the topic and will

⁷⁴ Allen, "Kelantan Rising", passim.

perhaps be of use to others who may wish to pursue research on the Northern Malay States. The most obvious point for me to make at the outset is that my thesis is based almost entirely on English language source materials and for the most part my comments here apply to sources in the English language. Certainly this language restriction imposes a significant limitation on my access to the total pool of recorded knowledge on the subject. Nonetheless the available English language source materials have allowed me substantial insight into the social dynamics of the four states, especially for the earlier period of my interest. Since there is no one major English language source dealing in any comprehensive way with the four Northern Malay States, and the tendency in the sources in general is to treat the NMS as peripheral to the colonial states to the south, it has been necessary to piece together the course of events marking social change in the region from a wide variety of secondary and primary source materials exhibiting a wide variety of approaches to, and perspectives on, their subject.

I have found the sources uneven both in quantity and in terms of their utility for my topic. This is perhaps an inevitable consequence of attempting a broader overview of a hitherto largely neglected subject. At the same time it was the anticipation of just such a difficulty with the sources that suggested a more general initial approach to the four states inviting others to more closely examine specific aspects painted here in broad outline.

The main substance of my thesis deals with the economic and social change occurring in the four northern states throughout the colonial period and it is this period which offers the greater quantity of source material for the historian studying that region. The strong primary British colonial influence on the peninsular has meant a wealth of English language source material for that period. It is source materials relating to the Northern Malay States situated within this core of material which have been the documentary mainstay of this thesis. On the basis of the sources available to me I have been able to indicate in broad outline wider British colonial and foreign policy in relation to the NMS and in more specific terms the colonial administrative policy and practice in operation in those states, and have been able to go beyond this on the basis of the same kind of source material to examine the more fundamental economic and social consequences of those policies. These sources allow us a very good picture of the modus operandi of the colonial state and of economic enterprise that operated under its auspices. Notwithstanding the limitations of the sources discussed in this chapter above they do nonetheless allow a good idea of the effect that these colonial

influences had at the level of the economic base in the four states. Of particular assistance to me have been the annual reports prepared by the British Advisers presenting a pragmatic review of the social and economic progress of the respective NMS individually. I have also made much use of more obscure published primary and secondary sources conveying, peripherally, vital information on social change in the region.⁷⁵ I found that say a scientific article on Malayan agriculture, or an article on Malayan railways and the like, while initially appearing largely irrelevant to my topic, could nonetheless in passing or in full convey vital detail throwing light on the changing rural mode of production the area - detail not hitherto picked up by the secondary sources. Likewise, in a more direct and fully developed way, the first hand observations of Clifford, Skeat and Laidlaw and other early colonial observers have recorded, without drawing attention to its deeper significance, evidence of a Malay rural society undergoing early modern transformation and I have accordingly placed much reliance on their writings.

The greater concentration of colonial source materials in one place exists in England and London in particular and it is mainly for this reason that the bulk of my research was conducted in the United Kingdom. The main repositories of source material of use to me are to be found in the Public Records Office (PRO), the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) library, the University of London library, the library of the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) library and the Rhodes House library in Oxford. Although there is useful source material available in west Malaysia and Singapore, particularly in the form of local undergraduate theses, it has not been practical for me to pursue my enquiry to any great extent in those countries.

⁷⁵ For example, agricultural journals, travelogue descriptions, and the like.

CHAPTER 2

THE PRE-1909 ECONOMY AND SOCIETY IN THE NORTHERN MALAY STATES.

(a) Introduction.

When the British established a formal presence for themselves in the NMS in the first decade of this century they did not encounter societies in the locality which were static in the sense that they existed in some traditional form totally unchanged by modern outside European influences.¹ When that formal presence was introduced - in 1902 in the case of Kelantan and 1909 in the remaining three states - it was into societies already experiencing a colonial transformation. While those societies still looked traditional on the surface - and were treated by British observers at the time as though they were as they had been in the period prior to any European contact - they were, arguably, in a state of marked transition between the old and the new. I therefore use the term 'pre-colonial' in this chapter and throughout the thesis to mean traditional and totally uninfluenced by European factors. And, correspondingly, 'colonial' in the context of my thesis means influenced in some significant way by European factors from the time of the earliest presence of those factors onwards.

Because change in the NMS occurred gradually the periodization of the impact and effect of colonial influences is difficult. For a long period of time the NMS contained some characteristics which were indigenous to settled Malay society and some features which were modern. It is necessary therefore to be wary of attempting to draw too hard-and-fast a line between colonial and pre-colonial periods on the peninsular and I make no attempt to do so here.

The periodization is further complicated by the fact that change occurred at an uneven pace across the NMS. While there is a theoretical possibility of picking the time at which particular states crossed the line from being mainly traditional to mainly colonial in character and therefore pinning down the time of modern transition for the NMS as a whole this remains in practice an impossibility since we lack the historical evidence to do so in

¹ Although they are often treated by scholars and other commentators as though they are, no society is ever static. All societies, whether in a state of open conflict or not, have a dynamic of opposing social forces. Society will either exist in a state of tension (latent conflict) between them or open conflict between them. See my discussion of broad historiographical approaches above where I discuss the view that over time society alternates between periods of turmoil and conflict on the one hand and states of harmony and equilibrium on the other.

anything other than the most general terms. For the NMS as a whole, then, we can really only say that there was a society in the four states which had certain basic characteristics prior to the arrival of the first Europeans in significant numbers in the sixteenth century and that by 1874 in the tin producing states, and by 1909 in the four NMS, there existed societies exhibiting marked signs of modern colonial change. It is because these societies were experiencing changes which were very largely, though not entirely, beneath the surface, that the strong tendency has been, and still is, to see them as being in their natural indigenous state at the time the British advisers came. That they were undergoing marked transition is, I contend, beyond dispute and the main point I want to demonstrate in this chapter and the one which immediately follows it. The degree to which, and the precise nature of, that transition is open to debate as I have indicated in my introductory chapter above. In this thesis I have only been able, very unevenly on the basis of a patchy treatment in the secondary sources and only very limited primary source information (mainly first hand participant observation) to outline something of the way this transition was occurring in the four states which are the focus of my study. Certainly the nature of this social change will need much closer scrutiny in the scholarship if we are to fully understand how the NMS came to be as they are today.

My main intention, then, in this chapter and the next, is to outline some of the key characteristics of NMS society as it had come to be by 1909. My purpose in so doing is to peg something of the nature and magnitude of social change occurring there to that time. This chapter, and the one which follows it, are intended to act as the starting point for our understanding of the nature and degree of continuing social change that occurred in the four states under the formal colonial British presence there. What we need to complete the picture of course is a close identification of the ways in which the transition from a purely non-European society to one which had started down the path of modern transition under early European - mainly trading - influence was taking place. Such a close identification remains of real interest and relevance and would need to start with a clear enunciation of what the economy and society of the four states was like in their untouched state prior to any incursion of European influence.

The historical record on this subject - the earliest indigenous writings, the earliest colonial observations, and colonial and post colonial archeological evidence, is, for the

purposes of this exercise, thin. It does, however, allow us to see how those early societies worked in some of their broad essentials. I begin the chapter therefore with a sketch of the make-up of the pre-1909 economy and society in the north, as far as this can be done on the secondary sources this far forward in time.

Because trade was a very significant influence on society in the four states I have included a substantial treatment of it in this chapter and much more so in the next. Because it is clear that European influences were significantly altering society in the four states, and it is a plausible hypothesis that this was substantially due to the operation of merchants in the area, a substantial part of the next chapter focusses on trade. The primary and secondary sources do allow us a very good general idea of the kind and magnitude of the trade being conducted in the four states in the pre-1909 period. In this chapter I offer a broad description of the importance of trade in the pre-1909 NMS. The next chapter will focus on the social effects in the NMS of a major expansion in colonial trade on the peninsular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It should be noted before proceeding further that it is common practice within the scholarship on Malaysian history to see the 'pre-colonial' ('traditional') and 'colonial' phases on the peninsula as corresponding in time with the periods before and after the formal colonial presence there. For Gullick, for example, the dividing point in time is 1874 as we shall see. I will maintain my use of the terms in the sense defined above except where I am making reference to the views of scholars operating on the differing periodization. Where referring to such works I will generally use the terms 'pre-colonial' and 'colonial' as they do to avoid confusion, unless I want to draw attention to the difference.

The broad features of the traditional Malay State are well known, at least in terms of a perception of their structure and function, if not so much in terms of the actual class relations underlying and shaping them. There is a strong tendency in the literature on the subject to perceive relatively static social formations in Malaya, and much emphasis is placed upon what is seen as the equilibrium and balance between the functioning component parts of the Malay social system.⁽²⁾ The essential dynamics of class relations are obscured. Class

² Gullick and Roff approach it in this way.

tensions in traditional Malay society are hidden behind talk of reciprocity and acceptance of subordination and superordination in productive and wider social relations. Given this tendency to show the shadow rather than the substance of the inner workings of the pre-colonial Malay State, it is necessary to dig deeper to uncover, insofar as this is possible, the dynamic class relations based on the process of mainly agricultural production in each state. Source materials on the subject are in short supply but clues to the way in which society was organized around agricultural production in pre-1909 times in the four states are to be found in the literature on Malaya. We can then piece together a good idea, at least in broad outline, of the way in which the various groups in the region combined in production and how the class relations generated there constituted the essential character of those state societies before modern forces strongly intruded and changed them. Thus the sources allow us some understanding of the essential nature of pre-1909 society in the four states. In reading them what we want to know is how, in the period before the stronger intrusion of European, mainly British, influence in the first decade of this century, labour and the means of production came together in the NMS in the creation of productive wealth and the nature and character of the wider social relations ultimately springing from this process. We want to know how subsistence needs were met at the base level of the economy and how surplus was extracted from that base in support of traditional elites in those societies. We want a close a look as is possible at the way in which the basic relationship between rural producer and non-producer was at the core of a wider set of interlocking and contentious productive relationships which, in very large measure, made those societies what they were.

The sources allow us to go some but not by any means all of the way towards an understanding of these things. We can, on a careful scrutiny of them, see the way in which subsistence needs were met at the base level of the economy and how surplus was extracted

J.M. Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya(London, 1958).

J.M. Gullick, Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century(Singapore, 1987).

William R. Roff, The Origins of Malay Nationalism(Kuala Lumpur, 1967).

See below in this chapter for a discussion of these specific examples of the approach. See also the introductory chapter of this thesis for a discussion of this approach across a wider span of Malaysian history.

relationship between producer and non-producer was a very strong influence within a wider set of interlocking and contentious productive relationships making that society what it was.

There is no single comprehensive account of pre-1909 society in the Northern Malay States. The most comprehensive and thorough account of the 'pre-colonial' Malay political system remains Gullick's fine study Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya.⁽³⁾ Gullick's book focuses attention mainly on the southern and central states of the peninsula, Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan, with some material being drawn from Pahang and Kedah.⁽⁴⁾ Gullick's book is, however, broadly applicable to the peninsula as a whole and is treated as such by the literature on Malaya. This book is thus a good first point of reference for any examination of the pre-1909 economy and society in the Northern Malay States, but with some qualifications as we have seen in the chapter above.

Gullick emphasizes structure and function in his analysis in the manner described above immediately above in this chapter, and so lacks the depth and perspective required to answer the main questions on the pre-1909 economy in the NMS that I am seeking to answer in this thesis. Gullick's book is also limited in its usefulness in understanding the pre-colonial economy and society in the four states by the dimension of its geographic focus. The question here is how far the generalizations he makes for the particular states of his study are applicable to the states in the rest of the peninsula and caution needs to be exercised in applying his description to all the four states which are the focus of my study here in this thesis. And finally we need to be wary of Gullick's periodization of the pre-colonial period when applying his statements to the NMS. Gullick describes the Malayan political system as it existed immediately prior to the beginning of a formal British presence in the states he is concerned with in 1874. In so doing he believed that he was describing a society at 'zero point' before outside European influences were having a major impact. However, as Gullick later conceded half heartedly, colonial influences were having a significant impact on the peninsula in general and including the NMS by that year, and it is important to bear this in

³ The work cited immediately above in footnote 2 of this chapter.

⁴ Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.1.

mind when applying Gullick in the context of this thesis on North Malaya.⁵)

⁵ Evidenced, as we have seen, by Khoo Kay Kim's study of the Western Malay States and Peter Burns' argument that a capitalist mode of production existed in the tin producing states on the peninsular at the time of British intervention there in 1874.

Khoo Kay Kim, Western Malay States.

P. Burns, "Capitalism and the Malay States" in Alavi and others Capitalism and Colonial Production.

As indicated in the chapter above Gullick has subsequently (to the commencement of my drafting of this thesis) written another work on Malay society. The question has therefore arisen for me as to whether I should abandon my reliance of the prior work in favour of the later in my description in this thesis of traditional Malay society in the NMS. On a reading of the later volume I have decided that I should not.

It is clear by implication from the later work that, while the broad subject matter is similar, it is not intended as a substitute for the earlier one and that the latter still stands. Indeed, Gullick makes it clear that the two do have a sequential relationship to one another with Malay Society seeking to trace the earlier changes to traditional Malay society mainly forward in time from the cut off point for Indigenous Political Systems:

This book and Indigenous Political Systems do have a sequential connection in my mind but this book is not a simple successor to the earlier one. It stands on its own feet as a description and some analysis of what was happening in Malay society during the first generation of its experience of colonial rule and related influences.

Gullick, Malay Society., p V1

It is clear that Gullick does accept Khoo Kay Kim's assertion that '1850 or thereabouts was the time when "dynamic energies began to penetrate ever more deeply into the peninsular" and that it is 'therefore necessary to go back to the beginning of the nineteenth century to find a time when "traditional Malay society, in general, had not been structurally altered"'.

Ibid., p 2.

There is, it must be said, some inconsistency in this in that, while he appears to accept Khoo Kay Kim's assertion he nonetheless says nothing to qualify his notion that Indigenous Political Systems remains as a description of Malay society in 1874 at 'zero point' - as a 'synchronic "snapshot" of the situation to provide a starting point for the examination of the ensuing changes'.

Ibid. p 1(Preface).

While he concedes that 1874 can no longer be considered a satisfactory bench mark year there is no serious effort on his part in the later book to revise the notion of Indigenous Political Systems as a work which describes Malay society at 'zero point'. Instead, he points to the methodological difficulties of describing and understanding Malay society for the earlier period of time and announces his intention to build sequentially on his earlier work by widening his geographic and periodic focus.

Ibid., pp V1, 1 - 13.

Indeed, to the contrary he makes it clear that in writing Malay Society he relished the long awaited prospect of going 'on from "zero point" to an account of the ensuing changes'.

For our purposes, while the book is an excellent guide to the broad morphology of the traditional Malay polity on the peninsular as it existed in 1874, we can not extrapolate too specifically from this to the social organization of each of the four states by 1909. For the more detailed information on each state, insofar as this is accessible to us, it is necessary to rely on other sources of information as well.⁶

THE BROAD FEATURES OF THE PRE-1909 STATE IN NORTH MALAYA.

The Pattern and Location of Settlement.

We can safely assume that the most obvious general features of the pre-1909 Northern Malay States were those existing in common with the other states on the peninsular and which

Ibid., p V1.

In the later volume then, he does not set out to systematically describe traditional Malay society in the way that he did in the earlier work. Rather, notwithstanding his benchmark reservations, he seems to assume unqualified validity for the earlier work. His primary concern in the later volume was 'to describe and, as far so far as the available material permit[ted], to analyze the processes of change in Malay society in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century'. More specifically, he sought to do so for the period 'between 1870 and about 1905'. In chronological terms, then, the two volumes are sequential in that the second one's main focus starts around the time of (four years earlier than) the cut off year of the first.

Ibid., pp. 2,5.

It is, then, to the earlier work that we need to go for an out-and-out description of the make-up of that traditional society and how it worked and accordingly I do so in this thesis.

In his 1978 volume Gullick has lost nothing of his functionalist perception of the way in which traditional Malay society worked. For example his opening to his chapter 9 entitled 'Inequality in Malay Society' reads: 'Inequality was perceived as one of the facts of life. It was neither approved or disapproved. It simply happened and one must learn to live with it.'

Ibid. p 210.

Clearly, then, the later work has little to offer of relevance for this chapter since it is in the main an attempt to trace changes to the traditional Malay society under the formal colonial presence on the peninsular described in the earlier volume. While Malay Society does contain new and interesting material on the wider focus it is in no sense a substantial revision - an update - of Indigenous Political Systems and offers nothing significantly new on the narrower subject of that book - the nature of Malay society as it existed in 1874 - in terms of content and perspective. Indeed the later volume serves to confirm the need arising from Gullick's perspective for us to exercise caution in applying his otherwise excellent work here in seeking to understand pre-colonial Malay society in the NMS. It is a reminder that the very great value of the earlier volume is confined to the description it offers of the morphology - the organisational structure - of Malay society on the peninsular in the later nineteenth century. Accordingly, I continue to rely on the earlier volume on this basis.

⁶ While the differences in social organization between states prior to European contact are largely inaccessible to us for the period prior to European contact due to lack of evidence such differences in social organization for the late nineteenth century period of European influence do start to become clear in the sources as we shall see below in this chapter.

have been described by Gullick.⁽⁷⁾ The traditional northern Malay state (negri) was characterized by the riverine and coastal locations of its settlement. For inland settlers the rivers provided a means of communication and water for domestic and productive use, while the sea provided the basic livelihood of the coastal fishermen as well as a communication link with the inland settlements. Malay settlement was not spread evenly along river banks and coast but was clustered in villages (kampongs) consisting of up to around fifty houses. In close proximity to the dwelling houses lay an area of land under cultivation. This land was divided into contiguous plots worked by the peasant cultivators and their families. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the total area of land under cultivation in the NMS was limited and represented only a small portion of the total cultivable land in the region.⁽⁸⁾ Two main kinds of rice were grown: wet rice (sawah) and dry rice. Sawah was the most important of the two and, as the name suggests, was grown in flooded paddy fields bounded by flood banks on level ground. Dry rice was of secondary importance and was cultivated on hill sides close to the kampung. In addition to rice the river dwellers cultivated various fruits and vegetables, caught fresh water fish and raised domestic livestock. Production methods were primitive by modern standards. Production relied mainly on the hard physical labour of the river and coastal cultivators and fishermen - labour assisted by the use of implements or animal labour of one kind or another - wooden ploughs, water buffalo, fishing nets and so on - allowing some mechanical or animal advantage in the productive endeavour. The water buffalo was the main beast of burden for Malay peasant producers.

⁷ Described by Gullick and generally accepted within the scholarship as indicating the main features of the traditional political organization of the Malay state. The description which follows is based mainly on Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, cited above.

⁸ This assertion cannot be demonstrated in statistical terms for the pre-nineteenth century period in the NMS. As Zahara Mahmud says, speaking for Malaysia as a whole, "...no statistically based discussion on population or land use can be undertaken for periods earlier than the 19th century."

Zahara Mahmud "The Population of Kedah in the Nineteenth Century", Journal of South Eastern Asian Studies, V3, No. 2., (1972), p.193.

It will be clear from the accounts in chapter 3 and 4 below of the expansion of settlement and colonization of new areas in the NMS in the 19th and 20th centuries that much unoccupied cultivable land existed in pre-colonial times. Gullick makes several reference to the availability of cultivable land. See for example Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.28.

The location and pattern of settlement was very much a function of the needs of sedentary agriculturalists and those in the village relying on their surplus. The fertile soil and level ground of the river valleys was, for example, conducive to the production of durable food supply in support of the village population. Although the villagers generally cultivated their individual plots of land independently of one another there were some advantages in having these plots contiguous with one another, and there were a number of ways in which they could make common cause in their productive activities. The villagers could more readily co-operate in the eradication of pests and weeds, the construction of drainage ditches and the construction of banks on the landward side of the kampong to stop water buffalo straying onto the padi fields. Most important of all, however, the clustering of houses and land together must have facilitated the appropriation of surplus by the non-directly economically productive river dwellers living in close proximity to the kampong or groups of kampongs. We can assume that the latter sought to keep direct producers in a compact group and resisted any fragmentation away from the kampongs which would put cultivators' surplus beyond their reach.⁹

The kampongs were not by any means completely economically self sufficient. Various imported goods corrected deficiencies in the productive and domestic needs of the kampong dwellers. Limited specialization of labour therefore allowed for an internal trade within north Malaya and between north and the rest of Malaya, and an external trade between north Malaya and countries beyond the peninsular. Trade was also an important, though before the nineteenth century still limited, mechanism allowing certain powerful villagers and city dwellers to appropriate surplus, and for this reason the location of settlement on river and coast facilitated the communication necessary for this source of wealth to be conveniently tapped.⁽¹⁰⁾

⁹ The sources don't generally spell it out in this way but it is a necessary implication from what they do say about the way the traditional Malay elite extracted produce and services from the peasantry. See my discussion of traditional ways of surplus extraction immediately below in this thesis.

¹⁰ See fuller discussion of trade as a mechanism for surplus extraction, below.

The Pre-Colonial Polity

The main features of the political organization of the peninsular Malay state are those taken from Malacca during the period that bears its name.¹¹ The Malacca Sultanate lasted from 1400 to 1511.¹² While the basic shape and form derived from the period of the Malacca Sultanate the functioning dynamic of each state polity in the north differed according to local factors as these operated at particular periods of time. Trengganu for example first achieved a marked degree of centralization under the aegis of the ruler during the reign of Baginda Omar (1839 - 1876) as we shall see in the next chapter below. Kelantan did not emerge as a distinct and autonomous polity until the reign there of Sultan Muhammad 1 (1800 - 1837).¹³ And Dianne Lewis, in her study of Kedah in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, points out that while that state was structured in basically the same way as those to the south it was distinctive in the way that structure functioned.¹⁴ The distinctive political features of the individual NMS are dealt with in this thesis below in this chapter and the next in the context of a wider discussion of the dynamic of social change in the four states. Before moving on to this wider discussion, however, it is useful to establish the broad essential features of the Malay negeri (state). These are the broad and basic identifying features which emerged during the period of the Malacca sultanate, which the British encountered when they established a formal colonial presence in the north in 1902 and 1909, and which have continued, with modification, down to the present day.

The riverine and coastal settlements which characterized the Malay state existed in relative isolation from, and only limited social integration with, each other. Indeed, it is questionable whether the term "state" with its implication of centralized authority and administration and over-all unity of purpose and strength of political identity is applicable to pre-colonial northern Malay society at all. The negri was, to borrow the words of one writer,

¹¹ Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p 7.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Rahmat Bin Saripan, "Salient Features of the 19th Century Kelantan Sultanate", MH, vol. 26, (1983), p.5.

¹⁴ Lewis, "Kedah - The Development of a Malay State", p 1,2.

'an agglomeration of river settlements'.⁽¹⁵⁾

Day-to-day economic, social and political life in the northern peninsular areas was very much localized. The word 'state' is however used by the sources when referring to Malay social and political organization around the turn of the century and, to avoid confusion, I shall continue to use the term selectively in this thesis, though in the limited sense stated here.

The negri was then the largest independent political unit on the peninsular. The negri was sub-divided into districts (jajahan or daerah). The smallest political unit was the kampong. The Malay states had a three tiered hierarchy and power corresponding in importance to the size of the political units described above. At the apex of State political system stood the supreme ruler, a person linked by paternal blood ties directly to a line of previous rulers. The ruler bore the Malay title Yang di Pertuan Besar (he who is made lord), the Hindu generic term for ruler, Raja, and the Arabic personal honorific prefix, Sultan. The Sultan had a direct and close control of a particular district from which the bulk of his wealth and support came, but he had important functions pertaining to the State as a whole as well. Gullick summarizes the latter functions as follows:

...to exercise the limited power of central government, to conduct external relations, to provide leadership in foreign wars and to embody and symbolize the unity and welfare of the State.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Sultan was assisted in these tasks by a small group of menteri (ministers), each exercising a specific executive function of State, and other assistants of royal lineage and close kinship with him, or of non-royal aristocratic and, less frequently, non-aristocratic lineage.⁽¹⁷⁾ The Sultan was usually situated in the capital on the river mouth. This gave him a communication advantage in that he was generally within reach of all or most of the settled areas of his state,

¹⁵ Khoo Kay Kim, Introduction to H. Clifford, Expedition to Trengganu and Kelantan, pp.16-17.

¹⁶ Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.21.

See below for a discussion of the Sultan in the context of the wider northern Malay ruling class.

¹⁷ Ibid.

and certain strategic and trade advantages stemmed from this.¹⁸

Below the Sultan stood the district chiefs and village headmen (penghulus). The district chiefs exercised an intermediate authority in the State. In the years before strong central control by the Sultan - before there were states as we know them - their role must have been fairly self-contained in terms of their relative freedom from any sustained outside control. Thus, in the period before the Northern Malay States began to acquire a degree of central control in the nineteenth century they would have been largely a law-unto-themselves.¹⁹ The chiefs exercised a general leadership and organizational control over the kampongs making up their districts - the hearing of disputes and the general administration of justice, for example. Their primary function, however, was to organize local labour in the service of local power holders at the district level. Like the Sultan, the district chiefs were assisted in their function by a small group of helpers and deputies who were generally close kinsmen. At the lowest level of power and authority the penghulu acted as an intermediary between the district chief and the villagers and as a leader in his own right in local village affairs. The penghulu had the very important function of providing and organizing the labour from his kampong.

Other figures exercised a religious or spiritual authority at the kampong level. The most important of these were the imam who were the local Islamic religious leaders operating from the village mosque. The imam, in addition to their religious function, could also exercise a secular leadership role in village affairs. The imam were therefore placed generally below but close to the penghulus in what was basically a secular hierarchy of authority. There was, in pre-colonial times, no strong hierarchical religious organization extending upwards from kampong level; the religious function of the imam was thus highly localized. The imam, like the penghulus, were usually from leading families in the locality.

Classes in Pre-1909 NMS Society

Related to and overlapping this hierarchy of authority was the broad ranking of NMS Malay society into two main classes: a ruling class and a subject class. The Malay term for the subject class was raayat. In terms of the hierarchy of authority the Sultan and chiefs

¹⁸ See below in this chapter for a full discussion of this trade advantage.

¹⁹ The emergence of new centralization in particular of the NMS is discussed below.

belonged to the ruling class, while the penghulus and imam generally belonged to the raayat. The ruling class consisted of the Sultan's extended family and of the wider elite that had inherited their position in NMS society, both in a genetic sense and, more importantly, in a cultural sense through a process of social change, stretching back to the original families that had, from the earliest division of labour, managed through force, intrigue and manoeuvre to enslave some members of their society and to appropriate the surplus of others.⁽²⁰⁾ There was no generic term for the ruling class by the late pre-colonial period but some of its members were identified by certain honorific titles.²¹ It is worth setting out some of these briefly, since they will recur throughout the text of this thesis.⁽²²⁾ The title Raja (a ruler) or

²⁰ Not much is known about this process, and the sources frequently comment on the lack of evidence on the subject. Wong, for example says this:

While the development and existence of separate Malay peasant settlements in the Malay peninsular presumably preceded the evolution of a political system in the form of a kingdom which consisted of several settlements in a territory grouped together into a larger unit in subjugation to a common ruler, not much is known about the actual process of such conversion.

David S. Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, p.13.

Wheatley's account of the development of tribal society in Malaya from the third century A.D. is informative and strongly suggestive of my statement in the text. Writing of the emergence of the derivative concept and practice of divine kingship and the earliest form of state superstructure which developed around this, Wheatley says:

A prerequisite for divine kingship of this type was consecration, which in the Indian model could be consummated only by the brahman varma.... In Southeast Asia, too, there developed privileged groups styling themselves brahmins and performing consecratory and ritualistic functions. The maintenance of a state appropriate to a god-king and his priesthood necessitated the ministrations of craftsmen and artisans, who were located within the precincts of the royal palace, and of the peasantry who drew dividends from the annual cycle of plant and animal life within the territory of the god-king.

Paul Wheatley, "Desultory Remarks on the Ancient History of the Malay Peninsular", in John Bastin and R. Roolvink(eds.), Malayan and Indonesian Studies. Essays presented to Sir Richard Winstedt on his eighty fifth birthday(London, 1964), p.42.

On the same page in the same reference Wheatley indicates the importance of physical force in the extraction of surplus by the earliest state superstructures. (See below.)

²¹ That is to say, in the period regarded by Gullick as late pre-colonial in his Indigenous Political Systems. Gullick makes the point about a lack of a generic title on page 22 of this volume.

²² The titles cited here are on the basis of Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.22. Their usage is confirmed by sources dealing with two of the NMS - Kessler on Kelantan and

Anak Raja (son of a ruler or princeling) could apply to those of either sex of royal patrilineal descent.⁽²³⁾ Raja had a wider application than to the Malay head of State. Raja and Tungku (sometimes spelled Tengku) were honorific prefixes applied to chiefs, though raja was not applied to chiefs of non-royal descent.⁽²⁴⁾ Non-royal chiefs bore the prefix Dato (grandfather or chief).⁽²⁵⁾ While there was no term to denote the whole ruling class, the phrase waris negeri (literally, heirs to the State) designated all male members of the Sultan's family in line for the throne. Gullick defines 'waris negeri' in this way:

A Sultan was usually the son of a previous Sultan, but not necessarily of his immediate predecessors. This fact was reflected in his designation of sons, patrilineal grandsons and possibly nephews of any reigning or former Sultans as waris negeri (heirs of the State).⁽²⁶⁾

Roff gives a wider definition of waris negeri to include 'all members of the royal house as being potential heirs of the ruler.'⁽²⁷⁾

It will be made clear in this chapter below that, by the late nineteenth century, the phrase waris negeri closely approximated a ruling class in north Malaya.

Of course the specific composition and characteristics of the elite - the ruling class - varied from state to state and from locality to locality within states as we shall see. These differences are explored more fully below where they are a factor in the social change occurring within our period.

The raayat was divided into a ranking order of two main groups according to

Bonney on Kedah. See Kessler, Islam and Politics, pp.254-255 (datok, Wan, tengku) and Bonney, Kedah, pp.191-193(Dato, Tunku, Wan).

²³ Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.22.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, p.54.

²⁷ Roff, Malay Nationalism, p.259.

freedom and status. The majority of the raayat were orang merdeka (literally, free men). Below the majority of the orang merdeka were two main categories of slaves. In descending order of status these consisted of the orang berhutang (debt bondsmen) and the abdi or hamba. The orang berhutang, as the name suggests, were bonded to render service to an overlord creditor on the default of repayment of a loan. In theory, at least, the orang berhutang resumed their full orang merdeka status upon discharging their debt. The abdi on the other hand existed in a state of a stronger and more permanent powerlessness in their obligation to their masters. The abdi were even lower in status than the orang berhutang, and whereas orang berhutang were considered to be part of the same society as their masters, the abdi were not.²⁸

Land

Before looking further at the way production occurred and how productive wealth was distributed in pre-1909 NMS society it is important to clarify the notion of land tenure which existed at the time since the practices governing access to, and use of, land were of prime concern to rural producers and those in NMS society dependent upon the surplus linked inextricably with productive activity based on land and its use. It is important to establish very clearly at this juncture the kind of control exercised over land as the most important means of production if we are to avoid confusion in our understanding of how and on what customary tenurial basis subsistence needs were met, and surplus extracted, within that economy.²⁹

David Wong, in his authoritative study, Tenure and Land Dealings in the Malay States, argues that the studies on land in pre-colonial Malaya suffer from the basic misconception that cultivators exercised a limited proprietary right to land and that this right stemmed ultimately from the Sultan, who held an absolute proprietary interest in all the soil in his State.⁽³⁰⁾ This misconception, he says, has its origins in the observations and

²⁸ Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.104.

²⁹ Bearing in mind that most of the sources referred to below regard 'pre-colonial' or 'customary' land use as that practiced prior to the formal British presence on the peninsular.

³⁰ Wong develops his criticism of this view in Chapter 2 of his book.

interpretations of colonial administrators of Malay land use. He refers to W.G.E. Maxwell who argued, in an influential article entitled "The Laws and Customs of the Malays with Reference to the Tenure of Land", that ultimately all right to State land was vested in the Sultan and that a reciprocal relationship existed in which the peasantry cultivated royal land subject to their rendering to the Sultan certain feudal dues.³¹ According to Wong Maxwell's article set in train an erroneous conception of pre-colonial use and awareness of land which caught on and was perpetuated by other scholar-administrators of Maxwell's day.³² Certainly the perception lasted well beyond the time of Maxwell among the scholar administrators operating on the peninsular. Wilson, in the only source dealing at length with the question of land tenure in north Malaya, specifically followed Maxwell in his 1958 study asserting that a formal system of land tenure existed in north Malaya based upon the Sultan's position of supreme proprietor of all land in his State.⁽³³⁾

A strong echo of Maxwell's conception of Malay land tenure can be seen in Lim Teck Gee's excellent study Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya 1874-1941 published as recently as 1977.⁽³⁴⁾ Lim Teck Ghee's study focuses upon the Federated Malay States but draws additional material from the Northern Malay States as well. Summarizing the position with regard to land in Malaya prior to 1895, this book states:

Prior to British intervention, there were in the Malay negeris customary rules which had been derived from long and established practices and which were related to the acquisition, use and disposal of agricultural land. According to these rules, although supreme and allodial rights to land in the negeri were vested in the Sultan, every peasant member of the community had the right to make use of land so long as it was not being cultivated by some one else and the exactions

³¹ Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, pp. 16,17.

³² Wong comments on the fact that nearly all the writers who followed Maxwell on Malayan land tenure 'were at one time or another employed in the colonial public service in the Malay peninsular'.

Ibid., pp. 8,9.

³³ T.B. Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production in North Malaya(Kuala Lumpur, 1958) pp.7-11.

³⁴ Lim Teck Ghee, Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya 1874-1941 (East Asian Historical Monographs), (Kuala Lumpur, 1977).

demanded by the Sultan, chief or some other authority were paid.⁽³⁵⁾

The strong tendency, then, in the secondary sources in Malaya is to speak in terms of formal rights and obligations to land and reciprocal obligations on the part of the peasantry to render service to their overlords. Thus from the time of the early scholar administrator onwards, Malayan land use has been interpreted in terms of a pre-conceived notion that there was a system of land tenure in pre-colonial Malaya which was like that which existed in pre-capitalist Europe. Whether the Sultan's aegis over the soil (there is general agreement within the scholarship that the Sultan exercised some sort of authority over land) was more a matter of general sovereignty or whether it was more in the direction of proprietorial control is something of a fine distinction not easily susceptible to definitive explanation one way or the other.³⁶ However, Wong's view that we need to guard against a too Eurocentric perception of customary authority for land access and use and that such access and use had more to do with the immediate economic and social realities of rural production than any abstract tenurial authority residing ultimately in the Sultan seems very plausible.³⁷

³⁵ Lim Teck Ghee, Peasants, p.17.

³⁶ In large part because the record on the subject is so thin. Wong makes the point in his study of Malay land tenure and use. Our knowledge of indigenous Malay customs in general is, he writes, 'very limited', in part because the Malays 'never committed their customary law to writing'.

Ibid., p.8.

³⁷ There is a sense in which any European perception of land tenure is bound to be Eurocentric and can not be seen in any other way. While it is helpful to exercise as much detachment as possible it is a conceit to pretend that a European can see the world - land tenure included - through anything other than European eyes. Wong puts it like this: 'But it seems any description of any native custom could hardly be free from a foreign "translation" of the native customary norms. The very approach of treating the native cultivators in relation to land would seem to have been prompted by the western idea of landed property'. Wong quotes Baden Powell on the subject. Baden Powell, after giving a descriptive account of the customs of the native cultivators in India wrote: 'These are the facts of tenure; you may theorize on them as you please: you may say this amounts to proprietorship or this is a dominum minus plenum or anything else'.

Ibid., p.12.

Baden Powell was, Wong observes, 'obviously critical of any attempt to define a cultivator's relationship with land under native customs in terms of western concepts'.

Ibid.

It was rather the absence of a concept of land tenure in any formal sense which characterized the productive process and productive and social relations in north Malaya in the period before substantial colonial contact. The peasantry occupied and remained on land as long as it was sufficiently cultivable and as long as they were not forced from the land by natural or human contingency without necessary reference to the Sultan's authority. The peasantry were left on the land as long as chief and Sultan had a vested interest in leaving them there. In this sense then, the sustained occupation of land arose from the productive relations between the ruling and subject classes and the essential need of powerful Malays to appropriate surplus from sedentary agriculturalists and fishermen and was not referable to any abstract notion of formal land tenure and the ultimate sovereignty of the Sultan over the soil.

It is essential to understand that the pre-colonial Malays valued land solely as a means to a productive end, but in a completely non-proprietary sense. From earliest times in the cultural evolution of the peninsula, when agriculturalists were located more-or-less permanently in one place, the very fact of a cultivator's occupancy of a plot of land gained a de facto recognition from other cultivators and their overlords.⁽³⁸⁾ It was this land custom in particular which was misinterpreted by the early scholar administrator and continues to be misunderstood by those who have followed their thinking since as constituting a right to land in a limited proprietary sense.⁽³⁹⁾ And so this continued occupation and use of land was, and is, described as a usufructuary right to the soil stemming ultimately from the Sultan's supreme proprietorship of all the land in his State.⁽⁴⁰⁾ There is no evidence, however, as Wong has

Ibid.

³⁸ Settled agriculture and the division of labour in north Malaya pre-dated the arrival of Europeans by twenty-six or more centuries. Hill points out that there is some evidence to suggest that the culture in prehistoric Southeast Asia, existing in an area which included Malaya, may have moved from hunting and gathering to early forms of settled agriculture by 7000 B.C., though this is far from conclusive.

R.D. Hill, Rice in Malaya A Study in Historical Geography(Kuala Lumpur, 1977), pp.3-4.

³⁹ Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, pp.12,13.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

pointed out, that this basic customary recognition of the peasants' right to occupy and cultivate land was ever formalized in the name of the Sultan prior to the period of the formal colonial presence on the peninsular.⁽⁴¹⁾

While periodization is difficult, and I do not attempt it with precision here, it is useful to ask what land customs were like in pre-colonial times in the NMS in order to capture something of the dynamic in land usage and control in the period prior to the formal colonial presence in the four northern states.⁴² Lack of evidence on Malay land customs for the earlier period of time - the period before the stronger European presence on the peninsular in the lead-up to the establishment of a formal colonial presence there - means that written descriptions of those customs leave us well short of absolute certainty. However we can, on the basis of Wong's observations, be reasonably sure of some things.

Malay land customs in pre-colonial times were, by modern standards, uncomplicated and arose from a simple response to the physical environment and the social and economic needs of the locality.⁽⁴³⁾ Thus the land customs reflected the peasants' mutual concern to maintain a livelihood for themselves and their families from a plot of land on a more-or-less permanent basis; the customs functioned in a way which tended to secure a productive use of land for peasant families in the locality from one harvest to the next and from one generation to the next. And so the customary right of occupancy of land referred to above operated strongly in favour of the occupier, and the notion of occupation was a broad one. That this was so no doubt had much more to do with a consensus view in the village that secure occupancy was a necessity for production to take place than any hierarchical granting from above of a secure tenure on land. The Malays relied on their observation of nature in deciding when abandoned land was no longer occupied. Such land was regarded as the preserve of the former occupier and could not be re-settled until it reverted back to its natural state. Land

⁴¹ Ibid, p.14.

⁴² Bearing in mind that by 'pre-colonial' here I mean the period before a quickening European presence on the peninsular from the early sixteenth century onwards was starting to have a significant social impact.

⁴³ Ibid, p.13.

which was cleared and still in use was called tanah hidup (literally, live land) and land which had become overgrown with natural vegetation on being abandoned was known as tanah mati (dead land).⁽⁴⁴⁾ Within this basic framework other land customs of an incidental nature were followed.⁽⁴⁵⁾

There are two important points arising from this discussion of the place and function of land in the earlier pre-1909 period in the NMS which are of crucial importance in understanding the effect of colonial influence in the area. The first is that land was valued for its utility as a factor of production and had no intrinsic value apart from this. Land was not owned in any proprietary sense. There were no land titles giving a usufructuary, full proprietary or other formal juristic right to land. Thus land could not be transferred from one Malay to another as an object of proprietary possession. Land could not, for example, be exchanged in return for goods or services. Land could not be offered as collateral against the default of repayment of a loan. In short, land was not a commodity in pre-colonial Northern Malay State society.

Negotiations concerning land, then, always focussed upon land usage in pre-colonial NMS society and were, by modern standards, of a rudimentary nature. Such negotiations were based on the customary awareness that each peasant had an essential need to draw his subsistence from the soil without interference from his neighbour.

The peasants' cultivation could be interfered with in a number of ways: his neighbour might allow a water buffalo to wander through his rice crop, for example; or his neighbour might fail to co-operate in the eradication and control of pests. Demarcation disputes could arise hinging upon where one peasant's land ended and another's began. Such disputes might be negotiated between the contending peasant parties or with the assistance of an outside party - the penghulu, for example. However, land dealings involving the transference of occupation rights were of little importance in the pre-colonial NMS economy.

⁴⁴ Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, p.10.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Land was inherited from one generation to the next.⁽⁴⁶⁾ It is important to stress however that what passed on through successive generations was the right to use land. There was no land inheritance in the proprietary sense. However, aside from the transference of the right to use land through inheritance, it must be assumed that for the most part land came to be occupied through the settlement of vacant plots whether cleared or not. As the twin concepts of tanah hidup and tanah mati imply, one plot of land was simply abandoned in favour of another when peasant circumstances made a change of locality desirable or necessary.

Thus the customs pertaining to land acquisition and use were very informal indeed at this time. In pre-colonial times arable land was freely available, and so competition for land was limited.⁽⁴⁷⁾ It was only in colonial times, when the pace and extent of colonization of land increased and cultivable land was in short supply, that the formalization of land dealings became necessary to cope with increasing contention between Malays to occupy and use land.⁽⁴⁸⁾

⁴⁶ Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, p.11.

⁴⁷ Gullick makes several references to the availability of land in 19th century Malaya. See above.

⁴⁸ Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, p.11.

Wong comments that Malay 'simple customary dealings seemed to be more concerned with actual use of land and the produce crops[sic]'. 'Land simpliciter', he says, 'was involved as a medium rather than as an object'.

Ibid., p.12.

While he does not give precise periodization Wong seems to be suggesting that Malay land customs became more sophisticated with the growth of settlement. With this settlement growth there was, he says, less available land and as a result 'more complex relationships in respect of land developed and some sort of peasant dealing in land occurred.'

Ibid.

Wong then goes on to outline the Malay customary [land] dealings already well developed at the time of British intervention. Of these, the 'security' land dealings involved land transfer and had a certain proprietary aspect to them prompting Wong to observe that '[p]resumably "security" dealings were a relatively late development in a peasant community'.

Ibid.

The second crucial point to stress is that there was nothing akin to an English feudal connection between peasant land use and their rendering of goods and labour services to their overlords. There is no evidence to suggest that the Sultan's relation to the land in his State approximated that of an English monarch to English land in modern times. Therefore, no parallel can be drawn between NMS land and English Crown land with its corresponding notion of feudal dues rendered in return for occupancy rights.

In sum, then, Wong highlights for us a confusion in the literature on the place of land in pre-colonial Malay society. In large measure this misconception stems from the imposition by early scholar administrator, most notably Maxwell, of a European feudal perception of the Sultan's relation to land in his State. Even Maxwell, it should be noted, arrived at the position, in his "Laws and Customs" article, that 'the Raja's absolute property in the soil is but a barren right, and as he undoubtedly has, independently of it, the right of levying tenths and taxes and of forfeiting lands for non-payment, Malay law does not trouble itself much with speculation about it.'⁴⁹ It is a measure of the strength of Maxwell's pre-conceptions on Malay society that, despite his observations to the contrary, he persisted in the error that there existed, however theoretically, an indigenous system of Malayan land tenure with the Sultan at its apex as the ultimate land owner. And so Maxwell's qualification did little to correct the basic misconception of his article.

Wong cites an observation made by F.A. Swettenham, then British Resident in Perak, on the Sultan's influence over land. In Wong's view, this observation conveys a more realistic perception of this influence than that held by his contemporary Maxwell and cited immediately above in this thesis:

... there was not in the pre-Residential period any system of payment by tenths, or, indeed, any recognized system of native tenure of any kind. The people occupied and cultivated such lands as they chose and paid nothing for them but the authorities, Sultan, State Officer, local headman, or anak Raja, whoever had the power or might, dispossessed the occupants at pleasure, or helped themselves to any produce that they thought worthwhile having whenever they felt able and inclined.⁵⁰

Swettenham might well have added that those authorities seized labour services from the same

⁴⁹ Cited in Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, p.17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 17, 18.

peasantry whenever they wanted them subject to the need to avoid any self defeating interruption to the cycle of harvest and planting which sustained the peasantry as a source of surplus for these superordinate figures in rural Malay society.

Surplus Extraction in Pre-Colonial times.

Because tension between direct producers and those appropriating their surplus was such an important factor shaping NMS society it is important to look at the traditional methods of such extraction in order to gauge how these changed with the coming of colonial influences. We need to know how the direct producers supported themselves in fulfilling their economic and social needs and in what ways powerful figures were able to draw on the peasants' productive capacity in support of their own position in society.

It will be clear thus far that in pre-colonial times the peasantry in the NMS were subsistence agriculturalists. The basic productive unit operating at the level of the economic base was that of the family.⁽⁵¹⁾ Gullick writes that 'in general each simple family of man, wife and children had its own house and the number of persons per house was probably about five on the average.'⁽⁵²⁾ The peasant family laboured to maintain themselves with food, shelter and clothing, to maintain their land, tools and other means of production, and to fulfill their social and ceremonial needs. Beyond this they laboured in support of powerful figures in the social superstructure. This extra work was extracted directly through enforced labour(kerah) and indirectly through the seizure of produce that the peasant had laboured to produce. The levying of a trade tax at the river mouth was an important way of siphoning off peasant surplus for those in a strategic position to do so. Apart from these there were several other less important ways of extracting surplus.

The situation of the slaves was very different. Their labour was totally controlled by their masters. They laboured in total servitude in support of those masters. Those masters maintained the slaves and gained the net value of the slave labour beyond the cost of

⁵¹ Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.30.

⁵² Ibid., p.27.

maintaining slaves in food, shelter and clothing.

Enforced Labour: Kerah and Slavery.

Under the system of kerah or forced labour the peasants could be called away from family production to perform labour service for Sultan, Chief or other power holder. The tasks performed varied. Winstedt states that peasants '[could be] recruited to build a palace, to make roads and drains, to tend elephants, pole boats and cultivate the royal domain and to fight as a soldier.'⁵³ The labour performed in this way, as its name suggests, was enforced: the peasant was compelled to work by the threat or use of physical or other coercion. Abdullah gives an account of a particular instance of kerah that he observed in Kelantan in 1838 which can serve to illustrate the coercive aspect of the institution.⁵⁴ Abdullah described the arrival of peasants conscripted into guarding the Raja's stockade during the Kelantan civil war. Abdullah began his account with a description of the conscripts:

I observed that most of the men had shaven heads and wore no coats; they wound a bit of rattan or string round the head. This was their costume wherever they went.

Every single man had six or seven javelins and a kris, and carried in his hand a cutlass or sword or a long kris-all unsheathed; and some of them had guns. That is how they were all day and every day, and they had nothing else to do.

We met men streaming in all along the path.

Everyone carried various kinds of provisions and cooking-pots and foodstuffs, as if they were going on a voyage.

I noticed that they always walked in single file whether in the jungle or the settlement; I never saw people walking four or five abreast.

I asked some of these people where they were going, and they said they were going to guard the Raja's stockade.

I asked what all the provisions were for, and they said it was their own food.

I asked why they took their own food, instead of receiving it from the Raja. The man whom I asked this made a sign, indicating that he was afraid to speak in front of the young Raja.

When I realised this, I persuaded Raja Temena to go ahead, saying that I wanted to rest for a bit. When the Raja had got some way off, the man spoke.

'This Sir', he said, 'is the usual oppression of us Malays. I have to bring my own food, leaving my family with no certainty of getting anything to eat. So it goes on, month after month; every day we serve the Raja. If anyone doesn't go, the Raja seized his house and property; If the man resists, he is killed; fines are also

⁵³ Sir Richard Winstedt, Malaya and its History(London, 1958), p.125.

⁵⁴ An example showing how it worked for a particular state in the earlier nineteenth century. The assumption here continues to be that, while the example is taken from a point in time well forward in the period of European contact, the institution remained relatively unchanged until its abolition by the British during their formal presence there. That abolition is discussed below.

levied."⁵⁵)

By its very nature kerah was something that was confined to the orang merdeka since they, unlike the slaves, were supporting themselves and were only able to render part of their total productive labour to those with the power to coopt it. Slaves devoted their total labour to their masters and their net value to the latter was that created beyond the cost of maintaining them in servitude. Kerah was periodic in its performance since the power holders for whom work was performed were aware that the very existence of a labour supply depended upon the peasant being able to work in their own support. Thus the timing of the performance of kerah was partly determined by the necessary productive needs of the peasantry and partly by the productive needs of the power holders to have labour performed at some times rather than others. By contrast, slaves were under a much stronger compulsion to work for their master. Unlike the orang merdeka they were always, in the case of the abdi, and for the duration of the debt liability in the case of the orang berhutang, under direct control of their masters upon whom their very existence depended. The slaves thus had a much stronger and a constant place in their masters' work force and were entirely dependent upon them to provide the means for their subsistence. Slaves were therefore a particularly valuable source of labour in that they were separated from the means of production, the most important of which was land, and therefore had no choice but to work for their master whenever and wherever he desired since they had no independent means for subsistence. Thus slaves were a constant source of labour and formed a very important part of their masters' retinue.

In sum then, the institution of slavery provided a constant source of labour while

⁵⁵ A. E. Coope, The Voyage of Abdullah A translation from the Malay by A.E.Coope(Malaya, 1967), p.54.

Certainly it is necessary to be wary of Abdullah's pro-British bias and his tendency to overstate what he sees as the iniquity of the oppression of the peasantry by their overlords. But with this caution in mind, Abdullah's description here can serve as a useful illustration of the way in which kerah was used, as seen by an early contemporary observer. The sources in general, despite their varying interpretations of kerah, agree on its essential coercive nature, and even though Abdullah's description here manifestly belongs to the colonial period in its perspective on the practice it still stands as a useful illustration of the coercive nature of the institution throughout the period of its practice.

kerah enabled power holders to draw on a greater quantity of labour for specific projects at specific periods of time. It was largely in terms of the quantity of labour performed that kerah was, in Ahmat's words, 'one of the fundamental institutions of a Malay state'.⁽⁵⁶⁾

The Importance of Slavery in NMS Society.

The importance of slavery resting upon the very high degree of control that masters had over their labour can be seen in Winstedt's account of the institution. Winstedt's account gives us a very good idea of how slaves came to be separated from the means of production.

Generalizing for the peninsular as a whole, Winstedt says:

The Malays had brought with them the institution of slavery, long before they were influenced by Hindu ideas. Ownership of slaves and bondsmen was the mark of wealth, rank and power. Slaves included prisoners of war, pagan aborigines snared "like chimpanzees", murderers who, unable to pay the blood-price, bartered liberty for sanctuary with the ruler, the children of female slaves other than those acknowledged by their owners, Batok and Balinese bought in mediaeval Malacca and in early Penang, Abyssinian and negro slaves smuggled back from Mecca in the guise of servants. Most iniquitous, perhaps, was the case of the debt-bondsman, whose work in his creditor's house, field or mine was never set against himself. Sometimes the desire of a Chief or his wife to possess the services of a particular person led to his or her enslavement on the score of a debt entirely fictitious. With brutal logic Malay law laid it down that the hiring of a slave was like the borrowing of a stick and the borrower had the same responsibility for the safety of a slave or debt-bondsman as he had for the safety of a buffalo. Only in Negri Sembilan was debt slavery rare, the tribe defraying a tribesman's debts rather than lose his services.⁽⁵⁷⁾

The Importance of Slavery in Kedah in the Late Pre-Colonial Period.

Maxwell, in his Annual Report for 1909, dismissed slavery in Kedah as being of merely 'historic interest'.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Other evidence, however, strongly suggests the importance of slavery to the Kedah elite in general and the Sultan in particular. Winstedt tells us that the Kedah Laws of A.D. 1650 provided for the payment of duty on the import and export of slaves, a provision which tends to suggest that slavery was of much more than marginal

⁵⁶ Sharom bin Ahmat, Tradition and Change in a Malay State: the Economic and Political Development of Kedah 1879-1923(Phd., History Department, University of London, 1969), p.67.

⁵⁷ Winstedt, Malaya and its History, p.124.

⁵⁸ W. George Maxwell, The Annual Report of the Adviser to the Kedah Government for the year 1327 A.H.(23 January, 1909-12 January, 1910)(Kuala Lumpur, 1910)

importance to the Kedah economy from the mid- seventeenth century.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Furthermore the use of slave labour was thought sufficiently important for requests and provisions for the return of run- away slaves to Kedah to be included in treaties and other negotiations between British authorities and the Kedah elite. A 'Treaty of Peace and Friendship' between the Kedah elite and British authorities on Penang concluded in 1791 provided that '(a) slaves running from Queda to Pooloo Pinang or from Pooloo Pinang to Queda shall be returned to their owners.'⁽⁶⁰⁾ In the same year as this treaty a letter sent by Kedah Chiefs to the Superintendent of Prince of Wales Island requested the return to Kedah of Sultan Abdullah's debt-slaves who had previously fled to Penang.⁽⁶¹⁾ Clearly, they would hardly have figured so prominently in Anglo-Kedah relations at this time if their labour had not been highly valued by their masters.

Seizure of produce.

From time to time power-holders in the NMS seized a portion of peasant produce directly at the point of production. The point to stress here is that this practice was capricious and unsystematic. Again, in Swettenham's words: 'The authorities, Sultan, State officer, local headman or anak raja, whoever had the power or might ... helped themselves to any produce that they thought worth having whenever they felt able and inclined.'⁽⁶²⁾ As with kerah, the ability of power holders to appropriate surplus produce in this way depended on their capacity to use force.

In general, then, it could be said that where peasant labour gave rise to surplus produce - to more produce than was needed for his subsistence - there was a strong risk that this extra produce would be appropriated. Gullick again quotes Swettenham on the subject: 'Few commoners accumulated any wealth; if they did so a

⁵⁹ Winstedt, The Malays, p.116.

⁶⁰ Bonney, Kedah, p.181.

⁶¹ Bonney, Kedah, p.179.

⁶² Quoted in Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.30.

Raja would rob them of it or oblige them to lend it without any prospect of repayment.'⁽⁶³⁾

Trade

The sources do not allow us a specific and comprehensive idea of how trade operated and the way it influenced production and the wider social relations focussed around such production in pre-colonial times. We can however, through the writings of Gullick, Winstedt and others, arrive at a good general idea of the operation and effect of trade on the peninsular as a whole and in Kedah in particular at this earlier (before European influences - especially trade influences - had begun to have an appreciable effect on society there) time. Before going on then to look at the social effect in the NMS of a massive expansion of peninsular trade in the later nineteenth century it is useful to outline the traditional role and importance of trade as it was in the lead-up to this expansion.

The strong indication in Winstedt is that there was a strong reliance on trade by the pre-colonial Malay elite on the peninsular. It was the wealth this trade created for this elite which in large measure enabled it to maintain its position in society.⁶⁴ That trade wealth was

⁶³ Ibid.

According to Gullick for the peasant to 'have evident surplus was to invite confiscation'.

Ibid.

⁶⁴ The following description is based primarily on Winstedt's chapter 7 in his book The Malays A Cultural History. While there is passing reference to other states in this account it is focussed mainly on Kedah. It may well be that this is a reflection of the early development of a rice export economy there - something which perhaps bought the trading activities of the Malay elite in that state into stronger relief than was the case in the northeastern states.

Richard Winstedt, The Malays A Cultural History (sixth-1961-edition), Chapter 7 'Economic Systems', pp 120 - 138.

In his account of the sources of Malay elite wealth in his Indigenous Political Systems Gullick's emphasis is rather different. He stresses the importance of elite trade taxing ability and the tin wealth available to district chiefs in the major tin producing states. Gullick however, as we have seen, has his focus more to the south on the peninsular and for the later period in time (see also my reference to Gullick immediately below in this chapter). The period of Gullick's focus in time is the focus of my next chapter below.

Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, pp. 125-128.

While Winstedt's writing does seem to be motivated by a certain British moral humanitarian outrage at the suffering the elite inflicted on its social subordinates it stands nonetheless as a valuable, if less than complete, record of the place of trade in the pre-colonial NMS economy.

gained in two main ways: through the exchange of commodities possessed by the elite and produced on the basis of peasant(orang merdeka) and slave(orang berhutang and abdi) labour; for some of the elite also through the levying of a trade tax at a strategic point on the waterways. In pre-colonial times - in the period before the upsurge in trade in the nineteenth century - it does seem likely that it was the former which was by far the most important. While in the former case it was trade - the wealth that was promised from the exchange of commodities - that provided the incentive for surplus extraction in the latter case the extraction of trade tax was in itself a method of extracting surplus. In both cases it was peasant and slave labour which was the basis for the wealth that went upwards from the base to the elite level in Malay society. It was in this sense that early trade was an important factor in labour relations between direct producer and elite and therefore an important factor in the social dynamic of that society as a whole.

Dianne Lewis, in her study of Kedah in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, describes the importance of trade in providing revenue to the Malay state and for the Sultan who was its embodiment:

Trade provided the lion's share of their revenue, either via the collection of port and customs duties, as in Malacca, or via profits from the sale of their own produce. Usually the two were combined in some way ... In the case of the smaller ports which were visited by foreign merchants after Malacca had declined as an international entrepot, the Sultan often acted as the chief or only merchant, the main link between the people producing local goods such as tin or gold, and the visiting trader anxious to collect a cargo. He was of use to both.⁶⁵

While the activities of the Malay elite as merchants impinged directly on the peasants and slaves with whom they came into contact the imposition of trade tax did so indirectly and from a distance from the point of production. The initial impact of the trade tax would have been felt by the elite trader who would have tended to pay more for goods bought and was likely to receive less for goods sold. It would then have been the way in which this loss was passed onto the peasantry - whether through exploitative behaviour in petty trading transactions with peasant producers, in seizing produce in greater quantities at the point of production or in demanding labour from peasants(kerah) and slaves in the production of trade

⁶⁵ Lewis, "Kedah", p. 7.

goods - that the trade tax had an impact at the productive base level of Malay society. Very little detail indicating how this worked appears in the secondary sources. In any case the impact of trade tax in this way could not have been strong until the expansion of trade under colonial influence. Even then, while we can see the broad effect of trade tax on the peasantry, we do not have a detailed picture for that period of time of how it worked in practice.⁶⁶ It seems very likely that it was the incentive that trade offered for the application of pressure on peasants and slaves at the point of production of goods for exchange that had most impact.

Clearly, however, the potential for wealth and power for Sultan and riverine and coastal chiefs in a position to tax trade as it passed along the river and along the coast was a strong one. That potential was realized with the expansion of trade in the nineteenth century on the peninsular as we shall see in the next chapter of this thesis.

Goods for trade would have been acquired by elite figures through petty transactions with the peasantry though this must have been a limited exercise in pre-colonial times.⁶⁷ Whereas such transactions did occur it seems likely that the exchange was an uneven one with the elite trader using their greater power to advantage to get the best of the deal. Certainly this was true for Kedah in pre-colonial times (see example in this chapter below) and it is a fair surmise that it was the general situation on the peninsular in pre-colonial times.

While we lack the details then what does seem clear in very general terms is that the relationship between trade and production was a strong one. It was trade - the demand for certain commodities rather than others in certain quantities - which was the impetus behind much of the productive activity organized by the elite and the basis of peasant and slave labour in pre-colonial times. The presence of outside traders, to whom these commodities were sold, was significant in that their presence served as a strong incentive to produce goods for sale. The presence of outside traders - Arab merchants and those from Europe present in small numbers from the early sixteenth century and which were to feature prominently in the NMS economy in the nineteenth century - was significant in that their presence served as an

⁶⁶ See below.

⁶⁷ Limited because for an elite in a position to demand labour and seize produce there would have been little or no need to seek goods through exchange. Likewise a peasantry liable to lose produce through seizure would have had little incentive to produce for exchange.

incentive for local production. Their principal effect on the economy in the area was the incentive they provided for commodity production.⁶⁸ It was their presence together with that of local buyers which substantially added to the incentive for the NMS elite and to a limited extent the peasantry to engage in a more extensive commodity production and exchange.

Clearly then both local and external trade and traders were a strong and integral part of the pre-colonial economy in the NMS. While trade in general had a strong impact on production in the incentive it provided to produce commodities it seems likely that external traders had a direct impact on the productive process itself. Thus whereas European and especially British and Dutch traders were to have a strong impact on commodity production in the nineteenth century they remained prior to that period very much on the periphery of production. While elite traders organizing the production of the commodities they traded would have been directly involved at the point of production - kerahing in extra labour for a rice harvest when a trade opportunity demanded it and so on - as far as we can tell outside traders would have taken commodities as they came without seeking to directly influence the nature and quantity of goods in supply.⁶⁹

Still, while trade was in this way a factor influencing production in pre-colonial times it is important to keep that influence in perspective.

Clearly then the existence of commodities in circulation and the activities of traders in organizing the movement (and in the case of Malay elite traders the production as well) of these goods, while very important, was not a dominant feature of the mode of production then in existence. It was very much a subsistence economy and society. While a limited commodity production and exchange was an important factor sustaining the position of wealth and influence of the elite, and an important supplementary source of income for some of the peasantry, it was not a characteristic feature of the economy as a whole and remained of

⁶⁸ The development of trade affecting the NMS over a longer period of time is given in the next chapter below.

⁶⁹ Certainly there is nothing in the sources - nothing in Gullick or in the Kedah sources cited immediately below - to suggest that outside traders did intervene in production in this way. The whole matter of precisely what role traders play in production, if any, has been the subject of scholarly debate. See my reference to this in the next chapter below.

peripheral importance to the wider productive process in the region. The primary endeavour of the majority of the population - the peasantry - remained production for use with only limited, supplementary, commodity production and exchange; commodity production was only of marginal importance to the peasantry and they exercised a high degree of self sufficiency in their own reproduction.

It is important to stress that whilst trade was an important source of wealth and power in pre-colonial north Malaya that advantage was always limited by the overall size of the market. Thus the imposition of trade tax, while significant enough in the overall context of pre-colonial trading activity, had its limitations nonetheless when viewed on a wider historical perspective. Relative to later developments trade tax was only of limited significance since the volume of goods passing through north Malaya was too small to be a very substantial source of wealth and therefore political power. Still, what limited power and authority the Sultan was able to exercise beyond his own district stemmed largely from his ability to tax trade. Clearly, the Sultan's position at the river mouth gave him a clear advantage over other power-holders in his state since all trade passing in and out of the state had to pass through his hands. The potential for the concentration of a great deal of wealth and therefore political power through trade tax existed. But that potential was limited in pre-colonial times by the volume of trade passing through his port, and it was not until the strong emergence of new colonial markets in the nineteenth century that the Sultan's potential advantage as controller of the river mouth was fully realized.

Pre-Colonial Trade in North Malaya: Kedah.

The sources do not give a detailed picture of the way in which trade operated in pre-colonial north Malaya, and it is only for the colonial period that a more specific picture emerges. But the general pattern, outlined above, is clear. Perhaps because colonial trade developed more quickly and had a stronger impact in the nineteenth century in the north west of the peninsular than the north east, a clearer picture of pre-colonial trade emerges for the north west peninsular in the sources. An account of the early development of trade on the basis of subordinate labour can more easily be given for Kedah and can serve as an illustration of the way in which trade developed on the basis of peasant and slave labour in north Malaya

as a whole.⁽⁷⁰⁾

The Early Development of Trade in Kedah.

Ahmat tells us that from its very earliest days - from the 5th to the 11th centuries AD - Kedah's economy depended upon trade.⁷¹ This was mainly entrepot trade; the state acted as a convenient collection point for the distribution of commodities in the area.⁷² It was when the entrepot trading function began to decline in the 11th century that the state started to function as a producer of commodities (mainly rice) for trade.⁷³

Kedah was from the beginning of this entrepot trading period colonized by India; by the 5th century it had become 'a fully Indianized state'.⁷⁴ According to Ahmat this colonization was the result in large measure of the trade potential it offered the colonizers. It was, Ahmat says, 'Kedah, ... which provided the first sight of land for the Indian traders and colonists after crossing the Bay of Bengal'.⁷⁵ Kedah offered access by land to the states of Patani, Singora (Songkla) and Ligor on the other side of the peninsular for the Indian colonizers wanting to profit from the movement of commodities to and from these states.⁷⁶

The state's geographical position lent itself to strong trading activity bordering, as it

⁷⁰ My generalizations for the NMS as a whole here in this subsection rest largely on Winstedt's description of pre-colonial trade in Malaya.

Winstedt, The Malays, pp 120 - 138 (ie his trade comments contained in his chapter 7 entitled, 'Economic Systems')

Winstedt, in his account, generalizes for Malaya as a whole but draws upon particular examples for particular states of which Kedah is, perhaps, the most prominent example.

My description of early trade in Kedah also relies heavily on Ahmat's thesis on Kedah.

Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp 14 - 16.

⁷¹ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p. 15.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 14, 15.

does, the Straits of Malacca - the main sea route between the west and China.⁷⁷ It was a trading advantage taken up by a wider range of traders across a long period of time - by Arab traders by the 8th century and later (from the 16th century) Portuguese, Dutch and English traders.⁷⁸

It was, then, the strategic location on the east-west sea lane for the wider range of traders for the longer span of time, and the access by land to the neighbouring states immediately to its east that Kedah offered its Indian colonizers, which meant that the state was strongly established from the fourth century as a collecting point for products from surrounding areas on the peninsular.⁷⁹ By the 8th century the port city was well established and famous; Arab traders had begun to come there and commercial contacts were established with China.⁸⁰

Trade was, then, clearly well established as a main prop for the Kedah economy by the time of the earliest European merchant contacts. By the sixteenth century Kedah was trading with merchants from near by ports and with those from further afield - from the Middle East and China for example.

Until the eleventh century then, Kedah trade did not draw directly, to any significant extent, upon peasant surplus and slave labour in the sense that they laboured in the production of trade goods since the exchange of goods at this time operated as an early form of *entrepôt* trading activities for goods produced elsewhere.⁽⁸¹⁾

From around the eleventh century Kedah's role as an *entrepôt* trading centre began to fade and the state began moving more towards a trading position as a producer in its own

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp 15,16.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp 14,15.

Ahmat gives the starting period for Kedah's trade as the 4th century: 'As early as the 4th century Kedah had become the collecting point for the products of the surrounding areas'.

Ibid., p 15.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸¹ Ibid.,

right.⁽⁸²⁾ From this time, Ahmat tells us, Kedah turned to agricultural production, especially rice growing, as the basis for its trading economy.⁸³ And so it was from this time that subordinate labour began to operate as the basis for the Kedah trading economy in the manner outlined generally above.

It is clear from Winstedt's account of the pre-colonial economic system in Malaya that the Malay elite depended heavily on their activity as merchant traders for their wealth and political power.⁽⁸⁴⁾ All large trading transactions in pre-colonial north Malaya were in the hands of the elite - the Sultan, chiefs and other power-holders - with smaller transactions only left for the peasants and other *raayat*.⁸⁵ It is equally clear by implication, from the accounts of Winstedt and others of the uses of *kerah* and slave labour cited above, that the wealth and political power that came from such elite merchant trading activity depended primarily on the direct appropriation of subordinate labour at the point of production. The point has been made above that subordinate labour was used in a wide range of productive activity including mining, the tending of elephants and the cultivation of the power holder's land. In this way the subordinate classes laboured to produce the material goods, either consumed by the appropriator or, more to the point here, traded for goods outside north Malaya in a way which tended to further increase and diversify the wealth of that power holder.

Winstedt gives numerous examples suggesting the way in which the members of the northern Malay elite and especially the Sultan increased their wealth and political power through trade with oriental and very early European colonial merchants. According to Winstedt, 'in the 9th century even Arabs were trading with Kedah for tin'.⁽⁸⁶⁾ And of the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 15,16.

⁸⁴ Winstedt, *The Malays*, pp.120-121. He deals with the topic of elite trade over a wide time span. His account ranges from pre-colonial to colonial times.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp 131-133.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.130.

Sultan's trading activity in the later pre-colonial period Winstedt writes:

In 1641 the Dagh-Register relates how the Sultan of Kedah traded with Bengal and had just sold the Dutch tin and four elephants which he had bought from Tamils. In the next year His Highness sent so much tin to Coromandel in his royal vessels that the Dutch had no chance of getting half Kedah's annual output as the Sultan had promised. In the same year a new Sultan of Kedah himself sailed to Coromandel with seven elephants and 200 bahar of tin.... In 1665 Mr. Lock, an English free trader in Kedah, sailed to Coromandel with two yachts, one on his own account and one on the Sultan's behalf, taking twenty elephants.⁽⁸⁷⁾

And in the year 1771, Winstedt wrote, 'the Sultan of Kedah sold to Chuliahs and exported to the Coromandel coast about seventy elephants a year, thereby getting the chief part of his revenue, which to increase by trading he took in the form of blue cloth and white cloth.'⁽⁸⁸⁾

Winstedt then accounts for the Sultans' wealth as stemming from their role as merchant traders. Winstedt doesn't mention rice production as a basis of trade here. But presumably the Sultan, chiefs and other elite power holders were trading increasingly in rice from the 11th century as the staple became the most important commodity the state produced.⁸⁹ This is to be compared with Gullick's emphasis on trade tax as an important source of wealth and power to the Sultans.⁽⁹⁰⁾ It needs to be remembered, however, that Gullick has in mind mainly the central Malayan States for the later decades of the nineteenth century.⁽⁹¹⁾ In the NMS, for the pre-nineteenth century period, trade tax as a means of wealth

⁸⁷ Winstedt, The Malays, p.132.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p.121.

⁸⁹ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p. 16. See also immediately above in this thesis.

⁹⁰ Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.127.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Gullick also points to tin mining as an important source of revenue for Malay chiefs.

Ibid., p. 126.

It is clear, however, that this situation held true for the major tin producing states on the peninsular in the late nineteenth century and does not characterize that prevailing in the four northern states in the pre-colonial period.

for Sultan and chiefs would have been important but not paramount.

Winstedt's account of the Kedah Laws A.D. 1650 indicate that they are little more than port regulations, and we can see from his description of them the way in which wealth could be drawn from a very wide variety of trade taxes by the Sultan who controlled the port. As such they indicate the potential, not fully realized in the pre-colonial period, for the concentration of wealth and therefore power in the hands of the Sultan through the taxing of trade - trade which was ultimately based on the labour of the subordinate classes in the manner described above. In part, Winstedt's description runs as follows:

The Kedah Laws [included] provisions for a poll-tax on immigrants, port dues on ships from Gujurat and Kallingar, the collection by the harbour master of money due to trading captains, the duty payable for the import and export of slaves and for the export of tin and elephants, ships' manifests, standard weights and measures, and the reception of envoys and their missives.... These Kedah regulations make it clear that the trader was fleeced from the moment of his arrival until he sailed away. Presents of the cloth that formed the Indian cargoes had to be made to the Sultan, the harbour master, the warden of the port, the police and innumerable satellites. Ships from Perak gave presents of tin slabs. In addition there were fees for counting each bale of cloth, fees for storing bales even when they were not stored, import duty to be paid on every bale, fees for pilotage, port dues on entry and exit, fees for witnessing the sale of goods.....⁽⁹²⁾

Winstedt also provides a partial illustration of the way in which peasant petty trading could provide the elite with wealth in Malaya. According to Winstedt the arrival of Indian merchants allowed the peasantry in Trengganu and elsewhere on the peninsular to supplement their subsistence production through trade:

Centuries before rubber or even coconuts were cultivated for the market the arrival of Indian merchants had caused the Malay to add to his precarious means of subsistence by selling tin, gold and jungle produce..... According to Newbold, Trengganu exported, besides 7000 pikuls of tin annually, ivory, gold, pepper, camphor and gambier, and it had formerly exported 2000 pikuls of coffee.⁽⁹³⁾

This situation, Winstedt says, was typical of the Malay States generally in pre-colonial times. In the same passage Winstedt continues:

⁹² Winstedt, The Malays, p.116.

⁹³ Ibid, p.128.

It would be tedious to continue with statistics for all the states. The exports show on what the Malay depended to supplement his bare livelihood and the imports show how his supplementary earnings were spent on foodstuffs like salt which inland districts lacked, on cloths and on such luxuries as opium and tobacco.⁽⁹⁴⁾

The sources are silent on the way such transactions took place and their exact terms. It seems likely, however, that where Indian or other outside traders were involved, the initial transaction was between Malay elite and peasant and that it was followed by a trading transaction between this elite figure and the outside trader. On the river mouth and along the coast there may well have been some direct trade between outside merchant and peasant. In a general way the sources make it clear that it was the large trader who benefited most from the exchange with the peasant trader losing out. As one observer of peasant trading relations with the elite in Kedah from earliest times has stated:

The old kingdom of Kedah..... had an extensive supply of tin, pepper and elephants..... and she owed her prosperity mainly to them. the Malays have always had the worst in business transactions due either to the greed of the ruler or the trading incapacity of the people.....⁽⁹⁵⁾

The suggestion here is that in elite-peasant trading transactions at least, it was the Malay elite who most benefited .

It would have been, however, the larger trading transactions that provided the Malay elite with most of its wealth. The situation in the four states would have been typified by Winstedt's Kedah Sultan who received the 'chief part of his revenue' by trading in elephants and cloth. It should be noted that Winstedt's account of trade in Kedah in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries makes it clear that European traders were making their presence felt at that time. However, the impact of European trade was still limited in comparison with its later impact on the four states in the nineteenth century and had not at that stage begun to radically change their economy and society.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Tunku Nong, "Something About Kedah", The Asiatic Review, vol. XXX 111, No. 116, (October, 1937), p.839.

Less Important Methods of Surplus Extraction.

Apart from kerah, periodic crop seizure and trade, other methods of surplus extraction were practised in pre-colonial Malaya. Credit dealings, religious exactions and penalties in the form of court fines were among several miscellaneous ways in which surplus was extracted from the peasantry. It is self evident that before the penetration of a cash economy at the base level of the NMS economy, court fines and religious exactions were levied in a non-cash form.⁹⁶ The religious taxes, zakat and fitrah, were levied in support of the village mosque and its religious and charitable function at the local level. Certainly up to the time of the second decade of this century, in Kelantan at least, these taxes were exacted from the peasantry in the form of surplus in kind.⁽⁹⁷⁾

Against the use of kerah however, religious taxes and court fines were only of minor importance in the wider appropriation of surplus and need not be accounted for in detail here. Loan arrangements however do warrant some further brief mention here since in pre-colonial times lending arrangements could serve to furnish the elite with a small but valuable slave labour supply and because credit transactions, together with the strengthening of trade, assumed a much greater significance with the expansion of the colonial presence in north Malaya in the nineteenth century.

It will be clear from the brief account of subsistence agriculture and fishing above that the peasantry was largely, though not entirely, self sufficient in catering for its economic needs. Sometimes, however, the peasant cultivator did need assistance in the form of a loan to tide him over bad times. If his plough had broken, for example, he borrowed his neighbour's

⁹⁶ Gullick does make reference to the imposition of court fines in the form of cash penalties. As we have seen, however, Gullick does have a later period in mind than the one which is the focus of this chapter - a period in which a cash economy was starting to become general in certain states on the peninsular.

Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p. 117.

⁹⁷ William R. Roff, "The Origins and Early Years of the Majlis Ugama", in William R. Roff(ed), Kelantan Religion, Society and Politics in a Malay State(Kuala Lumpur, 1974), p.135.

See also Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 below.

to complete his ploughing, and a bad harvest might force him to borrow rice for himself and his family. It is important to understand the basic nature of pre-colonial Malay lending arrangements since their character was greatly changed by colonial influences.⁹⁸

Early lending transactions at the base level of that society were closely linked to various traditional forms of mutual co-operation and help. These included simple gift giving amongst kinsmen and neighbours, and the co-operative efforts of villagers. Where a villager needed help in a project too big for him to handle himself - in the construction of a house, for example - other villagers would assist in the project.⁽⁹⁹⁾ In this way peasant mutual assistance was very localized in its operation and was rendered in the form of labour directly or indirectly in the form of goods. The important point to stress then is that borrowing and lending within the peasantry in the pre-colonial NMS operated as a form of mutual assistance.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Mokhzani makes it clear that borrowing and lending within the peasantry had both an economic and moral aspect: the borrower had an economic obligation to return 'similar goods and services' to the lender and a moral debt of gratitude to assist the lender when his time of need came.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ It will be noted then that because the loan was repaid at face value the arrangement was entirely non-exploitative: there was no objective of profit making; it did not entail any accumulation of wealth, and it in no way amounted to surplus extraction by one peasant from another.⁽¹⁰²⁾

In sum then, credit transactions within the peasantry were conceived and operated in terms of a reciprocal sharing of roughly equal amounts of labour and goods. No appreciable

⁹⁸ The following account is based mainly on Mokhzani bin Abdul Rahmin, "Credit in a Malay Peasant Economy", Phd(Arts)., Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics, 1973.

⁹⁹ See Mokhzani, Credit in a Malay Peasant Economy, pp.30-50.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Mokhzani makes it clear that such loans were interest free.
Ibid., p.49.

material advantage accrued to the lender, and no significant material disadvantage was suffered by the borrower as a result of these arrangements.

It was possible for lending arrangements to take place without formality in this way because, in a small village community, the parties to the arrangement were personally known to each other and the moral obligation to repay the debt was therefore stronger.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Most important of all however was the fact that the peasants were not under any undue pressure to outlay on the productive process in a way which would have created the strong and widespread need to acquire assistance well beyond their means. Because their capital investment in the productive process was low, borrowing and lending was only necessary on a limited scale and was easily accomplished in the informal way described above. Thus the presence of usurers was simply not necessary in pre-colonial NMS society. In any case, as Mokhzani points out, before the time when there was a demand for cash credit from the peasantry a usurer would have had to store goods in bulk - rice for example - something which would not have been feasible in pre-colonial times. It should be noted briefly here that the Islamic religion of the NMS peasantry prohibited the charging of interest on a loan.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ But it will be clear from the above that this prohibition was not operative as a restraining influence on credit transactions until changing colonial circumstances prompted the need for cash borrowing and the practice of charging interest on loans.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

However, not all lending and borrowing took place within the peasantry in a way which was free from any supra demands on the labour of the subordinate classes, as the presence of debt-bondsmen - the orang berhutang - in the pre-colonial NMS implies. As we have seen, peasants defaulting on the repayment of a loan from a member of the ruling class were forced to work in servitude for the creditor overlord until it was considered by the latter

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.2. Winstedt, The Malays, p.137.

¹⁰⁵ See below.

that the debt had been repaid.¹⁰⁶

The scale of peasant production

It will be seen thus far that, since peasant surplus was siphoned off by those above in the social hierarchy the peasant family productive unit was not able to expand and remained at more-or-less constant level of simple reproduction from one generation to the next. The exactions of overlords afforded little opportunity for capital accumulation - for the acquisition of more land, more seed, more water buffalo, hired labour, and the like - so no opportunity existed for the extended reproduction of the peasant productive enterprise. There was therefore only limited economic and social differentiation within the NMS peasantry in pre-colonial times. In terms of its social structure the NMS were simply organized with a hereditary elite on top and a relatively undifferentiated peasantry and slaves below.

Unfree Labour in the Pre-Colonial NMS.

The point, stated briefly earlier in this chapter and implied throughout the chapter thus far but which needs to be highlighted, is that peasant labour was unfree in the sense that it was performed by individuals who were tied to the land for their livelihood. This is not to be confused with the notion of freedom implied in the generic classification orang merdeka. The orang merdeka were free in the sense that they were not tied to a master in the way that the abdi and orang berhutang were, but they were unfree in the very important sense that they were tied to the land, the most basic means of production for subsistence in rural society. Thus kerah had to be exercised near the site of peasant domestic production for relatively short periods of time; to do otherwise would have separated the raayat from the land and therefore threatened the labour supply itself. Similarly the orang merdeka could only produce

¹⁰⁶ In this way credit transactions could serve as a mechanism whereby a small but significant number of peasantry became separated from the land, at least for a time. Such separations would have been limited in scale (in time for each peasant and in the numbers of peasants affected) and in line with the social realities of the time. From the power holder's point of view too many debt bondsmen separated from the land and dependent upon them for their support and too few independent peasant small holders able to render periodic labour service and to provide produce would have threatened the social order on which their position depended. Certainly it would have been mainly for this reason that the number of debt bondsmen would have been small and the partial separation from the land they experienced would have been an integral part of, and no way a trend undermining, the social formation upon which power and wealth depended. The socially transforming kind of 'freeing' - separating - of peasants from the land in the NMS came much later and for quite different reasons.

a domestic surplus of produce while they remained attached to the land and since that produce could only be obtained through direct physical seizure it inevitably passed into the hands of the local power holders with the means to do this. Thus surplus labour was of necessity rendered directly in the locality in which it subsisted in the form of kerah, the basic institution for the extraction of surplus in NMS society. There was then only very limited mobility of labour in pre-colonial north Malaya, occurring only occasionally and for periods of short duration, when the peasantry were kerahed into fighting for an overlord from outside their locality, for example.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

The use of kerah by NMS power holders was subject to certain limitations stemming from the fact that peasant labour was unfree in the sense defined here. Since the peasants were tied to the land for the purpose of their own reproduction and since the existence of the orang merdeka was essential as a source of labour the demands of peasant subsistence labour necessarily limited the amount of kerah labour available to the elite. The time available for extra labour over and above subsistence was limited and to some extent determined by the natural cycle of subsistence production.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ During the planting and harvesting of the staple rice crop, for example, the orang merdeka were in no position to perform kerah, or certainly not without severe hardship to themselves.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Because the peasantry controlled the means of their own reproduction, they had the option of resisting a power holder who imposed undue hardship on them. Thus, conflict between the peasantry and those who appropriated their surplus could manifest itself in simple refusal to perform kerah, appeal to higher authority, or flight; in the latter case the peasant simply moved from one locality to another to work a

¹⁰⁷ For Siamese overlords, for example. See below.

¹⁰⁸ Ahmat makes this point for Kedah.
Ahmat, "Tradition and change". p.171.

¹⁰⁹ Ahmat states this for Kedah.
Ibid, p.29.

living from the land.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ In the case of simple refusal the overlord would have to weigh up the possibility of his peasants taking flight in deciding how much, if any, coercion he was to use in obtaining the labour he sought.

The Economic Basis of Power.

It will be clear so far that in pre-colonial times the NMS elite was dependent for its social position on the surplus it extracted at the point of production in the form of seized produce or direct labour services from the orang merdeka, the orang berhutang, and the abdi. Of the three groups being exploited it was the orang merdeka that was numerically the strongest and which was the most important in the rendering of surplus to power holders above them in the social hierarchy.

The Distribution of Power.

Although the sources don't account for it in quite this way the central point to understand here is that it is because the elite was dependent upon the surplus of peasants who were unfree in the sense that they were tied to the land - tied to the main means of production - that surplus was necessarily extracted at the point of production and the acquisition and exercise of the political power dependent upon this surplus was necessarily localized in pre-colonial times.¹¹¹

It will be clear so far that in pre-colonial times the NMS elite was dependent for its social position on the surplus it extracted from direct producers at the base level in those societies. That surplus was extracted, as we have seen, in the form of seized produce or coercive labour services. With hindsight we can see it as a relatively cumbersome way of extracting surplus. The method of so doing, and the form in which that surplus was available, meant that economic exploitation, and therefore political power, were highly localized. The

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p.72. Roff, Malay Nationalism, pp.10-11.

¹¹¹ There is some partial recognition of this in Lewis' description of the dependency of the Kedah elite on peasant rice production. Raayat complains against penghulus in that state may have been taken seriously, she says, 'because of the overwhelming importance of the rice crop to Kedah's economy and the consequent need to ensure the cooperation of the raayat'. 'The Kedah Malays were', she writes, 'in a fine position to vote with their feet, by migrating to Province Wellesley'. Lewis implies this may have been the case 'even in the eighteenth century'.

Lewis, "Kedah", p. 3.

essential reason for this was that surplus had to be extracted at the point of production. From the time of settled agriculture the social hierarchy on the peninsular had come to depend primarily on the capacity of the peasantry to support themselves and those able to exploit them. Basic to this was, from the time of sedentary agriculture onwards, the production of food and in particular the staple rice. The central point for us to understand here is that this rice production depended upon the application of peasant labour to the land in which the rice grew. That labour was unfree in the sense that it was tied to the land and could not be separated from it without dire economic and social consequences in the circumstances then prevailing. Thus, while the NMS could and did depend heavily on slaves who were prized possessions - sources of labour - that could be moved around because they were not tied to the land in the end it came back to the same thing - the slaves were not economically self supporting and were therefore, like their masters, dependent upon the surplus of the peasantry - the orang merdeka - who were necessarily stationary and tied to the land. The slaves, then, were a very important supplementary support to the NMS elite. Economically, because they were not self supporting, their service was of limited value to their masters. Both slave and master were dependent upon the productive activity of settled peasant agriculturalists who labour above and beyond the needs of their own subsistence benefited - supported - the elite without the dependency costs that were inevitably there with the slaves.

To sum up then, while the labour of the abdi, the orang berhutang, and the orang merdeka were all very important in supporting the elite it was the latter group which was numerically much stronger and whose productive activity was by far the most important in supporting the elite in that society.

It was especially on surplus in the form of direct services that the elite depended for their support. Gullick's claim on the importance of man power for the peninsular elite as a whole for the period to the late eighteenth century would have been generally true for the period leading up to the nineteenth century - the period leading up to the massive expansion of trade and trade tax as a source of elite support in the north.

Gullick comments that 'in the Malay States political power even though it is exercised

in respect of defined territorial areas is based on control of people'.¹¹² Later in the same study Gullick elaborates in these terms:

Political power in the Malay States rested on the control of man power. In order to attain and hold power a chief had to have a sufficient following of armed men at his back. He must therefore command the means to support a sufficient following. Revenues for this purpose could be obtained from taxing a prosperous, and therefore populous, district. The chief aimed to promote the development of his district and to increase its productive population so as to maximize the surplus which could be diverted into his own hands as the instrument of power.¹¹³

We can see from Gullick here - and as we shall see in more detail below - there was a circularity in importance of man power in maintaining political power: in the end power came down to (as it always does; as it still does today) control of people who will physically enforce the will of the power holder; and in turn the means to support this coercive following itself depended on the control of people - other people - whose productive endeavour could be used to support the enforcers. Certainly Gullick in his description of how this operated is well forward in time from our pre-colonial period as I have defined it here. By the period of the late nineteenth century Gullick had in mind trade had burgeoned, and large scale tin mining was well established on the peninsular under the by then very significant European colonial presence on the peninsular. Both tin production and general commodity trade were a source of tax wealth for power holders seeking to maintain and augment their position in society.¹¹⁴ But the basic principle in operation at the time Gullick had in mind would have been the same as that operating in the pre-colonial period of this thesis. The critical point for us here is that it was the direct control of subordinate labour that was of central importance to the acquisition and maintenance of political power on the peninsular before surplus - surplus labour - labour beyond that needed to maintain those performing it - was available in indirect forms such as trade tax or a tax on tin production.

Wheatley, in an essay produced in the 1960s, hypothesizes on the political development of the peninsular Malay state from the time of its earliest form through to the time of its more mature form at the time of the earliest European contact. In so doing he

¹¹² Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p. 113.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 127.

highlights the pivotal importance of direct labour control in this development. He begins by indicating the importance of trade contact in introducing a particular early state form from the Indian sub continent - a form centred on a god-king - and then goes on to outline the significance of labour control, and elite competition for such control - in the early development of the peninsular Malay state into its pre-colonial state form:

The maintenance of a state appropriate to a god-king and his priesthood necessitated the ministrations of craftsmen and artisans, who were located within the precincts of the royal palace, and of a peasantry who drew dividends from the annual cycle of plant and animal life within the territory of the god-king. At some stage previous to this stage of development there had arisen among nascent regional chieftainships competition for control over labour, which led successful chiefs to seek to extend their authority so as to draw on labour rights in as many of the surrounding villages as possible. Opposition to this policy was forthcoming both from less successful chiefs, who rightly regarded a siphoning off of their labour forces as a diminution of their own power (political status being measured in terms of their labour rights), and from other regional chieftains or emergent kings. Concomitantly there arose the need for protective devices such as palisades and walls, and the maintenance of a force of warriors, Kshatriyas, who in return for a share in the wealth of the court, acted as household guards, organized the peasantry in times of need, and enforced the sanctified authority of the god-king. In short there had evolved the city state, the *negara*, focussed on a new landscape feature, the town, from which, over the first millennium of the Christian era, there would develop the territorial states and thalassocracies whose conflicting interests comprise the main theme of most of our corpora of epigraphic sources.¹¹⁵

Certainly, as Wheatley and others point out, the historical record for the long pre-colonial period leading up to the intrusion of European influences onto the peninsular is scant indeed. There is, however, general agreement on certain essential features in that evolving

¹¹⁵ Wheatley, "Desultory Remarks", p. 43.

Wheatley goes on to point out a lack of sources when it comes to charting this social change: 'It is doubtful if the secular socio-economic changes here referred to could have been deduced solely from the fragmentary evidence relating directly to the Malay Peninsular. A wider view is necessary to document the change... The earliest information that can be assigned with certainty to the Malay peninsular depicts this process in its initial stages and relates specifically to the northern tracts, ...'.

The wider view that Wheatley refers to entails extrapolation from a body of fragmentary evidence for social change in the south east Asian area in general over a longer period of time:

In the interpretation of these and subsequent socio-economic transformations [ie radical changes in patterns of authority relationship on parts of the isthmus in the third century A.D.] the evidence relating specifically to the peninsular is seldom sufficient to do more than validate a pattern manifested by a variety of documents for South-east Asia as a whole.

Ibid., p. 42.

social situation - an agreement expressed by Gullick, Roff, Winstedt and others - and it is on that agreement that I draw in this chapter. While the sources do not always interpret the nature of elite reliance on the exploitation of human and material resources as means of maintaining social position in the same way (some see it as the embodiment of a reciprocal harmony between rulers and ruled) my account here of this social and economic relationship between elite and majority on the peninsular in pre-colonial times can be deduced in a general sort of way from the agreed interpretations of how that relationship worked even if it can not be pinned down in a detailed definitive description.

Given then the fact that all power holders, Sultan and chiefs alike, rested their power and prestige for the most part on their ability to control labour directly at the point of production, and given the fact that the larger part of that labour was unfree, it will be seen that political power was inevitably widely dispersed in north Malaya in pre-colonial times. From a certain point in time in the early development of the Malay state the theoretical position, certainly, was that the Sultan was the supreme power holder in the northern Malay state. Theory and practice however would not necessarily have been aligned with one another. It is important not to confuse the symbolic significance of the Sultan with the degree of power that he actually wielded over his subordinates outside his own district. The extent of the Sultan's supra district power in reality would have varied in place and time depending on the amount of labour that he controlled in his own district and the amount of labour that he was able to control directly or indirectly beyond his own district.¹¹⁶ But it was, by-and-large, the use of labour directly under his control that supported the Sultan's position in pre-colonial NMS society, and he had only limited control of labour beyond his own district. It follows, then, that considerable power was vested in the periphery of the pre-colonial polity, in the hands of the district chiefs and other power holders. The Chiefs' role was crucial in pre-colonial NMS society because they represented the real foci of power in a highly decentralized economic and

¹¹⁶ The latter came in the nineteenth century principally, as we shall see, to depend on the Sultan's ability to extract surplus in the form of trade tax from his vantage point at the river mouth. Prior to this he would have had to rely on his ability to extract surplus from beyond his own districts in some other form. His chiefs might have rendered him tribute or gifts in the form of goods, embodying peasant or slave labour; or peasants might have been *kerahed*, or slaves sent, to labour in the Sultan's interests - to fight as troops in the Sultan's cause for example; or the Sultan might have simply seized labour from a non-royal district in one form or another.

political system. The political independence of the chiefs stemmed from the fact that they controlled the labour of the subordinate classes in their own district and were therefore largely independent of any central authority for their livelihood and power. The Chiefs, like the Sultan, were able to appropriate some labour from outside their own district - in the later pre-colonial period - notably through trade tax - but the greater part of their wealth and therefore their power and independence from each other and from central authority rested on a basis of the direct appropriation of surplus within their own district.

The essential reason for the decentralized nature of political power in the pre-colonial NMS lay then in this economic reality. The fact that political power for both Sultan and Chief rested primarily on the extraction of surplus at the point of production meant that no permanent basis for any centralization of political power existed because the main ways of surplus extraction from an economically self sufficient labour force did not allow for this. It was the basic reason why, to borrow Roff's phrase, the Sultan was, in terms of the actual power he wielded, little more than 'a district chief among district chiefs' in the period before colonial influences had any major impact.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

Class Relations in Pre-Colonial North Malaya.

It will be recalled from the introductory chapter of this thesis that most of the literature dealing with pre-colonial Malaya tends to stress what is seen as a structured harmony in pre-colonial society, in which the interests of the peasantry were complemented by and balanced with those of the ruling class. While there was no doubt a strong aspect of reciprocity in the social relationship between the two - it is hard to be sure because, as for the pre-colonial economy and society generally, the definitive evidence for this early period is lacking - we do need to be wary of a too mechanistic view of how this worked. The risk is that too mechanistic a perception will serve to obscure - to belie - what must have been the contentious reality of productive and wider social political relations between ruling and subject classes in this northern peninsular area before the strong impact of colonial influence.

Gullick summarizes his study by addressing himself to what he sees as the

¹¹⁷ Roff, Malay Nationalism, p.5.

cohesiveness of pre-colonial Malay society:

The heterogenous villages of the Malay States were held together in a larger community by something more than the fear of their chief and the men at his back. They were conscious of themselves as people of a State whose welfare depended on the good or bad genius of their Sultan. They shared a common relation of subjugation to their chief. They were bound to him by ties of loyalty and yet were sagely cynical about the risks and misfortunes which came to them at his hands. In the worship of their God and in the magical procedures for obtaining supernatural help and blessing they were aware of what they shared. On this foundation of partial social cohesion the political system was built.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

Thus in Gullick's account the opposing interest of the peasantry and ruling class are played down in favour of what Gullick sees as the unity of these two classes within a wider state identity. The element of coercion exercised by the elite over the peasantry ('the fear of their chief and the men at his back') is minimized. And there is a weak echo of the idea of reciprocity which existed between lord and serf in mediaeval Europe in Gullick's reference to peasant dependence on the good and bad genius of the Sultan for their welfare and the reference to the ties of loyalty which existed between peasantry and Sultan.

Roff offers a similar interpretation:

The subordinate position of the raayat was held in question by neither side, nor was the right of members of the ruling class to receive on demand a wide range of goods and services in return for protection and the perpetuation of general welfare.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

While they do seem plausible in explaining the ideological aspect of the relationships between rulers and ruled in pre-colonial Malay society they do, in their emphasis, tend to obscure the likely real function and place of Sultan, Chief and other power-holders in that society and the way in which their power rested ultimately on physical coercion to render goods and services at the point of production.¹²⁰ Whatever the theoretical position, the objective economic reality of power in the pre-colonial NMS is likely to have been that the

¹¹⁸ Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.143.

¹¹⁹ Roff, Malay Nationalism, p.10.

¹²⁰ 'Likely real function and place' because the lack of evidence makes it impossible to be certain.

extraction of surplus was much more a function of ruling class - subject class conflict than any consensual agreement within the elite and between the elite and their subjects to extract goods and services according to something akin to a European, mediaeval scheme of rights and privileges.¹²¹

It is more believable to assume that, while some sort of ideological justification along the lines reciprocity no doubt featured strongly in the situation the stronger driving reality underpinning the behaviour of rulers and ruled towards one another was that Sultan, chiefs and other elite figures simply appropriated goods and services to the extent that their coercive power over these subordinates and their coercive, persuasive, manipulative power to assert claims to such economic gain over those of rival power holders, allowed.

This is not to say, however, that there was no similarity at all between pre-colonial Malaya and mediaeval Europe. Indeed, as Sutherland points out, the parallels are tempting.¹²² But as Sutherland also cautions these parallels should not be overdrawn in attempting to understand the essential dynamics of pre-colonial Malay society.⁽¹²³⁾ No doubt to some extent on an ideological level the peasantry accepted the supremacy of their 'overlords'. They must have shared at least some awareness of the Sultan's position as head of their state, though scholarly assertions along these lines on the subjective political awareness of the peasantry are inevitably very general in nature and cannot have the ring of social scientific certainty.¹²⁴ The

¹²¹ That is to say, akin to the established perception of that scheme and how it worked. This is to leave aside the question of whether this is how it actually worked in Europe at that time.

¹²² Heather Sutherland, "The Taming of the Trengganu Elite", in R. T. McVey(ed), Southeast Asian Transitions(Yale, 1978), p. 35.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Both Gullick and Roff make it clear this was true in an abstract sense. According to Gullick villagers were 'people of a state whose welfare depended on the good or bad genius of their sultan and that this consciousness was an important element in the "partial social cohesion" upon which the political system was built'. The consciousness of the place and importance of the sultan was, Gullick says, expressed in 'the worship of their God and in the magical procedures for obtaining supernatural help and blessing'.

Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p. 143.

Roff expresses it in these terms:

reality that would certainly have impinged itself on peasant consciousness was that they had no choice but to accept the exactions of their 'overlords'. While it is impossible to be certain it seems much more likely that, in the last analysis, the peasants worked for them not so much out of any intrinsic notion of their place and that of their superiors in the Islamic or the magical supernatural scheme of things, but because they were physically forced to do so. Ultimately, then, it must have been very much the 'fear of the chief and the man at his back' which ensured the surplus upon which the superstructural levels of the pre-colonial northern Malay polity depended. And for their part, the members of the ruling class exercised domain over their subjects' labour not so much out of any abstractedly determined notion of their position in Malay society but for the very practical reason that they needed the surplus to support their position in society.

Clearly some minimal level of consensus must have existed in the NMS for them to have constituted any sort of economic, social and political unity at all, limited though this would have been in pre-colonial times. It is on this perspective that we can more easily surmise the major importance of the Sultan in holding together a larger number of river settlements in such a unity. A more accurate perception is likely to be that the primary function of the Sultan at a supra village and supra district level, was to symbolize the limited consensus which both provided the ideological framework within which surplus extraction took place, and which legitimized this extraction. The Sultan's symbolic and ideological function then, would have had more bearing at the level of the elite and it would have been largely within their ranks that the sort of consensus referred to here was operative, since it was the elite not the peasants who were the beneficiaries of the Sultan's symbolic function. Whether the subordinate classes shared the sort of consensus referred to by Gullick to any great extent, or not, it made no difference to their position in NMS society since they occupied

The role of the Yang di-pertuan was first and foremost to express the symbolic unity of the State and to protect its order and integrity. Embodying in his person both daulat, the mystical reinforcement of personality conferred by kingship, and kuasa, supreme temporal authority, he was invested with an aura of sanctity and the supernatural that found outward form in an elaborate apparatus of ceremonial practice and belief, nonetheless important even if it frequently represented no corresponding concentration of administrative strength or real power.

their economic and social position largely by compulsion.

Elite conflict to control labour.

At the time of the earliest European encroachments onto the northern peninsular sections of the Malay elite had long been contending with one another for the control of both human and material resources. The human resource sought was, as we have seen, the labour of orang merdeka, orang berhutang and abdi which could be applied directly in the productive enterprise of the power holders. Material resources existed in part in the form of peasant produce which embodied surplus labour; its seizure therefore constituted a less direct form of labour control. Control was also sought over material natural resources - land and mineral wealth for example - as a vital ingredient in the creation of productive wealth.

However, it remained labour services which was the main prize in this intra-elite conflict since it was the active element creating value in the northern Malay productive process. The NMS elite, then, competed within itself not so much to acquire additional land - to seize additional territory to expand a domain in spatial terms for its own sake - but more to maximize the manpower - the labour power - under its control.¹²⁵

The Sultan, at the pinnacle of the Malay State, sought to extend his control over labour in as many villages, settlements, and districts as possible by a variety of means. Since in pre-colonial times the Sultan was unable to wield much real power directly beyond his own district it was very much in his interest to have as many neighbouring districts as possible in the hands of his relatives or close supporters. Not only did this give him a measure of influence if not outright control beyond his own district but it could also serve, at least in theory through the rendering of dues, to allow him a more extensive acquisition of surplus.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ As indicated in the Gullick and Wheatley passages cited above.

Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p. 113.

Wheatley, "Desultory Remarks", p. 43.

¹²⁶ Not that this was happening to any strong degree in practice at this earlier point in time. Gullick indicates that in the states he was concerned with for the later period of time which is his focus, while 'in theory the Sultan and other holders of royal offices ... were entitled to collect certain taxes throughout the state in practice it appears the Sultan rarely received all that was due to him from outlying districts'.

The acquisition of royal wealth in this way was to become much more important, as we shall see, in the nineteenth century and beyond, when changes to the way in which surplus was extracted enabled the Sultan to concentrate more wealth in his hands through the agency of local appointees to positions of power in outlying areas beyond the royal district.⁽¹²⁷⁾ Subordinate power-holders, notably the Chiefs, who stood to lose control of labour from the Sultan's encroachments, resisted.

In general, then, power-holders sought to extend their hold over as much labour as possible and, in reaction to any encroachments into their domain, to retain their hold on the labour they controlled. Political conflict, between Sultan and Chief and between Chief and Chief, tended, then, to be a conflict over the control of labour. And as we have seen this meant, in pre-colonial times, principally unfree labour which was controlled directly at the point of production, a severely limiting factor prohibiting the permanent concentration of power across a wide geographic area in the hands of one person.

Finally it should be noted that intra-elite conflict for control of labour often focussed upon the succession to the Sultancy as a means of securing for one elite contender or another and their backers the most favoured position for that control.⁽¹²⁸⁾ Again, as we shall see in the chapter below, the sources indicate that dynastic conflicts were particularly important at the time when changes to the way in which surplus was extracted, as a result of colonial influence, enabled a much greater concentration of wealth at the capital than before.

The Siamese influence.

Demands on human and material resources in the NMS in pre-colonial times came, not only from the NMS elites but from outside power holders as well. Thus in the centuries leading up to the colonial period, some of the surplus of the subject classes in the north was

Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p. 127.

If this statement indicates the state of affairs in the north for the later period of time - the period of the late nineteenth century - it seems even more likely that the ability of the northern rulers to acquire dues in this way would have been even less in the period before such dues existed in an easily transportable form.

¹²⁷ See Chapter 3.

¹²⁸ See below.

extracted, successively, by Sri Vijayan, Majapahit, Siamese and Burmese power holders.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Of these, however, it is the Siamese supremacy which is most important to our discussion here, since the Siamese were having a significant influence on the NMS economy and society in the later pre-colonial period and during the period of the expansion of European colonial influence into north Malaya in the nineteenth century.

The two important points, then, in understanding the significance of Siamese influence in pre-1909 north Malaya are these:

- (1) In the later pre-colonial period up to around the turn of the eighteenth century, a Siamese elite was in competition with the local elite in the NMS for a share in the productive wealth of the area.
- (2) That intra-elite conflict was being, increasingly in the nineteenth century, influenced by the intrusion of European influence there.

It is the first of these points which I will develop in this chapter. I will develop the second point in the next chapter of this thesis.

According to Hall early incursion by Siamese overlords based in Sukotai took place on the Malay peninsular in the thirteenth century.⁽¹³⁰⁾ By the end of the eighteenth century certainly Siamese and to a lesser extent Burmese overlords were exercising a degree of control

¹²⁹ North Malaya came under the influence of Sri Vijaya, a Buddhist kingdom centred in Sumatra to the south in the seventh century A.D., and under the influence of the Majapahit kingdom centred in Java in the fourteenth century.

Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.7.

¹³⁰ D. G. E. Hall, A History of South-East Asia(London, 1964), p.163.

Bonney states that by the thirteenth century Kedah had recognized Siamese overlordship.

Bonney, Kedah, p.13.

over northern Malaya. Siamese hegemony lasted until 1909, when the Siamese formally handed over their suzerainty of the Northern Malay States to Britain.

The Siamese exacted surplus from the NMS in two main ways; they received tribute from them triennially in the form of the bunga emas (literally: golden and silver flowers); and they exercised the right that superior force gave them to demand troops, food or other material assistance from them. Thus labour was appropriated directly in the case of raayat or slaves conscripted into fighting a Siamese cause and indirectly in the case of tribute in kind, since raayat or slave labour cultivated the rice, mined the tin, tended the elephants, and generally produced any of the goods forwarded to the Siamese as triennial or irregular tribute. In short, the Siamese used the same methods of surplus extraction as the NMS elites. Like the latter they either seized labour services from the raayat directly or demanded tribute in kind. In this way the Siamese elite and the NMS elites competed for the productive wealth created by the raayat in the area.

The exactions of the NMS elites and those of the Siamese must have caused considerable hardship for the raayat who were forced, from time to time, to do double duty. It would have been largely for this reason, as we shall see in the next chapter, that the NMS elites and their subjects made common cause in resisting Siamese influence in their area.

It follows from the above that the same kind of economic limitation on the concentration of power applying within the Northern Malay States also severely limited the ability of the Siamese to exercise a strong centralised control over them. Because it was the Sultans and Chiefs in the NMS that controlled labour at the point of production and not the Siamese, the former were able to exercise considerable independence from the latter. We have seen that the riverine link between most points of production in the NMS enabled their power holders, and especially the Sultan, to siphon off some surplus labour indirectly in the form of surplus in kind or trade tax. Siamese overlords enjoyed no comparable advantage enabling them to siphon off NMS surplus at a point in Siam remote from the production location. Distance, then, was a severely limiting factor for the Siamese. The Siamese had much further to go (from Sukhotai, Ayutia and Bangkok, to take the successive Siamese capitals from the thirteenth century) to extract labour in the NMS than did the Sultan and chiefs in the same region. Thus, the Siamese hegemony there, before the strong impact of

colonial influences in the nineteenth century, was not, by modern standards, a strong one. The Siamese elite could extract surplus from them only to the extent allowed by their coercive, persuasive and manipulative power to influence their elites to render tribute. This was true of the Siamese domain over all of the Siamese Malay States including the four that came to be known as the Northern Malay States and which are the focus of this thesis.

It was however, the use of physical coercion, or the threatened use of force, that was by far the strongest factor in Siamese paramountcy over the Siamese Malay States. Bonney cites an example of Siamese exactions in Kedah which, although set in the early nineteenth century, does typify the nature of the irregular extraction of tribute by the Siamese in the NMS in pre-colonial times. In 1809, Bonney states, a revolt in Patani, one of the Siamese Malay States, against Siamese authority resulted in an order from Siam to Kedah 'to provide men and other forms of assistance to help the Siamese forces put down the uprising.'⁽¹³¹⁾ In the same year, Bonney continues, Kedah was forced by Siam to assist her in driving Burmese forces from Thalang to the north of Kedah on the western sea board of the Isthmus of Kra. In Bonney's words, Kedah 'was now ordered to provide men, boats and provisions for the recovery of Thalang and the defence of the Isthmian region from further attack.'⁽¹³²⁾ In this example the use by the Siamese of subordinate labour in Kedah is clear and there is no mistaking the degree of compulsion used by the Siamese elite to get its own way. Bonney quotes Sultan Ahmad's words on this: '...[the Siamese] being numerous and the country of Queda being insufficient to oppose them by force, I fulfilled their requisitions.'⁽¹³³⁾

A wider picture of Siamese reliance on locally recruited labour can be seen in Winstedt's account of a Siamese attack on Patani at an earlier period of time:

Under January 1634 there is an entry in the Dagh-Register that the king of Siam had sent 30,000 men from Ayuthia to subdue rebellious Patani, where with

¹³¹ R. Bonney, Kedah 1771-1821 The Search for Security and Independence(Kuala Lumpur, 1971), p.115.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

reinforcements from Tenasserim, Kedah, Bordelong and Ligor the army would amount to 50 or 60,000 men and leave the issue in no doubt.⁽¹³⁴⁾

Winstedt's account gives us a good idea of the scale of such an operation. Clearly the Siamese reliance on locally recruited labour was substantial. Such labour conscripted from outlying areas from the seat of conquest approximately doubled the original Siamese force.

Bonney and Winstedt illustrate, then, the kind of way in which the Siamese were, in their acts of conquest in the NMS and neighbouring areas, heavily dependent on locally conscripted labour and confiscated goods to achieve their purpose. We can see here the element of circular causation in the acquisition of resources and power outlined above for the NMS elite as it applied to the Siamese in their exploitation of their subject areas. The more human and material resources labour the Siamese were able to control within or outside Siam, the greater their wealth and political power - the greater their capacity for hegemony beyond their own borders; and the greater this wealth and political power by these means the greater their ability to command the surplus upon which this power depended. In this way the Siamese supremacy in the NMS was self-perpetuating. Once the process of domination and surplus extraction was started the Siamese went from strength to strength. It was then in this way that the Siamese elite, within the limits defined by the form in which that surplus existed at that time and outlined in this chapter above, was able to periodically exercise a supremacy over the NMS. They were able to exercise a suzerainty over these states on the basis not only of the surplus they extracted from subordinate classes in Siam but also the surplus it was extracting in neighbouring territories including the NMS, as well.

Bonney's examples help us to understand how the Siamese relied on raayat and slave labour in the NMS on an irregular basis and the importance of that labour to Siamese conquest.⁽¹³⁵⁾

¹³⁴ Winstedt, Notes on the History of Kedah, p.156.

¹³⁵ There is ample evidence in the sources to show the importance of slavery to the Siamese in their far-flung conquest. We read, for example, in a letter by Colonel H. Burney written in

Important, too, in sustaining Siamese suzerainty beyond its borders and as an objective for such conquest was the receiving of the bunga emas from subjugated territories. That importance was two fold. Because the bunga emas was made up primarily of precious metals the material advantage to the Siamese was substantial. But the value of the bunga emas to the Siamese went well beyond this. The tribute had a symbolic significance betokening the overlordship of Siam and the vassalage of the state rendering the tribute. The degree to which such a relationship signified by the tribute existed was, however, vague and variable, both in place and time. The degree of subjugation varied from state to state, according to Siamese inclination and power at the time. As we have seen, distance was a factor influencing the degree of Siamese control over her vassal states. Generally speaking those states closest to the centre of Siamese power came under stronger Siamese influence than those further away.⁽¹³⁶⁾

1841 of the capture by the Siamese of 1400 Burmese men, women and children at an unspecified time prior to 1841.

Colonel H. Burney to Maingay, 28 May, 1841, p.3. Printed letter addressed to A.D. Maingay labelled 'relations with Kedah' and held in the Royal Commonwealth Society library in London. The library holds six copies with one copy corrected.

The same document also refers to the fact that the Raja of Kedah's 'family, his sisters, nephews and personal servants, (and) seventy men women and children' had been seized in 1821 and carried away as captives to Siam.

Ibid., p.3 (original emphasis).

Certainly these are later examples of Siamese acquisition of slave labour but the frequency of such references does serve to illustrate the importance of slave labour to the Siamese for a period lasting from earliest pre-colonial times well into the nineteenth century. The examples here suggest the great importance of slavery to the Siamese in the exercise of their paramountcy in areas well beyond their power base in Bangkok. Burney doesn't say so but it seems reasonable to assume that the utility of slave labour not tied to the land was of especial importance to a Siamese force whose mobility placed great limitations on the use of unfree labour in the manner suggested in the text above.

¹³⁶ For example, Sutherland says of Trengganu's relationship with Siam: '... as the most distant of all Siam's Malay tributaries, it never felt Thai domination as more than an intermittent threat.'

Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp.35-36.

Winstedt, comparing the practicality of the Siamese 'protecting' Kedah by quelling an anti-Siamese rebellion within the state the same way they had quelled anti-Siamese rebellion in Patani wrote: 'Kedah was too far away from Ayuthia to enjoy Siamese protection.'

Sutherland characterizes the significance of the bunga emas in the wider South-east Asian context in this way:

...Sending the tributary token was much vaguer than anything comprehended by European legal categories; it might mean anything from friendship to total subordination and one of the central characteristics of Southeast Asian state relationships was the constant reinterpretation of such ties, reflecting the waxing and waning of relative power.⁽¹³⁷⁾

The variable nature of Siam's relationship with its subject states helps to explain the varying interpretation of the significance of the bunga emas in the sources.⁽¹³⁸⁾ Bonney sees the rendering of the bunga emas by Kedah as indicative of that State's subordination to Siam.⁽¹³⁹⁾ According to Bonney, however, the ruler of Kedah asserted that 'the Bunga Emas Don Perak was sa pakat dan bersahabat or a token of friendship and alliance, and thus a free-will and complimentary offering.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Sheppard states that the origin of the tribute in Trengganu lay in the passing of a gift to the Siamese by Sultan Mansur in 1781.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ According to Sheppard, 'this was the first time in the history of Trengganu that "bunga emas" was sent to Siam and it is clear that the gift was an entirely voluntary one and was not sent at the request of the Siamese. These flowers were despatched to Bangkok with an embassy in 1782 and were subsequently sent at intervals of three years.⁽¹⁴²⁾ Sheppard continues: 'any suggestion that the "bunga mas" was a form of tribute has always been entirely repudiated by successive

Sir R.O. Winstedt, "Notes on the History of Kedah", Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. 14, No. 3, (1936), p.156.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.35.

¹³⁸ But, it should be noted, not the full explanation. The differing interpretations of contemporary observers can also be explained in terms of their respective economic and political motives. See Chapter 3 below.

¹³⁹ Bonney, Kedah, pp.11-12

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ M.C.F.F., Sheppard, "A Short History of Trengganu", Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society, V.22, pt.3, (June, 1949), p.19.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Sultans and Chiefs of Trengganu.'⁽¹⁴³⁾

It is clear however from the frequent exercise of coercion by the Siamese in the area that, despite the protestations of the NMS elites to the contrary, any variations in the power relation between Siamese overlords and these subjects were variations on the degree of superordination of Siam and the subordination of NMS Malays. There is nothing in the sources to suggest that, in terms of the economic and political realities of the Southeast Asian region, the bunga emas was rendered from one equal to another. No doubt there were periods when the NMS elite could have asserted with justification that Siamese dominance was weaker and their willingness to send the bunga emas stronger. But, if the vassal state sent the bunga emas in a spirit of friendship and willingness, it did so only in a very limited sense and always with the knowledge that Siamese coercion was the basis of the suzerain-vassal relationship. Sultan Mansur's motives in passing on a free-will offering to the Siamese in 1781 may have been friendly but this did not stop the Siamese subsequently enforcing their demands on Trengganu. According to Sheppard, Sultan Mansur's gift to the Siamese in 1781 'was soon to prove embarrassing and in 1787 he wrote to Captain Light in Penang complaining that the King of Siam had given orders that the rulers of Trengganu, Kedah and Patani should go to Bangkok and do homage, and that when he refused to do so the king had sent an envoy who demanded a hundred pieces of cannon and a variety of rich articles'.¹⁴⁴ In sum then, it would seem Newbold's view of Siam's relations with Kedah typify Siam's relations with all its subject Malay states including the four NMS: '...it seems after all that the Lord of the White Elephant (Siam) has as much original right as present power and ancient aggression can give him and no more...'⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

It follows from the above that, apart from the material gain from the bunga emas, the economic and political reality underlying the tokenism of the tribute was that it assisted the

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Ahmat, Transition and Change, p.20.

Siamese in their calculation of conquest over labour and goods in the area. The rendering of the triennial tribute was thus linked with the irregular exactions of the Siamese in that it indicated which states were amenable to Siamese demands for men, materials and other tribute. It was in the general pattern of far-flung conquest in pre-colonial Southeast Asia that there was, by modern standards, a distinct lack of formality in the conquering and 'holding' of subject settlements. In the days before labour was held in subjection by a large and permanent occupation force and by clear-cut and binding agreements, the conquering power needed some indication of which settlements - which Sultans, Chiefs, villages - were likely to meet their demands. The rendering of the bunga emas was such an indication. It seems reasonable to assume that at the time of the Siamese invasion of Patani and Thalang cited above, the Siamese knew that Kedah could probably be relied upon to provide men and provisions because the Sultan of Kedah had betokened such a willingness in the prior sending of the bunga emas. The connection between the bunga emas and the exaction of irregular tribute is stated by Bonney in this way:

The Bunga Emas dan Perak were the tributary offerings submitted triennially by Kedah to Siam as an acknowledgment of the overlordship of the latter. Its submission also carried the obligation to provide men, money, arms and supplies when required by the suzerain state which, of course, was regulated by the needs of the suzerain and its power to coerce and enforce its demands.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

Burney accounts for the connection between the bunga emas and the arbitrary extraction of tribute in a similar way:

But the obligation which this token [i.e. the bunga emas] involves is undefined and regulated only by the wants or caprice of the paramount state in requisitions at any time, for troops, guns, boats or provisions.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾

The indication is then, in the sources, that the receiving of the bunga emas signalled the Siamese that they could rely on the tributary State to satisfy their demand for men and

¹⁴⁶ Bonney, Kedah, p.11.

¹⁴⁷ Captain H Burney, 23 March, 1827, narrative of Captain H. Burney's mission to Siam, Calcutta 9 March, 1827, Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, Vol. 345, No. 19, Burney Papers, Vol. 11., Part V. (1912), p.118. These papers printed for private circulation by order of the Vajiranana National Library, Bangkok, 1912.

materials.

It is clear from the above that the limitations of distance and the nature of production and its social organization - the fact that wealth and power for both local and outside imperial power holder was largely dependent upon the direct, physical, coercive control of labour and resources at the point of production - meant that the Siamese were unable to effect a strong and sustained hegemony in the NMS and the other subject states in the vicinity. The corollary to this is that they were forced to remain at some distance from the NMS productive process and their presence in the region therefore did little to alter the mode of production in the region. It is only later, when new colonial factors began to enter NMS production that the Siamese were able to some degree to effect some changes in the productive organization of the area in their own interest as we shall see in more detail below.

We can see then how Siamese overlords intruded themselves into NMS economy and society by exacting both regular and irregular tribute. This bought them into conflict with local Malay power holders since both sought the human and material resources of the area. It also bought them into contentious relationship with subordinate Malays who were in a situation where their surplus was being forcibly extracted by not only local Malay but Siamese and other imperial overlords as well. We can see then the basis for the contentious social relationships that characterized the NMS in the wider pre-colonial context - relationships that were to alter in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as new forces and interests intruded into the area.

Conclusion

We are now in a better position to see the nature of pre-colonial production and how NMS society was organized around production before any major incursion of colonial influence into the region. The NMS economy at that time was characterized by production for use with significant but nonetheless comparatively limited commodity production. In the absence of any major stimulus for any enlargement of the pre-colonial commodity market the volume of trade along the waterways did not vary appreciably. Thus the circulation of commodities and the activities of those organizing this did not appreciably change the pre-colonial mode of production. The essential point to stress here is that the limited amount of

commodity production which did feature in the economy did not lend, in any very significant way, a particular character to the productive relationships in the region. Thus social relations revolved around production for use rather than exchange. The orang merdeka laboured in production for their subsistence and were periodically kerahed into the performance of labour beyond subsistence for Sultan chief or other power holder. The Abdi and orang berhutang operated under a stronger and more sustained compulsion to work in support of themselves and their masters.

In all this we can see the fundamental social tensions characterizing pre-colonial NMS society. The orang merdeka sought to make a living from soil and sea while at the same time being forced to meet the exactions of their overlords. At the same time the Malay and Siamese elites confronted one another in their endeavour to extract surplus from the raayat. At the elite level political conflict in the region was essentially a conflict for the control of labour and material resources since the application of the former to the latter produced the wealth that was the basis of power and prestige. The very heavy reliance on the control of labour services directly through kerah and the secondary reliance on the seizure of produce at the point of production meant that power in the pre-colonial polity was inevitably decentralized. Much power lay with the chiefs and the Sultan's position as head of state was nominal.

It is important to note too that land was not a commodity in pre-colonial NMS society. Some peasants did become separated from the land but this in no way arose from the inherent nature of land tenure in pre-colonial society itself.

All this was to change, as we shall see in the next chapter, as European and especially English merchants began to exert a stronger presence in the NMS.

This was, then, the shape and character of the pre-colonial state as it had survived from the early sixteenth century through to the late nineteenth century. The description given here is of the traditional (Northern) Malay state as it had continued to be throughout the period of European trade contact from the early sixteenth century to 1874. While we can assume - and the sources do universally make the assumption - that we can see these main features of a traditional state in the later stages of their development - we must at the same time be aware that, in ways not easily defined, changes to the Malay economy and society were, by 1874 for

the peninsular as a whole,(and for us by 1902 for the NMS in particular), already taking place. It now remains to try to identify some of these changes to fill out our description of the economy and society in the four states before the arrival of a formal British presence in them.

CHAPTER 3
THE EXPANSION OF THE COLONIAL ECONOMY IN THE NORTHERN MALAY
STATES: 1800-1909.

Introduction

As we have seen European and Asian traders had been operating in and around the four states for several centuries before 1800. At its most proximate that trade involved an exchange of commodities between peninsular settlements and those on the neighbouring islands of what is now Indonesia, and on the Indian sub continent. At its most distant the peninsular was a valuable staging post for European shipping moving between Europe and the exotic commodity producing areas as far east as the eastern extremity of the Asian continental mainland. It was the marked expansion of this European and especially British trade in the region in the nineteenth and especially the later nineteenth century that had a strong effect in altering the Northern Malay State economy and society. It was under this trade stimulus that the pre-1909 economy described in the previous chapter was undergoing marked and fundamental change throughout the nineteenth century and by the end of that century the basic character of NMS society was greatly changed.

The evidence shows that, while these merchants did not enter the productive process directly at this stage to substantially alter the way in which it took place their presence and trading activity on the periphery of the productive process did act as a strong stimulus for social change. The role of merchants vis-a-viz the productive process - whether they alter production directly by entering it and manipulating it to their own ends, or whether they affect it indirectly in the manner I am suggesting for the NMS here - has been the subject of scholarly debate.¹ It is not my intention to enter this debate - not my aim to seek to locate my

¹ See for example Geoffrey Kay's analysis where he argues that the earlier coming of merchants from developed western (metropolitan) countries to those on their periphery did serve in the indirect sense referred to above in the text of this thesis to exploit and stunt the latter economies only to have industrial capital enter their production process later in time in a way which reinforced the backwardness of those economies caused by the earlier intrusion of merchant capital. It is Kay's contention that, paradoxically, the colonial powers created truncated, ill formed or underdeveloped economies in their subject countries not because they exploited them too much but because they failed to exploit them enough. Merchants, Kay says, drew surplus value out of the subject economies without revolutionizing their mode of production in a way which would have seen them with developed modern economies able to

account here within the context of that discussion -but rather to seek in a more general and non specialized way to account for the reasons why, by 1909, the four NMS had an economy and society which was already manifestly in a state of marked transition. I seek to offer an account which is informed by that discussion on the role of merchants in modern colonial social change only in a general kind of way.

In terms of its outward morphology the mainly peasant society in the NMS looked, in 1902/9, the same as it had for centuries and as it was to continue to look for decades further forward in time(it was not until well into the post World War 11 period that the surface rural landscape of peasant life began to change in an obvious way). But what we see on close scrutiny is that, by the later part of the first decade of this century, its basic character had begun to change in certain important respects. While I am not able to give the full story on the nature of that change, and the causes for it, the sources I have seen do allow a good general description of certain aspects of this fundamental social change and to go a considerable way in offering an explanation for it. This chapter seeks, then, having established the broad features of the pre-1909 NMS economy and society including the importance of trade as a source of elite wealth and a cause of productive imposition on the peasantry, to explore the way in which a greatly expanded colonial trade was stimulating this fundamental social change in the four states in the decades leading up to the establishment of a formal British colonial presence in them.

Thus, the contention here is that by 1909 when the British had a formal presence in each of the four northern states, those states were, despite superficial appearances, already in a stage of marked transition.

The Expansion of Peninsular Trade.

Before moving on to examine the effect of nineteenth century trade on the NMS it is useful to spell out just what that trade was - its nature and dimension - in order to identify as closely as the sources will allow the character of the earlier forces initiating modern change to the north on the peninsular.

adequately serve the needs of their populations.

Geoffrey Kay, Development and Underdevelopment A Marxist Analysis(London, 1975).

The involvement of the peninsular in trade was always very much a function of its location - geographic and otherwise - within the wider context of the exercise of imperial power as outside social political forces sought advantage of one kind or another in the peninsular locality and used the port and other facilities on the peninsular as a staging post in a much wider trading scheme of things. It was only much later, in the later nineteenth century, that on a regional and world scale, the peninsular, in addition to retaining an important entrepot function to its south in Singapore and to its north west in Penang, became a major trading force in its own right in the sense that it was a major commodity producer and able to have an impact on the world economic stage as such.

Gullick points out that up to about 1400 A.D. Malaya lay on the periphery of various political units centred elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago or even further away!² Thus in succession Malaya came under the aegis of Hindu kingdoms centred on Annam in Indo-China and the Coromandel coast of India in the early Christian era, was within the sphere of the Sumatran Buddhist kingdom of Sri Vijaya in the seventh century, and then the Javanese kingdom of Majapahit when this overwhelmed Sri Vijaya in the fourteenth century.³ The characteristic form of peninsular Malay political organization as that existed when Europeans came along was established with the commencement of the Malacca Sultanate on the peninsular west coast in about 1400 A.D.⁴

The early sixteenth century saw the intrusion of European colonial influence onto the peninsular. In 1511 the Portuguese captured Malacca and based their maritime empire there.⁵ In 1641 the Dutch captured Malacca from the Portuguese thus becoming the dominant European power in the Straits of Malacca.⁶

Peninsular trade and the fortunes of its economy generally were very much

² Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁶ Ibid.

influenced over the centuries by these successive imperial ascendancies.⁷

Portuguese, Dutch, British and other European traders had been operating in the vicinity of northern Malaya for many centuries leading up to 1500.⁸ In that period, as we have seen, European trading activity together with that of Asian traders, especially those from India, played an important part in enabling the NMS Malay elite to sustain and increase its wealth and power through trade in the manner described above in chapter 2. But because the volume of trade was limited in its dimension the effect on the NMS economy in general, and the wealth and power of their elites in particular, was minimal. From the beginning of the nineteenth century however this began to change. As the industrialization of Britain gained momentum, a demand for tin and various jungle produce led to increased industrial and trading activity in Malaya. With the strong momentum of the industrial revolution, especially in the late nineteenth century, and the impetus this gave to the acquisition and maintenance of state and private wealth and power both in England and on-the-spot in Malaya traders, politicians and administrators had an even stronger stake in the fostering of peninsular trade.

⁷ Ryan puts it like this:

... Malaya and Brunei were prosperous and important during the days of the Malacca Sultanate when East-West trade was channelled through the Straits of Malacca, and Malacca itself was the entrepot for this trade and for the whole archipelago. Later when the commerce of the region was under the control of the Dutch, main trade routes between East and West passed through the Sunda Straits, and Batavia(Djakarta) prospered and Malacca and Brunei declined ... The establishment of Settlements in Penang and Singapore bought much trade back to the Straits of Malacca and led eventually to the development of modern Malaysia's mineral wealth.

N.J.Ryan, The Making of Modern Malaysia and Singapore A History from Earliest Times to 1966(Kuala Lumpur, 1969), pp.2,3.

Ryan concludes: 'Malaysia's place in history therefore has fluctuated with the interest the rest of the world has shown in the area and what she has been able to offer to the economic intercourse of Asia and to the world generally'.

Ibid., p.3.

⁸ Ryan puts it in these terms. Referring to the period before the fifteenth century he says:

The first fact of importance is that Malaysia lay between the two dominant centres of civilization at that time: India and China. Malaysia was affected by both, though in different ways. As far as trade was concerned the Malay peninsular was a useful 'half-way-house', and traders not only from India and China, but also from distant lands like Arabia, used its geographic facilities.

Ibid., p.13.

The Far East trade, as it was known, with its Malayan component, was thus a vital link in a process creating public and private wealth in a rapidly industrializing Britain and its colonies.

To understand why this expansion of trade occurred then we need to appreciate the wider imperial changes that were occurring at the time within which the economic changes on the peninsula were occurring. Emerson draws a distinction between the new British imperialism that emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the old imperialism which preceded it.⁹ The old imperialism, Emerson says, was in operation between the sixteenth and the first three quarters of the nineteenth centuries.¹⁰ This was, according to Emerson, an 'older imperialism which was content to set its decisive stamp on only a fragment of the remote lands it touched, disturbing only accidentally and in passing the history and culture of their peoples'.¹¹ Emerson sees the change from the old to the new imperialism as resulting from changes in western economic life during the period in question. Identifying the main economic features of an industrializing Britain he says that it was, 'the development of the world market, the appearance of "surplus" capital and goods searching for a market, the need for raw materials, and the necessity, under the new methods of production, for a regime of law and order more closely approximating that of the West ... that in the nineteenth century bought about a change in the purpose of empire'.¹²

⁹ Rupert Emerson, Malaysia A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule(New York, 1937), p.64.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 65.

Allen links the industrial revolution in Britain with the strong impact that western societies had on those in the east. He does so in terms of what he sees as a cultural superiority industrialization brought to the former over the 'largely static and traditional' societies of the latter. The resultant 'disparity of power between east and west' meant that the latter was 'bound to make fresh and disturbing impact' on the former.

Richard Allen, Malaysia Prospect and Retrospect The Impact and Aftermath of Colonial Rule(London, 1968), pp. 24,25. The passage is quoted in full in chapter 1 of this thesis above.

Ryan, a former colonial official writing in 1969, draws a direct link between the industrial revolution in Britain and British moves in the area. According to Ryan 'the industrial revolution in England [led] to the establishment of the Straits Settlements and British protection over the Malay States'.

Ryan, The Making of Modern Malaysia, p. 3.

It was in large measure wider imperial trade considerations that led to the establishment of British trading settlements on Penang(1786), Singapore(1810), and Malacca(1824). Collectively these bases were called the Straits Settlements.

The Penang base was established to provide shelter for the British East India Company's ships sailing through the Straits of Malacca to and from Canton.¹³ The Singapore and Malacca bases were established to help protect British merchants against Dutch rivalry and to promote British commerce in Malaya.¹⁴ In the 1860s, as commerce there became stronger, and as social disorder began to characterize life on the peninsular, the Straits merchants began to press the British Government to establish a formal colonial presence there.¹⁵ Initially there was reluctance on the part of Whitehall foreign and colonial policy makers to get too involved. Up to the early 1870s they maintained a policy of non-intervention on the peninsular for fear this would lead to complications.¹⁶ The British authorities did not want to become embroiled in local politics. They were eventually persuaded by the 'men-on-the-spot' that they needed to establish a presence on the peninsular in order to secure social order at a time when disorderliness was rife.¹⁷

¹³ A.G.L.Shaw., Emergence and Expansion A Modern World History(Melbourne, 1964), p. 197.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Ryan indicates a two fold reason for the establishment of the Straits Settlements as a whole: '... to protect the trade route to China and secondarily to establish trading centres for the whole Malaysian region'.

Ryan, The Making of Modern Malaysia, pp. 96,97.

¹⁵ Gullick draws attention to the disorder - social conflict - on the peninsular and the response of the Straits merchants in seeking to pressure the British government on the matter: 'This, then, was the situation of the late 1860s when the Straits merchants began to clamour for British intervention in these states'.

Gullick, Malaysia, p.49.

¹⁶ Emerson, Malaysia, pp. 114,115.

¹⁷ Emerson comments on the break down in order between 1867 and 1873 in these terms:

'The condition of the native states of the peninsular at this time was far from happy and was growing increasingly worse. It was evident that a disintegration was taking place which would shortly bring a state of anarchy and a war of all against all'.

Ibid., p114.

In 1874 the British Forward Movement, as this expansion was called, commenced. In that year the British Colonial Secretary sent fresh instructions to the Governor of the Straits Settlements to the effect that while the British Government had no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of the Malay States it was 'incumbent on it ... to rescue, if possible, those fertile and productive countries from ruin which must befall them if the [then] present disorders continu[ed] unchecked'.¹⁸ In the years that followed the British established a formal colonial presence in the central Malayan states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang. British Residents were installed in the states who, while notionally there to advise the existing Malay leaders there, in fact exercised an advisory function which strongly implied control. It was a form of indirect British rule which received even stronger formal recognition when these four states were joined together under a central administration as the Federated Malay States. The remaining states on the peninsular were bought under the British aegis in a formal administrative sense later in 1909 as we shall see below in this thesis. While they remained for that period formally outside the sphere of the British colonial administration their proximity to it, and the general colonial circumstances - especially economic circumstances - that came with that formal British colonial presence to the south, strongly influenced the four northern states in the period leading up to 1909.

The nineteenth century saw a major increase in trade on the peninsular which was both cause and effect of British moves there. For example, in 1867 Singapore had sixty European companies compared with only fourteen in 1827, and the value of its trade increased four fold from 1823-4 to 1868-9.¹⁹ This Singapore trade was subject to major fluctuations, being affected adversely by the general European trade slump of 1858, the American Civil War, rebellion in China, and the extension of Dutch control over the Macassar area in the early 1860s.²⁰ The overall trend for Singapore trade throughout the nineteenth century however was up. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 as a more direct shipping route

¹⁸ Quoted in Shaw, Emergence and Expansion, p. 198.

¹⁹ C.M. Turnbull, The Straits Settlements 1826-67 Indian Presidency to Crown Colony (London, 1972), p. 187.

²⁰ The extension of Dutch control deflected some trade away from Singapore. Ibid., pp 186,187.

between Europe and the Far East boosted the volume of trade passing through the Straits. The trade traffic passing in and out of Singapore as the port which commanded the Straits therefore increased. By 1869, then, with the added effect of the opening of the Suez Canal Singapore stood 'on the threshold of unprecedented commercial expansion'.²¹

The Straits trade as a whole for the decades spanning the mid nineteenth century - the decades immediately preceding the Forward Movement of the British onto the peninsular mainland - added up to a period of strong and prosperous merchant activity.²² It was a period of strong trading activity for private merchants based in all of the three Straits Settlements but much more so for Singapore than the other two.²³ By 1862-63 half of Singapore's big trading firms had branches in Penang.²⁴ In the ten years from 1851 to 1861 Penang's trade increased at a greater rate than at any other period in her history largely due to the opening of tin mines in Perak.²⁵ Penang's trade was in these years steadier and less subject to fluctuations than was the case with Singapore trade at that time.²⁶ Much of this trade was anchored in the production in its own territory and in near-by states - in the production of tin, tapioca, sugar and nut meg.²⁷ Particularly important was the export of tin from Perak and the import of supplies for the mines.²⁸ Malacca's trade in this period seems to have been the weakest of the three. By the 1840s it was regarded by Singapore merchants as a dying settlement. Its trade tended strongly to be local with most overseas trade going through Singapore and Penang. The discovery of tin at Kassang and the influx of Chinese miners gave an impetus to Malacca's trade and economy in the 1840s. However, an exodus of miners from Kassang in the late 1850s and disturbances in Sungei Ujong in 1860-1861, were a major set back to the settlement's

²¹ Ibid., pp.186,187.

²² Ibid., p.160.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.160,161.

²⁵ Ibid., p.160.

²⁶ Ibid., p.161.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

economy 'which continued to depend largely on a precarious trade with the nearby troubled states'.²⁹

There were, then, two main kinds of trade operating in and around the peninsular which were, in the nineteenth century, having a strong impact on the economy and society in the NMS. There was the entrepot trade involving the importation, storage and transhipment of commodities produced elsewhere on the one hand; and there was the trade which bought commodities onto the peninsular for consumption, and which sent commodities produced on the peninsular for export and consumption or use elsewhere - the so called peninsular trade - on the other. Of the two kinds of trade it was the latter that had the stronger impact on the four states since it was a direct influence in altering their economy and society, as we shall see below.

The chief importance of the Straits Settlements lay in their function as depots for British trade with the Malay states.³⁰ Turnbull, in his study of British policy in Malaya in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, describes the role of the settlements as facilitators of peninsular trade, in these terms:

The Settlements ... distributed in the Peninsular and Archipelago the produce of Britain, chiefly textiles and metals, and of India, chiefly opium and to a decreasing extent Indian piece-goods, and collected the returns for the markets of Europe and India, and for dispatch to China, where they were traded for tea. But the junks bought down raw silk, cassia, alum, coarse earthenware, and so on, also distributed in the Archipelago in return for jungle and marine produce for which an age-old demand existed in China.³¹

Of the northern states the records show that it was Kedah that was emerging as the principal exporter of colonial commodities, supplying some tin and becoming very significant as an exporter of rice to, and through, Prince of Wales Island.³²

This peninsular trade was dominated by the Chinese.³³ For trade operating between the three

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 161,162.

³⁰ Nicholas Tarling, British Policy in the Malay Peninsular and Archipelago 1824-1871(London, 1969), p. 13.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See below in this chapter.

³³ Ibid., p. 176.

Straits Settlements they used mainly European-type square-rigged ships.³⁴ Most of this trade was speculative trading in opium, manufactured goods and textiles.³⁵ The rest of the peninsular trade - and it was especially this trade that was having the direct and strong impact on the local economy and society in the four northern states - was carried on largely in Chinese owned sampan-pukats or prahu-pukats.³⁶ These were rowing boats which could use a sail but were not reliant upon the wind.³⁷

It was the founding of Singapore which stimulated the growth of peninsular trade in the decades spanning the mid nineteenth century.³⁸ Singapore's trading relationship was much stronger with the eastern peninsular than it was with the west and was based on the rich gold and tin production of the states on that side of the peninsular.³⁹ This trade saw the export of gold and tin, and the import of opium and supplies for the mining communities extracting these commodities and the traders involved in their distribution.⁴⁰

As one manifestation of the expansion of British trade in the 'Far East' in response to the strengthening of the industrial revolution the British East India Company, the principal British instrumentality organizing trade in the South and Southeast Asian region, increased its activity in Malaya.⁴¹ The company remained the dominant trading force in the Straits for the first three decades of the nineteenth century. In these decades private, non-company, traders also operated moving goods in and out of the area for profit though their activities were overshadowed by those of the company.⁴² Early in the fourth decade of the century the trading

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 176.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ The basic facts of this trade are to be found in any of the broad texts dealing with Malaysian history. See for example Shaw, Emergence and Expansion, pp. 197,198.

⁴² The so-called 'country traders'. Fairbank, Reischauer and Craig describe the trade for the East and Southeast Asian region generally as follows:

operations of the company in the Straits Settlements ceased and the circulation of commodities in the area was largely given over to the private traders.⁴³ The latter sought to maintain and establish an advantageous relationship with the British imperial and colonial state as that expanded its influence in the area - a relationship which would help secure their trading interests in the area. They were among those pressing the British government to move forward onto the peninsular and establish a formal presence there in the 1870s.

Undoubtedly the main British motive in securing a presence first in the Straits Settlements and then in the four states on the peninsular was to secure a stable set of conditions on the peninsular within which British enterprise could flourish. Certainly other motives were there as well: expression was given at the time to a belief in the civilizing influence the British could bring to the area.⁴⁴

Private enterprise had from the first been an indispensable support and extension of the operations of the various East India companies necessary to connect them with the local Asian sources of trade and revenue. This took the form of the so-called 'country trade', that is, trade conducted by private individuals within the commercial domain of the various companies' charters, which usually included all the Indian Ocean and Asia from the Cape of Good Hope eastward.

John K Fairbank, Edwin O Reischauer, Albert M. Craig, East Asia The Modern Transformation(London, 1965), pp. 69,70.

Tarling comments on the coincidence in the operation of company and private traders in the east:

Up to 1833, the most important part of her trade - that direct between Canton and Great Britain - was monopolized by the East India Company, although private 'country' traders carried to China Indian and Archipelagan produce to finance its tea purchases.

Tarling, British Policy, p 9.

⁴³ 'In 1833 the company ceased to do any trade whatever.'

James A Williamson, The British Empire and Commonwealth A History for Senior Forms(London, 1963), p. 213.

The abolition of the company's trade monopoly, first with India(1813) and then with China(1834), were two in a series of 'legislative and diplomatic steps' arising from the 'growth of Eastern commerce in western hands' accompanied by 'the rise of the British doctrine of free trade, with its linking of capitalist enterprise and individual freedom.'

Fairbank Reischauer Craig, East Asia, p. 483.

⁴⁴ For example, they believed, or at least gave expression to a belief, that the securing of free trade for the peninsular would benefit the local native population as well as British and other outside entrepreneurs there. By his own word Sir Stamford Raffles, the British founder of Singapore, wanted free trade that would benefit natives as well as Great Britain. He wanted

To sum up then: there was, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, and especially the last quarter of that century, a marked expansion of trading activity on the peninsular. It was a development which, as we shall see, was having a significant social impact on the NMS well before the establishment of a formal colonial presence there in 1909. Initially this trading activity was focussed on the Straits Settlements. These settlements were strategically placed on the sea lanes connecting Britain with ports in the Far East and they were therefore well suited to act as a staging post for goods moving to and fro along these trade routes - to act as a transit station for goods moving between India and China for example. Important though they were as staging posts for goods in transit however, their main function lay in the trade they carried on with the peninsular itself.⁽⁴⁵⁾ These ports acted, then, as entry and exit points for goods going into and away from the peninsular. Outward bound commodities came from all over the peninsular but it was tin from the southern and central states that was becoming increasingly important as the principal export commodity as the century progressed. In the reverse direction they also channelled import goods to the peninsular - to the colonial populations working and servicing the developing extractive industries on the peninsular, the people located in the expanding trading settlements and, increasingly, to the local rural native Malay and immigrant populations in the settlements and on the peninsular.

The three settlements and their trade were initially within the sphere of responsibility of the British administration in India. That responsibility passed to the colonial Office however, in 1867.⁽⁴⁶⁾

NMS Trade with the Straits Settlements

Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth there existed a strong trading relationship between Prince of Wales Island (later Penang) and Kedah. The north

to protect and educate the local population - to make '[their] stations not only seats of commerce but of literature and the arts' as well.

Ibid. Shaw quotes Raffles on the subject.

⁴⁵ Tarling, 'British Policy', p.13.

⁴⁶ Thio, British Policy, p xvii.

eastern states of Trengganu and Kelantan traded with Singapore. This Singapore trade with the east coast was much less strong than that taking place between Prince of Wales Island of Penang and Kedah. No doubt reflecting this trade emphasis, the sources, both primary and secondary, have a lot to say about the latter while giving scant details of the former trade until the period of the earlier twentieth century.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Perlis, too, was developing as an exporter of commodities, most notably rice, in the nineteenth century though the treatment of the subject in the sources is (as is the case generally in Kedah/Perlis historiography) very much secondary to the Kedah trade of the same period.⁽⁴⁸⁾ It is clear that, certainly by the first decade of this century, Kedah and Perlis both shared a role as major exporters of rice through the Penang outlet though unequally; Kedah exported more than the smaller state of Perlis.⁽⁴⁹⁾

An 1830 trade report minuted by the president of the East India Company and forwarded to the Resident Councillor, Mr. Ibbetson, details the import and export trade of the three settlements for that year.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The report gives a good idea of the geographic reach of the

⁴⁷ Both the Straits Settlements Factory Records, accounting not only for the trade conducted by the East India Company in the Straits but other traders as well in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and the Colonial Office records (C0273) accounting for trade and other matters in the Straits for the later nineteenth century, have a heavy emphasis on the trade between Kedah and the off shore island with only scattered references to the NE peninsular trade with Singapore. It was only with the writing and printing of annual reports for the four states in the first decade of this century that a clear quantitative contemporary description of NMS trade with Penang and Singapore became part of the history of the region.

⁴⁸ Bearing in mind that Perlis was not a separate state from Kedah until several decades into this century. See below.

⁴⁹ See below.

⁵⁰ Sallah? to Ibbetson, "Minute by the President Report on the Trade of the Three Settlements Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca", Fort Cornwallis, 29 April 1830. SSFRG/34/133 The president's signature is indistinct. The pages of the report are not numbered.

The recipient of this minute was Robert Ibbetson, Resident Councillor (ie the senior official) at Penang before becoming the second Governor of a united Straits Settlements in 1830.

Turnbull, The Straits Settlements, pp. 55,62.

In 1805 Penang acquired the status of a Presidency which meant that, in common with the

Straits Settlement trade in that year. The report indicates that Prince of Wales Island traded with thirteen 'places': Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, England, China Java, Ceylon, Siam, Coast of Tenafserim, Atheen, Delhi, Kedah and 'a few petty native ports'.⁽⁵¹⁾ In the same year Malacca traded with thirteen 'places': Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, England, China, Java, Ceylon, Siam, Coast of Tenafserim, Atheen, Dehli, Kedah and 'other native ports'.⁽⁵²⁾ Singapore, the report makes clear, traded with many more places than the aforementioned settlements. These included England, America, Cape of Good Hope, Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, China, Java, Siam, Cochin China, Ceylon, Acheen, Sumatra, East Coast of Peninsular, Celebes, Borneo, Manila, and other native ports.⁽⁵³⁾

The report also gives a good idea of the kinds of commodities moving to and from the Straits Settlements: opium from Calcutta to Prince of Wales Island; beer from England to Singapore; Indian piece goods from Madras to Malacca; pepper from Prince of Wales Island to Calcutta; Indian piece goods and tin from Malacca to Madras. These were amongst the principal commodities being shipped between the Straits Settlements and other Far Eastern

other presidencies in the area - Madras and Bombay - it had a Governor and a council though with much less status and power than those on the Indian sub continent.

Ibid., pp. 54,55.

Ibbetson got the post of Governor 'as the sole survivor of the officials appointed to the new Penang presidency in 1805'.

Ibid., p. 62.

There was some confusion surrounding the use of titles such as 'Resident Councillor' between 1830 and 1832.

Tarling, "British Policy", p 39n.

⁵¹ Report on Trade, under the sub heading, 'Trade of Prince of Wales Island'.

⁵² Report on Trade, under the sub heading, 'Malacca Trade'.

⁵³ 'Report on Trade', under the heading, 'Singapore Trade'. More places are listed. These places are, however, indecipherable to me.

ports at that time.⁽⁵⁴⁾

The report allows us a sharper focus on the state of NMS trade with the Straits Settlements at that time. It is clear from the report that, of the four states, it was the trade between Kedah and Prince of Wales Island that was by far most important and Kedah is the only northern state for which substantial trade details are given. The report itemizes the Kedah export trade to Prince of Wales for 1830 giving both the particular commodities exported and their monetary value in rupees. They are listed as follows:

birds nests	5,340
ghee	2,000
paddy	7,560
rice	412,640
tin	7,030
Straits sundries	26,000 ⁽⁵⁵⁾

Two things are clearly indicated at this point in the report. The first is that the trade between Kedah and Prince of Wales Island was well established in 1830 and was a significant component of the Straits Settlement trade generally. And secondly the figures above indicate that by far the most important commodity produced and traded by Kedah in that year was rice. In the words of the report: '[The?] principal Item of Trade is the Rice import for the consumption of this Island'.⁽⁵⁶⁾

⁵⁴ 'Report on Trade', under the sub headings, 'Trade of Prince of Wales Island', 'Singapore Trade', and 'Malacca Trade', respectively.

⁵⁵ 'Report on Trade', under sub-heading, 'Trade of Prince of Wales Island' and the further sub-heading, 'Queda Imports from'.

⁵⁶ 'Report on Trade', under sub-heading, 'Trade of Prince of Wales Island' and further sub-heading, 'Queda Exports to'. The first word of the sentence is obscured in my photocopy of the document.

It must be pointed out that there is some inconsistency in the sources on the matter of Kedah trade at this time. While the report here indicates strong rice and other trade with Prince of Wales Island in 1830 this evidence is contrary to the notion in the secondary sources that the state's trade was in a greatly weakened state in the early decades of the nineteenth century - a severe trade weakening caused by a Siamese invasion of the state in 1821 and the subsequent occupation which lasted until 1842.

There is an inconsistency between Hill's account of the Kedah rice trade with Prince of Wales Island and the indication in the report on the same subject for the earlier nineteenth century period. Hill reports that a burgeoning Kedah rice trade with the island was sundered by a Siamese invasion of the state in 1821 and that this trade did not fully recover until the 1860s.

Hill, Rice, p.50, 51.

The impression given by Hill is that of a drastically weakened Kedah rice trade with the island in the years immediately following 1821 - a trade which only gradually strengthened to its pre-1821 level over a period of some 46 years.

It may be however that Hill has grossly exaggerated the effect of the invasion on that rice trade. Hill states that for the 1818-1819 period, the value of the Kedah-Penang rice trade was 20,000 Spanish dollars.

Hill, Rice, p.51.

Using the equivalent values between the operative currencies in Kedah during the 1771-1821 period given by Bonney we can see that the 1818-19 figure was the equivalent of 449,000 company rupees.

Bonney, Kedah, under the heading 'Weights and Currencies'.

If we assume that the equivalent values of the two currencies had not altered by 1830 (if it did alter it does not seem likely that it would have altered by much in the nine year period) we can see how the 1818-19 figure of 449,000 rupees compares with the figure of 472,640 rupees given by the report as the value of the Kedah-Prince of Wales rice trade in 1830. Clearly this calculation suggests that the rice trade had returned to pre-invasion levels by 1830, well before the 1867 year given by Hill.

Certainly it is true that it is difficult, on the available information, to assess the economic effect of the Siamese invasion with any precision. As Hill points out, and as I have indicated in chapter 1 above, the sources give only scant information on the situation in Kedah and the other NMS in the nineteenth century and it was not until the first decade of this century that coherent and definitive source materials came into existence. Hill discusses the problem in the first paragraph to his chapter four.

Ibid, p.47.

Hill was unable then to directly quantify what he sees as a major rupturing of the Kedah - Penang rice trade in 1821 and we have no specific idea from Hill or any other secondary source of the dimensions of that trade in the nine year period following the year of the invasion. Hill's study is an exercise in historical geography and is based mainly on sources, including a substantial number of primary sources, held in Malaysia with only limited use of UK materials. In accounting for what he sees as the slow recovery of the post invasion rice trade in Kedah Hill relies heavily on indirect and fragmented evidence of the situation. In particular he focusses on the difficulties in the production of rice in the post-1821 decades and does so on the thin basis of superficial, recorded observations of the time.

Ibid, pp.51, 52.

Certainly the Siamese invasion must have caused some significant disruption to the Kedah rice economy and trade and it is the degree rather than the fact of this disruption which is in doubt in the sources. For one thing the hardship resulting from the invasion caused a mass exodus from the state - something that we might expect would have tended to undermine the state's export economy at its base. Ahmat indicates that 'thousands of refugees' fled to Penang as a result of the invasion though he doesn't say who the refugees were - whether rice

producers or not.

Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.22.

Mahmud describes the exodus caused by the invasion in much stronger terms. Mahmud, in a population study of Kedah, approximates a figure of 30,000 as the number of refugee Kedah Malays in Province Wellesley at the height of the influx and estimates that the population of the state was halved by the exodus of the 1820s.

Mahmud, "Population of Kedah", p. 196.

According to Mahmud it was not until the early 1830s that a return flow of population lasting twenty years commenced.

Ibid, p.196.

Mahmud further states that a number of these refugees were agriculturalists who took up land in the province.

Ibid.

Beyond this however Mahmud is not able to give us the sort of demographic, occupational break-down that would take us further towards a definitive understanding of the economic effect of the invasion of Kedah.

We do need however to approach Mahmud's study as well as that by Hill with caution in attempting to understand the economic effect of the Siamese invasion on Kedah trade. Mahmud's account of the demographic dimensions of the exodus is based on contemporary estimates and other kinds of indirect evidence and, while persuasive, is not conclusive on the subject.

Ibid, pp.193-195 and passim.

Clearly if the 1830 report is correct the disruption to the rice trade can not have been of the magnitude implied by Mahmud and of the duration stated by Hill.

It is clear, then, that the 1830 report is inconsistent with the stated view in the secondary sources on the strength of the effect of the Siamese invasion on the Kedah economy and trade. What we are concerned with here is the relative strength of the Kedah-Prince of Wales Island rice and other trade in the overall context of the Straits Settlements trade with the peninsular and elsewhere in the 'Far East'. Whereas Hill gives the impression that the Kedah - Prince of Wales Island rice trade (and by implication other trade as well) was reduced to insignificance - 'sundered' - in 1821 by the invasion and for some decades afterwards only slowly building up to its pre-invasion significance, and Mahmud tenders demographic evidence broadly consistent with this, the report indicates to the contrary a strong rice and other trade between the mainland state and the island only nine years after the invasion. The issue, however, is not whether the Siamese invasion had a catastrophic effect on the Kedah trade - clearly it must have done and to this degree at least Hill's claim seems most plausible - but how long that trade took to recover. The information in the report suggests that it recovered more quickly than Hill thought. Either way it doesn't matter for the purposes of my argument here since that rests on the proposition that Kedah trade - a trade that was having a significant social impact - was strong for the nineteenth as a whole, particularly the later part of that century, leading up to the 1909 transfer of power in the north.

To sum up, then, while there must have been some significant weakening of the Kedah-Penang trade due to the Siamese invasion the report casts doubt on the view that the Siamese invasion and presence devastated the Kedah trade for a significantly long period of time and

The report does not give separate details for the trade of Perlis, Trengganu and Kelantan with the Straits Settlements. In 1830 Perlis was a district of Kedah and since the report does not give a district-by-district breakdown of production and trade with Prince of Wales Island we can not draw any particular conclusions from the report alone on the nature and magnitude of Perlis production and trade.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The report does show that the east coast of the peninsular was conducting trade with Singapore in ebony, iron, opium, European Indian and Malay piece goods, rice tobacco, gold dust, pepper, tin, sugar and other commodities to the value of 653,032 rupees for the goods being imported into Singapore and 593,425 rupees for goods moving in the reverse direction.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Unlike the situation with the Kedah trade with Prince of Wales Island rice was not the major commodity traded being well down on the value of other goods: pepper, tin and opium were by far the most valuable commodities in the east coast trade with Singapore.⁽⁵⁹⁾ It is clear then from the report that in 1830 the east coast trade was substantial. Kelantan and Trengganu must have been exchanging goods with Singapore in that year though how important the trade of the two states was to the east coast trade in general the report does not say. Unlike Kedah and its trade the Kelantan and Trengganu trade with Singapore was not deemed significant enough for separate treatment and we can see in this some measure of the comparatively limited importance of the two states as exporters and importers of commodities in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century in the wider context of the Straits Settlements trade in the Far East at that time.

It will be clear then that the mercantile exchanges between the Straits Settlements

the topic awaits further research for clarification. There is no doubt, however, of the relative strength of the Kedah trade within the NMS context in the nineteenth century as a whole. Crucially for this thesis the sources are, as we shall see below, in agreement on the great strength of Kedah trade, especially rice trade, from the later decades of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁷ See below for details on the separation of Perlis from Kedah as a separate state.

⁵⁸ Report on Trade under the sub heading, 'Singapore Trade' and the further sub headings 'East Coast of the Peninsular Imports from' and 'Delta Exports to'.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

and the peninsular fitted into a wider pattern of Far Eastern trade. In particular it is clear from the report that the four states which are the focus of this study were tied into a wider trading activity having the same overall purpose and modus operandi; that was, as we have seen in part, the distribution of commodities - raw materials used in manufacturing, manufactured goods, food stuffs and the like - throughout the British empire through the activities of merchants who took goods from one port to another, exchanged them for more goods, and profited from the difference between the selling and buying price on these exchanges. It was, as we shall see in more detail below, the Far Eastern imperial trade in general and the Straits Settlements trade with the northern peninsular in particular, which initiated the break down of the insularity of the region and saw the introduction of major and fundamental changes to the economy and society in the region.

The trade between the Straits Settlements and the peninsular continued to grow in its dimensions throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. By the time of the establishment of a formal British colonial presence in the NMS trading operations and relations between all the northern states and the Straits Settlements were substantial and well established and can be clearly seen in the sources as such.

The secondary sources give us a partial picture of NMS trade with the Straits Settlements for the decades leading up to formal colonial rule in the region. Ahmat gives figures indicating a substantial rice export from Kedah to Penang and elsewhere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth period.⁶⁰ Kessler comments on the effect of the founding of Singapore in 1819 in expanding the Gulf of Siam trade.⁽⁶¹⁾ In particular Kessler indicates a strong Singapore trade with the east coast peninsular ports, including those of Kelantan, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.⁽⁶²⁾ Shaharil Talib refers to a 'fairly steady trade' between Singapore and Trengganu in the late nineteenth century.⁽⁶³⁾

⁶⁰ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp. 31,32.

⁶¹ Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.42.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Talib, Image, p. 51.

While we can see in the sources in a very general way the impact that the operation of the Straits Settlements was having on the trade economy of the four states in the later part of the nineteenth century it is only for the first decade or so of this century that the sources begin to allow us a more systematic and detailed picture of that trade - of the kinds of commodities traded and the specific dimensions of that trade over a period of time. By that time the trade economy of the four states was coming under a formal colonial administrative influence and the later more systematic trade reports must be read with that in mind. Still, the earliest accounts of NMS trade by colonial administrators can be taken as a indication of the nature and importance of colonial trade in the region as that had come to be under the influence of the activities of the Straits merchants before formal colonial administrative influences had begun to take strong effect.

The earliest administrative records show colonial authorities moving towards the compilation of a systematic and reliable account of the trade of the four states though a full and comprehensive record of NMS trade did not appear immediately on the adoption of formal colonial administrations in these states. Despite this limitation it is clear however from the earliest annual administrative reports for each state that all the NMS were at the outset of formal colonial rule operating a substantial external trading economy.

In Kedah in the 1904/1905 period rice was still the principal item in the export trade of that state.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Though the annual report for that state for that period does not give details of this and other trade in its trade section the unique position of Kedah on the peninsular as a producer and exporter of rice very early in this century is clear.⁽⁶⁵⁾ In 1909 the state exported

Talib indicates that there was a 'considerable trade' between Trengganu and northern ports in Siam and Cochin China as well.

Ibid.

⁶⁴ Kedah Annual Report 1904-1905, p.6.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

It is equally clear that this was also true of Kedah in the following year: 'At present paddy and rice is the principal product, a large amount being exported annually. This is particularly noteworthy, as the other Malay states in the peninsular are almost without exception compelled to import rice in order to meet their requirements'.

3,278,000 gantangs of rice and 7,950,000 gantangs of padi to Penang.⁽⁶⁶⁾ In the same year the state imported 12,502 pikuls of tin ore.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Other exports for the year included poultry, pigs, fish, tapioca, forest produce, rubber and pepper.⁽⁶⁸⁾ There are only scattered references to Kedah commodity imports in the earliest administrative reports. Nonetheless it is clear from these references that the state was a significant market for commodities in a wider system of imperial commodity circulation. We can see from the 1906/08 administrative report for Kedah that the state was importing sarongs and cotton piece goods from Birmingham and India and was importing from an unstated source ironmongery, earthenware pots and cooking utensils 'required for household use'.⁽⁶⁹⁾ The administrative report for 1909 indicates the importation of animals and salt in that year.⁽⁷⁰⁾

According to Meadows Frost in his annual report for Perlis for 1909 'there [was] little to be said of the trade of Perlis for that year.'⁽⁷¹⁾ It seems likely that this ambiguous and somewhat dismissive statement on 1909 Perlis trade was prompted more by the unavailability of information on the state of Perlis trade in that year ('There is no register of imports and exports') than any belief that Perlis colonial trade was unimportant.⁽⁷²⁾ Certainly that report indicates an export trade in padi, tin ore, ducks and fowls - with Penang and lists cottons,

Kedah Annual Report 1905/1906, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Kedah Annual Report 1909, p.25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, Appendix E and F pp v-vii. The list of revenue farms in these appendices indicates that these items were export commodities subject to an export duty.

⁶⁹ Kedah Annual Report 1906/08, p.3

⁷⁰ Kedah Annual Report 1909. Appendix E, page v. The report makes reference to a revenue farm collecting duty on the importation of salt. There is a reference to the importation of animals on page 45 of the report.

⁷¹ Perlis Annual Report 1909, p.7.

⁷² *Ibid*, p.7.

kerosine oil and tobacco amongst the items imported into the state in that year.⁽⁷³⁾ In that year, the report makes clear, the state exported about 389,000 gantangs of rice and 2,182 pikuls of tin ore.⁽⁷⁴⁾

Although Meadows Frost was unable, on the information available, to him to give a more specific idea of Perlis trade in that year nonetheless it is clear from his report that the Perlis economy including the raayat economy, was, as we shall see in more detail below, now to a significant extent tied in with an expanding colonial economy on the peninsular and beyond that the British imperial trading economy in the Far East.

The 1910 annual report for Trengganu indicates a substantial trade between the state and Singapore in that year.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The exports listed reflected the maritime, agricultural and mining pursuits of the population. In descending order of their monetary value the commodities exported were: fish; tin ore; copra; padi; black pepper; rattans; rice; raw hides and dammar torches.⁽⁷⁶⁾ It is important to note in reading this list that, unlike Kedah and Perlis around the same time, Trengganu was not a significant producer of export rice. In the words of the report:

Very little of the padi and rice shown in the export return is grown in Trengganu. These exports are purchased by Trengganu traders in the Siamese East Coast ports and Kelantan, shipped in Trengganu sailing vessels, and transhipped at Trengganu for Singapore.⁽⁷⁷⁾

The imports listed in the report indicate the commodity consumption of the state's population at that time. In order of their monetary value these were; rice, cotton piece goods, sarongs, opium, sugar, raw silk, tobacco and cigarettes, and petroleum. It is clear from the inclusion of rice as a substantial import commodity that, far from producing a surplus of the

⁷³ Ibid, p.6-7

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.6.

⁷⁵ Trengganu Annual Report 1910, p.8.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.11.

staple for export, there was actually a rice shortage and that the provision of enough rice for the consumption of the state's population was beyond Trengganu's productive capacity at that time.

The Kelantan annual report for 1909 indicates a substantial colonial trade in that year. The chief export items listed in order of monetary value were: copra; gold; cattle and buffaloes; padi and rice; betel nuts; fish; silk manufactured goods.⁽⁷⁸⁾ The chief imports into the state in that year as listed in the report were: cotton goods; provisions; kerosine oil; gambier; opium; sugar; timber; salt and machinery.⁽⁷⁹⁾ It is clear from the report that, much more so than for Trengganu, Kelantan had been developing as a producer of export rice in the years leading up to the adoption of formal colonial rule. In 1909, according to the report, the padi harvest 'was an excellent one' and was exported in quantities given as 737,000 gantangs for padi and 89,853 gantangs for rice.⁽⁸⁰⁾

Trade and Society in the NMS

Clearly the main focus of colonial entrepreneurial activity - both that involving the production of commodities and that concerning itself with the circulation of commodities - was concentrated in the late nineteenth century in the southern and central states on the peninsular. In those states principally Chinese and British entrepreneurs worked at fostering and developing the tin and plantation production while traders organized the transportation of

⁷⁸ Kelantan Annual Report 1909/1910, p.6.

Saripan describes the trade for Kelantan for the nineteenth century as a whole in these terms:

The chief export of Kelantan were[sic] copra and coconuts, bullocks and other live-stock, rice, dried fish, gutta-percha and damar. Almost all were exported to Singapore except coconuts to Bangkok and betel nuts to Patani. Most of the trade was handled by sampanpukat(sailing vessels). The main imports of Kelantan were cotton goods, dyed threads, timber, gambier, tobacco, sugar, salt, kerosine, oil and silk.

Saripan, "Salient Features", p. 9.

See also my general reference in this chapter above to the kinds of vessels carrying trade goods in the Straits.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.3.

these and other commodities away from the peninsular and the importation of commodities to service the needs of the colonial populations in those states. This economic activity was generally assisted by colonial administrators who sought the establishment and continued development of a colonial economy that would ultimately serve British imperial interests at that time.

However while British colonial economic activity was focussed to the south of the peninsular, there was some developing commercial colonial economic enterprise - both in the production and circulation spheres of commodity enterprise - as well. Of the two spheres it was by far the latter one that was having the stronger impact on NMS society. There was some mining and plantation activity in the north though on a much smaller scale than that in the south and its social impact, certainly at this time, would have been limited. Much more important, then, in the nineteenth century, and especially the late nineteenth century, was the effect of colonial trade in initiating changes in NMS society.

It was not until the years leading immediately up to the transfer of formal power over the four states from Siam to Britain that large scale commercial enterprise was starting to acquire any significant dimension in the four states.⁸¹ Of the four states it was Kelantan that experienced the most dramatic incursion of European colonial enterprise with the setting up of the Duff Development Company early in the first decade of this century.⁸²

In 1900 Robert William Duff left the Federated Malay States service and returned to England and formed the Duff Development Syndicate. The syndicate, through Duff as its representative, then embarked on complicated negotiations with British Siamese and Kelantanese authorities for a concession in Kelantan. A more detailed account of these negotiations is given below. Their outcome was that the concession was granted by the Raja

⁸¹ And even then that dimension remained limited. Throughout the colonial period on the peninsular the export economy continued to be focussed on large scale enterprise to the south. This is discussed further in the next chapter below.

⁸² This whole matter is discussed more fully in the chapter below. On the matter of periodization see for example Salleh's account of a Kelantan in transition for a twenty year period spanning the turn of the nineteenth century. Salleh points out that it was in the middle of 1900 that Robert William Duff arrived in Khota Bahru to obtain a concession.

of Kelantan in October, 1900 and ratified by the Siamese Government in July, 1901. By this agreement the Duff Development Company Limited, as the syndicate became in February 1903, enjoyed undisputed and 'absolute monopoly of all mineral, trading and other rights within the concession.'⁸³

The Duff Development Company, and other smaller companies like it, were only just getting under way when the British established formal colonial presence there in 1902 and the main social effects of this kind of activity belong with the formal colonial period.⁸⁴ Trengganu lagged well behind Kelantan in the development of large scale commercial activity in the nineteenth century.⁸⁵ The sources point to the inaccessibility of the state for such enterprise and the limited scale of other such activity in the pre-1909 period.⁸⁶ In Kedah (and Perlis) it was a similar story. Tin mining and commercial agriculture were practiced but only on a small scale and almost entirely by the immigrant (Chinese) population.⁸⁷

In general there was, until the first decade of this century, a feeling of remoteness and inaccessibility about the NMS, and especially Kelantan and Trengganu in the north east, and that all the action in terms of commercial development was happening in the south. It is a

⁸³ Ibid., p. 38. Salleh quotes the Straits Budget on the terms of the October concession agreement.

⁸⁴ The formal colonial presence set up in the state by the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1902. Indeed, it was the disputatious nature accompanying the establishment of the Duff Development Company that was in large measure responsible for the treaty. The full story on this is given in the next chapter of this thesis below.

The fact that Duff and other development companies were only just getting under way is amply illustrated by the passage from Graham's hand book quoted immediately below.

⁸⁵ Brelich, writing in 1920, makes the comparison.

Henry Brelich, "Mining in Trengannu", in F.J.B. Dykes, Mining in Malaya (1920). Copy held in the Royal Commonwealth Society library in London.

⁸⁶ Brelich makes the inaccessibility point.
Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp. 36-39.

Ahmat observes that '[i]n Kedah, rubber plantations came on the scene with some degree of success only after 1905 and it was not until the British took over in Kedah in 1909 that sizable well capitalized companies commenced operations'.

Ibid., p. 37.

feeling well encapsulated by Graham's contemporary observation along these lines for

Kelantan:

Very little has up to the present time been done in Kelantan by foreigners in the way of agriculture, a fact which is scarcely surprising if it be borne in mind that only a very few years ago the few foreigners who knew of the existence of the state had heard of it only as a lawless and savage country, whose people were given over to all manner of wickedness, and where the life of any stranger, even in the capital, would not be considered worth many hours purchase. When, at last, foreigners penetrated in the country with some idea of turning its resources to account, it was not to planting but to mining that their attention became directed, and it was not until towards the year 1905 that the great agricultural possibilities of the State first began to be appreciated. Early in 1906 the Duff Development Company, the holders of a very large mining, planting, and general trading concession in the State, began to advertize their concession by various means for planting purposes, and the Government, about the same time, took measures to make widely known the terms and conditions on which planting land could be obtained in the State. These efforts resulted in the receipt of numerous enquiries, in many cases followed by actual selection of land. Active negotiations are being conducted, and estates comprising 21,700 acres of land are now being opened up and planted with coconuts and with rubber... It is expected that further areas will be opened up shortly.⁸⁸

Certainly these commercial enterprises must have been starting to have a social effect in the four states by around the turn of the nineteenth century. However, on a historical approach this would not have been a discernible social effect until from the end of the first decade of this century when the significant observable social effects of this commercial enterprise had time to develop in a situation where a continuous systematic record of state social development was now being kept. Because these social effects coincided with, and influenced, the wider range of new social influences coming to bear under a formal British colonial presence in the four states I deal with them in my next chapter.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ W.A.Graham, Kelantan A State of the Malay Peninsular A Hand book of Information(Glasgow, 1908), pp. 80,82.

⁸⁹ Enterprises like the Duff Company clearly introduced quite different ways of combining labour and the means of production from that in operation in pre-colonial times. However this new productive organization remained contained within those enterprises and did not directly serve to alter the wider small scale colonial productive organization that was becoming dominant in NMS society. At the same time it is important to emphasize - and herein lies the significance of the presence of some extractive and other large scale commercial enterprise in the four states - that such enterprise did serve to further alter the dominant NMS mode of production indirectly by altering the wider context within which that production operated. It was the presence and perceived potential importance of commercial enterprise in the north, together with the presence of a thriving tin and later rubber industry to the south, that prompted British foreign and colonial concern to formally establish a presence in the NMS and which significantly influenced the shaping of British colonial and local British administrative policy and practice once they were there. The reasons for, and the effect of, the expansion of the colonial state in this way make up the subject of the next chapter of this thesis and the way in which the presence of commercial interests in the north served to focus British imperial and colonial policy concerns in a particular way are detailed there.

To underscore the point then, what needs to be understood in this chapter is the way in which trade and traders were influencing the NMS economy and society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was the activities of the Straits merchants - the European (especially British), Chinese and Malay traders operating in the Straits of Malacca - that initiated marked and fundamental social change in the four states. It was their activities throughout the nineteenth century, especially the closing decades of that century and into the present one, that set in train change which resulted in a NMS society which was, by World War 11, markedly different in its essentials.

It is important to stress here then that the Straits traders did not remain as exchangers of commodities totally on the periphery of, and strictly neutral in their effect on, production and the wider economy and society in the four states. On the contrary they had, by exercising a combination of direct and indirect influences, a very strong bearing on production and the way in which those societies were organized around production. The question is not, then, whether the traders had an effect on the economy and society in the four states - they clearly did; what is at issue is the way in which, and the degree to which, this happened. While the sources do not allow anything more than a fragmented view of the involvement by merchants in NMS production we can see in broad terms, and something of the specific ways in which, merchants were involved in NMS production and the effect this was having on the wider economy and society in the four states.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ See my reference to the debate on the role of merchants in the productive process in this chapter above.

Peter Burns, in his chapter on the early emergence of capitalism in the tin producing Malay states (referred to by me in the introduction to this thesis above), draws attention to the fact that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, some of the Straits merchants were investing their capital in production. Burns refers us to Jackson's scholarship for information on merchant investment in agricultural production in Malaya. Burns takes the view that Geoffrey Kay has adopted too narrow a definition of 'merchant capital' in his book on the nature and causes of underdevelopment confining it to trade alone. Burns implies that Kay's notion of a merchant as someone only involved in commodity circulation blinded him to the wider function of traders in production highlighted by Jackson.

Peter Burns, "Capitalism and the Malay States", in Alavi, Burns and others, Capitalism and Colonial Production (London, 1982), pp. 166, 176n. Burns' references are to Geoffrey Kay's Development and Underdevelopment cited in this chapter above and to James C Jackson, Planters and Speculators Chinese and European Agricultural Enterprise in Malaya, 1786-1921 (Kuala Lumpur, 1968), p.245.

Jackson strongly emphasized the role of merchant capital in the development of the plantation

The Straits merchants influenced NMS production in a number of ways: through the organizing of trade agreements with local rulers; by investing funds in production through control of revenue farms and by creating the access to markets that served as an incentive for NMS production. There is no evidence that I have seen that they entered the productive process in a very direct way - that they, for example, used their own capital to set up and run production enterprises on any significant scale. But there is evidence for particular states that traders did much more than operate on the sidelines of production confining themselves solely to the circulation of commodities for profit. While the subject warrants much closer scrutiny than I am attempting here - I make no pretence to an exhaustive, definitive statement on the role of merchants on NMS production and wider economy and society - it is possible to show something of the way that effect was operating in the decades leading up to 1909. It is possible for me to establish enough of that effect in this chapter to serve as a bench mark from which to gauge the post 1909 social changes in the succeeding chapters containing the main focus of this thesis.

One way of securing trade advantage was to make an entry into state affairs. Following the practice common throughout the geographic areas of European trading intervention in the nineteenth century the merchants conducting trade with the Northern Malay States entered into trading agreements with local rulers and their states in order to

rubber industry in Malaya:

The merchant - or agency - houses assumed a dominant role in this process because they had well-known and respected names which gave to this new and highly speculative enterprise a degree of integrity and stability attractive to investors. They became the link between the plantations in Malaya and the sources of capital in Europe. They played a fundamental role in the expansion of the new industry which occurred in western Malaya during this early period[ie during the first decade of this century]. But perhaps most important of all is the fact that by paving the way for the investment of huge sums of share capital from the west, they facilitated the European domination of plantation agriculture in Malaya which accompanied the development of the rubber industry. Undoubtedly this basic change, which occurred between about 1904 and 1908, resulted from the long-term investment of large sums of money required for the cultivation of a crop such as rubber on a plantation basis.

Ibid.

While the focus of both Burns and Jackson is on the states to the south their comments point to the possibility that merchants had involvement in NMS production. Clearly, as we shall see below, merchants did have considerable influence on NMS production. The issue of involvement in, and influence on, production is canvassed below in this thesis chapter.

secure favourable trading circumstances for themselves. These agreements secured, for the merchants, various trading advantages - access to ports, land and supplies for the setting up of trading settlements and the like - in return for services rendered to the ruler. Where traders had the resources they were able to offer troops and supplies for the protection of the ruler and his followers against their enemies as the quid pro quo for trading advantages received. In this way traders played some part in the political process in the four states in a way which indirectly affected production.

Bonney cites an example of one such agreement which can serve to illustrate how in a less direct sense, traders sought to maximize production through the creation of conditions of political stability before politicians and administrators exercised a more direct - a stronger - influence over the internal affairs of the four states with the motive in part of facilitating colonial production and trade in the region. Bonney refers to a contract agreed between the East Indian Company and Sultan Muhammed of Kedah in 1772 whereby the Company was granted a monopoly of the state's exports of black pepper, elephant's teeth and tin in return for company supplies of opium.⁽⁹¹⁾ The contract also contained defensive provisions whereby the company agreed to maintain warships to guard the coast of Kedah.⁽⁹²⁾ Bonney makes it clear that Sultan Muhammed had his personal reasons for entering into what amounted to a defensive alliance with the company. He wanted to secure his position against Siamese domination and internal threats by family pretenders to his position as head of the state.⁽⁹³⁾ In the late eighteenth century Edward Monckton was acting as spokesman for the company in its negotiations with Kedah. In 1772, writing at a time when he was negotiating a contract with the Kedah sultan, made reference to the devastating effects of an incursion into Kedah by

⁹¹ Bonney, Kedah, p.44.

On a more general level Thio comments on the way in which the East India Company entered into treaty and trade arrangements with Malay elite on the peninsular in order to extend its influence there.

Eunice Thio, British Policy in the Malay Peninsular 1880-1910 Volume 1 The Southern and Central States(Kuala Lumpur, 1969), pp xvi, xvii.

⁹² Bonney, Kedah, p. 44.

⁹³ Ibid, pp.45-46

Bugis mercenaries in 1771 and stressed the stabilizing benefits for Kedah of the contract in protecting the state from such attacks in future:

...the enemy having plundered the Country occasioned a Famine last year, and there is likely to be one again immediately till the Crops come in November, which has put an entire Stop to all Trade. But I really imagine a very great trade may be carried on here when things are settled[.][T]he Foreign Prows know that the Company are settled here, [and] that no Oppression will be suffered,...(sic)⁽⁹⁴⁾

We can see then that especially in the defensive provisions of the contract the Company acting to protect Kedah production in its own trading interest. Certainly this kind of 'trade in return for protection' arrangement was an indirect influence on production. It was a measure designed to secure the circumstances in which production was taking place rather than an influence on production per se. Certainly it does illustrate that traders did not operate entirely on the periphery of production being content to take what export commodities happened to be available. It illustrates one way in which they took active steps to ensure a constant and sizeable supply of the commodities they wanted to trade.

It seems likely that the extension of credit by merchants to direct producers would have been developing strong significance around the turn of the nineteenth century as the developing colonial market in the NMS increased both the incentive, and the pressure, to produce a commercial surplus.⁹⁵ By advancing loans to direct producers the merchant

⁹⁴ Monckton to Du Pre, 22 April, 1772. G/35/15 Sumatran Factory Records(SFR), The British Library, India Office Library and Records.

⁹⁵ Merchants may well have been investing in NMS production before this, at least in Kedah. Certainly British East India Company traders were investing in the Kedah economy in 1786 by extending loans to the local population. Bonney cites a 1786 letter outlining an agreement between the Raja of Kedah and the Company. Under the terms of that agreement the Raja of Kedah expressly rejected any responsibility for any unpaid debts incurred by his subjects on loans extended to them by the company: 'In case the Hon'ble Company's Agent gives credit to any of the King's Relations, Ministers, Officers or Ryatts the Agent shall make no claim upon the King.'

'[Article] 4th' 'Raja of Kedah to Governor-General of India', 'Conditions required from this Government by the King of Queda'. Cited in Bonney, Kedah, p. 171.

Certainly this disclaimer does not indicate for what purpose any credit may have been extended by the company's agent but it seems reasonable to assume that the investment envisaged in the article may have been ultimately directed at least in part into Kedah Malay rural and other production.

Although he does not detail progressive changes in the credit economy in that state it is clear from Mokhzani's account that in the broad period from the expansion of the rice economy in the late nineteenth century and 1973(the date of submission of Mokhzani's thesis) there was a

obtained a direct stake in production and a strong measure of influence on how production was conducted. The extending of such loans had the effect of binding producers to a specific production quota at a given time in order to pay off the debt.

By far the most important way in which merchants were influencing production in the NMS was through the control of revenue farms. While the record on the way in which merchants may have been influencing production through credit transactions in general remains thin and much more research for the four states as a whole is needed, the secondary sources have a lot to say on the importance of trade tax (with its credit extension component) in the overall economy and society of the NMS.

Ahmat reports that throughout the nineteenth century Chinese merchants from Penang and Kedah were prominent amongst a group of enterprising individuals enjoying the

change from traditional credit transactions and the widespread and strong adoption of cash values in the usurious goods exchange.

Mokhzani bin Abdul Rahmin, "Credit in a Malay Peasant Economy", Unpublished Phd thesis, Department of Anthropology in the School of Arts, London School of Economics, pp. 50-53.

Mokhzani also refers to a 'greater degree of economic calculation' in the conduct of these transactions and the operation of seasonal credit 'repaid at harvest when incomes are received'.

Ibid., pp. 51,52.

Mokhzani also makes it clear that within this changed Perlis rice economy it was the village shop keepers who were the main lenders.

Ibid., pp. 52,53.

Thus it is clear from Mokhzani that the expansion of the rice economy late in the nineteenth century set in train a change in the way credit transactions took place and which saw the village shop keepers as the main creditors in Perlis rural society. See my discussion of Mokhzani's account of the changing role of credit transactions in Perlis during the period of his study in a later chapter of this thesis below.

It seems likely that this credit function of shop keepers was well established by the first decade of this century in Perlis. Certainly the general trading function of these shop keepers was well established by then. The 1909 annual report for Perlis, for example, describes the role of village shop keepers in these terms:

There is one street of shops whose proprietors besides selling sundry goods also export padi - the staple product of the country - as well as ducks and fowls for the Penang market. The chief imports are cottons for native clothing, kerosine oil, tobacco, and the sundry odds and ends used by the Malay country people.

Perlis Annual Report 1909, p.7.

purchased right to tax trade on behalf of the Sultan and at profit to themselves.⁽⁹⁶⁾ As we shall see in detail in this chapter below the profits offered by this kind of trade taxing enterprise, depending heavily as those did on the productive labour of the peasantry, did lead its operatives to enter the rural productive process in that state in a very direct sense through the extension of credit to peasant producers with a view to maximizing the volume and regulating the timing of their production.

In Trengganu, too, Chinese merchants were the main group involved in the taxing of trade in that state.⁽⁹⁷⁾ These traders also operated at an intermediary level between Malay elite figures and the raayat and were able as we shall also see below, to pressure the latter in their sphere of production in the interests of their own profit and in the interests of the Malay elite figures in whose name they collected the tax.

In Kelantan, too, in the nineteenth century, the farming out of the right to tax trade was an important source of income for the ruling class.⁹⁸ It operated as part of a wider prerogative of the ruler and the ruling class to tax trade coming into and leaving the state.⁹⁹

In all the NMS, then, the revenue farms were becoming a major economic support for the Malay elites as the dimensions of trade expanded in the north. By 1909 the farms were so important as the economic basis of political power in these states I deal with them as such

⁹⁶ Ahmat, 'Transition and Change', pp.43,45.

Ahmat points out that in Kedah 'revenue farms seem to have been fairly well established by the beginning of the 19th century'.

Ibid., p43.

Ahmat points out that evidence on the working of the farms in the state is lacking until the fourth decade of the last century. Evidence is available, he writes, for the later part of that century on 'the working and problems of the revenue farm system'- evidence enabling a realization of the importance of the farms 'in the context of the country's economy'.

Ibid., p.44.

⁹⁷ Talib, Image, p. 52.

⁹⁸ Saripan, "Salient Feature", p. 10.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

in a separate section below.

The added stimulus of the colonial market in the later nineteenth century saw the emergence of an even stronger role for the northern Malay elite as producers and traders. As colonial merchants these Malay elite figures continued to be closely involved in NMS production and exerted a strong influence on it in new ways which are made clear below in this chapter.

At the same time at a lower level in NMS society the changing economic circumstances saw petty traders along with other small entrepreneurs closely tied in with and exercising a strong influence on, production in the region. Prominent amongst these were shop keepers who bought up peasant produce for export and retailed commodities to peasant producers as well as extending credit to these producers.

Still, while the picture of the way in which traders were influencing the NMS production process in the nineteenth century is a somewhat fragmented one in the secondary and primary sources and the scholarship awaits a thorough-going examination of the ways in which this was occurring it is clear, at least in outline, that merchants were, in various ways and in varying degrees, influencing the economy and society in the NMS which was the source of their livelihood.¹⁰⁰ Certainly we can see in a very general kind of way how this was occurring around the turn of the century. Clearly merchants were involved in activities - not just trading - which had a significant bearing on production in the four states.

Still, it is not until we are well into the twentieth century - until we are well into the formal colonial period - that we can see how merchants, along with other, wider, colonial influences, were influencing production in the four states in a significant and substantial way. For that reason the strong impact of merchants on colonial transformation in the north is dealt with in chapter 5 below. It is in that chapter that I give a more specific idea of how merchants were influencing production in the north for the post 1909 period when it was stronger and

¹⁰⁰ In a general kind of way there is recognition of the way in which merchants sought some measure of influence at least over the economy on the peninsular as a whole. Tarling, for example, has this to say: 'Opportunities for commercial dispute were manifold, especially as traders might advance money for future harvests, or make arrangements for the monopoly of the trade of a whole river to the exclusion of competition'.

more clearly visible. The real point for this chapter is that we can see something of the beginnings of this transformation in the lead-up to 1909. What I want to stress in this chapter is that the merchant-influenced social transformation which was in full operation from the opening decades of this century had its genesis in the trade expansion affecting the NMS in the later part of the last century. It will be my contention in the next chapter that, while there is no evidence for the NMS that merchants entered the productive process in the most direct way - in the sense that they actually owned and controlled enterprises producing the commodities that they were trading on any significant scale in the north - that they nonetheless sought to influence the productive activity of others in ways which tended to maximize their trade profit and which served to strongly influence production and the way society was organized around it. It was the contentious interaction of all the social groups involved in this which lent a distinctive character to the changing mode of production in the four states and which lay at the heart of social change in them. The point to establish as clearly as possible in this chapter then, as a development on chapter 2 above, is the dynamic of change - fundamental change - that was underway in the four states in 1909 when the arrival of a formal British presence there added new impetus to it. It is the second of the two benchmark chapters of this thesis attempting the difficult task of describing a social status quo which was not, as the text books tend to have it, relatively static in its nature and composition, but rather in a state of flux - a state of flux out of which came the modern colonial NMS by 1941 and which continued in that contentious form into the independence period to 1980 and beyond.

The beginnings of colonial transformation

Having established some of the modern colonial forces at play in the NMS in the lead-up to 1909, the principal among which was the expansion of trade and the activities of traders, we are now in a position to examine the effect of those colonial forces on the economy and society in the north. To repeat: while the subject requires thorough going examination for a definitive understanding of the pre-1909 NMS economy and society - or as close as it is possible to go to this on the available source materials - the attempt must be made here to peg, at least in outline, the basic dynamic features of the NMS at the outset of the formal British presence in all four states in order to more effectively gauge the magnitude

and general significance of the social changes occurring there in the formal colonial period.

The most important economic and social changes occurring in the NMS in the lead up to 1909 can be summarized as follows:

(1) The expansion of the British colonial presence in Malaya in the nineteenth century created a much stronger home market for various products, most importantly rice, which were produced in the NMS. At the same time there was a much stronger demand for tin, rubber and other jungle produce produced in the NMS in limited quantities and required for export. New opportunities were thus created for the NMS Malay elite some raayat and sections of the immigrant population to increase their wealth and power. The new market for rice in particular to feed the new colonial settlements and for tin and other precious metals increased the incentive and opportunity for the NMS elite and others to prosper through trade on the expanding colonial markets. It was, then, principally this expansion of the colonial economy into the NMS that resulted in the commencement of fundamental alteration of society there by the end of the first decade of this century.

The NMS Malay elite, unlike that in the states to the South, continued to depend for its wealth and political power on the labour of subordinate Malays. The increased opportunities for trade meant that the elite pressed their raayat even harder to meet the productive opportunities created by the expanded colonial market on the peninsular. At the same time immigrant Chinese, Indian and Malay labour was being pressured into greater production to meet the expanding opportunities for profit created by the colonial market.¹⁰¹ This pressure took various forms but the net result was to set in train tensions in NMS society which were to last right throughout the modern period and which go a long way towards accounting for certain important developments in the history of the four states in the wider context of Malaysian history. In short the penetration of outside colonial economic forces introduced a new logic to production and productive relations in the four states and in so doing altered the basic character of those societies.

¹⁰¹ Pressured by British, Chinese and Indian elite figures in the mining and plantation enterprises in the four states. At around the turn of the century this would have been of important but very much secondary significance to the Malay response to the market expansion referred to in the text of my thesis immediately above. At this point, while it is important to recognize that it was there, it was not a dominant factor determining the basic character of the transformation and I therefore do not develop on it in this thesis chapter.

(2) The increased production in the NMS and the increased volume of trade enhanced the capacity and incentive of the elite to extract surplus in new ways and in new forms. Most notably, the capacity of the elite to prosper through trade tax increased and the Sultan's position at the head of the river enabled him to siphon off a much greater amount of trade tax than had hitherto been the case. It was primarily through the taxing of trade in this way that the Sultan was able to concentrate a large amount of wealth in his hands. Thus, for the first time in the history of the region there now existed an economic basis for the centralization of political power.

(3) The raayat were now coming under greater pressure to part with surplus in kind and, correspondingly, the cooption of labour services directly - kerah - while still significant, was becoming less important in the late nineteenth century. At the same time and relatedly there was the beginning of the penetration of a cash economy at the level of the economic base in the four states. What this did was both to act as an incentive to produce for cash and to offer another form in which surplus could be extracted. While we can not measure the relative degrees of hardship felt by the raayat subject to the old and then new ways of extracting surplus we do know that new ways of extracting surplus were at the focus of sharp and dramatic disputation between those rendering and those extracting surplus during the formal colonial period as we shall see. What we can say for the earlier, turn-of-the-century period, is that the raayat - in the main made up of Malay peasantry - were being induced and coerced to work hard in their domestic sphere in ways which leant intensity to the tension of old between direct producer and those siphoning off some of the fruit of that productive labour.

(4) The new economic influences stimulated changes to the value and concept of land. Land came to be thought of by the elite more consciously in terms of its productive capacity to meet the demands of the new colonial markets. There was a much more extensive colonization of new land and the availability of cultivable land, especially the most fertile cultivable land, began to diminish. As a result land acquired a new value and began to be thought of and dealt with in terms of proprietary ownership. Early forms of land title emerged and land dealings in a proprietary sense began to emerge as a feature of the NMS economy. In short, the concept and use of land as a commodity began to emerge. There was the beginnings of an economic differentiation in the NMS countryside on the basis of land tenure and this significantly added

to the rural tensions which were developing in a more general sense in nineteenth century NMS society and which were to last throughout the colonial and modern periods up to the present day.

While the origin of these changes can be dated in a very general sense from around the turn of the eighteenth century the pace of change quickened towards the end of the nineteenth century. Not only this but change occurred at an uneven pace across the four states. Generally speaking, Kedah and Perlis came under stronger colonial influences and underwent a greater degree of change than Kelantan and Trengganu on the east coast.⁽¹⁰²⁾

The Revenue Farms

In the nineteenth century the ability of the Sultan to tax trade took on a new significance. The expansion of trade into the northern states from the early nineteenth century meant that the capacity of the Sultan to siphon off trade tax from his river mouth vantage point was outstripped by the sheer volume of the increased trade and the revenue potential that went with it. The Sultan therefore needed more effective ways of tapping this new source of trade wealth. Thus, increasingly as the nineteenth century progressed, the NMS Sultans farmed out the right to collect trade tax on particular specified commodities to lesser entrepreneurs operating within his state. The enterprise extracting revenue in this way was known as a revenue farm and the individual chiefly responsible for collecting the revenue was known as a revenue farmer. The particular arrangements varied but the effect was that the revenue collected in this way was shared between the Sultan and the revenue farmer.

It was, then, in the nineteenth century the revenue farms which were becoming the basis of the state economies in Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu and by the latter part of that century the farms were firmly established as the basis of the economy in each state. It

¹⁰² There are numerous and various indications in the sources of the differing regional effects of colonial influences in this way. To take just one example, Khoo Kay Kim comments, in his introduction to Clifford's description of Kelantan and Trengganu, that 'the major difference between the eastern peninsular and the western peninsular ...was that in the latter case, the rate of economic growth was much faster, and hence also, social change.'

Khoo Kay Kim, Introduction to Clifford, 'Expedition', p.xvii.

A more specific idea of the differing nature and extent of change within the NMS is given in the context of this chapter below.

was the expansion of colonial trade which meant that the Sultan in particular in the wider elite through their own collection of trade tax, were becoming less dependent upon the cooption of labour services directly at the point of production in favour of a more remote surplus extraction. This meant, as we shall see in more detail below, that the NMS Sultans were able, from their vantage point at the river mouth, to assume a much stronger position of real power as well as one of symbolic significance as nominal head of state.¹⁰³ Thus the Sultan's wealth was now much more strongly identified with his position as head of state: by the end of the nineteenth century 'state wealth' or 'state revenue' was effectively in large measure the Sultan's wealth and revenue.

The sources clearly indicate that by around the turn of the nineteenth century the bulk of the Sultan's wealth came from trade tax collected under the revenue farm system. Speaking of the later decades of the nineteenth century Ahmat says of Kedah that 'practically the entire source of the states revenue came from the letting of revenue farms'.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Elsewhere Ahmat points out that the farms were 'the backbone of the country's revenue'.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Writing on 3 January, 1900, Skeat noted that the total revenue from revenue farms in Perlis was \$21,380 towards a total annual revenue of \$27000.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Sutherland notes that the annual revenue of Trengganu in 1909 was M\$100,000 most of which was derived from the nine major revenue farms of the State.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ And Mason indicated that in Kelantan in the year 1909 revenue farms contributed the very substantial sum of \$55,741 to a total annual revenue of \$370,959.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

¹⁰³ See my discussion of this in chapter 2 above.

¹⁰⁴ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.89.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.93.

¹⁰⁶ Skeat and Laidlaw, 'Cambridge Expedition', p.136.

¹⁰⁷ Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", p.53.

¹⁰⁸ J.S. Mason, British Adviser, Kelantan Administrative Report for the Year 1327 A.H.(23 January, 1909 12 January, 1910), (Kuala Lumpur, 1910), p. 1.

The fullest account in the secondary sources of how the revenue farms operated are those given by Ahmat for Kedah in the late nineteenth century and Talib for Trengganu in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ahmat makes it clear that the revenue farms were, by the standards of the day, well organized and the revenue farmers efficient and enterprising in collecting the trade tax revenue.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ More importantly, however, in terms of the Sultan's political power was the fact that, in Kedah and Trengganu at least, by the later part of the nineteenth century the farms had come to be delegated out mainly to Chinese revenue farmers.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ This meant that the task of extracting labour in the form of trade tax was, in these states, given over to Chinese who were outside the Malay political system and therefore did not constitute a direct threat to the power of the Sultan. Certainly, in Kedah at least, they were eventually to become an economic threat to the Sultan in that they were handing over less than the Sultan's due share of the revenues collected.⁽¹¹¹⁾ There is no suggestion in the sources, however, that there was ever any question of the Chinese controlling labour in support of their own position of political power with the Malay political hierarchy.

Both Talib and Ahmat indicate that for Trengganu and Kedah respectively the wealth drawn from the revenue farm system by the farmers and the Malay elite stemmed ultimately from subordinate labour in the two states - principally that of the raayat but also that operating within the immigrant communities as well. The measures adopted by the revenue farmers to ensure a large and constant supply of trade produce and the hardship this created for the raayat in Kedah is dealt with in the context of the changes occurring to land tenure in that state below.

Talib identifies and describes a wider system of trade monopoly in Trengganu. That system - the Pajak system as it was called - 'was an established means of raising revenue from

¹⁰⁹ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.52.

¹¹⁰ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.45.
Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", p.53.

¹¹¹ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.116.

the commodity trade generated by the peasantry'.¹¹² Under this system there were two kinds of commodity generating wealth for the ruler and the state's Malay ruling class.¹¹³ The first of these commodities were the exclusive preserve of the ruler.¹¹⁴ According to Talib the Trengganu ruler was able 'to purchase these articles at a price fixed by himself and he then sold them on the open market.'¹¹⁵ The remaining commodities in circulation in the state were not subject to royal monopoly. These were generally of lesser importance and were the subject of a trade tax monopolized by the Malay ruling class. This taxation was exercised through their agents - the revenue farmers.¹¹⁶

There was in Trengganu another kind of trade monopoly - a second category of farms(though not strictly speaking revenue farms) - enabling the farmer, on payment of a fee to the government, trade in royal monopolies at a price fixed by the farmer.¹¹⁷

Both kinds of monopoly put considerable strain on the peasant economy in Trengganu since that economy provided the bulk of rural trade commodities on which both farming systems fed.¹¹⁸ It was in particular the monopoly farm system which created special hardship for the peasantry in Trengganu. That practice saw the peasantry purchasing commodities from monopoly farmers at prices giving much profit to the farmer at the expense

¹¹² Talib, Image, p. 47.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 48.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-64.

In the thesis on which his book is based Talib, writing under the name of Leslie Robert, refers to the effect of the pajak system on both the raayat and the Chinese smallholder economy with the state.

Robert, "Malay Ruling Class", pp.174, 175.

of the peasant purchaser; at the same time the peasantry were selling their produce to these farmers often at prices well below profitability to themselves.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Such transactions led at worst to the ruination of the peasant and the termination of his enterprise.⁽¹²⁰⁾

The principal commodity needed from the Northern Malay States by the new and proximate colonial markets was rice. In the nineteenth century it was Kedah and Perlis who were the strongest rice producers. Rice production in these two states was stimulated by the market for the commodity on nearby Penang. It was, then, the Penang market which principally accounted for the more rapid changes to the economy and society in Kedah and Perlis than occurred in Kelantan and Trengganu. Kelantan and Trengganu, from 1819, were experiencing economic and social changes stimulated by the east coast trade based on the less proximate trading centre in Singapore.

Because a more constant supply of rice and other produce was needed in larger quantities for the colonial trade the raayat in the northern states was coming under a more systematic pressure to part with surplus in kind. From the early nineteenth century there was too, the beginnings of a substantial penetration of a cash economy in these states and this further strengthened the trend away from elite reliance on labour directly in favour of an increased reliance on surplus in other forms. With the penetration of a cash economy at the raayat level it was now becoming possible for surplus to be extracted in cash as well as kind.

As the century progressed there was an increasing reliance on the part of the elite on the extraction of surplus in kind through petty trading transactions. By this means the NMS Malay chiefs and Sultans increasingly obtained rice, tin and other commodities through petty trading with the raayat in order in turn to trade these products on the lucrative colonial markets. And there was a strengthening trend from the early nineteenth century for the peasantry, especially in the richer rice growing areas, to trade their surplus rice for cash. This trend was already evident in Kedah in the eighteenth century but was to become much stronger in the nineteenth.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 62, 63.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.63.

An early example of such elite-raayat cash transactions can be seen in the purchase of 500 coyons of rice by the Sultan of Kedah from his peasants for sale to the Dutch government.⁽¹²¹⁾ This transaction, which took place 'some time before the cession of Penang to the British', resulted in a twenty five per cent profit for the Sultan on the original purchase price of the rice received from the peasants.⁽¹²²⁾ By 1909 there was in Kedah, as we have seen, a well established group of middlemen traders. These traded with the peasants directly to obtain their surplus rice and then in turn traded this produce in bulk to larger traders and retailers located in the bigger distribution centres for the commodity. In the words of the Kedah Annual Report for 1909: 'The petty dealers [ie Chinese petty dealers] sell to bigger merchants, also Chinese, in Alor Star, Sungei Sala and Sungai Semau, who export to Penang'.⁽¹²³⁾

Clifford gives us a very good idea of the way in which the Trengganu raayat were being forced to produce for colonial markets late in the nineteenth century. Clifford explains that in Trengganu, at the time of his visit there in 1895, 'the people throughout the state [were] taxed until the limit of the possible [had] been reached'.⁽¹²⁴⁾ One method of such taxation was that of serah and it is worth quoting Clifford's account in full since it serves to illustrate the kind of way in which the NMS raayat were being drawn into new and contentious productive relations throughout the nineteenth century under the influence of new and stronger colonial market forces:

This is a very well-known manner of obtaining revenue, and is as much valued by the taxing classes as it is abominated by those upon whom devolves the duty of paying taxes. It is managed in one of two ways. Either a consignment of goods is sent to a village, or to an individual, and a price considerably in excess of that

¹²¹ Hill, Rice, p.51.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Kedah Annual Report 1909, p.25.

See also Hill, Rice, p.61.

¹²⁴ Clifford, "Expedition", p.72.

current in the markets demanded in return for them, or else a small sum of money is sent and a message conveyed to the recipients informing them that a given quantity of getah, or other jungle produce, is expected in exchange. I need hardly say that the sum of money so sent is altogether disproportionate to the quantity of getah or jungle produce which is demanded in return. On the receipt of a serah a village headman calls his people together, and enforces a public subscription to meet the sum required by the Raja. The goods are then divided among the subscribers, but as the quantity of goods is altogether out of keeping with the high price paid for them, as the village elders usually insist on receiving the full value of their subscription, the weaker members of the community get little or nothing in return for their money. Money serah, in return for which jungle produce is to be supplied, is generally made to an individual, who has forthwith to betake himself to the jungle there to seek for the required commodity until a sufficient quantity has been obtained. Meanwhile the cultivation of his land, and all the labour on which he and his family depend for their livelihood, has to be neglected until the Raja's demands have been satisfied. Nor are his ills then at an end, for if he has successfully performed one behest, he is very liable to at once become the victim of a second serah.⁽¹²⁵⁾

What is clearly evident here for Trengganu then is the way in which villagers were being forced to produce goods to meet the trading requirements of the Raja. Not only were they being forced to labour beyond subsistence to produce a set quantity of goods at much less than equal exchange values to themselves but they were also forced to purchase goods from the Raja as well. In both cases the incentive for exploitation was profit on the wider colonial market.

In Kedah, too, by 1909 a similar sort of pressure was being applied to the peasantry to produce rice for the colonial market. The annual report for that year explains the rice marketing arrangements in that year in this way:

The rice is bought up by Chinese petty dealers, who by advancing money to the Malays in the planting season are able to buy up the crops at rates below the market prices in the harvest season.⁽¹²⁶⁾

We can see from this the way in which small merchants invested in production in such a way as to commit Kedah peasants to the production of a given quantity of rice at a particular time at less than its market value. The passage further illustrates the fact that local merchants did not remain passively on the periphery of production taking commodities when

¹²⁵ Clifford, "Expedition", pp.72, 73.

Saripan, citing Clifford, describes the practice for nineteenth century Kelantan in less emotive terms though still pointing to its exploitative character.

Saripan, "Salient Features", p. 10.

¹²⁶ Kedah Annual Report 1909, p.25.

and where they were available but, in a context of expanding colonial trade, actively sought to maximize the supply of commodities from direct producers on terms favourable to themselves. The report also illustrates the importance of not ignoring the ethnic aspect to surplus extraction and class tension in Kedah.

While the relative importance of kerah was declining throughout the nineteenth century the raayat continued to labour directly in the service of a chief or Sultan in the production of trade goods. Clifford gives an example for Trengganu in the very late nineteenth century:

The people of Dungun and other parts of the country from which good timber is exported are called upon annually to fell a certain number of trees, to square the logs, and to float them to the mouth of the river ready for transmission to China or the Straits. For this they receive no remuneration of any kind, the timber all being regarded as the property of the District Raja, who goes so far as to enforce payment from the people for the tools supplied in order to enable them to perform this work.⁽¹²⁷⁾

Once again we have to be wary of the moralistic tone that Clifford shared with other British scholar administrators in describing aspects of the working of the Malay economic and political system. But allowing for this bias it remains clear from Clifford's statement that he is describing a situation in which raayat surplus was now being extracted directly to supply timber for the new colonial market in the Straits Settlements as well as for the older China market.

Increasingly in the nineteenth century the NMS raayat were being exposed to a wide range of consumer products circulating on the international market. Skeat, for example, noticed in Trengganu in 1899 that '[t]he shops...were well supplied with bread, light beers, soda, cheroots and similar European wares, as well as with an extensive assortment of Malay goods and, above all, Chinese and Indian articles.'⁽¹²⁸⁾ Likewise the reference in the 1909

¹²⁷ Clifford, "Expedition", p.73.

Saripan indicates that for Kelantan in the nineteenth century kerah 'was a means by which the ruling class could mobilize man-power for the extraction of jungle produce without payment'.

Saripan, "Salient Features", p.10.

¹²⁸ Skeat, "Cambridge Expedition", p.122.

annual report to imports into that state of 'cottons for native clothing, kerosine oil, tobacco, and the sundry odds and ends used by the Malay country people indicates the extent to which the Perlis raayat had been drawn into a colonial consumer economy by that year.⁽¹²⁹⁾ And speaking of the Siamese Malay states in 1899 generally Annadale reported on the extent of the penetration of a modern international consumer economy:

It is thanks to Chinamen that it is now possible to buy Manchester cottons, German prints, Japanese lucifer matches, Javanese printed handkerchiefs, Chinese porcelain and American or Sumatran parafin oil, in even the smallest markets - markets which hardly a white man has ever seen.⁽¹³⁰⁾

Thus the raayat were being induced to labour in the purchase of a wider range of commodities than ever before at values determined ultimately by capital operating in the wider world market economy. Local and imported commodities available for raayat use and consumption were increasingly given cash values and to an increasing extent could only be obtained with cash. For example, Winstedt paraphrases Abdullah's first hand observation that in Kelantan in 1830, 'a large ox...[was] fetching \$2 to \$3..., a large goat \$1 and a cow buffalo \$2 to \$2.50.'⁽¹³¹⁾

Saripan points out that in Kelantan in the late nineteenth century the raayat were subject to three main kinds of taxes within a taxation system which was 'quite elaborate'.¹³² These were a poll tax, land tax and royal monopolies.¹³³ The poll tax (known as banchi) was collected by the ruler for the purpose of paying the triennial Bunga Emas to Siam and was levied at the rate of \$1.00 for every adult Malay male payable every three years.¹³⁴

It was in this way then that the raayat in the four states were, in the nineteenth century, being drawn much more strongly into commodity production and cash commodity

¹²⁹ Perlis Annual Report 1909, p.7. Passage cited in full above.

¹³⁰ N Annadale, "The Siamese Malay States", The Scottish Geographical Magazine, 16, (1900), p.519.

¹³¹ Winstedt, The Malays, p.134.

¹³² Saripan, "Salient Features", p. 10.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

exchanges. The attempts to implement a land tax in Kedah and land and produce taxes in Kelantan late in the century were a further pressure on the raayat in those two states at least to produce for cash though it was not until the period of formal colonial rule that the implementation of such taxes was to operate very strongly as a factor forcing the NMS towards a situation of generalized commodity-production with the raayat substantially dependent for their subsistence on commodity production.⁽¹³⁵⁾ Certainly the raayat economy was not fully monetized in the four states until well into the twentieth century and the coexistence of cash transactions and those in kind prevailed in the nineteenth century. Skeat illustrates the transitional nature of raayat commercial transactions in Trennganu in 1899:

The penghulu of one of the mukims on this coast was a firm convert to vaccination; and he ordered all his anak buah to undergo it. Every patient paid the penghulu a fee of one dollar, two fowls, and three gantang of rice, together with another pair of fowls if the vaccination took.⁽¹³⁶⁾

The pressures on the raayat to increase production and to enter the field of commodity production and especially cash commodity production were not by any means always commensurate with their means and general ability to do so. The raayat were now being forced to increase their capital investment in the production process to an extent which was very often beyond their means. Because cash was, throughout the century, rapidly becoming the medium of exchange on a wider scale at the raayat level the condition now existed for the operation of usury as a cash enterprise. Thus, the new colonial circumstances now forced many raayat to borrow cash in order to buy productive equipment and other commodities to satisfy their present needs. In so doing however the raayat debtor had not only to work harder beyond that necessary to satisfy his immediate subsistence needs in order to repay the loan at face value; he also had now to perform extra labour to pay interest on the loan. In this way then usury emerged as a method of surplus extraction of great significance.

Concurrent with, and related to, the increased commodity production and the stronger development of a cash economy in the north was the changing conception and use of land. By

¹³⁵ See below for further account of the moves to implement these land and produce taxes.

¹³⁶ Skeat and Laidlaw, "Cambridge Expedition", p.124.

the end of the nineteenth century the trend whereby land was regarded and dealt with in a proprietary sense was well developed in at least two of the northern states; Kedah and Kelantan. Private land ownership in a formal sense was also becoming a feature of Perlis and Trengganu. The strongest evidence pertains to Kedah and indicates that in that state, certainly, land was transferrable, had a cash value and so had taken on the character of a commodity. The issuance of land titles, the sale of land, moves in the direction on an imposition of land and produce taxes were all evidence of the changing concept of land and land use in the altering economic and political circumstances in the north as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

Throughout the last century land increasingly acquired a value in itself in the context of expanding production for the new colonial markets. As the opportunities for wealth to be made on colonial markets increased competition intensified within the NMS elite for control over agricultural surpluses. That elite encouraged colonization of new areas with a view to maximizing the amount of agricultural surplus, especially, in Kedah and Perlis and to a lesser extent Kelantan, rice surplus, available to them to trade on colonial markets. As the availability of arable land, especially the most fertile land, began to diminish intra-elite competition for control of labour began to focus on a contest to control land as means whereby they could maximize the productivity of labour under their control. In this way, then, land began to acquire an intrinsic value which it had not had in pre-colonial times. Because the elite was beginning to measure their wealth and political power more in terms of the amount of peasant produce they could extract, peasant domestic productivity came to be a concern to the elite. Thus NMS elite figures were now seeking to acquire fertile land initially for themselves but with a view to colonizing the land with peasants capable of producing a profitable agricultural surplus. The resettlement of peasants in this way was being effected through the subdivision and then re-sale or letting of small lots of land alienated initially in large blocks to members of the NMS ruling class.

The peasants, too, had now to pay more attention to the productive capacity of their land since the amount of land they cultivated and the fertility, the productive capacity of that land, was a limiting factor governing their survival in a situation where they were coming under greater pressure to render surplus labour directly and, increasingly, surplus produce. Thus,

colonial economic circumstances created a situation in which land was beginning to acquire a value in itself as a means of meeting the demands of expanding colonial markets, a value which was starting to become formalized through the issuance of land titles and through other actions of the Sultan aimed at the systematization of land tenure and use in the northern states.⁽¹³⁷⁾

The earliest form of land title in Kedah was called a Surat Putus. Ahmat explains that the title 'was made out as a decision by the Hakim or Judge of the state arising out of his findings into a dispute over land.'¹³⁸ Ahmat explains that it was a written decision, signed and sealed by the Sultan and served as an absolute title to the land.¹³⁹ Land held under the Surat Putus 'was considered as freehold and would be held in perpetuity by the descendants of the original claimant unless ... the land was sold or there was no inheritor.'¹⁴⁰ 'The possession of the document became', Ahmat says, 'so highly desirable that it was customary in any transfer of land to try to get the signatures and seals of the Hakim and Sultan.'¹⁴¹ Ahmat cites Maxwell to indicate the title existed in Kedah from 1689 and that 'earlier titles of this kind were issued'.¹⁴²

Economic forces alone, however, do not account for the formalization of this new land value. The formalization of the concept and use of land was partly derivative. Wong makes the very important point that, although the understanding of early colonial administrator of Malayan land tenure was misconceived, that misconception had its own historical reality in that British administrators in their actions in relation to land in Malaya, tended to create something like the feudal system of land tenure they thought had existed in Malaya from

See below.

¹³⁸ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p. 62.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

earliest times.⁽¹⁴³⁾ Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, although the British did not on the whole affect NMS arrangements with regard to land directly the British notion of land tenure, both what they wrongly perceived to be the status quo traditional Malayan land tenure, and to a limited extent prior to 1909, what they thought that land system ought to be, was becoming increasingly influential in changing the concept and use of land in Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu.¹⁴⁴

According to Wong, 'in those other Malay states which were brought under British rule much later, it would appear that British influence had in the meantime contributed to new development in their land systems.'⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Wong gives two examples for the NMS. In Kedah in 1883 the promulgation of the Hasil Tanah Proclamation and the Surat Kechil Proclamation 'purported, inter alia, to impose land-tax (hasil tanah) on all land-holdings, to require the obtaining of a permit for clearing forest land, and to provide for the issue of documents of title for occupied land.'⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ Wong points out that in Kelantan in 1881 attempts were made by the Sultan to establish a land office for recording land holdings and dealings.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Wong explains in a footnote that in Kedah, 'in 1906, a few years before the State came under British protection, a Land Enactment had already been introduced in Kedah which basically followed the line of the early land legislation in the neighbouring British protected States (subsequently

¹⁴³ Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, pp.18, 20.

¹⁴⁴ The misconception is explained in chapter 2 above. Wong explains that this misconception took on a historical reality of its own since it was the British perception of the nature of traditional land tenure that was 'the basis of their political and administrative action' on the peninsular.

Ibid., p.18.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.20.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp. 62,63.

¹⁴⁷ Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, p. 20.

the Federated Malay States).⁽¹⁴⁸⁾

The need for the elite to protect its interest in labour and land as opposed to its former interest in labour per se was reflected in the increasing importance of land titles in the NMS in the nineteenth century. The surat putus featured more prominently in the operation of land tenure within Kedah and, later in the century, another title to land, the surat kechil, was being issued as well under the provisions of the Surat Kechil Proclamation mentioned above.¹⁴⁹ The surat kechil was a more limited title to land than the surat putus. Ahmat explains that the surat kechil 'served as a provisional title which meant that the holder had the authority to occupy state land and that he had to pay land rent.'⁽¹⁵⁰⁾

The fact that the surat putus had become, in Kedah, a strong proprietary title to land by the 1880s can be seen in the contrasting rights to land it conferred in comparison with those conferred by the surat kechil. Ahmat explains the differing right to land conferred by the surat putus and the surat kechil respectively: 'The difference was that in the first instance a man paid the hasil (tax) of 25 cents per relong upon land granted to him by the ruler of the state in the other instance a sewa (rent) of 25 cents was paid for land belonging to the state.'⁽¹⁵¹⁾

Perhaps the strongest evidence of the development of a proprietary and commodity character to land in Kedah is the record that exists of the alienation and sale of land in the state on a significant scale in the later part of the century. Wilson reports for example that in Kedah in the 1880s land on either side of the newly constructed Alor Star to Kedah Peak canal

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ See Hill on the increasing granting of the surat putus, and Ahmat and Wong on the Surat Kechil Proclamation.

Hill, Rice, p. 58.

Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp. 62,63.

Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, p.20.

¹⁵⁰ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.63.

¹⁵¹ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.65.

was alienated and sold to settlers:

The canal builders, like Wan Mohammed Saman [Wan Mat], a Mentri of Kedah, on building the 22 miles of canal from Alor Star to Kedah Peak by forced labour, 'received in return a concession of all land to a depth of 20 relongs on either side of this canal' (i.e., just under 30 squ. miles) 'which he could sell off to intending settlers at a uniform rate of \$3 per relong and an annual rental of 50 cents per relong.'⁽¹⁵²⁾

Wilson does not give details of the kinds of land title that may have been involved in this transaction but what is clear is that Wan Mat, at least, was able to exercise a strong proprietorial control over the land bordering the canal. Clearly such land was alienable and transferrable. Precise information on the extent of land ownership in Kedah is lacking but a new proprietary interest in land for some Kedah Malays is clearly indicated in the sources. It was this changing interest in land that formed the basis for the beginnings of a concentration of land in the state by the later decades of the nineteenth century to be discussed more fully below.

It is important to stress that there did not exist in Kedah a situation where full or limited proprietorship in land, and the commoditization of land, was generalized prior to 1909. Private ownership in land as signified by the holding of a surat putus was confined to a small group comprised of members of the Malay aristocratic elite, a non-Malay, non aristocratic group - most notably wealthy Chinese entrepreneurs - and, much later in the nineteenth century - an emerging number of wealthy raayat.⁽¹⁵³⁾

In theory, from 1883 onwards, all raayat not holding a surat putus were holders of the more limited surat kecil although, as Ahmat points out, this intended wider spread of title holding amongst the raayat did not eventuate in practice.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾

What is important about the 1883 land proclamation in Kedah is that it had the effect of beginning a transformation of the relationship between direct producers and surplus appropriators with land as the basis of the relationship. The intention of the proclamation was

¹⁵² Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production, p.9.

¹⁵³ Hill, Rice, p.58.

¹⁵⁴ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp.63, 65-67.

to create a situation where some Kedah Malays were landowners and the rest, the majority, were tenants of the state. Although, as previously stated, the reality fell short of this intention there was a move towards a situation where some Kedah Malays - mostly the aristocratic elite - were owners of land and where others were, in effect, tenants of the Sultan.

There are no overt references to the existence of land titles in Perlis in the nineteenth century in the literature on Malaya but their existence in the state or at least the existence of privately owned land is strongly implied in Skeat's first hand observation for the turn of the nineteenth century that penghulus in Perlis 'were given commission at the rate of 10% on all crown lands sold in their districts'.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾

There is a similar indication that land had become disposable as a commodity in Kelantan in the late nineteenth century. Saripan, in his description of the main features of Kelantan for this period of time, writes:

All land in the kingdom belonged to the ruler. It was common practice for the penghulu to dispose of wasteland on behalf of the ruler. A small fee had to be paid to the ruler, but most penghulu retained the payment.¹⁵⁶

In other words Kelantan seems to have had a similar situation as Perlis with the penghulus profiting on the sale of land by default rather than arrangement. The implication in Saripan is that this rather informal process whereby land was alienated as a commodity was underway before a systematic system of land tenure had come into existence:

Prior to 1881 there was no land record. It was Sultan Muhammad 11 who first introduced a system of registration which recognized the right of the registering party to own property. However, not till the reign of Long Mansor, was a Land Office established for the purpose of keeping registers and title deeds.¹⁵⁷

In Trengganu a similar trend in changes to the system of land tenure appears to have been in operation to that in the other NMS. Sutherland's account suggests that some sort of land title was in operation in the state around the turn of the nineteenth century and that the

¹⁵⁵ Skeat and Laidlaw, "Cambridge Expedition", p.137.

At least no overt references in the literature that I have seen.

¹⁵⁶ Saripan, "Salient Features", p.10.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.10,11.

nature of the title changed when the development of mining and plantation industries elsewhere on the peninsular stimulated an interest by outsiders who sought 'the concession of exploitation rights' in the state.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾

Around the turn of the century, with non-Malays applying for concession rights in growing numbers, the Trengganu government abandoned its practice of making land grants via a simple letter with the Sultan's seal and began to issue more formal documents specifying the length, terms and purpose of the contract.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾

Sutherland's example clearly shows the way in which the incursion of the colonial economy into Trengganu had the effect of making the Sultan and the wider elite more conscious of the value of land per se and how this led to changing conditions of land tenure in the state. The Trengganu elite, in collaboration with outside economic interests, began to perceive and treat land as a commodity. As was the case in Kedah some of the royal land grants went directly to outside entrepreneurs - to Chinese, Arabs and Europeans - and some went to figures in the traditional Malay elite who were then able in turn to lease out land concessions to foreign business interests as a new source of revenue for themselves.

What is also clear from the sources is the way in which a proprietorial character to land was developing as a direct response to the intrusion of colonial influences onto the peninsular. We have seen in the chapter immediately above how, in Trengganu, a proprietorial interest in land was stimulated when mining and plantation interests sought exploitation rights in the state and needed a clearly understood claim to land to effectively exercise these rights. In Kedah, too, it is clear that the commercial possibilities of rice production stimulated a proprietorial interest in land. And we have seen in this chapter immediately above how the canal builder Wan Mat was able to profitably sell land on either side of a canal he was building. It was in the act of receiving land as quid quo pro for the canal building, and the subsequent division and sale of the land to settlers, that the recognition of land as a commodity was contained.

It is clear from Dianne Lewis' study of Kedah in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that it was a decline in Kedah trade with the establishment of the Straits Settlements,

¹⁵⁸ Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", p.50.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.30, 31.

especially Penang, that prompted the Kedah elite to adapt by looking for other sources of wealth.¹⁶⁰ That other source of wealth, Lewis implies, was 'large areas of land ... available for rice cropping', an advantage that Kedah had, Lewis says, over 'all the Malay states'¹⁶¹. The 'late 18th and 19th centuries', she says, 'saw the construction of several important canals which allowed new areas of erstwhile marshland to be opened up for agriculture'.¹⁶² This activity, she points out, was undertaken 'by members of the traditional hierarchy' in Kedah, activity which, she adds somewhat vaguely, 'provided an important outlet for their energies as

¹⁶⁰ Lewis, "Kedah".

Lewis attributes 'the disintegration of the Malay states as political units in the nineteenth century' somewhat narrowly to a loss of trade revenue to the Straits Settlements when these were established.

Ibid., p. 8.

This was, she says, 'the fundamental reason' for this disintegration'.

Ibid.

However, while we can accept that, with the establishment of the Straits Settlements there would have been some decline in entrepot trading activity this would not have been a critical component of the total trading activity of these Malay elite merchants. The English settlement on Penang, she says, 'drew trade away from the Malay ports' and drew 'Malay merchants there with their wares'.

Ibid.

Kedah alone of all the Malay states was able to withstand this disintegration 'because her rulers became aware of the British at an early date and altered their own policies to account for it'.

Ibid.

This seems a misplaced emphasis on the diversionary effect of the Straits Settlements on mainland peninsular trade. While a decline in mainland trade no doubt was a factor in diminishing the wealth and power of the Malay elite there the real economic weakening - undermining - of this elite in the southern and central (but not, as we shall see the northern) states on the peninsular came once the British had established a formal colonial presence in those states and cut off their Malay elites from their traditional economic bases of support.

Burns, "Capitalism and the Malay States", pp. 171-175.

As for the NMS the bulk of the evidence points, as I argue in the text, to a strong reliance of their Malay elites on trade and trade revenue, throughout the nineteenth century and from especially towards the end of that century.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.9.

¹⁶² Ibid.

well as benefiting the state in many more obvious ways.¹⁶³

We do need to be cautious in relying on Lewis' statements on the decline of trade. She doesn't mention the disruption to the rice trade by the Siamese invasion of 1821, and her claim that the Straits Settlements diverted trade revenue away from the rulers on the peninsular is inconsistent with the weight of evidence in the sources that, by the turn of the century, trade tax revenue was the economic mainstay of the Malay elite in all four NMS.¹⁶⁴ However her reference to the systematic opening up of land for rice cultivation on a large scale does strongly suggest the way in which the Kedah Malay elite was able to respond to an expanding market for rice by acquiring and selling land. Putting what Lewis says against what the Kedah sources say generally it seems likely that the Kedah Malay elite, rather than diverting from trade to some other sort of land based wealth (what this might have been is not specified by Lewis) in fact augmented its trade revenue - wealth drawn from taxing trade and from the buying and selling of trade goods - by acquiring and selling the land in commercial exploitation of the opportunity offered by the expanding rice market as the British colonial presence strengthened on the peninsular in the nineteenth century. Certainly this must have been the situation of land alienation and transference in the state that Wilson was describing for the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

The general trend then in the changing concept and use of land in the four NMS states in the nineteenth century is clear. Throughout the century the Sultans in the NMS were exercising a new kind of dominant proprietary interest in land, as the issuance of land titles in Kedah and Kelantan, Skeat's reference to crown land in Perlis, and Sutherland's account of the granting of land concessions in Trengganu, show. It was primarily the northern Malay elite and outside entrepreneurs who were the chief recipients of land titles, though in Kedah at least the sources clearly indicate that at least some raayat had a full or limited proprietary interest in land by the closing decades of the nineteenth century.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁶⁵ In Kedah only a very few raayat had a full proprietary interest in land however. Ahmat comments that, apart from a few exceptions, 'land ownership was unknown amongst the raayat'.

That the Sultans in the four states were able to impose this new kind of proprietary control over a wide area of land in their states was a direct consequence of their increasing political power within their states in the changing economic and political conditions in north Malaya in the nineteenth century. The increasing power of the Sultans is dealt with in more detail below. The important point to note here is the fact that this new kind of control exercised by sultans and the wider elite over land - control that treated land as a commodity - control that took the form of land ownership, not just the right of access to use land - was indicative of a wider process in which the northern Malay elite was seeking to extract surplus in new ways on the basis of land as the attempts to impose land and other taxes associated with the new conditions of land tenure shows. In other words a new rationale - a new legitimization - for the entire process of surplus extraction - was beginning to emerge with land as its basis. It was part of a process - in its early stages in the years spanning the turn of the nineteenth century - whereby the somewhat arbitrary exactions of ruler or chief were starting to give way to subtler, more controlled - eventually bureaucratic - ways of extracting surplus from a raayat most of whom were engaged in land-based rural production. Since this process saw fully fledged development in the formal colonial period I deal with it more fully in Chapter 5 below.

The crucial thing to understand at this point is that, because land became a commodity which could be transferred from one owner or user to another it was now possible for peasants to become separated from the land in a way that was not possible before. Land was no longer a relative constant in production - something that was always there and available for use subject to the limitations outlined in Chapter 2 above.¹⁶⁶ There now existed a potential for the alienation of land holder and land that wasn't possible before. Longevity of land access and use no longer depended on the de facto commonality of interest in peasants wanting secure use of land in their own productive support and those above them in the social hierarchy

Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.61.

¹⁶⁶ As we have seen security of land use was not absolute. Harsh exactions by a ruler or chief could force peasants to take flight from their land for example.

wanting them securely supporting themselves on the land in order that the productive surplus they generated could be extracted. Built into the new emerging concept of land and land use was the idea that a land holder had secure access and control of land if he met the *quid pro quo* which was either the payment of a large sum of money for ownership or, much more commonly, the payment of rent - increasingly money rent - for its use. At the extreme the possibility existed in these new formal land arrangements coming in to existence for the separation of peasants from land altogether. Short of the extreme the threat was always there that if the peasants did not meet what were becoming increasingly monetary exactions - not just land rent but land tax, produce tax and the like - then eviction would be the result. Furthermore these exactions were developing an administrative structural aspect that had not existed in the capricious exploitation before. Whereas once the capacity of chief or other power holder to extract surplus in the end depended on his capacity to use unregulated force there now existed a formal legal mechanism whereby land owners - by and large it was the traditional elite who owned land - for the extraction of surplus.

At the turn of the century this new way of siphoning off the productive wealth created by the peasantry was just beginning to take shape. In order to understand how it got to final developed colonial form in the decades leading up to World War 11 we do, certainly, need a close understanding of the way the new land arrangements were working in the early transitional phase it was in the early twentieth century prior to the establishment of the formal British presence in all the four states to the north. Such a close examination is beyond the scope of my thesis here and I do not attempt it. I offer here, instead, in this chapter, an outline of the beginnings of the commoditization of land and land use prompted initially by the stimulus of strengthened colonial influences on the peninsular in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Thus the NMS were moving towards a position where the peasantry had a right from the Sultan to cultivate land as long as he rendered service in various forms. Although the sources don't show specifically how, it seems clear in a general way that the NMS Sultans, most notably in the case of Kedah and Kelantan, followed the example of the formal, colonial exploitation of peasant productivity on the basis of land being implemented in the British colonial states to the south on the peninsular in the later decades of the nineteenth century. It

was in this way, as we have seen, that British ideas on traditional Malayan land tenure, misconceived though they were, were exercising their own historical reality not only in the states under colonial rule but indirectly in the northern states as well, in the late nineteenth century.

The tendency towards a strengthening of the proprietary character - towards the commoditization of - land, operated together with the much stronger commoditization of peasant production to effect the early beginnings of a differentiation within NMS society on the basis of land tenure. Because land was now becoming an object of proprietary possession and some land, at least, was transferrable, a situation was developing in the four states where land could be gained or lost as an object of proprietary possession by individuals in a variety of circumstances.

Borrowing was one way in which peasants could become separated from land. A peasant who borrowed cash and who was unable to repay the debt lost the land that had been put up as collateral against such a default on the repayment of a loan. As the NMS peasantry was being induced, or pressured, into greater production to meet the needs of an expanding colonial market - especially for rice - they sought credit to meet the greater investment needed for this increased production. Thus money lenders emerged more strongly as a group able to exploit the peasants' increased need for such investment. While the traditional Malay elite continued to extend credit to the peasantry Chinese money lenders featured strongly as a group of usurious middle men able to profit from the peasants' need for funds to meet production targets voluntarily or under pressure from bulk handlers of the product.

Ahmat gives an example of the way in which revenue farmers conducted usury in Kedah. The example is important since it shows how revenue farmers were able to pressure the peasantry into producing for the colonial export market. The example also shows how the revenue farmers were able to do this with the support of the Sultan. And most important, the example shows one way in which some peasants were becoming separated from the land.

One way in which the Chinese revenue farmers ensured that a large and regular supply of padi was available for the export market was to get the Malay peasant into debt. This was clearly done in the name of assisting the padi growers and unfortunately the Sultan naively assisted in it. For example

Leong approving of his intention to help the Malay cultivators by giving them loans. The Sultan then issued instructions whereby the raayat who wished to take a loan from Phua Leong would have to enter into agreements with their land as surety. What normally happened of course was that the raayat was unable to honour the loan on time and this meant that he had either to hand over a more than proportionate share of the harvest or lose the land.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

Several important points indicative of the way in which colonial influences were bringing about changes at the level of the economic base in Kedah can be seen by considering Ahmat's example in a wider context. Ahmat doesn't state the terms under which the raayat referred to held the land but what is clear is that this land, at least within the context of the loan transaction referred to, was on instruction from the Sultan, transferrable.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ As with the operation of serah in Trengganu usury in Kedah was a method of forcing raayat into providing a larger quantity of goods for the colonial market thereby increasing the wealth of the elites at the expense of the raayat producers. Ahmat's claim that the Sultan naively assisted in the loan transaction must be treated with some scepticism since the economic interests of the Sultan in maintaining a large supply of padi for export and the same objective held by the revenue farmers were closely linked. In Ahmat's words: 'As for the Sultan, he too wanted rice production to be good, for if the revenue farmer could not make ample profit, he normally asked for a reduction in the rent of the farm.'⁽¹⁶⁹⁾

Although Ahmat does not say so explicitly in the passage quoted we can see that it was in this way that usurious middlemen and the Malay elite were able to capitalize on the

¹⁶⁷ Ahmat, 'Transition and Change', p.30.

¹⁶⁸ No mention is made by Ahmat of any specific land title in this context. The puzzling feature here, certainly, is why the Sultan's permission was necessary to approve the granting of loans to the raayat in this way. Perhaps the situation was that the raayat held land under a leasehold title - the surat kechil - in which proprietary ownership of the land remained vested in the Sultan and for this reason, together with the fact that the revenue farmer was in some sense an agent of the Sultan empowered to collect trade revenue, the Sultan's permission was necessary to enter into loan arrangements with raayat. The assumption that I am making here is that the land in question passed to the revenue farmer on default of the payment of the loan on a land title not specified by Ahmat, but either a surat kechil or surat putus. At any rate the exact nature of the title involved does not matter since the proprietary and commodity character of land is clearly illustrated by Ahmat's example whatever the juristic form in which it was clothed.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p.30.

raayat's stronger inclination to produce beyond subsistence commodities for exchange on the colonial market - an inclination which stemmed partly from the inducement offered by the availability of a wider range and greater quantity of consumer commodities and partly from the coercive pressures on the raayat to increase their productivity. clearly there was an element of circular causation in the use of usury to pressure the raayat into greater productivity since it was this and other kinds of pressure which forced them into greater productive overheads in their enterprise and which helped to create the need to borrow in the first place.

In Kedah, then, we can see how peasants could lose land to traditional elite or entrepreneurial immigrant elite figures on default of repayment of loans. It was in this way that, on the basis of changes being made to the operation of land tenure in Kedah, a new kind of tenancy was emerging. While the majority of the peasants in Kedah were, at least in theory, tenants of the state (i.e. the Sultan) those who were becoming separated from the land were forced to become tenants of a particular landlord, usually a member of the Kedah elite though sometimes the landlord was Chinese.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ Thus, whereas the sources, as we have seen, tend to convey an impression that the landlord-tenant relationship was a traditional feature of Malay society the reality in the NMS was that relationship was a modern social feature arising directly from the effects of colonial influences on the NMS economy. The emergence of landlordism and tenancy introduced a new element into the general relationship between direct producers and those appropriating their surplus. Since peasant tenants were now dependent upon a landlord who owned land - the main means of production - for their subsistence and reproduction the coercion applied on the tenant to labour beyond subsistence was becoming economic in form. This dependency was limited, however, while land was freely available in the state. As Ahmat comments for the late nineteenth period: 'In an age when population was highly mobile and where land was plentiful, dissatisfied peasants could

¹⁷⁰ Ahmat makes it clear that most landowners in Kedah were members of the Malay elite. Ibid., p.64.

always move on to a different area and work for a landlord who was more reasonable.'⁽¹⁷¹⁾

Ahmat illustrates the way in which the acquisition of peasant produce by the Kedah elite was coming to operate in a more systematic way on the basis of land in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

The peasants in Kedah cultivated the land under one or two systems. Firstly, there was the pawah system by which the landlord would fix a specific amount of produce as his share of the harvest...The second system which the peasants could opt for was known as the bagi dua system which operated on the basis of an equal share of the harvest between landlord and the cultivator.⁽¹⁷²⁾

What is not clear from Ahmat's account is the extent to which this was landlordism and tenancy in the fullest modern economic and juristic sense. On the one hand, as we have seen, tenure in land was becoming increasingly based upon the issuance of land titles. Some kind of formal tenancy and landlordism is implied in Ahmat's statement that recipients of land grants in Kedah 'normally leased them out to raayat who would cultivate the land under either the pawah or bagi dua system'.⁽¹⁷³⁾ On the other hand Ahmat's reference to raayat flight response above suggests that the raayat were less subject to the degree of economic coercion that we would normally associate with modern landlord-tenant arrangements. The fact too that under the pawah cultivation system the amount set as the landlord's share of the harvest was arbitrary suggests something less than a clear cut form of tenancy agreement backed by strong and efficient central authority and looks more like the seizure of surplus in kind characteristic of the pre-colonial economy.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾

Clearly the position in the nineteenth century Kedah was that such tenancy

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.61.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.117.

¹⁷⁴ Ahmat comments in this context that 'since the laws pertaining to payments in respect of cultivation rights were not standardized, the quantity demanded by the landlord tended to be arbitrary.'

Ibid., p.61.

arrangements were in a transitional stage. It was not until the twentieth century that some raayat were to become more strongly subject to the extraction of surplus by economic means within the context of a more tightly organized colonial bureaucratic system of land tenure. But we can see from Ahmat's account how, in the nineteenth century, the freeing of some raayat labour in a limited sense added significantly to the nascent class tensions developing between direct producers and those appropriating their surplus as a result of modern colonial influences. And in a wider sense the changing concept and use of land was turning the raayat into tenants of the state. The process wasn't by any means complete by the end of the nineteenth century but productive relations in the NMS were becoming increasingly premised on the basis of the raayat's limited tenure in land, a tenure which we have seen was being given a more definite formal expression in the nineteenth century.

We can see from Ahmat's Kedah example how the commoditization of land, together with a commercialization of peasant production, brought the latter into contentious relationship with usurious Chinese middlemen and added a new dimension to the tension between peasant and ruler as these related to one another in production. In the other NMS, by the early twentieth century, as we shall see, a similar transformation in productive relations arising from changing land tenure and the commercialization of peasant agriculture was well under way by 1909.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Given the fact that in a very general sense modernization took place more rapidly in the NE than in the NW of the peninsular it may well be that this land commoditization and general agricultural commercialization was taking place more rapidly in Kedah and Perlis than Kelantan and Trengganu. It wouldn't have necessarily been the case in all its aspects in them for the pre 1909 period though. As we shall see below in chapter 5 the Graham administration in Kelantan moved modernization of land tenure, at least, along apace. Certainly a close examination of the relative pace of social change within the four states is needed if we are to fully understand the timing of modernization. I do not attempt this close study here. My main focus in this study is the post 1909 period and it is in that part of my study that I look at differential change in the north.

The slower modern social development of the NE peninsular is, in a variety of ways, often stated in the sources. Kessler, for example, referring to the British period of Kelantan's social development, says that it was a state 'protected by its colonial administration from alien populations and commercial development'.

Kessler, Islam and Politics, p. 29.

And Wheelwright, writing in 1974, describes 'the whole North-east area[of Peninsular Malaysia] as 'extremely backward and poor'.

To sum up, then, it is clear that important changes were taking place at the level of the economic base in the NMS throughout the nineteenth century. Colonial influences, specifically the presence of colonial markets, led not only to greater pressure on the raayat to labour beyond subsistence in support of elite groups within that society. There was also inducement for them to work beyond subsistence for commercial profit in their own interest. The way in which surplus was being extracted was, in response to these colonial influences, changing.

The result of this was that the production and wider social relations within the NMS were undergoing major change. This was especially true of those social relations existing between the traditional elite and the raayat. The peasants now had to produce a larger surplus in kind to meet the demands of power holders who were starting to take on the character of landlords in the sense that they were beginning to demand surplus as the quid pro quo for the peasants' use of the land. Of great importance was the fact that surplus produce was, to an increasing extent, being extracted by trading transactions between elite and peasant. In Kedah a middle group of petty traders dealing directly with the peasantry and trading the rice so obtained with larger merchants in the big distribution centres was, by the first decade of this century, well established. That is to say, by trading increasing quantities of their surplus produce and by effecting such transactions increasingly for a cash return, the peasants were entering the field of commodity production much more strongly than they had before the emergence of the colonial market and were becoming increasingly dependent on that market for their economic well being. The increasing activity of the raayat in producing goods for trading or sale with traditional Malay elite entrepreneurs and middlemen who wanted goods for trade on a colonial market meant that the raayat themselves were becoming tied to colonial market forces. It was these forces which determined the return that bulk handlers of agricultural produce - rice for example - got on their sales and which in turn largely determined the terms of the initial petty trading transactions conducted at the peasant level. Not only this but once the raayat was dealing in cash, or cash values - for the effect was

E.L. Wheelwright, Radical Political Economy Collected Essays(Sydney, 1974), p. 348.

See also my reference to differential social changes in the NE and NW of the peninsular in the introductory chapter of this thesis.

basically the same in both cases - the return that they got in any purchase or trading transaction was now being determined by wider monetary market forces well beyond their control.

It was in this way then that the penetration of a cash economy at the raayat level and the drawing of the raayat into new commodity relations with each other, with immigrant middlemen - the Chinese revenue farmers, traders and other middle-ranking entrepreneurs - with the traditional elite and with outside forces in the colonial Malayan and wider imperial establishment was changing the basic nature of productive relations and therefore the wider basic character of the NMS societies as a whole.

It is clear from their reactions that the new methods of surplus extraction created significant hardship for the raayat. Ample evidence exists of latent class tensions in the NMS countryside stemming directly from the new colonial methods of surplus extraction. Kessler summarizes the pressures on the peasantry in Kelantan prior to the imposition of Graham's British administration in the state in 1902. The circumstances described are, in their specifics, unique to Kelantan, but Kessler's description does serve to illustrate in a general way how colonial influences served to pressure the peasantry and thus give rise to tension between peasant producers and those extracting their surplus. Speaking of the reasons for and the effects of, a conversion to a new method of rice production Kessler says:

Conversion to the labor-intensive padi chedongan was prompted not by any autonomous desire of the peasant to increase his output, but by pressures on him - the need, as population grew and land became scarce, to increase the productivity of land in order to meet growing exactions above an inelastic subsistence. Since, at the same time, land titles were being issued and the rural economy was becoming increasingly monetized, the new agricultural system prompted a rapid rise in the value in land, placing it beyond the reach of poor peasants, who, if they did not emigrate, were absorbed into the new agricultural regime as sharecroppers and tenants. The intensification of Kelantanese agriculture benefited not the peasant but those who demanded a share of his produce; it stemmed from and contributed to the growing power of the central regime, especially the chiefly aristocracy.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾

Whilst these class tensions had only limited manifestation in the NMS in the nineteenth century they were to have much stronger expression in the twentieth.

¹⁷⁶ Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.65.

The Centralization of Political Power

The NMS first began to achieve a centralization of political power in the nineteenth century. That this was so was due largely to the fact that there were new opportunities for the concentration of wealth and therefore political power in the hands of the state ruling elites. It was in the nineteenth century that the ruler's position at the river mouth gave him an overriding economic advantage in the collection of trade tax and it was largely by this means that the ruler was able to start exercising a degree of real political power commensurate with his symbolic position as head of the state. This resulted from the success of particular state rulers in manoeuvring to concentrate revenue and therefore political power in their own hands at the expense of their chiefs and other rival power holders. It is important to stress that such manoeuvrings could only succeed because the wider socio-economic colonial circumstances allowed them to do so. With the increasing elite reliance in Kedah on trade tax and other forms of wealth there was a corresponding shift away from a reliance on raayat labour services. Changes to the form and method of surplus extraction in Kedah had a significant effect on production relations in the state. Ahmat states that there was in Kedah a correlation between political stability and the well being of the raayat in that the Kedah elite - the Sultan, other members of the Malay ruling class, and Chinese padi and rice revenue farmers - were dependent on the rice productivity of the former for their wealth and power.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ That productivity in turn depended in part on these raayat not being exploited too much by the elite.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ Ahmat reports that it was because the sultan of Kedah was aware that it was in his own interest not to place excessive pressure on rice producers that he 'relaxed the raayats' obligation to forced labour.'⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ Ahmat further makes the point that in Kedah, in the same period '[t]he ownership of ... debt-bondsmen for ... political purposes did not exist in Kedah because, unlike Perak and Selangor, Kedah in the nineteenth century did not suffer from the same political instability.'¹⁸⁰ What is clearly implied though not overtly stated in Ahmat's

¹⁷⁷ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p. 136.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 136,144.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.144.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p 77.

account then is that the availability of a strong colonial rice market meant that the Sultan's power and that of the wider elite in that state was depending less on labour services directly through kerah and slavery and more on their ability to tap into peasant small scale agricultural productivity.

Kedah achieved a remarkable stability in the nineteenth century which was unique among the Malay states on the peninsular.¹⁸¹ This stability existed because the sultan was able to concentrate wealth and power in his own hands to a degree which hitherto not existed. In large measure this was due to the capacity of the sultan to concentrate revenue - mainly trade revenue - in his own hands and it was on this revenue that this unprecedented power largely rested. Diane Lewis, in her study of Kedah, explains the importance of trade to all the Malay states in the nineteenth century, including Kedah:

The origin and further development of these riverine states was closely tied to their importance in the trading patterns. Trade provided the lion's share of their revenue, either via the collection of port and customs duties ...or via profits from the sale of their own produce. Usually the two were combined in some way.¹⁸²

Lewis explains that the Kedah Sultan was able to concentrate power in his hands by ensuring that most of the important district chieftanships were held by the royal family.¹⁸³ This family connection, a mutual concern to ensure law and order in the state, and a shared fear of further Siamese intervention in the state ensured a measure of loyalty on the part of the chiefs towards the Sultan.¹⁸⁴ Very significantly Lewis points out of the chiefs that 'their share of the revenue-collecting was much smaller in Kedah than in other states, as most sources of revenue were farmed out to the Chinese in Alor Star, thus short circuiting any designs of the district

¹⁸¹ Lewis, "Kedah", p. 11.

¹⁸² Lewis, "Kedah", p.7.

As we have seen, Lewis goes on to imply that the Kedah elite came to rely on rice production for an income - a claim I have indicated is at odds with the sources which clearly indicate a strong reliance on trade tax revenue on the part of the Kedah elite in the late nineteenth century.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.2.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.2,3.

chiefs on the Sultan's income'.¹⁸⁵ 'This had', Lewis continues, 'the doubly effective result of increasing the power of the Sultan, and making his chiefs dependent on him for their income'.¹⁸⁶ Lewis also quotes Ahmat on the Sultan's control of penghulus:

In Kedah, all the Penghulu were appointed by the Sultan by the issue of Surat Kuassa with the Sultan's signature and seal. This was in contrast to the other west coast states, where it was common to find that the appointment of the Penghulu was made by the district chief, particularly when he was a powerful one.¹⁸⁷

Lewis adds: 'The Sultan in this way re-inforced his grip on the administration'.¹⁸⁸

A pattern of political instability had prevailed in Kedah in the decades spanning the turn of the eighteenth century contrasting strongly with the politically stable period of the closing decades of the nineteenth century in the state and which is described by Ahmat and Lewis.¹⁸⁹ There is no major source dealing squarely and in detail with the intervening years of the nineteenth century but the course of events can be broadly understood for this period. In 1821 the Siamese invaded Kedah and exercised, up to 1842, a strong and exploitive control over the state.¹⁹⁰ The reasons for and the effect of, this invasion are dealt with below. What is important here is that the Siamese presence forced, as we shall see, a measure of unity upon the state and in this way set the stage for the self sustaining unity which followed after 1842 and which occupies much of the attention of Ahmat in his thesis. Ahmat makes it clear that when the Sultan, who had been removed from Kedah by the Siamese during their occupation was returned, the Sultanate continued to be the strong institution referred to by Ahmat in a way which is not explainable solely in terms of initial Siamese backing.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

See also my comments on the role of Chinese revenue farmers along these lines for the colonial period below in chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p.3.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ The period before 1842 in Kedah was characterized by intra-elite conflict for power and wealth. This political conflict took the form mainly of succession disputes with the elite dividing in support of one contender or another in the hope of reaping some economic or political reward for themselves. For an account of one of these succession disputes in 1810 see Bonney, Kedah, pp. 103-127.

¹⁹⁰ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp. 21-24.

To sum up then, what is clear from Ahmat and Lewis is that the Sultans of Kedah were, from 1842 onwards, able to assert a strong control over that state on the economic basis of wealth - mainly trade tax - made available with the expansion of colonial trade on the peninsular.

The volume of trade and especially rice trade passing through the Sultan's capital was greater than the volume of trade passing along the Kedah waterways prior to the nineteenth century and by the second half of the nineteenth century the amount of trade tax that could be extracted as the basis of royal power at the river mouth and at other strategic points along the river banks in relative terms was very substantial indeed.⁽¹⁹¹⁾ The decreasing importance of kerah and slavery were indicative of the more general decreasing reliance of the Sultan and Chiefs on the extraction of labour directly and their increasing reliance on other forms of surplus especially trade tax. It was now possible for the Sultan in Kedah to concentrate wealth and therefore political power in his hands in a way and to an extent which had not been possible in pre-colonial times. The district chiefs in Kedah, while sharing in the new colonial trade wealth to a degree, had no comparable alternative sources of wealth to match or supercede that of the Sultan such as the chiefs in the tin rich districts had in the states to the south. It was in this way then that the strength of the Sultan's power in Kedah owed much to the expanding colonial market on the peninsular and the revenue that could be drawn from it.

Trengganu first saw a strong measure of central power during the reign of Baginda

191 Comparative statistics that might help to anchor this assertion on a more quantitative numerical basis are hard to come by since few such quantitative records for the pre and early nineteenth century periods exist. Likewise comparative statistical evidence showing the differing volume of trade for each state for any one period of time are not easily found. One difficulty is that such evidence on the amount of trade is given in the sources for the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but not according to a constant quantitative criteria. To take just one example, annual trade figures are given in currency (dollars and pounds) in the 1909 Trengganu and Kelantan Annual Reports whereas trade figures for the same year for Kedah are given as a quantitative measure (e.g. gantangs of rice) in the Annual Report for that state.

See Trengganu Annual Report 1909, p.8; Kelantan Annual Report 1909, p.6; Kedah Annual Report 1909, pp.13, 25.

Thus, while the sources do not easily provide a suitable statistical basis for comparison, they do make the proposition asserted in the text clear in a general sort of way.

Omar (1839-1876). Accounts of the reasons for this centralization of power in the hand of Baginda Omar are framed in terms of his greater ability to concentrate revenue in his own hands through the force of his personality and his ability for manoeuvre and intrigue. Helen Sutherland, for example, in her excellent account of the way in which the British bought the Trengganu elite to heel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, describes Baginda Omar's ability to concentrate power in his own hands in these terms:

Through his personal force and astuteness he appears to have succeeded in overriding the territorial headmen and drawing all revenues directly into his own hands. Since revenue was power, and the proof and purpose of political authority was the collection of dues, this economic by-passing of the hereditary local chiefs signalled their defeat and they were either reduced to the level of commoners or absorbed into the central elite, that formed the ruler's entourage.⁽¹⁹²⁾

The implication in this description is that it was because, by Baginda Omar's time, political power in Trengganu was coming to rest increasingly on the extraction of surplus in the form of trade revenue that such a concentration of power in the hands of the Sultan was possible. Thus, Trengganu, along with all the other NMS was no longer limited in the degree of political centralization that it could achieve by the heavy reliance of power on the extraction of labour directly in the way that was true in pre-colonial times. This is not by any means to say that there were no limitations on the centralization of power in Trengganu as the political instability which followed Baginda Omar's reign shows.

In Kelantan revenue collection, and therefore political power, seems to have been concentrated in the capital, Khota Bharu, from around the beginning of the fourth decade of last century.¹⁹³ Saripan, in his study of nineteenth century Kelantan, indicates that while, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the lineage of the chiefs in that state was mixed - some royal; some non-royal - the most important ones were of royal lineage, something which, as

192 Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp. 37, 38.

Sheppard interprets the concentration of power in Baginda Omar's hands in a similar way.

Sheppard, "Short History", pp.34, 35.

¹⁹³ Saripan, "Salient Features", p. 9.

was the case with Kedah, would have inclined them towards loyalty to the ruler.¹⁹⁴ The prominent Kelantan chiefs came from the anak raja class and were known as Raja Jajahan.¹⁹⁵ The non-royal chiefs had the title Datok.¹⁹⁶ From the reign of Muhammad 11 in Kelantan(1838-1886)`all territorial chiefs had to reside in Khota Bharu and the collection of revenue of these chiefs was frequently entrusted to their budak raja who made periodic tours through the districts'.¹⁹⁷ Saripan doesn't refer to trade revenue specifically here, but it is clear from Kessler's comments for around the same period of time that trade revenue featured prominently in the wealth being acquired by chiefs and the Sultan in Kelantan.¹⁹⁸

Kessler points out that Kelantan first attained a measure of political unity in the nineteenth century under Sultan Muhammad I who acceded to the Sultancy in 1800 and that this measure of political unity continued under his successor Muhammad II.¹⁹⁹ Unlike Ahmat on Kedah and Sutherland and Sheppard on Trengganu, Kessler offers an explicit account of political centralization in Kelantan in economic terms. Speaking of Kelantan from the turn of the eighteenth century, Kessler says:

From the south came new economic influences. The founding in 1819 of Singapore, soon a burgeoning centre of international commerce, expanded the Gulf of Siam trade. During the middle third of the nineteenth century, the overwhelming part of Singapore's peninsular trade was with the east coast ports, and its impact upon their politics - especially those of Kelantan... - must have been great. **By augmenting the politically valuable resources upon which rulers and chiefs could draw, trade enhanced the ascendancy of**

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

The budak raja were the `courtiers' in the service of the chief.

Haji Abdul Rahman bin Yusop, Collins Gem Dictionary Bahasa Malaysia - English/English - Bahasa Malaysia(Revised edition, no date, London and Glasgow), p. 215.

Kessler gives the dates for Muhammad 11's reign.

Kessler, Islam and Politics, p. 41.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 41-44.

the port cities over their environs.²⁰⁰

Kessler doesn't mention trade tax and revenue farms specifically in this context but the great reliance of the Sultan on trade tax revenue in 1909(indicated above in this chapter) strongly suggests that this revenue was becoming, from around the middle third of the nineteenth century, the basis for a concentration of power in the Kelantanese capital. From Kessler's account, then, we can see that Kelantan, along with other NMS, was moving towards a position of greater central authority on the basis of new ways and forms of surplus extraction - and especially the exaction of trade tax in the port cities - throughout the nineteenth century.

A full account of the political history of Perlis is hard to come by in the sources. Perlis tends to be treated as an appendage to Kedah in the sources and the details on Perlis politics in the nineteenth century are not given. This is no doubt partly because for the early decades of the nineteenth century Perlis was a district of Kedah. In 1841 Perlis became an independent state and it would appear from the isolated references to the state that Perlis was moving towards a position of greater central power on the basis of new methods of surplus extraction.⁽²⁰¹⁾

Skeat's first hand observations on the Raja's control at the local level in Perlis around the turn of the century can serve to illustrate the point:

Under the previous Raja there had been two classes of headmen, *ratu* and *penglima*, and one of subordinate headmen (*penghulu*). The *ratu* class had

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.42. My emphasis.

²⁰¹ There is some discrepancy in the sources on the year in which Perlis ceased to be a district of Kedah and became a state. Mokhzani gives the year as 1824.

Mokhzani, "Credit", p.9.

The Perlis Annual Report for 1938 gives the year as 1841 and Ahmat, too, seems to favour the later date.

Perlis Annual Report 1938, p.2.

Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.24.

The later date seems preferable since even if Perlis had been given formal statehood in the earlier year no true independence could have been enjoyed by the state until the ending of the Siamese occupation in the area.

died out by the time of my visit, but formerly there had been three members of it, holding office direct from the Raja. At that point every penglima was appointed by these men. Both classes, ratu and penglima...were...bound to give military service if called on to do so (kerah) and the penglima was still liable for such service down to the time of my visit.⁽²⁰²⁾

Skeat then refers to the fact that penghulus were given the 10% commission on the sale of crown lands stated above and continues:

Each penghulu also received four shares (habuan) out of every ten of the poor rate (padizakat) monthly and did not have to pay timber duties, except for the 3% ad valorem duty on exported logs.²⁰³

Skeat does not elaborate further on the subject and so much remains unexplained in his description - how and why the ratu class disappeared for example. But the account does appear to give a picture of centralized control in Perlis with local functionaries directly answerable to the Raja and a state political system relying to a significant extent on new methods of surplus extraction. Given the very great reliance of the Raja on trade tax revenue cited earlier in this chapter for the same point in time it seems reasonable to assume that Perlis was achieving a strong degree of central control in the years between 1841 and the end of the century and that the general trend towards a political centralization in the NMS on the basis of new ways of surplus extraction outlined above encompassed Perlis as well.

It will be clear from the above that the increasing political centralization on the basis of new ways of surplus extraction was accompanied by an increasing systemization of the process of surplus extraction by the Sultan. The revenue farms are clear evidence of this but further evidence exists in the emergence of what may be described as rudimentary bureaucratic instrumentalities aimed at streamlining the process of popular taxation. The earliest attempts at the setting up of a centralized civil and religious administration were effected in Kedah under the rule of Sultan Muhammad II.⁽²⁰⁴⁾ These changes included, as we have seen, the attempt to institute a land office in Kelantan in 1881 and although this office

202 Skeat and Laidlaw, "Cambridge Expedition", pp.136, 137.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Kessler, Islam and Politics, pp.42-43.

achieved only limited success in its implementation, it did signal the earliest beginnings of a bureaucratic apparatus for the systematic extraction of surplus in the form of land revenue. Muhammad II's attempt to set up a central machinery of government was largely ineffective and it was not until the presence of a Siamese adviser of British nationality, W.A. Graham, charged with the task of organizing Kelantan's affairs, began to institute changes to the Kelantan government that a more durable infant bureaucracy was created.⁽²⁰⁵⁾

Similar moves occurred in Kedah at around the same time. Ahmat explains in these terms:

...[O]n the whole Kedah authorities understood and accepted British institutions and methods of administration. This was reflected in the Kedah administration which was obviously based on the Penang model. At the end of the 19th century, there were in Kedah departments like the Treasury, Lands and Survey, Office of the Auditor General, a Posts and Telegraphic Office and Courts of Law.⁽²⁰⁶⁾

In Trengganu, too, around the turn of the century, the beginning of a state bureaucracy had begun to materialize. In Sutherland's words:

Around the turn of the century, Trengganu began to adopt some of the trappings of a bureaucratic state. A civil service was established on paper, though in fact it seems simply to have meant that certain chiefs were designated departmental heads. A formal system of courts based on a written enactment was realized, and judges learned in Islamic law replaced the small panel of major chiefs which had previously heard cases in the state Hall.⁽²⁰⁷⁾

The sources do not give a specific idea of the development of the Sultan's administration in Perlis later in the nineteenth century. However, Skeat's reference to the sale of crown lands with its implication of the issuance of land titles in the name of the Sultan does imply the existence of some sort of administrative apparatus, however basic, aimed at extracting land revenue in one form or another.

The point is then that before a formal British administrative presence existed in all the NMS in 1909 moves had already begun in the direction of the extraction of surplus by a

205 Kessler explains that one of Graham's goals was 'to create his own administrative apparatus dominating the state institutions'.

Kessler, *Islam and Politics*, p.60.

206 Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp.159-160.

207 Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp.51-52.

state administrative apparatus. This was very different from the pre-colonial situation where surplus extraction was highly decentralized and took the form mainly of the direct extraction of labour at the point of production. Clearly such a development was only becoming possible because surplus was becoming increasingly available in more manageable - more accessible - forms. The pressure to surrender surplus through the agency of a bureaucratic apparatus in this way created new kinds of hardship for the raayat. Kessler describes the effect of Graham's regime on the Kelantanese peasantry in these terms:

Graham's regime and the British were thus imposed not upon a static rural society but upon one in transition, and their policies only intensified pressures on the peasantry. Resolving to finance themselves by taxing the peasantry, they failed to provide the security of land tenure that they hoped would render their taxation popularly acceptable. Graham had to devise ways to finance his new administration...[H]e concluded that the 'only hope of increasing revenue lay in those taxes not farmed, and in new taxes'. He therefore resuscitated certain hitherto erratically collected produce taxes and introduced a new poll tax. His belief that the land revenues could be 'greatly increased' was soon vindicated, and from the taxes paid by the peasantry the state coffers were replenished.⁽²⁰⁸⁾

Certainly Kelantan was in advance of the other NMS in the implementation of systematic taxes in this way. It was not until the imposition of British control from 1909 that systematic taxation became fully established in all the northern States. The point to stress however, is that the imposition of such a bureaucratic taxation was not a completely new innovation imposed from the commencement of a formal British presence in north Malaya. Clearly the stage had been set for such bureaucratic surplus extraction by the turn of the nineteenth century in the four states. That such development of rudimentary bureaucratic structures was taking place at all in the NMS late in the nineteenth century was, in itself, strong evidence of the increasing political power at the centre of the state in north Malaya.

Clearly, then, the way in which wealth was extracted from direct producers was changing in such a way that the political methods - intrigue, patronage and the like - used to seek power now had the effect of concentrating power in the hands of the Sultan and his relatives and associates in a way which had not been economically possible in pre-colonial NMS society. By the later decades of the nineteenth century the Sultan and the wider elite had come to hold power resting firmly on a basis of raayat labour now being extracted to a much

208 Kessler, Islam and Politics, pp.65, 67.

greater extent in indirect forms and by new and more systematic methods. Within the traditional elite by far the greater concentration of power was in the hands of the Sultan and beyond that the Sultan's extended family. Thus, in the nineteenth century the waris negeri closely approximated a ruling class within north Malaya.⁽²⁰⁹⁾

The Sultan was able to extend his reach over surplus in outlying areas from his capital by appointing members of his own family as district chiefs. According to Ahmat, by the late 1870s in Kedah 'most of the district chiefs were members of the royal family, particularly in those districts which were economically rich.'⁽²¹⁰⁾ Likewise in Kelantan the Sultan's family had a strong hold over the districts through royal appointees to the position of district chief. According to Salleh, up to 1903, the state was 'divided into several informal but recognized districts, held in fief by chiefs or Dato's who were in most cases members of the royal family'.⁽²¹¹⁾ In Trengganu the majority of chiefs were either relatives of the Sultan or otherwise closely connected to him. According to Allen, in Trengganu by 1909 '[O]nly three rivers were clearly in the hands of chiefs who were not either closely related to His Highness [i.e. the Sultan] or owing their position to him.'⁽²¹²⁾

It is important, however, not to overstate the degree of centralization and certainly political stability in the NMS prior to 1909. In Kedah there was, as we have seen, a strong degree of central control in the state from 1842 to the later decades of the nineteenth century. By the 1890s however the state, that is to say the Sultan, was experiencing severe financial difficulties and by 1904 the state was close to bankruptcy.⁽²¹³⁾ The Sultan was forced, in 1906, to take out a loan from the Siamese and the conditions attached to the loan - principally the institution of a state council - robbed the Sultan of any real power in the state though he

209 Certainly this was the case on Roff's definition of waris negeri. See Chapter 2 above.

210 Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.134.

211 Salleh, "Kelantan in Transition", p.44.

212 J. de V. Allen, "The Ancien Regime in Trengganu, 1909-1919", JMBRAS, 41, i, (1986) p.37. My parenthesis.

213 Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.121-122.

remained symbolic head of state.⁽²¹⁴⁾

In Kelantan, although an economic basis for the centralization of power now existed, it was not as we have seen achieved in any durable form until Graham's regime took the reigns of power in 1902. In Kelantan, the geophysical features of the state tended to limit the access to wealth and therefore a wider sweep of political power at the capital. Kessler explains that Kelantan contained an open cultivable plain between the jungle and the sea 'not all of whose densely populated district's were directly linked by river to the capital'.⁽²¹⁵⁾ Thus the resources of these districts were not easily accessible to the capital and a strong measure of economic and political independence was enjoyed by them. Kelantanese politics was, then, in the nineteenth century, 'fundamentally unstable'.⁽²¹⁶⁾ Still, political conflict in Kelantan had the effect of further strengthening, not weakening, the tendency towards centralization in the state. In 1839 Kelantan experienced major political conflict in the Kelantan Civil War. Kessler points out that in this conflict 'the protagonists did not fight each for his own share of power in the state, to be enjoyed if necessary through regional succession, but for control of Kota Bharu and through it of large acres of the coastal plain.'⁽²¹⁷⁾ In the 1890s the state was wracked with political conflict in the form of succession disputes until the imposition of Graham's regime. Graham restored the Sultan to a position of supremacy over the wider aristocratic elite.⁽²¹⁸⁾

In Trengganu, too, the geophysical features of the state militated against the centralization of political power across the whole state. Sutherland records that the Besut and Kemaman rivers were relatively isolated from the capital by distance and that Ulu (up river)

214 Ibid., pp.126, 195.

215 Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.37.

216 Ibid., p.39.

217 Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.41.

218 Ibid., p.50.

Trengganu was cut off from the capital by rapids.⁽²¹⁹⁾ In these areas therefore productive wealth was not easily accessible to the capital. The human and material resources of the remaining areas - the bulk of the state - were accessible and were under the sway of what Sutherland refers to as the central elite - the elite controlling the central area of Trengganu. Here again as with Kelantan and Kedah, intra-elite conflict for power was contained within a strong centralizing tendency. Sutherland points out that the centralizing modernizing tendency in the state in the decades spanning the turn of the nineteenth century was largely a response to the threat posed to their power by the increasing British presence on the peninsular.⁽²²⁰⁾ Thus, although Baginda Omar's successor, Zainal Abidin, exercised much less personal power than his predecessor, he presided over a centralizing tendency in the methods of state surplus extraction and the exercise of political power.⁽²²¹⁾

Trengganu, by all accounts, suffered a chaotic administration at the local level and this indicates the failure of individuals within the elite to maintain control. This situation seems to have developed with the demise of Baginda Omar's strong personal control and the eventual accession of the much weaker Zainal Abidin. Various members of the Trengganu elite, formerly under the strong control of Baginda Omar, were able to parcel out the districts amongst themselves. The sources indicate that these districts were badly administered and the exploitation of their raayat ruthless.⁽²²²⁾

Baginda Omar's reign had left Trengganu without effective leadership at the local level. Baginda Omar undercut the economic basis of support of chiefs and penghulus by diverting surplus into his own hands - something that he was able to do, as we have seen, because a greater amount of surplus was becoming available in indirect forms in the changing

219 Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", p.42.

220 Ibid., pp.48-49.

221 Baginda Omar's immediate successor was Sultan Ahmad II, but he ruled for a relatively short period of time (1876-1881) and 'had little time to make an impression on the state'.

Ibid., p.43.

222 Sheppard, "Short History", p.38.

colonial circumstances in Trengganu.⁽²²³⁾ But nonetheless, as with all states in the north, the system itself was changing in the direction of a strong centralized control on the basis of new forms of surplus even if individual rulers failed to match this tendency in the exercise of their personal control.

To sum up the position on the changing nature of political power in the four states in the closing decades of the nineteenth century we can see how colonial economic changes in these areas meant that an unprecedented concentration of power was now possible. The economic changes meant that the wealth needed by the elite to rule existed in a form - revenue - which was more accessible and which could be obtained by methods which were more manageable.

Siamese Expansion into North Malaya in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century also saw an increasing Siamese presence in the NMS. Given the new opportunities for wealth being created by the presence of new colonial markets there it is hardly surprising that Siamese power holders who, as we have seen, had sought a share of NMS wealth for themselves, should have intensified their presence in, and their exploitation of, the area. The aim of further exploiting the potential wealth of north Malaya in the changing colonial circumstances of the times led to direct Siamese intervention in the affairs of Kedah, including the Perlis district of Kedah, in 1821 as we have seen. The Siamese

223 Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp.37-38.

Hill, Rice, p.68.

Allen claims that there was an absence of penghulus in the state altogether. According to Allen penghulus had been abolished in the state 'sometime before Zainal Abidin's accession... "because the people of the state were hostile to him".'

Allen, "Ancien Regime", pp.31, 40.

Allen's statements hardly amount to a convincing explanation of what he sees as a complete absence of penghulus in the state. Sheppard, however, referring to the same period of time, does speak of 'local headmen'.

Sheppard, Short History, p.38.

The point to stress here is that whether penghulus had some formal existence or not they were not exercising any real local power for the reason stated in the text above.

derived considerable economic benefit from the State throughout the period.⁽²²⁴⁾ Between 1821 and 1842 Siam exercised a strong influence in the state in a way which had the effect of pressuring and invoking the opposition of the raayat on whom the principal burden of meeting Siamese demands fell and of the Kedah Malay elite who were reluctant to share the productive wealth under their control.

In general, Siamese exploitation in the NMS provoked resistance from both their raayat and Malay elite. Thus the class interests of rulers and ruled coincided in the NMS viz-a-viz the Siamese presence at a time when Britain was becoming increasingly involved there. According to Mohamed B. Nik Mohd. Salleh: `...it is undeniable that the Malay rulers, and the majority of Malays in the states concerned who had dealings with Siam, had found Siamese control somewhat repugnant, and had they been given a free choice, would have preferred British rule.²²⁵ Siamese pressure in north Malaya had the effect then of drawing the NMS Malays towards the British to whom they turned for assistance against their oppressors. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Siamese, faced with the increasing difficulty of controlling north Malaya entered into negotiations with the British for the cession of those states to Britain and in 1909 the Anglo- Siamese Treaty transferring the NMS to Britain took effect.

Throughout the nineteenth century the Siamese continued to exploit the four states in the manner described in chapter II above.²²⁶ In Kedah the exploitation of raayat labour was manifestly causing hardship and the Sultan corresponded with the Governor-General of India, Lord Minto, asking for help.⁽²²⁷⁾ The identity of elite and raayat interests under Siamese domination in that state can be seen from the fact that the Sultan framed his appeal to the Governor-General partly on the basis of raayat hardship caused by Siamese exactions: `[A]ll

224 In 1841, Burney noted, 'I found, that the Siamese were deriving a large profit from the occupation of Queda,...'

Burney to Maingay, 28 May, 1841, printed letter labelled 'relations with Kedah', "Burney Papers", Royal Commonwealth Society Library, London, p.3.

²²⁵ Mohamed B. Nik Mohd Salleh, "Kelantan in Transition", p. 56.

²²⁶ Bearing in mind, until 1841 or 1842, it was three states. See above in this chapter.

²²⁷ Bonney, Kedah, p.122-123.

the Ryots [ie rayaat] and People are much distressed by the labours necessarily imposed to avert the resentment of Siam, and every exertion on my part has been made to prevent coming to a rupture with that power...⁽²²⁸⁾

Both the Kedah Malay elite and the raayat resisted the occupation. As we have seen during the Siamese occupation of Kedah between 1821 and 1842 very large numbers of raayat resisted Siamese exploitation of their labour in a classic flight to other areas of the peninsular and in particular Prince of Wales Island and Province Wellesley. While the strength of this exodus and its effect on the Kedah trade economy remains inconclusive in the sources it is clear, as we have seen, that the effect of the invasion must have been substantial, at least in the short run, and must therefore have significantly undermined the economic gains available to the Siamese for some period of time yet to be more accurately determined in the scholarship.²²⁹ At the same time the Siamese had to contend with the Kedah elite plotting and manoeuvring towards the removal of the Siamese occupation of their state.⁽²³⁰⁾

From the Siamese point of view the occupation of Kedah was found to be self defeating. Faced with a situation where the energy spent on occupation was not justified by the economic benefit received the Siamese, in 1842, withdrew. Ahmat comments on the fact that the Siamese learnt that 'direct involvement in the internal affairs of Kedah would only bring about Malay resistance and this would be too costly to put down unless they obtained help from the British'.⁽²³¹⁾

From 1842, however, having withdrawn from a direct occupation of Kedah, the

228 Ibid., p.123.

Bearing in mind that the Kedah elite was divided in their relations with Siam in that one section of the elite - Tunku Bisnu, the son of the sultan, and his supporters - were seeking Siamese assistance to oust the Sultan from the throne in favour of the accession of Tunku Bisnu. This must be seen as a pragmatic move in which Tunku Bisnu sought to use Siam for his own ends and can not be construed as a willingness to submit to Siamese exploitation.

²²⁹ See above in this chapter for a discussion of the exodus.

230 Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp.22-23.

231 Ibid., p.24.

Siamese continued to exercise a suzerainty over the NMS with a view to extracting as much economic benefit for themselves as possible without actually occupying any of the states. Kynnersly reported in 1901 a remark by Maxwell which can serve to illustrate Siamese objectives in North Malaya: 'Mr. Maxwell remarks further that these states [i.e. the Siamese Malay States] all suffer from being regarded in Bangkok not as provinces to be developed but as mere sources of revenue to be spent at the capital.'⁽²³²⁾

The principal form of regular tribute rendered by the NMS continued to be the bunga emas. The sources give a good idea of the substantial value of the tribute in the nineteenth century and because, as we have seen, the tribute was the embodiment of raayat labour in one form or another the value of the bunga emas can serve to give some idea of the degree of Siamese exploitation of raayat labour in the four states. The sources vary in their assessment of the value of bunga emas. Kynnersly's report of 1901 gives Maxwell's assessment that 'sixty percent of the revenue [of the Siamese Malay states]...goes to Bangkok.'⁽²³³⁾ Other writers however suggest that the net value of the bunga emas was much less than this. Attention is drawn to the fact that Siam made a return gift to the vassal state which, at least in part, offset the expense of the original tribute. Writing in 1827 Burney claimed that the return gift more than cancelled the value of the tribute: 'The expense, although it is sometimes enhanced by the addition of a sum of money and rich clothes, forms no object for consideration as the return made by the superior state in presents is always of much greater amount.'⁽²³⁴⁾ On the other hand Skeat reporting on 31 December, 1899 on this exchange between Siam and the vassal state indicated 'a fairly considerable difference in the values of the two "gifts".'⁽²³⁵⁾

232 C.W.S.Kynnersly, "Notes on a Tour through the Siamese States on the West Coast of the Malay Peninsular, 1900", JSBRAS, No. 36, (1901),p.63.

233 Ibid. p.63.

234 "Burney Papers", Vol. II, Part V, p.118.

235 Skeat and Laidlaw, "Cambridge Expedition", p.133.

More specifically, Skeat indicates that the cost of the bunga emas to Perlis at this time was in part defrayed by the return of cloth. Skeat states that 'two Kayu (=80 cubits) of kain twit were given to each of the chiefs who carried up the bunga mas'.

Ibid., p.137.

Cash estimates of the value of the bunga emas given in the sources give a more specific idea of the economic benefit of the tribute to the Siamese. Burney, writing in 1827 of the practice of rendering the tribute among the Indo Chinese nations generally, estimates the value of the bunga emas as not exceeding 1000 Spanish dollars not including any 'extra' gifts in the form of money and rich clothes.⁽²³⁶⁾ According to Bonney the bunga emas was valued at between 800 and 1000 Spanish dollars in Kedah in 1814.⁽²³⁷⁾ Skeat reported that the total value of the bunga emas sent to Siam from Setul district in Kedah around the turn of the nineteenth century was about \$1500.⁽²³⁸⁾ Skeat indicated in the same report that the value of the bunga emas sent by Perlis in 1900 was \$2000.⁽²³⁹⁾ Most commentators therefore put the value of the bunga emas as between 500 and 2000 Spanish dollars. The bunga emas thus represented a small but significant proportion - certainly not generally as high as 60 per cent - of the wealth generated at the base of the four state economies.⁽²⁴⁰⁾

236 "Burney Papers", II, V, (1912), p.118.

237 Bonney, Kedah, p.11.

238 Skeat and Laidlaw, "Cambridge Expedition", p.132.

I am assuming here that the estimate here is made in the same currency referred to by Bonney and Burney above.

Gullick does not refer to Spanish dollars but points out that, 'the Mexican dollar was, in the nineteenth century...the currency of the British - administered Straits Settlements.'

Gullick, Indigenous Political Systems, p.20.

I am assuming therefore that Mexican and Spanish dollars are one and the same currency.

239 Skeat and Laidlaw, "Cambridge Expedition", p.137.

See below for a breakdown of the composition of the tribute from Perlis at this time.

240 For example, Skeat gives a figure of \$27,000 as the total annual revenue of Perlis around the turn of the nineteenth century. Given that the value of the bunga emas was \$2000 for the same year it will be seen that the bunga emas represented much less than 60 per cent of Perlis revenue for that year.

Ibid., pp.132, 136.

It is interesting to note that amongst the earliest systematic taxes levied on the raayat in the NMS were those aimed at providing the bunga emas. It was then in this way that the Siamese were, through the agency of the Malay elite in each state, able to increase their wealth on the basis of the new colonial methods of surplus extraction. It is in the use of these new methods that we can see how a new more constant and systematic pressure was being imposed not only on the raayat but also on the northern Malay elite as well in a way which invoked as we have seen, the opposition of both groups to Siamese dominance and the eventual withdrawal of Siamese suzerainty from the area.

Skeat gives a full account of the composition of the bunga emas and the way in which it was raised in Perlis around the turn of the nineteenth century:

The Bunga Mas at Perlis was made up of 12 bungkal (=bunkal) of gold (Penang wc), and 25 dollars weight of silver. There were two trees, one of gold and the other of silver, with their combined cost coming to about \$1500: to this had to be added some \$500 for presents to the Siamese chiefs, making a total expenditure of about \$2000. Rice swamp (sawah) holders paid \$1 each, women as well as men, but only married units were taxed, not bachelors. About 2000 people paid this tax and the Raja made up the deficiency.⁽²⁴¹⁾

In reading Skeat's statement here we need to remember that the short fall in the Bunga Emas payment made up by the Raja, while an imposition on him, still represented wealth created ultimately by labour under the Raja's control.

Bonney points out that in Kedah, in the decades spanning the turn of the eighteenth century, the bunga emas was raised at the base level of that society:

It was generally raised in Kedah by a hasil repai (poll-tax) which would have the logical effect of keeping alive the population's awareness of Siamese overlordship.⁽²⁴²⁾

Bonney's account thus hints at the sustained pressure on the Kedah raayat to labour in the maintenance of the Siamese tribute and overlordship.

In Kelantan, too, it was the case, as Kessler points out, that to pay the bunga emas the ruler 'depended upon the chiefs to collect the poll tax from the rural peasantry' in the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁽²⁴³⁾ In Kelantan, as we have seen above in this chapter,

241 Ibid, p.137.

242 Bonney, Kedah, p.11.

243 Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.43.

every male paid \$1.00 every three years. And Sheppard reports that, late in the nineteenth century in Trengganu, 'the poll tax on one dollar per head was imposed by the Sultan on every circumcized male in three years to defray the expenses connected with the sending of the "bunga mas" to Siam.'⁽²⁴⁴⁾

What is clear then, in the nineteenth century, is that the Siamese were starting to capitalize on the changing colonial circumstances in north Malaya and the new opportunities for regular exploitation as their influence in pressuring the northern Malay elite into the imposition of taxes to pay for the bunga emas in all states shows. Certainly in Trengganu and Perlis surplus was extracted in the form of cash to pay for the tribute and it seems likely that in all the northern states, as a cash economy was becoming more developed at the raayat level towards the end of the nineteenth century, cash taxes, or taxes having a cash value, were levied to pay for the tribute.

In Kelantan it appears that the Siamese influenced the entire process of state surplus extraction at the local level to their own end in a more direct sense than appears to have been the case in Kedah, Perlis and Trengganu. According to Kessler, in Kelantan the Siamese provided 'both the model and the impetus' for Muhammad II's territorial administration, 'one of whose major tasks was to collect poll taxes for triennial tribute payments (bunga mas) to Bangkok'.⁽²⁴⁵⁾ Kessler continues: 'Taxes were collected, after the Siamese pattern, through village heads (nebeng) acting under "circle" heads (tok kweng) answerable to district chiefs'.⁽²⁴⁶⁾

Clearly, then, in addition to the plunder of goods and services in the NMS the

244 Sheppard, Short History, p.46.

245 Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.42.

246 Ibid.

Saripan outlines local administration in Kelantan in these terms: 'While the task of decision-making was left in the hands of the ruling elite, the administration at the daerah level was responsibility of the Tok Kweng. The institution of Kweng was first introduced during he reign of Muhammad II. Tok Kweng was the title given to a headman of a group of villagers, usually larger than a mukim...'

Saripan, "Salient Features", pp. 9,10.

Siamese had, in the nineteenth century, sought to extract labour from the NMS raayat on the basis of new methods of surplus extraction - principally taxation. This exploitation had, however, proved increasingly self defeating since it invoked the opposition of the northern Malay elite and raayat alike. The popular opposition to siamese rule had shown most spectacularly in Kedah where there was a flight of a significant, though in the sources indefinite, number of Kedah Malays beyond the reach of siamese exploitation. Repeated elite-led resistance to Siamese rule in Kedah eventually led to the withdrawal of the Siamese occupation of Kedah in 1842. Siam experienced difficulty exercising control over the other northern states on the peninsular where the rulers, anxious to exploit raayat labour exclusively in support of their own position of economic and political power, had repeatedly resisted Siamese rule.⁽²⁴⁷⁾ Trengganu, the most distant of the northern states from Siam, had always been beyond the reach of any strong control from Siam.⁽²⁴⁸⁾ As these difficulties in controlling the southern most areas of the Siamese empire increased the British were becoming increasingly interested in securing a foothold in north Malay in order to protect their economic interests in the central and southern states. By 1909 therefore the Siamese were predisposed to hand over their suzerainty of north Malaya to the British and the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 to that effect was duly ratified and implemented.⁽²⁴⁹⁾

Mohamed B. Nik Mohd Salleh outlines the factors which induced the British Government to enter into the Treaty and it is important to state them here since they show the broader objective of the British in setting about exercising a degree of indirect control over the four states from 1909 onwards. According to Salleh:

...the transfer of the Siamese Malay states to Britain would advance the British sphere of influence in the peninsular. Secondly, the treaty would also safeguard British naval interests in Malayan waters for the Siamese Government was prepared to guarantee not to cede or lease, directly or indirectly, any territory situated in the peninsular south of the southern boundary of the province of Rajaburi, or in any of the islands adjacent to the above - mentioned region...Another consideration was the desire of British subjects in Siam to

247 Mohamed B. Nik Salleh, "Kelantan", p.52.

248 Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp.35-36.

249 Ibid., pp.50-59.

acquire the right to hold land in the country - a right already acquired by French subjects under the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1907. Furthermore, in the eyes of Straits and other commercial interests, the new territory gained by Britain could naturally enlarge the field for British trade and economic enterprise in the Malay peninsular.⁽²⁵⁰⁾

Clearly then from 1909 onwards the British suzerainty over north Malaya was to be the umbrella under which even stronger penetration of the colonial economy than had been the case in the preceding century would take place.

Conclusion

To sum up then it will be seen that the effect of the penetration of colonial economic influences in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been to set in train a fundamental alteration in NMS society well before a formal colonial presence in the area was introduced by the Anglo Siamese Treaty of 1909. Clearly the tendency in the sources to characterize the colonial period as beginning in 1909 is misleading.

It was the activities of traders and their effect on the productive process which was crucial in setting in motion the changes to the NMS economy and society and which initiated the social transformation of the four states.

Within the period this colonial trading activity stimulated changes to the way in which surplus was extracted. The economic changes that came with the expansion of colonial trade had important and far reaching social effects. These changes involved significant alterations to the social relations of groups and individuals as these sought to secure wealth for themselves in order to meet their subsistence needs, and beyond this, in the case of the elite, in support of their elevated position in society.

Crucial to these changes in social relations were the changes taking place to the way surplus was extracted. By 1909 the northern Malay elite was achieving a degree of centralized power on the basis of raayat surplus now being extracted more systematically in different forms. At the same time the spread of the cash economy under the stimulus of the colonial market saw a group of middlemen - traders, revenue farmers, usurers, shop keepers and the like - becoming established as intermediary exploiters of raayat surplus increasingly in the

250 Salleh, "Kelantan in Transition", pp.52-53.

form of cash and on the basis of cash values.

In all this it was the traditional Malay elite which remained dominant. This elite dominated within an increasingly centralized state structure. This maintenance of political power by the traditional Malay elite in the north contrasts strongly with the loss of power by the Malay elite in the central and southern states under formal colonial rule within our period. Unlike the situation that was coming to prevail in the southern and central states of the peninsular where the economic basis of power was becoming increasingly free immigrant labour in the tin industry, and where the Malay elite had been increasingly separated from this economic basis of power until by the 1880s Malay rule had been broken and replaced by British rule, in the NMS, by contrast, the Malay elite was firmly established on a basis of raayat surplus extracted by modern methods and were, in 1909, exercising a degree of real power that presented certain problems for the British to be outlined in the next chapter.

The increasing commercialization and commoditization of the NMS economy, then, introduced new class relations and class tensions into the area. The new methods of surplus extraction were closely tied in with the changes to land tenure that were occurring in the period. Land occupancy was becoming formalized and was becoming the basis on which some surplus was extracted. Some peasants were becoming separated from the land and landlordism and tenancy were becoming features of NMS society - something which, by the early decades of this century, had the effect of adding to class tensions in the four states as we shall see. There was emerging by 1909 then - it was still in its early stages in that year - a situation where an emergent group of commercial middlemen and landlords were putting increasing pressure on the raayat for a portion of their productive labour while at the same time the new and centralized state run by the traditional elite was coming increasingly to rely on raayat surplus in the form of various taxes. These tensions thus generated within the NMS colonial economy and society, while largely latent in the nineteenth century, were to become overt and visible in the twentieth century as we shall see in chapter 6 below. Before examining how these new colonial class tensions were manifesting themselves more strongly in the twentieth century in detail however, it is important to understand how the broader changes to the NMS economy and society, and to the productive and wider social relations in these areas in the nineteenth century, continued and were intensified under a formal colonial presence in north Malaya in the decades following 1909.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXPANSION OF THE COLONIAL STATE INTO NORTHERN MALAYA

1880 - 1957

The decades leading up to the formal transfer of suzerainty over Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu from Siam to Britain saw several shifts in policy in the direction of greater protection for British colonial interests on the peninsular. When the transfer came these four states ceased to belong with the wider group of Siamese Malay States as they were then known and became, together with Johore to the south, the Unfederated(British) Malay States(UMS) instead as we have seen.

1897-1909

The period saw a succession of agreements forged between Britain and Siam involving the northern peninsular states. These agreements were the specific focus for the for the gradual, cautious extension of a British Forward Policy - a policy which had previously been confined to the southern and central states on the peninsular - into the northern peninsular states as well. The most important of these agreements was the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 which clearly and unequivocally established a strong formal measure of British control in the region out of the confusing tripartite Siamese, British and local NMS influence in the northern peninsular areas. The 1909 Treaty thus marked a strong and decisive shift in British Colonial and foreign policy in the Kra and northern Malay peninsular areas and was the culmination of the series of lesser agreements shaped in the 1890s and into the opening decade of this century. The formal expression of this extended Forward Policy in the various treaties marked a gradual alteration in the policy of Whitehall away from the cautious, non-international stance they had adopted in relation to the Siamese Malay States up to the mid-eighteen nineties and a triumph for the protectionist policies that had long been advocated by the men-on-the-spot in the peninsular.⁽¹⁾

¹ Eunice Thio, "British Policy in the Malay Peninsular 1880-1909", Phd., University of London, 1956, passim. My account here of changing British policy leading up to the 1909 Treaty is heavily reliant on part II of Thio's excellent thesis on the subject.

Thio's book focussing on British Policy in the southern and central states of the peninsular and having the same main title as the thesis contains some useful references of a general nature to, or having a bearing on, British policy towards the northern Malay states as well.

British Foreign and Colonial Policy Making 1880-1909

British policy makers having an interest and involvement in the four Siamese Malay states did not then speak with one voice within the 1880-1909 period. Thus policy formulation in relation to those states arose from an interplay of conflicting policy objectives within the British imperial administrative structure in the 'Far East'. Responsibility for policy towards the four states was divided between the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office and to a much lesser extent the India Office.⁽²⁾ Within the 1880-1909 period the Colonial Office, in formulating its Malayan policy, took advice from the Governor of the Straits Settlements who was also defacto the High Commissioner for the Malay States until 1896. It also took advice occasionally from the British Residents in the four Federated Malay States, the Resident General of those states and other individuals on the spot.³ In formulating Malayan policy the Colonial Office, then, considered the advice of the individuals on the spot in Malaya together with wider colonial and imperial considerations that came to its attention. It consulted, when appropriate, with the Foreign Office. Where there was a clash between Foreign Office and Colonial Office interests it was however usually the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs who had final say.

Throughout the nearly thirty period then it was the Foreign Office, administering its policy towards the four states through Siam, which held sway over the other two policy making arms of British imperialism in the Far East. During this time it was the need to protect wider interests, especially trading and particularly Indian trading interests, which was the

Central States(Singapore, 1969).

The book is based on Part I of the thesis and promises a sequel volume dealing with British policy towards the northern Malay states (the subject matter of Part II of the thesis) though no such volume has, to my knowledge, yet appeared.

² While the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office exercised dual responsibility on questions affecting the Siamese Malay States the India Office was occasionally consulted on Malayan policy.

Thio, "British Policy", pp. 6-7.

It is important to realize that, up until 1867, the Straits were administered by the India Office. In that year responsibility for the Straits was transferred to the Colonial Office.

Thio, British Policy, p. xvii.

³ Thio, British Policy, p. xv.

dominant consideration in deciding on British priorities, objectives and actions in relation to the four Siamese Malay States. At the same time policy making for the four states was complicated by differences in opinion between the men-on-the-spot administering British interests in the region and their superiors in Whitehall. Understandably, then, while the latter, with their wider imperial and colonial concerns and their detachment from local concerns and objectives, often wanted foreign and colonial policy to move in one direction the former, with their close association and identification with local conditions, wanted this policy to move in another. Throughout the period Whitehall tended to act in the interests of India and Indian trade and out of a concern to maintain a secure trade between Britain and Siam giving, against the wishes of Straits and Federated Malay State administrators, a lesser priority to Malayan colonial considerations.⁽⁴⁾ On one particular issue - that of whether to expand the British presence to the north on the peninsular - it was in the end the British officials located in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States whose opinion and objectives in the region prevailed. This occurred only after those objectives had been vigorously and persistently argued and circumstances were auspicious for a change in Whitehall policy along these lines.

Within the Colonial Office the Secretary of State for the Colonies decided policy in consultation with his Parliamentary Under-Secretary (also a political appointment) and his senior permanent staff (the Permanent Under-Secretary who stood at the head of the permanent establishment and several Assistant Under-Secretaries each dealing with a different aspect of departmental business) on the advice tendered to him from the colonies.⁽⁵⁾ Four governors dominated the period 1880-1910 in providing that advice: Sir Frederick Wild; Sir Cecil Clementi Smith; Sir Frank Swettenham; and Sir John Anderson.⁽⁶⁾ These sought strongly to influence their superiors in the Colonial Office in London to adopt a northward

⁴ Thio, "British Policy", p.340.

In her 'Abstract' Thio makes the point that India's interests dominated British foreign policy and that this in turn conditioned Britain's policy towards the Siamese Malay States.

⁵ Thio, British Policy, p.xii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.xv.

expansionist policy during their periods in office.⁽⁷⁾ Up until 1895 the men who dominated the Colonial Office - men like Sir Robert Herbert, head of the permanent establishment from 1871 to 1892 and Sir Robert Meade who succeeded Herbert in the office in 1892 and held it until 1895 - were very cautious in response to the expansionist overtures of the men-on-the-spot in Malaya.⁽⁸⁾ The loosening of this caution then occurred from around halfway through the 1890s with the dominance of the Colonial Office of Joseph Chamberlain (Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1895), Sir Montague Ommaney (Permanent Under-Secretary from 1900-1907) and C.P. Lucas (later Sir Charles Prestwood Lucas, made the first head of the new Dominions Division in 1907).⁽⁹⁾

To a very significant extent British policy towards the four Siamese Malay States was very much a product of a concern that other European powers - particularly France and Germany - would secure a foothold on the Kra and northern Malay peninsular area in such a way as to threaten British economic, and strategic interests on the peninsular and in the 'Far Eastern' region as a whole.⁽¹⁰⁾ There was agreement on the part of both British foreign and colonial policy makers on the need to keep foreign interests on the peninsular at bay but disagreement on the means of achieving this end.⁽¹¹⁾ Initially the British Government adopted a 'watch and wait' policy in response to a danger of French intervention on the Kra peninsular. In this the Foreign Office shunned suggestions of the adoption of a Forward Policy in the northern peninsular from British colonial government officials opting for the more cautious

⁷ Ibid., pp.xv,xvi.

Thio, "British Policy", pp.500-501.

⁸ Ibid., p.xiv.

⁹ Ibid., pp.xiv, 162.

Thio, "British Policy", p.504.

¹⁰ Thio, "British Policy", p.342.

Thio points out that it was a cardinal principle of both British and colonial foreign policies that no other European power should obtain a footing in the Malay peninsular especially on the western side between Tenasserim and Province Wellesley.

¹¹ Ibid., pp.342-343.

policy instead - a policy which met with only 'hesitation and indecision among those in the upper ranks of the Colonial Office hierarchy'.⁽¹²⁾ This disinclination on the part of Whitehall to heed the exhortations of the Colonial Government for a Forward Policy in the north continued up until the last years of the last century. Straits policy in this period was based on the assumption that France would ultimately absorb Siam and that there was therefore no strong need to sacrifice the gains that would come with the adoption of a northward Forward Policy for the sake of maintaining Siamese good will and friendship towards Britain. Since a foreign European power - France - was going to absorb Siam anyway the question of whether Britain might offend Siam by expanding onto its territory was, on this view, of academic interest only. The Foreign Office did not share this assumption on French expansionism and aimed at promoting an independent Siam friendly to Britain. It was therefore against any British expansionist moves which might offend Siam.⁽¹³⁾ In the 1880s and early 1890s Whitehall intended to maintain its detachment from the northern areas on the peninsular simply monitoring events there and further north in the Kra peninsular with an eye to protecting British trading and other interests in India, on the peninsular and in the Straits. However, the course of events in that area in the two decades spanning the turn of the century caused its senior foreign and colonial policy makers in London to change their minds.

Siamese possessions on the peninsular in the 1880s were of 'two distinct classes': states where the rulers and inhabitants were of Malay origin and Malay speaking and those with a preponderance of Siamese and where the language was Siamese.⁽¹⁴⁾ It was, as we have seen, the Siamese Malay states, some more than others, that had most bearing on the British situation in Malaya. There were seven of these states altogether: the four northern ones (eventually known collectively as the NMS as we have seen) of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis; and also Patani, Reman, and Stul [i.e. Setul].⁽¹⁵⁾ British detachment from

¹² Ibid., pp.271, 504.

¹³ Ibid., pp.342-343.

¹⁴ Ralph Paget to Sir Edward Grey, 'General Report on Siam', May 27, 1907, p.6. F.O. 371/333/54186.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the northern peninsular began to break down in the closing years of the 1890s when she was drawn into negotiations affecting the Siamese Malay states and especially Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu. It was in this way that, by degrees, British influence increased in the north of the peninsular until, in 1909, Siamese suzerainty over the four abovementioned states was formally transferred to Britain.

The Anglo-Siamese Treaties of 1897 and 1899

Up to 1897 the Siamese continued to exercise a somewhat nebulous and ill-defined authority over the Siamese Malay states. The British had formally admitted to Siamese claims to Kedah in the Burney Treaty signed in Bangkok in 1826 but beyond this Siamese claims to the Malay States to the north on the peninsular had no clear de jure recognition by the British and at best de facto recognition mainly by default in the sense that they were reluctant to question Siamese claims in these states.⁽¹⁶⁾ In 1897 however, in response to French encroachments into the area, Whitehall agreed, in a unified move by both the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office to take steps to secure British and Siamese interests against European interference south of the Muong Bank Tapan basin and a Treaty between Britain and Siam to that effect was signed in 1897.⁽¹⁷⁾ The 1897 convention, as this agreement was called, was a landmark in the history of British policy in the area north of the Federated Malay States since it was generally accepted by the colonial Office and the Foreign Office alike that it committed the British Government to a policy of strengthening rather than weakening Siamese influence in the region as a bulwark against rival European encroachments on British interests in the

¹⁶ Thio, "British Policy", p.448.

According to Salleh the treaty described Kedah and Patani as provinces of Siam.

Salleh, "Kelantan", p.33.

Curiously, whereas Thio says in her thesis, that 'Kedah had been recognized as a province of Siam in the Burney Treaty of 1826 but was described as a dependency in the Anglo-Siamese Boundary Agreement of 1899', she says in her book that '[a]ccording to the treaty of 1826... Kedah was expressly recognized as a Siamese dependency'.

Thio, "British Policy", pp.473-474 and British Policy, p.xii.

Whatever the precise recognized category of status for Kedah under the treaty it is clear that there was definite recognition of Siamese suzerainty over Kedah while the recognition of Siamese claims to Kelantan and Trengganu was left ambiguous.

¹⁷ See Thio, "British Policy", pp.342-381.

area.⁽¹⁸⁾ However, while Colonial office and Foreign Office officials in Whitehall were in agreement on the move the Colonial Government felt that the convention placed an obstacle in the path of future British expansion northwards on the peninsular.⁽¹⁹⁾

The Convention of 1897 was followed two years later by another agreement which took Britain further in the direction of a Forward Policy in the north of the peninsular. This Boundary Agreement as it was called, was concluded in 1899 and was, like its 1897 predecessor, concerned with securing Siamese territory against interference by the European powers in the face of a perceived French threat in the region. Initially negotiations for this agreement centred on clarifying the border between the federated Malay state of Perak and the Siamese Malay state of Reman on its northern frontier - something which was in dispute at the time. In the course of the negotiations however, discussions ranged more widely than this and the final agreement was of more general significance than the rectification of the single border. This agreement conceded Perak about one third of her claim in upper Perak in the territorial dispute between that state and Siam and defined the rest of the boundary between Pahang, Trengganu and Kelantan. In so doing the British formally admitted for the first time that Kelantan and Trengganu were 'dependencies' of Siam.⁽²⁰⁾ The cumulative effect then of the 1826 Burney Treaty, the 1897 Convention and the Boundary Agreement was that by 1899 the British Government formally recognized Siamese supremacy north of the Federated Malay States.

Clearly then by the turn of the century Britain was no longer detached in her policy towards the Siamese Malay States on the peninsular. At the same time the two agreements in the 1890s did not see only British incursion into the area and Britain had not adopted a Forward Policy in the north at that stage even though the colonial government was in favour of this. Rather Whitehall was now inclined to take more limited and diplomatic action in the form of positive steps to shore up Siamese authority in the area in order to hold at bay European, especially French, intrusion there. The significant thing about the Anglo-Siamese

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.380-381.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.381.

²⁰ Ibid., p.381.

Treaties of 1897 and 1899 is that they represented a departure from the British Government's 'wait and see' response to European interference to the north on the peninsular. While the end of the century saw the British Government holding back on the Forward Policy being requested in the colony developments on the peninsular were to lead to a marked change in this trend in British policy.

The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1902

In 1902 in contrast with the preceding period it was the Colonial Office and no longer the Foreign Office that dictated British policy towards the Siamese Malay States.⁽²¹⁾ Since 1895 the Colonial Office had, as we have seen, been headed by expansionist officials more receptive to the colonial ambitions of the men on the spot in Malaya and much more inclined to adopt a Forward Policy in the north of the peninsular in favourable circumstances. Moreover the argument advanced against a Forward Policy in the north - that the fostering of a pro-British and otherwise independent Siam through a policy of non interference was the best way of serving British interests in the area - had lost much of its validity with the turn of events around the turn of the century.⁽²²⁾ Britain's Indian interests had been secured through a treaty with France in 1896 while the 1897 Convention had helped to keep Siam on side with Britain and disinclined to favour European competitors with concessions in the region which might threaten British economic and strategic interests in the years spanning the turn of the century.⁽²³⁾ If the Siamese could be persuaded to allow an increased British involvement on the northern peninsular it seemed that a Forward Movement into the north was possible without sacrificing the diplomatic objective of the Foreign Office of not offending and therefore alienating Siam to the detriment of the British position in India and Malaya. On the negative side it was clear by 1902 that the 1897 Convention had only been a partial success. While that convention had secured the territory south of the Muong Bank Tapan basin the fact that the Siamese had only tenuous control in Kelantan and none at all in Trengganu meant that

²¹ Ibid., p.428.

²² Ibid.

²³ The Anglo-French Declaration of 1896.

the convention had its limitations as an instrument keeping European powers that might compete with Britain out of the northern peninsular. It was clear that the Siamese were not master of their own house in the north east at a time when entrepreneurial interest in the area was increasing. It was for this reason that the Colonial Office was persuaded by the Colonial Government, and the Foreign Office came to agree, that a move to keep foreign concessionaires out of the area and to secure for British interests the same sort of facilities for trade and investment that were offered in the Federated Malay States, was needed. The British Government therefore decided to establish a presence, indirectly under the umbrella of Siamese authority, in the two states.⁽²⁴⁾

It was the application of Robert Duff for a concession in Kelantan which highlighted the ambiguous and tenuous nature of Siamese control in Kelantan and, by inference, the difficulties that the British government could expect in the future, in assisting British enterprise in both Kelantan and Trengganu, in the future. As we have seen Duff's application for a concession was less than straight forward in the confusing situation in which three governments had an ill-defined say as to whether Duff was granted the concession or not. On meeting resistance from the Foreign Office to his application Duff adopted a policy of blackmail.⁽²⁵⁾ The Foreign office view was that the October 1900 agreement concluded between Duff and the Raja of Kelantan for the concession in defiance of Siamese wishes ran against the 1899 Boundary Agreement whereby the British Government had recognized Siamese claims to suzerainty over Kelantan and Trengganu. It was for this reason that the Foreign Office initially refused to ratify the concession. Duff responded by threatening that unless the British Government protected the syndicate from Siamese interference in working the concession he would seek the help of certain foreign governments who were anxious for a footing on the Malay peninsular or alternatively dispose of their rights to a German company.⁽²⁶⁾ This threat clearly struck a nerve with Whitehall. The Foreign Office was sensitive, as we have seen, on the issue of rival European activity in the area. The British

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Salleh, "Kelantan in Transition", p.38.

²⁶ Ibid., p.38.

government was spurred on by the threat to conclude, as we have also seen, an agreement with Siam in Duff's favour. The negotiations over Duff then invoked in Whitehall the strong belief that the two agreements in the 1890s were not doing all that was needed to protect British interests in the northern peninsular area and that the independence being exercised by Kelantan and Trengganu from Siam was becoming a liability at a time when pressure was mounting from British entrepreneurial interests and the colonial government to develop the area economically. As a result the British government entered into negotiations with Siam to secure a stronger Siamese control of Kelantan and Trengganu and, by proxy in the name of Siamese authority, a greater security for British interests in the two states. Sir Frank Swettenham who was Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Malay states, was at the forefront of expansionism at this time, and was engaged in persuading London of the advisability of a further forward movement to the north on the peninsular.⁽²⁷⁾ He argued a deteriorating political situation in the northern states especially Kelantan stating that other European intervention, by Germany or the United States, was imminent.⁽²⁸⁾ Swettenham put forward proposals to London for an arrangement between Britain and Siam whereby Britain would enjoy some degree of control over Kelantan and Trengganu while they remained nominally under the aegis of Siam.⁽²⁹⁾ These proposals were accepted by the British Government and negotiations were commenced with Siam to put them into effect. The end result of these negotiations was the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1902. The Treaty took the form of a joint declaration on Kelantan and Trengganu and an agreement between Britain and Siam whereby the Rajas of Kelantan and Trengganu were to accept Siamese control in their foreign relations and a strong measure of British control over their internal administration in the name of Siam.⁽³⁰⁾ The joint declaration was framed in very general terms and was clearly aimed at

²⁷ Ibid., p.40

²⁸ Ibid., p.40.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Thio, "British Policy", p.456.

further regularizing the relations between the Siamese Malay States, Siam and Britain.⁽³¹⁾ It is clear that the joint declaration was designed to re-assert the basic principle of non-rival European interference in the affairs of the Siamese Malay States established in the 1890s treaties.⁽³²⁾ At the same time the agreement of that year broke new ground in seeking the establishment for the first time, in an indirect formal sense, of a British presence in the two states. By the terms of the agreement the Rajas of Kelantan and Trengganu were to accept Siamese control in their foreign relations.⁽³³⁾ A key element in the agreement was the provision for the appointment of Advisers to the two states by Siam whose advice was to be followed 'in all matters of administration other than those touching the Mohammedan religion and Malay custom.'⁽³⁴⁾ Confidential annexes to the agreement and joint declaration provided that the official appointed as Adviser and Assistant Adviser to the Rajas should be of British nationality.⁽³⁵⁾

While the Treaty of 1902 took Britain some of the way forward in achieving its aims in the Siamese Malay States those objectives were much less than fully realized in that year. While Kelantan became party to the Anglo-Siamese proposed arrangements for the two states, Trengganu refused to comply and remained outside the agreement. In addition while the British had, in the secret negotiations annexed to the declaration and agreement, sought to have its own nominees appointed to the two states as Adviser and Assistant Adviser, the Siamese demurred on this insisting that they should say which nominee of British nationality should represent their interests in the two posts in Kelantan and Trengganu.⁽³⁶⁾

³¹ Paget to Grey, 'General Report', May 27, 1907, p.6.

³² Thio, "British Policy" p.456.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p.457.

³⁵ Ibid., pp.457-458.

³⁶ Ibid., pp.457-459, 463-464.

The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909

The transfer of Perlis, Kedah Kelantan and Trengganu from Siam to Britain in 1909 marked the culmination of the British Forward Policy in Malaya initiated and applied to the south in 1874 and pursued by successive Governors and other officials on the peninsular throughout the decades 1880-1909.

Although Whitehall was, by 1902, disposed to move further forward on the peninsular it maintained its reservations on being too direct and obvious in seeking to secure the protection of its economic, diplomatic, strategic and political objectives on the peninsular. It was the turn of the peninsular events in the area which overcame these reservations and saw the establishment in an open and direct way of a British presence in the four states.

From the British point of view there were several factors operating in the early years of the first decade of this century beyond 1902 which prompted the British Government in the direction of a more comprehensive treaty with the Siamese and one which would allow them a much stronger and unambiguous role in the protection of their interests in the northern parts of the peninsular. There was continued pressure on Whitehall from official and commercial circles on the peninsular after 1902.⁽³⁷⁾ A continued anxiety over German and American competition in the area also inclined Whitehall towards a policy which would secure the British a much more secure footing in the peninsular than was the case up to 1902.⁽³⁸⁾ In 1907, Ralph Paget, the British Foreign Office representative in Bangkok, cautioned Whitehall in a general report on the situation in the Siamese Malay States:

Foreigners, especially Germans, are making more constant and increasing demands for land in the Siamese Malay states, and the difficulties surrounding the question are consequently also increasing. The arrangement which is now in contemplation vesting greater authority in His Majesty's Representative in Bangkok regarding the sanction of concessions will certainly expedite matters and afford a certain amount of relief, but it scarcely presents an entirely satisfactory solution.⁽³⁹⁾

³⁷ Ibid., p.466.

³⁸ Ibid., p.467.

³⁹ Paget to Grey, 'General Report', May 27, 1907, p.6.

Clearly in this report Paget was indicating to his superiors in the Foreign Office in Whitehall that he thought half measures would produce only a temporary solution to the problem of German rivalry for influence in the Siamese Malay States. In the years leading up to 1909 the Foreign Office kept a close eye on concessions being requested in the Siamese Malay States, acutely conscious that their German and American rivals might seek to extend their influence into the area by subterfuge, through such applications. In 1906, W.R.D. Beckett a British consular official in Bangkok recorded his reservations on one such transaction in confidential Foreign Office correspondence:

With reference to our conversation... on the subject of the transfer to Europeans of other nationalities of land in the peninsular purchased by British subjects, the case in point is one brought to my notice by Mr. Frost. It appears that several large tracts of land in Kedah, probably amounting to 20,000 acres, have been bought, or are in the process of being bought, in the name of one of the Chinese clerks in the office of M. Katinkampf, the German Consul in Penang, who is also the local Manager of Behn, Meyer, and Co. This clerk is a British subject, but there are clear evidences that he is being financed by Behn, Meyer, and co., a German firm...

This case emphasizes, in my opinion, the importance of a very strict watch being kept on all transfers of land by British subjects or Siamese subjects to subjects of a third Power. Otherwise the whole object of the 1897 Convention is defeated.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Similarly the Foreign Office correspondence of the immediate pre 1909 years reveals an anxiety that American investment was finding its way into the Siamese Malay States in the name of Danish enterprise contrary to the 1897 Convention.⁽⁴¹⁾

At the same time as a German and American threat - or at least a perceived threat - was increasing in the area the French threat that had figured so prominently in Britain's Siamese foreign policy deliberations in the eighties and nineties was further diminishing - something which helped to draw the British in the direction of a stronger Forward Policy initiative towards the end of the first decade of this century. In 1904 Britain and France concluded a treaty of friendship - the Entente Cordiale - and this meant that the anxiety of the British Government that any moves by them into the northern peninsular might invoke French or Siamese hostility and therefore a threat to their interests, especially their trading interest in

⁴⁰ Beckett to Westengard, 28 December, 1806. F.O. 371/332 xc/A/54713.

⁴¹ Minute signed 'R.B.' 3 April, 1907, FO. 371/332/ xc/A/54713.

the area was very much lessened.⁽⁴²⁾ In 1907 the French and Siamese concluded a treaty between themselves and since this served to settle French ambitions in the area the British had even less to fear from French rivalry in the area.⁽⁴³⁾

The internal situation in the northern Malay states, too, was causing Britain concern in the years leading up to 1909. Trengganu had in 1902 as we have seen refused to be party to the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of that year. The Sultan of Trengganu continued, in the years following 1902, to cling tenaciously to his autonomy allowing the British little or no influence to protect their interest in that state.⁽⁴⁴⁾ In Kedah where Siamese claims to suzerainty were less ambiguous and where the situation for the British on that score was less problematic, there were serious problems of internal administration which did threaten British interests there and which achieved only partial remedy in the years preceding 1909. It was due in large measure to the internal mismanagement of the Kedah economy that the state was by 1904 as we have seen, close to bankruptcy.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The Siamese came to the rescue of Kedah's sick economy by advancing the state a very substantial loan with conditions attached. One of those conditions was that Kedah had to accept a Financial Adviser who would assist in the ordering of Kedah's finances for the duration of the period of the loan.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The purpose of the Adviser, whose advice was to be followed in all state financial matters, was to help ensure that the loan was repaid and that the circumstances of financial decline which made the loan necessary did not recur.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Kedah had no choice but to accept the loan and the Adviser but the arrangement

⁴² By the terms of the Entente both France and Britain entered into mutual agreement to respect each others interests in their respective spheres of influence in the area.

Thio, "British Policy", p.471.

⁴³ Thio outlines the terms of the treaty in her thesis. Ibid., p.472.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.473.

⁴⁵ Ahmat, "Transition and Change", pp.81-126.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.125-126.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.125.

was, from the time of the signing of the Loan Agreement in June 1905 and the appointment of a Financial Adviser which came with it, problematic for the British, the Siamese and the Kedah administration. The main area of confusion and a bone of contention between the three authorities involved, focussed on the issue of where the line was to be drawn between financial advice and advice on more general matters of state. There was a strong feeling within the Kedah ruling class that the Siamese Adviser operating in the state was overstepping his brief and intruding upon matters of state which were more properly the province of the Sultan and his administration. Perlis, too, had taken out a Siamese loan under similar conditions to that of the Kedah loan and there was dissatisfaction on the part of British authorities in Malaya with the way in which the Financial Advisers in both states were carrying out their duties.⁽⁴⁸⁾

In Kelantan and Trengganu too, the advisory system that the British were seeking to implement in the four states was in difficulty in the years following 1902. In Kelantan there was friction between Graham and Duff and there was a feeling within the Foreign Office that Graham as Siamese Adviser was not conducting himself in that office in a manner conducive to British interests in the state. Part of the problem from the British point of view was that they had no clear and direct authority to intervene on their own behalf in the state since they were restrained by the 1897 convention from doing so. On top of this they were forced to act on their own behalf in the state by proxy through Siamese authority under the terms of the 1902 Treaty. Still, at least in Kelantan the British had some influence. In Trengganu, while in theory the British had influence through the operation of the advisory system, in practice it was very different. Whereas in Kelantan the British Government could exercise limited influence in protection of their interests in Trengganu they had, as we have seen, little or no influence since the Trengganu Sultan refused to be party to the 1902 Treaty and there was no advisory system in operation in that state.

A primary consideration for the British in their policy planning for the northern peninsular region continued to be the need to facilitate the introduction and operation of British commercial enterprise in that area. As we have seen with the Duff application such

⁴⁸ Thio, "British Policy", p.475.

commercial enterprise suffered in that there was no one state authority exercising jurisdiction over these matters. Rather, a confusing situation existed whereby entrepreneurs had to deal with Siamese, British and northern Malay State authorities each having an ill-defined say in whether enterprise should be allowed to enter the area and how it could operate once it was there. Thus when Clunis Ross sought a concession in Kelantan in 1903 he too found himself caught up in confusing negotiations with the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the Siamese and the Raja of Kelantan.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The concession was originally granted by the Sultan of Kelantan in 1903 but when he sought Siamese ratification of the concession this was rejected by the Siamese ruler Prince Devawongse.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Ralph Paget, the British Foreign Office representative in Bangkok, was involved in the negotiations and took the view that Graham, the Siamese Adviser in Kelantan, was behind the Siamese rejection of the concession.⁽⁵¹⁾ By 1905 the negotiations were still continuing and Ross sought British Government intervention to enforce the ratification of the concession, something the British Government refused to do.⁽⁵²⁾ In 1907 Ross abandoned his bid for the concession.⁽⁵³⁾

By 1907 it is clear that British authorities felt that an acute situation was developing to the north on the peninsular and they began looking for a more satisfactory arrangement which would satisfy their interests there. In Kedah in that year Tunku Mahmud became the new ruler of the state on the death of the Raja Muda and took the line with the British that the Adviser under the late Raja had exceeded his brief, had gone well beyond the function of a Financial Adviser.⁽⁵⁴⁾ It is clear that there was resistance to the strengthening of British and Siamese influence within Kedah through the Advisory system in operation there - a resistance

⁴⁹ 'Memorandum respecting Mr. R. Ross Clunis' Concession in Kelantan'. F.O. 371/333/54186.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁵³ Clunis Ross to Campbell, 16 December, 1907. FO. 371/333/54186.

⁵⁴ Meadows Frost to Beckett, 26 August, 1907. FO. 371/332/xc/A/54713.

which invoked a more determined response within British officialdom in the direction of formally widening the powers of the Financial Adviser in that state. In September 1907 Beckett wrote on the subject:

It is true, doubtless, that in theory Tunku Mahmud's contention is strictly correct,... that the only change made by Siam, with our consent, in the existing Administration of Kedah [ie by the terms of the Loan Agreement] was 'the appointment of a Financial Adviser until the repayment of the loan,...' But since it is equally clear... that Tunku Mahmud's object in raising this question is to shake off all foreign interference, whether British or Siamese, it is, I submit, manifestly to the interest of Kedah, as well as of neighbouring British territory that the British Adviser to the Sultan should be something more than a Financial Adviser, and hold some authority to insist that his advice is respected.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Still, while believing in the need for wider powers for the Kedah Financial Adviser Beckett was at the same time aware of the constraints on the effectiveness of such a move imposed by the inadequacy of the wider arrangements whereby the British exercised indirect influence in the Siamese Malay States - constraints illustrated by the situation in Kelantan where there was a general Adviser. In the same year he wrote:

The problem which presents itself therefore appears... to be how to reconcile the exercise of wider authority and powers by the Adviser with the non-interference engagements of the Siamese Government, especially when, as in Kelantan, those powers are exercised in a manner detrimental to important British interests and are dominated and controlled by the Minister of the Interior at Bangkok.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Clearly there was a strong feeling at the time that Kelantan was illustrative of the general difficulty of running an advisory system in the north. At the time Paget expressed the view that Graham's tenure as Advisor at that time '[could] not ... be termed an unqualified success' particularly in that he had failed to properly support Duff in his enterprise in the state.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The Foreign Office would have liked to intervene in this situation but was prohibited from doing so by the 1897 Convention.

⁵⁵ Beckett to Grey, 28 September, 1907. FO. 371/332/xc/A/54713.

⁵⁶ Beckett to Grey, 28 September, 1907. FO. 371/332/xc/A/54713.

⁵⁷ Paget to Grey, 'General Report', May 27, 1907, p.7. FO. 371/333/54186.

It is clear that by 1907 a view was emerging within the Foreign Office that the best solution to the difficulties posed for Britain by the situation in the four states in the north would be a transfer of suzerainty over those states from Siam to Britain. In 1907 a Foreign Office despatch stated: 'All this friction about advisers in Kedah and Kelantan will help the Siamese perhaps to see that their best interests will be served by disencumbering themselves of the states over which they have practically no control.'⁽⁵⁸⁾ The same despatch indicated the mutual concern that Siam and Britain had in having an effective Adviser in Kedah:

In Kedah much must depend on the strength of character of Mr. Hart [the Kedah Advisor] and his ability to guide the Kedah authorities without rousing opposition. It is to the interest both of Siam and Great Britain that he should succeed as neither wishes to have a bankrupt and disorderly state on its frontiers.⁽⁵⁹⁾

It is clear then that by 1907 Britain was seeking a new and more comprehensive arrangement with the Siamese that would give her a much stronger and more direct presence in the northern peninsular and therefore a much more uniform and effective influence in protecting her interests in the area. In September, 1907 Beckett recorded the opinion of Mr. Stroebel, General Advisor to the Siamese king, on the issue:

Mr. Stroebel has, in the course of recent private conversations, made no secret of his... firm belief and conviction... that the wisest policy for Siam is to disencumber herself of those portions of the kingdom over which her control is shadowy and unreal, and by so doing so increase the vitality of that portion where her control is real and effective. Mr. Stroebel is further of the opinion that if he could successfully induce the Siamese Government to recognize the wisdom of this policy, its fulfilment, in the case of Kedah and Kelantan,... would be worth considerable sacrifices in other directions on the part of His Majesty's Government.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Another issue of great importance which served to incline the British Government towards a general formal takeover in the north was that of the proposed construction of a

⁵⁸ Foreign Office Dispatch No. 362000. FO. 371/332/xc/A/54713.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Beckett to Grey, 28 September, 1907. FO. 371/332/xc/A/54713.

railway by Siam down through its southern provinces and States to link us with the north-south railway on the Malay peninsular. Because the Siamese Railway Department was dominated by German nationals the British were anxious on that score to secure a stronger hold on the Northern Malay States on the peninsular in order to forestall the likelihood that the railway project would allow Germany access into the British sphere of influence in the Siamese Malay States.⁽⁶¹⁾ On hearing of the Siamese plan to extend the railway south towards the Malay peninsular the British made it clear that such an exercise should be effected only by British or Siamese engineers and not by Germans in the employ of the Siamese Railway Department, invoking the 1904 Franco-Siamese Treaty and the 1897 Convention in support of their claim.⁽⁶²⁾ The Siamese, however, were unsympathetic pointing out that any exclusion of Germans from the construction project might give rise to representations on the part of the German Minister.⁽⁶³⁾ It was then the contentious issue of the construction of the Siamese railway which helped to focus the attention of British officialdom on the urgent need for a more durable and effective solution to the Siamese Malay States question as a whole.

The Siamese by 1907 had reasons of their own for wanting to exercise the transfer. They had been humiliated by the 1897 Convention then in force: article three of the Convention implied that Britain could exclude non-British enterprise in the Peninsular south of Muong Bang Tapan, not only in the Siamese Malay States but also in provinces which were unquestionably Siamese and directly under Bangkok.⁽⁶⁴⁾ It was also clear as we have seen, that by 1909 any effective control by the Siamese of their southern Malay states was beyond them and that any arrangement which would secure these states in the hands of a friendly power and which would allow the Siamese other negotiated advantages was something to be

⁶¹ See Thio, "British Policy", pp.476-477.

⁶² Paget to Grey, 'General Report', May 27, 1907. p.8.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.475.

sought by them.⁽⁶⁵⁾

In 1907 negotiations were well under way between Stroebel, Paget and the British Foreign Office in Whitehall for a better Anglo-Siamese arrangement viz-a-viz the Siamese Malay States that would be mutually satisfactory to both parties.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Certain proposals took shape and these were written into a draft treaty.⁽⁶⁷⁾ A final version of the treaty was signed by Prince Devawongse and Ralph Paget in Bangkok on 10 March 1909 and ratified in July of the same year.⁽⁶⁸⁾ This treaty satisfied British territorial and strategic interests on the Malay peninsular after decades of mounting difficulty in administering its affairs in the area. Central to the resolution of Britain's difficulties was the first article in the treaty providing for the transference from Siam to Britain of 'all rights of suzerainty, protection, administration, and control whatsoever which they possess over the States of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Perlis, and adjacent islands.'⁶⁹

The 1909 treaty thus marked the beginning of the formal stage of a British presence in the four Northern Malay States and a new phase of British activity in the area. Throughout the decades leading up to the 1909 Treaty it had been the economic motive of protecting trade and production on the peninsular, both that well established in the south and that opening up in the north, which had been a dominant motive for the British in the conduct of their affairs in the northern peninsular. In 1909, with the signing of the treaty, British authority in the four states existed only on paper. As we shall see in chapters 6 and 7 below the establishment in practice and the consolidation of that authority in the decades which followed did not go

⁶⁵ Paget suggested that the lack of good communications between Bangkok and its southern states was in part the reason why the Siamese had such poor control over those states - a deficiency at which the construction of a railway must have been partly aimed.

Ibid., p.7.

⁶⁶ Thio, "British Policy", p.476.

⁶⁷ Salleh, "Kelantan in Transition", p.55.

Thio, "British Policy", pp.476-477.

⁶⁸ Thio, "British Policy", p.477.

⁶⁹ The article is quoted in Thio, "British Policy", pp.477-478.

unchallenged by the local inhabitants of the four states. In 1909, however, in technical legal and formal diplomatic and political terms the way was clear for the British to reinforce the economic and social transformation already well under way in the north on the peninsular. It remains now to examine how the British developed and consolidated their hold on the four states and the economic and social effects of this during the second phase of British imperialism to the north on the peninsular.

CHAPTER 5
THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE COLONIAL STATE IN
NORTH MALAYA 1909-1957.

Introduction.

In 1909, with the implementation of the Anglo Siamese Treaty of that year, Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan had Advisers whose advice had to be followed in all matters except custom and religion. Trengganu however was judged unready for an adviser and was given instead an Agent 'with mere consular powers'.⁽¹⁾ From 1919, however, Advisers similar to those in the other Northern Malay States were appointed to Trengganu.⁽²⁾ In the formal administrative sense however the consolidation of the colonial state was limited by resistance from the northern states. There had been resistance from within them to the 1909 Treaty and they were disinclined to be drawn too closely into British designs and policy making for the peninsular as a whole as we shall see in detail in chapters 6 and 7 below. For over three decades from 1909 they remained unsympathetic to the idea of their inclusion in a wider federal structure encompassing the whole peninsular and the four states together with Johore in the south remained outside the Federated Malay States and were termed collectively the Unfederated Malay States. Thus despite attempts to unite the peninsular under a single centralized administration in the years leading up to 1946 - the year the British authorities proposed that a Malayan Union including all states on the peninsular be set up - the five states held out for a maximum of independence. Eventually and with reluctance they accepted the broad unification proposal and in 1948 the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States were combined in a less centralized single political and administrative unit called the Federation of Malaya. After a break in British administration

¹ Allen, "Ancien Regime", p.24.

This differed from the situation in the Federated Malay States where Britain's chief representative in each state was known as a Resident.

G Maxwell, "Notes on a Policy in respect of the Unfederated Malay States", CO 717/10, October 1920, p.4.

² Ibid.

during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) the British returned to Malaya to resume their colonial administration before granting the Federation independence in 1957.

British Administrative Policy and Practice in North Malaya.

On a broader level of policy, then, the British were compelled by the independent inclination of the Unfederated Malay States to bide their time, effecting as much defacto uniformity in the specifics of peninsular administration as possible while awaiting their opportunity to unify the peninsular by direct constitutional means.⁽³⁾ From 1909 the situation on the peninsular was, then, that while the Federated Malay States did represent a political and administrative unity the Unfederated Malay States had no overriding formal connecting link at all - something which added to the difficulty of implementing a coordinated British policy for the peninsular as a whole. Against this limitation, then, the British, from the earliest period of formal colonial rule in the north and principally through their Advisers, set about organizing the northern states individually in a manner which served the British colonial and imperial economic and political interests on the peninsular as a whole.

It was the influx of European capital into the mining and especially the rubber industry and the growth of European population on the peninsular from the first decade of this century which gave the British stronger motivation to effect an efficient administration in the northern states and the peninsular as a whole and which as we shall see, largely governed the way in which the British set about organizing the economy and society in the four states. While the tin industry continued to prosper and expand throughout the century the newer rubber industry developed quickly in Malaya and by early in the century rubber had been added to tin as a major commodity sustaining the colonial economy. The rapid development of the American car industry and the use of pneumatic tyres in World War I provided a strong market for the commodity being produced on plantations and small holdings throughout the peninsular.⁽⁴⁾ This rapid development of the rubber industry was added incentive for colonial

³ Thio points out that Anderson, who had been appointed Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States in 1904, did not think that the Unfederated Malay States would consent to join the Federation immediately in 1909.

Thio, "British Policy", p.498.

⁴ Malcolm Caldwell, "The British 'Forward Movement', 1874-1914" in Mohamed Amin and Malcolm Caldwell Malaya The Making of a Neo-Colony(Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1977) pp.33, 38.

policy makers to work for the maintenance of economically auspicious circumstances on the peninsular.

From 1909 onwards then the British were seeking to foster stability and self-sufficiency in both the Federated and Unfederated Malay States to create a suitable economic and political climate in which colonial capital could thrive.⁽⁵⁾ While that capital, as we have seen, was concentrated in the southern and central states and the Straits Settlements and was inevitably the major focus of British colonial policy on the peninsula, nonetheless the British Government sought the development of extractive industry in the north as well.

To this end it was considered important to have well ordered and stable societies in all the states on the peninsular, it was considered that the northern states should be stable and prosperous, both for the sake of the extractive industry they contained and because the crucially important colonial export economy based in the south would suffer if it had disordered states on its borders. Thus, although a formal constitutional unity was not to come to the peninsular until after World War II the British were, from 1909, thinking in holistic terms in their administration of the peninsular.

Clearly the British, from 1909, looked forward to a significant expansion of the colonial export economy into northern Malaya with the new British administration there. Although there was to be no major development of extractive and rubber industry in north

⁵ Eunice Thio accounts for friction between Sir John Anderson, High Commissioner for the Malay States and Sir William Taylor, Resident General of the Federated Malay States over the use of FMS finance to subsidize the British expansion into north Malaya as well as British interests beyond the peninsular. Whereas Anderson sought the use of FMS revenue in this way Taylor resisted such moves on the grounds that it was against the interests of the Federation. Thio suggests that Anderson was 'hard pressed' by British imperial fiscal policy and that this in large measure helps to explain his desire to use FMS finances to support a wider British colonial interest in the area:

As British expansion in the Malay Peninsula had been self-supporting, it was expected to continue to pay its way Exchequer. From 1906 the finances of the Colony were anything but flourishing, so the High Commissioner looked to the Federation for Assistance in carrying out the forward policies approved by the Colonial Office.

Thio, British Policy, p.206.

Though Thio does not make specific reference to the need for self-sufficiency in the NMS that need is implied in her account in a way which suggests the wider reasons for the concern of the NMS British in achieving economic self-sufficiency in their particular states.

Malaya comparable with that which occurred in the Federated Malay States and Johore such a possibility was clearly viewed with considerable optimism in some quarters and must have been influential to some extent in the minds of colonial planners as a possible option for the future in a way which helps to explain the British *modus operandi* in the NMS throughout the period in question. Graham's book on Kelantan, published in 1908, reads in many places like an investment manual. For example, he speculates in his section on agriculture that 'the future may possibly see her mineral resources developed to equal those of the Malay States...'(⁶) In the same chapter he refers to the 'great agricultural possibilities of the state', and the 'great possibilities' of rubber planting in the State.⁽⁷⁾ The Duff Development Company, the principal commercial enterprise in north Malaya and based in Kelantan, issued a prospectus for shareholders in 1910 which thanked the Governor of the Straits Settlements, the British Adviser and other British officials appointed to Kelantan for their assistance and promised that the Company's 'self imposed task [was] the development of the greater part of the interior of the State'.⁽⁸⁾ The economic social and political well being of the four northern states continued to rest on a basis of raayat surplus and it was this status quo which British policy makers sought to preserve. The sources don't say so in so many words but it is clear that the contrasting development of the NMS on a basis of raayat surplus on the one hand, and the Federated Malay States on a main base of immigrant labour in the extractive and rubber industries on the other, continued to prevail throughout the 1909-1957 period.

Still, while the development of an export economy was an important secondary consideration it was the fostering of economic self-sufficiency, and beyond that the production of a rice surplus, that was paramount in the policy making for the four states from 1909.

British Protectionism Towards the Malays in the NMS

It was the fact that large scale commercial industry in Malaya was dependent upon immigrant and not Malay labour that largely accounts for the adoption of a non-interventionist, protectionist policy towards the Malays on the peninsular as a whole. Malay

⁶ Graham, Kelantan, p.70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.78, 81, 82.

⁸ The Duff Development Company's Territory(London, 1910) p.3.

labour was not needed directly in the service of the colonial export economy and so the British had no need to disrupt the Malay economy and society by drawing them off the land and into rubber plantation and tin mines. Nonetheless marked changes were, as we have seen for the NMS, occurring in rural Malaya and the British perceived in their own way that the raayat were being exposed to various modern influences that could have the effect of disturbing Malay society. They therefore sought actively to preserve the status quo, or what they saw as the status quo, of the Malay community in general and the raayat economy in particular. To this end the colonial government sought to limit Malay involvement in the commercial sector of the colonial economy and to keep land in Malay hands.⁽⁹⁾ One reason for protectionism of this kind was that the agricultural policy of the government was geared, however ineffectively it operated in practice, towards the bringing about of self-sufficiency in rice production for British Malaya, and colonial administrators did not want Malay cultivators distracted from their traditional occupation of rice growing.⁽¹⁰⁾ This was particularly applicable to the NMS and again in particular to Kedah and Perlis as the main rice producing states. More important however was the fact that the British sought to avoid destabilizing changes to the raayat economy in the NMS that might have had the effect of undermining the economic power base of the colonial administrations in those states. Thus, the 1932 Kelantan annual report cautioned against 'taking too many steps at once' in the development of the Malay economy and asserted that '[a] thrifty, prosperous and loyal Malay peasantry should be the backbone of the country and a strong shield against many undesirable tendencies.'⁽¹¹⁾ The same report, noted that the Malays in Kelantan were predominant in numbers. It indicated that they were 'good workers being both industrious and adaptable and capable of long hours and heavy work' in support of the state. However they would not, the report stated, be able to withstand exploitative economic competition from immigrant races. There was a need, it said, for 'the

⁹ See below for a fuller discussion of both these aspects.

¹⁰ Lim Teck Ghee, *Peasants*, p.118.

Kelantan Annual Report 1931, p.13.

¹¹ Kelantan Annual Report 1932, p.57.

protection of the race' from such competition.⁽¹²⁾ Thus, the British had some inkling of the contradictions developing within the NMS economies and sought precautions against any weakening of the Malay economy resulting from economic competition between the races.

Given that the British were anxious to avoid destabilizing the peasant small holder economy and to keep the Malays free of competition from immigrant races the colonial administrations were confronted with something of a problem when it came to providing labour for the larger scale state and private enterprises regarded as essential for economic and social progress in the north. Whereas there was an inclination on the part of some entrepreneurs there to seek the services of immigrant labourers, the British administration discouraged this seeking reliance on Malay labour instead.⁽¹³⁾ To this end administrators sought to promote the abilities of the Malays handle the work in large scale enterprises. Thus the Annual report for Kelantan for 1937 viewed with approval the labour policy of the British firm of Messrs. Bonstead which operated on an extensive scale in the state.⁽¹⁴⁾ That firm operated a rice mill, a copra grading and export business, a rubber grading packing and export section, a general import and export business, and a shipway and repairing business - all with local Malay labour 'able to adapt itself to these various activities.'⁽¹⁵⁾ In the report pre-eminence was given to the fact, as we shall see in another context below, that the state was not dependent upon immigrant labour and that the Public Works Department, Survey Department, Irrigation Department, Electrical Department, Posts and Telegraphs Department and the Kelantan Match Factory all employed Malay labour.⁽¹⁶⁾ The fact that the NMS were able to employ Malay labour in extractive enterprises was due in large measure to the limited scale of such industry in the area. Referring to the desirability of using Malay labour on the state's rubber estates without disrupting the raayat economy and way of life, the 1937 Kelantan report

¹² Ibid., p.5.

¹³ See for example Kelantan Annual Report 1937, pp.45-47.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.45

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

states: 'With a population of approximately 400,000 and rubber estates employing a total labour force of under 8000 it is difficult to see why immigrant labour should be required at all.'⁽¹⁷⁾

Clearly then colonial administrators, while encouraging the use of Malay hire labour in support of the state's economy and administration, were at the same time cautious in implementing this policy lest the use of labour in this way disrupt 'the natural form of life of the Kampong Malay.'⁽¹⁸⁾

From 1909 the British were concerned, then, in all areas of their policy making for the four states, to foster and maintain peasant labour as their economic base. In a wider area of policy making we can see how the British were in Kelantan seeking to educate the local populations in a manner consistent with this aim. The report for that year for 1931 stated:

Kelantan is an agricultural State, and the future economic prosperity and the happiness of its people will turn largely on the maintenance of the State as an agricultural unit, and of its people as an agricultural people. ... Kelantan might well become the granary of Malaya. Accepting this supposition as a basis for argument, it follows that the majority of people will remain workers on the land and will not therefore require a knowledge of the English language. An English education for the majority of the inhabitants will not be conducive to the happiness of the people or the welfare of the state. The state does not want its people to gravitate to the towns, to acquire a smattering of English, (such as is represented by the winning of a Junior Cambridge Certificate) and with it, a contempt for manual labour. Rather it is to be desired that the peasant will be equipped mentally and physically to carry out the work of his forefathers more efficiently and with better results. The schools of Kelantan must not be dominated by a course of instruction designed for urban classes. The removal of illiteracy and the teaching of elementary agriculture with clean and healthy methods of living must be the aim and object of all vernacular schools.⁽¹⁹⁾

We can see in this passage how a recognition of peasant labour as the economic basis for the state was a basic premise in all policy formulation not just that concerned with productivity directly.

The British had little faith in the ability of the Malay peasantry to successfully enter

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.46.

The report outlines the various ways in which Malays could be employed on rubber estates without disrupting the domestic life and productivity of the Kelantan raayat.

Ibid.

¹⁹ Kelantan Annual Report 1931, p.42.

the field of commercial production. Such doubts were usually expressed in paternalistic and racist terms. A handbook on Malayan agriculture produced by the Department of Agriculture for the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements in 1922 accounted for Malay agricultural incapacity in these terms:

The Malays lack the organizing power of the Chinese and also their industry. The competition for life has never been keen with them, as with the Chinese in China and this is reflected in their agricultural systems. Generally speaking, one may state that Malay agriculture lacks effort, and the systems are devised without respect to the amount of labour involved.⁽²⁰⁾

The same handbook itemizes rural commodities in terms of their suitability for small holder production. The crops considered suitable with some reservations were padi, fruits, tobacco, roselle fibre and kapok.⁽²¹⁾ The handbook considered rubber unsuitable for small holder production on the grounds that it would further undermine the enterprising spirit in Malay agriculturalists.²² It was an enterprising spirit those behind the handbook clearly thought necessary to ensure Malay agriculturalists fitted in with the 'new order of life' - that is to say the new British colonial order - then being established on the peninsular.²³ The old order envisaged in this publication was one in which the Malay satisfied simple wants by obtaining 'the majority of his necessities from the jungle'.²⁴ The new order was one where he satisfied these wants substantially and increasingly on the basis of limited commodity production.²⁵ The handbook describes the transition from the old to the new order thus: 'As time goes on, Malay life recedes from the jungle, and with the diminishing knowledge of jungle produce which follows, he has to rely more on cultivated plants.'²⁶ The British view was that the Malay agriculturalists were not ready for rubber small holder production and that where these

²⁰ Malayan Agriculture 1922 Handbook Compiled by the Department of Agriculture FMS and SS, p.12.

²¹ Ibid., pp.13, 14.

²² Ibid., pp. 12, 13.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 12-14.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

agriculturalists had adopted it it had damaged their capacity to survive economically leaving them stranded between the old subsistence order and the new one with its reliance on some commercial agricultural production.²⁷ Again, in the words of the hand book: 'The gradual transition from this old order to the new was rudely interrupted by the introduction of rubber into Malaya. In this crop the Malay saw that he might earn sufficient to supply his wants. The consequence has been that agricultural enterprise amongst Malays has been practically killed - he has lost his old cunning without acquiring new experiences in agriculture'(²⁸) The answer to this problem lay, in the mind of the Department, in 'a system of agricultural education(really rural economy) for Vernacular schools'.²⁹

The British agriculture policy in Malaya as a whole was, therefore, to encourage a degree of commercialized agriculture within the peasantry while stopping short of widespread petty commodity production.⁽³⁰⁾

It was in the NMS however that this agricultural policy had particular relevance for it was there that the states were now heavily dependent upon raayat surplus in kind and cash and the success or failure of Malay peasant agriculture was therefore vital to the support of the four states.⁽³¹⁾ The British feared that too great a dependence upon cash crops, vulnerable as those were to fluctuations in world market prices, could lead to economic instability at the Malay peasant level with a consequent loss of revenue and weakening of basic support for the NMS. They also feared that such economic instability within this peasant economy would upset what they saw as Malay quiescence and result in troublesome social and political instability.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 12, 13.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁰ Apart from the handbook cited above a good idea of British Malayan agricultural policy can be obtained from Donald Honey Grist, An Outline of Malayan Agriculture(Malayan Planting Manual No. 2.)(London, 1950), pp.25-37. The manual was published of behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Federation of Malaya, by the Crown Agents for the Colonies.

³¹ See below in this chapter for a fuller discussion of the abolition of kerah and slavery and changing methods of surplus extraction generally under formal colonial rule.

Broader British policies not aimed specifically at NMS Malays nonetheless had a strong bearing on the Malay peasantry in its agricultural pursuits in these states. The Stevenson Rubber Restriction Scheme in operation from 1922 to 1928 and the regulation of the Malayan rubber industry in the 1930s aimed at stabilizing rubber prices in the wake of successive slumps in the price of rubber in 1920 and during the depression of the 1930s. The effect of these regulatory policies was to limit the amount of land coming under Malay peasant small holder production. British land policy too, by reserving land for Malays on the condition that it be used for rice growing, also served to keep NMS Malays out of rubber smallholding.⁽³²⁾

To sum up then the British pursued a policy in Malaya as a whole of limited commercialization of Malay peasant agriculture. This policy was of especial importance in the NMS where peasant surplus, surplus which came to hinge increasingly on their agricultural productivity, was the main economic prop on which the states rested. Thus British rural policies in the NMS aimed at the degree of commercialization of peasant agriculture necessary to maximize surplus in kind and cash available to the state but stopped short of a full commoditization of this agriculture that might have had the effect of destabilizing that rural economy to the detriment of economic support for the colonial states. As we shall see below the British were seeking from the earliest period of Advisory government in the NMS a uniform policy for the whole of the peninsular and so it seems likely that the need for the preservation of Malay society in the four states as the British perceived it was especially influential in determining their policies towards the Malays on the peninsular as a whole from 1909 onwards.

The moral justification for this non-interventionist policy was a concern for the welfare of the Malays and the policy statements of the day were framed in these terms. No doubt humanitarian reformism was an element in the motivation of at least some British colonial officials in the NMS. However the primary concern of the British was, as I have stated, the economic one of fostering strong traditional Malay states based on the surplus

³² Kelantan Annual Report 1932, p.5

See also my discussion of rice in north Malaya below.

labour of what they liked to think of as an independent yeoman peasantry.⁽³³⁾ References to the work capacity of the Malays abound in the statements of colonial officials. In his Annual Report on Kelantan for 1909, the British adviser for that state, J.S Mason observed:

The Kelantan Malay differs considerably from the F.M.S. Malay. He is a tallish, raw-boned man, much more bonily built than a Pahang Malay. The difference has been well compared to that between the cart-horse and the polo pony. The Kelantan Malay is capable of much continuous labour and in this respect resembles the Javanese. There is little doubt that although imported labour is a necessity on large rubber estates, the local labour will continue to be used in larger numbers than in the Federated Malay States.⁽³⁴⁾

This statement and statements like these certainly indicate the racist, patronising perceptions of the Malays and their labour capacity held by the British but they do have relevance in this context because they indicate the underlying concern of colonial officials not just with revenue per se but with the labour capacity of the Malays to furnish this revenue.

Large-Scale Commercial enterprise in the NMS

Under the auspices of the new colonial administration large-scale primary industrial activity of all kinds received a new impetus as British administrators sought ways of increasing state revenue and colonial entrepreneurs took advantage of British control to develop enterprises in the NMS. While such enterprise did not operate in the northern states on the scale that it did to the south its presence in the four states its presence nonetheless did have a significant effect in adding to the process of social change there. It is important then to stress here the differing effects of large-scale commercial enterprise in the northern and southern areas on the peninsular within our period. In the southern and central states this commercial enterprise and the productive relations it contained mounted a much stronger challenge to the old order than was the case to the south. The contradictions developing within society in the southern states were therefore significantly different in their character from those developing in society in the northern ones. Industrial wage labour relations were, for example, a much stronger feature of southern and central Malayan society and of much

³³ For example: '...the vast majority of the population of Kelantan consists of yeoman peasants and fishermen.'

Kelantan Annual Report 1936, p.37.

³⁴ Mason, Kelantan Annual Report 1909, p.13.

lesser importance to the north. To the south then, for a significant section of the population, labour and the means of production were combined principally through the economically coercive mechanism of the wage contract and it was this which was a major factor giving the five states to the south their distinctive character within the period.⁽³⁵⁾ To the north by contrast it was the way in which labour and the means of production were being combined in smaller scale enterprise which was the dominant basic feature shaping society at that time. Still, in the north as in the south the presence of larger scale industry had a strong effect on the small scale rural economy indirectly by helping to change the context in which that economy was changing. In the north then it was the indirect effect of the large scale industry which was strongly influential in changing the basic character of the four state societies.

It was the limited presence of this industry in the north together with its much stronger presence to the south, and the promise of the further development of this export economy, especially in the south, which provided, as we have seen, a strong motive for a British Forward Movement into the central and southern states in the years spanning the turn of the century, and which was, in large measure, responsible for a formal British presence in the north, from 1909. Looking at Malaya as a whole then, once the formal British presence was established on the whole peninsular the presence of extractive industry and the British desire to foster it served to influence the way in which all the states were administered - whether in the north or south - and therefore in this indirect sense the environment in which the peasant economy functioned on the peninsular in general. While certainly the main thrust of this operated to the south where the colonial export economy was strongest, it nonetheless had a strong bearing on how British administrators behaved in the north as well. This was

³⁵ It is clear in general terms from the secondary sources that the state economies to the south were from 1874 substantially dependent upon an industrial economy relying on mostly immigrant labour drawing wages for their subsistence. However the scholarship still awaits a thorough going account of the wider social effects of this economy - of the interaction between the old and new economies in those states and the way in which this was shaping society there.

For a general account of this industry in the southern and central states in its earlier stages of development see Jackson's Planters and Speculators referred to in this thesis above.

See also Burns' argument for the early emergence of a capitalist mode of production in the tin producing states of Perak, Selangor and Sunju Ujong.

Burns 'Capitalism and the Malay States' in Capitalism and Colonial Production, pp.159-178.

because the NMS were from the outset administered in a way which served the interests - which strongly fostered the development of - the colonial export enterprises in the south, and because they wanted to also foster what export enterprise there was in the north as well. Thus the export industry in the north had a strong secondary importance to that in the south and held out the promise of a stronger development which might one day match that of the enterprise to the south. That this was an attitude consistently held by NMS administrators in the decades leading up to WW 11 is strongly implied in their annual reports for this period.

In general then as we have seen the colonial authorities in the north administered their states with a view to helping to create an environment on the peninsular which would allow the geographically wider colonial export economy to prosper.

This had a bearing on the NMS peasant economy in several ways. For example, as we shall see in more detail below, the British aim of establishing for the peninsular a secure and orderly land system (for the sake not only of a stable and prosperous peasant economy but the economic well being of large scale commercial enterprise as well) saw the development of a new land system. The result in the NMS (and the rest of the peninsular) was a new relationship between peasant producers and land - their most important and basic means of production. It had been, as we have seen, non Malay concessionaires who had given the initial stimulus for a more systematic land tenure in the north in the years leading up to formal colonial rule. Throughout the formal colonial period the states continued to develop their land systems in line with this. It was a remodelling of land tenure and use which, while applying to the whole population in each state, was implemented with the needs of the commercial export economy on the peninsular at large very much in mind. Not only this but sizeable tracts of land - fertile land - that might otherwise have been available for peasant cultivation, were being given over by the colonial administration to large scale production of plantation commodities and mining. This added to the pressures on the peasantry as new arable land was alienated and became scarcer throughout the period - a land shortage which had begun to be felt, as we have seen, later in the nineteenth century in the northern states. In 1909 for example the Duff Development Company owned some 3000 square miles of that state - an occupation of land which was a significant factor adding to land pressure and peasant hardship

in that state.⁽³⁶⁾

The capacity of the larger scale enterprise to furnish revenue for the state was also an important factor affecting the welfare of the raayat in the NMS. These enterprises, with their large scale productivity and profitability were an important supplementary source of revenue for the colonial state through taxation. Indirectly, this added to the burden of the peasantry since in augmented British incentive to devise, maintain and operate a system that would effectively tax the available productive endeavour on the peninsular including that of the raayat as well as that of larger scale enterprise. It meant that British administrators, anxious to balance their revenue sheets, were additionally resolved to implement a taxation system that would effectively tap into all the productive wealth available in each state to the maximum degree possible.

The need of colonial government to service large scale commercial enterprise in the north also had considerable effect on the raayat economy. Thus the presence of such enterprise in the four states stimulated the development of infra structural facilities by colonial administrators and had, by strengthening communication links between centres of administration and their hinterlands, the side effect of tightening the degree of state control over raayat surplus.⁽³⁷⁾ To a considerable extent, too, the marketing facilities developed to service the larger scale enterprises assisted in the marketing of peasant produce as well and by so doing had the effect of drawing them even more strongly into commodity production for

³⁶ Kessler includes land scarcity as an important factor putting pressure on the peasantry in that state around the turn of the nineteenth century.

Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.65. See my reference to this in chapter 3 above.

³⁷ For example, the extension of railway construction into north Malaya in the early decades of this century was clearly motivated principally by a desire on the part of British colonial authorities to develop extractive and other export orientated industry in the area. See for example, C. A. Fisher, "The Railway Geography of British Malaya", The Scottish Geographical Magazine, Vol., 64, No. 3, December, 1948, p.128.

An article on the construction of the east coast railway in Malaya begins: 'The East Coast branch of the F.M.S. Railways is being constructed purely as a development line to open up the states of Pahang and Kelantan, which are known to have rich mineral and agricultural resources.'

Lieutenant Le., R.E. Wansbrough-Jones, "The Kelantan Section of the East Coast Railway, F.M.S.R.", The Royal Engineers Journal(R.E. Journal), Vol. XLIV, No. 4, December, 1930, p.647.

the now more accessible markets.

The presence of larger scale commercial enterprise in the north was, then, part of the changing colonial context within which the raayat economy was operating and by which it was being affected. While this changing colonial context was coming about as a direct result of British actions in guiding state development through their advisory function this was also happening in other ways not so directly tied in with the administrative function of the colonial state. For example, the presence of personnel associated with these industries added to the size of the internal market for peasant produce and in this way added to the pressures and incentives influencing them to enter the field of commodity production.

To a limited degree these enterprises had a more direct effect on the raayat economy and society. A significant number of raayat were affected directly by being drawn into the larger scale export enterprises as participants in their productive process. Some raayat joined immigrant labourers as workers in these industries, and on government projects servicing these industries (and as government employees in its wider function in providing state services). Some did so as full time wage labourers with a greater number of raayat employed in part time labour for wages in these projects around the seasonal demands of their domestic agricultural production.

A report for Kelantan for 1932 points out that the state in that year was not dependent for its hire labour supply on immigrant labour as was the case in the western Malay states and that for the most part the requirements of the state and private enterprise were met by Malays who 'live[d] in their own homes' and who were 'small scale peasant proprietors' who worked 'as paid labourers 14 or 15 days only per month and devote[d] the rest of the month to their own cultivation of food stuffs.'⁽³⁸⁾ The number of full time wage labourers in the NMS was small - under 2 per cent of the total state population in Kelantan in 1937 for example.⁽³⁹⁾ The 1938 Annual report for Perlis indicates that state was certainly, by the

³⁸ Kelantan Annual Report 1932, p.21.

³⁹ Kelantan Annual Report 1937, pp.41, 48.

The report gives a figure of 3,887 Malays labouring full time in estates, mines and factories out of a total labour force of 7,996 in the 44 enterprises that submitted information for the report. Among the immigrant labourers listed as working in the 44 establishments are Indians, Javanese and Chinese.

immediate pre-war period, largely dependent upon local part time labour in its large scale enterprises. In that year the full time labour force was composed of 500 Chinese labouring in tin mines for fixed wages, 95 Chinese labourers employed in rice mills, 215 Malays and 407 Indians divided between the Public Works Department, the Railways Department and various rubber estates and local contractors.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The same report continues:

Apart from the small classes of what may be termed professional labourers to whom reference has been made there is a large reservoir of unskilled labour available in the Malay population. The Malay peasant proprie[t]or will always put the cultivation of his fields and the reaping of his crops before everything else, but in the off-seasons he is ready and willing to supplement his income by daily labour on road making, river clearing or other Government work. For this he receives payment at standard rates.⁽⁴¹⁾

We can see therefore how the presence of large scale enterprise in the NMS meant that some peasants were separated from the land and entered into full time wage labour relations with private and state enterprise while others - the greater proportion of the total wage labour force - while remaining basically subsistence agriculturalists worked for, and drew wages from, large scale private or state enterprise on a part time basis. That is to say we can see how to a very limited extent the colonial state and private enterprise was able to extract surplus by economic means from a very small number of Malays and immigrant full time workers dependent upon wages for their subsistence.

The colonial state in the north was, then, only partially reliant on Malay wage labour. To put it into perspective, that colonial state was dependent primarily on Malay labour in two senses: large scale state and private enterprise was partially reliant on raayat labour; and much more importantly raayat small holders surrendered a portion of their productive wealth in support of the state in the form of various taxes and other state charges, as we shall

Ibid., p.41.

It is clear from the same report that in the year the state continued, unlike the western Malay states, to rely on Malay rather than immigrant labour in large scale enterprise.

Ibid., p.45.

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Perlis Annual Report 1938, p.24.

⁴¹

Ibid., p.25.

see more fully and clearly below.

To sum up the significance of the presence of some large scale enterprise in the four states it is clear that while the limited operation of wage labour relations in the north represents an important dimension to economic and social change there and should be acknowledged as such this was not a dominant feature of fundamental social change in that area. This limited importance of wage labour relations serves to underscore the extent to which NMS society - the basic character of that society - depended on a small scale subsistence and commercial agricultural base and the productive relations entailed in this. The significance then of some larger scale enterprise in the north lay not in the fact that it exerted a strong presence challenging the old forms and relations of production both directly and indirectly as a significant factor causing a basic re-ordering of society as was, arguably, the case to the south. Rather, its presence served in various largely indirect ways to alter the broader context within which the NMS economy was functioning and in this way operated with a wider range of forces to further fundamental economic and social change in the area.

The Further Commercialization of Peasant Agriculture

General

The commercialization of peasant agriculture was intensified with the expansion of the colonial state into north Malaya. With this expansion peasant commodity production became not just a response to the incentives and pressures of the colonial market but something which was also a response to the rural policies of colonial administrators outlined in this chapter above. In this British colonial policy, and peasant agricultural practice, were not by any means always in step with one another. Indeed the rural development of the NMS throughout the period was characterized by tension between a rural policy aimed at the maximizing of peasant productivity in support of the colonial state and the need and desires of these peasants themselves to stretch their subsistence agriculture in the direction of commercial production in their own favour.

Peasant Petty Commodity Production: Baling and Sik

The development of rubber as the twin prop of the Malayan export economy provided the incentive not only for the large scale growing of the product on plantations but for peasant smallholder production as well. While most peasants in the four states remained subsistence growers engaging in varying degrees in some commercial agriculture a significant

number of them, despite restrictive government policies, made the transition to petty commodity production. By far the greater number of these specialized in rubber smallholding.

It should be noted at this juncture before proceeding further that the term 'petty commodity production' or the synonymous phrase 'simple commodity production' are not generally used in the sources to refer to Malay rubber smallholders and therefore some brief explanation of my use of the term here is warranted. The phrase does, in its use in the theoretical literature on Third World questions, have a very specific meaning and involves complex issues which need not detain us here since I am not concerned to elucidate a general category of simple or petty commodity production.⁽⁴²⁾ As I use the term in the NMS context then I have in mind three main features:

1. Small units of production specializing in one commodity, in this case rubber.
2. A dependence on the production and sale of the one commodity, or one main commodity, for the subsistence of the small holder and for the reproduction of his enterprise as distinct from the subsistence agriculturalist who produces for his own consumption and who thus enjoys a strong degree of self-sufficiency in satisfying his basic needs selling produce only when he produces a surplus beyond subsistence.
3. Most important of all, reproduction of the enterprise governed by wider international market forces and not just by local exchange values.

My aim then in using the phrase 'petty commodity production' is to draw attention to the distinction between rubber smallholding as a small scale capitalist operation and

⁴² See, for example, Joel S. Kahn, "Petty Commodity Production and the Periphery of the World Economy: The Case of Indonesia", University of London, Centre of International and Area Studies, Peasants Seminar, Paper for discussion on 23 November, 1979, p.5 and passim.

Kahn uses the term 'petty commodity production' to apply to rubber smallholding in Malaya.

Ibid., p.5.

See also Harriet Friedman, "Peasants and Simple Commodity Producers: Analytical Distinctions", University of London, Centre of International and Area Studies, Peasants Seminar, Paper for discussion on 4 May, 1979, passim.

Both papers are concerned to outline a general notion of petty commodity production whereas my aim here is limited to showing how small-scale rubber production operated in north Malaya.

subsistence agriculture, and to distinguish both the latter from large-scale farming (plantation agriculture) in the NMS context. My use of the term 'petty commodity producer' in the NMS context has then more particular connotations than less specific terms such as 'smallholder', 'commercial agriculturalist' and the like. Applying Lim Teck Gee's typology of the peasant economy in Malaya as it had come to be the Second World War 'petty commodity producer' although Lim Teck Ghee doesn't use the phrase, corresponds with his 'commercial type' of peasant economy. Lim Teck Ghee characterizes this kind of peasant agriculture in this way:

The third form of peasant agricultural economy was the commercial type. It emerged in an exceptionally short period of time and contained the peasants who were specialized agriculturalists fully committed to production for sale and quite unconcerned with subsistence cultivation. With most of their productive resources allocated to commercial production, these peasants were particularly vulnerable to changes in the market price of the commodity they produced, and the market price was the principal determinant of the precise allocation of their resources. Generally, the production unit in the economy,..was small... The commercial economy was dominated by peasant rubber smallholders.⁽⁴³⁾

Certainly Lim Teck Ghee's description applies principally to the peasant economy in the Federated Malay States but descriptions of the rubber smallholding economy in the NMS make it clear that the main characteristics of rubber smallholding were common to the enterprise throughout the peninsular.⁽⁴⁴⁾ It will be noted that Lim Teck Ghee's account of the commercial type of peasant agriculture illustrates the susceptibility of the peasant to world market forces and therefore underscores the third feature of petty commodity production in the NMS stated by me above. The essential point to emphasize here is, then, that the rubber smallholders in the north were much more strongly tied to wider international market forces than were the subsistence rice farmers who made up the majority of peasants in the NMS throughout the formal colonial period.

Some idea of the extent of rubber smallholding can be obtained from Emerson's comparative figure for rubber acreage in north Malaya in the 1930s. In Kedah in 1937 rice occupied 244,000 acres while rubber extended across 310,500 acres

⁴³ Lim Teck Ghee, Peasants, p.233.

⁴⁴ Compare for example Lim Teck Ghee's account of rubber smallholding with that of Conner Bailey for the Sik district of Kedah outlined below.

devoted to rubber smallholding.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Rubber growing was much less a feature of the Perlis economy. In Perlis in the same year rice occupied 45,000 acres while only 5000 acres were given over to rubber.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In Kelantan in 1934 Emerson records that rice occupied 148,518 acres and rubber 75,491 acres. Emerson's breakdown of the rubber acreage has two thirds of the total acreage given to small holding lots of under 100 acres and the remaining acreage held in estates of over 100 acres.⁽⁴⁷⁾ And in Trengganu in 1937 there were 40,000 acres of rice.⁽⁴⁸⁾ In the same year there were 30,000 acres of rubber the great bulk of which was made up of small holdings.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Baling and Sik

This trend towards fully commercialized peasant production was exemplified strongly in the Sik and Baling districts of Kedah where a change over from a subsistence rice economy to one based on commercial rubber smallholding took place early this century. Conner Bailey provides a good idea of the nature of this transformation in Sik and his description of the economy changes for that district can serve to indicate in a general way the nature of the parallel economic and social changes that were occurring in neighbouring Baling as well.⁽⁵⁰⁾

⁴⁵ Emerson, Malaysia, p.243.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.247, 248.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.267.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ To my knowledge there is no work dealing at length with economic and social change in Baling specifically. But the proximity of the two districts to one another and the strong similarity of the response of the peasants to hardship in 1975 in the two districts strongly implies the parallel economic and social development of the two districts in their transition to and development of, rubber smallholding, as the mainstay of their two economies. Bailey's references to the Baling and Sik 1975 disturbances strongly imply such a parallel development though Bailey gives no details for Baling.

Bailey, "Broker, Mediator, Patron and Kinsman", pp.2, 8.

See also my discussion of Bailey's reference to the Baling and Sik disturbances in the opening chapter of this thesis.

From early in this century then the Baling and Sik peasantry was becoming increasingly dependent upon cash commodity production for their own reproduction. In Bailey's words: 'No longer engaged in predominantly subsistence agriculture, the people of Sik increasingly depended on their cash incomes even to buy their rice.'⁽⁵¹⁾

Bailey describes the way in which this transformation from subsistence to petty commodity production led to new productive relations in Sik:

Sik's nineteenth-century subsistence economy was based upon the local exchange of commodities, especially foodstuffs. These exchanges moreover, were often made with kinsmen or someone with whom the villager had an established reciprocal relationship (e.g. with a patron). Rubber production, however, necessitated a more complex series of exchanges through which money was obtained to purchase food...Such exchanges involved Sik's villagers in a new set of economic relationships with local Chinese merchants who, though careful not to antagonize their predominantly Malay customers, were nevertheless more interested in profit than in meeting the expectations of generosity associated with men of wealth in Malay culture.⁽⁵²⁾

In Bailey's account, then, of the changing productive relations brought about by the changeover to peasant smallholder rubber production we can see the early emergence of one aspect of the class tensions that were to characterize the post 1909 period and which were to have overt manifestation much later in the century. We can see how the rubber smallholder had to contend with Chinese middlemen who dealt with them in a profit seeking and exploitive manner in buying up their rubber and in the retailing of commodities to them.

The arrival of formal British rule and the strong emergence of rubber cash cropping then, significantly altered the pattern of productive and social relations in Sik. An economy based on the local exchange of commodities and commercialized only to a limited extent through its relative isolation from colonial influences operating more strongly in the older established areas of the state was now being transformed in the formal colonial period along a path of modernization in line with, though in pace a long way behind, that of the bulk of the state. Sik's villagers now dealt in their economic transactions not so much with local Malay patrons within a traditional patron-client relationship now being defined increasingly as we have seen by the aims of traditional patrons to prosper on colonial markets but increasingly with Chinese middlemen who stood outside this framework and who could extract surplus

⁵¹ Ibid., p.34.

⁵² Ibid., p.34.

without reference to adat or other traditional practices. At the same time the villagers in the district were becoming increasingly subject to the exactions of the colonial state - land and produce taxes and the like - and were developing relations with local and central state functionaries who were supervising the collection of these taxes in cash or kind. Thus, a situation was developing where the Sik peasantry laboured to produce, in terms of world market valuation a valuable commodity, while remaining at the level of simple reproduction of their smallholding enterprise. There is no evidence to suggest any significant degree of capital accumulation on the part of these rubber smallholders and the main beneficiaries of small scale commercial agriculture in the district were the colonial state and the large and middle ranking entrepreneurs operating within the state. These developments, to be seen in Bailey's account of Sik, were paralleled in Baling. Their effect in both Baling and Sik was the gradual building up of social tension in these localities throughout the formal colonial period. It was a tension which was to manifest itself more strongly in the two districts in the Independence period as we shall see. It should be noted here that although the developments outlined above can be seen in Bailey's account Bailey himself does not seem to comprehend their full significance and his study lacks perspective on that score. For example, he outlines the relative isolation of Sik from central control but in so doing under emphasizes the importance of that limited contact between Sik villagers and central authority:

Administratively, Sik remained a quiet backwater during most of the colonial period, attracting no more than an occasional tour of inspection from British officials stationed in Alor Setar. Postal service was established, a travelling dispensary visited the district and a school was opened which offered four grades of classes. Some graduates of this school found local employment in the land Office as clerks and summons servers, but the majority of the population, though faced with sometimes contradictory requirements of adat and the money economy, continued to live a life uncomplicated by external political considerations. The Sultan continued to reign, albeit with foreign advisors, there was food and land enough for all, and the state was at peace.⁽⁵³⁾

Now in view of the disturbances in Sik less than two decades into the Independence period Bailey's closing statement here on the colonial period seems extraordinary. Bailey, in the introduction to his monograph, hints at wider social causes for the disturbances, but does so on a short and arguably misguided historical perspective and thus fails to develop on them

⁵³ Ibid., p.37.

in the main body of his work as we shall see more fully in chapter 8 below. The reason for this misinterpretation of the significance of the disturbances in his introduction and a misplaced emphasis in his work seems to be that he is, in his study as a whole, more concerned to account for the ideological aspects of rural leadership in Sik than he is the economic realities underlying such leadership roles.

Bailey's general approach may be illustrated by citing his account of pengaruh, or 'influence' as one aspect of authority in rural Sik:

Non-consensual power in the form of physical or economic coercion (e.g. the withdrawal or threatened withdrawal of access to land) does not constitute pengaruh. The coercive aspect of power is an obvious reality in human affairs, yet in the context of a Malay village few people have the resources or capacity to ignore the negative sanctions which the community itself would in turn impose on the transgressor of its standards. To be sure, a relatively large landowner (who in Sik may provide employment to perhaps a dozen tenants) possesses a limited coercive potential. In reality, however, his control is circumscribed by a common though extralegal acknowledgement of the tenant's right to the land he works. The amount of rent the landowner is able to charge is also affected by common usage and popular opinions of fairness. If a landlord violates the expectations associated with being a landowner he risks a serious loss of prestige amounting to opprobrium.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Thus Bailey emphasizes what he sees as consensus and equilibrium in class relations between rulers and ruled at the local level and he is therefore not pre-disposed to see the contradictions developing within Sik society in the colonial period.

These contradictions were, however, undoubtedly there in the colonial period. Certainly Bailey is correct in so far as he indicates that there was no overt economic social and political instability in Sik during the colonial period between producers and appropriators of their surplus. But latent tensions were developing in Sik society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and are implied in Bailey's references to the collection of land rent, the profiteering of Chinese merchants in their dealings with Sik raayat, and landlordism and tenancy in the district. The major contradiction was not between adat and the money economy but between the traditional economy and the modern money economy, a contradiction which, as we have seen, was developing in the nineteenth century by Bailey's own account but which took on a new dimension and a new intensity with the strong emergence of the rubber

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.12, 12.

economy in the district in the twentieth.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Thus, to some extent the landlords in Bailey's account were governed by custom in their exactions from their tenants but the underlying economic reality of such relations was, as we have seen, that the tenant had no choice but to work for the landowner. The alternative for a peasant dispossessed of the means of production was starvation. This economic coercion to labour in support of a landlord was neither potential nor limited. It was to the contrary actual, sustained and strong. Likewise Bailey's reference to summons servers clearly indicates state economic coercion in the extraction of surplus through the agency of the Land Office. And the emergence of Chinese merchants to rival the penghulus as extractors of raayat surplus clearly indicates a conflict within the rural leadership of the district. At every turn in his argument then Bailey indicates by implication the contradiction which was the essential cause shaping Sik society throughout the colonial period and, on a wider scale, the whole of NMS society throughout the colonial period.

To sum up, then, while the relative strength of the class tensions generated by the contradiction between the pre-colonial and colonial economies in the north - a contradiction given added stimulus with the introduction of rubber small holding there - can not be given with any specificity the existence of such tension in the four states is illustrated by the history of rubber smallholding in the Baling and Sik districts of Kedah and especially the 1975 disturbances there. Placed against a wider context in which raayat protest was registered against new methods of surplus extraction in Kelantan and Trengganu in the early decades of formal colonial rule the later disturbances in Baling and Sik can be more readily seen as a manifestation of tensions which were present though latent in the pre-Independence, colonial period. In this way these tensions were typical of the social effect of one aspect of the further commercialization of the raayat economy in the NMS. While there was a concentration of rubber smallholding in the two districts and this helps to account for the later disturbances

⁵⁵ Bailey defines adat as 'traditional social norms and associated forms of behaviour, [which] influences the way a Malay lives by setting the standards by which behaviour is judged to be either refined and seemly (halus) or unrefined and unworthy (kasar).

Ibid., p.9.

there the class tensions exemplified in the history of rubber growing in the two districts also indicate the kinds of productive relationships and the tensions associated with them within the NMS as a whole in the formal colonial period.

Rice in the NMS

The fact that British policy makers, in pursuit of their limited objective of generating an agricultural surplus in Malaya looked to rice rather than rubber and other tropical cash crops to help support the colonial economy meant the majority of peasants in Malaya who remained within the sphere of subsistence rice farming came under periodic governmental pressure to maximize their rice surplus. Throughout the formal colonial period in the NMS the peninsular as a whole remained a net importer of rice - a commodity which was the staple diet of labour in the extractive industries and of the Asian population servicing the colonial economy generally and which was an essential and an expensive item featuring on the debit side of the colonial profit-loss account. Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai, reporting on the development of the Malayan rice industry for the period 1920-1940, gives a breakdown of the source and cost of rice imports into Malaya for the period:

To supplement her rice deficits, Malaya imported 50 per cent of her total rice imports from Siam, 43 per cent from Burma, and 5 per cent from French Indo-China. The country as a whole spent about \$70 million each year to import rice. The F.M.S. alone spent between \$10 million to about \$30 million each year on rice imports. During our twenty- year period Malay's yearly imports increased nearly two- fold, from 370,000 tons in 1920 to 660,000 tons in 1940.⁽⁵⁶⁾

A recurring theme then in the policy thinking of the period was that of self-sufficiency in rice for the peninsular, a theme which came more sharply into focus during periods of serious rice deficiency. Such periods of deficiency occurred around the time of World War I, in the 1930s and during the Second World War. During the First World War

⁵⁶ Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai, The Rice Industry in Malaya 1920-1940(Singapore Studies on Borneo and Malaya No. 2.), University of Singapore, Department of History, 1963, p.5.

Though it should be noted that in the same period it was cheaper to import rice than to grow it locally. The lucrative nature of the extractive industries meant that 'the profits from tin and rubber could be used in buying Malaya's staple food from elsewhere'.

Ibid., p.21.

This did not apply, however as we shall see in times of economic difficulty.

rice imports were threatened by enemy action.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Cooke reports that 'between the years 1917 and 1921, when rice crops failed in India and Siam and the Indian Government prohibited the export of Burmese rice, Malaya was badly hit'.⁽⁵⁸⁾ In the 1930s the tin and rubber industries were badly affected and export earnings from them fell markedly. Rubber smallholdings suffered badly and the colonial government had to curtail the import of foodstuffs.⁽⁵⁹⁾ These effects of the depression 'strengthened the conviction [amongst colonial officials] that peasant dependence on cash crops was to be discouraged and that a new government policy was needed to boost peasant food-crop cultivation, especially that of padi cultivation'.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The body charged with the responsibility of formulating such a new policy was the Rice Cultivation Committee. Two important recommendations were made by the Committee: that 'the problem of increasing rice production... be tackled not in isolation by the State or Settlement Government, but on an overall basis extending over the entire country'; and that a new Drainage and Irrigation Department (D.I.D.) be set up to be responsible for the better carrying out of rice irrigation programmes.⁽⁶¹⁾ Colonial authorities were, before the creation of the Federation of Malaya, clearly hampered in the implementation of their first objective in the NMS. The D.I.D., for example, was when proposed 'to be vested with executive power

⁵⁷ Hill, Rice, p. xvi.

⁵⁸ Elena M Cooke, Rice Cultivation in Malaya (Malayan Studies Series No. 2.) (Singapore, 1961), p.5.

⁵⁹ Lim Teck Ghee, Peasants, p.181.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

In Kelantan for example, '[t]he low price of rubber... combined with Government activity in encouraging rice cultivation resulted in greater attention being paid to rice in 1931'.

Kelantan Annual Report 1931, p. 13.

⁶¹ Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai, Rice Industry, p.25.

within the S.S. and F.M.S., and to act in an advisory capacity in the Un-F.M.S.'⁽⁶²⁾ Some headway was made in the 1930s in implementing the recommendations of the Rice Cultivation Committee. The new Department of Drainage and Irrigation was formed in 1931 and some work was done under the auspices of this department towards the restoration of padi lands that had become abandoned because of silting. The D.I.D. also oversaw the initiation of several important padi schemes.⁽⁶³⁾ It was not however to be until the Independence period that the policies proposed in the 1930s were to be more fully implemented and stronger and more positive steps in the direction of Malayan self-sufficiency in rice were to be made.⁽⁶⁴⁾

The Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Malaya severely disrupted the pre-war pattern of rice importation and further underscored the need for a greater independence from outside sources of supply of the staple. The war also disrupted internal supplies of rice and the restoration of stable rice marketing within Malaya was a major priority of colonial administrators in the post war reconstruction of Malaya. In 1945 for example, Colonel E.V.G. Day estimated that Kedah would be able to supply a surplus of 25,000 tons of rice to the rest of the peninsular.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The problem that confronted the British Military Administration in the area was that of effectively distributing this rice in the wake of the disruption to the internal marketing mechanisms in Malaya caused by the war and

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., p.27.

We can see the limited operation of the D.I.D. and the entire rice development programme of the time in the NMS in that the three schemes initiated (at Sungei Manik, Lower Perak, Panchang Pedina, Selangor, and Payer Besar, Pahang) were all located within the Federated Malay States.

Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hill, Rice, p.xvi.

⁶⁵ Colonel E. V. G. Day, 'Notes of Telephone Conversation with Mr. F.A. Shelton, Dy. Food Controller, K.L., Subject - Approved Padi Buying Scheme', item 1., Diary of Col. E.V.G. Day, British Military Administration, Region No. 1., S.C.A.O. Kedah/Perlis(22/10-28/11/45). Held in the Royal Commonwealth Society library, London, under this listing: British Association of Malaysia(BAM), 1/23 E.V.G.Day Papers(S.C.A.O. Kedah and Perlis, Oct-Nov 1945).

occupation.⁽⁶⁶⁾ We can see then that, with the restoration of the British colonial regime in Malaya, peasant surplus rice was, in the commercial rice producing areas of north Malaya, a significant prop to the post war reconstruction programme in Malaya.

The major rice producing areas on the peninsular were, and are, the northern coastal plains centred around the Kelantan Delta and the northwest coastal zone running from Perlis southwards to the Krian plain of Perak. From 1909 onwards Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan were producing a rice surplus for export. Trengganu however, while a significant rice producer, was not self-sufficient in the staple and had to import one third of its requirements.⁽⁶⁷⁾ The position of Kelantan as a rice export surplus producer was however much less secure than that of the north western states. The Kelantan Annual Report for 1931 states that in 1924, due largely to the undermining of rice cultivation by the advent of rubber planting, the state became an importer of rice: 'In 1924 the position of Kelantan as a rice exporting State was changed into that of an importer; and in the last ten years between nine and ten million dollars have gone to one of the State to buy foreign rice,...'⁽⁶⁸⁾

Since the major rice producing areas were concentrated for the most part in three of the four states in north Malaya it was the peasants in those states who were most subject to these self-sufficiency drives. Thus the colonial authorities periodically set about systematically maximizing the amount of rice produced by the NMS peasants beyond that needed for their own consumption. That objective was stated directly in the 1931 Kelantan Annual Report. That report, in assessing the productive requirements of the basic economy needed if Kelantan was to become a major exporter and supplier of rice to the peninsular,

⁶⁶ Ibid.

There are scattered references to the problem throughout the Day Papers. One highly placed British official complained in a letter written in the middle of 1946 that 'the rate of drain on KEDAH/PERLIS[rice] production' threatened to leave Kedah and Perlis a deficiency area.

Newbould to Day, 10 June, 1946. Letter included in the Day Papers.

⁶⁷ Ding Eing Tan Soo Hai, Rice Industry, p.3.

⁶⁸ Kelantan Annual Report 1931, p.13.

said: 'What requires to be ascertained is not so much the total padi crop (and the possibilities of obtaining bigger yields) as the extent to which individual peasants' crops exceed the needs of the family for the ensuing year.'⁽⁶⁹⁾

Clearly then the Colonial government in Kelantan looked to the subsistence rice grower to produce a domestic surplus to meet the state's export requirements in the commodity. The report goes on to outline the kind of survey needed to indicate the state of peasant rice surplus rice productivity, to state that such a survey had been commenced and to briefly chart the history of rice surplus in Kelantan. This historical summary concluded: 'The evidence seems to show therefore that in recent times Kelantan has never done much more than supply its own needs.'⁽⁷⁰⁾

Still, given that the NMS were to a considerable extent beyond the reach of policy emanating from the Federation and since the self-sufficiency policy was not on the whole sustained throughout the period with any vigour, the degree of pressure on the peasantry in the north to supply the peninsular at large with rice, while considerable, should not be overstated. The stronger pressure on the peasantry continued to be that of labouring beyond subsistence in support of the individual state economies in the areas.

In sum, then, the attempts during the First World War, in the 1930s and in the immediate post World War II period to produce a saleable surplus of rice for the tin and rubber producing states to the south, though uneven in operation and effect, were nonetheless an important factor in the new productive relations between the colonial government and the raayat emerging in the NMS in the formal colonial period.

Advisory Government in the NMS

The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 provided only in very broad terms that the British colonial government had an overriding say in how the NMS were to be run from 1909 onwards. The particular article in the Treaty giving this power to the British ran:

The Siamese Government transfers to the British Government all rights of suzerainty, protection, administration, and control whatsoever which they possess over

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.21.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.21-22.

the States of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Perlis, and adjacent islands.⁽⁷¹⁾

The trouble was that, since as we have seen, the precise nature of the suzerainty exercised by Siam over the northern states was unclear the legal status of the new British suzerainty was unclear and additional formal arrangements were made between Britain and the individual northern Malay states in the early post 1909 period to clarify the position in juristic terms. In 1910 Kelantan and Trengganu entered into separate treaties with Britain spelling out the legal status of British suzerainty more specifically.⁽⁷²⁾ In addition a further supplementary agreement between Britain and Trengganu in 1919 provided for the changeover from Agents to Advisors stated above.⁽⁷³⁾ In 1923 Kedah, and in 1930 Perlis, entered into treaties with the British government to place Advisory government in those states on a stronger legal footing.⁽⁷⁴⁾

The varied timing and nature of these formal supplementary arrangements forged between the individual states and the British government was due in large measure to the fact that the degree of control over the particular states assumed by Britain in 1909 varied. Since, as we have seen, the strength of Siamese suzerainty prior to 1909 varied from state to state in the north the transfer of this suzerainty to Britain by the 1909 treaty bestowed a variable control over the four states on Britain as well.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The establishment of British control in Kedah, Perlis and Trengganu took place slowly as a result of the large degree of autonomy exercised by them under Siam.⁽⁷⁶⁾ The situation was however very different in Kelantan where what amounted to a Residential system had been in force since 1903 - a system

⁷¹ Quoted in Emerson, Malaysia, p. 231.

⁷² Emerson, Malaysia, pp.233, 234.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.233.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.233-234, 235.

⁷⁵ Thio, "British Policy", p.483.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

instigated as we have seen, by the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1902.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Because a considerable measure of British control there was already established by the time of the 1909 transfer an early, more specific, regularization of Britain's relations with Kelantan was possible. Thus the 1910 treaty with that state was the more decisive of the two treaties signed in that year. With the transfer of Kelantan formalized by the more specific treaty of 1910 James Scott Mason took over from Graham in the administration of the state. With the change over Kelantan 'continued smoothly and made quiet progress very much on lines already laid down by Graham.'⁽⁷⁸⁾ By means of this treaty Britain formally assumed control of Kelantan's foreign relations and acquired the right to appoint an Adviser to the Raja of Kelantan who undertook 'to follow and give effect to the advice of the Adviser...in all matters of administration other than those touching the Mohammedan religion and Malay custom.'⁽⁷⁹⁾

In Trengganu the refusal of the ruler to become party to the 1902 Anglo-Siamese treaty meant that with the 1909 transfer Britain had no control over the administration of the state at all.⁽⁸⁰⁾ The 1910 treaty achieved only limited agreement between Trengganu and Britain on how and by whom the state was to be controlled and left the British Agent there with no power to interfere in the state's administration.⁽⁸¹⁾ It was the 1919 treaty between Trengganu and Britain which provided for an Adviser with powers comparable to those of a Resident in the Federated Malay States.⁽⁸²⁾

No document regulated British relations with Kedah and Perlis after the 1909 transfer and British officers from the Federated Malay States simply took over from those who

⁷⁷ Ibid.

See my account of the 1902 Anglo-Siamese Treaty in chapter 4 above.

⁷⁸ Salleh, "Kelantan in Transition", pp.57-8.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.58. Salleh quotes the key provision of the treaty.

⁸⁰ Thio, "British Policy", p.483.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.484.

⁸² Ibid., pp.484-85.

had been employed by Siam as financial advisers under the loan agreement between these states and Siam.⁽⁸³⁾ In the north west then, British administrators were hampered by the fact that the two states had undertaken to accept advice 'in all matters relating to finance' only.⁽⁸⁴⁾ In both states the British through their Advisers were, from 1909, left to achieve as much de facto control over the states as they cared - something which proved especially difficult in Kedah where government departments similar to those in the Federated Malay States and largely controlled and administered by Malays were well established.⁽⁸⁵⁾ In Kedah then there was, in 1909, a situation where modern state control - including not only executive power but legislative power as well - had long been in the hands of local state Malays.⁽⁸⁶⁾ These Kedah Malays were reluctant to surrender this control and this led, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, to considerable friction between the new British administrators and Malay administrations from the outset of a formal British presence there.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Over the years the British were able, to an extent, to overcome this resistance and both states formally accepted British advice on all matters of administration with the signing of the 1923 treaty in Kedah and that of 1930 in Perlis.⁽⁸⁸⁾

It was principally through the operation of the state councils and the government departments that the British through their Advisers and Agents sought to influence the 'social and economic progress' of the four states along a path they considered desirable for the

⁸³ Ibid., p.485.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.483. See chapter 4 above.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.483, 485.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.486.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ An extent which should not be exaggerated. See chapter 6 below. Thio speculates that the two treaties gave 'formal recognition of actual conditions which had grown up through the years.'

Ibid., p.486.

inhabitants of those states and in accordance with their other colonial - especially economic - objectives in the area.⁽⁸⁹⁾

In 1909 the variable influence exercised by the British in the four states is very clear in the sources. In each state in the early decades of formal colonial rule the Advisors and Agents were able to influence state administration to the degree allowed by the strength of the influence passed on by the Siamese in the 1909 treaty, the operation of the supplementary formal legal arrangements specifying and strengthening British influence in individual states, and the measure of British political success in overcoming local resistance to their influence. In the same period the fact that the councils and government departments were in an earlier stage of development and were in the process of becoming more efficient in their function also placed some limitations on the influence exercised by British officials in the four states.

Kedah had, as we have seen, set up a council to assist the ruler as part condition for the Siamese loan granted to it a few years prior to the 1909 transfer. The state had acquired a financial Adviser under the terms of this loan agreement. Whether Perlis set up a council or not under the terms of their Siamese loan it did, as we have seen, acquire a financial Adviser as part of that agreement and certainly was operating a state council in 1909.⁽⁹⁰⁾ While the Advisors were technically entitled to give financial advice, the Kedah Adviser certainly sought to influence the council and executive administration on a wider range of issues. In so doing he provoked the resistance from influential Malays within the state referred to above - influential Malays who sought to confine British advice to matters of finance only.⁽⁹¹⁾ It was not until the signing of the 1923 Treaty that there was a formal recognition of a fully fledged advisory system in the state with British Advisors, principally through the State Council, able at least in theory to direct the state on a wider range of policy issues. Certainly by 1938 the Kedah Adviser was a member of a powerful state council which was the supreme policy making body in the state. In that year the state was 'governed by ... the Sultan with the

⁸⁹ The title phrase used by Advisors and Agents in the four states to describe the broad content of the annual reports.

⁹⁰ See my reference to the Siamese loan to Perlis in chapter 4 above. The Perlis State Council is referred to in the Perlis Annual Report 1909, p.7.

⁹¹ This resistance is discussed more fully in chapter 6 below.

assistance of a State Council consisting of ... the Sultan ... as President and three other Malay members as well as the British Adviser.⁽⁹²⁾ In the same year in Kedah '[a]ll legislation [was] passed by the State Council and all questions of any importance in the administration of the State [were] referred to the State Council, which [sat] at least two or three times every month.'⁽⁹³⁾

The Perlis Adviser, too, was clearly exerting some influence on the State Council in that state in the early years of formal colonial rule though it is difficult to gauge the strength of this influence in the sources with any certainty. That influence does appear however to have been minimal. The indication seems to be in the sources that the Perlis Advisers did not, as in the case of Kedah, attempt to strongly advise the State Council and executive branch of state government on a wider range of policy issues. There is no suggestion, for example of any friction between the Adviser and State Council in the Perlis Annual Report of 1909. To the contrary the Adviser in that year, Meadows Frost, wrote in that report of a sympathetic relationship between himself and the Perlis State Council:

...I wish to record my thanks for the assistance which I have received from H.H. the Raja, Tuan Syed Salim and the other members of the State Council. Our relations have always been cordial and the Malay members have been most ready to accept my advice.⁽⁹⁴⁾

Certainly we can not take the Adviser entirely at his word here. Meadows Frost must have been influenced by diplomatic and career considerations in making these statements in the way that he did. More information from alternative sources is needed to effectively gauge the impact that the Adviser was having on the council and the wider administration and the reaction to this of local Perlis Malays.⁽⁹⁵⁾ Still, there are indications in

⁹² Kedah Annual Report 1938, p.5.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Meadows Frost would certainly have been telling his superiors in the Colonial Office what they wanted to hear when he went on the same report to say: 'It is noteworthy that at the time when the treaty was pending the Perlis people's only anxiety was lest they should not be included among the states to be handed over to the protection of Great Britain'.

the secondary sources which point to a much more cautious approach to advisory government in Perlis than in Kedah which do tend to bear out Meadow's Frost 'harmonious relationship' description. If Thio is correct in asserting that the post 1909 formal agreements between Britain and individual states formalized already existing de facto colonial relations in those states the late agreement (1930) in Perlis implies that a full advisory capacity for Britain in that state was achieved slowly and gradually in practice.⁹⁶ Perhaps this is because the British went about the task of securing their advisory government diplomatically in that state. Thio makes no mention of any friction between British and Malay authorities in Perlis. This may be reflective of a situation where the British were avoiding too strong an assertion of their presence and will in the state. It seems likely, then, on a wider reading on the subject that the statements by Meadows Frost and the Advisers which followed him in the years leading up to 1930 may be read as implying a felt need on the part of the British Government to tread lightly with the Perlis State Council and Malay authority in the state generally, perhaps to avoid the sort of friction then evident in the parallel circumstances in Kedah. Certainly by 1938 the Adviser was well and truly in place as a member of the powerful Perlis State Council with wide policy jurisdiction in a general advisory capacity. In the words of the annual report for that year:

The State of Perlis is governed by His Highness the Raja with the assistance of a State Council consisting of His Highness as President, three other Malay members selected by name or office by His Highness with the approval of His Excellency the High Commissioner, and the British Adviser... All legislation is enacted by the State Council and all matters of importance regarding the administration of the State are

Ibid.

This is not to say that there was not some element of truth in the statement. Perhaps a section of the Perlis Malay elite was very enthusiastic about the British takeover. However, given the fact of significant resistance to British rule in the north throughout the colonial period (see Chapter 6 below) the enthusiasm for British rule claimed here for the Perlis population seems, at the very least, surprising.

It may be that a closer scrutiny of other Perlis Annual Reports for the period may yield more clues on the British impact there. My impression however on a selective survey of this source is that the British Advisers in Perlis were inclined to hold back on the subject of British relations with Perlis and that they must, like the 1909 Perlis report, be read with caution.

⁹⁶ Thio's assertion is cited above.

considered by the Council, which ordinarily meets once a week.⁽⁹⁷⁾

Still, formal limitations on British influence in the State remained even at that late stage of the formal colonial period. As we shall see below the British had very restricted access to government positions in the State and likewise there was a restriction on the inclusion of additional British officers on State Council. According to the report it was only '[by] mutual consent of His Excellency and High Highness, [that] additional members [could] be added to the Council for any specific period.'⁽⁹⁸⁾ This provision was no mere formality and 'one such appointment was made during the year under review.'⁽⁹⁹⁾ Although the formal allotment of power in the state from 1930 is clear enough from the report - the Raja and his council were nominal rulers of state but acting on British 'advice' within the Council - the realities of power - the extent to which the Adviser was able to influence the council with his 'advice' - is not clear. Given the limitations placed on the participation of other British officials in Perlis government it seems that British influence in the state depended almost entirely on the political and diplomatic skills of the Adviser. The likelihood is that British influence was weaker and Malay influence stronger in that state than was the case in the other three states where there was a wider British participation in state government by the end of the first four decades of the formal colonial period.

Since in Kelantan the Adviser and his assistant had been sitting with a remodelled State Council since the establishment of Graham's regime in 1902 the British administration in that state was much practiced in its role of guiding that state through its Council and government departments along a path of colonial modernity in State administration.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

⁹⁷ Perlis Annual Report 1938, p.3.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Talib, in his thesis under the name of Robert, comments: 'The advisory system in Kelantan was under much tighter British control than that of Trengganu.'

Robert, "Malay Ruling Class", p.417n.

Success in this venture however was nonetheless by no means ensured by this prior experience and the early years of administration in that state were characterized by local resistance. Unlike the situation in Kedah, Perlis and Trengganu British administration in Kelantan was assisted by the fact that at the time of the 1909 transfer the Adviser was already established as a member of the State Council entitled to give general advice on policy matters before that body.¹⁰¹ The Kelantan State Council continued throughout the formal colonial period as a powerful vehicle for the implementation of British policy and in 1938 was a large council with a greater number of British officials participating directly in that policy making process. In the words of the annual report for that year:

The supreme authority in the State is vested in the Sultan who exercise it subject to the advice and consent of the British Adviser who is responsible to the High Commissioner for the Malay States residing in Singapore...

In carrying on the general administration of the country the Sultan is assisted by a State Council consisting of 15 members including the British Adviser, the Assistant Adviser and the Legal Adviser, the Sultan himself being President. The Council meets twice a month for the transaction of general business.⁽¹⁰²⁾

Thus Kelantan was the only state of the four in the north to begin the formal colonial period with a secure and comprehensive Advisory system in place.

In Trengganu the Agent was, with the transfer of suzerainty, no more than an observer of State Council proceedings and the executive function of State government with little or no influence over governmental processes. By the terms of the 1910 treaty the only functions of the Agent in Trengganu were 'to represent British subjects and to act as a liason between British and local economic interests.'⁽¹⁰³⁾ It may not only have been that the Agent was largely excluded from the governmental process in the years following 1909 that limited British influence in that State but also the fact that the modern governmental process itself, at least in its broad policy making aspect, was in its early stages of development relative to that of say Kelantan, in the early formal colonial period. Talib's assertion that the State council in Trengganu was 'a general advisory body' assisting in 'the administration of the state' within what Talib sees as an indigenous ruling class described by him for the the late nineteenth and

¹⁰¹ See chapter 4 of this thesis above.

¹⁰² Kelantan Annual Report 1938, p.4.

¹⁰³ Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", p.54.

early twentieth century period is at odds with the account given in the Trengganu Annual report for 1919.¹⁰⁴ In that report W.D. Scott, the second British Agent to hold the office in the state, indicates that in 1910 the Trengganu State Council exercised a more limited appeal and review function:

So far as I have been able to ascertain this Council or 'Office' has no jurisdiction over the General Administration of the State. Proposed new legislation is not submitted to the Council for the consideration of the members, but it appears to be the practice of the Sultan to depute two or more of the members, or others, as a Committee to draft any proposed new legislation. The draft is submitted to His Highness, and if confirmed by him is issued in the form of a proclamation bearing the State Seal. The functions of the 'Office' appear to be those of a Court of Appeal and Revision...(105)

Although Scott's report implies that he was very much an observer on the periphery of the operation of the Trengganu State Council and that he had difficulty in ascertaining how that body functioned it does strongly suggest that the Trengganu state council was much less than a 'general advisory body' and Talib's assertion to the contrary needs to be examined in the light of it. What appears to have been lacking in Trengganu, then, in the early period of a formal colonial presence in that state was an institution whereby the British could legitimately influence the broad thrust of policy making in the State. The nature of Malay rule in Trengganu in 1909 and the difficulty this posed for British administrations there in overcoming this is fully accounted for in Sutherland's excellent article on the subject.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ According to Sutherland, on the eve of a formal British presence in the state, 'formal institutions and avowedly political activity were not as all-important to Trengganu as to a Western state. Its world was defined by personal, religious, and cultural ties as well, and in many ways these were more important. It played a power game, but to rules the British did not

¹⁰⁴ Talib, Image, p. 17.

The corresponding thesis chapter makes it clear that the period of focus on this subject is 1881-1919.

Robert, "Malay Ruling Class", Chapter 3, 'The Indigenous Political System 1881-1919', pp. 64-129.

¹⁰⁵ Trengganu Annual Report 1910, p.10.

¹⁰⁶ Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp.40, 43-48 and passim.

recognize.'⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

It was only by degrees, Sutherland makes clear, that the British were able to open up the Trengganu political system to gain admittance to the institutions of power - including the State Council - and to participate in Trengganu's government in a way allowing them to achieve British colonial objectives in the state.

In the years following 1909 the Trengganu State Council was improving on its function and becoming more effective as an instrument for the extension of British influence in the state. Certainly by 1916 it was exercising a policy making function and in that year 'met frequently' and made progress 'in the disucssion of a number of projects for the future', something which, in the view of the Agent, promised 'tangible results' in the state in that year.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ In the annual reports for both 1916 and 1917 specific mention was made of an improvement in the transaction of Council business.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

British inroads into the state's affairs were well underway by 1919 when a full advisory system in the state was declared on paper with the signing of the treaty of that year though it is difficult to be precise about the real power and influence being exercised by the British in Trengganu in that year.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ While the Trengganu State Council continued to improve on its function as a policy making body assisting the government of the state in the early decades of formal colonial rule difficulties in the operation of the council remained and were a source of frustration to British officials anxious to implement British policy expeditiously through its instrumentality. Thus in Trengganu in 1929 - well into the formal colonial period - there was a strong feeling on the part of the British Agent there that the Trengganu State Council still had major limitations as an instrument for running the country.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.33.

¹⁰⁸ Trengganu Annual Report 1916, p.9.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Trengganu Annual Report 1917, p.6.

¹¹⁰ Bearing in mind that in general terms Sutherland argues that the Trengganu elite was not tamed until the immediate pre-war period.

Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp.83-85 and passim.

The 1929 annual report for the state for example, having stated that the state's Council 'met regularly once a week for the transaction of ordinary business [with] additional meetings... when necessary' and that the Council consisted of 'eighteen Malay members, under the Chairmanship of the Mentri Besar, with the British Adviser as the only European member' went on to state:

The despatch of public business at these meetings must of necessity keep pace with the capacity of the weakest members of this large body, of which the individuals are not equally equipped in ability or inclination to master before-hand many of the issues which come up at a meeting for decision.⁽¹¹¹⁾

Still, whatever the limitations in the way in which the Council went about its business it is clear that by 1932 the Adviser was able to influence the Council strongly to follow British policy. The Trengganu Council had, as we shall see below, a combined executive and legislative function in 1932 and it was therefore possible for the Adviser, through his 'advice', to impose on the state 'a system of government which gave [the British] direct control over land, judiciary and finance and to a lesser extent religion.'⁽¹¹²⁾

From the earliest period of a formal colonial presence in the north the British were exerting an influence on the judicial process in the north. They sat on state courts and by degrees through judicial and administrative measures of various kinds, altered the processes and the content of the law operating in the four states. In 1909 Mr. W.L. Conlay, the first British Agent to hold the office in Trengganu was appointed 'as a Magistrate with jurisdiction to adjudicate according to Muhammodan law and State regulations, jointly with the Hakim [a religious court], on all matters, both criminal and civil, in which British subjects [were] concerned.'⁽¹¹³⁾ In the same year in Kelantan the Adviser sat 'as a court of revision', and in

¹¹¹ Trengganu Annual Report 1929, p.13.

¹¹² Talib, Image, pp. 189, 190.

Robert, "Malay Ruling Class", pp.418-19.

¹¹³ Trengganu Annual Report 1909, p.10.

Kedah both the Adviser and Assistant Adviser were involved in the hearing of court cases.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ While such involvement in the judicial process offered British officials another avenue of access to institutionalized power within the states influence exercised in this way was less direct and, while important, had less impact than the involvement of British officials in the policy making and executive administrative apparatus of state in the north.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Although these British officials were, as we have seen in the case of Trengganu applying indigenous law in the cases before them, early in the formal colonial period their involvement did assist in the introduction of British common law into the northern states - something which served to reinforce the operation of British style legislation in the four states in re-shaping the economy and society in the north.⁽¹¹⁶⁾

The report gives the year as 1909. However, Sutherland states that '[i]n 1910 a Joint Court was constituted to enable the agent to act as co-judge in cases involving British subjects.'

¹¹⁴ Kelantan Annual Report 1909, p.7.

Kedah Annual Report 1909, pp.30-1.

¹¹⁵ Sutherland makes the point that the appointment of the British Agent to the joint court in Trengganu 'brought Conlay and his successors into working contact with Trengganu institutions, and it also provided for the first time a source of authority outside the Trengganu elites control, with the result that thwarted litigants and malcontents sought to bring their cases before it and both court and agent became the foci of complaints and politcking.'

Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", p.56.

¹¹⁶ British officials in the NMS frequently had legal training and were therefore well versed in British common law. in Kedah in 1909 for example both the Adviser and the Assistant Adviser were members of the English bar.

Kedah Annual Report 1909, p.30.

Within the period the NMS were included into an imperial heirarchical court structure and this served greatly to reinforce the use of British common law in the four states. The application of British imperial common law to large scale enterprise in the north is well illustrated by Duff Development Company V Government of Kelantan 1924 Appeals cases 797 House of Lords. A statement of broad common law principles being applied to Duff in Kelantan in 1924 by the appeal case is to be found in G. Hood Phillips, Constitutional and Administrative Law(London, 1967), pp.261, 769.

The dispute between Duff and the Government of Kelantan was, as we have seen, a protracted one and entailed a sustained legal battle between the litigants beginning in the state and moving eventually on appeal to the House of Lords. Newspaper clippings on the British High Court in London stage of these legal proceedings are to be found in the Guillemard correspondence.

Guillemard to The Duke of Devonshire, 14 January, 1923. CO717/30 XCA/55463.

Throughout the period under consideration in this chapter then Britain was, as a matter of legal formality, and, increasingly against local resistance as a matter of practice, becoming more secure in the exercise of Advisory influence in the four states. While the British purported to operate as advisers only in the four states they in fact sought to direct the four states in their administrations. Thus the so called British Advisory policy was a euphemism belying the degree of influence they sought for themselves in carrying out their objectives in the north. They were limited in this approach only by the formal restraints holding them back in the early part of the formal colonial period and the political resistance they encountered within the states - a resistance that was, as we shall see in the next chapter, sustained in one form or another, in varying degrees, throughout the entire 1909-1957 period. Precise periodization for the gradual extension of defacto British influence in the individual states is difficult and, given that a stronger measure of British influence was formalized at various times in each state, it is on these formal separate agreements that we need to rely for an approximate periodization of the extension of British influence in the north.

While the state councils, then, were developing and becoming established as policy making bodies in the early decades of formal colonial period that policy making process was focussed principally on the enactment of laws governing the inhabitants of each state and proving the legislative framework for modern colonial states in the north.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ This legislation was given effect by the various government departments in each state. The broad policy making and executive functions of government were closely tied in the four states. In

A thorough examination of the way in which the utilization of British common law additionally altered, along with the enactment of British inspired legislation, the indigenous law of the four states in the period of British administration is beyond the scope of my thesis here. Such an examination would, however, contribute much towards a more precise and balanced understanding of how the Pax Brittanica was altering the economy and society in the NMS in this period.

¹¹⁷ This legislative process was well advanced in Kelantan in 1909 and in that year ten meetings of State Council produced six enactments dealing with Muhammodan Courts, Tamil Immigration, Indian Immigration, the preservation of coconut trees, opium farms and gambling farms.

Kelantan Annual Report 1909, p.41.

Trengganu for example, there was a twenty four member council in 1917 which included 'the Eight Menteri [i.e. ministers] who [were] Heads of the Treasury, the Secretariat, the Land Office, and the Public Works Department, and [who] practically control [led] the work of Government.'⁽¹¹⁸⁾

The British sought to exert as strong an influence as possible on government administration by securing British nationals, or Malays sympathetic to British policies, in positions of executive power within the state. To do this it was necessary to overcome resistance from existing Malay power holders and the early years of formal colonial rule in the north was characterized by tension between 'new' administrators operating in the vanguard of the new colonial administration and traditional powerholders who resisted this change and who sought to limit British influence in the running of the state. Sutherland describes the conflict between the old and new administrative authority in Trengganu in the early years of the British take over in these terms:

The adviser's immediate aim was to create an effective central administration. This meant the appointment of British officers to key departments, but since the abrupt displacement of Malay officials was unacceptable a rather uneasy period of dual control began. Four departments - public works, police, lands and post office - were regarded as particularly important by Humphreys, as their efficient functioning was prerequisite for economic development and increased revenue. The council and Sultan attempted as best they could to stem the tide, stressing that Europeans should serve 'as long as it is considered desirable or until a suitable native officer can be appointed to the post'.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

Kedah, too, was operating a dual British and Malay control in state administration. In that state in 1937 the principal British officers apart from the Adviser were: the Assistant Adviser; the Adviser Lands; the Legal Adviser; and the Protector of Lands.⁽¹²⁰⁾ Other important executive positions - the Secretary to Government, the Director of Lands, the State Treasurer, the Auditor General, and the Superintendant of Customs and of Posts and

¹¹⁸ Trengganu Annual Report 1917, p.6.

¹¹⁹ Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", p.68.

¹²⁰ Emerson, Malaysia, p.239.

Telegraphs - were filled by Malays.⁽¹²¹⁾ In the same state British officers headed the departments providing the states technical services - Public Works, Medicine and Health, Veterinary and Surveys.⁽¹²²⁾

The position seems to have been very different however in Perlis where, under the terms of the 1930 treaty, British were generally excluded from serving in the state's government.⁽¹²³⁾

In general, then, with the exception of Perlis, the position was that in the northern states top executive leadership was shared between Malay and British functionaries with the British holding key positions in the government while the middle and lower ranking positions within the government departments were generally held by Malays. Responsibility for local administrative leadership at the district level was likewise between British and Malay officers.

In addition to their efforts to influence politics and administration at the centre of each state from 1909 the British were seeking to achieve an effective regional control and administration in each state. This did not occur all at once however and was limited by the ability of British officials to overcome central and regional Malay resistance to their control, the general competence and efficiency of the four state colonial administrations and the capacity of infra structural facilities to accommodate the centralization of colonial administration and control in each state. J.L. Humphreys, the British Agent in Trengganu in 1917, described the difficulty for that state in his annual report of that year:

The tendency of the Government is towards centralization, but difficulties of travelling, lack of telegraphs and telephones, and the inadequate skill and method of the Secretariate prevent as yet a proper control of the districts.⁽¹²⁴⁾

It was against these difficulties that the British, from early in the formal colonial period, took steps to create an effective regional organization of the state based on clearly defined mukims

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Perlis Annual Report 1938, p.3.

¹²⁴ Trengganu Annual Report 1917, p.6.

and districts (based largely on the less clearly defined administrative boundaries of the pre-1909 period) and staffed by regional operatives willing and able to implement British colonial policy being worked out in the capital. Thus in Kelantan in 1916 the kwengs - the sub-district administrative unit in Kelantan based on the Siamese model and referred to in my chapter 3 above - were abolished in favour of the smaller administrative unit of the mukim or parish.⁽¹²⁵⁾

Marked and very important changes in rural leadership at the local level were made by the British - a process which has not been fully explored in the secondary sources to date and which can only be outlined for the northern states here. Broadly speaking the British set about, in the early years of formal colonial rule, to alter the indigenous leadership at the local level in two main ways: district chiefs were replaced by district officers; penghulus were being turned into salaried officers of the colonial state. The district chiefs operated by and large, as we have seen, independently of central authority controlling local resources directly in support of their own material well being, status and authority in a very localized way. They were being replaced by district officers who were servants of the colonial state organizing and utilizing local resources in support of that state. The position, function and status of penghulus as village heads was being changed so that they no longer had a purely localized role as kampong head subordinate to a district chief. They no longer organized kampong labour and material resources in support both of their district chief and their own position in kampong society. Instead they were, from early in the formal Colonial period, becoming salaried functionaries organizing local resources in support of the colonial state as the first point of contact of the raayat and other kampong dwellers with a modern and increasingly centralized bureaucracy.

In Kelantan in 1912 there were two districts, - Batu Meng kebang or the Bulu District and Pasir Puteh or the Coastal District - both with district officers.⁽¹²⁶⁾ In the annual report for that state for that year the primary fuction of Advisers to raise revenue in their districts and to organize local resources around this central objective is very clear. The report implies a belief on the part of both officers that the success or failure of their local administrations hinged upon the favourability or otherwise of their revenue balance sheets and

¹²⁵ Kelantan Annual Report 1936, p.82.

¹²⁶ Kelantan Annual Report 1912, p.3.

we can read in this the careerism that was one aspect of the motivation driving colonial administrators in the north in the formal colonial period. For example, the report indicates that the revenue for Batu Menkepang was raised mainly on the basis of the district's gold, tin and rubber resources and implies that the career success of the District Officer hinged in large measure on the successful collection of customs duties on these commodities and the formal recognition of this. Referring to a report written by the District Officer the Adviser wrote:

At present, the gold, rubber and most of the tin won in the State comes from this district, and the District Officer would certainly have written in a more sanguine strain if Customs duties on these articles with certain survey fees had been formally credited to his district.⁽¹²⁷⁾

It is significant, in the light of events in the district some three years forward from the time of the Adviser's report, that Pasir Puteh was not sustained economically by extractive industry but was dependent for its revenue on taxing its rice producers.⁽¹²⁸⁾ This clearly created problems for the District Officer and these are expressed indirectly, in somewhat apologetic tone by the Adviser, in his report. The Pasir Puteh District Officer, the Adviser wrote, had been 'unremitting' in his attention to his duties but that '[t]he development of a district unaided by the bonanza of rich mineral finds [was] necessarily slow.'⁽¹²⁹⁾ Whereas, the same report makes clear, the Batu Mengkebang District was in a very strong position financially with an increase in the revenue collected for the year Pasir Puteh by contrast was experiencing economic and financial difficulty with a decline in the amount of revenue collected over that of the previous year.⁽¹³⁰⁾ Thus while the Adviser's report states that 'the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ The Kelantan Rising in 1915 was focussed on the Pasir Puteh district and is discussed fully in chapter 6 below.

¹²⁹ Kelantan Annual Report 1912, p. 3.

¹³⁰ In Batu Mengkebank the 'total cost of the district [was] \$19,752 and the total revenue ... \$45,956, increases on the previous year of \$5,000 and \$10,000, respectively'. In Pasir Puteh '[t]he revenue for the year was \$20,409, or some \$2,200 less than in 1911, and the expenditure \$13,542'.

Ibid.

reports of both [District Officers] sound[ed] a note of disappointment at the results achieved' in their districts for the year that disappointment must have been stronger in the case of the Paser Puteh district Officer.⁽¹³¹⁾

The agricultural problems experienced in Paser Puteh in 1912 are outlined by the Adviser in his report and, although the Adviser does not make the connection, we can see in these difficulties some of the reasons for the 'disappointing results' in the district:

At Paser Puteh the District Officer reports a falling off in the applications for padi land from 1,280 to 320 acres, a decrease of some \$1,300 in the padi-tax collected, a failure in the crop, and consequent rise in price from 9 to 16 cents a gantang. The sireh vines, too, died under the previous year's abnormal rain, followed by excessive heat, and sireh had to be imported from Trengganu as had rice from Siam⁽¹³²⁾

We can clearly see, then, from this annual report the broad function and responsibility of the District Officer in that State and the pressure that both District Officers and Advisers were under to maintain maximum productivity and efficiency in district and state economies in order to maximize revenue collection and financial self sufficiency in district and state administration.

Trengganu and Kedah both had District Officers from early in the formal colonial period operating in a broadly similar way to those in Kelantan. Thus in Trengganu in 1919 the District Officer in the Kemaman district was engaged in attempting an extension of padi cultivation in the district in an effort to move the state towards self-sufficiency in rice production - an objective which was in the view of the Adviser Mr. J.L. Humphreys, not likely to be attained due to a lack of suitable land.⁽¹³³⁾ The Besut District Officer on the other hand sought to achieve 'good results' for the state by facilitating mining activity in his district - a task he was not, in the view of the State's Agent, performing very well in 1917.⁽¹³⁴⁾ In Kedah

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Trengganu Annual Report 1918, p.6.

¹³⁴ Trengganu Annual Report 1917, p.16.

each of the state's five districts was in the charge of a district officer.⁽¹³⁵⁾ The District Officers in the state had begun the year with only a limited function but had adopted a wider range of duties at the end of the year:

The administration of the Government is by departments somewhat on the lines of the departments of the Federated Malay States, and there are District Officers in each district. These District Officers, however, have not had the multifarious duties of the District Officers in the Federated Malay States, and have been considered merely as Police Court Magistrates. This was altered by General Orders issued by the State Council at the end of the year, and the District Officers now interest themselves in the work of the Land Office, Mines Office, Hospital, Gaol and Public Works and other departments in the same way that the District Officers do in the Federated Malay States.⁽¹³⁶⁾

There is no mention of the use of District Officers in Perlis in the annual reports for that state. Presumably the state was too small to be broken up into districts as was the case with the other three states.⁽¹³⁷⁾ Instead the State appears to have been operating a more limited form of local government - a local control with a much more basic and much narrower area of social, administrative responsibility than that of the district organizations in the other three northern states. In 1938, for example, the state was being administered at the local level by 'a Sanitary Board consisting of an official Chairman and other official and unofficial members appointed by the State Council.'⁽¹³⁸⁾ The Board was 'responsible for the control of ... street lighting, scavenging, conservancy, rating and the administration of the sanitary and building by-laws.'⁽¹³⁹⁾

In the four northern states then there was, from 1909, a marked change in regional leadership. The penghulus, and in three states district officers, were now becoming functionaries of an modern centralizing colonial state drawing state salaries and implementing state policies decided in the capital by councils and government departments following in

¹³⁵ Kedah Annual Report 1909, p.22.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹³⁷ After all Perlis was a district of Kedah in itself up to 1821. See above.

¹³⁸ Perlis Annual Report 1938, p.4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

varying degrees British advice. Unlike the District Chiefs who were largely only nominally under the control of the overriding authority of the Sultan and who exercised a high degree of autonomy in the exercise of their power the District Officers exercised power very much subject to, and on behalf of, a developing state bureaucracy.

At the kampong level the penghulus were no longer dependent upon the patronage of a district chief for their income and no longer did his bidding in organizing labour and performing other local leadership tasks in the kampong. Instead they were becoming salaried officials carrying out instructions issued at the capital in support of the bureaucratic state which provided their income. The penghulus were especially important to the colonial state in that they were in closest contact with the populace - with the raayat - and were the most immediate connecting link between the state populations at the base level and the colonial government. Their most important function was that of revenue collection including not only the collecting of various taxes but also the implementation of the various measures aimed at agrarian reform and increased production and therefore revenue potential at the village level.

As with the changes occurring at the centre in each state the alterations to administration and leadership at the local level took time to achieve. Thus in Trengganu in 1921 the transformation of penghulus into colonial state officials was still in its early stages. In the words of the Trengganu annual report for that year:

The want of Penghulus (headmen) as connecting link between the people and the Government was specially felt in matters connected with the encouragement of peasant cultivation in outlying localities. Some appointments were made, but the difficulty is to find men, otherwise suitable, who are not wholly illiterate.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

In Kedah on the other hand the modernization of the role of the penghulus was occurring more rapidly than in Trengganu and was well advanced in that state by 1914. The Kedah Annual Report for that year explains in some detail and is worth quoting here extensively since it is illustrative in its essentials of the changes occurring in local leadership in all the northern states under formal British influence. According to the report the State's Council in 1909 took steps to replace the system which existed up to that year under which 'headmen were appointed by private individuals and, being unsalaried, lived upon what they could make out of the peasants' with one in which all penghulus were salaried government

¹⁴⁰ Trengganu Annual Report 1921, p.5.

officials.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ The Report continues:

Under a 'Salary Scheme' penghulus who can read and write are now given salaries rising from \$15 to \$25 per mensem by annual increments, and men with better education get \$20 rising by increments to #30 per mensem. They also get remission from payment of the land-tax upon their lands, and are given a commission upon the revenue collected by them.⁽¹⁴²⁾

The report makes it very clear that the penghulus (and District Officers) were considered very important in the implementation of broad colonial policy made in the capital and well worth the very considerable cost to the state's coffers in salaries: '...the money will be given ungrudgingly, for the penghulu, like the District Officer, is not only the "head" but the "back-bone" of the area under his charge.'⁽¹⁴³⁾

We can see from the report also how the penghulus and their function was in 1914 becoming very much tied in with a wider beauracratc apparatus of state and was no longer very localized as it was prior to 1909:

A comprehensive code of 'General Orders' for the guidance of officers in departmental and financial matters was drafted during the year, and is now under consideration. In addition to the salary scheme for penghulus mentioned above, schemes for school teachers, prison warders, chandu officials and orderlies were drawn up and passed.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾

It is interesting to note that although the new arrangements for penghulus were a marked departure from the old system whereby the kampong leaders made an income directly from the villagers unchecked and unregulated by any superior authority, under the new system the penghulu was still motivated in fulfilling tasks of the colonial State to make part of his income directly from the raayat in his charge. Apart from the commission they received from the collection of productive revenues the penghulus were entitled to a portion of punitive state revenues as well. The same report points out that the penghulus were responsible for prosecuting every offender allowing water hyacinth to grow on their land and that 'the

¹⁴¹ Kedah Annual Report 1914, p.20.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

penghulu [was] himself punishable for any neglect in this respect and [was] entitled to half the fines in any case instituted by him.'⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ The report indicates that 'the penghulus ... [were] alive to the danger of the past' but it seems more likely that it was on the carrot-and-stick approach of remuneration and punishment in implementing this aspect of the state's agricultural policy that the British relied in motivating the penghulus to perform this task well.'⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

It would seem, then, that it was thought by the British in Kedah that if the penghulus had a direct personal economic stake in implementing particular aspects of colonial policy at the kampong level they would be additionally motivated to perform these tasks more effectively. In this the British in Kedah showed themselves astute administrators at the local level. While on the one hand they severed the penghulus from their traditional bases of economic support making them for the most part dependant on a salary paid in return for implementing colonial policy they at the same time allowed some play for the traditional practice of drawing economic benefit for themselves direct from the villagers. It was the two operating together that served as strong motivation for them to play their part in implementing British colonial policy at the local level in that state.

In 1914, then, in Kedah the transformation of penghulus into modern functionaires of the colonial state was, according to the report, going well. The report referred to the fact that the penghulus were over the five year period from 1909 to 1914 becoming less oppositionist in the performance of new colonial administrative tasks and summed up by saying; 'the penghulu of the present day is a very different person to the penghulu of five years ago.'⁽¹⁴⁷⁾

Kelantan had begun the formal colonial period as we have seen with a Siamese

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.20.

The report refers to 'the assistance given by the penghulus to the Veterinary Department (in the place of the opposition that they had invariably shown in the past years)'.
Ibid.

model of local organization and leadership with circle heads(To' Kwengs) and village heads (nebengs) acting as local leaders under the supervision, during the Graham administration, of District Officers. By 1937 local organization was very different as the Annual Report for that year makes clear.¹⁴⁸ Certainly, as we have seen, the Kwengs as an administrative unit were abolished in Kelantan in 1916 in favour of the smaller administrative unit of the mukim. And the 1937 report does not make mention of the To' Kwengs and nebengs implying their absence by omission.¹⁴⁹ While the report does not state it overtly its implication is that the To' Kwengs had been abolished in the state by that year. Instead it is clear from the report that the state had adopted a two-tiered local administration with district officers and village heads thus bringing it into line with local administration in Kedah and Trengganu and with that in operation in the Federated Malay States. Clearly from the report by 1937 the state was operating the two tiered local administration with District Officers and penggawas - village headmen - implementing colonial policy in the districts and mukims.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾

The report gives a very good idea of the way in which district officers and penggawas co-operated in their main function of collecting the state revenue in Kelantan. It describes the practice of rent collection in the field by District Officers and penggawas and the performance of other administrative duties around this main task:

A most attractive feature of the system of rent collection in this State is the collection of rent in the field. A small party of Land Office clerks with the District Officer or his assistant goes out for 2 or 3 days into the field and collects rent at the Vernacular Schools, headman's house or other convenient centre. This saves the peasant the cost of a long journey to the nearest District Office and also gives the District Officer the opportunity of hearing complaints and investigating them on the

¹⁴⁸ Kelantan Annual Report 1937, p. 87.

¹⁴⁹ I have been unable to find any explicit reference to the fate of the To'Kwengs and Nebengs after the period of Graham's regime in Kelantan in the 1937 Annual Report, or indeed, in any source. However, the abolition of the Kwengs delineating the area of jurisdiction of To'Kwengs and Nebengs in 1916, the fact that the primary function of the Siamese local administration had been the now defunct one of collecting taxes for the Bunga Emas, and the lack of any mention of To'Kwengs and Nebengs in the annual report dealing with the local collection of revenue in the state in 1937, strongly suggests the abolition of To'Kwengs and Nebengs in 1916, or at least the abolition of these two offices some time between 1916 and 1937.

Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

ground. Other transactions as well as the collection of rent are conducted at the same time and coupons (export rights under the Rubber Control Scheme) are issued.⁽¹⁵¹⁾

The value of the penggawas with their close ties with the raayat as a bridge between the unfamiliar practices of the modern colonial bureaucracy and the old way of life in the kampong is clear from the report. The report indicates the the penggawas 'endeavour[ed] to make these field collections successful' and that in one case a penggawa staged a cock fight 'as an incentive to his villagers to come in and pay rent early.'⁽¹⁵²⁾ Certainly the staging of the cock fight is characterized as 'excessive zeal' in the report but it does nonetheless illustrate the way in which the penggawa's knowledge of local customs and pastimes could be used in the service of the colonial state.⁽¹⁵³⁾

We can see then that at all levels of state in the north the British were, by a series of administrative changes, able to fundamentally alter the way in which leadership of the populace was exercised. At the centre and periphery of the colonial state political and administrative power was no longer exercised on an individual personalized basis but rather as a function of an increasingly structured colonial state. In all this the modern states developing in the north continued to have, in their administration, a strong secular emphasis with Islam remaining a strong ideological force with its own parallel organization for the administration of the religious life of the Malay population but a force which did not have a direct strong representation in secular affairs of state.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Thus in Kelantan for example Imam had been

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ As Roff points out this exclusion from secular state power and the development of a largely separate Islamic administration arose partly from the agreed principle of British non-interference in religious affairs which was part of the formal basis of British influence on the peninsula:

But to say that in general the principle of non interference in religious affairs was a characteristic of British rule in the Malay states is not to say that British rule was without its effects on Islam in Malaya. On the contrary, the presentation and reinforcement of the traditional bases of authority and social organization implicit in this policy, together with greatly improved means of communication and centralization and backed by effective sanctions now open to British-supported Sultans, combined to produce an authoritarian form of religious administration

squeezed out of their role as general administrators at the kampong level during the Graham administration as we have seen, and they continued in that state as in the other three states in the north to remain very much on the periphery of the non-religious administrative changes being implemented at the local level in the four states.

Critical to the implementation of a British colonial administration at all levels in northern Malaya was the undercutting of the traditional economic basis of power of the Malay ruling class. It was principally by this indirect means that the British were able slowly and often painfully to make the NMS Malay leadership malleable to their aims. The British achieved this by creating a situation where the members of the elite were dependent for their livelihood on a state salary or pension and not on privilege personally bestowed and enjoyed to acquire material wealth directly from production in the locality they controlled. With various administrative changes elite wealth and political power no longer depended in the first instance on an interlocking system of personal patronage whereby in hierarchial fashion the right to tap into the productive base of the economy directly was bestowed to individuals from the top down. Instead the acquisition of elite wealth now depended on the dispensation of a state salary and the exercise of power on the positioning of elite members within an hierarchial and stratified bureaucratic state system allotting wealth and power not so much in

much beyond anything known to the peninsular before. The rulers and the traditional elite, much of whose real power to influence the destiny of their states had been stripped from them by the circumstances of British rule, not unnaturally turned to the only fields now left open to them, religion and custom, to express what remained. A direct effect of colonial rule was thus to encourage the concentration of doctrinal and administrative religious authority in the hands of a hierarchy of officials directly dependent on the Sultans for their position and power. The introduction of an alien system of civil and criminal law to regulate all departments of life other than those held to come under the description 'Malay religion and custom' resulted in pressure to establish a more formal system of Islamic Law than had hitherto existed. Islamic legislation was enacted in State Councils, courts and legal procedures were established, and a legal bureaucracy was created to run them. Many of these developments, in addition in some cases (notably that of the regulation of courts) to responding to a real need, may also be seen as a reflection of the desire to emulate Western administrative systems in a field the Malays felt to be peculiarly their own. Few of the measures were wholly innovating in themselves (there had been *kahhis*, shariah law, and restrictive Islamic regulation at various times and places before); what was new was their systematic application and the organization that lay behind it.

Roff, Origins, pp.71-2.

response to intra-elite politicking and on the basis of inherited social position but more according to the need for a pragmatic and systematic positioning of Malays within the administrative apparatus in line with their functional ability. It was in this way, then, that the NMS Malay elite, as the building of the colonial state structures progressed, lost their personal, localized independent means of economic support and became instead dependent on a state salary and on their placement within the administration according to formalized procedures being borrowed from the practiced administrations in the Federated Malay States and the British Civil Service. Thus at the ruling class, and to a much lesser extent the raayat, levels of the NMS (the penghulus it will be remembered, came mainly from the raayat) the acquisition of wealth was becoming increasingly the quid pro quo for service within a wider state structure. Power and status was now dependent upon promotion within an hierarchically organized state bureaucracy. The administrative actions of the new state entailed the payment of salaries to government officials - government departmental employees in the capitals, District Officers and penghulus in the localities as we have seen - while still others were pensioned off in order that the resources and wealth they controlled be passed into the hands of the colonial state. It was in this way that the capacity of the Malay elite to exercise individual control of wealth and power through the holding of traditional privileges was greatly diminished. The payment of salaries to District Officers, penghulus and other governmental officials was, then, part of a much wider fundamental and far reaching process whereby the basis of wealth, status and power was being changed by the British colonial administrations. The primary instrument for these changes in each state was the State Council and, from early in the formal colonial period, various enactments were passed having the effect of cutting off the NMS Malay elite from its traditional economic bases of support and making them economically dependent upon the colonial state.

The Kedah Annual Report for 1909 gives a good idea of how this objective was being achieved at the outset of British suzerainty over the state:

The State Council has in the latter months of the year given its careful consideration to the problems connected with apun-kernia-holders, mukim holders and nobat men... In October, a proclamation signed by H.H. the Sultan abolished the forced labour system throughout the State, and with its abolition the mukim-holders lost their power in their mukims. The later decision of the State Council to pay salaries to such penghulus as were recommended by the District Officers as suitable for Government employment and to appoint new salaried penghulus in place of unsuitable men has cut off the penghulus in the most effectual manner from the mukim-holding, and with the payment of these salaries the Government

has abolished altogether the repai-tax. Lastly, in December, H.H. the Sultan gave his approval to a recommendation of the State Council, whereby salaries are to be paid by the Government to a limited number of the nobat-men, and the nobat tax abolished.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾

In the same year in Kedah, the state set about taking over the ampun-kernias.

'When the State Council was created' the report continues, 'the Raja Muda was able by the payment of allowances and salaries to obtain surrenders of money of the ampun-kernia.'⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ A few of the ampun-kernia's were acquired by the state when their leases terminated on the death of the holders but it was mainly through the exchange of ampun-kernia in return for substitute remuneration that the ampun-kernia revenue was acquired by the state.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ The 1909 report gives a full account of the process:

At a meeting of the State Council held on 22nd November it was decided that it was necessary in the interests of the State that the Government should as soon as possible get into its own hands the collection of the revenue covered by the ampun-kernia. The most natural way of effecting this was for the Government to take the place of the Chinese, who in almost every case had a 'farm' (which for the sake of convenience may be called a sub-farm) from the ampun-kernia holder. A notice was, therefore, issued to every ampun-kernia holder notifying him that upon the expiration of the current sub-farm it was the intention of the Government to sub-farm from him the right of collecting the revenue covered by the ampun-Kernia, and to pay him for life the sum which he now received from the sub-farmer. The arrangement is advantageous to both sides: the ampun-kernia holder has now an assured allowance for his life time without the worries and risks incidental to the Chinese sub-farms, and the Government has the benefit of the excellent bargains made by the Chinese.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾

We can see then how in Kedah the British acting through the primary instrumentality of the State Council set about systematically diverting revenue away from private individuals and into the state coffer and in the process severing Kedah powerholders from their traditional sources of income. In that state the nobat holders were no longer supported by the nobat tax. The abolition of kerah in Kedah and the other northern states is dealt with more fully below but it is clear thus far that in Kedah with this abolition and the

¹⁵⁵ Kedah Annual Report 1909, p.12.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.59.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

payment of salaries to penghulus the mukim-holders could no longer rely on the latter to organize labour in their support and that they had lost their power in the mukims. The payment of salaries to penghulus and the abolition of the ripai tax upon which they had depended meant that they were now dependent on the state not the mukim holders for their livelihood and the latter were left without any economic hold over the penghulus to make them do their bidding. The ampun-kernia holders in Kedah, it will be remembered, were Malay and Chinese elite figures who enjoyed the privilege granted ultimately from the Sultan to collect revenue of various kinds on their own behalf. The privilege was the economic basis of power for a significant number of elite figures and, when the ampun kernia system was abolished, there was a corresponding undermining of the power and influence of these elite figures.

The economic undercutting of the Malay elite from their traditional sources of support described above for Kwdaah was paralleled in the other three states on the northern peninsular. Those states, too, were experiencing the abolition of District Chiefs and their replacement by salaried District Officers and the introduction of a system of salaried penghulus who were colonial state employees in the manner referred to above. Talib describes the broad process in Trengganu. Referring to 'the transfer of political control from indigenous to colonial hands' by breaking the stranglehold of the ruling class over the Trengganu state economy Talib describes British efforts to 'on the one hand' transform 'the official elements in the indigenous political system into a salaried class - a civil service under Adviser's ultimate control - and on the other to changing the non-official ruling class into dependents and pensioners of the State Treasury, receiving a variety of regulated monetary allowances and other privileges in place of their earlier unregulated perquisites.'⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Talib continues:

The loss of political control by the ruling class had consequences for its economic domination. By means of a series of new specialized committees the British Adviser stripped the aristocracy of its advantageous position with regard to pajak, concessions and cap kurnia which had hitherto been their main source of income. They were thus transformed gradually into an official bureaucracy whose members drew salaries, allowances, annuities and pensions from the State Treasury on a regulated and controlled basis.'⁽¹⁶⁰⁾

¹⁵⁹ Talib, Image, p. 190.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

By 1930, then, each northern state was operating a State Council. These councils were made up of a general Adviser, exercising a strong British influence on the state and the Sultan together with the remaining councillors who were powerful and influential members of the Malay state elite. These Councils were the supreme policy making body within each State. Various government departments implemented the policy of the Council at the capital and in the various district localities across the states. At the district level the district officer was the principal agent of the central government and appointed by that body. Thus, the diminution of the Sultan's power in favour of a broader spread of power at the centre within a wider section of the Malay elite - a process which had begun in the pre-1909 period - was now given even stronger formal expression under the new colonial arrangements for government in the four states. Thus, in all the NMS the Sultan, though he remained nominal head of state, was relegated to the position of figurehead. Where the Sultan wasn't totally a figurehead he had at the most only a share of top power now being exercised by the colonial policy making and administrative elite through the instrumentality of the state councils and their executive departments. These councils and departments were now under the direction of the British government, specifically the British Colonial Office and less directly, the British Foreign Office, through the agency of the Advisers, and, in Trengganu up to 1919, the British Agent. The ruling colonial elite in the NMS was thus made up of a mixture of Malay and British functionaries, with British officials generally holding the key posts in government but with a greater number of Malays in top government positions than was the case in the Federated Malay States. In this way, then, the British expanded on and refined the rudimentary central administrations already in existence in 1909. It was these bureaucracies, staffed at the top with strategically placed British officials seconded within the Malayan Civil Service to positions of leadership within the NMS administrative structures, and a greater number of leading NMS Malays, that implemented the decisions of the state councils. These British and Malay bureaucrats were also able, within the parameters defined by broad Council policy in their

particular departmental areas and the bounds of normal bureaucratic discretion, to exercise their own initiatives in maintaining and developing NMS society. The overall effect of NMS colonial government was to order these state societies in a way defined by the broader needs of the Malayan colonial economy and state, and to some significant but diminishing degree, the self interest of the (demographically stronger and to a significant but lessening and variable degree entrenched) Malay state elites in the north. The colonial administration aimed first and foremost at satisfying an economic objective in the NMS and in so doing it caused more far-reaching change at the level of the economic base in that area. It was primarily through the instrumentality of the state councils and their bureaucracies that British indirect rule sought to organize raayat labour to suit their own designs in the area. In so doing they accelerated and intensified the transformation begun in the four states in the nineteenth century.

The annual reports of Advisers and Agents and the records of Council proceedings clearly reflect the dominant concern of the British to preside over well ordered and self-sustaining states in the north in the formal colonial period.⁽¹⁶¹⁾ In particular, these documents make clear the primary concern of the British-dominated NMS administrations to, in effect, streamline and augment the process of tax collection from the raayat as the principal means of furnishing the revenues needed to run the state along modern colonial administrative lines. Unlike the situation in the Federated Malay States and Johore the British were dependent upon the NMS Malay elite with the Sultan as its symbolic head to maintain the state economies on the basis of raayat surplus. Kessler quotes Governor Sir John Anderson on the subject for Kedah and Kelantan:

[T]he vast preponderance of the population both in Kedah and Kelantan is Malay, and even if their finances could bear the cost of a European staff, it would be highly impolitic and undesirable to replace the Malays. Some further European assistance for supervision and direction may be necessary, but our policy should be to confine ourselves to that and to educating and training the Malays to carry on the administration themselves.⁽¹⁶²⁾

¹⁶¹ The Public Records Office in London has a complete set of annual reports for all the NMS for the 1909-1938 period. The same institution holds CO717 materials for the 1920-1945 period which includes correspondence between NMS British Advisers and minutes of the State Council meetings. These materials are to be found elsewhere. The London University School of Oriental and African Studies library has an incomplete collection of annual reports for the NMS for the period while Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia, has the CO717 documents on microfilm.

¹⁶² Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.57. Original emphasis. My parenthesis.

Thus the British sought to rule the NMS through Malay elite leadership exercised on the basis of the new methods of surplus extraction being further developed during the period of formal colonial presence there.

British Land Administration in the NMS

In particular early colonial administrators and their successors focussed upon land as a means of augmenting state revenues. Their primary motivation in changing the land system was two fold. Through the continued development of a systematic land administration the British sought to encourage large scale mining and plantation enterprise and the state revenue earning potential it offered. Such enterprise it was thought, would be attracted by an orderly system of land administration capable of providing a secure proprietary interest in land as a major means of production. More important, however, was the British objective of increasing the amount of revenue that could be drawn from raayat securely based on land.⁽¹⁶³⁾ An

163 For example Wilson's 1958 study reflects the priorities in the thinking of colonial authorities on the subject for the late colonial period. Although published in the year after Independence the survey work upon which the report is based was commenced in 1954 under T.B. Wilson in his capacity as a colonial official.

Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production, Introduction and page 1.

Wilson's first recommendation for change on the basis of his report indicates a secondary concern with land reform as a means of encouraging foreign capital enterprise in north Malaya and a primary concern of promoting security of tenure amongst the raayat:

A full Land Reform programme is advocated based on Middle East and Asian experience, to ensure a more even distribution of land-ownership, to promote agrarian stability, to consolidate smallholdings and to divert local capital interests into playing an active part in the future industrialization of Malaya.

Ibid., p.98.

The Perlis Annual Report for 1909 portrayed a similar notion of priorities in its statement on land legislation then in operation in the state:

The Existing Land Act of the year 1326 has been considerably amended and is now being printed in its amended form. Though primitive, it is suited to the present requirements of the country but some more advanced regulations may be necessary should we receive applications for large concessions in the future.

Perlis Annual Report 1909, p.7.

orderly land system, it was thought would give the raayat security of tenure which would assist their productive capacity and increased the amount of produce tax that could be drawn from them. Not only this but the further systematization of land tenure also aimed at greater efficiency in the extraction land surplus more directly in the form of land tax. A prosperous raayat securely based on their land would also, by fostering raayat commodity production and trade, increase the amount of wealth available to the state through trade tax now being levied by the state. It was also thought that an orderly land system would promote agrarian stability in the four states.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ In general, then, it was in large measure through their land policies that the British sought to foster self-sufficiency in, and enhance the general economic welfare of, the raayat upon which, in various ways, the well being and stability of the state as a whole depended.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ It is, then, in the working of the British-inspired land system in the NMS that we can see more clearly the overall aim, and one aspect of, the operation of British protectionism towards the Malays.

We can clearly see in this dual British motive for land reform the way in which the presence of large scale commercial enterprise in the north was serving to alter the wider context in which the peasant economy was operating in the period. It was the presence of such industry which, as we have seen in this chapter above, gave added motivation for the British to modernize land tenure in the four states and which, through a process of balancing the land requirements of large scale and small scale enterprise, served to influence the shape of the new system. It was a balance which was not necessarily comfortable for the peasantry

'Present requirements' in this context may be taken to refer to the needs of raayat agriculturalists as opposed to the requirements of foreign capitalists who would be seeking 'large concessions' of land.

164 A concern with the promotion of agrarian stability through the development of the land system in the very late colonial period can be seen in Wilson's statement quoted immediately above.

165 The British well understood the importance of land to the productive and general economic welfare of the raayat. For example de Moubray, in his 1936 annual report for Kelantan, includes a long section on the 'history of the Kelantan survey and settlement'. In the report he rebuts any notion that he has 'unduly lenthen[ed]' his report by prefacing the history with the remark that the 'matter is ... a fundamental constituent of the welfare of the peasantry'.

Kelantan Annual Report 1936, p.75.

and the British authorities were aware of this. Whether the balance was a fair one or not the very fact that it was being attempted indicates that the well being of the peasantry with regard to land was being influenced substantially by the needs of large-scale land based enterprise. Meek highlights the official uncertainty as to whether the new land system was equally advantageous to small and large scale rural enterprise in the closing passage of his chapter on the Unfederated Malay States in his book on land law and customs in the colonies. He does so by quoting a series of questions posed by a report dealing with the post World War II land situation in Malaya:

Are the steps taken in regard to the alienation of land adequate to preserve a just balance between the interests of the small-holder and those of the capitalist enterprises? Is the existing system of land tenure such as will not only give stability of tenure to the small-holder but will minister to the needs of progressive farming?...⁽¹⁶⁶⁾

For these reasons, then, the trend towards a formal systematization of land tenure already underway in the pre-1909 period was greatly strengthened by British indirect rule in the NMS. Throughout the period the administration of British-inspired land policies were taking the area closer to a position where a proprietary and commodity character to land in the fullest modern juristic sense was generalized. It is difficult to give a precise periodization to the development of this modern land tenure in the NMS. But Wilson's 1958 study of land tenure in north Malaya, based as it is on data collected in the late colonial period, does make it clear that modern land proprietorship was well established by the latter part of the colonial period.

The late nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth had seen, as I have indicated, the uneven development of a modern land tenurial system in the four states. In the succeeding decades, however, British-led moves to more fully implement existing centralized land policies, and the further enactment and implementation of land legislation, meant that a wider area of land was being invested with a proprietary character in practice as well as in theory. From the time that modern land laws had been introduced to all the NMS land

166 Meek quotes from Problems of the Post-War Settlement in the Far East. Interim Report by a Group of Members of The Royal Institute of International Affairs. British Malaya. Paras, 14 and 24.

C.K. Meek, Land Law and Customs in the Colonies(London, 1949), p.56.

proprietorship was in a theoretical sense generalized across the north. The practical implementation of such proprietorship however lagged some way behind.

The initial concern of British administrators, then, was to bring about a more effective implementation of the fledgling land systems already in existence in 1909. Land had to be surveyed, titles registered, rent rolls drawn up, rent-collectors organized, and other land-related tasks performed to fulfill the aims of existing land law. This concern to improve the colonial land system that was the status quo in 1909 can be seen in the report of the Adviser to Perlis for that year. Speaking of the activities of the Land Office the report stated:

There is much to be done here. I found that there was no such thing as a rent-roll or any registration of the titles issued previously to the year 1325.

The staff are now busily employed calling in all the old titles issued before that date and registering them. From the register thus compiled it will be possible to make a rent-roll. The State Council devoted a considerable amount of time to amending the Land Enactment. With regard to Malay holdings we intend to apply the existing amended Enactment, but further regulations will be necessary for dealing with large areas. Land rents produce at present barely \$15000, but on the completion of the rent-rolls I hope that this amount will be doubled.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

It is clear from this passage that the colonial government, while continuing to keep an eye on the possibility of future capitalist development in the state, was primarily concerned to better organize existing land tenure with a view to maximizing the amount of land revenue that could be extracted from the peasantry.

In Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu, too, early colonial administrators displayed a preoccupation with the collection of land revenue from the peasants and they therefore sought to introduce and develop new land systems to that end. In Kedah in 1910 land revenue was the second most important source of revenue for the state and the Annual Report for the same state for 1909 dealt with the question of land very much in terms of its actual and potential revenue earning capacity.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ The British preoccupation with land revenue is also to be seen, as I shall indicate in more detail below, in the abolition of kerah in Kedah. Maxwell's forecast

167 Perlis Annual Report 1909, p.3.

168 Kedah Annual Report 1909, pp.14-20.

Ahmat itemizes the sources of revenue income for Kedah in 1910. Land revenue was second in importance to that obtained from the opium monopoly.

Ahmat, "Transition and Change", p.235.

was that the abolition of kerah and the concurrent removal of the peasants' exemption from land tax in 1909 by proclamation in that year was likely to have the 'most beneficial' effect of, amongst other things, 'adding to the land revenue'.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾

In Kelantan the British-dominated administration sought to intensify efforts already begun to increase revenue extraction from the raayat. In 1915 a new land system was introduced into the state which provided that 'instead of the produce taxes imposed previously, a fixed land rent was to be levied, and simple titles were to be issued in due course for lands upon which rent was paid'.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ In Trengganu the British sought to regulate land use with a view to controlling and increasing state revenue from land-based enterprise. In 1921 a new land regulation introduced a new permit system aimed at checking the indiscriminate clearing of forest land to plant hill rice.⁽¹⁷¹⁾ A Land Enactment introduced into the state in 1926 sought to further regulate the use of land by the peasantry.⁽¹⁷²⁾ By 1928 the Trengganu peasantry was coming under increasing state pressure to pay land rent in cash.⁽¹⁷³⁾

We have already seen that the moves to formalize land tenure in the NMS in the

169 Kedah Annual Report 1909, p.21.

170 Ibrahim Nik Mahmood, "The To Janggut Rebellion of 1915", in William R. Roff, Kelantan Religion, Society and Politics in a Malay State(Kuala Lumpur, 1974) p.72.

171 Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", p.73.

Sutherland does not say exactly how the permit system would increase revenue in this way. Presumably the indiscriminate clearing of forest land by the peasantry robbed the timber industry and the state of revenue by diminishing the amount of timber available for cutting and processing. The permit system would have ensured a sufficient timber supply by controlling the clearing activity of the peasants. In so doing it would have helped secure the timber industry as a source of taxation for the state. Of course, the charging of fees for the permit would have been a source of revenue in itself.

172 *Ibid.*, p.78.

173 H.P.Bryson, "Trengganu 'Rising' in 1928", British Association of Malaya(BAM) Historical Collection, 11, 4, p.2. The document is in the form of a hand written reminiscence of the event. Held in the Royal Commonwealth Society library in London.

latter part of the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century were to a considerable extent derivative of and parallel to, land developments in the British controlled states to the south. This broad trend continued throughout the formal colonial period in the four states though specific land arrangements were particular to the NMS and to particular states in the north.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ The British were hampered in their aim of implementing a common land system for the whole peninsular by the unfederated status of the NMS and it was not until the emergence of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 paved the way for the implementation of a peninsular-wide approach across a wider range of policy that the British were able to institute a uniform land policy on the peninsular. By that stage, however, the legislative ground work had been laid for such a uniform land system by land acts in the NMS which were, in their essentials, very similar to each other and those operating elsewhere on the peninsular.

By the time of the Second World War all states in north Malaya were operating a western-style land system and a modern land tenure existed on a solid legislative footing. In 1926 a Land Enactment was passed in Kelantan embodying the Torrens system of registration of titles.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ In the same state a 1938 Enactment superseded the earlier Act though the principles of the Torrens system were retained.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ In 1932 in Kedah, 1937 in Perlis, and 1939 in Trengganu, similar land legislation was enacted.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ This land legislation in the four states followed closely land legislation in the Federated Malay States and was designed to confirm the northern Malays in what the British believed was a modified and updated version of the traditional system of Malay land tenure. Thus, by the Second World War the objective historical reality of British misconceptions on Malayan traditional land tenure was given full expression in the legislation and policy designed to protect the Malays as traditional

174 Meek's book, published in the late formal colonial period, states: 'Generally speaking, it may be said that land legislation in the Unfederated Malay States has been gradually assimilated to that of the Federated Malay States'.

Meek, Land Law and Customs, p.44.

175 Meek, Land Law and Customs, p.48.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid., pp.49, 52, 54.

agriculturalists as the British perceived them to be. Malay reservations enactments designed to keep land in Malay hands were effected in Perlis in 1935 and Kelantan in 1930.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ By 1945 Kedah had a Malay Reservations Enactment and the 1939 Trengganu legislation referred to above contained provisions for 'the safeguarding of Malays from loss of their land, by the provision of Mukim Register titles which [could] not be transferred or charged to other than Malays'.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Clearly, then, a very different system of land tenure prevailed in the NMS from the land tenure practiced by northern Malays in pre-colonial times. By World War II a modern land system had been legislated into existence embodying major principles of European land tenure superimposed on what the British saw as the major tenets of Malayan agricultural land tenure. The later land acts gave a modern colonial juristic expression to the long held and mistaken belief that the Sultan had been the supreme proprietor of land in his state since earliest times. Thus the British were able to give effect to the notion of Crown land in the NMS context and the Sultan's position of supreme proprietor and landlord was centrally enshrined in colonial legislation in all four states.⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ By World War II the peasants' positions as tenant of the state, occupying land and paying rent, land tax or other dues in return for this occupation had been given full and updated expression in the land legislation of the four states. It should be noted that to say this is to use the term 'tenant' in the wider juristic sense to refer to the fact that all land was held from the Sultan who was supreme proprietor. It includes raayat who were owners in the more limited sense of holding a free hold title to land.⁽¹⁸¹⁾ By the more thorough and systematic implementation of the embryonic land policies

178 Ibid., pp.53, 59.

179 Ibid., pp.50, 54.

Meek makes no reference to a separate Trengganu reservations enactment here.

180 Ibid.

181 For a discussion of the state's role as landlord see Wong, Tenure and Land Dealings, pp.30, 31.

already in existence in 1909 and by the further development of land policy and law in new directions British administrators facilitated the operation of wider colonial economic forces serving to separate an increasing number of peasants from the land. A much stronger legal and administrative framework now existed within which land could be more easily gained or lost than was the case in the nineteenth century. Thus British land policy served to increase the incidence of landlordism and tenancy in the NMS and in so doing helped to cause the emergence of the landlord-tenant productive relationship as a major feature of the NMS, a trend which, as we shall see, is clearly visible in the sources for the very late colonial period.

Landlordism and Tenancy in the North Malaya: 1958

Wilson's 1958 study of the economics of padi production in north Malaya makes clear the extent to which the economic forces at work in the colonial situation had resulted in an economic concentration of wealth on the basis of land ownership by the very late colonial period in three of the four states in the north.¹⁸² By that time around half of the total acreage under padi was occupied by cultivators under one of five basic types of private tenancy contractual arrangement.⁽¹⁸³⁾ The remaining land was held on a freehold title from the state. Wilson's statistics allow us a more precise definition of this concentration in spatial terms though not in terms of land owned and land tenanted on a per capita basis. On the basis of Wilson the following figures can be given for Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan:

Padi Land Tenanted and Owned in North Malaya¹⁸⁴

	Acreage of land owner- farmed	Acreage of land tenanted	Total padi land	Percentage total land
Kedah	120,894	153,972	274,866	56
Perlis	24,273	21,333	45,606	46.8
Kelantan	72,478	69,949	142,427	49.1

¹⁸² T.B. Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production in North Malaya, Malaya, Ministry of Agriculture Bulletin No 103, Kuala Lumpur, 1958.

¹⁸³ The 5 types listed immediately below in this chapter. Wilson describes these 5 kinds of tenancy arrangement as 'well-understood and long established forms of contract'.

¹⁸⁴ Adapted from Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production, Table 3, p. 11.

What is clear from these figures is that, by the later stages of the formal colonial period a very significant proportion of padi land in the three states - around half - was worked by tenant agriculturalists with approximately half the padi acreage being occupied by padi growers who owned their land. Though no specific per capita figures showing the number and percentage of land owners, private landlords and tenants involved in padi production in the three states are given by Wilson nonetheless he indicates the concentration of land ownership in a few hands in general terms. In his summing up Wilson states: 'Ownership of padi land is shown to be widely but very unevenly scattered, with a predominant proportion of the padi land area concentrated into a relatively few large properties.'⁽¹⁸⁵⁾

While Wilson does not give a further breakdown indicating the extent of single and joint ownership of these properties it seems a fair assumption that Wilson has in mind a situation where most of the around fifty percent padi land ownership was held by relatively few individuals. Wilson's account of the five main types of private tenancy arrangement show how the position of landlords as appropriators of tenant surplus was well established by the late colonial period.

We can see in these five main kinds of 'contractual obligations of farmer and landlord' the division of peasant productive wealth between direct producer and landlords and the way in which this kind of surplus extraction had been formalized - systematized - by the end of the formal colonial period.⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ These main types of private tenancy arrangement were: fixed rent (sewa); crop-sharing (pawah); lease (pajak); loan (gadai); and mortgage (jual janji). Wilson also gives an account of the agreement between landowners and the state (sendiri). Under the fixed rent (sewa) agreement the peasant tenant agriculturalist agreed to 'pay a specified amount of rent in respect of either a local unit area, e.g., the relong, or the

185 Ibid., p.97.

186 The phrase used by Wilson, Ibid., p.10.

whole of the land he cultivates'.⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ Wilson further states that these rents were paid either in kind or cash and this is a reminder that it is important not to overstate the extent to which the peasant economy was monetized in the colonial period.⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ Under the crop-sharing (pawah) system the tenant agreed `prior to entering the land to pay the landlord at harvest a fixed share or fraction of the resulting crop, i.e. a stated proportion of the final yield, with the actual amount to be paid being decided only at or after harvest and varying according to the yield'.⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ Wilson explains that `the leasing type of agreement is an extension over a longer period of the annual fixed-rent-in-cash type, since the farmer agrees to pay a lump sum of cash in advance to cover the whole period, which is longer than one year and usually is between three to five years but may be as long as 11 years'.⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ The gadai system entailed the temporary transfer of usufructuary but not proprietary rights to land by the landowner in return for the loan of a sum of money.⁽¹⁹¹⁾ The last two categories of tenancy agreement involve `tenancy' in the wider juristic sense stated above and describe land arrangements between titled free holders of land and individuals or organizations having some claim on the labour of the freeholder, or indirectly, subordinate tenant labour controlled by him on the basis of landownership. The jual janji agreement is of particular importance since, as we have seen, it was a mechanism whereby usurious transactions could have the effect of separating peasants

187 Ibid., p.13.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid., p.14.

It will be remembered from my discussion in Chapter 3 above that Ahmat gives a slightly different account of the pawah system of cultivation in Kedah for an earlier period of time. According to Ahmat the pawah system as it operated in Kedah in the later decades of last century and up to half way through the first decade of this century entailed the landlord himself fixing his own share of the harvest. Not only this but, whereas Ahmat indicates a separate alternative bagi dua system of cultivation to pawah cultivation Wilson treats bagi dua cultivation as indicating one of a number of ways in which a proportion of the harvest was divided between landlord and tenant.

Ahmat, "Tradition and change", p.61.

190 Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production, p.15.

191 Ibid., p.16.

from the land. According to this arrangement the peasant landowner put up his land as surety against default on repayment of a loan taken out by him. If the peasant debtor freeholder failed to repay the loan the agreement was that the land passed to the creditor.⁽¹⁹²⁾ The last category of tenancy, sendiri, entailed the payment of certain dues by a titled freeholder to the state in the name of the Sultan in his position of supreme land proprietor. Under the sendiri arrangement the freeholder, although he held his land in perpetuity subject to certain payments and cultivation restrictions, remained in a wider sense a tenant of the state.⁽¹⁹³⁾ Wilson appears to downplay the burden of state rent on land owners:

An owner-farmer will normally hold land on a grant in perpetuity under the Land Code from the State and be subject only to certain cultivation conditions and nominal annual quit rents (hasil tanah) and (if irrigated) water rates (hasil ayer).⁽¹⁹⁴⁾

Meek's account makes it clear, as we shall see in more detail below, that in 1946 the rent paid by landowners were not purely nominal and represented a very real demand on the labour of the owner cultivator and the tenants of private landlords in north Malaya.⁽¹⁹⁵⁾

Wilson further elaborates certain ancillary conditions which could be superimposed on some of the basic types of agreement outlined above. One of these ancillary conditions featured in Kedah and Perlis and involved the payment of a refundable cash deposit by the tenant to a landlord in addition to normal rent. According to Wilson: 'the cash deposit [could be] demanded by a landlord short of funds, but usually [was] proffered by a would-be tenant to induce the landlord to give him occupation, or by an existing tenant to induce continuation of tenancy'. The system had, Wilson continued, 'arisen in areas of severe competition for land

192 Ibid., p.18.

193 See above.

194 Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production, p.18.

195 It may be that Wilson qualifies the severity of payments made to the state to highlight the relativity of the degree of burden imposed on tenants in the differing tenancy arrangements.

where landlords [had] been evicting tenants in order to raise rents'.⁽¹⁹⁶⁾

Thus by Independence landlordism and tenancy was a major feature of northern Malay society. Although precise figures for the numbers of landlords and tenants is lacking we do know that the number of tenants entering into the private rental agreements outlined above was substantial. Wilson reports that, in the very late colonial period 'rent in some form [was] paid on over one-half of the padi land of North Malaya and [was] the most important of the costs of producing padi'.⁽¹⁹⁷⁾

The Abolition of Kerah and Slavery

The British moves to make the state reliant for its survival and prosperity on taxation of various kinds went hand in hand with a policy of eliminating kerah and slavery. In so doing the British were motivated partly by humanitarian concerns but more by an awareness that the practices of kerah and slavery obstructed the methods they were seeking to adopt for the concentration of raayat reproductive wealth in a manner supportive of the colonial state. Thus, although the methods of surplus extraction had, as we have seen, begun to change under the new economic influences intruding into the north in the nineteenth century, those changes were hastened by administrative action in order that the colonial state be placed on a sound economic footing. In all states, then, kerah and slavery diminished dramatically in importance from 1909 onwards, partly as a direct consequence of the British policy of seeking to rest state power on a basis of taxation revenue, and partly as a consequence of the new economic forces which operated more strongly under an umbrella of British indirect rule. It was in this sense, then, that the abolition of kerah and slavery were an essential part of the process whereby administrative power and authority was coming to rest principally on a basis of raayat surplus in kind or cash extracted through a centralized, depersonalized, apparatus of state.

The practice of debt slavery was particularly iniquitous from the British point of view and they set about working on its abolition early in the formal colonial period. Debt bondage was abolished in Kedah in 1910 and had been suppressed in Kelantan and Perlis by

196 Ibid., p.19.

197 Ibid. p.22.

1917.⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ The practice was abolished in Trengganu in 1919.⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ The later abolition of the practice in Trengganu was in keeping with the slower modernization of that state and we can see in the official record of its abolition the basic clash between the old and new methods of labour organization - a clash which was more acute in that state by reason of the slower pace of colonial social change in the state prior to 1909. J.L. Humphreys, in his 1918 annual report for Trengganu, perceived in somewhat Eurocentric terms the persistence of the practice as being indicative of the backward social development of the state:

The custom resembles villeinage in many ways, and like it is proper to a stage of society in which Status not Contract is predominant - a stage from which Trengganu has not yet completely emerged.⁽²⁰⁰⁾

Although the report does not elaborate on its use of the terms 'status' and 'contract' the distinction between the two in the British mind is clear. It was the distinction between a society in which subordinate labour was separated from the means of production and controlled by physical coercion on the basis of the inferior status of that labour on the one

198 Wright and Reid account for the abolition of debt-bondage in Kedah.

Arnold Wright and Thomas H. Reid, The Malay Peninsular A Record of British Progress in the Middle East(London, 1912), p.191.

Sheppard cites Humphreys in his Annual Report for 1917 to the effect that 'Trengganu was then the only Malay State under British Protection in which the custom of debt slavery openly continued.'

Sheppard, "Short History", p.57.

199 Ibid.

While Sheppard, without elaboration, gives 1919 as the year of the abolition J.L. Humphreys, the Trengganu Agent in 1918, records the passing of an 'Enactment for the abolition of debt-slavery' in his annual report for the state in that year.

Trengganu Annual Report 1918, p.16.

Humphreys' report on the subject is discussed more fully below. There is not necessarily any discrepancy however since some time may have passed between the passing of the enactment and its implementation. Certainly, as we shall see below, it was calculated in the report that the abolition of the debts would take some year to effect once the system for the abolition was underway.

200 Trengganu Annual Report 1918, p.16.

hand; and by contrast one in which the amount of labour and the payment for that labour (in this case in the form of a reduction on the debt) was controlled instead by a contractual arrangement defined in broad terms and backed up by the colonial state. The report sets out the provisions for the abolition of debt slavery:

The enactment drafted and now passed ... provides for the elimination of the idea of Status and the definition of the element of contract. A summary of its provisions is as follows: All existing debts are to be registered within six months (debts not so registered become void); the making of any new agreement for debt slavery is prohibited; all registered debts are reduced automatically by fixed monthly reduction on account of the debtor's labour.⁽²⁰¹⁾

We can see in the abolition of debt slavery in Trengganu then how the British were seeking to radically change the way in which state labour was organized in Trengganu according to quite a different rationale - a rationale rooted in a wider notion of modern European social organization. We can also see how, in that state, the old methods of labour organization were strongly, if residually, entrenched up to 1918. The report makes it clear that the abolition of debt-slavery was not achieved quickly or easily in Trengganu:

It is calculated that existing debts will be wiped out within three years; any quicker process would not educate either master or debtor class sufficiently to secure a permanent abolition.⁽²⁰²⁾

We can see too in this report the kind of thinking behind the various tenancy controls referred to by Wilson and outlined in this chapter above. Although Wilson does not demonstrate the British role in the emergence of the five main types of tenancy agreement it is nonetheless very clear how surplus extraction within these tenancy arrangements was a systematic, regulated practice differing markedly from the old methods whereby peasant surplus was extracted in an arbitrary and unsystematic manner through enforced labour and through the periodic seizure of their produce. Humphreys does not specify but no doubt his thinking embraced the notion too of the wage contract as being a civilized alternative to debt bondage for labour separated from the land. Wage labour was, however, of peripheral importance to the NMS economies as we have seen, and it is much more likely that he had in mind the formal contractual regulation of the labour of the unfree peasant small holder upon whose productive activity the colonial state in the main, depended. Certainly Humphreys seems in

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid.

the passage cited to be arguing for the general adoption of a contractual method of regulating and controlling state labour as a way of achieving a higher, more advanced level of social development in the state.

In Kedah Maxwell was responsible for the abolition of kerah in 1909.⁽²⁰³⁾ Elsewhere in north Malaya the institution persisted at least into the early decades of formal colonial rule. It was, for example, in use in Kelantan in 1915 and in Trengganu in 1925.⁽²⁰⁴⁾ On the whole however the sources make little mention of the use of kerah in the NMS in the formal colonial period and it would appear that the continuance of its use into the early formal colonial period in the two states was residual and that it was not in general use in the north as a major method of surplus extraction.⁽²⁰⁵⁾ Nonetheless the persistence of the institution into the early decades of formal colonial rule in at least two northern Malay states and of debt-bondage in Kelantan, Trengganu and Perlis into the first decade following 1909 in the face of the rapidly developing new methods and forms of labour appropriation is further evidence of, and further underscores, the importance of direct forms of labour as the basis of support for

203 Kedah Annual Report 1909, pp.20, 21.

See also Maxwell, "How Krah was Abolished", for a personal account of the abolition of the institution in the state.

W.G.(later Sir George) Maxwell, "HOW KRAH (FORCED LABOUR) WAS ABOLISHED IN KEDAH", British Adviser, Kedah. British Association of Malaya(BAM) Historical Collection, 11, 2. This source is an extract copied from a private letter sent by Sir George Maxwell to H. Bryson, Secretary of the British Association of Malaya, on 2 October, 1958.

204 J. de V Allen, "The Kelantan Rising of 1915", Journal of Southeast Asian History, Vol. 1X, No. 2., (1968), p.246n.

Also: Mahmood, "To Janggut Rebellion", pp.78, 80 and Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp.75, 76.

Sutherland's reference is to the ostensible use of kerah in Trengganu but even the ostensible use of the institution is evidence of the fact that the genuine practice existed in Trengganu at the time. See below in this chapter.

205 I have not been able to find any reference to the formal abolition of kerah in Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu. It may be that it simply fell into disuse by the time of World War II. A search through the Annual Reports for the three states for 1938, for example, reveals no reference to kerah at all but to modern methods of labour extraction instead.

the pre-colonial NMS.

In resisting Maxwell's efforts to abolish kerah in Kedah the Sultan, according to Maxwell, pleaded that 'the safety of the state and the throne depended on it [i.e. kerah]'.⁽²⁰⁶⁾ It seems likely that the Sultan had in mind the strategic, military use of kerah in resisting Maxwell's proposal in these terms. According to Allen, the Sultan had used kerahed troops against a Chinese uprising in the Kulim district of the state 'shortly before the British takeover'.⁽²⁰⁷⁾ Although evidence on the subject is thin it seems likely that in the early post 1909 period it was the strategic use of kerah that was important to individuals in the NMS Malay ruling class anxious to preserve their position against threats emanating from the raayat or rival sections of the elite on the one hand, and British incursions on the other. Kerah was used in Kelantan in 1915 during the major disturbance in the state in that year.⁽²⁰⁸⁾ According to Mahmood in that year 'the four Kweng in the vicinity of Pasir Puteh ... were to enrol by corvée (kerah) all peasants in their Kweng and proceed with them to Pasir Puteh to round up the rebels.'⁽²⁰⁹⁾ And again referring to a separate occasion during the same disturbance, Mahmood states:

[T]he Sultan instructed several To'Kweng of the Kweng around Gunong and Pasir Puteh [i.e. in the vicinity of the disturbance] to 'kerah' the villagers and proceed with them to Gunong to help carry supplies for the British soldiers and others.⁽²¹⁰⁾

Writing also on the Kelantan Rising Allen suggests that the Kelantan ruler was considering the use of kerah by coopting raayat as soldiers for use against British troops sent from Singapore to counter the Kelantanese rebels in the state in 1915.⁽²¹¹⁾ The Trengganu

206 Maxwell, "How Krah was Abolished", p.1.

207 Allen, "Kelantan Rising", p.246n.

208 The Kelantan Rising of 1915. The rising is discussed more fully in chapter 6 below. The issues involved are complex but in brief the disturbance involved a physical rebellion by Kelantanese in the Pasir Puteh district of the state against a new tax being levied by the colonial government at that time.

209 Mahmood, "To'Janggut Rebellion", p.78.

210 Ibid., p.80.

211 Allen, "Kelantan Rising", p.246n.

example of kerah cited above suggests the strategic use of kerah in that state in an intra-elite conflict. According to Sutherland a dispute arose in the state in 1925 when the land office alienated land in the Telemong area claimed by Tungku Nik, sister of ex-Sultan Mohamed, to some Chinese. In response to this Tungku Nik summoned a group of raayat to his assistance:

On 3 May,...several hundred Malays assembled at Kuala Telemong, summoned by letters said to have been sent by Tungku Nik...They had been called up ostensibly for corvee labour (kerah), clearing the land in furtherance of Tungku Nik's claim. Though the gathering was eventually dispersed peaceably there are indications that more had been intended.⁽²¹²⁾

While the stated task of land clearance was according to Sutherland a pretext the precise objective of the assembly is unclear, but seems to have been meant in some way as a demonstration against the colonial status quo. Thus, although the raayat here were not in reality summoned for the land clearance, the situation described by Sutherland looks very much like one in which raayat were in some sense 'kerahed' into a show of resistance on behalf of a member of the royal family against a particular action of the Land Office in the first instance, and the British and Trengganu elite backers of Land Office policy in general.⁽²¹³⁾ Sutherland points out that the assembly may have aimed at an even wider protest against colonial rule. The several hundred Malays may have been 'kerahed' in support of a

According to Allen it is not clear whether the Sultan was considering using kerah in this way for use against Kelantanese raayat rebels or against the troops sent from Singapore. However, he concluded that 'if the Kelantan Ruler now sought to use it [i.e. kerah], it seems far more likely that he had ideas of using it against invading foreign troops than against Kelantan rakyat in Pasir Puteh'.

Ibid.

212 Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", pp.75, 76.

213 Sutherland makes it clear that there were wider objections from Trengganu Malays - both from the elite and raayat - to Land Office policy at this time than the particular instance here. See below for a discussion of these objections. Given the fact that the raayat had their own objections to land policy at this time the question arises as to the extent to which the several hundred raayat were coerced and the extent to which they were willing participants, in the assembly. Nonetheless, the important thing here is that kerah was still an acceptable and recognized practice whereby raayat could be summoned and assembled in an elite cause.

more general challenge to the State Council and British authority.⁽²¹⁴⁾ A further possibility exists that the object of the assembly was the backing of an ex-Sultan's claim in a succession dispute.⁽²¹⁵⁾ Both Allen and Sutherland speculate on the extent to which the Malay elite may have backed clandestinely raayat resistance to British rule in the Kelantan and Trengganu risings respectively.⁽²¹⁶⁾ If those two state elites were thinking in terms of forcibly ousting the British it does seem likely that they would have sought to kerah their raayat into a war of resistance against the British.

It would seem that the residual importance of kerah in the NMS in the formal colonial period stemmed much more from its actual or potential military value than in its economic value to an elite now heavily and increasingly reliant on the extraction of surplus in indirect forms for their economic welfare. Given the importance of kerah in the pre-colonial NMS economy it is not surprising that the institution continued to be of some importance into the formal colonial period. The initial reluctance of the Sultan of Kedah to abolish kerah clearly illustrates the fact that dependence on the old forms of labour extraction still existed in 1909 and that their dispensation did not come easily to the NMS Malay elite. But the importance of kerah in the NMS did diminish markedly from 1909 onwards. Some economic dependence on the extraction of labour directly did persist throughout the formal colonial period but in much modified and limited form. Wilson, for example, outlines the rendering of labour services (Tanaga) by raayat tenants as part payment of the rent to a landlord, in the very late colonial period:

This labour usually consists of sending the padi rent from the place of harvest to the house and often loading into the store of the landowner in the village. Where the landlord wishes to sell and not retain padi for his own consumption, the tenant will be asked to carry it, or pay for it to be carried, to the road-side or main drain where the middle-man's buying price will be higher than the price in the field where grown. Occasionally other services may be demanded of the tenant, e.g., that he should

214 Ibid., p.76.

215 Sutherland states that 'there were also suggestions that the ultimate aim [of the assembly] was to drive out the British "and restore ex-Sultan Mohamed who is a brother of Tungku Nik"'.
Ibid.

216 See below. Elite involvement in these two risings is fully discussed in chapter 6 below.

construct extra batas or a raised house-site which will enhance the capital value of the landlord's property.⁽²¹⁷⁾

In sum, then, we can see how the abolition of the appropriation of labour services directly at the point of production in favour of indirect methods of surplus extraction lay at the heart of the British administration's effort to modernize the four states. The sharp contrast between the two approaches to surplus extraction as seen through British eyes is neatly encapsulated in the opening statements of Maxwell's 'Forced Labour' section to his 1909 Annual Report:

The direct antithesis between liability to pay a land-tax - which is a comparatively new thing in Kedah - and a liability to forced labour - which is one of the fundamental institutions of every Malay State - is so marked that it is convenient to proceed from an account of the land administration to an account of the recent abolition of forced labour.⁽²¹⁸⁾

Revenue Collection and the Consolidation of the Colonial State

It is important to stress at this juncture the central importance of revenue collection as the major source of wealth for the colonial state consolidating its position in north Malaya from 1909 and as the primary function of the new administration since it was on this revenue that the new structures of state depended. Since the four states were expected to pay their own way - to be self sustaining without becoming a drain on the resources of the British empire - the major preoccupation of the four state administrations was with the collection of revenue and with the fostering of economic and social changes in the states which would enhance the state's revenue producing potential. Ultimately, as we have seen, this revenue came directly or indirectly from the state's direct producers and more particularly the raayat whose productive labour was the ultimate source of most of the state's revenue. It was primarily this productive wealth that the state was seeking to tap into with its various arrangements for the taxing of land, produce and trade. Of particular importance in this process was the transference of the trade wealth which had become in the later nineteenth century the economic mainstay of the state rulers and other powerholders to the colonial state

217 Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production, p.20.

218 Kedah Annual Report 1909, p.20.

as part of a wider wresting of economic privilege from the NMS Malay elites. It is not surprising, then, that in the early years of formal colonial rule attention focussed on the revenue farms as a source of wealth for the state.

According to Sheppard administrative reform in Trengganu sought by the British in that state from 1909 was greatly hampered by the operation of revenue farms:

The greatest obstacle to administrative expansion was the system of farming out many of the main sources of revenue to the material advantage of those who obtained the farms at an increasing loss to the state.⁽²¹⁹⁾

The reformation of this situation was in full stride by 1917. That year, according to Sheppard 'saw a notable increase in State revenue mainly as a result of the abolition of the Opium Farm and of the Import and Export Duty Farm which had been urged by successive British Agents'. 'These two reforms', Sheppard continues, 'provided an immediate increase of \$180,000 for the year and enabled salaries of officials and subordinates to be appreciably increased.'⁽²²⁰⁾

In Kedah, too, the revenue farm system was removed by degrees by British strategies:

Under British supervision a determined effort has been made to suppress this system [i.e. the revenue farm system], which is so detrimental to the financial interests of the State. As the most effectual means of doing this the state has arranged to take over the farms by buying out the interest of the sub-farmers, who are mostly Chinese, and who are glad to relinquish their privileges for the settled remuneration that is offered. In this way the Ampun-Kernia of Kedah bids fair, at no very distant date, to be merely an interesting and harmless historical survival.⁽²²¹⁾

It will be clear from the above, then, that the British were, in their administration of the Northern Malay States, operating on two broad levels. While on one level they were, from early in the formal colonial period, implementing the structural changes more narrowly associated with the expansion and refinement of a colonial apparatus of state, they were also, on a broader plane, presiding over changes to the productive base in the four states. The concerns of the British with the structure of the state - with the setting up of new government

219 Sheppard, "Short History", p.56.

220 Ibid.

221 Wright and Reid, Malay Peninsular, p.190.

departments, the remodelling of those already in existence in 1909, the staffing of these with administrative functionaries, the mechanics of imposing of various taxes and the like - were closely related to, and supported by, British moves to achieve a broad basis of reform in agriculture. They sought to achieve this agrarian reform through changes to the system of land tenure, improved agricultural techniques, and other reforms designed to increase agricultural productivity in the north. In administering in this way the British saw themselves as exerting a civilizing and humanitarian influence on Malay society in the north but remained primarily motivated by their desire to achieve their economic and strategic goals in the area. The transformation to modern bureaucratic government in the NMS, begun in the late pre-1909 period, was now hastened and strengthened with the coming of a formal colonial presence in the area. The drawing of wealth from the productive base in support of political power and authority was, as the British presence took hold, becoming depersonalized. The Sultan and other powerholders within the NMS Malay community were no longer able to utilize human and material resources in the state in a personal sense in support of their political position in NMS Malay society. Instead, under the formal British presence, the right to tax the productive labour of the populace was transferred from this privileged group of elite powerholders and became instead the clear prerogative of a stronger and more sophisticated central state authority. At the local level district chiefs and penghulus lost the privilege of drawing on the productive wealth of the districts and mukims under their control as the economic basis of their power and influence. Instead, local leadership and authority was given over to district officers and penghulus now acting as salaried state government employees, and other functionaries of central government operating at the local level. Once these bureaucratic structures were in place power and influence for the elite meant administrative power and influence. Access to this depended on quite different criteria from those applying for the acquisition of power in pre-colonial society.

Aside from manipulating the NMS Malay elite towards the fulfillment of British aims colonial policy had to concern itself very much with the primary need to preserve the raayat labour which was supportive of the colonial state economies, and less directly, the wider colonial economy operating on the peninsular. We can see, then, the real reason for the

British policy of protectionism towards the Malays, not only in the north, but on the peninsular as a whole. The British aim of preserving the NMS Malay economy and society in what was believed by them to be its natural state was a pragmatic one with humanitarian concerns providing an overgloss on a stronger primary objective of keeping the NMS as self-supporting as possible on a basis of raayat labour. Certainly the British did recognize a need to preserve a stable and prosperous raayat in the states to the south as well. But those state economies were more broadly based with a much stronger reliance on extractive industry and later rubber production and their immigrant labouring populations. It was, in a situation where the British were seeking to apply uniform administrative policies to the peninsular as a whole, the critical importance of raayat productive activity to the four northern states which was by far the major stimulus for the peninsular-wide British policy of protectionism towards the Malays. But while the preservation of Malay society may have been the intention of British policy makers the actual effect of that policy was to hasten the radical changes that had been occurring in the region in the century or so leading up to 1909. Wilson's study in particular paints a picture of a society in north Malaya which was distinctly colonial in certain of its essentials by the immediate pre-Independence period. We can see in this the way in which British land policy in particular was changing the relationship between direct producer and his primary means of production and how this policy resulted in new kinds of productive relationships in the four states. Precise periodization is difficult but it seems safe to assume that by 1942, when British colonial policies had had considerable reign, that all the main features of pre-colonial society in the NMS had been supplanted by the modern features of a colonial state.

The Social Effects of Colonial Rule in the NMS

It now remains to show how British indirect rule in the NMS affected productive and wider class relations in the period. In broad terms it will be clear from the above that the British policy aimed at building modern states in north Malaya on a basis of raayat labour meant that the raayat were coming under new kinds of pressure in their productive sphere - pressure which clearly caused them considerable hardship. Through land and other taxes the state forced the peasantry to work harder towards greater productivity in order to be able to subsist while at the same time meeting the exactions of the state. Not only this but the now more widespread and more thoroughly executed policy of money taxation forced the peasantry

into a greater commoditization of production than had hitherto been the case. At the same time the stronger penetration of colonial capital under the auspices of the colonial state, while having the effect of allowing for a continued measure of capital accumulation for the few in NMS society, limited such expansion for the majority of peasants. These peasants remained, on the whole, subsistence producers at the level of simple reproduction. It was the increasing pressures to produce for the commercial market to meet taxes, and the incentive to do so in order to purchase the consumer products now more readily available in the market, that pushed the peasants into closer productive relations with the new and developing commercial elites - traders who sold them consumer commodities, bulk handlers of their produce, and so on. They now produced more and more beyond subsistence for a commercial market, in part to meet the exactions of the modern state, and in part to accommodate a desire to purchase consumer commodities from inside and outside the NMS now becoming increasingly more available. These purchases bought them into contact with an emergent trading group itself responding to the new opportunities - the new circumstances - of the formal colonial environment. Thus the new elites that had been emerging in the NMS countryside in the nineteenth century were exerting a stronger presence in the twentieth and their effect combined with that of the state bureaucracies to squeeze the raayat to work hard above subsistence.

Although the overriding stimulus affecting raayat production was now the formal presence of British administrators the activities of private traders themselves, reacting as they were to the more favourable circumstances created by the colonial state for increased commodity production and trade, continued to have a very strong effect on the raayat in their productive sphere. Thus, with the abolition of Malay elite trading and trade taxing privileges, private trade was no longer the basis of political power in the four states. It remained, however, a source of considerable private wealth and influence for traders buying and selling commodities produced in the north. While it appears from the sources that the Chinese dominated this trade, there were Malay traders as well, and it was the trading activities of both Malay and especially Chinese merchants that greatly added to the pressure on peasant producers.

In Trengganu Malay and Chinese traders remained well established in the state 'carry[ing] on a profitable trade with Siam, Singapore and Cochin-China' and deriving much profit from this activity.⁽²²²⁾ It would appear that the state was atypical on the peninsula in the strength and prosperity there of the Malay component of the trading group. According to the report '[i]t [was] not unusual to find Chinese trade in Trengganu financed by Malay capital, a remarkable contrast to the conditions in other States'.⁽²²³⁾ The 1931 Kelantan report, by contrast, indicated that the trade of that state was '[w]ith a few exceptions ... entirely in the hands of Chinese who almost monopolise both the export and import business'.⁽²²⁴⁾ In that state the raayat continued as petty traders selling their produce to bulk dealers in commodities in local markets now flourishing more strongly with the formal colonial presence.

Beyond the effect of colonial rule in increasing raayat commodity production the British also acted to facilitate the marketing process itself. In Kelantan in 1932 for example, peasant produce was marketed in 'many country markets licensed by the District Officers' and, in that year, 'the number of them was increasing'.⁽²²⁵⁾ In the same year in Kelantan in Khota Bharu 'in addition to the large central market, a new one was built in the locality of Kubang Pasa'.⁽²²⁶⁾ In these markets '[t]he produce sold [was] brought in by the Malay land-owners themselves'.⁽²²⁷⁾ Apart from the establishment of new markets the British presence also assisted the marketing process through the improvement and modernization of infra structural facilities enabling greater peasant access to markets than had existed before. Thus in 1936 the Kelantan Adviser, G.A. de Moubray, describing the origins of marketing in the state, wrote that

222 Trengganu Annual Report 1924, p.126.

223 Ibid.

224 Kelantan annual Report 1931, p.22.

225 Kelantan Annual Report 1932, p.57.

226 Ibid.

227 Ibid.

markets in the state in part functioned 'as the meeting place of the fish and agricultural trades, limited originally as to distance inland by the distance a runner could carry the day's catch sometimes along very primitive paths, a distance now extended by better paths, and the bicycle, and roads and the motor car.'²²⁸ It was principally, then, in these markets that the peasants conducted their trading transactions and came within the ambit of the trading operations of the Chinese and Malay merchants referred to above. The peasant produce traded in this way was varied. Much more small holder rice and rubber was traded in north western markets than in the north east and in all states a variety of jungle produce was traded by peasant producers. In Kelantan in 1936, while rice was the state's most important crop produced for home consumption, 'sweet potatoes, yams, tapioco, ground nuts, sugar cane, ginger, bananas and other fruit trees [were] extensively grown by small holders, both for thier own consumption and for sale at local markets'.²²⁹ There were both small and large scale handlers of peasant produce and the process described in chapter 3 above, where direct producers sold direct to smaller merchants in local markets who then exchanged the produce to larger merchants making a profit on the difference between the buying and selling price, continued to be typical of this kind of local trade in the NMS throughout the formal colonial period. The process was described for Kelantan in 1935 by J. A. Craig, the state's Principal Agricultural Officer, in an article written by him in that year:

The main markets for peasant produce of both perishable and non perishable nature are Kota Bharu, Tumpat, Kuala Krai, Pasir Mas, Pasir Puteh and Bachok. In addition to these there are permanent daily markets in small villages throughout the State and in these disposal of all products can be rapidly effected by the grower... Non-perishable goods are purchased in small villages and markets by small dealers who in turn sell to the larger dealers in the towns whence export most frequently to Singapore, is effected.²³⁰

It is clear from the sources that the peasants were, with the strengthening of the colonial market in peasant-produced commodities, and the pressures and incentives to produce trade commodities, very strongly motivated to engage in local trade with these

228 Kelantan Annual Report 1936, p.20.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ J.A. Craig, "Agriculture in Kelantan", Malayan Agricultural Journal, 23, (1935), p. 373.

merchants. The 1932 annual report for Kelantan indicates that direct producers of agricultural commodities in that state had to 'walk in [to Kota Bharu] for many miles... [carrying] heavy loads.'⁽²³¹⁾ The same report continues:

In the mornings a large number of them may be met coming to Kota Bahru, in some instances from kampongs ten miles distant; and by the time they reach their homes again in the evening they have done a twenty mile walk carrying a heavy burden. The writer of this report had the curiosity to weigh a basket of pineapples being carried to market by a woman from her kampong of two or three miles distant; the basket weighed 99lbs and needed two people to lift it onto her head.⁽²³²⁾

The Adviser remarks superficially that to the woman this effort 'was just every day business'.⁽²³³⁾ It is more likely, however, that this description is illustrative of a stoicism in the marketing effort of the Kelantanese peasantry born of both the luxury and necessity of gaining the material rewards now more strongly attainable in markets being established by the colonial regime in that state.⁽²³⁴⁾

Apart from providing a venue for the sale of peasant produce these markets also continued to expose the peasantry to a widening range of consumer commodities. The Kelantan annual report for 1936 refers to the presence in that state's markets of 'pedlars of piece goods and sundry goods'. It was with traders such as these that the smallholders in all

²³¹ Kelantan Annual Report 1932, p. 57.

²³² *Ibid.*, pp. 57,58.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²³⁴ The establishment of new markets is dealt with below in this chapter. The difficulties in marketing produce and peasant persistence in overcoming these are mentioned frequently in the primary sources for the formal colonial period. For example, in 1935 J. A. Craig, the Principal Agricultural Officer in Kelantan in that year referred to in the text above, wrote of the markets then operating in the state: 'In the majority of cases these markets are comparatively empty until 11,00 a.m. or later in the day, as cultivators frequently have to carry their merchandise for considerable distances across the plain'.

Craig, "Agriculture in Kelantan", p. 373.

A fuller account of Kelantan markets and the marketing process is given by Craig and is referred to in this chapter below.

In 1915 the Kelantan Adviser wrote of the state's up-country peasants having to bring their produce 'sometimes of incredibly small value for extraordinary distances' in order to market it.

Kelantan Annual Report 1915, p.2.

four states were increasingly obtaining the luxuries and necessities of their lives through exchange transactions.⁽²³⁵⁾

As the cash economy gained strength at the kampong level consumer commodities were being obtained increasingly by the raayat through cash transactions. The incentive for the peasants to produce beyond subsistence for a cash return is very evident in the sources. The 1937 Kelantan annual report, for example, refers to need of the Malay small holder for 'cash to purchase the small luxuries of life and to improve his own position'.²³⁶ Specifying the attraction of a cash surplus for the smallholders the same report continued: '...[h]e may want to buy a boat, to buy bulls, to marry and buy more land...'⁽²³⁷⁾ The report was referring to the motivation of the small-holders in seeking cash wages through part time wage labour on the state's rubber estates. It is, however, illustrative in a broader sense. We can see in it the broad attraction for the peasants in Kelantan, and the rest of the NMS, of the attainment of a cash surplus beyond subsistence whether through part time wage labour or through the sale of their surplus produce on the new colonial markets being established in Kelantan (and the other NMS) at that time. Certainly the description of peasant motivation to acquire cash is couched in somewhat idealized, Eurocentric terms. It is, in its perspective, typical of the colonial perception of the lot of the peasantry. Nonetheless the report does register the fact that there was a positive draw for the peasantry to produce beyond subsistence in order to satisfy an acquisitive desire for luxury and self improvement. The report correctly observed that there was in Kelantan 'no over-bearing economic pressure to compel the peasant to leave a healthy and natural form of life [ie to leave the land and to enter into full time wage labour]'.²³⁸ Nonetheless it is clear from it that the small holder was, at the very least, strongly drawn in a positive way to acquire material gains beyond subsistence in a way which was placing strong demands on his labour - a demand which did not exist in this way in pre-colonial times.

²³⁵ Kelantan Annual Report 1936, p. 20.

²³⁶ Kelantan Annual Report 1937, p. 46.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45,46.

The report gives no indication of the negative pressures on the peasantry - to acquire cash for the payment of land rent and the like - and this is in large measure a reflection of the idealized perception of Malay kampong life which was strongly characteristic of British protectionism towards the Malays at that time and which helped to blinker the British understanding of raayat hardship under their protectionist policies. Thus, while the Kelantan Adviser in 1937 saw the acquisition of cash gains as causing no major interruption to the Kelantan 'peasants natural attachment to the land, with its varied round of planting and harvest, the company of his family and friends and the sequence of fast and feast enjoined by the Moslem faith', in fact, 'the need of cash to purchase the small luxuries of life and to improve his own position', and the negative pressures of meeting the payment of cash taxes to the state and the exactions of landlords was, as we shall see below, producing new tensions in the peasants' economic and social life. These tensions were overtly evident, as we shall see, in 1915, and were sustained throughout the formal colonial and into the Independence period, as the new productive forces gaining strength in that state clashed with the old.⁽²³⁹⁾

It is important at this juncture to stress that for the majority of peasants in the north there was only a partial commoditization of their economy and that the main focus of their domestic productivity was on the satisfying of their basic material needs directly. While the trading of surplus produce in local markets was the principal means whereby the peasant obtained cash for the purchase of necessities and luxuries and for the payment of state taxes, the amount of cash the peasant obtained for these purposes remained limited. This limitation was particularly acute for those peasants producing a long distance from the nearest market. The Kelantan Adviser in 1915 described the difficulties of the state's up-country people in marketing their produce for cash in these terms:

There can be no doubt that the native of Kelantan "eget aeris", the flocking of "orang darat" (up-country people) to the daily markets[,] does not imply cash. They bring their produce [ie to the market] ...and sell it, and then only have the cash to buy what they require. At one market I found a woman who carried 40lbs of betel leaves 6 miles in order to sell it for twice what it cost her[. H]er gross profit, before deducting a market charge of nearly a penny, was 12 1/2 cents (say 3 1/2 pence) with which she would buy her luxuries before trudging home again! (and this is not a single outstanding case.)⁽²⁴⁰⁾

²³⁹ Ibid., pp. 45,46. The idealized description of kampong life is given on page 45.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

This cash limitation was both a source of frustration to peasants anxious to maximize their wealth through the sale of their produce and something which was a source of hardship as the peasants were pressed to render cash taxes to the state. It was a hardship which was general throughout the NMS within the period and which was strongly evident in Kelantan in 1915 and Trengganu in 1929 as we shall see in chapter 6 below. Much has been written in the official and semi official sources on the difficulties experienced by the peasantry in coping with the exactions of the colonial state and those of private traders within the period. In these sources the fact of peasant exploitation by merchant middlemen is very clear. For example, Jack recorded the activities of such buyers of peasant produce in Kelantan in taking advantage of the fact that in that state in 1928 there were 'no set standards for weights or measures in many areas' to cheat the latter in trading transactions with them.²⁴¹

Emerson also describes the same kind of exploitation in Kelantan. He quotes the state's British Adviser in his report for 1932 on the need to prevent the Malays 'being ousted from the trade in many articles' by other Asiatic races' who had 'no interest in them beyond exploiting them and who [could] not be relied on to give them a fair deal.'⁽²⁴²⁾ In Trengganu the British presence enabled merchants in the first decade of formal colonial rule to exploit the *raayat* by preying on their fiscal ignorance in currency exchanges. The annual report for Trengganu explains the situation as it was in 1914:

The old British dollar and the new Straits dollar are both legal tender in the state, the latter having its fixed value of 100 Straits cents and the former a fixed value of 100 local cents or pitis.

The Trengganu natives prefer the old British dollar, which is larger than the Straits dollar, and the pitis to which they have been accustomed. The Singapore traders and their local agents have for years been bleeding the country by taking advantage of the fact that, whereas the old British dollar fluctuates daily in Hong Kong and the China money market it always had a fixed value in Trengganu, and this fixed value was at a premium over the rates obtainable elsewhere.

The credulous natives would not believe that the old British dollar fluctuated in value as it was always worth 100 pitis, and therefore the difference of values between that dollar and the Straits dollar were attributed to the fluctuations of the latter and it was therefore always in disfavour. For instance, when the British dollars were quoted by the Banks at 68 cents, Straits, the Chinese traders would

²⁴¹ Jack, "Agricultural Conditions", p. 91.

²⁴² Emerson, *Malaysia*, p. 252n.

import them into Trengganu and find a market for them at 100 pitis and obtain in exchange Straits dollars which were perhaps at 105 pitis locally. Enormous profits were made in this way.

At one time during the year under review the Straits dollar and the old British dollar were quoted equal at 100 pitis.

During the past five years the Trengganu Government have made several half-hearted attempts to abolish the old British dollar by publishing notifications to the effect that the Government proposed to abolish the coin and by prohibiting its importation.

When these proclamations were published the unfortunate raiyats put their trust in their princes and eagerly implored the traders to relieve them of the coin, which the traders, with a show of reluctance, and at a considerable discount, proceeded to do.

In a very short time the dollar was back to its former value and was again being freely imported. The traders made a large profit in which various Government officials participated.⁽²⁴³⁾

We can see, then, from this report how the monetization of the raayat economy, and the introduction of a colonial currency as an exchange medium, created circumstances in which profit could be derived from direct producers by unscrupulous merchants through the manipulation of raayat ignorance of currency exchange values.

The dependence of the NMS on raayat surplus can be read in Jack's reference to the 'enforced industry of the cultivator' in the north eastern states of the peninsular:

The saving grace of the country is the enforced industry of the cultivator which has become habitual, for life is hard and the means of existence demand strenuous effort and exposure to risk (fishing) - two factors which tend to develop the finest type of agriculturalists so that there should be a big future looming ahead for our eastern states especially if

243 Trengganu Annual Report 1914, p.2. A pitis, the report explains, 'is a token, composed of a mixture of tin and lead, of little or no intrinsic value.'

Ibid.

The report goes on to explain administrative moves being adopted to eliminate this kind of exploitation in the state:

I am glad to be able to report that I have been able to obtain the Sultan's consent to take action to abolish the British dollar. At the time of writing this report, considerable progress has been made. The British dollar is no longer accepted by the Government in payment of dues, and, as a result, its local value has dropped considerably. During the next three months, the Government will redeem any dollars brought to them at Singapore Bank rates, and after the 11th August, 1915, in accordance with a proclamation issued by the Sultan, the old British dollar will cease to be legal tender in Trengganu.

Ibid.

agriculture is fostered and developed as the mainstay of the country.⁽²⁴⁴⁾

Now it is clear from the wider context of this passage that Jack was saying that the difficulties inherent in the producers way of life - the fact that 'his main food crop [was] so very dependent on the whims of the weather' and the exploitation of middlemen - had created a habit of hard work in the north eastern producers.⁽²⁴⁵⁾ The very important point implicit in this passage then is that the 'big future looming ahead for... [the] eastern states' rested on the capacity of the raayat for hardworking productivity - in the agricultural surplus this would engender and state wealth in the form of produce, trade and land taxes that this industry would make available. The broad tendency of officialdom in the formal colonial period was to contrast a laudable British progressive humanism and reformism with the primitive nature of local economic practices - a backwardness which the British saw themselves as overcoming throughout the period of formal colonial rule.

In some sources however, the emphasis on the backward and exploitive nature of local economic dealings is particularly strong. Some of the official and semi-official sources ascribe raayat hardship in their trade dealings in part to the raayat's own cultural and cultural limitations and in part to those of immigrant Asiatic racial groups with whom they traded. While on this interpretation the Asiatic races were seen to be aggressively enterprising exploiting the raayat for their own gain, the Malay producers for their part were seen as ignorant, backward and unenterprising and therefore an easy prey for immigrant asian enterpreneurs who played upon this ignorance. In presenting the exploiters and exploited in this light there is in the sources a usually implicit, though sometimes explicit, contrast between the civilized and humane method of doing business that the British saw themselves as implementing on the one hand, and the lack of business accumen in the raayat and the unscrupulousness of the immigrant middlemen on the other. Thus the British Adviser for

244 H.W. Jack, "Brief Notes on Agricultural Conditions on the East Coast of Malaya", Malayan Agricultural Journal, 16,(1928), p.91.

245 Ibid.

Kelantan in 1932 deplored the activities of commercial Asiatic races who had 'no interest in ...[the raayat] beyond exploiting them' and the fact that the former could not be relied on 'to give them [ie the raayat] a fair deal.'⁽²⁴⁶⁾ Likewise Jack, writing in 1928, pointed out that in Kelantan the ignorance of the raayat, and 'their improvidence when food supplies [were] or when they [became] ensnared by the prevalent vice of gambling' meant that they were vulnerable to exploitation by 'the wiley and unscrupulous buyer' of their produce.⁽²⁴⁷⁾ Furthermore Jack continues, while the raayat failed to cooperate amongst themselves to defeat this exploitation the 'merchants combine[d] sufficiently to "rig the markets" at suitable times with distinct pecuniary advantage to themselves.'⁽²⁴⁸⁾

There was also a related tendency in the officialdom of the day to consider that the raayat experienced hardship in the exactions of the state only in the sense that colonial rule interfered with raayat religious and customary practices. It was this failure in perception which tended to render colonial authorities insensitive to the material consequences of their policies. It was this in particular that caused them to offend the raayat as we shall see more clearly in the next chapter.⁽²⁴⁹⁾

On the other hand ample evidence exists in the primary sources it is clear pointing to an enterprising response on the part of the raayat to their colonial economic circumstances. On a more general moralistic plane the Trengganu annual report makes reference to the 'habits of industry and frugality in the whole Malay population [of?] Trengganu', while elsewhere in the sources from more specific descriptions of raayat productive dealings that they were astute in seeking to maximize material benefit to themselves.⁽²⁵⁰⁾ For example, the Perlis Annual Report for 1921 stated:

246 Quoted in Emerson, Malaysia, p.252.

247 Jack, "Agricultural Conditions", p.91.

248 Ibid.

249 In particular see Bryson's interpretation of the causes of the Trengganu rising in 1928 below in the next chapter for an example of this kind of approach.

250 Trengganu Annual Report 1924, p.12.

The padi harvest was good. According to the returns furnished by the penghulus the crop amounted to 5,964,640 gantangs but there is reason to believe that this is an underestimate. The padi planter regards with suspicion the collection of these statistics as a possible basis for further taxation and minimizes his harvest, impelled by the same motives as the European income tax payer but undeterred by the heavy penalties which deter the latter from making a false return.⁽²⁵¹⁾

Clearly this statement runs counter to the prevalent colonial rationalization that raayat hardship stemmed from the raayat's own laziness and lack of enterprise and initiative.

In similar vein the Kelantan Annual Report for 1938 stated, referring to the adaption of the Kelantanese peasantry to modern methods of production:

The Kelantan peasant is conservative but he has a very shrewd sense of values and as soon as he was convinced that the methods really meant more immediate profit and not just a white man's folly to be respectfully admired in words and carefully avoided in fact, the success was complete and rapid.⁽²⁵²⁾

Now, clearly the statement here by the Kelantan Adviser is self-serving in support of colonial economic policy but nonetheless it does betray a recognition of the capacity of the Kelantan peasantry for enterprise in their economic activities. It is also clear from the record that Kelantan peasants regarded the levying of taxes on them with suspicion and that they sought ways of avoiding this taxation. Thus, in 1936 the Kelantan Adviser noted that 'one of the greatest obstacles to successful land administration was still the prevalence of verbal transactions in land, the economical peasant seeing no necessity to pay the small fees demanded for registering them at the Land Office.'⁽²⁵³⁾

Colonel E.V.G. Day, in noting arrangements being made by colonial military authorities for the purchase of padi in Kedah in 1945 stated:

I am quite satisfied that unless we are permitted to use the existing tried machinery, i.e. the buying organization of the big millers, it is inevitable that the Scheme in this area will fail completely. The buying of padi is a highly skilled business calling for much experience and such experience is to be found only in the ranks of the old established firms of millers. To think that by employing temporary Assistants or Purchasing Agents unused to the wiles of cultivators and the tricks of the trade we shall be able to gather in more than a small proportion of the crop is to

251 Perlis Annual Report 1921, p.22.

252 Kelantan Annual Report 1938, p.26.

253 Kelantan Annual Report 1936, p.83.

say the least unduly optimistic.⁽²⁵⁴⁾

Clearly, then, Day implies a running battle of wits between middlemen padi purchasers and peasant padi producers in Kedah in a way which throws the latter in an enterprising light. Likewise, we can see in the record a degree of enterprise in the Kedah rubber small holders acting to circumvent Rubber Restriction in order to maximize the material benefit to themselves through the illegal marketing of their produce. In 1923 the Kedah Adviser wrote:

Kedah with the rest of British Malaya adopted the principal of Rubber Restriction. In the early stages there was, as elsewhere, a certain amount of trouble, more especially with smallholders. There was, of course, a good deal of smuggling, while a certain amount of rubber was exported under the guise of Siamese rubber in transit through the State: as one loophole for evading restriction was closed, others were made, but at the close of the year matters had considerably improved and the scheme was on the whole, working satisfactorily.⁽²⁵⁵⁾

Clearly, then, the sources are not wholly consistent in their descriptions of the way in which NMS peasants were reacting to the colonial economic circumstances from 1909 onwards. While some seem to emphasize a perceived backwardness and passivity in their dealings with the state and private entrepreneurs, others allow a degree of resistance on their part to these exactions portraying them as shrewd and enterprising in seeking to maximize the material benefit to themselves. It is clear, however, from the very frequent reference to peasant enterprise in these colonial sources and the fact that, as we shall see in the next chapter, peasants did on two notable occasions within the formal colonial period overtly and violently resist the state pressure to part with a portion of their productive wealth, that they did not accept their new economic circumstances impassively. On balance the record shows that the NMS peasantry were reacting against material deprivation at the hands of state officials and traders; they were conscious of the need to protect their economic welfare against the demands of state officials and private entrepreneurs seeking to siphon off a portion of their productive wealth and acted on this often with considerable enterprise.

While, as we shall see more clearly in the next chapter, the raayats' perception of

254 Day, "Notes of Telephone Conversation with Mr. F.A. Shelton, Dy. Food Controller, K.L., Subject - Approved Padi Buying Scheme", "Day Papers", item 4. These notes are undated.

255 Kedah Annual Report 1921/1922, p.15.

their material circumstances was shaped by their long term ideological leanings - by religion and custom - they were not generally backward unenterprising and ignorant in the way stated by some colonial officials. Rather, such assertions may be seen as a rationalization in the minds of certain colonial officials who wanted to see themselves as enlightened and humane administrators bringing prosperity and progress to the 'natives' in the NMS, and who needed an explanation outside their own actions for the evident raayat hardship in the area.

In sum, the raayat in the NMS during the formal colonial period experienced hardship resulting from new and more intensive methods of surplus extraction in a way which is not explainable in terms of their economic folly or a backward ideological disposition to react against 'progressive' colonial economic policies. It is clear that they were coming under increasing pressure in their trading relations with bulk-handling entrepreneurs - relations which were developing strongly in the nineteenth century and which were intensified under the umbrella of formal colonial rule. These peasants were now subject to much more systematic and strongly imposed exactions of state - exactions which took many forms including land and produce taxation and the imposition of what were for them restrictive production and marketing arrangements. It was these new exactions which were especially important from 1909 in creating economic hardship for the NMS peasantry. It may be that when Allen stated his impression of the early years of British rule in Kelantan - '[o]ne begins to wonder whether the people of Kelantan got anything at all from six years of British control except heavier taxation' - that he touched upon the dominant factor of colonial rule in all four states from the raayats' point of view. Certainly raayat reaction to state taxation was the most obvious cause of social unrest in two of the northern states within the first two decades of colonial rule in the north.⁽²⁵⁶⁾

Landlords and Tenants in North Malaya

For the significant number of peasants who had become separated from land hardship was experienced at the hands of landlords who extracted land rent of one kind or

256 Allen, "Kelantan Rising", p.250.

I refer here to the Kelantan and Trengganu risings. These are both dealt with at length in the next chapter of this thesis.

another. The way in which the emergence of landlordism and tenancy as a much stronger feature of NMS Malay society in the formal colonial period contributed substantially to class tensions associated with rural hardship in general, and the payment of rent in particular, is a constant if somewhat muted theme running through Wilson's report. Wilson accounts for the hardship created by the payment of cash deposits in some localities in Kedah and Perlis:

These deposits are liable to cause hardship to the individual farmer concerned, since the amounts of deposits were found to be considerable. In both Kedah and Perlis, the deposit was approximately equal to the current value of one year's rent in padi on the same land...Since the deposit is always paid before entering the land for initial cultivation, the first year entails considerable financial sacrifice, with the padi rent being paid as normal at padi harvest. Many of the cash deposits paid did entail abnormal borrowing, and some rural indebtedness arises solely from this cause.⁽²⁵⁷⁾

Not surprisingly, then, Wilson concludes that the payment of the deposit was indicative of a 'deterioration in landlord and tenant relationships'.⁽²⁵⁸⁾

The tension between peasant tenants and private landlords extracting a portion of their productive wealth in the form of rent, and the British concern that this would lead to agrarian instability in north Malaya, can be seen in Wilson's account of rent increases in the immediate pre-Independence years:

Changes in agricultural rents always arouse interest, partly because they are infrequent, rents being generally regarded as fixed overhead costs, and partly because they are usually in one direction - upwards. Because rent levels are often the basis of agrarian unrest it was thought desirable to give some quantitative estimate of the extent to which Malayan padi rents are increasing.⁽²⁵⁹⁾

Wilson then states that between the two year periods 1949/50 and 1955/56 rents rose in Kedah by 16% and in Perlis by 22% and in part concludes: 'Rent increases of this order are considerable and have been responsible for genuine complaint in certain localities,...'⁽²⁶⁰⁾

In sum, then, it can be seen that at the end of a long transitional period lasting through the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, the NMS peasantry now stood in a

257 Wilson, The Economics of Padi Production, p.28.

258 Ibid.

259 Ibid., p.27.

260 Ibid., p.27.

markedly different relationship to the land upon which it primarily depended for its livelihood. They also stood in a markedly different relationship to those extracting their surplus on the basis of the new land tenure. In particular, we can see how it was within the context of the modern landlord-tenant relationship that they experienced an economic coercion to pay land rent. It was a coercion that affected them not just in their relations with landlords, but in all their productive relationships, since it was these relationships that in varying degrees determined the quantity of surplus wealth acquired by them - surplus from which they were able to pay the land rent, and which they needed to retain their land. Thus, it was in large measure this economic coercion that drove them to intensify their trading activities with the middleman bulk handlers, shop keeper retailers, money-lenders, and other traders whose custom they needed to retain their land for the maintenance of subsistence and surplus production.

Under the new system of land tenure the quid pro quo for tilling soil, now a legal right of occupancy or ownership having legislative, juristic form, was the payment of rent to state or private landlords. This rent was paid on pain of eviction from the land - on pain of the loss of the main means of production for subsistence. Meek, in his discussion of Kelantan land law, makes clear the kind of economic coercion embodied in documents of title and the land legislation of that state. His commentary on the subject can serve to illustrate the kind of economic coercion being applied to peasant landowners throughout the NMS as a whole:

In the case of any break or default in the observance of the conditions (expressed or implied) of any document of title, the District Officer may, on the ruler's behalf, re-enter the land, and, upon registration of such re-entry, the land shall be forfeited to the ruler and the title of the owner extinguished. Thus, if the owner of a holding not exceeding ten acres fails to cultivate it continuously, the District Office may take possession. Or he may re-enter land on account of failure to pay the land rents. It is laid down (sec 179) that as soon as possible after the 31st of March in each year the District Officer shall cause the following notice to be posted throughout the District: 'Proprietors of land are hereby reminded that the annual quit rents on their land are now due. Unless these rents are paid soon the lands will be sold and the proprietors will lose them.'⁽²⁶¹⁾

From this it would appear that there was nothing nominal about the quit rents paid by landowners in the manner suggested by Wilson. Rather, they were a harsh reality for

261 Meek, Land Law and Customs, p.49.

peasant proprietors who had to pay up or lose their land. The land law in the north spelled out the mechanism for this kind of economic coercion in no uncertain terms: it is very clear from the sources that that mechanism operated effectively in practice to force the peasants into the payment of land rent. In 1937 for example, the Kelantan Adviser wrote that the successful collection of land rents in the state showed amongst other things 'that the agriculturalist is attached to his land and does not propose to lose it for failure to pay rent.'⁽²⁶²⁾

To sum up, then, we can see how the landlord-tenant relationship was of critical importance in NMS society under colonial rule since it was this which in its formal contractual expression determined the conditions under which land was occupied - which ensured peasant control over land as the basic means of production without which their production could not proceed at all. It was economic coercion applied by state and private landlords that drove the peasants even more strongly into surplus commodity production and which therefore had a profound effect on production and wider productive relations at the level of the productive base in these state societies.

The Effect of Colonial Rule on the Elite in the NMS

In all states, then, the British did not sweep aside the existing ruling class but rather sought to control their activities - to manipulate them - by a variety of means including persuasion, superior political manoeuvring, and, very importantly, cutting their traditional ties with the productive base from which they had drawn economic support directly and tying them instead to the colonial bureaucracy for their material well being. It was a process which was 'an arduous and protracted' one of 'confrontation and change' and one which was not, from the British point of view, wholly successful.⁽²⁶³⁾

The NMS elite was never wholly subdued and continued to exercise a strong voice in the colonial administrations throughout the period of colonial rule in the north. Thus Kessler says of Kelantan for the period of colonial rule in that state:

While British officials determined policy and provided the 'motive power' of

262 Kelantan Annual Report 1937, p.87.

263 The phrasing used by Talib to describe the transfer of political control from indigenous to colonial hands in Trengganu.

Talib, Image, p. 190.

administration, princely and titled Malays remained influential politically as leaders of indigenous society and as functionaries of the colonial regime. The old elite was still the state's administrative class and, though it now served a foreign master, its hegemony within indigenous society was strengthened.²⁶⁴

Although Kessler is describing Kelantan here his comments are indicative of the situation developing at different rates, and in differing degrees, in the other three states as well. In general it can be said that, whereas in the Federated Malay States the British were able to attain a much stronger influence over the Malay elite than was the case in the north, that control was not without its limitations.

As we shall see in more detail below, the differing degree of British control in the north and south lay partly in the fact that the acquisition of the north by the British was a later development and thus British control over the elite there tended to lag behind that in the Federated Malay States where the British had been establishing their influence and control in advance of that in the north. There was also the obvious fact that there were far more European (mainly British) officers within the state administrations to the south and the British had therefore a much stronger hold over state government in those states. British control was also weaker in the north because the productive base, and the elite relationship with that base, differed in the north and south. The fact that the NMS were primarily dependent upon raayat surplus for their economic well being meant that the British were highly dependent upon the services of the Malay elite there. This was partly because the weak state economics wouldn't support a large number of European officers, and partly because, given the very high proportion of Malays in the four state populations, the British needed to retain the degree of moral and customary authority of the Malay elite in carrying out the administration of the state. Thus, we can see why, in Sir John Anderson's view, that apart from the lack of finances to 'bear the cost of a European staff' in Kedah and Kelantan 'it would [have been] highly impolitic and undesirable to replace the Malays' in the two state administrations.⁽²⁶⁵⁾

It is perhaps ironical that in fact the limitations on British control in the north arose

²⁶⁴ Kessler, Islam and Politics, pp. 56-7.

²⁶⁵ Anderson is quoted in Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.57.

from the British policy of protectionism on the peninsular. As we have seen, partly for the economic reason that the British wanted to preserve Malay labour as the basis of the colonial state, the British sought to preserve Malay society in the north more-or-less intact from top to bottom. The British well understood the differing economic bases of power in the north, and to the south, and it is clearly implicit in the sources that while in the Federated Malay States by deliberate act of policy the combination of labour and capital in the mining and plantation industries was to provide the basis of state power and authority, the Malay smallholder economy was to be the basis of such power in the north. Thus, in Kessler we can see the distinction between 'the "lavish" and more heavily European administrations... "financed directly or indirectly, almost exclusively by the highly organized European and Chinese tin and rubber industries' in the Federated Malay States on the one hand, and Kelantan as a state 'ruled... through a small European staff that saw its task as the creation of a model Malay monarchy supported by a "thrifty prosperous and loyal peasantry"' on the other.⁽²⁶⁶⁾ In 1937 Emerson implied the same distinction for three of the northern states when he wrote that the British in Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu, '[i]nstead of pursuing the more showy goal of perfecting an efficient and complex Western administration supported by and in large part existing for a highly developed imported economic structure, ... have interpreted their task as being that of utilizing and gradually amending the existing administration for the purpose of implanting and nourishing the seeds of change in the traditional Malay economy.'⁽²⁶⁷⁾

We are now better placed to understand the position and reactions of the NMS elites under colonial rule. Given that the British had set out from 1909 to undermine the political position of this elite indirectly over a period of time in order to secure them in an intermediary

266 Kessler quotes Emerson on the Federated Malay States economic base and the Kelantan Annual Report 1932 on that of Kelantan.

Kessler, Islam and Politics, pp.56-7.

267 Emerson, Malaysia, p.252.

Emerson cites the Kelantan annual report for 1932 to show of prime concern to the British in that state was the protection of the Kelantan Malays from 'the fierce and unrestricted competition of other Asiatic races' and that it was principally this competition which posed the principal threat to the economic base in that state. I cited this passage in the text above where I discuss British protectionism towards the Malays.

position in terms of effective power in the states between themselves and the raayat, there was a sustained tension between the Malay ruling class and the British administration throughout the period of colonial rule. Initially it was the divergent approaches to the acquisition and distribution of state material resources that was the strongest and most fundamental source of discord between the British and the Malay elite in the north. By setting out to draw the economic resources of the state away from private individuals in support of a self-sustaining colonial state apparatus the British came into conflict with the NMS Malay elite as the latter sought to retain control of the resources traditionally under their control. Thus, the NMS Malay elite rightly perceived that the new methods of revenue collection exercised by a depersonalized bureaucracy represented a threat to their political power - a power still largely, though decreasingly in the very early stages of colonial rule, perceived in individualistic, personal terms. Thus, the very early political history of the NMS in the colonial period was characterized by a tug-of-war between British colonial administrators who wanted to channel state economic resources in a direction supportive of a British colonial state, and individuals within the elite who sought to retain control of a portion of the state's productive wealth in support of their positions of personal power. By stages, however, the British got their way and the Malay elite, while certainly not supplanted by British officials, nor subjugated to the extent that the Malay elite was in the Malay states to the South, were, to borrow Sutherland's phrase as applied to the Trengganu elite, tamed.⁽²⁶⁸⁾ Thus, in very broad terms, Sutherland's thesis for British-Malay elite relations in Trengganu applies to those relations in all the NMS. As the British proceeded to build a formal colonial state centred on a centralized, bureaucratized revenue collecting apparatus, the NMS Malay elite adjusted by seeking to secure and maintain positions of power for themselves within this new apparatus. The very important point to stress here is that, from the time the new colonial administrative structures were in place, and the NMS Malay elite had been fully absorbed into it, the tussle for power - the political process - entailing as it did a contest between the Malay elite and the British, and between individuals and sections of the elite - was operating on a fundamentally different

268 Sutherland, "Trengganu Elite", *passim*, p.84.

basis. The Malay elite no longer sought wealth and power directly on the basis of raayat productive wealth but indirectly, through the bureaucratic administrative processes of the new state. Just as the launching of political parties and modern party political processes in the Independence period again markedly changed the rules for gaining wealth and political power, so the imposition of a colonial administration fundamentally changed the ways in which wealth and power were acquired by the traditional elite, and opened the way for new non-traditional elites to gain a measure of wealth and power within the colonial administration in ways that were not possible under the old system. Thus, although it was as we have seen, the traditional elite that was dominant within the new colonial structures in the north, there was a social mobility opening the way for raayat to move into a lower and middle strata of the colonial bureaucracy. Access to political power and privilege was no longer largely determined by hereditary factors. Quite new criteria applied for the acquisition of material wealth, authority and social positions within the new colonial administrative structure. In particular, education was a prime consideration in deciding administrative placement, power and influence within the colonial administration in each state.

It was, then, the further development and expansion of the colonial administration and the absorption of local Malays into it, that served to partially re-define the lines of social conflict within the four states in the north. We can not read a full and detailed account of this process for all the four states in the north and more detailed research is needed to complete the picture for the NMS as a whole. Still, the sources do allow us a good general picture of the contentious way in which Malay power and influence was being distributed within the four administrations, and a detailed picture of certain of its aspects in two of the states - Kelantan and Trengganu. Kessler has shown for Kelantan, for example, that it was the contest for power and influence between those that were in favourable position viz-a-viz the new administration, and those not so favoured, that was in large measure responsible for the shaping of the emergent modern Malay political process. It was a process still in its embryonic stages and very much dominated by the British administration in the period of colonial rule, and which in large measure determined the main lines of demarcation in Malay party political conflict in Kelantan in the Independence period as we shall see below. Kessler argues strongly on the basis of Roff that, from the time of Graham's regime, that the state's estuarine elite having been deprived of many of their traditional prerogatives by Graham and the British regime

viewed for positions and influence in the new regime and for control of indigenous bases of power, primarily the Islamic administration.'⁽²⁶⁹⁾ The deprivation of the power of the state's indigenous ruling class prompted, in reaction, an expansion and strengthening of Islamic administration in the state as an alternative structure. The elite was able to assert a measure of power and influence within this state structure. In particular it was the Majlis Ugama Islam dan Isti adat Melaya Kelantan (Kelantan Council of Religion and Malay Custom), an organization set up to administer religion on the ruler's behalf, that was in the vanguard of this strengthening and expansion of the state's Islamic administration and through it aristocratic power within the state. In Kessler's words: 'Islam facilitated the aristocratic resurgence, and in the Majlis the connection between the aristocratic power and Islamic administration was sealed.'⁽²⁷⁰⁾

It was not only in the religious sphere that the Majlis fostered a resurgence of aristocratic power however. The Majlis also served to enhance the secular power of the aristocratic elite within the colonial administration through their organization of educational institutions within the state. According to Kessler '[a]n English education, the prerequisite for higher government office in Kelantan, was provided only by the Majlis, and was narrowly restricted to the sons of the old elite and its protégés.'⁽²⁷¹⁾ 'Such restriction', Kessler continues, 'was increasingly resented by critics whom the Majlis itself soon generated through its less favoured ventures: its religious school whose graduates were influenced by Islamic modernism, and its Malay school, which prepared the sons of selected commoners for government employment as clerks.'⁽²⁷²⁾ It is ironic, then, that the Majlis' educational policy and practice contained within it the seeds of dissension - a dissension which was building in

269 Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.52. Kessler's argument is based on Roff, "Origin and Early Years" in Roff (ed.) Kelantan, pp.101-152.

270 Kessler, Islam and Politics, p.56.

271 Ibid., p.57.

272 Ibid.

intensity throughout the period of colonial rule and which took on, as we shall see, a definite party political dimension in the early Independence period.

In Trengganu, too, the unequal adjustment of the traditional elite to the intrusion of the British colonial administration was a source of conflict within the upper echelons of the new state. Talib makes it clear that it was the fact that the Ulama family had lost power and influence with the appointment of a British Adviser in 1919, and the fact that they were not at that time absorbed into the new administrative structure, which intensified the anti establishment feeling of that family.⁽²⁷³⁾ This was directed not only at the British but at those sections of the Trengganu Malay elite that had been able to capitalize on the presence of plantation and mining industries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which was enjoying a privileged position within the new British administration in the state. While from 1919 the British Adviser had been unable to 'absorb the Ulama into the colonial structure' that same colonial administration had, by 1928, offered the aristocracy 'a salaried position, power and status' within its ranks.⁽²⁷⁴⁾ Not only this, but this aristocracy was able to turn their new official positions to personal economic advantage and this further strengthened their privileged position over that of the Ulama and the Trengganu raayat.⁽²⁷⁵⁾ It was, Talib argues, Ulama resentment of these aristocratic privileges that caused them to lead the raayat in direct physical protest against them in 1928, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter.⁽²⁷⁶⁾

In Trengganu, as was the case in Kelantan, unequal status and privilege was enjoyed by its Malay employees - a differential status on the basis of hereditary position within the traditional Malay hierarchy and effected largely through the instrumentality of the state's education system. The Trengganu Civil Service was divided into a pegawai (officer) and

273 Talib, Image, pp. 146, 147.

274 Ibid., pp.146, 224.

275 Ibid., pp.224-227.

276 Talib devotes a whole chapter to the 1928 uprising.

Ibid., chapter 6, "The 1928 Peasant Revolt", pp. 134-175.

kerani (clerical) class. According to Talib '[t]he weak Trengganu school system provided a major share of civil servants and the remainder, usually younger members of the ruling class, were educated at Malay College in Kuala Kangsar, and King Edward VII School in Taiping'.²⁷⁷ 'The state education system' according to Talib, 'denied openings to the commoner for pegawai or kerani positions and thus favoured the growth of a bureaucratic elite of aristocratic birth or connections.'⁽²⁷⁸⁾ It would seem, then, that the colonial bureaucracy in Trengganu was even more elitist than that in Kelantan where the raayat, at least, had access into the lower tiers of administration through the vernacular schools run by the Majlis. It was in this sense that the system in Trengganu was vital in maintaining a closed system of Malay aristocratic, administrative privilege - a system which in many respects paralleled that existing in the state before the period of colonial rule in the state. Talib describes the aristocratic motive for maintaining a closed system in these terms:

The fundamental reason for the strong resistance to opening up the Civil Service was that it provided job opportunities for senior members of the old ruling class and a future for the younger generation of that class. The characteristic of the administration maintained the essence of the traditional relationship between prince and peasant. Even within the Civil Service the bureaucratic lines of hierarchy were merged with traditional relationships.⁽²⁷⁹⁾

We can see, then, how in both Kelantan and Trengganu the establishment of a British administration engendered conflict between not only the British and the Malay elite in those states as a whole, but also an intra elite conflict inspired in large measure by the degree of accessibility to positions in the new administration.

To sum up the chapter as a whole then, we can see how, with the coming of British rule in the north, further marked and fundamental change to the NMS economy and society took place. The changes implemented by the British administration were many and varied but central to all of them were the changes being made to production itself as the primary means

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 223, 224.

²⁷⁸ Robert(Talib), "Malay Ruling Class", p. 534.

²⁷⁹ Talib, Image, p. 224.

whereby the British sought to modernize the four states on an economically self-sustaining basis. The British thought of the raayat producer in ideal terms and, in seeking to secure raayat production as the economic basis of the four states, set out to implement this ideal through various protectionist policies. The British fell short of this ideal however. This was in part because the British harboured other contradictory motives which ran across this humanitarian concern for the welfare of the raayat; in practice for example the British taxed the raayat heavily in order to raise the revenue needed to run the states. In addition, they lacked control over, and an understanding of, the productive forces unleashed or fostered by their policies. The raayat did experience economic hardship as the various pressures set in train by colonial policies forced them to produce to the limit of their productive capacity. The raayat were exploited by middlemen, into whose hands they were in large part forced in order to meet the exactions now being levied by the colonial state. The raayat were not, as many sources would have it, totally quiescent and backward in response to the colonial pressures; to the contrary there is ample evidence to show that they resisted these pressures in various ways, often with considerable enterprise and sometimes, as we shall see in the next chapter, by force.

The effect on the traditional elite in each state was also profound. By degrees they were subdued by the British, though this subjugation was never total and they remained a strong force in each of the four states. Whilst the traditional NMS Malay elite largely lost its ability to tap into the wealth of the productive base directly in support of its position of power and prestige, they did nonetheless as members of the colonial administration, retain considerable wealth - both as state officials drawing lucrative salaries, and as private entrepreneurs - and enjoyed considerable subordinate power and status at an intermediary level in NMS society. The NMS Malay elite were necessary agents for the British colonial state to draw on the productive wealth of the raayat and the elite made good use of this in their power struggle with British administrators. Thus, unlike the situation in the peninsular states to the south where the colonial state was dependent upon mining and plantation wealth, and where the Malay elite had lost its hold on the extractive economy, and therefore its ability to resist the British to any great degree, the NMS elite was able to persist as a strong and viable force in the states' government and administration. The NMS Malay elite did not enjoy this favourable position uniformly however, and there was contention in at least two of the northern states - Kelantan and Trengganu - not only between the British and the Malay elites

as a whole, but also between privileged and non-privileged sections of the elite as well.

Clearly, then, the establishment of a British administration in the four states radically altered the way in which the major social groups combined in production, and it was this which lay at the heart of the major and manifest changes in the social relations in the area, both in the colonial period itself, and which continued in its essentials, into the Independence period as well. It now remains to examine the more dramatically contentious of those social relations against the wider economic and social changes in the area beginning, in the next chapter, with those in evidence in the period of colonial rule.