

THE EVOLUTION OF OVERSEAS CHINESE
SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY WESTERN MALAY STATES

by

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ABSTRACT

An attempt is made to demonstrate that locally-based Chinese communities as such did not take shape at the point of settlement in the western Malay States during the early half of the nineteenth century. Rather, they evolved and eventually emerged through a slow process of change, the effects of which may be found mirrored in the fluctuating fortunes of the initially all-powerful and all-encompassing secret societies.

With growing length of settlement and expansion, differentiation took place and social stratification occurred. Economic and social leadership emerged and became stabilized. Commensurately, stakes in and attachment to the local environment mounted. Thus almost imperceptibly to the participants, locally-based and orientated overseas communities took shape and grew. As the yardstick of social prestige became increasingly interpreted in local terms, leaders began to court the favours of the masses more and more. In this process, the coming of indirect British rule in the Malay States contributed not a little to its gathering momentum.

Owing to the relative scarcity of comprehensive historical data on the subject and the period under study, it has also been the aim of this thesis to provide some detailed background information on the politics of the host society as well as the groupings of the various secret societies in Malaya.

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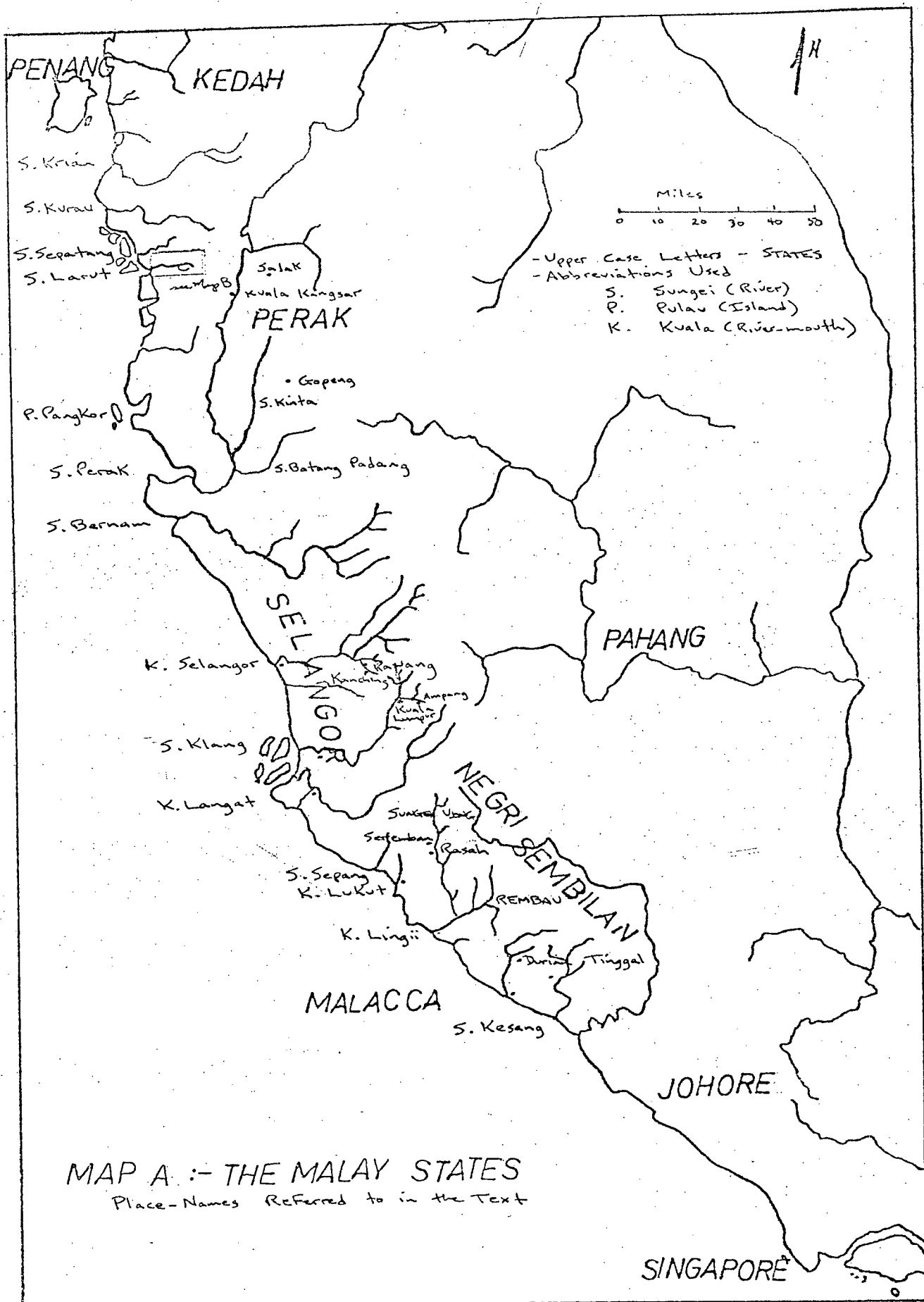
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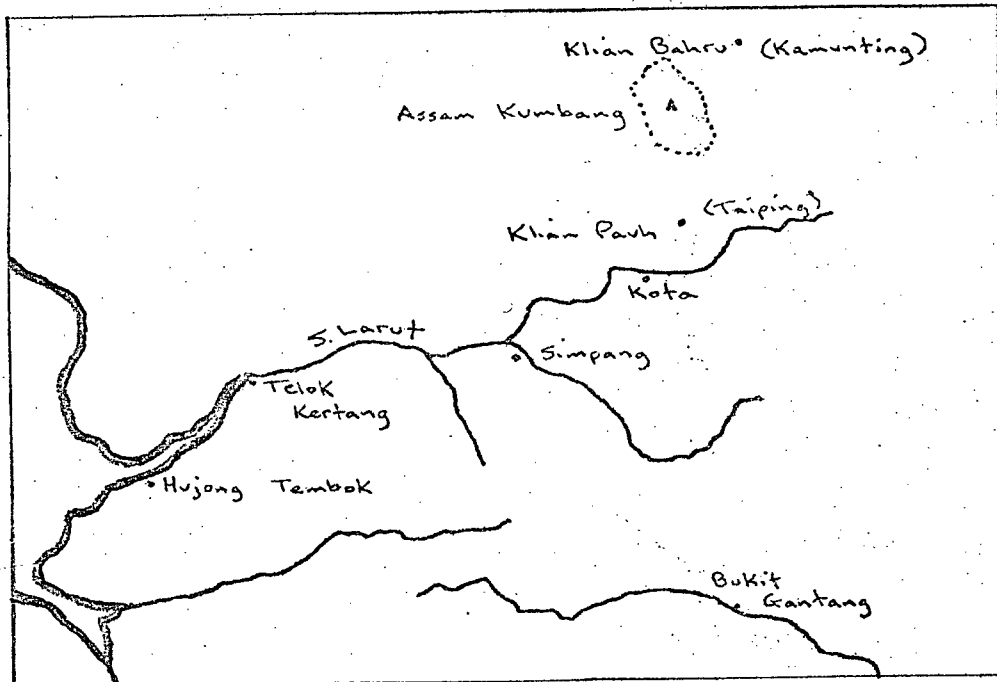
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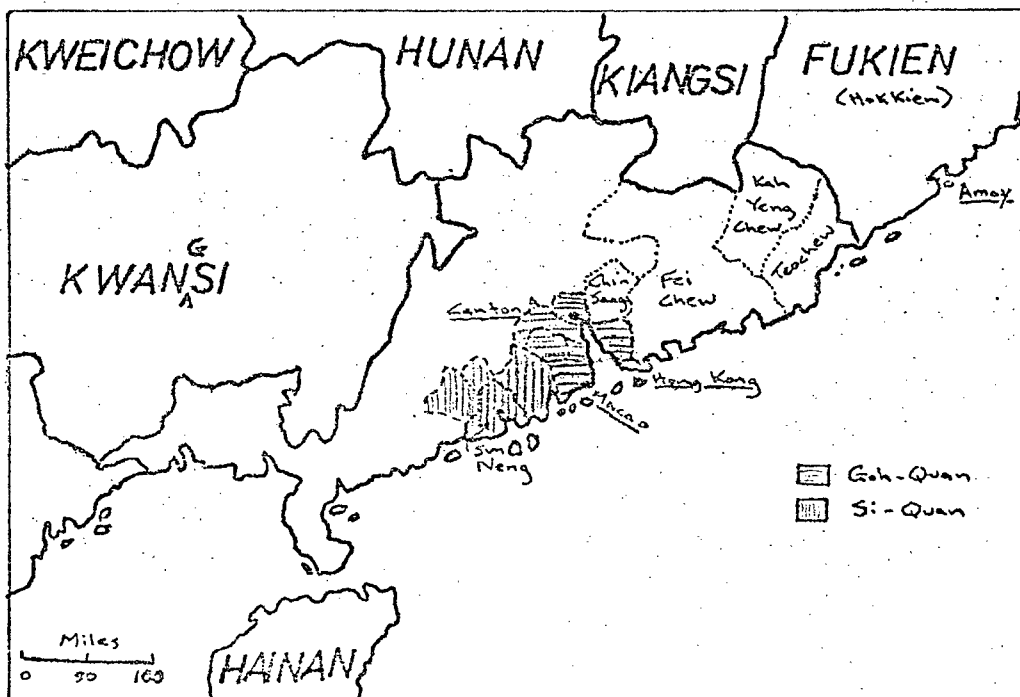
Secret Society	Dialect Groups	Mining Area
GHEE HIN 義興	-Fei Chew 惠州 (Hakka) -Sun Neng 新寧 -Teochew -Chin Chew (Hokkien) -Cantonese	-Klian Bahru -Klian Bahru -Perak -Perak -Perak
HAI SAN 海山	-Fei Chew (Hakka) -Chin Sang 增城 (Hakka)	-Sungei Ujong, Klang, Kuala Lumpur -Klian Pauh
TSUNG PAK KUN 松柏館	-Kah Yeng Chew 加應州 (Hakka)	-Sungei Ujong, Kanching, Langat
TOA PEH KONG 大伯公	-local-born Hokkien	-Perak
HO HUP SEAH 和合社	-Sun Neng -Cantonese -dissidents	-Klian Bahru
HO SENG 和勝		-Perak



MAP A :- THE MALAY STATES
Place-Names Referred to in the Text



MAP B:- THE LARUT DISTRICT OF PERAK



MAP C:- AREAS OF ORIGIN FOR CHINESE
MIGRANTS TO THE MALAY STATES

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years much attention has turned to the study of overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and North America. Their continued survival as distinct communities within larger host societies challenges scholars in the field to seek an explanation of the phenomenon. Interest has turned to the nature and possible significance of Chinese organizational behaviour outside of China. These attempts have given rise to different theories on how Chinese associations and the initial common stock of organizational experience from which these derived, influenced and lent continuity to the cultural survival of the Chinese overseas.

Crissman attempted to establish that a relationship exists between the social experience of the Chinese peasant at home and that which he faced overseas. The crux of this explanation lay in the existence of an "inter-relationship of urban and rural Chinese culture and society".¹ Through this inter-relationship² seemingly rural 'sociological principles' of social organization became readily adaptable and relevant even to essentially urban situations overseas. Thus, as Crissman concludes:

The unity underlying the diversities in urban and rural life demanded a parallel, and in a sense inevitably

1. Crissman, L.W., "The Segmentary Structure of Urban Overseas Chinese Communities," Man, 2(2), p. 202 (1967)
2. See Skinner, G.W., "Chinese Peasants and the Close Community: An Open and Shut Case," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 13(3), July, 1971.

similar, development of Chinese urban society abroad. The basic sociological principles that organize rural life—descent, locality, and occupation—are also used to order urban society. Indeed it is not just the same principles, but the same facts of stipulated agnation and origin which are used, a use made possible by the putatively temporary³ nature of migration to cities, whether in China or abroad.

From this model of analysis, one does acquire new insight into the raison d'être of overseas Chinese organizations within their new environment. It allows greater perception of the meaning and functions which these transplanted frameworks of social action held for their participants. In addition, Crissman outlined some of the major criss-crossing principles of social coherence which help to elucidate the basis of social cohesion within an apparently dissected and segmented Chinese community.

Reference to the Chinese context and origins of overseas Chinese social structures therefore enables one to assess organizational behaviour of Chinese migrants in a new light. Despite the presence of essential similarities in needs and experiences as Crissman's analysis has shown, it must nevertheless be recognized that however similar the Chinese and overseas situations may appear, they nonetheless could not be exactly identical. This disparity must in turn necessitate modifications and adaptations of what began essentially as a "common Chinese core of social experiences." Indeed the process of modification and adaptation was a never-ending one in the history of community development among overseas Chinese. The existence of these factors thus makes a realistic appraisal of overseas Chinese communities incomplete if seen solely in terms of a structural model of analysis.

In this respect, Freedman's theory appears to provide a more comprehensive approach. Freedman argues that the bases of overseas Chinese social organization change and differentiate in response to

3. Crissman, p. 202.

particular circumstances existent in the community, be it a growth in scale or a development in complexity. The idea of a link between evolutionary change and internal needs of the community presents a more realistic picture not only of change but of the necessary adaptation which must have taken place at the time of settlement. In fact Freedman's study of "Immigrants and Associations" demonstrates that in the nineteenth century, "once the anti-dynastic apparatus was moved overseas it adapted itself to new aims. These aims included the assertion of the independence of the Chinese in territory under the control of 'foreigners' and the building up of some kind of community organization to meet the needs of new settlements."⁴ A further illustration may be found in a comparison of Crissman's and Freedman's observations on the major bases of social cohesion in overseas Chinese communities. Crissman's segmentary system offers the principles of locality, clan and speech group affinity as the major pivots of social organization in migrant Chinese communities. The employment of the cross-cutting nature of these traditional loyalties, Crissman argues, provided a "powerful agent of social cohesion."⁵ Freedman on the other hand believes that for the case of Singapore it was the secret societies which cut across the more basic and conventional mainsprings of Chinese social organization mentioned by Crissman.

W.E. Willmott's study of the Chinese in Cambodia presents yet another variation of local organizational behaviour, a type he ascribed to the "system of indirect rule adopted by the French."⁶ Contrary to the Singapore situation, the Chinese community in Phnom-Penh was marked by a "paucity of associations, almost none of which included members from more than one speech group."⁷ Thus, it appears that sufficient modifications

4. Freedman, M.V., "Immigrants and Associations: Chinese in Nineteenth Century Singapore," Comp. Studies in Society and History, 3(1), Oct. 1960, p. 33.

5. Crissman, p. 194

of the migrants' social experiences occur to make consideration of internal needs within any single overseas Chinese community important to the analysis.

Willmott's observation also brings up a third variable which circumscribes the Behaviour of Chinese overseas — that is the influence of the host government and their policies. Skinner's comparison of migrant Chinese societies in Thailand and Java reported that significant differences in role and extent of assimilation exist between these two groups. This disparity, he argues, "cannot be accounted for by factors inherent in the Chinese. They must flow, rather, from differences among the receiving societies."⁸ That the host society does exercise a force in determining the resultant pattern of overseas Chinese organization is in fact well demonstrated by both Willmott's and Skinner's findings in their respective areas of research.

In essence, therefore, major differentials affect the pattern of development in a migrant Chinese community. With a given core of shared social experiences, the migrants shaped their individual communities in response to internal changes and external pressures. It may be assumed that a process of interaction exists between initial heritage, internal change and external demands. It is the purpose of this study to analyse the forces which affected the foundation and development of Chinese communities in the tin mines of nineteenth century West Malaya. As far as patchy source material will allow, it aims to demonstrate that a network of variables operate to produce changes, adjustments and adaptations.

6. Willmott, W.E., "Congregations and Associations: the political structure of the Chinese community in Phnomh-Penh, Cambodia," CSSH, 2(3), June 1969, p. 283.
7. Ibid.
8. Skinner, G.W., "Change and persistence in Chinese culture overseas," J. of South Sea Society, Singapore, vol. 16, 1960, p. 87

Until recently, academic interest in the Malayan Chinese was primarily focused on the impact of British rule on them, as well as the attempts which these rulers made to cope with them. This view is understandable since the majority of these efforts had been directed towards a record of British policies and the enlightenment which these writers thought they imparted. Apart from this tradition, straightforward records of Chinese activity in Malaya were written, though with a distinct bias towards the establishment of a direct cause and effect relationship between British policies and Chinese activity. With the appearance of studies made by Freedman and Marjorie Topley,⁹ however, a new approach to the understanding of Chinese in Malaya and Singapore seems underway. Recent appraisals have been characterized by an interest in the internal dynamism in Chinese communities — a force, it has been found, which generates within limits, its own momentum for growth and change. Thus, the method of study has changed, analytically at least, from treating the Chinese community as a dependent variable of the law-making process to one whereby the Chinese were active, if not equal, participants in the evolution of their own community as well as the larger society. This trend is clearly manifested in Clarkson's study of the Chinese farmers in the Cameron Highlands.¹⁰ In this study an attempt was made to understand the system of relationships that exist between a farming community and its larger eco-system, both physical and cultural.

This changed dimension of enquiry is evident from available studies and is mainly a product of empirical research. Such empirical enquiries give the distinct advantage of a less restricted range of materials

9. Topley, M., "The emergence and social function of Chinese religious associations in Singapore," CSSH, 3(3), April 1961.

10. Clarkson, J.D., The Cultural Ecology of a Chinese Village, Cameron Highlands, Malaysia, Univ. of Chicago, Dept. of Geography, 114 (1968)

from which a more independent and balanced conclusion may be arrived at. Can such a task be similarly accomplished by the use of historical data alone? This is the crucial question in the following pages as my study proposes to deal with Chinese immigrants to nineteenth century Malaya. Much of course depends on the availability of sufficient data resources of the period, but the fact that Freedman's examination of "Immigrants and Associations" in Singapore was done on a partial historical base provides one with some grounds for confidence.

Very little sociological documentation of Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century exist, as no records of their activity were kept by the Chinese themselves¹¹ nor by their Malay rulers. British colonial observations, aside from their strong administrative bias are scattered, destroyed, and difficult to locate where they still exist. Occasional travelogues by English visitors were sometimes inaccurate¹² and often lacking in depth.¹³ Whatever the documentary source, it appears that much sifting and selecting has to be done. This process is by no means complete, but efforts by Blythe, Khoo Kay Kim, Middlebrook, and Wong appear to have assembled some order from the chaos. In their individual studies, these scholars have presented a core of readily available data which may be tapped for further discussion and theoretical constructions relating to Chinese social behaviour and organizational forms. Blythe¹⁴ for example has worked through an extensive range of colonial records and official files for his data. His work is valuable as it contains relatively undedited sections of primary details and data. Khoo's unpublished thesis¹⁵ is

11. Purcell, V., The Chinese in Malaya, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1967, p. 52

12. Wang Gung-wu's introduction to Cameron's work (Our tropical possessions in the Malayan Indies) remarked on its lack of historical accuracy and its tendency to get carried away by the novelty of the situation to the detriment of a factual report (Oxford U. Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1965)

13. Purcell, op. cit., referred to "foreign impressions" of the Chinese in these terms: "although illuminating they often suffer from the fact that (cont.)

equally informative and particularly useful for the period prior to 1874.

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Middlebrook's study of the Chinese in Selangor helps to provide further details missing in the other more general accounts. These works, together with Wong Lin Ken¹⁷ will form the mainstay of my factual resources. Personal interviews of Chinese tin miners in Penang and the Kinta area of Perak will be used in forming the final conclusions and observations on Chinese behaviour towards the close of the nineteenth century.

The appearance of an adequate supply of data is only a relative one and can be misleading. Scholars familiar with the field will agree with Khoo that "the now available historical data provide no ready information."¹⁸ In his attempt to reconstruct "a proper social framework into which the materials on wars and politics could be fitted", he remarked that the "difficulties are enormous. In the case of Chinese Secret Societies, [for example] the available historical records are more concerned with details of their origins and conflicts than with that of their internal organization."¹⁹ Freedman's research produced similar sentiments regarding the lack of a satisfactory account of the secret societies and their role.²⁰ In view of these obstacles it may not be possible to reconstruct those historical situations pertaining to the analysis to a satisfactory degree of detail. However, enough material exists for the emergence of a recognizable framework from which it is hoped, some insights into Chinese organization may be gleaned.

the writer had to rely on a superficial acquaintance and had no intimate contacts assisted by a knowledge of the Chinese language." p. 94

14. Blythe, W., The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya, a Historical Study, Oxford U. Press, London, 1969.

15. Khoo Kay Kim, "The Western Malay States, 1861-1873," unpublished thesis, University of Malaya, 1965.

16. Middlebrook, S.M., "Yap Ah Loy," J. Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society, vol. 24, part 2, 1951.

17. Wong Lin Ken, The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914, Arizona U. Press, Tuscon, 1965.

18. Khoo, op. cit., p. 2.

19. Ibid, p. 1.

20. Freedman, p. 30.

Khoo observed that the internal organization of overseas Chinese secret societies is of crucial import to understanding the framework of social action within early Chinese settlements in Malaya. This remark is significant, as Freedman's study has shown. Secret societies in Singapore according to Freedman performed more central and significant functions in early immigrant Chinese groups than first meet the eye. In Freedman's terms, "they [secret societies] set up mechanisms of 'law' within the Chinese community. They provided immigrants with an organized group in which they could find a place for themselves in the absence of traditional territorial and kinship systems. They distributed political power among the Chinese in such a way as to harmonize with the economic system which grew up."²¹ Thus, secret societies in Singapore acted as the focus of political, social and economic organization within early immigrants' communities.

In the tin-mining areas of West Malaya it may be argued that secret societies performed a no less important role vis-à-vis the early migrants. By virtue of this initial all-encompassing function, it may be possible to view changes in secret society function, structure and leadership as indicators of social change within the Chinese community. It is argued here that, initially, secret societies constituted a social system for their members, one which fulfilled certain needs and demands. As these needs changed, it is assumed that the bases of group cohesion and aspirations changed in a commensurate manner. These adjustments would in turn be reflected in the structure, function and leadership of the secret societies as these frameworks of social action and internal polity expanded to meet the new demands.

In the analysis that follows I shall examine the history of migration into the tin-mining areas of West Malaya with a view to tracing

21. Freedman, op. cit., p. 35.

how increased numbers and the accompanying complexity in organization affected the secret societies and how these structures in turn modified and adapted to such exigencies. In short, I hope to apply these above assumptions to a case-study of the nineteenth century Malayan situation. It is known that comparatively more records of Chinese secret society activity, their dominance and eventual decline exist than those of everyday Chinese activity or aspects of their social behaviour, organization and adaptations. However, since changes in secret society dominance were directly related to pressures generated by the community either in response to internal growth or external situations, such records may indeed be of use for the elucidation of its internal dynamics.

The study will concentrate on three major aspects of secret society organization in Malaya — its leadership, structure and function. Changes in each of these facets reflect significant trends of development within the community. Nineteenth-century secret-society leadership, for example, may be seen as an expression of the nature of social stratification in the community which it dominated. As such, changes in the type of leadership or the type of men who rose to be leaders may be indicative of new class consolidations within the community. In its structural aspect, the processes of selection employed by secret societies provide further revelation of the patterns and avenues of social mobility existent in the society.²²

Changes in organizational techniques may be similarly treated. If secret societies derived their mandate for dominance from their fulfillment of essential needs within that community, then sudden or unprecedented reversals to overly coercive methods of social enforcement²³ may

22. Ibid, p. 38.

23. Coercion had always been a factor in secret society control, but according to Freedman, in the earlier period of settlement "physical force...were evidently not the only means of ensuring adherence and loyalty," p. 37

be symptomatic of a serious displacement in this basis for power. Such a challenge could rise from one of several areas. There could be, for example, the emergence of alternative and increasingly more attractive bases for social coherence within the community. It could also arise from the establishment of alternative basis for primary loyalties, such as those of real kin relationships as opposed to fictive kinship ties propagated by secret societies. It is evident that major adjustments within early Chinese communities in Malaya bore significant repercussions for the secret societies. Conversely one may say that changes in the early secret societies had a direct relevance to the rate and nature of development in the nineteenth century Chinese communities of Malaya.

In similar fashion, modifications in the role of secret societies will be equally significant to one's understanding of the larger trends of change within the group. There will be no lack of examples in this instance, for over the space of a century Chinese secret societies in West Malaya moved from the peaks of supreme dominance to the troughs of outlawed and petty existence. Many writers ascribed this latter occurrence to the direct intervention of British policy which outlawed secret societies from Singapore and the Malay States in 1890. Though fully recognizing the potential effects of British rule and legislation on Chinese social behaviour and organization, I nevertheless think that British policy in this instance merely hastened the process of decline rather than generated it. As the study proceeds it is hoped that this will become manifest -- that overseas Chinese secret societies in Malaya were propelled by their own inherent forces, derived from within the social fabric of the migrant Chinese community.

Chapter II

THE WESTERN MALAY STATES AND THE ROLE OF THE HOST SOCIETY.

Large-scale Chinese migration to Malaya was initially attracted by the presence of relatively accessible deposits of tin, usually found in the foothill regions of the west coast states. Even historically, the states of Perak, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan had been known as the major tin-bearing states of the Malay Peninsula. Armed with a "knowledge of ingenious techniques of water management and an ability to mobilise a large and industrious labour force", these migrants were able to effect "a more thorough exploitation of the alluvial deposits than had ever been achieved before".¹ As has been found elsewhere in Southeast Asia² the application of these techniques were best suited to the exploitation of this type of mineral deposits. It is therefore to the states of Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Perak that they flocked when the opportunity arose.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the situation in the western Malay States seemed particularly equipped to aid and receive this influx. That the equipment and the subsequent reception was not totally one of deliberate or conscious choice by the Malay rulers and their subjects will be a matter for further discussion. At the moment, however, it is important to define the area of study as well as examine some of the major

1. Jackson, J.C., Chinese in the West Borneo Goldfields, University of Hull, 1970, p.31.

2. The Chinese had been mining tin in Bangka as early as 1720 and they were engaged in gold mining in Borneo around the mid-eighteenth century. (Jackson, p. 21. Also see Wong Lin Ken's study on the Malayan Tin Industry).

geographical and historical characteristics of this context.³

The Malay Peninsula commonly refers to the area bounded by the Thai border to the north, the Straits of Malacca to the west and the South China Sea to the east. It is also distinguished by a cultural affinity generally termed as Malay.⁴ Within the broad framework of overall unity however immense diversities occur. Geographically, the area is divided longitudinally by a range of hills which run in a NNE-SSW direction. Since, as Gullick observed "the Malay States, the major political units, were centred on river valleys, the central watershed was also a political boundary. The western Malay States lie between the central ranges and the west coast."⁵ It is this area that will form the focus of the present study. West of the Main Range are the states of Perlis, Kedah, Province Wellesley, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Malacca and Johore at the extreme south.

Today only the settlements of Province Wellesley and Malacca bear distinct structural differences in political organization from the rest of these mainland states. At the beginning of the nineteenth century however, no such broad homogeneity in structure and practice existed. Perlis in the north was, for example, under the nominal suzerainty of Thailand while her immediate neighbour, Kedah, led a precarious and often dubious independent existence.⁶ Perak was slightly more successful in asserting her independence while Selangor and Negri Sembilan managed to emerge almost unscathed from the trials of strength to the north.⁷ Johore, at the extreme south on the other hand was for some time incorporated in a larger Bugis empire removed from the mainstream of Malay Peninsula activity.⁸

3. The following section will be based mainly on Gullick. His work is fairly comprehensive and detailed for my purposes. As Khoo's study demonstrates, there is a general lack of any comprehensive work on this subject. (Khoo, op. cit., p. 59).

4. Gullick, J.M., Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya, LSE Monographs on Social Anthropology, 17, 1958.

5. Ibid, pp. 3-4.

6. Ibid, p. 10.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

The islands of Penang in the north-west and Singapore in the south were ceded as colonies to the British and, as such were incorporated territories of the British Empire far removed from the pale of Malay politics and practice. Similarly, Malacca since her fall from her heyday, had been ruled by various European powers and was finally transferred to British hands. Province Wellesley, a strip of coastland opposite Penang was also regarded as a British colony.⁹ Until recent decades, therefore these territories were generally termed as the Straits Settlements, separate and distinct from the Malay States.

Hence it may be said that Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan made up the main core of the west coast Malay States at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In addition to a common ability in asserting their own cultural and political independence, other events were to further emphasize the already perceptible convergence in development.¹⁰ Thus in this study, the term 'western Malay states' will mainly refer to the states of Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan unless otherwise qualified.

According to Gullick, "the nineteenth century saw rapid changes in the political[and one may add economic] situation of these three States".¹¹ Among other things, it witnessed the mass inflow of Chinese migrants to the foothill regions of the area. This brought with it not only new economic situations but eventual political complications as well. As will be seen these events were to effect an even closer parallel in the development of these States.

On the West Borneo goldfields Jackson's study shows that "the growth of this large wealth-producing Chinese population in what had been hitherto an almost empty forest zone generated a new conception of desirable

9. Ibid. Information was also gathered from general reading, the references for which are not now available to me for accurate citation.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

territorial authority among the Malay rulers."¹² As a consequence "disputes arose, such as that between Mampawah and Sambas over the lands between the Doeri and Raja rivers in 1772."¹³ In the western Malay States, similar redefinitions of power and authority were in evidence by the middle of the nineteenth century. A proper understanding of the significance and potential effects of these changes however, necessitates a prior appreciation of the original basis and definitions of sovereignty, fealty and loyalty within the Malay context.

At the time of the Malacca Sultanate (1400-1511) each of the three western Malay States was organized along different lines to serve different purposes within the larger empire of the Sultanate. With the disintegration of that power bloc, the states were left to their own resources, uncontrolled and uncoordinated. It was at this point in history that a common experience in the political tradition of the Malacca Sultanate helped to bring about converging similarities in structure and practice of west coast Malay politics.¹⁴ Though they began at different levels of sophistication in organization, the fall of the Sultanate left them not only to their own resources but to the mercies of limited and more traditional apparatus of government. Given these means it will be seen how various circumstances and events were to affect individual courses of evolution until a growing parallel in structure occurred.

Negri Sembilan, meaning nine countries or states, began as a collection of dependencies of the Malacca Sultanate.¹⁵ Each district had its own appointed headman. "After the fall of the Malacca Sultanate these headmen persisted and maintained formal relations with the Sultans of Johore."¹⁶ However removed from the effective support of a central

12. Jackson, op. cit., p. 53.

13. Ibid.

14. Gullick argues that "the later Malay States inherited from Malacca both a tradition in which some of their major values were expressed (cont.)

unifying authority, a general dispersal of political power took place within the collectivity. This trend was reinforced by the inflow of substantial numbers of Menangkabau settlers from Sumatra. According to Gullick, the long-established ruling families became culturally assimilated to the matrilineal social system of the later arrivals from Menangkabau. "Negri Sembilan thus became a loose aggregate of independent minor states...ruled by chiefs whose lineages, like those of their immigrant subjects, were based on matrilineal descent".¹⁷ Another factor further contributed to this dispersion of power. As Gullick observed "the immigrant population spread over a number of localities and earned its living by mining and agriculture — in contrast to the 'trade centre' pattern of settlement of the Malacca Sultanate. Dispersion of settlement made it inevitable that there should be a dispersed system of local control."¹⁸ A change in life-style and livelihood of the population had taken place and these changes had in turn demanded a changed pace and form of government.

In the other two states, Selangor and Perak, similar trends of evolution were in evidence. Substantial immigration of Sumatran Malays into Selangor led to the rise of petty Sumatran kingdoms in the region. In Perak, a parallel process of political decentralization set in as "the Malay population increased and scattered."¹⁹

and also a pattern or form of political organization which it was their pride to preserve," (p. 7). It will become obvious that there were some very significant differences between the political set-up of the Malacca Sultanate and those of the later western Malay States. As Khoo argues, the Sultanate was a centralized type of government while the Malay States were at best a loose collection of river settlements. As a result, the Malacca Sultanate formed a model only in the ideal and did not exert a comparable influence on the actual conduct of government.

15. Ibid., p. 9.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 11.

19. Ibid.

It was the threat of foreign invasions which forced a semblance of unity in policy and practice on these states. Hence fear of the Bugis in the eighteenth century brought the major "states" of Negri Sembilan into a political confederation with a constitutionally prescribed leader. As a consequence, a weak but institutionalized focus of central authority emerged. In Selangor, the disunited Sumatran kingdoms were less able to resist Bugis invasion. After a long struggle the Bugis conquerors succeeded in imposing a ruling dynasty on the entire state. By so doing, they brought a measure of centralized rule to a formerly fragmented political unit. In Perak, the Thai threat was an ever-present reality. Fear of invasion therefore helped to perpetuate a loose form of unity within the state.

External exigencies thus imposed a course of unity on each of the western Malay States by the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, as the very nature of these bonds may suggest, their ties could not be sufficiently binding as to effectively counterbalance the prevalent centrifugal trends of population movement and activity. In other words, centralization was a course contrived of convenience whilst decentralization was one generated by popular social dynamics. Hence seemingly divergent trends of political evolution became locked into a single framework of political expression. Attempts to accommodate such contradictions were to result in a particular concept of sovereignty, fealty and loyalty within the Malay States.

In the case of Negri Sembilan, it had been noted that "a decentralized system of district government had developed before there was any organ of central government at all; as a result the royal ruler was not only powerless but he governed under a constitution which was designed to yield that result."²⁰ By 1830 it appears that the Yam Tuan²¹ "was unable...to

20. Ibid.

21. Yam Tuan was the title of the constitutional ruler of Negri Sembilan at the time.

make the authority of his office effective outside the limits of the royal domain."²² With the recession in foreign threats, the various chiefs of Negri Sembilan resumed their former independence with regard to the central authority. Such then was the general view by which obligations of loyalty and fealty were regarded by the district chiefs of Negri Sembilan.

As each group of chiefs attempted to interpret its duty to the group above it in similarly tenuous terms, one may well wonder what eventually constituted the basis of territorial authority in the western Malay States. What alternative bonds of cohesion, if any, could have held together the ruling hierarchy within each state? The answer to this of course varies from one state to another in keeping with differences in detail of organization and practice. Yet the principle of the issue remains at the crux of all traditional Malay politics in west Malaya.

An examination of the political situation in Negri Sembilan shows that kinship ties provided the primary focus of political cohesion within a community. Swift observed, that "in Negri Sembilan the primary basis of social organization was by matrilineal corporate kinship groups....The Negri Sembilan chief exercises authority as the representative of a kinship group."²³ These ties which helped to secure bonds of allegiance within a single territorial unit nevertheless ran counter to larger interests of inter-district cohesion.²⁴ Parochial unity thus directly mitigated the wider interests of the political system. This probably explains the relative ease with which the various chiefs of Negri Sembilan regained their independence from the Yam Tuan at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

22. Gullick, op. cit., p. 16.

23. See Khoo, op. cit., p. 18.

24. Gullick observed that "in Negri Sembilan the centrifugal forces were stronger. Each district was a separate political unit in which hostility to neighbouring districts was the normal state of affairs. Intermarriage between districts was not common." P. 74.

The example of Negri Sembilan serves to illustrate ~~certain~~ common principles of Malay political organization. Though as will be seen, neither of the two remaining Malay States under discussion operated under a territorially defined kinship system, nevertheless, the reliance on primary ties of allegiance was no less real. As a consequence claims to suzerainty could not sustain any wide range in distances. Beyond a radius of relatively accessible face-to-face interaction, a chief's claim to suzerainty could be easily challenged. His authority could flounder precisely on the principle of primary allegiances which dictated that subjects owed allegiance first to their immediate ruler and only secondarily to a more remote though possibly higher authority. The strength of this is evidenced in Gullick's study by notes of contemporary observers²⁵ who remarked that

The spirit of the clan is also strong within him. He acknowledges the necessity of carrying out, even blindly, the orders of his hereditary chief, while he will protect his own relative at all costs and make their quarrel his own.²⁶

the position of the people to their chiefs is that formerly occupied by a clan in Scotland to its chief. They will do his bidding and take harsh treatment from him more contentedly than from anyone else.²⁷

That these observations were made independently by two different observers was, according to Gullick, significant of the impact which "the sense of loyalty to the chief" in Malay politics had on an outsider.²⁸

Given these factors, the concept of sovereignty in Malay politics could only be one of formal recognition and nominal control. Initially bound together either by a need for collective defence or by the grant of a

25. Gullick, J.M., op. cit., p. 137.

26. Swettenham, F.A., Malay Sketches, Bodley Head, London, 1895, p. 4.

27. Clifford, SSD, 15th Oct., 1887. See Gullick, op. cit., p. 137.

28. Gullick, J.M., op. cit., p. 137.

royal charter to rule, these bonds were apt to dissipate to mere formalities with the passage of time. Hence a delicate balance of political power ensued, one which survived only because chiefs within each level of the system refrained from extracting a maximum extent of subservience and tribute from their immediate dependencies. Within this loose network of obligations, continued membership in a larger political system not only became attractive but in fact offered some real and material benefits. For a land-based peasant economy, the economic advantages of a large political unit were obvious. Among other things, the existence of a central authority facilitated "a measure of peaceful inter-communication and trade over the area of a river basin."²⁹ As Gullick pointed out, it would be "impossible for people to live in inland villages unless traders serving their need could (at a price) pass the villages nearer the sea."³⁰ Apparently, in the absence of dire exigencies, the head of state was needed more in terms of his tempering influence on inter-territorial relations rather than in his capacity as an absolute ruler. Lacking effective means and machinery to assert their power otherwise, the Sultans generally succumbed to such a definition of their role. Hence, it may be said that traditional apparatus of government both made it possible and necessary to rely on primary bonds of political allegiance in the world of eighteenth century Malay politics.

In practical terms, this particular political world-view of the Malays found expression in a highly individualistic approach to the maintenance of power. As Gullick suggested, in societies where land is scarce or has a special value, the ruler who controls this land in fact controls and commands

29. Ibid., p.133

30. Ibid., ..

its population.³¹ Spatial control in this case leads to political power. However, in the Malay States land was abundant, hence possession of territory did not necessarily entail commensurate political power. Rather, power was defined in terms of the control of manpower.³² This criterion of strength could not help but place added emphasis on the personal capabilities of individual chiefs. Gullick records that Malay chiefs frequently strained to the limits of their resources to maintain and where possible "augment the number of his dependents."³³ Added to this were the limitations of traditional apparatus of government and the consequent dependence on primary ties of allegiances, factors which further helped to concentrate power into an even smaller orbit round the personality of the chief. Situationally, it may be seen in the following terms. A Malay chief initially depended on a following for his ascendance to political power. In the absence of more abstract ideological bonds, primary ties of personal affiliation were resorted to (this was particularly true of Selangor and Perak where not even kinship bonds could be substituted for them). The dependence on this in turn demanded the situation of his subjects, peasants and retainers alike within close reach of his seat of government. Traditional means of communication further limited the efficacy of his influence to a radius of relatively easy face-to-face communication. Thus, with each situation, the field of power became drawn inwards until it rested largely within the immediate countryside of a chief's court.³⁴

The dependence of the ruling class on the populace as its basis of political power bestowed an important mechanism of political checks and

31. Ibid., p. 113.

32. Ibid., p. 125.

33. Ibid., p. 126.

34. There were, of course, other extra-political ramifications of power such as the control of a river mouth which afforded that particular chief added bargaining power vis-à-vis his subordinates. In spite of this, the real effective field of personal power for any chief was indeed limited.

balances in the hands of the common people. As expressed by Gullick, "flight was a recognized response to hostile invasion or undue oppression."³⁵ In another instance he commented more extensively thus,

It is an essential function of a political system that it should afford to the community in which it exists a necessary minimum of internal order and of protection against external attack. It is not necessary or possible that there should be complete tranquility. In many societies the political order is built upon the existence of groups which are themselves held together as groups partly by their opposition to each other...[In] the Malay States, inter-group opposition was only one factor among severalThe situation to be expected is then a balance between order and disorder rather than a perfect state of order. It was in this sphere of law and order that the Malay subject class was able to check an abuse or failure of the exercise of power by its rulers. Justice and order to a superlative degree was not expected. But if it dropped below a certain minimum level the bases of power were sapped away.³⁶

Expressed in modern terms, the peasants' flight from their land represented a vote of no confidence in their ruler, though not as deliberately delivered or as consciously conceived.

These demands of the political situation inadvertently deterred the Malay population from engaging in large-scale commercial tin-mining enterprises. As evident from Wong Lin-ken's description of Chinese commercial tin-mining in Banka,³⁷ sustained and large-scale exploitation of tin required substantial initial inputs of labour. Not only was prospecting a risky proposition, but even when it did yield results there were still the forest to be cleared and the top strata of dirt to be removed. All in all such ventures would incur too heavy an initial investment to permit a relatively painless exodus when the circumstances so dictated. Direct involvement of the general populace in the political machinery of the state thus made them unwilling participants in the

35. Gullick, J.M., op. cit., p. 29.

36. Ibid., p. 113.

37. Wong, p. 47.

construction of its economic future. Beside this lack in inclination, the Malay peasants also lacked the technical knowledge for large-scale commercial tin mining. Traditional Malay methods of mining tin involved the use of fairly simple implements such as the dulang tray used for washing deposits from a river bed or a simple changkul for unearthing deposits found relatively near the surface. These methods were not suited to the economically specific and full-time pursuit of tin-mining. Wong, for example, reckoned that an area of at least one hundred feet in length must be worked before the effort became economically productive. Such a scale of operation was clearly beyond the scope of a single changkul or a solitary dulang. Other complications such as problems of drainage and water control as well as economic methods of organization and labour mobilization further made large-scale mining more complex than the level of traditional Malay technology could contend with.

Aside from the lack of incentive and the limitations in technology, it was also not in the interest of the Malay chiefs to encourage their subjects to engage in mining operations of any permanence. As noted, a chief needed his retinue and his peasant subjects within a close radius of his court. Gullick also pointed out that "the chiefs preferred to keep their subjects in compact groups for ease of control."³⁸ These administrative requirements were clearly incompatible with the nature and demands of large-scale mining operations. Gullick observed that "miners moved from one place to another... at different times there were quite large movements from Larut and from Sungei Ujong to Kuala Lumpur."³⁹ Wong's description of Chinese mining methods also pointed to the provisions which "both the organization of the mine and the technique of mining called for rapid movement from one place of rich tin land to another."⁴⁰ Mobility was thus an essence of economically

38. Gullick, op. cit., p. 29.

39. Ibid, p. 24.

40. Wong, op. cit., p. 40.

specially tin-mining. In prospecting procedures, for example, the miners had to be able to roam the countryside in search of rich tin deposits. The release of his subjects to such occupations could thus weaken the very basis of a chief's authority. Furthermore, the choice of settlements in full-time mining operations was dictated by the presence of the ore and could not be administratively directed. This was again contrary to the main strength of a chief's control. Hence the Malay peasants were not mobilized for mining on any big scale even though tin had been a commercial commodity since the Malacca Sultanate.

Yet the fragile balance of internal power in each of the western Malay States made the possession of an added source of economic wealth important to the interest of the local chiefs. Developments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were to make the opportunity both available to and desired by members of the Malay ruling hierarchy. The close of the eighteenth century saw the founding and subsequent development of Penang as a British trading post in the Malay Peninsula. This was followed closely by the establishment of Singapore as a British port of call to the south of the peninsula. By 1824 Malacca was permanently ceded to the British by the Dutch, thus making its future as a trading base less insecure and hence more attractive. The trade attracted to the Malay Peninsula, as a result, coupled with other industrial developments in Europe, made tin "increasingly an article of singular importance"⁴¹ in trade. This inevitably turned the attention of traders and financiers alike to potential deposits in the western Malay States. The situation of the British settlements in easy reach of these deposits in turn helped to further their designs.

Internally, nineteenth century conditions in the western Malay States were far from ideal. Wong observed that, "in the 19th century, Malay

⁴¹. Khoo, op. cit., p. 59.

society in the tin states had become so degenerate and unstable that there was no central authority in any of them capable of controlling or powerful enough to control the whole territory. In the contest for power, the control of armed men was an absolute prerequisite to success."⁴² Granted that a complete dissolution of the central authority occurred only after the penetration of Chinese miners who, as shall be seen, brought unprecedented complications to the Malay political scene, it is nevertheless recognized that political conditions in the Malay States were far from stable. As Gullick observed, the uneasy balance of centrifugal and centripetal forces in these states did take its toll on the cohesion of the states. Thus "to a considerable extent the Malay States did break up into anarchy and civil war with results in terms of economic chaos and depopulation which have been mentioned."⁴³ By the beginning of the nineteenth century a mixture of factors further accentuated this political propensity to anarchy and civil war.

As mentioned, fear of the Bugis in the eighteenth century prompted the chiefs of Negri Sembilan to institute a constitutional ruler who could be both a military leader and a focus of unity to the state. "The first three rulers were invited over from Menangkabau to hold office for life only. According to the tradition each married the daughter of his predecessor."⁴⁴ Gradually a royal dynasty emerged and by the first quarter of the nineteenth century became sufficiently powerful to oppose the major chiefs of the state for the right of hereditary succession to the royal office. This embroiled Negri Sembilan in a civil war of some magnitude.⁴⁵ The resultant struggle for power directly prepared the way for a massive influx of Chinese miners to the region. This was precipitated by the need for increased revenue in the local chief's

⁴². Wong, op. cit., p. 21

⁴³. Gullick, J.M., op. cit., p. 133

⁴⁴. Ibid., p. 10

⁴⁵. Ibid., p. 16

campaigns. The opening of tin mines thus, was seen as a much needed source of wealth as well as a possible lever of extra bargaining power to the chiefs. Hence it was a constellation of factors which developed a need for economic expansion within the state at a time when outside interests were turning an inquiring eye at its possible potential.

In Selangor, the political vigour of the Bugis rulers faded with the death of Sultan Ibrahim. Sultan Mohamed who succeeded him was an ineffectual ruler.⁴⁶ The weakening of the central authority allowed even greater leeway for ambitious chiefs to strengthen and build up their individual strongholds. Enterprising district rulers hence turned their attention to developing their tin resources in earnest. This was the beginning of Chinese penetration into Lukut, Klang and later Kanching in the early nineteenth century.

Perak's political situation had often been unstable. Part of this stemmed from the fact that the Sultan's court was centred on the more inland reaches of the Perak estuary,⁴⁷ thus leaving the downstream chiefs relatively unsupervised and independent even economically of his presence.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Perak was a big state and thus was more susceptible to the development of factional units and strongholds. In fact the state of intermittent feuds was so serious that it actually deterred the growth of mining activities in that state.⁴⁹ Nevertheless it was precisely this state of open-ended politics which urged Long Ja'afar and later his son Ngah Ibrahim to encourage the economic exploitation of tin in Larut. Ngah Ibrahim, at least, harboured ambitions of one

46. Ibid., p. 14.

47. Khoo, op. cit., p. 12.

48. It has been argued that one of the ways in which a Sultan maintained his power was through the economic control of the main thoroughfare of his state through the control of the estuary.

49. Khoo, op. cit., p. 109.

day succeeding to the throne by virtue of his wealth and consequent influence over the court.⁵⁰

While these forces worked in favour of Chinese economic involvement in the western Malay States they however wrought drastic changes in the balance of Malay politics. Chiefs who had successfully opened their districts with the help of Chinese enterprise and labour either acquired political power way out of proportion to their status, or they became the focus of jealousy and resentment of their neighbours and nominal overlords. In either case, a strength of personality and will was required to keep the political situation at an even keel. In Selangor for example, Raja Juma'at, the Raja of Lukut, attained a high position of regard in the state.⁵¹ It was, however, collected statesmanship and a strength of personality which kept the less fortunate chiefs from combining against him.⁵² In Negri Sembilan, on the other hand, the discovery of tin in Sungei Ujong excited the attention of Rembau who attempted to exert remote or imagined rights of overlordship over parts of the area.⁵³ Tin passing downstream from Sungei Ujong was also subjected to extortions by chiefs in control of the lower reaches of the river.⁵⁴ In the trials and troubles of Sungei Ujong one may perceive a changed concept of territorial

50. Gullick, op. cit., p. 13.

51. It has been said that, "it is currently reported that the Rajah of Lookut has been recently vested by the Sultan [Abdul Samad] with supreme authority over the whole of Selangor but no official notification has yet been to the Government on the subject." SSR, R. 40 Singapore to Fort William, 16 May, 1861, (see Khoo, p. 199)

52. When Raja Bot succeeded his father, Raja Juma'at, trouble threatened the district. Khoo attributed this to the fact that "apparently Raja Bot did not measure up to his father for during the initial years of his rule he encountered." Khoo, op. cit., p. 200.

53. Khoo, p. 63 and p. 193.

54. Ibid, p. 192.

authority.⁵⁵ Instead of accepting a nominal recognition of suzerainty, chiefs began to regard their sovereignty with more seriousness than the traditional mechanism of politics could cope with. Consequently frequent eruptions of hostilities ensued as "overlords" attempted to assert their claims while "vassals" sought to resist them.⁵⁶ Within the new definition of territorial authority, a slight negligence in apportioning revenue could result in renewed strife and warfare.⁵⁷ At times, one crisis was no sooner averted than another reared its head. In the midst of such a state of affairs, political apparatus of the state, which existed primarily to keep a fair measure of stability in the area became eroded away.

The nineteenth century was thus a period of immense hardship for the Malay subjects.⁵⁸ Before long similar troubles broke out in Selangor and Perak. Malay peasants resorted to their one means of political protest—flight. However such an avenue of action was not feasible for those Chinese miners who had invested a large amount of labour and perhaps capital in the mines. For purposes of self-defence therefore these Chinese groups sought refuge under the wings of secret society organizations. The political usefulness of secret societies to Chinese miners will become more manifest as one traces the origins of small-scale Chinese mining and trading operations in the Malay States. Middlebrook's research attested to the fact that individual Chinese traders or miners at the beginning of the nineteenth

55. In the case of Perak too, Khoo observed that in the mid-nineteenth century "the desire to obtain political control over the economically attractive northern territories affected seriously relationships among members of the ruling elite." Khoo, p. 222.

56. Ibid., p. 192.

57. The Penghulu of Rembau was provoked because Klana Sending of Sungei Ujong did not consult him when he met with other downstream chiefs to arrive at a fixed duty on the river. Ibid.

58. Gullick, op. cit., p. 29.

century often suffered exorbitant demands for levies from Malay chiefs and, on occasion, were robbed and murdered by the Malays.⁵⁹ Only when the "Chinese immigrated in large numbers, were they able to protect themselves against the Malays."⁶⁰ In addition, given the differences in custom and language between these two racial groups, it was found to be to mutual advantage to allow the Chinese to "govern" themselves.⁶¹ Hence, while chiefs became increasingly preoccupied with squabbles and re-definitions of rights, the Chinese were left more and more to their own devices, thus allowing them to consolidate their secret society organizations in the Malay States.

Economically, Chinese secret societies probably provided an intervening framework for enterprise and activity in the midst of a chaotic political situation. The traditional subsistence economy of the Malays, frequently battered by disruptions and anarchy, could not have been, at its best, vigorous enough to support the "industrial" nature of Chinese mining activity.

Consequently, certain factors in traditional Malay society and politics directly encouraged the formation and subsequent employment of Chinese secret societies as vehicles of political and economic expression for this group of migrants in their midst. Socially too, it was convenient for the Chinese to seek "protection" from an alien culture and language under the umbrella of the secret society. It will be seen how the original composition of the migrant group gave rise to particular characteristics in organization and conduct of these secret societies as well as how later developments both within the group and in the host society led to changes and adjustments in their internal organization, behaviour and subsequent outlook on the host society.

⁵⁹. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 17.

⁶⁰. Ibid.

⁶¹. Gullick observed that "whenever there was any considerable number of Chinese it was found convenient to have a headman." p. 24.

It may be appropriate to draw some distinctions between the Chinese migrants in the Straits Settlements and the Chinese in the Malay States. As this chapter may show, the Malay States differ considerably from the Straits Settlements in mode of government and in objective in ruling. These differences arose partly from differences in culture and in level of political sophistication between the British and the Malays. It also arose partly from a difference in role, locality and scale of the respective areas administered. As a result, different administrative methods and different frameworks of policy and economy were evident. These differences initially reflected on Chinese behaviour, at the early years of settlement. However, phenomenal growth in their numbers in subsequent years somewhat ironed out some of these differences as the Chinese migrants themselves began to generate near-similar pressures on their compatriots. Of course, after the British intervened in the Malay States in 1874, considerably greater similarities in development emerged. In consideration of these factors, I shall not include the Chinese communities in the Straits Settlements in the mainstream of my study, but this does not preclude reference to them in relevant incidents for the support of the general thesis, especially towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Chapter III

MOVEMENT OF CHINESE MINERS INTO THE MALAY STATES;
Secret societies: their Role and Development from
1810-1860.

Both the settlements of Penang and Singapore were founded with a view to protecting the commercial and strategic interests of an expanding British trade route. Their development in the nineteenth century indeed realised this vision of their founders, for trade remained the mainstay of the port economies. Given these aims it may be inferred that once established, the settlements became rapidly "colonised" by British entrepreneurs and Agency Houses. In fact, as evidenced by Buckley's Study, this was certainly true of Singapore,¹ and judging from accounts of Penang's activities, it may also be said that she shared like experiences though on a much smaller scale.² When Malacca was transferred to the British, this settlement came to be regarded as an important "feeder" port to Singapore and Penang.³ Thus, the links which helped incorporate the economies of these settlements into a wider network of British commercial interests helped to create a defined framework of economic activities in the port areas.

Hence, when Chinese migrants settled in the port, they initially settled within a pre-existing economic framework. It may also be assumed that the first of these migrants were traders and merchants who were already

1. Buckley, C.B., An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore, Singapore, 1902.

2. Khoo, op. cit., p. 58.

3. Ibid.

familiar with, if not actually settled in an area in Southeast Asia.⁴ Their knowledge of European trading methods therefore equipped them to interact with and be integrated into the British dominated economies of the new settlements.⁵ This, coupled with a real dependence on the British for their initial economic opportunities, made for a further reinforcement of the existent economic framework. It was this presence and viability as contrasted with the ill-defined and constricting subsistence economy of the Malays which accounted for some of the initial differences between migrant Chinese behaviour and mode of organization in the Straits Settlements and those in the Malay States.

Administratively, the British had never been known for exercising a close check over the activities of the Chinese migrants in their colonies. In fact their policy of laissez-faire eventually gave these migrants a virtual free-play in the regulation of their own social and political conduct for the most part of the nineteenth century. Despite this later development, it was nevertheless the establishment of a British administrative authority on the islands which, at the outset attracted Chinese settlers who sought both a congenial climate for trade and measure of legal protection from abuse. This was therefore yet another factor which made for differences between initial behaviour and organization of migrant Chinese communities in the Straits Settlements and those in the Malay States.

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4. Song Ong Siang, One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore, U. of Malaya Press, Singapore, 1967, p. 8, records that "Chinese traders who had before 1819 resorted to such places as Manila and Brunei found it safer and more profitable after that date to visit Singapore in their junks and in time to settle down here." For the case of Penang, Blythe records that "a Capitan China from Kedah, eager for an extension of his power in the new Settlement, arrived with a present of fishing nets... Chinese from Malacca, Siam, the Dutch Indies, Sarawak, and China were all drawn to Penang by the prospect of trade." Blythe, op. cit., p. 40.
 5. Khoo records that the Straits Chinese in Penang, by virtue of their background, commercial knowledge and previous contacts with the British at Malacca succeeded, in the course of time, in establishing close business connections with the Europeans and their friends and thus became very influential with the leading Europeans in the Straits Settlements. Khoo, op. cit., p. 39. A survey of both Buckley and Song's accounts of Singapore appears to attest to a similar occurrence in that island. See also Khoo, pp.85-6.

Analytically, the situation may be viewed in the following terms. In the case of the Straits Settlements, it was a combination of British capital, enterprise and administrative presence that attracted the first Chinese settlers to the ports. In other words, the attraction was the product of a created situation, the preservation of which was vital for the furtherance of the interests of these migrants. Hence, it was to their advantage to support and uphold these very source-springs of their livelihood — the mercantile economy and the administrative authority. Furthermore, if the Chinese migrated for the very reason of the British presence, economic and political, then there is perhaps cause to believe that for the early years at least, the colonial framework provided them with sufficient economic opportunities and administrative safeguards to fulfill some of these needs within the group. Given these circumstances, it is argued here that the initial need for alternative frameworks of economic and political action was not as pressing or as immediate as was felt by migrant Chinese communities in the Malay States.

In the Malay States, Chinese migrants were drawn to the area by the presence of natural resources — tin. Their subsequent settlement was therefore determined by factors independent of and probably despite the extant political and economic situation in these states. Indeed for reasons mentioned, it had been noted that the politico-economic framework of the Malay States offered little if any organizational prop to the particular nature of Chinese enterprise and activity in these regions. Failing to derive adequate outlets and safeguards for their energies from the traditional system therefore, migrant Chinese found it increasingly necessary to construct their own means of political and economic regulation within their own communities. Hence Chinese secret societies were planted in the Malay States from the very first days of mass Chinese settlements in the region. In their new environment

therefore, these organizations were no mere sectarian units but were vital community structures which dealt with real situational needs of the group.

Consequently, for the Malay States it may be said that secret societies started out, from the very beginning of mass Chinese settlement in the region, as the medium through which the total economic, political and social needs of the migrant groups were fulfilled. It was from this point of concentrated control that later diversifications in function and needs of the community evolved together with their demands for differentiated control and structures. In the Straits Settlements, on the other hand, the presence of alternative structures (British administration and economy) which performed some important basic functions for the Chinese community at the outset helped in effect, to disperse powers of control to areas external to the community. Furthermore, as noted, the first immigrants were mainly those who had settled or traded in other parts of Southeast Asia. These migrants, generally classified as 'Straits Chinese' in the Straits Settlements unlike their compatriots from China, were frequently born and bred in Southeast Asia. An even more significant difference was their general orientation towards the region, regarding their place of settlement as their ultimate home. This, coupled with the presence of established 'Straits Chinese' groups in the region, greatly facilitated a swift reconstruction of family and kinship units in the new settlements of Singapore and Penang. Thus, as distinct from the later arrivals from China, no cultural inhibitions or formidable physical distances stood between the Straits Chinese and their formation of natural social groupings in new environments of recent settlement.

The existence of these natural social groups among the Straits Chinese hence further served to limit the secret societies' basis for control

among the Chinese communities in these settlements.⁶ In the presence of family bonds and real kinship ties, the need for social fulfillment within the framework of the secret society and its structure of kinship ties became displaced. Thus, as evidenced in Khoo's study, secret society organizations among the Straits Chinese groups were not in evidence until 1840, when their economic survival became threatened by the sheer pressure of other Chinese groups.⁷ Even when the secret societies made their appearance within the Straits Chinese groups, they merely represented a partial fulfillment of the groups' needs as opposed to the total and monopolistic role performed by similar organizations vis-à-vis migrant Chinese groups in the mining areas of the Malay States.

With regard to other Chinese groups in the Straits Settlements, secret societies possibly held more meaning and perhaps usefulness for their survival in the new environment. As opportunities within the existent economic framework became exhausted for example, these migrants were required to create their own sources of livelihood.⁸ In such an event, secret societies became useful foci of economic organization and management. Socially, too, they were more dependent on these societies for personal security and group order. However, as Khoo relates, economic success in the back-woods of the settlement invariably led to involvement in the commercial activities of the port area.⁹ This involvement then had the effect of drawing these men into the established port economies of the settlements. Thus through a system of mobility, economic dependence on the secret societies became transferred to that of the British mercantile economy. Consequently the pressure of competing structures of

6. Khoo observed, "it is significant...that Malacca-born Chinese who, until then, formed exclusively the wealthy class of the Chinese population in Malacca, did not, at this stage, belong to these societies [secret societies]. They had societies of their own which were, primarily, of a religious character as their chief object was to combine in offering sacrifices to the names of ancestors. Annual sacrifices were held outside the town and were very much of the nature of picnics affording an agreeable relaxation to the families of the society members." (Khoo, op. cit., pp 44-5)

7. Khoo's study shows that in Malacca "the growth of Chinese Secret Societies was associated with the increase in Chinese immigration population." (Ibid. p. 44)

economic and administrative organization in the Straits Settlements led to a mutation in the secret societies' role vis-à-vis the Chinese communities in these ports. As a result, the expression of vital processes of internal change in these overseas Chinese communities became obscured.

For these reasons, I propose to consider Chinese communities in the western Malay States as separate from the Straits Settlement communities. I shall argue that in the Malay States Chinese groups followed a relatively indigenous course of social development, one that was uninterrupted and unobscured to any noticeable extent by the presence of intervening forces and structures in the host society. The rather passive and non-competitive role of the Malay host society thus helps to concentrate attention on the processes of social change as the expression of an interaction between internal growth and external demands rather than as a one-way response to external impositions. It is hoped that the study of Chinese communities in the Malay States will yield a sufficient case for the assumption that even the factor of British intervention and their impositions of policies after 1874 could be similarly viewed as just one more factor among a myriad of other determinants of social adjustments and growth within these communities.

The rate and beginnings of Chinese migration into the Malay States have both escaped accurate documentation. According to Khoo's findings, "as early as 1815, Chinese miners were already in Lukut."¹⁰ Even before this date, Blythe believed that "perhaps a sprinkling of Chinese labourers" worked for the Malays while they were still in control of the production and marketing of

7. (continued) In the case of Penang, the Toa Peh Kong (the secret society of the local-born Chinese in that settlement) was not founded until 1844. Khoo, p. 42.

8. Ibid., p. 36.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. 93.

tin¹¹. By 1824, it appears that "the earliest reliable figures" of Chinese economic involvement in the Malay States were recorded.¹² In that year it was found that "some 400 Chinese were working in Perak as mining labourers and traders, and 200 were employed in tin mines at Lukut..."¹³ Despite these figures, the exact circumstances of settlement and the subsequent type of business arrangements made are nevertheless not clear. Various accounts of different forms of business arrangements with the Malay rulers exist and it is from these that one may perhaps piece together some coherent picture of an evolutionary progression of types.

Middlebrook, for example, observes that the first Chinese miners to the Selangor and Negri Sembilan regions were initially based on Malacca. From this centre they would travel to Sungei Ujong, Lukut and the mouth of the Selangor river. At times, they took coolies (labourers) with them with the intention of working tin for a few months. However, more usually, they only traded, advancing money to Malay miners or buying the tin they had collected. At this stage of Chinese interest in tin reserves, the attitude of the Malay chiefs quite effectively smothered any intentions of permanent settlement within the region. It appears that in the absence of strict checks from the Sultans, the chiefs constantly demanded heavier and heavier dues from the traders until they were eventually driven away. Sometimes they were even murdered for the money they had on their persons.¹⁴ From the above account it is evident that the beginnings of Chinese involvement in tin mining mainly consisted of haphazard efforts made by individual traders or adventurers who were attracted by the wealth of the area.

However, with the passage of time and when rich tin fields were discovered at Lukut and Sungei Ujong, Chinese miners began to migrate to the

12. Ibid.

11. Blythe, op. cit., p. 42.

13. Ibid.

14. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 17.

regions in numbers.¹⁵ With the presence of a group, Chinese miners became better able to protect themselves against the Malays.¹⁶ Under this new-found security, miners began to work tin in earnest, an undertaking which involved full-time excavations as well as considerable investments of time and labour. Settlement for periods of months or even years was inevitable. Economic and perhaps political arrangements with local Malay rulers thereby became necessary. Perhaps one of the earliest documented examples of such arrangements was that of Lukut in the early decades of the nineteenth century. According to Khoo, Chinese miners were found in Lukut as early as 1815. "In 1824, there were ...about 200 [of them there] under a Capitan China appointed by the Sultan of Selangor [Ibrahim] ,"¹⁷ It appears that when Raja Busu¹⁸ opened up Lukut subsequent to that, he began to impose " a duty of 10% on all tin exported from Lukut. As the industry grew, Raja Busu raised the duty from time to time."¹⁹ This antagonised the Chinese miners, who attempted to obtain redress by negotiating directly with Raja Busu.

One night, in September 1834, Chinese arrived at Raja Busu's house to try settle the question of duty. They found the vicinity stacked up with tin. Jealousy got the better of them. [Tempers rose and there was a massacre of the Malays]. But on their retreat to Malacca, they were ambushed by the Malays."²⁰

Similar troubles which erupted in Sungei Ujong around the same time seem to point to a parallel in type between Malay-Chinese economic relationships in Lukut and Sungei Ujong. In Sungei Ujong, Khoo notes that

By 1828, there were nearly a thousand of them [Chinese] there. Even at this early stage, the seed of discord was sprouting, [between the Chinese and the Malays] prompted by the desire for greater wealth: in 1829, the Malays raided the treasure chest of the Chinese; in 1833, the Chinese 'presuming on their numbers attacked the Malays, but were defeated, and had to abandon the mines.'²¹

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Wong, op. cit., p. 18.

18. Raja, as distinguished from Sultan, usually meant a prince or a close relative of the Sultan. Sultan is the title given to the paramount (cont.)

The above incidents serve to indicate the nature of initial Malay-Chinese economic relationships which existed between early Chinese mining groups and their hosts in the western Malay States. From both these accounts, it appears that originally Malay economic involvement in these Chinese group efforts was slight, hence their sole avenue of gain lay in the exercise of their political privileges — the imposition of duty and other levies. As will be evident, this mode of behaviour was later resorted to when Chinese miners recaptured these rights as sole entrepreneurs and financiers of their ventures.²²

Gullick has attempted to explain the latter occurrence in terms of a linear development in stages of organization. As he suggests,

In the context of a study of the Malay political system it is more useful to divide Chinese mining communities into categories differentiated by the degree of Malay control. Large mining centres such as Larut, Kuala Lumpur and Lukut (in its heyday) were beyond the administrative resources of Malay chiefs to control.... In the smaller centres where there were only a few hundred miners the local Malay chiefs might be able to exercise some general control and even to participate as sleeping partners in the profits of the mines. Finally there were cases of Malay chiefs who employed Chinese miners in small numbers under their own management.²³

In the last case Gullick explains that very often it was not their own money which they risked on these ventures. Frequently European and Chinese financiers of the Straits Settlements, who were reluctant "to supply food and stores on credit direct to the Chinese headman of a small mine...preferred to go into partnership with the chief so that he would have an interest in

18. (cont.) ruler of a state. In this case it appears that in 1824, Sultan Ibrahim had direct control over Lukut, and thus he dealt with the Chinese and "supervised" their affairs. Meanwhile, the territory could have been granted to Raja Busu to rule, and thus he came to "open up Lukut" as recorded in Khoo. It seems, too, that the Chinese had to deal with him rather than with Sultan Ibrahim after this point.

19. Khoo, op. cit., p. 92.

20. Ibid.,

21. Ibid., p. 60.

22. Ibid., p. 68.

23. Gullick, op. cit., p. 24.

supervising the mine and ensuring that it was allowed to succeed." By this method, Gullick argues, the capitalists hoped to safeguard their investments from attempts at default or dishonesty by the Chinese headman as well as from extreme vacillations in policies from the local Malay chief himself.²⁴

From the above description it may be gathered that when a mining venture was small or was in the process of being established, this method was most frequently employed. By assumption, it may be said that as the enterprise grew and as their numbers and commensurate economic standing increased, Chinese entrepreneurs became less and less dependent on their economic association with these local Malay chiefs. As a result, a general evolution of organization type took place, displacing the economic role of the Malay chiefs in the process. Khoo's thesis appears to offer a similar explanation in the following observation:

[Around 1840] the system of financial arrangement relating to the mining enterprises in Sungai Ujong had undergone a significant change. Until the early 1830's, the Malay rulers received cash, opium and rice from the Malacca merchants which they in turn advanced to the miners at high prices. The miners were obliged to sell their tin to the rulers at an agreed price and from the rulers, the Malacca merchants obtained the tin for export....But by the 1840's, Malacca merchants were able to make advances to the miners directly.²⁵

Yet, the two instances of early Malay-Chinese economic arrangements in Lukut and Sungei Ujong already mentioned do not appear to substantiate the above assumptions. In at least these two pioneer mining settlements, operations did not begin in economic partnership with the Malays. In Lukut especially, the Chinese were already in the district before the Malay chief, Raja Busu, took over the district. When he did, no recorded overtures were

24. Ibid., pp. 129, 130.

25. Khoo, op. cit., p. 68.

made to incorporate him as part of the economic establishment of the mines. In fact as noted, Raja Busu and the Chinese miners merely co-existed, each encased within a separate sphere of preoccupation until the Raja attempted to extract the maximum possible levies from the miners.

Though these examples constitute important variants to Gullick's and Khoo's assumptions of a general trend of evolution in organizational types, there are nevertheless other instances which support their conclusions. Later events of renewed development in Lukut under the direction of Raja Juma'at, for example, clearly manifest developments along lines indicated by Gullick and Khoo. Further the opening of the north Perak mines by Long Ja'afar followed a similar pattern of growth. In other subsequent cases of mining development, a comparable path of organizations may be discerned. Hence, in Kanching and Klang, mining settlements developed with the direct encouragement and involvement of these local princes or chiefs. It must be mentioned, however, that tin in the Kanching area was already worked by a group of Chinese miners "even before Raja Abdul Samad began to take an interest in tin-mining."²⁶ It may be assumed that at that time miners operated on a similar footing as miners in Lukut and Sungei Ujong before the advent of interested Malay chiefs. Perhaps the degree of economic sophistication and awareness of the local Malay chiefs helps provide a key to understanding the disparity in development between the different pioneer mining settlements examined. It is evident from historical records that as soon as a local Malay chief recognized the advantages which could accrue from a direct economic involvement in and encouragement of tin-mining in his area, his participation in the economic sphere then became an indispensable asset to incipient ventures and their prospective financiers. Prior to this,

26. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 18.

it may be argued, attempts to secure their cooperation were neither contemplated nor welcomed. Could the variant situations then be seen as an initial stage of Malay-Chinese economic relation precedent to the progression of types postulated by Gullick, a stage not too unlike the final one of Malay-Chinese co-existence, where non-participation in each other's spheres of activity became the order of the day? Or were they rather the expressions of initial variations in type and method of settlement?

Given the state of limited records, it may be extremely difficult to determine an answer to these questions with accuracy. However, judging from examples of Lukut and Kanching on the one hand and those of Perak and Klang on the other, one may say that evidences for each proposition existed. Furthermore, records of differences in initial organizational methods adopted by various Chinese mining groups in their respective areas does seem to indicate that initial variations in type and method of settlement did exist. The common assumption, for example, that pioneer mining settlements were solely founded under the shadow and mechanics of secret society organizations does not appear to be fully borne out by some recorded instances of settlement and subsequent developments. This is not to deny, of course, the central and commanding role which secret societies eventually came to play in all these mining settlements with virtually no exceptions. It merely argues that possibly different types of settlement initially existed. In the case of Sungei Ujong, for instance, Khoo records that the secret society by the name of Sung Pak Kun "had its headquarters at Sungai Ujong."²⁷ This leads one to question if settlement in this mining district had indeed preceded the formation of the particular secret society named, such that when a secret society did eventually emerge from the group, Sungei Ujong came to be its headquarters.

27. Khoo, op. cit., p. 51.

In the foundation of Kuala Lumpur the circumstances of its settlement and growth were more explicit. Here Middlebrook records that two Chinese traders who had supplied goods to the newly developed tin mines at Ampang were encouraged to settle in the area by a Malay trader, Sutan Puasa. Their response and consequent success "soon brought others, and within a short time Kuala Lumpur became a thriving settlement."²⁸ Rapid growth in population according to Middlebrook soon necessitated the 'election' of a Chinese headman, and "Hiu Siew was selected the first Capitan China."²⁹ In this case, it is evident that settlement began through the efforts of single individuals as opposed to mass engineering through an organization. As a consequence the formation of a cohesive order proceeded from settlement and growth rather than preceded it.

The existence of these and possibly other instances of uncoordinated initial settlement coupled with the later and common adoption of secret-society organizations as the medium of internal social and economic coordination thus makes the role of the secret society that much more significant in the study of organizational behaviour and needs within these migrant Chinese communities. Perhaps it may be asked what were the circumstances which prompted, in the first place, a need for organization? And, more significantly, what were the specific social and economic demands which favoured the institution of secret societies as the medium of social control within these communities?

The need for some form of organization seems obvious enough. The presence of an alien cultural group, unincorporated into the host society and its social system, invariably required some measure of internal social regulation as well as a focus for general cohesion. As Robin Williams observed, "all social structures...developed out of nonstructures, as mere aggregates,

28. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 19

29. Ibid.

gradually transform themselves into definite social groups or collectivities. The emergence of organization means that norms arise and consensus develops; it also means that internal differentiation occurs."³⁰ An initially loose aggregate of individuals possesses, as the above quote implies, a potential to develop into a defined social group with its own organizational framework. Even more so, it may be argued, will a collection of Chinese migrants whose social well-being seldom evoked the concern nor the interference of the local Malay authorities.³¹ Furthermore, as South Chinese these migrants belonged to a tradition of large-scale corporate lineages,³² one where interaction with outside authorities and internal units alike were conducted through a group structure as opposed to a fundamentally individualistic approach. In what Wittfogel termed as "clan familism"³³, the family structure and its future perpetuation derived special preeminence. Ritually, for example, the family unit was regarded as the basic unit of the system; in ceremonial occasions of ancestral sacrifices, the subsequent distribution of meat was often made with respect to heads of households or to the eldest male child rather than to individual males in the lineage.³⁴ In other internal political and economic matters, relations and settlements were conducted through the "chia-chang," heads of respective households who would in turn pass on the information to their respective members.³⁵ In these ways, we see how the individual migrant in his home environment was accustomed to the intervention of groups in the conduct of his day-to-day affairs. Moreover, through the corporate lineage, an individual derived a sense of historical perspective and an appreciation of

30. Williams, R., American Society, a sociological interpretation, A.A. Knopf, New York, 1970, p. 507.

31. Refer to chapter 2 and Gullick, op. cit., p. 24 and p. 25.

32. Freedman, M., Lineage Organization in Southeastern China, 1958, p. 104.

33. Wittfogel, quoted in Freedman, Ibid., p. 1.

34. Gathered from interviews with Chinese migrants. Also, Freedman, Ibid., p. 13, attests to the existence of such occasions.

35. Lin Yueh-hwa. See Freedman, p. 34.

his own role and meaning of existence on the unfolding continuum of time.³⁶

Within a new environment removed from these traditional moorings of meaning and permanence, it can be appreciated why a given collection of Chinese migrants needed organization. It is further obvious that the organization needed was no preliminary structure of relationship in the midst of chaos but rather a more specialized type of organism that could help reconstruct the familiar institutions of the corporate lineage group. In this, one sees the social basis of the secret society structure in pioneer mining camps of western Malaya..

A survey of the nature of specialized tin-mining work, the pre-dominant occupation of Chinese migrants in the area, may in addition afford an appreciation of the economic basis for secret society existence in these settlements. According to Swettenham's and Jackson's descriptions, overseas Chinese mining methods in Southeast Asia relied heavily on the use of labour. Jackson, for example, remarked that "nothing could emphasize more forcefully the fact that while the "waterworks" are the best-known Chinese contribution to the mining industry, the pillar of their techniques was the individual labourer prepared to perform incredibly tedious and strenuous work for immensely long hours and driven only by his personal interest in the ultimate profitability of the venture."³⁷ In another instance, he observed that part of their success in the West Borneo goldfields lay in their "knowledge of ingenious techniques of water management and an ability to mobilize a large and industrious labour-force."³⁸ Hence not only were Chinese miners of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries dependent on the industry of individual mine workers but they were also dependent on the presence and subsequent organization of a labour force. Tien's study most emphatically pointed out

36. Freedman, op. cit., p. 134.

37. Jackson, op. cit., p. 36.

38. Ibid., p. 31.

that the survival and economic success of the overseas Chinese in Sarawak was in fact "a great tribute to their toughness, their tenacity and [above all] their powers of organization."³⁹ It may be argued that this remark was no less true for the tin mines of western Malaya.

In Swettenham's report, "the mine is simply an excavation made in the form of a square, averaging an acre in extent and penetrating perpendicularly to the strata containing the tin."⁴⁰ These tin-bearing strata, locally called "Te Kang," were in Speedy's estimation "generally found in the plains at a depth of from 20-50 feet, though at the foot of the hills it lies within 6 feet of the surface."⁴¹ With the help of simple tools, which Speedy saw as "inefficient in the extreme," the labourers set to work, preparing the ground for mining. The ground, assuming the tedious and time-consuming processes of prospecting had proved fruitful, had to be first cleared of the "huge primeval forest" which covers most of the region.⁴² Then the alluvial strata, or the overburden, had to be "methodically removed."⁴³ At this stage, the coolies, or labour force, of the mine were divided into two gangs: one group would dig up the soil with a hoe (commonly termed Changkul) and shovel it into small flat baskets made from cane. The baskets, "not holding more than four pounds of earth," and the hoe were, according to Speedy, "the only implements known to the Chinese coolie."⁴⁴ When two baskets were filled, they were carried away by the second group of coolies. This was done in "regular order." As Speedy described it,

On a pair of baskets being filled, they are placed, one at each end of a stout stick, called a kandar, prepared

39. T'ien Ju-k'ang, The Chinese of Sarawak, a study of social structure, 1950, p. 6.

40. Speedy, T.C., "Blue Book of Larut District of Perak," in F. Swettenham's Papers (loose documents), box one, Malaysian Archives. Material was read a number of years ago, and specific folio numbers were not available at the time.

41. Ibid. The section following is primarily based on these documents.

42. See Wong, op. cit., p. 47.

43. Ibid.

44. Speedy, op. cit.

with grooves for the purpose, which is balanced on a man's shoulder, and the basket having been carried away and emptied they are brought back and refilled.⁴⁵

Usually at the initial steps of this stage, the assistance of a water-race was enlisted to remove the superfluous soil. This water was then diverted away from the mining hole by means of a sluice-gate into a washing trough where it was to be eventually used for washing the pay-dirt excavated from the ore-bearing strata.⁴⁶ As the excavations grew deeper, a tree trunk with notches roughly hewn into its sides was employed as a ladder.⁴⁷ Normally, at a depth of six feet, seepage became a problem. In smaller mines, this water was baled out by hand,⁴⁸ whereas in larger mines a chain-pump called "chin chia" was used. This was constructed on the spot with three long wooden planks, each measuring a hundred feet in length. When formed into a trough, this was lowered into the mine, resting at an oblique position with one end at the lowest part of the mine and the other at the edge of the bank. Then "a wooden chain with small oblong pieces of wood placed at right angles to the line is fitted accurately into the above-named trough. The wooden chain is endless, and is passed round two wheels, a small one at the lower end of the trough and a larger one at the upper end."⁴⁹ The larger wheel was a water wheel which was propelled by a constant stream flowing over it. By its

45. Ibid.

46. Jackson, J.C., op. cit., pp. 33, 34. Even though Jackson's account of Chinese mining methods relates to the west Borneo goldfields, it is nevertheless possible to discern immense similarities in method and technique. As he himself observed, "with minor modifications, these techniques were used wherever Chinese worked alluvial mineral deposits in South-East Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," p. 37.

47. See Wong, op. cit., p. 47. Also Jackson, p. 36.

48. Gathered from interviews of Chinese miners in Perak. Also Purcell, op. cit., p. 101, alluded to the practice of clearing water from the mines by manual labour.

49. Speedy, op. cit.

revolving action the seepage water was brought to the top of the mine in the following manner,

Round the axles of the water wheel are cogs, each of which in turn as the wheel revolves, draws up a joint of the endless chain through the trough, and as each joint fits accurately into the trough, they bring up in succession a quantity of water, which, on reaching the mouth of the trough, falls into the channel by which the water which turns the wheel is carried off, and is thus also taken away out of the mine, and conducted to the next, where the process is repeated.⁵⁰

Jackson's account points to the fact that this water was first directed to the washing trough before it was finally released to the next mine.

Consequently, in addition to the arduous work of clearing the ground and removing the overburden, an intricate process of water control and management had to be devised and constructed. According to Jackson, this frequently involved damming a neighbouring stream "to create a small reservoir; [from which] a canal was led to the intended mine site and fitted with a sluice at its lower end."⁵¹ A washing trough was then constructed and this, in Speedy's account, consisted of a long open trough made of planks measuring about "two feet broad, about thirty feet long, and one high. This is placed on an incline of about twenty-five degrees."⁵² Speedy also noted that small bars of wood about three inches high were fitted at intervals along the bottom of the trough.⁵³ These bars, being also nailed to the sides, thus created effective barriers to trap the heavier tin-ore from being washed away with the rest of the gravel. In Borneo, Jackson noted that the length and complexity of the washing trough varied considerably from small and medium sized mines to large ones.⁵⁴ This also appears to be the case in West Malaya

50. Ibid.

51. Jackson, op. cit., p. 33.

52. Speedy, op. cit.

53. Ibid.

54. Jackson, op. cit., pp. 33, 34.

as accounts of early mining methods gathered from interviews shows that the lanchut or washing trough usually measured from seven to eight feet long in a small mine. This box was however built in a wedge-shape, broad at the top and narrow at the end. The box also sloped from the broad end to the narrow so that a certain volume of the water poured in at the top could flow off at the bottom carrying the light sand and gravel with it. Meanwhile, a man, stationed at the side continually dragged the heavy tin ore back in the opposite direction to the water flow.

Except for the use of water for selected forms of motive power, the mainstay of Chinese tin-mining methods in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was manual labour. Irrespective of size or scale in operation, a heavy dependence on human labour was in evidence. Though in Swettenham's estimation, Chinese mining operations appeared simple, it may be argued that about the only simple feature in these arrangements was their tools and machinery, or the lack of them. Otherwise, Chinese tin-mining works, as seen from the above account, were complex ventures exhibiting an ingenuity in planning and control, both with respect to water and human resources. It is in the latter aspect, one may argue that secret society organizations came in useful as a medium of economic organization. It can be seen that if all the arduous and dangerous processes of ground preparation, water sluicing and eventual mining and smelting were accomplished mainly through the use of manual labour, the need for a sizeable labour force became imperative. Indeed, Wong estimated that "in 1850, the number of coolies in a mine in Malacca worked out on an average of about 70-80 men, whereas in 1862, the number of coolies employed in twelve of the mines in Larut averaged 71 labourers per mine."⁵⁵

⁵⁵. Wong, op. cit., p. 40.

The recruitment and transportation of these bodies of men into the interior where the tin mines were located presented a large enough problem, not to mention those organizational ones which the subsequent mobilization, coordination, and control of these men on the actual mine site would entail. An added difficulty rests with the dangerous nature of the work involved. One may indeed say that each stage of the tin-mining process bore some real or potential hazard to life. The dense equatorial jungles, for example, frequently posed immense difficulties and hardships. The tenacious and deep undergrowth often harboured snakes and insects which could attack the men while they cleared the area. In Middlebrook's account, when an Ampang mine was opened, eighty-seven coolies were brought in to clear the jungle. Within one month the majority of the force died, mainly from fever. "By the end of the month only eighteen were left."⁵⁶ More coolies had to be subsequently transferred in with "a full stock of provisions."⁵⁷ Even with the jungle cleared and burnt, the threats to a mine labourer's life and well-being were by no means completely abated. One can probably visualize some of the physical odds that beset a labourer attempting to manoeuvre his way up a roughly improvised ladder with about eight pounds or more of earth balanced precariously on ends of a pole slung across his shoulder; or even some of the problems and hardships they encountered while attempting to construct sluice-gates, washing troughs and chain-pumps from the solid deciduous hardwoods of the region. Given the limited tools in use, these men were not only driven to work hard but for incredibly long hours. In this respect, Wong remarked that the Chinese "entrepreneurs...had no scruples about working his men to death."⁵⁸

Seen against these circumstances, it would indeed be somewhat idealistic to suppose that these mine labourers were motivated solely by "a

56. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 18.

57. Ibid.

58. Wong, op. cit., p. 40.

personal interest in the ultimate profitability of the venture."⁵⁹ Granted that in smaller workings where a group of eight to ten men worked together on a share basis, this could be true, but in the average mining enterprise where from eighty to ninety men were employed, the prospects of deriving any direct profit from one's exertions must surely seem extremely remote. Further, given the almost inhuman limits of work to which they were driven, the chances of their very survival beyond the term of their indenture was even in question. It may therefore be argued that the mobilization of these men must have required some measure of force and coercion, such that its exercise would be seen by the labourer as more daunting than the fear of physical dangers or even those arising from his everyday work. It is in such a situation that the secret society mechanism came in useful.

Secret sects and societies, in Blythe's terms, had been a deeply rooted tradition in the Chinese experience. The power which they possessed commonly rested on a "readiness to kill should their demands be refused or their commands disobeyed, and over all was fear."⁶⁰ Consequently, built into the secret society mechanism was a body of "fighting men" ready and swift to mete out punishments or vengeance on its erring members or foes respectively.

It was this claim and ramification to power which seemed most suited to the above-mentioned conditions of economic control and vigilance in the nineteenth century Malayan tin-fields. Furthermore, in the eyes of the migrant Chinese, the secret society framework represented a culturally familiar and commonly feared force of authority. To the mine worker, therefore, the ruthless and exacting demands of obedience were well within his social experiences and comprehension. A combination of these factors hence helped to secure a close and exploitative control over the economic energies of the labour force.

59. Jackson, op. cit., p. 36.

60. Blythe, op. cit., p. 17.

The control and mobilization of mine labourers was not the only sector within the general economic management of a tin-mine where secret society organization proved useful. The upkeep of a labour force invariably presumed the supply of provisions and the mining of commercial ore meant that it had to be exported. Both these activities involved organization not merely on the spot but in coordination with agents or financiers of the Straits Settlements. The transport of goods, sometimes over long distances to and from the mines, could pose immense difficulties and dangers. Plying along uncharted waterways and trekking through dense jungles were sufficient hardships in themselves, not to mention possible attacks from rival Chinese groups or hostile Malays. In view of such circumstances, it can perhaps be appreciated how backing of an organization with its corps of fighting men was useful for such operations. In addition, hampered by distances and difficult conditions of travel, communication and transport were long-drawn processes. The maintenance of a steady flow of supplies thus inadvertently demanded a fair amount of skill, good planning and organization. The direction and execution of such tasks must surely be beyond the single capacities of individuals. Group effort with a strong emphasis on closely coordinated and integrated actions was necessary. In terms of these requisites, the most optimum organizational medium appears to have been the secret society with its extra-economic bonds of fictive kinship and loyalty unto death. Through these organizations, men's efforts and actions became more strongly bound together than would otherwise have been the case in a less demanding and more economically specific type of organization.

In yet another area secret-society membership proved to be a practical medium for the conduct of economic transactions. Difficult conditions of travel, giving rise to serious lags in communication challenged not only the material and organizational life-lines of the mines but their financial

aspects as well. The nature of tin-mining work, for example, presented its own particular problems in terms of capital returns. Preliminary preparatory work required meant that for a period, at least, tin could not be mined. Even after the actual mining of tin had begun, the ore could not be immediately extracted and sold as a series of processing steps was required before it reached a marketable state. Tin-bearing gravel carried from the mines had to be first collected before the effort was economically profitable.⁶¹ Finally, after a lapse of about a month,⁶² tin was taken up from the washing trough, smelted and moulded into ingots for export.⁶³ A considerable delay therefore existed between the initial establishment of a mine and the eventual realization of profit. Yet, during this time expenditure and the need for constant capital outlay was in no way abated. The workers must be fed, tools must be purchased and existing works must be maintained. Hence, while waiting for their capital returns to materialize, miners had to depend on external sources of finance. Such financial support frequently took the shape of supplies and provisions advanced to the miners on credit in return for a promise that the financier would thereby obtain monopolistic control over the produce — in this instance, tin. The form of security offered in these credit transactions was therefore a mere promissory one. Although the high risks taken were well calculated into the profit margin and the interest rates charged, advancers and traders, in these cases stationed at the nearest Straits Settlement, nevertheless needed some intermediary basis of economic security over and above the concept of economic trust. Initially, as described, financiers operated through the Malay rulers or mines were located sufficiently close to Malacca to allow for the frequent and unobstructed flow of

61. Speedy, op. cit.

62. Gathered from interviews. Also see Jackson, p. 34.

63. Speedy, op. cit.

provisions and tin. With the expansion of the industry, however, both avenues of operation became unsatisfactory. In such an event, it is argued, the principle of common brotherhood within the secret society organization provided that important extra-economic link which made such financial transactions acceptable to either party.

In T'ien's study of the Chinese in Sarawak, he too found that in the rural regions where communications were difficult and capital reserves scarce, Chinese economic relations were often structured on an "elaborate system of credit" which was in turn "tied into a system of clan relationships."⁶⁴ In the absence of "impersonal securities" such as property or other economically acceptable forms of mortgage, clan ties, T'ien explained, with their built-in "mutual sentiments of clan relationship," provided an extra-economic basis for the founding of economic trust.⁶⁵ Thus, as he elaborated, "the rural peasant, having no property, has only his good name to offer as security. But this personal kind of security will only be accepted by his clansmen."⁶⁶ Indeed the frequent use of intervening social and particularistic criteria in the establishment and conduct of business relations is a familiar and deeply embedded practice in Chinese economic behaviour both in the past and present.⁶⁷ As Silin's study of Hong Kong's Kennedy Town Market demonstrates, "the market for those who work there is more than a mere source of income, it is an important focus of social activity, a community to which each member owes support."⁶⁸ It was also through the operation of these very social bonds that an expectation of fair dealing and regard for business ethics could be enter-

⁶⁴. T'ien, op. cit., pp. 37-41

⁶⁵. Ibid., p. 42

⁶⁶. Ibid.

⁶⁷. Refer to Feuerwerker, Silin, T'ien, and DeGlopper

⁶⁸. Silin, R.H., "Kennedy Town Market", unpublished article

tained. As Silin explained, business ethics in the market appears to be externally enforced by one's social community (the market in this case). Once outside this social environment, one could dabble in sharp practice and fraud, an allowance which Silin termed as a "permissible area of malpractice."⁶⁹ Attempts to explain such particularism in Chinese economic practice have hinted at the general lack of an internalized code of economic ethics,⁷⁰ a phenomenon which owed its existence, according to Feuerwerker, to the persistence of an overly rigid and overwhelmingly dominant Chinese imperial political system and its Confucian ideology.⁷¹ The official polity not only sapped off the financial strength of the incipient capitalists through heavy taxation and other exactions⁷² but drained at the source roots of mercantile talent by coopting successful members among the ranks into the bureaucratic fold. Thus deprived of long-term continuity in policy and practice, Chinese enterprise became traditionally dependent on intervening social structures for their operation.

As early as the T'ang dynasty recorded evidences of economic operation through a defined socio-economic community were found. In this respect Kato recounted that,

The merchant who sold provisions to the frontier army at the north frontier of Shen-hsi, was given a sort of promissory note that was called "chiao-yin", and came to K'ai-feng, the capital with it. In case the merchant was a "hang-shang", the merchants who were purveyors to the monopoly bureau...stood surety for him, upon which he was paid by the monopoly bureau for the provisions he had sold to the army....In case the merchant was not a hang-shang, no resident merchant would vouch for him, so that, unable to get any payment from the monopoly bureau of the government, he was obliged to sell the chiao-yin to some resident merchant, who in turn sold it to some tea merchants.⁷³

69. Ibid., p. 91.

70. T'ien, p. 62. Refer also to Silin and DeGlopper, "Doing Business in Lukang," unpublished article.

71. Feuerwerker.

72. Kato, Shigeshi, p. 67. See also Feuerwerker. (Kato's article is translated by H. Kodara as "On the Hang, or the Association of merchants in China," Memoirs of the Research Department of Toyo Bunko, 8 (1936).

73. Ibid.

The hang as a merchant community in which both threads of social and economic interaction were inextricably intertwined continued to persist right through to the Ch'ing period.⁷⁴ In Canton during the Ch'ing dynasty for example, Kato records that a merchant could not conduct his business unless he was a member of a hang and, to be accepted into a hang he needed theoretically two or three merchants who would stand surety for him. In actual practice however, Kato observed that "it is difficult for a merchant to join a hang unless he managed to purchase the good will of a firm that belonged to some hang."⁷⁵ Granted that these obstacles of hang membership were planted primarily for the control and protection of the hang's monopoly over its particular field of commerce, yet the emphasis and stipulations on personal ties and patronage cannot nevertheless be ignored. Furthermore, it was not only in the area of membership where functionally non-specific characteristics were manifested. Kato records that "some of the influential hang built a hui-kuan... and assembling in the hall worshipped deities or held conferences."⁷⁶ In the T'ang period as well, such religious functions of the merchant hangs were alluded to.⁷⁷

From historic times therefore, Chinese economic practice had been conditioned by a long and deeply embedded tradition of particularism and functionally non-specific methods of operation. Against this background, secret society organizations or clan associations, with their respective ties of fictive kinship or clan relationships thereby fitted into a culturally prescribed slot within the economic workings of pioneer overseas Chinese groups. As T'ien suggested, where a community was relatively well-developed economically "the elaboration of the division of labour produces occupation organizations, such as guilds and trade unions."⁷⁸ But where such development was in its rudimentary stage, "kinship bonds and dialect similarity" served in their stead as

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. T'ien, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

bases for organizational polarity — both social and economic."⁷⁹ In the rural communities of Sarawak, clan ties, as evidenced by T'ien's study, were widely employed as the basis of socio-economic relations. In nineteenth century mining settlements of the Western Malay States however, secret societies predominated as their medium of socio-economic organization. The occasion for their existence is apparent enough — stemming as discussed, partly from a long tradition of Chinese economic practice and partly from the nature of a relatively undeveloped and therefore undifferentiated economic system within the new environment. Yet, given these basic similarities, what were the disparate factors which led to the adoption of one type of socio-economic organization in Sarawak as opposed to the employment of another in the tin mines of nineteenth century Malaya?

Differences in time and era of existence may help to account for part of this disparity, but it would seem that the more fundamental issues lie in a basic difference in economic pursuits between the two communities. In rural Sarawak, the main occupation of the Chinese was commercial agriculture — small rubber planters or smallholders of other commercially marketable products such as pepper, coconuts and occasionally dry rice.⁸⁰ The essence of smallholdings as opposed to large estates lies in their diminutive scale. It was a unit of economic operation well within the capacity of a smallholder and his family with perhaps the hired help of one or two labourers.⁸¹ With no demand for large scale commercial labour forces, this mode of economic operation appreciably favoured a process of selective immigration. By this I mean that such communities could afford to be selective in their recruitment of new members from China — a low demand for labour thus making possible the selection of only close kin or a distant "relative" for immigration into the existent fold. Hence a gradual

79. Ibid., p. 38.

80. Ibid., p. 37.

81. Ibid., p. 40.

emergence of clan localization occurred.⁸² With the existence of a cash crop economy, these clan relationships did not merely act as social ties but as networks for economic relations as well. Thus, it may be said that in a small and close-knit overseas Chinese community, clan associations and relationships became employed as intermediaries of economic transactions.

In the west-Malayan tin mines of the nineteenth century, however, mass labour requirements led to a less discriminate process of recruitment from China.⁸³ This, plus the high mortality rate in the mines, initially mitigated the development of strong primary social groups such as clan or kinship groups within the community. Consequently some other principle of social coherence had to be employed — in this instance the principle of fictive kinship within a secret society organization. Also, the nature of economic operation in the mines differed markedly from the working of a smallholding. In the tin mines, economic organization meant more than the mere presence of a community for the enforcement of a code of business ethics; rather, it constituted the very structure of economic operation within each mine, the nerve centre, so to speak, which dealt with tasks of organization, control and direction — functions that would demand a more rigid control over the organism than clan ties could afford. In addition, the dependence of these mines on external markets as well as on imported supplies of food and labour made the employment of a series of inter-connecting economic units inevitable. In the area of labour recruitment, for example, Chen Ta records that it was the usual practice for prospective employers to make their requirements known to agents or brokers stationed in the nearest Straits Settlement port. These agents would in turn contact their

82. Ibid., p. 35.

83. Freedman remarked that "to get the numbers of emigrants demanded by the labour market in Southeast Asia the recruiters scoured the rural area; the urban concentrations of poor people were too small to act as adequate reservoirs." Freedman, "Immigrants and Associations," p. 26.

agents in China who "in many cases practically made contracts...with the coolies, so that [on their arrival] the formal contracts were signed within a day or two, and the coolies taken at once to the estate or mine where they were to work."⁸⁴ Such time-saving efficiency could not be obtained unless close contacts, probably through organizations, were frequently maintained. It is argued here that in the absence of commercial companies, in the Western sense of the term, secret societies took their place.

Furthermore, located in the interior, isolated from supply centres, the mines were often required to conduct their own arrangements for the marketing of tin and the purchase of food and necessities. This, as already discussed, made the secret society machinery even more indispensable because common secret society membership provided, as hang membership did in Kato's discussion, a basis for trust and business cooperation. Like the hangs, secret societies had control over sanctions that could be applied should the more personal ties of relationships be betrayed. Hence, these organizations, unlike the clan associations of Sarawak, could command a more binding loyalty from their members. It may be said therefore, that a difference in social composition and economic needs in effect helped to produce, as between Malaya and Sarawak, different intermediary structures of socio-economic organizations even in the face of a roughly similar stage of economic development.

It has been seen how in pioneer conditions, secret societies were vital economically to the management and operation of tin-mining enterprises in the early decades of overseas Chinese involvement in the area. It has also been suggested how secret societies could help to bridge the gap caused by a disparity between the social experiences of the migrants at home and the anonymity of their existence in the new environment. To the individual, for example, bonds

⁸⁴. Chen Ta, Chinese Migrations with special reference to labour conditions, Bulletin of U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, No. 340, Taipei, 1967.

of sworn brotherhood, solemnized through elaborate and mystical religious rituals could represent, in the midst of strangers, a partial but valuable reconstruction of his own corporate lineage group in the home village. The significance of these ties may appear minimal when assessed solely on their own merits, but when seen as a part of a tradition of Chinese culture and values, one can perhaps begin to appreciate their meaning and import to Chinese migrants abroad.

Conditioned by a pattern of social behaviour at home which stressed the importance of kin ties and "familial" obligations, it can be visualized how significant group structures were to the migrant's existence in his new environment. In addition, programmed to interact in terms of kin bonds and obligations, it may be seen how even the slightest semblance to a reconstructed fragment of such ties could help to lend meaning to the immigrants' relationships in the new environment. In consideration of these factors, it has been found that "a propensity to form groups for mutual support and the attainment of common objectives has long been a characteristic of the Chinese social pattern."⁸⁵

Probably stemming from a similar source, sworn brotherhood as a viable form of relationship has been employed from antiquity. As Blythe observed, "sworn brother relations are still a common feature of Chinese life, even in the commercial world, and whenever the oath is taken it supercedes all other ties and is binding until death."⁸⁶ Not only does such a relationship reconstruct for the individuals involved familiar bonds of kin ties but also embodies in its practice all the traditionally upheld virtues of "Yi" (justice, or right-conduct, between men) and "Chung" (loyalty to the group).⁸⁷

In addition to appealing in the abstract to the migrants' sense of honour, ideals and virtues, secret society membership also had its practical

85. Blythe, op. cit., p. 14.

86. Ibid., p. 16.

87. Definitions quoted from Blythe, p. 17.

usefulness. In Freedman's words the "secret society provided the sin-kheh, the greenhorn, with something equivalent to a local community. It furnished him with assistance when he was in need, organized funerals, defended his rights, and established a focus for loyalty in a social setting far removed in its structure from the kind of society he had known at home."⁸⁸ Politically the secret society acted as a buffer between the individual migrant and the "alien" administration whose customs and language were equally foreign. It has been seen also how secret societies have actually helped to defend the lives of the migrant Chinese from the vacillations of policy of some local Malay chiefs. Internally, the societies acted as "mechanisms of 'law' within the Chinese community."⁸⁹ All in all therefore, in the early years of overseas Chinese settlement in the western Malay States, the secret society organization fulfilled for the individual migrant the role of a local community and its entire machinery of social organization.

Although the measures of "social" enforcement employed by the secret societies were by no means altruistic nor humane, it can nevertheless be appreciated how a promise of relief in times of sickness and of a decent burial in case of death could be of immense practical value to a helpless, uprooted new migrant faced with an environment where conditions were harsh and the chances of survival slim. As Blythe remarked, "a Chinese attached great significance to the funeral rites which enabled the spirits of the dead to proceed on their way with decorum. To the labourer working away from home and family it was a great comfort to know that provision had been made for his funeral and that his body would not be abandoned in a hole or thrown into the river like that of a dog, and his spirits left to howl bewildered in space."⁹⁰ Consequently while death, sickness and injury posed ever-present threats, and while strangers of different

88. Freedman, M., "Immigrants and Associations," p. 37.

89. Ibid., p. 35.

90. Blythe, op. cit., p. 14.

dialect groups and at times of different ethnic groups continued to live around them, the social and cultural insulation which the secret societies could provide for the individual in the initial years of settlement cannot be lightly dismissed. Furthermore, even though the society headmen were callous in the treatment of their members and often ruthless in extracting the last drops of sweat and blood from their labourers, the secret society organization was nevertheless significant in the life of a new migrant, if only by serving as a convenient rallying point where fellow migrants like him were gathered. This thereby provided him with much needed comradeship in a situation of isolation and with help and support in times of hardship. Finally, through the secret society structure, each migrant could nurse hopes of achieving the status of economic success and leadership along roughly the same routes marked out by his leaders, for, as Freedman observed, "a fluid and commercialized society threw up men who united political and economic power by controlling their fellows through the secret societies."⁹¹ The high premium placed on valour and fighting ability in a society where might made right must have made such prospects both feasible and attainable in those early decades of Chinese mining settlement in the western Malay States.

Backed by these social ramifications of power, secret society organizations became the keystone of Chinese supremacy in the early years of the mining industry. As Wong elaborated, "Chinese entrepreneurs... ruled their labourers with an iron hand through the secret societies, which gave to them the means to get the necessary labour for the mines and to the Chinese as a community the organization to govern and protect themselves."⁹² Significant though their role was, it is nevertheless evident that the very nature of their dominance contained within itself the seeds of their eventual downfall. In the area of

91. Freedman, M., "Immigrant and Associations", p. 38.

92. Wong, op. cit., p. 40.

economic domination, for example, the adoption of fictive kin relationships and the employment of the secret society organization as a focus of economic operation was, as suggested, prompted by an absence of concentrated localization of primary social groupings such as clan or kinship groups and by the special demands of tin-mining enterprises at that time. Their continued supremacy would therefore depend on the continued absence of strong localized primary social groups as well as on the consistency of economic needs and conditions in the mines. But the very essence of economic success is development and change. Prolonged settlement meant the consolidation of some ties, and economic success could facilitate the establishment of families and the recruitment of kin from China. The emergence of wider primary social groups seems inevitable and, as shall be discussed, this weakened the very roots of secret society dominance in the mines. Similarly, with development, the economic system differentiates, so that the basis for particularism in economic practice shifts from more diffuse principles of primary social bonds, real or fictive, to more specialized ties of occupational identity and contract. This, too, would undermine the very raison d'être of the secret societies' economic stronghold.

Furthermore, if the organization, through the criteria of might and fighting ability promoted men from the ranks to military leadership (panglimas), its persistence and relevance would indeed become questionable in more settled times. Besides, such strong militaristic emphasis on personal distinctions would tend to make for an insecure and possibly unstable leadership as aspiring men from the ranks sought to advance themselves. In settled conditions such problems became magnified as drastic losses of men and consequent turn-overs in military leadership grew less frequent. As leaders became more entrenched and their positions more consolidated, a system of patronage was to evolve together with its attendant problems and weaknesses. Hence, within those special

circumstances of the secret societies' economic and social stronghold one finds the very elements of their future disintegration.

Politically, too, changes in the host society, developing alongside these internal social and economic differentiations further helped to undermine even the political relevance of the secret societies vis-à-vis their members. The effects of these changes were slow and gradual, however, working almost imperceptibly through many decades, eroding and wearing down the foundations of secret-society power. In the following chapters, I shall trace the slow and only occasionally perceptible momentous processes of change in overseas Chinese secret society organization, role and significance in the western Malay States of the nineteenth century.

Chapter IV

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MINES, 1830-1870.

The establishment of a fair-sized mine usually involved the importation of considerable numbers of men recruited from China and funnelled into the interior through the Straits Settlement ports. This mode of mining, as most sources agree, was however not widely adopted until some time in the mid-nineteenth century. Prior to that, mines were more often started by small groups of men attracted by the prospects of "quick profits." As Blythe observed, Cantonese and Hakka settlers in the Straits Settlements were quickly drawn to a mining area once mines began operating, as they often preferred "the gambler's chance of quick profits (they worked on a share system) should they strike a rich patch."¹

In shared-system workings, the profits were generally equally divided among all the miners in a venture. By the very nature of such arrangements, operations were invariably limited in scale, normally involving not more than a handful of men. Through this way, small groups of men spread into the western Malay States at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Not only did these activities furnish the men with means of livelihood but also provided them with avenues of quick gains should their efforts prove successful. The feasibility of such ventures, however, depended on the presence of favourable conditions and circumstances, among them a ready accessibility to market outlets and supplies. This meant that new workings developed further inland from the

1. Blythe, op. cit., p. 44

existent ports must, as a matter of course, have required more sophisticated planning, coordination, and general organization than an informal "kongsi" of men could muster. Indeed, it is argued that with expansion of extant share workings and the establishment of other new workings, a changed scale of operation in fact occurred, giving rise to a changed mode of organization as well as a new pace of production. With this change, mass importation of labour became necessary and with growth in numbers, structures of migrant Chinese social organization began to take shape and acquire prominence in the western Malay States. In consideration of this, an inquiry into the course of social change in these migrant Chinese communities must take for its starting point the beginnings of such average-sized mine operations in the western Malay States.

In Wong's estimation, "the important period of Chinese penetration into Selangor, Sungei Ujong, and Perak began from about the 1840's."² Blythe went further in suggesting that the 1850's saw an important turning point in mine development as "the enterprise of some Malay chiefs...brought increasing numbers of Chinese into the Malay States...and from then³ onwards floods of male Chinese immigrants poured into the country."⁴ Though both the above quotes are agreed that the mid-nineteenth century witnessed the important beginnings of Chinese involvement in the mines of the western Malay States, they nevertheless appear to have brought up two distinct stages of development in their claim. Wong, for example, alluded to the very beginnings of mass Chinese penetration into the mining areas which he placed at about the 1840's while Blythe referred to one of the actual phases of increased inflow into the Malay States, namely that encouraged and facilitated by the enterprise and initiative of some of the Malay chiefs. Perhaps one of the earliest instances

2. Wong, op. cit., p. 21.

3. My own italics.

4. Blythe, op. cit., p. 42.

of organized and large-scale penetration of Chinese miners into the Malay States may be found in the "discovery and subsequent exclusive exploitation of the tin mines at Kesang by members of the Hai San [from 1834-48] ." ⁵ Here one sees an example of a secret society controlled and directed penetration of labour forces into the mines as opposed to the filtering in of small groups of men supported and sustained solely by individual initiative and backing. The former mode of tin exploitation, as mentioned, was to acquire increasing importance and currency in the subsequent decades. Judging from the available historical information, it may be possible to regard this ascendant trend of mine organization and operation as the result of two convergent strands of development. One of these consisted of a wholesale movement into newly discovered tin areas monitored and controlled either by secret society organizations based in the Straits Settlements or by Malay chiefs "employing" the services of similar secret societies. The other consisted of the expansion of successful share system workings.

According to a miner's account, ⁶ a share-system working was usually started by one or two people who had capital while the others contributed their labour. When such ventures proved successful, the "capitalists" especially stood to gain financially. Through supplying the capital they were entitled to a double share in the profits, one presumably for money put out and the other for their personal involvement in the mine, usually in the role of overseer or manager. In addition, while a mine was yielding well, the labourers were often encouraged to take out cash advances, at a monthly rate of 10%, from those partners financing the endeavour. Some of these advances were in turn spent on the purchase of opium or on gambling, both of which means of release were again provided at a high profit by the financier of the mine. Hence, from the initial control of a small capital these men were able, through share system workings, to build up their reserves. With these beginnings, expansion of

5. Khoo, op. cit., p. 45

6. Gathered from personal interviews of Ipoh miners, Malaysia.

existent workings or the establishment of new ones became possible — the now better-equipped financiers being in a position to incorporate a corps of wage labourers into expanded workings or even to develop a new mine with an entirely new force of hired labour.⁷ In this way, therefore, a new method and scale of mining evolved from initially small-scale cooperative efforts.

Since it appears that the beginnings of a new style of mine organization and control in the western Malay States, that was to dominate in later decades, actually occurred in the 1830's, it may be relevant and useful to examine some aspects of the day-to-day organization of the mines at the time as well as the nature of relationships that existed between organizers and labourers, between the Malay chiefs and mine owners, and in cases of Straits Settlements directed enterprises, of the relationship between financier-director in the Straits Settlements and the overseer-cum-manager in the actual mine site. It was from these original arrangements, relationships and obligations that later changes and developments were to stem. This thus makes an understanding of their initial state and status a valuable pointer in the establishment of change and concurrent assessment of their effects on the social organization of these mining groups.

As suggested, relations with the local Malay chiefs as proprietors of the land were inevitable. It has also been mentioned what the varying types of arrangements and relations were that had been entered into between Chinese mining groups and different Malay rulers. Also, both Gullick and Khoo's ideas of an evolutionary development of such relationships have been briefly examined and exceptions to the general trend were shown to exist. Originally⁸ the Malay chiefs merely exercised their rights as owners of the land as well as controllers

7. Ibid. Though the account referred to share-system workings towards the end of the nineteenth century, the development nevertheless could not have been drastically different in the earlier but extremely similar type of cooperative effort. Indeed it seems as though, with the establishment, towards the latter decades of the nineteenth century, of supply centres in the mining centres themselves, a reversion to share system workings took place.

8. Discussed in chapter two.

of the arteries of communication, in those days the river system. The frequently high, and what must have appeared to the Chinese miners as unprecedentedly exorbitant, rates of levies led to frequent clashes between the Malay chiefs and the miners in their respective territories. Possibly stemming from such mutually injurious experiences, the economic involvement of the Malay chiefs became increasingly solicited. This trend was also undoubtedly spurred on by a growing expansion in the "industry" which helped to concentrate funds and attention on the establishment of new mines.

Hence arose arrangements in which Chinese financiers "advanced the necessary capital to Malay chiefs who worked the mines with Chinese labour on the understanding that they received all the tin produced."⁹ Though Wong maintained that "such was the arrangement between the Malacca capitalists and the Klana of Sungei Ujong when the mines were first worked,"¹⁰ Blythe's study published since then reports that clashes which occurred between the Chinese miners and the Malay chief at Sungei Ujong as late as 1828 arose primarily over the issue of revenue collected on the export of tin and the import of supplies.¹¹ It would surely seem that such an issue could not have arisen has the Malay chief held the financial control of the mines and the economic possession of their products at the time, as Wong appears to suggest.

This becomes more apparent as one examines the provisions of the arrangement between the Malacca capitalists and the Klana of Sungei Ujong. According to Wong, "the Malacca capitalists advanced 2,500 Spanish dollars per month to the Klana, who undertook to consign all the tin to them."¹² From this it may be surmised that the Klana, under this arrangement, undertook to secure control of the tin before it reached the stage of export. Indeed, as Wong elaborated, the Klana proceeded to buy, at fixed prices, during the

9. Wong, op. cit., p. 19.

10. Ibid.

11. Blythe, op. cit., p. 62.

12. Wong, p. 19.

smelting season "three bahara of tin of three pikuls each...from each bangsal, or shed, either for smelting or for housing the labourers."¹³ The other additional source of income was derived from the levy of 6 Spanish dollars a month as rent from each mine.¹⁴ Furthermore, if the Klana at that point had been directly involved in advancing capital to the miners, it would certainly not have been in his interest to disrupt their activities by first raiding their treasure chest and subsequently dealing a telling defeat on them so that they were forced to abandon their mines.¹⁵ In fact, if one recalls that one of the primary reasons for securing the cooperation of the Malay chief was so that "he would have an interest in supervising the mine and ensuring that it was allowed to succeed,"¹⁶ then it may perhaps be fairly conclusively argued that at least some mines in Sungei Ujong were not worked in economic partnership with the Klana.

Yet on the other hand, Khoo records arrangements where "until the early 1830's the Malay rulers received cash, opium, and rice from the Malacca merchants, which they in turn advanced to the miners at high prices."¹⁷ This seems to suggest that ventures involving a partnership with local Malay rulers existed side by side with others during the years of the 1830's. It merely serves, one may argue, to demonstrate the diversity of types of organization and mode of exploitation that prevailed at the beginning of large-scale tin-mining enterprises in the Malay States. However despite differences, the important common elements were firstly a need to come to some terms or settlement with the local Malay ruler as the proprietor of the soil and as the controller of arteries of communication and transport, and secondly, the need to supply some of the basic needs of the mine labourers once they were transported to the mines. As I have dealt briefly with the first of these above, I shall now concentrate attention on the latter.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid, p. 20.

15. Khoo, op. cit., p. 59.

16. Gullick, op. cit., p. 130.

17. Khoo, p. 68.

The maintenance of a work force, normally averaging seventy to eighty men, in an environment isolated from centres of supply by great distances and difficult conditions of travel would inevitably bring with it attendant problems. Primary of these was perhaps the supply of food and the provision of housing on the site. Indeed, within such mine situations, labourers were more dependent on their employers for the supply of their everyday needs than would ordinarily have been the case in more settled and populated centres.

Consequently special arrangements arose between labourer and organizer, arrangements which involved economically diffused functions and obligations. In a mining camp, for example, dormitories were provided for the labourers.¹⁸ These usually consisted of one or more long wooden sheds, roughly constructed with trees felled in clearing the jungle. The walls were made either with attap (dried palm leaves attached together) or with wood hewn from the trees.¹⁹ In these sheds the entire labour force was housed, frequently in fairly packed and squalid conditions.²⁰ Bedding in the form of mats was provided. Food was also provided and served in communal meals, the staff of a mine often counting a cook in its midst. In addition, the advancers supplied the mine with opium, oil, and liquor, commodities for which the labourers had to pay exorbitant prices as the advancer reserved the right to be the sole supplier of such goods.²¹

Hence besides being a miner, the advancer and organizer of the mine acted as trader-monopolist and even money-lender.²² In this last capacity, the mine owner frequently handed out petty cash advances to the labourers at the end of each month, in lieu of pay, which was settled only once yearly or at the most twice yearly. For these advances the labourers were charged interest, calculated at a monthly rate which, according to Wong, could range from 10% to

18. Gathered from interviews.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Wong, op. cit., p. 81.

22. Ibid.

30%. As he elaborates,

The interest rates for loans were graduated to exploit the position of the labourers. Thus, the tribute workers, who were relatively more independent, were charged 10% per month, while the nai-chang and wage coolies were charged according to a graduated scale, ranging from 30% in the first three months of employment to 10% in the last month before wage settlement.²³

Oftentimes these debts accumulated to sizeable sums until the labourer had, in effect, "'very little, if anything' left at the time of wage settlements."²⁴ Indeed, more often than not, the labourers, especially those on indenture, were unable to clear the total amount owing by the end of the year and were thus forced to continue working under the original terms of their contract until these debts could be paid off. As it was in the direct interest of the mine owners or organizers to prolong the period of indenture or secure added bargaining power vis-à-vis other more independent wage labourers,²⁵ their usual policy was to encourage indebtedness. Besides the customary advance of \$1 per month for incidental expenses, the labourers were further encouraged to gamble and smoke opium on credit, the employer doubling as opium purveyor and gambling master. Often the strenuous and hazardous nature of mine work lent inducement to indulge so as to escape from the miseries and drudgery of long hours and scant rewards.

The labourers were also charged for every conceivable service rendered to them. The mine clerk, employed by the organizer to keep the books, was, for example, entitled to charge each labourer ten cents per month (commonly called pen-rent). The advancer or organizer in turn charged 10 cents per labourer for "book-rent," a fee for maintaining a record of his wages until the time of wage settlement. Bedding was again rented out for

23. Ibid., p. 75. The duties of the nai-chang, or contractual labourer, are explained on p. 72.

24. See Wong, p. 76.

25. Wong, p. 74, points out some of the measures adopted by advancers to keep the labourers perpetually in debt so that they could be kept on the mine over-long periods of time.

ten cents a month²⁶ and not infrequently, the labourers were made to pay for the food which they were entitled to get free according to the terms of their contract.²⁷ In Middlebrook's account of Yap Ah Loy, one finds that even the mine cook was entitled to receive "a few cents extra [from each of the mining coolies] whenever they received their wages."²⁸ It can thus be seen how the already small wages of a mine labourer could be rapidly dissipated through these designs of the employer and their relative defencelessness at that time.

Probably the question that comes to mind is why did the labourers stay and accept those obviously exploitative conditions of work? In part, they had very little choice in the matter once they had committed themselves to be transported overseas on the sole security of their labour, because in the mines they were under the surveillance of a secret society, an organization to which they were "compelled to become members...on arrival"²⁹ and through which Chinese merchants and entrepreneurs controlled "an instrument for coercing Chinese labourers into the tin mines."³⁰ Also, there is truth in Wong's suggestion that "seen against the Malthusian environment of their origins, it [life in the mines] ...opened to the labourers new opportunities which made the tin states a veritable 'El Dorado' to them."³¹ As a labourer expressed it, "I like being here (Perak) because I make money."³² Perhaps in this one statement are summed up the dreams and aspirations of an entire corps of indentured mine workers as well as those who came with their own money to seek a living in the tin mines of the western Malay States. The reality of being housed and fed, however meagrely, undoubtedly lent endurance to otherwise near inhuman hardships.

26. Gathered from interviews.

27. Wong, op. cit., p. 74.

28. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 14.

29. Wong, op. cit., p. 42.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p. 76.

32. Ibid.

But surely a sustained endurance of such conditions could not be inspired by these rewards alone. Indeed, one may argue that it was rather the hope for some future economic success that kept the labourer alive and made otherwise unbearable conditions tolerable. It was also this hope which drove him in the first place to accept and endure immense hardships, and as one shall see, it was the achievement of this success, moderately by some and spectacularly by a few that was to change the labour situation in the mines as well as affect the type of community organization that prevailed in the mining areas at the time.

Before he could come remotely near to the realization of such aspirations, however, a penniless peasant from China had first to undergo all manner of privation as an indentured labourer for this was his sole means of escape from the "Malthusian environment" of his home area in South China. The desire to emigrate and make good overseas probably helped to provide the first foundations of the indentured labour system commonly known as the piglet system. As Wong suggests, the trade in all likelihood developed initially from the individual enterprise of private merchants or junk owners who undertook to transport those who were poor and destitute to the Nanyang, on credit, in the hope of recovering their expenses and obtaining profits from employers who would advance the "cost" of their passage in return for their labour. The growth of the market for such labour, around the mid-nineteenth century,³³ eventually transformed the individual initiatives of private merchants into a "well-organized speculative business"³⁴ often involving the assistance and direction of powerful secret society organizations. Despite a change in scale of operation, the "principles of the trade had not changed. The Chinese immigrant still came on credit and mortgaged his labour for a period to some

33. Freedman, "Immigrants and Associations", p. 25.

34. Wong, op. cit., p. 66

employer who advanced the cost of his passage."³⁵ Labourers destined for the mines of the Malay States were landed in one of the three Straits Settlements — Singapore, Penang, or Malacca. From these depots, prospective employers collected their work forces for the mines. Judging from recommendations submitted by a Commission on indentured labour in 1876 and the ensuing legislation one may gather that "malpractices" had already begun at the points of disembarkation."³⁶ In fact reports of maltreatment at depots in China and of serious overcrowding on board junks and later coolie boats seem to point out that abuses and malpractices were long in existence before the labourers ever reached their destination.³⁷

On arrival, indentured coolies were again housed in depots until their employers arrived. Expenses incurred during this brief stop were often liberally computed into their "cost of passage" to be paid by the employer. The employer in turn sought to recover the advance from the labourers by extracting as much work as he could from them on a day to day basis, by extending their period of indenture, or even both. In this way therefore, the labourers' hardships had only just begun at the port of embarkation. In fact as Wong suggests, "the abuses in the coolie trade were less than those inflicted on the labourers during the duration of their contract."³⁸ Once in the mine, the labourers were "encouraged" to work hard by a system of fines and "inducements". Wong discusses the system as follows,

Even the method of computing wages was designed to benefit the employer. Thus, the so-called wage labourers were paid according to a graduated scale, which combined inducements for hard work with fines for tardiness and neglect. There were, apparently, two variants of the same principle. Under one system, they earned a larger average wage per day if they worked 26 to 30 days per month than 21 to 25 days, and almost nothing if they worked less than 18 days. Under the other system, they were given a fixed monthly wage for a 24-day

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., p. 69.

37. Refer Cameron, Freedman and Chen Ta.

38. Wong, op. cit., p. 70.

working month, but would only be paid for the actual number of working days if they worked less than 24 days, in addition to forfeiting their right to free food for each day of absence and their normal six days' free time per month. Under this second system of payment, the labourer would not earn enough to pay for his food unless he worked more than 20 days in a month. In summary, the workers under any system of payment would earn nothing unless they completed a minimum number of working days per month.³⁹

Though technically the indentured labourer was to work eight hours per day, with provisions that time put in outside these hours would be reckoned on an overtime basis at the rate of 10 cents per hour, Wong remarked that until as late as 1891 "the labour laws were honoured more in the breach than in the observance."⁴⁰ Thus in all likelihood, the indentured labourer was required, in reality, to work at least ten hours per day, that, from most sources, being the average length of a work day in a nineteenth century west Malayan tin mine.⁴¹

Though at their face-value the system of fines and inducements may not sound unduly harsh, one must remember that the physical conditions posed a constant threat to the labourers' fulfillment of these terms, while the stipulation of a full 24-day attendance on the other hand made no such allowances for them. Already weakened by a long and arduous seas journey where they were ill-fed and uncomfortably confined, the labourers had further to adjust to a hot and humid climate to which they were not accustomed.⁴² On top of it all they were required to do hard physical labour for at least eight if not ten hours a day. It is indeed a small wonder that the mortality rate in the mines was so high. Constitutionally thus weakened, the labourers were particularly vulnerable to fever and/or malaria. In fact the Sinkheh's (new-comer's) code of hygiene included an elaborate ritual with innumerable numbers of cold-water baths a day to drive the heat out from his body. If he did not adhere to these rituals,

39. Ibid., pp. 75-6.

40. Ibid., p. 74.

41. Ibid., p. 72. Also Pucell, op. cit., pp101-2.

42. T'ien, op. cit., pp5-6.

it was said that he would fall ill from fever.⁴³ To fall ill was disastrous. As no provisions were made for sick leave, the labourers were frequently made to keep working. As Wong's study shows, "as late as 1898, it was 'by no means infrequent' for employers in Ulu Selangor to work their sick labourers to the point of death and then throw them out of the mines to die by the roadside."⁴⁴

The conditions of indentured labour described above prevailed, as can be gathered from the evidences quoted, until the final decade of the nineteenth century. Indeed it was only through the studies of government-sponsored labour commissions conducted subsequently to British intervention in the Malay States that such conditions came to be recorded for the scrutiny of posterity. In reconstructing the terms ~~and treatment~~ of indentured labour in the 1840's, therefore, it was necessary to refer to these records for data. In all likelihood, the contractual demands and nature of treatment experienced in the 1840's differed immaterially from those found by the Commission in the 1870's. If any difference did indeed exist, it was likely to be for the worse in these earlier decades when no attempts at all were made, at supervision or regulation of excesses, by the Malay rulers.

Under such conditions, the climb up the economic ladder of success was by no means easy. Many had despaired and wasted their lives through opium smoking and unsuccessful gambling. Many others lost their lives from sheer hard labour and adverse circumstances. Yet despite the sombre picture, one may indeed argue that the situation would have been worse if it were not for the ability of these labourers to form organizations through which a tradition of mutual help was fostered. As Wong suggests, the secret societies, besides being an instrument of control for the mine entrepreneur, further provided the miners with the organization to govern and protect themselves.⁴⁵ In another

⁴³. Gathered from interviews.

⁴⁴. Wong, op. cit., p. 74.

⁴⁵. Ibid, p. 41.

instance, he commented that, "unlike Indian coolies, Chinese labourers could take care of themselves after some days in the settlements and were often aided by their clansmen."⁴⁶ In this statement one may perhaps find the key point to Chinese social organization in the mining settlements of the 1830's and 1840's.

In those first decades of mass migration into the mining areas, there was a general willingness, among members of a community, to come to each other's aid. This in fact formed the very basis of Chinese community and social organization in the early mining settlements. Surrounded, as seen, by alien peoples of different ethnic and dialect groups, the proffer of help was by no means given indiscriminately nor unreservedly. However, within limits, the principle of differentiation may be said to have been broadly based. Lacking a true reconstruction of traditionally prescribed kin and localized clanship groups in those early years of settlement, the boundaries of such groupings, for example, were often extended to include fellow-workers in the same as well as fellow-countrymen bearing a like surname. These relationships were commonly cemented either ritually by secret-society bonds or socially by a shared sense of mutual solidarity.

Within these broadly based terms, therefore, miners working and living together in one settlement or strangers bearing a common surname could feel entitled to call on the help and support of their comrades in much the same way that a member of a kin or clan group could on the loyalty and support of his relatives. The sense of a community was thus also interpreted in broader terms than in a strictly localized and territorially bound one as was the case in China. By this I mean that fellow "clansmen" regardless of their territorial location in China or in the new environment began to look upon themselves as a single solidary group, furnishing its members with all the

⁴⁶. Ibid., p. 69.

attendant ties and obligations which characterized such relationships in China.⁴⁷ Hence, one finds repeated instances of help being given to one clansman by another or even by men of a similar dialect or territorial group to compatriots in distress. These offers of aid were by no means restricted to those living in close territorial proximity at the time of need, as one often finds cases of help being given to fellow clansmen or to secret society members located in another or at times in a different country altogether. The history of Yap Ah Loy's early career, for example, manifested several examples of such clan and even secret-society solidarity.

Before discussing the characteristics of Chinese social interaction in the newly established mining settlements of the western Malay States, it is perhaps important to establish a brief chronology of their penetration into the different regions. It was recorded that the Hai-San society discovered and subsequently secured an exclusive exploitation of the tin mines at Kesang, around 1834.⁴⁸ Miners were recruited directly from China and according to accounts, their numbers increased from two thousand in 1848 to four thousand in 1850. By 1851, there were "between 5000 and 6000" miners in the area,⁴⁹ thus forming a sizeable community. Attracted perhaps by stories of the Hai-San success, local Malay rulers of various districts in Selangor began to scour their territory for tin deposits.

In the 1840's, tin was reported to have been discovered in Lukut "in paying quantities."⁵⁰ In addition to encouraging "Chinese miners and prospectors"⁵¹ to come to Lukut on their own initiative, it appears from documentary evidence that Raja Juma'at also obtained advances of capital from Malacca merchants so as to start mines of his own in the area.⁵² The process

47. For a more explicit discussion of this, please refer to T'ien, op. cit., p. 25.

48. Khoo, op. cit., p. 45.

49. Blythe, p. 73 and p. 74.

50. Middlebrook, p. 14.

51. Ibid.

52. Khoo, p. 202, quotes a letter written by the British authorities to the Sultan of Selangor in which mention was made of the considerable claims which certain resident Malacca merchants had "against...the Rajas of (cont.)"

seems to have been better documented in the case of the development of Klang around the 1850's, as Middlebrook was able to record the different stages by which Raja Abdullah, in partnership with Raja Juma'at, his brother, transferred coolies and provisions into Klang for the opening of a tin mine. Hence, it is apparent that by the 1840's the Chinese mining population in Lukut was developing into substantial numbers both through the natural course of expansion of already extant mine settlements, and through the encouragement and involvement of Raja Juma'at.

In 1844, following Raja Juma'at's example, Raja Abdul Samad, ruler of the Selangor River district, began to take an interest in developing the resources in his territory. Through the efforts of his own endeavours and those of a Chinese prospector, Kanching soon developed into a mining centre.⁵³ Also, as mentioned, in 1853, Raja Abdullah initiated the development of Klang and before long converted it into a thriving mining district.

While the Selangor princes were opening up their territories to Chinese miners, growth was also in evidence in other longer established settlements such as those at Sungei Ujong. In spite of repeated troubles and skirmishes with the Malay rulers, Chinese settlements in Sungei Ujong and Linggi had increased greatly in numbers since their earliest beginnings in 1828. In a major outbreak of hostilities between the Chinese and the Malay rulers in 1860 it was recorded that the Chinese community numbered about 14,000 miners in that area.⁵⁴

To the north of Selangor, Chinese mining activity was also astir in the Larut valley of Perak. In about 1848, the discovery of tin by Long Ja'afar led to an introduction of Chinese miners into the area and from thence their numbers

52... Lookoot [Lukut] and Kallang [Klang] on account of advances made to those Chiefs to enable them to work the tin mines in their respective districts."

53. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 17.

54.. Blythe, op. cit., p. 118.

increased rapidly.⁵⁵ For several decades, however, the Chinese miners merely worked as agents of Long Ja'afar, for it was his policy not to allow self-financed miners into the area. This stipulation was to continue right up to the time of his death, after which his son and successor, Ngah Ibrahim began to find it necessary to revoke the order under increasing pressure from Penang capitalists eager to obtain control of a share of the rich deposits.⁵⁶

Consequently, while the founding and rapid development of Chinese mining settlements was an almost universal happening in the western Malay States between the 1840's and 1850's, the conditions by which they were allowed to settle varied considerably from district to district. Noticeable at one extreme was perhaps Long Ja'afar's policy which he held firm until 1857. At the other, that of the ruler of Sungei Ujong who had been pressed into abdicating his financial foothold in the mines as early as the 1840's. That these initial differences were to be important determinants in the rate and direction of organizational and financial development in the mines will be a subject of further discussion, but firstly it will be a necessity to piece together (as far as records will allow) a more complete picture of some factual aspects of the nature of social relationships, financial arrangements, and general organizational set-up in these newly established mining settlements.

In the records of Yap Ah Loy's career, as mentioned, one finds some informative examples of migrant Chinese social behaviour within the pioneer conditions of early overseas Chinese mining camps in the Malay States. As trade was bad, Yap Ah Loy left Durian Tinggal, where he had stayed for four months after coming from China, and went to Kesang. There he "found work in the shop of a relative named Yap Ng."⁵⁷ After a year (1855 or 1856)⁵⁸ Yap Ng decided to

55. Ibid., p. 120.

56. Swettenham's records.

57. In the records, Yap Ng was described as Yap Ah Loy's uncle, but it was not indicated how closely or distantly related these men were. Judging however, from the offer of a sizeable sum for his return to China, one may speculate that some possible blood relationship existed between them. It is important to establish the true nature of such relationships as it was a common custom among overseas Chinese to address their fellow clansmen by kinship terms.

58. In the records the exact date of the event was not stated. Judging (cont'd)

send Ah Loy back to China. With some money given him by Yap Ng, Yap Ah Loy set sail for Singapore. However, while the ship was in port, Ah Loy lost his money at a gambling house and had to return to Malacca. Not wishing to return to Kesang, he set off on foot to Lukut, in company with "one Yap Fook, a cousin of Yap Ng's."⁵⁹ In Lukut, Yap Ah Loy found employment in a mine with a Fei-Chew Hakka where he worked for three years as a petty coolie and cook. There he was able to save up some money, for his position as cook allowed him sources of income that were not open to the regular mine labourer. He received, for example, "a percentage [over and above his regular wages] on all the vegetables, fish and meat which he bought on behalf of his employer."⁶⁰ In addition, he was given a "tip" of a few cents per coolie at times of wage settlement. With these earnings, he felt equipped, at the end of three years, to go into business on his own, Yap Fook apparently helping him at this point with a loan. Yap Ah Loy thus "set himself up as a pig dealer."⁶¹ With his capital he bought pigs and brought them round to the mines to sell. In exchange, he collected tin ore and sold it in turn to the dealers. In this way he was able to compound his profits and as his "business prospered he extended his area [adding] parts of Sungei Ujong which lay inland from Lukut, in his circuit."⁶² It was perhaps on this newly extended route that he came to become a regular visitor to Seremban, which Middlebrook thinks was really Rasah, as "Seremban was not named yet."⁶³

In this town was a sizeable Chinese community, led by the Capitan China of Sungei Ujong, Shin Kap. Under him were two panglima (head fighters)

58. (cont.) ..however from the approximate year in which Yap Ah Loy arrived at Lukut, and the year he left Macao, it is possible to place the occurrence of the above.

59. Middlebrook, p. 13, Again one has to be careful of the kinship term used here, as it may just mean that Yap Fook was known to Yap Ng and, by virtue of a shared surname, became regarded as a cousin.

60. Ibid., p. 14.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., p. 15.

63. Ibid.

who were in charge of the fighting men in the community. As Wong comments, "many of the mining labourers were also tough fighting men, who had fought in the great Taiping Rebellion of 1851 to 1864."⁶⁴ Hence, they could be easily "turned into fighting men at short notice."⁶⁵ On his visits to Seremban, Yap Ah Loy frequently stayed at the house of Liu Ngim Kong, a Fei-Chew Hakka and panglima to Capitan Shin Kap. The other panglima was another Fei-Chew man by the name of Yap Ah Shak. It was recorded that partly as a result of the influence of Liu and possibly Yap Ah Shak, Yap Ah Loy became appointed an assistant panglima to Liu. From this point, it seems that Yap Ah Loy "began to rise in the world."⁶⁶

Shortly after his appointment, fighting broke out between Shin Kap's men and a splinter Chinese group in the region,⁶⁷ each nominally fighting for one of the two sides in a local Malay jurisdictional dispute as a means for expressing their own long-harboured ill-feelings and rivalries. Being the relatively unprepared party, as the history records, Shin Kap's men were defeated. Liu, the panglima, was wounded and had to find shelter in Yap Fook's kongsi house. Capitan Shin Kap met his end at the sword of an adversary. Meanwhile, Yap Ah Loy took refuge with a family of charcoal burners in the jungle. His enemies, the followers of the opposing Malay chief, were hot on the pursuit and attacked Ah Loy's sanctuary, wounding him in the process. Though incapacitated, he managed to crawl away to a hiding place where his friends found him early the next day, weak and dangerously ill. There they attended to Ah Loy's condition until it was safe to journey to Lukut. In Lukut the refugees were welcomed by Raja Juma'at as well as by the Chinese miners — for the majority of these Chinese shared similar territorial origins

⁶⁴. Wong, op. cit., p. 41.

⁶⁵. Ibid., p. 40.

⁶⁶. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 15.

⁶⁷. The following section is primarily based on Middlebrook's account of the Sungei Ujong disturbances in 1860.

(Fei Chew) and secret society affiliations with the men from Sungei Ujong.⁶⁸ Fighting eventually died down. War-weary, both the Malays and Chinese were ready for a settlement. It was decided that a new Capitan China should be appointed and the man chosen was Yap Ah Shak, the gambling farmer and former panglima to Capitan Shin Kap. After holding the position for a short while, he stepped down in favour of Yap Ah Loy. At the invitation of the Chinese of Sungei Ujong, therefore, Ah Loy returned from Lukut and took up the appointment as Capitan China. It appears that for the year that he was Capitan "there was no recurrence of fighting."⁶⁹

Meanwhile, Liu, Shin Kap's other panglima, had moved to Kuala Lumpur and become the panglima to Hiu Siew, headman of the Chinese population in that rapidly developing town. Within less than a year of Liu's arrival, Hiu Siew died and Liu managed to succeed him as the new Capitan. It was on Liu's ascension to power that Yap Ah Loy received an invitation to join him in Klang. "Attracted by accounts of the wealth of the new settlement, [Yap Ah Loy] accepted."⁷⁰

In 1862, therefore, Ah Loy left for Kuala Lumpur where he was "put in charge of [Liu's] mines."⁷¹ In the years to follow, Yap Ah Loy "prospered and soon became a relatively wealthy man."⁷² By 1865, he was owner of two mines and manager of several others for Liu. In addition, he opened a druggist shop in Kuala Lumpur. With success, Ah Loy was required to consider the question of marriage. This apparently was suggested and eventually arranged by Liu, who selected a daughter of an influential Baba family.

Ah Loy continued as Liu's "right-hand man" and played a leading part in the affairs of the community. Through the years the settlement grew and

68. Khoo, op. cit., p. 46, pointed out that the Hai San moved into Sungei Ujong, Lukut, and Klang in large numbers.

69. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 16.

70. Ibid., p. 20.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., p. 21.

the district's tin resources became extensively developed. Other districts in Selangor were also being opened up, notable among which was Langat in about 1866. Meanwhile already-developed areas such as Kanching and Lukut continued to grow and the Chinese population became more entrenched. As mines spread out along the valleys, the question of space and new land began to generate new problems. This was to lead to a new phase of competition and strife, under the gathering clouds of which Yap Ah Loy was to succeed to the Capitanship of the dying Liu Ngim Kong.

Before examining the new era of social and economic relationships that had increasingly made itself manifest since the early 1860's, it is probably appropriate to analyse some of the characteristics that one has just seen in Yap Ah Loy's early career and in the organizational set-up of Sungei Ujong. Much of the activities and relationships that facilitated his rise to power may be seen, it is argued, as indicators of more general characteristics of the early period of migrant Chinese social organization and interaction in the western Malay States. With respect to Yap Ah Loy's success, Middlebrook comments as follows,

In a brief period of six or seven years Yap Ah Loy rose from being an obscure immigrant to become the headman of a Chinese settlement with several hundred inhabitants. Such success was unusual even for that period, and his sudden rise must have been due in a large measure to his fortunate association with his clansman Yap Ah Shak.⁷³

Indeed, repeated instances of fortuitous associations with and assistance from clansmen appeared to mark Yap Ah Loy's career. At Kesang even when times were bad, for example, he managed to find work with an uncle and at Lukut, he was given a job by a fellow Fei-Chew Hakka. When he was contemplating going into business he obtained a timely loan from a clansmen and, in Seremban (or Rasah), he secured a position in the secret-society hierarchy through his connections with Liu and Yap Ah Shak. With the help of clan ties

⁷³. Ibid., p. 16.

again he was made Capitan in Sungei Ujong and finally through his friendship and ties of territorial affinity with Liu he obtained first an economic foothold and subsequently a political position in Klang.

Perhaps from these instances and from the willingness of many clansmen and friends to lend a helping hand to Ah Loy, one may observe just how important a place clan and friendship ties occupied in the social interaction of the early migrant Chinese communities. In a time when new mining lands were relatively plentiful and accessible and when entrenched personal and familial interests had not yet taken a tenacious hold, mutual help and cooperation among clansmen and friends or even among fellow-workers in a mine were given fairly ungrudgingly. This characteristic was not limited to a personal level alone, but was also in evidence in intercommunity relationships. Thus Hai-San secret-society members from Kesang could find a welcome among the Hai-San tin-miners at Sungei Ujong, Lukut, and Klang.⁷⁴ Again when Sungei Ujong was sacked by the Malays in 1828, "most of the refugees went south to Lukut where the mines could absorb them."⁷⁵ In 1860, it has also been seen, friends and clansmen sheltered the wounded and the dispossessed miners from Sungei Ujong in their kongsis in Lukut.⁷⁶ Even as late as 1865 when personal interests and rivalry had begun to efface clan solidarity as a motivation for action, an example of inter-community cooperation on the basis of ties of territorial affinity can still be found in the invitation given by Yap Ah Loy to the defeated Fei Chew of Larut to move to Klang.

Perhaps part of the solidarity felt among clansmen in an early migrant Chinese settlement in the western Malay States stemmed from the relatively undifferentiated nature of the community. As Wong points out,

⁷⁴. Khoo, op. cit., p. 46.

⁷⁵. Blythe, op. cit., p. 62.

⁷⁶. Middlebrook, op. cit., pp. 15 and 16.

"in the early days, practically all the Chinese labourers were imported under the indentured system."⁷⁷ The rather indiscriminate methods of labour recruitment could further help to cement bonds of fellowship felt among men thrown together in a common environment. Lacking the competition of primary kinship ties, men with shared territorial or clan affinity became drawn into a closer and more intimate circle of relationship than would otherwise have been the case. In this respect, the organizational apparatus for the recruitment of migrant labour came in useful in bringing about concentrations of men from similar territorial origins.⁷⁸ Consequently, in a mining settlement where the majority of men were labourers, and indentured ones as such, a sense of identity and solidarity could be cultivated relatively unhampered by barriers of social distinctions and rank. Under these circumstances therefore, clan, dialect, and territorial affinity formed as T'ien describes it, "the fundamental basis on which the social relations of the overseas Chinese are regulated, and by which the sense of mutual solidarity is made very real."⁷⁹

The relative absence of social stratification among the ranks also helped to facilitate a rapid rise in social status for those who could achieve economic success or paramilitary distinctions. In the case of Yap Ah Loy, his success was aided by the added advantage of being a non-indentured labourer. In this way, he was entitled to a cash wage in addition to the free food and lodging normally provided by a just employer. With a small sum of savings obtained from his wages and with perhaps some financial or other assistance from a well-meaning clansman or friend, an ambitious immigrant was able to set up a business of his own. From a point of small-scale enterprise, he could then progress,

77. Wong, op. cit., p. 72.

78. Freedman, op. cit., p. 30.

79. Tien, op. cit., p. 17.

should conditions prove favourable, into a larger-scale business and from thence to maybe a working of financial partnership with a big-time mine financier.

Economic conditions during those pioneer stages of development were such that once a business had managed to become established there existed little if any restrictions in scale to its growth. As Wong observes, "an advancer who started financing the mines in a new district usually ended up by controlling the whole area."⁸⁰ With this control, the entrepreneur also came to acquire a strong basis for political power. Thus once an aspiring migrant has achieved sufficient economic success to bring him to the notice of an advancer, political privileges in the shape of secret society office or even membership in the leadership echelons came to be available to him. This appeared to have been the pathway of Yap Ah Loy's success. Once admitted into the ruling hierarchy of the secret society in Sungei Ujong, his rise to power became unprecedented — paramilitary distinctions and business acumen standing him in good stead in the consideration of his superiors.⁸¹

Although the course of social mobility mapped out above was much more accessible to "paid immigrants"⁸² as opposed to indentured ones, there is, nevertheless, evidence of the latter's success. Wong, for example, points out that while "in the early days, practically all the Chinese labourers were imported under the indentured system. But in the course of time, there grew up a reservoir of labour, comprising ex-indentured labourers who had not returned to China."⁸³ Also, in time, there was found to be a rapid "increase in the numbers of immigrants who could pay their own passages, either because they were helped by friends and relatives who had already made some money from the mines,...or because they were Chinese labourers returning to the

80. Wong, op. cit., p. 76.

81. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 16.

82. Wong, p. 66, explains that the term was one "applied to those who paid their own passage either with their own money or loans from relatives or friends."

83. Wong, p. 72.

Straits to make more money."⁸⁴ Even allowing for the fact that there were some "paid immigrants" among the Chinese arrivals in the mines in the "early days," most were not. Therefore the change in pattern of immigration must have stemmed primarily from a proportion of indentured labourers who had become prosperous enough to be able to advance, in their turn, passage money for their friends and relatives in China.

Generally with success, a Chinese migrant preferred to set up a business, or trade, or even a mine of his own. As Purcell observed, even "to this day it remains the ambition of the coolie or servant to set up in a shop of his own."⁸⁵ Given the consuming interest in achieving a state of economic independence as defined above, it can be seen how changes in the nature of social stratification were bound to take place with the passage of time. As a settlement became more established, those who were able to, distinguished themselves from the others through either their hardiness or their industry. As mentioned, tin mining frequently claimed a heavy toll on the labour force. Even when a labourer did manage to survive that hazard, he was further exposed to the snares of unwise gambling and of uncontrolled opium smoking. Wong records that many were ruined by excessive indulgence in opium smoking, not to mention those who were kept perpetually at the grind by their sheer inability to refrain from all such activity.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, should an indentured labourer survive these odds and eventually succeed in working off his debt, then his chances of upward mobility were good, given

85. Purcell, op. cit., p. 65.

86. Wong, op. cit., p. 78, describes the practice whereby mine financiers "supplied chandu to their workers at truck prices the moment these had wages to their credit, and at reduced attractive rates as the date for wage settlement approached, in order to keep them in the mines by allowing them to run into debt....In time, the smokers became unfit for work through physical deterioration, and, eventually, could not even earn sufficient to buy the drug. Inevitably, he 'was dismissed; he could not get any employment elsewhere because other towkays would not take him on, and having no work he had to lie down by the roadside',.... In more remote areas 'the coolie generally died by the roadside or in the jungle.'"

the pioneer economic conditions of the time. For example, as gathered from interviews, should a mine financier decide to expand his present workings or establish new ones, he often chose an able labourer from the ranks to be his new overseer in either the new section of an already established working or in the newly established one. From this stepping-stone, the labourer could then acquire both the capital and the experience for entering into a future partnership or even beginning a new venture of his own when the chance presented itself. In the early period of growth there could have been little lack of opportunity as mines proliferated throughout the Malay States.

Consequently, with growth and expansion, greater differentiation in terms of ability and achievement ensued. For those who survived and made good, new opportunities provided them the means to "import" their relatives and friends to the Malay States. New ventures meant new employment opportunities. These could in turn be suitably distributed to one's kinsmen when they arrived in the Malay States. For those who chose to set up retail stores or enter into a small-scale trade (in the nature of Yap Ah Loy's initial efforts), the help of a trusted kinsman was especially valued. Thus with economic success, social stratification developed in complexity and with the ascendant trend in social mobility, a rapid increase in the number of "sponsored immigrants" was to result.

A second and parallel trend of development, directly linked with the issue of rapid social mobility within a pioneer migrant Chinese community, was the establishment of families by those who succeeded in attaining to positions of economic and/or political power. Yap Ah Loy, for example, was advised to marry. Liu Ngim Kong, Ah Loy's employer and predecessor, was probably married and had a family. Definite records exist of Hiu Siew (Kuala Lumpur's first Capitan) having had a family, as Middlebrook clearly indicated that Hiu Siew had a son who should rightfully have inherited the

property which Liu so freely appropriated to himself together with the office of Capitan.⁸⁷ In the case of Yap Ah Sze, an influential businessman in Selangor, records exist that he left behind a widow at the time of his death. Chong Chong, a contender to Yap Ah Loy's office and relative to Liu, was also reported to have a wife and a small son. Hence, marriage and the establishment of a family in the new environment appeared to have been characteristic of those in possession of economic power or political authority in the migrant Chinese communities of the western Malay States.

There are several possible explanations for this trend. Economic success, for example, had brought marriage, and the financial responsibilities it involved, within the means of those so favoured. This, coupled with the frequently-held belief among the Chinese that having a wife acted as a desirable stabilising influence on a single male, made the decision to marry a well-favoured if not an actually anticipated one.⁸⁸ In normal circumstances, the choice of a spouse and the subsequent arrangement of a marriage were left to the discretion of one's parents in China. However, the inability or unwillingness to leave the scene of control and activity for the settlement of one's matrimonial affairs in China might have influenced the particularly successful migrants to set up a family in the new environment instead. This certainly appeared to have been one of Yap Ah Loy's major considerations when advised to contemplate marriage by Liu.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the establishment of a liaison with a local Straits Chinese family offered distinct advantages in cementing existent business connections.⁹⁰ Judging from Middlebrook's account, it did seem as if Liu Ngim Kong had such thoughts in mind when trying to arrange a possible match for Yap Ah Loy.⁹¹

87. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 20.

88. Gathered from interviews.

89. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 21.

90. Crissman, op. cit., p. 188.

91. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 21.

This growth of primary kinship groups either through the direct "importation" of one's kinsmen to the Malay States or through the establishment of new families was to add a new dimension to the nature of social interaction in these migrant Chinese communities. However, before analysing its consequence and effects, it is imperative to comment on the changes, especially in wider financial and working arrangements between the Malay chiefs and the financiers, that helped to make a large measure of the above developments possible.

It is evident that some areas in Sungei Ujong were first worked with the active economic participation of the local Malay ruler_s. In the 1820's, for example, "the Malacca capitalists advanced 2,500 Spanish dollars per month to the Klana, who undertook to consign all the tin to them."⁹² During this time, the "tin trade down the Lingii River was handled by several Malay merchants."⁹³ By about 1831, changes in these arrangements were made whereby Malay rulers obtained an even larger share in the control and management of the profitable tin trade as well as of the enterprises. Under the new terms, the mines became financed by these Malay chiefs "who jointly obtained their capital from the Malacca merchants. In return, the Chinese miners undertook to buy their provisions and opium from the Malay chiefs at above market prices and to sell them their tin at a much lower level than that at which the Malay chiefs had agreed to sell to their Malacca financiers."⁹⁴ By this change the Malay chiefs had in effect exchanged their roles as mere agents of the Malacca financiers to active entrepreneurs. If their monopoly had continued unchecked, the opportunities open for Chinese capital and enterprise would have been extremely restricted. This would in turn have made the flourishing of Chinese economic activity in the Malay States, with its attendant social implications, a virtual impossibility.

92. Wong, op. cit., p. 19.

93. Ibid., p. 20.

94. Ibid.

Probably a resentment against such heavy-handed control over a lucrative sector of the economy eventually prompted the Malacca financiers to force the field open for "free enterprise". In any case by the 1840's, Malacca merchants won the right "to make advances to the miners directly."⁹⁵ From this point, Chinese commerce and enterprise were able to spread their wings. The right to make advances directly to the miners also meant the right to the produce of the mine. Furthermore, given the intricate system of Chinese credit transactions,⁹⁶ advances were only made in the form of supplies — food, opium, and perhaps tools, thus securing for the advancer an additional area of control. Under the shadow of these transactions, a host of smaller secondary services were to emerge.

It has been seen how, as mining ventures spread farther afield, secret societies had been found useful in regulating the behaviour and well-being of an already existent community of settlers or miners. As development got underway, for example, initially individualistic enterprises (such as those which began as share basis workings) coalesced to form secret societies for their own protection. Newer workings on the other hand were becoming increasingly launched under the direction of established secret societies in the Straits Settlements. The supreme example of this trend may be the workings in Larut where Long Ja'afar directly negotiated with the Hai-San headmen and in effect "farmed" the mines out to them as representatives of a secret society.⁹⁷

Despite the need for secret-society protection, one must not however be under the mistaken impression that a rigid regimentation was required and maintained in all spheres of activity. In the area of indentured mine labourers and farm rights perhaps, a strict surveillance and discipline was deemed necessary, but in the conduct of ordinary business and the commonplace routine of social interaction there was probably very little imposition of

95. Khoo, op. cit., p. 68.

96. T'ien, op. cit., p. 42.

97. Blythe, op. cit., p. 120.

rigid regulation nor of a constant observance of hierarchical rights and privileges. By this is argued that in the area of ordinary business contacts and transactions, a secret society member probably did not have to consult or depend solely on his headman either in the local community or in the far away Straits Settlements for the creation of his opportunities or for his finances. That is, within the framework of the community and secret society, channels for individual initiative and enterprise were open. It was these channels, one may argue, that directly gave rise to the boom in Chinese economic activity soon after the Malay monopoly over the entire tin trade and enterprise was relaxed. Equally, without relative freedom for personal endeavours, the aspiring and the enterprising might not have had the same chances for their success as they did. Yap Ah Loy, for example, did not begin his business under a secret society directive or finance, but was merely aided by a personal loan from Yap Fook.⁹⁸ Similarly, when Hiu Siew and Yap Ah Sze first moved to the Klang district, they went at the invitation and support of a private Malay trader, Sutan Puasa. Undoubtedly, being Hai San men, these traders could count on their society in major issues such as the protection of their goods and persons from attacks by rival secret society members, but within these limits of security, the personal exercise of initiative was given free play.

In fact, T'ien's observations on the credit arrangements in Sarawak may well find an interesting parallel in the early phase of Chinese economic activity in the Malay States. According to T'ien,

Lack of capital in the rural shops often means that the cash actually borrowed by rural Chinese has passed through the hands of at least three different money lenders, the rate of interest increasing at each step....In Siniawan and elsewhere one can find several examples of comparatively well-to-do money-lenders who have been able to borrow money from the banks at $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ per month, probably against mortgage; from this they have lent to the shops at about $3-3\frac{1}{2}\%$ per month, while the shops in their turn are lending to the peasants at 4% or 5% per month.⁹⁹

98. Refer to p. 80 above.

99. T'ien, op. cit., p. 42.

Loans of a size that would not interest important money-lenders were thus broken down into sums within the reach of poor peasants. As may be gathered, the lifeline and workability of such credit systems depended on the existence of intermediaries who could stand surety, as it were, for the debtors immediately below them. Through a chain of debtor-creditor relations, reinforced at every step by extra-economic bonds of trust, the big time advancer was able to obtain a guarantee for a loan which was to eventually reach someone totally unknown to him and who might not otherwise feel constrained by any personal or social obligations to honour the debt.

Since the principles of social relations as well as the availability of capital in the nineteenth century mines of Malaya differed more in detail than in concept from those in Sarawak, there are reasons to believe that similar arrangements might have been employed. One can perhaps even visualize the roughly similar channels through which capital in the form of cash or, more usually, of provisions, trickled down from the advancers in the Straits Settlements to the ambitious but poor labourers in the mine areas. Through such activities each man in the chain was able to make a living from the services rendered. Hence with the removal of Malay control, a certain latitude of economic freedom set in, a factor which fostered a burst of entrepreneurial activity in the mining areas of the Malay States. Under the umbrella of expansion, the hierarchy of money-lender cum trader-middleman began to swell, absorbing in its wake the up-and-coming into its ranks. This therefore was the event that sparked off the rapid emergence of primary kinship groups within the migrant Chinese communities in the Malay States and thereby brought a new dimension into the nature of their social interaction.

Undoubtedly such profound changes in the economic structure left their mark on the political scene, which in turn bore further repercussions on the social organization of the migrant communities. Meanwhile, the growth

of primary kinship groups together with the reassertion of such ties created in the communities a new principle of social dependence which could exist independently of the bonds of brotherhood or clan solidarity which the sense of an early Chinese migrant community and its secret society symbolized. Hence, not only the strength and control of the secret societies, but also the entire foundations and rationale of an era of social cohesion were threatened by the coming-in of a new order. From this point, too, personal jealousies and commercial rivalries began to acquire an additional edge to their strife — that of succession.

Perhaps the most dramatic and important issue of succession was that to secret society leadership, and with it to community leadership. As evidenced by various instances, such issues were often determined, in the early phase of settlement, on the basis of personal distinctions and valour. Although Yap Ah Loy's association with Yap Ah Shak resulted in his nomination to the Capitanship of Sungei Ujong, it was nevertheless believed that Ah Shak "would not have chosen Yap Ah Loy if the latter had not displayed courage as a fighter and been well able to control the miners and maintain order."¹⁰⁰ Hence patronage, though already a feature at that time, was nevertheless only given to men with merits. After all the choice of Ah Loy was one well approved by the community, as they were the ones who invited him from Lukut to be their Capitan. Therefore up until 1860 at least, the migrant Chinese communities of Sungei Ujong, Lukut, Klang, Kanching, and Larut still manifested characteristics of a "fluid and commercialised society which threw up men who united political and economic power by controlling their fellows through the secret societies."¹⁰¹ In about 1860 again, Hiu Siew, the founder trader at Kuala Lumpur and a prosperous businessman by that time, was selected to be the first Capitan China of Kuala Lumpur, apparently with the support and approval of the general populace, including the local Malay population.

100. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 16.

101. Freedman, op. cit. ("Immigrants and Associations"), p. 38.

As a community became more established and stable, its "fluidity" was bound to abate. First the creation and then the defence of a hierarchial order of administration was apt to mitigate opportunities for late-comers seeking to infiltrate its ranks. The high risks and dangers of an era of settlement which once helped to ensure a fairly rapid turnover in leadership and other positions of rank had ceased to exist. With settled conditions, increasing stability, and burgeoning numbers, even some of the more natural enemies of the early settlers got under control. As numbers amassed, for example, and as settlements grew into towns, concerted action on planned sanitation and a better standard of hygiene began to show favourable results against the mortality rate.¹⁰² Also the old dictum of safety in numbers was to work in more ways than one. The presence of a wealth-producing community of Chinese with perhaps even greater promise of growth as time went on, must have helped to restrain more impulsive and devastating attacks on the group by the local Malay chiefs.¹⁰³ Secondly, the threat of tigers subsided as greater numbers of people congregated in a living area. With increasing security and prosperity, as seen, successful migrants began to send for their relations and friends. These new "sponsored" migrants in turn benefitted from the store of survival experiences known to their sponsors, thus giving them a greater chance of adapting to the climate and conditions of the new environment. Being better provided for by their kinsman in terms of employment, the mortality rate of this new group of migrants was also decidedly lower than that of those working in exposed conditions at the mines. As a result, there emerged a reservoir of men who had a distinct initial advantage over the other aspirants to wealth and power.

102. Captain MacPherson witnessed in 1860 the development of the town of Lukut. He wrote, "the (as yet) only street of Chinatown is uniformly built of brick and tiled roof, kept scrupulously clean and well-drained." See Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 14.

103. Khoo, op. cit., p. 197.

Situationally the circumstances may be seen as follows. With more indentured labour being imported alongside the "paid immigrants,"¹⁰⁴ a backlog of ambitious but poor ex-indentured labourers was bound to build up. These men, not content merely to return to China as free men, eagerly awaited an opening for the further development of their energies and enterprise. Among their numbers might be men who came in the earlier years of development but who had taken a somewhat longer time to arrive at the stage where they could strike out on their own. Already the settled and less taxing conditions in the mining areas had drastically reduced chances of a sudden and rapid short-cut to success through para-military service, by greatly prolonging the life-expectancy of leaders and their fighting men. On the economic front also their ambitions were seriously circumscribed by the presence of close relatives who were trained and ready to step into the roles of their patrons. As these kin groups proliferated, it can be seen how they could begin to monopolize in time, not only a business but a large sector of the particular trade or industry in which they were involved.¹⁰⁵ This in fact was to lead to an entrenchment of class interests in the communities. However while these forces were yet coalescing, the situation within the community could prove to be explosive as those who were deprived of their chances clamoured for consideration.

Amidst the tides of change, therefore, the development of primary kin groups in the migrant Chinese communities in effect constituted an additional force in its wake, generated by and in turn generating changes in its course. As ties with and commitments to larger solidarities such as secret society, clan (in the overseas definition of the word) and territorial or dialect groups began to weaken in the face of such fundamental shifts in social composition, kin loyalties and interests were thereby better able to assert themselves thus creating potentially dangerous polarizations within an already tense situation.

104. Wong, op. cit., p. 68

105. Song, op. cit., records many instances of successful Chinese passing on their business and financial interests to their sons who in turn sought to expand and enlarge these undertakings. For specific references refer pp. 129 & 406.

The migrant Chinese communities thus appear to have evolved to a stage of organizational crisis. Evidently, increasing numbers and greater concentrations of people had placed untold strains on the existent organizational apparatus, held together as it was by shared bonds of brotherhood, a common belief in mutual aid and, above all, by an indefatigable ideal of unlimited upward social mobility should a sinkheh succeed in overcoming and surviving his first few years of hard labour and harsh conditions. Consequently, when these bonds and beliefs were supplanted by kin ties and loyalties, and when the channels of upward social mobility were blocked by entrenched interests, then the entire rationale for wider cohesion had virtually come into question. Of course one way in which such pressure could be resolved was through the economic 'colonization' of new territories and the establishment of new communities where the fluidity and adventure of pioneer conditions could be once again reconstructed to accommodate the aspiring and the successful with opportunities commensurate to their hopes and efforts. However, such avenues of expansion, once so effective in relieving tension and diverting strife, were fast being crowded out as all known deposits with the span of Chinese methods of transportation and communication were becoming exploited. In addition, old workings such as Lukut and even Kanching had passed their prime, deposits becoming rapidly depleted. As Khoo remarked, in the case of Selangor, "the days of the Kanching and Lukut mines were numbered. In the ensuing years, the really productive mines were those centred along Sungai Klang. The repercussions... of this were serious."¹⁰⁶ This was indeed so, for as miners from exhausted workings crowded into Klang, the pressures generated on extant resources became even more intense. Instead of a release, therefore, the Klang situation was to become increasingly competitive.

In Larut similar conditions were in evidence. Since Long Ja'afar's death in 1857 Penang merchants had been allowed to invest directly in the

106. Khoo, op. cit., p. 108.

opening and working of mines.¹⁰⁷ With this privilege, economic developments began to acquire momentum. Indeed, a rapid establishment of new mines by the late-comers soon led to the growth of a whole new district named Klian Bahru as opposed to Klian Pauh, the stronghold of the original group. As both groups pushed out to new frontiers, an eventual meeting of boundaries became inevitable. Beset with diminishing resources, the Hai-San group at Klian Pauh were casting eyes on the potentials at Klian Bahru. However, unlike Selangor, the two groups belonged to opposing secret societies, the Fei-Chew Hakka at Klian Bahru being predominately Ghee Hin members. Consequently, a fierce competition for mining lands was engendered, complicated in this instance by secret society rivalries and animosities. Hemmed in by an increasing shortage of new lands, the economic energies of both groups must have experienced similar frustrations in finding, as mentioned, inadequate outlets. Thus tension mounted until a dispute "over a water-course so necessary for the working of the mines"¹⁰⁸ between a Hai-San man and a Ghee-Hin miner delivered the final spark in 1861 to the explosive situation.

Despite the dominance of Hai-San men in most areas, Selangor was nevertheless not free from such problems. In fact, Hai-San control of Sungei Ujong, Lukut, and Klang, three roughly contiguous areas of mining activity, was to eventually complicate rather than help the situation in Klang. While development was on the ascendant, the proximity of these three areas was useful as they formed a formidable bloc of Hai-San domination, intimidating if not actually repelling any serious offers of competition, economic or political, by other major secret society groups. In fact, repeated records of conflict within the Chinese communities in Sungei Ujong exist.¹⁰⁹ These instances may be interpreted as evidences of the struggle for power between the Kah-Yang-Chew Hakkas, members

107. Wong, op. cit., p. 26.

108. Khoo, op. cit., p. 229.

109. Blythe, op. cit., p. 62 and p. 74.

of the Tsung Pak Khun,¹¹⁰ and the Fei-Chew Hakkas, members of the Hai-San society. That the struggle should be most fierce in Sungei Ujong is understandable as, judging from records, Sungei Ujong was at one time the stronghold of the Tsung Pak Kun.¹¹¹ However, with the passage of time, it was probable that the Hai San gained the ascendancy,¹¹² and by the 1850's Sungei Ujong was clearly an area dominated by the Hai Sans, as one finds their men installed in positions of economic and political power.¹¹³ The majority of Kah-Yeng-Chew Hakkas, ousted and probably relegated to an ineffective minority, left the area in 1844 for Kanching where the opening of new mines in the district by Raja Abdul Samad of Selangor offered them a chance of a new start and new lands.¹¹⁴ In this one may find an example of how the opening of new areas could offer relief to an area beset by tension, but it can also be argued that if the Kah Yeng Chew had not felt that the situation at Sungei Ujong was as good as lost, they probably would not have been the ones to move.

Hence, in those decades prior to the 1860's, the bloc of Hai-San power served them in good stead. Their proximity also helped, then, to bolster each other's strength and morale, especially at times when one of the settlements met with a disastrous defeat or reversal of fortune. Thus when the community at Sungei Ujong was defeated in 1860, the nearby Hai-San settlement at Lukut furnished the refugees with food, shelter and medical attention until peace was restored and their strength in the home settlement was replenished. Even as early as 1828 when the Chinese in Sungei Ujong were routed and driven out by the Malays, they were able to find a refuge and a living in Lukut where, as Blythe remarked, "the mines could absorb them."¹¹⁵ This gradually established and

110. As a result of this secret society's connection with the Ghee Hin in Singapore, it has often been mistakenly classified as Ghee Hin. Thus Middlebrook records that the Hai San clashed with the Ghee Hin in Selangor. Khoo however, believes that they belonged to the Tsung Pak Kun (p. 219). This latter view appears more logical as the Kah-Yeng-Chew Hakkas of Selangor were recruited from Sungei Ujong, the one-time headquarters of the Tsung Pak Kun.

111. Khoo, op. cit., p. 50, records that the Tsung Pak Kun had their headquarters at Sungei Ujong.

112. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 25 (contin.)

accepted practice of moving to the next settlement in times of hardship and privation was all very well in times of prosperity. However, as the nineteenth century wore on, it was to become an obligation that grew increasingly burdensome and detrimental to the host community as one has seen in the case of Klang.

In fact, as frustrated mine developers from Lukut and Sungei Ujong poured into Klang, there arose an additional area of potential tension in the community. With established economic interests staked out by members of the host community, the newcomers were unlikely to find sufficient scope for their expertise. Consequently a new line of division was to emerge, that between the established leadership and the outside challengers. Hence, while within itself the community was already split between the established order and the aspirants, the arrival of more Hai-San men was to add one more factor of competition that had to be reckoned with.

While domestic problems were increasing, Klang's troubles were being rapidly compounded by the development of difficulties in its external relations. As mentioned, to the north of Klang was Kanching, worked by Kah-Yeng-Chew Hakkas, members of the Tsung Pak Kun. As Middlebrook observed,

When the two settlements were in their infancy the men were fully occupied in their own areas opening up the land and prospecting. Then, with each side extending its field of operations, they found themselves working the same ground... fights were frequent: the friends and relatives of the injured swore revenge and ultimately it became a common practice to stage small attacks on public festivals when the mines were closed.¹¹⁶

Though competition for mine lands was a frequent and real enough issue for inter-society feuds, the above account nevertheless appears to have overlooked some finer facets of the origins to the dispute. One of them was the acquisition by Yap Ah Sze of a large financial interest in the mines at Kanching. This arose

113. Ibid, p. 16.

114. Khoo, op. cit., p. 101.

115. Blythe, op. cit., p. 62.

116. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 27.

as a result of a quarrel which Chin Ah Chan, an influential mine-owner and revenue-farmer, had with his fellow Kah-Yeng-Chew Hakkas in Kanching. Disgruntled, he sold all his interests and left the area.¹¹⁷ The new 'proprietor' Ah Sze, though a good-natured pacifist was nevertheless seen by the Kanching men as an outsider, a Fei Chew and a Klang man belonging to the Hai-San society.¹¹⁸ Even given the fact, as Khoo argues, that animosity between the two secret societies was not as deeply-embedded or as bitter as Middlebrook stated it to be,¹¹⁹ there is nevertheless reason to believe that relationships between men from these two groups were not all that different from the situation at Larut where it had been remarked that "though cordial enough, they were clearly mindful of their differences."¹²⁰ Thus, the extension of Hai San economic influence into Kanching was to introduce a sensitive issue into Klang-Kanching interactions, — one that could be easily sparked off into a major conflict by the slightest aggravation or instigation.¹²¹

The situation was indeed to increase in gravity as further pressure on Klang resources prompted its leaders to plot the extension of greater Hai-San domination over the Kanching mines.¹²² In fact, Ah Sze's decision to invest in Kanching was probably prompted in the first place by a growing shortage in opportunities for large scale economic expansion in Klang, caused, as noted, partly by internal factors and partly by the inflow of men from near-exhausted workings in Sungei Ujong and Lukut. It has often been overlooked that this additional burden which the Klang community had to bear on the basis of their secret society affiliations directly contributed to a greater paucity in opportunities, a situation that was to lead in turn to further aggravated relations with Kanching. This may be seen in one of the steps taken by Liu Ngim Kong to

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Khoo, op. cit., p. 219.

120. Ibid., p. 228.

121. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 49.

122. Ibid., p. 28.

alleviate the problem. By 1868, knowing that he was a very sick man, Liu attempted to persuade Yap Ah Sze to succeed to the Capitanship. Through this move he had hopes that "it might be possible to bring the two Hakka clans under one leadership,"¹²³ a Fei-Chew leadership that is, together with all the advantages that that would accrue to the Fei-Chew community. In this he was encouraged by the fact that the "Capitanship of the Kah Yeng Chew had lapsed."¹²⁴ Yap Ah Sze, however, declined the offer, but in their subsequent plans for the heir to the office, the two men devised a strategy of winning the support of the Sultan and all the economically powerful Malay chiefs of Klang with the exception of Raja Mahdi, in anticipation that he would eventually be defeated thus leaving, as they hoped, the Kah Yeng Chews at their mercy.¹²⁵

These plans were thwarted however, by an unexpected turn of events. On hearing of Liu's death, all his clansmen and relatives from Lukut and Sungei Ujong rushed to Klang "with the hope that they might receive the succession after the funeral."¹²⁶ When they learnt of Yap Ah Loy's appointment as the next Capitan and of the support which he commanded from the local Malay headman, Sutan Puasa, they were silenced though bitter and resentful.¹²⁷ From this corps of dissatisfied clansmen and relatives was to emerge the leaders of opposition to Yap Ah Loy both in and out of Klang. Once again, therefore, the intrusion of kinship groups, loyalties and expectations as well as the declining prosperity of Lukut and Sungei Ujong was to generate problems that besieged the internal situation in Klang and endangered its external relations.¹²⁸

As seen, tension between the Hai San society in Klang and the Tsung Pak Kun in Kanching was caused by Ah Sze's investment in the Kanching mines in

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid.

125. Ibid., p. 19. Kanching in the district of Ulu Selangor was then ruled by Raja Musa, the Sultan's son. By allying with the Sultan, the Fei Chews did have a basis to hope that they also had the alliance of Raja Musa, and through him control over the Kah Yeng Chew.

126. Ibid., p. 31

127. Ibid.

128. One may indeed speculate that if the economic situation in Sungei Ujong and Lukut had remained viable, Liu's kinsmen might not have been as anxious or determined to succeed to Liu's position, as there would have been ample (cont'd.)

1867. However, the establishment of a Kah Yeng Chew settlement in Langat, south of Klang, by Chin Ah Chan (the dissident Kanching man) was a scant source of comfort for the Fei-Chew Hakkas in Klang.¹²⁹ Hence, the two groups had begun to regard each other warily. Added to that, the Kah Yeng Chews in Kanching suffered from the insecurity of being leaderless and as seen, the Hai-San men already had designs to exploit the situation. In the midst of such growing uneasiness, Chong Chong, the most determined and fiercest contender for the Capitanship of Klang, arrived in Kanching and offered to lead the Kah Yeng Chews in their opposition to Yap Ah Loy. Though a Fei-Chew Hakka and therefore not wholly acceptable to the Kah Yeng Chews, Chong Chong hoped that a common cause against Ah Loy would rouse the Kah Yeng Chews into supporting his attack against the Capitan.¹³⁰ In this expectation he was proved right as he succeeded in instigating the Kah Yeng Chews against the most immediate representative of Yap Ah Loy in Kanching, Ah Sze. Not only was Ah Sze an irksome intruder into the Kanching economy, he was also an important power behind the Capitan of Klang.¹³¹ Consequently an attack on him would amount to striking a real material blow at Yap Ah Loy. Through the leadership and promptings of Chong Chong therefore, the Kanching men murdered Yap Ah Sze in February, 1869, while he was attempting to make a quiet getaway from the area.

This was to spark off a protracted war in Selangor between the Fei-Chew and Kah-Yeng-Chew Hakkas, the developments of which were to become extremely interwoven with Malay struggles for political power in the various districts of Selangor at that time. Indeed, it is argued that in some ways, a break-down in the Malay political machinery lent fuel, literally and otherwise, to these

128. (cont'd)...opportunities for them in their home bases to attain to positions of economic success and political leadership. However, the situation being as it was, they had little to lose and everything to gain by challenging Ah Loy's succession, even to the point of taking up arms against him.

129. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 28

130. Ibid., p. 34.

131. Ibid.

internecine feuds. In the course of the Klang war this was to become especially apparent. In 1868, Liu Ngim Kong and Yap Ah Sze were already trying to take advantage of the insecure position of Raja Mahdi to further their plans against the Kah Yeng Chews. In 1866, Raja Mahdi, a minor Malay prince who originally ruled a small district in the neighbourhood of Klang, succeeded in ousting Raja Abdullah (then ruler of Klang) and his men from power thereby assuming control over Klang. The conflict was apparently touched off by a disagreement over revenue dues, the revenue collection of Klang district having been recently (1865) farmed out to the Read-Tan Kim Cheng syndicate of Singapore, a purely economic concern that was no respecter of princely exemptions or privileges.¹³²

Perhaps the more fundamental cause to this outbreak of conflict was the death of Raja Juma'at which left, as Middlebrook remarked, "two weak and ineffective sons...to inherit Lukut and unofficially keep peace in Selangor."¹³³ While Raja Juma'at was alive, his long-standing reputation for ability and integrity had won him the confidence of his creditors.¹³⁴ Through his influence, Raja Abdullah, Raja Juma'at's brother and ruler of Klang, was able to obtain substantial advances for his development of Klang. At Raja Juma'at's death, however, the creditors probably felt no longer obliged to or secure in prolonging these credit terms. As a result, a year after Raja Juma'at's death Raja Abdullah was called upon to honour his debts, an occasion which probably led directly to the farming out of the Klang revenues to Read and Tan Kim Cheng which in turn brought about the beginnings of conflict in Klang.¹³⁵

But, of even more crucial importance to Selangor's well-being than his role as Abdullah's financial guarantor was Juma'at's part in holding the political machinery of Selangor together. For the same reasons that he commanded the

¹³². See Khoo, op. cit., p. 265.

¹³³. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 25.

¹³⁴. Khoo, op. cit., p. 201.

¹³⁵. Ibid, p. 202.

respect of his creditors, he was able to command the political respect of his peers. It has been said that "he was the most prominent and forceful of the territorial chiefs"¹³⁶ in Selangor. From his control and subsequent development of Lukut he obtained the necessary financial and economic basis for his political strength. This, in combination with a wise statesmanship, was to win him effective authority over the other major chiefs of Selangor. Thus unofficially Raja Juma'at coordinated the actions and activities of the Selangor chiefs, tempering their excesses, advising caution and removing as far as possible major causes for grievance and potential strife.¹³⁷ In effect therefore he provided the offices of an able Sultan and a central authority. With his death the entire machinery of central control collapsed leaving the weak and ineffectual Sultan Abdul Samad in a quandary.

In normal circumstances (that is, in the days before Chinese commercial mining) the Sultan often controlled the richest district in the state or the most strategic and commanding position in the area, thus allowing him a certain bargaining advantage vis-à-vis his major chiefs.¹³⁸ However, with the development of commercial mining, this was changed, placing the Sultan on an equal or sometimes even an economically less advantageous footing than his other chiefs. With this turn in events, the premium of political authority began to rest increasingly on a personal ability and a strength of personality, both of which criteria depended too heavily on individual capabilities as opposed to institutional safeguards to guarantee any long-term continuity or stability. As seen, the central authority in the Malay political system was by no means strong even at its best, but, in the face of fast-developing changes, a breakdown of even those tenuous bases of centralization was to occur leaving the Sultan in an extremely exposed position, where his survival rested solely on the strength of his individual

¹³⁶. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 23.

¹³⁷. Ibid.

¹³⁸. Gullick, op. cit., p. 21.

capabilities. In this way, therefore, the authority of the traditional Malay political apparatus became so seriously undermined that the stage was set for anarchy and chaos. While a capable man was yet at the helm, the process was only delayed but not averted. It was this disintegration of power that gave the Chinese miners the opportunities and the latitude to settle their own scores on a big scale. Through well-calculated stratagems of political alignment and alliances with warring Malay chiefs, the Chinese entertained hopes of obtaining an eventual and total mastery over their erstwhile commercial rivals. From these alliances too, the Chinese miners were able to obtain men and arms from the Malay chiefs in support of their cause. Consequently, as the Hai San in Klang, under the leadership of Yap Ah Loy and supported by the Viceroy, Tengku Kudin, were preparing for their attack on the Kah Yeng Chews in Kanching, allies of Syed Mashhor,¹³⁹ similar situations and circumstances were threatening to draw the Hai San of Sungei Ujong into open conflict with their rivals the Ghee Hins (probably Tsung Pak Kun) who were beginning to reassert themselves in the area.¹⁴⁰

While a break-down in Malay political control precipitated the magnitude and tenacity of Chinese internecine struggles in Selangor, Latut and possibly Sungei Ujong, it must however not be overlooked that the many incidents of strife leading up to the major outbreaks of hostilities may indeed constitute equally important pointers to a growing inefficacy in secret society organization and control. That is, as the settlements grew, the secret society organization became increasingly inadequate for the situations and problems of a more complex community. While mining settlements were in their infancy, the alignment of economic and other interests within the community may be regarded as fairly simple and monolithic. Labourers, for example, were solely concerned with mining, their overseers with supervising their efforts, and financiers (or their on the spot

¹³⁹. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 48.

¹⁴⁰. Blythe, op. cit., p. 188-9.

representatives) with collecting the tin and moving in supplies of rice and opium for the mines. All these activities and interests revolved around mining and while this was the case the secret society served their need competently.

As the settlement grew, other interests and needs were bound to emerge. In the area of supplies, for example, a rapid increase in numbers resulting in a commensurately heavier flow of traffic was apt to encourage the establishment of intermediary trading bases between the port and the mines. On the one hand these were made possible by an increased capacity in the commercial traffic to support and absorb permanent feeder centres that would distribute supplies and collect the products in turn.¹⁴¹ On the other, rapid expansion, being a good index of economic success, was itself yielding up men with small capital or sufficient ambition to fill the entrepreneurial openings within the developing system.¹⁴² As a result, the expansion of each settlement left scope for diversification in sources of livelihood as the system padded itself out to include the provision of more and more services. In this process middlemen became established, specialty trades found their niches, and from such a base greater differentiation was to occur. With growth, even the initially monolithic structure of advances (from Malacca financier directly to mine organizer) was to undergo differentiation, traders and middlemen being quick to step into the role of petty advancers, thus giving form to the well-known chain of debtor-creditor relations.

While differentiation was developing on a local scale, changes were also happening to the lines of control ensuing, originally, directly from Malacca to the mines. As trading bases grew into significant towns, local concentrations of financial power and interests emerged, leaders were created and increasing

141. In the development of Klang, for example, it was recorded that Hiu Siew, a miner in Lukut, used to supply goods to a Mandeling trader in Kallang (Sutan Puasa). When mines were being developed at Ampang in the Klang district, Hiu Siew was persuaded to go and trade there. It was recorded that within "a short space of time, [Hiu Siew and his friend] were doing excellent business importing necessities for the mines and exporting tin". (Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 19)

142. Yap Ah Loy, who was a good case in point, started out as a pig-seller.

development of local independence, economic and political, became inevitable. With expansion therefore, a chain of economically interdependent units evolved in the place of an originally unitary system of control. This differentiation in leadership and political authority as expressed in the emergence of local units of secret societies, affiliated to but independent of the larger secret society in Malacca, was symptomatic of the way in which the secret society apparatus had to be constantly stretched and strained to incorporate wider frontiers into its framework. While this was accomplished with a fair degree of success at the overall level, the secret society machinery were however much less able to cope with the differentiations that were taking place in interests, relationships and occupations on a local level.

With the emergence of occupational differentiation in the community a process of horizontal differentiation into trade groups and vertical one into class proclivities resulted. This in turn generated finer economic principles of cohesion and shared interests in the wider society, offering inevitably a positive competition to secret society bonds of shared brotherhood. Added to that, the growth of primary kinship groups and ties further mitigated the significance and ideal of fictive kin relationships. Also, with greater increase in population, the concentration of men from a like village, clan, dialect, or provincial origin was likely to increase, thus introducing yet a third principle of social cohesion that could distract from secret society loyalties. With these developments therefore, it became inevitable that the basis of a wider solidarity within the secret society framework would be gradually eroded away. Indeed an alliance of two or more of these newly arisen principles of social cohesion had begun effectively to supplant secret society bonds and loyalties.

The overlapping of class and kin interests had already helped to create a strata of entrenched economic interest in the community. With this development, secret society membership undoubtedly lost much of its attraction, for it had

ceased to be the organization through which the aspirant could hope to blaze his way to the top. Furthermore, lacking the former solidarity and close-knit interdependence between members, a newcomer could scarcely hope to find, through the secret society, the same type of help or the same degree of concern that had spurred earlier members on to their success.

All in all, the secret society machinery, as an effective apparatus of community organization, had been undermined. Yet, in the midst of general disintegration, the secret society possessed a last stronghold of enforcement and control — the exercise of force, an instrument of discipline that had succeeded through the ages in instilling fear into many otherwise recalcitrant members. At the outset, although "the sanctions at the disposal of the societies for coercing men into membership and holding them to the rules once they had joined seem to have been drastic...physical force and self-interest were [nevertheless] not the only means of ensuring adherence and loyalty."¹⁴³ With their usefulness, as far as internal organization and cohesion was concerned, at a virtual end, the secret societies became forced to rely increasingly on the use of coercion in the imposition and continuation of its rule on the community. The beginning of a process where the societies were to change from "communities" to purely criminal associations is, one may argue, already in evidence.¹⁴⁴ However, in the processes of this transformation, the secret societies' tottering domination became temporarily strengthened by the outbreak of inter-society hostilities as they helped to divert attention from their internal inefficacy to their yet vital role as protector and champion of the rights and interests of the entire community.

Consequently, as the 1860's drew to a close, the overseas Chinese communities in these western Malay States were characterized by a marked internal

¹⁴³. Freedman, op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁴⁴. Ibid., p. 38.

instability which necessitated conscientious vigilance — in the nature of those measures adopted by Yap Ah Loy when he became Capitan of Klang in 1868. According to records, it appears that "his first step was to recruit more fighters for his bodyguard being determined to rule with an iron hand."¹⁴⁵ He also set about augmenting his fighting force by recruiting men from Singapore and encouraging migrants from his home district in China.¹⁴⁶ That this fervour in gathering new recruits was not a new phenomenon prompted solely by the development of open hostilities with the Kah Yeng Chews is evidenced by the readiness with which Liu welcomed the dispossessed Fei Chew miners from Larut in 1865. It was recorded that they were welcomed "as persons experienced in tin mining and fighting".¹⁴⁷ Indeed from these instances, it may be argued that it was an increased dependence on force that had made it imperative for the secret society leaders to maintain a better and a larger body of fighting men.

A general break-down in secret society control was also in evidence in the mining settlements of Larut. In 1865, trouble again erupted in Larut as the result of a quarrel over a gambling table between a Fei-Chew Hakka and a Chin-Sang Hakka. Though secret-society rivalry was undoubtedly a factor, Khoo nevertheless cautions against over-emphasizing the importance of such considerations as motivating actions. Other considerations could well be involved, such as those of personal interests and perhaps one may add those relating to needs for release from the mounting tensions within one's own social system, represented by one's secret society. After all, judging from the close intermingling between the two groups, it would not be too far-fetched to believe that quarrels over gambling tables had occurred before but without perhaps quite those explosive consequences.

Again in the final outbreak of hostilities in Larut, the occasion was said to have been engendered by the upsurge of social conflict, this time

¹⁴⁵. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁴⁶. Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁴⁷. Ibid., p. 21.

occurring between a Chin-Sang Hakka and a Cantonese man (the Cantonese having moved in to replace the Fei-Chew Hakkas, who left Klian Bahru in large numbers after their defeat in the second Larut war).¹⁴⁸ According to Swettenham's report,

A Si-Quan (Hakka) woman, the wife of a headman, liked a Goh-Quan man better than her husband, the husband discovered this, and inciting his men, they took the Goh-Quan man, and the woman of their own tribe, and put them each into a basket (one of those Chinamen carry pigs about in), they carried them to this old mine, threw them into the water and ~~then~~ held the basket until the unfortunate wretches were drowned.¹⁴⁹

When the Goh-Quan men came to know about it, they were incensed, but were however momentarily appeased by the promise of a money settlement. This being not forthcoming at the appointed time, fighting broke out between the two factions. Although infidelity in a woman was regarded very seriously by the Chinese,¹⁵⁰ there was nevertheless an element of lawlessness in the Si-Quan men's actions as they should have consulted and conferred with the headman of the other secret society before meteing out such drastic punishment. That they were apparantly in the wrong was evidenced by their agreement to pay a "money settlement" to the aggrieved Goh-Quan men. Their subsequent failure to honour that agreement was to lead to the third Larut war. Again in this instance therefore, a personal grievance became converted into an issue of inter-society conflict.

The development of these occasions of strife in Larut as well as in Selangor does lead one to question whether there was not, indeed, a deeper malaise in the society; namely, that the apparatus of secret society control had become stretched too thin by the rapid growth of the communities.

¹⁴⁸. Khoo, op. cit., p. 220.

¹⁴⁹. Swettenham's papers.

¹⁵⁰. In traditional China, an erring couple were frequently drowned in similar fashion, but only with the sanction of the village elders.

Chapter V

DEVELOPMENTS FROM 1870 TO 1890.

In the discussion of economic expansion and the accompanying changes which this brought to the nature of control and financial arrangements extant between the Straits Settlements and the mining areas, attention has hitherto been only focussed on the relationships that obtained between merchant-financiers of Malacca and the mines of its hinterland, that is, Sungei Ujong, Lukut, Klang and Kanching. The other major group of financiers and miners, based on Penang and Larut respectively, being at a different stage of economic development, was not included in the analysis. One may^{say} that Larut, to begin with, had a relatively late start compared to the other mining areas (with the exception, perhaps of Klang, which only began operations in 1857). However, unlike Klang and indeed the rest of the mining areas in Selangor and Sungei Ujong, Long Ja'afar followed an initially cautious and rather restrictive policy in introducing Chinese miners into the area. As Swettenham recorded, "in the days of the Mantri's father [Long Ja'afar], no papers in the shape of grants of land were given at all, but that certain Chinamen, chief of them Ah Quee, were allowed to go and work mines, Che Long Ja'afar providing the money necessary for the work."¹ Khoo reports that after discovering tin in the area, Long Ja'afar opened up mines and "successfully accumulated sufficient capital by about 1848 to invite Chinese miners to Larut".²

1. Swettenham Papers.

2. Khoo, op. cit., p. 121.

It is evident that Long Ja'afar was determined to keep full control over the mining enterprises in his district. This is further substantiated by Blythe's account, which relates that "Long Ja'afar appointed one Low Sam, from Penang, to be his agent."³ From this evidence, it may be seen that expansion in Larut was initially strictly limited by the amount of supplies or funds that the efforts of a single man could muster. Until his death in 1857, Long Ja'afar persisted in his policy of being the sole financier of mining works in his district. This markedly different approach affected economic developments in Larut in two ways. In the first place, it seriously restricted growth until the late 1850's, when Ngah Ibrahim succeeded his father as ruler of Larut. Only then was Larut thrown open to private financiers and to the rate of growth which such a brisk inflow of capital was to engender. Secondly, Long Ja'afar's installation of a Penang merchant as his sole agent in the distribution and subsequent overseeing of all the operational rights in the area inevitably lent itself to linking the economics of Larut too closely to those of Penang and of the interests and aspirations of these Straits capitalists. A continued maintenance of this close liaison with Penang merchants by Ngah Ibrahim had the effect of forcing even the new enterprising spirit to conform very much to their interests. A combination of these factors thus sets the development of Larut apart from the rest of the mining areas in the Western Malay States. By comparison it may be said that the economic growth in Larut was yet in its infancy, with control by Straits merchants and financiers at its most direct and viable stage.

Mention has been made of the various outbreaks of hostilities among the Chinese in Larut and of the immediate causes of such feuds. By the 1870's, however, these local conflicts had developed in magnitude as warring Malay chiefs began to ally themselves with one or the other of the Chinese factions. According

3. Blythe, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

4. Refer to discussion in preceding chapter.

5. Khoo, *op. cit.*, p. 255

to Khoo, this was indeed taking place all over the tin-mining areas of the Western Malay States.⁵ Before an appraisal of the events and their significance can be made, it is perhaps necessary to ascertain the conditions within and composition of the Chinese communities in the opening years of 1870.

In the case of Larut, after the second outbreak of hostilities between the two Chinese groups in 1865, the Fei-Chew Hakka were expelled from the area⁶ and, as mentioned, "their places were gradually taken over by Sun-Neng people."⁷ Before their expulsion, these Fei-Chew miners were largely financed by Cantonese and Chin-Chew Hokkien merchants, who were mainly members of the Penang Ghee Hin.⁸ Prior to the outbreak of hostilities in June 1865, the "composition of the Chinese population in Larut" was recorded as follows,

In Klian Pauh where there were 100 shops, 70 to 80 belonged to Chin Sang, about 7 belonged to Fee Chew, 3 to Eng Teng Hokkien, 3 to Kah Yeng Chew, 2 to other Hokkiens and 2 to Hailam. There were close to 4,000 people in the village of which about 3,000 were miners and gardeners. In the neighbourhood, there were about 20 mines belonging to Chin Sang, 3 to Fee Chew, 3 to Chin Sang and Fee Chew in co-partnership. There were also Chinese engaged in burning charcoal and other occupations.⁹

Klian Bahru was very predominately a Fee Chew village. All the shops there, about 40 to 50 in number, belonged to them...population of 2,200 of whom about 2,000 were engaged in mining, gardening and other occupations. In the neighbourhood, there were about 20 mines, of which 15 or 16 belonged to Fee Chew, 3 to Chin Sang and only one to Hokkien.¹⁰

The Chin-Sang Hakkas, being then pioneers of the tin industry in Larut, predominated in Klian Pauh, location of the original mining sites in Long Ja'afar's days. However, by virtue of their initial headstart and their influence over the Malay ruler of Larut, the Chin-Sang Hakka had, "since 1861..., clearly demonstrated that they were the most powerful group in Larut and as such they became intolerably arrogant."¹¹ Hence, when the Sun-Neng Cantonese moved into

5. Khoo, op. cit., p. 255.

6. Many of the Fei-Chew miners eventually fled to Klang where they were absorbed by the existent community of Fei-Chew Hakka.

7. Khoo, op. cit., p. 299.

8. Ibid., p. 367.

9. CO 273/15. Evidences of Oh Wee Kee, 1865, and Affidavit of Loh Chong, 1865, quoted in Khoo, op. cit., p. 242.

10. Khoo, op. cit., p. 243.

Larut, they not only became heirs to the abandoned mines of the Fei Chews but also to their long-standing rivalry with the Chin-Sang Hakka.

Since the Fei Chew predominated in Klian Bahru, it may be surmised that the Sun Neng eventually gravitated to that settlement. However, as may be gathered from the immediate cause of the third Larut war, a fair amount of intermingling between the Sun Neng and the Chin Sang took place, just as had happened during the Fei Chews' time. But, in the course of such interaction, it was recorded that the Chin Sang, as a result of their greater numbers (some 10,000 of them as opposed to about 2,000 Sun Neng), invariably obtained the upper hand over the Sun Neng whenever a conflict of interests occurred. This led to a build-up of ill-feeling among the Sun-Neng Cantonese and was eventually to effect an alliance between them and the Ghee-Hin secret society in Larut.¹² The Sun-Neng Cantonese, according to the account, belonged to the Ho-Hup-Seah secret society led at that time by Ho Ghi Siu. It is not clear, however, who the Ghee Hin were.

When the Fei Chew were in control of Klian Bahru, they were the main-stay of the Ghee-Hin society in Larut, but after their expulsion, their places were taken by the Sun-Neng Cantonese, who were members of the Ho Hup Seah. Nevertheless, it may be conjectured that, since the Ghee-Hin secret society consisted of a multiplicity of units, its members in Larut could have been made up of, perhaps, residual Fei-Chew elements, Puntei Cantonese traders, Teochew agriculturalists and Chin-Chew Hokkien traders either resident in Larut or commanding a substantial share of financial and mining interests in the area. In fact it is recorded that the Penang financiers from the Puntei Cantonese, the Chin-Chew Hokkien and even the Sun-Neng Cantonese groups who made advances to the first Fei-Chew miners in Larut were "all largely members of the Penang Ghee Hin."¹³ These

11. Ibid., p. 299.

12. Munshi Ibrahim, quoted in Khoo, p. 299 (text in Malay).

13. Khoo, op. cit., p. 367.

men, in view of the close nature of commercial relations maintained between Larut and Penang, would undoubtedly have personal agents and representatives stationed in Larut thus inevitably introducing the Ghee-Hin influence in the area. In addition to them, there were other traders at the coastal regions of Larut serving the settlements of wood-cutters and charcoal burners in the region. Some of these traders also belonged to the Ghee-Hin society, as accounts of the progress of the Larut disturbances of the 1870's were to show.¹⁴ Moreover, farther north in the Krian District was the established commercial headquarters of Khaw Boo Aun, a Teochew and an important leader of the Penang Ghee Hin.¹⁵ Taking these into account, it is evident that the Ghee-Hin secret society continued to wield a considerable influence in Larut even after the Fei Chew exodus.

The Hai San, however, were not without their allies. As seen, their members, predominantly, Chin-Sang Hakka, occupied a commanding position in Klian Pauh and in many ways Klian Bahru (ever since they succeeded in routing the Fei Chews from the area). Commercially, they had a long period of close economic relations with the Hokkien merchants¹⁶ in Penang, who were members of the powerful Toa-Peh-Kong society.¹⁷ Hence when their positions were threatened by the alliance between the Ghee Hin and the Ho Hup Seah, the Toa Peh Kong of Penang together with their representative in Larut¹⁸ moved in on the side of the Hai San. On top of it all, they had the Mantri, the Malay ruler of Larut, on their side. This had lent immense weight to their cause against the Fei Chew in 1865, as the Mantri mobilised his forces against the Fei Chew instead of remaining neutral.¹⁹

In the initial trial of strength between the Ghee Hin - Ho Hup Seah faction and the Mantri - Hai San alliance in July, 1872, however, the Hai San were

14. Ibid., pp. 303- 314.

15. Ibid., p. 359.

16. It is believed that these were "largely local-born Hokkiens" who considered themselves distinct and separate from other Hokkiens who migrated to the Straits Settlements at a later date. (Khoo, op. cit., p. 366).

17. Ibid., p. 367.

18. According to Khoo, "the Toa Peh Kong had been established in Larut probably among the few Hokkien people present there, since 1861" (p. 303).

19. Ibid., p. 251.

less fortunate, for they were defeated and were temporarily driven out. It was at this point that the Toa Peh Kong, together with their allies, the Ho-Seng secret society, came to the rescue of Hai San. From then onwards, the struggle was to become more complicated as an ever widening circle of interests were drawn into the fray.

At this juncture, it is important to appraise the meaning and significance which such combinations held for an understanding of the composition and distribution of the Chinese population in Larut and north Perak. It is apparent, first of all, that the two major mining centres of Larut, Klian Pauh and Klian Bahru, were not the only settlements in north Perak where a sizeable Chinese population had collected. According to Khoo, "although the Chinese population were concentrated largely in these two villages, there were also other important villages in Larut which had Chinese residents."²⁰ One of them was Tupai which, according to Khoo, was also a mining village. Another was Telok Kertang, a village on the estuary of the Sungei Larut "which from all indications was also densely populated by Chinese."²¹ In addition, along the Larut coast were large settlements of Teo Chews who, since the 1850's had supplied a great proportion of the firewood needed in Penang for both industrial and domestic purposes.²²

From further records of the disturbances, one learns that a Chinese was also in the process of developing the interior of Sepatang "for the purpose of cutting and sawing timber into planks and other house building materials for Penang."²³ In the northernmost district of Perak was yet another pocket of Chinese settlers, primarily agriculturalists who worked on the sugar plantations of the influential Ghèe-Hin leader, Khaw Boo Aun.²⁴ Also evident from the

20. Khoo, "The Chinese in Larut, the early years." Unpublished seminar paper.

21. Ibid.

22. Khoo, "The Western Malay States," Unpublished thesis, p. 311.

23. Ibid., p. 308.

24. Ibid., p. 359.

progression of the Larut war is the fact that, interspersed in these settlements of miners, wood cutters or sugar planters, were traders and capitalists who were in the main residents of Penang and who belonged to one or other of the powerful secret societies of that settlement.

Greater economic development had meant the introduction of increased numbers of commercial interests into the district together with their differing secret society affiliations. The development of the Sepatang timber resources, for example, brought with it the extension of the Toa Peh Kong influence and foothold in Larut.²⁵ A growth of trade similarly attracted an inflow of traders with diverse secret society loyalties into a particular area or town in the district. As each secret society acquired a greater economic stake in the region, an overlapping of interests became unavoidable. It was this resultant increase of frequent intermingling among such secret society groups in Larut in general and in specific localities in particular that aggravated and accentuated the subsequent development of the Larut war.

The intrusion of rival secret society groups into areas that had hitherto been controlled by a single secret society also proved prejudicial to the basis of that secret society's authority over its men as well as over the area. The latter is perhaps apparent as the presence of rival groups inevitably challenged the supremacy of the established society over the region. The former may be explained as follows. In the preceding discussion on the weakening effects which economic growth had on secret society control, it was noted that the strength of the secret society's power in the mining settlements lay in the exclusive nature of its control. The intrusion of traders and financiers belonging to a different secret society into an established settlement thus represented not only the creation of an alternate and competitive focus of economic power but also a threat to the monolithic nature of the established secret society's control over the economic activities of the settlement.

25. Ibid., p. 308.

An illustration may be obtained from the mining activities of the Hai San at Klian Pauh. Originally, the Hai San were, as seen, the sole group of miners in Larut. In that period, they had close commercial relations with the Hokkien in Penang belonging to the Toa-Peh-Kong society. The operation of such a partnership directly reinforced the Hai San's control over their men as the Toa Peh Kong, in consideration of their own interests, which were aligned with those of the Hai San, were apt to support the Hai San in their enforcement of law and order in the settlement. However, when financiers from the Ghee-Hin society entered the scene in the late 1850's, they not only carved out a sector of the mine economy over which the Hai San had no control, but they were also likely to challenge the Hai San's authority as they (the Hai San) were the commercial partners of the Ghee Hin's rivals in Penang, the Toa Peh Kong. Hence, the presence of the Ghee-Hin capitalists in the mining settlements of Larut posed a positive threat to the totality of Hai-San control over the processes of economic production in the mines, for they provided an alternative source of funds for rebellious or recalcitrant Hai-San members. Through such cross-secret society arrangements, the Hai-San secret society could no longer maintain an effective hold over all its members, which as I have indicated, was one of the keystones of secret society supremacy and authority in the tin states of western Malaya. Furthermore, the presence of powerful members of a rival secret society in a settlement was bound to introduce an area of tension and a potential rallying point for opponents to the established hegemony.

From the above discussion, it can be seen how similar occurrences of encroachment by one secret society into another's preserve which appeared to be also taking place in the other Chinese settlements in Larut and Krian (north Perak)²⁶ was to lead to a build-up of intense resentment, animosity and bitterness

26. From accounts given in Khoo, it appears that the Ghee Hin were not always the intruders as records of the coastal settlements show ^{that} Toa-Peh-Kong traders also made inroads into Ghee-Hin controlled territory. Similarly in north Perak, the Hai San and Toa Peh Kong were attempting to make a break-through in Khaw Boo Aun's monopoly over the region.

that eventually became unleashed in the form of alliances and atrocities in the development of the Larut war.

At this point in time, succession disputes in Perak had prompted the various powerful Malay chiefs to seek allies among the feuding Chinese parties in Larut and north Perak. By the offer of trade concessions and revenue farm rights, the Malay chiefs hoped to attract the powerful Penang merchants, who were also backers of the Larut Chinese conflicts, to support their respective causes.²⁷ In the subsequent development, therefore, the Mantri of Larut, Ngah Ibrahim, was, except for a brief period of deviation, the staunch ally of the Hai-San, Toa-Peh-Kong and Ho-Seng faction. Raja Abdullah, the contender to the throne, on the other hand, sympathised with the Ghee-Hin, Ho-Hup-Seah cause.

Along this line of division the other Malay chiefs of Perak became aligned, up to and including the newly elected Sultan, Sultan Ismail. The chiefs of Lower Perak (Hilir Perak), entered the fray on the side of Raja Abdullah, who himself was a downstream chief. They supported Raja Abdullah's contention for the throne, occupied at that time by Sultan Ismail, an upstream chief and successor by default, as Raja Abdullah had failed to present himself as required by custom, at the burial of the dead Sultan, Sultan Ali.²⁸ Sultan Ismail, being an upstream chief and an enemy of Raja Abdullah, undoubtedly sided with Ngah Ibrahim, who was also a prominent leader of the upstream group. Thus, around this axis of alliances, the major Malay chiefs of Perak became divided into two camps, each camp supporting and in turn being supported by one of the two warring Chinese factions in Larut.

However, the nature of the struggle was such that as the test of strength proceeded, allies began to accumulate on either side, for those who felt threatened by the strength of one faction immediately joined the other for

27. Khoo, op. cit., p. 277.

28. Gullick, op. cit., p. 12.

their own self-protection. A case in point was Khaw Boo Aun's enlistment in the Raja Abdullah side when he felt threatened by the Ngah Ibrahim-Hai San alliance. But the field of potential allies was not just limited to the state of Perak. It was recorded that some Perak chiefs were on the verge of "offering material assistance" to Raja Mahdi of Selangor when a sudden turn of events "prevented the plans from being fulfilled."²⁹

This, however, did not mean that the Perak chiefs were thereby kept out of Selangor politics and vice-versa but that the tables were turned in such a way that intended allies of Raja Abdullah went over to Sultan Ismail's side instead.³⁰ To recover from his disadvantage arising from the new development, Raja Abdullah offered to ally with Tengku Kudin of Selangor, who was the political enemy of Raja Mahdi. Hence as the struggle for power in Perak proceeded, further entanglements in the form of alliances and counter-alliances were to result.

Neither was such a state of events peculiar to Perak, for Selangor, and to a lesser extent Sungei Ujong and Rembau, were undergoing similar disturbances. In fact, Khoo states that the affairs of Selangor appear to provide "a useful unifying theme for the very turbulent history of these Malay States at this period [as] the Mahdi-Kudin struggle eventually became the one issue in Malay politics which touched the interests of several Malay leaders outside the country of Selangor."³¹ The beginnings of the Selangor War in 1866 have been alluded to.³² As was seen in the case of Perak, the struggle inadvertently developed in magnitude and complexity with the progress of time.

The first complication to arise was the appointment of Tengku Kudin, a Kedah prince and therefore an outsider in the eyes of the Selangor princes, as the Viceroy of Selangor. He was empowered to act from the date of his appointment (26th June, 1868) as the representative of the Sultan with "the full authority

29. Khoo, op. cit., p. 267.

30. Ibid., pp. 267 - 275.

31. Ibid., p. 255.

32. Refer preceding chapter.

of the Sultan."³³ To him was entrusted the task of settling the Klang war. Instead of applying his power and authority as Sultan for the control of the Selangor chiefs and the maintenance of the general peace in the State,³⁴ Sultan Abdul Samad had in fact introduced an issue of contention in Selangor by delegating his authority to Tengku Kudin, a Viceroy much resented by the Selangor aristocrats "who were set on getting rid of outsiders."³⁵ Around the figure of Tengku Kudin therefore was to revolve much of the conflict, complications and bitterness of the Selangor war.

Alongside this tussle for power, the Chinese miners in Selangor were also involved in a struggle for economic supremacy in the mining areas. However, lacking the immense backing, political and financial, which close commercial connections with Penang merchants afforded for the Larut miners, the Chinese in Selangor were somewhat more dependent on alliances with the Malay princes. Hence arose a situation in which the developments of the Selangor war were closely followed for possibilities whereby advantages in the Malay conflict could be harnessed for their own cause.³⁶

Consequently, by the beginning of the 1870's, both factions of the Chinese conflict, the Hai San and the Kah Yeng Chew were attempting to align their military fortunes with one or other of the contesting Malay parties. Prior to that, Yap Ah Loy, the leader of the Hai-San group, appears to have merely bided his time by courting the approval of both sides without "committing himself [if he could help it] too overtly" to either party.³⁷ This Middlebrook attributed to the relative weakness of his position around the closing years of the 1860's. However, the moment of decision for Yap Ah Loy appears to have arrived with the siege of Klang by Raja Ismail, who was aided in turn by Tengku Kudin, the Sultan's

33. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 30

34. Ibid., p. 25.

35. Gullick, op. cit., p. 15.

36. Refer to Middlebrook, p. 30. Also see preceding chapter.

37. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 45

Viceroy.³⁸ As Yap Ah Loy watched the proceedings, it became clear to him that "nothing could save Mahdi's garrison unless the Fei Chews were prepared and strong enough to help him."³⁹ With this turn in fortunes, Yap Ah Loy was quick to bridle the ascendant power of Tengku Kudin for his cause. It was thus recorded that in November, 1869, Yap Ah Loy "visited the Sultan at Langat to explain matters and to ask for help against the Ka Yin Chius of Kanching."⁴⁰ From thence, it was said that "the relationship between Kudin and Ah Loy was particularly cordial."⁴¹ His decision was also rewarded in the short-run for the Sultan provided Ah Loy with ammunition, gunpowder, money and opium for his proposed expedition against the Kah Yeng Chews.

The expedition against Kanching, said to have been undertaken some time between February and June, 1870, ended in a massacre of about one hundred Kah Yeng Chews.^{41a} This incident was to mark the beginning of armed conflict between the two groups of Chinese in Selangor. Middlebrook aptly sums the situation up in the following,

He [Yap Ah Loy] started with potentially hostile Kah Yeng Chews to the north and south of him: he finished with those to the north, at least with good reason for taking up arms against him at the earliest opportunity. It is significant that though the first attack on Kuala Lumpur was made from the east, most of the subsequent fighting was in the area north of the town. It was in Ulu Selangor, not Ulu Langat, that Chong and Sayid Mashhor gathered the majority of their men.⁴²

Hence, by 1870, "the fighting which had begun on the Klang River [had] spread to other parts of the State."⁴³ Not only had it spread in terms of magnitude but the issues of contention had also broadened. As Khoo remarked, "1870-1871, therefore, saw the beginning of a merger of interests between Malay leaders and Chinese headmen in wars which were originally not related to each other."⁴⁴

38. Blythe, op. cit., p. 73.

39. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 44.

40. Blythe, op. cit., p. 173.

41. Khoo, op. cit., p. 256.

41a. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 48.

42. Ibid., p. 49.

43. Ibid., p. 48.

44. Khoo, op. cit., p. 256.

Similar to the Larut war, as the conflict developed, wider and wider issues and interests became involved together with their inevitable chain of alliances and counter-alliances. Among the first dissatisfied element to support the Kah Yeng Chews against the Kudin-Ah Loy alliance was Syed Mashhor. Originally a "noted Malay warrior" under Tengku Kudin's command, Syed Mashhor fell out with the Sultan and Tengku Kudin as a result of the murder of his brother, Abdullah, at Langat.⁴⁵ According to Middlebrook, he had reason to believe that Raja Ya'akob, the son of Sultan Abdul Samad and full brother of 'Arfah, Kudin's wife, was responsible for the deed.⁴⁶ Angered by the state of affairs, he left his assignment at Kuala Selangor and went to Kuala Langat. It was at Langat he agreed to join forces with Chong Chong, the leader of the Kah Yeng Chews against the Kudin-Ah Loy group. A combined attack on Kuala Lumpur was subsequently carried out (September to October 1870), but the Chong Chong-Syed Mashhor men were successfully repulsed by a joint force of Fei Chew Chinese and Mandeling Malays (the latter under the command of Raja Asal, a Mandeling Malay who had allied with Yap Ah Loy against the Kah Yeng Chews in his earlier expedition to Kanching). Defeated, Syed Mashhor was forced to retreat to Ulu Selangor where it appears he made common cause with Mahdi who was then in control of Kuala Selangor.⁴⁷

Some time in May or June of 1871, Chong Chong and Syed Mashhor made another attack on Kuala Lumpur, but were disastrously routed at Rawang, and Syed Mashhor had to retire to Ulu Selangor again. Around this time, a case of piracy in the mouth of the Selangor River brought the wrath of the Colonial government at the Straits Settlements on the heads of the culprits. Though the issue was far from that of a simple punitive expedition,⁴⁸ the occasion gave the British the chance to shell and destroy the fortifications at the mouth of

45. Cowan, C.D., Nineteenth Century Malaya, O.U.P., 1961, p. 76.

46. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 52.

47. Cowan, op. cit., p. 76.

48. The British government at Singapore had been partial to Tengku Kudin as early as 1870 and had sought to give him indirect support in his dealings and clashes with the Selangor chiefs. (Khoo, p. 212) In fact Khoo questions if the "colonial authorities had not capitalized on the Kim Seng Cheong (cont'd)

the Selangor river. The British mission also succeeded in extracting a formal statement from Sultan Abdul Samad reaffirming the grant to Kudin of complete authority over all those districts of Selangor that were not under the direct rule of the Sultan.⁴⁹ This development substantially threatened the future position and power of Raja Muda Musa, heir apparent to the throne of Selangor. Consequently, he allied with Mahdi and Syed Mashhor in the hope of expelling Kudin.

As the scope of interests represented by the struggle widened, the field of contestants was to spread even to beyond the borders of Selangor itself. The involvement of the Perak chiefs and their motivations have been discussed. This occurred in the early half of 1871. The intervening action of the British in favour of Kudin has been seen, and so has the involvement of Kudin himself, a Kedah man with his force of Kedah followers.⁵⁰ The bombardment of Selangor struck at Mahdi's stronghold and he soon left to recruit men and requisition arms from Sumatra and Singapore. The Maharaja Abu Bakar of Johore was clearly in sympathy with Mahdi.⁵¹ Raja Mahmud, the other outstanding warrior in Mahdi's faction, took temporary shelter in Sungei Ujong, the Klana of which furnished him with right of way and other assistance. On the other side, Tengku Kudin was able to secure the backing of Wan Ahmad, the Bendhara of Pahang and bitter enemy of the Maharaja of Johore. He also obtained the support of the Penghulu of Rembau, a state adjacent to that of Sungei Ujong. Also involved on either side of the contest were Chinese miners and powerful merchants and financiers, predominantly Chinese residing in the Straits Settlements.

A similar pattern of outside interest and involvement was exhibited in the Perak conflict and subsequently in the one to develop in Sungei Ujong. It therefore seems apparent that the disturbances were not merely localized and

48. (cont'd) affair [name of the boat that was plundered] to enable Kudin to gain control over Sungai Selangor" (Khoo, p. 258)

49. Cowan, op. cit., p. 91.

50. Cowan explains this succinctly in p. 71.

51. Khoo, op. cit., p. 274.

petty internal wars but that a wide spectrum of interests, motivations and issues was at stake. Each of the actual scenes of strife was thus only a convenient battleground for the settlement of wider differences. Such outside intervention in what originated as internal succession disputes and economic squabbles over mining rights could not help but have prejudicial effects on the areas involved. The injection of outside aid, for example, often in the form of financial and material backing, moral support, and finally the offer of refuge in cases of temporary set-backs, undoubtedly helped to exacerbate the tenacity and scale of the conflict. It has been said for instance that "it was the merchants who provided the sinews of war."⁵² Thus externally prolonged beyond the usual course and capacity of a succession dispute or a common faction fight between two mining groups, the negative effects on the social and physical environment could be immense. What effect did this have on the nature of overseas Chinese social organization in the western Malay States?

In the case of Selangor there were three major sieges of Kuala Lumpur in which Chinese fighting men were employed on either side. Subsequently, there were campaigns by Yap Ah Loy to retake Kuala Lumpur and later attack the town of Kanching. In the second siege of Kuala Lumpur where Yap Ah Loy's men were reported to have emerged victorious, their casualty rate over the entire period of the siege was calculated in the region of "25% of the men engaged, of whom about half were killed and half wounded."⁵³

Bearing in mind the massive armies used in the type of warfare in the western Malay States at that time,⁵⁴ it is obvious that "constant recruitment was essential even for the victors."⁵⁵ The ability of the Chinese headmen in

52. Gullick, see Khoo, p. 328.

53. Middlebrook, notes on the text, p. 110.

54. In each of the battles, it was recorded that forces on either side from 1,000 to 2,000 men were usually involved. Middlebrook, pp. 66, 59, 67, and 74.

55. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 110.

the warring Malay States to perpetuate such a practice stemmed in part from alliances with the Malay chiefs but more directly from financial backing which the Straits merchants were prepared to offer to both the Malay chiefs and the Chinese headmen. As a result, prolonged conflict among the Chinese "seriously depleted the labour available for working the mines, in addition to stopping all work when fighting was in progress in neighbourhood."⁵⁶ An even more important long-term consequence was that pointed out by Middlebrook;

these campaigns could only be continued by bringing men in from outside the area. Inevitably this led to the introduction of men fitted more for fighting than mining. Much of the rioting and other troubles that occurred after the conclusion of the civil war in Selangor, and the clan wars in the other mining districts, was undoubtedly due to the recruitment of persons selected for characters not well suited to peaceful conditions.⁵⁷

This probably is one of the more serious and signal effects on Chinese social organization in the post-disturbances period in the Malay States. This, more than the temporary hardships of economic dislocation and scarcity, was to influence the course and nature of Chinese social organization in the Malay States. The need to contend with a restless population composed predominantly of fighting men whose skill and energies had no place in times of peace could prove problematic. In turn, the measures and steps adopted to handle them might themselves generate cyclical effects.

Another potentially significant development that was to influence post-disturbance social organization was the loss of prominent military leaders in the course of skirmishes.⁵⁸ Did depletion of men at the top of the secret-society echelon result in the alleviation of the tense social situation whereby these ranks had become clogged through lack of turnover? Or did the exigencies of war eventually mitigate against its effects?

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Teng Sam and Tung Khoo, two important military leaders under Ah Loy's regime were killed in the war. Also in Larut, So Ah Cheong, one of the leaders of the Chinese community was recorded killed in the course of that war. (Refer Middlebrook, p. 20, and Khoo, p. 249, respectively)

In Selangor's case, of which more comprehensive records exist, the latter seems to have obtained. In these large-scale and long-drawn out conflicts, quite unlike localized fights between rival secret societies in the preceding decade, massive forces were involved and the question of loyalty could no longer be taken for granted, betrayal and defection increasing in probability. Consequently a necessity to forestall its occurrence arose. This took shape in the appointment of trusted men who were either personally known to or connected through clan or real kinship ties with the Capitan. This was particularly evident in Yap Ah Loy's following. At the start of the disturbances, he had his two most trusted panglimas, Hiu Fatt and Chung Piang, in charge of the guards. As the war developed, Teng Sam and Tung Khoon, two men who accompanied him to Kuala Lumpur from Sungei Ujong and who according to the records were Ah Loy's close friends, were appointed panglimas in additon to Chung Piang and Hiu Fatt.

It was in the further progression of the Selangor war that this trend became increasingly evident. At the second siege of Klang, it was recorded that one of the Capitan (Captains) of his troops was Yap Voon Lung, a name that had not been mentioned in the records before then.⁵⁹ One would suspect that he was one of the men recruited from Yap Ah Loy's clansmen in China and who had subsequently distinguished himself in service. Meritorious promotions it seems were still practised, only this time with probably an added principle of selection in tow, that of personal relationship and ties with the Capitan. Even at the beginning of the first attack on Kuala Lumpur, Yap Ah Loy had started to surround himself with his own kin and clansmen. According to the records, his brother, Yap Tet Fong, ranked as significantly as Chung Piang and Hiu Fatt in their capacities as recruiting agents for the Capitan.⁶⁰

At the end of the third and final attack on Kuala Lumpur, when it fell to Yap Ah Loy's opponents, Teng Sam and Tung Khoon were recorded to have been killed in battle. It is of interest to note the new group of military leaders

59. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 61.

60. Ibid.. p. 53.

appointed to replace these two men and also to strengthen the entire corps of fighting men. Ah Loy, it was recorded, divided his men into eight groups in the campaign to retake Kuala Lumpur. Each group of men was placed under a leader, Hiu Fatt and Chung Piang (jointly in charge of one group), Yap Kwee, Yap Yeng Onn, Yap Fa Tho, Ng Ki, Yap Tong Li, Loh Ah Seng and Hiu Lok (each in charge of a group).⁶¹ The preponderance of Yaps in the new group of appointed leaders is apparent. Thus indirectly, a system of patronage had been born out of the exigencies of war. As a result of this system, a further consolidation of the entrenched leadership was to occur as these men were likely to protect and defend their patron with great zeal, for he had become the sole author of their rise in social standing within the hierarchy. The effects of the war thus effectively removed the final rationale for maintaining even a semblance of contact between the leaders and the led.⁶²

A further development was to lend itself to a greater consolidation of the established leadership. The massive recruitment of fighting men necessary for the continuation of the struggle left its legacy in times of peace as mentioned. To deal with problems of law and order engendered by the presence of such tough and dissatisfied fighting men in the community, the Capitan was thus provided with a basis, even in times of peace, to perpetuate a close circle of trusted panglimas around himself. A necessary corollary of this was the perpetuation of the recruitment pattern whereby only men related to the leadership in some personal capacity were admitted to the ranks of military or administrative leadership. The result could only be a greater entrenchment of the established ruling clique.

61. Ibid., p. 79.

62. The gradual withdrawal of secret society leadership from grass-roots support was evident even at the time of Yap Ah Loy's succession as Capitan, but it was not until the outbreak of disturbances that the severance became complete.

This course of transformation certainly appears to have taken place in the Fei Chew community in the Klang mines of Selangor. The wider implications and consequences of these trends for the social organization and stability of the settlement will be the subject of later comment. Meanwhile, it is essential to ascertain how far the two other major Chinese settlements in the western Malay States, Sungei Ujong and Larut, shared in these trends as the result of similar disturbances.

Sungei Ujong, it was seen, was a declining mining area even before the outbreak of the Selangor war in the 1860's. Increased pressures on Klang's resources had in fact been partially generated by a general exodus of able and ambitious men from Sungei Ujong who eventually found their way to Klang.⁶³ However, at the outbreak of conflict between the two antagonistic Chinese groups in Selangor, some time in 1870, a reverse in flow of refugees could have taken place, a flow which probably increased in the ensuing years as the attacks and counter-attacks on the mining areas increased in ferocity.⁶⁴ By 1873, it was said that "the real grievance [in a fast-developing hostility between Kudin and the Dato Klana of Sungei Ujong] was that the Chinese miners who had been driven out of Klang, had come to work in Sungei Ujong and Tuanku Kudin wished to drive them back."⁶⁵

In an earlier postulation, it was argued that the Fei-Chew Hakka, belonging to the Hai-San society, probably gained an ascendancy over the Kah-Yeng-Chew Hakka, members of the Tsung Pak Kun, in the 1850's and from then onwards were able to secure the leadership of the area, except perhaps for a brief interruption in 1860 when the Hai-San Capitan China of Rasah was temporarily defeated. That the days of Rasah's prosperity were numbered as early as 1860

63. A case in point was Liu Ngim Kong's relatives who took the excuse to go to Klang and some, prominent among them Chong Chong, stayed on to contest the position of Capitan to the last.

64. Middlebrook gives a good account of the progress of the war.

65. Shaw (Lt. Governor of Malacca), see Khoo, op. cit., p. 319.

was evidenced by Yap Ah Loy's decision to relinquish his post as Capitan China in Sungei Ujong and leave for Klang. Perhaps through a progressive depletion of the ranks of the Hai-San society by their migration to Klang, a reassertion of the Kah-Yeng-Chew power in Sungei Ujong took place, for by 1874 the Kah Yeng Chew were a group to be reckoned with. Reports indicated, for example, that bitter rivalry between the Fei Chew and the Kah Yeng Chew was in evidence in 1874.⁶⁶ The numbers on both sides were probably augmented by miners from Klang and Kanching respectively.

By 1874, it was estimated that the Chinese population in Sungei Ujong numbered "just over 10,000" and that they were probably divided into several groups as "the names of at least five headmen are on record."^{66a} Despite this fact however, there were really two major factions lined up against each other in that year, the Fei Chew against the Kah Yeng Chew-Cantonese faction. In addition, except for the record of one incident in which the Fei Chew "attacked the Kheks^{66b} and burnt all that remained of Rassa",⁶⁷ Chinese rivalry in Sungei Ujong did not flare up into any massive conflict to the extent that obtained in Larut and Klang. That a disturbance was averted has been accredited to the timely intervention of the British in the matter. As Pickering wrote,

I am quite persuaded that the man [Bandar] did not think of fighting after he saw us in force, and especially after he could not hope for Chinese assistance. That the Chinese would have joined if we had not come and explained things to them I have evidence from themselves, and the result would have most likely been a general disturbance.⁶⁸

But another probable explanation could well be that there was comparatively less wealth at stake in the mining areas in Sungei Ujong. This, coupled with the relatively broken history of settlement, may have played a role in warding off

66. Khoo, op. cit., p. 372.

66a. Ibid., p. 372.

66b. The Kheks were most probably Kah Yeng Chew, refer Khoo, p. 371.

67. Dunlop's report, Dec. 1874, see Khoo, p. 371.

68. Pickering's report, 14th Oct., 1874, see Khoo, p. 373.

a protracted struggle similar to those which occurred in the other two states. After all unsettled political conditions in the nature of those in Selangor and Perak were also found in Sungei Ujong especially at the end of 1872. Yet the Chinese had not taken advantage of succession skirmishes for their aggrandisement, a quiescence which certainly could not be accounted for by British action as they had not come on the scene at that point of time.

It is argued that the economic stakes in the area were small enough and the length of stay sufficiently abbreviated that developments in the scale of entrenched class and family interests, as well as of political consolidation such as had occurred in the other settlements, did not occur in Sungei Ujong. One may take as an example, the man identified as "probably the richest of the Chinese [in Sungei Ujong]" , Wong Ying,⁶⁹ who according to Khoo had been in Sungei Ujong since the 1840's. Despite the length of time he had been in Sungei Ujong and the economic standing which he had acquired by 1874, his name was not even mentioned in records of earlier decades. In fact, when referring to the 1860's, Middlebrook singled out Yap Ah Shak as the leading trader and gambling farmer in Sungei Ujong.⁷⁰ It is not clear what happened to Ah Shak in the interim period between being the leading trader in Sungei Ujong in the 1860's and a leading mining employer in Kuala Lumpur in 1874.⁷¹ Judging from the account he must have been in Kuala Lumpur for some time prior to that as he had become "the biggest tin miner [in Selangor] after Ah Loy himself."⁷²

Indeed, scant data on Chinese activities in Sungei Ujong has posed a persistent problem in the piecing together of its history.⁷³ Despite this and despite the initial existence of close connections between the miners in Sungei Ujong and the merchants in Malacca,⁷⁴ there exists sufficient evidence to assume

69. Khoo, op. cit., p. 373.

70. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 16.

71. Ibid., p. 91.

72. Ibid., p. 73.

73. Khoo, op. cit., p. 369.

74. Ibid., p. 45.

that by 1874 the Chinese settlement in Sungei Ujong had developed into a fairly independent economic entity. Hence, when the Dato Klana of Sungei Ujong decided to institute an opium farm in his district and to let it out to a Malacca man, there was considerable "restlessness" among the local Chinese headmen. Subsequently, the Klana had to change his mind and offered it to the local Capitan China instead.

The picture was vastly different in the case of Larut. Khoo has remarked that "the available data [on the Chinese in Perak] are [considerably] more substantial."⁷⁵ Though the proximity of Larut to the British colony of Penang has often been thought to have given rise to this, it nevertheless seems that the close documentation of events in Larut could be more directly attributable to the active participation of actual Penang residents in the frequent conflicts of the area. This may be gathered from Raja Abdullah's plea for assistance in dealing with the Larut conflict. He said,

Now we have got sufficient power to go to Laroot and stop the fighting, but among the men who are making the disturbances are a great number of our Friend's subjects from Penang, and so we are much troubled in mind how to put a stop to this by ourselves without our Friend's taking a part with us.⁷⁶

Unlike Selangor and Sungei Ujong, where Straits merchants merely supplied the war capital, the struggle in Larut was much more closely welded to the machinations of the Penang merchants, who were involved, not only in the financing, recruiting and equipping of the fighting men, but were also involved in the active direction of the entire struggle. As a consequence, in order to compare the effects of the Larut disturbances on trends of development in the Chinese communities involved it will be necessary to take the Chinese population of Penang into consideration.

⁷⁵. Ibid., p. 350.

⁷⁶. SSR, 07, 2nd April, 1873, see Khoo, p. 314.

As far as Larut was concerned, the creation and subsequent perpetuation of an entrenched economic and possibly political leadership within the district was probably already inherent in the system of mining grants adopted by Long Ja'afar. As seen, Lau Ah Sam was give sole rights to mining in the district, and it was only through him that an allotment of land and rights could be obtained. Lau was in turn represented on the spot by Chang Keng Kwi to whom was entrusted the responsibility of overseeing the actual mining operations. All works in Long Ja'afar's d's were of course financed by Long Ja'afar himself, which meant that the only substantial profits which Lau Ah Sam and Chang Keng Kwi could derive from the system were through the provisioning of their men and the manipulation of their wages.

Such a system unmistakably induced the Chinese managers to limit their recruitment to men who were already subject to their control within the Hai-San secret society, as their economic success depended vitally on their ability to maintain and enforce a rigid economic domination over the labourers. Hence the creation and perpetuation of an entrenched economic leadership in Larut became built into the initial cession of mining rights.

Although Ngah Ibrahim, Long Ja'afar's successor, followed less stringent lines in the granting of mining concessions, he nevertheless continued his father's policy of dealing through Lau Ah Sam. This was evident from his statement to the British. He remarked, "Lau Ah Sam used to make the distribution of the allotment at the mines."⁷⁷ He also testified that

Lau Ah Sam is head of Hysan Congsee and farmed the tin mines at Larut from me. He is the representative of the original settlers at the mines and he has as farmer management of them. I have always protected this man.⁷⁸

This therefore ensured for Lau Ah Sam and Chang Keng Kwi even after Long Ja'afar's death, the perpetuation of their economic hegemony in Larut.

⁷⁷. See Khoo, op. cit., p. 241.

⁷⁸. Ibid.

In the case of Penang, economic leadership had always been concentrated in the hands of the local-born Hokkien in that settlement. In fact, the many riots and inter-society feuds that occurred throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century were often attributed to the jealousy of other groups of Chinese, comparative late-comers to the scene, who were anxious to establish themselves. Hence the long-standing feuds between the Ghee Hin and the Toa Peh Kong (representing the local-born group) were interpreted as attempts by the Ghee Hin to challenge the Toa Peh Kong leadership.⁸⁰ In a similar strain, Blythe comments "in Penang these riots [August, 1867] marked the culmination of the struggle between the Kien Tek [which he thinks was synonymous to Toa Peh Kong] and the Ghee Hin."⁸¹

The Ghee-Hin challenge for a share of the Toa Peh Kong's leadership and economic power, though centred on the arena of Penang was by no means confined to it. Hence Khaw Boo Aun, a sugar planter in Province Wellesley and Krian took up arms against the Toa Peh Kong in an attempt to prevent "the ambitious and resourceful Penang Hokkien from further monopolising new fields of commerce."⁸³ In similar spirit, the Ho Hup Seah of Larut took on the Mai-San and Toa-Peh-Kong backed mine owners and financiers in that district.

Consequently the situation in Larut and Penang, both before and during the disturbances of the 1870's, was somewhat different from that which existed in Selangor. While the Selangor disturbances were actually used to consolidate the position of an emergent economic power in the mines, the Larut war on the contrary was essentially an attempt to dislodge an already strongly established and entrenched economic hegemony in the area.

These differences in long term aspirations, expectations and eventual achievements notwithstanding, the immediate effects of the disturbances were

80. CO 273/3, Resident Councillor of Penang to Blundell, 1859, see Khoo, p. 39.

81. Blythe, op. cit., p. 98.

83. Khoo, op. cit., p. 367.

fairly similar. The emphasis on military skills, manoeuvres and defences meant that the political prestige and power of leaders were greatly elevated in the short-run. The need to amass large fighting forces could not help but inspire awe. The crisis situation of a war, coupled with a desperate need for protection, further ensured for those leaders the command of their people's support and co-operation. All in all, the disturbances made for a consolidation of political leadership, though with very different end results in the two states — Perak and Selangor.

In Selangor, the ascendancy gained by Yap Ah Loy served him in good stead, as he was to subsequently win both support for and confirmation of his position from the British when they intervened in Selangor's politics and administration shortly after the end of the war. That he was able to so successfully harness his gains was in no mean degree a result of his having supported the victorious British-backed Malay faction in the Selangor war. Tengku Kudin's actions immediately after the end of the war appear to provide substantiation to this claim. It was recorded that shortly after securing his own control over Selangor, Kudin hastened to bestow his public recognition of Ah Loy's position vis-à-vis the Chinese in Kuala Lumpur and Klang.⁸⁴ But perhaps of greater significance to Ah Loy's interest and the securing of his own undisputed leadership over the Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur was the fact that his military partner, Tengku Kudin, won the war with the aid of external allies (for example, the Bendahara of Pahang), all the major chiefs of Selangor having joined forces with the faction that opposed him (Kudin).⁸⁵ This thus ensured for Ah Loy that no other major chief of Selangor could claim for his own Chinese supporter a similar share in the honours awarded to Ah Loy, as none of these chiefs numbered among the victorious party. Consequently, the events of the Selangor

⁸⁴. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 83.

⁸⁵. Khoo, op. cit., p. 278 and 281.

war effectively helped Ah Loy in the elimination of any real and potential rival to his power. It is significant that Chong Chong, the most determined challenger to Ah Loy's position, fled the country after Ah Loy re-took Kuala Lumpur.

For the Chinese leaders in Larut the outcome of that war was vastly different. In the first place the struggle was not brought to an end by any decisive victory. Rather, the proceedings were halted by the forcible intervention of the British. Consequently neither faction (that is the respective Malay chiefs and their Chinese allies) could lay claim to the spoils of the war. These were therefore duly divided between the two warring Malay parties, and their Chinese allies, the terms of which were respectively embodied in the Pangkor Engagement and the Pangkor Agreement. Only the latter will concern us here.

In this settlement, the British Commission, set up to arbitrate the Chinese conflict, divided the mines in Larut by a line drawn across the district, those to the north of the line to go to the Ho Hup Seah and those to the south to be retained by the Hai San.⁸⁶ In effect this was to give the Ho Hup Seah in Larut equal rights with the Chin-Sang men (Hai San) in the area.⁸⁷ Thus, on an individual level, the eventual outcome of the Larut disturbances enabled each Chinese leader in the area to retain the personal advantage which he had gained in terms of the consolidation of his own leadership vis-à-vis his supporters during the war. But on an overall level, where leadership and domination within the entire district was at stake, the termination of the war did not give rise to the ascendancy of any one group over the others. Nor was even the slight supremacy which the Hai San-Toa Peh Kong faction obtained during the war over the Ho Hup Seah -Ghee Hin alliance given practical expression in the final settlement.⁸⁸ In

86. Blythe, op. cit., p. 187.

87. Ibid.

88. In September, 1873, the Hai San managed to secure the support of the British British government, through their alliance with the Mantri. From then on, they began to gain ground on the Ho-Hup-Seah faction. Refer Blythe, p. 182-4.

this respect, the close of the Larut war differed significantly from that which existed with regard to Chinese leadership in Selangor.

One may say that this disparity stemmed, in a way, from an initial difference in circumstances and objective. It would also seem as if the intervention of the British at the time they did in the course of the Larut war helped to arrest and accentuate the differences mentioned between Selangor and Perak. This refers specifically to the way in which British intervention, and subsequent arbitration, in the Larut dispute acted for the reinstitution of the Ho-Hup-Seah group in their mines, with equal economic rights and status to those of the Hai-San society. This externally imposed settlement may, indeed, lend itself to the interpretation that British intervention in the course of the Chinese conflict in Larut, as compared to a seeming absence in Ah Loy's campaigns, directly resulted in the difference in situations. As Blythe pointed out, the terms of the agreement were not really acceptable to the Hai-San headman who had hoped that his position could be improved "by their [his and the Mantri's] supporters on the ground."⁸⁹ It was only the administrative presence of the British in Larut that effectively foiled the Hai San's designs.⁹⁰ Consequently British intervention in no small way helped in the establishment and eventual perpetuation of a dual leadership with the Chinese community in Larut.

If the role of the British in influencing the development of the Chinese communities in 1874 and after can be established beyond little doubt, their responsibility in generating disparate situations in Perak and Selangor through the apparent pursuit of divergent policies, is nevertheless open to question. Although the results of British action in Larut appear to be more readily evident, the consequences of their policies with regard to the Chinese in Selangor did not,

89. Blythe, op. cit., p. 188.

90. Swettenham recorded that "during the early part of the year [1874] several petty outbreaks occurred, but this was entirely owing to the machinations of a few fighting chiefs of the Goh-Quan [Hai San] faction whose occupation, now that peace was proclaimed was gone. Nine of these men, however, were, by my advice, deported by the Mantri on the 23rd July and since then everything has been as satisfactory as could be desired." (Swettenham's Journal).

as a matter of fact, differ all that materially from those in Larut. Perhaps initial discrepancies in circumstances of intervention distract from basic underlying similarities in effects. The establishment of indirect British rule in Perak served, for example, to affirm and maintain the authority and power of the established Chinese leaders in the district, very much as it had done in Selangor. Indeed, this common feature of British indirect rule was to have some far-reaching repercussions on the general nature and relevance of Chinese leadership within the mining communities of the western Malay States.

British Intervention, 1874

In Perak, the Larut was tentatively ended by an agreement signed in January, 1874, which submitted the dispute over mining lands to the arbitration of a Commission composed of "one or more officers of the Colony Government with one Chinese from each side".⁹¹ Among the provisions for the observance of the truce was the stipulated disarmament of both parties and the destruction of their stockades. As an additional safeguard, "all future arrangements as to water supply" were to be left solely to the decision of a British Resident who would be stationed at Larut.⁹²

The Commission mentioned was duly appointed and a tour of the Larut mines began. Among the objectives of the Commissioners were the determination of the legal basis for claims to mine lands and the supervision of a thorough destruction of stockades, as well as the total surrender of arms. By 20th February, 1874, the major tasks of the Commission had been deemed satisfactorily accomplished and an award of lands was made. This award (referred to earlier) established a definite boundary between the Hai-San mines and the Ho-Hup-Seah mines.⁹³ To set a seal to their work, Speedy was immediately appointed as

91. Blythe, op. cit., p. 186.

92. Ibid.

93. This referred only to extant workings; new workings could be started by either party in both sectors, subject of course to the issue of proper leases by the Assistant Resident.

Assistant Resident, with special charge of Larut. The role of the Resident was never clear-cut. As Cowan remarked, "the treaty gave the Resident no executive powers, but it stipulated that his advice 'must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay Religion and Custom.'" ⁹⁴ However, since "the collection and control of all Revenues and the general administration of the country [was to] be regulated under the advice of these Residents," the office, in reality, carried with it, as Cowan pointed out, the effective control of the country. ⁹⁵ The Assistant Resident was to be under the general control of the Resident.

In Perak's case, however, the appointment of a Resident was somewhat delayed, and Captain Speedy was said to have "ruled Larut himself, without reference to any other authority." ⁹⁶ Speedy, nevertheless, took swift measures to organize a strong police force, incorporating the Mantri's Malay police force into his own following of Indian recruits. With regard to the Chinese he acknowledged the authority and leadership of the secret-society headmen, Chang Keng Kwee (Hai San) and Chin Ah Yam (Ho Hup Seah), consulting with them and communicating through them to the miners. ⁹⁷ Working on the foundations laid by the government Commission which broke the military arm of the secret societies' power, Speedy was able to secure the acceptance and acquiescence of both secret society headmen, to his rule and to their own mutual co-existence. ⁹⁸ With their co-operation and approval, so Speedy claimed, he prohibited secret societies from Larut and dealt with Chang Keng Kwi and Chin Ah Yam as if they were merely "the wealthiest and most influential men in Larut." ⁹⁹

This rather naive ¹⁰⁰ yet diplomatic non-recognition of the headmen's bases of power by no means eliminated the secret-society presence from Larut, but it did succeed in limiting the opportunities for the establishment of new

⁹⁴. Cowan, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

⁹⁵. Ibid.

⁹⁶. Ibid., p. 217.

⁹⁷. Ibid.

⁹⁸. Refer to earlier footnote regarding British action in relation to the Hai-San bid for a comeback.

lodges in the area. The policy of prohibition, for example, empowered the administration to deal with new, and therefore plainly evident, secret society activities. As it was also in the interest of the established leadership to stamp out possible challengers to their hegemony, information and help were quite readily volunteered. As Speedy recorded, "two attempts have been made during the year [1874] to establish lodges in Larut, but having received timely information, I have happily been enabled to crush each attempt in the bud."¹⁰¹ The informers undoubtedly were Chinese.¹⁰²

Inconsequential though this particular piece of communication may seem, the readiness with which Chinese leaders in Larut now turned to the British presence and power for support against any perceivable threat to their domination cannot but be seen as the addition of an important new factor in the maintenance of the Chinese power structure. This appeal to British action was not only sought in relation to potential rivals but also, at times, with regard to control over their own men.

In the area of indentured labour, for instance, legislation in the Straits Settlements provided for a formal written contract of the terms of indenture. This measure, adopted apparently for the mitigation of abuses inflicted on the labourers by crimps who sought to kidnap the men for work in the East Indies, in fact afforded greater protection to the coolie-brokers and employers.¹⁰³ With the terms of servitude clearly written down, an employer became eligible for police assistance in tracking down a runaway coolie. As Wong observed, "from 1877 onwards, all labourers under advances for mining had to sign a contract before leaving the Straits ports."¹⁰⁴ As part of its terms,

99. Cowan, op. cit., p. 217.

100. Ibid.

101. Blue book of Larut district in Perak (Swettenham's Papers)

102. Ibid.

103. Wong, op. cit., p. 70.

104. Ibid., p. 71.

the coolie was held liable for "all expenses of recapturing him" should he leave his employer before paying back the amount owing.¹⁰⁵ This clause appears to have anticipated not only the eventuality of desertion, which was common enough, but perhaps even envisaged the involvement of external parties in his recapture. With British administration committed to the actual policing of the western Malay States, much of such work would likely involve them. That the possibility is real enough is evidenced by the following report,

On my arrival in this Colony I found that cases have occurred in the Native Protected State of Perak in which Chinese prostitutes, who have sold themselves or been sold by others to the brothel keepers and have sought to escape, have been given back to them by the police under magisterial direction, to work out their debt by prostitution. Mr. Low reported upon such a case so long ago as 1878.¹⁰⁶

The establishment of a court of Justice along the lines of the British judicial system must also have been regarded, by the recognized Chinese headmen, as one more convenient instrument for the maintenance of their own power. Speedy had referred to "the readiness with which the people, especially the Chinese, avail themselves of the power of appeal to a European decision," in the first year of his service as Assistant Resident in Larut.¹⁰⁷ Although the general enthusiasm for, and resort to, British methods of justice could be exaggerated, the fact that a British court was able to function at all in their dealings with Chinese offenders must, nevertheless, be interpreted as a definite concession from the secret-society leaders.¹⁰⁸ That such a concession was made in the first place may indeed suggest a new vested interest in the operation of the British-administered judiciary.

The question that comes to mind is - why did the secret societies' leaders in Larut co-operate (to an extent) with the British law-keeping processes

105. Ibid.

106. Gov. Weld (Singapore) to Kimberley, 1880, in Swettenham's papers.

107. Blue Book of Larut, 1874.

108. In the early days of the Straits Settlement history, the cause of justice, as the British officials saw it, was often thwarted by secret society interference. Milne, for example, observed in 1818 that "they [secret society members] engage to defend each other against attacks from Police officers; (cont'd)

while their compatriots, at a similar phase of British rule in the Straits Settlements, did their utmost to frustrate them?¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the key to an understanding lies not with any particular phase of British rule but rather with the timing of its introduction.

The establishment of indirect British rule in Larut came at a time when the secret-society leaders in the area had achieved a degree of economic success and standing. Chin Ah Yam's statement that "some ten years ago, there were at Galien Pow [Klian Pauh] a large number of Goh-Quans with Ah Quee (not then a rich man) for their head"¹¹⁰ attests to the fact. Hence, these secret-society headmen, at the time of British intervention, were no longer poor, desperate men in positions of leadership, whose sole interest and avenue of success lay in opposing, at all costs and to all ends, the established authority and hierarchy in the area. To the contrary, having attained to positions of economic power themselves, their interest became aligned with that of the wider political authority whose role was the maintenance of order and the suppression of troublesome elements. In the execution of these duties, the wider administration could only lend support and affirmation to the headmen's own positions on the one hand and assist in the elimination of likely contenders to their hold on the other. It is significant that it was these "Chinese headmen in the country [Larut] who one and all concur in saying that they [secret societies] are but productive of evil and never of good" and therefore the future establishment of "any lodge of this kind in Larut" should be made penal.¹¹¹

Increased association with the British administrative processes thus had its advantages. But what might have seemed a most opportune move on the

108. (cont'd) to hide each other's crimes; to assist detected members to escape from the hands of Justice." For further accounts, refer Blythe, op. cit., p. 47.

109. Refer to preceding footnote.

110. Swettenham's Papers. By 1874, Ah Quee had become a rich man in Larut.

111. Blue Book of Larut, 1874.

part of the Chinese secret-society leaders in the mining settlements also brought with it significant hazards to the very authority which they had hoped to safeguard. Acting in concert with the British administration, for example, meant a continued exposure to its expectations and censure of Chinese behaviour and activities. The viability of such a partnership thus demanded some adjustments and accommodations, on the part of the Chinese leaders, to many of these objections. Possibly the joint denunciation of secret-society activities in Larut, issued by Speedy and the Chinese leaders in the district, was one manifestation to that end.

Freedman's study of the Chinese in Singapore demonstrated that when compulsory "registration and supervision" of secret societies in the settlement was effectively carried out, the internal authority of the secret-society leaders became considerably undermined, as "the super-imposition of an outside power weakened the headman vis-à-vis their followers and [thus] affected their ability to keep order within their own ranks."¹¹² A growing effectiveness in British administrative surveillance of secret-society activities, in Freedman's terms, brought on the fast culmination of the headmen's power. But whether the road to their decline did nor spring from a more remote source, or even from a longer history of steady erosion, is yet to be determined. In the case of the Malay States, the super-imposition of externally-held values and standards of social respectability in the Chinese communities might well have constituted the vital first stages in the eventual downfall of secret society leadership. And yet, in the final analysis, was the British government or the introduction of such methods of administration totally responsible for the fall of secret-society leadership and with it the very secret-society institution itself? Were the secret-society headmen altogether oblivious of the inherent pitfalls

¹¹². Freedman, op. cit., p. 32.

in their increasing reliance on and acquiescence with British rule?

The introduction of British rule in the Malay States infused a new factor into the extant situation and, even if that was its only contribution, would no doubt require some measure of response and adjustment to its presence. However, more than being a mere unobtrusive presence, the British administration took active measures in disarming the Chinese and in enforcing its rulings. In the process of the Commission's work to settle Chinese claims to mine lands in Larut, for example, the uncooperative Hai-San leaders were first arrested and one of their men was subsequently flogged in public for refusing to comply with its orders. In a parting speech, the same Commission assured or cautioned the Chinese with the statement that "the country was now under the advice and control of a government which would not only issue just laws for the benefit of its inhabitants, but would enforce them to the letter."¹¹³ Those who were dissatisfied or ill at ease with the new order were categorically advised to leave, as the slightest move to counteract the new measures would not be tolerated. The Commissioners further prescribed that Speedy, the Assistant Resident, "leave a sufficient force at the mines under an able officer...and we would beg that the slightest appearance of opposition on the part of either faction may be visited in the severest manner, as we are assured that that peaceful settlement which we are so anxious to obtain can be secured by no other means."¹¹⁴ Although the actual administration was far from able to enforce all its laws "to the very letter", especially in areas that were removed from the hub of government, the British authorities had, nevertheless, established the fact that they were serious in restoring peace and in keeping it. These were the new elements in the situation which the secret-society leaders in the Malay States had to contend with. Also, differently from their Straits-Settlements'

113. Swettenham's Papers.

114. Ibid.

experiences, or perhaps because of them, the British were much better able to detect and eradicate attempts at founding new secret-society groups in the protected Malay States. Consequently, the extant secret-society groups in the area were not placed under nearly as much strain to defend, by their own efforts, their acquired positions against contenders, as the Penang secret societies had been in earlier decades under British rule.

It would seem that British intervention was responsible for removing a prime rationale for secret-society operation and ferocity in the Malay States and, by so doing, had therefore condemned the institution to obsolescence. The contribution of the British government to secret-society decline in the Malay States appears clear, but perhaps what is less obvious, should one accept the view above, is the motivation which seems to have steered the secret-society headmen themselves to choose the path of their own undoing. Perhaps it was because their military strength was quite permanently crippled, or because they had reached such a state of stalemate that an outside authority became welcomed. Yet in the earlier years of Chinese economic exploitation in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States, such stalemate situations had arisen~~and~~ the severe crippling of each other's military strength had taken place, with no evident attempt to come to terms, to the extent that was occurring, with the British authorities.¹¹⁵ Instead, temporary set-backs were rapidly put right as best they could, and before long they were back in the fray, British injunctions against such activities notwithstanding.

These past events appear then, to suggest that a deeper transformation had come over the secret-society organizations in the Straits Settlements and the Malay States, changes which cannot be explained or even properly gauged by the spate of surface changes activated by British intervention. Perhaps more

115. Refer to Blythe's account of secret-society activities, especially in the Straits Settlements.

important, in this respect, than British policies and their demands for accomodation was the slow process of evolutionary development within the individual secret society. As Blythe observed, "in China ritualistic societies existed for centuries born of social needs, based on a combination of self-protection and spiritual satisfaction. Once established, such societies frequently deteriorated through the easy profits of power into tyrannical groups of bullies and extortioners."¹¹⁶

Morgan's study of Triad societies in Hong Kong also finds similar cycles of rise and fall in secret-society groups. In one of his observations, he wrote, "societies rise and fall frequently and the turn-over is great. New society names are always appearing and some of the older names have fallen into disuse."¹¹⁷ Secret societies, Morgan continued to explain, began by fulfilling a real need among their members, be it political resistance (e.g., Nationalist groups against the communist government in China) or minority-group solidarity (such as new immigrants from certain parts of China defending themselves against the local citizens and their secret-society groups).¹¹⁸

Secret-society organization, in its initial stage, thus, served a definite cause. It was a means to "bind everybody together"¹¹⁹ in a shared commitment to the achievement of certain goals. The political cause appears to illustrate this most prominently, but even in the pursuit of lesser objectives, such as the survival of one's minority group, and thereby one's self, the concept of shared interest in the common objective must be no less real. A case in point seems to be the South Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, whose circumstances of settlement threatened to make them easy prey for the local Triad societies. These refugees banded together and formed their "own consolidated Triad group," a solidarity that was extremely vital to their survival

¹¹⁶. Blythe, op. cit., p. 1.

¹¹⁷. Morgan, W.P., Triad Societies in Hong Kong, Gov't. Press, p. 90.

¹¹⁸. Ibid., pp. 79, 88.

¹¹⁹. Ibid., p. 79.

in the first stage of settlement.¹²⁰ It was only in solidarity that they could derive strength, and with strength, survival as a group and as individuals.

From these events and instances, it appears that each secret society's viability depended on the existence of a defined focus of cohesion. Given that, the secret-society apparatus provided an apt structural expression through which greater energy, discipline and commitment could be harnessed and marshalled. The disappearance of a common interest in the eventual objectives of the organization thus could bring dissipation of its strength. This might occur in one of several ways. The leaders, for example, could, as a result of personal successes, lose sight of or interest in the original aims of the organization. Or conversely, the rank-and-file, distracted by easy gains and profiteering which membership afforded, could cease to be guided by the initial motives of service and group achievement that brought the collectivity into existence. Finally, the secret society's strength could dissipate through the disappearance of the very cause for which it existed.¹²¹

Whatever the reason, the decline of a secret-society group was generally followed by a perceptible dissociation of the leaders from the rest of their men, as may be seen in the following example. According to Morgan, in 1945 the Nationalist Government of China made use of Triad societies for the organization of resistance to the Communists. When the Communists succeeded in taking over China, these secret societies

fled to Hong Kong. They were patriotic societies to begin with but later degenerated into criminal organizations. At the death of Lieutenant-General Kot Siu Wong, the more determined branch leaders embarked on a campaign of extortion and intimidation, the ruthlessness of which shocked not only the local societies,

120. Ibid.

121. This is especially relevant to resistance movements of a political nature, such as the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty or the attempt to repulse communist domination in China in their early days of take-over. For details, refer Morgan, p. 65. In the Malay States this also occurred, though to a much lesser extent.

but also some of the older 14K officials and branch leaders. Unable, or unwilling, to adopt similar tactics, certain of the sub-leaders retired from the scene and their followers were absorbed into the more forceful branches.¹²²

In the above case, some of the leaders, unable to identify with the new line of activity adopted by the men, opted out of the system and, thus, dissociated themselves from the organization as well as its members. In the mining settlements of the western Malay States, it is argued that such a process was in fact in progress at the time of British intervention in the area.

The initial aim of most migrants to the Malay States was the acquisition of material success through involvement in the production of tin. This common hope for fortune and success bound the men together in the face of adverse odds and untold oppression.¹²³ The leaders, though exploitative, nevertheless needed the men in their own quest for wealth and gain. Thus, in aspirations, at least, if not in the means of its achievement, the leaders and the led were agreed. Around this central focus of cohesion, the strength of the secret-society structure was built, reinforced, no doubt, by the uncertain conditions of the times which opened up opportunities of upward social mobility for the general rank-and-file.¹²⁴ Consequently, despite harsh exploitation, the ordinary mine labourer, through these faint but real glimmers of hope, was able to identify with the activities and objectives of the secret society in the early mining settlements in the western Malay States. Furthermore, as seen, in a pioneer mining society, the secret-society apparatus provided "some kind of community organization to meet the needs of new settlements."¹²⁵ In the performance of this role, therefore, each secret society became even better equipped to secure the energies and loyalties of its members. Hence, a combination of factors,

122. Morgan, op. cit., pp79-82.

123. Refer to preceding chapter.

124. Discussed in an earlier chapter.

125. Freedman, op. cit., p. 33.

including that of mutual defence against external threats, be they from the host society or other rival secret societies, facilitated the rise of these societies to supreme positions in the pioneer mining communities of the Malay States.

For reasons discussed, however, these initial bonds of mutual advantage, and therefore of shared interest, were fast becoming annulled by development and also by the spread of Chinese settlements in what began as hostile environment.¹²⁶ For example, with the gradual alleviation of external threats, save that from each other, the need to cling together as a group became commensurately less. Hence, solidarity and the survival of the organization became open to question. It has been suggested that just prior to the introduction of indirect British rule in 1874, secret-society leaders were in fact attempting to divert attention from the flagging internal situation by concentrating their men's attention on probable external threats and sources of irritation.¹²⁷ It has also been argued that the very frequency with which eruptions of petty inter-society skirmishes occurred was a further index of the waning control which the leaders had over the societies. The final outbreak of a full-scale internecine war in both Perak and Selangor may well bear overtones of a desperate attempt by the leaders to recover sufficient elbow-room for their respective members, so as to re-establish to some extent the original basis of cohesion and mutual commitment to a set of shared goals.

Despite these hopes and efforts, the development of such wars, for reasons discussed, made for a greater alienation between the leaders and the led.¹²⁸ The establishment of peace and, with it, the new demands of dealing with huge forces of fighting men, liable to turn into troublesome elements for want of profitable occupation, led, as seen, to a redoubled effort by

126. Discussed in preceding chapter.

127. Ibid.

128. Refer to earlier section in this chapter.

leaders to surround themselves with trusted and selected proteges, a trend that began at the commencement of the disturbances and which became further developed as fighting progressed. This invariably resulted in a further removal of contact between the secret-society leaders and the members. However, while inter-secret-society hostility and rivalry remained an active factor, the bonds of inter-dependence between leader and members, though greatly strained, could not as yet be entirely severed. The leaders, on the one hand, needed men for the defence of their positions against rival secret-society heads, and the men, on the other, stood the risk of being overrun by their opponent, should they lack organized resistance.

British intervention helped to remove the leaders' fears. By setting up a more regulated and better-staffed administrative machine, the British Residents and their Assistants were able to impress upon the established secret-society leadership in their respective states that the threat of rival secret-society headmen could be, and indeed was, dealt with. This was certainly the case in Perak and, in the support which the British administration gave to Yap Ah Loy in Selangor, was to prove to be the case in that state as well. In Sungei Ujong, too, the three Chinese Capitans were made to "enter into a \$10,000 bond (to be forfeited to His Excellency in case of offence) to keep the peace amongst themselves and to obey and assist the Klana always."¹²⁹ By removing their fear of each other and, indeed, of any possible and potential threats to their supremacy and economic domination, British indirect rule in the Malay States broke one of the last vital bonds which held the leaders to an active partnership with the very institution that once facilitated their rise to power. This is probably a more plausible explanation for the seemingly sudden about-face of Chinese secret-society leaders at the introduction of

¹²⁹. Pickering's Journal, from Singapore to Sungei Ujong.

British indirect rule in the Malay States.

Post-1874 - The Aftermath of British Intervention.

The perceptible dissociation of the well-established leaders from active secret-society affairs in no way meant that secret societies were no longer needed, nor that they had ceased to function altogether. As Blythe observed, "a deeply-rooted social habit which provided them [the miners] with personal protection, death benefits, and a pleasurable feeling of importance and strength,"¹³⁰ could not be done away with at an instant's notice. But the new development did mean that, while secret societies continued to function, their leaders had ceased to identify with their aspirations and objectives. Though maintaining contact with and utilizing, whenever convenient, the secret-society apparatus in the pursuit of their own goals,¹³¹ the leaders had, nevertheless, effectively detached themselves from the bulk of secret-society activity. In the context of the general social organization of the mine communities, one may say that a defined class structure had taken shape and social stratification had acquired new lines of demarcation.

The progress of inter-society wars in the Malay States in no small way aided in this eventual outcome. The system of patronage, so widely and unstintingly practised during the war, helped to build up within each secret society a corps of men who were totally dependent on the headman for their position. Being mere appointees, as opposed to successors by merit, these men were generally devoid of real contact with members at the grass-roots level. The headman, whose position and life had been overly prolonged (by secret-society standards) as a result of settled conditions of the time, was even further removed from the aspirations of the masses. In fact, the economic successes which he had been allowed to gain as a result of his long term of

¹³⁰. Blythe, op. cit., p. 191.

¹³¹. Refer Khoo, chapter 6.

leadership, transformed him from a champion (of sorts) of the masses' causes to an arch-opponent of them. Given the situation, about the only channel of contact which could be maintained between the members and their leader was through the intermediate ranks in the hierarchy,¹³² men who, in "normal" times, would have risen from the grass-roots level through some merit of personal distinction or valour. However, with the outbreak of hostilities and the change in pattern of recruitment on this level, the isolation of the headmen from their members appears to have been complete. In this way, therefore, the development of inter-society wars in the Malay States directly facilitated the maintenance of an even more enhanced gulf between secret-society leaders and their men. The perpetuation of such recruitment patterns in times of peace, on the assumption that only trusted and loyal men could deal with the problems presented by large forces of idle fighting men in the community, helped to carry through the ever-widening gap into the post-war era. Hence, the wars created both the opportunity and the mechanism for a more rapid breakaway between leaders and the main body of the secret-society organizations. In so doing, the wars contributed to the entrenchment of a defined class structure, in which each class and its interests became distinct and different from the next.

The changed pattern of recruitment for positions of rank in the secret-society hierarchy also brought with it other far-reaching changes in the social organization of the mining communities. It has been seen how a system of patronage based on particularistic criteria of selection resulted in the appointment of men who, in effect, had little if any real contact with or support from the masses. As the leaders became less interested and less concerned in secret-society affairs, the dependence on his intermediate ranks for information about and practical dealings with the general rank-and-file

132. Yap Ah Loy, for example, mainly dealt through Chung Piang (his military aide) and Voon Siew (his advisor in civil matters).

became commensrately greater. Yet, unlike pre-disturbance days these men were as out of tune with the general membership as the very author of their own privileged positions.

Given these factors, an effective maintenance of control can hardly be expected. Middlebrook frequently stressed the importance of Voon Siew's role in the perpetuation of Yap Ah Loy's regime in Kuala Lumpur. It was Voon Siew who took care of "drawing up rules and improved terms of service for [Ah Loy's] fighting men." It is he who "explained them to the troops...After most of the battles it was he who calculated the sums due to the participants, and saw that they received them."¹³³ Much of Voon Siew's shrewd judgements and perceptive reforms must have been born of long contact and interaction with the ordinary men in the society, as his actions, alluded to above, seem to betray a certain insight or feel for the people he dealt with. The strong personal element in his relationships with his men also shows an understanding of their lot and an ability to empathize with their difficulties. These characteristics, it is argued, could best have been derived from actual experiences as a member of the rank and file. After the end of the Selangor war, Voon Siew appears to have been displaced by Yap Ah Shak who, in 1875, was seen as Ah Loy's "right-hand man."¹³⁴ It is also significant to note that, since the appointment of a British Resident in Selangor, Yap Ah Loy, together with Yap Ah Shak, increasingly employed the British system of justice — trial by courts of law. As Middlebrook observed, "Ah Loy and Ah Shak sat as magistrates to try minor cases. Until 1878, serious cases were remitted for trial in Klang; between 1878 and 1880 the Resident and a magistrate came up to Kuala Lumpur once a month to hold a session of the High Court and the Magistrate's Court."¹³⁵

¹³³. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 52.

¹³⁴. Ibid., p. 91.

¹³⁵. Ibid.

Despite these activities of the leaders and their new mode of operation, certain community needs remained in existence and hence the secret societies were able to operate, albeit temporarily, until other structures emerged to displace them. The introduction of British rule in the Malay States had no doubt taken care of some larger outstanding matters in the various Chinese communities, and thereby restored peace and a general environment that was conducive to the resumption of productive work. But this could scarcely take adequate care of the many day-to-day problems, needs and hardships of the ordinary Chinese miner in the various settlements. Also, questions of organization, of moving supplies to more remote regions, still remained and these, as seen, had been "traditionally" managed by secret-society organizations. In a similar way, the men continued to look to secret societies for the promise of proper burial rites, and for help should they fall sick. In fact, many of the welfare services of a normal community were dealt out by the secret-society organization in the early years of British administration in the Malay States. For these reasons, the secret societies continued to fulfill a vital role in the lives of the miners and as a consequence subjected them to much of the secret societies' dictates.

A change had nevertheless come over the secret societies' leadership (as discussed). The new de facto headmen, more apt as proteges and personal followers than leaders or representatives of the men they now had charge of, were devoid of experience in managing them, and, perhaps one can understand, of any depth in perception or identification with their needs and demands. Thus handicapped, the new leadership must have felt hard-pressed in maintaining communication and discipline. Neither could these attempts have been helped by the presence of fighting men, quick to rebel, and the general disillusionment and apathy of the rest towards the secret society as a whole.

The consequent impasse was to lead to a greater dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and revolt, countered on the part of the leaders by harsh suppression, and ruthless measures designed at intimidation of the populace into blind submission and obedience. But the forces of change were rapidly moving in contradiction to the aims and ambitions of the leaders. As Blythe observed, "the introduction of the Residential system led to the adoption of an increasingly British administration throughout these States."¹³⁶ This British administrative apparatus, in turn, brought in its wake a number of innovations and general conveniences for the population. Among these were the construction of roads and the founding of towns. Prior to British intervention, for example, Larut could boast of only two roads — one which connected Kota to Hujung Tembok, "the landing place on the Larut,"¹³⁷ and the other which led along the Kota-Hujung Tembok passage to Simpang and branched off from there to Bukit Gantang. Both these roads, according to Speedy, were "in need of entire repair or rather remaking" at the time of his appointment in 1874.¹³⁸ These roads had been very simply constructed with trunks of trees sunk into the swamp and subsequently covered over with clay and sand. As the wood decayed, "large holes or rather immense pits were formed."¹³⁹ Undoubtedly they were inconvenient, if not actually unsafe for travel.

With the extension of British administration into the interior, these conditions were vastly improved. In addition, new roads were cut into previously near-impenetrable areas. An example was one that linked Kota to the towns of Taiping (Klian Pauh) and Kamunting (Klian Bahru). An idea of the immense difficulties encountered may be gained from the following report,

136. Blythe, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

137. Blue Book of Larut District in Perak, 1874.

138. *Ibid.*

139. *Ibid.*

the road to Kamunting, which is in the centre of the new mining district, has been cut principally through the spurs of the Assam Kumbang range. In this road in the short space of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles it has been necessary to construct no less than ten bridges, owing to the numerous streams which came down from the hills and are utilized for mining purposes.¹⁴⁰

From the description, it is possible to gain an appreciation of some of the problems, dangers and work that were involved in the transportation of supplies into and tin out of the mining areas before the advent of the road. Perhaps one can then appreciate the role and the need for a secret society organization to man such hazardous and uncertain operations. The varied terrain involved also seems to demand specialized knowledge of the area and special skills in negotiating one's way through the dense jungles. All these require specialization and the maintenance of a separate class of men well-versed in the work. The demand, in the days of pioneer settlement, seems best fulfilled in a secret-society structure where the responsibility for the support of a specialist group of fighting men was, in any case, forced on the less fortunate masses.

The construction of roads along the essential supply routes, however, changed the picture considerably. The clearing of a defined track through the dense jungles and the bridging, where necessary, of streams and other waterways helped to simplify travel by minimizing former hazards. In this way, the monopoly of secret-society men over knowledge of the route and skills of manoeuvring through it no longer remained effective. An entrepreneur, for example, could now arrange small-scale credit and supplies to miners fairly independently of the entrenched secret society's expertise and support. Consequently, yet one more stronghold of the secret societies' basis for sole domination over the various mining settlements in the western Malay States was overrun.

¹⁴⁰. Ibid.

Nor was this the only outgrowth which was to prove prejudicial to their once-undisputed supremacy in these mine communities. Less complicated conditions of travel eventually meant a larger flow of traffic. In the case of Larut, the much-depleted Chinese population at the end of the war¹⁴¹ was rapidly replenished to full pre-war strength as soon as peace was established. Over and above this, new enterprise and miners began to pour into the district as settled conditions continued to prevail under British political supervision. This was evidenced by the ferment of prospecting activity which took place in 1874.¹⁴² According to the report,

prospecting parties both of Malays and Chinese have sunk pits and dug trenches at intervals not only along the base of the hills, but throughout the country [Larut] in all directions and almost invariably have found the sand which contains the metal.¹⁴³

Rapid increase in numbers meant greater concentration of population within a given mining district. The resulting economic development and prosperity engendered, in turn, new needs for living areas, trading facilities and lines of communication and access. This flourish of economic activity thus led to "the laying out of new towns" and the planning of more roads and bridges.¹⁴⁴ Also, the establishment of police stations, as found by the British administration of the Malacca Territories in 1852, quickly led to the growth of towns in their vicinity.¹⁴⁵ Blundell reported, "good houses and shops were rising around the police station," traders and residents alike being swift to take shelter under the wing of British surveillance.¹⁴⁶ As the mining areas became more heavily colonised, economically and politically, the establishment of more police stations became necessary, and with it the growth of towns spread. As the Chinese population increased in numbers and

¹⁴¹. During the course of the Larut war, the Chinese population in the area was reduced to only 4000 fighting men (Blythe, p. 191).

¹⁴². Blue Book of Larut, 1874.

¹⁴³. Ibid.

¹⁴⁴. Cowan, op. cit., p. 217.

¹⁴⁵. See Blythe, op. cit., p. 75.

¹⁴⁶. Ibid.

in density, alternative principles of social coherence began to acquire an even greater anchorage within the migrant Chinese communities than was the case immediately prior to the outbreak of disturbances in the different mining districts.

The rapid development of towns saw the rise and consolidation of a class of middlemen and small-scale tin ore dealers who had begun to enter into entrepreneurial partnerships with mine prospectors and eventual miners. The British stipulation on the issue of legal titles before mining could begin had the effect of releasing many aspirant small-scale mine owners from a set of power-maintenance factors which had formerly made the mobilization of the entrenched secret-society machinery mandatory. The concept of legal rights written into the issue of a lease had exchanged legal safeguards and surveillance for the once-indispensable powers of secret-society protection — the sole means by which rivals from other secret-society organizations could be intimidated into respecting the owner's property rights, while aspiring challengers from one's own society could be bound, by common membership and a shared code of ethics, to refrain from menacing each other's property or rights.

All in all, the secret society represented to the miners, in pre-British intervention days, the highest authority from which protection and safeguards for their property rights and investments could be obtained. As such, an active membership in these organizations was vital for success. With the new mode of administration and the growing effectiveness in its implementation, however, secret-society membership was no longer as essential to the establishment nor continuation of a mine working. A higher authority had, indeed, successfully supplanted its rôle. As a consequence, the new wave of economic activity saw the emergence of a new group of independent mine operators, whose work could be initiated outside the dominant secret-society structure in the

area. Alongside this, the new class of middlemen, brought into being by the vast improvements in communications, was to acquire increasing economic strength and numbers as, more and more, they took over the task of supplying and financing these small-scale miners.

With increase in numbers and a growing ease in communication, a new sense of class consciousness and solidarity began to emerge. The rise of new towns also assisted in fostering such awareness, for a town inadvertently brought with it demands for service industries, and therefore greater congregation of men from one trade or craft in an area. The increasing numbers of towns also made possible a greater contact and communication among men of similar social standing, thereby generating an enhanced sense of solidarity. These new lines of coherence could not help but distract from the demands of secret-society loyalty, based as it now was on the sole bond of fictive kinship.

Consequently, while, in the early years of British administration in the Malay States, secret societies persisted as a fairly viable force in the migrant Chinese communities, their continued dominance over the community as a whole was, nevertheless, short-lived. The general disaffection of the new group of secret-society leaders or their right-hand men has been referred to. The mass of membership, realizing that the leadership lacked interest in and identification with their needs, aspirations and welfare soon began to transfer their attention and energies to the cementing of bonds that held better promise of realization. As a result, ties among members of similar occupational groups became strengthened.

The dispossessed secret-society organizations, desperate in their bid to regain control, were forced to rely more and more on methods of sheer intimidation, extortion and oppression. The need to resist these onslaughts, in turn, helped to reinforce rather than dissipate the newly forged bonds of

class interests and survival. A group of middlemen, threatened, for example, by secret-society excesses, were more apt to stay together and present a united resistance to its intimidation. In fact, this solidarity was to become the future basis for group organizations along occupational lines. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a spate of formal occupational associations, generally termed clubs (公會) came into being.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, in the 1870's, the groupings were only in their formative stage and the alignment of interests was less clear-cut. It could also be possible that finding inadequate redress or protection from the existent British authorities, these groups actually operated initially as trade secret societies (as opposed to later-date trade associations), so as to effectively counter the threats of the older established Triad groups.

As diversification of interests and economic activity proceeded, more and more sub-groups came into being in defence of their particular interests from encroachment by the others. With this development, the domination of any single secret-society organization over the entire community came to be more of a myth than a reality. The bulk of the mine labourers, unable to support and maintain a specific organization for the representation of their needs, however, began to fall back on the long-standing dialect and district associations for the fulfillment of these demands. By regularly contributing to a common pool, over and above the small charge of a membership fee, the mine labourer could also build up for himself a sure source of funds for the execution of appropriate burial rites at his death. But perhaps of more immediate relevance to his interests was the facility which such services provided for the expression of traditionally prescribed and accepted concepts of mutual assistance, as exercised through groupings based on recognized

¹⁴⁷. Gathered from interviews and from a review of literature published by Chinese Associations in Penang.

principles of social coherence. As solidarity within these voluntary associations grew, with increased numbers and a greater sense of commitment on the part of their members, they began to be an increasingly significant force within the Chinese community.

Hence, with the once-dominant secret societies' fall from supremacy, a myriad of smaller and more specific organizations arose to take their place. The secret society nevertheless continued to assert its presence through intimidation, extortion and criminal activities.¹⁴⁸ Partly because a meticulously built-up structure of force could not be expected to disintegrate when its usefulness had ceased, and partly because these societies were indeed powerful reservoirs of a potential for violence, their existence was indeed prolonged.¹⁴⁹ "In the end," as Morgan observes, "it must be the public [the community] that will have to bring about its destruction [for] it is the public itself that encourages Triad growth."¹⁵⁰ Ultimately, therefore, social conditions and pressures justify and sanction the continued existence or the doomed extinction of social institutions.¹⁵¹ What then were these forces, conditions, and pressures that continued to give secret societies cause for existence and power? One should recall that the now-detached headmen of the secret societies, and to a lesser extent even the common man, wielded the power (in both Larut and Selangor) to inform on these organizations and thus cause the deportation of their "leaders" and the disruption of their continuity.

That there were no forthcoming informers appears to be evidence of the hold which the secret societies continued to have on the community. For

148. See Freedman, op. cit., p. 38.

149. See Morgan, op. cit., pp. 79-82.

150. Ibid., p. 88.

151. Ibid.

the general masses, long-schooled in an avoidance of direct contact with any form of administrative authority, the demand for forthright and face-to-face dealings with the new British authority could appear forbidding. Also, even if the entrenched secret societies had ceased to serve the interests of the general masses, their powers of intimidation over their lives and livelihood had by no means abated. In fact, having lost much of their real involvement in the economic activity of the area, the secret societies began to depend more and more on extortion, blackmail and protection rackets for their survival. Just as in Hong Kong, where a spate of violence and ruthless intimidation normally followed in the wake of a secret society's loss of real power and justification for a viable solidarity,¹⁵² a similar situation seems to have obtained both in the Straits Settlements and in the western Malay States towards the latter decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁵³ Perhaps to fend off the increasing menace (it may not be too far-fetched to speculate), trade and craft groups began to match these secret societies' violence by employing equally violent means of defence.¹⁵⁴ Consequently the secret-society syndrome of these migrant Chinese communities became perpetuated as the new network of trade groups, guilds and associations resorted to increasingly violent measures of self-defence, and perhaps even of coercion, this last factor being prompted by a growing need for numbers and funds in the execution of their activities. Given the new balance of power, it is no surprise that the common tradesman or dealer failed to exercise his legal privileges by bringing an end to the secret-society menace.

¹⁵². Morgan, op. cit., pp. 79-82.

¹⁵³. Blythe reports that by 1880, discipline within the secret societies in the Straits Settlements had fallen sharply owing, he seems to think, to the new "generation" of leaders, whom he describes as of a "different stamp" from the old headmen. These new leaders, he maintained, had little influence over the disorderly elements of their societies. (Blythe, op. cit., p. 211) Also Freedman pointed out that by 1889 "the unruliness of the Chinese in the Straits Settlements had grown to a point where the authorities would no longer tolerate it." (Freedman, op. cit., p. 28)

¹⁵⁴. Freedman, p. 39.

Yet in both Larut and Selangor, the respective headmen (Chin Ah Yam and Chang Keng Kwee for Larut and Yap Ah Loy for Klang) had cooperated with British authorities by volunteering information regarding the attempted establishment of new lodges in the district.¹⁵⁵ How was it that they did not inform on the new trade groups which were fast developing into centres of power through the use of methods which were not too unlike those employed by full-fledged secret societies? What unseen line of division governed the preservation of some and the condemnation of others? Perhaps the fact that the voluntary associations and trade groups answered more to the description of benevolent organizations acted as the crucial distinguishing factor between them and the hard-core Triad groups, which were regarded as serious "mischief-makers." Or was it because the former, as real or potential foci of economic and political power, in effect constituted an integral part of the power structure of the community, while the latter presented unwanted competition to the established order?

Skinner's study of the structure of leadership in the Chinese community of Thailand observed that these leaders exercised their control through a hierarchy of intermediate organizations. Each level of leadership within the structure was made responsible for the social control of their immediate followers. By securing control over these channels, a man succeeded in raising himself to the top echelons of leadership within the community; for leader status, as defined by Skinner, "depends on the exercise of a high degree of influence."¹⁵⁶ The possession of this condition or qualification of leadership was especially essential in the context of an overseas Chinese community, as the leaders lacked more traditional social sanctions and support for their power. In the China context, for example, scholarship was a

¹⁵⁵. Discussed earlier in the chapter. For Selangor, refer Blythe, p. 193.

¹⁵⁶. Skinner, G.W., Leadership and power in the Chinese Community in Thailand, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1961, p. 79.

criterion of leadership, and through such distinctions, the political leaders acquired an aura of respect that was not easily challenged or undermined by the general rank-and-file. In other words, the basis of their domination was founded on a more arduous process of specialization that could not be easily equalled within a short space of time. In the overseas Chinese context, on the other hand, successful leadership and domination were solely measured by the degree of effective influence which a man could exercise over his compatriots. Consequently, to secure a hold over the means to power, it was essential for community leaders or aspirants to come to some arrangements with the extant power blocs in the community. Short of this, the leader would either run the risk of losing his position or of having to take on himself the enormous task of exercising a personal and direct control over the entire community.

It is argued here that the latter state prevailed in the early phases of secret society domination in the mining settlements of the western Malay States. Through the economic control of mining, secret-society leaders initially held complete jurisdiction over their men, who in any case were members of the secret society as well as the community. But as the community grew and the economy expanded in keeping with it, the monolithic structure of power became untenable. More specific intermediate organizations were needed to cope with increasingly divergent needs and interests. Hence growth, the essence of economic success, ironically helped in dislodging the secret societies' monopolistic hold over the entire community. With progressive expansion, further intervening pockets of power became formed. As Freedman observed, "the associations which in a small-scale and relatively undeveloped settlement express social, economic and political links in an undifferentiated form tend, as the scale and complexity of society increase, to separate into a network of associations which are comparatively specialized

in their functions and the kinds of solidarity they express."¹⁵⁷ It was as indispensable parts of a wider power structure that the various trade groups and other voluntary associations were vital to the very interests, efficacy and continuity of even the most influential and powerful community leader in the mine settlements of the post-British intervention era.

Secret societies, voluntary associations and trade groups, as seen, contributed to a delicate network of social forces which helped to sustain the power of the established leaders in the community. Yet, having risen to positions of great wealth and success, it hardly seems logical that these very men should voluntarily choose to subject themselves continually to the uncertainties and possible risks involved in courting the backing of ruthless secret-society groups and perhaps equally troublesome "voluntary associations." This appears even more especially incomprehensible after the way the headmen had sought to dissociate themselves from secret-society affairs and turned to British methods of administration and judicature for their guides in dealing with their own men.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the fact that these headmen, despite apparent advantages to the contrary, continued to regard the above organizations as inimitable authors and custodians of their power suggests deeper underlying sociological reasons for their existence.

First and foremost, "in a society based economically on business and recruited largely from peasant China, social differentiation was geared very closely to the distribution of wealth. Men who made money moved up in the social scale, and those who lost it declined."¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, placed in the context of an open economy where the criterion for upward social mobility was plentiful, wealth could not have appeared a sufficient or satisfactory basis of differentiation in the eyes of those who had succeeded. Freedman, for

157. Freedman, op. cit., pp. 47-8.

158. The details for Larut are known. Even in Selangor, it was reported that Yap Ah Loy and Ah Shak "sat as magistrates to try minor cases [and] remitted " more serious ones for trial in Klang before the Resident or a British Magistrate. (Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 91)

159. Freedman, op. cit., p. 28.

example, records the rather contrived barriers and observances which the wealthy members of the Singapore community sought to adopt as marks of distinction between themselves and their compatriots of humbler circumstances. It was probably this overwhelming feeling of impermanence, generated by the criterion of wealth as the sole accepted basis of social differentiation in the overseas Chinese communities, which spurred the rich and the economically dominant to seek further validation of their position and attainments through the control of political leadership.

In the Malay States, prior to British intervention, this was achieved through secret-society leadership, which concentrated both economic and political domination in the hands of the same men. But with internal development and the coincidence of British intervention, the situation became more complicated. Secret-society leadership no longer carried with it the "automatic" office of economic and political leadership of the community; hence, the noticeable dissociation of the top leaders from the main body of secret-society activity. But secret-society organizations, in combination with other groups and associations, also represented the base of the entire population, and in that capacity helped to subtend the leaders' position of power and success. Consequently, in a migrant Chinese community where alternative forces and mechanisms to the rather transitory mandate of wealth were lacking for the validation of the "elites'" hold over the positions, these leaders were forced to rely on the interplay of violence between the constituent organizational bodies within the community for the perpetuation of their strength and power. In other words, where more permanent and staid social guarantees for the confirmation of elite-status were absent, the continuity of any one leader's regime thus came to rest on the rather grim and uneasy network of force and violence within the community.

The "speculative nature of business" in which the rich men in overseas Chinese communities engaged¹⁶⁰ also served to make a heavy-handed rule all the more imperative. As Freedman continued, such businesses "did not ensure for them a safe place at the top of their society, nor was wealth so regularly and securely transmitted down the generations as to procure a class system based on descent. The class of rich and influential Chinese established itself early in the history of Singapore, but it was a class the personnel of which appears to have been subject to constant change."¹⁶¹

Tin mining in the Malay States was also an extremely speculative enterprise during the period under discussion. Based on a heavy reliance on labour with a minimum of fixed capital investments, the operation could not ensure for the entrepreneur a steady source of long-term profits accruing from capital invested. The very nature of the venture consequently thrived on the realization of quick and lucrative turn-overs, derived from the outlay of short-term credit or ready cash. This was mainly achieved through advances of supplies and opium to the men at work. The risks involved were no doubt immense, as these advances were essentially short-term loans to penniless men whose survival, or indeed trustworthiness, was in question. Nevertheless the profits, should the entrepreneur succeed in keeping a hold over his debtors, were equally lucrative. As Wong remarked, "the Chinese towkay [employer] owning a tin mine can often afford to run it at an apparent loss, by reason of the enormous profits he makes out of the food-stuffs and other necessities which the coolie can obtain from him alone; out of the gambling, the opium-smoking, the pawnbroking, the liquor traffic, and other rights which he farms; and of the usurious rates he imposes for advances and similar transactions with his coolie."¹⁶²

160. Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

161. *Ibid.*

162. Wong, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

Given the nature of operation, the means of profit-making were extremely tenuous. Where so much speculation and so few solid investments were involved, it is hardly surprising that the dependence on force became amplified. The need to outwit one's rivals and subordinates for continued economic survival could hardly preclude the use of ruthlessness, coercion and violence. Hence the economic structure of migrant Chinese activity in the Malay States lent further justification for the continued existence and employment of a network of force.

An additional ramification of the leaders' economic stronghold was the control of revenue farms in the Malay States. Prior to British intervention, rights to individual farms were arranged between the Chinese leader and the Malay chief who controlled the respective district. In this way, considerations of possible political alliances and affiliations with the Malay chiefs tended to obscure the deeper, underlying currents of secret-society polarisation and interests in these farms. With British intervention, all rights to the revenue farms in the western Malay States had to be applied for through the Residents in the various states. Consequently, as Blythe observed, "the interest of secret society leaders in the revenue farms throughout the Malay States becomes clearer after the appointment of British Residents."¹⁶³ The rights, privileges and workings of these farms are described as follows,

The successful tenderer for a farm had the monopoly for the supply of opium or spirits or tobacco for a certain area, but the protection of his interests against smuggling was primarily a matter for him and not for the Government, though investigations would be made if he complained. To protect his monopoly the members of a secret society were invaluable. They were the eyes and ears of the underworld and were quick with information to protect their own group and to collect the resultant reward. They formed a force ready to hand for policing the area on the farmer's behalf. Without the support of

163. Blythe, op. cit., p. 250.

such a force the farmer was likely to fail, for his rivals would undermine his business by smuggling, conducted by members of their own societies.¹⁶⁴

Again, without secret-society assistance, these extremely remunerative but speculative ventures would not yield the expected profits.¹⁶⁵ Hence, from yet one more area of important economic activity, secret societies were to derive a continued lease of life. The need for secret-society support may be further appreciated should one examine the distribution of revenue farms in the individual states. In Perak, the revenue farms were divided along district lines. To the north was the Krian and Kurau farm, south of it was the farm for Larut. Towards the coast were a series of "coastal farms" and in the interior was the Perak River farm. In Selangor, after the reinstitution of the Kah-Yeng-Chew Hakka in their mines in Kanching, the revenue farms were split into the Kanching, Klang and Langat areas (the latter being another Kah-Yeng-Chew dominated area). In Sungei Ujong, the farms were initially jointly undertaken by the representatives from the different groups of Chinese in the area.¹⁶⁶

Each farm was put up for bids after the end of every three-year term. Though it was known that "while every influence that could possibly be brought to bear came into play [in competing for the farms], it was necessary to see to it that by agreement between possible tenderers the field of competition should be reduced to avoid paying to the Government any more than was unavoidable."¹⁶⁷ But despite these informal prior arrangements, competition could be fierce and the eventual outcome uncertain. Added to that, the close juxtaposition of the farms provided scant comfort to one

¹⁶⁴. Ibid.

¹⁶⁵. On the subject, the Recorder of Penang (in 1835) observed as follows, "the revenue derived at Singapore from the opium farm has increased very remarkably of late and the solution I have generally heard of it has been that some Chinese connected with the Hooeys or Fraternities in the Island have become the Farmers, and have been able to afford a much larger rent than their predecessors, from the additional power which this connection gives them of detecting any smuggling. In short, they gain the advantage of having^{besides} their establishment of peons an irregular body of spies (cont.)

farmer should the one directly contiguous to his be let to a leader or member of a rival secret society. In view of this, a command over a corps of spies and fighting men became all the more vital in the maintenance of his own position and monopolies. The situation in Perak was particularly complex in this respect, as different secret-society groups dominated different areas in the state, with the result that a new farmer could meet with severe armed opposition if he should belong to a secret opposed to the dominant one in the area (or worse, if he had no backing at all from any secret society). From the period between January, 1877, to December, 1879, for example, Ghee-Hin men were in control of the revenue farms in the Krian-Kurau district and in the south Larut district (outside of the mining area). The powerful secret society group along the coastal regions was, however, the Ho Seng, arch-enemies of the Ghee Hin. Thus the Ghee Hin "intrusion" was strongly resented and attempts at undermining and even forcibly repelling the Ghee-Hin farmer's control over the region was resorted to.¹⁶⁸ In circumstances like these the employment of a balance of force was crucial for continued survival.

While the system of revenue farms continued, secret societies also performed a useful role in relation to the commercial interests of the local Chinese leaders. The British policy of attracting outside capital into the Malay States led to the frequent practice, in the 1880's, of offering revenue farms in the Malay States to Straits Chinese merchants in Penang, Malacca, and Singapore. In 1879, for example, Low, the British Resident in Perak, was on the verge of letting the farms in the Perak district to Straits merchants. No tenders for these farms were, however, forthcoming,

165. (cont.) and intelligencers scattered in great numbers over the Island." See Blythe, p. 56).

166. Pickering's Journal, from Singapore to Snngei Ujong (Swettenham's Papers).

167. Blythe, op. cit., p. 55.

168. See Blythe, p. 250.

because "the Chinese miners at Gopeng and Batang Padang would never allow them to be introduced."¹⁶⁹ Along similar lines, the Resident at Sungei Ujong attempted to offer the farms of that area to Malacca merchants in 1882-3 and again in 1888, when Lister finally succeeded in letting out the farms to Singapore and Malacca merchants. In 1884, the Resident of Selangor let out those farms to Penang traders, but the experiment failed and "caused much ill-feeling."¹⁷⁰ Neither could the Malacca-Singapore syndicate who held the Sungei Ujong farms from 1888-1891 bring off the success and economic development that the British anticipated. In fact, for the duration of their lease, they "had had a very bad effect" on the area.¹⁷¹

As Blythe has analysed, "in all such cases the attitude of the local secret society was of major importance to any intruding financier tendering for the farms. Invariably the existing holders of these monopolies (usually the local mining advancers) were the leaders of the local secret society and relied on it to protect their interests. Unless the outsider could come to terms with these men he faced the opposition of the society with all the intrigue and smuggling which that implied."¹⁷² In these cases, then, the local secret societies helped to hold off a possible wholesale intrusion of outside, and potentially more powerful, economic interests in the local economy. If the Straits ventures had been allowed to succeed, their greater economic resources and power could well have jeopardized or overwhelmed the local leaders' supremacy in their own areas. Even as things stood, the local leaders' hold and control did not always remain unchallenged from these Straits merchants. Ah Loy's "awards in mining cases [for example]

169. Ibid., p. 252.

170. Blythe, op. cit., p. 254.

171. Ibid.

172. Ibid.

were often disputed by litigants from the Straits Settlements who denied his jurisdiction over British subjects."¹⁷³ It may be visualized how much more insecure the local leaders' economic positions would have been if it were not for the support which the local secret societies could give in the form of harrassments to those intruders who attempted to usurp the leaders' economic domination. A multiple of social and economic factors in these overseas Chinese communities therefore gave the secret societies, and their web of other organizations, the licence for continued survival.

How, it may be asked, could secret societies continue as such an integral part of Chinese social organization when, as had been discussed, a fair proportion of administrative changes and improvements introduced by the British authorities since 1874 had given rise to substantial changes in the way of life of the migrant Chinese in the western Malay States? It is indeed argued here that measures introduced by the British Residents, such as the vast improvements in communications, the establishment and maintenance of a better state of law and order, as well as the institution of legal recognition to mining rights, helped to facilitate an already imminent break-away of various segments and groups within the community from the overall control of the then entrenched and all-powerful secret society or secret societies in the area. In other words, British intervention helped to free these groups from the last remnants of the entrenched secret society's power that was once crucial to survival and livelihood. But given the nature of social organization and the state of economic operation during the period under discussion, the secret-society influence was by no means completely eradicated from the Chinese communities. Indeed while British administrative policy aided in the liberation of certain groups and segments of the population from the domination of one particular

¹⁷³. Middlebrook, op. cit., pp. 91 and 93.

secret society, they certainly did not extricate them from the grip of secret-society apparatus as such.

Rapid economic development nevertheless continued under the encouraging and helpful watch of the British administration.¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile British administrators, benefitting from experiences gained by their counterparts in the Straits Settlements, were acquiring a better insight into ways of dealing with the Chinese. A combination of these two factors was to lead to further and far-reaching changes in the social organization of the Chinese communities in the Malay States.

As each community expanded and grew in numbers, the Chinese headman's ability to actually and effectively control the population grew increasingly problematic. Records of Kuala Lumpur's development bear witness to the claim. According to Middlebrook,

His [Yap Ah Loy's] very success in restoring the prosperity of Kuala Lumpur was the cause of his being displaced from his position as administrator of the town. In the middle of 1879 there began an influx of miners sufficient to increase the population by 30% in twelve months. Ah Loy's system of administration could not cope with the strain....It was inevitable that the centre of government should be moved to Kuala Lumpur [from Klang] . A British officer was stationed in Kuala Lumpur for the first time in September, 1879, and the Resident moved there in March, 1880.¹⁷⁵

Similarly in Perak, especially in the Kinta district, where British intervention progressively removed many of the crippling impediments to mining profitability, population figures rose rapidly. At the same time, tin reserves at Larut were approaching exhaustion, thus making mining more and more uneconomical. Hence a "shift of Chinese capital and labour from Larut to Kinta" took place.¹⁷⁶ As Larut men spread into the Kinta area, the Larut Chinese leaders were at a loss in maintaining effective control over them. Yet, unlike the influential merchants in the Straits Settlements in

174. See Blythe, p. 254.

175. Middlebrook, op. cit., p. 94.

176. Wong, op. cit., p. 92.

earlier decades, these headmen were held directly responsible by the British administration for the good behaviour of their men.¹⁷⁷ As a result of this commitment, and given the change in circumstances, Chinese leaders of the Malay States (as had happened in Selangor) had to appeal increasingly to British intervention and British structures of peace-keeping for help in the fulfillment of their legal obligations. That the action was not altogether out of character with reactions of Chinese leaders in this regard may be seen from the precedent set by the Penang Ghee-Hin leaders when they were hard-pressed in keeping order among their own men during the riots of 1867.¹⁷⁸

In appealing for British help, the headmen in turn precipitated a series of chain-reactions that led to some far-reaching developments in overseas Chinese organization in these areas. As the British became more deeply involved in actual peace-keeping within the Chinese communities, their scope of administration vis-a-vis the Chinese was commensurately widened. In other words, as their duties with regard to the Chinese communities increased, similarly also would their knowledge of and contact with the people. These newly-acquired skills and insights could then facilitate an even greater penetration of the British administrative machinery into the Chinese communities. Possibly a culmination of the process came with the appointment of a Protector of Chinese, first in Perak in 1884, followed by the appointment of a second officer for Kinta in 1887. By 1896, the federation of the states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang led to the appointment of an overall Secretary for Chinese Affairs in the Federated Malay States. His headquarters were in Kuala Lumpur.¹⁷⁹

177. In the Larut Proclamation made in January, 1874, Swettenham stressed that "if hereafter there should be the slightest disturbance with regard to this settlement [the settlement of mining claims decided upon by the Commission], Captain Speedy would at once call upon the headman to answer for it." At a later date, in the case of Sungei Ujong, Pickering wrote, "I am going to make them [the three Chinese Captains] enter into a bond (to be forfeited to his Excellency in case of offence) to keep the peace amongst themselves and to obey and assist the Klana always". See Swettenham's papers.

178. See Blythe, p. 132.

179. Ibid, p. 259.

The establishment of a Protectorate indeed constituted a significant landmark in British administrative understanding of migrant Chinese communities under their rule. The Protectorate was a specialized branch of government, comprised ideally of men who could speak the predominant dialect used by Chinese under their supervision. The staff were to concern themselves solely with Chinese affairs in the region; the routine of the Chinese Protector in Perak included, for example, visits to mines to explain government legislation to the miners as well as to check on their observance of government regulations regarding conditions of employment, of work and of organization.¹⁸⁰ That the operation of the Protectorate lent itself to a more accurate understanding of migrant Chinese communities may be seen from Captain Schultz' experiences during his term in office as Protector of Chinese in Perak. In 1884, when Schultz took up his position, he was fairly strongly convinced that there were no secret-society organizations in Perak. He even interviewed "the Capitans and other leaders" to confirm for a fact that no secret societies operated or existed in the state.¹⁸¹

"During the next three years" in office, however, he "was able to dig deeper and discover the existence of widespread ramifications of the Triad root system."¹⁸² In 1887, he was to report that a number of riots which took place that year in Perak were all "due to the pernicious influence of secret societies."¹⁸³ At Salak (near to Kuala Kangsar) the riots occurred, according to Schultz' findings, as a result of clashes between men from the Ho-Seng society and those from the Ghee-Hin society. From this information, the administration was able to take the necessary punitive action by banishing the leaders of both societies and sentencing others to terms of imprisonment.

180. Wong, op. cit., p. 95.

181. Blythe, op. cit., p. 256.

182. Ibid.

183. Ibid.

Although it is doubtful if these leaders were in fact the real leaders of the secret societies, it was nevertheless a significant demonstration to the actual secret-society leaders that, increasingly, the British were gleaning more useful and relevant knowledge of their organizations and activities. With that, the British could then strike more and more tellingly at the secret societies' strength. In being able to trace any riot directly to the engineering of specific secret societies, the authorities could deal effectively with the men at the base of the problem, instead of with mere scapegoats which the societies had often offered in the past to mislead or placate the officials. Also, as the office of the Protector acquired more details of the secret-society set-up, conditions for those leaders, now elevated to positions of influence and wealth, could prove increasingly uncomfortable. These men, looked on by the British authorities as respected and influential leaders of their respective communities¹³⁴ stood to have their hard-won positions jeopardised should they be found to be secret-society leaders. As seen, their relations with the main-stream of secret-society activity had grown increasingly remote, and a continued control over these societies was only maintained in consideration of the economic support which these groups could give to their business interests. Balanced on the other side of the scales, was the much sought-after administrative and political recognition which the British administration accorded to these leaders, together with the elite status which only leadership and political office could bring.

With these new developments, the influential community leaders were less and less able to maintain, without risk of eventual discovery

134. Swettenham (then Resident of Selangor), for example, wrote that "the most respectable and intelligent members of the Chinese community possess a valuable influence over their countrymen and exert it to support the Government, which they regard as the cause of law and order." (See Blythe, p. 259)

and retribution, the last remnants of their active association with secret societies. From then on, these leaders' connections with secret societies, though useful, could only prove increasingly irksome. But while revenue farms remained, and while their sale continued to furnish an open channel for the intrusion of outside capital and competition into the community, the tool of secret-society sabotage was as yet too crucial to the leaders' economic survival. However, the break-through for these leaders came with the abolition of the opium farms, first in Negri Sembilan¹⁸⁵ in 1892, then in Selangor in 1894 and finally in Perak in 1895. Although farms for "spirits, gambling and pawnshops" were retained, these were in no way as productive economically or as easily undermined by external interests as the opium farms were. Farms for gambling and pawnshops, for example, were mainly concerned with localized service activities. This meant that gambling houses and pawnshops had to be set up on the site of the mine settlements themselves and the revenue derived depended very much on the actual frequency with which these facilities were made use of by the mine workers. The nature of their operation thus made it possible for local mine-owners, on their own, to apply sufficient sanctions against outside interests should those succeed in obtaining these farms. By refusing permission to an outside farmer to erect gaming houses and pawnshops on his mine, the owner could, without involving secret-society aid, successfully undermine the farmer's profits. By jointly cooperating in such a "boycott" and by successfully with-holding their men from patronising any shops that did get established, the local mine-owners could sink the farmer's profits to a dangerously low level. The new factor that had entered in the maintenance of their economic power was mutual cooperation. This trend, which had been

185. Negri Sembilan is a federation of nine states among which are Sungei Ujong and Rembau.

on the ascendant since the 1880's, was to acquire greater prominence in the growing effort to displace the secret society apparatus with economically more acceptable methods of competition and protection.

A final and complete rejection of the secret society apparatus in the direct and actual maintenance of their power, however, could not be achieved without coming to terms with ~~two~~ major problems of organization. The first was the question of supervision and surveillance of mine labourers ^{of} and _A those revenue farms which continued to function. In this area, perhaps, the preceding discussion supplies the clue, for in the absence of secret society protection, a solidarity of mine owners became vital to mutual survival. With concerted action, rivals could be repulsed and their economic sphere of influence preserved from external threat. Through such cooperation and the growth of a sense of mutual vested interest in such solidarities, even the element of undercutting one another's businesses might be minimized.

That such cooperation had been employed to advantage was seen in the handling of increasing shortages in labour in the early 1880's. Due to competition from other Southeast Asian markets and the implementation of more effective control on emigration in China, the arrival of new labourers for mine work began to fall off. This, coupled with poor treatment, made absconding frequent and profitable. The escaped labourer could often find employment in other mining settlements and, by running away, he also benefitted by not having to pay off his debt to the original advancer. To arrest the process, the Discharge Ticket system was introduced in Selangor and subsequently adopted in both Larut and Kinta. The system essentially attempted to prevent the hiring, by one employer, of labourers who had absconded, without fulfilling the full-term of their contract, from

another. The issuance of a discharge ticket at the end of a contract was aimed at helping prospective employers in identifying those labourers who were eligible for employment. Except for this aid, "the successful operation of the Discharge Ticket System depended largely on employers cooperating among themselves and on their observing the regulations."¹⁸⁶

In the mines of Larut and Selangor, the system worked effectively. In Selangor especially, this cooperation and solidarity led eventually to the building of the Shiah Mee Kong Sze which took charge of all the processes involved in importing, housing and finally discharging the labourer at the end of his contract. From such cooperation thus had emerged a new breed of associations, functionally specific organizations which more and more were to assume a leading role in Chinese economic organization. Though initially the Shiah Mee Kong Sze had only five members in its committee, who were "described as the most important employers and the most influential Chinese among their own clansmen,"¹⁸⁷ their ranks grew in subsequent years to nine members. A significant point to note was the small beginnings made by the association at cutting across clan affiliations and at placing the basis of its membership on primarily economic considerations. A new ordering of the social structure had taken shape, an order where the secret society was to have less and less part.

The second problem with which the emerging community leaders had to reckon was that of popular representation. Secret-society members had constituted a part of the basis of influence and power of Chinese community leaders among the people. Should the leaders reject the employment of the secret-society apparatus in the direct maintenance of their power, a sizeable gap in the political hold on the community could be created. However, in this area as in the economic sector, the policies of the British government

¹⁸⁶. Wong, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁸⁷. Ibid., p. 107.

had unwittingly paved the way. Frequent denunciations of secret-society activity by the British authorities had given the community leaders the excuse to take action even before the need actually arose. One of the expressions of this appears to be the foundation of the Kwangtung Association in Taiping in 1887. Among the aims of the organization was that of solidarity among^{men} from Kwangtung Province. Taken at face-value, this seems an adventurous departure from the general current of organizational effort, as it attempted to bring together men of diverse dialects — Cantonese, Hakka and Teochew — under one Association. But in terms of a wider context of development one may perhaps begin to perceive its possible objective — the creation of a "respectably" organized and widely-based structure of power that could be acceptable to the increasingly more discerning British authorities. That this was not totally unfounded may be gathered from the immense pride which the Association placed on evidences of political recognition and compliments sent by the British authorities in Larut and by a successful candidate of the Chinese Imperial examination who was himself a native of Kwangtung Province.¹⁸⁸ Also, the construction of the building was evidently planned to impress, with most of its materials fashioned by craftsmen in China and imported from that country at great expense.

Hence new types of Chinese associations which came into existence towards the end of the nineteenth century were by no means limited to those born of economic necessity. A changed mode of organization indeed seems to have entered into every sphere of associational activity, undercutting and replacing the more general functions of the secret-society organizations of an earlier era. A change, therefore, had definitely come over the Chinese

¹⁸⁸. At the foundation of the Association, the first Protector of Chinese of Larut presented the Association with a motto, the evidence of which has since been framed and put on display on a wall of the Association. Also, the signboard of the Association was said to be written by the successful candidate of the Chinese Imperial examinations. His name was 梁耀樞 狀元 . Gathered from interviews of the secretary of the Association.

communities in the western Malay States by the end of the nineteenth century. The slow disappearance of the secret-society organization from the centre of power was maybe made complete with the passing of the Societies Enactment, in 1899. This legislation not only prohibited the establishment of new secret-society groups but also the continuation of any extant ones in the western Malay States. The order was accompanied by a Chinese Affairs Enactment which gave powers to "the officer to arbitrate in disputes" and, with a third Enactment, the power to banish undesirable elements from the Malay States.¹⁸⁹ That this legislation came as a fitting end to an endogenous process of decline and growing obsolescence is, however, probably generally overlooked.

189. Blythe, op. cit., p. 260.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

The new pattern of social behaviour, largely external to the secret societies, had become an established way of life by the end of the nineteenth century. The British insistence on written deeds and titles to land and properties was soon incorporated as an accepted part of the business life of the community. Merchants and financiers adapted quickly to settling, and avoiding, disputes without resort to displays of force. More and more, trade and enterprise had come to be governed by economically rational considerations.

No doubt the change was hastened by natural attrition of the old leadership. Those experienced enough to be in positions of power during the wars of the 1860's and 1870's were growing old (Yap Ah Loy, for example, died in 1885). Those who had been sponsored by that leadership took over from them on the merit of their political ability rather than of their personal strength. As a consequence of the changed demands in leadership, new channels of political bargaining and diplomatic accommodation with the British administration were bound to emerge with the new leadership. Alongside this, as the economy became more broadly based, the leaders devoted themselves more to their business interests than to the increasingly irrelevant secret societies that they still led. A combination of factors thus made for the rise of new Chinese elite, the parallel of which may be seen in Thailand where, according

to Skinner, the "abolition of vice-farms [at the beginning of the twentieth century] knocked the economic props from under the secret society leaders."¹ From that point a new Chinese economic elite emerged, one which derived its wealth "from productive enterprise". Also, with "economic power divorced from the monopoly of farms and rackets, their commitments to the secret societies were nominal or nil."²

This, according to Skinner, was a manifestation of "the transition to a new era for the Chinese in Siam."³ Perhaps such an event was not strictly peculiar to the experiences of the Chinese in Thailand, for equally perceptible changes were also taking place, around the same time, in the Chinese communities of the Straits Settlements and the western Malay States. Indeed, by the beginning of the twentieth century, most overseas Chinese settlements in Southeast Asia were caught up in the tides of major reorganization.⁴ Among the common characteristics of this development was a growing awareness of a Chinese identity (as opposed to more parochial lines of division such as clan, dialect or territorial affinity). This was frequently given expression in the emergence of "new kinds of Chinese associations", following the weakening of formerly dominant secret society organizations as well as in the establishment of Chinese schools and of Chinese newspapers.⁵ Developing alongside these innovations was a growing interest in events in China, particularly in the course of the revolutionary movement led by Dr. Sun Yat Sen. The movement and its appeal for financial help and moral support from the Nanyang Chinese had the effect of forging a more intense sense of unity and identity among the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. The sense of being directly involved in the shaping of the political future of China afforded the disparate

1. Skinner, G.W., Leadership and Power in the Chinese Communities in Thailand, Cornell University Press, 1961. p. 12

2. Ibid.

3. Skinner, G.W., Chinese in Thailand, p. 155

4. For details refer E. Wickberg, The Chinese in Philippine Life, D. Willmott, The Chinese of Semarang and W.E. Willmott, Chinese Society in Cambodia.

5. Skinner, op. cit., p. 155.

groups of Chinese overseas with a new-found focus of purpose and cohesion. In 1911, the adoption of Mandarin as the National Language of China further gave the Chinese at home and abroad an added tool of unity. In the schools that were being rapidly established by overseas Chinese leaders in their respective communities, Mandarin became increasingly employed as the medium of instruction. A growing mastery over this facility for cross-dialect communication in turn sustained and intensified the new awareness of a national identity.

That these changes which bore such immense impact on the organization and ideology of overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia should have taken place simultaneously in most migrant Chinese settlements in the area, with few cross-links between them, and with very different host societies, heightens the feeling that governmental (however constituted) decree played, at best, a small part in the development of the various communities. One must seek a wider explanation. With Crissman, the inclination is to look to their common background in China. Ties with the homeland were always strong: large homeward flows of money to families still there, the constant renewal and increase in manpower by new migrants, the smaller homeward return (the physical expression of much longing if not always the means), and the sense of belonging to a structured, somehow changeless cultural group such that, however long his absence, the migrant always had a home where he belonged and where others would recognize his place there.

But there is also the factor of internal change, in the needs and aspirations of the overseas communities. Widely separated, they were often roughly contemporaneous in establishment or development. Individual differences could and did occur to hasten or delay their evolution, but the general trends appear similar. The difficulties faced were broadly the same. A niche had to be found, marked out, established, and expanded when

it could. Needs changed as conditions grew more settled. Surely, one must conclude with Skinner that "changes came in response to new situations both within and without the Chinese community."⁶ Indeed, Freedman places considerable emphasis on the effects of change and differentiation within a community. Age-old Chinese apparatus of organization were, for example, adapted to new demands and uses in the new environment.

One may well question if the process of transformation under examination was not in fact one of a slow but gradual modification of traditional goals, aspirations and finally of structures of organization to cope with the new situations. Early migrants went overseas to make money in times of hardship at home, or to enhance their social standing there. The intention was always to return to China, to their own village, and resume life within the familiar social system. While overseas, their organizations, however essential to life and state of mind, need be only transitory. They would, after all, be there but for a short time. Relatively few of the migrants actually did go back. Most sent money, some never achieved the success they sought, still others did succeed, but with success found themselves heavily committed to maintain it. They found they could not leave and risk losing the hard-earned basis for their wealth. Money was ploughed back into expansion and into consolidation. Kin-folk were sent for from China and from this point the successful migrants began to look for social validation of their positions within the overseas community rather than in their home district of China.

A similar sort of process occurred with regard to the Straits Chinese in Malaya. Their length of stay, as a group, and their means of livelihood meant that they developed roots in the Malay States before the era of mass migration. When business interests or fortune-seeking led them

6. Skinner, G.W., op. cit., p. 166.

to remote spots in the Malay States, one eye was always on a speedy return to Malacca, Penang, or Singapore. But the same forces at work in other overseas communities were at work here too. While physically easier, the return was always of short duration if undertaken at all.

As the outlook of the Chinese became less China-orientated, more permanent bases of social organization were introduced to cope with changing expectations. Schools were set up, community-consciousness grew, and more care was taken of the less fortunate. Temples for worship were sanctified locally, rather than relying on others in China. In effect, more serious efforts were made to reconstruct the social fabric of China in the overseas setting. Where once the secret societies, as practised outside China, functioned adequately in fulfilling the material and albeit simple spiritual aspirations of their members as they were conceived to be, these societies could no longer, in the wake of such changes, persist in their former role. In the new order the more conventional diversity of socially-sanctioned groupings and associations of China (including the hang 行 and hui-kuan 會館) came closer as embodiments of the spirit of the community. Families became established, clan ties linked families and businesses. The old order gave way to the new, or more truthfully, the older order had been successfully transplanted in the overseas environment once conditions grew settled.

That is why a study of the secret societies' rise and decline in the western Malay States is useful. In the absence of records, they reflect forces and needs within the Chinese communities of the time that are easily overlooked or underestimated if one thinks only in terms of outside pressures. The secret societies were an expression of social organization at the bare minimum. Their recession in the last decades of the nineteenth century was not so much the result of British policy, but rather the visible sign of

more sophisticated needs within the Chinese community, needs which were beyond the capacity of the secret societies to settle.

It is not denied that host governments (native or colonial) did affect the development of Chinese communities, but its consideration should not be allowed to obscure perception of the inherent dynamics of evolution within those communities themselves. Colonial authorities seldom understood the organizations of the Chinese fully, yet it is on them that much of our records are based. No wonder a direct causal effect between government actions and social change is so often invoked. To be sure, the establishment of a Chinese Protectorate in the Malay States led to better British understanding of Chinese affairs, and eventually enabled them to deal directly with individual Chinese rather than with headmen alone. Yet such contacts were generally limited to the specific matters at hand. The social system within which the Chinese moved was in large measure ignored. Even in studies of overseas Chinese such as that by W. Willmott,⁷ the impression is that they may have passed over the developmental aspects of the Chinese community too lightly and placed correspondingly heavier emphasis on the actions of the host government than is fully warranted.

As regards to the Malay Peninsula, there were undenied differences between the interaction of the Straits Chinese and their hosts, and that which occurred in the western Malay States. It is the contention here that they were primarily the result of their being two different types of migrants, whose economic aims and pursuits were not the same. The Straits Chinese were a small, trade-oriented group, very much along the lines of Wertheim's "functional group" type.⁸ They did not constitute a self-sufficient community by nature of their economic pursuits, and so were drawn to a host

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7. Willmott, W.E., The Political Structure of the Chinese Community in Cambodia, LSE Monographs on Social Anthropology, 1970. Also see Willmott, op. cit.
8. Wertheim, W.F., "Trading Minorities in Southeast Asia," in Wertheim, East-West Parallels, Chicago, 1965, p. 43.

society which could provide those other needs. They could not remain apart, but had to form contacts with the larger society around them and establish themselves within its framework. The Chinese in the Malay States, on the other hand, were forced by conditions to form enclaves largely separate from their host society. If not self-sufficient, they were at least self-reliant communities. And so the two groups responded differently first because of their innate difference in nature and only secondly because of the policies of the hosts.

Perhaps in the final analysis, one must look again to the social history of China. Migration had been a common phenomenon over the ages. Peasants driven by natural disasters had moved en masse to more promising land until, plagued in turn by natural calamities, they were forced again to move on. Supplementing this type of geographical mobility was the geographical mobility consequent to social mobility. The institution of the examination system as the sole principle of selection for the civil service of China had made unlimited upward social mobility a possibility for even the poorest peasants. Though unimpeded social mobility on the strict basis of achievement remained more of an ideal than general practice, the odd success of some poor, talented peasant had never ceased to attract and tantalize the entire population of China. In this way, the structure of Chinese social aspirations became firmly annexed to the pull of official status and bureaucratic membership.

Such upward social mobility was pursued in different ways by different groups in traditional China. Although the ultimate goal was the attainment of official recognition and status, the channels to attain it were diverse. There were scholars who attempted the arduous imperial examinations, there were rich peasants who attempted to fraternize with the

bureaucrats, hoping eventually to acquire a bureaucratic niche for themselves. There were also traders and merchants who hoped with commercial success to gain a foothold in the bureaucratic echelon. Except for the single-minded scholar, the rest of the aspirants attempted to work their way in through the accumulation of wealth. Wealth became a means to the attainment of the much cherished and culturally ingrained goal.

Much of the emigrant Chinese' aspirations and behaviour were initially guided by similar motivations. Urged on by tales of rags-to-riches experiences of a few isolated emigrants, the Chinese migrants left China in search of wealth. Often driven from their homes by necessity or poverty, the Chinese migrants were, however, comforted and pushed on by the ever-present hope that they might be the ones to become rich overnight and in that way attain the much coveted rise in social status. The hope of gaining official status through bribery, or of realising that dream in the next generation, could not have seemed too remote to the imaginations of the migrants. With these goals in view, it is apparent that the migrants' attitude and reaction to their new environment were ones of exploitation rather than construction. In these terms, too, the overbearing emphasis on economic functions of the reconstructed social system of the migrant Chinese may be better appreciated. T'ien related that "whenever the overseas Chinese are being considered, attention must always be turned to questions of economic significance. If we consider the actual activities of the various dialect Associations we can see at once that, without exception, their most important function is in connection not with dialect, locality or clan matters, as such, but with the economic interests of the occupation which is followed by the majority of its[sic] members."⁹

9. T'ien, op. cit., p. 17.

The predominant role that economics played in initial overseas Chinese social organization may be explained by yet another element within the traditional structure of Chinese economic behaviour. Skinner's study explains it very competently. He observes,

Another feature of Chinese society that appears to set it apart from most agrarian societies is that whereas an ambitious man was likely to leave his local community to work or study elsewhere, his family's residence normally remained unchanged. Here I am distinguishing residence from abode. Residence was maintained in one's native place, and one's native place was in the short run of generations virtually an ascribed characteristic. Abode by contrast was an exigency of the moment, though the moment could easily stretch to decades. A man's abode varied; his residence perdured. A man's class membership might change; his membership in his native local system persisted. We can now perceive the outlines of a society in which upward mobility did not involve estrangement from one's native place.

[Thus when] the opportunity structure prevailing during the dynasty's heyday led to high rates of upward mobility...[that] mobility in no sense undermined the integrity of a successful man's local system but rather increased its resources and improved its competitive position.¹⁰

The "remarkably open structure of rural communities" to social mobility led to the system whereby an "upwardly mobile Chinese in either the trader or the scholar track left his own locality to serve in other local systems, which in turn were plundered for the benefit of his own."¹¹ Herein lay what is probably the crux of the issue. The structure of the Chinese rural communities had long been tailored to accommodate individual geographic mobility. In addition to a passive acceptance, the social system had generated values which would ensure that the maximum benefit from such movements would be returned to the home community instead of being irretrievably lost to it. Hence developed social foundations which continually pulled migrants back to their native place.

10. Skinner, G.W., "Chinese Peasants and the Closed Community," CSSH, vol. 13, no. 3, July, 1971, p. 275 and p. 277.

11. Ibid.

The temporary social system that a migrant initially reconstructed to serve his needs at the place of his temporary abode was therefore regarded by him as no more than an extension of his own local system, not a complete reconstruction of it. The new community organization was not meant to be socially sufficient in itself. Consequently there existed defined and formal economic controls but by no means as well laid-out measures for the community's social and moral regulation. Perhaps the responsibility for such duties was still regarded as within the preserve of the migrants' own local systems in China whereas economic structures, on the other hand, were necessary for dealing with the rather immediate and non-traditional elements in the new environment.

In the course of settlement and growth, however, these original aims of the migrants underwent significant modifications. Today overseas Chinese communities are no longer mere extensions of the Chinese social system. They exist in their own right, buttressed, perhaps, by the indigenous socio-political system. I have tried to trace this very gradual shift from a system of economic convenience to a full-fledged community with its base firmly planted in the local situation. Chinese communities, as evident from anthropological studies, are undergoing or have undergone the throes of such changes. Indeed today the overseas Chinese communities may be entering into yet another phase of change, that of voluntary or involuntary assimilation into the indigenous societies. Although this phase is beyond the scope of my thesis, the slow but sure establishment and growth of the family system in the overseas settlement, the hesitant but now full-blown involvement in local politics as opposed to the involvement in the politics of China are all signs that perhaps today overseas Chinese have in effect transplanted their roots to foreign soils. This transfer was a long drawn-out process, one that did not occur at the time of migration, not in fact until modernization

with some of its beneficial and harmful processes had left its mark on the overseas Chinese as well as on the Chinese in China.

The overseas Chinese then may be seen in terms of an extension of the merchant tradition of traditional China. They strove for wealth and riches not entirely as ends in themselves. Their ultimate goal was a rise in social status, a place in the official hierarchy. Against this bulwark of traditional goals and social experiences, the pressure and forces of the new overseas environment acted. The gradual erosion first affected the material culture of the migrant groups; it was then extended to re-directing the material goals themselves. That is, instead of aspiring to enter the Chinese bureaucratic hierarchy, overseas Chinese, when the opportunities arose, were lured into striving for positions within the indigenous or colonial ruling hierarchy. These were steps in the gradual re-direction of the aims and goals of overseas Chinese vis-à-vis the local environment overseas. These changes initially eroded the material aspirations of the migrants and made no significant inroads in their ideology as such. Making only small gains in the first fifty years of overseas Chinese settlement in Malaya, the process of erosion was greatly speeded up by the development of transport and communication.

Paradoxically, the final ideological change only began with the modernization of China. The logical transference of new ideas to the overseas communities gave the first impetus to the slow detachment of the overseas Chinese communities from their traditional social bonds with the social systems of China. The final break was precipitated by the communist take-over of China. This drastic political, social and economic change destroyed most of the traditional values of family ties and extended family loyalties. The transformation in China thus removed the structural basis for the former

continuity with the migrant's home social system. From then, overseas Chinese communities became rapidly interested in the local situation and chose to be totally involved in it.

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