



KUALA LUMPUR 1880-1895 • GULLICK • 1955

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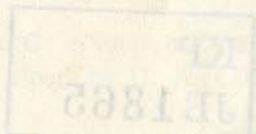
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Kuala Lumpur, 1880-1895

by

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by J. M. GULLICK, M.A.

Early in 1888 Frank Swettenham returned to Kuala Lumpur after a period of absence from his post of British Resident, Selangor. Soon after his return A. R. Venning proposed to him that a botanic garden should be laid out in the valley of the Sungei Bras Bras. Venning was the State Treasurer, Selangor, but before coming to Malaya he had been a planter in Ceylon. This fact may explain his interest in horticulture. Swettenham was a thorough administrator. Before he would give the scheme his support, he and Venning spent several early mornings scrambling up and down the sides of a "valley which consisted of several acres of swamp, in which briars and lallang, forest trees, screw pines and tree ferns were interspersed in picturesque confusion." At length Swettenham was satisfied and agreed to authorise a small grant from State funds for the new garden.

Venning then began what his colleagues recognised as a "labour of love". Over a period of nearly ten years he gradually cleared and laid out a garden or park of 173 acres. Scrub and rank grass were cut down; common trees were replaced by ornamental and flowering trees and shrubs; "an experimental economic garden" was laid out (not for nothing had Venning been a planter). The project attracted public interest and support from the start. Towkay Chow Ah Yeok, leading figure of the Cantonese community, contributed one hundred white chempaka and orange trees to Venning's initial planting programme of 1888. A European construction contractor called Gordon undertook to dam up the Sungei Bras Bras so as to make an ornamental lake. Later on there were band concerts in the gardens and the general management of the place was entrusted to a representative committee over which Venning presided.

Even in his first year Venning achieved a great deal. When, therefore, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Cecil Clementi Smith, came on a visit to Kuala Lumpur in May 1889, Swettenham asked him to recognise Venning's work by formally opening the new gardens. A heavy downpour of rain on the afternoon of the 13th May did not entirely mar the occasion. In the presence of a large gathering Clementi Smith declared the gardens open and gave the name "Sydney Lake" to the "fine sheet of water" dammed up by Mr Gordon. It was so called after Mrs Swettenham's Christian name.

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Thus Kuala Lumpur got its Lake Gardens. The episode is typical of a process at work throughout the fifteen year period with which this paper is concerned. In 1880, when the State capital was moved from Klang to Kuala Lumpur, the town was a thriving but raw and rumbustious Chinese mining centre. The first European administrator to be permanently stationed in Kuala Lumpur arrived only in the autumn of 1879. Until then Kuala Lumpur had been administered by its Capitan China, Yap Ah Loy. Ah Loy's achievement in this respect deserves high praise. But his government was limited to maintaining law and order and promoting economic development in the form of tin-mining. He hardly tackled the problems of health, fire prevention and municipal administration generally. Kuala Lumpur in 1880 was a crowded and appallingly dirty village, swept by fire and epidemic disease in almost every year.

By contrast Kuala Lumpur in 1895 had for some years been "the neatest and prettiest Chinese and Malay town" in Malaya (this was the opinion of a visiting Governor). The deficiencies of Ah Loy's administration had been remedied. There had also been a subtler change in the minds of men. In 1880 Kuala Lumpur had been a place to which men came to work for a few years and to make money. In 1895 it had become a settled community or group of communities with their own institutions and social organisation. Thus its inhabitants had founded the need which did not exist in the mining camps of 1880. Thus Victoria Institution for the education of their children — a social Venning's ornamental trees in the Lake Gardens were both an acknowledgement of a need for amenity and recreation, and a declaration of intention to remain and enjoy such things.

The subject of this paper is a study of the making of this urban community.

Kuala Lumpur up to 1880.

Kuala Lumpur in 1880 was Yap Ah Loy's Kuala Lumpur. For nearly twenty years this dynamic and masterful Chinese miner had defended, reconstructed and developed Kuala Lumpur. This story has been well told by S. M. Middlebrook in his biography of Yap Ah Loy (*JMBRAS*, 24 (2) 1951), but a summary of it is a necessary introduction here.

Tin had been mined in the Klang valley for centuries and it is reasonable to suppose that the deposits around Kuala Lumpur had been worked from time to time. But tin-mining until the nineteenth century was generally a very small-scale and

spasmodic affair. The opening of a mine did not entail any permanent settlement on or near the site. By 1824 it was possible however to list the known mining centres, whether permanent or not, as "villages" in the Klang valley. These were:—

Penaga
 Petaling
 Serdang
 Junjong (Jinjang ?)
 Pantei Rusa (not now identifiable)
 Kuala Kubu (ditto)
 Goa Batu (Batu Caves)
 Sungei Lumpur

Was "Sungei Lumpur" near or on the site of the modern Kuala Lumpur? It is an intriguing possibility but there are difficulties.¹

The miners who penetrated to the interior used the rivers as the only practicable means of communication. There were a few tracks through the jungle but they were not much used. Swettenham once described travel overland thus:—

Over the roots, through the thorns, wading and swimming rivers and streams, ploughing through miles of bog and mud in the heat and the rain, stung by everything that stings (their name is legion) and usually spending two or three nights in the jungle with any kind of shelter that a chopper and the forest could supply.

Miners came up the rivers as far as their boats could go and then struck overland for the last few miles to the chosen mining site. Produce from the interior came down the rivers by boat. Klang, at the river mouth, was thus the point of entry and exit, and hence also the point of control, for the whole valley of the Klang river. A river valley was the natural unit of political administration. The Malay chief of Klang was the nominal ruler of the whole basin of the Klang river, including the upstream area around what is now Kuala Lumpur. His revenues depended on the amount of trading and mining which went on upstream of his riverside fort at Klang town.

Raja Sulaiman, chief of Klang up to his death about 1853, was never able to promote successful mining up the Klang River. At the death of Raja Sulaiman, the Sultan of Selangor passed

¹ This list is given by John Anderson in his "Political and Commercial Considerations relative to the Malayan Peninsula etc" (Penang 1824, page 196). The writer of this paper is much indebted to Mr. G. F. Gripper, Chief Inspector of Mines, for inviting his attention to this passage. Mr. Gripper's interpretation of Anderson's list is quoted and considered later in this paper.

over his son, Raja Mahdi, who had a normal right to inherit his father's district, and assigned Klang to Raja Abdullah. Abdullah was a member of the Rhio branch of the Selangor aristocracy and, as such, an outsider compared with Raja Mahdi. But Abdullah was also the brother of Raja Juma'at, the phenomenally successful chief of Lukut, then the main mining centre of Selangor. The Sultan may have hoped that Raja Abdullah, aided by his wealthy and influential brother, would be able to find the capital and the "know-how" with which to develop the Klang valley. There would then be an increase in revenue to the common benefit of the Sultan and Raja Abdullah.

Chinese mining in inland Selangor had begun at Kanching in the late 1840's. Kanching is only some ten miles north of Kuala Lumpur but it is a part of the upper Selangor River basin, not of the Klang valley. Miners, following the rivers to their source, came up the Selangor river and its tributaries to reach Kanching. They left their boats at a place called "Bandar" (the port — still so called) and then travelled overland the short distance to the mines at Kanching. The moderate success of Kanching demonstrated that there might be tin deposits along the upper reaches of the Klang River.

At some time, perhaps before 1860, Sumatran Malays began to wash for tin at Ulu Klang. But this was a very minor effort. In 1857 Raja Abdullah of Klang and Raja Juma'at of Lukut persuaded two Chinese merchants of Malacca to provide supplies on credit to the amount of \$30,000. They then sent 87 Chinese miners from Lukut up the Klang River to prospect for tin. It is probable that the party travelled by boat as far as the confluence of the Gombak and Klang Rivers (the site of the modern Kuala Lumpur) and that they then walked overland to Ampang where they began to mine for tin. The newly cleared land of the mine proved exceptionally malarious, as so often happens when jungle is felled. It is related that within a month of their arrival only eighteen of the party of eighty-seven miners survived. But Raja Abdullah obtained an additional 150 miners from Lukut and the work went on. The first tin was exported in 1859.

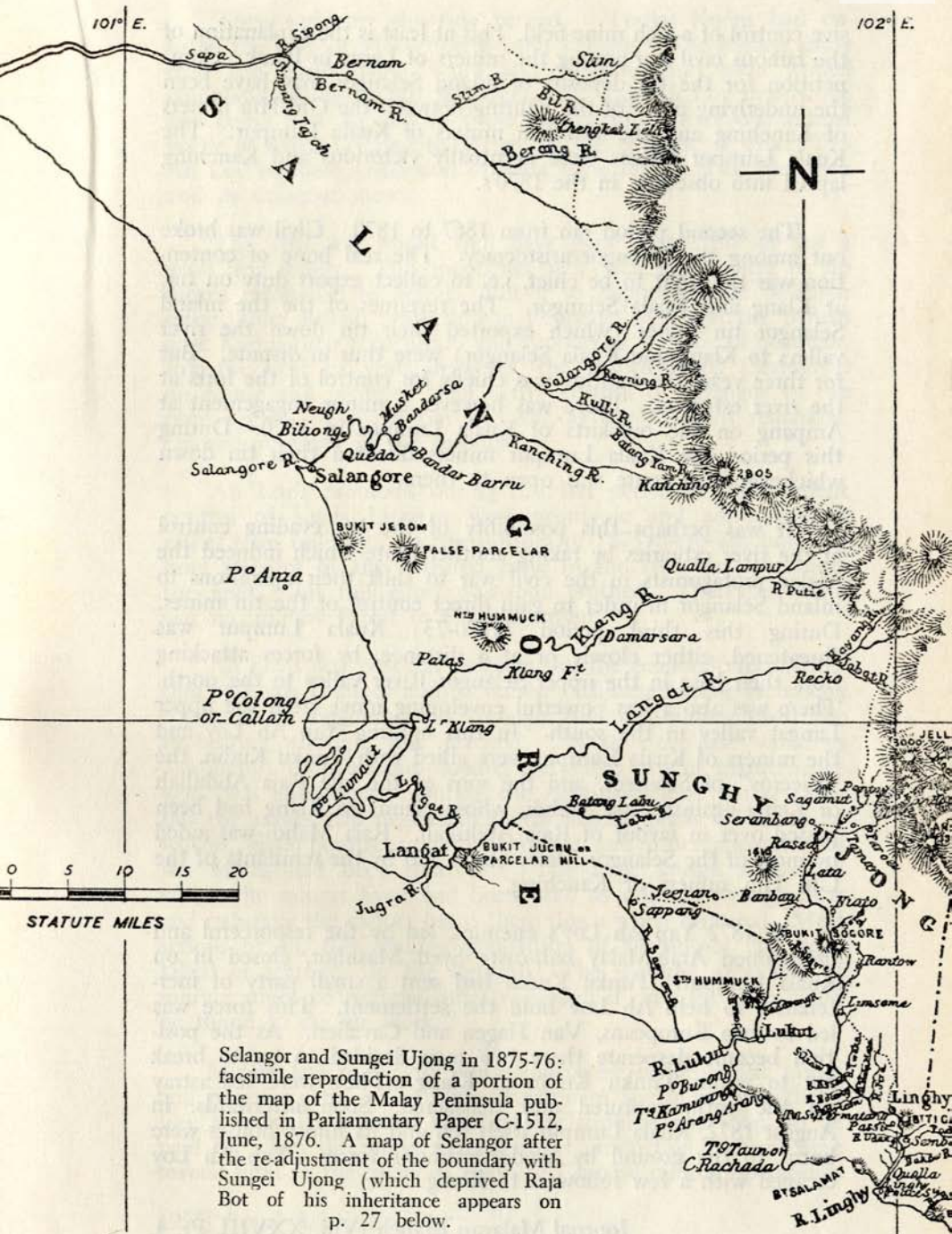
The success of the mines at Ampang led to the establishment of a trading settlement at the site of Kuala Lumpur, which was apparently the highest point on the Klang River to which supplies could conveniently be brought by boat. Middlebrook relates how two Chinese, Hiu Siew and Ah Sze Kēledok, opened a shop at this spot in association with a Mandiling (Sumatran) trader called Sutan Puasa. The latter may well have had connections with the Sumatran miners at Ulu Klang.

It is impossible to say now why this trading settlement was called "Kuala Lumpur". It was indeed a junction of two streams (Kuala). But the point at which a smaller stream runs into a large one is usually called the "kuala" of the smaller stream. Kuala Lumpur should thus have been called "Kuala Gombak". Yet it was not so called. Middlebrook, following J. C. Pasqual, states that there was a Lumpur River joining the Klang River a mile upstream from the Gombak junction. But, since the first settlement was undoubtedly at the Gombak junction, why should it take its name from another junction (not now identifiable) a mile away? Another suggestion is that the place was originally called "Pengkalan Lumpur" — the muddy jetty or landing-place. Klang was also known as "Pengkalan Batu" the stone jetty, and it is argued that the upstream terminus of the river traffic might well have been called "Pengkalan Lumpur", the mud jetty, by way of contrast. This explanation goes on to assume that the Chinese then shortened and corrupted "Pengkalan Lumpur" into "Kalen Lumpur" and then into "Kuala Lumpur". In default of any evidence that this corruption of the original name did take place, the writer doubts whether this explanation can be accepted. The basic assumption however that "Kuala Lumpur" is an awkward phrase in Malay seems reasonable. It may well be that "Kuala Lumpur" is a corruption of some earlier but unidentifiable name now forgotten.

Mr. Gripper advances an explanation based on the list of villages given by Anderson (v.s. p. 5). Anderson says that "At all these places tin is obtained but most at Lumpur beyond which there are no houses. Pahang is one day's journey from Lumpur." Anderson's Sungei Lumpur must — to judge from its position in the list — have been north of Batu Caves in the Sungei Tua area, where there is now no trace of it. Mr Gripper conjectures that the name "Sungei Lumpur" persisted down the length of the stream to its confluence with the Klang River. The Gombak river was in fact the "Sungei Lumpur" and Kuala Lumpur is properly named as the junction of the Lumpur/Gombak river with the larger Klang River. It is more difficult to accept Mr Gripper's further hypothesis that since Serdang, which is not on the Klang River at all, appears in Anderson's list of Klang river villages between Petaling and Jinjang, the name "Serdang" may in 1820 have been given to what we now know as Kuala Lumpur. Let it suffice that the place where the modern Cross Street comes down to the Klang River at the Patterson Simons building became known as "Kuala Lumpur".

Hui Siew was the first Capitan China of Kuala Lumpur. This title of "Capitan China", which has a long history stretching back to Malacca under the Portuguese, was the usual nineteenth century title of the headman of a large Chinese village in the Malay States. Hui Siew had come originally from Lukut. He died a year after his arrival in Kuala Lumpur and was succeeded as Capitan China by his assistant, Liu Ngim Kong. In 1862 Liu Ngim Kong brought to Kuala Lumpur a young Chinese, Yap Ah Loy, whom he had previously known at Lukut and Sungei Ujong (Seremban). Yap Ah Loy managed Liu Ngim Kong's mines and acted as his assistant. In 1868 Liu Ngim Kong died and was succeeded as Capitan China of Kuala Lumpur by Yap Ah Loy.

Yap Ah Loy was to continue as Capitan China of Kuala Lumpur until his death in 1885. Here it is necessary only to summarise briefly Middlebrook's long account of the war and intrigue of the period up to 1873. It is possible to distinguish three periods. From 1862 to 1867 was a period of steady expansion and prosperity at Kuala Lumpur, marred only by a bitter feud with the miners of Kanching. This feud reflected the enmity between the "secret societies" controlled by the financiers of the Straits Settlements. Every Chinese immigrant who arrived in the Straits Settlements from China was admitted to a society. These societies to some extent were based on common local origin in China. The two society groups best known in the Malay States at that time were the Ghi Hin and the Hai San (there are many other names for these groups in the records). The Ghi Hin were mainly Cantonese and the Hai San were mainly Hakka. The capitalists of the Straits Settlements were the headmen of the various societies; having inducted the newly arrived immigrant into the appropriate society (i.e. the one which the capitalist controlled) they sent him to join the labour force on a mine which they had financed. The headman of this mine, and the supervising headman of mines in an area such as Kuala Lumpur, were also members of the hierarchy of the same society. Hence the economic basis of tin-mining and the political system of Chinese mining communities were identified with the structure of the secret societies. The capital for opening new mines was advanced down the chain of society leaders, from the wealthy potentate in the Straits Settlement to the Capitan China of the mining area, and then on to the headman of the individual mine. The mine labourer received his food from the mine headman, took his orders from him, looked to him to organise his protection, and turned out to fight in the common cause when required. Fights between members of rival societies were common. The immediate occasion of these fights was often trivial; the underlying cause was generally a struggle for the exclu-



Selangor and Sungei Ujong in 1875-76: facsimile reproduction of a portion of the map of the Malay Peninsula published in Parliamentary Paper C-1512, June, 1876. A map of Selangor after the re-adjustment of the boundary with Sungei Ujong (which deprived Raja Bot of his inheritance appears on p. 27 below.