PLURALITIES, HYBRIDITIES, AND MARGINALITIES

The Social Landscape of Nineteenth Century Melaka

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INTRODUCTION

Since its founding in the beginning of the fifteenth century, Melaka underwent four major transformations: from an Islamic Kingdom, to a Portuguese base, to a Dutch colony, and finally a British Settlement clubbed alongside Penang and Singapore. Over these years the dynamics it shared with other Indian Ocean polities, and its own position within the human world of this water body also significantly shifted. These shifts had a profound impact on the kinds of people who visited and settled in Melaka. Since its inception, Melaka had been peopled by a wide variety of communities, owing to trade and migration. By the nineteenth century, Melakan population mainly comprised of people of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch and English origin. These included sailors, traders, labourers, shopkeepers, scribes, prisoners, etc. These various people had different kinds of interactions with each other on a day to day basis because of their occupations and lifestyle. Given this context, I am interested in understanding the population composition of Melaka in the nineteenth century.

This thesis tries to answer the following questions: Which were the various communities populating Melaka in the nineteenth century? What were the patterns of continuity or change in terms of the identity of these communities? What was the basis for deciding identity and who made the decision? In other words, from the vantage point of Melaka, how was community identity defined in the area in the period under British rule? Furthermore, did this differ from earlier periods and under previous regimes? What impact did the political regime and interregional connections have on the social landscape of the town? Essentially, the research studies Melaka from the historical viewpoint of both political change and identity politics. Additionally, it attempts to situate Melaka within the broader world of the Indian Ocean, and specifically the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, by looking at its ties with other regions.

Trends in Historiography

Any scholarly work on the early modern Indian Ocean world will rarely overlook the position of Melaka. Situated strategically between India and China, Melaka in this period was the intermediate port sought by merchants both from the west and east of it. Surprisingly however, Melaka has never been the primary focus of historical study. Any scholarship on Melaka between 1400 and 1795 has approached it from a wider perspective of studying the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal or South East Asia. Relevant titles include the works by K.N. Chaudhuri on the Indian Ocean trading world, Sunil Amrith on the Bay of Bengal, and Anthony Reid on Southeast Asia.[1] The focus of these works has primarily been trade, although they allude to the people who made the long, often arduous, journeys. These histories nevertheless provide a helpful context to situate pre-modern Melaka, pointing to the networks it sustained with other regions, and the kinds of people who could be expected to arrive and survive on it. One of the major publications dealing with the history of Melaka in this period is 'Asian Trade and European Influence' by M.A.P Meilink-Roelofsz[2], which provides a historical narrative of the growth of Melaka and its fate under the Portuguese and Dutch governments. A second trend in scholarship has been the emphasis on the strategic positioning of the Straits of Melaka; Melaka's location made it a point of contention between the Portuguese and the Dutch, both vying from maritime control and trade monopoly. This antagonism has been written about by

[1] Refer to K.N Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Sunil Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
[2] M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969).

scholars like Peter Borschberg interested in the violence, diplomacy and security engulfing the region in the 17th century.[3]

In general, there is a lacunae of literature dealing with the years of the 18th century, especially around the time when the Dutch was forced to give up Melaka. For the period after 1795, the independent significance of Melaka in scholarship starts waning. Melaka next resurfaces in scholarship clubbed alongside Penang and Singapore as a British colony, later to become a part of the Straits Settlements. Owing to the lack of attention paid to this city, given its waning monetary importance since the Dutch policy of favouring Batavia, the identity of Melaka more or less coalesces with that of the other two colonies mentioned above. This is a development reflected in both British colonial reports and historical scholarship. Individual works dealing with the Malay area, especially the Straits Settlements have focused on particular sections of the population present in the region. For instance, K.S. Sandhu has worked on the Indian population in Malaya, D.J.M Tate on the plantation industry in the Malayan peninsula, and David Chanderbali on Indian indenture in the Settlements.[4] However, these works have at most remained independent, and it is the endeavor of this research to bring them into conversation to get a more wholesome picture of the socio-cultural milieu.

Situating the research

Global developments and British dominance

[3] Refer to Peter Borschberg, *The Singapore and Melaka Straits: Violence, Security and Diplomacy in the 17th century* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010).

[4] Refer to K.S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya; Some Aspects of their Immigration and Settlement (1786-1957)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); D.J.M Tate, *The RGA History of the Plantation industry in the Malay Peninsula* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996); David Chanderbali, *Indian Indenture in the Straits Settlements* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2008).

The focus of this study majorly corresponds with the timeframe of Christopher Bayly's book "The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914".[5] In many ways, the trajectories of Melaka and the global developments delineated in the book coincide on various occasions. For instance, the British-French struggle for hegemony, which saw its heightened form in the Napoleonic Wars, resulted in the transfer of Melaka from Dutch to interim British authority between 1795 and 1818. Similarly, the spread of plantation economies as a part of British economic policy across the globe found its echoes in the Straits Settlements, where indentured labour was brought in from other parts of the Empire. This thesis draws from Bayley's introductory tenet that "all local, national, or regional histories must, in important ways, be global histories".[6] This, in many ways, defines the history of Melaka that was impacted through its lifetime by global happenings and processes.

Bayly stresses on the interconnectedness of the world, a major feature of globalization. However, he also argues that this process, often associated with the modern world, had archetypes in the pre-modern world as well. To explain this, he presents the concept of "archaic globalisation" defined as the networks created by the geographical spread of ideas and social forces from a local to inter-regional level, catalyzed by the idea of universal kingship, cosmic religion, spread of bio-medical knowledge. The latter spelt the quest of acquiring goods, especially those symbolizing exoticity and life-enhancing properties, and migration, including pilgrimage. The next stage of globalisation, marked by European expansion, did not upturn the existing connections but involved the archaic networks, while exhibiting novel trends such as imperial state assertion, slave trade, etc.[7] Melaka was very much a part of these developments, which in many ways impacted the flow of population in the region. Hence, a historical understanding of Melaka requires situating it within a broader global context, as is

[5] C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
[6] Bayly, 2.
[7] Bayly, 41-45.

recommended by Bayly. The author also emphasizes how the interlinking exercise of globalization simultaneously resulted in societal differentiation[8], and this is an important approach towards understanding the processes of identity formation in Melaka.

Historically, the takeover of Melaka by the British has to be understood in the context of the growing dominance of this European entity over the Indian ocean from 1750. Scholars like Sunil Amrith and Edward Alpers, while charting the broader history of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, respectively note how from the mid-eighteenth century, the English East India Company began asserting its influence through territorial acquisitions of strategic locations and islands, like Bengal, Oman, Ceylon, Penang, Singapore, Andaman Islands, Aden, Hong Kong, etc.[9] Scholarship especially alludes to the importance of India in sustaining British economic power. The 1757 Battle of Plassey gave the English control over Bengal, and in 1765, it won the right to collect revenues of this highly productive area. From Bengal, control was expanded northwards to Awadh, and then westwards and southwards, encompassing most of South Asia.[10] The rise of control over India and its revenues helped the British consolidate its power and further expand their empire. Alpers and Amrith further mention the role of the Industrial Revolution that created a growing demand for Asian goods in England.[11] The demand for Asian goods thereafter formed the basis for the Empire and facilitated trade across the Indian Ocean; one significant example of this was the Opium Trade which sustained a commercial relation between India (which produced opium), China (which consumed opium and exported tea) and England (which consumed tea).[12] In Melaka, opium from India was traded with the local Chinese for other commodities.[13]

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[8] Bayly, 1-2.
[9] Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 98.
[10] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay*, 65.
[11] Alpers, *The Indian Ocean*, 114.
[12] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay*, 67-68.
[13] Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes* (USA: University of Hawai'I Press, 2009), 57.

A supplementary reason proposed to explain the British dominance is the strength of its army, comprised of English officers, under whom were a large number of Indian sepoys. Garrisons of this army were not only instrumental in winning wars and acquiring foreign territories, but were also stationed at colonies to guard territory and the penal establishment within it.[14] The stationing of sepoys at Melaka added a new dynamic to the population of the town. Literature also refers to the importance of victory in wars with other European powers, which allowed the British to diminish the influence of other European entities in the Indian Ocean. For instance, The Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815) allowed the British to exploit the vulnerable position of the Dutch, enabling it to occupy Cape Town, Melaka, Java and Riau, although the last three were eventually returned in 1818 as a conciliatory measure.[15] By 1806, the English had also taken over the Dutch possessions in Ceylon, which was valuable for its plantations.[16]

In terms of territory, the British completed their dominance over the eastern edge of the Indian Ocean through their influence over the Malay Peninsula. Amrith argues that this was a strategy adopted to counter the Dutch monopoly over the Indonesian archipelago and the Moluccas. The British acquired Penang in 1796, Singapore in 1819, and retook Melaka in 1824; these were combined in 1826 to form the Straits Settlements. For nineteenth centuries historians, the growth of Singapore is of much importance, both from the point of view of the Indian Ocean, and South East Asia. This is because of the commercial prominence of Singapore, which developed into the most significant port of the Indian Ocean in the nineteenth century, surpassing even Dutch Jakarta.[17] Hence, in scholarship, Singapore overshadows the other two Malay settlements of Penang and Melaka, and often, discussion on the value of the

[14] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay*, 68.
[15] Amrith, 68.
[16] Amrith, 69.
[17] Amrith, 69.

Straits Settlements for the British is reduced to the importance of Singapore. The other reason why the Straits Settlements are of historiographical consequence is due to their strategic location which provided a steady link between the eastern and western extremities of the British empire. Furthermore, in addition to bridging the route between India and China, the Straits Settlements, including Melaka, also functioned as a penal colony, holding convicts shipped from the British holdings in India.[18]

Another point made about the British dominance in the Indian Ocean is over the role of technology. Scholars like Michael Pearson refer to four technological developments which allowed the English to overcome several 'deep structure' elements of the Indian Ocean. One, the British invested in map-making and navigation, which gave them an edge over others in sailing the water body.[19] Allied to this was the introduction of steam ships around the second decade of the century, which were suitable for long-distance journeys, and were even resistant to the vagaries of the monsoon winds, ensuring faster transportation and communication across the ocean. It was steam that enabled the travel of a large number of Europeans, and other free and coerced people like merchants, indentured labourers and convicts, and brought them to the Straits Settlements.[20] Thirdly, the opening of the Suez canal further shortened the travelling distance and time between Europe and the Indian Ocean settlements, and functioned as a "vital link in the imperial system".[21] To sum up, scholarship points out that control over India, Ceylon and Malaya, and advancements in technology enabled the British to dominate the Indian Ocean world, allowing them to insert themselves into a large number of networks glazing the expanse of the water body. This maritime prowess provided the fuel required for the realisation of long-distance networks across the empire, such as the movement of convicts, and the advancement

[18] Borschberg, *Singapore and Melaka Straits*, 126.
[19] Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003), 199-200.
[20] Pearson, 202-203, 204-205.
[21] Pearson, 210-11.

of trade. It is within these geographical acquisitions and network formations encompassing the worlds of the British Empire, Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, that this thesis locates the historical position of Melaka in the nineteenth century.

Plurality, Race and 'Britishness'

Nineteenth century Melaka was by definition an Asian colonial town, in that it was "a society segregated along ethnic lines, (with) a pluralistic population of emigrants and natives, and an Asian majority ruled by a European minority".[22] It also fit the other characteristic of colonial towns – social stratification – whereby the Europeans born in the motherland made up the top stratum, as they held positions of power and perceived themselves racially superior. The second tier was the intervening group, involving both interracial and migrant populations, such as the Indians and Chinese in Melaka. The third comprised the indigenous population from the countryside; in the case of Melaka, these were the Malays, who resided both in the town and the suburbs.[23] Melaka can also be perceived through J.S. Furnivall's concept of a colonial plural society, where "different sections of the community live(d) side by side, but separately, within the same political unit."[24] The 'separation', however, was less pronounced in Melaka since communities lived in kampongs, which while divided ethnically, were more tenuous in terms of interactions.

The presence of multiple kampongs not only denoted ethnic plurality, but also signified inter-community contact. The British came to rule a society, which in many ways, had been culturally, linguistically and religiously ambiguous since pre-colonial times, and tried to make sense of this by imposing arbitrary labels that conflated many of the diversities. The inability

[22] Nordin Hussin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007), 271.
[23] Ronald J. Horvath, "In Search of a Theory of Urbanisation: Notes on the Colonial City," *East Lakes Geographer* 5 (1969), 76-77.
[24] J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 304-305.

to account for the multiple identities of the population was a limitation manifested through the census, which used existing ethnic divisions but failed to capture the nunaces in self-identification. For instance, straits-born Chinese called Babas, followed Chinese customs, but spoke the Malay language, and belonged to various religious groups. The census however labelled them purely as 'Straits-born Chinese', camouflaging other distinctions.[25] This counters the scholarly belief that the census cemented identity formation in the colony, since this largely existed and evolved outside official discourse. As Sumit Guha argues, colonial enumeration had no correlation "with the capacity for self-interested collective action."[26] Hence, colonial reportage cannot be equated with social reality, and this forms the basis of enquiry for the fifth and sixth chapters.

This thesis draws from Lynn Hollen Lees to understand the two distinct senses of the word 'British' in the nineteenth century. The first was based on the binary opposition between the "white" British and the "black" Others. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, people from Britain defined themselves as opposed to colonized people who were considered "manifestly alien in terms of culture, religion, and color", a perception crafted to maintain European claims to superiority. White skin became an identifier of being British, in addition to Protestantism, loyalty to the monarch, and the English language. This version of Britishness was based on strict racial and cultural separateness held by the white British elite.[27] The modern grammar of racial difference was fed by the Enlightenment ideals of superiority and the Darwinist model of advancement and backwardness, which were, in turn, used to justify colonial subjugation. The century saw a flourishing rise in scientific theories about race,

[25] Charles Hirschman, "The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (1987), 564.
[26] Sumit Guha, "The Politics of Identity and Enumeration in India c. 1600-1990," *Comparitive Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 1 (2003), 149-151.
[27] Lynn Hollen Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 1 (2009), 77-78.

legitimizing the application of racial theory to colonial governance.[28] Involved in this was the racial classification of the colonized, which meant that each person was accorded a racial category, which determined their physiology, character, customs and even behaviour, including propensity towards violence.[29] The English in Melaka upheld these standards as well, and attempted to maintain their 'British' identity through racial segregation, an experiment which, however, was not very successful in the Melakan environment.

Othering was also constructed through the ascribing of specific racial identities to the various communities in the population for the purpose of the census, which would cement racial classifications. Nordin Hussin notes that the first official reports on the population of Melaka were made by the Dutch, although estimates might have been made during the Sultanate and Portuguese periods as well.[30] However, these reports were riddled with gaps, and the process of data collection itself was temporally haphazard, resulting in very inaccurate estimates of the population during this period. Population in these amateur censuses was categorized by ethnicity into Dutch servants and burghers, Portuguese Eurasians, Malays, Chinese, and Klings.[31] From annual reports and other accounts, we are aware that the British made attempts to estimate population on various occasions through the nineteenth century. The first official census was conducted in 1871, but other enumerations predated this. The British used the census as an instrument to solidify racial classifications, but employed the existing ethnic categorisations, suggesting that race and ethnicity in nineteenth century Melaka were commutable conceptions.

On the other hand, the nineteenth century involved years of intense globalisation and cultural hybridity, when diasporic and colonized populations imbibed plural identities to

[28] Tayyab Mahmud, "Colonialism and Modern Constructions of Race: A Preliminary Inquiry," *U. MIAMI. L. REV.* 53 (1999), 1226.
[29] Mahmud, 1220-1221.
[30] Hussin, 163.
[31] Hussin, 164.

sustain themselves in their colonies. This suggests, an alternate version of being 'British', one that allowed for multiple, compatible identities, one that was based upon a more egalitarian notion of the 'British subject' encompassing all those under imperial rule and contributing to the benefits of empire. This second definition became the one to which Chinese, Indians, Malays, and other ethnicities in the Malay peninsula could appeal in their dealings with the white imperial elite.[32] Malay towns, in extension Melaka, functioned as multi-lingual, multi-ethnic spaces, where government offices like the courts, administrative offices, police stations, etc were run by non-English staff. Many of them had been educated in the schools set up by the English government, and later found various jobs in the town requiring literate workers and clerks, in turn creating a locally rooted, modernized middle class of sorts.[33] Because of their economic importance, the claims to being 'British' subjects by these ethnicities, who were nevertheless, viewed through a racial lens, could not be dismissed by the English.[34] Towns like Melaka, became part of a "global public sphere" where people could participate in transnational networks and discussions, where the mixture of British racist rejection, fear of, and economic dependence upon the natives, influenced the development of a wider sense of British identity.[35] Hence, as Lees argues, the nineteenth century was marked by the presence of this layered or 'federated' concept of Britishness, simultaneously involving racial othering, as well as that acquired by 'others' as a part of their subjecthood to be identified as a part of a territory like Melaka.[36]

Community Identities, Plural Landscapes

[32] Lees, "Being British," 83.
[33] Lees, 85.
[34] Anthony Webster, "The Development of British Commercial and Political Networks in the Straits Settlements 1800 to 1868: The Rise of a Colonial and Regional Economic Identity?," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 4 (2010), 912-913
[35] Lees, "Being British," 77-78.
[36] Lees, 81.

The landscape of Melaka has to be perceived as more than just a geographical territory but also "as a set of relationships between people and places, which provide the context for everyday conduct". This is the lens through which Anoma Pieris views colonial Singapore, which she perceives as a divided landscape, characterized by social, cultural, or political divisions related to the exercise of power. This thesis similarly views the morphology of Melaka by simultaneously studying the physical divisions, such as the fort and kampongs, and the social binaries within communities. It further tests the notions of plurality, hybridity, marginality and difference as perceived by Pieris for Singapore to better understand the limitations of the colonial state in Melaka.[37] Through her book, Pieris looks at the linkages between social and spatial distancing based on race by the government, through the dialectic of the convict population to understand practices of differentiation and deviance, which defined the plural societies of Southeast Asia.[38] This thesis studies both the attempts of the government, as well as the assertion of autonomy by ethnic communities through systems of self-governance and collaboration, which inscribed alternate meanings and desires on the colonial landscape of Melaka that were baffling to the Europeans. State-encouraged free and forced immigration in the nineteenth century has to be seen in this light as it was sponsored to check the local population.

This research uses Anthony Smith's definition of ethnic communities, which "unites emphasis upon cultural differences with the sense of an historical community", stressing both a sense of unity and cultural uniqueness.[39] The various communities in Melaka buttressed all the features proposed by Smith including a collective name, a common ancestry, a shared history, unique culture, in terms of language, religion, customs, institutions, dress, food, etc, a territory, not necessarily possessed but also from where they dispersed, and solidarity, in that

[37] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 4-5.
[38] Pieris, 6.
[39] Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 22.

they possessed a sense of belonging to the community.[40] These and other ethnic communities, both defined themselves and were identified by others based on this. In Melaka, such identification was somewhat simpler since identification was foremost based on place of origin – such as Klings from South India, Chinese from China, Javanese from Java, etc. – which determined the kind of culture that the person exhibited. This, of course, did not controvert the existence of inter-ethnic marriages and interactions, which characterized much of social life at Melaka in the nineteenth century, giving rise to hybrid communities like the Peranakan. Interestingly, British officials used the features of ethnic differentiation to divide the population according to race, implying that at least in nineteenth century Melaka, there was no difference between race and ethnicity. In other words, races were ethnically classified. Hence, this thesis uses the term race for categorisation in the nineteenth century since that is how it is presented in documents. It is nevertheless aware that there is no conceptual divergence. Ethnic (or racial) communities, including the Malays from other parts of the peninsula, had rooted themselves at Melaka through migration since pre-modern times. As Manning emphasizes about migrant communities[41], not all were uniformly stationed or mobile, and could be settlers, sojourners, or itinerants, especially in the nineteenth century, when there was a large influx of labourers and convicts, who either stayed on or returned. This raises the conceptual ambiguity between ethnic and migrant communities.

Oftentimes, as witnessed above, definitions about communities overlapped in ways that broke the boundaries that existed between them. Such confusion surrounding the identity of mobile communities is for instance, exemplified by Engseng Ho in his work on the Hadramis.[42] Whereas Hadramis are inaugurally deemed a distinct society, at some point, Ho begins

[40] Smith, 22-31.
[41] Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen and Patrick Manning, *Migration History: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 14-15.
[42] Refer to Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2006).

referring to them in terms of a diaspora. The emphasis on genealogy, Hadramawt, and burial, raise the question of 'return' and ties with the homeland. However, it is unlikely that such trends characterize all diasporic communities and are likely unique to the Hadramis. Engseng Ho also highlights how transcultural travel results in forms of creolization and hybridization, whereby the Hadramis, or at least subsequent generations, get embedded in local relations while retaining connections with distant lands. Hence the Hadrami offspring retain links with genealogy and religion through name, while adopting the local language, dress and diet. Hereby, the diasporic identity of this community gets superimposed by a second signifier of what Ho calls 'local cosmopolitans', raising the possibility of multiple identities in simultaneous existence.[43] Such an enigma plagues this research as well. Like the Hadramis, the Klings and Chinese formed some of the mobile communities within Melaka, who simultaneously broke and retained ties with their homelands. Within their new surroundings, they built novel connections and occupations, while still retaining their community distinctiveness through, for instance, their habitations within kampongs. Since newly arriving groups did not have uniform periods of stay, the level of assimilation in Melakan society differed by experience. This thesis attempts to accommodate these ambiguities, nuances and interactions by looking at Melaka through McPherson's lens of cosmopolitanism, defined by the presence of a variety of confessional, cultural and racial groups within a single urban setting.[44]

Shape of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first four chapters, divided into the four distinct regimes of Sultanate rule, Portuguese rule, Dutch rule and British rule, provide a long term

[43] Ho, 189.
[44] Will Hanley, "Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle East Studies," *History Company* 6, no. 5 (2008), 1351.

history of the town and territory of Melaka, beginning from its founding in the fifteenth century till the period under British rule in the nineteenth century. Combined, they provide a general background to the situation in Melaka as an independent state, and subsequently, as a colony of the Portuguese, Dutch, and English. They highlight the changes in Melaka associated with the change in regime by looking at the administration and interregional connections of the port, and the impact this had on the social landscape of Melaka. Secondly, they study the historical continuity of communities present in the town, and the basis for deciding their identity. The four chapters attempt to delineate how Melaka evolved under each regime by looking at the political impact on both trade and society.

The fifth and sixth chapters specifically look at the social terrain of nineteenth century Melaka. They document the socio-cultural context of Melaka by studying the various kinds of communities and societies present, the ways of ascribing their identities, the linkages they had with the British, and the linkages they shared with each other. The fifth chapter provides a general overview of the population dynamics of the town as well as the state's role in enumeration and categorisation. The sixth chapter gives insights into the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities, which made up the three largest groups. Secondly, it focusses on the patterns and politics of immigration, studying both the settled, immigrant, and convicted people present at Melaka.

Research for the social landscape of Melaka is based on a supplementation of the extensive secondary literature with traveller and settler accounts, official documents, and the annual reports of the Straits Settlements government. Looking at government reports alone provides a very clean-cut image of society, which was not only more diverse than what was presented, but was also riddled with nuances that could not be captured by official documents. Furthermore, these reports employed a top-down approach to understanding population, and harboured colonial biases of race and superiority. These limitations necessitate comparison

with other sources which provide different perspectives. Travel accounts, for instance, while written by Europeans with their own racial prejudices, provide more details on community relations than state reports. Similarly, secondary literature, where possible, has been used to glean through colonial predilections and one-sided discourses. The endeavour of this thesis has been to uncover the social reality of Melaka, while examining the role of the state in community divisions and identity formations, an aim demanding an insightful study and juxtaposition of all the available sources.

POLITICAL TRANSITIONS

CHAPTER I: A COMMERCIAL EMPORIUM, 1400-1511

This chapter looks at the history of Melaka in the first hundred years since its founding. It narrates how Melaka was formed as a kingdom, how the links with China enabled it to become an intermediary port between China and the Indian Ocean, and how Melaka's control over spices, pepper and cloth, made it the dominant port for both Indian Ocean and inter-archipelagic trade. Additionally, the chapter describes the inhabitants of Melaka, illustrating how the nature of the town as a trading destination impacted the status and composition of the people living in it.

The Kingdom of Melaka

> Now the city of Melaka at that time flourished exceedingly and many foreigners resorted thither; so much so that from Ayer Leleh to Hulu Muar there was an unbroken line of habitations, and it was thus too for Kampong Kling to Kuala Penajah. People journeying even as far as Jenggra had no need to take firing with them, for wherever they stopped on the way there would be a dwelling house. Such was the greatness of Malaka at that time; in the city alone there were a hundred and ninety thousand people, to say nothing of the inhabitants of the outlying territories and coastal districts.[45]

Between the third and fifth centuries of the common era, the Straits of Melaka became an important sea route to China. Even earlier, the Straits had been a point of convergence for important trade circuits, one which went towards China, and other towards north Java on the

[45] *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, trans. C.C. Brown (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 151.

way to the Spice Islands.[46] The years leading up to the founding of Melaka saw several political developments in and around the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. After the eleventh century, the rise of Srivijaya, which controlled both sides of the Malay Straits, started bringing this region to the fore; Arab and Chinese sources started mentioning the role of the Malay-Indonesia area.[47] Following the twelfth century, when the Chinese themselves made voyages through the Melaka Straits to south India, the role of Srivijaya as an intermediate carrier of trade to China collapsed, and Java, a point between the Spice Islands and Malaya, gained prominence under the Majapahit kingdom.[48] Java established link with the spice islands, and control over these spices allowed it to attract foreign merchants. In other words, Majapahit control over the Moluccas made Javanese ports ideal destinations for overseas merchants. Furthermore, China too started relying on Java for spices. Chinese sources mention that Java was more commercially prosperous than Srivijaya in this period, which by the second half of the 13th century, had disintegrated into a number of smaller kingdoms.[49]

The natural export item from Java was rice, and this was used to feed ports both to the west and east of it. Meanwhile in north Sumatra, Samudera Pasai was gaining prominence as a major exporter of pepper. There was flourishing trade between the pepper ports of Sumatra and seaport towns of north Java, based on foodstuffs from Java, and spices from the Moluccas and Banda Islands. By controlling the supply of rice, pepper and spices, Java could dominate both the Indian ocean, and Malay-Indonesian archipelagic trade. By the fifteenth century, however, Java had started losing its influence, with the rise of Samudera Pasai, which established direct relations with China.[50] By the time Europeans were first acquainted with

[46] Arun Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia: 1500-1800," in *South East Asia: Colonial History Volume I*, ed. Paul Kratoska (London: Routledge, 2001), 92.
[47] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade,* 13-14.
[48] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 93.
[49] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 17.
[50] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 93-95.

Java, its trade was restricted to the Indonesian Archipelago, having lost all long-distance flavour.[51] Java and North Sumatra became two independent centres of trade on the east and west of the archipelago, respectively. In other words, as Meilink-Roelofsz points out, at the end of the fourteenth century there was no "one central commercial town" in the Malay-Indonesian area.[52] This would change with the turn of the century.

Melaka was founded in 1400 by Parameswara, a fugitive Malay prince, coinciding with the beginning of the expansion of Ming sea power. According to the *Sejarah Melayu*, the ruler fled his kingdom after an attack from Majapahit. After crossing several neighbouring cities, he came across the land which he decided to found as the city of Melaka. Since he was standing under the *Malaka* tree, that is how his new kingdom came to be named.[53] Early Melaka was based out of piracy, and majorly peopled by the Celates, a proto-Malay coastal population, dependent on fishing and piracy. Tome Pires mentions that the king gave these original Celates, who had followed the ruler to settle at Melaka, the status of 'mandarins'–– nobles.[54] Soon the town was populated by others, who cohabited with the original inhabitants. Only a minority was engaged in agriculture, and with the town largely bordered by tropical jungle, Melaka had to depend on other regions for food supplies. The only natural export was tin which was mined from the mountains and smelted into blocks.[55]

From its base at Melaka, the kingdom expanded to acquire a larger area. The kingdom itself was spread between the two rivers of the Linggi and Muar, to the north and south respectively. Additionally, the king of Melaka was powerful enough to subordinate smaller polities around Melaka; supremacy was established over Pahang and Trengannu, and treaties

[51] Meilink-Roelofsz, 23-25.
[52] Meilink-Roelofsz, 26.
[53] *Sejarah Melayu*, 41-42.
[54] Tome Pires, *Suma Oriental Volume II*, trans. Armando Cortesao (London: Hakluyt Society, 1944), 235. The book was originally written sometime between 1512 and 1515.
[55] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 28.

were forged with tin-producing Klang, Selangkor, Perak, Bernam, etc. Tribute was levied mainly in the form of tin. Melaka also expanded its control to other inferior states in Sumatra, and to the islands between the Malay Peninsula and the coast of Sumatra. The *Suma Oriental* list Rokan, Rupat, Siak, Purjm, Kampar, Indragiri, Pahang, Tongkal, Linga, and Bintang as the kingdoms obedient to Melaka.[56] These subordinate states had to provide tribute in the form of products for re-export. The existence of large rivers in Sumatra made the control of dependencies easier in Sumatra than on the Malay Peninsula. Melaka's biggest political contention was the Siamese state of Ayuthya that was expanding southwards. To counter this, Melaka allied with China which promised the advantage of gifts and honorary titles in exchange for tribute.[57]

Trade and Connections

The Chinese court first heard of Melaka in 1403. Based on his reading of the *Yung-lo Shih-lu*, Wang Gungwu argues that the knowledge of the existence and potential of Melaka was possibly carried by south Indian Muslim traders who travelled to China from Siam.[58] Chinese contact with Melaka commenced under the expansionist policy of the Ming emperor Yung-lo, who despatched a series of expeditions into the 'Western Ocean' first under Yin Ch'ing in 1403, and then under the Muslim grand eunuch Cheng Ho, beginning 1405. These naval voyages, especially the latter, that covered a wide expanse till Mecca, bestowed gifts on foreign rulers, and subjugated unwilling kings through force.[59]

[56] Pires, *Suma Oriental II*, 262-264.
[57] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 29-31.
[58] Wang Gungwu, "The Opening of Relations between China and Melaka, 1403-1405," in *Admiral Zheng He and Southeast Asia*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 8-12.
[59] Ma Huan, introduction to *Ying-yai sheng lan: The Overall Survey of the ocean's shores*, trans. J.V.G. Mills (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1970), 1-2.

> (The) Emperor ordered the principal envoys, the Grand Eunuchs Cheng Ho, Wang Ching Hung, and others, to take supreme command of more than twenty-seven thousand government troops and forty-eight seagoing ships, and to sail to all the foreign countries to publish the imperial edicts and to confer rewards.[60]

In October 1405, the first mission from Melaka was received by the Chinese emperor, marking the beginning of a special diplomatic and commercial relationship. This envoy from Melaka travelled along with the Chinese ships that were returning from their missions of 1403 and arrived in Canton in 1405. Melaka was the first foreign land to be accorded an inscription by the Emperor on its very first mission to China.[61] The granting of this special status rested on the realisation of this station as a growing port by the Muslim merchants, Yin Ch'ing and the Emperor. Cheng Ho undertook seven voyages in all, beginning from the year 1405, and the fleet visited the port of Melaka in at least six, if not all, of them.[62] One of the sources describing these journeys was penned by Ma Huan, a translator of the Arabic script, who accompanied Cheng Ho on the fourth, sixth and seventh expeditions. The author used to make local journeys within the territories visited and recorded notes of all he witnessed, and these later made their way into his book *Ying-yai sheng-lan*, finished between 1434 and 1436.[63] Another such account, *Hsing-ch'a sheng-lan*, was written by Fei Hsin in 1436, who travelled with the fleet on the third, fourth, fifth and seventh expeditions.[64] While classified as travel accounts, these two publications do not flow as travel logs, but rather region-by-region retrospective journals, describing the appearance of the people, customs and lands encountered. Hence, the image we

[60] Fei Hsin, *Hsing-ch'a-sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Craft*, trans. J.V.G. Mills (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1996), 33.
[61] Gungwu, "The Opening of Relations," 13-17.
[62] Ma Huan, introduction to *Ying-yai sheng lan*, 8-18.
[63] Ma Huan, 34-36.
[64] Fei Hsin, *Hsing-ch'a-sheng-lan*, 31-32.

get of Melaka is the result of the observations of the several visits to the place over the years between 1409 and 1433.

Fei Hsin writes that Melaka was in a state of subjugation to Siam and had to "remit forty *liang* of gold in payment of their tax."[65] He further writes that on the expedition of 1409, Cheng Ho was ordered by the Emperor to bestow on the ruler of Melaka a pair of silver seals, a cap, a girdle, and robe, and set up a stone tablet raising the rank of the territory to that of the 'Country of Melaka', seemingly allowing it to overcome Siamese domination[66]. This likely resulted in tensions between Melaka and the kingdom to its north. The diplomatic mission of Cheng Ho lifted the state of Melaka to the position of a Chinese vassal kingdom. Ties were further strengthened by the intermarriage between Malays and Chinese, especially within the noble circles, in the years following the arrival of the Melakan embassy in China.[67] Because of the diplomatic backing from China, by the mid-15th century, Melaka could take over the position of Java as the meeting point for traders from the East and West.

The Ming dynasty following Yung-lo's death took a more anti-expansionary turn, and suspended overseas expeditions, although it remained symbolically significant through the well-entrenched tributary system.[68] Following 1433, when Cheng Ho returned from his final voyage, China chose Melaka as its intermediary for foreign trade, enabling Indian merchants to find this a suitable location for trade as well.[69] From the Indian Ocean, the main export to Melaka was cloth; from the Moluccas and Java, Melaka imported spices, and from Sumatra, it received pepper. In the fifteenth century, Melaka had become the biggest spice market, a major incentive for traders from the west. In return, Indian merchants found in Melaka a destination

[65] Fei Hsin, 54.
[66] Fei Hsin, 55. Thailand continued claiming suzerainty over the entire Peninsula, and Melaka only formally repudiated vassalage in 1488. See R. Winstead, *A History of Malaya* (Singapore: Royal Asiatic Society, 1962).
[67] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 31.
[68] Ma Huan, introduction to *Ying-yai sheng lan*, 3-4.
[69] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 96-97.

to sell cloth, which was in high demand in Southeast Asia and China.[70] In addition to Gujarati merchants, Hindu and Muslim traders from the Coromandel, Bengal and Dabhol established links with Melaka. These ships carried merchants from other regions as well, like Turks, Armenians, Arabs, Persians and Abyssinians.[71] The Gujarati merchants and Kling traders from Coromandel were especially important in Melaka, as they supplied cloth from India that was desired by the Malays, Javanese and Chinese. Rulers of Aden, Hormuz, Cambay and Bengal encouraged merchants to sail to Melaka, mostly guided by commercial and religious ambitions.[72] The meeting of these merchants from the West and the East, gave Melaka a uniquely cosmopolitan character.[73] Pires identified some eighty-four languages spoken at the port of Melaka.[74]

> When Diogo Lopes de Sequeira arrived before the port of Melaka, there were at that time – according to what truly stated – a thousand Gujarat merchants in Melaka, among whom there were a great many rich ones, some who were representatives of others; and in this way they say that with Parsees, Bengalees and Arabs there were more than four thousand men here, including rich merchants and some who were factors of others. There were also many Kling merchants with trade on a large scale and many junks.[75]

In addition to the broader Indian Ocean network, there had also existed an inter-Malay-Indonesian island trade over archipelago goods like forest produce, tin, rice, and pepper and

[70] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 98-99.
[71] This is partially corroborated by Sebouh Aslanian as well who quotes Tome Pires, "Armenians come and take up their companies for their cargo in Gujarat, and from there they embark in March and sail direct for Melaka;" Refer to Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2011), 65.
[72] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 35.
[73] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 98.
[74] Pires, *Suma Oriental II*, 269.
[75] Pires, *Suma Oriental II*, 255.

spices, two commodities located at the eastern and western extremities. Arun Das Gupta argues that this trade depended on seasonal monsoon winds – ships sailed to the Moluccas with the western monsoon and back to the Melaka Straits with the eastern. After 1450, this inter-island trade became more oriented towards Melaka.[76] As a result, Melaka became a convergence point for ships involved in both regional and interregional mercantile activities. Melaka relied on Java for food supplies, especially when the availability from Siam was unreliable; furthermore, Java held the reigns on the export of spices. These Javanese products were procured in exchange for cloth brought in majorly by Indian traders. Friendly relations were maintained with the Majapahit kingdom, ensuring the recourse of Javanese junks to Melaka instead of the port of Pasai.[77] Melaka also ensured amicable relations with Pasai to guarantee a supply of pepper from Sumatra.

> If it was a letter from Pasai (or from Haru) it was received with full ceremonial equipment, trumpet, kettle drums, and two white umbrellas side by side and the elephant was brought alongside one end of the audience hall. For the Rajas of those two countries (Pasai and Haru) were regarded as equal (to the Raja of Melaka in greatness) and however they might stand to each other in point of age, it was greetings (not obeisance) they sent to each other.[78]

Meilink-Roelofsz argues that junks carrying tribute from Pasai to China likely sailed from the port of Melaka, which was in its process of development, and simultaneously involved in sending tribute to China.[79] The link with Pasai resulted in the arrival of Muslim traders and preachers on Melaka soil, and this influence ultimately resulted in the transformation of Melaka

[76] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 94-97.
[77] Meilink-Roelofsz, 32-33.
[78] *Sejarah Melayu*, 45.
[79] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 19-20.

into a centre for propagation of Islam. From there, Islam spread to the subordinate kingdoms under Melaka.[80] Hence, Melaka adopted Islam from Pasai in the early 15th century, within the larger trend of Islamisation of the Southeast Asian islands from the 13th century, a result of the links with Indian Ocean traders.[81] Ma Huan observed that the king and people of Melaka "follow the Muslim religion, fasting, doing penance, and chanting liturgies".[82] The king Parameswara adopted the title of Sultan Iskander Shah around 1413. According to the Malay Annals, it was Iskander Shah's grandson who ordered all subjects to convert to Islam.[83]

Polity and Society

In the fifteenth century, Melaka was ruled by an urban monarchy, largely dependent on the revenue from custom duties and presents from traders. Under the king was the *bendahara* (the prime minister and Chief Justice of all criminal and civil affairs), the *laksamana* (the admiral of the fleet), and the *tummengung* (for the administration of justice). In addition to custom duties, foreign merchants had to offer gifts to these four people. Trade was controlled through *shahbandar*s, who were superintendents in charge of foreign merchants. There were four *shahbandar*s – one for Gujaratis, one for Coromandel, Bengali, Peguan and Pasai traders, one for Javanese, Moluccans, Bandanese, Palembang and Luções merchants, and one for the Chinese, Japanese and Champa traders – revealing the awareness about the major trading zones.[84]

As shown above, maritime trade was the basis of the kingdom. In addition to seafarers, a large number of long-distance merchants arrived at Melaka temporarily, or established

[80] Meilink-Roelofsz, 34-35.
[81] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 95.
[82] Ma Huan, *Ying-yai sheng lan*, 110.
[83] *Sejarah Melayu*, 44.
[84] Das Gupta, 99.

themselves more permanently, mingling with the original Malay population. The southeast and southwest monsoon winds allowed only a brief period when the sojourning traders from the east and west could stay in Melaka before returning to their homelands. While this period did not necessarily coincide for all traders, it provided opportunities whereby they could establish contact with each other. For instance, merchants from Java dealt with ware brought by the Chinese, Indian and others to barter on Melakan soil. The months between December and March saw the most amount of interregional dealings, while the rest of the year, Javanese and other traders from Southeast Asia kept the commercial centre busy by selling the goods that had been left behind.[85] This cemented the importance of Javanese merchants in Melaka. In addition to the dues from trade, the kingdom received its income from the issue of licenses for selling goods in the streets, bazaars or the bridge.[86]

> There is one large river whose waters flow down past the front of the king's residence to enter the sea; over the river the king has constructed a wooden bridge on which are built more than twenty bridge-pavilions, all the trading in every article takes place on this (bridge).[87]

There was a certain hierarchy among foreign merchants as well, of whom the Klings and Javanese held considerable authority. For instance, the approximation of the value of a ship was carried out by ten merchants, of which five were always Klings. Javanese merchants were so rich that a certain Utimuti raja possessed goods and slaves only next to the sultan. Other foreign inhabitants did not seem to possess such influence, like the Bengalis who lived as fishermen and tailors.[88] Melakan nobility largely comprised of people of the Malay community, and emerged from families that were highly respected; for instance, the *bendahara* families

[85] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 38.
[86] Meilink-Roelofsz, 44.
[87] Ma Huan, *Ying-yai sheng lan*, 109.
[88] Pires, *Suma Oriental I*, 93.

held enough prestige for sultans to marry into them. However, the nobility was not immune to foreign insertions. The author of the Malay Annals belonged to the family of Tamil *bendahara*s, and the *bendahara* of the ruler Mansur Shah was a Kling, as was the *Bendahara* Tun Mutahir.[89] Nevertheless, foreign merchants might not have been fully accepted by the elite, evident from how Pires said that, "in trading-lands, where the people are of different nations, these cannot love their king as do natives without admixture of other nations".[90]

In addition to duties and licenses, tin was the third way in which the kingdom generated income. According to Pires, the kingdom of Melaka was divided into seven *tima*s or tin lands; each of these was required to pay the king in tin. These were governed by a *mamdaliqua* who was in charge of civil and criminal jurisdiction. The population of each of these lands varied between around two to four hundred residents. These people were all Malays, except for a village in Mimjam *tima* which was inhabited by Luções. Not all inhabitants of Melaka were engaged in tin processing, however; some were involved in fishing, and others in local trade, carrying items to sell in Melaka in *paraos*. What is also evident is the role of the Celates, referred to as 'mandarins' in the *Suma Oriental*. They were usually accorded positions of power and are mentioned as the governors of the *timas* or as knights; Tuam Açem, a mandarin from Melaka was the governor of Bruas, while Cinjojum was also governed by a mandarin.[91] The kingdom also comprised a number of noblemen called *cabaees*, who acted like knights, and came from Linga, Brunei, Pahang and Melaka. A third kind of knights were *amoks* who largely came from Java.[92] What is evident here is that the Malay population in the town of Melaka was stratified by occupation; at the top was the nobility, and below that were the fishermen, local traders, and tin-processors.

[89] Pires, 249.
[90] Pires, 279.
[91] Pires, *Suma Oriental II*, 260-261.
[92] Pires, 266.

In his account, Ma Huan differentiates between the men and women of the country, people of the countryside, and 'foreigners'. In the first category were people who were "slightly dark" and wore a short jacket of coloured cloth with a white cloth kerchief below. They lived in two-storeyed houses; the upper floor consisted of beds made from bound strips from the coconut tree, where they ate, drank and slept. The main occupation of the men was fishing which they did on dug-out boats from single tree-trunks. Occasionally, they were involved in collecting commodities like incense which was transported to other countries for trade.[93] Fei Hsin additionally mentions that the main occupations of these people were sifting tin and melting it into blocks, and netting fish in the sea.[94] As mentioned above, these people were the indigenous Malays below the status of the nobility.

The only thing mentioned about the 'foreigners' is that they used a certain incense found in Melaka to melt and smear it on the seams of their 'foreign ships' to prevent the inflow of water. They also used it to make cap buttons and sell them.[95] The connection with ships and the market makes me think that these foreigners referred to the long-distance merchants and sailors, including the members of the Chinese fleet, who came to Melaka for trade, or on royal business. However, the identity of this category of people remains shrouded in mystery as Ma Huan reveals no clues about their origins. The people of the countryside were involved in selling certain local items found in the forests, and on adjacent islands. The skin of the *shaku*-tree was soaked and powdered to make balls of *shaku*-rice, and this was sold as an item which could be consumed. From the islands they collected the leaves of a certain plant to weave them with bamboo, and these were sold as mats.[96] The people living in the countryside made up the lowest rung in the social hierarchy of the Malays.

[93] Ma Huan, *Ying-yai sheng lan*, 110-111.
[94] Fei Hsin, *Hsing-ch'a-sheng-lan*, 54.
[95] Ma Huan, 110-111.
[96] Ma Huan, 111-112.

Conclusions

Looking at the Indian Ocean from the point of view of Melaka adds new dimensions to the understanding of the workings of this water body. The history of Melaka reveals that this centre was simultaneously involved in two circles of trade. One was the inter-archipelagic trade that encompassed the island kingdoms from Aceh till the Spice Islands. The other was the larger Indian Ocean trade that ensured that Melaka had links with areas beyond Southeast Asia. In many ways, Melaka displaced the position held by Java in the fourteenth century. Melaka had a central role to play in either circle, right from the fifteenth century, especially as an intermediary port. Furthermore, these two circles of trade were distinct yet interlinked. The overlap of the two circuits was crucial to the sustenance of Melaka. For instance, Melaka was dependent on Java for foodstuffs , but these could only be procured in exchange for textiles that Melaka had to acquire from India.

Keeping Melaka as the centre helps us reimagine the Indian Ocean in terms of these two commercial zones. Through the fifteenth century, while acting as an intermediary port for China, Melaka attracted traders from the west as a steady market for spices, which were supplied by Southeast Asian merchants. These spices were sold in exchange for textiles that the western traders had to carry with them. This advantageous role continued onto Portuguese years as well, especially given the strong Portuguese position in western Asia, which ensured a stable exchange of products from the west and east at the market of Melaka. Given its position as a pivotal trading centre, trade was the basis of the land itself.

The original population of Melaka was made up of the Celates community, who were close to the sultan, and accorded the status of ‘manadarins’ and tin overseers, as well as other

Malays found as members of the nobility, local traders, fishermen, and so on. It is difficult to point out the exact origin of these Malays, i.e. whether they were indigenous to Melaka or arrived from other parts of the peninsula. It is likely that all Malays in the peninsula followed the same customs, and hence might have mingled well with each other, creating a homogenous entity. A similar story can be narrated about the Celates population who were drawn from various regions but could be identified as one community. The Malays were, however, distinguished from other Southeast Asian populations, evident from the mention of the Javanese and their lifestyle.

The nature of the kingdom determined the kind of people who could live in it, and the kinds of relations they had. The nobility was sustained on dues from trade, and this explained the exponential rise in foreign merchant populations from the fifteenth century at Melaka, catalysing a large number of interactions with the local populations at the dock, the city and the markets. Furthermore, trade had a social value, and marked the way for social mobility; this established a certain social differentiation according to occupation. Traders were prosperous and held positions of power, while local Malays, leaving the nobility, lived in poorer conditions as farmers, fishermen, tin-processors, etc. There was also a social hierarchy among the local Malays, marked by the affluence of the nobility, and the poverty of fishermen, and men in the countryside.

The place of origin was an important identifier, especially for merchants and seafarers – Chinese, Javanese, Klings, Bengalis, Arabs, Persians and Gujarati. Administratively, merchants were distinguished under the *shahbandars*, a differentiation again based on place of origin. Melaka received merchants from different parts of the wide Indian Ocean world; it also housed Javanese and Malay traders catering to the inter-archipelagic trade. Furthermore, the ties with China engendered the presence of Chinese diplomats and merchants on Melakan soil, while intermarriages ensured a Chinese and mixed-Chinese settled population in the town.

Intermarriages were unlikely restricted to the Chinese communities, and Melaka in all probability boasted various kinds of hybrid populations.

Indian merchants, especially the Gujaratis and Klings, were of importance as they traded in cloth which was in high demand, as were the Javanese, who brought in spices. Members of these communities could hence enter nobility as *bendaharas*. Not all foreigners, however, were merchants, evidenced through the Bengalis, who were fishermen and tailors. The exact significance of the name is unclear, although it was likely based on place of origin as it was for other communities. A more concrete definition of the term Bengali develops in the nineteenth century. Finally, the Portuguese, identified as Luções, had started arriving in Melaka from the fifteenth century, and some even permanently lived there such as in Minjam *tima*. Their presence pre-empts the developments in the sixteenth century when Melaka enters a new political regime.

CHAPTER II: A PORTUGUESE BASE, 1511-1641

This chapter looks at the takeover of Melaka by the Portuguese. This conquest fell in line with the Portuguese appropriation of other strategic points around the Indian Ocean littoral like Goa, Columbo, Diu, Hormuz and Aden. The chapter studies how this change in regime impacted the administration of the town, as well as the interregional connections, and the trading networks of Melaka. It then analyses the effect of these changes on the social landscape of the town, as well as the patterns of continuity and change as compared to the years before.

The Portuguese takeover

At the heart of the Portuguese conquest lay the imprisonment of some Portuguese sailors, at Melaka, who had alerted Afonso d' Alboquerque, the Viceroy of India, of the conditions they were living in; and hence, a fleet with the Viceroy set sail from Goa in April 1511 to take "vengeance for the treason". This vengeance also possessed a religious character is it was the 'Christian' force of the Portuguese rescuing the prisoners from 'Moorish' lands. When negotiations with the sultan of Melaka fell through, the first Portuguese attack was planned on Saint James Day. After days of fighting, the Portuguese took over Melaka using their superior artillery. Once Melaka fell to the attack, the sultan fled to Johore, where his new base was set up. In August, Alboquerque established the fortress *A Famosa* of Melaka, and within it built a church.[97] This marked the end of the independent Melaka sultanate.

Melaka had been aware of the militaristic intentions of the Portuguese, referred to as 'Franks' in the Malay Annals, and had been eager to repel the forces. Among its trading partners, Melaka could only garner support from the Muslim Gujaratis, who continued to

[97] *Sejarah Melayu*, 162-164. The Portuguese perspective of the conquest can be found in Afonso d'Alboquerque, *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso d'Alboquerque*, trans. Water de Grey Birch (London, Hakluyt Society, 1880). This was first published in 1557.

oppose the Portuguese even after the takeover. What is evident is that the Muslim trading network had not generated any sense of "Islamic solidarity" so as to ensure any backing for Melaka.[98] The Portuguese took over and continued to rule Melaka till 1641. The first major consequence was the dispersal of the Muslim elite, with the sultan setting up a new base in Johore, which eventually took over a part of the Melakan trade.[99] Subsequently, several Muslim traders deserted Melaka, establishing themselves at Aceh, Bantam and Brunei. The unity of the Malayan trading world centred on a single international port was replaced by the creation of a number of such ports such as Aceh, Banten, Johore and Patani.[100] The Portuguese cemented ties with non-Muslims like the Hindu merchants from South India, and princes from Java.

The Portuguese had entered the Indian Ocean waters to seek a place in the spice trade, a pursuit that was flavoured with a certain antipathy towards followers of Islam, which in turn was steered by the crusading spirit; the opposition to the Islamic sultanate at Melaka was not an exception but more of a pattern. The religious tenor often guided Portuguese commercial policy, manifest through alliances and belligerence. For instance, Pedro Álvares Cabral bombarded Calicut in 1500 when its ruler refused to disperse Muslims from his territory.[101] Violence, as also witnessed in the case of Melaka, accompanied the Portuguese efforts at inserting themselves into Indian Ocean commerce. The bellicose European power displaced several Islamic states like at Hormuz, Columbo, Goa, and even Melaka, engendering the Luso-Ottoman rivalry spanning the area between the Red Sea and Sumatra, since the Ottomans started reimagining themselves as the protectors of Islam in the Indian Ocean world.[102] Both direct and indirect confrontations between these two forces marked the years of the sixteenth century, and Melaka was often dragged into this as a Portuguese base. The Ottomans sent

[98] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 101.
[99] Das Gupta, 101.
[100] Das Gupta, 102.
[101] Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History*, 71.
[102] Alpers, 74-75.

several troops to support attacks by Muslim allies in Southeast Asia, especially Aceh, on this Malay territory. Of course, beyond religious motivations, the Ottomans also wanted to control the spice trade, and hence asserted this desire by challenging the Portuguese position.[103] The Portuguese, however, managed to hold their ground, and maintained significant control over not just Melaka, but much of the open seas of the Indian Ocean.

While the Portuguese initially presented a disruption to the inter-island trade, eventually Asian traders found new routes to bypass Portuguese control, and Indian Ocean trade continued to flourish. Naval superiority allowed the Portuguese to defeat Java to gain access to the Moluccas, but they could not dominate Indonesian trade, and only remained another "thread in the existing Malay-Indonesian inter-port trade."[104] The Portuguese in Melaka were disadvantaged in terms of money and manpower, and by the second half of the 16th century reversed their original policy of hostility to one of partnership with Asian traders.[105] In general, the Islamic antipathy cannot be overstressed for the Indian Ocean world since there were commercial collaborations between the Portuguese and Muslim groups like the Mappila traders and other merchants from Coromandel and Ceylon; pragmatism softened the crusading spirit as the Portuguese realised the need to reorder interactions with the dominating Muslim merchants to ensure profits.[106] In Melaka, Portuguese trade came to be carried out in cooperation with the Malays, Javanese and Chinese. However, Melaka no longer remained the primary meeting point as, for instance, Gujarati traders, who usually did not sail beyond Melaka, were now bypassing Melaka to enter waters further east.[107] At most, the Portuguese spun an additional thread of network between the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, and

[103] Alpers, 77.
[104] Das Gupta, 105.
[105] Das Gupta, 103.
[106] Pius Malekandathil, "The "Other " as a Crusading Enemy and Collaborator: Changing Relations between the Portuguese and the Muslims of Indian Ocean, 1500-1650," in *The Evolution of a Nation : Pre-Colonial to Post-Colonial Essays in Memory of R.S. Sharma*, ed. D.N. Jha (New Delhi: Manohar Books, 2014), 291.
[107] Das Gupta, 104.

Melaka, as the point of contact, managed to sustain its role in both Indian Ocean and inter-island trade. Melaka maintained its position as a player in the inter-island trade mainly as a supplier of textiles procured through Portuguese trade in India to several Malayan countries like Tenasserim and Pegu, as well as Siam, Cambodia, Java, Macassar and the islands beyond like Bali, Solor, Timor and Bima.[108] Portuguese control over Java and the supply of cloth, continued to attract traders to Melaka who supplied the port with food.

Nevertheless, the role of Melaka in inter-archipelagic trade lost much of its momentum with the rise of Johore and Aceh. Gujaratis expelled from Melaka collaborated with Aceh to establish a new supply line of pepper from Sumatra to the Red Sea; Bandar Aceh became the new market for Gujarati cloth. Aceh soon established control over the entire pepper supply in Sumatra, and entered into agreements with the English and Dutch to secure its position against the Portuguese and Johore.[109] Meanwhile, Johore obstructed trade to Melaka by imposing lower duties at its port. The fighting between Johore and Aceh made the Straits of Melaka unsafe, and restricted Indian Ocean traders from sailing to Johore. Johore then turned to China, supplying it with pepper from Sumatra, and spices from Banda. It established ties with the Dutch, and would later be instrumental in undermining Melaka.[110] As a result of the developments in Aceh and Johore, much of the pepper and spice trade was directed away from Melaka. Portuguese Melaka only managed to stay afloat in this sphere because of the fighting between these Southeast Asian powers. These developments, while weakened the role of Melaka, could not make it obsolete, however; armed with Portuguese military prowess, and its control over parts of India and Indonesia, Melaka continued attracting shipping traffic from both its west and east.

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[108] M.A.P. Meilink Roelofsz, "The coming of the Northern Europeans to the Malay-Indonesian area," in *South East Asia: Colonial History Volume I*, ed. Paul Kratoska (London: Routledge, 2001), 243.
[109] Das Gupta, "The maritime trade of Indonesia," 107-108.
[110] Das Gupta, 111-112.

Administration and Population

The Portuguese could easily accommodate themselves into the Asian trade because of the loose trading structure; the government in Goa had no effective control over Portuguese trade in the rest of Asia, allowing the Portuguese captains and *fidalgo*s to indulge in private networks of trade. This decentralised character sparked the ubiquity of Portuguese presence at ports.[111] Melaka was chosen as the base of operation in the archipelago and converted into a 'European-style port town'. A 240 feet high fortress was constructed to encircle the European-style buildings, including churches, hospitals, a Jesuit college, and other administrative structures. The Portuguese government divided Melaka into 8 parishes, each of which had a local church.[112] Estimates suggest that the number of Portuguese in Melaka never exceeded 600. According to Arun Das Gupta, the Portuguese encouraged intermarriage to ensure both settled and loyal servants. This, however, was not highly successful given that in 1525, there were only 38 marriages, while a century later, no more than 114.[113] A large number of Portuguese married elsewhere and later settled at Melaka. For instance, the missionary Juan de Eredia married the Bugis princess of Celebes and had four children who were born and raised in Melaka; one of their children was Manuel Godinho de Eredia, the Malay-Portuguese cartographer best known for his *Description of Malaca, Meridional India, and Cathay*.[114]

The influx of the Portuguese missionaries, encouraged since the time of Alberquerque, spelt an increase in the Christian population which jumped from 7400 to nearly twenty thousand in the 28 years after 1613.[115] That the Malays were converting to Christianity is

[111] Das Gupta, "The maritime trade of Indonesia," 104.
[112] Das Gupta, 104-105.
[113] Das Gupta, 103.
[114] Manuel Godinho de Eredia, introduction to *Description of Melaka, Meridional India and Cathay*, trans. J.V. Mills (Malayasia: MBRAS, 1997), 1. This was written in 1613.
[115] Das Gupta, "The maritime trade of Indonesia," 104.

evident from how a Portuguese ship from Macassar captured by the Dutch was carrying both a Muslim Malay and a Christian Malay from Melaka.[116] Eredia writes that the faith adopted by the Malays was Islam, but this was practised in a debased manner as the people consumed both wine and pork. In the hinterland there also existed idolaters, who followed the religion of the Brahmins and believed in the transmigration of the soul. Eredia narrates how a merchant of Melaka was mistaken as the reincarnation of a Hindu king's dead brother, who then filled the trader's cargo with sandalwood.[117]

Urban Melaka was divided into three main suburbs: Yler on the same side of the river Melaka as the fortress, Upe on the opposite side of the river, and Sabba extending along the banks of the river. Upe consisted of country-houses and groves, encircled by a wall, and was further sectioned into two parishes. The first, kampong Kling, was inhabited by merchants and other inhabitants from India. In the other, kampong China, lived the Chinese and Javanese. The Javanese population from north Java, however, lived in the Yler suburb. The beach at the mouth of the river was designated the 'Bazar of the Jaos' because that is where Javanese merchants sold rice and edible grain, indicating the position of Java as a primary purveyor of foodstuffs. Sabba was inhabited by the Malay fishermen, whose houses were built right over the water of the river. The State was administered through a Governor, a Bishop, municipal officers, ministers and other dignitaries, as well as a native *Bendahara* in charge of "infidel vassals and strangers".[118]

Eredia does not specify where exactly the Malay population lived, except that they "dwell in their orchards and gardens along the banks of the river"; they survived on produce from their land and their animals, although this was not practiced on a commercial scale.

[116] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 163.
[117] Eredia, *Description of Melaka*, 49-50.
[118] Eredia, 19-20.

Beyond the main city was the countryside which was largely uninhabited, except the district of Nany, occupied by the Monancabos, who traded in the 'betre' plant at the market-place in Melaka. Another group of people in the countryside were the Banuas who were engaged in witchcraft and sorcery.[119] Eredia segregated the "civilised" Malays into three social divisions. The aristocracy lived a life of leisure and indulgence, characterised by music, cock-fighting and wine-drinking; another entertainment was provided through *rajavas*, dancing girls, commonly found at feasts and banquets, although they were prohibited by the Portuguese. They occasionally dabbled in trade and commerce, and engaged with arms only at times of war. The "common" people were involved in more practical pursuits like carving or alchemy. The third tier involving the servants were occupied in cultivation, wine-making, and fishing.[120]

Duarte Barbosa, in his observations of Melaka, listed three categories of "foreigners of various lands, who live there and are born in the country".[121] One were the Moors he called *malaios*, who carried daggers called *crus* at their waist. The *crus* likely refers to the *kris*, a Malay dagger, and hence these people must have been the indigenous Malays who had adopted Islam; they are referred to as foreigners as they likely hailed from other parts of the Malay peninsula but settled down in Melaka . Some of them might have been the Celates, but this community had largely been loyal to the king, and had followed him out of Melaka in large numbers during the Portuguese incursion; Roelofzs points out that the Celates inhabiting the regions around Johore were faithful to the displaced sultan and opposed the Portuguese.[122] Eredia writes that natives of the Malay Peninsula (Ujontana) spoke the Malay language and referred to themselves as *Malayo*.[123]. The *malaios* followed patrilineal succession, and the

[119] Eredia, 22-23.
[120] Eredia, 39-40.
[121] Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa Volume II*, trans. Mansel Longworth Dames (London: Hakluyt Society, 1921), 176. The manuscript was completed in 1516.
[122] Meilink-Roelofsz, *Asian Trade*, 139.
[123] Eredia, *Description of Melaka*, 30.

practice of burying their dead. The men were generally bare above the waist and wore cotton garments below, except the more distinguished ones who donned a coat of silk. They lived in large houses outside the city, although they maintained separate houses for trade within the city. Each man possessed a number of slaves, women and children, who lived in separate quarters. Barbosa described them as polished and well-bred, and the women as always well-attired with fine hair.[124]

A second kind of foreigners were the *Chetti* merchants from Coromandel; these were the community of the Klings. *Chetti* was a Tamil term meaning merchant. All that is written about them is that they were big-bellied and only clothed below the waist. These are the only foreign merchants from the west of Melaka that are written about, suggesting either the decline of other groups, or the rise of the Portuguese as intermediaries in these trade circles. Under the Portuguese, the Klings had motive to prosper because of their contact with Coromandel, an area outside Portuguese jurisdiction, from where they could acquire a supply of cloth to Melaka. These merchants had a historic link with Melaka, and were also greater in number than the Portuguese. Meilink-Roelofsz observes that most of the commodities imported into Melaka fell into the hands of the Kling merchants.[125] The third category of residents were the *Jaos*, who were also Muslims; these were the settlers from Java. They had "broad ill-formed chests and wide faces", and remained naked above the waist. Barbosa did not have a good impression of these people, who he called cunning and 'skilled in malice'. They possessed good quality weapons and often unleashed violence; a few among them, called the "*guaniços*", were especially feared as they carried daggers and slayed whoever they met in their path.[126] This low opinion of the Javanese dwellers seems to have been a common observation among Europeans, as it is echoed in the account by Ludovico Varthema who passed Melaka many years prior in

[124] Barbosa, *The Book*, 176.
[125] Meilink-Roelofzs, *Asian Trade*, 172.
[126] Barbosa, 177-178.

1503/4; Varthema called them an 'evil race' who often took law into their own hands by unleashing violence that forced foreign merchants to sleep in their own ships.[127]

Conclusions

The Portuguese position towards Muslims led to an exodus of not just the sultan, but also a large number of merchants who set up their bases elsewhere, weakening the trading supremacy of Melaka. As compared to the Sultanate period, Melaka no longer remained the primary commercial emporium, but had to share the status with other emerging ports like Aceh and Johore. It is also crucial to note that the Portuguese did not majorly disrupt existent trade routes, but rather inserted themselves within these circles as an additional thread. This explains why the new government could not sustain itself on its anti-Moor policy in the long run.

The policy however did spawn some shifts. A large number of Indian Ocean traders of the Islamic belief, of whom the Gujaratis made up a major part, as well as some others, no longer called at Melaka, providing impetus to the rise of other ports. The Klings, however, continued to showcase their presence in the town. Both Portuguese and Kling traders were involved in importing cloth into Melaka, which was exchanged for spices brought by Javanese and Malay traders; Javanese also brought in foodstuffs. Hence, Melaka continued to play a role in both the Indian Ocean and inter-archipelagic trade circles, but in a frailer state as compared to the years before.

The transition in the political regime was accompanied by mutations in the social landscape. From within the original population, the Celates had largely followed the sultan into Johore and allied territories in the peninsula, while the Malays were still found in large

[127] Ludovico di Varthema, *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema*, trans. John Winter Jones (London: Hakluyt Society, 1863), 226-227. The book was printed in 1510.

numbers, employed in various pursuits. The Chinese continued to exhibit their appearance at Melaka in notable numbers, evident from a kampong dedicated to their habitation. The Portuguese, already present in the town since pre-European times, only increased in number over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of them marrying into Malay and other families and permanently establishing themselves. After the exit of the Portuguese government in 1641, it was these Portuguese Eurasians who remained in Melaka, and in the nineteenth century formed a significant part of the population. From Barbosa's account we know that Kling merchants, and Javanese traders and clans, also resided and procreated in the town.

The term Kling during the Portuguese era is quite ambiguous. While earlier, people from India were identified as Klings, Bengalis or Gujaratis, in the Portuguese accounts, the Indian population in Melaka was generally equated with 'Kling'. Gujaratis were indeed identified through their growing presence in other ports, but the Indian population in Melaka was never perceived with differentiation. At the same time, there was a correlation between Kling merchants and Chetti merchants, signifying a link between the identifier 'Kling' and the people from the south of the Indian subcontinent. This does not mean that Indians from other parts did not reside in Melaka, but that it is difficult to arrive at a precise survey. It is also important to keep in mind that Kling was a geographical identifier, and consisted of both Hindus and Muslims. Hence, while initially, the Hindu Klings associated themselves with the Portuguese, over time, the Muslim Klings returned to Melaka, and then both groups were involved in the cloth trade and other engagements. The absence of this nuance in Portuguese accounts is interesting as inhabitants of Melaka were identified by Portuguese writers according to whether they were Muslim (moors), Hindu (idolaters) or Christian, qualifiers not present in accounts preceding the takeover. The persistence of geographical signifiers for communities, especially in demarcation of kampongs, suggests that place of origin continued to be an important part of identity, both for settlers and itinerants.

CHAPTER III: A DUTCH COLONY, 1641-1795

This chapter will study the developments in Melaka in the one and half centuries following its shift from Portuguese control, when it was taken over by the Dutch. If in the centuries before, Melaka had been characterised by its strength as a commercial emporium, under the Dutch in the seventeenth century, it became a mere shadow of Batavia, the newly founded Dutch headquarters, and eventually lost its position as the single most important centre for trade and exchange, a status that had started diminishing since the years of Portuguese rule.

The Taking of Melaka

Accounts about Melaka circulating in the seventeenth century proclaimed Melaka as possessing unbridled wealth, and deemed it the 'jewel of the crown' of the *Estado da India*. It was these reports that fired the imagination of the Dutch, and made Melaka a destination of conquest. Of course, besides Melaka, the Dutch were also vying for monopoly over the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. Evidence of Melaka's wealth was witnessed in the form of the cargo of the Portuguese carrack *Santa Catarina*, carrying Chinese and Japanese goods on route from Macau to Melaka in February 1603, which was seized by the Dutch off the coast of Singapore and auctioned.[128] Three years later, the Dutch delivered their first attack on Melaka, with support from Johore with whom they had signed a treaty of alliance. Despite this failed attempt, Melaka remained a point of Dutch attention, and received further attacks in the following years. By the 1620s however, there was a change in the attitude of the Dutch towards Melaka, since the delay in wresting Melaka was impacting Dutch growth in other parts of Asia, where it still hadn't established a steady base. Furthermore, once Jakarta, renamed Batavia, was made the

[128] Amrith, 45.

base in 1619, much attention was diverted to this location. Melaka was no longer desired for the legendary profits, but to bring stability to Dutch rule in the region.[129]

Within the first six years of the seventeenth century, the Dutch had established a base in Amboina, and two factories at Pulicat and Masulipatnam, thereby exerting their control over the spice trade of the Moluccas and the cloth trade from India. The latter was especially a threat to Portuguese Melaka as it relied on cloth from Coromandel for food supplies from the Javanese and Malays.[130] Between 1633 and 1641, the Dutch established a blockade in the Straits and on Melaka. Networks of trade and the flow of goods between Portuguese ports were strangled to weaken the financial ability of the *Estado*.[131] In the Straits region, Dutch ships were positioned at the specific nodal points of the entrance of the Singapore Straits around Pedra Branca, at the mouth of the Johore river, and on the coast of the Karimuns. To the north, two other positions were assumed at the Ilha das Naus outside the port of Melaka, and in the waters off Cape Rachado.[132] The Dutch interception of other ships carrying food gradually weakened Melaka's networks of supplies, and according to the Dutch, it suffered famine-like conditions. Following June 1640, there were a number of Dutch assaults on Melaka, aided by vessels from Johore. Already weakened, the final blow came in the form of the plague that affected both Portuguese and Dutch troops, forcing Melaka to surrender to the Dutch on 3 January 1641.[133]

The Dutch Settlement

After the conquest, the Dutch established a settlement at Melaka. The Dutch retained the fort around the hill built by the Portuguese, although modifications had to made as much of it had

[129] Peter Borschberg, *The Singapore and Melaka Straits*, 157-165.
[130] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay*, 46.
[131] Borschberg, *The Singapore and Melaka Straits*, 170.
[132] Borschberg, 173-174.
[133] Borschberg, 184-186.

been destroyed during the attack[134]; it was renamed Fort Wilhelmus. There was a garrison of 550 Dutchmen stationed at Melaka. The Portuguese church on the top of the hill was renamed St Paul's and was used for Protestant worship; most of the existing Catholic places of worship were destroyed. All signs of Portuguese presence were demolished or remodelled according to Dutch needs. The Stadthuys, the residence of the Governor, was built at the bottom of the hill between 1641 and 1656, beside which a Dutch Reformed Church was constructed in 1753. The area in front of this was a marketplace. Along the bottom of the hill, houses and government buildings were erected.[135] Melaka was divided into three main units – the fort area, the town on the opposite side of the river, and the outer suburbs. The presence of a river dividing the administrative European sector and the town, was a feature present in most colonial towns.[136] There were three bridges that connected the fort to the town and other parts of the suburbs. The town comprised several streets like Herenstraat, Jonkerstraat, Vishersstraat, etc; these streets held residential quarters, shophouses, markets, and places of worship. Herenstraat and Jonkerstraat made up the main Dutch residential area; the former housed the more influential and wealthy Dutch inhabitants. The outer suburbs were divided into localities like Tengkara, Bandarhilir, Bunga Raya, and Bukit China.[137]

The main population in Melaka was made up of VOC employees, Dutch burghers, Malays, Peranakan Chinese, Klings, and Portuguese Eurasians. The few population reports that we have from this period also divided the population along these lines, in addition to counting the slaves. In 1729, there were around two or three hundred newly settled Dutch, alongside the

[134] For a full history of the modifications of the fort by the Dutch see, Robert C.M. Weebers and Yahaya Ahmad, "The Dutch Fort of Melaka" in *The 4th ASEAN Post Graduate Seminar in Built Environment* (University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur: Faculty of Built Environment, 2009).
[135] Robert C.M. Weebers and Yahaya Ahmad, "Interpretation of Simon Stevin's Ideas on the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (United East Indies Company) Settlement of Melaka," *Planning Perspectives* 29, no. 4 (2014), 547.
[136] Hussin, *Trade and Society*, 129.
[137] Nordin Hussin, "A Tale of Two Colonial Port Towns in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English Penang," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 75, no. 2 (2002), 74-75.

existing Portuguese families of mixed descent.[138] Like in its other colonies, the Dutch were numerically a minority as compared to other communities. Many of the inhabitants of the town were land proprietors, who owned large tracts of land in the hinterland of Melaka. This was the result of the Dutch policy of granting territory to private hands in Melaka.[139] Since these proprietors lived in the town, they functioned as absentee landlords, who did not exhibit any interest in stimulating agriculture; they were obliged to collect taxes from the people working the land and pay this due to the *penghulu*, the local headman in charge of that area of land.[140] Often this task was delegated to more enterprising Chinese, resulting in extortion and repression of the peasantry. These proprietors were mostly Dutch burghers and residents, although a minority belonged to the Chinese, urban Malay or Kling communities. These people made up the more influential section of the population as compared to the actual cultivators, largely the rural Malay community, below them, who paid rent to the proprietors.[141] Accounts of preceding centuries do not emphasise land proprietors since they were a Dutch creation; earlier, the major stimulant for Melaka was trade, and the people owning land mostly belonged to the less privileged native Malay population. Now, with trade losing its momentum, it seems like the populations who were earlier living off trade had to shift to other forms of income, and land provided one such avenue. This, for me, explains the rise in land proprietors from among the former influential communities of Melaka, like the Klings.

William Dampier noticed that native Malays lived in small cottages on the outskirts of the town.[142] Like previous years, these poorer Malays were engaged in low paying jobs like fishing or farming. A large number of them were employed in the land of the absentee landlords. As under the Portuguese, ethnic segregation continued under the Dutch. Each of the

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[138] Hussin, 84.
[139] John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1865), 227.
[140] Hussin, 74.
[141] D.J.M Tate, *The RGA History*, 34-35.
[142] William Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries* (London: Argonaut Press, 1931), 110.

communities mentioned above had their own colony within the town. For instance, Herenstraat and Jonkerstraat made up kampong Belanda for the Dutch inhabitants, Colijstraat was kampong Kling, and kampong China was situated on Goudsmidstraat and Eerstebrugwalstraat; kampong Java was situated outside the town. The Portuguese, mostly of mixed descent, lived in the quarters of their European compatriots in kampong Serani. Nordin Hussin observes that by the end of the eighteenth century, this segregation had largely blurred. For instance, areas formerly inhabited exclusively by Dutch burghers were populated by rich Chinese. Wealth had displaced ethnicity as the criterion that determined the population orientation in Melaka by the turn of the nineteenth century.[143] Unlike Dutch settlements like Cochin where there was a physical segragation between 'little Holland' and the more cosmopolitan Asian town[144], the only division in Melaka was the river which divided the settlement into the VOC headquarters in the fort, while all residents, whether Dutch or not, lived in geographically adjacent kampongs. Kampong Belanda boasted traditions of Dutch architecture, and was in this way distinct from other ethnic colonies. This suggests that while the Dutch might have aimed at isolation, they adapted to the existent framework of the town, making adjustments within very limited frames of authority.

Monopoly and Decline

What differentiated the Dutch from the Portuguese was the emphasis on trade monopoly. The first sixty years of Dutch rule led to shifts in the economic balance of power in the region. With control over Surat, Coromandel, and the Moluccas in the seventeenth century, the Dutch asserted a monopoly over the cloth and spice trade between India and Indonesia, affecting non-

[143] Hussin, "A tale of two colonial port cities," 85.
[144] Jos Gommans, "South Asian Cosmopolitanisms and the Dutch Microcosms in Seventeenth-Century Cochin," in *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600-2000* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 14.

European merchants. The Klings were edged out as the principal suppliers and carriers of cloth, and many of their vessels passed into European control. These Klings, based out of smaller and scattered business houses in India, could not compete with the large resources and centralised administration of the Dutch, as well as the growing strength of its private European traders. The role of the Indian middlemen in the textile trade declined. The Indian traders started losing their economic and political consequence, and likely had to sell their shipping and confine themselves to brokerage and money supply services or find other occupations.[145] This explains why some Klings bought land from the Dutch and became land proprietors. Consequently, in the nineteenth century, Klings were engaged majorly in non-mercantile activities. With the Dutch imposing a monopoly around the Moluccas, the importance of Javanese and Malay merchants in Melaka also declined in the spice trade. Malay tin, however, was one commodity that the Dutch could not monopolise, and hence the Malay peninsula harboured several non-European merchants trading in tin in the seventeenth century.[146] The other circle that the Dutch could not monopolise was the trade in archipelago goods, which continued to arrive at the port of Melaka, although on a more limited scale in comparison to before.

The rest of the century after the takeover did not see much growth for Melaka as it was overshadowed by Batavia due to Dutch commercial policy.[147] Governor-General Coen had attempted to divert all the China trade away from other ports in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago to Batavia, and as a result Batavia became the "central port of a new trading network encompassing the Indonesian archipelago and beyond".[148] Melaka was made to fit into

[145] K.S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 29-30.
[146] Das Gupta, "The maritime trade of Indonesia," 119.
[147] Kerry Ward mentions that, "Prior to its conquest by the Portuguese in 1511, the Sultanate of Melaka had been the greatest trading entrepot in the whole region for over a century. When the VOC established Batavia along the Straits of Melaka, it sought to emulate Melaka's former glory as the center of transoceanic trade. The VOC conquered Melaka in 1642, securing Batavia's claim for predominance in the region." Refer to Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 59.
[148] Das Gupta, "The Maritime Trade of Indonesia," 120.

the Dutch trading system centred on Batavia. It was to engage in no activities that could threaten the position of Batavia; Melaka was not even allowed to expand on commercial agriculture, and cultivated only a few fruit trees and paddy fields, sealing its dependence on foreign food supply.[149] This also explains why land proprietors never actively worked to expand cultivation on their lands. Furthermore, the company policy of control over supply and prices through monopoly stood at odds with the entrepot quality of trade at Melaka, pushing this centre into relative insignificance. Contrary to the early motives of wealth, Melaka was retained by the Dutch not to enlarge trade but simply as a point of strategic location.[150]

The eighteenth century, however, saw a series of new developments that brought Melaka into the fore again. From the 1720s, Europeans realised the value of importing Chinese tea, which was financed by tin from the tin-producing areas in the Malay peninsula and Sumatra, catalysing a resurgence of importance for Dutch Melaka. Melaka now had to compete over the procurement of tin with other Malayan ports controlled by the English, Danes and Portuguese engaged in the Chinese tea trade.[151] The same century also saw the rising influence of the Bugis, a trading community from the Celebes Islands that had migrated to the Malay peninsula following the Dutch domination of the Moluccan spice trade; they had set up their bases at the tin-producing polities of Klang, Selangor and Johore. The Bugis were interested in the trade in tin at Johore and Melaka, and initially established ties with the Dutch, helping them augment the delivery of tin to Melaka. However, like the Dutch, these traders also wanted to establish complete monopoly, leading to hostilities.[152] While the Dutch continued to have monopoly over tin from Melaka, the Bugis started expanding their control over other sources in the Malay Peninsula outside Melaka, such as Johore and Perak. A rival market to Melaka

[149] Hussin, "A tale of two colonial port cities," 74-75.
[150] Arasaratnam, "Dutch commercial policy and interests in the Malay Peninsula," in *South East Asia: Colonial History Volume I*, ed. Paul Kratoska (London: Routledge, 2001), 335.
[151] Arasaratnam, 336.
[152] Arasaratnam, 337.

emerged in Kedah, to where nobles from Perak were transporting their tin with the help of the Bugis; Kedah prospered as it was a free market, unlike Melaka, where goods were subject to Dutch monopoly.[153]

In order to strengthen their own supply of tin, the Dutch signed a number of treaties with Malay sultans who felt threatened by the growing influence of the Bugis. The treaty with Perak in 1746 ensured the supply of tin from there back to Melaka, which allowed the Dutch by 1749 to fulfil the total demand for Europe, China, Surat and Batavia.[154] Similarly a treaty was signed with Johore in 1754, according to which the sultanate won back control over its tributary Siak, another source of tin. By 1755, Siak had been subordinated, and tin from either location secured to Melaka.[155] The Bugis retaliated along with other anti-Dutch Malays by attacking Melaka in 1756. With naval reinforcements from Batavia, the Dutch pushed back and used this opportunity to exert influence over several other Malay territories like Selangor, Linggi and Rembau. Armed with the treaties with all these polities, the Dutch enacted that all vessels from Sumatra and the peninsula had to be inspected at Melaka; furthermore, vessels going westward from Batavia and Macassar could only call at Melaka.[156]

The Bugis were not, however, undermined, and established themselves at Riau from where they traded in several commodities, including tin, with the local Malays as well as the English, Portuguese and Chinese. Melaka started losing out to Riau as it was not a free market, and following 1758, suffered from the Dutch policy of prohibiting Chinese junks at Melaka to divert them to Batavia.[157] The Bugis established close ties with the English, and the latter set up a post at Riau in 1772. A decade later, the English set up a port at Penang, 250 miles north of Melaka. Because of the English commercial policies of free trade, Penang became a leading

[153] Arasaratnam, 338.
[154] Arasaratnam, 338.
[155] Arasaratnam, 339-340.
[156] Arasaratnam, 340-341.
[157] Arasaratnam, 344.

trade centre. For instance, Achinese merchants bypassed Melaka to provide their pepper at Penang. Vessels from Rangoon, Mergui and other ports of Kingdom of Ava, which hitherto came to Melaka to sell their produce in exchange for archipelago goods, shifted their destination to Penang. This further diminished Melaka's already limited role in the archipelago trade network. Furthermore, there was an increase in the smuggling of tin and pepper from Perak, Selangor and Palembang to the ports of Kedah and Penang. The English forbade their ships from calling at Melaka, reducing the revenue from harbour dues and services of English ships that called there; this was a significant amount.[158] Penang had surpassed Melaka as the centre for trade in pepper and other archipelago goods like tin. In the years following the 1780s, the Dutch proposed a number of radical trade strategies for Melaka, among which was the plan to accord greater freedom of trade at the port. However, before these proposals could be actualised, the English took over Melaka in August 1795.[159]

Conclusion

In contrast to the previous centuries, the years following 1641 spelt economic decline for Melaka. Reeling from food shortage engendered by the Dutch blockade, Melaka switched hands from the Portuguese. The subsequent Dutch policy was not conducive to this entrepot and it soon lost its commercial prominence. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it kept losing out to other ports like Batavia, which scaled up in Dutch importance, or Kedah, Riau and Penang, which were more oriented towards attracting trade. To elaborate, over the seventeenth century, the Dutch monopolised both the cloth trade from India and spice trade from the Moluccas, and diverted these commodities from Melaka to Batavia.

[158] Arasaratnam, 347-348.
[159] Arasaratnam, 350-351.

In the eighteenth century, Melaka lost out to Penang in the supply of pepper from Sumatra. During Dutch rule, the only two items Melaka continued to trade in were tin, and archipelago goods, although the scale of the latter had largely diminished since the Portuguese left. Hence, following 1641, the nature of Melaka drastically transformed from a commercial emporium to a mere Dutch holding devoid of much of its former glory. The two circles of Indian Ocean and inter-archipelagic trade continued, but Melaka was no longer at the centre of these networks. In effect, trade was no longer the basis of Melaka. Hence, there was a shift to non-trade oriented engagements, and explains why by the nineteenth century, majority of people were occupied in non-mercantile occupations.

The community composition remained more or less the same, comprising Malays, Chinese, Klings and other Indians, and Portuguese Eurasians. The new addition were the Dutch, made up of both company servants and other civilians. Owing to Dutch monolpoly over spices, the importance of Javanese traders declined, and many of them left Melaka for other ports. Hence, in the nineteenth century we see a very negligent population of the Javanese community at Melaka. Other non-European traders like Klings and Malays also lost their influence in trade, and had to enter other occupations. This might explain the rise in the land proprietors who hailed from communities that had historically attained wealth through trade, such as the Klings. If earlier, association with trade had characterised social value, under the Dutch, land became a new indicator of affluence in Melaka. This would change under the British as the government bought most of the land owned by the proprietors.

In Dutch accounts, the term Kling was always associated with the cloth trade, suggesting that for the Dutch, Kling was an identifier for a trader. There was no differentiation based on religion, however, and they were perceived as a compact community living in one colony, and involved in a specific occupation. Hence, one can argue that the Klings who became land proprietors referred to only those Indians who had earlier traded in cloth. Other

Indians also existed but there is no clarity on how they were recognised or the kinds of occupations they were involved in. All Indians lived in kampong Kling, which was likely labelled as such because the Klings made up the majority, or that the civilian population idenitified all Indians as Klings. It is also interesting to note how by the seventeenth century, certain communities were asscoiated with certain kinds of goods. For instance, the Klings with cloth trade, and the Javanese with spices and foodstuffs. This did not mean that the Klings or Javanese did not trade in other items, but that certain stereotypes had been established about each community based on historic mercantile connections that pervaded both civilian and state perceptions.

CHAPTER IV: NINETEENTH CENTURY MELAKA

The chapter will narrate the developments that engulfed Melaka in the nineteenth century, when it became a British colony, and was later combined with Penang and Singapore to form the Straits Settlements. This chapter aims to provide a sense of how the nature of this state in the Malay peninsula witnessed a transition owing to political and economic factors accompanying the change in regime.

Developments in the Malay Peninsula

The British East India Company, like all other European entities in the Indian Ocean, was interested in dipping its hand into the Malay-Indonesian trade networks. Facing stiff competition from the Dutch in Indonesia, the English initially turned their attention to the Indian subcontinent, enlarging their revenue potential there through control over Bengal, Awadh, Madras, etc over the second half of the eighteenth century. Towards the last decades of the century, the East India Company began delving into the Malay Peninsula in a bid to counter Dutch dominance. The first territory conquered was Penang. The territory of Penang comprised the Penang island, alternatively referred to as the Prince of Wales Island, and Province Wellesley, a strip of land directly opposite on the coast of the peninsula. Until 1786, Penang had been under the sultanate of Kedah. It was Captain Francis Light, a member of the Royal Navy, who negotiated with the sultan for Penang in exchange for providing protection to Kedah against the Bugis maritime raiders, and the threats of Siam. The need to take over Penang was guided by the British strategic agenda of acquiring a port to the east of India that could facilitate trade with China, and also act as a harbour for refreshment and repair.[160] A secondary motive was to stop British dependence on the existing Dutch ports, and hinder the

[160] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay*, 63-64.

growing influence of the Dutch in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. The other considerations besides Penang were Phuket or Junk Ceylon, the Andamans and Aceh. Penang was deemed as the final choice given its central location, and its favourable situation of being able to receive communication from Bengal and Madras at all times.[161] From a Residency under the Bengal Presidency, Penang was made a Presidency of its own in 1805.

The next Malayan territory appropriated was Melaka. During the French Revolutionary Wars, France attacked the Dutch Republic, forcing the stadtholder, William V to flee to England. From his residence in Kew, William V penned a series of letters to various governors of Dutch colonies to hand over their territories to the British for "safe-keeping". This is how the East India Company took possession of Melaka in August 1795.[162] In the succeeding years, till the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Melaka was ruled as a British settlement. In 1818, Melaka was returned to the Dutch. However, six years later, according to the Anglo-Dutch treaty signed between Holland and Great Britain in 1824, in an attempt to allay tensions between the nations, all British territories in Sumatra like Bencoolen were ceded to the Dutch in exchange for Melaka; the agreement further stipulated that the Dutch could not establish control nor enter into alliances with any territory on the Malay peninsula.[163] According to the British, "in the exchange of Melaka for Bencoolen, nothing probably was gained by either nation; though both these settlements, under proper management, may at least be made to pay themselves,"[164] suggesting that Melaka was not a valuable acquisition, and was even becoming a fiscal burden. In fact, in 1807, the British government had plans of destroying Melaka and moving the population to Penang; the mission failed when the inhabitants refused to desert Melaka.[165] The

[161] C.D. Cowan, "Early Penang and the Rise of Singapore, 1805-1832," in *South East Asia: Colonial History Volume II*, ed. Paul Kratoska (London: Routledge, 2001), 227-228.
[162] Arasaratnam, "Dutch Commercial Policy," 351.
[163] T.J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Melaka, Volume I* (London: Stewart and Murray, 1839), 15-16.
[164] Newbold, 18.
[165] Newbold, 127.

administrative reason why Melaka was retained was for unhindered control over the Straits of Melaka, which provided a direct passage of trade between India and China.

> The possession of the Straits of Melaka secures to Great Britain one of the two most important passes to China, and affords excellent places for refitment and refreshment to vessels engaged in the China and other trades, as well as to H.M's ships serving on the East India station. In the event indeed of a rupture with the Chinese, and the removal of our establishments from Canton and Macao, these settlements, especially Singapore, will prove invaluable.[166]

The third territory usurped was Singapore. In November 1818, the Stamford Raffles received instructions to set up a base at Riau. However, the Dutch beat the English to this and signed a treaty with the sultan. Hence, the British turned to acquire a base at the alternate location, Johore. On January 28, 1819, Raffles anchored off the island of Singapore, a territory under Johore. The island was home to the Admiral of Johore, under whom were some hundred and fifty Malay living off fishing and piracy.[167] On February 6, a factory was set up at Singapore with permission from the sultan of Johore; later, by paying the sultan a certain amount, the British came to acquire the settlement of Singapore.[168] Singapore had a favourable harbour, and commerce at the port was free of all custom dues. This drew Malay, Bugi, Chinese and other European merchants to this port. There was a phenomenal increase in trade, and owing to its low costs of administration, Singapore became a highly profitable possession of the British.[169] A large number of merchants and other workers from Melaka emigrated to Singapore. Singapore not only exceeded the trade of Penang and Melaka, but also threated the prominence of Batavia. The Dutch complained that Batavia

> was formerly visited by numbers of large junks from China and Siam, and by prahus from all parts of the Archipelago; but since the establishment of the British settlement at Singapore, the perfect

[166] Newbold, 23-24.
[167] L.A. Mills, "British Malaya, 1824-1867," in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, no. 2 (1925), 54-56.
[168] Mills, 58.
[169] Mills, 62.

> freedom of commerce enjoyed at that place has attracted the greater part of the native trade, while that formerly carried on by junks between Jakarta and China has totally ceased.[170]

In 1826, Penang, Melaka and Singapore were grouped together to form the Presidency of the Straits Settlements, in the hope that the combined administration would prove more economical. The experiment proved however to become a financial burden for the State and hence, in 1830, the Straits Settlements were subordinated to the position of a Residency under Bengal. The Settlements were administered by a Governor seated at Singapore, with assistant residents stationed at the other two territories of Penang and Melaka under him.[171] In addition to bridging the route between India and China, the Straits Settlements also functioned as a penal colony, holding convicts shipped from the British holdings in India. As opposed to Dutch monopoly, the Straits Settlements were charcaterised by free trade. In 1867, the Straits Settlements were transferred from a being a Residency under India to a crown colony under direct British control. This was the result of agitations against the Indian government over dissatisfaction with how the Straits were being administered. The Residency had been a victim of neglect following the loss of British monopoly of Chinese trade in 1833. The Settlements also complained against the large influx of Indian convicts and troops in the territories, which was massively adding to its expenditures.[172] The Indian Government had also started infringing on the free nature of trade enjoyed at the colony. Following the Mutiny of 1857 in India, European merchants at Calcutta petitioned for direct Crown control; similar demands were advanced in the Straits Settlements as well. In 1859, the transfer was agreed to in principle. It took another eight years for finances to be sorted and negotiations to be reached between the

[170] George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (London: Hallen and Co., 1837), 23-24.
[171] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 6-7.
[172] Mills, "British Malaya," 263-264.

London office and India office. An Act was passed in 1866, and on 1st April, 1867, the Indian Government formally transferred the Straits Settlements to the Crown.[173]

There were several other developments in the rest of the Malay peninsula in the nineteenth century. Following the rise of Singapore, thousands of Chinese migrated to the peninsula, engaging themselves in plantations and tin mines in Johore, Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. Rich Chinese traders backing these workers dominated the trade from their base in the Straits Settlements. These immigrants created secret societies, and disputes among these factions and with Malays threatened the peace of the Straits Settlements. Furthermore, as tin mining developed, the Malay chiefs of the mines gained more influence than the sultans of these states, leading to civil strife; this threatened the subsistence of the Chinese miners, in turn financially impacting their backers in the Straits Settlements.[174] The civil wars in the Malay states and the chaos caused by the Chinese wreaked unrest across the peninsula. Certain order was restored once the British signed agreements with Perak, Selangor, Pahang and Negri Sembilan, bringing them under its protection. A British resident was station to assist the sultan at each of these territories, and in 1896 they were combined to form the Federation of Malay States. The remaining five Malay states of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu were deemed the status of Unfederated Malay States.[175]

Nineteenth Century Melaka

British Melaka stretched from the Linggi river, separating it from Selangor, in the north, till the mouth of the Cassang river, that formed a boundary from Johore, in the south. The Melaka

[173] Mills, 271-275.
[174] Mary Turnbull, "Malaysia: the nineteenth century," in *South East Asia: Colonial History Volume II*, ed. Paul Kratoska (London: Routledge, 2001), 246-248.
[175] Turnbull, 249-250.

river divided the territory into the fortified area on one bank, and the main town on the other. In 1807, the British destroyed the fort surrounding the hill in Melaka. Several of the administrative buildings established along the base by the Dutch were continued to be occupied. For instance, the stadthuys was made the Government House, and the residence of the Governor and Recorder on their visits to Melaka.[176] Further, around the base of the hill were the barrack lines and houses of the military, where the garrisons were stationed. The church atop the hill was used as a powder magazine to store gunpowder, and the residency was set up beside it.[177] The south bank of the river was, hence, attributed by the military capability of the colonial enterprise. Surrounding the hill were smaller knolls where one could find Chinese cemeteries; the tombs were white and surrounded by low walls in the shape of a horseshoe.[178] The Chinese also used certain detached islets along the sea coast as places for sepulchre. On the other side of the river, the town was divided into three main roads, which held the bazaars, houses of the Dutch, Portuguese, Chinese, Kling and Malay inhabitants, chapels, Chinese and Hindu temples, mosques, and the Anglo-Chinese college, established in 1818.[179]

Commerce and Revenue

> "The future prosperity of this non mercantile settlement must almost entirely depend on its agricultural productiveness."[180]

There were several Malay villages subsisting on fishing along the banks of the rivers, and in the hinterland of Melaka. Each village was under the command of a *penghulu*, headman. The countryside beyond the main town had fruit trees which were grown as the property of certain

[176] Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, 351.
[177] Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 41.
[178] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 109-110.
[179] Newbold, 110-111.
[180] *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements, 1867-1883*, created by Robert L. Jarman (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 2014), 21.

villages. Coconut tree cultivation was a major occupation. Nutmegs, cloves and rice were also cultivated to some extent in various parts. The cultivation of rice, especially, was promoted by the British to counter the dependence on Java. Rice was grown on plots of wetland called *sawahs*. Other produce from Melaka included commercial crops like tapioca, sugar cane, jaggery, sago, gambier, pepper, and rattans, timber, vegetables, fruits, poultry and cattle[181]; much of this produce, as well as ebony, ivory and other forest products was exported to Singapore. The export trade of Melaka in the nineteenth century was mostly restricted to its own produce and manufactures. Tin was the major item mined and exported from Melaka. Gold, tin, and other forest and archipelagic goods were also brought from nearby territories to Melaka from where it was shipped out; gold dust was exported to Calcutta, Madras and Singapore, and tin was shipped to Penang and China. Iron implements for agriculture, nails, fire-arms, etc produced by Chinese smiths in Melaka was exported to other Malay States. The only items imported were either for consumption or re-shipment.[182] What was imported from India was cloth and opium, which was traded exclusively by European merchants, although the scale was hardly comparable to the previous years.[183]

When the British assumed power, they observed that most of the land was in private hands, a result of the Dutch policy of handing out land. After 1827, these were bought from the proprietors, most of whom were Dutch, on the condition that they would receive an annual sum in exchange for the sale. Through this process, the government came to acquire much of the land, which was then put under cultivation.[184] Land proprietors and the Chinese middlemen were done away with, and the holder of the land was someone involved in the cultivation process, and could employ other labourers. Revenue from land was an aggregation based on a

[181] Newbold, 119-120.
[182] Newbold, 145-146.
[183] Hussin, *Trade and Society,* 51.
[184] Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, 227-228.

ten percent levy on the produce from each plot from the cultivator, a mostly insignificant sum collected by the *penghulu*. Not all landholders, however, agreed, to pay the ten percent and were labelled as squatters, who according to the Melaka Land Act of 1861, could continue to occupy the land but had to follow the conditions laid down by the Government.[185] This land revenue was supplemented with the dues on tin mines in Durian Tunggal, Ayer Panas, Kesang, etc, and workings, considered another part of produce from land.[186] As a result, the state of Melaka derived its revenue from the dues on the produce, rent, taxes on markets and shops, post office dues, and fees and fines of the police and courts of justice.[187] Another sources of revenue was labelled as excise, which included the collections from the sale of licenses to pawn brokers, and from the retail of opium and spiritous liquors. In 1860, there were 111 shops for spirits, toddy, opium, and pawn brokers.[188] Opium, which was transported from India to China was intercepted and consumed by Chinese and Malays in Melaka. The Chinese had the exclusive right to farm opium, i.e. purchase it from the government and sell it in their opium shops.[189]

Education

The government established a Protestant Free School in Melaka in 1828. It was initially open to the Christian youth of the poorer classes, but later enrolment was extended to native boys who wished to learn the English language. The amount of education received by these boys was low; as soon as the boys were slightly proficient in the language, they were withdrawn and put to work as Writers or Shop-boys. The school taught English, Tamil, Chinese, Malay, French, and even Portuguese, given that many of the students were Portuguese descendants.[190]

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[185] Tate, *The RGA History*, 36-37.
[186] *Annual Reports, 1855-1867*, 14.
[187] Newbold, 156-157.
[188] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 245.
[189] Isabella Bird, *The Golden Chersonese* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 134. Originally published 1883.
[190] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 86-87.

Besides languages, a number of other subjects like arithmetic, history, geography and astronomy were also taught. A Protestant Girl's School was established in 1858, and the Institution of the Holy Infant Jesus in 1860. Five Roman Catholic Mission schools existed run by Portuguese and French missionaries, partly on government grants, and partly on private funds. These Christian institutions were run by Mission Fathers who were involved in 'civilising' and Christianising various forest tribes under missions like the Mantra or Jacoon Mission.[191] Other than this, were ethnically homogenous vernacular schools, including nine Malay and a single Tamil school (later closed in 1875), which taught reading, writing, and some arithmetic.[192] By 1881, there were 21 vernacular schools in Melaka.[193]

Beside these government institutions were Chinese, Malay and Tamil schools run by the community. Unlike Chinese and Tamil schools which taught in Chinese and Tamil, none of the Malay schools taught Malay, and the students were instead taught Arabic through the medium of the Koran.[194] Not many Malays were keen to send their children to government schools. They feared education as a tool to convert their children to Christianity[195], a fear not really unfounded since the major government schools were run by Protestant and Catholic missionaries, who were socially involved in coaxing people to convert. This repulsion towards a British education is evident from the words of an illiterate *penghulu*, who rather preferred a *mata-mata* (Malay information providers) to do his writing for him than someone more qualified, as such people were considered to have *jahat* (bad character).[196] The *penghulus* both imbibed the anxieties of the Malays, and further propagating them within the community, making them an authoritative challenge to the colonial project of education. The Chinese, in

[191] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 19.
[192] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 217.
[193] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 557
[194] Munshi Abdullah, *The Autobiography of Munshi Abdullah*, trans. W.G. Shellabear (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, 1918), 14. The original Malay version was published in 1849.
[195] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 162-163.
[196] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 686.

contrast, were eager to learn English to apply it for productive pursuits of accounts, note taking, and making shop bills. Hence, they invested in making sure their children knew the basics of the language, but nothing more.[197]

The Prison at Melaka

Melaka started receiving convicts from 1805, when some prisoners from Penang were transferred. Thereafter, convicts arrived from India and other British colonies; according to colonial policy, Melaka only took in term prisoners, while lifers were sent to Penang and Singapore. Upon arrival in Melaka, convicts were initially placed in the former Portuguese barrack on the eastern side of St Paul's hill, which held a hospital and warder's quarters, as well as other buildings, all surrounded by a high stone wall built from the old fort ramparts.[198] The local prisoners were held in the old Dutch prison, and both the convicts and local prisoners were put under the charge of half-blood Portuguese warders.[199] The original prison building used in Melaka was described in 1851 as

> a doubled story house, containing four rooms with an upper and lower verandah. Each room was capable of accommodating 20 people or 80 in all. There was a clean and dry courtyard, attached to it, with a long tile covered range of workshops, an attap roofed saw pit, tiled cook room and privy, and well of good water, all within the precinct of the establishment.[200]

In 1860, a new prison was constructed of brick and mortar at Bandar Hilir. It was a two-storeyed T-shaped building, split into three divisions of two wards each, for convicted prisoners, those awaiting trial, and Europeans, respectively. There was no supreme court in Melaka, and hence, the jail acted as the holding cell for prisoners awaiting hearings in Penang and Singapore; before 1860, these prisoners had been held at a separate building called the

[197] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 163.
[198] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 70.
[199] J.F.A. McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co. 1899), 28.
[200] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 79.

House of Correction. At the end of each enclosure of the new prison were the latrines, wash rooms, wells, and cook houses. On the upper level was the house of the jailer, and three establishments for European, native and women debtors, who were also prisoners but deemed separate from the convicts.[201]

As compared to Penang and Singapore, the prison population in the Melaka jail was quite small. This population kept decreasing through the years since not a lot of convicts were sent to Melaka. Furthermore, the convict population in Melaka was predisposed to adjustments because of discharges, deaths, escapes, and transfers to Penang and Singapore. In 1857, the convict body in Melaka numbered 605. In 1858, this was 584, in 1860, 532, and after closure of transportation from India in 1861, the number of convicts was 502.[202] Perhaps, owing to the relatively low prisoner population, one crucial feature of the Melaka jail was the absence of separate quarters based on gender and ethnicity. The lack of gender and ethnic segregation proved to be cost-effective, but the absence of women's quarters caused problems on some occasions. For instance, a certain Eppagey Christiana, transported from Ceylon in 1859 was compelled to lived entirely among men, and required both a guard and a cook to wait on her when punished to solitary confinement. This proved to be too heavy of a burden for the Melaka prison authorities, and she was transferred to Singapore within six weeks.[203]

Initially, Penang, Melaka and Singapore followed different prisons systems, but in 1827, a committee was formed to revise the regulations at Penang, and the new Penang rules were instituted; these were extended to Singapore and Melaka, enabling a uniform framework for prison administration.[204] Three major changes were enacted – the introduction of industrial training workshops, the institution of an incentive program, and the creation of convict warders.

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[201] Pieris, 81.
[202] Refer to *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 124; 154; 233.
[203] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 81.
[204] McNair, 24.

Implementation of these measures was completed over the next few decades. Performance of labour was a requisite part of punishment for the convicts, and largely contributed to the development of the Straits Settlements over time. Convicts in Melaka were put to work on several public works projects involving clearing land, quarrying, road and bridge building, brick making, and other construction and repair work.[205] Hence, convict labour served the dual purpose of punishment and urban development. As Stephen Nicholas puts it, "the convicts were, in effect, the public works department of the Straits governments."[206]

Labour was especially stressed given that the penal commissioners and superintendents in the Straits were all colonial engineers, who were equally interested in urban planning, as opposed to in India and Burma, where mostly medical men were assigned this post.[207] The administrative view of labour in the Straits differed from other penal settlements. In South Asia, Ceylon and Burma, the British saw physical labour merely as a disciplinary measure; in contrast, in the Straits Settlements, it was perceived as a part of reformation.[208] Labour was said to possess the potential to transform convicts into better people. Hence after 1827, workshops for industrial and craft training were introduced in great measure to turn prisoners into productive members of society. Furthermore, blacksmith and carpenter shops were established, and prisoners were taught various crafts like chair making, basket weaving and rattan working; these products were of such good quality that they often fetched high prices, and some items were even exported to Europe and America.[209] In Melaka, convicts were trained to make carts, work iron and wood for bridges, roof timber for public works, turn and fit metal, etc.[210]

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[205] McNair, 29.
[206] Stephen Nicholas and Peter Shergold, "Transportation as Global Migration," in *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 33.
[207] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 106.
[208] Pieris, "The Other Side," 456.
[209] McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders*, 19-20.
[210] McNair, 29.

Linked to the performance of labour was the institution of an incentive programme to keep prisoners motivated to work. Prison authorities divided convicts into six classes. Labour output and behaviour were monitored through a point system that allowed convicts to progress through these classes. The first class of prisoners were awarded tickets of leave to settle outside prison within the civilian population; they merely had to appear in prison during the monthly muster. The second class worked as convict overseers, peons, hospital staff and public officers.[211] The class below this was delegated outdoor labour; these convicts were divided into gangs, and provided their own accommodations outside the prison lines near their place of work, which were guarded by officers day and night. The huts of these convict labourers were situated in farms or villages termed as commands, each supervised by a convict warder. The fourth level, made up of newly arrived convicts, the fifth, of serious offenders, and sixth, of invalids, were confined to the prison day and night.[212] This system was drawn from Bencoolen, where convicts had similarly been divided into three classes with the first class having the privilege to settle outside the prison, and the third forced to do hard labour and live confined at night. The mobility within classes gave prisoners the incentive to work hard and demonstrate good behaviour to reach the first class.[213]

However, not all prisoners showcased a willingness to work. This can be seen in the case of the Kandyan rebel, Tikiri Banda, who was transported to Melaka in 1848. Tikiri often neglected the tasks assigned to him, displayed aversion to labour, and had to be reappointed on five occasions; as an educated prisoner, he also penned petitions complaining against his status as a third class prisoner. For instance, he was often absent from his duty at Kepang, and the superintendent of Melaka, Captain Man dispatched him to Ayer Panas, where he was assigned

[211] Nicholas and Shergold, 33.
[212] Clare Anderson, *Indian Uprising of 1857-8: Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion* (Cambridge: Anthem Press, 2007), 107. Also refer to McNair, Prisoners their own Warders, 22-24.
[213] McNair, 5-7.

to manual labour, and other demeaning tasks such as cleaning the superintendent's horse, and carrying his provisions, attempts aimed at humiliating Tikiri into compliance. On another occasion, Tikiri absconded to a constables' plantation while on the duty of supervising men felling timber.[214] Such examples of disobedience likely stemmed from the unwillingness to work for a government these convicts had formerly been rebelling against. This was commonly seen among Ceylonese prisoners who had to be appeased through additional benefits like allowances and offers of reduced sentences.

In the case of Tikiri Banda, however, aversion to uninteresting labour was also fuelled by his clandestine project of illegally building a school; once caught, he lost his position as overseer of other labourer convicts and further his motivation to perform labour. It was at this point that Tikiri penned a petition alleging excessive violence by the Superintendent for working on building a school.[215] This, among other of his earlier petitions, engendered a profusion of official paperwork, which stand out in the archive, making Tikiri Banda one of the most popular convicts of Melaka. Tikiri did not gain much from the industrial training as a prisoner, and instead used his prior education in law to become a writer and provide legal advice in Melaka upon his release in 1864. He later repatriated to Ceylon.[216] Similar to Tikiri's escapades, McNair narrates an incident when a gang of labourers escaped inland while clearing land for a lighthouse in Cape Rachado, owing to ill-treatment from the overseer[217]; in this case, however, nothing is known about the convicts themselves, except that they were later returned with the help of Malay chiefs in the countryside. In general, occasions of rebellion against the penal authorities are shrouded by silence in the archive given the largely illiterate nature of convicts, who were marginalised as a collective in the larger colonial discourse.

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[214] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 135-136.
[215] Pieris, 136-137.
[216] Pieris, 137.
[217] McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders*, 29.

A distinctive feature of the Straits penal establishments was the introduction of a system whereby warders were raised from within the prisoner population. These convict warders, identified as *tindals* or *sirdars*, were usually prisoners belonging to the second class of prisoners. They were mostly in charge of commanding the gangs of convicts assigned to outside labour, such as repair of roads or stone quarrying[218], as seen in the case of Tikiri Banda. The system was necessitated by the general lack of warders at the settlements which was becoming a security issue. Initially, free warders had been employed for the job, but such free labour was hard to come by, and owing to vacancies and dismissals, and alternate system was required.[219] Furthermore, European soldiers, the suggested alternative, were expensive and not knowledgeable of native languages, and hence not suited for the role.[220] The system of convict warders had its roots in a failed experiment in Penang, when well-behaved prisoners were randomly chosen owing to the shortage of warders. The appointment became more systematic following the introduction of the system under the new Penang rules, which legislated the introduction of convict overseers. In Melaka, these convict warders replaced the Portuguese warders, who had initially been employed since 1805.[221]

Conclusion

> It is difficult indeed to realize that this strange, dim old place was once the centre of a thriving trade from so many distant countries, though it still carries on its cultivation of rice and other grain, and this is yearly being more developed.[222]

[218] McNair, 19.
[219] McNair, 18.
[220] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 74.
[221] McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders*, 27-28.
[222] McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders*, 27.

By 1795, Melaka was mostly devoid of the India Ocean trade of spices, textiles and pepper, and paid for its food through tin and other archipelago products. Despite this loss of trade, Melaka was important for its strategic location, and this explains why the English were interested in possessing it. Through their settlements in Penang, Melaka and Singapore, the British effectively controlled movement across the Straits of Melaka, a valuable passage between India and China. The British also recognised the potential for cultivation at Melaka, and honed in on this. This reduced Melaka's dependence on foreign traders for food supplies to some extent. Melaka continued to be involved in trade but this was at a much reduced level, restricted mainly to its own produce and forest products, which was traded within the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, especially the Straits Settlements of Singapore and Penang. Gold and tin were the only items that were shipped from Melaka outside Southeast Asia. The Annual report of the Straits Settlements for 1856-57 mentioned that the trade in Melaka was too "insignificant for mention, being almost wholly confined to its intercourse with Singapore."[223] In this way, Melaka had lost most of its long-distance edge, and was now limited to the networks encompassing mainly the Malay peninsula.

By the nineteenth century, the nature of the town had completely transformed. Previously, as a trading emporium, Melaka derived its revenue from dues from trade; now it sustained itself majorly on rent, taxes on produce, excise, and fees and fines. It had mutated into an agriculture and mining economy, dependent on its produce and tin. Furthermore, as a part of the Straits Settlements, Melaka lost its independent value and was attributed a collective identity alongside Singapore and Penang. For the British, Melaka was the least valuable of the three, and was treated accordingly. How this impacted the population of Melaka will be the focus of the following two chapters. Finally, the influx of convicts added a new dimension to the town. The presence of a penal settlement at Melaka was a nineteenth century development,

[223] *Annual Reports 1855-1867,* 95.

which not only transformed the nature of the town, but also inserted a novel section of people who interacted with the existing population in various ways. This will be further explored in the sixth chapter.

SOCIAL TERRAIN

CHAPTER V: COMMUNITY, CONVERSATION, AND PLURALITY

The communities who made up the population of Melaka in the nineteenth century forms the basis of enquiry for this chapter. It begins by analysing the imposition of race as a category in the nineteenth century, and describes the British attempts at and challenges to racial segregation. This chapter then looks at the censuses conducted at Melaka, and how the census was a means to enforce racial identity. Having looked at the British perception of the population at Melaka, this chapter moves on to provide an overview of the civilian population, and aspects of internal and external relationships.

Racial Segregation and Colonial Plural Societies

In the Indian subcontinent, East India Company rule was characterised by commercial monopoly, restricted immigration and closed bureaucracy. In contrast, the Straits Settlements flaunted free trade, light taxation, and a laissez-faire government, implying that this colony was an "incongruous offspring", a mere appendage, of the British empire.[224] Since the Straits Settlements were situated on the periphery of the Calcutta-centred Indian administration, and acquired and sustained through negotiations with Malay chiefs, British authority in this region was more tenuous as compared to other colonies. Economically, the free trade conditions implied that the British did not accrue much revenue for themselves, and hence, this colony was the victim of much neglect. The limited British authority also meant that migrants had more freedom to pass through these borders. These immigrants were rather needed in the Straits Settlements for labour, and therefore, as compared to the Indian subcontinent, Penang, Singapore and Melaka "promised regional migrants greater rights to self-determination".[225]

[224] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 35.
[225] Pieris, 36.

Regulations over migration were only imposed after 1864, and the government actually encouraged immigration of Chinese labourers into the settlement for much of the century. Over time as immigrants and settlers mingled with each other socially and economically, the line between migrant and settled blurred, especially given inter and intra-community interactions. Despite this liberty, movement and community relations were still colonially scrutinised to ensure they did not subvert British sovereignty. The strategy employed for this was racial segregation, whereby migrant and non-European communities would remain isolated. Racial segregation was a form of othering, whereby the English physically distanced themselves from those they considered as 'other'. Natives were deemed racially inferior, and were controlled through laws and education in the pursuit to make Melaka the ideal colony for the British.

In the Straits, the various communities were subject to the colonial laws of race which hierarchised them according to their physical appearance, their religious and cultural practices, and the role they played in the colonial economy.[226] For the British, each race, such as Chinese or Malay, was distinct not just by features, but also culture. In Melaka, pluralism was a result of both the presence of diverse communities, and the widespread labour immigration characterising the nineteenth century. Community and corporal distinctions had historically existed in society in terms of ethnic origin, blurring the lines between race and ethnicity. From the British government's point of view, ethnicity came to be perceived in terms of race. In other words, ethnic boundaries largely formed the lines for racial difference, resulting in no real polarity between either term.

The Straits administration also identified and classified the "race-based propensity for a particular form of work."[227] This in turn propagated racial prejudices ascribed to communities, such as labelling the Chinese community as industrious but degenerate, the

[226] Pieris, 37.
[227] Pieris, 36.

Malay community as valiant but complacent, and the Indians as a labouring class loyal to the government. Malays were negatively perceived as lazy in comparison with the assiduous Chinese, whose rate of migration and settlement was translated as an index of economic growth. Indians, who were largely brought in for labour, both as free and unfree migrants, were relegated an inferior position because of this association.[228]

British administrators strongly believed in the immutable divisions of race, and the explanatory, almost predictive powers of racial categories. The desire to organise race was motivated by two reasons. One was to implement a division of labour based on race, which could be quantified to calculate the profitability of the Straits Settlements; for instance, Chinese labour immigrants were put to work in tin mines, while most paddy workers were Malays. The other was to thwart the alliance of races for anti-colonial rebellion.[229] The division furthermore defined the kind of association the British government was meant to sustain with each community. Europeans were a privileged community, while Indians, Chinese and Malay immigrants were free settlers with restricted autonomy and systems of self-governance.[230] Indian convicts and sepoys were governed by laws different from those for Indian settlers.

Despite this racial distance, the government was, nevertheless, keen to attract the loyalty of the population and thereby build an idealised British community. Such a structure defined the foundations of the plural society and also determined the laws for naturalisation and subjecthood. Any person born within the colony of Melaka was deemed a British subject. Newcomers into the territory, like Indian and Ceylonese immigrants, were also granted this status, which was extended to their children born in Melaka.[231] However, for Chinese immigrants to acquire British subjecthood, they had to forego all their rights in their homeland,

[228] Pieris, 36-37. These prejudices are also evident in *The Golden Chersonese* by Isabella Bird, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* by James Cameron, and in the *Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements*.
[229] Pieris, 37.
[230] Pieris, 38.
[231] Lees, "Being British in Malaya," 79-80.

which meant they would not be protected when they travelled back to China. As a result, many of them were disinclined to give up their title of immigrants and accept British subjecthood in the Straits.[232] Hence, long-time immigrants might have been perceived as settlers but were not necessarily British subjects. Such nuances are what characterised the population of Melaka.

The implementation of the British system of racial segregation was far from absolute. Perhaps owing to the historical existence of numerous regional ethnicities, as noted in previous chapters, racial segregation, in terms of 'White' and 'Black Towns, was not enforced in Melaka to the extent it was in Singapore. In Melaka, communities continued to reside in specific kampongs, where there was more flexibility in racial and territorial boundaries. These kampongs resulted in the town existing as an amalgamation of intermingling ethnicities like the Eurasians in kampong Serani, Klings in kampong Kling, Chinese in kampong China, and Javanese in kampong Java. The only prominent racial distinction was the river, which divided Melaka into the militarised headquarters of the British on the south, and the accommodations of other communities on the north.

Secondly, forms of self-government like religious institutions, cultural associations, and secret societies (*hoeys* and *kongsis*), challenged the imperial authority in various ways. Malays were foremost loyal to their chieftains, while the Chinese focussed on clan loyalties. British law often did not pervade in the resolution of Chinese and Malay conflicts. Another example of this was the mitigation of minor conflicts by the village headmen, the *penghulu*, despite the existence of British courts of judicature.[233] The *penghulus* were required to assist the police in reporting criminal activity in their villages, but this assistance was often not rendered, and at times, the *penghulus* were themselves part of illegal assemblies.[234]

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[232] Lees, 81.
[233] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 50.
[234] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 209.

The British were also not equipped to enforce divisions on hybrid categories such as Malay-Chinese Babas, Peranakan Indians, and Eurasians of Portuguese descent. In general, the population of women among non-Europeans was low, which prompted contacts between Indian, Chinese and Malay communities giving rise to a new ethnicity of the Peranakan, or Straits born.[235] This Peranakan population took roots in Melaka in the fifteenth century, but became more prominent as a distinct identity in the nineteenth century when they could not easily be racially classified.[236] The fused character of these communities caused much anxiety to administrators as it cracked the racial edifice.

> Here is an ethnographical puzzle which would pose a Pritchard, a Bunsen, and which, no doubt, has puzzled a Crawfurd. Here the Hindoo features are most remarkably apparent in that Chinese, with shaven head and long tail ; there that coal-black woolly-headed personage calls himself a Portuguese ; and yonder fair, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed youth says he is a Malay. Again, that yellow-skinned, oblique-eyed, flat-faced, snub-nosed gentleman says he is a Dutchman. The climate of Melaka is a surprising one in creating such incongruities. In two generations an Englishman becomes a Negro, a Chinaman a Chitty, a Malay becomes a Brahmin, and a round lusty German changes into a dried-up leather-jawed Arab.[237]

Peranakan Indians were considered "a compound character of no amiable description, partaking in the vices of both parent stocks." Similarly, hybrid Chinese communities were described as a "race inferior in energy and spirit to the original settler."[238]

Beyond marriage, Indians, Chinese and Malays were also involved with each other in various other social interactions, ensuring cultural transmissions and collaborations. Furthermore, interethnic alliances were not restricted to the town but also flowed through the rural suburbs of Melaka, resulting in a variety of hybrid cultural institutions across the

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[235] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 37.
[236] Pieris, 41.
[237] John Thomson, *The Straits of Malacca, Siam and Indo-China* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993), 313-314. Originally published in 1875.
[238] Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal*, 98-99.

settlement. For instance, in Tanjong Kling, an Indian village in rural Melaka, Chinese *hoey* meetings were held at an altar containing a certain jar of nectar, a book of regulations, banners, swords, and knives, suggesting a close relationship between the Kling and Chinese communities. These networks were also visible during religious and cultural festivals, such as Muharram, when Muslim Indians, Malays, and Chinese came together to celebrate.[239]

> the most amiable part of the Melaka man has not been mentioned ; this consists in his absence of religious prejudice. The Buddhist, Brahmin, Catholic, Protestant, and Mahomedan, each assist at each other's festivals, and join with ardour in the ceremonies.[240]

Munshi Abdullah, a Peranakan Malay scribe, mentions how Muslim Indian sepoys would congregate at his grandfather's house to read the Koran.[241] Religion often overrode the barriers of ethnicity based on place of origin. Furthermore, such inter-ethnic collaboration at times proved to be a threat to the Straits government. For instance, in November 1859, firearms and gunpowder were discovered at an assembly at Parit Malana in Melaka, in which one hundred Chinese and Malays had assembled.[242]

Census, Enumeration and Imperfections

The British often asserted the need to carry out proper censuses in their colonies, as the numbering of people would allow the government to 'perfectly feel its way' and estimate its duties, rights and powers.[243] Furthermore, the census became the tool whereby the British could enforce racial identity to classify the population according to their standards. Race, in Melaka censuses, involved a difference in bodies, but also considerations of place of origin, language,

[239] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 173-174.
[240] Thomson, *The Straits*, 314.
[241] Abdullah, *The Autobiography*, 22.
[242] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 174.
[243] *Annual Reports, 1867-1883*, 121.

religion, and lifestyle, suggesting an administrative confusion over the concept of race and how to apply it to the population.[244] The process of collecting data was executed with caution so as not to irk the suspicions of the native population, who were perceived 'ignorant' to the necessity of a census. For instance, the Straits report of 1867 states that when *penghulus* were called to estimate the livestock and cattle in Melaka, the poor villagers, considering it a pretext to tax their flocks and herds went into town to sell off their goats in large numbers.[245] A number of attempts were made to enumerate the population of Melaka in the years before 1871, when the first proper census was conducted. By 1836, seven counts had been taken in Melaka in the years 1826, 1827, 1829, 1833, 1834, 1835 and 1836.[246] These head counts were neither reliable nor comprehensive, and barely accounted for the race and sex of the population.

A preliminary census was conducted for Melaka in 1852. The next one was taken in 1859/60. A comparison of the two shows a gradual increase in the population of Melaka. The total male population jumped from 35,170 to 36,023, while the female population increased from 27,344 to 31,244. The 1859 census recorded an increase in the European and Eurasian male population that rose from 1050 in 1852 to 1445 in 1859. A decline was noticed in the Chinese male population, attributed to the exodus of miners into neighbouring States. There was an increase in the population of Malays, especially Malay women, who it seems came in to Melaka from nearby regions. The Indians, divided into Klings, for those from south India, and Bengalees, for those from north India, made up 1026 in number. There were about 220 Malay, and 205 Chinese Christians. Besides this were 410 troops, and 170 police officers.[247] These were the figures mentioned in all future reports till 1871, when the first proper census was published.

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[244] Sandra Manickam, "Bridging the Race Barrier: Between "Sakai" and "Malay" in the Census Categorisations of British Malaya," *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 3 (2014), 374.
[245] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 18.
[246] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 36.
[247] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 245.

The 1871 census coincided with the decennial census undertaken by Britain in all her colonies. In addition to race, nationality, age and sex, the census also provided data on houses, occupations and geographical areas. The number of births and deaths were also recorded thereafter, but these numbers were rather skewed given that most residents did not come forward to register the births and deaths in their families. Following 1871, censuses were conducted at Melaka every ten years. A distinctive feature of these censuses was that in addition to Malay, Chinese, Indians and Europeans, other races were also identified, such as Achinese, Africans, Arabs, etc. In 1871, Melaka recorded 41,936 males and 35,820 females. Malays made up the largest section of the population followed by the Chinese.[248] These numbers increased to 52,059 and 41,520, respectively, by 1881.[249] In the last decade of the century, however, the population declined by 1722 males, although the female population marked an increase. This decline in population reflected in the 1891 census was because of the flow of many natives out of Melaka to avail enterprises in the newly opened Federated States.[250]

What needs to be noted through these censuses is that while the British counted the distinct ethnicities, there was no column enumerating the Peranakan or mixed races, except for the Muslim Indo-Malay community, labelled as Jawi-Pekan.[251] This indicates a limitation on the part of the government, and suggests that hybrid communities de facto became part of the Chinese and Malay divisions by stating their preferred ethnicity. Such an official classification was likely the result of the fact that these hybrid communities were quite small as compared to the Portuguese Eurasians, who were large enough to exist as a separate entity.[252] Furthermore, ethnicity itself was often ambiguous. For instance, some of the Dutch Eurasians had converted

[248] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 341.
[249] *Blue Book 1888*, P 42.
[250] *Annual Reports 1884-1891*, 567.
[251] Refer to, for instance, the *Blue Book for the year 1888* (Singapore: Government Printing press, 1899), P 42.
[252] Hussin, *Trade and Society*, 271-272.

to Catholicism, and had been absorbed into the Portuguese Eurasian community[253], but such a nuance was not reflected in the census. Indians were provided the blanket term of Kling or Bengali, without any provisions for linguistic and community diversities among them. Similarly, the various tribes in the forests were simply labelled as 'Aborigines', often clubbed with the Malay population. The census reveals the British confusion over race and ethnicity, whereby both were inadevrtently presented as replaceable terms, given that the guidelines defining race were the same as those for ethnic boundaries. As a result, for Melaka, there is a continuity in community classifications, although it is presented as different in British documents with the use of the term 'race'.

The Civilian Population

The major part of the population of Melaka was made up of the Malay, Chinese and Indian people, who are deemed as the 'natives' of Melaka by the British. Given their number, these people were involved in almost every occupation found in Melaka. The government observed that these communities retained the characteristics of their respective progenitors, marked by an

> adhesion to the land of their birth, and at the same time to the language, religion, manners, habits, customs, prejudices, and even costume, of the nation of their paternal ancestors.[254]

As mentioned above, intermarriages resulted in fused communities like the Peranakans. These people could be found in all walks of life, and often interposed between Malay, Indian, Chinese and European worlds through their economic roles. One prominent example of cultural hybridity at Melaka is evident through the person of Abdullah abd al-Kadir, also known as

[253] Hirschman, "The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia," 557.
[254] *Annual Reports 1855-1867,* 24.

Munshi Abdullah. He was a scribe and translator for the East India Company, and his most famous contribution was his autobiography *Hikayat Abdullah*. Abdullah's great-grandfather was a Hadrami Arab from Yemen, who settled at Nagore and married a local Tamil woman. They had four sons, of whom Abdullah's grandfather, emigrated to Melaka, and wedded a Tamil Muslim woman, named Peri Achi. His brothers settled down in Ambon, Sumatra and Java.[255]

Abdullah's father, Abdul Kadir, was born in Melaka and worked as a merchant trading sundry goods between Melaka and the hinterland. He was proficient in Malay, and Tamil, and well-versed in the Koran, and propagated Islamic knowledge and Muslim prayers among the people in Melaka's interior. Kadir's multi-lingual and multi-cultural versatility enabled him to intermediate between Indian, Malay and European worlds as an employee for the Dutch. His wife was a Melaka-born half Indian.[256] Abdullah, embraced this cultural inheritance by gaining fluency in Arabic, Malay, and Tamil, making him another intermediary just as his father. He later learnt Hindustani from the sepoys in Melaka[257], and English from his British employer.[258]

The fourth largest group comprised the European and Eurasian population. The English residents of Melaka worked as the Civil and Military servants of the Government, merchants, and missionaries, making up the more well off faction of the European population. Some of the Dutch were employed in government offices, few in commerce and agriculture, while others lived off the annual sum paid by the government for the transfer of their landed rights. The Portuguese Eurasians were mostly impoverished, principally relying on fishing, and the produce from the gardens and enclosures attached to their houses. Some were employed as

[255] Abdullah, *The Autobiography*. 1-2.
[256] Abdullah, 2-3.
[257] Abdullah, 22.
[258] Abdullah, 72.

servants of European gentlemen and as writers in offices.[259] In all, the European population made up a very small number in Melaka, as compared to the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

Alongside these ethnicities, there were a negligible number of Arabs, Javanese, Achinese, Bugis, Vietnamese, Siamese, Africans and Ceylonese.[260] The African population mainly comprised the caffre slaves and their descendants who had previously been brought in for labour. Ceylonese had arrived in Melaka, and the Straits Settlements in general, to look for work. Bugis, Achinese, Siamese and Vietnamese communities had set up base at Melaka through the inter-archipelagic trade.[261] While these various communities are recorded in the census, it is unclear whether they were permanent settlers or itinerant voyagers for that year. In the forests outside the town lived a number of tribes like the Mantras, Benuas, Jacoons, and Orang Huban.

Cultivation and fishing were the mainstay of the poor population of Melaka. By 1868, two-thirds of the population in Melaka was engaged in agricultural pursuits, of which some natives in the inland kampongs were involved in sea fishing, during the off-season.[262] Rice was almost entirely grown by Malay and Chinese squatters.[263] The people majorly engaged in the tin mines were the 'foreigner' Chinese, who had almost 5000 labourers occupied in the mining.[264] These were all male workers who had recently immigrated to Melaka from China, and lived together near the mines in shed like accommodations built of timber and other products from the jungle. They were considered "lawless and unfettered", and only retrained from violence outside their community when they were economically successful.[265]

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[259] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 138.
[260] *Blue Book 1888*, P 42.
[261] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 22.
[262] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 18
[263] *Annual Reports*, 62.
[264] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 14.
[265] *Annual Reports*, 25.

While slavery was forbidden by the British, a certain number of slaves also resided in Melaka, formerly bought by the influential Dutch, Portuguese, Chinese, Klings, and Malays.[266] Some of the female slaves were bought to provide company to Chinese immigrants, and eventually became wives in respectable Chinese families. Many of the slaves had been manumitted in the years since Dutch rule.[267] The police force in the town was mostly made up of Malays, and a few Indian natives, under European command. The British found it difficult to recruit people as the pay was very low, often below that paid to *coolies* working on plantations.[268] This situation, however, changed after 1873, when these numbers increased with the rise in pay. Besides the police, were troops stationed at Melaka, made up of European commanding officers and native sepoys from India. Initially the Bengal Native Army was stationed, which was later replaced by two regiments of the Madras Native Infantry and three garrison batteries of the European artillery.[269]

Abdullah's autobiography gives a rudimentary idea of the relationship between the English and natives. Abdullah being educated, was employed as a scribe by various officers including the Resident William Farquhar, Stamford Raffles and the founder of the Anglo-Chinese college, William Milne. Other literate natives were employed in similar pursuits as interpreters, letter writers, and secretaries. Abdullah's relationship with his employers seems to have been quite cordial, involving warm exchanges and great hospitality. For instance, Milne agreed to teach Abdullah English in exchange for Abdullah teaching him Malay.[270] Other natives who could not read or write, interacted with the English in the markets, and in the latter's homes as domestic servants.

[266] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 142.
[267] Hussin, *Trade and Society*, 177.
[268] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 61.
[269] Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, 207-208.
[270] Abdullah, *The Autobiography*, 91.

Often, Malays and other non-Europeans arrived at English houses with food items, animals and other products native to Melaka, since the English officers showcased a desire to learn about the place and its products. For example, while Raffles was residing in Melaka, natives arrived at his doorsteps with Malay books, monkeys, durians, etc. He also employed certain people to find specific plants and animals in the forest, and a Cantonese to paint these things.[271] Other natives met with the officers to provide information or express complaints. British attitude towards Asians was a mixture of racist rejection, fear and economic dependence. For instance, the inflow of Chinese working in tin mines, increased the strength of the *kongsis*, whose violent presence made the British anxious. At the same time, it was these Chinese who sustained English opium traders in Melaka, who brought in opium from India to supply it to Chinese consumers.[272]

However, not all interactions were this affable. For instance, Abdullah narrates how residents often had to stay indoors at night because of drunk soldiers who caused menace in the town. The people of Melaka also feared English sailors, who wandered the streets in drunken states, indulging in violence and chasing women.[273] Furthermore, a certain English resident was involved in capturing Malay boys and forcing them to fight, causing Malays, especially women, to avoid the street where he lived.[274] Forms and language of British identity were occasionally insisted upon the interethnic populations through ritualised performances and ceremonial celebrations, in an attempt to draw the population into an 'imagined British community'. For instance, William Evans, the collector of land revenue and assistant protector of the Chinese, forced the Babas of Melaka to write and sign a congratulatory address for the 1887 jubilee of the Queen, despite their refusal since they were not sure what the government

[271] Abdullah, 52-53.
[272] Webster, "The Development of British Commercial and Political Networks," 912,
[273] Abdullah, *The Autobiography*, 48.
[274] Abdullah, 47-48.

would do with it. The consequent compliance cannot be seen as acceptance of being part of a 'British community', but perhaps, if at all, a distant recognition of being British subjects.[275]

Conclusion

Corresponding with the tenuous English administrative rule in Melaka was the punctured manifestation of racial segregation. Despite the division of the fort and native town, the urban streets of Melaka fingered out into numerous kampongs where, due to the precolonial tradition of intermarriage, diverse communities already intermingled. The town was an aggregate of villages made up of Eurasian, Dutch, Chinese, and Indian enclaves. In addition to the urban connectivity, there were hybrid rural enclaves marked by a similar inter-community flexibility, strengthened through marriages, religious celebrations, assemblies and secret societies.

Race was a concept foreign to residents of Melaka, and was imposed on them officially, mainly through the census, a document rarely read by anyone outside the government. In fact, through nineteenth century reports, it is possible to see that even the British were not conversant of the divergences between race and ethnicity, and thereby, followed the historic conventions of community differenciation. Historically, communities had been identified according to the region they came from such as from China, India or within the peninsula, and this seems to have pervaded nineteenth century native conceptions as well. In other words, communities held on to the historic notions of identity, based on ethnic origin, despite colonial experiments with racial differencing. Since we do not have any vernacular records from the time, it is difficult to say whether race was ever seriously considered as an identifier by non-English people in the nineteenth century.

[275] Lees, "Being British," 86-87.

The Chinese, Malay and Indian communities made up the three most populous sections, far exceeding the Europeans. Together, they were engaged in every kind of occupation found in Melaka, making them economically requisite for the government. This will be further explored in the next chapter. The previous chapter described how Melaka had become an agriculture and mining economy. The existence of a large number of cultivators, agricultural labourers and miners corroborates this state of affairs. The virtual lack of merchants, except among the Chinese and European community, spells the mercantile absence at Melaka. Intermarriages and kampongs, suggest the dual existence of rigidness of identity, and fluidity of interaction. Populations held on to certain customs associating themselves with their homeland, yet this stiffness was not the norm, as seen through hybrid communities or inter-community celebrations.

CHAPTER VI: A CLOSER LOOK

Having looked at the British perspective, and the general framework of the population of Melaka, this chapter zooms in on the Malay, Chinese and Indians living in Melaka. It studies the structure of these communities, the occupations they were engaged in, and the way they were identified. The chapter further looks at the different avenues of immigration into Melaka, including the forced transportation of convicts by the colonial government from other colonies to provide their service of labour for the development of the settlement.

The Malay Community

The Malays made up the largest population of Melaka. By 1891, there were 69,151 Malays in the settlement. The Malay community was socially hierarchised, and interactions within each class was defined by certain customs. An appropriate physical distance was maintained from those considered socially superior.[276] Cock-fighting was a major sources of entertainment, at times involving participation from other communities. All Malays were Muslims belonging to the Sunni sect, differentiating them from the Indian population, which was Shi'a.[277] They had their separate mosques, but celebration of religious festivals, like Muharram, often involved participation by all Muslims regardless of ethnicity. Many of the Malays, both men and women, embarked on the pilgrimage to Mecca, some making it two or three times in their life.[278]

The language spoken was Malay, although certain phrases in Arabic were also employed in conversation, such as while greeting a fellow Malay, and in religious incantation; general trade, business and accounting was carried out in the Malay language.[279] In the Malay

[276] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account Volume II*, 176.
[277] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 23.
[278] Bird, *The Golden Chersonese*, 140.
[279] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account Volume II*, 178.

schools, however, children were taught in Arabic. The Malays always carried a small dagger for protection called the *kris* wherever they went, and commonly engaged in altercations when their family or community was disgraced. In Melaka in the nineteenth century, the *kris* was mostly manufactured by Chinese smiths.[280] The ties within the community were very strong, and the Malays lived a somewhat feudal life among their own people, marked by an allegiance to the Malay chiefs, under whom labour was organised. Given historic linkages, they chose to be loyal to their chiefs and fight for them, rather than live under British protection.[281] The loyalty of the Malays lay not just with the chief, but also the *penghulu*, who acted as an intermediary between the Malay community and the British government.

The Malays living in the town were engaged in native commerce, and as sailors, boatmen, wealthy Hajis, and slave debtors. The agricultural classes resided in the countryside outside the boundaries of the main town, within native villages under the penghulus. Owing to their numbers, Malays made up the largest workforce in almost all sectors, whether industrial, agricultural, domestic or professional. There were a large number of Malay priests, and schoolmasters and mistresses. Several were enrolled in government jobs as clerks, policemen, and civil servants, or as domestic servants for English households. Over ten thousand were engaged as paddy, pepper and gambier planters, agricultural labourers, market gardeners and cultivators. There were nearly 1200 fisherfolk, and almost 2500 industrial labourers. Others were engaged as shopkeepers, dealers, sellers, seamen, boatmen, and cart owners and drivers, etc.[282]

A number of secret societies had sprung up among the Malays in Melaka over the nineteenth century. These were called the Red Flag and White Flag societies. These likely had

[280] Newbold, 201.
[281] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 60.
[282] *Blue Book 1888*, P 49-53.

their origin in Penang, from where Malays spread it to Singapore and Melaka. These societies were highly influenced by the Chinese secret societies around them, and used the *kongsi* framework to initially create associations for religious purposes. Soon the societies' designs expanded beyond simply religion to build spaces for mutual benefit and safeguarding social needs.[283] Unlike the Chinese societies, these did not have a root in old established customs and prejudices, and the British seemed to believe that they served no practical purpose, only leading to elongated quarrels and litigations based on partisan evidence. They were often involved in political and territorial struggles.

The government in Melaka was threatened by the influence these societies had on local Malays, especially given that some Malay police officers were also part of these flag societies.[284]

> "If the police are unable to find any means of crushing these objectionable organisations, which are utilised by influential natives for the purpose of increasing their influence and of squeezing their poorer brethren, there is no immediate prospect of doing away with them, but (…) it may be hoped that education will (…) open the eyes of the masses to their folly in allowing themselves to be made tools of."[285]

While the displeasure at their existence is apparent, not much is known about the societies for Melaka, although information is available for Penang and Singapore. The British in Melaka passed Ordinances about these societies, but knowledge about them was patchy. While there were suspicions that the Red and White Flag societies might have alliances with Chinese societies and other Muslim Indians, there was a lack of proof; in fact, the Melaka government did not even possess a register of all the members of these societies. Hence, the most we know

[283] Mahani Musa, "Malays and the Red and White Flag Societies in Penang, 1830s-1920s," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 72, no. 2 (1999), 153.
[284] Musa, 167.
[285] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 684.

about these Malay societies in Melaka is that they existed, and that they were source of annoyance for the government as they threatened law and order. According to Ordinance IX of 1869, these societies stopped being recognised by the government, and were not allowed to be registered. By Ordinance IV of 1882, these societies were made illegal altogether.[286] Despite this official regulation, the societies could not be supressed, and continued to function till the end of the century and after.

The Chinese Community

People from China had been coming into Melaka for trade and marriage since the time of the Sultanate. For instance, the Chinese princess Hang Li Po had come to Melaka to marry Sultan Manshur Shah, implying that intermarriage between Malays and Chinese had existed for nearly five centuries.[287] There were a large number of Chinese families, who had been residents at Melaka for generations. They were attentive to genealogy, and only arranged marriages with other 'natives' of Melaka. Hence, there were a large number of semi-Malay Chinese (Peranakan Chinese), who by 1868 had a history of settlement in Melaka of over six generations. The Chinese can broadly be divided into two groups – *Babas*, all Chinese born in the Straits, whether Peranakan or not, and *Sinkehs*, those arriving from China. The Babas claimed no connection with China, chose to speak Malay, and actively differentiated themselves from other pure native Sinkehs. The former proclaimed themselves as 'British subjects', while the subjecthood for the latter was often ambiguous given their migratory status.[288]

[286] *Annual Reports*, 556.
[287] Suhaila Abdullah, "Effect of Malay-China Trade Relations During the Melaka Sultanate on the Emergence of Chinese Peranakan Community," *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilisation* 3, no. 4 (2013), 146.
[288] Bird, *The Golden Chersonese*, 17.

Babas were characterised by their clothing of long jackets, loose drawers and black skull caps.[289] Many of these Babas established commercial links with Singapore following its economic rise after 1819. As a result most of these Chinese families in Melaka lived off inherited wealth or money from commercial establishments at Singapore. The nineteenth century was marked by a growing affluence of this Chinese community who had enlarged their holdings of land and property. In contrast, the Portuguese and Dutch had retrograded, falling to the "level of hewers of wood, and carriers of water", with the Dutch showcasing rare exceptions of wealth.[290] This explains how the Babas could inhabit the former houses of Dutch burghers. Some were influential enough to even make donations in the public sphere, such as Tan Kim Seng who financed the construction of the iron bridge over the Melaka river.[291] In 1886, the Clock Tower was built in front of the Stadthuys by a fourth-generation Chinese named Tan Jiak Kim. These Straits born Chinese made up the largest proportion of the Chinese population at Melaka.

The Chinese coming into the Straits were mostly from Canton, Fokkien and Macao. While it was easy for men to emigrate out of China, social restrictions were placed on the movement of women, forcing married men, and wealthy bachelors looking to marry in their homeland, to return from their ventures every so often.[292] While a large number of Chinese annually left Melaka, they often came back. Others chose to sever ties with their homeland and build new networks. In general, the middle and upper classes in China were disinclined to move out of their country. It was the poorer sections that travelled overseas for job opportunities.[293]

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[289] J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2. Originally published in 1879.
[290] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 24-25.
[291] *Annual Reports*, 335.
[292] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 10-11.
[293] Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, 6.

Chinese labourers were brought to Melaka by wealthy capitalists who paid for their travel, bedding, food and clothes. This money was made up by the capitalist through the profits of the labour performed by these immigrants.[294] Hence, these labourers essentially worked under debt contracts, and much like indentured labourers, were free to employ themselves as they wished once the debt was repaid. The role of the capitalist middlemen, however, diminished over the century, as steamers were plied by the government between the Straits and China to convey these *coolies*, as the labourers came to be called. A Chinese Protectorate was established in 1877 to oversee the immigration of these *coolies*, and the general well-being of the Chinese population.[295] Chinese usually came into Melaka impoverished, but by applying themselves fastidiously in various kinds of work, most ended up creating reasonable fortunes for themselves.

In Melaka, Chinese made up the chief commercial men of the town. They made up the largest work force in the commercial sector, and controlled most of the trade in Melaka, alongside Europeans. Some of them, belonging to old-established Chinese merchant families, owned or rented large tracts of land for tapioca or other cultivation; self-contained tapioca plantations were managed on a *kongsi* basis by Chinese overseers.[296] Others were involved in farming patches of sugarcane, pepper, gambier and vegetables.[297] The largest section of the Chinese were engaged as agricultural labourers, gambier and pepper planters, market gardeners, paddy planters, sago manufacturers, overseers of estates, and tin miners. Chinese made up the largest section of shop keepers and general dealers in Melaka; the Chinese had the exclusive right to sell opium in their shops.[298] Besides, members of this community were found in almost all kinds of occupations – actors, chemists, clerks, physicians, surgeons,

[294] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Accoun*t, 12.
[295] Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, 7.
[296] Tate, *The RGA History*, 91.
[297] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 18.
[298] *Blue Book 1883*, P 49-53.

schoolteachers, priests, civil servants, police, domestic servants, butchers, cloth hawkers, grass sellers, hawkers, merchants, agents, brokers, black smiths, carpenters, cart drivers, gold and silver smiths, tin smiths, industrial labourers, masons, tailors, seamen, and so on.[299]

Social and financial security for the community was guaranteed through membership in Chinese societies (*kongsis* or *hoeys*). To commissioned labourers, these fraternities advanced a sum from their treasury according to the wants of the labourer, which had to be paid back as soon as the debt to the employer was repaid.[300] Similar financial arrangements were made for other members as well. The society intervened in cases of the arrests of its members by the government, and agreed to look after the member's wife and children in case he travelled out of Melaka. The basis of the *kongsi* was the unity and solidarity of fellow Chinese in foreign environments. At times, however, Malays, Klings and other races were also admitted into the societies, forming another avenue for inter-cultural collaboration.[301]

There were five registered Chinese secret societies in Melaka – the *Gi Hin*, the *Do. Macao*, the *Gi Bu*, the *Hok Beng*, and the *Hie San*. The number of members were counted based on the books kept by these societies. The total number of members in all these societies increased from 3500 in 1879 to 5716 in 1881. According to the British, this dramatic increase of over 2000 members did not represent the actual rise in members, but rather reflected the fact that these *kongsi* houses added names to the register without striking out those who died, left the country or ceased to be members.[302] Hai San Street (Jalan Hang Lekir/3rd Cross Street) was the street associated with secret societies in Melaka.[303] The interior affairs, disputes, and private interests of the members were resolved by the heads of the *kongsis*, often in blatant disregard

[299] Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, 15.
[300] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 12.
[301] Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, 114.
[302] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 556.
[303] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 163.

of British regulations. Secret societies provided both protection and support, and often acted as political forces undermining the authority of the government.

> The ends of justice are frequently defeated both at Pinang, Melaka and Singapore, by bribery, false swearing, and sometimes by open violence, owing to combinations of these fraternities formed for the purpose of screening guilty members from detection and punishment.[304]

1875 especially saw a lot of incidents involving the *kongsis*.[305] By 1881, however the number of cases of such violence had declined, with the societies taking the position towards, in what the government hoped, more "inoffensive associations for mutual support and assistance".[306]

The Indian Population

The once prosperous community of Hindu and Muslim Indians occupied in trade was snatched of its affluence during the years of Dutch rule. Many, in fact, showcased signs of abject poverty, such as Nachodar Giantij, who died without any estate to his name, and had to have his debt cancelled.[307] In the nineteenth century, therefore, we see several Klings and other Indians engaged in occupations outside the mercantile field. In addition, a number of Indians migrated to the Straits in the nineteenth century in search for work, and assimilated with the existing Indian communities. Their movement over the nineteenth century was largely uncontrolled by the government,[308] although it was likely encouraged. The Klings were active as boatmen, seamen, road labourers, money-lenders and money changers. A large number of these Tamils from Coromandel as well as other natives from India were engaged as agricultural and

[304] Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account*, 14.
[305] *Annual Reports 1867-1883*, 310.
[306] *Annual Reports*, 556.
[307] Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 29.
[308] Tate, *The RGA History*, 156.

industrial labourers, and fishermen; merely a couple of them were involved in managing estates. Some entered the Government Civil Service and police. Others became chemists, domestic servants, butchers, tailors, sellers, fishmongers, hawkers, shop and eating house keepers, and cart owners and drivers. There were very few priests and schoolteachers, most of whom taught in Tamil.[309]

Other ethnicities in Melaka broadly identified Indian settlers under two terms – Bengali for those who came from the north of the subcontinent, and Kling for those who came from the South. The census also divided the Indian population into Kling, and Bengali and other natives from India. At times, Bengali was implied as a blanket term assumed for all Indians who were not identified as Klings. The origin of this term is dubious, but it likely derived from association with the Bengal Native Infantry, stationed at Melaka in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, although the arrival of these people into Melaka likely predated that. The Bengal Native Infantry largely derived its sepoys from Awadh, Buxar, Bhojpur and Arrah in Uttar Pradesh, and from western Bihar. These men were specifically chosen as they came from a population rich agrarian economy, where they were highly involved in village sports like *kusti* (wrestling) and *gatka* (wrestling with clubs), and where peasantry was often combined with military entrepreneurship over land and community disputes.[310] Hence, the British army could raise a large number of native soldiers from these regions, who were deployed within the subcontinent or stationed overseas. This was the route through which North Indians came to be stationed at Melaka.

The soldiers hailed from areas that were prone to famine and poverty, and that did not provide any employment opportunities outside agriculture.[311] These soldiers were willing to

[309] *Blue Book 1888*, P 49-53.
[310] Rajesh Rai, "Sepoys, Convicts and the 'Bazaar' Contingent: The Emergence and Exclusion of 'Hindustani' Pioneers at the Singapore Frontier," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 1 (2004), 8.
[311] Rai, 13.

enter the army and endeavour overseas given the significant pay, and the attempts by the British to allay fears of caste contamination. For instance, special attention was paid to the dietary needs of the sepoys, and they were allowed to oversee the filling of their own water caskets. In 1789, Marquis Cornwallis wrote:

> The Government of Bengal has studied every means to render this situation on board ship comfortable with a view to lessen and if possible to remove those prejudices which Hindus of every description entertain against going to sea. Due attention to these prejudices will be no less necessary on shore.[312]

Besides soldiers, other people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, who by the twentieth century were labelled by the British as 'Hindustani' because of the language they spoke, arrived either as a part of the bazaar contingent, comprising *dhobis*, *doodhwallahs* (milk providers), *chaiwallahs* (tea makers), servants, prostitutes, etc, that followed the Army for the service of the sepoys.[313] A third form of immigration involved the arrival of Indians for labour.

There were three types of Indian labour existent in Melaka. The first was the system of indentured labour whereby poor people were recruited for fixed periods of time on low wages, after which they were free to work for themselves. Most indentured labourers in India came from the Bengal and Madras Presidencies, and recruitment was handled by agencies like Ganapathy Pillai &Co., etc or by individual agents. Most of them were put to work in cultivation of commercial crops.[314] Poverty, debt, and lack of economic opportunity were the reasons behind people turning to indenture. Initially restricted to men, women were soon introduced into the system to create a more stable work force. The presence of women, in turn, led to the creation of more permanently settled indentured communities at the receiving

[312] Rai, 10.
[313] Rai, 11.
[314] Tate, *The RGA History*, 156-157.

colonies. According to Alpers, nearly a quarter million migrated to the Straits Settlements to work as labourers.[315]

The second form was also based on contract, called the *kangani* system, involving recruitment by Tamil *kanganis* (headmen) from their own villages in India. Contracts with the labourers were verbal, and based on ties of rural kinship.[316] The third type was 'free' immigration, involving completely independent movement of migrants from India into the Straits; the number of such labourers, however, was insignificant, since most Indians were unable to pay for the journey across the Bay of Bengal. Local 'free' labour was also available in the form of indentured labourers in Melaka, who had worked off their former obligations.[317] In the census, these new arrivals were identified by the racial identity of Kling or Bengali and other natives of India, although separate registers were kept to note the number of immigrants in a year. In general, however, this migration was entirely free of government regulation.[318]

Convict Population

The prison in Melaka not only held overseas convicts, but also the local prisoners from within the population. Women convicts made up a minority. In all, Melaka received only two female convicts over the course of its penal life. Estimates suggest that the Straits Settlements annually received around 200 convicts from the three Indian Presidencies amounting to some 15,000 convicts through the course of its penal era.[319] Anderson however believes this to be an underestimation, given one report in the *Bombay Gazette* that recorded 16,000 convicts in

[315] Alpers, *The Indian Ocean*, 115-117.
[316] Tate, *The RGA History*, 157.
[317] Tate, 159.
[318] Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, 77.
[319] Nicholas and Shergold, "Transportation as Global Migration," 30.

Singapore alone by 1858.[320] Convicts arrived from nearly all parts of India, thereby representing a large number of communities like "Benares brahmanas, Sikh and Dogra kshatriyas, Chettiar, Bengali and Parsi financiers and *ryots* and untouchables." The language spoken predominantly among these convicts was Hindustani.[321] While most transported convicts were from India, later, convicts arrived from Hong Kong and Rangoon as well. Convicts from Ceylon were sent to Melaka from 1846.[322] In 1855, when transportation to Australia stopped, European convicts were sent to the Straits from India.[323]

An overwhelming majority of transportation convicts were serious offenders[324]; the crimes ranged from fraud, robbery with violence, to dacoity, *thuggee* and murder.[325] The British also shipped pirates, political prisoners, and those involved in regional, peasant and tribal rebellions. These criminals were specifically chosen as they were perceived as anti-colonial threats, who had to be subdued by being shipped overseas, where they would be anonymous and isolated. Transportation of such convicts often resulted in the violence being extended on to the ships, and thereafter the overseas prisons, by the convicts against the authorities. For instance, a convict mutiny broke out among the convicted *marathas* on board the *Recovery* from Bombay to Singapore.[326] These uprisings were usually quelled through brutality, engendering further tensions between convicts and penal authorities. Imperial opposition, however, was not the only provocation in inciting convicts to rebellion, whether in prisons or on ships.

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[320] Clare Anderson, *Indian Uprising*, 107.
[321] Rai, "Sepoys, convicts and the 'bazaar' contingent," 12.
[322] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 290.
[323] C.M. Turnbull, "Convicts in the Straits Settlements 1826-1867," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 43, no. 1 (1970), 91.
[324] Anderson*, Indian Uprising*, 28.
[325] Anoma Pieris, "The "Other" Side of Labor Reform: Accounts of Incarceration and Resistance in the Straits Settlements Penal System, 1825–1873," *Journal of Social History* 45, no. 2 (2011), 455, doi: 10.1093/jsh/shr082.
[326] Clare Anderson, "The Age of Revolution in the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and South China Sea: A Maritime Perspective," *IRSH* 58 (2013), 244.

The Experience of Transportation

For Indian convicts, imprisonment was more than just a legal punishment. Prisons brought together people from different ages, social standings and political ideologies, and forced them to share a single space and life behind bars. Furthermore, convicts decreed the punishment of overseas imprisonment had to undergo this experience twice, first on the ship, and then behind bars. This situation often resulted in unrest and rebellion from prisoners who feared that they would lose their faith or caste by being in proximity with others from lower social categories. Imposition of activities such as common messing were often reasons for unrest among prisoners.[327] Imprisonment, in this way, reasserted caste and religious consciousness, making prisons locations of both legal and social punishment. Overseas transportation played a similar role, and for colonial administrators constituted an equally important part of the punishment. Life on the ship entailed joint chaining and messing, whereby water, foods, vessels and utensils were all shared regardless of social status; hence, prisoners on board often refused food. Furthermore, religious ceremonies for the dead were ignored, and prisoners were simply thrown overboard if they died. Hence, transportation over the sea was dreaded, and the sea was reimagined as *kala pani*, the black water that enforced caste and religious transgressions, and made people lose their social distinctions.[328]

> To the native of India it meant even a severer punishment than to the European, for to be sent across the "*kala pani*," or "black water," in a convict ship or "*jeta junaza*," or "living tomb" as they called it, meant, especially to a man of high caste, whether of the right or left hand section, the total loss to him of all that was worth living for. He could never be received in intercourse again with his own people, and so strong are the caste ideas of ceremonial uncleanness that it would be defilement to his friends and relations even to offer to him sustenance of any kind, and he was in point of fact excommunicated and avoided.[329]

[327] Anderson, *Indian Uprising*, 40-41.
[328] Anderson, 134-135.
[329] McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders*, 9.

A more physical discomfort was experienced in the form of conditions on board, characterised by food shortages and lack of hygiene, resulting in a large number of deaths owing to malnutrition, dysentery and gangrene. Prisoners were provided only a single set of clothes and assigned a limited physical space, often not large enough to even lie down. On the *Imam of Muscat*, shipping convicts to Penang in 1850, nine prisoners died of dysentery, four of whom had refused to take any food. Similarly, six died en route for Singapore on *Margaret Skelly* in 1853, while others embarked on shore in weakened states; the cause seemed to have been both limited rationing of food and water, and the reluctance of a certain section about eating food cooked by others.[330] Nineteen convicts died on board the *Atlanta* sailing to Singapore in 1857; conditions on the ship were so poor, that deaths were reported even after imprisonment, and several were hospitalised for two months following the journey. Cases of unrest were hence observed on the ships, especially during the mutiny years of 1857-58. An outbreak was recorded on board the *Julia* journeying to Singapore in 1858, stirring panic among Singapore authorities, and the prisoners had to be transferred to Port Blair.[331] The depression from social anxiety, and the poor travelling conditions were factors common to all ships carrying convicts for overseas imprisonment, regardless of the destination.

A Place in Society

Convicts were viewed through a racial lens that deemed them intellectually inferior and incapable of perfectly reforming their soul. According to the prison commissioner of the Straits, Major McNair, confinement did not impact the soul of the non-European prisoner, who suffered from an "absence of moral perception and absence of thought", unlike the European prisoners, who when left to themselves, were capable of reflection and remorse.[332] Given such

[330] Anderson, *Indian Uprising*, 142.
[331] Anderson, 143.
[332] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 142.

a predisposition, European superiority was imposed at all times. Identity of the Indian convict was contained within the identity of the collective, enacted through racialised penal labour.[333] One blatant manifestation of this was the segregation between European and non-European prisoners, according to which the former were not expected to work.[334] Penal authorities, although careful of Indian convicts, in general viewed them as a collective, who were harmless in their new isolated surroundings. European convicts, on the other hand, were not perceived with such anonymity, and rather as cunning and intelligent who could not be corrected simply through geographical separation and physical labour. Hence, the supervision was relatively lax for the Indian convicts, who were allowed more freedom of mobility expressed through outdoor labour and religious liberties, like celebrating Muharram or Dussehra outside prison lines.[335]

The system of prison administration at Melaka resulted in two consequences. As mentioned above, unrest in the homeland often translated onto ships and overseas prisons via convicts. The system of convict classes helped keep particularly 'dangerous' convicts in check, as they were denied the right to progress to a higher class. For example, rebels of the 1857 revolt, and Punjabi convicts of the Anglo-Sikh war, were not allowed to progress through the penal classes.[336] On the other hand, the rigorous training aided the prisoners in entering society after the period of imprisonment since they were capable of finding employment. The system hence facilitated a sort of bridge for the prisoners into civilian society. It also enabled a certain attachment of the prisoners to these overseas destinations. In fact, authorities observed, that once these prisoners married within the Straits they seldom showed interest in returning to their home country.[337] These marriages with the local population resulted in an addition to the *Jawi-*

[333] Pieris, 105.
[334] Pieris, 108.
[335] Pieris, 110.
[336] Anderson, "Age of Revolution," 246.
[337] Pieris, "The Other Side," 456.

Pekan or Indo-Malay community, a section of the Melakan Peranakans.[338] The prisoners given tickets of leave entered civilian society even earlier while still carrying the identity of a prisoner.

Most convicts comprised cultivators, rural migrants and the urban poor from India. On release or with tickets of leave, a majority of them were eager to stay on, and as a result, a large number entered the urban industrial sector to provide productive services.[339] This desire is also evident through how prisoners married into the local population and also bought property that was passed on to future generations.[340] On release, former *ryots* (farmers) found occupations as herdsmen or community traders. Others bought bullock carts and palanquins to becomes hack syces or cart drivers. Yet others enlisted in the police or served in other public departments.[341] Some of the Indian convicts were expert *shikarris* and would train dogs to hunt deer and wild boar, whose flesh they sold to Chinese shopkeepers in the town.[342] Hence, after completing their terms in prison, most convicts became productive members of society, gradually transitioning into long-term settlers, who had to deal with local civilians for their sustenance. As a result, the Straits Settlements in the nineteenth century was a melange of civilians, half-prisoners and convicts, who got opportunities to interact with each other through work and social activities. This dynamic is what characterised the population of nineteenth century Melaka.

The non-European population, comprising Malays, Indians, Chinese and other ethnicities, was both excited by, and dreaded the arrival of convicts. Many of them perceived the convicts as agents and informants for the colonial government, and hence, chose to maintain their distance. This was because 'rogue' activities of the government that were perceived as

[338] Turnbull, "Convicts in the Straits," 90.
[339] Pieris, 104.
[340] Pieris, 154.
[341] Pieris, 101.
[342] McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders*, 30.

below the dignity of Europeans were usually allotted to convicts. In the Naning War of 1831, fifty convicts were employed as soldier bearers and coolies. During riots in the 1850s and 1860s, convicts prisoners were accorded police duty, and were used to pursue and disperse rioters. Furthermore, convict peons were engaged in arresting robbers and pirates in the town.[343] Penal status allowed convicts the opportunities to become contractors, caretakers, police and scavengers, and enter civilian society through these roles. Despite instances of tensions because of their role as government servants, convicts were not entirely shunned by the local population, who often joined the former in the celebration of religious festivals such as Muharram and Dussehra.

A Fount of Friction

By the 1850s, however, the penal establishment in Melaka had become a bone of contention for European civilians; this was an anxiety that was shared by Penang and Singapore as well. In general, residents and administrators perceived the convicts, whether civil or political, as bandits and murderers. They especially feared the arrival of thugs, who hailed from communities of hereditary murderers.[344] This panic was perhaps not unfounded given that the Straits annually received a large number of 'anti-colonial threats', many of whom had been involved in violence and widespread rebellions like the Anglo-Sikh war and the Kandyan rebellions in Ceylon.[345] For instance, Tikiri Banda, the Kandyan rebel, who was shipped to Melaka in 1848, proposed to publish a work about the Kandyan rebellion, implying that he could still assert influence over other Kandyan transportees. He was also once caught committing highway robbery.[346] Such reports of cases of crimes by convicts circulated among

[343] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 101.
[344] Anderson, *Indian Uprising*, 108.
[345] Pieris, "The Other Side," 459-460.
[346] Pieris, *Hidden Hands*, 134.

Straits civilians. In 1862, the news of convicts discovered robbing the streets of Penang at night, spread through Melaka.

There were also speculations of secret societies developing among Indian prisoners, mainly comprising thugs, involved in cases of street violence.[347] The garrison stationed at Melaka was small and, the supervision over Indian convicts was lax, feeding the disquietude of the civilian population. The English population also voiced concerns over local prisoners, especially the Chinese, who were part of secret societies, that often indulged in violence. The problem of Chinese prisoners was exacerbated after 1847, when Hong Kong stopped transporting Chinese criminals to Tasmania, and these instead arrived in the Straits. These convicts had been pirates and leaders of secret societies in Hong Kong, and often unleashed violence against authorities on the ships sailing to the Straits.[348] Allied to these fears was the emergence of the feeling that the settlement was being socially ruined owing to the presence of these people, who formed the "very dregs of society".[349]

The inflow of convicts especially became an issue in the years of the Indian revolt (1857-58), when the Indian government ordered the Straits to accept more convicts from India. As the mutiny spread through mainland South Asia, district commissioners started making contingency plans for the administration of existing prisoners. For instance, the district commissioner of Patna suggested the transfer of convicts sentenced to more than three years of imprisonment to the penal settlements in Penang, Singapore and Melaka. The government of India approved the suggestion and ordered the Straits Settlements to prepare for the arrival of the convicts. Term prisoners would be kept at Melaka, while those sentenced for life would imprisoned at Singapore and Penang.[350] The government of the Straits Settlements, however,

[347] Turnbull, "Convicts in the Straits," 99-100.
[348] Turnbull, 88-89.
[349] Anderson, *Indian Uprising*, 108.
[350] Anderson, 68.

was not willing to accept these new prisoners. For one, it felt that this was the most "dangerous class of prisoners", and second, given that the Straits could only rely on the small Indian garrison for security, the government refused to receive further transportation convicts.[351]

Much of the government's opposition was fed by the general fears of the Europeans and Anglo-Indians residing in the Straits Settlements, who had already voiced objection to prisoners in previous years, as mentioned above. During the revolt, a large number of mutineers in India attacked jails and set prisoners free, with many of the escaped prisoners turning to the rebel cause. The news of these developments caused panic among the residents of the Straits, as they feared that similar incidents would occur at their prisons. The news of the revolt in India had already raised rumours about an uprising by some 3000 Indian convicts in Singapore. The stationed garrison was mostly made up of India sepoys, and English residents, who doubted their loyalty, became anxious and demanded the arrival of British troops.[352]

A second anxiety against prisoners abounded over the mostly unsupervised celebration of Muharram and Dusserah by Indian convicts. The European and the Anglo-Indian community were opposed to the convicts being allowed to process outside the prison lines onto the road leading to the seashore. This was a liberty awarded to all classes of prisoners, and these processions were joined by civilians from Indian, Malay and Chinese communities. The government however was initially apprehensive to repugn this freedom in the fear that it would be considered a religious restriction, especially in the background of the revolt.[353] Later, following some incidents of hooliganism, the governor banned the procession in Melaka.[354]

The general dissatisfaction with the existence of prisoners heightened in the context of the news of the revolt in India. Melaka did not have a steady garrison to guard more prisoners.

[351] Anderson, 96.
[352] Anderson, 108.
[353] Anderson, 109.
[354] Turnbull, "Convicts in the Straits," 92.

The European community was concerned that the government was acting too weak, and would eventually fall to an outbreak by the prisoners. It was further anxious at the prospect of rebel convicts being joined by Malays, Chinese, and men on tickets of leave to wreak havoc in the settlement. This panic was communicated to the governor of the Straits through the press, which was largely invested in the issue. European merchants were also worried about the burden of accommodating these convicts on the economy. The Straits' negative response to the government of India's request to send more prisoners was a reflection of these growing sentiments among the civilian population.

The Indian government, however, given the urgency of the situation, mostly ignored the Straits' position on the matter. Over 200 more prisoners were shipped to the Straits from Bengal and Bombay in 1858.[355] The Straits recorded nearly four thousand convicts in the Straits Settlements: 1,839 in Singapore, 1,358 in Penang and 648 in Melaka.[356] The establishment of the penal settlement on the Andaman Islands in 1858, to where a large number of convicts, especially rebels were transferred, provided some respite to the fears of the population and government of the Straits, and the panic following the Mutiny was quelled. Nevertheless, the indignity of using the Straits ports as penal stations continued to fester, and was extensively debated, alongside deliberations of the economic profitability of keeping convicts, following the transfer of the Straits from the Indian government to direct Crown control. As a result of these discussions, the British government stopped the transportation of convicts from India to the Straits Settlements from September 1860, although the convict prisons continued to function till 1873.[357] The Annual Reports of the Straits Settlements for 1860/61 mention:

[355] Anderson, *Indian Uprising*, 110-112.
[356] Turnbull, "Convicts in the Straits," 96.
[357] Turnbull, 99.

> The Straits having ceased to be a penal settlement for the reception of Convicts from India, at all three stations, there has been a considerable decrease in their number.[358]

The report for the year before recorded 4063 overseas convicts at Penang, Singapore and Melaka.[359] By 1873, most of them were transferred to the Andamans, and some convicts were sent back to Hong Kong. Those on tickets of leave were merged into the population. After 1873, separate jails were constructed for the remaining local prisoners.[360]

Conclusion

As is evident from this chapter, the Malay, Chinese and Indian people were involved in nearly every occupation in Melaka. Their strength made them both an aid as well as a challenge to the state, as seen through, for instance, the response to secret societies. Nineteenth century Melaka was marked by the presence of thousands of labourers, and several more immigrating from overseas, especially among Chinese and Indians. Migration was fluid, guided by the presence or absence of opportunities. For instance, while there was migration into Melaka to fulfill labour needs, there was also emigration of settlers with the rise of the Federated States. The flux of immigration highlighted the ambiguity surrounding subjecthood, which the British enforced through both social distancing and imaginary inclusion.

This chapter provides a new perspective on the identification of the Indian community. By the nineteenth century, Indians in Melaka were broadly recognised as Klings or Bengalis, depending on whether they came from the north or south of the subcontinent. Such a categorisation, however, screened the myriad caste and class divisions that pervaded the community. The census too adopted this framework, and hence officially presented the Indian

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[358] *Annual Reports 1855-1867*, 276.
[359] *Annual Reports*, 231-233.
[360] McNair, *Prisoners their own Warders*, preface vi.

population as divided into two brackets, labelling the exceptions as ‘other’. The ninenteenth century, in some ways, provides more clarity on the composition of the Indian community in Melaka, which ergo had largely been equated with Klings in official documents, who are also no longer associated just with trade. However, the official discourse still lacked in representing the social reality that was more diverse and complex.

The Indians in Melaka were split between the settlers, the new immigrants, some of whom deicided to stay on while others left, soldiers, and convicts. These occupational categories certainly harboured variety that remained veiled in colonial reports, likely stemming from the discomfort of officials to deal with these complexities. The interactions between these various groups would unlikely have been uniform, especially given that the last two were more prone to government control. The widespread immigration of workers in the nineteenth century, a phenomenon found also among the Chinese, both fractured and added to the civilian population; the former because most immigrants were birds of passage, with no attachment to Melaka, and the latter because some stayed on and assimiliated into the existent population. Finally, it is important to realise, that the government likely encouraged immigration, whether Indian or otherwise, to limit the strength of the settler population, who by pervading the work force might have acquired the force to topple the authority.

The convicts brought in from overseas made up the final ingredient in the profile of the population of Melaka. Furthermore, they constituted the third form of immigration by Indians into the town. However, as opposed to labourers and soldiers, the movement of these convicts was forced in nature, facilitated through British ships and policy. In addition to Indians, Melaka also received prisoners from Ceylon, Hong Kong, and Rangoon, who diversified the population dynamic. Convicts were sent to Melaka for banishment, to dawn new masks of anonymity, in environments where they were likely to be unimposing. They were forced to clinch ties with their home, property, family and community. However, these filial relations were replaced by

new associations based on collective labour overseas; the freedom of mobility strengthened such associations. The common experience of shipment and imprisonment engendered solidarity among prisoners, while work and social celebrations allowed avenues of interaction with the local population, who somewhat fearful of convicts, in general were never averse to them.

The productive rather than punitive form of labour, marked by the incentive of physical mobility and self-employment, eased the transition from incarceration to freedom. After their terms or on tickets of leave, convicts were governed by the same laws as non-penal populations, gaining equal occupational rights as the other settlers. This impacted the number of civilians populating Melaka in the nineteenth century. Former convicts came to be employed in a variety of jobs in the town, some even entering public service, making them productive members of society. Furthermore, many of them married into the local community adding to the Peranakan and non-Peranakan population. After their term, convicts were free to stay on or return to their homeland. This movement and assimilation, in turn, threaded new histories of settlement and migration for Melaka.

The threatening nature of the convicts, and their growing solidarity with the local population and secret societies was a matter of alarm for the European population. The issue reached its fever pitch in the Mutiny years (1857-58), in the aftermath of which convict transportation from India was stopped. The reaction of the government shows its dual attitude towards the convicts. On the one hand, it found them requisite for labour, while on the other, in the same vein as English residents, it was insistent on supressing them into negligibility. Hence, convicts were simultaneously marginal and central to the project of Straits governance. While the convict population was both a sign of colonial authority and subjection to it, it was troubling to bourgeois ideas of morality and urban democracy, an uneasy signifier of the

colony's racial politics and a threatening presence within the community. Given this impact on the population of Melaka, the presence of convicts cannot be historically neglected.

EPILOGUE

Since its founding in the beginning of the fifteenth century, Melaka underwent four major transformations: from an Islamic Kingdom, to a Portuguese base, to a Dutch colony, and finally a British Settlement clubbed alongside Penang and Singapore. This tiny landscape shot to prominence as a trading centre in the Indian Ocean, but eventually lost its interregional entrepot status, subsisting as a collecting an distributing centre in its immediate vicinity and around. The fact that it never really contributed much of its own, except tin, engendered the rise of a mining and agriculture economy in the nineteenth century, when the mercantile potential was snatched away. Present day Melaka stands as testament to these multiple legacies. Legacy here is defined as something that has been left by an abstract predecessor, like a state or a people, and that continued for some time or still continues to survive, to be observable, and to be influential at some level of being or existing, well beyond the lifetime of its original agent, albeit with modifications along the way.[361] Each of the four transformative periods left behind their own legacies. For instance, the ramparts of the fort stand as a reminder of Portuguese rule, while the repainted Stadthuys signifies Dutch rule. In many ways, Melaka evolved into what it is today by using, remoulding, and discarding these various symbols. The continuities, additions and subtractions added to the richness of this town's history, revealing what Daniel K. Richter terms as 'layered pasts', since ancient worlds persisted below the surface, much like geology, with their traces surviving and influencing what follows.[362]

The communities found in nineteenth century Melaka act as similar paragons of legacy since each community can be traced back to more historic times. The community of Portuguese Eurasians, much like the remains of the fort, reminds one of Portuguese conquest as well as of

[361] Laura Jarnagin, "Introduction: The Qualitative Properties of Culture and Identity," in *Culture and Identity in the Luso-Asian World*, ed. Laura Jarnagin (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011), 1.
[362] Daniel K. Richter, *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 4.

the history of intercommunity marriage. Melaka was a multicultural society, marked by ethnic, linguistic and religious plurality, ethnic mixing, and cultural hybridisation. Many of the customs found in communities had roots in historic times, such as the loyal congregation around the Malay chief. The religion followed and the language spoken also betrayed the origins of a person. Nineteenth century Indian migrants spoke Hindustani amongst themselves, but it is likely that they appropriated Malay to facilitate conversations with others in the town. Similarly, Muslims from India were distinct from Malays since the former practiced Shi'a Islam, while the latter Sunni. Nevertheless, this existence of plurality did not hinder integration, since Malays and Indians collectively celebrated festivals like Muharram. It was possible to find elements of both multiplicity and coexistence in Melaka. The Peranakan community, born of intermarriage, was a paragon of these circumstances. Society differentiated individuals based foremost on their place of origin (in the case of hybrid offspring, their parent's background), which related not only a certain physiognomy, but also cultural traits like food, clothing, institutions, etc. Together this formed the ethnic criterion for the identity of communities, allowing various Peranakan populations to be considered separate ethnic categories as well, since they also had these unique factors. Hence, this is what determined the identity of the major communities of Malays, Chinese and Indians in nineteenth century Melaka.

Nineteenth century Melaka was a complex society, characterized by pure and hybrid ethnicities, immigrants – some who left and some who stayed – ,British subjects who were perceived as distinct from the British, as well as convicts and soldiers who were both part and not of civilian society. There was a blurry distinction between forced and free migration since soldiers, slaves, transported convicts, and migrant workers toiled together on Melakan soil. Furthermore, the birds of passage who decided to settle down added to the interracial conundrum. This plurality, hybridity, and marginality was a challenge to colonial authority,

who were eager to simplify the nuances for their own conveniences. As a result, colonial reportage was more concise, and cannot be equated with social reality. For instance, immigration widened the complexities in communities, such as the Chinese by highlighting the cultural divisions between Babas and other incoming labourers, yet they were all classified as one uniform category of Chinese in the census. The official classification of communities did not necessarily reflect the complete ethnic divisions in the population of Melaka. The logic of classification itself was flawed since nineteenth century official enumeration involved the usage of ethnic binaries which were, however, styled as racial distinctions. There was no colonial discourse on the differences between ethnic and racial communities in nineteenth century Melaka, and these were treated as commutable conceptions.

The British view of natives was typified by racist rejection, fear of, as well as economic dependence on these people. Government offices operated through Asian personnel. Every court, police station, and administrative department had its staff of Chinese, Tamil, and Malays who turned British laws and regulations, codified in English, into understandable prose in other languages. A small army of clerks, competent in English and at least one Asian language, copied letters, took information, and placed orders. Trained in mission or government schools, they moved into the towns for an education and stayed on to work, becoming a locally rooted, modernized middle class of sorts. These workers, alongside other labourers were the reason why racial spurning was nuanced. This was also the reason why ‘Britishness’ was obscure, as it fell on the crossroads of inclusivity and exclusivity. This social perspective of race was distinct from the official vision, as mentioned above, since one was based on ingrained mentality, while the other was a reworked model of existent frameworks. Hence, one can argue that colonial rule did not have a major impact on identity formation in nineteenth century Melaka, which remained firm, but not overtly rigid, allowing for ample flexibility.

This thesis has attempted to understand the social landscape of Melaka, survey the various communities, and examine the politics of identity formation in the nineteenth century. Its findings somewhat predate the developments in the coming century, when official debates on race became comparatively fiercer, impacting methods of enumeration and census formation. Ideas on race crystalised and became more concrete in the twentieth century, when a greater number of enumerators and anthropologists became involved in the task to add to colonial knowledge. Racial subcategorization of communities was brought into focus after 1900, such as for the Chinese community, whose races or tribes were to be categorized according to language, in a likely attempt to differentiate the Babas who spoke Malay, from the other Chinese who did not.[363] Similarly, Malay tribes came to be differentiated and found distinct spaces in the census, where ergo they had been classified broadly as 'Aborigines' or clubbed alongside Malays in general. These developments added more and more people into the body of knowledge of anthropologists and the colonial state, through a process involving rigid classification by connecting groups with others, and discerning differences.[364] In the 1921 census, the population was divided into over twenty-eight racial groups, of which six were considered the main racial divisions.[365]

The difference between race and ethnicity, however, seems to have continued to survive on ambiguous ground, especially given that colonial officials could not come up with a single definition to impose on the population, and instead relied on self-identification.[366] Nevertheless, many of the racial emotions found among present-day Malaysians have their roots in these twentieth century colonial classifications, which in turn partly evolved from happenings in the nineteenth. Race relations in the 1900s and after were cemented through

[363] Manickam, "Bridging the Race Barrier," 371.
[364] Manickam, 378.
[365] Manickam, 372.
[366] Hirschman, "The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity," 565.

social forces engendered by the expansion of British colonialism, including state-sponsored immigration that altered population counts of communities and economic segregation, policies that continued in postcolonial times, raising tensions and further dividing communities.[367] A comparison of the social categorisations between the nineteenth and twentieth century would make for an exciting scholarly exercise since it will reveal more about the evolving ideas of race in British Malaya, and the impact of colonial censuses on social psyche. It will also determine the extent to which Melaka in the twentieth century was marked by interethnic harmony, as generally found in centuries before, characterised by a largely nonviolent coexistence of settling communities. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to look more into the impact of the creation of British Malaya by combining the Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated States, on the social landscape and on the growing consciousness of a Malay nationality. In this pursuit, this thesis can act as a springboard for future research on the twentieth century given its focus on the political and social legacies of the centuries before.

[367] Tomas Petru, "A Curious Trajectory of Interrace Relations: The Transformation of Cosmopolitan Malay Port Polities into the Multiethnic Divisions of Modern Malaysia," *Asian Ethnicity* 19, no. 1 (2017), 69-70.

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