CHAPTER 2. THE SUPPLY OF CHINESE TIN MINING LABOUR

The previous chapter established that the Chinese provided the bulk of the mining labour force in the development of the Malayan tin mining industry during the 19th century. This chapter seeks to examine the supply of that labour and its system of recruitment. Chinese tin mining labour, it will be seen, was wholly immigrant. Furthermore, it was composed, for the most part, of unskilled "coolie" labour for whom the economic opportunities offered by the expansion of tin mining, coupled with the pressure of population and political instability in China, encouraged migration to the Malay States in large numbers. The chapter is divided into four sections. Section 1 outlines the question of domestic labour supply in the early decades of the 19th century and the factors behind the need to import Chinese labour into the tin states. Section 2 contains a discussion of Chinese immigration to the Straits Settlements and Malay States during the 19th century. This includes an examination of the magnitude of immigration, the type of migrants emigrating from China, and the factors inducing emigration. A study of these factors is particularly relevant given the Chinese practice of ancestor worship and the existence of an Imperial Edict that, before 1860, forbade Chinese subjects from leaving the country without a special permit. Section 3 looks at the methods of recruitment of Chinese labour to the Straits Settlements and Malay States. The final section describes some of the initial problems caused by the influx of large numbers of Chinese miners to the interior tin states prior to British intervention in 1874.

1. THE NEED TO IMPORT CHINESE LABOUR:

Many arguments have been advanced to explain the failure of the Malay population, who had been the original miners in the peninsula to meet the demand for labour in the mines consequent on rising tin demand and the exploitation of the newly discovered deposits. One such argument emphasises the inherent cultural attitudes of the Malay peasantry, since although the Malays had

been traditionally noted as energetic traders they seemed unwilling to work as mine labourers.[1] Although this may have been a contributing element, a more plausible explanation centres on the social and economic factors that prevented the indigenous population from providing an unrestricted full-time, large-scale and highly mobile labour-force.

In the first instance Malaya, in the early decades of the 19th century, was land abundant but sparsely inhabited.[2] Furthermore, political organisation was based on a series of small river states (*negri*) of varying degrees of independence and isolation.[3] Geographical barriers also restricted settlement to small, traditionally-organised and often temporary coastal and riverine *kampongs* and to a shifting aboriginal (*orang asli*) population elsewhere.[4] Internal communication was limited to rivers and occasional jungle-tracks. In the areas of settlement, economic activity centred on subsistence *swidden* cultivation of rice (*ladang* -dry padi and *sawah* wet-padi), with fishing as the main supplement. There was little specialisation since isolation in small village communities made a degree of all-roundedness essential.[5] Within this framework, the early tin mines were usually located on the outskirts of agricultural settlement with mining undertaken as a part-time activity to supplement income between harvests.[6]

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[1] Andaya & Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, p.136. This unwillingness to become a tool in the production system of colonial capitalism earned the Malay peasantry a reputation of indolence. However, this reputation is disregarded by Alatas who argues, particularly in terms of tin mining labour, that the Malays avoided the type of slave labour that the Chinese were compelled to do owing to their immigrant status. See H.Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native- A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th Century to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism*, London, Frank Cass, 1977, pp.74-75.

[2] Statistics on total Malay population in the Peninsula before British intervention are unreliable. However, Newbold estimated the population of the Malay States in 1835-36 to be 280,680 (excluding the Straits Settlements). When the first reliable statistics were made available in 1874 the Malay population was recorded to be only 150,000. Newbold *British Settlements*, Vol.1, p.137; Sidhu & Jones, *Population Dynamics*, p.1.

[3] The northern states, in particular Kedah and Kelantan, were under the vague and fitfully exercised suzerainty of Siam. In the south, the sultanate of Riau-Johor held a diminishing sway over (present-day) Johor and Pahang. In the central area, west of the mountain range, were the three independent (but by no means monolithic) states of Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong. Each state consisted essentially of one or more river basins with the state capital located near the main river estuary. Here the ruler could control movement to and from the state, organise defence against external threat and levy tolls and taxes on imports and exports. External control was exerted over subsidiary settlements at inland upriver sites through supporters, territorial and district chiefs. For details see J.M.Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya*, London, Althone Press, 1958.

[4] For details see Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, pp.1 *et. seq.*

[5] To quote Winstedt, "...The pirate, the fisherman, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the weaver, the medicine man were also rice planters". R.O. Winstedt, *The Malays: A Cultural History*, Singapore, Kiely and Walsh, 1947, p.103. Families formed the basic economic unit and every member of the family laboured to contribute to overall wealth. To supplement their diet the peasants reared poultry and cultivated fruits and other crops. In order to obtain basic necessities such as salt, ironware and cloth, the peasants collected jungle produce to sell at local markets.

[6] Malay mining methods will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3

A second factor restricting domestic labour supply was the absence of a wage labour market. Two institutions existed which appear to have satisfied the demand for what otherwise constituted wage labour. These were slavery and compulsory labour service (corvee or *kerah*). Slavery in particular was a well-entrenched institution in the Malay Peninsula with slaves being of two main types - ordinary slaves (*abdi* or *hamba*) and debt-bondsmen (*orang berhutang*).[7] Abdi were acquired in several ways with main source being through capture in wars or raids. Negro slaves were also imported from Mecca. Murderers and other criminals who had committed serious offences were also enslaved. Debt-bondsmen, on the other hand, were acquired through personal indebtedness and had to serve their creditors until they had settled their debts.[8] Corvee (in effect a kind of forced labour), was the obligation of a tenant to perform a certain amount of work for an overlord in return for being allowed tenancy of the land.[9] The service was, at the order of the chief or Raja requiring it, organised by the village headman (*penghulu*). In the mining areas tin production was often performed by *kerah*; both men and women worked in the mines all year round but at fixed intervals that allowed them time to tend their farms.

Widespread political instability in the Malay States in the early decades of the 19th century also discouraged large-scale tin production by the indigenous population. Subsequent to the dissolution of the Melaka Sultanate the Malay political structure had gradually disintegrated in the course of the centuries. By the 19th century, Malay society had become so degenerate and unstable that there was no authority in any of the states capable of controlling,

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[7] The distinction between *abdi* and *orang berhutang* lay in the fact that the latter were still acknowledged as members of the same society as their masters while the former were not. For a detailed study on the institution of slavery in the Malay peninsula see Patrick Sullivan, *Social Relations of Dependence in a Malay States: Nineteenth Century Perak*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Monograph, No.10, 1982, pp.45-69. See also Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems*, pp.98-105.

[8] A general account of debt-bondage is given by Frank Swettenham. After explaining that the chiefs did not permit their subjects (*rayat*) to accumulate wealth he continued: "Thus when a *rayat*...is want of money he goes to his *Raja* or chief to lend it to him...Either money or goods are lent, and a certain time stipulated for payment. If at the expiry...the money is not paid it is usual to wait some time longer...should payment not then be made, the debtor, if a single man, is taken into the creditor's house; he becomes one of his followers and is bound to execute any order and do any work the Raja ...may demand, until the debt is paid...During this time the Raja usually provides the debtor with food and clothing, but if the creditor gives him money, [this] is added to the debt...Should the debtor marry...the wife and descendants are equally in debt bondage..." Quoted in Gullick, *ibid.*, p.99.

[9] The fundamental axiom of customary land tenure law was that, while proprietary rights existed in people, the right to land was usufruct. The economic foundations of the power of the ruling class lay in the tax system. The right to demand taxes and services from their subjects had long been acquired by the ruling class during the course of the historical development of Malay society. In the exaction of *kerah* the chiefs stopped short of demands beyond the endurance of the peasant because severe oppression could compel the peasants to abandon their land and migrate to other areas. See Gullick, *ibid.*, p.125.

or powerful enough to control, the whole territory. Furthermore, in the contest for power the control of armed men was an absolute prerequisite to success. But, in order to maintain them, the contestant had to provide food and clothing. The district was therefore taxed to the utmost with revenue being spent in maintaining or extending political power. Under such conditions there was little incentive to produce more than was essential for a subsistence existence. Whatever human resources could be removed from the land were mobilised into fighting men rather than into labourers for productive enterprise.[10]

The general outcome of the restraints to domestic labour supply was the development of a labour shortage. Therefore, when the Malay chiefs sought to take advantage of rising tin prices by increasing the scale of production they were forced to look to immigration to fulfil labour requirements. Attention naturally focused on the flourishing Straits Settlements where the pool of labour was growing rapidly due to the immigration of increasing numbers of Chinese. While many of the Chinese in the Straits Settlements were engaged in trading and shopkeeping but the bulk were labourers employed in agricultural enterprise (in growing gambier, cloves, nutmeg, sugar and in market gardening).[11] Thus in addition to distinguishing themselves by their adaptability, willingness and capacity for hard work, Chinese labourers in the Straits Settlements were, compared with the indigenous Malays, accustomed to the notion of wage labour and regular involvement in the exchange economy.

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[10] See Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914*, p.23; R.E.Elson, "International Commerce, the State and Society: Economic and Social Change", in Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol.II, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.13[illegible]-135.

[11] By 1827 the Chinese were the largest single community in Singapore, by 1845 they accounted for more than half its population. Migration had been stimulated by the opportunities afforded to trade following the establishment of the free ports. The Straits Settlements, and particularly Singapore, with their commercial links with east and west developed into the headquarters of Chinese commercial activity in the western Nanyang. The port provided the Chinese with a direct link to the markets and sources of labour and capital in the homeland. See Jackson, *Immigrant Labour*, pp.1-4; Wang Gungwu, *A Short History of the Nanyang Chinese*, Singapore, University of Malaya Press, 1959, p.19. Active encouragement was given to the migration of Chinese by the Straits Settlements government; a Chinese community was also valuable because it provided revenue through taxes levied on opium, pork, pawnbroking and the sale of spirits. The administration itself was also relieved of the burden of collecting taxes since this could be "farmed out" to other Chinese, either individuals or a syndicate. To quote Francis Light, "...The Chinese...are the only people of the east from whom a revenue may be raised without expense and extra-ordinary efforts by government." Quoted in Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, p.137.

Initially, the Malay chiefs mobilised tin mining labour by inviting Chinese labourers to work in the tin mines in the interior states of their own free will.[12] The miners obtained the tin they extracted as payment. The tin was then exported to the Straits ports via the chiefs.[13] However, despite the potential high returns, overall migration was insufficient to meet production demands. Moreover, those Chinese who did venture into the Malay States to work in the mines remained only long enough to earn a few hundred dollars and then returned either to the Straits Settlements to begin a business of their own, or to China. This transience was largely due to the unsettled political conditions in the Malay States which rendered mining full of risks to the lives and property of the Chinese.[14]

In addition to labour shortages, the Malay chiefs were also faced with the need to inject increasing amounts of capital into the opening of newly discovered deposits. Gradually, they turned to merchants in the Straits Settlements to provide both the capital and the labour to work the mines. For their part the Straits merchants, both Chinese and Western, were anxious to find profitable avenues for investment that would complement their trading activities. In the Malay States commercial agriculture and tin mining were the only potentially rewarding areas for investment able to service both the China trade and the growing markets in the Europe. In the event, it was the Chinese who responded to the offers of the Malay chiefs.[15] Chinese

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[12] Chinese tin mining was already well-established in the Netherlands East Indies. See for example Alex L.Ter Braake, *Mining in the Netherlands East Indies*, New York, 1944 and James C. Jackson, "Mining in Eighteenth Century Bangka: The Pre-European Exploitation of a "Tin Island"", *Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol.10 No.2, September 1969, pp.28-54. In the Malay States the pattern had been set as early as 1776 when Sultan Alauddin of Perak requested that 50 or 60 Chinese be sent from Melaka to overcome a labour shortage. He was also willing to encourage the import of Chinese workers on a regular basis and to guarantee their wages and conditions of work. See Andaya, *Perak, Abode of Grace*, pp.337-38, 351n.

[13] Until the 1850s the Malay chiefs forbade the direct export of tin by others. The miners therefore had to sell their product to the chiefs at the rate of $33 per *bahara*. Khoo, *The Western Malay States*, pp 75-76.

[14] In one incident in 1828 approximately 1,000 Chinese miners in Sungei Ujong were massacred by their Malay employers for some alleged offence. Newbold, *British Settlements*, Vol.II, pp.33, 96-97.

[15] Andaya & Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, pp.134-35; Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula*, p.412. See also Petition from Chinese Miners to Resident Councillor Penang, 5 August, 1861 in CO 275/5; Memorandum on Larut Disturbances, G.W Campbell, 24 October, 1872, *Precis of Perak Affairs*, A.Skinner, 10 January, 1874, Petition from Malacca Traders to Singapore Chamber of Commerce 27 July, 1872 and Memorial from Chinese Merchants to Gov., 28 March, 1873 all in CO 809/1. Western merchants were reluctant to invest in the Malay States for a multiplicity of reasons. These will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

entrepreneurs in Melaka began to finance mining operations in Larut, Sungei Ujong and Kuala Lumpur, while those in Penang moved into the mining districts of Perak.

Initially, Chinese investments in tin mining took the form of direct advances to the chiefs of money, rice, and opium.[16] In return the chiefs undertook to consign to the merchants all the tin produced in the mines.[17] However, as demand for tin increased and the need for capital to open up newly discovered deposits grew, the Chinese capitalists began to make advances directly to the miners. Gradually, they assumed control of production while the Malay chiefs continued to tap the flow of wealth from the mines by drawing an agreed tribute.[18] Coinciding with their takeover of control of production, the Chinese merchants also began to control the supply of labour to the mines. Chinese immigration during this period increased dramatically and a complex system of immigration and recruitment evolved to meet the demand for labour.

II. CHINESE IMMIGRANTS-MAGNITUDE, TYPE & FACTORS INDUCING MIGRATION:

Magnitude of Chinese Immigration to the Straits Settlements and Malay States

Chinese contacts with the *Nanyang* (Southern Ocean) can be traced through dynastic records to ancient times when Chinese pilgrims, travellers and goodwill missions visited the region.[19] As

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[16] This system prevailed everywhere except Melaka, where the Chinese merchants always financed mining operations directly.

[17] Such were the arrangements between the Melaka capitalists and the Klana of Sungei Ujong when the tin mines in this state were first worked. The capitalists advanced 2,500 Spanish dollars per month to the Klana who undertook to consign all the tin to them. From the Chinese who worked the mines the Klana demanded from each *bangsal* (a shed used either for smelting or for housing the labourers) at every smelting season, three *bahara* of tin (each containing three pikuls of tin) at 30 Spanish dollars per *bahara*. In addition, a rent of 6 Spanish dollars was levied per month on each mine. Later, in about 1833, the terms under which the Chinese worked the mines were revised and the mines were financed by three Malay chiefs, including the Klana, who jointly obtained their capital from Melaka merchants. In return the Chinese miners undertook to buy their provisions and opium from the Malay chiefs at above market prices and to sell them their tin at a much lower level than that at which the Malay chiefs had agreed to sell to their financiers. In addition the miners paid to the Klana 100 Spanish dollars for every new Chinese house erected in the mining settlements and one dollar for each *bahara* of tin produced. One of the other chiefs monopolised the supply of opium to the miners and the third had the right to collect half a Spanish dollar on each *bahara* of tin produced. Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914*, pp.20-21; Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula*, pp.402-09; *Second Continuation of the Report on Government Proceedings in the Malay States*, T.Braddell, 1874 in CO 809/5.

[18] In an account of British relations with Sungei Ujong it was stated that the Melaka traders who advanced money, rice and opium to the Malay chiefs had begun to finance directly to miners around 1840. *Proceedings of Government relative to the Natives in the Malayan Peninsula*, c.1320, encl. in No.8. Clarke to Canarvon, 29 December, 1874, cited in Sadka, *The Protected Malay States*, p.19.

[19] Detailed accounts of early Chinese contacts with South-east Asia in general and the Malay Peninsula in particular, are given in (among others) Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, London, Oxford University Press, 1951; Ta Chen, *Chinese Migrations*, pp.79-81; Swee-Hock Saw, *Singapore. Population in Transition*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970; Khoo Kay Kim, "Chinese Economic Activities in Malaya: A Historical Perspective", in Manning Nash (ed.), *Economic Performance in Malaysia- the Insider's View*, New York, World Peace Academy, 1988, pp.179-223; Wang Gungwu, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, Singapore, Times Academic Press, 1991, pp.3-21, 166-189.

for the Malay Peninsula, the Chinese appear to have frequented the east coast from the early 4th century, but it was only in the mid-14th century that they were known to have first settled on the western side of the Peninsula at Tumasik.[20] In the 15th century Chinese merchants and emissaries visited the Malay Kingdom in Melaka in increasing numbers and, during the latter years, it was recorded that a few Chinese were residing there as merchants and traders.[21]

During the periods of Portuguese and Dutch influence the Chinese population in Melaka remained static at about 1,000. Then, following the establishment of British administration, the Chinese population increased rapidly.[22] By 1860, thirty-six years after the British finally took over Melaka, the Chinese population had increased to about 10,000. In other parts of the Straits Settlements the increase was even more spectacular; between 1820 and 1860 the number of Chinese in Penang had increased from under 9,000 to 36,000; in Province Wellesley from around 2,500 in 1830 to over 8,000 by 1860; and, in Singapore from just over 3,000 in 1823 to 28,000 in 1850 and 50,000 by 1860.[23]

Initially, Chinese population in the Malay peninsula was centred on the Straits Settlements, where the immigrants were afforded British protection. Although there were some Chinese in the interior Malay States, including some small mining communities in Larut and Perak, overall numbers were comparatively insignificant.[24] The years following 1850, however, witnessed a spectacular increase in Chinese migration to the Malay States.

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[20] Victor Purcell, "Chinese Settlement in Malacca". *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol.20. Pt.1. 1947. p.124.

[21] From the opening of the era of western colonialism, beginning with the Portuguese capture of Melaka, the Chinese in the region sought to accommodate themselves to the changing order by permanently settling in the area. However, the size of the Chinese community during this period is unknown because Portuguese records excluded non-Christians in the population. In the first detailed census taken by the Dutch in 1678 the Chinese population was given as only 892 out of a total population of nearly 5,000. *ibid*

[22] The focus of Chinese settlement moved from Melaka to Penang in 1786 and from Penang to Singapore after 1819. In 1819 Raffles wrote, "My new colony thrives most rapidly. We have not been established four months, and it has received an accession of population exceeding 5,000 - principally Chinese. and their number is daily increasing". Quoted in Purcell, *Chinese in Southeast Asia*, p.249.

[23] See Purcell, *Chinese in Malaya*, pp.69-71; Mills, *British Malaya*, pp.216-17.

[24] As previously noted, the unsettled political conditions in the central Malay States discouraged permanent Chinese settlement. In 1830 the total Chinese population in the Malay States was estimated to be between 15,000 and 20,000, approximately one-tenth of the Malay population. Mills. *ibid.*, p.211.

Since all immigrants had first to arrive at either Penang or Singapore (and a negligible number at Melaka), these ports played a crucial role in the "sorting out" and distribution of Chinese immigrants to the tin mines in the Malay States. Singapore developed into an important distribution centre for Chinese immigrants to the tin mines in Selangor and Sungei Ujong while Chinese labourers destined for Perak usually disembarked and were distributed in Penang. As shown in Table 9 below, the number of Chinese immigrants arriving at Singapore and Penang increased approximately ten-fold in the period 1877-1900.[25]

Table 9

Number of Chinese Immigrants Arriving at and Emigrants Leaving Singapore and Penang, 1877-1900.
(Figures given in nearest thousand)

Year	Number Arrived at Singapore	Number Arrived at Penang	Total Number Arrived at Singapore & Penang	Total Number Leaving Singapore & Penang
1877	10,000	na	...	na
1878	34,000	na	...	na
1879	35,000	na	...	na
1880	47,000	na	...	na
1881	48,000	42,000	90,000	na
1882	56,000	45,000	101,000	na
1883	61,000	48,000	109,000	na
1884	69,000	38,000	107,000	na
1885	69,000	42,000	111,000	na
1886	87,000	57,000	144,000	na
1887	101,000	65,000	166,000	na
1888	103,000	63,000	166,000	73,000
1889	102,000	44,000	146,000	na
1890	96,000	37,000	133,000	38,000
1891	94,000	49,000	143,000	33,000
1892	93,000	45,000	138,000	na
1893	145,000	68,000	213,000	na
1894	107,000	46,000	153,000	31,000
1895	150,000	61,000	211,000	na
1896	142,000	57,000	199,000	na
1897	91,000	41,000	132,000	26,000
1898	107,000	45,000	152,000	28,000
1899	118,000	51,000	169,000	35,000
1900	160,000	73,000	233,000	45,000

Source: Figures for 1877-80 are from *Annual Reports, Straits Settlements* cited in Yip, *Development of the Tin Mining Industry*, Table 1-3, p.68. Figures for 1881-1900 are from International Labour Office, *International Migrations Volume 1 Demographic Monographs*, New York, Gordon & Breach Scientific Publications, Table II, p.913.

[25] Records of Chinese immigrants arriving at Singapore were not kept prior to 1877 and at Penang prior to 1881. Statistics for Chinese immigrants to Melaka, which became available from 189 , show that in the period 1891-1899 the annual number of Chinese immigrants arriving at Melaka was between 500 and 1,000.

It is probable that after 1850, and particularly after 1874, the attraction for most Chinese immigrants to the Malay Peninsula was not the Straits Settlements but the rich Malayan hinterland. As shown in Table 10 below, many of the immigrants arriving at Singapore or Penang during this period did in fact find their way into the Malay States; between 1891 and 1901 the Chinese population in the Malay States nearly doubled, while that in the Straits Settlements increased by just about one quarter. By 1901 there were more Chinese in the FMS than there were in the Straits Settlements.[26]

Table 10

Chinese Population in the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements, 1891 and 1901.[a]

(Figures given in the nearest thousand)

	1891	1901
Federated Malay States		
Perak	94,000	149,000
Selangor	51,000	109,000
Negri Sembilan	15,000	33,000
Pahang	3,000	9,000
Total for Federated Malay States	163,000	300,000
Total for Straits Settlements	228,000	282,000
Total for Unfederated Malay States	na	na

Source: Yip, *Development of the Tin Mining Industry*, Table 1-4, p.69.

Note: [a] Reliable figures for the FMS are unavailable prior to 1891.

The increase in the Chinese population in the FMS during this period was most significant in the two chief mining states of Perak and Selangor. It has been estimated that in the period 1891-1900, no less than 1.5 million Chinese immigrants entered these two states alone. By 1901 the Chinese population in Perak exceeded the Malays while in Selangor there were two and a half times more Chinese than Malays.[27] The bulk of these Chinese immigrants were either directly or

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[26] It should be noted that no reliable figures of population are available for the Unfederated Malay States before 1911.

[27] *Annual Report Federated Malay States, 1901*, p.23 cited in Yip, *The Development of the Malayan Tin Mining Industry*, p.68.

indirectly engaged in tin mining; of a total FMS Chinese population of about 300,000 in 1901, over half (approximately 163,000) were tin miners.[28]

Types of Immigrants

Almost all the Chinese immigrants arriving in the Straits Settlements and Malay States in the floodtide of immigration from 1850 shared two main characteristics. Firstly, without meaningful exception, all were poor and, until around the beginning of the 20th century, only a small percentage were women. The vast majority of immigrants were young adult males who were either unmarried or had left their wives behind in China. Second, almost all Chinese immigrants came from the southern maritime provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien. Smaller numbers came from Kwangsi and the island of Hainan south of Kwangtung. The majority embarked at Macau or Amoy or, after it was founded in 1842, at Hong Kong. As shown in Figure 9 below, this "emigrant region" consisted of five dialect or speech groups: Hokkiens from the Amoy area; Teochius from the Swatow area; Cantonese from the areas of Canton, Macau and Hong Kong; Hakkas from the various parts of Kwangtung province; and Hainanese from Hainan Island.[29] Occupational diversity among the Chinese in the Straits Settlements and Malay States tended to coincide with these dialect groups.[30] Therefore, although the Chinese of all tribes engaged in agricultural pursuits (the Hakkas and Cantonese probably to the greatest extent and the Hainanese and Hokkiens the least), the Hokkiens, as the oldest settlers and the most numerically dominant group in the Straits Settlements, gravitated to urban areas and into trading and commercial occupations. The Hainanese, as late participants in the coolie trade were smaller in number than the other groups,

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[28] In Perak 51 per cent of the Chinese population were tin miners, in Selangor 52 per cent, in Negri Sembilan 48 per cent and in Pahang 44 per cent of the Chinese population were tin miners. A.M.Poutney, *The Census of the Federated Malay States, 1911*, London, 1911, p.64 cited in Yip, *The Development of the Malayan Tin Mining Industry*, p.69.

[29] Other speech groups from farther north in coastal Fukien (Henghua, Hokchia, Hokchu), from Taiwan or from Kwangsi province were smaller in number and comparatively insignificant. For detailed studies of overseas Chinese emigrant communities see G.W.Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, New York, Ithaca, 1962, pp.35-39; Ku Young Zo, "Emigrant Communities in China. Sze-Yap, *Asian Profile*, Vol.5, No.4 April 1977, pp.313-323.

[30] See Mary F.Somers-Heidhus, *Southeast Asia's Chinese Minorities*, Hong Kong, Longmans, pp.4-6; Smith, *Population Growth in Malaya*, p.64.

and were limited to more menial occupations. The Hakkas, as the second largest and least easily assimilated group of immigrants, entered agricultural occupations in disproportionate numbers. The Cantonese on the other hand became the most numerous group in west Malaysia outside Penang and Melaka. Tin mining in the Malay States was dominated by Hakkas and Cantonese.

Figure 9. Emigrant Communities of the Major Overseas Speech Groups

Factors Inducing Migration

The multiplicity of factors that existed to stimulate the influx of labour from China, particularly from the southern provinces, to the Malay States can be broadly divided into "push" factors that acted as propelling agents or driving forces from China, and "pull" factors that acted as attracting agents from the Malay States.[31]

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[31] It should be noted that Chinese emigration to the Straits Settlements and Malay States did not occur in isolation. Rather, it occurred as part of a world-wide movement of Chinese labour to places as diverse as Australia, California, Indochina and Hawaii. Detailed studies of Chinese emigration are given in Yen Ching-Hwang, *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese During the Late Ch'ing Period*

In the first instance, contiguity in terms of climate and geographic location and setting of the southern maritime provinces was conducive to emigration to the nearby countries of the Malay Archipelago.[32] Secondly, trading contacts between the southern provinces and the Malay Peninsula were long-standing.[33] Emigration grew out of the Chinese junk trade by following the international trading routes that fanned out from the southern ports into Southeast Asia and which touched most of the major settlements including Singapore and Penang.[34] Under the 1842 Treaty of Nanking, China surrendered Hong Kong to the British. Subsequently, Canton, Shanghai, Amoy, Fuzhiou and Ningbo were opened to service the opium trade. At this time the capitalist nations regarded China as an inexhaustible source of cheap labour. These ports therefore not only handled opium imports, but also witnessed the export of Chinese workers to all parts of the world.[35] The Chinese living in the coastal ports naturally had greater opportunity to emigrate than their compatriots in the interior.

Although geographical and other factors were important, the characteristic feature of Chinese emigration to the Straits Settlements and Malay States was that it was motivated by economic necessity. The Chinese emigrated with but one desire - to escape the grinding poverty at home by making their fortunes overseas. Few had any intention of settling permanently in the Peninsula.[36]

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[32] For details see Ta Chen, *Chinese Migrations*, pp.22-36.

[33] Wang Gungwu emphasises that one important feature of Chinese interest in the Straits Settlements, in particular Singapore, followed from the Chinese understanding of *Nanyang* geography. The *Nanyang* had been divided into eastern and western *Nanyang*, a distinction which the Chinese made by drawing an imaginary line through the middle of Borneo. To the east of the line trade was centred on Luzon Island in the Philippines. To the west were commercially far more developed territories, but there had never been a trading centre in the area that was satisfactory to the Chinese. Thus the Chinese were ready to find a centre for the western Nanyang. The foundation of Singapore as a colony filled this void. See Wang, *A History of the Nanyang Chinese*, pp 33-35.

[34] See Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-1869", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol.33, No 4, 1960, pp.45-46. A number of influences account for the fact that it was the natives of Fukien and Kwangtung in particular who developed maritime skills and commercial relations with the *Nanyang*. Firstly, the modern "Chinese" population of the southern coastal provinces descended from migrants originating in the Yangtze Valley and further north. As these "Chinese" populations grew in the coastal valleys of Fukien and Kwangtung, there were several compelling reasons for turning to the sea. Most importantly, contact with the national base in the river valleys of central and northern China was easy by sea but extremely difficult by land; the mountains in the south made overland transport arduous and inland water transport to the north impossible. The impossibility of extending the Grand Canal to the south further forced the development of coastal shipping in the southern provinces. The junk trade with the *Nanyang* which followed was therefore a southward extension of coastal shipping. When, in the 19th century, stability and economic development became prevalent in the *Nanyang*, the general southward migration of people quite naturally continued in considerable numbers to Southeast Asia, including the Straits Settlements and Malay States. For details see Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, pp.28-29, 39-41.

[35] After the abolition of the African slave trade in the 1830s, the export of Asian workers became important to many of the colonial societies that had formerly owned slaves. Chinese workers were of vital significance in those countries that had not previously acquired their labour power through the transatlantic slave trade. See Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, pp.41-57; Lydia Potts, *The World Labour Market A History of Migration*, London, Zed Books Ltd.,1990, pp.65-67.

[36] This was the general sojourning characteristic of the overseas Chinese. For a detailed analysis see Paul C.P Siu, "The Sojourner", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.58, July, 1952-53, pp.34-44.

The first important economic factor inducing emigration was overpopulation.[37] According to Ping-ti Ho China's population was approximately 150 million in 1700; by 1794 it had increased to 313 million and to 430 million by 1850.[38] The impact of overpopulation was two-fold. In the first instance, because of the lack of comparative increase in cultivatable land, overpopulation increased the pressure on existing holdings.[39] As land was the main productive factor in the agrarian economy, its scarcity created an imbalance in the supply and demand of agricultural products. The obvious result was increased inflation.[40] High levels of unemployment due to the irregular slumps and booms to which the tea trade had become subject during the 19th century, coupled with the decline of handicraft industries caused by the introduction of machine-made goods, contributed to the problem. The combined effect was clearly illustrated in Fukien where many villages became desolate.[41]

The second component of the economic factor were natural calamities caused most frequently by drought and flood. Statistical evidence suggests that there was drought in 92 years and floods in 190 years during the entire 267 years of the Ch'ing dynasty. These calamities involved many provinces and affected millions of people.[42] The frequency and intensity of natural calamities created a stimulus for people to migrate overseas.

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[37] According to Skinner, early Chinese contacts with Europeans in south China led to the introduction of sweet potatoes and peanuts by the early 17th century. These crops could be grown on the abundant but infertile hilly land of Kwangtung and Fukien- land unsuitable for rice cultivation. The peace and order that followed the consolidation of Manchu victory, in addition to the added productivity of these new crops, led to rapid population increase. See Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, p 29.

[38] See Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China, 138 -1953*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1959, p.278.

[39] This was most clearly reflected in the worsening of the land-population ratio. In 1753 land per head was estimated at 3.86 *mou*. It decreased to 3.56 *mou* in 1766; 2.19 *mou* in 1812; and 1.86 *mou* in 1833. Meanwhile, it was estimated that the minimum requirement to maintain living standards during the same period was 4 *mou* per person. Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, p.33; Ta Chen, *Chinese Migrations*, pp.5-11.See also Ch'en Han-Seng, *Landlord and Peasant in China: A Study of Agrarian Crisis in South China*, New York, International Publishers, 1936.

[40] Inflation was most seriously reflected in the price of rice, the main diet of the population in the southern provinces. Rice prices had started to climb as early as the beginning of the 18th century and became especially serious by the middle of the 19th century. In Hunan province the price of a *shih* of rice during the K'ang-hsi period was 2-3 *ch'ien* (the equivalent of 200-300 yen). This increased to 4-5 *ch'ien* during the Yung-cheng period (1723-35) and 5-6 *ch'ien* in the Ch'ien-lung reign (1736-95). By the middle of the 19th century the price had increased dramatically. The Governor-General of Fukien and Cekiang reported in 1899 that the price of rice in Fukien had soared sharply to more than 7,000 *wen* (70 *ch'ien*) per *shih*. Yen, *ibid.*, p.34.

[41] See L.T.Gardener, "Amoy Emigration to the Straits", *China Review*, Vol.22, 1897, pp.621-26.

[42] One of the worst drought-famines in modern Chinese history occurred in 1877-78 and struck the four northern provinces of Shensi, Shansi, Honan, Hopei and the eastern coastal province of Shantung. Between 5 and 6 million people were affected. Many undoubtedly starved to death and still millions more were forced to move south in search of food. See Ho, *Studies on the Population of China*, pp.229-231

The third economic factor inducing emigration was the impact of the opium trade. Since the 18th century western trade had grown considerably through the system of controlled exchange between the foreign and semi-official Chinese merchants. From the mid-19th century, however, it began to exert a serious impact on the Chinese economy, not so much because of the volume of the legitimate trade but because of the increased smuggling of opium.[43] Due to its illicit nature opium absorbed large amounts of Chinese silver thus seriously upsetting the internal fiscal system. This greatly aggravated the financial problems of the vast Chinese peasantry.[44]

Added to the economic factors inducing emigration were political factors centred on a number of rebellions that had greatly shaken the foundation of the Ch'ing empire. Among the most famous uprisings were the White Lotus Insurrection in the Hupei-Szechwan-Shensi border area in 1796, the Nine Rebellion in the Huai river area, southern Chihli (Hopei) and western Shantung in the mid-19th century, and the famous T'ai-ping Rebellion in southern and central China between 1851 and 1864.[45] The economic impact of the rebellions on the economy was profound - severe disruption of economic activities, destruction of farms, and the forced internal migration of many of the rural population to the coastal cities. Combined with economic factors, these political rebellions created a situation of rural destitution, a concentration of population in coastal cities, an oversupply of labour and, eventually, a strong desire for emigration.[46]

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[43] The volume of this illicit trade increased dramatically; from [illegible]555 chests worth £1,800,000 in 1800 to 40,000 chests worth £16,000,000 by 1838. For a study of the opium trade and its economic impact on China see Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42*, Cambridge, Oxford University Press, 1969 reprint.

[44] Chinese internal currency was based on silver (used for taxes and the payment of officers' salaries) and copper (used for general transactions, particularly in the local agricultural markets). Traditionally, a certain parity was maintained between the two. However, with the outflow of silver due to the opium trade the internal value of silver to copper was altered from a ratio of 1:2 to a ratio of 1:3. Chinese peasants were severely affected because they were required to pay tax and rent in silver but received their income in the devalued copper currency. Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, p.35.

[45] In the latter years of the T'ai-ping Rebellion the "rebels made inroads into the emigrant areas of Kwangtung and Fukien, leaving famine in their wake. In several areas, particularly Ch'ao-chou, anarchy and disorder increased for years after the demise of the T'ai-ping movement and methods of regaining order were themselves so ruthless as to encourage people to flee the area. With the collapse of the T'ai-ping movement, thousands of its supporters took refuge abroad. It is estimated that the population loss during the T'ai-ping Rebellion was 20 million. See Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand*, p.31. Banditry, uprisings and intermittent fighting between warlords were also frequent in the Cantonese, Hakka and Teochiu emigrant communities in Kwangtung. In 1864-66 for example, feuds between Hakkas and Cantonese in southwestern Kwangtung were recorded to have cost 1 million lives. Yen, *ibid.*

[46] Oversupply of labour was demonstrated in the low wages paid to labourers in coastal cities. In Amoy, for instance, a British consular officer Dr.Charles A.Livingstone observed in 1852 that "...The average wages of all labour at Amoy are very low, and there is not much variation between the rates paid for different kinds, skilled and unskilled. From 80 to 100 cash is the daily hire of an able-bodied man. The highest of these amounts is about equal to 4d". "Note by Dr. Charles A.Livingstone, British Consulate, Amoy, 26 August 1852", in *British Parliamentary Papers: Command Papers (1852-53)*, p.355, Inclosure 3 in No.8.

Finally, there is the question of the change in the attitude of the Chinese government towards emigration. Prior to 1860 emigration throughout China was prohibited and the Ch'ing government considered emigrants as "deserters" and "political conspirators". Those persons who emigrated illegally returned to China under the penalty of death.[47] At the close of the Opium War, however, China was forced, in several treaties with Western powers, to accept a provision according to nationals of the contracting parties the privilege to travel and reside in each other's country.[48] Chinese emigration was effectively legalised in 1860. Article 5 of the Convention of Peace signed between China and Great Britain stated that:

> ...as soon as the ratification of the Treaty of 1858 shall have been exchanged, his Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of China, will, by decree, command the high authorities of every province to proclaim throughout their jurisdictions that Chinese subjects choosing to take service in the British colonies or other parts beyond the seas are at perfect liberty to enter into engagements with British subjects for that purpose, and to ship themselves and their families on board any British vessel at any of the open ports of China; also that the high authorities aforesaid shall, in concert with Her Britannic Majesty's representative in China, frame such regulations for the protection of Chinese, emigrating as above, as the circumstances of the different open ports may demand.[49]

On the "pull" side, the economic opportunity offered by the demand for labour was the most important factor inducing emigration to the Straits Settlements and Malay States. As previously outlined, one of the largest areas of labour demand was in tin mining. At the same time, the British government's *laissez-fair* attitude towards emigration made it possible for new-comers to pursue their economic interests without fear of arbitrary despoliation or expulsion. Victor Purcell explains that, "British policy...was calculated to encourage the immigration of Chinese, for the British

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[47] This prohibition in part reflected a traditional attitude toward duty to the family and the land. More importantly, as a policy of state it was explained on three grounds: (1) in the earlier period of the Ch'ing dynasty a large number of patriots had left the country to continue opposition to the Manchu regime; (2) the defence of the sea-coast at that time became more urgent, chiefly because of the prevalence of pirates and because of the formation of bands of vagabonds who first roamed through rural Fukien and Kwangtung and later, under the Heaven and Earth Society, sought refuge in Singapore and other parts of British Malaya and western Borneo; (3) it was also in the interest of the new rulers to reinforce the folkways and mores of the people in so far as their proverbial love of home and soil made for stability and high agricultural production. For details see Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, pp.49-51; Robert L.Irick, *Ch'ing Policy Towards the Coolie Trade, 1847-1878*, Beijing, Chinese Materials Centre, 1982.

[48] Under the 1842 Treaty of Nanking China and Britain agreed that "... their respective subjects shall enjoy full security and protection for their persons and their property within the dominions of the other" Quoted in Ta Chen, *Emigrant Communities*, p.52.

[49] Quoted in *ibid.*

realised that the industry of this people would create wealth for the new territory."[50] By the time British administrative policy in the Malay States had altered to one of active intervention after 1874, the Chinese had established themselves as an important factor of production, especially in the tin mining states. The colonial administration therefore retained its policy on immigration. Chinese immigrants flowed into the Malay States during the 1880s and 1890s on the triple stimuli of the promotion of peace and stability, the establishment of a modern administrative structure and the development of a comprehensive transport and communications network.[51]

III. THE SYSTEM OF RECRUITMENT:

In the early part of the 19th century the Chinese immigrants were "taken on board one of the unwieldy [junks] that annually roll, like great leviathans, with the monsoon, down the coast of China, among the islands of the Archipelago, a voyage of twenty, thirty or sometimes forty days".[52] The junks made one round trip each year arriving in the Straits Settlements in January, February or March, and leaving for China in April or May. In 1851 it was estimated that "...about 2,500 to 3,000 arrive annually with the junks at Malacca", and in 1854 "...from 2,000 to 3,000 Chinese land annually at Penang and spread from there to Province Wellesley and the Siamese and Malay provinces".[53] Even after steam vessels made their appearance in the Straits in the 1840s, the junks continued to carry immigrants to the Straits Settlements. By the 1860s, however, steamships dominated the bulk passenger traffic. The migration was greatly facilitated as the route between China and the Straits Settlements was reduced to between six and eight days.

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50 Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, p.39.

51 It should also be noted that towards the end of the 19th century Chinese migrants were being barred from America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Many would-be emigrants to these places therefore turned to Southeast Asia. See Joyce Ee, "Chinese Migration to Singapore, 1896-1914", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol.2, No 1, 1961, p.-5

52 Newbold, *British Settlements*, Vol.1, p.15; Ta Chen, *Chinese Migrations*, pp.12-13.

53 Newbold, *ibid.*

In the early decades of the 19th century Chinese immigration to the Straits Settlements and Malay States was on a small scale, being unassisted and purely voluntary.[54] Unassisted immigrants, as the name implies, were those who had paid their own passage, using either their own money or loans from friends or relatives. On arrival in the Straits Settlements these immigrants were free to go where they liked and to work for whom they pleased. Then, from the 1820s, as the demand for labour began to outweigh the supply of labourers paying their own expenses, a system of active recruitment and "assisted" passages for immigrants developed which quickened and extended this flow.[55] By the 1840s Chinese immigration to the Straits Settlements and Malay States had developed into a well-organised and speculative business. The system that evolved was the so-called "credit-ticket" system. Credit-ticket immigrants were those whose passage was paid by someone else, to whom for this they then owed a debt. As shown in Table 11 below, although "free" or "unassisted" immigrants continued to form the majority of Chinese arriving in Penang and Singapore, the number of "assisted" passages in the period 1877-1899 was significant.[56]

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[54] For detailed studies of the system of immigration to the Straits Settlements and Malay States see Persia Crawford-Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries Within the British Empire*, (second impression.) London, Frank Cass & Co., 1971; Blythe, "Historical Sketch", pp.68-75; Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, pp.243-256.

[55] It is impossible to determine precisely when "assisted" migration to the Straits Settlements was first employed. As early as 1805 it was recorded that "..immigrants pawn their persons to the owner or Captains of the junks for a passage and victuals", the cost of which "...they borrow on arrival at their destination from relations or cultivators whom they engage to work for, and repay by monthly deductions from their wages." Quoted in Jackson, *Immigrant Labour*, pp.43-44. Later, in 1823, Raffles wrote, "...it frequently happens that free labourers and others are brought from China and elsewhere as passengers who have not the means of paying their passage, and under the expectation that individuals resident in Singapore will advance the amount of it on condition of receiving the services of the parties for a limited period in compensation thereof". Quoted in Blythe, "Historical Sketch", pp.68-69. Similarly, in 1839, Newbold recorded, "...The passage money to the Straits Settlements is from 8 to 12 Spanish Dollars, a sum usually paid by the person hiring the services of the emigrant on landing. A certain number of labourers are often commissioned from China by some wealthy capitalist, who reimburses himself for the sum laid out on their passage money, food and clothes from the profits of their labours on first landing". Newbold, *British Settlements*, Vol.I, p.15; *Labour Commission Report 1891* in CO 275/41.

[56] Reliable figures for the number of credit-ticket immigrants arriving in the Straits ports are unavailable prior to 1877. In 1854 it was recorded that "masters of junks not understanding the science of statistics, view any attempt at counting their passengers or bales of goods as a prelude to taxation". Quoted in Campbell, *Coolie Emigration*, p.8. The number of total and (unpaid) immigrants arriving in Melaka were: 1891 1,355 (490); 1892 882 (311); 1893 908 (194); 1894 1,112 (478); 1895 1,325 (680); 1897 320 (233); 1898 625 (608); 1899 1,323 (1288); 1900 537 (494). International Labour Office, *International Migrations*, Table III, p.914.

Table 11

Number of Free and Assisted Chinese Emigrants Arriving at Singapore and Penang, 1877-1899.
(Figures given in the nearest thousand)

Year	Number Arrived at Singapore			Number Arrived at Penang			Total Arrived		
	Free	Assisted	Total	Free	Assisted	Total	Free	Assisted	Total
1877	7	3	10	na	na	-	-	-	-
1878	28	6	34	na	na	-	-	-	-
1879	31	4	35	na	na	-	-	-	-
1880	38	9	47	na	na	-	-	-	-
1881	36	12	48	21	21	42	57	33	90
1882	45	11	56	28	17	45	73	28	101
1883	51	10	61	32	16	48	83	26	106
1884	59	10	69	23	15	38	82	25	107
1885	60	9	69	25	17	42	85	20	111
1886	71	16	87	34	23	57	105	39	144
1887	82	19	101	42	23	65	124	42	166
1888	82	18	100	47	16	63	129	34	163
1889	87	12	99	35	9	44	122	21	143
1890	88	8	96	30	7	37	118	15	133
1891	88	6	94	41	8	49	129	14	143
1892	84	9	93	39	6	45	123	15	138
1893	126	19	145	58	10	68	184	29	213
1894	98	9	107	40	6	46	138	15	153
1895	135	15	150	52	9	61	187	24	211
1896	127	15	142	47	10	57	174	25	199
1897	82	9	91	36	5	41	118	14	132
1898	96	11	107	40	5	45	136	16	152
1899	104	14	118	47	4	51	151	18	169

Sources: *Paid and Unpaid Immigrants to Singapore 1877-1890 and Penang 1881-1890* in CO 273/41; International Labour Office, *International Migrations*, Table III, p.913.

Note: na = not available.

Credit-ticket immigrants were of two types. The first group comprised those who were brought to the Straits Settlements on credit by shipowners on board whose vessels they were detained until redeemed by an employer. The employer would pay for the labourer's passage plus a margin of profit to the shipowner. The labourer was then obligated to work for that employer until the debt was repaid (usually a year) receiving food, clothes and a only few dollars for indispensables such barber's expenses. In 1855 the system was described in principle as follows:

> The passenger (called *Sin-Kheh*), not having money for his passage, enters into an agreement with the master of the junk, to bind himself apprentice to someone at the port for one year, without wages, only receiving food, clothing and a small sum for barber's expenses, tobacco and other little indispensable luxuries; the balance of consideration for the labour of the year is to be handed over to the master of the junk, as payment for the passage-money. The *Sin-Kheh* are kept on board the junks as security for the passage till taken by an employer, who, in consideration of obtaining his services for a year at a low rate, pays part of a year's wages in advance, with which advance the *Sin-Kheh* clears himself with the junk master.[57]

No sooner had the junks arrived in the Straits ports when Chinese flocked on board to buy the *sin-khehs*. The transaction for the *sin-kheh's* services was conducted directly between the junk master and the intending employer. The amount of passage money varied with the demand for labour and the junk master obtained anywhere between $15 for a skilled craftsman to $3 for a sickly man. A coolie usually fetched between $6 and $10 dollars. On the other hand, if the *sin-kheh* paid the passage money himself (by obtaining money from a relative in the Straits Settlements for example), at the same rate demanded from the employers, then the debt was paid and the *sin-kheh* was treated as a free labourer.

The second type of credit-ticket immigrant were those whose passage was paid by professional recruiters (also called coolie-brokers or "crimps"), who then transported the immigrants to the Straits Settlements as labourers. The labourers were kept in depots or lodging-houses at the ports and disposed of to an employer as soon as one could be found.[58] There was, particularly during the second half of the 19th century, little difficulty in finding employers for these assisted immigrants as the demand for labour was high, particularly in the tin mining states. The employer would settle the debt of the passage to the coolie-broker in exchange for a *lien* on the immigrant's services for a specific period. The prices demanded by the coolie-brokers varied with the conditions of supply and demand and, not uncommonly, immigrants were held on arrival in the ports for speculative purposes.

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[57] J.R.Logan, "Notes on the Chinese of Penang", quoted in Jackson, *Immigrant Labour*, p.44. See also Mills, *British Malaya*, pp.206-07.

[58] Although this category were "paid" immigrants as far as their passage was concerned they were classed as unpaid or credit-ticket immigrants in Straits Settlements official returns.

To ensure a steady supply of Chinese labour the coolie-brokers in Singapore and Penang worked in co-operation with lodging- or eating-house keepers in Swatow and Amoy and, to a lesser extent, in Hong Kong and Macau. These depot-keepers were regularly informed of the state of the labour market in the Straits Settlements and, on this advice, would advance funds to certain *kheh-thaus* (headmen also known as sub-ordinate brokers), to recruit emigrants in the maritime villages of southern Kwangtung and Fukien. The *kheh-thau* usually recruited labour from his own native village and surrounding districts among persons known to him. The impoverishment in southern China meant that there was little difficulty in collecting small bands of labourers. The recruiters would offer to secure a passage for the coolies to the Straits Settlements on the understanding that the expenses so incurred would be recovered from the employers, to whom the coolies would engage their services on arrival. The coolies would then be assembled in various ports and lodged in baraccoons until departure. The lodging-house keepers either arranged for the coolies' passage with the masters of Chinese junks or (later) with agents of European vessels that were chartered for the emigrant service, or consigned the emigrant to a Chinese coolie broker or his Straits counterpart. This latter system was described in 1854 as follows;

> One or more of the Chinese merchants charter a vessel and leave Penang in April or May for Macau or Amoy. On arriving at the destined port, the charterer, who usually proceeds in the vessel as super-cargo, sets a number of agents to work. These men go about the country and cajole the unsuspecting people, by promises of a speedy fortune and return to their native land, to accept the bounty money, which varies according to the respectability of the victims. They are then huddled on board. The Agents receive a dollar a head...They arrive in the months of January, February and March.[59]

The coolies' passage might be paid for in advance or given on credit until arrival in Singapore or Penang. If credited, the *kheh-thau* was made responsible to the master of the junk or the super-cargo of the chartered vessel for the payment of the due for his coolie band. The rate of passage-money paid in advance differed from $5 to $8 according to competition. Rates on credit ranged

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[59] Quoted in Blythe, "Historical Sketch", p.72.

from $7 to $12. The number of credit passages that shipping agents were prepared to give differed with the state of the labour market in Singapore and Penang. However, in 1876 it was reported that it had become the general practice for emigrants from Amoy and Hong Kong to have their passage paid in advance; that passages from Hainan were often on credit, but frequently paid or arranged for in advance; and approximately half the passages of Teochius from Swatow were taken on credit.[60] Before embarkation each emigrant received a ticket stating the port of destination and whether the passage had been paid in advance or was on credit. On arrival in the destined port the Chinese who had paid their own passage, or were indebted for it only to relatives or friends, were free to go ashore at once. The "assisted" *sin-khehs* were detained on the vessels until their services were engaged. To this end headmen went ashore to seek employers for the labourers. There is little evidence to suggest that the coolies had any say in the manner in which their services were engaged; in Singapore employers were generally found among the Chinese businessmen of the port or the Chinese gambier, pepper and tapioca planters of the Straits Settlements, whilst the *sin-khehs* taken to Penang were frequently engaged for work in the tin mines in Perak and Selangor. The price of transferring the *sin-khehs'* financial obligations was settled between the coolie-broker and the employer. If there was keen competition for labour, large profits would be made by those who engaged in both the recruitment and the sale of the coolies' services.[61] As soon as the passage debt had been arranged, the coolie was released from the ship and handed over to the employer or agent. In 1879 the system of recruiting Chinese immigrants to the Straits Settlements was described in greater detail;

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[60] Campbell, *Coolie Emigration*, pp.2-3.

[61] For example, although it was estimated that in 1876 the total cost of introduction (including expenses of recruitment and lodging in China and the passage money) amounted to $13-$14, the price received by the broker was often as high as $20-$24. *Ibid.*, p.5.

> Immigration takes place chiefly between the months of June and October, during the fine weather in the China Seas of the South-West Monsoon...The method of recruiting the immigrants is as follows: - The steamer is usually chartered by a Chinese supercargo for a lump sum...Some three weeks before the date of her projected departure, notice is given in the adjoining villages that a ship is going to leave for Singapore when bands of men are formed under the leadership of a Kheh-Thau...who is generally, but not always, a returned Emigrant from the Straits; the Kheh-Thau takes his band to a lodging-house at the port of embarkation, and their departure is arranged for through the agents of the ship- invariably an European firm, as being less open to be squeezed by the Chinese officials...The rate of passage-money when paid in advance is about $7 to $8 (say 30s.), the rate of passage on credit being about $12 (say 45s.), and the Kheh-Thau being responsible for it to the supercargo as regards the band of from 10 to 20 men under his charge. Each immigrant has a ticket which specifies the port of destination, whether his passage-money has or has not been paid, &c., &c., and on arrival in Singapore harbour, those who have paid their passages land and go where they like, or it would perhaps be more correct to say, wherever the Kheh-Thau takes them. The charterer of the ship usually allows three or four days of detention, and during those days of grace the immigrants who owe their passages are detained on board, the Kheh-Thaus being allowed to land and find employers for their bands who will settle for their passage money. If there is demand for coolies, the Kheh-Thau makes a large profit, getting perhaps $20 per head for his band, whereas they will probably have cost him $13 to $14. The usual price paid by the employers is from $17 to $20, the margin between this and the passage rate constitutes the Kheh-Thau's profit.[62]

Of the two systems of credit-ticket immigration, that of the professional recruiter and lodging-house keeper was the more widely practiced, particularly as assisted immigration developed into a profitable business after 1860. By 1899 the system of keeping the immigrants on board the ships until they were redeemed existed only in Melaka, where the coolie trade continued to be controlled by junk masters.

IV. INITIAL PROBLEMS:

The penetration of Chinese miners into the western tin states, particularly on the scale it had assumed by 1860, gave rise to many problems. In Selangor and Larut for example, the Chinese quickly outnumbered the settled local population. During the 1860s and early 1870s serious disputes and armed clashes, often amounting to endemic civil wars, erupted in many of the mining settlements. In the majority of cases the clashes erupted between rival Chinese groups and their secret societies over disputes to the ownership of mining land.[63] A large number were also caught

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[62] Quoted in Blythe, "Historical Sketch", pp.72-74.

[63] Secret society involvement in the tin mines will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

up in political disputes between local Malay chiefs fighting over royal succession and rights over the collection of tin revenues. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the Malay rulers, possessing only rudimentary governmental organisation, were completely unable to cope with the problems in the mining communities; they lacked both the political stability and the means of enforcing law and order. Eventually, these disputes formed one of the pretexts for British intervention in the Malay States.[64]

From 1866 tin mining in all districts of Selangor was disrupted by a civil war that broke out among rival Malay chiefs over the collection of taxes.[65] In 1866 Raja Mahdi, a dispossessed and discontented Selangor chief, ousted his rival, Raja Abdullah, from Klang. Raja Mahdi remained in effective control of the district until August 1869. At this time Mahdi's enemies staged a siege that lasted until March 1870 when Tunku (Tengku) Kudin, son-in-law of the Sultan, arrived with reinforcements and attempted to arbitrate between the two factions. But, when Raja Mahdi refused to accept arbitration Tunku Kudin joined the siege and troops were brought in from Kedah. With these reinforcements, Kudin recaptured Klang and forced Raja Mahdi across the Selangor River.[66]

In the course of the Selangor civil war the Chinese miners took sides. Underlying the disputes between the Chinese were rivalries between different clans for possession of the tin

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[64] Unstable conditions in the mining areas were a direct cause of law-breaking in the Straits Settlements and a source of much concern to the Straits government. In 1867 rival branches of Chinese secret societies were involved in large-scale riots in Penang. More importantly, however, merchants in the Straits Settlements who had invested heavily in the mines in Perak, Selangor and Sungei Ujong, began to push for British intervention in the tin states in order to safeguard their investments. See Ryan, *Making of Modern Malaya*, p.110; Mr Seymour Clarke to Col. Office, 17 November, 1873, Messrs. Lambert, Burgen and Petch to Col. Office, 25 June, 1873 both in CO 273/74; Gov. Sir H.Ord.C.B., 20 March, 1873, 6 November, 1872, 24 June, 1873, 10 July 1873, 21 August 1873, 2 September 1873 all in CO 809/1.

[65] Detailed accounts of the Selangor disturbances are given in Kennedy, *A History of Malaya*, pp.139-143; Ryan, *The Making of Modern Malaya*, pp 115-117; Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914*, pp.23-25. See also S.M.Middlebrook & J.M.Gullick, "Yap Ah Loy", *Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Reprint No 9, 1983; Gov. to Col. Office, 24 October 1872 in CO 273/60; Gov. to Col Office 5 November, 1872 in CO 273/63; Gov. Sir Andrew Clarke, 2[illegible] October, 1873, 29 November, 1873, 22 December, 1873 in CO 809/1.

[66] In the midst of the fighting the Chinese merchants in Melaka with mining interests in Klang urged the British administration in the Straits to support Kudin against his enemies. This appeal was made on the ground that the merchants had invested large sums of money in the belief that Kudin had the support of the British government. The Chinese appeal was supported by the Singapore Chamber of Commerce. The British government, however, declined to interfere and made it clear that the traders who invested in the native states did so at their own risk. *Petition of the Malacca Traders to the Singapore Chamber of Commerce*, 27 July, 1872; the Singapore Chamber of Commerce to Colonial Secretary, 20 July, 1872 and Colonial Secretary to Singapore Chamber of Commerce, 21 August, 1872 in CO 809/1; Gov. to Col. Office, 10 July, 1873 in CO 273/67; Mr Seymour Clarke to Col. Office, 6 November 18[illegible]3, Mr Seymour Clarke to Col. Office 17 November 1873, Messrs. Lambert, Burgin and Petch to Col. Office, 25 June, 1873 all in CO 273/74; Gov. to Col Office, 11 November, 1872 in CO 273/61; Admiralty to Col. Office, 5 November, 1872 in CO 273/63; Gov. to Col. Office, 20 March, 1873, in CO 273/65. Gov. to Col. Office, 30 June, 1873 in CO 273/67; Gov. to Col. Office, 24 June, 1873 in CO 273/68; Gov. to Col. Office, 8 August, 1873, 21 August, 1873, 5 September, 1873 all in CO 273/69; Admiralty to Col. Office 25 September, 1873, 24 September 1873 both in CO 273/72.

mines. The miners were divided by both clan and secret society association. In Selangor, the miners were mostly Hakkas, but belonged to different clans; those in Klang being members of the *Fei Chew* (*Fui Chuis*) clan and those in Kanching and Langat being of the *Kah Yeng Chew* clan. In addition to clan loyalties the miners were divided by association with the two secret societies that dominated their lives. In Klang the miners belonged largely to the *Hai San* society, whereas those in Larut, Kanching and Langat owed their loyalty to the *Ghee Hin* (Triad) society. Thus in Selangor clan loyalties coincided more or less with those owed to the secret societies. As more and more mines were opened up the *Fei Chew* and *Kan Yeng Chew* miners found that they were working the same ground. Rivalry for the mines inevitably arose and small disputes developed into fighting on a large scale. In the early months of 1870, for example, the *Fei Chew Chin* of Klang, under the vigorous leadership of a Hakka-born Chinese named Yap Ah Loy, massacred the *Kah Yeng Chew* miners at Kanching. A retaliatory force of *Kah Yeng Chew* Chinese mustered at Langkat, and, in September 1870, launched an abortive counterattack against the *Fei Chew* at Kuala Lumpur. By this date both groups had also committed themselves to the rival Malay chiefs of their choice; the *Fei Chews* of Kuala Lumpur allied with Tunku Kudin and the *Kan Yeng Chew* miners at Kanching joined Raja Mahdi. In the ensuing warfare the *Fei Chews* were eventually victorious, capturing Kanching, Ampang and Ulu Selangor. As a consequence Yap Ah Loy became the virtual ruler of the Kuala Lumpur area.[67]

Mention has previously been made of early fighting between Chinese and Malays in Sungei Ujong. In January 1833 two Malay chiefs from the adjoining state of Rembau attempted to levy a duty of $3 per *bahara* on tin exports on the grounds that the land on the left bank of the Sungei Ujong River, down which the tin traffic flowed, belonged to Rembau. This

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[67] In 1875 Davidson, the first British Resident in Selangor, commented on the disruption to mining caused by the fighting: "Most of the mines were completely flooded out...and all their mine houses, machines and property were burnt or otherwise destroyed". Quoted in Jackson, *Immigrant Labour*, p.37. See also Gov. to Col. Office, 30 June, 1873, 10 July, 1873 both in CO 273/67; Gov. to Col. Office, 24 July, 1873 in CO 273/68; Gov. to Col. Office, 8 August 1873, 21 August, 1873, 5 September, 1873 all in CO 273/69; Admiralty to Col. Office, 24 September, 1873, 19 December, 1873 both in CO 273/72.

act started the so-called Linggi War and marked the beginning of many years of intermittent feuds between the Rembau and Sungei Ujong chiefs for control of the tin traffic. In 1839 mining in Sungei Ujong was said to be retarded by these incessant disputes. By the early 1840s Chinese mining in Sungei Ujong had recommenced. However, this was short-lived. In 1848 a second civil war resulted in the destruction of the tin mines. Later, in 1860, about 14,000 Chinese miners took sides in a dispute between two rival Malay chiefs over the ownership of the tin mines. In the course of the feud approximately 4,000 Chinese were estimated to have been killed.[68]

Clashes between rival Chinese groups also occurred in Perak. In 1862 fighting erupted between two groups of Chinese miners at Larut. The miners at Taiping (who were Hakkas and belonged to the *Hai San* secret society), attacked the miners at Kamunting (who were mostly Cantonese and belonged to the *Ghi Hin* society), and drove them out of Larut.[69] Pressure from the British administration in the Straits resulted in the Cantonese being allowed to return to their mines and an uneasy truce operated in Perak until 1872, when open war broke out between the groups. Of one campaign of this war it was said, "...a thousand Chinese were killed in the first day's fighting and three thousand in all."[70] Swettenham also described how "...The villages and every isolated house had been burned down, [and] almost every mine had stopped work".[71] When the war ended following British intervention in 1874, there were only 4,000 Chinese remaining in Larut. By this time the mines were so blocked, choked and flooded that Speedy, who had just been appointed Assistant Resident, wrote in his annual report,

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[68] Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914*, pp.25-26.

[69] For detailed accounts of the Larut rivalries see Kennedy, *A History of Malaya*, pp.137-38, 151-53; Ryan, *The Making of Modern Malaya*, pp.117-120; Winstedt & Wilkinson, "A History of Perak", pp.79-90; Wong, *ibid.*, pp.26-27; W.L.Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya, A Historical Study*, London, Oxford University Press, 1969, pp.120-126. See also Gov. to Indian Gov., 27 March, 21 May, and 16 June, 1862 "Larut Wars", in CO 273/5; *Precis on Perak Affairs* in CO 809/1. The root cause of fighting in Perak was that the mines of the *Hai San* at Klian Pauh were less rich than those of the Triad at Klian Baharu, with the result that *Hai San* miners began to encroach upon the ground worked by the Triad. Competition for mining land was in itself sufficient cause for friction between the two rival camps, but the situation was aggravated by the fact that mining permits did not signify any well-defined boundaries. Clashes were therefore inevitable.

[70] Quoted in Jackson, *Immigrant Labour*, p.36. See also Gov. to Col. Office, 16 November, 1872, 11 November, 1872 both in CO 273/61.

[71] Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p.124. As shown in Table 6 above, the amount of tin imported into the Straits Settlements from the Malay States, having increased to 4,639 tons by 1871 had fallen to 2,335 tons by 1873. The largest fall occurred in imports into Penang.

"...Several months were occupied in clearing away the debris and pumping the water out of the mines, and the machinery by which they were worked having been entirely broken and destroyed, much time was lost before it could be replaced and operations commenced".[72]

In the course of these clashes the two groups of Chinese miners also became involved in the political intrigues of the two disputants to the Perak throne and their Malay supporters. At various times during the fighting the two factions memorialised the Straits government to intervene, but the administration declined to take any measure that would effectively restore peace and order.[73] Consequently, these faction fights, which had erupted in February 1872, were prolonged until 20 January 1874. On this date the Chinese leaders signed a bond at Pangkor undertaking, under penalty of $50,000, to maintain peace among themselves and to accept a commission appointed by the Straits government to settle the dispute concerning the ownership of the mines and other matters relating to the disturbances.[74] From 1880 onwards the Hakkas predominated in the Larut tin-fields while the Cantonese gradually moved their interests to Selangor.[75]

In summary, the tin mines in the Malay States up to the early decades of the 19th century were controlled by Malay chiefs. Labour in the mines was performed by Malay miners, either slaves or peasants undertaking mining on a part-time basis to supplement agricultural income. While demand for tin remained relatively low, some form of equilibrium was reached between the tin deposits on the one hand and the capacity of the miners on the other. However, as demand for tin

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[72] Quoted in Jackson, *Immigrant Labour*, p.36.

[73] For a detailed account see Blythe, *Impact of Secret Societies*, pp.120-126. R.J.Wilkinson. "Notes on Perak History" in Wilkinson (ed.), *Papers on Malay Subjects*. pp.89-100.

[74] The restoration of peace in Larut is described by Speedy: "...The population of the whole country had, during the disturbances of 1872 and 1873, been reduced to the number of 4,000, who were mainly the fighting men of both factions. Not a trader, Chinese or Malay, had remained; but since the establishment of peace, at the end of eleven months, the population has reached the number of 33,000 of which 26,000 are Chinese. So flourishing is the present condition of Larut that it bids fair to be trebled before the close of the year". Quoted in Yip, *The Development of the Tin Mining Industry*, p.59.

[75] Siew Nim Chee, "Labour in Tin-Mining in Malaya", in T.H.Silcock (ed.), *Readings in Malayan Economics*, Singapore, Donald Moore, 1961, pp.404.

increased and new deposits were discovered, the equilibrium was upset and a labour shortage developed. At the same time the Malay chiefs turned to Chinese merchants in the Straits Settlements to provide the finance for mining operations. In addition to providing the necessary capital to open the new mines, these merchants also provided labourers to work the deposits. This labour was part of the floodtide of Chinese immigrants arriving in the Straits Settlements and Malay States to escape poverty and political instability in the southern Chinese provinces. A significant proportion of these immigrants were indentured under the credit-ticket system. So great was the overall influx of Chinese into the tin mining states that serious conflicts erupted between rival groups which also became embroiled in disputes between Malay chiefs fighting over royal succession and the control of tin revenues. These disputes formed one of the pretexts for British intervention in the interior states in 1874.