

Klang District and Town: History and Historical Sources

Khoo Kay Kim*

Abstrak: Makalah ini meninjau terutama sekali sejarah Kelang - termasuk kedua-dua kawasan daerah dan bandar - dari awal 1870an hingga ke tahun 1930an. Walau bagaimana pun sejarah bukan menjadi fokus utama. Petunjuk diberikan kepada sumber-sumber sejarah yang berguna untuk menyusun semula sejarah Kelang dari masa ianya berfungsi sebagai pelabuhan utama bagi negeri Selangor sehingga Kelang dan persekitarannya menjadi pusat utama bagi pertanian. Akhirnya penyentuhan dibuat kepada satu perkembangan yang penting yang pada masa ini kurang diketahui iaitu, permulaan penempatan perindustrian di Malaya. Industri utama pada waktu itu ditempatkan di Kelang oleh kerana kedudukannya yang berhampiran dengan Pelabuhan Swettenham.

Abstract: This paper deals primarily with the history of Klang - both the district and the town - from the early 1870s to the 1930s. But history is not the main focus. References are made to historical sources which are useful in helping to reconstruct the history of Klang from the time it functioned as the principal port of the State of Selangor to the period when 'greater' Klang and its surrounding territories became a major agricultural centre. Finally, mention is made of an important development hitherto little known, namely, the beginnings of industrialization in Malaya. The major industries were located in Klang because of the proximity to Port Swettenham.

Early History

Klang has a history, although still vaguely known, which dates back to ancient times. R.O. Winstedt tells us that:

In the *Nagarakrtagama* Klang is mentioned along with Sungai Ujong, then Sang Hyang Ujong, as subject in the middle of the XIVth century to Majapahit.

Reputed to have been used by the eunuch Cheng Ho who seven times visited the overseas "barbarians" between 1405 and 1433 A.D., Chinese charts mention Langkawi, Kedah river, Pinang Island, Pulau Sembilan, *South Shoals* (at the mouth of the Klang), *Selangor highlands*, *Klang river*, *Tumasik* (or Singapore) and many other places round the Malay Peninsula.¹

A more meticulous scholar -- Paul Wheatley -- writing much later, and using primarily Portu-

guese sources, provides a little more information about Klang as well as other territories under Melaka hegemony. He says:

Northwards beyond the Linggi River was a succession of settlements which were under the direct rule of Malacca and which, in addition to paying an annual tribute of tin, engaged in a coastal trade in foodstuffs for that city. Most of these were mere villages. Sungei Ujong ..., Klang (*Clam*) and Perak ... each had about 200 persons, Selangor ... was somewhat larger, while Bernam had 400.²

Klang was, apparently, important to Melaka largely because of tin for it was one of those territories with which Melaka concluded treaties by the terms of which they had to supply the Melakan sultans with a certain amount of tin each year.³

Throughout the succeeding centuries, after the fall of Melaka in 1511, Klang continued to

*Professor of Malaysian History, University of Malaya

feature in the history of the Malay Peninsula, as an important source for the supply of tin. It was, of course, also a dependency of the kingdom of Johor, Melaka's successor. By the early years of the 18th century, together with Selangor and Linggi, Klang had become an important Bugis settlement. For slightly more than a century thereafter, Klang was, to a significant extent, overshadowed by Sungai Selangor.

It was at Sungai Selangor that the Bugis, in 1766, founded a new kingdom. Kuala Selangor became a major trading centre along the Straits of Melaka. Despite Dutch attempts to impose a monopoly on the tin trade, English country traders succeeded in purchasing tin at Kuala Selangor even before the founding of Penang.⁴

For almost a century, Kuala Selangor remained the capital of the new kingdom of Selangor. However, when the third ruler, Sultan Muhammad, passed away in 1857, significant developments had taken place to boost Klang's position to a level never again to be overtaken by Kuala Selangor.

The Klang valley was the major tin producing area in the kingdom of Selangor by the mid-nineteenth century and the Klang estuary became the main gateway for the valley. The main town, situated at the estuary, was, until the 1870s known as Pengkalan Batu. It is from this period onwards that Klang's history becomes more 'visible'.

Klang in the 1870s

One of the earliest descriptions of Klang that we have was given by Muhammed Ibrahim, son of that famous Malay literator, Munsyi Abdullah. He visited Klang in 1871 and again the following year. Unfortunately, his record of his earlier visit cannot be located. His second visit to Klang together with his visits to other parts of the western Malay states were also recorded. These were printed in 1919 and the book was given the title - *Kisah Pelayaran Muhammad Ibrahim Munsyi*.⁵ On his second visit to Klang, Muhammad Ibrahim recorded:

At five o'clock the next morning, Saturday 20th April [1872] we raised anchor and sailed through the straits until, at half past six, we entered the mouth of

the Klang. When I went there before, I had seen many attap houses on the left as one enters the river-mouth. Now they were derelict and tumbling down, and only one or two remained intact. On the right as you enter the river-mouth, Tengku Khia'uddin [Kudin] had recently built earth-works in the swamp, with a wooden stockade. As we passed, the fort fired a salute to welcome the *Pluto*;⁶ however we did not put in there but went on upstream.⁷

The village or town of Klang, according to Muhammad Ibrahim, "is situated on the right as you go upstream, and about eleven miles from the river-mouth." Within a period of about two years the town, apparently, had changed somewhat for C.J. Irving, the British officer whom Muhammad Ibrahim accompanied also remarked that "When I came here two years ago there was nothing but jungle. All you could see was two or three attap houses. Now there are all these houses," and Irving gave the credit to Tengku Kudin. Muhammad Ibrahim himself testified that, in 1872, "The town of Klang had many newly-built attap houses, and quite a large number of inhabitants, but only two or three older houses with tiled roofs."⁸

After these preliminary remarks, Muhammad Ibrahim then proceeded to give a more detailed description of the town:

I saw many newly-built attap houses in rows along both sides of the streets. There were many Chinese and Malay shops, and there were large numbers of people about. A number of roads had just been constructed, while others were planned but had not yet taken shape, and the roads intersected and branched off in various places. There was one long, straight road, stretching from the fort to the village, called China Street. At the end of the street there was a station and a bridge. At that time there was still no mosque, only an attap prayer-house which had not yet been repaired. Similarly, the gaol, police station and hospital etc., were all built of attap, except for a large *limas*⁹ house, which had a tiled roof; the lower part of the walls was stone and above this the walls were of wood.¹⁰

Klang then was obviously being developed by Tengku Kudin. In earlier years, it could not have been more than a sparsely populated settlement with simple attap houses. It was certainly not a town in a modern sense. Tengku Kudin proceeded to introduce modern ideas. Apart from erecting new buildings he planned and named the streets as well. According to Muhammad Ibrahim:

The regulations decreed by Tengku Khia'uddin, and the street names, were all modelled on English usage, but the result was only a superficial approximation of the original. Thus, the street names employed were as follows: King Street, Beach Street, Market Street, Wharf Street, China Street, Chulia Street, Hospital Street and Mosque Street.¹¹

All these names were reminiscent of street names in Penang. It is plain where Tengku Kudin's ideas originated from. Muhammad Ibrahim was more than a little upset by what Tengku Kudin had done and did not hesitate to put on record that he thought "It would be an excellent idea to employ Malay names."¹²

Klang was in the early 1870s a flourishing settlement even though when Muhammad Ibrahim was there, the civil war which had commenced in 1867 had not ended. "Many houses", in his words, "had been built along the streets to be let out at a high rental." And even before the houses had been completed, "people were renting them, at a cost of from three to five or six dollars a month." He estimated that there were about four hundred houses in the village of Klang at that time. The total population of the village or town, including young and old of both sexes, and taking into account all races and the sepoys who were stationed there, numbered approximately 3,000 persons. Typical of the modern Peninsular town, the population was made up of numerous races: Malays, Chinese, Arabs, Eurasians, Southern Indians, Bengalis as well as local-born persons of Straits Settlements origin. There were not a few Europeans too - drifters who could not get jobs in Singapore and were employed by Tengku Kudin as officers of his sepoys. Already, Klang had a larger proportion of immigrants than those who were born in that settlement itself.¹³

The civil war had adversely affected Klang so that the presence of Tengku Kudin who had obviously made it his base marked the begin-

ning of a new phase in the history of the settlement. It would not be too far wrong to say that modern Klang began in early 1872. At that point in time, apart from those living off Tengku Kudin, there were also those who earned their living by poling boats, making palm-frond thatch and so forth. Muhammad Ibrahim testified that:

Previously, there had been people with some money who lived by trading in tin and sailing, but they had all fled elsewhere due to the unrest in the settlement, which was in a state of constant upheaval and war; and the previous rulers had been particularly oppressive. During my walk, I saw only nine or ten bullock-carts and two or three horses. A large number of cattle were being reared by Tengku Khia'uddin, but as yet there were no horse-carriages.

There were no fruit trees, crops or orchards in the hinterland, only forest and primary jungle; and there was nothing very much across the river apart from a few banana trees, some sugarcane and vegetables, which had only recently been planted. There were no paddy-fields there nor anything which could serve as a basic foodstuff, and everything was purchased and brought in from Malacca and elsewhere.¹⁴

Still, as Muhammad Ibrahim had observed earlier, Klang was developing. Indeed, just about two years later, it became the new capital of the state of Selangor when British administration commenced. But, in Selangor as well as in Perak and Sungai Ujong, the early years of British intervention brought little constructive change. Even though Selangor experienced none of the disturbances which occurred in Perak and Sungai Ujong, there was widespread opposition to Tengku Kudin, the outsider, and whose good friend, James Guthrie Davidson, had been appointed the first Resident of Selangor. Davidson was transferred to Perak in 1876, not long after Birch had been assassinated there. Bloomfield Douglas became the second Resident of Selangor.

In early 1879, a second visitor came to Klang: someone who had travelled widely even before coming to the Malay Peninsula and who had

many more years of travelling to come. Her description of the town conveys the impression that since Muhammad Ibrahim's visit in 1872, despite being officially established as the state capital, Klang experienced little significant transformation. Isabella L. Bird, alert and observant, missed little as she surveyed the scene around her when the boat approached Klang. She noted:

At daybreak the next morning we were steaming up the Klang river, whose low shores are entirely mangrove swamps, and when the sun was high and hot we anchored in front of the village of Klang, where a large fort ¹⁵ on an eminence, with grass embankments in which guns are mounted, is the first prominent object. Above this is a large wooden bungalow with an *attap* roof, which is the British Residency. There was no air, and the British ensign in front of the house hung limp on the flagstaff. Below there is a village, with clusters of Chinese houses on the ground, and Malay houses on stilts, standing singly, with one or two Government offices, bulking largely among them. A substantial flight of stone steps leads from the river to a skeleton jetty with an *attap* roof, and near it a number of *attap*-roofed boats were lying, loaded with slabs of tin from the diggings in the interior, to be transhipped to Penang.¹⁶

She next proceeded to give her impression of Klang:

The village of Klang is not interesting. It looks like a place which has "seen better days," and does not impress one favourably as regards the prosperity of the State. Above it the river passes through rich alluvial deposits, well adapted for sugar, rice, and other products of low-lying tropical lands; but though land can be purchased on a system of deferred payments for two dollars an acre, these lands are still covered with primeval jungle. Steam-launches and flattish bottomed native boats go up the river eighteen miles farther to a village called Damarsara [*sic*] from which a good country road has been made to the great Chinese village and tin-mines of Kuala Lumpur.¹⁷

Returning to her evaluation of Klang, she said:

Klang looks as if an incubus oppressed it At all events Klang, from whatever cause, has a blighted look, and deserted houses rapidly falling into decay, overgrown roads, fields choked with weeds, and an absence of life and traffic in the melancholy streets, have a depressing influence. The people are harassed by a vexatious and uncertain system of fees and taxes, calculated to engender ill feeling and things connected with the administration seen somewhat "mixed".¹⁸

Her final remarks on Klang presaged the misfortune which was to befall Klang hardly one year after she left. She wrote:

Klang does not improve on further acquaintance. It looks as if half the houses were empty, and certainly half the population is composed of Government employees, chiefly police constables. There is no air of business energy, and the queerly mixed population saunters with limp movements; even the few Chinese look depressed, as if life were too much for them. It looks too as if there were a need for holding down the population (which I am sure there isn't), for in addition to the fort and its barracks, military police stations are dotted about. A jail, with a very high wall, is in the middle of the village.

The jungle comes so near to Klang that tigers and herds of elephants, sometimes forty strong, have been within half a mile of it.¹⁹

Isabella Bird would not have been surprised, of course, if in 1880 she was told that Kuala Lumpur had replaced Klang as the state capital. Although she had not visited Kuala Lumpur, she was aware that it was a bustling trading centre. But, in 1880, Kuala Lumpur too was no more than a village of numerous *attap* huts. Its growth, however, was phenomenal especially since it also became the capital of the Federated Malay States in 1896. It went on to become the Malayan capital after World War II and it is now the capital of Malaysia.

The Centre of Commerce

Klang had been eclipsed since 1880; yet, the transfer of the state capital to Kuala Lumpur did not lead to its demise. Klang had long replaced Kuala Selangor as the chief port of the state of Selangor. Beginning from the early 1880s, it was in constant touch with the ports of Penang and Singapore. Steamships called regularly at Klang as shown below:

As everybody knows Klang is the principal port of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur the chief town. Instead, however, of running the railway from Kuala Lumpur to Klang, the wise men of Selangor have run it only to Bukit Kuda about three miles further up the river, with the natural result that the river is still preferred to the railway for the transit of goods. Mr. Rodger has made up his mind to stop this, and

Steamers	Arrival (from)	Departure (for)
S.S. Bentan	Singapore and Penang once in two weeks	Penang and Singapore once in two weeks
S.S. Billton	- do -	- do -
S.S. Spaniel	- do -	- do -
S.S. Mayflower	Singapore every week	Singapore every week
S.S. Rainbow	- do -	- do -
S.S. Louisa	- do -	- do -

Goods brought into Selangor via Klang included oil, rice, tobacco, salt, opium, etc. and Selangor's export was confined solely to tin. Until railway services commenced operation in 1886 between Kuala Lumpur and Bukit Kuda, communication between Klang and the mining depot, Kuala Lumpur, in the interior, was dependent on the Klang river, as Isabella Bird explained.

The Kuala Lumpur-Bukit Kuda line was the second to be established in the country; the first was the Taiping-Port Weld line which was opened a year earlier. J.P. Rodger, the Acting Resident of Selangor (1884-1888), played a major role in linking Kuala Lumpur to Bukit Kuda by rail.²¹ Bukit Kuda is situated at a point on the Klang river about 12 1/2 miles from its mouth. The original scheme was to connect Kuala Lumpur with the coast. The port at Bukit Kuda was established purely as a temporary measure. It was soon found to be unsuitable. But, since Rodger had declared that the Selangor railway was an absolute necessity and that it would soon pay well, he was determined that he should not be proved wrong.²²

The *Pinang Gazette*, usually critical of British policies in the Malay states, explained how Rodger proceeded to help the Selangor railway succeed:

very effective means he has taken. He has raised the tax on each boat taking cargo up the river from \$2 to \$5! The boatmen now find that they cannot make a living and are leaving Klang for Teluk Anson.²³

A further comment was even harsher. The paper said:

... I cannot help again calling attention to Mr. Rodger's action in Selangor in raising the boat duty from \$2 to \$5, with the intention, which he avowed at the time, of driving the trade from the river to his pet railway. From what I hear, he has succeeded beyond his most ardent hopes. He has not only ruined the boatmen, but has made the railway, which many people said would be a failure, a most paying concern. For this he will no doubt get kudos. To my mind any amount of loss would be preferable to such wicked tyranny.²⁴

Not only was Bukit Kuda poorly situated, the jetty there was apparently said to be "a wretched affair, and the steamers that go there can only discharge at high tide". It was unavoidable that a decision had to be made to abandon Bukit Kuda. The town of Klang, three miles lower down

the river, was considered a more suitable place. So the Klang river was bridged at a cost of \$94,600 and the railway line opened to Klang in August 1890.²⁶

For the next ten years, Klang was again the chief port of Selangor. Before World War II, there was a document in the files of the District Office which defined the port limits of Klang as being from a point opposite the railway station to a sawmill which existed on the Bukit Kuda Road. Steamers called there and even in the 1930s, the steps of the old landing jetty could be seen near the railway gate in the old Riverside Road.²⁷

Klang, as a port, succeeded beyond expectation. Soon "the abnormal increase of both imports and exports ... so multiplied the railway traffic that, in 1895, it was decided to extend the line right away to the mouth of the river, at a point where there is a capital land-locked harbour capable of affording anchorage for far larger ships than those which now manage to get up the Klang river".²⁸ With regard to this new plan, it was stated in the Annual District Report for 1895 that:

The object of this extension ... is to connect Klang, the present port terminus of the State, with the mouth of the Klang River, where it is proposed to construct better wharfage accommodation than at present exists at Klang. The line is 5 1/2 miles long, and is estimated to cost \$157,000. It starts at Klang Station by an extension of the present main line across Rembau and Market Streets and Klang creek, then it curves to the west round Fort Hill for about a mile, from which point it goes direct in a straight line to the west of the Kuala Klang Police Station. The land traversed by the line is partly swamp and partly agricultural. At Kuala Klang it is wholly swamp and not in the least suitable for building purposes. The whole of the earthwork, bridges (with one exception), plate-laying, etc., was done by the Railway Department. The labour employed was Chinese, Javanese and Tamil. The line is now practically completed with the exception of one bridge, and will, in 1896, be used for transporting the greater part of the material used for the construction of the wharves.²⁹

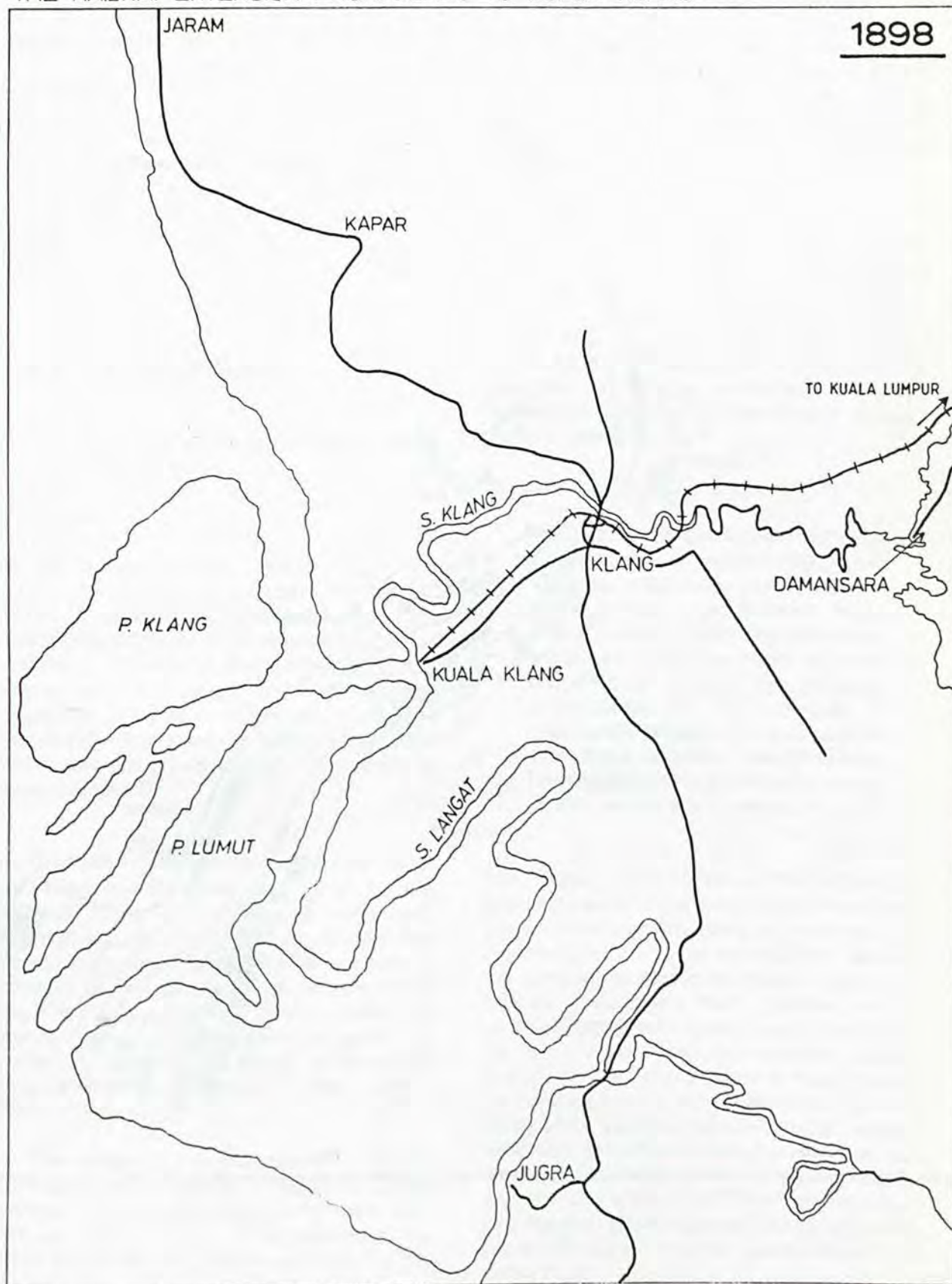
Thus was born Port Swettenham which replaced Klang as the principal port of Selangor. The beginning of Port Swettenham was more eventful than is generally known. According to one account in the papers:

An event of great importance to the State and the shipping trade was the opening of Port Swettenham, which took place on the 15th of September [1901]. During the months of October and November malaria was rife all over the coast districts, and Port Swettenham and Klang both suffered severely. Owing to sickness among the coolies and the staff generally, there was for several weeks considerable difficulty and delay in discharging cargo, and in a good many instances steamers had to leave the wharves with a part of their cargo undischarged.³⁰

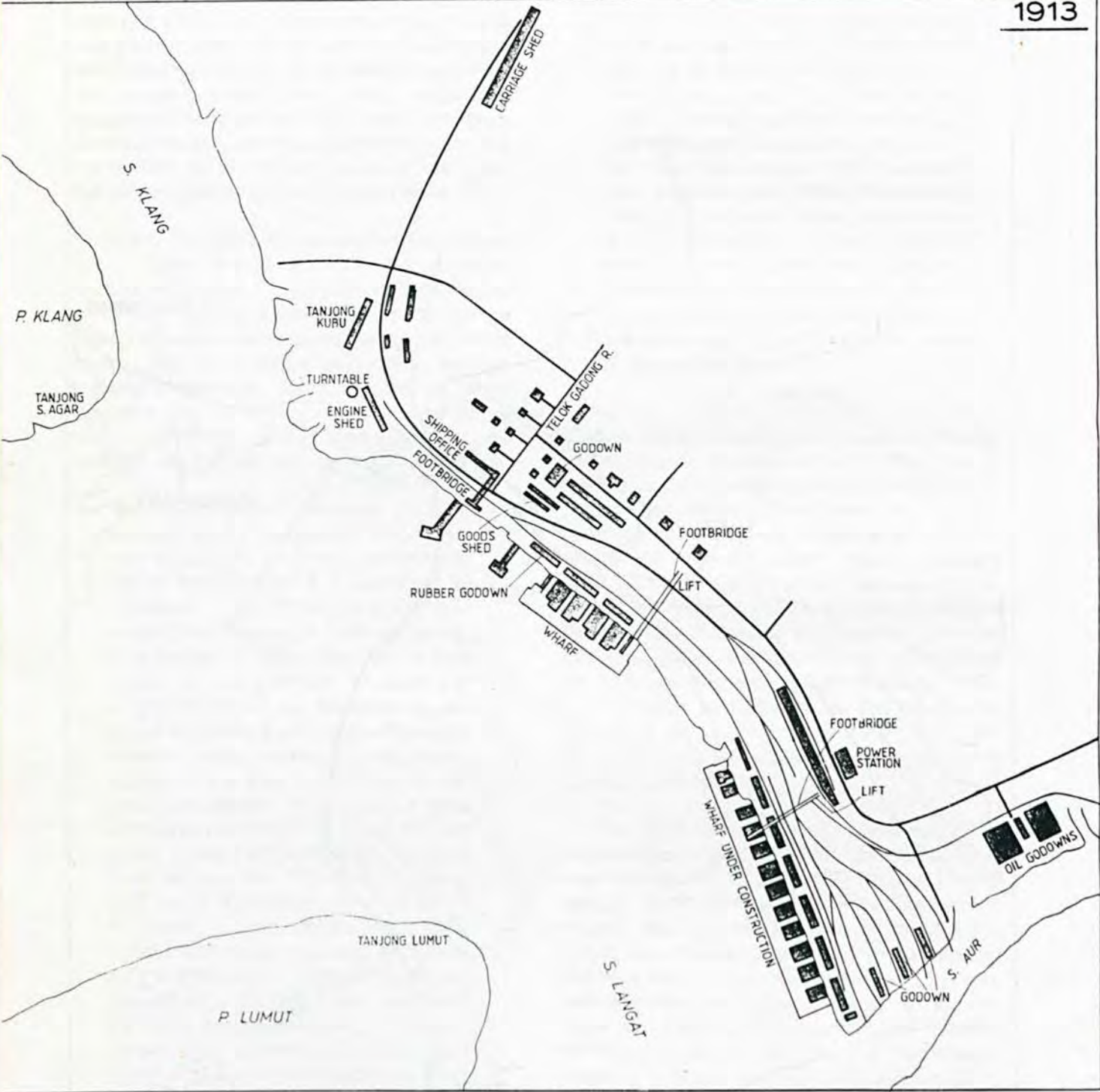
But this setback was only temporary and by the end of the year, there was a general decrease in malaria, and steamers were again able to run to their proper times. Nonetheless, the sanitary condition of the port and its surroundings gave reason for concern. The Resident-General (W.H.Treacher) appointed a Commission, consisting of the Director of the Institute for Medical Research (as Chairman), the State Surgeon, the District Surgeon (Klang), the General Manager for Railways, the State Engineer and the Resident Engineer for Railways, to enquire into the causes of the unhealthiness of the place, and to make recommendations for improving the sanitary conditions.³¹

The Port Swettenham problem helped to make one man famous - Sir Malcolm Watson. He was then the District Surgeon in Klang. Experimental work in Klang and Port Swettenham helped him to ascertain that by clearing the jungle and secondary growth and undertaking drainage construction at the same time, the incidence of malaria could be drastically reduced. In 1903, he published an account of the mode of formation of the sexual form of the malaria parasite. The next year he described a case of blackwater fever followed by an account of certain complications of quartan malaria which previously had not been recognized to be of malaria origin. To devote more time to the study of

THE RAILWAY EXTENSION FROM KLANG TO KUALA KLANG



MAP I



MAP II

malaria he resigned from Government service and, in 1908, became medical adviser to the rubber estates which were being opened all over Selangor. Around 1909, there was again an outbreak of malaria, this time in estates situated in hilly regions hitherto thought to be the healthiest. Watson decided to attack the problem at the root - the elimination of mosquitoes. The crucial experiment was carried out on Seafeld Estate near Klang. The work of draining the streams began in 1911 and, when it was completed in 1918, malaria had been successfully brought under control.³²

The Centre of Agriculture

It was indeed not by accident that Watson chose to carry out most of his work in the Klang area after his retirement from Government service. Malaria was a problem in the estates rather than the tin mines. Since the 1880s, Klang, in particular, and the surrounding districts became the centre of agriculture in the state of Selangor. James C. Jackson, discussing with meticulous care the development of commercial agriculture in Malaya, showed that European estates first established in the Klang District were confined to pepper cultivation. Coffee which became increasingly important in Selangor since the 1880s was first grown largely in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur.³³

Gradually, however, in the course of the 1880s, coffee was planted on most of the former pepper estates in Klang. In 1892, a planter expressed his view that the soil of the Klang District was more suitable for coffee than any other district in Selangor. Coffee planting on new estates initially began in the Klang District in 1893. Within the next two years, large areas were acquired by European planters in Klang which rapidly became the most important coffee planting district in Selangor.³⁴

The number of European-owned estates in Selangor increased from 35 in 1894 to 72 in 1896 and half of them were located in the Klang District. As Jackson put it: "The Malayan coffee boom had found its greatest expression in the Klang District of Selangor."³⁵

Two reasons led to the concentration of agricultural activities among Europeans in the Klang District. The Selangor Government directed the planters to the coastal area leaving the inland districts practically free for miners. Accessibility also contributed to the preference for the coastal districts.³⁶ It should be remembered that in the late 19th century the system of transport was still largely based on the rivers.

The coffee boom was of very short duration. By the late 1890s, the decline of coffee prices on the world market, resulting from increased production in Brazil, adversely affected Malayan coffee. Although many coffee planters remained optimistic that the situation would improve, the last three years of the 19th century "witnessed a noticeable growth of the desire to plant Rubber" in Perak and Selangor.³⁷

In Jackson's words:

Rubber was interplanted with coffee on many estates in Selangor during the last years of the century, particularly in Klang. In most cases, however, these coffee planters merely planted rubber whilst they waited 'for better times for coffee' for in general they remained unconvinced that the prospects of this new and untried crop were brighter than those of coffee; indeed, rubber planting was still 'considered by sober-minded people as a hopeless gamble'.³⁸

But, coffee never recovered and rubber proceeded to become the most important aspect of the country's economy. Klang together with Port Swettenham served an increasingly expanding agricultural area in Selangor which, apart from the Klang District itself, included the surrounding territories of Kuala Selangor and Kuala Langat. Indeed, Klang was important to Kuala Lumpur as well, for the District of Kuala Lumpur also continued to develop as a rubber-growing centre. It was pure coincidence that Port Swettenham was opened at a time when more serious attention was being given to rubber planting. But, the existence of Port Swettenham was to give Klang an advantage over other towns when the manufacture of rubber goods began after World War I.

Development of Klang Town

Little attention hitherto has been given to the history of Klang town. Visitors to Selangor were easily drawn towards Kuala Lumpur, the federal capital, with its magnificent Sultan Abdul Samad building and the splendid railway station, second to none in the world, from an aesthetic point of view. Compared to Kuala Lumpur, Klang was drab, perhaps even dirty. But a visitor there in 1886 who was more kind than Isabella Bird, wrote:

Klang is rather a pretty place; it has a neat, clean, an orderly appearance about it which is very pleasant. There is a large substantial building near the water's edge called "the Godowns" which is used for the same purposes as the Public Office at Kuala Lumpur; there is a prison, a hospital, and police stations, all of which are well kept up, there are a number of brick shop-houses all of which are occupied, but there are also a great many houses built of wood and roofed with attap. The grassy sloping banks of the old fort are mounted with a dreadful array of venerable guns of different shapes and sizes, a curious type of 4 pounder being the most frequent specimen; some of the guns have quietly slipped down from their carriages in search of a softer couch, and lie stretched at full length on the beautiful turf. A sense of sweet security reigns supreme within the precincts of this fortification. The Magistrate and Collector of Klang, Mr. Tiernay [Turney], lives in a roomy bungalow perched on a high hill commanding the town, of which the salient features have been thus simply described.³⁹

Klang was already a thriving commercial centre at this juncture. Just outside the town, sago was grown on one plantation, pepper on another and gambier a third. There was also a steam sawmill a little way out of the town. The revenue for the district during the first half of 1885 was \$62,803. For the first six months of 1886, the figure stood at \$78,736, an increase of \$15,935.⁴⁰

Many years later, two general accounts of Klang at the beginning of the 20th century were published by the *Malay Mail*. The first, somewhat brief, referred largely to a few buildings in Klang in about 1903:

About thirty years ago the District Office was housed in the present police station and the building now being used, was a Chinese temple which was removed to, and still remains in, Simpang Lima.⁴¹

The Chartered Bank started its Klang branch in the D.O.'s office, the Treasury being removed to the top floor and the strong room being made use of by the bank whose first manager was Mr. C.L. Chapman, now of Whittall and Co., Kuala Lumpur.

The P.W.D. in those days was by the side of the present Federal Dispensary. Later, when the new Astana was built the Chartered Bank removed to the late residence of His Highness which is opposite the present imposing bank premises and is now occupied by one of His Highness's sons.

Many of the old buildings are still to be seen in Klang to the north of Belfield bridge before the erection of which people had to get across the river in sampans.⁴²

The other account of Klang in about 1910 was a talk given to the Klang Rotary Club by a Rotarian, W.F.O. Stephens, who came to Klang in 1909. At that time, according to him:

There were no buildings in front of the [railway] station and the Government offices were housed in attap sheds in the vacant land opposite the present Government offices. The present court house was then the Resthouse. The Labour Office was housed where the police station is at present and the police station occupied the present site of Messrs. Hock Ban Seong and Co.

The evenings were generally spent either at the station watching the trains

come and go or at the Klang United Association which is now the Selangor Coast Club. Drinks were very cheap. Stakes for billiard games were pints of champagne, which was selling at \$1.50 a pint.

People went to Port Swettenham either by rikisha or by hackney carriages at a cost of fifty cents. Baju tutup either in kahki or in white was the main dress. The Chinese wore their cues, which were well plaited, and put them in the pockets of their bajus. If they were not mourning they had a red tape tied at the end of the cue. Slippers and Singapore hat completed the dress of the Malacca Chinese, who were then employed in the many European mercantile firms in Klang. Swee Heng Leong and Co. was the first big Chinese firm, when rubber was selling at \$600 per pikul.

There was a large Malay population in Klang in those days. The whole of Port Swettenham road was owned by Malays and they cultivated coffee. Many of them disposed of their land at the first offer and with the money bought a bicycle and a black coat or spent it on marriage festivities.

On Hari Raya the Malays could be seen with their black coats and black spectacles bought from Arab and Jewish pedlars, riding in rikishas, holding English papers upside down.

There were no churches or services to attend. Wayang Hassan and Wayang Inche Puteh were the two popular amusements. The collection for a night often amounted to \$500. Bullock cart was the only means of travel between Klang and Banting. A Government coach ran from Klang to Kuala Selangor.

The richest Chinese was Towkay Lim Swee King, who owned most of the shop-houses in Rembau street. Dato Bintara Kiri had a palatial house put up at the cost of \$50,000 by the side of the present Chartered Bank, which was then occupying the present Istana Bank.

Gambling was very popular and during the racing on the Klang padang the whole town was present.

There were no buildings beyond Guan Hup Street and at night no one dared to go beyond that road for fear of tigers.

Chinese ladies were never seen out alone and even when males well known to the husbands went to the houses answers to queries were given by the oldest lady in the house from inside. If a Malay lady went out alone she was not looked upon as respectable.

There were half a dozen cars in Klang. A trip to Kuala Lumpur cost \$18 and one reached his destination after ten hours by a de Dion car.⁴³

One of the frequent complaints of Klang residents in the early part of the 20th century was the absence of a bridge over the Klang river. Agitation, however, did not go unheeded; the Belfield Bridge was officially opened by the High Commissioner of the F.M.S., Sir John Anderson, on Saturday September 12, 1908. H. Conway Belfield, the British Resident, in thanking the High Commissioner, said:

This structure is according to local standards a work of the first magnitude. It is by far the largest road bridge in the Malay Peninsula, and its dimensions are such that I propose to ask your patience for a few moments while I give you some account of the history of its origin and the details of its construction.

The first talk about a bridge over the river at Klang started about ten years ago at a time when Mr. Douglas Campbell was District Officer at Klang. At that time progress and development on the northern side of the river was comparatively small, and for some years the proposal was negated. Three years ago, when the rubber industry had attained larger proportions, Your Excellency paid a personal visit to the spot and decided that a pontoon ferry was sufficient. This having been provided, the planters set to work to obtain reliable

statistics of the traffic across the river, and the dimensions of the traffic indicated by these statistics convinced Your Excellency and the Resident-General that a permanent bridge was necessary.⁴⁴

The bridge cost \$26,000 to build. The purpose of the bridge was indeed to facilitate development of the northern part of the river, including the territory of Kuala Selangor where, by then, about 10,000 acres had come under cultivation. In 1907, the Kapar District alone exported half a million lbs. of rubber.⁴⁵ Although the bridge was intended, initially, to serve the needs of rubber planting, its existence made it possible in later years for industries to be located on the northern side of the river.

Manufacturing Centre of Malaya

Few are aware that, after World War I, Klang gradually emerged as the principal manufacturing centre in the country. Possibly the first person to establish a factory in Klang was Tan Kah Kee, the Singapore millionaire who, at one time, was known as the 'Henry Ford of Malaya'. In about 1922, he opened a pineapple canning factory at Klang which gave the necessary impetus for the planting of pineapples in the Klang and Kuala Langat districts. About four to five thousand acres of pineapples were planted for the most part in small holdings. Soon the Klang factory was unable to cope with the large deliveries. As a result, the factory reduced the price paid to the producers much to the disadvantage of the latter.⁴⁶ It was only after Tan Kah Kee went bankrupt in 1934 that one of the pineapple producers - Goh Hock Huat - decided to participate directly in the canning industry. He soon established a number of factories under the name of Malayan Pineapple Company.⁴⁷

In 1928, the first rubber factory was started at Klang. This was Shum Yip Leong Rubber Works whose manufacturing activities first began at Tapah in 1921. When business expanded, a larger factory had to be built and Klang was chosen owing to its proximity to Port Swettenham.⁴⁸ By 1935, two new factories were established at Klang - one a rubber factory and the other an oil factory. The Malayan Rubber Works

(owned by Ng Teong Kiat) bought the machinery of the rubber factory owned by Tan Kah Kee & Co. after the Singapore firm went bankrupt. Most of the skilled operators came over to Klang from Singapore with the machinery. The factory produced large quantities of rubber shoes, bicycle tyres, rubber mats, toys, tubing rings, etc. The oil factory produced oil from ground-nuts. The oil found a ready sale locally.⁴⁹ By May 1937, Bata Shoe Company also commenced operations in Klang.

On the eve of World War II, a fourth rubber factory was established at Klang. The following was an announcement in the local newspaper:

This new factory will be a branch of the Fung Keong Rubber Manufactory, the largest manufacturers of rubber goods in Hongkong, where Mr. Fung Keong started business almost a quarter of a century ago.

When the former Chief Secretary, F.M.S., Sir William Peel, went to the Crown Colony as Governor he visited the factory there and was much impressed by all he saw. In course of conversation he mentioned that there were similar factories in Malaya and although at the time Mr. Fung Keong had no intention of extending his activities in Malaya, the Sino-Japanese conflict forced him to close down his branch at Canton, Honam, which had been in existence for twenty years.

It was then that he considered Malaya as a new field. Coming here a year ago he studied conditions and, satisfied that there was a big future in this country for manufactured rubber goods, selected Klang as a centre.

He secured land in Kapar Road and on an area of 57,250 sq. ft., the factory and other buildings are now nearing completion. The buildings were all designed by Mr. Yuen Shieu Kee.

In addition to the manufacture of boots and shoes and general rubber goods, the Fung Keong Rubber Manufactory (Malaya), Limited, intend to produce

tyres and tubes, machinery for which purpose is on its way to Malaya. The head office in Malaya will be at High Street, Kuala Lumpur, opposite the former building occupied by the Kwong Yik Bank. It was completed recently and the ground floor now houses the Bank of China till the bank's own premises are ready.⁵⁰

Epilogue

Klang's position as the premier industrial site in the country remained unchanged until the eve of independence when plans were made to turn Petaling Jaya into a new industrial site. In the early postwar years, when there was widespread discussion of the possible site of the proposed University of Malaya, there was at least one person (W.S. Kao, a Research and Development Chemist at Klang) who made out a good case for establishing the university at Klang. His arguments were:

The writer is of the opinion that the University site should be so chosen that the future students would be able to devote more of their time and mind to learn something really worth while to them. If the site is chosen merely from the standpoint of beautiful scenery, cold weather, or even modern comfort, I doubt very much whether the students could actually be benefitted [sic] by the university education in view.

It might be true that if the University is situated in a big town like Singapore or Kuala Lumpur, where facilities for research, survey and practice do exist, the students will be able to avail themselves of all such facilities for their acquirement of experience and knowledge. But, in my opinion, the prospect of their making use of such facilities is rather little, especially if the students still have plenty to learn in the University itself while taking up their undergraduate courses.

I do not mean that the University, as such, would consist of buildings alone without libraries, laboratories, workshops,

and the like, and the professors would have to bring the students around the town so as to teach them something. What I do mean is a well-equipped, self-contained University not much inferior in scope than at least a university in China.

Whether the University would bear plenty of [sic] fruits depends largely on the organisation of the University itself and the ultimate aims for which it is established. Malaya, as we know it, needs qualified physicians, technicians, scientists and agriculturists to undertake the huge task of reconstruction, and in this respect, there is no other place in Malaya better than Klang, the industrial centre, as the site of the future University of Malaya. It is not a place for amusement, but an ideal place for studies.

Here in Klang the students will have a nice and quiet place to live in, plenty to learn and to do. Being only twenty over miles away from Kuala Lumpur, the progressive students can easily make arrangements with the departmental installations, research institutions, etc., for practical training, and if occasional visits are considered necessary, the distance should not be an obstacle.

If Klang should become the future site of the University, it would also be developed into a more potential industrial centre of Malaya because the local industries could be constantly guided and assisted by the professors and research fellows of the University, who, being away from the capital, may devote most of their time and mind to research and development.⁵¹

Of course, Klang was not even considered. In the minds of Malaysians, then and now, Klang was a town frequently enough heard of but elicited little excitement. Penang was the 'Pearl of the Orient' - long since considered the ideal choice of tourists all over the world; Ipoh was "the town that tin built" - rich, clean and well-planned; Kuala Lumpur, the federal capital, was snobbish (the highest government officials congregated here) and it was also known as a

'Garden City'; and Melaka was 'the mother of Malaya' - here time was said to stand still; history oozed from every brick used to build the ancient Portuguese and Dutch monuments as well as other buildings. But, so few even today know that, until it was gradually replaced by Petaling Jaya and, in recent years, by Shah Alam, Klang was indeed the premier industrial site in the country. It was Klang that first experienced the whole spectrum of development. Beginning from maritime trade, it passed through a phase when agriculture was the mainstay of the economy and, since the 1920s, industrialization became increasingly important there.

This is not an attempt to write a comprehensive history of Klang, merely an attempt to introduce

a subject hitherto neglected in Malaysian historiography - the history of Malaysian towns. More than that, it is also intended to emphasize the importance of newspapers as one of the more indispensable sources of Malaysian history. Valuable as official and archival materials are, their scope is inclined to be somewhat limited because they provide, more specifically, only the administrative perspective. It is from newspapers that one is better able to obtain a deeper insight into a particular society, especially the peoples' thoughts and views; often, also their feelings. Perception is so important in history writing. Therefore, the more varied his sources, the more likely it is that the historian will be able to obtain a truly rounded view of his subject.

Notes

1. R.O. Winstedt, 'A History of Selangor' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Malayan Branch (JMBRAS)*, Vol.XII, pt.3, 1934, p.1
2. Paul Wheatley, *Golden Khersonese, Studies in the Historical Geography of the Malay Peninsula before A.D. 1500*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1966, p.317.
3. M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influences in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630*, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1962, p.29.
4. See D.K. Bassett, 'British Commercial and Strategic Interest in the Malay Peninsula During the Late Eighteenth Century' in John Bastin & R. Roolvink (eds.), *Malayan and Indonesian Studies. Essays presented to Sir Richard Winstedt on his eighty-fifth birthday*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
5. The book was reprinted in 1956. It was subsequently translated by Amin Sweeney and Nigel Phillips and published under the title *The Voyages of Mohamed Ibrahim Munshi* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975). This was followed by a romanized version by Mohd. Fadzil Othman: *Kisah Pelayaran Muhammad Ibrahim Munshi*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980.
6. The *Pluto* was a steamer which belonged to the Straits Settlements Government.
7. See Amin Sweeney & Nigel Phillips (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.62. Muhammad Ibrahim was in Klang at a time when the Klang War was about to end. It had begun in 1867. Raja Mahdi (a Selangor prince) and Raja Abdullah (a Bugis prince from Riau) fought for control of the Klang valley. The civil war spread; eventually, it was clearly a contest between the local aristocrats and outsiders. Chinese merchants and the Straits Government became involved. An important protagonist in the early 1870s was Tengku Kudin, a Kedah prince, who, in 1868, became the son-in-law of Sultan Abdul Samad (1857-1898). The Kudin faction comprised numerous mercenaries recruited from Singapore. In 1872, Tengku Kudin was in control of Klang village and he used it as his headquarters.
8. *Ibid.*
9. A house where the four sides of the roof run up to a point.

10. Amin Sweeney & Nigel Phillips (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.71
11. *Ibid.*, p.72-73.
12. *Ibid.*, p.73.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p.74.
15. This was Raja Mahdi's fort which Tengku Kudin managed to capture at the time when Muhammad Ibrahim visited Klang. See his description of the fort in *ibid.*, p.63-64.
16. See Isabella Lucy (Bird) Bishop, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither*, London, 1883, p.217.
17. *Ibid.*, p.219.
18. *Ibid.*, p.210-220.
19. *Ibid.*, p.221-222.
20. *Colonial Office Records 273/119*, Gov. to Sec. of State, 12 Mar. 1883, with enclosures.
21. *Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle* 19 April 1887, p.5.
22. *Ibid.*; see also *The Straits Times*, 23 Sept., 1896, p.3.
23. *Pinang Gazette*, 19 April 1887, p.5.
24. *Ibid.*, 26 July, 1887, p.5.
25. *Ibid.*, 19 April 1887, p.5.
26. *The Straits Times*, 23 Sept., 1896, p.3.
27. 'When Klang Was A Port', in *The Malay Mail*, 26 Sept., 1933.
28. *The Straits Times*, 23 Sept., 1896, p.3.
29. 'Kuala Klang Railway Extension', in *The Straits Times*, 7 July 1896.
30. 'Selangor in 1901', in *The Malay Mail*, 15 July 1902.
31. *Ibid.*
32. 'Sir Malcolm Watson' in *The Malay Mail*, 11 April 1928. See also Chai Hon-Chan, *The Development of British Malaya 1896-1909*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967, p.222-223.
33. See James Charles Jackson, *Planters and Speculators: Chinese and European Agricultural Enterprise in Malaya 1786-1921*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968, p.181.
34. *Ibid.*, p.192.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, p.193.
37. *Ibid.*, p.220.
38. *Ibid.*, p.221.
39. 'Selangor: A Sketch of Kuala Lumpur and Klang', in *The Straits Times*, 15 Oct., 1887.
40. *Ibid.*
41. A brief description of Simpang Lima appeared in the Penang paper - *The Straits Echo & Times of Malaya* - of 19 Aug 1950 (*vide*: "Suburb of Historic Klang"). The author, styling himself 'Simpang Lima', wrote:

An interesting and peaceful suburb of historic Klang is Simpang Lima (centre of five junctions), originally so named after the five roads that converge at the spot.

Today in reality, Simpang Lima should be renamed Simpang Annam for, the birth place of the writer, has seen the addition of another road since the early days.

Simpang Lima is interesting in that it contains a hospital, a graveyard, temples, churches, schools, a kramat and a Sultan's palace, all within a stone's throw of each other.

The kramat at the foot of the hospital hill has been venerated for as many years as the writer can remember. It contains the tomb of a Menangkabau man who was supposed to have come from Sungei Ujong and of whose swordsmanship and courage the Malays of the neighbourhood speak to this day. The kramat is sacred not only to Malays but to Chinese and Indians as well.

42. 'When Klang Was A Port', *The Malay Mail*, 26 Sept., 1933.

43. 'Memories of Klang Thirty Years Ago', *Ibid*, 20 Dec., 1940.

44. 'The Belfield Bridge', in *The Malay Mail*, 14 Sept. 1908.

45. *Ibid*.

46. *The Malay Mail*, 2 July 1924, p.16.

47. 'Mr Goh Hock Huat', in *The Straits Echo*, 6 Dec., 1936.

48. 'Progress and Development of a Malayan Rubber Firm', in *Singapore Free Press*, 1 Oct., 1949.

49. 'New Factories at Klang', in *The Malay Mail* (Supplement), 1 Aug., 1936.

50. 'Industrialisation of Klang', in *The Malay Mail*, 17 Aug. 1940.

51. 'Klang As The University Site', in *The Malay Mail*, 19 April 1947.