

When Rubber Came: The Negeri Sembilan Experience

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Introduction

Gullick, a noted Malaysianist, once observed:

One picul of rubber was exported from Negeri Sembilan in 1902. This was an event; it had never happened before. [Gullick 1951: 38]¹⁾

The first consignment of rubber from Negeri Sembilan came from Linsum Estate, located near the border of Seremban and Port Dickson (Map 1). A few trees of *Hevea brasiliensis* had been planted there amongst the coffee in 1883, and a sample of their latex was sent for evaluation to Sungai Ujong, one of the major British administrative centres in Negeri Sembilan, in 1893 [Jackson 1968: 213, 215, 223]. However, it was only in 1902 that the first consignment of rubber was sent from the Linsum Estate to England and sold for a satisfactory profit. Thenceforth ensued the successful expansion of rubber cultivation in Negeri Sembilan.

The commercial cultivation of rubber, not just in Negeri Sembilan but British

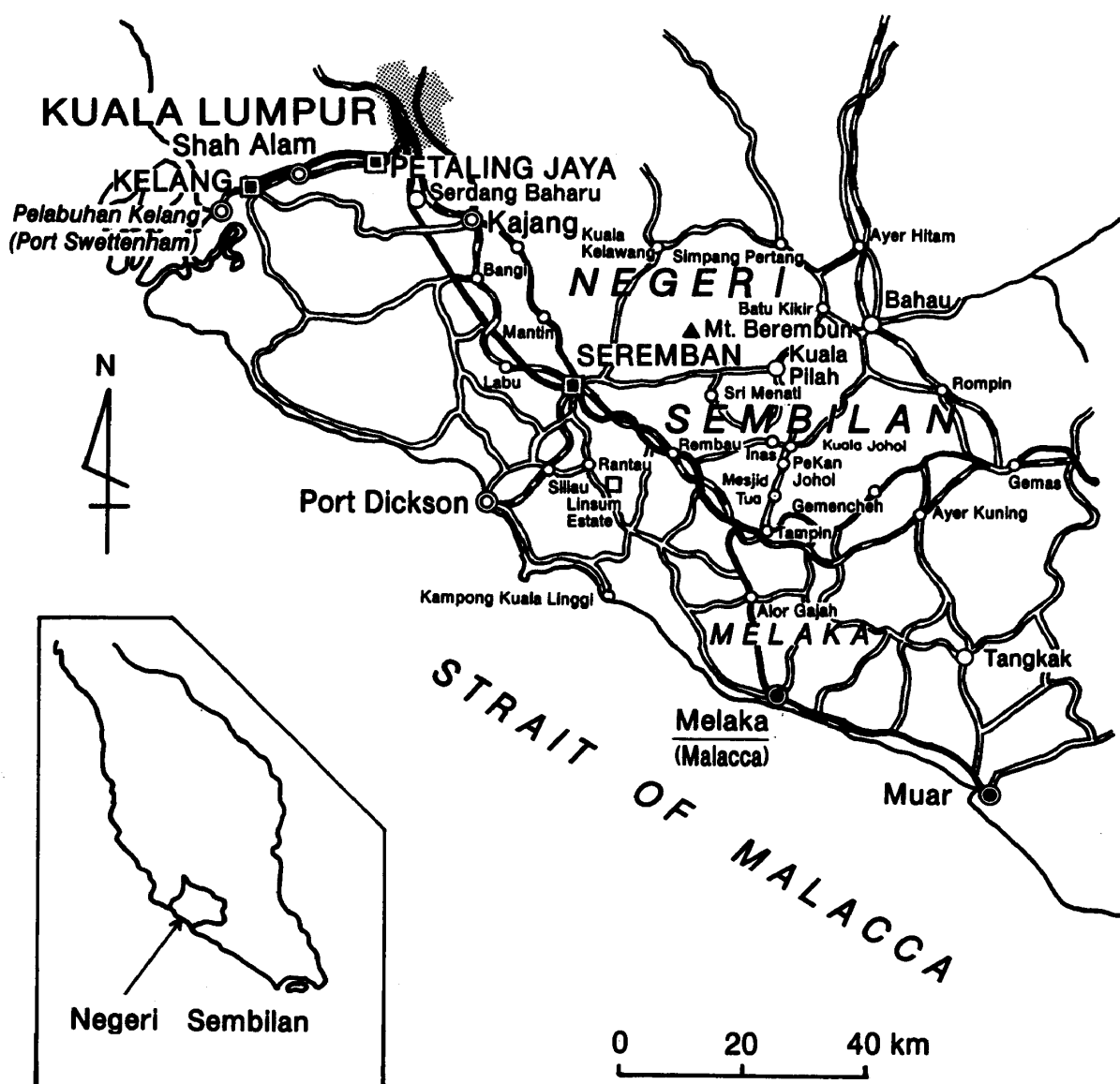
Malaya in general, was indeed an event. There had been other cash crops, for example, gambir and coffee, and other cash-generating enterprises such as tin-mining, before the introduction of rubber. But rubber decisively committed a large number of Malay peasants in different parts of Malaya to cash cropping and thus to a money economy. Malay village life was fundamentally affected by it.

The present paper will trace some of the influences experienced by the Malay peasantry through the expansion of rubber cultivation. In order to do so I examine the history of rubber cultivation in Negeri Sembilan. The choice of Negeri Sembilan for this inquiry is incidental; its results, however, will hopefully be consequential in their wider applicability to Peninsular Malaysia.

There are good reasons for carrying out the present investigation of rubber cultivation. Unlike other cash crops which preceded *Hevea*, rubber eventually spread to various parts of Malaya. Moreover, unlike other cash crops, rubber cultivation turned out to be an enterprise of enduring commitment, which has survived frequent price fluctuations in the international rubber market. Although oil palm has increased in significance in recent years, rubber still maintains an extremely important position in the national as well as rural economy of

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1) Negeri Sembilan is an old spelling of Negeri Sembilan.



Map 1 Negeri Sembilan and Surrounding Areas (ca. 1988)

present-day Malaysia.

Malays were involved in rubber cultivation almost from the beginning, although the British colonial authorities did not welcome this and sometimes even attempted to discourage them. As Malay smallholdings multiplied throughout the 1910s and 1920s, rubber cultivation began to exert ramifying influences over various aspects of Malay village life: land tenure, settlement patterns, religious awareness,

material culture, rice cultivation, life styles and work patterns. These are some of the influences I will discuss in this paper.

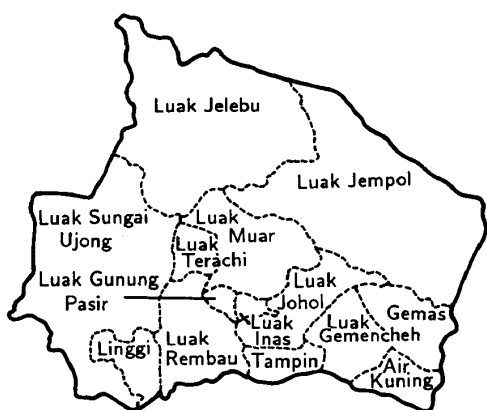
The historical examination of Malay smallholding provides valuable insights for the understanding of contemporary rural development in Malaysia. A significant element of post-war development projects, devised either by the colonial or Malaysian governments, concerns the strengthening of rubber smallholders, above all, Malay

smallholders. Concrete examples of this are the Replanting Scheme (Rancangan Tanam Semula), the FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) Scheme, and the Fringe Area Alienation Scheme (Rancangan Tanah Pinggir). These projects are not implemented in a vacuum; they are grafted onto the decades-long history of rubber smallholding. The accumulated historical experience of smallholding has affected the thought and behaviour of the Malay peasantry. It is also bound to affect the implementation and outcome of development projects. The historical examination of rubber smallholding is

surely a prerequisite of our proper understanding of Malaysia's contemporary rural development.

Before going any further, let me briefly describe my research methodology. The present study comprises the second step in my project to reconstruct a social history of a *luak* or *luhak* [adat district] called Inas in the District of Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan (Maps 1 and 2).²⁾ In my previous writing [Kato 1988], I described Malay village life in Inas before the introduction of rubber. In it I examined agricultural rituals associated with rice cultivation and tried to understand the cultural meaning of rice cultivation, an economic activity of decisive importance before rubber was introduced into Malay villages in the late 1900s. The present study begins where the previous study ended, and covers the period up to the early 1940s.³⁾

I utilize four major sources of information in the reconstruction of local social history.



Map 2 Administrative Districts and Adat Districts (Luak) in Negeri Sembilan

Source: Peletz [1988: 17]; Nordin Selat [1976: V]

- 2) Concerning my reasons for choosing Inas as a research site, refer to Kato [1988: 111–112].
- 3) There are at least four more studies planned after the present one. In a chronological order, the first one will deal with the Japanese occupation and the Emergency when the administrative reorganization and political transformation of rural society proceeded from above. The second focuses on the 1960s when the politicians, at the expense of administrators, wielded increasingly stronger influence over the decision-making processes of rural development. The third study concerns the last twenty years when the industrialization, urbanization and politicization of Malaysian society in general, under the New Economic Policy, has engulfed Inas. Fourthly “Inas at the crossroads” will pull together different strands of observation and consider future prospects for the Malay village.

One is my field research conducted in Inas. I spent the total of five months in Negeri Sembilan between late 1986 and early 1989, of which close to four months were spent in Inas. While in Negeri Sembilan, I also collected relevant data at various government offices at Kuala Pilah and Seremban. In writing this paper, land registration records at the Land Office of Kuala Pilah proved to be very useful. In addition to field work in Negeri Sembilan, I spent about one month at the National Archives of Malaysia, mainly reading Negri Sembilan Administration Reports and Annual Reports of Kuala Pilah District from the colonial period. The National Archives unfortunately does not have complete sets of these documents. Nevertheless, some of the documents I could locate there were useful for my present purposes. Finally, I consulted various published materials on Malay society and rubber cultivation in Malaya.

Among the four sources, I mainly relied on the latter three in writing this paper which is primarily a general description of the history of rubber cultivation in Negeri Sembilan. The paper is organized according to the following topics:

- I Negeri Sembilan in the Nineteenth Century
- II Chinese Cassava Estates
- III British Colonial Rule and Land Legislation
- IV Establishment of Pekan (Market Towns)
- V Introduction of Cultivated Rubber to Malaya
- VI History of Rubber Smallholding in

Mukim Johol

VII Implications of Rubber Smallholding

VIII Changes in Material Culture

IX Rice and Rubber

X Diminishing Forest and Agricultural Rituals

As a concluding remark, the "Anatomy of Malay Smallholding and Rubber Tapping" is discussed.

I Negeri Sembilan in the Nineteenth Century

Situated relatively inland, the cultural core areas of Negeri Sembilan, that is, Jelebu, Rembau, Sungai Ujong, Johol, and Sri Menanti, are seldom mentioned in European writings before the nineteenth century. Thus the following discussion basically concerns conditions in Negeri Sembilan in the nineteenth century, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Before the introduction of rubber, the mainstay of the Malays of Negeri Sembilan was rice cultivation. The quantity of rice harvested largely determined the quality of life enjoyed. Because of the long maturation period of indigenous varieties of rice, the Malays were involved in rice cultivation, though admittedly not continuously, for probably nine to ten months of the year [Kato 1988: 128]. Various stages of rice cultivation entailed agricultural rituals and festive activities. The annual cycle of rice cultivation accentuated a basic rhythm of village life. Rice cultivation was central to economic life, ritual life, and the belief

system of the Malay villagers.

Despite the overwhelming importance of rice cultivation, it was not the only economic pursuit in Negeri Sembilan in the nineteenth century [Gullick 1951]. Vegetables were planted in *kampung* (homesteads), and edible plants were collected from around *sawah* (wet-rice fields) and forest. The extraction of forest products such as rattan, honey, beeswax, *gaharu* (incense wood), all sorts of forest rubber, and *damar* (resin) was important because of their monetary value. Fishing was carried out in the sawah, ponds and rivers as fish were the primary source of animal protein. The raising of cattle and poultry was common, for they were "live assets" which could be multiplied or, if need be, exchanged for money or other goods or even used to generate prestige through their conspicuous consumption at ceremonial occasions. Pottery-making, *atap*-making (making thatch out of palm leaves) and mat-weaving were also carried out but these products were probably more for self-consumption than for markets, at least until the early nineteenth century. (On the other hand, after the mid-nineteenth century, Malay handicrafts had to compete against Chinese handicrafts.) Some cash crops, such as coffee and tobacco, began to be cultivated towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Tin-mining was practised in some parts of Negeri Sembilan, for instance at Sungai Ujong, Jelebu and Gemencheh but was already being dominated by the Chinese from around the middle of the nineteenth century. Gold-mining was not so important as tin-mining.

Despite this wide range of economic pursuits existing in Negeri Sembilan, the general impression is that Malay village life, relatively speaking, was still on the periphery of the money economy in the first half of the nineteenth century. As late as 1890, Javanese who came to Jelebu (a tin-producing yet admittedly remote area in Negeri Sembilan) are said to have commented that "the people of Jelebu so long as they have food are content." This implies that the Malays of Jelebu had not yet developed new needs and wants normally instigated by a money economy [Hill 1977: 138].

The above situation began to change from around the middle of the nineteenth century. Thriving Malacca, which became a British possession in 1824 and later functioned as one of the major entry points for massive Chinese immigration for tin-mining, was an important factor in this development. Malacca and the Chinese tin-mining areas in inland Negeri Sembilan came to constitute enclaves of a strongly money-oriented economy in contrast to the prevalence of village economies based largely on self-sufficiency.

Some Malays in Negeri Sembilan developed a steady involvement with the money economy through their interaction with these Chinese enclaves. In the 1830s the people of Johol, Sri Menanti, and Rembau were exporting surplus rice to Malacca. Farm produce and livestock were sold to the Chinese in tin-mines in Sungai Ujong, Jelebu, Malacca, and later Kuala Lumpur. Malacca Chinese came to the Kuala Pilah area to buy fruit in the

1880s. Some Malays squatted near Chinese tin-mines in the 1880s. Women re-panned and re-washed refuse heaps of sand for tin which Chinese miners had already panned and washed, while men did odd jobs around the mines such as building sheds [Hill 1977: 126, 137; Winstedt 1950: 124; Rathborne 1984: 132-133, 309, 319].

The involvement of the Malay peasantry in the money economy was given a further impetus in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Two events were responsible for this. One was the expansion of Chinese cassava estates from Malacca to Negeri Sembilan; the other, the consolidation of British control over Negeri Sembilan in 1887. One underlying element in these events was the restoration of "order" in Negeri Sembilan. The advent of large revenues for Malay rulers through tin-mining concessions and the influx of many Chinese to the tin-mines caused frequent feuds and much warfare among various Malay leaders and also among rival Chinese groups. The restoration of "order" by the British in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was conducive to the expansion of cassava estates in practically all of Negeri Sembilan.

Both events mentioned above were especially important to Inas. Inas, being geographically isolated from the major riverine trade routes and having no nearby tin-mines, had been little involved in the money economy even after the mid-nineteenth century. However, this situation began to change in the last quarter of the century. As Inas is situated relatively near Malacca, the expansion of the Chinese

cassava estates, with the concomitant development of land transportation, probably reached it by the latter half of the 1880s. Concurrently, the establishment of British control entailed the imposition of "house taxes" in Inas, apparently from around 1888. The implementation of the "house tax" system presupposed a certain degree of diffusion of the money economy and simultaneously predestined its further penetration.

II Chinese Cassava Estates

Cassava is significant as a cash crop as it is a source of tapioca flour, flakes or pearls. It is not clear why the demand for tapioca increased in the nineteenth century. There are two possible, though still conjectural, reasons for this: the rising demand for laundry starch in the British cotton industry and/or for tapioca pudding in step with the increasing consumption of coffee, tea and sugar in Europe. In either case, another important factor in making tapioca a successful export product must have been the opening of the Suez canal in 1869 and the subsequent adoption of steamships for the Asia-European sea route. The resulting decline in transportation costs benefited, for example, the export of sago, a bulk commodity, from the Straits Settlements to Europe [Latham 1978]; the same could well apply to tapioca.

Cassava estates in Malaya were initiated and subsequently controlled mainly by the Chinese of Malacca.⁴⁾ The large-scale

4) The following account of the development of cassava estates in Negeri Sembilan is based on Jackson [1968: Chapter 4].

commercial cultivation of cassava began in Malacca in the early 1850s. Its processed product, tapioca, was mainly exported to the British market. As lands in Malacca became exhausted, the cultivation of cassava eventually spread to neighbouring Negeri Sembilan and, to some extent, to Johor. But it never became significant in other states of British Malaya.

Cassava estates were operated on a system of shifting cultivation. This cultivation method was extremely wasteful and devastating to the soil. A cassava estate concession might occupy an area from 1,500 to 5,000 acres. A lot of land operated at any one time might range from 100 to 1,000 acres. Newly opened land was cultivated for from three to five years, during which time two or three crops of cassava were harvested, with diminishing monetary return. Then the lot was abandoned and a new tract of forest in the concession was opened up. When the concession was exhausted, a new one was acquired. In processing cassava roots to tapioca, large supplies of firewood were required. This fact also accelerated the speed of cultivation shifting and the denuding of forest. Thus, the cassava estates steadily shifted towards the outer areas of Malacca and, in due course, far beyond.

The expansion of cassava estates reached a peak in Malacca in 1882, by which time the frontier of cassava cultivation had already advanced to the border areas between Malacca and Negeri Sembilan. Cassava cultivation in Negeri Sembilan started in the latter half of the 1870s, initially in the Sungai Ujong area. Later

on, in the early 1880s, before tapioca prices plunged in 1882, it spread to Rembau, the neighbouring area of Malacca and Sungai Ujong. By the latter half of the 1880s, particularly after tapioca prices began to recover in 1886, cassava cultivation was also well established in Tampin, Johor, and Gemencheh, with all concessions situated near Malacca and along the Malacca-Tampin-Kuala Pilah road. In the meantime, Sungai Ujong ceased to be important in the cultivation of this crop.

Cassava remained the single most important cash crop in the present districts of Rembau, Tampin and Kuala Pilah until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. By that time much forest in the areas was denuded, the colonial government's attitude toward cassava cultivation became negative, and the gospel of a new cash crop, rubber, was already on the horizon.

Changes brought about by the spread of cassava estates were manifold. Road networks were opened, improved and expanded in order to connect Malacca and the areas of tapioca production. Cart roads crisscrossed and checkered the countryside, because cassava estates and forests for firewood supplies had to be connected by a road to the tapioca factories. The latter were usually located near a river as the processing of cassava roots required water for washing. Bullock carts eventually became ubiquitous as a means of transportation. Thus was initiated the "age of land transportation" in Negeri Sembilan. The incorporation of Negeri Sembilan in the British sphere of influence in 1887

further encouraged the advance of land transportation.

Another change wrought by the spread of cassava estates was the closer level of encounters between Malays and Chinese. Malay villagers in general had relatively limited associations with the Chinese when the latter were mainly concentrated in the tin-mines. Because of the shifting nature of cassava cultivation, the estates, unlike the encapsulated enclaves of Chinese tin-mines, spread to almost all corners of Malacca and Negeri Sembilan. Tin-mines were isolated dots on a map, while cassava estates comprised a horizontal expansion. Bustling activities associated with cassava cultivation and processing were more visible to the outsiders than tin-mining activities. Tapioca factories were usually established near water sources and at the same time close to existing or newly-established road systems. Bullock carts busied themselves shuttling between the factories and cassava estates.

The above characteristics of the tapioca industry must have made the Chinese more familiar figures in the countryside of Negeri Sembilan than before. Closer encounters between Malays and Chinese in rural Negeri Sembilan are shown in the "racial incidents" which were sometimes reported in official documents towards the end of the nineteenth century. Such incidents include "marriages" between Malay women and Chinese men and alleged murders of Chinese by Malays.⁵⁾

5) In the early 1890s the Kathi (Islamic official) of Johol complained to the District Officer of Kuala Pilah that two Inas women and one Johol

Although Malays were not directly involved in the commercial cultivation of cassava, many of them were hired as wage labourers on the estates. They felled trees at the initial stage of opening up the forest, and, after the planted lot began yielding, they dug cassava roots, loaded them onto bullock carts and carried them to the tapioca factory. This kind of arrangement was common because it was not unusual for estates and tapioca factories to be located near Malay settlements or even in the midst of them.⁶⁾ Thus cassava estates provided Malays with relatively easy access to a cash income.

In many ways, the expansion of the

woman had married Chinese men. In the opinion of the District Officer, the Malay women were probably concubines of the Chinese (NSSF 568/92). According to the journal for January 1891 by the District Officer of Kuala Pilah, a Chinese was murdered in Kampong Nuri in the previous year and two Malays were suspected of having committed the crime (NSSF 174/91). The identification numbers in parentheses signify document numbers used for the Negri Sembilan Secretariat Files at the National Archives of Malaysia. All abbreviations for documents cited in this paper are listed in the Bibliography.

6) For example, there was a large cassava estate (the present Sungai Inas Estate) just to the south of Inas, and its factory was located in Kampong Seginyeh, at the confluence of two small rivers flowing through Inas. According to Inas residents who are in their seventies or above, in their childhood some villagers still worked on the cassava estate for wages. Before the 1920s the path connecting Inas to Pekan Johol, a nearby market town, was through the cassava estate. Villagers sometimes encountered pigs raised by Chinese along the path to the *pekan* (market). Cassava cultivation was often coupled with pig-rearing because pigs could be fed the refuse from tapioca processing [Jackson 1968: 55].

cassava estates and the resultant changes foretold what Malay society in Negeri Sembilan would later experience as rubber cultivation expanded. For Malay peasants it provided a foretaste of their society's irrevocable transition from a subsistence-oriented economy to a money economy.

III British Colonial Rule and Land Legislation

Perak, Selangor and part of Negeri Sembilan, that is, Sungai Ujong, came under the sphere of British colonial rule in 1874. The rest of Negeri Sembilan followed in 1887, together with Pahang. These four states (Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang) were to become the Federated Malay States (FMS) in 1896.

The establishment of colonial rule brought about many changes in the Malay society of Negeri Sembilan, especially concerning land. The British began registering land for revenue purposes. The first state-wide land registers in Negeri Sembilan are called the Malay Grants. The Land Office of Kuala Pilah still preserves the district's Malay Grants in its office. I was fortunately able to examine the grants of Mukim Johol in which Inas is located. Altogether there are nine books of Malay Grants for this *mukim* (subdistrict), containing some eight hundred entries. The first entry in the first book is dated November 17th, 1887 and the last entry in the last book October 25th, 1896.

As far as I can ascertain from the case of Mukim Johol, the Malay Grants are considerably different in character from the

Mukim Register, which eventually replaced the Malay Grants. The Grants are written in Jawi (Arabic letters), and entries are made according to household, not according to land lot. Thus one usually sees both sawah and kampong (homestead) registered under one entry. No specification of land size is made.⁷⁾ No land other than sawah and kampong is registered in the Malay Grants, which suggests a rather narrow range of land utilization patterns among the Malays of this period. Orchards (*dusun*), for example, might have existed then but they were probably not yet so economically important, at least not important enough to be considered for tax purposes.

It is clear that the objective of the British in compiling the Malay Grants was to tax households rather than land lots. They

7) Sawah and kampong in the Malay Grants were later to be classified in the Mukim Register as "customary land" or land regulated according to matrilineal *adat* (a body of social etiquettes, customs and tradition). However, some entries for these lands were made under male names in the Malay Grants, which may suggest "confusion" in the translation of matrilineal *adat* into the Malay Grants. (Unfortunately I failed to check the relationship between these "land-possessing" males and the women under whose names the lands were eventually to be registered in the Mukim Register. Although it is probably impossible to check this, it would be valuable to ascertain whether the men were husbands or maternal uncles to the land-inheriting women. The importance of this distinction was suggested to me by Michael Peletz. Also see Peletz [1988: 137-138].) I observed no similar confusion in the Mukim Register. *Jinjang* was sometimes used as a measurement of sawah in the Malay Grants. It refers only to the width of the "head" of sawah and does not specify its size.

probably started collecting "house tax" around 1888. A letter from the Superintendent of Police at Kuala Pilah, dated January 4th of 1888, addressed to the Colonial Secretary, reports that Datuk Penghulu Inas (adat chief of Inas), after some negotiations, finally agreed to collect "house tax," that is, one dollar per house, for the British: "He [Datuk Penghulu Inas] has now accepted his allowances tho' he has asked for certain small additions & he & his chiefs have also agreed to the collection of the House tax in Inas." Initial negotiations between the two sides took place in April of 1887. The final agreement stipulated that the number of adat leaders in Inas who were to receive monthly allowances from the British would be increased from nine to seventeen.⁸⁾

Over and above the lengthy negotiations required and other difficulties they must have encountered, the British, from the beginning, were evidently not happy with the house tax. At the first meeting of the Negri Sembilan State Council, held on December 9th of 1889, they already proposed an alternative to the house tax: the flat rate of one dollar per "holding" was to be replaced with a five-percent tax on the average padi yield of sawah under cultivation (NS AR 1889, pp. 3-4). Gullick [1951: 42] writes: "During the 1890's the tax was changed to an assessment upon the profitability of the land (5% of the annual crop of padi instead of \$1 per

acre) and it was collected by District Officers." However, I could find no indication that the proposed new tax was actually implemented in Mukim Johol.⁹⁾

It is often stated that land possessed no monetary value before the establishment of British colonial rule in Malaya. Swettenham, who had long experience in British Malaya, observes: "Land had no value in the Malay States of 1874 and it was the custom for anyone to settle where he pleased on unoccupied and unclaimed land" (quoted by Gullick [1958: 113, n. 2]).

Judging from the way the Malay Grants were organized, apparently the British did not yet anticipate the commoditization of Malay smallholdings when they started compiling the Malay Grants in 1887. The

9) In Mukim Johol one dollar per "holding" was evidently still being collected through *lembaga* (matri-clan heads) in 1893. In a document dated March 16th of 1893 were listed 164 houses under seven *lembaga* in Inas, 432 houses under nine *lembaga* in Johol, and 213 houses under six *lembaga* in Gemencheh, with annual allowances totalling \$648 for 22 *lembaga* in Mukim Johol (NSSF 380/93). The document is titled "List of holdings under the jurisdiction of each *Lembagas* of Inas and Johol." It lists the names of *lembaga* in Inas, Johol, and Gemencheh, the number of "*rumah*" (house) under their jurisdiction, and the amount of their monthly allowances. It is clear that "holding" here means house or household, not land holding. (Note that in the above quotation Gullick seems to equate house tax with \$1 tax per one acre holding.) Likewise, the final entry in the final book of the Malay Grants of Mukim Johol, registered on October 25th 1896, still shows an entry "*cukai* [tax] \$1.00" in red ink on its backpage, indicating that the house tax was still being levied on that date. Malay Grants contain no information (for instance, sawah size) which could be used for the implementation of the newly proposed tax system.

8) See File "K.P. 9/88" in the Files "Superintendent of Police, Kuala Pilah, Negri Sembilan 1887-1888" at the National Archives of Malaysia.

Malay Grants for Mukim Johol are listed in books of two different sizes: one with the lengths of 30 cm by 19 cm and the other with the lengths of 22 cm by 15 cm. Information was filled on one page per holding/house with its backpage blank. Each page contains the following information: name [of the head of the holding], tribe (or clan name of the holding head), lembaga [of the holding head], number of persons [in the holding], nature of cultivation (that is, sawah and/or kampong), and date [of registration]. The page size of the Malay Grants allows no room for writing any other information, for instance, on subsequent land transactions. In addition to this size limitation, the fact that entries in the book were made according to a house, not according to a lot, without specifying land size, meant that the Malay Grants would not be useful once the commoditization process of Malay smallholdings unfolded.

In establishing and extending control in Malaya from the 1870s to the 1890s, it became imperative for the British to devise a relatively uniform system of land legislation in the western Malay States which would allow the expansion of British and other European-managed estates. We should note here that these were the decades when European interests in plantation agriculture, for example, sugar and coffee, were growing in Malaya [Jackson 1968: Part II]. The person who most influenced the drafting of this legislation was William Maxwell.

In 1882, Maxwell, a British official familiar with Malay systems of land tenure,

was sent to Australia to study the Torrens System of Registration of Title. The Torrens System was initially introduced in South Australia in the 1850s. Kratoska [1985: 25] succinctly summarizes its characteristics: "The Torrens System, which employs title by registration rather than title by deed, is based on land registers maintained by the government. All alienated land is entered in the registers, and these entries are the land titles; to be legally binding, mortgages, leases, and transmissions of title must also be entered in the register."

Maxwell was appointed as the Resident of Selangor in 1889. He drafted the Selangor Land Enactment of 1891, basing it on the Torrens System. This law laid the foundation for land enactments which were passed, without much variation, in each of the Federated Malay States in 1897; it was later repealed and reenacted with revisions in 1903. In the 1897 enactments, tenure of smallholdings came to be referred to as tenure by entry in the Mukim Register [*ibid.*: 24-26; Allen and Donnithorne 1954: 115]. This comprised the first tangible step toward the replacement of the Malay Grants with the Mukim Register. In Negeri Sembilan, the initial registration and survey of land for the implementation of the enactment continued until 1904 [Gullick 1951: 42].

I examined the Mukim Register of Mukim Johol in the Land Office of Kuala Pilah. There are altogether 33 books in the Register for this mukim. The first entry of the first book is dated June 23rd of 1903. Reflecting the purpose of the Mukim

Register, the books are designed to record all land transactions revolving around the entry of a particular lot. Thus the book size of the Mukim Register is considerably larger than that of the Malay Grants, with dimensions of 49 cm by 30 cm. Moreover, two open pages are used for one entry.

The Mukim Register concerns smallholdings of less than ten acres. They record the holdings of Malays, Chinese and Indians but most of the entries belong to the Malays. Each entry in the Register includes the following information: number of the holding (or a sort of identification number in the Mukim Register), survey number, number and nature of former title [if any], name of owner, area (that is, size), boundaries, nature of cultivation (for example, sawah, kampong or rubber) and locality (that is, settlement or village name), special conditions [of cultivation, such as "no rubber"], subsequent proceedings (date of issuance of extract and so on), [amount of] annual rent, and remarks (such as "customary land").

It is interesting to note that initially two facing pages of the Mukim Register contained two entries, one occupying the top half and the other the bottom half. This changed in early 1905 when the whole two pages were allotted to a single entry. As will be described later, this coincided with the first rubber planting boom in the European estate sector. This change in the allocation of page space in the Mukim Register may reflect an awareness on the British side that land transactions among Malay smallholders would become more frequent in the future.

If the British most probably devised the Mukim Register in full anticipation that Malay smallholdings would be commoditized, the very existence of the Register in turn promoted the commoditization process. Land began to be registered under individual names; the procedure for alienation was clearly specified; the transfer of ownership was regulated and guaranteed legally. These characteristics of the Register all contributed to the rapid commoditization of land. As will be discussed later, Malay peasants were already speculating in opening up and selling smallholdings during the 1905–1908 rubber planting boom. In retrospect it is the Mukim Register, among other things, which bred and nurtured Malay attachment to land ownership, although not necessarily to the land itself.

IV Establishment of Pekan (Market Towns)

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a time of great transformation in Negeri Sembilan. The general atmosphere was replete with new experiences and new expectations. Malay peasants increasingly came into contact with unfamiliar peoples and institutions in their own environment. As a result of the expansion of the cassava estates, more and more Chinese were seen in the Malay countryside. Some of them were operating as merchants among the Malay villagers in the 1890s [Gullick 1951: 53]. An increasing number of Sumatran Malays came to the peninsula, including Negeri Sembilan, as agricultural pioneers, mer-

chants or estate workers [Hill 1977: 127; Kratoska 1985: 17; Gullick 1951: 52–53]. Malays, who may initially have been “unable to suppress their wonders at the whiteness of a European skin, and astonishment at being able to see the veins in it” became accustomed to the sight of European planters and colonial officials, and even to Sikh police.¹⁰⁾ After the consolidation of British rule, such hitherto unknown institutions as police stations, and later vernacular schools, were established. The expansion and improvement of road systems further stimulated the movement of peoples, commodities, and ideas.

In particular, transformations during this period meant that Malay peasants were increasingly drawn into the money economy. For one thing, each house under the Malay Grants had to pay an annual house tax of one dollar to the colonial government. There were more and more opportunities for wage labour available, for example, forest clearing at European coffee estates or road construction sites [Rathborne 1984: 50, 331–332; Hill 1977: 138]. As already mentioned, a large number of Malays were also hired in the tapioca industry as labourers or drivers of bullock carts (see also Rathborne [1984: 37] and Jackson [1968: 74]). Circular migration was becoming common. Though referring to Malacca in the early 1880s, Rathborne [1984: 34] makes the following observation

10) The quotation is from Rathborne [1984: 193]. It describes the reaction of Malays in Perak when they saw a white man (Rathborne) for the first time, probably in the late 1880s. A similar reaction possibly occurred among the Malays of Negeri Sembilan.

concerning circular migration:

Malay silversmiths, blacksmiths, and carpenters are fast being superseded by Chinese, and as the villagers have no trades to give them occupation during the time there is nothing doing in the fields, many of the men leave their homes in search of employment, returning at frequent intervals, for they are able by working three months in the year to supply themselves with all the necessaries they require for the remaining nine.

At the hub of these transformations and commotions were the pekan or market towns. New institutions such as police stations, vernacular schools, dispensaries, and later offices for *penghulu* (mukim officials) were usually established in pekan.¹¹⁾ Chinese, Indians, Europeans, and Malays congregated there. Pekan were the nodal points of transportation systems, through which money, peoples, commodities, and ideas circulated. At shops and stalls in pekan the Malays were introduced to soap, matches, kerosene oil, and firecrackers. At coffee shops and small restaurants they also came to know the habit of tea- or coffee-drinking and acquired a taste for Chinese noodles and Indian

11) Evidently there were variations as to when the penghulu were instituted in different districts of Negeri Sembilan. There were no penghulu yet in Kuala Pilah in 1916, while there were already appointees in Jelebu in 1910. In the latter district land applications began to be made through penghulu, not through lembaga, after 1910 (AR KP 1916, p. 7; AR JB 1910, p. 11).

roti canai (Indian “pancake”).

I do not know the history of pekan in Negeri Sembilan. Old pekan were usually established at the major confluences and *kuala* (river mouths) of relatively heavily trafficked rivers. Yet, judging from the fact that the modern pekan in Malay society were, and still are, primarily inhabited by Chinese (and in some cases by Indians), the growth of contemporary pekan must date back to the time when the Chinese started taking up residence in inland Negeri Sembilan. The development of roads was another important factor, as these pekan are located along trunk roads.

As already mentioned, tapioca factories were connected with Malacca via cart roads or metalled roads. The transportation of goods between these places was two-way. Bullock carts brought tapioca to Malacca and carried back factory provisions on their return trip [Jackson 1968: 72–73]. As pekan were established, it is probable that these bullock carts also began to transport from Malacca goods for sale at the pekan. In the meantime, pekan functioned as collection points of forest products such as rattan and damar. According to a man in his late seventies in Inas, in his childhood, he used to accompany his father in carrying rattan or damar from the village to Pekan Johol, the pekan nearest to Inas. Given these developments, the transportation of goods by bullock cart became a business in itself.

Pekan Johol was already in existence around 1890, complete with police station and shops (NSSF 966/92). One of the shops was probably an opium shop supply-

ing to the Chinese cassava estates.¹²⁾ As early as 1892 a certain W.H.I. Silva proposed to the British Resident of Negeri Sembilan that, if given government assistance, he would be willing to run a daily mail coach between Malacca and Kuala Pilah via Tampin and Pekan Johol in ten hours (NSSF 553/92). The proposal indicates the existence of a good road system as well as frequent contacts and communications along this route. The first vernacular school in the area was being constructed in Pekan Johol in 1898 [NSSF 3036/98].

In essence the pekan were the embodiment of the money economy. It was at the pekan that money and goods could be exchanged and unfamiliar and attractive commodities could be purchased for a price. There had already been increasing opportunities to earn cash before the establishment of colonial rule, for instance, carrying out odd jobs around Chinese tin-mines and working for wages at cassava estates; these were all significant for the expansion of a money economy. But far more important than this was the fact that the pekan, together with the itinerant Chinese merchants who carried goods on a pole and travelled between the pekan and Malay villages, constituted institutionalized agents of consumption goods and thus aroused new material wants in the hearts of Malay peasants.

Rathborne, who opened a coffee estate at

12) It is not clear when the first opium shop was built but there was an application by a Chinese to open the second opium shop in Pekan Johol in 1893 (NSSF 463/93).

Gunung [Mt.] Berembun, near the border between Kuala Pilah and Seremban (Map 1), in the early 1880s, makes the following observation about his Malay workers, most of whom must have come from Negeri Sembilan:

I always entertained them [Malay workers] to tea, and their wonder was at the clock, whose pendulum swung backwards and forwards with constant regularity; and the ticking of my watch would surprise and amuse them as they placed it to their ears. Photographs they did not seem to understand at all, Notwithstanding the strangeness of their surroundings they never appeared *gauche* or awkward except when sitting on a chair for the first time, and then they would sit gingerly on the very edge of the seat, and were apparently half afraid lest it should give way beneath their weight. [Rathborne 1984: 53]

Malay naïvete about European material culture was to undergo a rapid change. Curious products which Rathborne showed to his Malay workers soon ceased to be objects of mere novelty and became objects of craving. In 1896, reviewing the first ten years of British rule in Negeri Sembilan, Cazalas, the acting District Officer of Kuala Pilah, made the following remark:

Ten years experience of the people here have demonstrated . . . that weakness for fine cloths and for adorning themselves with gold and silver ornaments has increased in proportion as

facilities for procuring money has [sic] advanced . . . a fondness for tweed suits, felt caps, smoking caps and even the 'sola topi' has been creating [sic]. (quoted by Hill [1977: 138])

Through their exposure to the pekan, the Malay peasantry of Negeri Sembilan was immutably enticed into a journey toward the money economy, a journey with no return.

V Introduction of Cultivated Rubber to Malaya

Concerned about the presumably impending depletion of tin deposits in western Malay States, Rathborne [1984: 153] wrote as follows in the late 1890s:

. . . these alluvial deposits are now within measurable distance of being exhausted along the western coast; and then the mining population will have to turn their attention to the undeveloped eastern side of the mountain. Before this takes place it is to be hoped that the permanent cultivation of some agricultural products will have extended sufficiently to enable this certain loss of revenue to be in some measure recouped, and that the nomadic habits of a considerable proportion of the Malay settlers will not cause them to abandon their holdings and migrate elsewhere, following in the wake of the mining industry.

The Victorian prospector's hope was to be answered dramatically in a short while by

the spectacular rise of rubber in the early twentieth century.

The general history of the introduction of *Hevea brasiliensis* to Malaya is well known; it is hardly necessary to retell it here in great detail. Suffice to say that it took over a quarter of a century from the first importation of *Hevea* seeds from Brazil, via Kew Gardens in England, to Singapore in 1877 and then eventually to Malaya in the early twentieth century.

Negeri Sembilan is one of three Malay states where rubber cultivation expanded quickly from the beginning of this century; the other two are Perak and Selangor. The successful shipment of rubber from the Linsum Estate in 1902 signaled a bright future for the new commercial crop. As if encouraged by the satisfactory showing of this first consignment, impetus for rubber cultivation mounted in Negeri Sembilan. In 1903 alone there were applications for rubber land covering roughly 20,000 acres in the state [Jackson 1968: 225].

Convinced of the future of rubber, the colonial government encouraged the expansion of European-managed rubber estates in Malaya [Lim 1977: 72-73]. They gave them tax incentives and offered them, with favourable conditions, abandoned tapioca or gambier estates which needed no forest clearing for rubber planting. They earmarked land near roads and railways for them, and eventually facilitated the importation of estate labourers from India. Buoyed by the rising rubber prices between 1905 and 1906, and assisted by London capital, rubber cultivation expanded phenomenally in Western Malaya between

1905 and 1908. The areas planted with rubber in the three states of Perak, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan increased from 43,410 acres to 166,257 acres between these years. In Negeri Sembilan alone they expanded from 5,718 acres to 27,305 acres during the same period [Jackson 1968: 229]. Major centres of rubber cultivation in Negeri Sembilan at this early stage were the districts of Seremban and Pantai (Port Dickson). In these districts the Chinese were also beginning to plant rubber, oftentimes mixed with cassava or gambier.

Rubber prices, and later government regulations, strongly influenced the subsequent expansion of rubber cultivation. There was a sharp price rise between 1909 and 1910, followed by a severe downfall in 1913. And modest recovery was registered between 1915 and 1916, only to be countermanded by a continuous downward trend, with a minor recovery in 1919, until the implementation of the Stevenson [rubber restriction] Scheme (1922-1928). Due largely to the impact of the restriction scheme, prices rose again in 1924 and 1925; they began to drop in 1926 and plunged during the Great Depression. In response to this dismal state, the International Rubber Regulation Agreement, signed by the British, Dutch, Siamese, and French governments, was implemented in 1934. After its renewal in 1938, the scheme remained effective until the outbreak of the Second World War. The second restriction scheme greatly helped to raise and stabilize rubber prices but never managed to bring about the kind of recovery effected by the

Stevenson Scheme, especially for the period 1924–1925. Throughout the 1930s there were no more dramatic fluctuations in rubber prices, such as were characteristic of the rubber market in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

The expansion of rubber cultivation generally followed price increases, and later was influenced increasingly by government regulations. The 1905–1908 initial boom was further fueled by high rubber prices between 1909 and 1911 and was to be followed by another notable expansion in 1915–1917. During the period of the Stevenson Scheme (1922–1928), the new alienation of rubber was prohibited by the colonial government, and the new planting of rubber on existing land discouraged. After a short interval during which this policy was reversed, new alienation was again prohibited in 1930, in response to the serious price drop during the Great Depression. From 1934 onwards this prohibition was accompanied by a ban on the new planting of rubber in Malaya; these “double restrictions” were to continue until the beginning of the war, with the exception of a short period between 1939 and 1940 [Allen and Donnithorne 1954: 126; Barlow 1978: 71; Bauer 1948: 3, 5, 43, 43, n.1, 65; Lim 1977: 153–154].

One conclusion we may draw from the existence of these restrictions is that the great expansion of rubber cultivation in Malaya, either in the estate or smallholding sectors, effectively ended, or at least greatly slowed down, after the implementation of the Stevenson Scheme. As will be shown shortly, this was not exactly what happened

with smallholdings in Mukim Johol, and most probably elsewhere in Negeri Sembilan.

VI History of Rubber Smallholding in Mukim Johol

By checking through the Mukim Register, one is able to study the local history of rubber smallholding in a particular area. This is what I did for Mukim Johol by examining the Mukim Register in the Land Office of Kuala Pilah.

Table 1 shows the number of approved applications for rubber lots registered in the Mukim Register of Mukim Johol. It covers the pre-war period from 1907 when the first application for a rubber lot was approved in Mukim Johol until 1940 when the expansion of rubber smallholdings had long ceased to be significant. The years indicated in the table refer to dates when applications were approved by the Land Office, not when extracts were issued. There was usually a time lag of several months to a few years between these two time points. Lots could be utilized once the application had been approved; but they could not be mortgaged or transferred until the extracts were issued. While Table 1 shows the increase in the number of smallholdings in Mukim Johol, Table 2 indicates the area of expansion of rubber smallholdings in Inas. There is little difference in growth trends between the two tables (compare Table 2 with “Inas” in Table 1), so I basically rely on Table 1 in the following discussion.

Rubber smallholdings in Mukim Johol

Table 1 Historical Changes in the Number of Smallholdings in Mukim Johol

	Inas				"Other Johol"			
	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Total	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Total
1907	0	0	0	0	84	2	0	86
1908	0	0	0	0	52	0	0	52
1909	0	0	0	0	22	11	0	33
1910	8	7	0	15	48	17	1	66
1911	0	3	0	3	4	5	0	9
1912	3	7	0	10	10	27	0	37
1913	2	2	0	4	8	17	3	28
1914	1	2	0	3	3	2	0	5
1915	13	5	0	18	12	35	3	50
1916	7	1	0	8	92	39	2	133
1917	12	0	0	12	24	19	0	43
1918	0	0	0	0	4	11	0	15
1919	1	0	0	1	7	4	0	11
1920	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1921	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1922	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1923	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1924	3	0	0	3	30	0	0	30
1925	15	0	0	15	43	0	0	43
1926	57	0	0	57	81	0	0	81
1927	21	0	0	21	92	0	0	92
1928	33	0	0	33	84	0	0	84
1929	8	0	0	8	34	0	0	34
1930	3	0	0	3	24	0	0	24
1931	2	0	0	2	5	0	0	5
1932	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1933	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1934	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1935	1	0	0	1	4	0	0	4
1936	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1937	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
1938	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
1939	1	0	0	1	4	0	0	4
1940	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	191	27	0	218	780	189	9	978

Source: Mukim Register of Mukim Johol, Land Office of Kuala Pilah

began shortly after the high rubber prices of 1905–1906, precisely the years when the first rubber planting boom took place in the estate sector. As early as late 1905 the

Dato' of Johol (adat chief of Luhak Johol) had already proposed to the government a special scheme to encourage rubber smallholdings in Johol. Local reception of

Table 2 Historical Expansion in the Area Size of Smallholdings in Inas

	Malay			Chinese			Total		
	Acre	Rod	Pole	Acre	Rod	Pole	Acre	Rod	Pole
1907	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1908	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1909	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1910	25	0	35	41	3	33	67	0	28
1911	0	0	0	13	3	35	13	3	35
1912	10	0	16.3	38	1	20	48	1	36.3
1913	9	1	0	8	0	20	17	1	20
1914	2	1	29	3	3	19.2	6	1	8.2
1915	24	3	20	23	3	28	48	3	8
1916	15	0	7.8	2	2	25	17	2	32.8
1917	26	2	11	0	0	0	26	2	11
1918	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1919	6	0	1	0	0	0	6	0	1
1920	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1921	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1922	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1923	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1924	5	1	33	0	0	0	5	1	33
1925	47	3	3.3	0	0	0	47	3	3.3
1926	183	0	20.2	0	0	0	183	0	20.2
1927	61	1	23.1	0	0	0	61	1	23.1
1928	86	2	16.6	0	0	0	86	2	16.6
1929	26	0	39.7	0	0	0	26	0	39.7
1930	11	3	3	0	0	0	11	3	3
1931	5	1	0	0	0	0	5	1	0
1932	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1933	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1934	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1935	4	2	38	0	0	0	4	2	38
1936	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1937	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1938	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1939	5	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
1940									
Total	556	3	17	132	3	20.2	689	2	37.2

Source: Mukim Register of Mukim Johol, Land Office of Kuala Pilah

the scheme was good and the District Officer of Kuala Pilah was supportive of it. The revised scheme was finally approved in March 1906 after considerable discussions

among British officials. Under the revised scheme, \$350 was set aside out of official funds to purchase seeds and set up nurseries for germination. "It was reported that the

Malays of Johol were busily clearing the lots which the Settlement Officer had demarcated" [Drabble 1973: 41; see also Lim 1977: 79]. Unfortunately no followup report on this scheme is extant. Some of the "early lots" of "Other Johol" in Table 1 may have possibly been opened up under this scheme.

In comparison to "Other Johol" rubber cultivation in Inas started a little later. The fact that Inas was isolated from the Kuala Pilah-Tampin trunk road seems largely to explain this lag. According to an old man in Inas, Inas people, without much previous contact with the outside world, were ignorant and afraid of trying new things such as planting rubber.

There were several pioneers in Inas in the early stages of rubber smallholding. Among them were Penghulu Sulong (then Datuk Penghulu Inas), two lembaga and Haji Jambi, a wealthy merchant immigrant from Sumatra [Lewis 1962: 292]. Like the Dato' of Johol mentioned above, pioneer smallholders in general were probably people of means in the village.

Although not indicated in Table 1, one characteristic of early rubber smallholding in "Other Johol" was its speculative nature to a certain degree. For example, in Kampong Kuala Johol and Kampong Mesjid Tua, two kampong situated along the trunk road, there were 86 Malay smallholdings approved between 1907 and 1909. Out of this figure, 53 lots were sold to Chinese and 24 to Malays within several years after their applications were approved, that is, even before the rubber trees started bearing. The majority of transactions took

place in 1913 when rubber prices dropped. Apart from possible economic difficulties, this easy release of lots seems to indicate a lack of commitment to rubber cultivation among the early Malay smallholders. I may add here that most of the plots bought by Chinese were eventually mortgaged to Chettier moneylenders in 1920. Rubber prices plunged between the beginning and the end of 1920 [Barlow 1978: 56].¹³⁾

Evidently the above tendency discerned in Mukim Johol was not an isolated case. After noting a considerable increase in the number of smallholdings between 1908 and 1912, the Negri Sembilan Administration Report for the year 1912 makes the following observation:

These figures indicate a steady demand for land by native cultivators, but would be more satisfactory if all the small holdings taken up remained in the hands of small cultivators. Unfortunately, a certain number of them are sold after a year or two, in some cases before they have even been planted, but usually after being cleared and planted with rubber trees, to adjacent estates or persons who are already considerable land owners, and, except in the Kuala Pilah, Tampin and Jelebu districts, where the Customary Lands Enactment is in force, the law provides no check upon such transactions and there only in the case of lands entered

13) Kampong Kuala Johol and Mesjid Tua were chosen as samples in my survey of the land registers because they are located along the Kuala Pilah-Tampin trunk road and Malay rubber smallholdings started earlier here than in other areas of Johol.

as customary lands in the register. (NS AR 1912, p. 6)

The expansion of rubber smallholdings in Mukim Johol was concentrated in two periods before 1940: 1907–1917 and 1924–1930. Active planting during the two periods was clearly influenced by high rubber prices.

The first period was obviously instigated by rising rubber prices between 1905 and 1906, and by the 1905–1908 rubber planting boom at the estate sector. There was a “steady demand,” according to the Negeri Sembilan Administration Report for the year 1911, for smallholdings in Negeri Sembilan from 1909 through 1911: “Probably a large proportion of these lots were taken up with a view to cultivation of rubber” (NS AR 1911, p. 5). (The Administration Report gives figures of smallholdings only from 1909 to 1911 but the “steady demand” must have started earlier than 1909.)

Above all, the period between 1915 and 1917 is considered “an era of rapid planting on the part of smallholders, both Malay and Chinese, particularly in the western Malay States” [Jackson 1968: 257]. The District Officer of Kuala Pilah made the following comment on the condition in his district in 1916:

The local Malays were badly bitten with the rubber craze, partly no doubt owing to the example set by Europeans and others, but chiefly I think, as a large number of small holdings came into bearing during 1916 and it was seen how

profitable a few acres of rubber in bearing are at present. Hundreds of Malays thronged the office daily clamouring for land and the books [of the Mukim Register] had to be closed on two occasions during the year. (AR KP 1916, p. 3)

The second rubber planting boom was preceded by several years of no active planting. The lack of action was caused by price falls and the prohibition of new alienation during the Stevenson Scheme. Difficulties encountered by the rubber industry in production and exportation under war-time conditions were not encouraging either for the expansion of rubber cultivation.

In Table 1 it is noteworthy that no more Chinese (and Indian) smallholdings are observable after 1919. Probably the Malay Reservations Enactment is largely responsible for this phenomenon. The enactment, which purports to preserve “Malay lands or reservations” under Malay ownership and for future Malay occupation, was initially drafted in July 1913. This was a reaction to the contemporary trend whereby many Malay smallholdings were sold to non-Malays as discussed above. After the enforcement of the Malay Reservations Enactment, alienation and land transactions in the smallholding sector became increasingly difficult and unattractive to non-Malays. The implementation of the enactment was scheduled for January 1st 1914 but concrete steps were not taken until 1915 [Drabble 1973: 102]. In Negeri Sembilan, it was only in 1916

that the enactment was actually implemented in most mukim of Kuala Pilah, Tampin and Jelebu. As far as Mukim Johol is concerned, it was most probably effected in 1917.¹⁴⁾

It is surprising that the second period of the rubber planting boom (1924–1930) was as important as, or in case of Inas more important than, the first period in Mukim Johol. This is particularly so because new alienation was supposedly prohibited in Malaya after the Stevenson Scheme (1922–1928), apart from the exceptional years of

14) This delay in implementing the enactment in the three districts of Negeri Sembilan is explained as follows: "When the Enactment of 1913 was passed, this course did not seem necessary owing to the protection against alienation of Malay customary holdings afforded by the Customary Tenure Enactment of 1909, which applies to the three districts of Kuala Pilah, Tampin and Jelebu, but to secure this protection it was necessary that the lands should be registered as customary—i.e., lands succession to which follows the 'adat perpatch,' and this course, though suitable in the case of kampong and sawah lands, was found irksome in practice if applied to lands taken up merely to be cultivated for profit. On the other hand, if these holdings were not registered as customary, there was nothing to prevent their sale later on to Europeans or Chinese, even though they were situated in the midst of Malay holdings, and after careful consideration the State Council decided on the course which was adopted as having the advantage of allowing Malays to take up land in their own mukims to cultivate for profit which they would be free to dispose of without obtaining the consent of the tribe and at the same time securing that, if the lands were in a locality predominantly Malay, they should not pass into non-Malay hands" (NS AR 1916, pp. 9–10). In 1916 "A further reservation at Inas is under consideration" (*loc. cit.*). The expansion of Malay reservations continued in the three districts in 1917 (NS AR 1917, p. 3).

Table 3 Number of "Nil Lots" in Mukim Johol

	Inas	"Other Johol"	Total
1925	2	4	6
1926	11	24	35
1927	12	75	87
1928	31	74	105
1929	3	18	21
1930	0	22	22
1931	1	4	5
1932	0	1	1
1933	0	1	1
1934	0	0	0
1935	1	4	5
1936	0	0	0
1937	0	1	1
1938	0	0	0
1939	1	0	1
1940	0	0	0
Total	62	228	290

Source: Mukim Register of Mukim Johol, Land Office of Kuala Pilah

1928–1930 and 1939–1940 [Bauer 1948: 3, 5, 43, 43, n.1, 65].

Part of the explanation for this "anomaly" is found in the "nature of cultivation" clause in the Mukim Register. Many "nil," which were not extant in the earlier period, are found in the "nature of cultivation" clause among the entries made after 1924, that is, during the second rubber planting boom (Table 3). I equated the "nil" with "rubber" in tabulating Table 1 for the following reasons. An official at the Land Office of Kuala Pilah with long experience in land administration informed me that the "nil" was in reality the same as "rubber." Some entries under "nil" in the Mukim Register had "rubber" written in pencil after the "nil." The tax rates for "nil lots" were exactly the same as those of

“rubber lots,” which were much higher than those of sawah or kampong.

The above observation strongly suggests that rubber smallholdings in Mukim Johol expanded significantly under the guise of “nil” when new alienation for rubber land was prohibited. In addition, “rubber lots” themselves increased during the second period (compare Tables 1 and 3). In fact, rubber holdings registered as such in both the estate and smallholding sectors in Negeri Sembilan as a whole increased remarkably between 1917 and 1939 (see Table 5 on page 150).¹⁵⁾

Old people in Inas remember the period of the second rubber restriction scheme as years of great prosperity. This is so despite the fact that rubber prices during this period were not as high as during the time of the Stevenson Scheme. One of the reasons for this incongruity lies in the fact that a far greater number of Malay peasants were involved in rubber tapping during the second restriction scheme than during the first. It is important to realize that the cumulative total of smallholdings acquired and planted from 1907 through to the 1920s were practically all at the bearing stage when the International Rubber Restriction Agreement was implemented in 1934. We must also recall that, prior to the implementation of the Malay Reservations Enactment (around 1917 in Mukim Johol), many Malay lots were sold to non-

Malays who themselves, until that time, had been active in opening up rubber smallholdings. In this sense, the expansion of smallholdings in the 1920s was critical because it signified a more or less pure gain in the number of Malay holdings and thus enlarged the involvement of the Malays in rubber tapping as either owner-tappers or share-tappers.¹⁶⁾

It is difficult to estimate to what degree the above observation is true for the rest of Negeri Sembilan or to other Federated Malay States. Judging from the general observation that new land alienation and planting were either prohibited or discouraged during the two restriction schemes, the Johol case might have been an exceptional one. Nevertheless, a further inquiry into this question is needed to assess the magnitude and timing of the economic impact of rubber cultivation in rural Malaya. As far as Mukim Johol is concerned, the latter half of the 1930s is far more important in this respect than that of the 1920s.

15) Unfortunately I do not know how common “nil lots” were in other districts of Negeri Sembilan and whether they were counted as “rubber lots” in calculating macro statistics such as those listed in Table 5.

16) It is also possible that Chinese who had purchased Malay lots in the early stage of rubber expansion later resold them to Malays after the Malay Reservations Enactment. However, this possibility is not substantiated in Mukim Johol. A cursory review of Chinese lots in Kampong Kuala Johol and Kampong Mesjid Tua reveals that few, if any, of the Chinese lots were sold back to Malays before the Second World War. However, this kind of transaction became common in the early 1950s, especially in 1954. This was probably related to the Emergency (1948–1960) and also to the initiation of a government-sponsored rubber replanting scheme for smallholders in 1953.

VII Implications of Rubber Smallholding

It is said that Malay settlements in the nineteenth century tended to lack permanence. Rural populations often dispersed in response to political oppression, economic exploitation, wars, new economic opportunities, epidemics, or soil deterioration [Gullick 1958]. The establishment of British control offered the Malay peasantry a relatively stable political environment and thus one more congenial to a settled existence. Rubber, a perennial crop which must mature for six to seven years until the trees can be tapped, further enhanced this tendency. Note, however, that the colonial introduction of land registers cut both ways in this context. On the one hand, land registration increased the peasants' attachment to land ownership, and thus, to some extent, to the land itself; the institutionalization of land ownership, on the other hand, enhanced the sense of deprivation among those who owned little or no land and thus encouraged them to migrate when a better chance for land ownership became available outside their village. (The FELDA scheme owes part of its success to this "peasant psychology" created after the colonial introduction of land registers.) The fact that land is now a liquid commodity, theoretically easily exchanged for money, also tends to enhance this mobility; small landowners can dispose of their existing lands and leave for a new settlement.

The eventual spread of rubber over vari-

ous parts of British Malaya was also instrumental for the rapid expansion of the transportation system, railways as well as roads, in the peninsula [Kaur 1985]. One by-product of this was that *dusun* or orchards became an important economic asset, as fruit, an easily perishable commodity, could now be marketed in towns and cities largely to Chinese. For example, after the town of Kuala Pilah was connected with Bahau by rail in 1910, *durian* from villages around Kuala Pilah became a lucrative commodity (AR KP 1912, p. 6). Likewise, *durian* harvested at Chiong in Inas became marketable only after a three-foot road (*jalan tiga kaki*) was built in the 1920s between Sekolah Melayu Inas and Kuala Johol, a junction on the Kuala Pilah-Tampin-Malacca trunk road.

In step with these developments in the transportation systems, Malay settlement patterns also underwent a transformation. According to old people in Inas, the best locations for houses were considered to be near sawah, streams or footpaths connecting settlements and sawah. In time past it was common for the front part of the house to face the sawah. As cart roads and later metalled roads were constructed, more and more houses began to be built along them (see also Gullick [1958: 27] and Kaur [1985: 13-14]). This tendency was a precursor of contemporary Malay settlement patterns where most houses are lined up along the roads, usually away from the sawah. A tangible sign of change in Malay settlement patterns is still occasionally seen in the location of mosques. Old mosques tended to be built near a river or

stream. Nowadays, if a road is located away from the river, a new mosque is usually constructed by the roadside. (Moslems need access to water for ablutions before their daily prayers; the availability of piped water now allows flexibility in the choice of mosque locations.) In the countryside of Kuala Pilah, one sometimes comes across abandoned mosques in a dilapidated state, away from the road but near a river.

Chinese involvement in rubber cultivation signified their decision to make Malaya a place of long-term or permanent, rather than temporary, residence. In cassava cultivation, they could reap quick returns and even squeeze out profits from an entire estate within several years. Rubber cultivation, in contrast, required a long-range commitment. Change in the Chinese orientation in this respect is reflected in the development of Pekan Johol. Reportedly it was already a sizable Chinese settlement in the first decade of the twentieth century. However, shops still had atap-roofs and atap-walls. The first brick-built shop (*kedai batu*) appeared in 1918. A Chinese primary school, supported by well-to-do merchants of the pekan, came into being in 1924. This meant a complete departure from the "era of tin-mines and cassava estates" when families were a minority among the male-dominated Chinese population in rural Negeri Sembilan.

Closer relationships between some Chinese and Malay individuals continued in the twentieth century when the rural rubber market was more or less controlled

by Chinese merchants. It seems that interracial relations then were not as problematic as they were to become after the Second World War. "[T]he tendency here [in the District of Kuala Pilah] of Malay women to follow Chinese" was still observed in 1912 (AR KP 1912, p. 4). The adoption of Chinese girls by Malay couples was not unusual either, judging from the existence of several, clearly Chinese-looking old women in Inas (see also Lewis [1962: 30, n. 1]).¹⁷⁾ Chinese shops were also commonly found in the

17) Adoption for the sake of continuing a matriline was common in Negeri Sembilan; whereas this was not the case in the Minangkabau society of West Sumatra. I was told in Inas that in addition to their fair skin, Chinese girls were preferred for adoption because they would not be claimed back by their original parents even after they grew up. This was not necessarily the case with adopted Malay girls. Demographic factors may have been partly responsible for this preference. It is my impression that the Malay birth rate and the ratio of children surviving to maturity in Negeri Sembilan increased only after the 1900s when rural Malays began to enjoy prosperity, sufficient and better food supplies, and improved hygiene and sanitary conditions. These improvements were due largely to the development of dispensaries and transportation systems under British control, and to the economic prosperity derived from expanding rubber cultivation. Until then, Malay families probably could seldom afford to relinquish children for adoption. Even if they did so, many children died before reaching maturity and thus the parents must have been prompted to claim back children given in for adoption. On the other hand, destitute immigrant Chinese families must have been more willing to give up their children for adoption, especially their daughters. Unfortunately the historical demography of Malaya is not a well developed area of investigation, and these comments remain very speculative in nature.

Malay villages of Negeri Sembilan before the arrival of the Japanese army during the war.

One interesting by-product of rubber smallholding could be the deepening knowledge of Islam among the Malays. The rural Malays of Malacca and Negeri Sembilan in the late nineteenth century do not strike one as being strongly self-conscious about their religion. Rathborne, who spent many years in Malacca and Negeri Sembilan in the late nineteenth century, makes the following observation:

They [Malays] are not strict Moslems, neglecting many of the observances and tenets of that religion when they clash with their own pleasures and indulgences. The fasting month of Ramadhan is kept by many only in a most perfunctory manner, and they have holy places at which they make their vows, whilst spirit legends and folk-lore enter largely into their faith. [Rathborne 1984: 58]

Dogs, presumably abhorred by Moslems, were a common sight in Malay settlements, again according to Rathborne [*ibid.*: 29–30, 33].

This situation seems to have changed in the early twentieth century. One significant factor in this change, in my opinion, was the increasing prosperity of the Malay peasantry. Profits from rubber cultivation helped boost the number of pilgrims to Mecca and also those who sought Islamic learning in Patani, Kedah, Kelantan and later Sumatra. Upon their return to their native places these individuals

must have been instrumental in deepening the level of Islamic knowledge amongst rural Malays. Closer contacts with infidel, pig-eating Chinese must also have heightened the Malays' self-awareness of their faith. The construction of expensive mosques in the 1930s is another expression of this trend.¹⁸⁾

As if in reflection of this increased self-awareness of Islamic faith, Malay naming styles also changed. Names which appear in the Malay Grants seldom sound very Arabic. A few notable examples of non-Arabic names, which I found in the Malay Grants of Mukim Johol, are Sulong (eldest child), Hitam (black), and Pendek (short). Names which later appear in the Mukim Register are increasingly more Arabic-sounding.

Furthermore, the Malay Grants often fail to make proper usage of "bin" (son of) and "binti" (daughter of) in writing down the names of owners for the registers. Both male and female names are interjected with "bin." In some cases single, non-Arabic names are written down without being followed by "bin" or "binti" at all. Even if "bin" is interjected, the space after it, which should be filled with one's father's name, often remains vacant.¹⁹⁾

18) In travelling around Negeri Sembilan, I encountered at least three such mosques in Kuala Pilah and one in Rembau. They are built of either solid wood or bricks. Decorative coloured glass and tile roofs are common features. The roof-styles and roof-decorations, which resemble those of Chinese temples, suggest that they might have been built by Chinese carpenters, probably from Malacca.

19) No proper distinction is made either between Haji and Hajah in the Malay Grants; both men ↗

The lack of expertise in the usage of "bin" and "binti" disappears completely in the Mukim Registers. Not only are "bin" and "binti" properly used but the space after "bin" and "binti," with a few exceptions, is almost always followed by a male name. I suspect that this complete turn-around was partly due to administrative guidance by the colonial officials. The Mukim Register, since its inception, presupposed frequent land transactions among Malay smallholdings. Yet in this system of land registration, modelled after the Torrens System, entries in the registers were, and are, equivalent to land titles. Thus the Land Office had to be extremely careful in ascertaining the identity of land owners, in the case of either new alienation or land transactions. The usage of "bin" and "binti" was one sure way of improving this process and thus lessening confusion and conflict in land transactions. Other than reflecting the increasing Malay self-awareness of their faith, the Mukim Register might have been largely responsible for the spread of Arabic names, interjected with "bin" and "binti," among the Malay peasantry.²⁰⁾

Apart from these ramifying implications,

↘ and women who made up pilgrimage to Mecca, were referred to as Haji. Azizah Kassim, who worked with me at the Land Office of Kuala Pilah, helped me to understand the Jawi script of the Malay Grants.

20) This situation contrasts with Indonesia where, although the population are overwhelmingly Moslems, the usage of "bin" and "binti" has never become popular. Syncretism among the Javanese, the politically dominant group, and the lack of land legislation outside Java may account for this difference.

two more implications of rubber cultivation are worth our special attention: its influence on material culture and on rice cultivation.

VIII Changes in Material Culture

Undoubtedly one of the most important consequences of rubber smallholding was that the money economy finally came to dominate the lives of Malay peasants. Rubber is a cash crop par excellence. It brings in money weekly or even daily. Its response to market prices is quick because trees can be tapped at short notice any time after they have reached the bearing stage. As rubber cannot be consumed locally, it necessitates the development of transportation and marketing systems for its exportation. The system works both ways. Rubber is transported out and outside goods transported in. The inward and outward movements of commodities are mutually reinforcing; more rubber means more money, and more money means the importation of more goods from outside, which in turn whets people's appetites for more money. The circle does not necessarily run smoothly since rubber prices are an extremely important factor in this equation. Nevertheless, rubber cultivation tends to generate its own momentum and, once set in motion, the penetration of a money economy accelerates.

The expansion of rubber cultivation brought about drastic changes in the material culture of the Malay peasantry in Negeri Sembilan. One may even wish to use the term "revolution" to describe this change; the change was far-reaching and

accomplished within a short time span.

The material culture of the Negeri Sembilan Malays was relatively simple before the turn of the century; it was probably still so even up to the 1910s despite the fact that the road-side pekan had already begun to spring up in rural areas by the turn of the century. The following account is mainly based on my interviews with old people in Inas.²¹⁾

Houses in Inas used to be built of logs of appropriate diameter with their tree barks merely peeled off. Building materials were atap for roofs, atap or woven bamboo matting for walls, and split bamboo or nibon bark for flooring. No nails were used. The stairs leading up to the floor level of this house on stilts were basically wooden ladders which could be pulled inside the house at night.

Furniture was minimal, consisting of woven mats for sitting or sleeping and wooden chests (*peti*) for storing clothes or other valuable possessions. A *damar* (resin) lamp was the usual means of lighting at night. Kitchen and cooking utensils were also minimal. Cooking was done with firewood. Earthen pots were more common than iron pans. Ladles were made of coconut shell with wooden handles. Wooden plates or banana leaves were used as plates when eating. Villagers drank unboiled water from *kendi* (earthenware water pitchers). Coconut shells (*gapong*), gourds or bamboo tubes (*kancung*) were

used as water containers. Cooking oil and flour were not as plentiful then as they are now. The most popular methods of cooking were boiling (for example, *gulai* or curry-cooking) and roasting or broiling (*panggang* and *bakar*). Deep-frying (*goreng*), very characteristic of contemporary Malay cooking, was not common then. Matches, soap, and cigarettes were practically unknown. Villagers still enjoyed sirih-chewing, rather than cigarette-smoking.

The material culture of Malay villagers improved dramatically after the turn of the century, especially after the two rubber boom periods in the 1920s and 1930s. In the case of Mukim Johol, the latter half of the 1930s was particularly important in this respect. As pointed out already, a far larger number of villagers were involved in rubber tapping in the 1930s than in the 1920s, thus many reaped the benefits of rubber cultivation. In addition, the commoditization of rubber "coupons" during the second period boosted the purchasing power of smallholders.

During the two periods of the rubber restriction schemes, the British colonial government issued quarterly coupons to smallholders in order to specify the permissible amount of rubber production from each holding during a particular quarter. These coupons were exchanged for export licenses at ports of shipment. For any given quarter, rubber dealers could only export the amount of rubber in accordance with the specifications on the accumulated export licenses in their hands. Thus, coupons inevitably formed their own

21) Concerning the material culture of the Malacca Malays in the late nineteenth century, see Rathborne [1984: 28-31]. His description is similar to that of the old people of Inas.

market which was separate from, yet tied to the rubber market [Bauer 1948: 121–123, 148–149, 158–159].

Unlike the Stevenson Scheme, coupons under the International Rubber Regulation Agreement were freely transferable within each administrative unit in Malaya, for example, within the Federated Malay States. The wider marketability of coupons naturally tended to push up their price [Barlow 1978: 64]. The Agreement was signed among participating countries in May 1934 and, by autumn of the same year, there was already a brisk trade in coupon dealing [Bauer 1948: 120]. Double earnings from smallholdings and coupons, and the very fact of the marketability of mere pieces of paper must have engendered a bonanza mentality among Malay smallholders. The smallholders were certainly prosperous [*ibid.*: 158–159] but it is this widespread feeling of euphoria which distinguishes the second rubber boom from the first. In Inas, it was reportedly not uncommon for smallholders just to sell coupons and let others “share-tap” rubber whenever coupons fetched high prices. There were even cases where no tapping was carried out because smallholders were already financially content with the high sale of their coupons (AR KP 1936, n.p.). It was indeed an extravagant period, both materially and psychologically.

Let us review some notable changes in the material culture of Inas people after the two rubber booms. For one thing, houses began to be built from timber hewn into square pillars. Occasionally cement foundations were laid under the pillars.

Planks, instead of woven bamboo mats or atap, began to be used for walls and floors.²²⁾ Square pillars and planks were provided by Chinese carpenters, who also built fancy houses for some rich Malays.²³⁾ The architectural style itself underwent a transformation. For example, with the advent of plank walls, windows became more elaborate, being sometimes adorned with balustrades. In some cases, the *serambi* (veranda), which used to be open, was enclosed by the finely fitted plank walls.

Galvanized zinc roofs were introduced during this period. Some front stairs were constructed of cement inlaid with decorative picture tiles. Glass was seldom used for windows but coloured glass was sometimes fitted above the windows for decoration. What is often touted as the traditional Malay house actually began to emerge in rural Negeri Sembilan only after this period.

Items of furniture became more numerous than before: beds, mosquito nets, chairs and coffee tables were introduced.²⁴⁾ Perhaps one of the reasons why the *serambi* was enclosed with plank walls was because chairs and coffee tables began to be placed

22) Planks were still a luxury item at the end of the nineteenth century. Rathborne [1984: 30] observes in Malacca: “Nowadays [in the 1880s] wooden planks are used by the better class of natives for the sides and floors of their houses.”

23) Rathborne [1984: 136] says that sawing planks was the work of Chinese. The Malays used an adze and wedges for making planks.

24) European-style furniture began to be introduced into Malay aristocratic households in Western Malaya much earlier, that is, around the 1870s [Gullick 1958: 129].

there and these had to be protected from sunlight and rain. It seems that much of the wooden furniture was manufactured, at least at the initial stages, by Chinese carpenters in Singapore, Malacca, and elsewhere in imitation of European models.

Chinaware, glassware and brassware became increasingly common among kitchen and cooking wares. Chinese jars and empty tin cans began to replace bamboo tubes and coconut shell as water containers and ladles. As the coconut estates spread over Western Malaya, cooking oil became more readily available. Coupled with the abundant importation of iron pans and flour (and also probably influenced by Chinese or Indian cooking), deep-frying became a common Malay cooking method. A whole host of new commodities—coffee, tea, tinned milk, other tinned foods, kerosine oil, bottled lemonade, matches, soap, cigarettes, and so on—were introduced to rural Negeri Sembilan. Sugar consumption went up, European-style sponge cakes began to compete with indigenous sweetmeats made of rice flour, glutinous rice and brown sugar, and tea time became an enjoyable event.

Colours and fashionable styles of clothing increased in variety as textiles became more readily available and sewing machines were introduced. (European-style wardrobes became popular as the number of clothes in the possession of each individual multiplied.) Velvet *songkok* (black caps worn by Malay men) probably began to be popular at the time as velvet materials became inexpensive and a *songkok* maker could sew *songkok* easily with the help of a

sewing machine. People became markedly more fashion-conscious as their material culture improved. According to an old man near Sri Menanti, village dandies liked to effect a short “London cut” (*gunting London*) hair-style and to wear the shoes with a fat and round point (which “looked like having an egg inside”) in the 1930s. One factor which prompted these changes in material culture was the Malay (and Chinese and Indian) craving for things European. They cultivated a fascination for European material culture, which came to be conceived of as generally superior to theirs. These values were proliferated through movies, *bangsawan* (“Malay opera”), magazines, visits to pekan and towns or the vicarious experiences of their families and fellow villagers who studied or worked with Europeans. A demonstration effect also occurred; those neighbours who acquired prized commodities had higher status.

The agents who supplied these commodities to rural Negeri Sembilan were the Chinese merchants in cities, pekan and village shops. Japanese merchants and shops were also important in this respect. Japanese products in particular became cheap substitutes for European goods in fulfilling the peasants’ dreams of a “modern life style.” Japanese commodities began to make significant inroads into Southeast Asia during the First World War when communication between Asia and Europe was cut off. Imports of Japanese products, famous for their cheap price, accelerated further after the early 1930s [Koh and Tanaka 1984; Shimizu 1988]. The

competitiveness of Japanese goods improved greatly through the merciless rationalization of industrial production during the depression period; Japan's export performance was further helped in late 1931 when Japan abandoned the gold standard, which had only been reverted to in 1930, and let the yen to depreciate against major foreign currencies. Before 1937 when the second anti-Japanese boycotts of the decade began to take effect, Japan's control over some sectors of Malayan imports was indeed substantial (Table 4). According to the reminiscences of old people in Inas, Japanese sundry goods such as textiles, toys and "breakables" (*pecah belah*) were well-known in Kuala Pilah.

Weekly fairs, established at the pekan after the Great Depression by the colonial government, were another important commercial channel.

These [weekly fairs] serve not only as

Table 4 Japan's Share of Malayan Trade in Selected Items, 1935-1936

Item	1935 (%)	1936 (%)
Artificial Silk Piece Goods	90.0	88.1
Canned Sardines	93.9	95.0
Cement	47.1	41.1
Printed Cotton Piece Goods	57.4	59.5
Cotton Underwear	68.4	59.8
Crockery and Porcelain	66.5	62.3
Fancy Goods	91.6	71.4
Glass and Glassware	68.0	66.7
Hollow Ware	73.3	78.6
Household Cotton Goods (Made-up)	69.6	64.0
Rubber Shoes	92.0	92.5
Silk Piece Goods	81.4	76.5
Toys and Games	59.8	61.0
Cycle Tyres	82.5	71.3

Source: Koh and Tanaka [1984: 391, Table 12]

places for the sale by Malays of their home-grown fruit and vegetables and for the purchase by them of such hardware, cloth, crockery, cutlery and the like as they want, but also for the transaction of public business affecting the area served by the fair, such as the issue of rubber-export coupons, the collection of land-rents, examination and adjudication of exhibits of padi and rubber brought in for mukim competitions [i.e., padi, rubber or livestock shows to encourage the improvement] in those products.

These fairs were dominated by "local [Chinese] shopkeepers and hawkers of various nationalities," including "foreign Malays" who set up stalls for songkok and sarong. The existence of weekly fairs is important when we think of the circulation of commodities in rural Negeri Sembilan. "[I]t is not now necessary to pay a visit to the nearest town to purchase goods. These can be obtained as cheaply at the local weekly fair" (AR KP 1934, n.p.; AR KP 1936, n.p.; AR KP 1937, n.p.).

The symbols of newly-found wealth in the 1930s in rural Negeri Sembilan were the three luxury items of the time: bicycles, sewing machines and gramophones. There is an indication that the distribution of these items might have been much wider than one would expect. The Research Division of the Japanese Gunseikanbu in Malaya (Malaya Military Headquarters) conducted a household survey in Kampong Kayu Ara of Mukim Ampang Tinggi and Kampong Tengah of Mukim Sri Menanti,

Kuala Pilah. According to their survey results, about 50% of the 275 households surveyed in the two kampong possessed bicycles, 25% sewing-machines, and 20% gramophones. (Another household item included in the survey was a mosquito net, which, although mostly not in good condition, was owned by about 80% of the households.)

These were the results obtained in 1943. Being under the Japanese military occupation, this was certainly not the most prosperous year in Malaya's history. By this time, a number of people must have already sold off their luxury items such as gramophones to make ends meet. Moreover, it is possible that some people might have lied concerning the possession of luxury items, especially bicycles, lest they be appropriated by the military. Given these possibilities, the above figures are surprisingly high and indicative of the prosperity enjoyed by the Malays of Negeri Sembilan in general in the latter half of the 1920s and especially in the 1930s, despite the economic hardships suffered by the peasantry during the Great Depression.²⁵⁾

What brought this prosperity to Negeri

Sembilan, and probably Western Malaya in general, was rubber. Winstedt [1950: 134-135] once commented:

British science, too, introducing new forms of cultivation, especially rubber that requires no large capital expenditure, brought him [the Malay] the novelty of an income so far above his

households owned smallholdings with an average size of 3 acres 1 rod 38 poles. (This size is slightly larger than that of Inas. See Table 2.) I speculate that the luxury items mentioned here were mostly owned by Malay smallholders. According to the same survey, smallholders and share-tappers in the two kampong enjoyed a relatively high degree of economic prosperity before the war. The average annual income of smallholders with a land area of 5 acres 2 rods amounted to about \$500 in 1940; that of share-tappers was \$156. See Marai Gunseikanbu Chousabu 馬來軍政監部調査部 [Malay Military Headquarters Research Division], Chousabu-hou Dai-Nigou 調査部報第二號 [Research Division Report No. 2], 15 May 1944, and Nanpou Gunseisoukanbu Chousabu 南方軍政總監部調査部 [Southern Military Central Headquarters Research Division], Souchou-shi Dai-Juurokugou 總調査第十六號 (October 1943) Marai Nouson Seikatsu-no Jittai (Chuukan Houkoku) 馬來農村生活ノ實態 (中間報告) [Research Division Material No. 16 (October 1943) Conditions of Life in Malay Village (An Interim Report)]. In comparison with the annual incomes of smallholders and share-tappers, the monthly salaries of teacher trainees and teachers at the Government English School in Kuala Pilah were respectively about \$90 and \$130 in the mid-1920s [Mohamad Yusoff 1983: 122], while European-made bicycles and Japanese-made ones cost about \$60 and \$14 each in 1933 [Koh and Tanaka 1984: 379, Table 5]. Apparently smallholders often made more money than Malay school teachers in the latter half of the 1930s; one old man in Inas told me that he quit being a Malay school teacher because he could make more money from rubber cultivation.

25) The interpretation of these results, however, is a little problematic. The survey involves 44 Chinese and 7 Indian households yet no racial breakdown is given in presenting the survey results. Twenty-two Chinese were vegetable cultivators who had been coolies in "rubber gardens" before the war. Eighteen Chinese and seven Indians worked in "other occupations," including as shop owners, itinerant merchants, lowly officials and coolies; no breakdown of "other occupations" is given. None of the Chinese and Indians owned rubber land, while over fifty percent of the Malay

daily needs that he could build a substantial house and buy cycles and gramophones and cars.

Bauer, who wrote a report on the impact of the International Rubber Regulation Agreement in Malaya, also observed:

Yet Malaya's specialisation in rubber and tin had real advantages. It was agreed by all observers that in the late 1920's the standard of living of all classes in Malaya was far higher than in India, Ceylon or the rice-producing countries of South-east Asia. . . . To quote one authority, Mr. C. A. Vlieland in his *Report on the 1931 Malayan Census* refers to the material benefits which the varied races living in Malay[a] derived from the commercial prosperity of the country. Economically, Malaya was a veritable Eldorado (Vlieland's expression) to the poorest masses of South and South-east Asia. 'So it comes about that there is a continuous stream of immigrants from China, India, Java . . . coming to seek their fortunes in Malaya' The benefits derived by the Malays were reflected in housing and health standards and in material possessions, including occasionally a motor-car. [Bauer 1948: 20]

These comments, especially that of Winstedt, do smack of colonial paternalism. Furthermore, the expansion of rubber smallholding, with the concomitant penetration of the money economy, widened the gap between the "haves" and the "have-

nots" among Malay peasants and made all of them more vulnerable to overseas economic depressions. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the material culture of Malay villagers in Negeri Sembilan improved a great deal within a short span of twenty to thirty years in the early twentieth century. And rubber smallholding, which was actually often discouraged and even discriminated against by the colonial government, was more or less directly responsible for this.

IX Rice and Rubber

William Maxwell once wrote about the Negeri Sembilan Malays of the 1880s in the following way:

A purely agricultural life requires that the cultivator be satisfied with poor fare and that his style of living be simple, modest and economical. As satisfying these conditions the Malays of Negeri Sembilan are an almost an ideal peasantry [sic]. Their methods of cultivation are excellent, they preserve their ancient habits and traditions and they are satisfied with little. In Malacca where Malays are good cultivators and much attached to the fields, cultivation is only one of a man's means of livelihood. The same may be said of the Malays of Province Wellesley, Penang and of some places in the Malay States. (quoted in AR KP 1912, p. 4)

Apparently cultivation here refers to rice cultivation. Rice planting in Negeri

Sembilan, according to more recent commentators, is supposed to have been "hallowed by tradition" [Gullick 1951: 45], and supported by "the moral value of rice cultivation" [Swift 1965: 42] and "the ideology of rice" [Lewis 1976: 78-80].

These observations notwithstanding, the possible adverse effects of money-earning opportunities on rice cultivation were already being noted in the late 1880s: "With the present facility for earning money in other directions, the difficulty will be to keep the people to the regular cultivation of their fields" (NS AR 1889, p. 8). This possibility was already a reality around 1910 when the creation of new rubber estates provided Malays with opportunities for wage labour.

Whilst the failure of the crop in 1911 was, in the main, due to lack of rain and to sickness among the Malay population, there is but little doubt that padi-planting tends to decline in popularity, for such is the demand for labour that the Malay finds that he can earn high wages and afford to buy rice instead of growing it. (NS AR 1911, p. 5)

In fact, the cultivated sawah areas shrank dramatically in Negeri Sembilan in 1911 (see Table 5 on page 150). Yet, the District Officer of Kuala Pilah was still confident in 1912 of the basic disposition of the Malays of Negeri Sembilan towards rice-growing.

Still the Kuala Pilah Malay lives in a style, simple, modest and economical;

. . . The men have no scope to become fishermen; little scope and no inclination to work for wages; they are padi planters first, secondly cultivators of kampong and beyond that nothing, unless one except a very few special callings such as *lembaga* [clan head], *pawang* [village magician], *kathi* [Islamic official], goldsmith, bullock-carter and so on. (AR KP 1912, pp. 4-5)

Likewise the Negri Sembilan Administration Report for the year 1917 still sounded wistfully hopeful about Malay commitment to rice cultivation, although the cultivated sawah acreage in the state remained relatively low in that year (see Table 5).

Padi planting has for generations been the chief industry of Negri Sembilan Malays and (except of late years in the Seremban and Coast Districts) the quantity harvested has always, at any rate in normal years, been sufficient for the settled population. The craze for rubber planting among the Malays certainly led to some falling off in the production, but the process never went very far and the fall in the price of rubber last year and the increase in the price of rice has done much to counteract the tendency to neglect the rice fields. (NS AR 1917, p. 5)

No matter how ideal a peasantry the Malays of Negeri Sembilan may have been in the 1880s, it became increasingly obvious, as the last quotation suggests, that padi planting was adversely affected by high

rubber prices. This oscillating, inverse relationship between rice cultivation and rubber prices had become a well-established pattern by the 1920s. Thus, in 1925 when rubber prices were very high, "The prosperity of the majority of the small holders appears to have had a bad effect generally on the planting of padi, admittedly, hard work and risky" (AR KP 1925, p. 5). Yet, in 1931, "The depression in the price of rubber led to greater keenness in planting up all available [padi] land" (NS AR 1931, p. 8). And, still, several years later, "It is thought that the chief reason for this [existence of uncultivated sawah] was the high price of rubber at the time when planting became due: it cannot be denied that a usual result in this district of a high price of small-holders' rubber is a certain reluctance on the part of sawah-owners to plant their padi-fields." In fact, in the year in question, "The estimated area of sawah left wholly uncultivated was approximately 1[,]550 acres out of a total of nearly 18,000 acres in the whole district [of Kuala Pilah]" (AR KP 1937, n.p.). Here emerges the forerunner of *sawah terbiar* or abandoned rice fields, a serious problem in contemporary Negeri Sembilan.

The colonial government was more than unhappy about this development. They, especially after experiencing difficulty in importing rice during the First World War, tried to discourage Malay rubber smallholding and, instead, encourage rice cultivation [Winstedt 1950: 125-126]. "Since the early 1920's rubber production by smallholders has been strongly discouraged by the authorities in many different ways,

and official pressure was always exercised in favour of food production and against rubber growing" [Bauer 1948: 64]. Government efforts were in no way successful. Some colonial officials were clearly aware of futility of their policies.

The benefits of rubber growing for smallholders are also well understood by Malayan administrators familiar with conditions in smallholdings. . . . These administrators also pointed out that with the pre-war technique (in the absence of mechanisation) padi growing was a most thankless pursuit over most of central and southern Malaya. [*loc. cit.*]

There are several reasons why rubber cultivation was in general preferred to rice cultivation by the Malay villagers [Bauer 1948: 60-62]. First of all, rubber cultivation, as the above quotation suggests, was more lucrative than rice cultivation if productive value per acre was compared in monetary terms. This was true even in 1932 when rubber prices hit the bottom during the Great Depression. Except for the initial stage of planting, rubber cultivation required far less investment for its continuing operation than rice cultivation. Local rubber markets were numerous and competitive; rubber was a more saleable commodity than rice. Rubber tapping was less influenced by weather factors, while rice cultivation was more susceptible to the whims of the weather and other calamities. Moreover, rubber tapping was far easier work than rice cultivation. Thus, Bauer [*ibid.*: 62-63] concludes:

Finally, rubber growing entails much less hard work than padi culture. Instead of toiling in the mud of a wet padi field sometimes for days on end, the Malay rubber-grower rarely had to work more than three or four hours a day, and could take a day or a week off whenever he wished. . . . Rubber tapping is among the least exacting forms of work in tropical agriculture, especially where great care is not demanded.

Given these overriding advantages of rubber against rice, advantages which to some extent were enjoyed by smallholders even during the Great Depression, it is actually surprising that rubber cultivation did not lead to the quick disappearance of rice cultivation. Despite the fact that the relationship between the two crops was like a seesaw whose balance was tipped in either direction by rubber prices, that is, cultivated sawah contracted or recovered according to rubber prices, yet most of sawah *was cultivated* even during the time of high rubber prices.

There are certainly many factors involved in the resilience of rice cultivation: "peasant conservatism," concern with obtaining rice for self-consumption, interest in securing hedges against falling rubber prices, British regulations prohibiting the conversion of sawah to rubber smallholdings, and matrilineal adat with its high regard for sawah as ancestral property. These factors may all have been important in this respect. The fact that there is no ecological competition between sawah and rubber lots also allows a flexible relationship

between the two. Different requirements in work schedules for rice and rubber are another important factor. Rice cultivation imposes a relatively well-regulated work schedule. In particular the timing of land preparation and planting is crucial in rice cultivation. Rubber tapping on the other hand imposes practically no work schedule, as long as it is carried out in the morning. It does not effect the rubber trees adversely if no tapping is done.

But there is another decisive reason for the persistence of rice cultivation. The establishment of the seesaw relationship between rice and rubber was accompanied by an increasing male preoccupation with rubber tapping and their decreasing involvement in rice cultivation. To be sure, the major burden of rice cultivation always seems to have fallen on women more than on men in Negeri Sembilan. For example, the District Officer of Kuala Pilah made the following remark in 1912:

A glaring side-light on social problems was thrown by a Malay whom I questioned on the tendency here of Malay women to follow Chinese, expecting to hear an outburst of racial or religious indignation: 'it is very hard, tuan,' said he, 'for it is the reason why *padi ta'boleh jadi* [padi cannot be successful]!['] Such comment is as genuinely unconscious as the present of a *changkul* [hoe] to a bride! But it shows how the men have so much time and energy to spend on debating tribal offices and tribal customs. (AR KP 1912, p. 3)

According to matrilineal adat, sawah together with houses and kampong (homesteads) generally belong to women; this may partly explain the major role played by women in rice cultivation in Negeri Sembilan.

Even given this long-standing tendency, the spread of rubber cultivation seems to have further provoked men's dissociation from rice cultivation, as evinced by the following comments made in the mid-1910s. "The total [cultivated sawah area in Negeri Sembilan] shows a small increase, but the native Malay population is far too engrossed in planting rubber to take much interest in opening up new sawahs, and the care of the fields is being to an increasing extent left to the women." "Where the [padi] crop was a poor one, the reason was solely and purely neglect. In Juasseh especially the work was left entirely to the women, and the people gave me the impression that they planted in order to escape a prosecution but did not care whether they got padi or not" (NS AR 1916, p. 6; AR KP 1916, p. 6).²⁶⁾

There is an indication that even during the time of low rubber prices men may have

been reluctant to go back to rice cultivation but, instead, looked for other cash-earning activities. Probably referring to the results of the "smallholdings enquiry" which was conducted in Malaya in 1931-1933, Bauer [1948: 59] observes: "During the worst period of the slump the smallholdings were often tapped by the dependants of the owner, who himself went out fishing or woodcutting." If this observation is applicable to Negeri Sembilan, the usual recovery of cultivated sawah areas during the time of low rubber prices was accomplished more by the appropriate mobilization of female labour than by the transference of male labour from rubber tapping to rice cultivation. Particular crucial must have been the sufficient recruitment of female labour in time for land preparation and planting.

What I am suggesting here is this: the spread of rubber smallholding in Negeri Sembilan created not only the seesaw relationship between rubber and rice but also an increasing division of labour by sex, that is, rubber tapping for men and rice cultivation for women. Admittedly, this division was not rigid, as the above quotation indicates. It is known that women (and children) often tapped rubber around the settlements and in times of

26) Another possible indication of male dissociation from rice cultivation is the disappearance of the cattle-driven plough in Inas in the 1920s and 1930s; ploughing was men's work. However, there are stories that the iron-tipped plough was introduced from Malacca to Inas only in the early twentieth century. In general, there are conflicting pieces of information concerning the existence of plough in Negeri Sembilan. For example, Hill [1977: 133] is negative but Rathborne [1984: 54] is positive about it, provided his description refers to Negeri Sembilan. (His reference to ploughing appears after he describes characteristics of Malays who

came to work for him at Gunung Berembun.) A few old people in Inas told me that the wooden plough existed before the arrival of the iron-tipped one. I may add here that sawah in Rembau were prepared by wooden hoes in the 1880s [Hervey 1884: 256], indicating that wooden tools were not unusual but ploughs either wooden or iron-tipped were not common, at least in Rembau, during this time.

a male labour shortage.²⁷⁾ Yet, this division of labour was observable even in the latter half of the 1950s [Lewis 1962; Swift 1965] and in the mid-1960s, and is still discernible today.²⁸⁾

There are several reasons for the male preoccupation with rubber cultivation. Male labour, to begin with, was a determining factor in carving smallholdings out of the forest. Male interest in rubber cultivation was especially strong in Negeri Sembilan because rubber gardens were the most important, and in many ways, the only economic asset that men could own under matrilineal adat; sawah, houses, and homesteads in the village generally belonged

27) Referring to the pre-war situation in Malaya in general, Bauer [1948: 7] says: "The rubber trees in and around the villages [settlements] are often tapped by the wife and children of the smallholder." Rubber was also often tapped by women during the Emergency: "The shortage of tappers on small-holdings continues and much of the work is done by women: the youths and able-bodied men having joined the Security Forces" (NS AR 1949, p. 14). During my research in Inas, I received the impression that share-tapping was common (in recent years?) among women from poor households who were usually divorced or widowed. The widening total acreage of sawah terbiar (abandoned sawah) and the increasing out-migration of the younger generation go hand in hand with this tendency. These women usually combine both rice cultivation and share-tapping.

28) The Third-Quarter Agricultural Report of Negeri Sembilan of 1965 makes the following comment on this point: "What is troublesome (*merunsingkan*) in Negeri Sembilan concerns the condition and cultivation methods of sawah. Sawah are very small and owned by women and mostly worked by women" (my translation from Malay) (see *Penyata Sukutahun Yang Ketiga 1965*, Jabatan Pertanian Negeri, Negeri Sembilan, p. 3).

to women according to adat and in practice. A predominantly large proportion of rubber smallholdings in Malaya were generally located away from the settlements [Bauer 1948: 6], so it was more difficult for women to commute, especially carrying heavy rubber loads on their way back. Bicycles were later introduced into the village as a means of transportation but it was not considered proper for village women to ride them.

The above division of labour by sex is important because it follows the more general and long-standing pattern of the cash economy mainly in the hand of men and the subsistence economy mainly in the hand of women. Even before wage labour on cassava estates and rubber smallholdings became common, the collection of forest products and the rearing of cattle, two of the major cash-generating activities in nineteenth-century Negeri Sembilan, were carried out by men. Rathborne [1984: 54] makes the following observation concerning the Malay division of labour by sex, most probably referring to the situation in Negeri Sembilan in the 1880s.

The women cook, carry water, see to the house, and work in the fields, where a great proportion of the manual labour is done by them. The men, when at home, build and keep their houses in repair, collect rattan from the neighbouring jungle, do all the fencing requisite, make traps for catching fish and game, and seek for forest fruits and edible roots. They attend to the buffaloes and drive them when ploughing, for these animals

are somewhat dangerous to handle, . . .²⁹⁾

The emergence of rubber practically everywhere in Negeri Sembilan amplified this cash-subsistence bifurcation between the sexes. By providing mainly men with a relatively steady and often extremely remunerative source of cash, rubber cultivation must have strengthened men's entrenchment and specialization in the cash economy, while increasingly confining women to the subsistence sector. In this connection it is interesting to observe that daily shopping in Inas is even now mainly carried out by husbands, not by wives.³⁰⁾

One implication of these observations is that the continuing cultivation of sawah in Negeri Sembilan basically hinges on the

combination of women's commitment to rice cultivation and their access to cash. As their access to cash increases, their commitment to rice cultivation probably decreases.

Rubber-tapping husbands did give some cash to their wives. But cash was earned in tapping usually on a daily or a weekly basis; being influenced by market prices the amount earned was not stable; and no cash was earned if it rained or if the husbands felt like spending the morning in a village coffee shop. Husbands may or may not give money to their wives, depending on their whims or on the state of their pockets. Thus rubber-tapping husbands could never be relied upon by their wives as a source of cash. An added factor here were high divorce rates. The prevalence of divorce tied women to rice cultivation, for it served as an economic buffer in case of divorce, not to mention low rubber prices.

As "*makan gaji*" (salaried) occupations have become common among men and, to some extent, among women, as urban and rural migration (the latter mainly to FELDA Schemes) has intensified, as urban-rural remittances have multiplied, and as marriages have become more enduring (changes all noticeable since the New Economic Policy), women have become less and less involved in rice cultivation. Salaries, dependents' allowances for government employees, pensions, and even monthly remittances from children established in the cities are far more reliable sources of cash for women than the earnings of rubber-tapping husbands in bygone days. Two

29) Note that Rathborne qualifies his description of male role with the phrase "when at home." This again suggests that it was not uncommon for men to go away on circular migration at the time. This is the passage which I previously mentioned in which Rathborne refers to ploughing in Negeri Sembilan.

30) The fact that the pekan were and still are far away from the settlements also accounts for this shopping practice. Motorbikes are common nowadays in Inas but it is not yet considered proper for women to ride them alone. In comparison with their counterparts in Minangkabau society of West Sumatra, Negeri Sembilan women had less access to a money economy in the nineteenth century and even in the early twentieth century. It was common in West Sumatra in the latter half of the nineteenth century for women to be active as traders in the local markets. Since the late nineteenth century they were also involved in producing handicrafts such as embroidered goods for the market. The Chinese domination of pekan in Malaya was a major factor in the relative lack of involvement of Negeri Sembilan women and men in commercial activities.

expressions of the increasing female dissociation from rice cultivation are the increasing areas of sawah terbiar and the prevalence of *ibu seri rumah* ("fulltime" housewives) among married women in Inas.

X Diminishing Forest and Agricultural Rituals

Rice cultivation in Inas used to be associated with a series of ritual activities [Lewis 1962; Kato 1988]. There were two types of agricultural rituals in Inas: community-wide rituals which involved the participation of the entire luhak (adat district), and household-based rituals which were carried out separately by each household. The beginning, middle (pre-harvest period) and end of a rice cultivation cycle were demarcated by community-wide rituals. Household rituals were performed in association with such activities as sowing seeds in a seed-bed or transplanting seedlings. These rituals enhanced communal solidarity and at the same time made rice cultivation more than simply a means of livelihood.

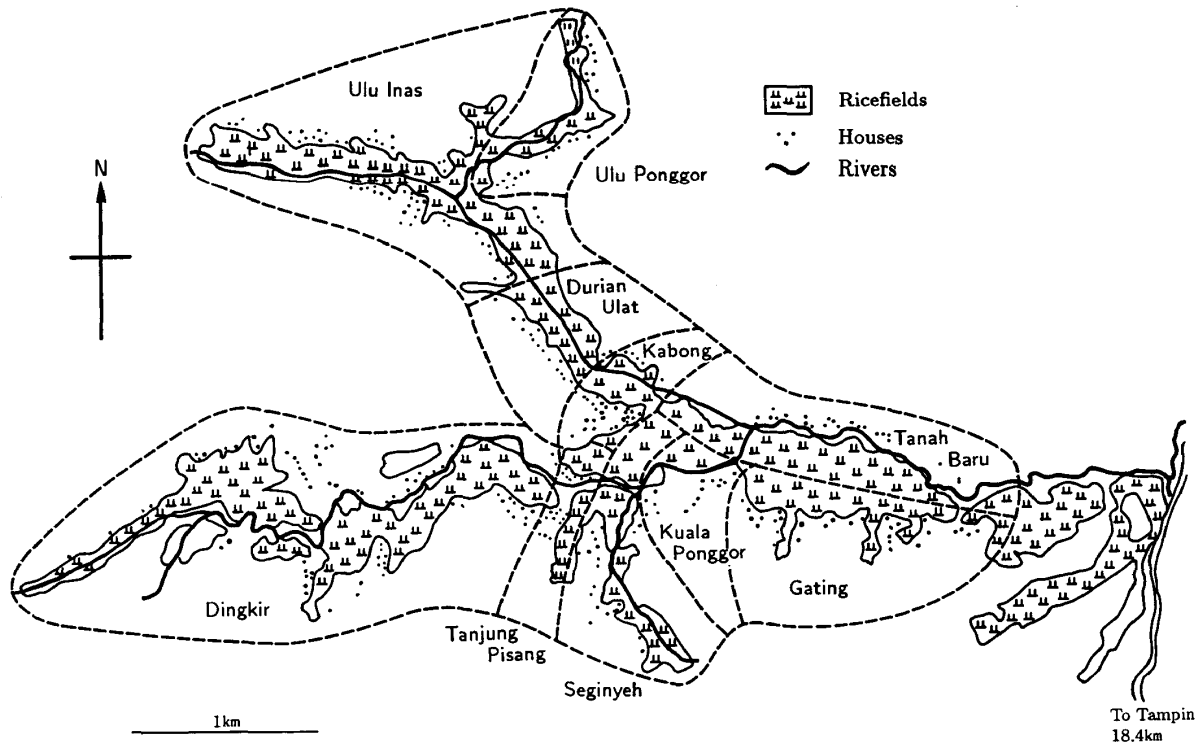
Through agricultural rituals, the villagers tried to negotiate good relationship between humans and the forest spirits. Spirits, which might be harmful to rice and humans, also resided in sawah but they were believed to have come from the forest via the waterways. One function of the agricultural rituals at the beginning of the rice cultivation cycle, which usually took place at the headwaters, was to expell evil spirits downstream. A special spirit that medi-

ated the relationship between humans and rice was *semangat padi* or the rice spirit. If the relationship was well maintained through the proper performance of agricultural rituals, the *semangat padi* stayed with humans and produced a good harvest. If not, she (*semangat padi*) fled and as a consequence humans suffered from a poor harvest.

According to some old people in Inas, agricultural rituals, especially the community-wide rituals, began to disappear in the late 1930s, precisely the period when rubber cultivation assumed a decisively important economic role in Inas. A similar observation was also reported from Seremban in the same period: "In days gone by padi-planting was attended by various ceremonies at the different stages. This ritual has to some extent now been abandoned, but the old methods of husbandry still persist" (AR SB 1937, pp. 3-4).

Soon after the 1930s came the Japanese occupation and the Emergency; and in neither period was the social situation conducive to the survival or revival of elaborate agricultural rituals. There are signs that some of the household-based rituals survived until the late 1950s [Lewis 1962: 305-311]. Yet the introduction of new rice varieties in the mid-1960s rendered even these rituals less meaningful. As one elder told me, these new varieties, which have not been handed down from earlier generations, do not have any *semangat padi*.

One reason for the disappearance of community-wide rituals was men's decreasing involvement in rice cultivation. Unlike



Map 3 Inas (ca. 1958)

Source: Lewis [1962: 24]

household-based rituals which were mainly performed by women, community-wide rituals were generally organized and carried out by men. As men became more involved in rubber cultivation, they must have lost interest in organizing agricultural rituals as well as participating in rice cultivation itself.

Mounting Islamic opposition was another important factor here. Opposition to agricultural rituals began to appear among Islamic teachers as early as the late nineteenth century [Blagden 1896: 11]. As already mentioned, rubber cultivation most likely contributed to the enhancement of Islamic consciousness among the Malays. Accordingly, Islamic teachers were increasingly vocal through the 1920s and 1930s in their opposition to agricultural rituals,

which incorporated the pre-Islamic belief system and were supervised by the pawang (village magician) [Abdullah 1927: 310; Gullick 1987: 130, 321–323].

As can be understood from the above description of community-wide rituals, one element central to the Malay belief system as well as to the agricultural rituals was the forest. Schematically speaking, the Malay settlements in Negeri Sembilan developed along the valleys. Wet lands near the river on the valley floor were turned into sawah, while natural levees became home-steads (for the example of Inas, see Map 3). On the lower valley slopes were planted fruit trees, dry padi, and, in the late nineteenth century, sometimes coffee and other cash crops (cf., Hill [1977: 130, 138]). This “artificial space,” a precarious token

of human settlement, was a mere island in the vast sea of forest. The forest in the Malay belief system was not simply a collection of huge trees. It was inhabited by good as well as evil spirits; it was feared and awed; it was considered to be a source of potent power. Consequently, human contact with the forest, whether in the form of felling trees or collecting forest products, always required a ritual mediation.

The above situation began to change as rubber cultivation spread in Negeri Sembilan. Vast tracts of forest were cut down. Before the Chinese started making planks out of the felled trees, probably around the 1900s at the earliest, they were simply burned after they had been left dry. Rathborne [1984: 72] describes such a scene when he opened a coffee estate in Gunung Berembun in the 1880s:

It is a glorious sight to see the whole hillside ablaze, and the fire and sparks leaping up, whilst listening to the roar and crackle of the flames; and for days afterwards the embers glow and simmer.

To call it a glorious sight is a white man's reaction. One could only guess what the Malays must have felt, seeing the once awe-inspiring and seemingly invincible forest being mercilessly cut down and then unceremoniously set afire, which were all accomplished without apparent retributions.

One estimate puts the total sawah areas in Negeri Sembilan in 1891 at about 19,423 acres [Hill 1977: 127]. For argument's sake let us say that before the introduction of cassava and rubber, that is,

in the early 1870s, the ratio between sawah and non-sawah agricultural lands in Negeri Sembilan was one to one. If we use the 1891 figure for sawah areas as our baseline, this would mean that at most the entire agricultural land, inclusive of sawah, in Negeri Sembilan in the early 1870s amounted to 40,000 acres. This constituted roughly 2.5% of the total land area in Negeri Sembilan.³¹⁾ Even including settlements, towns, mining areas and grazing grounds for cattle, one can see from this calculation that practically the whole of Negeri Sembilan was covered by forest before the introduction of cassava and rubber.

In comparison, Table 5 shows how rapid was the onslaught of rubber against the forest in Negeri Sembilan. By 1939 about

Table 5 Rubber and Sawah Areas in Negeri Sembilan

	(in acres)	
	Rubber	Sawah
1903	6,188	31,120
1906	15,103	32,475
1909	40,883	33,954
1911	189,409	17,440
1917	220,000	26,400
1929	341,848	33,187
1939	396,065	34,730

Sources: Peletz [1988: 140]; NS AR (1911, 4, ix); NS AR (1917, 3); NS AR (1929, 15); NS AR (1939, 4)

31) In 1939 the ratio between sawah and non-sawah agricultural areas excluding rubber lots was 10 to 6.4. Thus, the assumption of a one to one ratio is considerably higher than this figure. The total land areas, inclusive of agricultural areas and forests, in Negeri Sembilan amounted to about 1,632,000 acres in 1939 (NS AR 1939, p. 4). This is the figure used for the above calculation.

a quarter of the land area of the state was under cultivation and 87% of the cultivated areas were planted with rubber (NS AR 1939, p. 4).³²⁾ Furthermore, the expansion of rubber cultivation was accompanied by the development of transportation systems. Thus forests were not only cut down for rubber but were also scarred by roads and railways.

The location of rubber smallholdings vis-a-vis the village also had important implications for the diminishing forest. Smallholdings were generally located along the slopes of the valley. In general, they literally surrounded homesteads and sawah, that is, the "artificial space" in the sea of forest. Rubber smallholdings became a wedge between humans and the forest. As rubber cultivation expanded, the gap opened by the wedge widened. Significantly, rubber plots are considered by Malays to be ritually neutral zones. Villagers perform a special ritual when clearing the forest. However, once the cleared lot is planted with rubber, no more rituals will be held there even when the rubber trees are cut down for replanting. Thus the expansion of smallholdings meant the expansion of the ritually neutral zone between humans and sawah on one hand, and the forest on the other.

Aside from their ecological impact, one

32) Before the introduction of rubber, the invasion of the forest by cassava was already substantial. It is estimated that over 100,000 acres of land in Negeri Sembilan were occupied by cassava estates by the turn of the century, most of them already planted with cassava [Jackson 1968: 68]. Abandoned cassava estates were eventually turned into rubber estates.

possible implication of these changes was the Malay's increasing reluctance to believe in the efficacy of agricultural rituals and in the potency of the forest and forest spirits in general. The spiritual as well as ecological environment of the villagers began to change significantly.

Whatever the reasons behind the disappearance of agricultural rituals, it meant for people of Inas a decline in the cultural meaning of rice cultivation. Stripped of its sociocultural significance, rice cultivation ceased to be a way of life and instead became a means of livelihood.

Anatomy of Malay Smallholding and Rubber Tapping

Throughout this paper I have used the term "cultivation" in relation to Malay rubber smallholdings. Yet the term "cultivation" is most inappropriate for this purpose. To understand why this is the case is to come to grips with the nature of Malay rubber smallholding and its wider social implications.

"Cultivation" among Malay rubber smallholders was generally limited to the initial stage of opening a lot, that is, cutting down forest trees, burning them after they had dried, clearing the ground and planting seedlings. After this, usually minimum attention was paid to the lot until the trees started bearing, generally within six years of planting. Once the trees reached the bearing stage, tapping was more or less the only activity undertaken by the Malays. Thus, tapping, not cultivation, is a more appropriate description of Malay behaviour

in the context of rubber.

The lack of cultivation efforts was reflected in the phenomenon of self-sown seedlings which were usually left to grow on Malay smallholdings.³³⁾ Another manifestation of the same tendency was observed in the question of replanting. (Replanting of smallholdings, especially Malay smallholdings, became a real issue only after the Second World War. Trees in smallholdings were not yet old enough before this time.) The Annual Report of 1964 by the Negeri Sembilan Agricultural Department points out the "old age" of rubber trees in the state: "Malay smallholdings are in a bewildering state. Most of their trees are already old and very unproductive" (my translation from Malay).³⁴⁾ Yet, systematic replanting was seldom carried out by the Malays. Instead, self-sown seedlings oftentimes functioned as "automatic replanting."

It should be pointed out that socioeconomic factors were important in the question of replanting. Malays seldom possessed adequate capital to finance replanting. Clearing the lot, planting it with seedlings, and, above all, enriching the soil of the old rubber lot with fertilizer all required a substantial investment. Even if a smallholder managed to replant his

rubber lot, he then had to forgo the income from rubber tapping until the trees reached the bearing stage, that is, for about six years. One way of overcoming this problem was to replant a holding by sections but this was usually not practicable because of the small size of Malay lots.³⁵⁾ Joint ownership through inheritance was not unusual among Malay smallholders. This presented another problem because it was not easy for the joint owners to reach a consensus about replanting [Bauer 1948: 173-175; Barlow 1978: 233-234].

In addition to these socioeconomic factors, there may have been another factor involved in the lack of replanting activities among Malay smallholders. *Hevea brasiliensis*, which originally grew wild in the Brazilian forest, was accepted by Malays more as a forest tree than as a cultivated crop. The characteristics of *Hevea brasiliensis* were instrumental in promoting this kind of acceptance. This point should become clear when we compare rubber with other cash crops such as sugar cane, tobacco and coffee.

The above-mentioned cash crops demand more or less regular care and cultivation efforts, for example, weeding, replanting after some interval, and processing the yield. In contrast, *Hevea brasiliensis* is

33) According to Bauer [1948: 103], this was common throughout the East and especially so in the Netherlands East Indies. It is possible that self-sown seedlings were better controlled in Malaya than in the Netherlands East Indies, as was generally the case with various other aspects of smallholdings.

34) See *Penyata Tahunan bagi Tahun 1964*, Jabatan Pertanian Negeri, Negeri Sembilan, p. 2.

35) Another solution to the same problem was to open a new smallholding instead of replanting the old one. The cash outlay for smallholders was smaller for new planting than for replanting. In this way the smallholder could also continue to draw income by tapping the old lot until the new one started producing. However, this option was not easily available to Malays during the colonial period due to the government restrictions against new alienation after 1922.

a very easy plant to deal with. Cultivation requirements are minimal after the trees have been planted and especially after they reach maturity. Yet the rubber trees can produce, with little care, for twenty-five to thirty years or even longer. Trees or the latex they contain do not suffer damage even if the trees are neglected.³⁶⁾ Processing of the yield is not difficult and the product, rubber sheet, does not spoil.

Once planted, rubber trees are always there to be tapped, just as forest products are always there somewhere in the forest to be extracted. Moreover, rubber trees, just like forest products, or perhaps even more so than forest products, scarcely impose their biological rhythm on humans. One can tap them or extract them more or less whenever one wants to. The initiative and timing of work are dictated not by plants but by human need, will and whim. In this sense, the tapping of rubber must have easily fitted the pre-existing Malay work habits of extracting forest products.

I previously quoted the following comment made by Bauer [1948: 63]: "Rubber tapping is among the least exacting forms of work in tropical agriculture, especially where great care is not demanded." Yet rubber tapping is also among the least enjoyable works in tropical agriculture. No cooperative work is involved in rubber tapping, nor is any ritual festivity associated

with it. It is a lonely operation carried out in an enclosed atmosphere. While tapping, one can see only rows and rows of rubber trees and nothing else. The pleasure of witnessing a plant grow is alien to rubber tapping. Unlike the act of looking for forest products, no sense of adventure, mystery, anxiety, joyful discovery or even disappointment of non-discovery is involved in it.

Malays usually tap about 300 to 350 trees within a few hours. One makes a round of trees, cuts incisions, puts a receptacle for latex at its proper place, and then, after one round is over, makes another round of the same trees, this time emptying the latex into a pail.³⁷⁾ Rubber tapping consists of the repetition of the same routine day in and day out. Latex thus collected is useless by itself. Practically no self-consumption is possible, nor can it be consumed even locally. Thus rubber tapping is labour to be endured purely for money-making. If rubber is a cash crop par excellence, rubber tapping is a monetary pursuit par excellence. Considering the pragmatic, matter-of-fact nature of the activities involved, it is perhaps not surprising that no ritual is associated with rubber tapping or rubber cultivation.

Rubber tapping can also be contrasted

36) Neglect actually can be beneficial to the trees as it gives them a resting period. I was often told in Inas that the latex yield after the Second World War was very good because trees were not tapped at all during the Japanese occupation due to the lack of a market.

37) In recent years, the second round is generally omitted to simplify the procedure; the collection of latex (scrap rubber) is postponed until the following morning when tappers make a fresh round of the trees to cut new incisions. They can in this way kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. The latex in the receptacle will be diluted if it rains in the afternoon but the tappers nowadays are willing to take this risk.

in many ways with rice cultivation. (Of course, some of the contrasts between rubber and other cash crops apply here too.) There is practically no season for tapping; it can be carried out all year round. If one needs and wants to do so, one can even tap trees every day unless it rains. (It is not practical to tap on rainy days because the latex will not run along the incision to the receptacle.) Or conversely, one may not tap at all, even for months on end, if rubber prices are low or simply if one does not feel like tapping. Better still, the resumption of tapping after a long rest involves no preparatory work, except perhaps for clearing some of the undergrowth between the trees in the neglected lot. This switch-on-switch-off characteristic of rubber tapping gives it a free and easy quality. The fruits of the tapping endeavour can be exchanged with money in a short interval, even daily. Rubber is like a deposit made in trees which can be drawn up at will. It may be likened to a "savings account on roots."

In contrast to rubber, indigenous varieties of rice are harvested only once a year. Consequently, rice cultivation requires economic planning at least on a one-year basis in order to sustain the cultivator from one harvest to another. Rice cultivation also imposes a certain regimentation in work and time schedules according to the growth stages of the rice. These characteristics lead to the general observation in rice-growing societies that household-based festivities, such as wedding ceremonies, are better put off until the harvest is over.

As Geertz [1968] points out in outlining

the concept of agricultural involution, there is generally a positive relationship between the amount of work put into rice cultivation and the amount of rice harvested. There is no such relationship in rubber tapping. A greater amount of effort in tapping does produce a greater amount of latex collected. Unlike rice, however, latex is useless unless it is exchanged for money. It is not infrequent that the amount of money earned depends more on the market price of rubber than on the input level of human endeavour. The disjunction between effort spent and money earned is magnified because of frequent and widely oscillating fluctuations in rubber prices.

In sum, the above characteristics of rubber cultivation and smallholding patterns greatly influence the economic behaviour of the Malay villagers involved in rubber tapping. For example, the idea of rubber as a forest product and the disjunction between physical endeavour and monetary gain are not conducive to replanting efforts. The disjunction between endeavour and money and the unattractive nature as well as the ease of stopping and starting rubber tapping are not in any way supportive of an "ethic of hard work." Furthermore, these factors, as well as the half-day work schedule, are not likely to lead to specialization in rubber tapping as a profession; these characteristics are more congenial to the practice of combining diverse economic pursuits commonly observed among the Malays in the pre-rubber period [Barlow 1978: 225]. As one official of the Farmers' Cooperative of Pekan Johol, himself a Malay, commented somewhat critically to

me, the Malays of Negeri Sembilan like to have "*kerja rojak*" or a combination of various economic pursuits. (Rojak is a dish of mixed fruit or vegetables eaten with sauce.) Rubber tapping exactly fits this bill. Money earned through tapping is unlikely to be saved, for extra money can always be earned at any time through further tapping, that is, tapping the "savings account on roots."

What I have described so far actually applies to more or less any rubber smallholding, be it Malay, Chinese or Indian. Yet, Chinese smallholders, for instance, are reportedly very different from Malay smallholders in their economic behaviour. According to a Malay official of MARDEC (Malaysian Rubber Development Corporation) in Kuala Pilah, the Chinese, in comparison to Malay smallholders and tappers, are generally better caretakers of the rubber trees and lots, more receptive to the idea of replanting, more specialized in tapping regardless of rubber prices, and more concerned with adjusting the forms of the rubber product, that is, latex, sheet or scrap, depending on their respective current market prices.

There must be many factors to explain the above difference but let me single out one factor which partly accounts for the divergent economic behaviour between Malay and Chinese smallholders. Chinese smallholders more or less entirely depend on rubber tapping for a living but Malays do not. Often barred or discouraged from rice cultivation by government regulations, Chinese smallholders seldom have had recourse to any other means of livelihood

than tapping, save perhaps the cultivation of vegetable gardens. Thus, they are motivated, no matter whether rubber prices might be low or high, to maintain the production capability of rubber trees at a high level and at the same time to tap as much latex as possible within a permissible range. In contrast, Malay smallholders are motivated to take advantage of high rubber prices and, at the time of low prices, to diversify their economic pursuits. In other words, for Chinese smallholders rubber is more of a cultivated crop; for Malays, a forest product.

The economic flexibility of Malay smallholders is their strength as well as their weakness. Partly helped by the declining cost of living, it enabled them to survive even the Great Depression.

When the present writer visited Malaya in 1946 many smallholders were asked how they had managed to make a living during the great depression of the early thirties when the Singapore price of rubber at one time declined below 5 Straits cents ($1\frac{1}{2}d.$) per lb. The answer was generally that as the cost of living, especially the price of rice, had been very low at that time, it had been possible to make ends meet, though in some instances it had been necessary to rely to a greater extent than before on other activities such as fishing or hawking, or the production of *rattan* to supplement the income from rubber. But among smallholders, as distinct from unemployed or underemployed labourers, there was apparently little hardship even in 1931-1932. [Bauer 1948: 64]

Yet, this very flexibility keeps them in a limbo world, neither as peasants nor agricultural entrepreneurs. Malay smallholders, and probably share-tappers too, in Negeri Sembilan were seemingly not as poor as the rice-growing Malay peasants in Kedah or Kelantan. They occasionally became rich when rubber prices were high. Yet they mostly failed to sustain their wealth whenever rubber prices started to plunge. Variations of this story are not altogether unheard-of, even today.

By developing the arguments in this paper, it was not my intention to propagate rubber tapping's deterministic influence upon Malay economic behaviour. Nor was it my objective to resurrect the colonial "myth of the lazy native" (concerning a critical comment on the myth of the lazy native, see Alatas [1977]). I am well aware of the argument that Malay economic behaviour contains selective strategies adopted by peasants who had to undergo the transition to a money economy under colonial rule and whose life was increasingly subjected to politico-economic changes beyond their control. However, I maintain that no matter how one might approach the economic behaviour of Malay peasants-cum-tappers, there is no denying a close interconnection between characteristics of rubber as a crop and as a commodity, smallholding as an ownership pattern and as an operational pattern, and tapping as economic behaviour, which was largely defined within given socio-political and historical environments of colonial Malaya. Significantly this interconnection is still very real today even after Malaysia's

independence. It is this realization which, in my opinion, has to be borne in mind when we think of rural development projects in contemporary Malaysia.

Despite the increasing importance of oil palm, rubber still cuts a dominant profile in Malay rural economy and many government development projects are concentrated in this sector. The outcome of these projects is bound to be influenced by what I called here the "anatomy of Malay smallholding and rubber tapping." It is the aim of this paper to demonstrate that the sociology and social psychology of rubber, along with its economics, politics and agronomy, are most helpful in better understanding and perhaps better planning the development processes of contemporary rural Malaysia.

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Bibliography

Abbreviations

- JMBRAS*: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malayan Branch*
JSBRAS: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Straits Branch*
 NSSF: Negri Sembilan Secretariat Files
 NS AR: Negri Sembilan Administration Report
 AR JB: Annual Report Jelebu

- AR KP: Annual Report Kuala Pilah
 AR SB: Annual Report Seremban
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