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**THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF THE KERINCHI AND RAWA COMMUNITIES
IN KUALA LUMPUR DURING THE 19TH CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

The Kerinchi and Rawa communities had been present in Malaya long before its independence. The bilateral relationship between several Sumatran Sultanate and their counterparts in Malaya had existed as early as the Malacca Sultanate. In accordance to that, this paperwork will discuss the history of the presence of the Kerinchi and Rawa communities in Kuala Lumpur and the roles they played in the economic aspects during the mid- 19th century. The British Colonial Policy at that time encouraged and welcomed the Kerinchis and Rawas to Malaya to assist in the economic growth especially in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, the focus of the roles of the Kerichi and Rawa communities is in the economic aspects that could be traced since the opening of Kuala Lumpur. Those roles were more conspicuous during the British Colonial era. Among the significant roles were in the agriculture, livestock trading and subsistence economy practiced by them.

Keywords: Kuala Lumpur, Kerinchi community , Rawa community ,
economy, livestock trading

Introduction

Malaysia and Indonesia are affiliated since the time of Malacca Sultanate. However, in the beginning the bonds were made out of political allegiance.¹ The Malacca Government conquered Riau-Lingga coast² while Pahang was conquered by the Majapahit Government.³ The bilateral relationship between both countries is strengthened with the passing of time and each country cooperates for each other. Moreover, the geographical landscape between Malaysia and Indonesia are separated by Straits of Malacca. Therefore, the migration of Malay community from Indonesia is nothing new. The Indonesian Malays are determined to find a new place like Tanah Melayu so they could migrate. Since James L. Peacock stated "... Indonesians have migrated northward to found kingdoms and states in Malaya...";⁴ it is not extraordinary that the presence of Malay of Kerinchi and Rawa heritage in Tanah Melayu even before independence. The economic potential and spirit of togetherness in Malay community are successfully integrated by a leader called Dato Dagang who represented every Indonesian tribe in Kuala Lumpur. This kind of relationship brings closer the Malay community who lives overseas.

The Migration of Kerinchi and Rawa Communities to Kuala Lumpur

Raja Abdullah bin Raja Jaafar who was District Chief of Klang founded Kuala Lumpur and developed the tin mining excavation there.⁵ The economic potential of Kuala Lumpur in the 19th century encouraged the migration of Minangkabau, Kerinchi, Mandailing, Aceh and Jambi Malays from Sumatera to Kuala Lumpur.⁶ There was ups and downs that influenced the migration of Kerinchi and Rawa Malays to Kuala Lumpur. The Malay residency which consists of Kerinchi and Rawa tribes has existed along the riverside of Kuala Lumpur.⁷ Meanwhile, the Bugis, Javanese, Rawa, Mandailing Minangkabau, Batu Bara and Kampar Malays were led by Dato Dagang who was the representative of all Malay communities in Kuala Lumpur.⁸

There were many advantages and disadvantages in the migration of Malay community from Indonesia to Kuala Lumpur in the 19th century. One of the advantages for the migration was the significance of Malaysia and Indonesia as neighbouring countries. Besides, the similarities in religion, culture and language made it easier for assimilation. According to Ahmad Nizar Yaakub on the migration of Malay community from Indonesia to Kuala Lumpur, he stated "...basic similarities in culture, language and religion have made the inter-migration and assimilation process relatively simple...".⁹

In addition, another advantage for the migration was the aftermath of the British meddling in Selangor. The British encouraged the migration of Indonesian especially in the late 19th century. Ahmad Nizar Yaakub mentioned "...In terms of pull factors, the British actually encouraged the migration of Indonesians to the British colonies in the late 19th century...".¹⁰ The land discovered by the traders and merchants were promoted by British so that it could turn into a new village. Also, the British supported lands occupation by facilitating lands possession in Selangor.¹¹ The British provided incentive like tax payment alleviation to encourage land occupation.¹² Besides conquering new location, the British needed the migrants to work in agricultural sector.¹³

However, one of the disadvantages for the Indonesians to migrate to Malaya was because of the economic pressure from the Dutch colony. The Dutch implemented commercial estate to enhance the economy. The locals were enforced in coffee and tobacco plantation to export for Europe market. The Dutch's urge to exploit the economy caused misfortune for the locals as they were deserted and they protested.¹⁴ The foundation implemented by the Dutch affected the Indonesians and discouraged them to settle in Malaya.¹⁵ The location of Singapore and West

Malaysia which is close to Indonesia becomes their choice to migrate and change their destiny abroad.¹⁶ The pressure to survive decided the people in Sumatera Island to settle in a new location.¹⁷

Furthermore, during that time the economic opportunity was huge and improving in Malaya thus attracting the Indonesians to migrate there. Also, the strategic location of Kuala Lumpur appealed to the migrants as to not miss the opportunity to settle there. Several job opportunities became the contributing factor for the migrants to settle in Kuala Lumpur. Many job openings were demanding miners in the tin mining excavation and agriculture sector.¹⁸ Yap Ah Loy who was the third capitan in Kuala Lumpur encouraged the migration too. The Malay community nurtured the paddy cultivation in Kuala Lumpur area to provide sustenance for the miners in the city.¹⁹ Consequently, job prospect was one of the attractions for the migrants to migrate to Kuala Lumpur as it is one of the ways to facilitate their economic status and lifestyle.

Additionally, the Malays were fond of travelling and trading. The process of migration was easy for them because of their interest towards travel and trade as part of their culture.²⁰ Simultaneously, going on expeditions and trading sales increased their share of profit as well as gaining new experience. In this context, the culture of travelling was common for the Malays and became their drive to migrate to Kuala Lumpur especially among the Kerinchi and Rawa Malays. However, this culture also prevented them from migration. Nevertheless, there were many appealing dimension from politic, economic and social aspect that supported the migration.

Economic Industry of Kerinchi Community in Kuala Lumpur

There were many economic industries of Kerinchi community in Kuala Lumpur and one of them was their involvement in animal farming division. The increasing growth of Kuala Lumpur citizen induced the sales in meat market. Since there was not a lot of meat market available during that time, the Kerinchi migrants thought that they could increase the potential of animal farming in Kuala Lumpur. As a consequence, they decided to participate in animal farming as the demand was high and the lush profit that would come out of it.

The first step that the Kerinchi people took was to buy buffalos from Pahang. Abdullah Hukum who was the representative of Kerinchi people shared his budget with his two friends to begin animal farming in Kuala Lumpur. Since they only had \$600, they had to divide \$200 per person and went to Pahang to buy some buffalos. As a result, they bought 8 buffalos in Kampung Liri Bentong, Pahang to sell in Kuala Lumpur. They bought one buffalo each at \$20 and sold it to the customer at \$40.²¹ It showed that the sales from farm animal such as buffalo multiplied their income and they resolved to expand their business in this sector.

Next, they continued their business in Kuala Lumpur since farm animal sales were profitable and they could get the farm animal from Pahang at a low cost. The Kerinchi people decided to restock the buffalos at Lubok Terua in Pahang for the second time. The price was much cheaper in Lubok Terua than in Liri Bentong. The cost of a buffalo was only \$15.²² Since they got their stocks at a much cheaper price than before, their profit increased. However, the cost to deliver one buffalo was two ringgits and the procedure was done by people in Pahang.²³ Nevertheless, the animal farming business was returning huge profits for the Kerinchi people and made them travelled to Benta, Pulau Rusa and Tanjung Medang, Pekan in Pahang to purchase more livestock. They successfully secured 45 buffalos and 30 cows to sell in Kuala Lumpur market. The cost for of one buffalo was \$16 while an albino buffalo was \$14 each.²⁴

Furthermore, the Kerinchi people were not only involved in farm animal commercial; they also contributed in agriculture for personal support. They have been contributing in agriculture

sector in Kuala Lumpur since the 19th century. Sutan Puasa hired the Kerinchi people to build irrigation in Kuala Lumpur. This irrigation was important to water the paddy field in Kuala Lumpur.²⁵ The agricultural industry progressed in Kuala Lumpur since Raja Laut sent an approval letter to Haji Abdullah Hukum to open new lands in Pudu. The Kerinchi people worked the land by cultivating vegetables, sugar cane, banana, betel leaf and paddy for self employment.²⁶

Agricultural activities were performed by the Kerinchi Malay community who settled in Bangsar. They carried out coffee and black pepper plantation.²⁷ In 1894, the price of coffee skyrocketed in the market, so the Kerinchi people started to grow coffee. They focused on cultivating crops for coffee as the commodity price increased in the market. The retail price of coffee reached 40 ringgits per sack which brought profit for the citizen involved in the cultivation.²⁸ Meanwhile, the Kerinchi Malays also produced tobacco crops in Kuala Lumpur before engaging other kind of plantation.²⁹

Additionally, the Kerinchi Malays played a role in progressing the tin mining in Kuala Lumpur. A few Kerinchi people from Sumatera worked in this sector in the rural area. Some of them settled in Kuala Lumpur, Cheras and Bangsar and launched new township there.³⁰ This was recorded when Haji Abdullah Hukum execute tin mining by using the "melampun" method in Setapak.³¹ However, the Kerinchi people were not actively involved in tin mining in Kuala Lumpur.

Economic Activities and Role of Rawa Community in Kuala Lumpur

The migration of Rawa community to Tanah Melayu began earlier than the Kerinchi which was 300 years ago. Most of the Rawa people originated from West Sumatera. Their interest in travelling made them migrated to Kepulauan Melayu. The Rawa community did not only become the citizens of Tanah Melayu, they also contributed in economic activities such as business.³² In the 1850s, Java Street and Market Street were not only the main attraction for Mandailing Malay merchants, Rawa community in Kuala Lumpur was attracted to it too.³³ Haji Abdullah Hukum was a merchant who witnessed that many Mandailing Malay and Rawa merchants at Java Street and Market Street. During that time, he was lodging for a while at Haji Abdul Ghani's house at Java Street.³⁴

The Rawa community deemed that Tanah Melayu would be the best destination for them to build up a new place for the people.³⁵ The majority of Rawa Malay community contributed in textile business in Kuala Lumpur at that time. First, they became textile merchants at the shop houses in Kuala Lumpur which were made up of bamboo walls. The Rawa people were opportunistic and grabbed all the chances they got to improve the economy. After a while, they saw the potential in cuisine business, so they began to sell it in Kuala Lumpur.³⁶ They clearly utilized the business opportunity available and as a result, they assisted in improving the economy in Kuala Lumpur.

The Rawa community was also part of tin mining in Kuala Lumpur. Consequently, tin mining was growing especially in Ampang. Tin mining was a source of revenue for the British.³⁷ Therefore, many places were launched for tin mining like Pudu, Sungai Besi and Petaling.³⁸ Job opportunities in tin mining sector in Kuala Lumpur attracted the Rawa community to work for it in Kuala Lumpur. J. M. Gullick mentioned "...There was also smaller but steady flow of Sumatran immigrants – Mandailing, Rawa and Batu Bahara men – who established new trading posts and mines along the rivers of interior..."³⁹

In 1850s, tin mining demanded labour enforcement in Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁰ Job vacancies were dominated with incoming Chinese labours as well as Malays from Sumatera.⁴¹ This was recorded when Gullick mentioned the presence of Malay community from Sumatera with Mandailing, Rawa, Batu Bahara and Bugis heritage worked in Kuala Lumpur for tin mining "...The men of the inland mining villages were probably Sumatran immigrants, Mandailing, Rawa and Batu Bahara men rather than Bugis..."⁴²

The richness of tin mining in Kuala Lumpur attracted the British colonial attention as well as the Rawa. This has been clarified in Gullick's statement "...The mines around Kuala Lumpur were producing five times as much as tin as the whole of Selangor had exported a generation before..."⁴³ As a consequence, the majority of workers involved in mining were Rawa, Mandailing and Minangkabau people. Gullick said "...The two largest Malay groups in the area were Rawa – Mandailing – and Minangkabau, though only the former engaged in mining..."⁴⁴ Likewise, the Malay community also incorporated the lampan method for mining as Gullick specified "...Malay miners used the lampan method which in its simplest form was just "panning" for tin in streams..."⁴⁵ Nonetheless, this method did not bring a lot of tin as a result.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The prosperity in Kuala Lumpur was not only famous for being the centre of tin mining but also the hub for other business such as the meat market, textile, cuisine and agriculture. Those involved in upgrading the Kuala Lumpur economy in the 19th century were not just consist of the existing Malays but also the Kerinchi, Rawa and Chinese who have been there. The presence of Kerinchi and Rawa Malays are significant in enhancing the economy in Kuala Lumpur. They favour business, tin mining, agricultural activities and self-employment. As an impact, the economic activities in Kuala Lumpur now offer a variety of business.

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² Ahmad Nizar Yaakub (2013). *Dances with Garuda Malaysia-Indonesia Bilateral Relations*. Sarawak: UNIMAS Publisher. pp. 108.

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⁶ Azizi Muda (1983). Penghijrahan Penduduk Indonesia ke Semenanjung Malaysia *Malaysia Dari Segi Sejarah*, Vol. 12, Persaman Sejarah Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. pp. 171.

⁷ Khazin Mohd Tamrin, 'PENGHIJRAHAN PENDUDUK DARI INDONESIA KE SELANGOR, KHUSUSNYA ORANG-ORANG JAWA, pp. 213.

⁸ Suleiman, Lokman Mohd. Zen (1999) *Sejarah Kampung Bahru: Di Sini Awal Segalanya Bermula*, pp. 21.

⁹ Ahmad Nizar Yaakub (2013). *Dances with Garuda Malaysia-Indonesia Bilateral Relations*. pp. 108.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 109.

¹¹ Khazin Mohd Tamrin, 'PENGHIJRAHAN PENDUDUK DARI INDONESIA KE SELANGOR, KHUSUSNYA ORANG-ORANG JAWA, pp. 214.

¹² Azizi Muda (1983). Penghijrahan Penduduk Indonesia ke Semenanjung Malaysia, pp. 170.

¹³ Ahmad Nizar Yaakub (2013). *Dances with Garuda Malaysia-Indonesia Bilateral Relations*. pp. 109.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Mashitah Mohamed Tahir, (1999). *Berjajak: Ritual Terpenting Dalam Lingkaran Hidup Masyarakat Rawa*. Kuala Lumpur: Latihan Ilmiah, Universiti Malaya. pp. 19

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- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Adnan Nawang (1997). *Kuala Lumpur Dari Perspektif Haji Abdullah Hukum*. Selangor: Angkatan Edaran Ent. Sdn. Bhd. pp. 35.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid., pp. 36.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp. 42.
- ²⁵ Ibid., pp. 6-7.
- ²⁶ Yusman Ayob (1993). *Salasilah Nama Tempat Negeri Selangor Darul Ehsan*. Selangor: Prisma Sdn. Bhd. pp. 50.
- ²⁷ Ibid., pp. 49.
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- ²⁹ Ibid., pp. 53.
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- ³⁴ Ibid.
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