

NO 14
MALAYA

LONGMAN AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIES



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AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIES

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No. 14

MALAYA

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PUSTAKA PERDANA



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MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE

MALAYA is the geographic name for the southern extremity of a long peninsula that extends more than a thousand miles southwards from the heartland of Southeast Asia, and it includes several offshore islands such as Langkawi and Penang in the north, and Singapore and Tioman in the south. Malaya has always been politically complex, but in 1948 it became one political unit, the Federation of Malaya, which became a fully independent member of the British Commonwealth in 1957. Singapore remained outside as a British Crown Colony until 1959, became virtually self-governing, and thereafter differences of opinion between the two governments

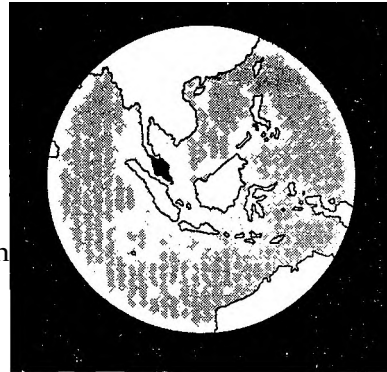


Fig. 1. New government offices in Kuala Lumpur. Independence has led to a great growth in the federal capital and many similar modern buildings have been erected in recent years.

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HUMANITIES CENTRE
CHRISTIAN BROTHERS COLLEGE
WAKEFIELD ST.. ADELAIDE

became more marked. Nevertheless, in September 1963, the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, and the British Borneo territories of Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah) were fused in a new political unit, the Federation of Malaysia. The reasons for these changes are to be found in the complex ethnic and communal problems which were one of the legacies of British rule in Southeast Asia, but the new grouping did not provide a satisfactory solution.

The term Malaysia has been used by some writers to describe the area of Southeast Asia inhabited primarily by peoples of Malay stock, which in addition to the Malayan peninsula, also includes Indonesia and the Philippines. Both of these countries have strongly opposed the new state of Malaysia because they have coveted parts of the Borneo territories for themselves. Indonesia conducted an armed 'confrontation' of Malaysia, but growing economic difficulties obliged it to accept the new state; the Philippines, however, still claims part of Sabah. But the internal strains of Malaysia proved greater than these external pressures, and in August 1966 Singapore separated off as a separate independent state. West Malaysia, as the old Federation of Malaya is now called, is very much larger than Singapore and has more than three times the population; but this is offset by the fact that Singapore is a very wealthy place and the purchasing power at the disposal of its citizens is almost as great as that of West Malaysia.

THE PHYSICAL SETTING

Malaya is about the size of England, or one-sixth of that of New South Wales. Although its highest point, Gunong Tahan in the State of Kelantan, is only a little over 7,000 feet, much of the country is very rugged, and even areas of modest relief tend to have steep slopes. Only a small proportion of the country consists of plains and, unlike in several of the neighbouring Indonesian islands, there are no extensive coastal plains. More important still, the largest areas of plain, including the Kedah plain which extends from Province Wellesley northwards to the Thailand frontier in the northwest, the Kelantan delta of the northeast, and the great plain of the Pahang river in the eastern portion of the country, have few of the activities that make Malaya so important to the world at large. The Pahang basin is a heavily forested and swampy wilderness supporting few people, but with the construction of new roads,

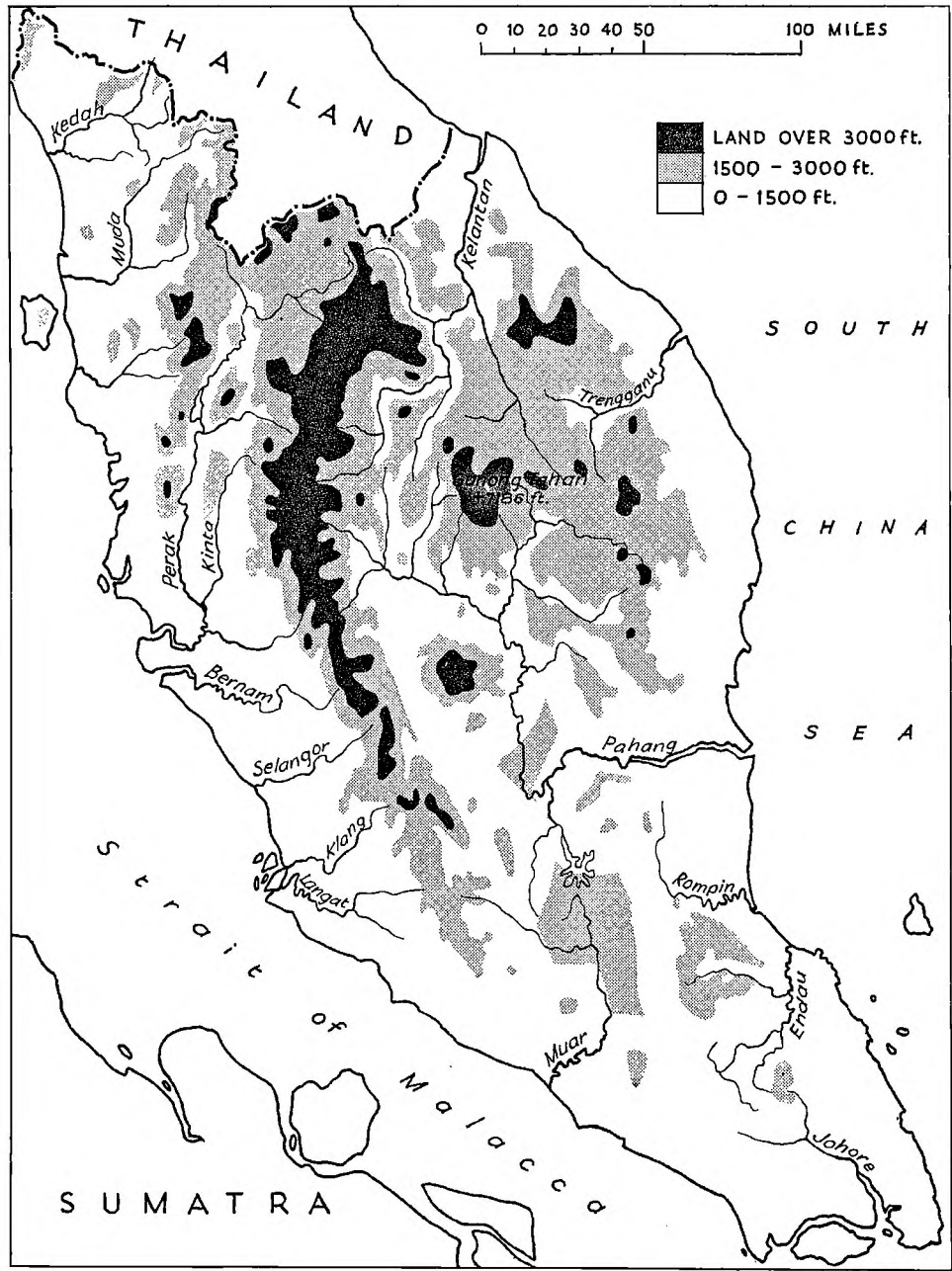


Fig. 2. Physical Features. Note the Main Range and the Basin of the Pahang River.

the land settlement schemes of the Federal Land Development Authority (FLDA) and the discovery of large deposits of iron ore, large areas are being rapidly transformed. Small scattered plains occur along both east and west coasts. Many of these plains are quite densely populated by Malayan standards, but for the most part they too are little concerned with Malaya's most important commercial activities. The reasons for this situation are to be found in the distribution patterns of the main racial groups in Malaya and in their main occupations.

Much of central Malaya is occupied by a series of parallel granite-cored ranges which extend from the frontier of Thailand to the State of Negri Sembilan (literally, the 'nine states'). The most important, which is known as the 'Main Range', lies to the west of the main axis of the peninsula. Its importance, however, is not physical or climatic — it is cultural. Modern Malaya lies west of the Main Range, between the foothills and the swamps that border the low lying coast of the Malacca Straits. East of the Main Range Malaya has been relatively little affected by the development of modern economic activities. Until very recently only two roads crossed the Main Range, both in the central portion of the country, while the eastern branch of the metre gauge Malayan Railway skirted its southern end. As a result of successive development plans, however, this part of the country is changing rapidly. New roads and bridges are breaking down the isolation of the east and are enabling the inhabitants to find new markets for their products. In the so-called Jengka (a tributary of the Pahang) triangle near Temerloh, the FLDA is carrying out a very large land development scheme, in which some 150,000 acres are to be devoted to oil palm, a relatively new crop in Malaya. But these developments are also making people more conscious of their poverty, and are assisting migration to the cities of the west.

CLIMATE

Lying only a few degrees north of the Equator, Malaya has a climate characterised by continuously high temperatures throughout the year, and a heavy precipitation with no definite dry season. Only in the extreme northeastern and northwestern portions of the country is there an approach to a dry season.

Almost the whole of the Malayan peninsula experiences a

rainfall of 80 inches; upland areas receive much more. Yet Malayan skies are clear throughout a large part of the year, because rain falls in violent, torrential downpours. As a result, the rate of erosion is extremely high, and in areas cleared of vegetation by man, great chasms may be cut in only a few years. It is this very high rate of erosion that is responsible for the rugged appearance of much of Malaya's landscapes. A further important result of the character of Malaya's rainfall is that soils are very impoverished; the soluble minerals are leached out (i.e., dissolved and carried downwards) and the soils are said to be 'laterized'. Unlike in several of the Indonesian islands, there are no active volcanoes in Malaya to distribute new supplies of minerals to the soil. The general poverty of the soils of Malaya is a great obstacle to food-producing agriculture.

NATURAL VEGETATION

In the recent past all the country must have been forested, and even now forests cover 70 per cent of the country. But it is only in the remoter eastern portions of the country that the primeval evergreen forest, called by the Malays *utan*, is still to be found. In much of the western portion of the country the original forest has been cleared for rubber cultivation or has become replaced by a more open secondary forest, or *belukar*. Cutting and clearing encourage the growth of the pernicious and useless speargrass, known in Malaya as *lalang*. The forest is in perfect harmony with its physical environment despite the general poverty of the soils, and contains within itself all that is required for its own survival. The best use for the greater part of the land is to leave it under its present forest cover, but considerable improvements in communications will be necessary before the forest wealth can be fully realized.

Along the west coast, mangrove forest occurs wherever conditions are suitable. Mangroves cannot grow where there is a strong tidal scour or heavy surf, and are largely absent on the east coast. These mangrove forests are important for they provide the fuel for the charcoal cooking braziers used in most Malayan houses. However, the mangrove forests have been greatly depleted by reckless cutting, but it is not easy to enforce measures which would make possible a high rate of new growth.



THE MALAYAN PEOPLES

THE INDIGENOUS INHABITANTS

THE hot and humid climate, the thick forest cover that limited communications to the rivers and the general poverty of the soils, have all greatly influenced the geographic distribution and the way of life of the indigenous peoples of Malaya. In the remote forests are found the aboriginal peoples, who number perhaps fifty thousand. They are sometimes known as *Sakai*, but there are several aboriginal groups and the use of this term is incorrect; moreover in the Malay language this word implies an inferior person. The aborigines are of negligible importance in the economic life of the country, for they practise a subsistence kind of agriculture known as 'shifting cultivation', in which there are no permanent fields but merely temporary clearings in the forest.

The largest racial group in West Malaysia is that of the *Malays*, who numbered some 3.8 millions out of a total population of 7.7 millions in 1963. The Malays regard themselves as the indigenous (i.e. original) inhabitants of the country; they are short, dark-brown people with broad faces, in appearance quite different from the Indians, who are also an important community in Malaya. They resemble closely the peoples of Indonesia (particularly those of the neighbouring island of Sumatra), have a very similar language and, like most Indonesians, are Muslims. The Malays are traditionally rice farmers, coconut growers and fishermen, residing in the lower navigable river valleys and along the coasts. As the valleys were originally separated by broad stretches of impenetrable forest, the various groups of Malay peoples owed allegiance to their local rulers, or Sultans; the idea of national unity is a very modern one.

The great concentrations of Malays are found in the plains of the east, northeast and northwest of the country. In the States of Trengganu, Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis the Malays are in an overwhelming majority. The Malays are mainly rural dwellers; although Malay migration to the towns and particularly to large cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh and Seremban is proceeding very rapidly. In the urban areas Malays are very much in the minority, and are usually employed in very menial occupa-

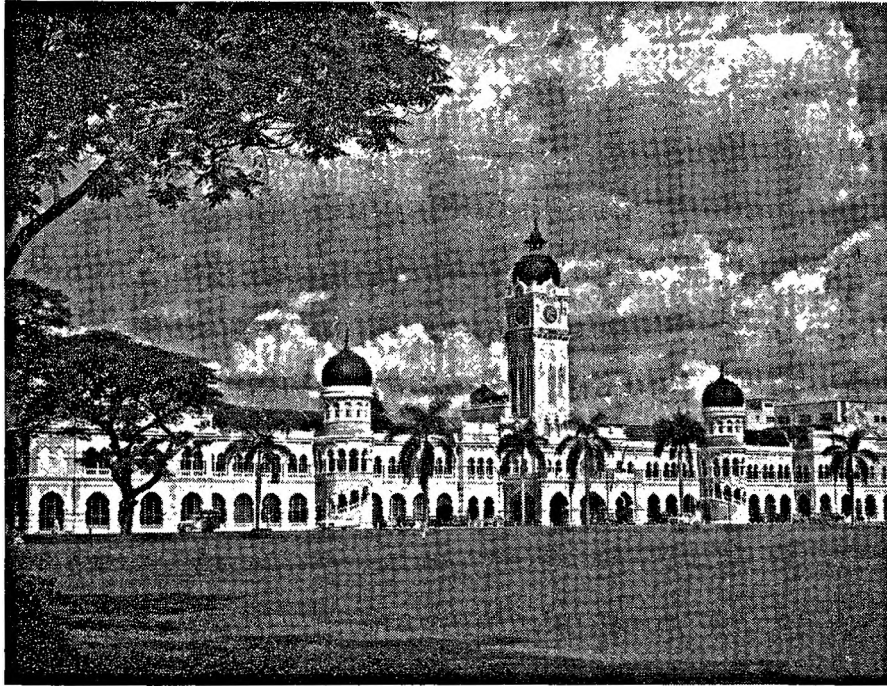


Fig. 3. The Selangor Secretariat, built in the traditional Moslem architectural style, at Kuala Lumpur.

tions; nevertheless, very many senior positions in government service are in effect reserved for Malays, so that almost all towns of any size contain a sprinkling of educated and well-to-do Malays. The government, which largely depends on the Malay rural voter, has adopted this policy in order to build up a Malay middle-class, and to break down the still largely feudal structure of Malay society.

The traditional Malay way of life is best seen in the villages of the east coast, where the population carries on a subsistence type of economy, largely unaffected by the great changes that have occurred in western Malaya. The kampongs (villages), with their houses built on stilts, are often situated on old beach lines or *permatangs*, the lower ground being occupied by padi. The houses have roofs constructed from the leaves of the nipah palm and are surrounded by vegetable and fruit gardens. Coconuts occupy the rest of the higher land beyond the houses and are one



Fig. 4. Political Map of the Malayan Peninsula. Compare with Fig. 2. Notice that the States of the Federation tend to occupy river basins, but often have no well-marked physical boundaries.

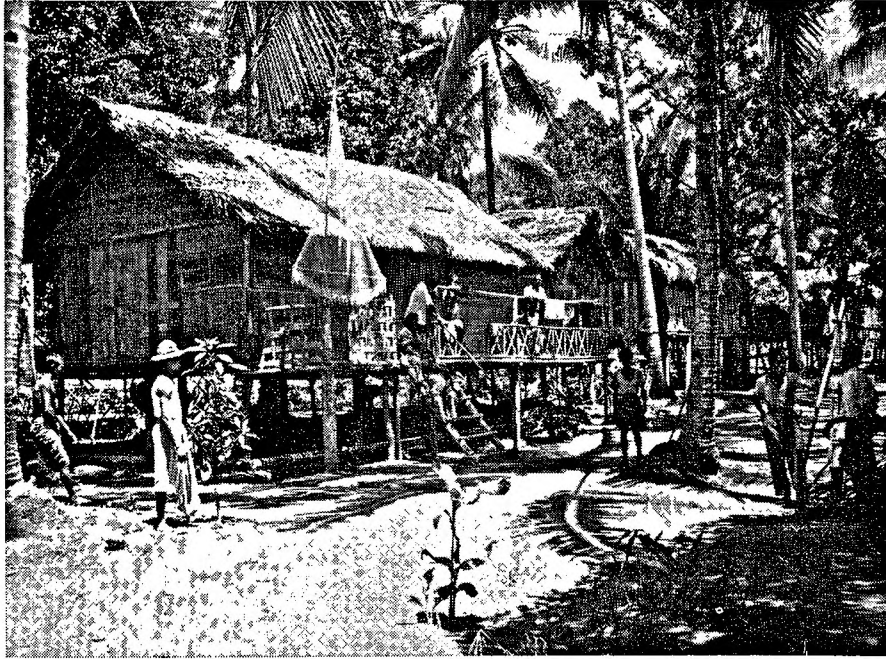


Fig. 5. A Malay village, or 'kampong'. Note the fishing nets hanging out to dry.

of the main sources of income. Fishing is also a major activity and many ingenious ways of catching fish are employed by the east coast fishermen. But in a climate such as that of Malaya, fresh fish must be consumed quickly. The poor transport facilities and absence of refrigeration means that any surplus must be dried; thus, dried fish constitute an important item of trade for the small boats that ply along the east coast.

From October to April the Northeast Trades blow onshore in eastern Malaya; they give rise to strong seas and heavy surf, and fishing is often impossible. During this period of the year, when the rainfall is at its heaviest, the population is mainly engaged in rice cultivation. There are, however, a few rural industries which enlarge the village income. Kelantan is particularly noted for its fine silverware (the importance of the metal in Malaya in former times is indicated by the name *Perak*, which means silver), and for the weaving of elaborate and colourful *sarongs*, which are worn by both sexes.

The Malays of the west have been much affected by the commercialisation of the Malayan economy. Many padi farmers are likely to have a few acres of rubber trees. But fishing is again an important activity, although the methods employed are different from those on the east coast. One principal means of catching fish is by the use of traps, or *kalongs* made of mangrove logs; there are many thousands of such traps in the shallow waters of the Malacca Straits, some situated miles from the shore. However, wherever transport facilities are better, such as at the ports, Chinese fishermen tend to displace Malays, for the Chinese make use of modern equipment, including power boats, in contrast to the traditional methods employed by the Malay fishermen. It is worth noting, however, that the most important fishermen in Malayan waters before the war were the Japanese, who used modern diesel vessels and trawling equipment. The Japanese have not been allowed to return to fish in Malayan waters and, as a result, fish are now relatively more expensive than before the war. Fishing is, however, one of the few occupations in which Malays and Chinese compete. It is to protect the Malays from the competition of other races that large areas in the Federation have been made 'Malay reservations', in which the sale of land to non-Malays is forbidden. Until 1939 rice cultivation was also reserved as a Malay occupation.

There are also several thousand other people who are considered as Malays for official purposes. These are comparatively recent immigrants from various parts of Indonesia, but who come mainly from the large island of Sumatra. As the Malacca Straits are perpetually calm, they are easily crossed, even in a small open boat. Other immigrants have come from Java, Sulawesi (Celebes), and from the island of Bawean in the Java Sea. In the past Indonesian Muslims arriving in Malaya were automatically accepted as citizens, but with the achievement of independence and the growing awareness of the problem of Malaya's high rate of population increase, immigration is strictly controlled.

THE CHINESE

Modern Malaya is the creation of alien immigrant communities, particularly the Chinese and the Europeans. Although Chinese immigration into Malaya is now forbidden, it was quite free until

1937. The result of this absence of restriction, together with the opportunities available in Malaya for making a living, encouraged large numbers of Chinese to enter the country so that at present in the combined territories of Singapore and West Malaysia, the Chinese are the largest racial group. It is largely this fact which causes the government to have misgivings about union with Singapore. In 1963 there were 2.8 million Chinese in West Malaysia and 1.4 million in Singapore. However, the Chinese form a number of separate communities and, although they all originate from south China, each group has its own language. The written characters or 'ideograms', however, are intelligible to all literate Chinese, irrespective of their linguistic group. But the most important division in the Chinese community is between the 'Straits Chinese', i.e. those born in the country, and the China-born Chinese. The Straits Chinese have been very greatly influenced by English education and institutions; many such families have been resident in Malaya

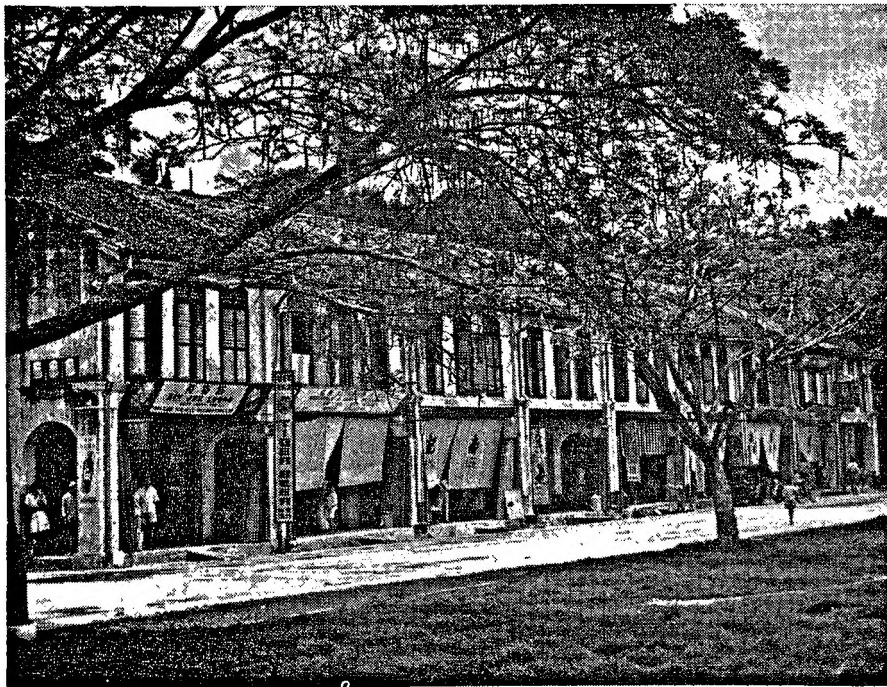


Fig. 6. A typical street scene in Kuala Selangor, with Chinese 'shophouses'.

for two or three generations. The much larger group of the China-born Chinese remains thoroughly loyal to Chinese ideals and institutions, and are thus greatly feared by the Malay community. The greatest concentrations of Chinese are found in the states of Perak and Selangor, both of which have substantial Chinese majorities, and in the islands of Penang and Singapore.

Although there is a considerable number of self-made millionaires or 'towkays', the ordinary Chinese inhabitant of Malaya is a person of very humble circumstances. The Chinese provide almost all the labour in the tin mining industry; they also operate rubber estates and smallholdings, and, as in every part of the world to which they have emigrated, they are also employed in market gardening. The Chinese, however, are largely an urban people; they have a monopoly of most skilled trades, and are also shopkeepers and 'middlemen'. Several have taken up industrial activities, either in the processing of local raw materials, or even manufacturing based on imported raw materials. There is virtually no city occupation in which Chinese are not found, but, although they are often accused of being moneylenders, this is, in the main, untrue. All the great cities are overwhelmingly Chinese places.

Although the growth of the Chinese community has created many great problems, Chinese, nevertheless, have been in Malaya for many centuries. There can be no question that they have made a vital and valuable contribution to the development of modern Malaya. But although the Chinese have considerable economic importance, they have relatively little political power in West Malaysia. This is still firmly in the grip of the Malays.

INDIANS AND PAKISTANIS

The third principal community in the Malayan peninsula is that of the Indians and Pakistanis. The Indians and Pakistanis, as are the Chinese, are a very mixed community — members of almost every major racial group in the Indian sub-continent live in Malaya. The most numerous of the Indian peoples, however, are the Tamils, from peninsular India. The Tamils were originally brought to Malaya under 'indenture' in the early years of this century to work as tappers on European rubber estates. Many chose to remain in the country on completion of their period of service and, although Tamils still provide the labour force on

European estates, many now also live in the towns. There are also many Malayalees (another people from southern India), Sikhs, who are quite numerous in the police force and who also have a predilection for moneylending, and Punjabis, who are mainly shopkeepers. Both in the economic and political fields the Indians and Pakistanis, who number some 850,000 in Western Malaysia and about 150,000 in Singapore, occupy an intermediate position between the Chinese and the Malays. The Indians and Pakistanis, despite their diverse origins, have a considerable degree of unity, and an importance out of relation to their numbers in the country. Though found in all parts of western Malaya, the Indians and Pakistanis are most numerous between Kuala Lumpur and Penang; a few live in eastern Malaya.

OTHER PEOPLES

Although constituting one of the smallest groups of people in the diverse population of Malaya, the Europeans and Eurasians are, nevertheless, one of the most important. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to penetrate into Malaya. They obtained control of the principal port, Malacca, in the sixteenth century, but they were later displaced by the Dutch. Both the Portuguese and the Dutch made marriages with local women, and their descendants today form the Eurasian community; many Eurasians have names such as de Silva, de Souza (Portuguese) or de Bruyne (Dutch). The Eurasians number about 11,000 in West Malaysia, but are a little more numerous in Singapore. They are almost entirely urban, and are mainly 'white collar' workers or engaged in the professions.

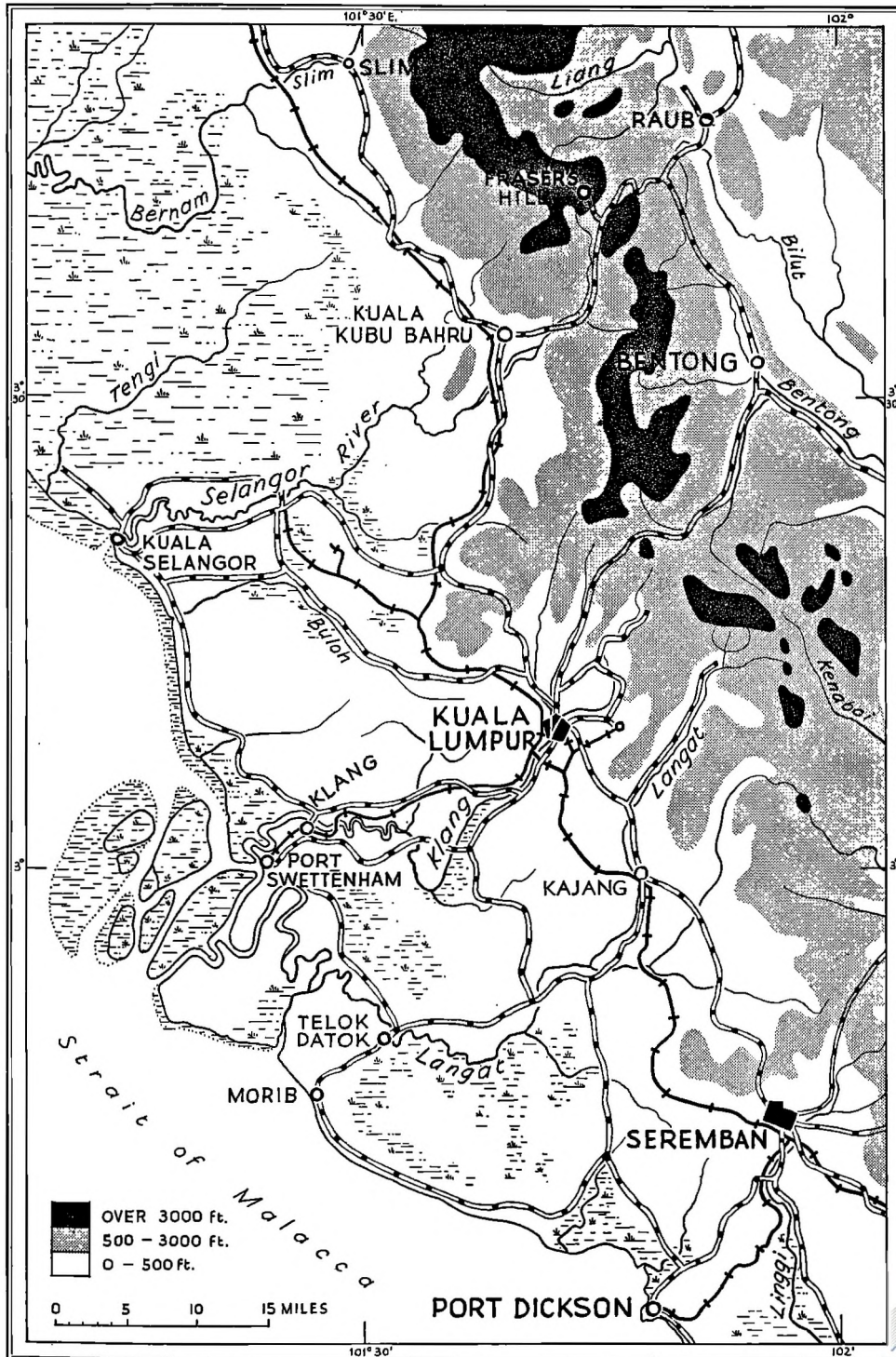
The Europeans are not permanent residents; most leave the country for good when they reach retiring age. About 12,000 Europeans live in Singapore and some 30,000 reside in West Malaysia, mainly in the large cities. In the rural areas they are estate or mine managers, or engineers. In the cities they are always employed in managerial, executive or professional capacities. The higher posts in government service in both territories were also filled by the British officials, but since the granting of independence this is rapidly ceasing to be true. British people are by far the most numerous in the European community, but there are also many Australians and Dutchmen.

POPULATION GROWTH

Despite some diminution in the rate of population growth since 1960, both in West Malaysia and Singapore population is increasing at about 3 per cent per annum. This rate exceeds that of Australia and is one of the highest in the world. This rapid growth is largely a consequence of a great reduction in the death rate through modern medical techniques, but it creates the gravest problems for Malaya's future well-being. A population that is growing rapidly can, of course, be of very great benefit to a country; this is the situation in Australia. But in Australia there is no shortage of employment. This is not the case in Malaya, where manufacturing and commercial activities are poorly developed by Australian standards.

1. Which is the largest community in the Federation of Malaya? What activities would you expect to find in an east coast village?
2. How have large numbers of Indians and Pakistanis come to be resident in Malaya? What occupations do they follow?
3. Which parts of the Malayan peninsula have most Chinese? What does the name 'Straits Chinese' imply, and how do they differ from other Chinese peoples?
4. Mark on a map of Malaya the following cities: Penang, Taiping (this word means 'peace' and is the only Chinese name for a Malayan city), Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Seremban, Johore Bahru, Kota Bahru, Singapore. What peoples would you expect to find living in these cities?

Fig. 7. Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. Kuala Lumpur is the centre for an important tin and rubber area, and the largest city on the mainland. Note Port Swettenham, which may become a rival to Singapore.





FOOD PRODUCING AGRICULTURE

THE activities described so far have been mainly the concern of alien peoples. But in food production the Malay peoples occupy an important role. Apart from certain specialised activities such as market gardening, food producing agriculture is unattractive to the Chinese population because much higher incomes can be

earned in other occupations.

The principal food of the Malayan peoples, as for most other peoples of Southeast Asia, is rice. The climate and soils of Malaya are, however, unfavourable for rice cultivation, for rice is an annual plant which demands some alternation of wet and dry seasons. It is not surprising, therefore, that the principal rice areas of the country are in the extreme northwest and northeast of the country where there is a short dry season, i.e. the plain of Province Wellesley and Kedah and the Kelantan delta.

Malaya's rice area is about 950,000 acres and has expanded steadily in the last three decades. However, this expansion has merely kept pace with population growth and even in a good year Malaya can only provide about half of her rice requirements. This expansion of rice cultivation has largely come about through improvements in irrigation. Irrigation is essential for successful rice cultivation in Malaya despite the high rainfall, for there is considerable variability in the amount of rain received month by month, and without irrigation there is danger of crop losses. The use of irrigation water also results in higher yields. Unlike most Indonesian *sawahs* (i.e. ricefields with retaining banks to hold water), most Malayan *sawahs* produce only one crop a year. Yields, however, are higher than the average for Indonesia.

The reasons for this difference are complex, but lie partly in the physical environment and partly in the very different economic conditions that prevail in Malaya. Most of the main rice growing areas of Indonesia experience a more pronounced dry season, and have elaborate irrigation systems which, in large part, owed their origin to the formerly very important sugar industry, which also made use of rice land. Malaya's irrigation systems are simpler for Malayan rice is long term rice, occupying the land for some eight to nine months. Moreover, Malaya has never experienced

the pressure on land that has long existed in Java, and there are many more economic opportunities open even to the Malay peoples; many rice planters also have a small area planted to rubber, which yields a large part of their cash income. During the Japanese occupation of Malaya during World War II there was some expansion of double cropping, and this practice has now spread over much of Province Wellesley. In 1966 nearly 90,000 acres of padi land were double cropped in West Malaysia, most of which was situated in the plain of the northwest. This second crop of rice, known as Taiwan padi (after, the island of Taiwan, or Formosa, from where the Japanese first brought the seeds) is planted out in February and is harvested three to four months later. Double cropping of rice requires very exacting water conditions, and lack of water has hindered its expansion in the Kedah plain. Province Wellesley is also unique in that virtually all ploughing is now done by tractors instead of by water buffaloes.

Although the rhythm of rice cultivation is essentially similar throughout the rice growing areas of Malaya, planting and harvesting take place at different times on the east and on the west coasts, to make best use of the rainfall. On the eastern coast the rainiest months are those from October to April, so that rice is planted to grow during these very wet months; usually, the heavier the rainfall during the growing period, the greater the yield obtained. On the west coast, however, planting and harvesting take place some two or three months earlier. In the scattered areas of rice cultivation in Negri Sembilan, Malacca, and in other southern States, there is frequently no clearly marked wetter season, so that a variety of cultivation patterns is found.

Although the rice area of Malaya has steadily expanded over the past three decades, there have been considerable changes in its distribution pattern (see Fig. 8). The area under rice has steadily contracted in the southern States, whereas that of the northern States has expanded considerably. In the small and scattered patches of rice cultivation in the south, irrigation facilities are poor; costs of production of rice have progressively increased, and the opportunities for alternative occupations for the Malay population, whose distribution closely corresponds with that of rice cultivation, are greater than in the north. In the northern States, on the other hand, rice areas are large and continuous. Much of the expansion here has come about through the opening

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