

RESEARCH ON THE CHINESE TIN MINING INDUSTRY ON THE MALAY PENINSULA

1. ECONOMIC HISTORY

Since mining was one of the most important industries of colonial states during the modern age, it is no wonder that the body of research literature, including the study of mines in Southeast Asia, is so large. The study of tin mining industry on the Malay Peninsula began from the perspective of economic history, as exemplified by J. T. Thoburn's study [1977] of tin exports and their economic contribution to the development of the Malaysian economy. With regards to the history of tin mining, there is W. E. Everitt's unpublished thesis [1952], and during the 1960s, there were two prominent studies on the subject published by Wong Lin Ken and Yip Yat Hoong. Wong [1965] showed that the British capital-intensive mining companies, which had not succeeded during the 19th century, overcame the labour intensive Chinese *kongsi* 公司 mining organization at the end of that century, using newly developed methods, while Yip [1969] discovered that the adoption of the dredge ship for mining and international control of tin production in the early 20th century helped English companies to dominate the industry at that time. In Japan, Yamada Hideo 山田秀雄 has characterized the period from the late 1870s to the early 1890s as the period of *towkay-labur* and the Brit-

ish Resident. This refers to the strong influence of Chinese merchants in the Straits Settlements who financed the recruitment of labour and mining operations (*towkay-labour*) under the British Protectorate system,¹ in which Residents who administered each protected state depended for their revenue mostly on an export tax on tin and an import tax on opium [Yamada 1965, 1973, 1977].

This research is based mainly on official documents, such as annual reports, government gazettes, and commission reports, and on the research done by English and French engineers. This is why the earlier research was able to demonstrate that a shift occurred from Chinese- to European-operated mines, but could not explain precisely how and why the Chinese mining operators lost control of their labour. To understand this, one needs to investigate the mode of mining labour relations and control in more detail.

2. CHINESE STUDIES

Regarding the study of Chinese mining, there is the research done by British administrators and scholars from late 19th century on, which mainly looked at Chinese society from single perspectives, such as secret societies, *kongsi*, or kinship, in particular during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, when the Malayan Communist Party's armed struggle plunged the peninsula into a state of Emergency (1948–1960) [V. Purcell 1951; Comber 1959; Blythe 1969; Mak 1981]. This research characterizes the control of Malay Peninsula tin mining labour by highly competitive Chinese mine owners through secret societies struggling to resist a government administration influenced by political parties active in mainland China.

Real progress has been made in recent years to reexamine the origin and function of the *kongsi* system in the mining areas of the Dutch East Indies [Wang 1994; Somers Heidhues 1992, 1993], secret societies in the Straits Settlements, and the history of Chinese business networks. The background of these changes are the end of the Cold War, the end of the Malayan Communist Party's armed struggle, and the economic development of mainland China from the end of the 1980s, out of which Chinese business networks globalized. Singapore is an important hub of the financial and shipping networks, whose industrialization was initiated by Chinese, who are mainly descended from immigrants who came to the peninsula during the 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, Carl Trocki's study [1990] of changes that occurred in the Chinese community during the late 19th century argues that the restrictions imposed

by the government which terminated the opium tax-farming system in Singapore influenced leadership over the Chinese community. In Japan, Onimaru Takeshi 鬼丸武士 [2003] has discussed changes occurring in the role of opium and secret societies in Singapore and Hong Kong during the early 20th century, while Hisasue Ryōichi 久末亮一 [2006] has focused mainly on the connection of Cantonese Chinese remittances from Singapore to the Pearl River Delta via Hong Kong. As for Penang, the second-largest port in the Straits Settlements, Cushman [1991] focused on the Khaw family, who organized a tin mining and shipping network linking Penang and Ranong, South Thailand, while Loh [Yeoh, Loh, Khoo, and Neil 2009] and Chuleeporn [Pongsupath 1990] looked at the Chinese business network extending from the Gulf of Bengal to the South China Sea. This research reveals the close connection of tin mining to smelting and shipping.

With regard to the mining states, Francis Loh [1988] described political and economic conditions of the Chinese community in Perak from the Great Depression to the post-World War II period, while Shinozaki Kaori 篠崎香織 [2002] examined leadership within the Straits Chinese community and showed that leaders used the British government as well as political parties in mainland China to derive maximum benefits for their communities. Concerning entrepreneurship within the tin mining industry, there are several studies on Yap Ah Loy, who is said to be a founder of Kuala Lumpur [Liew 1998; Tay 2005], while the 2000s saw two theses published on Eu Tong Sen, a successful tin operator in Perak, pharmaceutical businessman throughout the Malay Peninsula and Hong Kong, and real estate manager in Hong Kong [Lian and Koh 2004; Chung 2005].

3. REGIONAL HISTORY

There are several studies done by local historians in Malaysia during the 2000s on the development of their hometowns, using mainly official documents and oral history. Khoo Salma Nasution and Abdur-Razzaq Lubis took up the development of the region of the Kinta Valley and its cities, which were established by the tin mining industry, as well as the influence of Mandailing immigrants from west Sumatra, using the collected papers of the Rajah Bilah family, leaders of the Mandailing immigrants who became the local chiefs of the region [Abdur-Razzaq and Khoo 2003; Khoo and Abdur-Razzaq 2005].² Ho Tak Ming [2005, 2009] described the formation and development of Ipoh, the capital city of the

State of Ipoh, and its surrounding area. These contributions reveal that the interaction between the Malays and the Chinese at the grassroots level was more proactive than opinions framed within the context of the plural society.

4. RECENT STUDIES

The Malay Peninsula tin mining industry declined after the end of World War II and almost terminated operations due to plummeting prices in 1985. In the midst of the postwar decline, the towns and villages which had prospered through mining have suffered depopulation, and their memory of the mining era is now fading. To help us remember the history of tin mining David Palmer and Michael Joll [2011], ex-employees of the Osborn and Chappel, one of the major mining agencies on the Malay Peninsula, published a history of the company which is one of the first publications focusing exclusively on the history of mining operators themselves.

A new perspective on the social and economic history of the Malay Peninsula, in particular the state of Perak, by Tan Ai Boay [2006a, 2006b], who examined social conditions within the Chinese community and among tin mine labourers during the Great Depression, focuses on the social role of prominent Chinese leaders in Ipoh. Tōjō Tetsuo 東條哲郎 [2008, 2009] investigated the regional diversity and historical change in Perak's tin mining industry and the influence of that change on the Chinese immigrants employed as mining labour during the late 19th century. Tōjō [2013] has also examined the diversity of Chinese mine owners from large scale mining entrepreneurs to small scale mine operators, and their respective business strategies, including labour management and opium supply. To better understand the socioeconomic role of tin in the modern age, it is necessary to consider how forces revealed by regional history reflected the situation of other regions of Southeast Asia and globally, especially trends in immigrant labour during modern times.

NOTES

- 1 Perak became a British Protectorate under the Pangkor Engagement in 1874, as a result of internal warfare. For more detail, see [Cowan 1961:263–65; Chai 1964:6; Hirose 1999:182–267].

- 2 For the immigration of “Malay” from Sumatra and nearby area and their roles in the local community, please see [Tsuboi 2004].

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