

Trade and Traders: Economy and Cultures between South India and the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia: Special Focus on Kedah and Penang

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I Introduction

The story of Penang cannot be properly understood without connecting it with its original parent state, Kedah. Penang was within Kedah's territory before the British took hold of it in 1786. As Kedah was the oldest Malay state in peninsular Malaysia, it is not wrong to say that the earlier history of Penang was an extension of the history of Kedah. This is clearly shown by the migration of Kedah's population when the state was in turmoil or when it was attacked by enemies, such as Siam, Aceh or Burma in the earlier centuries. Seberang Perai (today's Province Wellesley) which is situated just opposite the island was already a wet rice cultivated settlement by Kedah Malays. It was one of the reasons why the British in 1800 forced the Sultan of Kedah to cede it to them after Kedah had failed in their attempt to wrest Penang back. The British hoped that this rice settlement could guarantee the supply of rice for the population of Penang island and also serve to strengthen the Penang harbour. It was also Malays, Indians and Chinese from Kedah that first populated the island after the British take-over. In fact the first *kapitan Keling*, Kader Mydin Merican, and the first *kapitan China*, Koh Lay Huan, already had businesses in Kedah. Thus Penang and Seberang Perai were not the creation of the British. Archeological excavations discovered at Lembah Bujang north of Seberang Perai and Kuala Selingsing in the south show that they were as old as Kedah's civilization itself. The archeological findings in Guar Kepah situated north of Seberang Perai and south of Lembah Bujang show that this place was the link between the two important archeological sites mentioned above. Kedah was already exposed to the civilization of the Indian Ocean earlier than any other Malay state in the peninsula. It had also enjoyed the influences of the older kingdoms of Southeast Asia, such as, Funan, Srivijaya, Majapahit, Siam and later Melaka. This paper attempts to trace the early influences of the Indian Ocean in Kedah, particularly in the areas that today became Penang and its territories. The second objective is to discuss the influence of Muslim traders in modern Penang.

II Traces of the Past: Economic Links Between the West Coast of Kedah (around Penang borders) and India

The discovery in 2009/2010 of an archaeological site in Sungai Batu on the north-eastern part of Bujang Valley in Kedah by a group of archaeologists from the Centre for Global Archaeological Research (CGAR), Universiti Sains Malaysia, postulates the idea that this could be one of the earliest economic centres of production and trade on the north-western coast of peninsular Malaysia. Through a scientific palaeoenvironmental reconstruction study, a 3-km area was discovered to have 97 mounds, 16 of which were already excavated. From the excavation, a structure of ritual monuments, a riverside jetty and an iron smelting industry were discovered dating from the 1st century CE for the iron industry, and the ritual monument and riverside jetty in the 2nd, about 200-300 years earlier than the date given for the Bujang Valley civilization. The earlier studies on the

Bujang Valley whose main centres were at Sungai Mas and Pengkalan Bujang, could not be earlier than the 4th century CE, thus confirming that the Sungai Batu area is older than Bujang Valley.

The fact that the present Sungai Batu is several hundred kilometers inwards from the mouth of the Merbok River and its estuary the Bujang River which opens to the Straits of Melaka and thence to the Bay of Bengal, is because between 5000 and 9000 years ago the sea level around Southeast Asia (and elsewhere) went up and down. 9000 years ago the sea coast of the western peninsula of Malaysia was about 50 meters from the present sea coast. Around 6000 years ago the sea level was at its lowest at about 100 to 130 meters lower than what it is today allowing people to use the land to migrate, but at around 5000 years ago, radiocarbon dates of elevated shoreline show that the sea level rose to about 5 meters above today's sea level. This situation, if it continued progressively, would drown the Merbok River and its estuary pushing the mouth further inwards. Such a phenomenon would then make Sungai Batu to be the entry point to the hinterland. Artifacts found around here were dated 1st and 2nd centuries CE coinciding with the growth of Funan, the first political and economic centre in Southeast Asia situated outside the northern borders of peninsular Malaysia. Other trading centres of the same period were also discovered in the Isthmus of Kra which could share boundaries with what was then known as Kadaram or Kalah, the present Kedah where the Bujang Valley and Sungai Batu are. Among excavated artifacts found in Sungai Batu are an iron smelting industry with thousand pieces of iron ore and slug, a round brick structure which is mounted on a square tablet with a round hole in the centre and an ancient brick platform with tiled roofing, believed to be a jetty. The findings indicate that Sungai Batu was indeed a harbour that exported iron from the surrounding areas. Thousands of pieces of iron ore and iron slug together with a large number of clay pipes believed to be used to blow air into furnaces were excavated. However, no manufactured items were found. This seems to confirm the mention of iron being imported from Bujang Valley in the Tamil poem, *Pattinapalai* and other Arabic literature by Al-Kindi and Al-Biruni.

The findings in Sungai Batu indicate that some trade had already taken place from the western coast of peninsular Malaysia from the 2nd century. From the Tamil poem dated 200 CE, it can be surmised that links with India had taken place as early as that century or perhaps earlier. Findings, however, have not been able to indicate whether any Indian influence had taken place here. The square tablet with a hole mounted on a round brick structure which indicates some local belief, does not have any similarity with any Indian symbol or mythology. But the existence of a brick jetty with tiled roofs indicates that the Sungai Batu society was already an organized community. The large presence of iron ore and slugs shows that the metal was mined or dug by a number or groups of people led by some persons or leaders of the community. The business of exporting products also needed some kind of organization. We can imagine the busy boatmen and accountants, the laborers and the proprietors (if we think along the present mode of trading). It is quite strange, though, that no imported goods seemed to be around (or yet to be discovered).

Peter Bellwood referred to the late pre-historic metal-using phase across Southeast Asia as the 'Early Metal Phase'. In the north of the Thai-Malaysian peninsula this phase lasted

to the coming of iron, which coincided with the Sungai Batu era. This was also correlated with significant rises in complexity and extent of pre-Indic or pre-Chinese political integration in Thailand as well as Vietnam (where Funan was). It was discovered that South Vietnam already had associations with other parts of peninsular Malaysia and the island of Borneo. It was also believed that in South Vietnam, some acquisition of iron metallurgy and transfer of technology had taken place with the Austronesian communities and iron-using societies of South Thailand and peninsular Malaysia. Therefore, although no foreign artifacts were yet to be found in Sungai Batu, we cannot completely dismiss the possibilities that Indian influence, at least the cultural or spiritual kind, was present in this area, because it could also have been transferred directly or indirectly through Funan or South Vietnam.

Funan, established around the 1st century CE was first ruled by a Malay princess who was married to a Brahmin known as Kaundinya. Her authority also extended to the areas in *Tun-Sun*, *Tu-k'n* (today's Cherok Tok Kun in Bukit Mertajam), Tambralingga and Langkasuka (Malays believe it was the early kingdom of Kedah), all in the northern zone of peninsular Malaysia which might include Sungai Batu and the Lembah Bujang area. A large number of traders from the Sunda Straits, India and China had visited Funan in this early century until it reached its height in the 4th century. The Funan queen who was also known as the 'Naga Princess', believed strongly in animism, where the *Naga* or dragon and snakes became symbols of greatness. The Naga King was taken as the patron of the deep seas, spirits of the oceans, rivers, lakes and dams and the father of the queen. They also believed in the mountains as the abode of their gods, which has some similarities with Hindu beliefs. It can then be speculated that the marriage between the queen and an Indian Brahmin might have served as the beginning of certain syncretism and/or coalition between Indian and local cultures and beliefs. This speculation is more convincing for the later centuries when trade between areas in peninsular Malaysia and the Indian Ocean became more significant.

The earlier discovery of other locations in Lembah Bujang, such as Sungai Mas which was dated to the 5th century, shows clearly that there existed here perhaps the first Malay kingdom in the peninsula. Various kinds of beads were excavated, viz. Indo-Pacific beads, glass polychrome and monochrome beads, semi precious stone beads, metal beads, terracotta beads, wooden beads and fishbone beads. The Indo-Pacific beads, and semi precious stone beads were most probably made by local artisans, while other semi precious stone beads, such as carnelian and quartz were imported from India, especially from Ratanpur near Cambay. 90% of the beads that were found in Sungai Mas were of the glass monochrome type which was also believed to be made locally. Other neighbouring localities that made the same types of beads were at Oc-éo of Funan, Takua-pa on the Isthmus of Kra and Kuala Selinsing in Perak State. It is interesting to note that glass beads of the polychrome type also known as 'eye bead' of various shapes and colours were quite rare in Lembah Bujang. It is believed that they were expensive and were imported from the Middle East, or the Roman-Hellenistic-Byzantine empire as well as from India. Their presence here, however small, allows us to surmise that only the elites could possess such ornaments, denoting that the society was hierarchical, or that the elites could also be foreigners.

Similar Indo-Pacific beads were found in Takua-pa and Sungai Mas indicating that these places were producers of and trade centres for the beads. As mentioned above these places grew together with the growth of Funan, although perhaps only as small trading centres. However, in the 5th century when the importance of Funan declined, Sungai Mas became more prominent. It is also believed that this area and others around Lembah Bujang and Tu-K'n (Cherok Tok Kun) in Bukit Mertajam, became centres for the manufacture of beads after Arikamedu in India, the original centre for the making of Indo-Pacific beads, was destroyed by the Kalabras barbarians in the 3rd century CE. In the 1840's Colonel James Low discovered an inscription engraved on a granite stone in Tu-K'n dated from the 4th century CE. The inscription was rather unclear. It was written either in Pali, the sacred language of the Buddhists of the Theravada school or Pallava of South India. On it were found the words that sound like *pratbame vayasi* (in the time of youth). Also found in the vicinity was an inscribed slate slab on a stupa surmounted by a *chattravali*, or seven-tiered 'umbrella'. It was a prayer for the successful voyage by one Buddhagupta, the master of a junk, who was said to reside in the 'Red Land' (in Kelantan?) The inscription was also dated around the 5th century. The findings in Tu-K'n also indicate that the area had been used as a trading centre by local or Indian Buddhist traders passing through the western coasts of peninsular Malaysia.

Apart from Indian traders from India, it is already known that the Malays from mainland and island Southeast Asia were efficient sailors for hundreds of years. They possessed sophisticated technology, and traveled thousands of miles from their homes, using the rhythm of the Central Asian winds. They had sailed through the Straits of Melaka and Sunda to India, even before imperial trade with India and China was established. However, the absence of archaeological evidence and literature until the discovery of the Tu-K'n inscriptions in the 5th century seems to indicate that Indian influences in peninsular Malaysia only started around this period. The early kingdoms in Southeast Asia had already reached a high level of civilization and it is generally thought that the influence of Indian civilization, including religion, should mainly be attributed to the endeavours by some Southeast Asian elites to assimilate elements of Indian culture that were consistent with, or could be adapted to, their own beliefs and practices. For example, the worship of mountains as abodes of gods as attested to in the Siva and Brahmana beliefs, also existed in the Malay belief about Mount Seguntang Mahameru as the original sacred abode of the godly kings of Melaka and other Malay states. The *Malay Annals* or *Sejarah Melayu* is full of such description.

Clearer evidence of Hindu-Buddhist influences can be attested to during the Srivijaya period, that is, from the beginning of the 7th century until after its fall in the 14th century and the rise of other Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, such as Majapahit in Java. The spread of Hindu-Buddhist influences corresponded with the expansion of trade between these kingdoms, India and China. Their influences, to some extent, were only checked with the advent of Islam from the 13th or 14th century onwards.

Briefly, the Srivijaya kingdom centred in Palembang in Sumatra, subjugated other territories, including places in the Malaysian peninsula, such as Kedah, Perak, Kelantan

and also certain parts of Borneo, through material and spiritual alliances. These alliances were made through oaths and threats of dire consequences using Indian inspired formalities and techniques. A Srivijaya inscription was found in the east coast of peninsular Malaysia dated 775 CE commemorating the dedication of a Srivijaya king of a Buddhist monastery. It referred to the king as ‘the patron of the snakes’.

It is also quite clear that a few decades before Kedah was subjugated by Srivijaya, she was already an autonomous political entity. Between 608 CE and 669 CE Kedah had independently sent delegations to China for direct trading as well as to have their rulers recognized. O.W.Wolters noted a study by O’Connor which concludes that during the 7th century places in the north of peninsular Malaysia had achieved and enjoyed a high quality art of engraving from the south-western coasts of India. Other ports along the Straits of Melaka, such as *Ch’ih Tu* and *P’o-lo* and Barus were in the same position and were also independent. The Straits of Melaka had indeed become an important route between China and India and the west. The rise of Srivijaya was mainly the result of the growing importance of the Straits of Melaka and her ability to have absolute control over it. By this time Funan was slowly being bypassed by traders as she was facing problems from the Khmer in the north. China too, was facing internal turmoil, forcing traders in the south to look for other alternatives to acquire Southeast Asian products, such as aromatic woods and spices for medicine. There was a certain Indian pepper that was very essential for bowel ailments. Since routes by land, via Funan, were no longer feasible, Chinese traders began to use the South China Sea and the Straits of Melaka. The growing importance of the Straits allowed ports in Sumatra and peninsular Malaysia, such as in Kedah, to grow as *entrepot* or transit ports. Srivijaya, however, would definitely not allow the freedom of the Straits ports to continue unchecked.

In the meantime, changes were also taking place in South India with the emergence of Nagappattinam as a port replacing Kaverippattinam in the early 7th century. The city was vibrant, said to be walled and the growth of the port was at the time of Pallava King Mahendravarman. Large ships that transited between India, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia anchored there. It was believed that the majority of the transit passengers were Buddhists. I-tsing, the Chinese monk and traveler had mentioned that after his stay in Srivijaya, he embarked on a royal boat and after fifteen days landed in the isle of *Mo-louo-yu* (in Sumatra, probably Jambi), and after another fifteen days, he arrived in the country of *Kie-cha* (Kedah). According to his notes, I-tsing continued his journey for another month to reach the port-city of Nagappattinam. I-tsing’s description of his journey noted the familiar routes that were taken by traders between Srivijaya, other ports in Sumatra as well as Kedah and South India, especially at Nagappattinam. Traders bartered spices and jungle products from Srivijaya and Kedah with Indian textiles.

In the 10th century Nagappattinam was annexed by the Cholas. The reign of the first king Rajaraja Chola 1 (c.985-1014) and the second king Rajendra Chola 1 (c.1015-1018) was important to the history of the Malay peninsula because it was during these times that political and commercial relations were clearly established. In 1005 the king of Srivijaya built a Buddhist temple in Nagappattinam named after him, Chulamanivarmadeva Vihara. Rajaraja allowed the revenues of a large village for its upkeep. Such endowment

was to allow traders from Srivijaya to worship freely according to their own tenets. An inscription was also found about a Srivijaya official who represented the king and resided in South India. This official had donated a silver image of Shiva in the form of an expensive jewel set with a variety of precious stones such as emerald and ruby. During this period Srivijaya was ruled by the Sailendra king.

Another inscription dated around 1015, during the reign of the second king Rajendra Chola 1, concerns a deity installed by the representative of the king of Kidara (Kedah) on the premises of the Srivijaya Vihara. The name of the official was Sri Kuruttan Kesuvana Akralekai. He also donated gold coins of China which seemed to be popularly circulated in South India. It was further mentioned that a shrine of Buddha was constructed by the king of Kataha (another name for Kedah) in Nagappattinam. The fact that Kedah had independently represented her own king indicates that the hold of Srivijaya over her was rather nominal. During this time too, Kedah's trade seemed to increase dramatically. This was also the result of some political disorders in Takuapa in the north that their elites transferred their activities to the port of Kedah. Arab geographers too, continued to use Kalah (Kedah) as their port of call. It is clear that the Kedah king followed Buddhist beliefs. It is interesting to note that around this period the names 'Kie-tcha', 'Kataha', 'Kadaram' or 'Kidaram' (Kidara and Kalah) which, according to George Coedes, refer to Kedah, began to be mentioned in Arab, Indian and Chinese sources.

Kedah which had its beginning probably with Langkasuka was situated at the base of Mt. Jerai, meaning 'the Island of Asoka'. The author of *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* gave another interpretation, that is, 'bersuka-sukaan'. It was used to describe the people's happy mood after having completed the building of the king's palace on the island 'that was about to merge with the mainland'. (As mentioned above about 5000 years ago the western coasts of peninsular Malaysia were still submerged under water and Mt. Jerai was an island). Both meanings can reasonably be accepted. Langkasuka might have been founded between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE. It was used as a settlement for Indian traders who had come to peninsular Malaysia for jungle goods such as aromatic woods. Kedah itself was well known for her tin. This period coincided with Asoka's fame as the most powerful sovereign of his time and the most remarkable. The Buddhist faith was propagated to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia by him and later by his son Mahinda. It is not surprising if Buddhist monks and traders continued the spread of Buddhism to Kedah and elsewhere.

Kedah's apparent independence from Srivijaya might be due to the weakening of the latter during the Chola period. In the 11th century during Rajendra Chola's reign several sea expeditions were launched against Srivijaya and her possessions in the Malay peninsula, including Kedah. Presumably the Cholas resented the independence that Srivijaya showed in her commercial and political sway in the empire. In 1025 CE the Cholas inflicted a staggering blow on Srivijaya, from which she did not fully recover. However, the Cholas' relationship with Srivijaya might have improved, for in 1068 king Virarajendra was said to have attacked Kedah on behalf of the Srivijaya king. Whatever the real situation was, Srivijaya's supremacy began to further decline in the face of new

threats from the Thais in the northern zones of the Malaysian peninsula and from Singosari and later Majapahit in Java. By the middle of the 14th century Srivijaya was no longer an important power to be reckoned with, although Palembang and Jambi might still serve as *entrepots*. The decline of Srivijaya saw the rise of Majapahit which seemed to have taken over Srivijaya's dependencies, including those in the peninsula. The *Nagarakretagama*, a poem written in 1366 CE by Prapanca, on the rulers of Singosari and Majapahit mentioned Majapahit's conquest of Kedah and Mt. Jerai, Pahang, Trengganu, Langkasuka, Kelantan, Cherating, Tembeling and others in the Malaysian peninsula. Majapahit also maintained friendly relationships with Siam, Burma, Cambodia, Champa and Vietnam.

International trade with India, China, the Malay archipelago and other areas in mainland Southeast Asia continued as before. Traders who stopped in Majapahit ports were very well treated as the rulers wanted them to continue activities with them. Majapahit was well known for her large navy that was used to control her large dependencies that stretched over areas in Sumatra, Borneo and Java besides the Malay peninsula. An annual tribute to Majapahit by the said dependencies was sufficient acknowledgement for the latter's suzerainty. The administration remained in the hands of the local rulers. Majapahit's glory peaked around the later part of the 14th century, and during this period both Hinduism and Buddhism were practiced, full of ceremonies and rituals.

In the meantime the political situation in mainland Southeast Asia was changing. It saw the struggle for and expansion of power among the rulers of Khmer, Angkor, Burma and the Siamese. In the late 13th century the Siamese king, Rama Khamheng from Sokot'ai expanded his conquests to the Malay peninsula. The Siamese hold in the peninsula was further strengthened in the middle of the 14th century during the reign of Ramadhipati when the Siamese capital was at Ayut'ia. Perhaps it was during this period when Kedah and other territories sent the *Bunga Mas* to Siam and when Tumasik or Singapore was ruled by a Siamese representative who was later killed by Iskandar Shah as mentioned in the *Sejarah Melayu*. During this period the Siamese who were staunch Buddhists maintained friendly relations with China. The situation remained the same until the end of the 14th century when Melaka rose as a political power and became the greatest *entrepot* in Southeast Asia.

The rise of Melaka coincided with the decline of Majapahit. O.W. Wolters in his book *The Fall of Srivijaya* asserted that Melaka was the extension of the Malay maritime power of Srivijaya. Melaka's ability to control the Straits of Melaka and hence the trade that passed through it was because of its location at the narrowest position of the straits, its deep and protected harbour, its competent administration, a comparatively peaceful period and the advantage of having China as her political patron. It was in Melaka that the monsoons met, that here great wholesale merchants, Moors and heathens, many of whom were from the Coromandel came with goods of all kinds to be traded.

Melaka rulers repeated what their predecessors in Srivijaya and Majapahit did. They strengthened their political positions by first sending embassies to China for recognition and patronage, followed by subjugating other territories in the peninsula and across the

straits, especially in Sumatra. Campaigns against Pahang, Terengganu, and Patani in the peninsula and Kampar and Indragiri in Sumatra, were successful. In the middle of the 15th century the Melaka empire included Kedah, famous for her tin, besides Johore, Tumasik, Jambi, Bengkalis, the Carimon islands and Bintang. Some of the territories, such as Tumasik, Pahang and Kedah were formerly under Siamese suzerainty. Melaka was now a political power of the first rank. However, the legacy that Melaka left behind in Malaysia as a whole, and in the Malay archipelago generally, is its initiative in the spread of Islam. Melaka became the centre of the religion from which it was disseminated although it is well known that places like Perlak and Pasai in Sumatra had received it earlier. It was Melaka's political power and trading influence that enabled her to do it. It was said that Parameswara, the first ruler of Melaka, converted to Islam and married a princess from Pasai who was already a Muslim, to enable him to trade there. This decision as well as his relations with China freed Melaka from her former overlord, Siam.

Before the coming of Islam to Southeast Asia Hindu-Buddhist influences that were adapted or adopted by peoples in the region took place gradually over the centuries together with the expansion of trade. It was reported that ships from India came with specialists, such as traders, sailors, scholars, monks, etc. 'Indianization' did not take place through conquests or through the work of missionaries from India. In fact the centres for the teaching of Buddhism were in Srivijaya. However, as was mentioned earlier, local elites adopted some of the Hindu-Buddhist tenets side by side with the local beliefs and culture to enhance their own positions.

In India, Islam came to Gujerat in the later half of the 13th century. In 1298 Cambay fell into the hands of the Muslims from the north. Although majority of the people remained Hindus, the Court and ruling class became Muslims. Cambay was the chief port for merchants traveling to Cairo, Mecca, Aden and ports in the Persian Gulf. They continued to Melaka with textiles and returned with cloves, mace, nutmeg, sandalwood, seed pearls, some porcelain, apothecary's linaloes and benzoin. Melaka also collected gold, tin, white silk and white damask, coloured silk and birds from the Banda islands prized for their plumage. It became an emporium for east-west trade where Muslim traders played a very important role. In India the centre was Cambay and in the east it was Melaka.

In peninsular Malaysia Malay rulers under Melaka's suzerainty became Muslims. It was reported that a Muslim prince ruled Kedah in 1474, thus politically and culturally breaking away from Siam during this period. However, after the fall of Melaka into Portuguese hands (1511), Kedah became a source of contention among other powers such as Aceh (1610's), the Dutch (1640's), the Bugis (1700's) and Burma. The Siamese also involved themselves in Kedah affairs. Constant struggles for the throne among the members of the royal families worsened the situation, with contenders inviting outside powers for support, thus encouraging interference by others. There were reports of large numbers of Kedah people being captured and taken away by the captors, such as the Achenese. There was also migration mainly to the south where Penang and Province Wellesley are today. Thus trade in Kedah suffered tremendously, although trade with China, the Coromandel and other Southeast Asian states continued. Kedah still supplied

tin and other goods from its hinterland. Such was the scenery until Francis Light appeared and took away Penang in 1786 and Province Wellesley in 1800.

III Penang and the Indian Ocean

When Francis Light entered Penang which he named the Prince of Wales Island, he described the island as being a jungle uninhabited save for a few Malays. How sparsely uninhabited it was, is not clear. However, some reports have it that when the Portuguese ruled Melaka in the 16th century, they had made Penang as a place for rendezvous by Portuguese galleys and merchant ships from Melaka and Goa to await for those from the Coromandel and Junk Ceylon before they proceeded to Singapore and there they waited for ships from the Far East. The Portuguese used Penang to avoid attacks by Malays from Kuala Kedah, Muar or Kuala Johore who plied the Straits of Melaka and threatened Portuguese ships from India. The Portuguese in Melaka were well known for their discrimination against the Muslims in the archipelago.

At Teluk Duyung in the area of Muka Head, several Achenese gravestones have been found dating between the years 1500 and 1700. There is a settlement called Kampung Pantai Acheh today and according to the inhabitants there were some 300 graves around the area but over grown with jungle.

Francis Light also obtained labour to cut down the jungle around Tanjung Penaga (where Fort Cornwallis is) some 20-30 Malays headed by one Nakhoda Kechil. Tanjung Penaga was already a familiar place to Malays in Seberang Perai (Province Wellesley) and Kedah. Malays from Lingga in Sumatra who traded with Kedah used this island which they called Pulau Kesatu. Reports by British officers also indicate that there were Malay settlements in the areas of Sungai Pinang, Perak Road and Dato Keramat. The sea lane between Tanjung Penaga and Pulau Jerejak was said to be used by some Chinese traders. In the 3rd decade of the 18th century, Batu Uban was already opened by Haji Mohammad Salleh or Nakhoda Intan from Minangkabau. Nakhoda Kechil was his younger brother. Both of them aided by their followers cultivated the land between Batu Uban and Tanjung Penaga with rice, sugar, coconut and different kinds of fruits. Haji Mohammad Salleh was also the first man to build a mosque in Batu Uban where he began to teach the religion to the people. His presence was well known among the Malays in Kedah and Muslim traders who passed the Straits of Melaka and who used Batu Uban as a port. Another Malay from Pagar Ruyung was Dato Janatun. He had gained some trust from the Sultan of Kedah who later gave him a 100-acre land from Batu Uban to Gelugor as a present for his aid when Kedah was attacked by Siam.

It cannot be denied, however, that the British occupation of Penang quickly led to an increase of the population. In 1788 Light reported that there were about 1000 people, but in 1804 it rose to 12,000, the majority being Malays followed by Indians, Chinese, Burmese, Bugis from the Celebes and a few Europeans who controlled the administration and trade. There were also others consisting of Armenians, Burmans from Pegu, Siamese, Javanese, Parsees and Arabs and Hindus from India. Penang grew as a centre for transit trade for manufactured goods from Great Britain and India. These were exchanged for

Straits produce, such as rice, tin, spices, rattans, gold dust, ivory, ebony and pepper from Burma, the Malay peninsula and Sumatra.

Although Penang's development did not meet with the British expectation as compared to Singapore, it was the door that opened the opportunities for British colonization of the whole of the Malaysian peninsula in later years. Penang was first made as the dependency of the East India Company (EIC) in Bengal. High hopes on Penang encouraged the EIC administration in India to create it as the Fourth Indian Presidency alongside Bengal, Bombay and Madras. In 1830 the Presidency in Penang, however, was abolished and in 1832 Singapore was made the capital of the four-year old Straits Settlements. Penang remained secondary to Singapore as its revenue could not support its administrative expenses. Private individuals and estate owners on the island, however, enjoyed a robust economy. Pepper trade with Sumatra revived and the trade with Kedah, Burma, Siam and the rest of the Malay peninsula grew. Population continued to increase, and by the middle of the 19th century the number of Chinese who settled in Penang made up 40% of the total population especially when they got involved with the opening of the tin industry in neighbouring Perak. Relationship with India continued since the British trade depended on Indian manufactures and piece goods in exchange for goods from Penang's neighbours. Francis Light had to rely on Indian soldiers, sailors and servants when he landed on the island. Labour for the physical development of the island, such as building roads and town houses, was sourced from convicts from India. Defence and security of the island largely depended on Indian sepoy. But there were other Indian petty traders, craftsmen and labourers. Some of them came directly from the sub-continent but others were migrants from Kedah, some were of Indian, Malay and Arab of mixed blood and were wealthy and influential in the courts of the old Malay state.

Penang's open-door and free trade policies invited people from all over the world especially from countries that used to trade in the Straits of Melaka. Such policies which were new in the region freed merchants and traders from the traditions of the Malay sultans. Anybody who had the means and courage to try his luck was welcome here. No control was applied on people who came in and out of the island until the 1930's world economic depression. By this time Penang had become the confluence of peoples with different cultures and religions. Being an international port, political ideas and social reforms flowed freely. Various types of education were started and administered by the different communities in Penang. Thus there were English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil schools springing up in localities dominated by a particular community. Administratively these communities were managed by their own leaders who were recognized by the British administration. People were also free to follow any religion. Churches, temples, mosques sprang up side by side as they exist today. Each community celebrated its own festivals in colourful splendour and gaiety enjoyed by all. Indeed Penang during the British period broke away from Kedah politically and socially. There was no sultan. Residents of Penang were British subjects of the Straits Settlements or remained as their original nationalities. New leaders who normally received modern education emerged. The Malays who used to be the dominant population in Kedah and other Malay states became the minority. Here Islam was only one of the religions on the island. In Penang Muslim leaders need not be Malays. They could be Indians, Arabs, Sumatrans, Achenese

or anyone with Islamic knowledge or influence. This paper will only discuss the role of Muslim mercantile communities especially those who came from across the Indian Ocean in the development of Islam and new cultures in Penang in the 19th and 20th centuries.

IV The Continuity of Tradition: Islam and the Muslim Mercantile Communities in Penang

Before Islam became the main religion in Kedah and her territories, the people believed in animism side by side with Hinduism and Buddhism. The Indian religions and cultures were brought by traders, monks, specialists, artisans from India, or by Malays themselves whose religions were syncretized with the above beliefs and culture. The rulers used some of these Indian beliefs and cultures to enhance their own positions in the eyes of their subjects. Rulers were seen as godly with extra-ordinary powers that could heal or destroy. Elaborate ceremonies and rites were meticulously followed to ensure that no ordinary 'rakyat' would cross the line. After the 14th century Islam played a very important role in the lives of the Malays. The rulers, now entitled 'Sultan' became the heads of the religion. They were surrounded by *ulama* (religious leaders) most of whom came directly from the Middle East or the Indian sub-continent and some found themselves in the royal courts through marriages and became very influential. They came together with Muslim traders from their respective countries. Islam became the religion of the courts and royal ceremonies were now conducted according to Islamic tenets, but some Hindu-Buddhist flavours continued to lace the rituals so that the 'daulat' (the ruler's divine power) was upheld and no 'tulah' or curse would befall the sinner. Generally all Malays became Muslims.

The concept of 'daulat' and 'tulah' did not affect the people residing in Penang. Penang became independent from the hold of the Sultan of Kedah. The Muslims here did not have any central figure as the head of their communities. They consisted not only of the Malays who originated from Kedah but also from the neighbouring archipelago. Others were Indians and Arabs who came from their original countries or were descendants of mixed marriages and those who had been residing in these areas even before the British. The Muslims in Penang had their leaders from among themselves.

In the 18th to 20th centuries the Muslim mercantile communities played a very important role in the strengthening of Islam in Penang. An ongoing research project is accumulating biographical data which throws light on this subject. Most of the immigrants were from South India. They came with their families or on their own to seek greener pastures. Many came when they were still in their early teens or even younger. A good example is Mohamed Merican Noordin who was born in Pondicherry in the 1760's and whose prominence resulted in a road, Noordin Street, named after him. When he arrived in Penang with his older brother in the first decade of the 19th century, he was only 7 years old. His brother, Cauder Moheedin Merican, later appointed as the first Kapitan Keling, was only 11 years old. Another very young immigrant was Seene Rawther who was also only 7 years old when he arrived Penang.

The Muslim mercantile communities were involved in the trading of spices, textile, manufactured goods, jewels, eateries, stevedoring and were also printers, publishers, writers and educationists. Many of them were successful and became millionaires. Most of their businesses were with India and other parts of the Malay archipelago. Hence the Indian Ocean tradition continued.

The first generation of Indian Muslims in Penang, such as Cauder Moheedin Merican, better known as Kader Mydin Merican, his brother Noordin and Seene Rawther and others left legacies to subsequent generations in Penang. They started trading on a small scale but their acumen and diligence made them very successful that later heightened their social prestige locally and in the vicinity. Kader Mydin, for example, traded his Indian textile products, eaglewood, beads and other precious stones in Kedah, Aceh and other Southeast Asian ports for Southeast Asian spices and other goods in the south Indian ports. By the 1830's he was the wealthiest Indian Muslim in Penang. Noordin also started his trade like his brother but he did it independently. He had his own fleet of ships that plied the Straits of Melaka, stopping in Aceh and other ports in Sumatra, as well as in Burma, India and as far as China. In 1832, the *Penang Gazette and Straits Chronicle* gave a coverage on his success as the merchant who sent the most number of cargoes to ports such as Aceh, Chittagong, Arakan, Deli, Pedu, Pedir, Cuddalore, Nagappattinam, Cochin China, Calcutta, Aleppy and Singapore.

Seene Rawther born in Ramnad in South India in 1882 and who had come to Penang at the age of 7, returned to India at the age of 11 to learn trading from his cousin, P.K. Shakkarai Rawther. A couple of years later he returned to Penang and started his business by transporting labourers from India to Penang. He imported Indian foodstuff, such as flour, sugar and cooking oil to Penang. Like the other Penang traders, he exported goods from Penang and the surrounding areas to India. Another person who supplied Indian labourers was S.M. Mohamed Yusoff Rawther. It is unclear whether he was related to Seene Rawther. He came to Penang only in 1915. His wealth, however, was based on his stevedoring business. Large ships could not anchor directly at the Penang harbour because the sea was not deep enough. The unloading and loading business had to be carried out by stevedores. Since Penang was a very busy port, the stevedoring business became very profitable. Most of it was taken up by Indian Muslims, more popularly known locally as the 'Mamak Tongkang'. Others in this line, to name just a few were T.M. Shaik Mohammad, Kana Patchee, and Khan Mohammad.

Another thriving and famous Indian Muslim business venture was the supply of food - Indian Muslim restaurants, the "mamak stalls" and the 'nasi kandar stalls'. One of the earliest entrepreneurs was M. Mohamed Thamby Rawther and his four sons, N.M. Seeni Packer Rawther, N.M. Packer Mohamed Rawther and N.M. Abdul Ghaney Packer Rawther. The older Rawther born in the 1830's in India, started his 'nasi kandar' business in the 1860's. He sold his cooked rice (nasi) and other assortments to go with the rice in two large rattan baskets hung on both ends of a pole. He carried the pole on his shoulder balancing the two containers, one in the front and the other at the back, hence the word 'kandar', a Malay word meaning to carry heavy materials on one's shoulder. The three sons, all born in India, joined their father to enhance the business. They plied the streets

along Dato Koya Road, Penang Road, Perangin Road, Pitt Street and sometimes they went as far as Tanjung Tokong with their 'nasi kandar'. They vended their food on foot since the British did not give them licences to sell any food in shop houses in order to safe guard the public health. This restriction was lifted after the Second World War and the Rawthers stopped vending their 'nasi kandar' but sold it from a shop that their father had earlier acquired. This was the beginning of the Hameediyah Restaurant on Campbell Street. It was named after Abdul Hameed, Packeer Mohamed Rawther's son who expanded the business with the other members of the family. Besides 'nasi kandar' they sold fried noodles or 'mee goreng' more popularly known as the 'mee goreng mamak'. 'Mamak' is an honorific address for an elderly Indian Muslim man. Today 'nasi kandar' and 'mee goreng mamak' are well known Penang dishes throughout Malaysia. These were started by Indians but ironically the Indians in India might not know them.

Other early proprietors in the 'nasi kandar' business was Mohamed Kassim who started in the first decade of the 20th century. His first shop was in Brick Kiln Road and the second was in Gurdwara Road. He was helped by his son, Seeni Pakir and other relatives. Today Penang 'nasi kandar' is synonymous with the name Mohamed Kassim.

Also well known was the M.M. Shaik Dawood Sahib Restaurant which also sold 'nasi kandar'. Shaik Dawood, the founder, who hailed from Keelakarai in South India, came to Penang in a British ship indicating that he already had earlier connections with the British in India itself. Other members of his family were already venturing in businesses like his younger brother, Kader Meerah Sahib, in Singapore. His nephew M.N. Mohamed Yusoff assisted Shaik Dawood as a cook in his newly rented building in Queen Street near the Penang port. The building was converted into a boarding house for sailors and port workers who came from afar. A special room was converted as an eating place where he could sell food to his tenants. In the 1940's this eating place was converted into Dawood Restaurant. Since his 'nasi kandar' and other items were deliciously prepared and suited the palates of his clients, more and more people came to patronize his restaurant. They included British army personnel, Australians, Africans and other Europeans.

Another trade mark that Penang is famous for is the rows of jewellery shops that lined Pitt Street (today Jalan Kapitan Keling). There were many such shops here that the street was first named *Jalan Batu Permata* or Jewel Street. They were also started by Indian Muslims from India. Two examples are Habib Jewel and Haji S. Abdul Wahab Jewellery Sdn. Bhd. Habib Jewel was founded by Habib Mohamed bin Abdul Latif who came, like many others, with his parents and other members of his family when he was still a teenager. His interest grew from his experience as an assistant in a jewellery shop in Penang. He gained the trust of his clients, thus when he struck out on his own, the clients continued to buy jewels from him. He became well known especially in Mecca when some of his clients sold Habib jewels there. This invited jewel merchants in Mecca to buy wholesale jewels from him. Today the business is managed by his son, Meer Sadik Habib who developed it into Habib Corporation Berhad and became the first jewellery shop to be listed in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. Like Mohamed Habib, Haji S. Abdul Wahab and others came to Penang with their parents and other members of their family.

They first opened a shop on Pitt Street, followed by another a couple of years later. They even supplied jewels to other states in Malaysia.

The second and later generations of Indian Muslims were born in Penang. They either inherited their businesses from their parents or started new ones on their own. They too, became successful in their own right. Mohamed Ariffin bin M.Tajoodin, for example, was the son of Bapu Alauddin who came to Penang under the Sultan of Kedah's instruction to accompany Francis Light. Bapu Alauddin was a cattle dealer in Kedah, Perak and Siam and continued to branch out to Penang. Upon his demise his son, Mohamed Ariffin inherited the trade and his other son, Wan Chik Ariffin, on the other hand, became more successful than his father or grandfather as a rice merchant. He was so successful that he acquired a lot of property. The Savoy Hotel was once his residence.

In the stevedoring business, Kana Patchee's sons, Haji Hussein Kanapatchee and Haji Abu Bakar Kana Patchee inherited their father's business. They supplied tug boat services and lighters to load and unload goods from ships to the jetty and vice versa. They also supplied foodstuff to the ships that anchored around Penang. Other businesses run by Indian Muslims born in Penang were the import and export of textiles, spices and other foodstuff between Penang, India, Sumatra, China and even as far as Europe. Examples are Haji Abu Backer bin Mamak Hussein who founded Barkath Store, K. Ghani, R.E. Mohd. Kassim, Tan Sri C.M. Hashim, Fazal Mohammed, Dalbadal Merican, F.A. Abd. Karim and many others.

The Indian Muslims were not the only community that became commercially successful. Arabs who came directly from Hadhramaut, or descendents of mixed Arab parentage also contributed to the economy of Penang and the well being of the Muslim communities on the island and its surrounding areas. Some of the best known are Tunku Syed Hussain Aidid, Syed Ahmad Al-Attas, Shaikh Mohamad Badjenid and Tan Sri Syed Abbas bin Syed Abdul Rahman. Al-Habshee. Tunku Syed Hussain Aidid hailed from Aceh. His parents were of Arab-Aceh lineage of the royal family. He migrated to Penang during Francis Light's administration to expand his trade on spices. He monopolized the spice trade between Penang and Aceh and also served as an agent for a British company, Palmer & Co. which was based in Madras. Syed Hussain was responsible for opening Acheen Street. His presence was specially felt by the construction of a four storey 'Rumah Tinggi' (Tall Building) which served as a godown for his spices. He had very close rapport with those in power and the who's who in Penang. Light appointed him as the Malay Kapitan. In the later part of the 19th and early 20th centuries other Arab merchants continued to be involved in trading, such as Syed Ahmad Al-Attas and Shaikh Mohamad Badjenid who delved in spice and textile trading between Indonesia, Penang and the Middle East. Tan Sri Syed Abbas who belonged more to the post Merdeka era was born in Penang of Arab-Malay descent. Apart from his trading in batik and other goods from India, Thailand and Brunei, he was well known for founding a shipping consortium known as *Konsortium Perkapalan Berhad Group* in 1982.

The participation of Malays in commerce was less prominent than that of their Indian and Arab counterparts. A few who deserve to be mentioned are Nakhoda Kechil and Soetan

Mohd Issa. Nakhoda Kechil was one of the early settlers in Penang present when Francis Light arrived on the island. He was the Malay chief who supplied the local labour for Light to clear the jungle around Tanjung Penaga. Together with his older brother, Haji Mohammad Salleh, he developed Batu Uban. Nakhoda Kechil traded spices such as pepper and cloves from Sumatra for local consumption. Soetan Mohd Issa bin Dato Hidjaou came from Singkil in west Sumatra in the early 20th century. He imported marine products, copra, spices, oil, etc. from Sumatra to be sold locally and exported rubber and milk products from Denmark. He based his businesses at Acheen Street where most Malay traders settled.

Other commercial activities included being Haj agents and as printers, publishers and authors in the literary sector. An example is Sheikh Omar Basheer born in Penang in 1811 who was the first known Haj agent. Muslims from the Malay peninsula, Sumatra and southern Thailand wishing to perform their pilgrimage to Mecca, used Penang as the port for departure to Jeddah. Sheikh Omar would make the necessary preparation for the pilgrims and find ships that would bring the pilgrims to and from the holy land. Sheikh Omar was already a well known religious leader. He was educated in Mecca and was familiar with the places and special needs there. In Penang he was the *Imam* for the Aceh Mosque which was close by his office and residence. He was very well respected by the British government such that Malays who participated in riots in 1867 were asked to make an oath before him to reject their membership in the Red and White Flag Societies.

Another notable personality responsible for Muslim reformist movements was Syed Sheikh bin Ahmad Al-Hadi or better known as Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi. He authored the famous Malay novel of his time, *Hikayat Faridah Hanom*. From the proceeds of his book he was able to set up the Jelutong Printing Press. He introduced several magazines and a newspaper for the benefit of the Malay communities in the Straits Settlements as well as other Malay States. They include *Al-Ikhsan* (1926-1931), *Al-Hikmah* (1935), *Cherita* (1936), *Dewan Pergaulan* (1940) and his newspaper *Saudara* (1928-1941). The writings were to create awareness among the Malays whom he felt were lagging behind the other communities in all aspects. Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi was also responsible for the establishment of the *Madrasah al-Mashoor*, a modern Islamic school as opposed to the *Pondok* School. Here the medium of instruction was Arabic and English. With the help of prominent members of the Muslim communities in Penang and the Malay States, *Madrasah al-Mashoor* became well known throughout Southeast Asia. Successful students were sent to the *Al-Azhar* University in Cairo or other universities in the Middle East to further their studies. Graduates from this *madrasah* were normally appointed as Qadi, teachers, and religious officers throughout the country.

Another publisher and printer who promoted Islamic education and knowledge was Sheikh Sulaiman bin Bakar Rafee. He was born and educated in Mecca and migrated to Penang with other siblings. He tried his hands in several businesses, including the trade in tin ore, batik and managing a sawmill, unfortunately he failed. Lastly he purchased *Persama Press*, a company involved in binding books. This company was then renamed the Sulaiman Rafee Press. Here he chiefly bound the Quran and other religious books, mostly in the Arabic language which he translated into Malay. Later he renamed the

company Sulaiman Press and Paper Sdn. Bhd. Many religious books were published and printed by this company and distributed throughout the country.

In the dissemination of Islamic knowledge through education and the establishment of mosques, all successful members of the Muslim communities contributed generously. Kader Mydin Merican, the first Kapitan Keling established the Masjid Kapitan Keling which is one of the heritage buildings in Penang today. Tunku Syed Hussain Aidid built the Masjid Melayu or Masjid Aceh; Syed Ahmad Al-Attas built the Masjid Arab at Seang Teik Road; Karna Nina Mohamed built the Masjid Karwa in Tanjung Tokong; Khan Mohammad built the Masjid Khan Mohammad in Perak Road; Dalbadal Merican and his family were responsible for the setting up of the Masjid Hashim Yahaya in Kampong Dodol in Perak Road and Sheikh Yusof bin Sheikh Latiff built the Masjid Sheikh Yusoff in Air Itam Road. The others endowed some of their income and property towards the management of mosques and *madrasah*. They also contributed zakat for the needy Muslims on the island or built homes for orphans and hostels for Muslim students who wanted to pursue their education (including English education) in the city.

Socially, many of the mercantile Muslims who originated from India, Hadhramaut, Sumatra and elsewhere, brought their families together with them when they came to Penang. Those who were single would later fetch their brides from their homeland. However, many took second or third wives in Penang. The wives they married locally were either women from their own ethnic groups born in Penang or married to local Malays, Chinese, or others, thus creating new generations of people known as the Jawi Peranakan of mixed Indian parentage (Darah Keturunan Keling or DKK) or mixed Arab parentage known as the Darah Keturunan Arab (DKA). Many of the DKKs and DKAs were prominent and were very vocal in their social and political thinking that created contestations in the 1930's among the Malays, especially in the choice of leadership. But these problems ceased when they became members of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) or other national political parties which fought for the independence of Malaya from the British. Without doubt their joint struggles for independence of the country placed them on equal footing with the rest of the *rakyat*.

The commitment shown throughout their lives towards the betterment of the Muslim communities and the general public as a whole indicates that the Penang communities chose Penang as their permanent home. Many of the above leaders and later generations were actively involved in social and political movements in Penang right from the start. Almost all of the economically successful personalities were also leaders of the communities, albeit within their own individual circles in the beginning. Their leadership eventually spread outwards when marriages with other communities and places of domicile were no longer restricted in the same localities where the original families were. Examples are Bahauddin Haji bin Abdul Hamid, the grandson of Bapu Alauddin, the man who represented the Sultan of Kedah to accompany Francis Light to Penang, who was the first *Penghulu* (chief) of Balik Pulau until he died in 1918. Haji Abu Bakar bin Kana Patchee, on the other hand, endowed some of his property for the benefit of the Muslim communities, and for that and other services he was bestowed the Justice of Peace by the British. Later the Malaysian Government honoured him with the medal of honour *Ahli*

Mangku Negara. Haji Habib Mohamed of Habib Jewel was the President of Muslim Jewellers Association and Money Changers Association of Malaysia. He was active in the Malay Chamber of Commerce as well as UMNO. Tan Sri C.M. Hashim of A. Deeneys & Co Sdn. Bhd., was once Chairman of the Federal Legislative Council when Sir Donald McGillivray was High Commissioner of Malaya, Chairman of the Penang Orphanages, the President of the Penang Malay Chamber of Commerce, Penang Football Association, etc. Haji Yusof Rawa was another example of a second generation Malay in Penang who became very active in the *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* (PAS) and in 1989 became its President. He was appointed Ambassador of Malaysia to Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan. There were other very prominent personalities from Penang which would warrant a separate paper.

V Conclusion

Archaeological findings in Lembah Bujang in Kedah and its surroundings show that trade between these areas and India had long been established even before the beginning of the Common Era (CE). Religious artifacts excavated from the sites denoted that trade was not the only objective of the Indian traders, but also indirectly to spread their beliefs. Local beliefs blended or coalesced easily with the new influences creating new kinds of cultures. Different periods of time and different dynamics of trade went hand in hand with the spread and syncretism of dominant cultures of the different eras. Such phenomena became more significant from the 18th century until the present, especially when Indian traders from the south, from Hadhramaut and Sumatra brought along their Islamic influences. This can easily be illustrated by the dominance of Indian Muslim traders, Arabs and Malays from Aceh in Penang after the occupation of the island by the British. These traders domiciled on the island and became part of the most influential groups that also shaped the economy, politics and social characteristics of the island in particular, and in the peninsula generally. This paper shows the dynamism of trade and cultures that crossed the Indian Ocean between the two areas throughout the centuries, as it developed over time under different political climate and conditions.