



MIGRATION AND INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS IN
JOHOR DURING BRITISH RULE 1885-1941

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how migration affects the population and the inter-ethnic relations of people in Johor during British rule from 1885 to 1941. This study also addresses the correlation between the land, the policy-makers of the Malay rulers and the British government, the migration and the people in Johor. It is thought that the British was responsible for the making-up of Johor's plural society as well as the state's prosperity. However, it is imperative also to rectify the role of Malay indigenous rulers in the migration process. In dealing with migration and its effects on inter-ethnic relations in Johor, one aspect to look at is the law and legal codes, especially the state's constitution, *Undang Tubuh Johor*, which is the first written constitution in Malaya. It was an instrument used by the local rulers in dealing with migration and this, in a way, explained the peaceful state of Johor in comparison to other Malay states during that time. By using archival materials such as state census records and newspapers, this study explores the reasons and impacts of migration in Johor of which the establishment of multi-ethnic society is the most prominent outcome. The findings of this study enhance the understanding of the concept of multicultural people in Johor from the historical point of view and consequently, benefit the present Malaysian society in dealing with the issue of migrants.

ملخص البحث

تقوم هذه الدراسة بدراسة كيفية تأثير الهجرة على السكان والعلاقات المشتركة بين الأعراق المتعددة لدى أهل جوهور أثناء فترة الحكم البريطاني من الفترة 1885 حتى 1941. كما تعالج هذه الدراسة أيضا العلاقة بين الأرض، وصناع السياسات من الحكام الملايويين، والحكومة البريطانية، والهجرة، وأهل جوهور. ويعتقد أن البريطانيين كانوا المسؤولين عما يصل إليه المجتمع المتعدد الأعراق من نهضة، وكذلك عن ازدهار الولاية. ومع ذلك، فمن الضروري أيضا تقويم دور الحكام الأصليين البلاد الملايو في عملية الهجرة. لمعالجة الهجرة وتأثيراتها على العلاقات العرقية المشتركة في جوهور، فهناك جانب يجب أن يؤخذ بعين الاعتبار وهو القانون، والبنود القانونية، ودستور الولاية على وجه الخصوص الذي هو أول دستور مكتوب في الملايو. كان الدستور أداة استخدمها الحكام المحليون في التعامل مع الهجرة، وهذا- بطريقة ما- فسر السلام الذي تتمتع به ولاية جوهور مقارنة بالولايات الملايوية الأخرى في ذلك الوقت. اعتمادا على المواد الأرشيفية مثل سجلات تعداد الولاية، والصحف، توصلت هذه الدراسة إلى أسباب وآثار الهجرة في جوهور، والنتيجة الأكثر بروزا منها تأسيس وإنشاء مجتمع متعدد الأعراق. نتائج هذه الدراسة تعزز فهم مفهوم أناس متعددي الثقافات في جوهور من وجهة نظر تاريخية، وبالتالي، تعود نتائج هذه الدراسة بالنفع على المجتمع الماليزي الحالي في التعامل مع قضية المهاجرين.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in History and Civilization.

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DECLARATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

“As a Malay kingdom, Johor was indeed an enigma.”¹

Through many centuries, historical facts have shown that millions of people have migrated from one place to another. Migration has been a part of human life where the purpose varies such as due to economic or social factors, to find new settlement or work and so on. Large population shifts had taken place in the region called *Nusantara* or Malay Archipelago before and will continue to happen in the future. It is widely known that maritime kingdoms that lay along the coastline of the region were very much affected by the migration activity. One of the most prominent maritime kingdoms was the Malacca Sultanate. The Sultanate which was founded by Parameswara in the early 14th century ended through the conquest of the Portuguese in 1511. Eventually, the Malay kingdom retained its survival through Johor Sultanate which was founded shortly after the fall of Malacca through the lineage of Sultan Mahmud Syah, the last heir of the Malacca Sultanate. The new capital was first established on the banks of Johor River before it was moved to Kota Tinggi, then Riau and later Johor River again. By the mid 16th century, Johor, whose main activity centered on trade, rose to power as a one of the most powerful maritime kingdoms in the Malay world.

To deal with Johor’s past events, one has to understand the true Johor and its importance politically and economically in relation to the history of Malaya. Situated

¹ Khoo, Kay Kim., *Malay Society: Transformation and Democratisation*, (Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1991), 120.

further south at the end of the Asian continental mainland, in the early days Johor held a vast political dimension covering areas that extended to Singapore and Riau-Lingga. However, the arrival of foreign powers to Southeast Asia caused Johor to lose Singapore² in 1819 to the British and Riau-Lingga in 1824 to the Dutch. The British acquired Singapore in 1819 after a treaty signed with Johor ruler. This acquisition certainly had a great impact on the Johor Sultanate in the sense that it later led to the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty which maximized the influence of Western powers in the *Nusantara* region. The *Nusantara* was consequently divided into two spheres, namely under the Dutch and British hegemony.

The strategic location of Johor and the importance of its economy were recorded in history. Johor received attention from the foreign powers whether from the West and East. It became the center of attraction for the people inside and outside the region including Javanese, Bugis, Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Japanese and so on. Later, this led to the influx of migrants and consequently created diversity in Johorean society. Statistics of Johor reported a population of 25,000 in 1838 that increased to more than 30 % i.e. 78,000 in 1868 and 100,000 in 1880³; the trend continued in the following years. By 1894, Johor's population including the Chinese people was at 210,000, of which the Malays stood at 50,000, the Javanese, Siamese, Bugis and other natives of the Malay Archipelago 30,000, while Indians, Arabs, Eurasians and Europeans 10,000.⁴ With this huge number of people migrating to Johor a question such as what motives caused their migration needs to be considered.

² Singapore became a part of "Straits Settlements" along with Penang and Malacca in 1826. Straits Settlements refers to territories controlled under direct rule of British.

³ Ahmad Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Haron, *Sejarah Johor Moden 1855-1940: Satu Perbincangan dari Pelbagai Aspek*, (Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Negara, 1978), 29.

⁴ Harry Lake., "Johore", *The Geographical Journal* 3, (1894), 296.

To answer this question, several factors may be pointed out. Johor's openness to the outside world and the position of Singapore as an international trading port are among the reasons. Yet, the two, namely Johor and Singapore, are somehow inter-related in that their close proximity caused Johor to adopt such an open policy and with the increasing importance of Singapore it accentuated the influence of the British on the Malay Peninsula, particularly in Johor. Furthermore, according to Rupert Emerson, the modernization and the prosperity of Johor had encouraged foreign immigration.⁵ Surely, this needs to be elaborated further and this is what the researcher seeks out to do.

It is worth knowing the existing historiographical debate on the subject of "the white man's burden"⁶ and the locals' pride by highlighting the role of Malay aristocrats and refuting the long-held assumption that British policy-makers played a significant role in opening modern Johor for migrants. The researcher believes this Statement is essential to the discussion as it clearly situates the study in the wider historiographical context. At the same time, one must understand the role of Johor's aristocracy as well as the intervention of British in relation to the migration process. The British did not have any concerns for Johor, for Johor had nothing back then. Johor was not particularly attractive to them until it prospered and developed a plural society by the end of the 20th century. In spite of some political tensions⁷ that occurred during the time when the British was expanding its influence in the Malay States,

⁵ Rupert Emerson., *Malaysia: A Study in Direct & Indirect Rule*, (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1964), 205-206.

⁶ Rudyard Kipling., *The White Man's Burden*, (England: Doubleday and McClure Company, 1899). In this context it indicates to the singular responsibilities of Englishmen to civilize the other nations.

⁷ A political tension in this context refers to the attempt of British to interfere in the Johor State's administration and the rejection of such an attempt by Johor ruler (Sultan Ibrahim) who despised colonial intervention. The issue such as railway links between Singapore and Federated Malay States (FMS) also became a debatable subject for British and Johor.

See Nadarajah, N, *Johore and the Origins of British Control, 1895-1914* (Kuala Lumpur: Arena Buku Sdn. Bhd, 2000), 128 - 179.

there was generally a mutual understanding between two policy-makers: Johor's Malay aristocracy who were ruling Johor at that time and the British government in matters of administration. Such an understanding was sealed in 1914 when Johor accepted a British General Adviser and became part of the Unfederated Malay States⁸. Hence, in order to understand the migration process in Johor as well as its consequences on the inter-ethnic relations in the State, it is important to look at these two policymakers, Malay rulers and British advisers. Another relevant question surfaces as to how both the Malay rulers and the British dealt with the issue of migration and inter-ethnic relations in Johor, and this study attempts to answer this question.

In dealing with migration and its effects on inter-ethnic relations in Johor, a vital aspect to look at is the law and legal codes. Not only did the law facilitate the administration of Johor, but it also contributed to the stability of the State. One such law that is worth analyzing is *Undang Tubuh Johor* or Johor State Constitution promulgated on 14th April 1895 during the reign of Sultan Abu Bakar. It was the first written law and constitution of Johor covering matters related to civil and criminal punishment, international laws, etc.⁹ The *Undang Tubuh Johor* had a very important role in the development of Johor as a State and its people or society. This constitution gave a firm base for Johor to maintain its sovereignty from the encroachment of European powers, particularly the British. It can be argued that, following the

⁸ Unfederated Malay States was a collective name given by British towards the Malay States such as Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu which were given much more autonomy, compared to Federated Malay States (FMS) which was established in 1895 consisting of States like Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang.

⁹ *Undang Tubuh Johor* was set up in 1895 by Sultan Abu Bakar and with the assistance of Johor's Council of Ministers and British law firm "Messrs Rodyk and Davidson" in Singapore. It was written in Malay Jawi transcript and English transcript and contains 64 law clauses. It was revised four times i.e. in 1908, 1912, 1914 and 1918. Especially in 1914, the constitution was substantially modified due to the acceptance of British Adviser into the Johor administration. See Haji Buyong Adil, *Sejarah Johor*. (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980), 288-289.

enactment of the law in 1895, Johor became a distinctive Malay State and set itself far apart from some other Malay States that were categorized as either the Federated Malay States (FMS) or the Unfederated Malay States; enjoying greater autonomy and having special relations with the British.

Apart from the law which can be seen as an instrument in dealing with migration, a more direct outcome of this social movement is plural society in the State of Johor. Migration contributed to cultural diversity and consequently, intricate inter-ethnic relations in the State of Johor. The question here is how did the people react to one another? Moorhead for instance, maintained that the Malays had been able to keep their own way of life despite the coming of different cultures, beliefs and lifestyles such as those by the Chinese and Indians.¹⁰ Apart from the plural society, the influx of migrants to Johor also caused changes to the existing fabric of the Malay society. For instance, with migration, Johor witnessed its classical Malay social hierarchy developed into a new structure of social hierarchy with the the inclusion of other non-local Malays named *Jawi Peranakan* which developed in the mid-19th century.

As far as the scope of this study is concerned, the researcher will attempt to examine the situation in Johor, particularly from 1885 until 1941 because it marked practically the socio-political changes experienced by Johor resulting from the combination of the policies of local Malay rulers and the indirect British control of the State. The selected date of 1885 refers to the foundation of the new Sultanate of Johor which was different from its previous State where the old type of bureaucracy associated with maritime kingdom was mixed with the Western administrative system. The closing period of the study, 1941 on the other hand, marked the State of Johor

¹⁰ Moorhead, F.J., *A History of Malaya, Vol.2*, (Kuala Lumpur: Longmans of Malaya, 1963), 184.

before the arrival of Japan to Malaya. This is an important phase in Johor history which brought Johor to its present identity. Generally speaking, the social history of Johor remains relevant until present day which also constitutes a part of Malaysian history.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Johor is one of the States in Malay Peninsula that holds a distinctive position. This State was depicted as such by Rupert Emerson (1964), “The State of Johore is the most difficult of all the States of the Peninsula to characterize and describe in any simple and straightforward fashion”¹¹. This is due to the fact that Johor was the only State in *Tanah Melayu* or Malaya which had a close connection¹² with the British government. Johor was also the last State to accept a British General Adviser. Unlike other Malay States, Johor agreed to accept the British Adviser only in 1914. In addition, the word ‘uniqueness’ is used to refer to the modern elements of the administrative as well as economic systems of Johor under the local Malay rulers. It can be argued that Johor was the first Malay State that openly adopted the Western system yet remained culturally Malay at the same time. Therefore, this distinctive character of Johor has intrigued the researcher to figure out the correlation between the land, the policy-makers, i.e. the Malay rulers and the British government, the migration and the people in Johor. It is worthy to pursue because it will illuminate the uniqueness of the Johor State.

¹¹ Emerson, R., *Malaysia: A Study in Direct & Indirect Rule*, 197.

¹² The close connection between Johor and British can be traced through the friendship of Sultan Abu Bakar with Queen Victoria which played an important element that brought Johor became successful State. See Trocki, C.A., *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore*.(Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979), 193.

The idea of migration tends to always champion the colonialist's view of "the white man's burden" thus, undermining the merit of the local Malay aristocracy; that it was the British who brought the immigrants and developed Johor. This theory was maintained by Lian Kwee Fee in his research that, "When the British decided to extend colonial rule and establish a permanent presence throughout the Malay Peninsula in 1874, it marked the beginning of the construction of plural society, by bringing into contact subsequently significant numbers of people from different historical and cultural origins"¹³. The popular view of the importance of the role of the British in Johor inaccurately portrays the real situation that happened there because of the way it ignores the local factors. This study will argue that the British were not all the time the pioneers who brought the immigrants into the State but that the Johor Malay aristocracy was also equally responsible for the migration into Johor.

The migration has led to different ethnics settling in Johor for certain periods of time or permanently. It was known in the case of Perak and Selangor that several clashes happened following the migration process i.e. between the locals and the immigrants, something that was nearly absent in Johor. While it was bizarre to note harmonious situation in Johor, it had a surrounding unlike those two other States. Indeed, as this study will show, the formation of a stabilized community in Johor has a close connection with some local factors. This study will attempt to seek out the attitude of the local Malays towards the influx of migrants into their State and how they dealt with the latter in ensuring peace in the society. This will refer to the attitude held by the Malay aristocrats specifically and the Malay masses generally. Similarly important in preserving order and peace is Johor's legal code known as Undang Tubuh Johor which was the first written constitution in Malay States. The important

¹³ Lian, Kwen Fee. (ed). *Race, Ethnicity, and the State in Malaysia and Singapore*. (Netherlands: Leiden), 221.

question as to what kind of legal implications migration had on Johor will thus be answered.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What was the role of Malay rulers over the issue of migration in Johor?
2. What was the role of the British over the issue of migration in Johor?
3. How did legal notions shape the migrants opportunities in Johor?
4. How did migrants connect with the host society and develop their cultural identities in Johor?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the role of Malay rulers over the issue of migration in Johor.
2. To ascertain the British's role in the issue of migration in Johor.
3. To assess the legal notions of migration in Johor.
4. To analyse the impact of migration on the host society and the development of cultural identities in Johor.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will provide descriptive analysis of Johor's social developments and inter-ethnic relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through the process of migration. It aims to analyse inter-ethnic relations in Johor and the connection with migration especially since much of the existing literature often mainly discuss more on the political and economic issues of Johor.

The study would be of great value since little has been written on migration into Johor, particularly in relation to the social history of the State and the attitudes towards migration among the Johor Malay aristocrats and commoners. A greater understanding from the social perspective would help to explain the prosperity and the relatively peaceful life in Johor experienced by the locals and the immigrants. This historical study of the issue of migration and its impacts on inter-ethnic relations is worth discussing due to the dynamics of the society which we live in presently day. It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to the study of Johor's history in general and provide a fuller understanding of the social developments in Johor in the past and the present.

The perception of the role of the British in the Johor administration and migration policies has somewhat been exaggerated and that consequently led to the view of the British being responsible for the making-up of Johor's plural society as well as the State's prosperity. This study will shed light not only on the involvement of the British in the Johor's development and relationship with its rulers, but more importantly the greater role played by the latter in the issue of migration and inter-ethnic relations in the State.

This research is also noteworthy since migration led to the different set-up of legal implications before and after the direct intervention of the British in Johor. The importance of Undang Tubuh Johor will be highlighted since it was the first written constitution in the Malay Peninsula. This constitution played an important role in setting up the rules and regulations pertaining to different traditions and cultures so as to regulate the conduct of people from different ethnic groups in the Johor society.

The social phenomena which occurred in the late 19th century up to the 20th century whereby there was a huge influx of migration into Johor contributed to the

present diversity in culture and tradition in the State. This study will enhance the understanding of the concept of multicultural people in Johor from the historical point of view, and consequently benefit the present Malaysian society in dealing with the issue of “migrants”. While this study cannot justify the entire phenomenon that is happening in Malaysia, a bit of understanding of the past will certainly help readers to comprehend the current society in Malaysia in general and Johor in particular.

Last but not least, the researcher is aware that while this study focuses more on the social history of Johor, some political and economic issues need to be highlighted and cannot be overlooked. This attempt to view it from different perspectives would hopefully help to boost “nation building” in Johor as one of the States in Malaysia. Therefore, it deserves more emphasis and a central position in the structure of the paper.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand migration and inter-ethnic relations in Johor, the researcher has consulted a great number of library sources. Most of them discuss the political dimension including the economic structure of Johor, yet, rarely touch on social development especially on migration matters. Without understanding the political circumstances, the researcher believes that one cannot get the idea of the situation of Johor during this period for which reason, their studies also look at some administrative aspects of Johor, whenever necessary.

When approaching the history of Johor, Shaharom Husain is widely known among Southeast Asian historians regarding Johor literature. He presents his work in a classical manner under the title, *Sejarah Johor: Kaitannya dengan Negeri Melayu*”

(1995)¹⁴. This work helps the researcher to understand the general history of Johor from the lineage of Sultan of Malacca that is late 19th century until the outbreak of Second World War. Though his work makes a valuable contribution to the research, the information about early 20th century Johor is somewhat limited and insufficient.

Turning to another scholar, R.O. Winstedt makes an excellent effort through his classical writing “A History of Johore (1992); his magnum opus that enlightens with a rather comprehensive history of ancient and modern Johor. This book becomes one primary source for other written historical accounts which cannot be overlooked. The fact that he was directly involved in the Johor administration in 1931 also helped to provide information on the situation back then. In writing the work he referred to the manuscripts in Johor archives and it was mentioned that he received help from several personnel such as Richard James Wilkinson and Major Dato’ Haji Muhammad Said, who were acquainted with the administration of Johor in the early 20th century. Yet, the work has its own weaknesses whereby it does not reflect professional historical writing and the primary sources were not used extensively.¹⁵

Nevertheless, a lot of studies have complimented Winstedt’s historical writing such as “Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore” (1979) by Carl. A. Trocki¹⁶ and *Sejarah Johor* (1980) by Haji Buyong Adil¹⁷. Both of them focus predominantly¹⁷ on the political affairs of Johor in the hands of dynamic Malay rulers. In addition, Trocki’s work in particular deals with Johor’s history by emphasizing more on the local perspective rather than the colonial views.

¹⁴ Shaharom Husain, *Sejarah Johor: Kaitannya dengan Negeri Melayu*, (Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd,1995)

¹⁵ Winstedt, R.O., *A History of Johore, 1365-1941*. With a final chapter by Khoo Kay Kim, (Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1992).

¹⁶ Trocki, C.A., *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore*. (Singapore: Singapore University Press,1979).

¹⁷ Haji Buyong Adil, *Sejarah Johor*. (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka,1980).

His approach provides a means of deconstructing the idea of colonial's "White men's burden" view which regard the British as having overwhelming influence on Johor. However, Trocki overly indulged on "great men stories" which concern with higher local administrative matters. What is missing is that he left out the popular attitude especially that of the masses towards the development of Johor and a thorough analysis on the social development of the State.

Another prominent work done on the British intervention in Malaya is "Rulers and Residents: Influence and Power in the Malay States, 1870-1920" (1992) by J.M. Gullick. He writes, "Johor was always a special case, since the political and economic pressure arising from its proximity to Singapore was matched by exceptional sophistication of Johor diplomacy in resisting it, so that the "Residential system" did not take root there until 1910-1914."¹⁸ His work is helpful in giving information about the administrative control in Johor State. In this sense Trocki and Gullick hold the same opinion regarding the idea of the strength of Johor under the local aristocracy. Unfortunately, the information about the upper Malay classes appears too abundant with very limited account on society at large, nor did they touch substantially on socially related matters of the State.

On the development of Malay politics and British role, a thorough research was done by Barbara Andaya and Leonard Andaya in "A History of Malaysia" (1982).¹⁹ This work gives particular attention to the evolution of Malay politics and its historical process which led to the emergence of the various cultures in Malaysia including Johor. Unfortunately, the role of migration and people's settlement which are social in nature are not well presented in this work.

¹⁸ Gullick, J.M., *Rulers and Residents: Influence and Power in the Malay States, 1870-1920*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

¹⁹ Andaya, B.W., and Andaya, L.W., *A History of Malaysia*, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1982).