

## CHAPTER 2

# THE STATE OF PAHANG

The Chinese word for “Pahang” is transliterated from Malay. This name was first seen in The Book of Tang and was known as “Po-Feng” in Chinese. In a book, Zheng He's Missions of the Ming Dynasty, it was named as “Pang Hang”.

## **Pahang – Abode of Tranquility**

Pahang, a land with dense forests and rich resources, is the largest state in Peninsular Malaysia. Kuantan is the state capital.

The official name of Pahang is Darul Makmur, meaning a place of quietness and tranquility. The natural environment of the state truly reflects the meaning of its name. 75% of the land area is covered by thick tropical forests. The Tahan Mountain, the highest peak of West Malaysia, is located in the Tahan Mountain National Park in Pahang, which is also the largest tropical forest in the peninsula. The main mountain range of Malaysia – the Titiwangsa – cuts across the state. There are many holiday resorts in this area, notably Cameron Highlands, Fraser’s Hill and Bukit Tinggi. All are famed for their cooler climate and beautiful scenery.

The longest river in the peninsula is the Pahang River. The river meanders through the towns and villages of Pahang before flowing out to the sea in Pekan. Pahang has plentiful supply of plain water fishes like Jerawat and Badin. These delicious and expensive fishes used to be served only to royalties. However, they have been bred successfully in rivers using nets, so now everyone has the chance to eat these delicacies. The Tioman Island, which is off the coast of Pahang, is one of the top Ten Most Fascinating Islands of the world. The sea bed there is covered with strikingly beautiful coral reefs. Its white



Cameron Highlands - the famous tea plantation in West Malaysia

sandy beaches and clear blue sea attract hundreds of tourists each year.

Pahang is blessed with bounteous natural resources. There are gold mines in Raub and tin mines in Sungai Lembing. The timber industry was a great source of revenue in the early days. The long coastline of the state is rich in marine life. Oil palms, rubber trees, cocoa trees, paddy fields and various types of fruit trees are also in abundance. In Cameron Highlands, tea, vegetables and flowers are grown for commercial purposes. The people of Pahang thus enjoy a comfortable and peaceful life.

## History

During the reign of the Sung Dynasty, Chinese traders from the southern province of Fujian had already set foot in Pahang. The state was known variously as Pong-Hong, Phe-Hang, Pang-Kang in Chinese historical records. The prosperous state also attracted the attention of Srivijaya in Sumatra, which occupied it for about six centuries. Pahang was ruled by the Malacca Sultanate in the 15th century. Later on, Johor, Aceh, Holland and Portugal contended with each other to possess it. It was finally conquered by Johor, which occupied it for about 200 years. The control of the state was passed to



Kuantan is famous for its salted fish



Malaysian Batik

the British in the 19th century and then the Japanese in the 20th century. Pahang joined the Federation of Malaya in 1948, and became a member state when Malaya gained independence in 1957.

## Culture

The royal house of Pahang uses a special cloth with lattice and floral designs for their official occasions. It was brought into the state by a Bugis trader, Keraing Aji, in 1722. His effort won him the honorary title of “Tuk Tuan”.

The Malays are the majority group in Pahang. As such, their traditional food is easily available in the local market. During the Muslim fasting month, delicacies of all shapes and colours are sold in the night markets. The seaside towns offer a variety of goodies like salted fish, anchovies, dried shrimps, fish and prawn crackers.



The main exit for the Chinese villages during the Emergency period in 1948

## Missions in Pahang

In the early days, churches involved in the outreach work in Pahang included the Anglican, Brethren, Presbyterian, Basel, Methodist and Assembly of God. These churches first established their bases in the main ports and important mining towns in Malacca, Johor, Penang and Borneo before venturing to the east coast towns and villages of the peninsula.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Methodists entered Pahang and set up schools in places like Bentung, Raub and Kuala Lipis before founding the Mentakab Church in 1950. The Brethren missionaries came to Pahang in 1925. In 1947, two Brethren church members, Sung Chiw-Hoay and his wife Kwai-Fah, established a Gospel Hall in Cameron Highlands while the Raub Gospel Hall was built in 1957.

During the Emergency years of 1948 to 1963, the Malayan government rounded up the Chinese and relocated them to restricted zones called the new villages. Surrounded with barbed wires and sentry posts, these new villages were run like concentration camps with strict curfew hours. In 1951, encouraged by the British government, many missionaries, especially those sent by the China Inland Mission (CIM, known as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship later) came to share the gospel with the villagers. The missionaries

lived together with the villagers in insect infested shacks which lacked basic amenities like water and electricity supply, while constantly threatened with instability, Communist disturbances and military suppression.

In 1954, the CIM Superintendent of the southern region, Peter Murray, and a few missionaries came to the Jerantut New Village looking for opportunity to work with the local believers to build a church together and bring hope to the despairing hearts. More than a hundred CIM missionaries flocked to the new villages like Karak, Kemansur, Gambang, Ringlet, Sungai Ruan, Temerloh and Triang. Some of the missionaries who served during this time were Rosemary Hill, Maud Wilkinson, Martha Blair, Sadie Custer, Amy Moore and Margaret Dyke.

Since 1970, because of the revised Immigration Acts, many western missionaries were sent back to their home countries. The new village churches were like shepherd-less flocks, some joined forces with other denominations while others retained their independence, looking to God as their provider.

Subsequently, other denominations such as the Anglicans, Assembly of God, Baptists, Presbyterians and Christian National Evangelism Commission came to build churches in Pahang. Compared to the other Malaysian states, the work of evangelism progresses at a much slower pace here and is often neglected. Indeed



Jungle- Home of the indigenous people

the harvest is plentiful but churches are few.

## Gospel into Forest

In the forests of Pahang dwell a good number of indigenous people who are largely neglected by the developing society. There are about 50,000 (2004 statistics) of them, and most live below the poverty line. Faced with the depletion of arable land, insufficient food supply, malnutrition and infectious diseases, their health is poor and life expectancy is lower than the norm. Has God forgotten them? When will the gospel penetrate the dense forests and rough terrains to reach them?

The involvement of the Methodist Church in the Orang Asli (indigenous people) ministry began in the 1930's. In 1932, the Methodist Church sent two Indonesian pastors to reach out to the Senoi people in Cameron Highlands, Pahang. Their work started with education and schools were built. Gradually, some of the indigenous people built churches and became independent. Meanwhile, the Lutherans and Brethrens participated in the Orang Asli ministry as well. In 1933, Cecil Jackson, an Assembly of God missionary from the United States came to serve the Sakai people.

In 1985, Rev. Leong Mock Chow took up the managerial post at the Lutheran Lake View Chalet in Cameron Highlands. At the same



Simple living environment  
of the indigenous people



Sweet smile on the face  
of a indigenous child

time, he was responsible for church planting for the Orang Asli ministry. Rev. Lieow Meng Kuang started sharing the gospel with the indigenous people in Tapah in 1980. Eight years later, he went to Maran and Bukit Ibam to assist Sister Ngeh of the Methodist Church to serve the Semelai people. Later, Rev. Lieow Meng Kuang founded JEKOA (Jemaah Kristen Orang Asli) to teach and train the indigenous people to live independently.

In 1984, moved by compassion, a Christian businessman bought food and collected clothes to bring to the Orang Asli villages. His kind acts so touched the heart of the indigenous people that they became Christians a few years later. He then started training the Orang Asli leaders in 1999 to lead their churches as well as equipping them with basic knowledge of farming and raising livestock so that they could be self-sufficient. In the 1980's, the Baptists and members of NECF (National Evangelical Christian Fellowship) such as the Assembly of God, Full Gospel Church and Calvary Church began reaching out to the Orang Asli in Raub, Bentung, Temerloh, Bukit Lancang, Cameron Highlands and other places.

In 1988, the founder of Gospel to the Poor, Rev. Moses Soo and a group of co-workers travelled from Grik, Perak and all the way down south to preach the gospel in Chinese new villages and plant churches. Rev. Soo entered the forests of Pahang in 1998 to reach out to the indigenous people there. To date, they have planted 42 Orang



Christians attending to the needs of the indigenous people



Gathering at an Orang Asli church

Asli churches in the forests (half each in the states of Pahang and Kelantan). They are training the indigenous people to be self-sufficient as well.

In the 1990's, SIB (Sidang Injil Borneo) church began their involvement in the Orang Asli ministry, planting churches in Benteng, Jerantut and Temerloh. In 2004, the local authority destroyed a newly built Orang Asli church in Sungai Pasu. The government compensated the church later when it was proven that the church was built on aboriginal reserve land.

## Conclusion

Before Jesus' ascension, He commanded the disciples to preach the gospel to all nations. His disciples obeyed His call and brought the gospel to the East. The Chinese had the opportunity to hear the gospel about 200 years ago, and yet there are still 2.6 billion people who have not heard the gospel in the world today. 99% of the people in Pahang do not know the Lord, may Christians continue to proclaim the gospel to all corners of the world.

## **A Brief Introduction of Bumiputera and Orang Asli**

In Malaysia, there are two categories of Bumiputeras: the Malays, who are born Muslims according to Malaysian law; and the Pribumis or natives of Sabah and Sarawak. The earliest inhabitants of Peninsular Malaysia are not granted the bumiputera status constitutionally. Only the 1954 Aboriginal Peoples Act provides for their protection, well-being and advancement.

Between the 13th and 14th centuries, with the development of marine navigation, Islam came to the states of Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu. In the early 15th century, Malacca was founded by a Sumatran prince and became a sultanate later. This marked the rise of Islam in the peninsula. These historical factors helped shaped the status and identity of the Malay people today. In appearance and skin colour, the indigenous people are often mistaken for the Malays.

At present, the Orang Asli can be classified into three major tribes and 19 ethnic groups. The three major tribes include the Negrito and Senoi whose origin could be traced back to the Stone Age, and the Aboriginal Malay or Proto Malay whose origin could be dated back to about 4,000 years ago. Among the 19 groups, Temoq is not recognised by the government because of their small number. According to the official statistics of 2010, there are about 140,000 Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. Most of them live near rivers, mountains, lakes, seas and deep in the interior. They are largely hunters and gatherers as well as seafarers. They practise tribal religions and animistic worship, and harbour all kinds of fear in their hearts. Have we ever thought of sharing the gospel with them?



The indigenous people capture their prey by blowing pipe



The indigenous people sell things collected from jungle



Living in harmony with nature



## **Profile of Pahang**

Area: around 35,965 square kilometers

Capital: Kuantan

Total population: more than 1.5 million

Malays (68.8%), Orang Asli (4.8%), Chinese (16.8%),  
Indians (4.8%) and others (4.8%)

Religions: Islam (73.8%), Buddhism or Taoism (16.2%),  
Hinduism (4.4%), traditional tribal religions (3.4%),  
Christianity and Catholicism (1.2%), others (1%).

## **Prayer for Pahang**

1. Pray for the Pahang state government and related authorities to respect Orang Asli's constitutional rights and freedom in terms of land, religious beliefs and customs. May the Lord revive the Orang Asli to preach the gospel to their own.
2. Pray that the urban churches will see the need for pastors in the rural churches. May God raise more people to dedicate themselves to share His love with the rural folks.
3. Pray for the many who are yet to hear the gospel in Pahang; believers make up a mere 1% of the state population. May the good news of God flourish in Pahang.

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