

## CHAPTER 8

# THE STATE OF PERAK

The Chinese name is transliterated from the Malay name “Perak.” Tin had been found here, and the state still retains the use of this name presently.



Tin-mining field in the old day

## PERAK – THE STATE OF GRACE

“Perak” is a Malay word meaning “silver”. It was said that silver was discovered here at one time, which was later identified as tin. However, the state name of Perak remains in use till now. Situated on the west coast of the Peninsular Malaysia, its coastline faces the Straits of Malacca. Perak is also known as “the State of Grace” because of its beautiful scenery. There are many small islands off the coast. The land area of Perak is approximately 21,000 sq. km. The state borders Kedah and Thailand in the north, Penang in the north-west, Selangor in the south while Kelantan and Pahang are her eastern neighbours.

In the 15th century, Beruas was the capital of Perak. Presently, Ipoh is the state capital. The latter serves as a commercial and administrative centre; it is also well-known for its striking landscape. The longest mountain range in Malaysia lies just next to Ipoh, which explains why Ipoh is given the name of “Hill City”.

Perak has a population of about 2.13 million. According to the official statistics of 2000, about 3% are Christians and Catholics. It is obvious that there is ample room for the development of Christianity in Perak. However, there is a town which presents a different scenario. It is the town with the highest Christian population in the state – Sitiawan.

In the early days, the tin mining industry created an



Rubber plantation estate

unprecedented boom for Perak. With the decline of tin mining, the state began to shift its attention to industry, agriculture, construction, tourism and other forms of economic development from 1983 onward. All these economic activities have brought about a positive impact, especially the road system which provides easy access to the towns and villages in the state as well as to the local delicacies.

## THE UNIQUENESS OF PERAK

The following is a general introduction of the uniqueness of Perak's culture and environment:

Firstly, the earliest rubber trees in Malaya were planted here. In 1877, rubber was brought into Malaya formally. R. N. Ridley planted the first nine rubber trees in Kangsar. Outside the main hall of the Kangsar District Office, at the junction of Jalan Tun Abdul Razak and Jalan Raja Chulan, an old rubber tree stands tall. This is the oldest rubber tree in Malaysia, it being one of the original nine. This old tree of more than a hundred years is still yielding latex.

Secondly, a town which enjoys many firsts: Taiping. Hailed as the "Pioneering Site of Historic Landmarks," Taiping has also been designated as a "Heritage Town" by the Malaysian government.



Taiping railway

Taiping's remarkable record of 33 firsts includes having the first court (1874), the first port (1877), the first railway station (1881), the first large market (1884), the first railway (1885) and the first Methodist Girls' School (1889). The first person to put forward the idea that "Taiping owns many firsts" is the 77 year old (2010) D. M. Ponnusamy. He wrote "Taiping's Many Firsts" in 1999 to commemorate the 125th anniversary of Taiping's colonization by the British (1874 – 1999, with the signing of the Pangkor Treaty on 20th January 1874, Taiping became a British colony.) However, some questioned many of these "firsts". Actually, not all the 33 firsts of Taiping are national firsts. Strictly speaking, they were firsts in the Malay States. Nevertheless, some of these "firsts" are truly first in our country. For instance, the railway connecting Taiping to Sepetang is officially documented as the first in our country.

Thirdly, Perak is the state with the largest number of Chinese new villages. Most of the new villages were set up under the Emergency Act (1948 – 1960), to re-settle the farmers in the rural areas so as to sever their link with the communists hiding in the nearby jungle. (The hometown of the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Malaya then was Sitiawan.) Some of the rural Chinese were sympathetic toward the communists and thus provided them with food, medicine, information and even helped them recruit new party members. The British government thus created these new villages



Signing agreement between Great Britain & royal Sultan of Malaya



Chinese villages  
- built during the Emergency period

under the Briggs Plan to block the communist expansion. To date, Perak is the state with the most number of new villages – there are altogether 125 of them.

Fourthly, Perak was the state which facilitated the formation of the Federated Malay States. In the mid-19th century, many Malay state rulers sought British help to resolve their internal conflicts. Within the first decade of the Colonial Office's take-over of the Straits Settlements, several Malay States on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula came under the control of the British as well. The merchants in the Straits Settlements wanted the British government to intervene in the internal affairs of the tin-producing states of the Malay Peninsula. The factional struggles of the Chinese secret societies and civil war within the Malay royal families prompted the British to adopt gunboat diplomacy, which was in the merchants' favour. Therefore, in 1874, Andrew Clark, the British Governor, and Sultan Abdullah of Perak signed the Treaty of Pangkor. This gave the British an excuse for intervention and eventually resulted in the expansion of British colonial power. This treaty also facilitated the formation of the Federated Malay States (different from the Federation of Malaya) which consisted of Pahang, Selangor, Perak and Negeri Sembilan, under the rule of the British Governors.



The Brethren set up orphanage centre in Ipoh

## MISSIONS IN PERAK

In the 1874 Pangkor Treaty, the British had agreed not to interfere in matters related to Malay religion and customs. Nevertheless, the Pangkor Treaty was a watershed event for the mission history of the Malay Peninsula. Mission work which was previously confined to the Straits Settlements began to make inroads into the Federated Malay States from this point onward.

The Brethren missionaries were the first to arrive in Perak. They first set foot in Taiping and planted the third Gospel Hall in the Malay Peninsula. From 1904 onwards, missionaries brought the gospel to Kampar, and the Kinta and Ipoh areas. In 1915, missionary George Wilson started a “Mission House” in Ipoh, which was later developed into Ipoh Elim Gospel Hall. At the same time, he set up orphanage house as a social bridge to gospel missions. This orphanage once adopted a total number of 60 orphans.

In addition, the Anglican Church of England came to Perak for mission in 1884. Their first choice was Taiping where they founded the All Saints' Church. The next year, they planted a church in Batu Gajah before going to Ipoh in 1906.

The Methodists started their mission work in Perak in 1895. They planted their first church in Ipoh and commenced their outreach work in Sitiawan in 1903.



The Methodist set up  
Anglo-Chinese School in Ipoh

At the onset of the 20th century, mission work in Perak was mainly a continuation of what had been started by the different denominations. However, mission agencies did not limit their work to church planting; they also ventured into community work, focusing on school education and medical services during this period. Actually, there were new denominations entering Perak at this time. For example, the Presbyterians founded the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ipoh in 1929. In response to the 1951 Briggs Plan, the China Inland Mission began working in Bidor, Tapah, Jeram, Lawan Kuda, Malim Nawar and Slim River in Perak. As for the Assembly of God (AOG), they started to reach out to Perak in 1959. Mrs. Lula M. Baird planted the First Assembly of God church in Ipoh, which was the third for the denomination in Malaysia.

In 1991, Malaysian Care - a ministry to care for the poor - began its outreach to the indigenous people ("Orang Asli") groups in Perak using a Community Development approach. The approach includes providing them with tuition classes and educational courses; and equipping them through capacity building, skill training, agriculture research and extension. In doing so, Malaysian Care helped in enhancing their capability and quality of living, and eventually helped them to become independent. This ministry plan was later extended to the central and southern part of Perak, and reaching even to the western part of Pahang and the Klang Valley in



The first Chinese Methodist church in Sitiawan



The Methodist Clinic in Sitiawan

### Selangor.

In 1993, Rev. Ng Moon Hing from St. Peter's Church of the Ipoh Anglican stream initiated the "Village Ministry". It originated from the concept of planting churches among the Chinese new villages in southern Perak. In the beginning, the village ministry grew slowly, and eventually covered about 10 villages. Gereja Shekinah in Mambang Di Awan was the first chapel built in the Chinese "Village Ministry". From 1995 onwards, the Anglicans extended their ministry to the "Orang Asli" living in the village areas. They set up English tuition classes and chapels in the tribal areas. Currently they are serving some 30 Orang Asli tribes, with a population of about 2,000. They have also started bible schools to provide basic theological training to the indigenous people.

The mission heritage and contributions of the church in Perak consist mainly of two aspects: school education and medical services. The early church founded schools to provide education for the people, grooming numerous leaders in various fields in Malaysia today. In fact, quite a number of these mission schools are considered elite schools.

Sitiawan serves as a good example when it comes to the mission heritage and contributions of the church in Perak. In 1903, Foochow Christians came south to Sitiawan to do pioneering work, leaving behind numerous significant contributions. Firstly, a place



One of the three wells  
in Kampung Koh



The parsonage retained as  
part of the museum in Sitiawan

name which reflects Christian input. To the locals, Kampung Koh is known as Mu Shi Lou (parsonage in Chinese). The name itself implies the important role pastors played in developing the place. Secondly, church wells are part of the mission heritage. In the early days, the church in Kampung Koh dug three wells to meet the water needs of the community. These wells were the main source of water supply until piped water was made available in the 1970's. The wells, part of a historical site now, are an apt reminder to future generations to be grateful for the good things they enjoy today. Thirdly, the church was an advocate of Chinese schools. In 1904, the church founded a Chinese school for the Foochow speaking people. The school was renamed Anglo Chinese School (ACS) in 1916. Later, in the 1920's, the Chinese pastors and Christian leaders worked together to open more Chinese schools. Hence, many Chinese primary schools in Sitiawan had close association with the early church. Fourthly, the provision of community medical services. The Methodist Church set up clinics in different places so that the poor and needy could receive medical help. The largest one is the Methodist Clinic in Sitiawan. Till today the clinic is in operation, albeit on a smaller scale. This clinic is the only heritage that testifies today of the medical mission of the Methodist Church in West Malaysia.



Rev. Lin Chen Mei

The landing place of  
the Foochow people in Sitiawan

## SPECIAL INTRODUCTION TO REV. LIN CHEN MEI

Rev. Lin Chen Mei, better known as Li Jing, was born in Foochow, China in 1854. He served as a senior Methodist pastor in places like Gu Tian, Ling Tou in China. He was promoted as the District Superintendent before he moved to Singapore to serve as the first pastor of the Singapore parish in 1897. Rev. Li Jing was assigned to visit Sibü when Foochow migrant workers moved from Singapore to Sibü in 1900.

In 1903, the British colonial government reached an agreement with the Sultan of Perak to develop the state. With the help of Rev. Lin and a German missionary, Dr. Heinrich L. E. Leuring, Chinese migrants were brought in from Foochow to team up with the local residents. With a total workforce of 363 Christians, they set out to develop Sitiawan.

Upon their arrival in Sitiawan, the men had to walk while the women rode on bullock carts to Kampung Koh. They lived in long attap houses for about half a year before moving to the houses located in zones 1,2,3 of the present day's main street, which stretched to Kampung China. Their means of livelihood were mainly the planting of rice and vegetables and rearing of pigs.

With an assortment of tools such as axes and hoes, these

Chinese workers transformed the forest land into fertile land for farming while roads and houses were built for the residents. Later, churches, schools, orphanages and medical clinics were built, turning Kampung Koh into a self-sufficient township.

Rev. Lin became the acknowledged leader of Kampung Koh as the town and the local church came to be the center of social activities and fellowship, in particular for the Foochow people. As such, the residence of Rev. Lin was frequently visited by people, so much so that Kampung Koh was also known Mu Shi Lou (parsonage in Chinese). The town continued to progress into a healthy, clean and pleasant township as Rev. Lin laboured to institute the principles of “no gambling, no prostitution, no drug”.

Towards the end of 1903, because of his poor health, Rev. Lin decided to return to China for treatment and convalescence. In 1913, Rev. Lin came back to Malaya and chose to reside in Lumut, Perak permanently. The former Minister of Transportation, Tun Dr. Ling Liong Sek, is the great-grandson of Rev. Lin’s brother, Mr. Lin Guang Mei.

Today, Sitiawan and Kampung Koh remain predominantly populated with Foochow people and its culture. It is undeniable that the prosperity and progress of the townships were due to the labour and perseverance of the Foochow pioneers. In 2003, as requested by clan associations and local churches, the state government finally

agreed to rename the main street in Kampung Koh as Jalan Lin Chen Mei, in recognition of the pastor's contributions and dedication, and also for the future generations to remember him as the Pioneering Father of Sitiawan.



### **Profile of Perak**

Area: around 21,000 square kilometers

Capital: Ipoh

Total population: around 2.13 million  
Malays (53%), Chinese (30%),  
Indians (12%), indigenous people (3%) and  
non-citizens (2%)

Religions: Islam (54%), Buddhism or Taoism (30%),  
Hinduism (11%), Christianity & Catholicism (3%),  
traditional tribal religions (0.6%), no religion (0.8%),  
others(0.6%).

## **Prayer for Perak**

1. Pray for the state government. Ask the Heavenly Father to grant the leaders a spirit of wisdom and righteousness to govern the state.
2. Ask our Heavenly Father to raise up more vibrant Christians to be involved in social concerns and the public sector, so as to exert positive influence within the community.
3. Pray for the Chinese new villages. This state has the most number of Chinese new villages. Ask the Heavenly Father to send more godly and well-trained workers to these villages & show more concern for the needs of the new villages.

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