Port Weld To Kuantan

(A Study of Malayan Place-names)

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INTRODUCTION

The writer of this book has undertaken a work which will add considerably to the literature of Malaya. Little research has been undertaken into the origin of place names and Mr. Singam's publication will be of much value as a reference work to all those interested in this subject. The origin of the names of many of the rivers in Malaya is shrouded in obscurity, but I would suggest that here is a fruitful source of exploration. Undoubtedly many of the up-country rivers have names which are of Sakai origin, some are named after trees and even those so named have had, in some cases, recourse to Sakai names. The same applies to the names of mountains which, due to a special incident connected with some ceremony, or legend of such ceremony, have a name whose origin is lost.

For instance there is a mountain shown on the maps of Malaya to be found on the main range to the east of Kuala Lumpur, which is called Gunong Nuang. There is a place on the Triang River in Jelebu called Pasir Panggil which is miles away from Gunong Nuang. Who would connect them, and yet they are closely connected by legend. The story is as follows. A Prince of Pahang came up the Triang River as far as a sand bank now known as Pasir Panggil and sent word up river that all the Sakai in that part of the country were to come to pay him homage. Some came but many did not. It was then found that most of them had gone to the mountains and a search discovered a large collection of Sakai on a mountain now called Gunong Nuang. It was named on this occasion Gunong Menuang Gasing because the Sakai found they were engaged in a competition of spinning tops (gasing) under a menuang tree. They were called to the sand bank where the Raja was, and this place has been called Pasir Panggil ever since. No doubt such instances could be found all over Malaya and the research that Mr. Singam is undertaking will do much service to the cause of archaeology in Malaya.

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PORT WELD TO KUANTAN

(A STUDY OF MALAYAN PLACE NAMES)

"There is a magic in a great name."—Shover.

It is not unusual for a teacher to hear boys calling one another nicknames. On close enquiry the teacher finds that there is a history behind each nickname. It is a veritable human instinct to give names to persons and places. The object of this book is to stimulate interest amongst students for a systematic enquiry on the interesting subject of place names. The student mind easily grasps this pursuit more easily I should think if treated in a hobby-like way and not as a class lesson. Teach Ma'ayan place names and one starts teaching Malayan history. Unroll the map of the world and very many places (to mention a few—Rome, Canada, England, India, America and Natal) have a story to tell, stories clothed in the countries' legend,—history, geography, folklore, tradition and linguistic forms.

A country changing its name is not an unknown event. Former Mesopotamia is called Iraq to-day, modern Iran went under the name of Persia until quite recent times and Ireland has gone back to the original Gaelic name Eire. The renaming of towns is also a more frequent occurrence. Constantinople is now Istanbul. Smyrna is Ismir. Peking has become Peiping. Angora is known as Ankara. Petersburgh took the name Petrograd and then Leningrad after the Great War. But Malaya is fortunate in having no Teutonic names to be eliminated.

In my own country, Ceylon, the Executive Committee of Education is considering a motion in the State Council—This council is of opinion that the correct name of this island is Sri Lanka and not Ceylon.' Incidentally one might mention that the first mention of the island was found in the story of Rama and Ravana written by Valmiki. Valmiki called the island Sri Lanka, the Arabs Serendib, the French Ceilan, the Portuguese Cerlao and the British Ceylon. Years ago there was a movement afoot to change the name of the Northern capital Jaffna to Yalpanam, the name given by the poet Yalpadi. Were we not taught in the history lessons that we learnt at the schools in Malaya that Essex was the land of the East Saxons, Wessex of the West Saxons, Northumbria as the land north of the river Humber? Were we not told that although Columbus dis-
covered America, it was named after a man called Amerigo Vespucci? How pretty and significant are the names of places in Burma! There are, for instance, all the Golden places, Shwe-le (the Golden boat) Shwe-bo, (the Golden Mister), Sh-we-gu (the Golden Cave), Shwedaung (the hill of gold), Shwelaung (the Golden canoe), Sh-wen—yaungbin (the Golden Banian Tree). Then there are all the rocky places—Kyaukse, (row of rocks), Kyaukpyu (white rock), Kyaukme (black rock), Kyaukton (line of rocks), Kyauktaga (door or rocks), Kyauktah (Royal rock), Kyaukchounggyi, (Big-stone Stream). There are places named after trees—Maubin (The Man tree), Nyaungle-bin (four Banian trees), Gyobingouk (the crooked Gyo Tree), Tantabing (one Palmira Tree), Zigon (Plum Hill), Buthidoung (Gourd Fruit Hill), Kyung-gone (Teak Hill). Then there are fantasies like Kyatpyin (the Ghost Plateau), Simmizwey (the elephant Tail Pull), Lu gaung-gyun (Human Head Island).

The history, culture and tradition of a nation lie locked in the chest of a country’s place names, street names and buildings. Malayan place names are to a great extent bound up with the Malay language and history. Some place names are words of polyglot linguist forms due to Javanese, Sanskrit, Tamil and Chinese influences. Some of the words are out of use while the significance of some others has been entirely lost. Local dialect sometimes changes or is entirely lost through the metamorphosis of tongue twisters, clippings, the vagaries of quaint pronunciation by village folk, and the non-Malays’ linguistic difficulties. The pronunciation of place names is of utmost importance. There are numerous places throughout the whole country which are never pronounced as they are spelt. Many a traveller displays quaint phonetics in the pronunciation of place names. Considerable trouble is caused to the traveller or motorist who cannot sometimes be guided by the spelling while on the other hand he often affords considerable humour when he pronounces a place name as it is exactly spelt. A writer ‘Wild Life’ in “Apa-Macham” anglicized some Malayan nomenclature in lighter vein thus:—Ker-ling, Bag-a-Nappie, Seg-a-mutt, Silly-You, Jelly-Boo, Bag-and-Atto, Sung-I-B-C., Quarl-a-Peller, Joe-Hor-boer Roo, Bato-o-pah-Hut, Parrot-Bunta-are.

While I am on the subject of the pronunciation of place names I cannot resist mentioning that there are some individuals who wish to spoil Malay names by Anglicising the pronunciation.

Again, there are many places with corresponding Malay names as for example Singapore (Singhapura), Penang (Pulau Penang), George Town (Tanjong), Province Wellesley (Seberang Peral), Bindings (Pangkor), Fort Canning in Singapore (Padang Kota), Fort Cornwallis (Kota), Government Hill in Penang (Bukit Bendera), Johnston’s Pier
now Clifford Pier (Jetty or Lampu Merah), Raffles Museum (Tempat Buku), Raffles Hotel(Pinchaus Bahru), Cape Rachado (Tanjong Tuan).

Most places have corresponding Chinese names, to mention a few are Rawang (MANLOW), Klang (PASANG), Seremban (FUYONG) a corruption of Sungei Ujong, Kuala Kubu (SZNGA-NGOK), Tras (TOLAI), Raub (LAUT), Port Dickson (ALANG), Pulau Arang corrupted to Alang, Pudu (FUNZANPAR, i.e., half-forest), Sungei Besi (SUNKAI CHONG, i.e., new town), Ipoh (PALOH), Kampar (KUMPOH), Singapore (Singtoa, i.e., Star island SINGCHOW, SHEKLIAT), Penang (PUN-NONG-YUE meaning betel-nut island), Pulau Langkawi (LENGGE-KAU-I), Pulau Sembilan (CHIA-CHOW), Gemas (KIM-MA-SA), Johore Baharu (JIU-HUK), Kluang (KO-LUANG).

The fertile imagination of a prominent Chinese of Kuantan led to the naming of his children, some of whom were my students in the Kuantan English School, with such names as Miss Pahang, Miss Beserah, Miss Pontian, Wong Lipis, Wong Bentong, Wong Kuantan, Wong Gambang, Wong Jelai, Wong Pekan. In fact the whole household is full of Pahang place-names. Malayan place-names have also travelled far and wide. We have a “Segamat House” in England, a “Rumah Pahang”, “Rawang House,” “Penang House” and “Malaya House” in Jaffna, Ceylon. Four of the Sunderland craft now stationed at Singapore have been named by the respective Rulers ‘Perak,’ ‘Pahang,’ ‘Selangor,’ and ‘Negri Sembilan.’ The names acknowledge the sum of £292,000 contributed towards the cost of aeroplanes by the Sultans and the peoples of the Malay States. H.M.S. Malaya is another gift by the Rulers of the Malay States. The Straits Steamship Company has named their steamers after Malayan places, e.g., s.s. “Raub,” s.s. “Klang,” s.s. “Kelantan.” The new ‘O’ class engines of the F.M.S. Railways bear the names of river estuaries Kuala Kuantan, Kuala Kemaman, Kuala Merbok, Kuala Muda and Kuala Krian. The ‘C’ class engines bear the names of Malaya’s chief mountains G. Tahan, G. Korbu, G. Temangor, G. Irau, G. Benom, G. Ophir, G. Liang, G. Chabang, G. Semangok and G. Angsi.

As is often the case inquiries from the local inhabitants on place names we often get the answer, ‘nama sahaja (just a name). Any student of place names would agree with Mr. A. H. P. Humphreys that it is a maddening answer. “The interpretation of most Malay Place names,” writes Mr. Reginald J. Bee, “is by no means an easy matter having regard to the various waves of religious thought grafted on to the original pagan religion combined with the numerous corruptions and idioms in speech that obtain in different parts of the country. The Malay records his impressions in a facile way, usually in a poetic and sympathetic manner.” Mr. C. W. Harrison gives the following account of Malayan Place
Names in his illustrated Guide to the F.M.S.:— "Everywhere the towns and the districts have retained the musical collocations of vocables given them by those first colonists, the Malays. The Chinese amongst themselves have either Chinese names for many places or else use corruptions of the Malay, but except in the case of the city of 'everlasting peace' Taiping, their names have not prevailed over the original Malay. Tamil place names exist for the Tamil, too, but for them alone. Amongst the Malays place names are conspicuous those beginning with Kuala, a word meaning the mouth of a river. Kuala Lumpur means the mouth of the muddy (river) the town being situated at the junction of the river Gombak with the Klang river, Port Swettenham was formerly Kuala Klang, the mouth of the Klang river where it debouches into the sea. Port Dickson was at one time Pulau Arang. Port Weld was Kuala Sapetang. One says was, but really they are all so still, for the Malay population still uses the old terms, feeling perhaps that they are quite as euphonious as the new. This country has been spared the cacaphonous combinations, which afflict America, where the musical Indian names have faded with the fading of a race. But in Malaya the Malays the only race with a normal birthrate, fade not at all but increasing and multiplying steadily, still impose their tongue and their place names upon all alien races. Read the names of the towns and districts from the map, and roll the liquid syllables upon the tongue. We could not better them with our unconscionable consonantal English names, and are you not grateful that we have not tried? Each of these names has a meaning or had; nearly all of them refer to some natural object remarked by the first nomenclators. Trees, birds flowers, rocks, rapids, all of them have been noted by someone in the past, found true and useful descriptions by the next comer, and retained unaltered. But many of them are now unmeaning to the men of to-day, and have either to be explained by some legend or referred to the aboriginal inhabitants naming. To take the map and consider the names therein is an innocent pastime. Who, for instance, was Toh Kha'ipah, who gave his name to a certain village on the Bernam river? The iniquity of oblivion blindly scattered her poppy and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Be sure he was someone in his time, or such a high sounding title as Khalifa would not have been attached to him. Be equally sure that the old man was nobody at all but a Mendeling Malay who after the custom of those immigrants from Sumatra, love to bear a nominal dignity and gave it to the little place where he settled. What are these 'kota' names which you find everywhere? The word means a fort, of course, they seem to have dotted a good many of them over the country in the old days. New fort and old fort, Kota Bharu and Kota Lama Old fort on the left bank and 'Old fort on the right bank' Kota Lama Kiri and Kota Lama Kanan, all memory of their 'drums and tramplings' is to-day lost, but no doubt went up against them, all after the approved methods of the skulking Malay combats when the
‘pahlawan’ and the ‘panglima,’ the knights of old, were bold. Then what possessed them to call one of the highest hills Mount Buffalo, Gunong Kerbau, for assuredly no buffalo ever grazed its slopes? And is there anything distinctive in calling a place Bamboo Village, Kampong Buloh, seeing that there is hardly a village in the land where the bamboo hesitates to grow? Who was the stranger from the west who gave his name to Changkat Orang Puteh, White Man’s Hill? How many people were taken by the crocodile of Kampong Buaia, Crocodile Village, before they set a bait for him, caught him and speared the ugly life out of him? This nicknaming process seems to have been a great favourite in the past, and even yet it prevails. In Perak is a place called Blanda Mabok, Drunken Dutchman, named after an adventurer whose beer bottles and gin bottles still remain in a remote jungle breeding mosquitoes in the water they hold. In Negri Sembilan the British Resident’s horse dying at a point on the road between Tampin and Kuala Pilah, the Malays called and to this day call the place Dead Horse Hill (Bukit Kuda Mati), quite after the best allusive style of which the classic example is Dead Man’s Gulch. Black Water, White Water, Yellow Water (Ayer Itam, Ayer Puteh, Ayer Kuning), are all very common names, and are often still referable to the colour of a stream, and the Batu Glugor (Weathered rock) names are easily to be interpreted. Casuarina Tree Point (Tanjong Rhu) and Fish Point (Tanjong Sepat) are plain enough, and some time in seventeenth century there may have been a trading station on Pulau Pintu Gedong and this name is a corruption of Pulau Pintas Gedong, Island of the Channel to the store. Certainly ingots of tin were dug up near the lighthouse here not long ago. But of very many of these meaning and musical names all history has long been lost amongst this gentle and indolent people, who live for the happiness of to-day; and recking not of the future, equally inquire not of the past. It is a fascinating exercise to let the mind wander amongst these names, for though puzzling questions and not explicable to the satisfaction of Dryasdust, they are equally like Sir Tomas Browne’s What song the Syren sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, not beyond all conjecture.”
Malayan nomenclature may be divided into the following groups:

1. Places named from Indian Sources e.g. Singapore, Sungei Naga Raja, Pengkelaran Rama, Bukit Chempakai, Sungei Nagemram (in the valley of the Sungei Tanum in Pahang), Chendera Wati in Bruas, Sungei Laksmana in Lower Perak, Changkat Chendera, Chankat Mentri, a small hill on the Bernam River in South Perak.

2. Places associated with East India Company administration e.g. Fort Canning, Province Wellesley.

3. Places named after incidents—legendary e.g. Gunong Noring.

4. Places named after incidents—historical.

5. Places named after fruits e.g. Tanjong Rambutan, Sungei Manggis, Durian Sebatang, Belimbing.

6. Places copied from other lands e.g. Kent.

7. Places with Portuguese names e.g. Cape Rachado, Tranquerah, D’Almedia Street.

8. Places with English names e.g. Port Swettenham, Cameron Highlands, Carey Island, Mount Ophir, Hole Island.

9. Places with Semi-English and Malay names e.g. Teluk Anson, The Gap, Kampong Dew, Bukit Fraser, Batu Caves.

10. Places with Chinese names e.g. Taiping, Kangkar.

11. Places with Sakai origin e.g. Gunong Nuang.

12. Places named after their discoverers or founders.

13. Places with semi-Sanskrit Javanese names e.g. Sri Menanti.

14. Places with Tamil names e.g. Kampong Palli, Kota Malikai, Limau Kesturi Halt.

15. Places named on account of rich mineral products.

16. Places with pure Malay Names e.g. Gua Musang, Pekan.

17. Places with Siamese origin e.g. Bachok in Kelantan, Chini in Pahang.

There are also other places which might defy classification and might not fit in with any of the foregoing groups.

The most common words in Malayan Place names are: Bagan—Landing place; Bukit (Bt)—hill; changkat (ct) Hill Gunong (G) mountain; Ginting (Gtg) a Pass; Kampong (Kg) Village; Kota—Fort; Kuala (K) River mouth; Pengkalan (Peng) Landing place; Pulau (P) Island; Sungei (S) River; Tanjong (Tg) Promontory or cape; Tasek—Lake Telok (Tk) Bay; Ulu—Upper reaches of river.
Ayer:—Places like Ayer Itam (Penang and Malacca) Ayer Puteh, Ayer Kuning, Ayer Panas (Malacca)—Black Water, White Water, Yellow Water, Hot Water refer to the colour of the streams. Ayer Hitam (or Itam) in Johore is a small town with 130 inhabitants who are mostly shop-keepers and garage owners. Ayer Kring is a village north of Kuala Pilah, Ayer Merah is a village north-east of Pasir Puteh in Kelantan. Ayer Mati is the place where the Kinta River flows into the Perak River. The Kinta River flows rapidly till it reaches the Perak River where the speed is stopped (dead or mati). There is a Sungei Mati in Johore.

Ayer Tawar:—There are many places with this name in Perak, Pahang and Kelantan. There is an Ayer Tawar on the way to Kelantan from Besut to Kelantan. “Ayer Tawar” is the name given to a portion of fresh water which is separated from the sea only by a very narrow piece of land. Though on the same level the land is not high enough to be called barrier, the sea water never flows into the portion of fresh water even during the highest tide or storm. This gives a natural wonder to the visitors.

Alor Gajah:—This place is in Malacca. ‘Alor’ in Malay means a furrow or ditch. ‘Gajah’ means an elephant. Alor Star is in Kedah.

*Alor Pongsu:—Alor Pongsu is a name of a Malay village with a railway station on the main line about fifteen miles north of Taiping. Pongsu is a hillock or mound; an ant-hill.

Asam Jawa:—This is a small village near Klang. Asam Jawa is a sour fruit used for the flavouring of curry by the Malays.

Asam Kumbang:—This place is in Taiping. Kumbang is a generic name for the humble-bees, coconut beetles.

Ampang:—The correct spelling of the word is Empang. The word means a dam. Ampang is a small Chinese village on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur wherein is the reservoir.

†Ampang Pechah:—Ampang Pechah is a place in Kuala Kubu. The place gets its name from the breaking of a dam when certain persons shot a crocodile.

Bukit:—The Malay word for a hill (Bukit) next to a river (Sungei) is the Malay’s favourite resource for naming places. The hill is itself christened with some physical peculiarity, natural attribute or surrounding or a tradition e.g., Bukit Hantu (the haunted hill), Bukit

* Appendix 1.
† Appendix 2.