

Economic transition in late nineteenth century Malaya: Malay economy in multiethnic perspective

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the economic aspect of the Malays in multiethnic perspective in Malaya in the late 19th century. It focuses on the central issue associated with the slow pace of Malay economic development and their reaction to the changing economic orientation from subsistence to capitalism. The main concern here is the assumption based on the general consensus that the involvement of the Malays in commercial activities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was less eminent compared to other communities. This assumption is referred to the historical development which indicates that the immigrant Chinese community was closely associated with the economic development which had taken place in Malaya during this period. In another respect, the Malay economic activities as a whole were also manifested by the economic integration with the Europeans, the Chinese as well as the Muslim immigrant communities of Indians and Arabs. Nevertheless, it still gave the impression that the pace of economic change of the Malays was considerably slow by comparison to those immigrant communities. Accordingly, they were still unable to adapt themselves to the commercial orientation in their economic activities. This new phenomenon was necessary for them to penetrate into trade and commercial plantation which were dominated by Europeans and Chinese merchants and planters.