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Raw Meat Business Activities in Kuala Lumpur, 1884-1929

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Abstract

This article will examine a different dimension by highlighting raw meat business activities in Kuala Lumpur between 1884 and 1929. Much research has focused on mining activity since the early exploration of Kuala Lumpur by Raja Abdullah, thereby overshadowing other economic activities at that time. Although it may seem unusual for a British-administered town to have a raw meat business activity, the reality is that such activities were indeed organized in Kuala Lumpur. This study focuses on buffaloes and pigs, as both animals held significant economic value at that time. Furthermore, article focuses on the factors that led to the emergence of the raw meat business activities in Kuala Lumpur. This article will also discuss how slaughterhouses, cold storage and fresh markets, which served as distribution medium for meat, helped drive the growth of this business. Therefore, this article will show how the raw meat business activities operated between 1884 and 1929 in Kuala Lumpur. This study used a historical method based on primary and secondary sources from various archives and libraries.

Keywords: Business; Slaughterhouse; Cold Storage; Market; Economy

Introduction

Mining activity has dominated the economy in Kuala Lumpur. It is no surprised as to how research have been focusing more on mining activities instead of other economic activities in Kuala Lumpur. J. M. Gullick argued in A History of Selangor 1742-1957 that the commodity expense on tin was not stable on the market. Hence, the cost of tin production increased when the commodity expense collapsed. Khoo Kay Kim supported his argument in regard to this matter. Meanwhile, Kok Loy Fatt emphasised in his article 'Chinese Mining Labour in Ampang 1900-1914' that Chinese labors dominated the mining activity in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur.² Furthermore, Emile Sadka stated in *The* Protected Malay States 1874-1895 that enormous tin production had started in Kuala Lumpur since early 1870s.³ This information is in line with J. M. Gullick's who insisted that Kuala Lumpur was primary producer for tin in Selangor.⁴ On the other hand, there has been a report on raw meat as the culprit behind food poisoning accident in Kuala Lumpur was discussed by Ahmad Kamal Ariffin Mohd Rus in Sanitary Board Kuala Lumpur: Peranan dan Pentadbirannya, 1890-1914.5 This article aims to emphasise raw meat as an economic activity that has not been given much attention to before. There are many types of animals farmed by the residents of Kuala Lumpur such as buffaloes, pigs, cows and goats. However, only two of them are chosen as the topic for this research which are buffalo and pigs. Both animals are chosen out of two main factors. Firstly, pigs were slaughtered the most at Shapiza Sharif, Arba'iyah Mohd Noor and Masitah Mohammad Yusof

74,805 in 1929 because of high demand for pork.⁶ Secondly, buffaloes are chosen for the justification of its many uses such as for gatherings and transportation in Kuala Lumpur. Since both animals were valued during the period of research, raw meat business indirectly developed the economy of Kuala Lumpur.

Factors That Led to the Growth of Raw Meat Business in Kuala Lumpur

Tin mining was a significant economic activity in Kuala Lumpur. Although this activity could not stand on its own without the support from other economic activities as miners required basic needs such as raw meat for energy. Hence, the food production was essential to the community in Kuala Lumpur including the miners. There are some factors that have been indentified as the motivation behind the raw meat business in Kuala Lumpur. First, the main factor which contributed to this business was the increase in Kuala Lumpur's population. The table below shows the composition of residents according to race in Kuala Lumpur from 1891 to 1931.

Table 1: Composition of Residents According to Race in Kuala Lumpur, 1891-1931

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Year	Chinese		Malay		Indian		Others		Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
1891	13,927	73.2	2,333	12.2	2,367	12.4	393	2.0	19,020	100
1901	23,181	71.5	3,727	11.5	4,435	13.7	1,038	3.2	32,381	100
1911	31,152	66.6	4,226	9.0	9,068	19.4	2,272	4.8	46,718	100
1921	48,587	60.4	7,297	9.0	20,889	25.9	3,651	4.5	80,424	100
1931	67,929	60.9	10,769	9.6	25,342	22.7	7,378	6.6	111,418	100

Source: Manjit Singh Sindhu. 1978. *Kuala Lumpur and Its Population*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, p. 13.

It is clear that total population residents of Kuala Lumpur had increased 23.6 percent from 19,020 in 1891 to 80,424 in 1921.⁷ The rising population of Kuala Lumpur at the time had contributed to a higher and more varied demand in food supply, including the raw meat.⁸ The increase in number of residents would certainly cause people to demand livestock such as buffalo meat and pork. Buffaloes were useful for all, but pork was demanded by non-Muslims as daily food.

Secondly, buffaloes were used as a holy sacrifice for the Muslim holy day, 'Eid Al-Adha where buffaloes would be slaughtered by the neighbourhood and family members.⁹ During 'Eid Al-Adha, people would slaughter buffaloes as their big built could provide a bigger quantity of meat compared to other animals. The meat would be distributed to the neighbourhood. Moreover, a few British administrators in Selangor would provide buffaloes to the Malays in all regions of Selangor including Kuala Lumpur¹⁰ as a gift for 'Eid Al-Adha celebration.¹¹ This phenomenon indirectly influenced the demand for buffaloes in Kuala Lumpur especially for gatherings and festive celebrations.

Thirdly, the Malay elites considered buffalo fighting as a form of entertainment in their circles and thus it increased the demand for buffaloes for this activity. The buffaloes would be maintained and cared first to ensure that they were healthy. These buffaloes were moved on safe transportation to avoid injury such as through trains which accelerated the time to transfer them. This can be observed when Chief Mohit¹² appealed for approval to carry five buffaloes belonging to the sultan on trains¹³ for free from Kuala Lumpur to Klang.¹⁴

Fourthly, raw meat business was profitable in Kuala Lumpur that people were eager to engage in this business. The price for an animal was much higher in Kuala Lumpur than other places and this indicated that animal farming business was profitable. As an example, the price of a buffalo in Kuala Lumpur exceeded \$40 compared to Kampung Liri Bentong, Pahang, which sold at \$20 each. It was

cheaper in Lubok Terua, Pahang in which the cost was only \$15.15 Meanwhile, Benta, Pulau Rusa, Tanjung Medang and Pekan in Pahang sold at \$16 for a buffalo while albino buffalo costed for only \$14. The merchant in Kuala Lumpur usually bought buffaloes from Pahang for its cheaper option and then they retailed it in Kuala Lumpur for twice the price they paid for it.16 The fact was that the raw meat business was highly rewarding as people could lavishly profit from it. This situation brought more locals to farm animals in Kuala Lumpur.

Fifthly, buffaloes were useful as transporting people in Kuala Lumpur. Generally, people would use irrigation and land as the path to travel to Kuala Lumpur at that time. Farm animals were usually used as land transportation because of the uneven land paths structure and thus, buffaloes were useful for transportation where people could also ride it.¹⁷ Buffaloes made it convenient to complete everyday tasks efficiently. The merchants in Kuala Lumpur had buffalo carts to carry their goods so that they could travel faster to their destination. In this case, the body of the cart was attached to the back of the buffalo and tied by a rope so that larger loads could be transported. This advancement of transportation could further develop the animal farming business in Kuala Lumpur.

Clearly these five factors inspired raw meat business in Kuala Lumpur. Buffaloes were more advantageous than pigs for these purposes as pigs were only used by the non-Muslims community as livestock.

Raw Meat Business in Kuala Lumpur

In the beginning, animal farming did not involve buffaloes at all in Kuala Lumpur. This was due to the long journey to Pahang that the merchants had to take just to restock buffaloes. Buffaloes from Pahang were brought through Ulu Selangor before they reached Kuala Lumpur. This was proven when people who were assigned to bring buffaloes from Pahang had to ask for confirmation for which way they must go through from Ulu Selangor to Kuala Lumpur. Although in the early 20th century, people in Kuala Lumpur started to farm buffaloes due to high demand. The statistic in 1915 recorded that there were 248 buffaloes farmed in Kuala Lumpur. The total number of farmed buffaloes had increased since there were only 224 buffaloes in 1913. This statistic had proven that the rise in number of buffaloes farmed in Kuala Lumpur was due to its high demand.

Raw meat business was grew rapidly in Kuala Lumpur with the introduction of slaughterhouses, markets and cold storage. Besides, these three facilities were connected to each other and played a significant role in supplying raw meat in Kuala Lumpur. The three facilities had their tasks maximised by the British not only to supply buffalo meat but also pork for non-Muslim locals. They did not doubt the decision to farm pigs in Kuala Lumpur after the British Resident visited Cold Storage Company in Singapore. The decision was taken after considering three main aspects. First, the location of Kuala Lumpur was close to Singapore. Second, the total number of Chinese was high in Kuala Lumpur. Third, Singapore Cold Storage could only provide 1,200 pigs while the market demand was 15,000.²² Based on these justifications, animal farming was further developed for farmed pigs in Kuala Lumpur.

The Growth of Slaughterhouses

Slaughterhouse was originally built as a result of high demand of meat in Kuala Lumpur. Slaughterhouse made it possible to depend on local meat rather than imported meat in Kuala Lumpur at that time. Hence, the tender offer for animal slaughter was offered by British government in Kuala Lumpur to any interested merchant. This tender was significant because it contained important information related to business and protection for those who signed the written documents. This indicates that with the existence of tender offer at that time, slaughterhouses could fulfil the demand for meat supply

in Kuala Lumpur.

The British did not only offer tenders for slaughtering, but they also offered tenders to build slaughterhouse in Kuala Lumpur. This measure was significant because the number of slaughterhouses had to be sufficient to support the capacity of slaughtered animals in Kuala Lumpur. Khor Ah Yong was one of the contractors that believed in creating slaughterhouses in Kuala Lumpur. The total for approved tender offer was \$2,372. However, the elected contractor must finish building slaughterhouse in two months period only.²³ Withdrawal of tender would be executed when the contractor failed to complete the construction of slaughterhouse within the period as stated in the contract. The strictness of the contract was shown when Wee Kim Sang's tender was withdrawn.²⁴ His slaughterhouse contract was later given to another contractor named Low Choy. Two explanations were made for the withdrawal of slaughterhouse contract to Wee Kim Sang. First, Low Choy's tender was \$2,050 which was \$20 less than Wee Kim Sang's. Second, Wee Kim Sang broke the rules by claiming more than the total cost. He could claim supposedly based on the percentage of construction that has been done.²⁵

The Malay community realized the good prospects raw meat business in Kuala Lumpur and thus asked for tender for slaughtering buffaloes and selling its meat.²⁶ The slaughter of farmed animal in Kuala Lumpur was operated in slaughterhouses provided. Before slaughtering, the owner of slaughterhouse had to get a license and follow the terms and condition. At the same time, slaughterhouse had to emphasis the *halal* aspect to ensure that slaughtered animal consumed by 2,333 Muslims in Kuala Lumpur²⁷ was guaranteed halal and abided by the shari'ah rules. One of the earliest slaughterer requested offer to lease an area for slaughtering buffaloes was Panglima Garang Ishak.²⁸ Panglima Garang Ishak quoted \$1,000 per year in the tender appeal for slaughter and buffalo meat business.²⁹ At the same time, Panglima Garang and Haji Husin Kerinci appealed for slaughter tender together in Kuala Lumpur.³⁰ The tender appeal from Muslim locals assured them when they purchased meat to be *halal* guaranteed since they know that the slaughterer are Muslims too.³¹ As an example, the slaughter of buffaloes in Ampang region was given to Haji Abdul Samat.³²

Furthermore, the type of animal could also indicate the cost for slaughtering per animal in Kuala Lumpur. The cost for pigs was less than buffaloes. Moreover, the pay for slaughtering a pig was only \$1 while a buffalo was \$2.33 This was due to the bigger size of a buffalo than pig and more workforces were needed when slaughtering and skinning a buffalo. Besides, the period needed to slaughter buffaloes was longer compared to pigs. One of the locations of a pig slaughterhouse was in Pudoh.³⁴ Even though there was a demand to release notice regarding tender offer for pork and its slaughterhouse in 1889, the permit for slaughtering pigs was not released.³⁵ Permit for slaughtering farmed animal had to be renewed annually for pig's slaughterer. Yeap Leng, Yap Sau Sew, Yeow Yang Choon were among pork merchants who applied for pig's slaughter permit continued in Pudoh.³⁶

The total slaughter of pigs and buffalos increased in 1905 compared to 1904 since the construction of slaughterhouses. Moreover, in 1905, there were 22,616 pigs slaughtered at public slaughterhouse in Kuala Lumpur compared to the previous year where only 19,344 were slaughtered. Meanwhile, the total of slaughtered buffaloes was 559 in 1905 and 390 in the previous year.³⁷

Table 2: Farmed Animal Slaughtered in Public Slaughterhouse in 1904-1907 in Kuala Lumpur

Type of farmed animal	1904	1905	1906	1907
Buffalos	390	559	589	703
Pigs	19,344	22,616	26,899	46,920

Source: Annual Report, Sanitary Board Kuala Lumpur, 1904-1907.

This situation showed that more tender was needed to meet the demand of pork and buffalo meat in the Kuala Lumpur market. Hence, there was more tenders granted to people accordingly.

Moreover, Chin Loong Kwang's tender was approved to slaughter farmed animal in Central Market. Nonetheless, this tender was temporary and based on a one-month trial.³⁸ The trial period was to ensure that only responsible individual should be granted the tender. Strict actions had to be taken towards slaughterhouse owner who did not observe cleanliness by moving the slaughterhouse to a different place. As an example, notice was issued to move a pig slaughterhouse in the 'High Street' area to Petaling Street as they failed to observe cleanliness.³⁹

The difficulty to control slaughterhouse owner to observe cleanliness led to an amendment on 5th October 1895 regarding the regulations related to slaughterhouse. ⁴⁰ The regulation of slaughterhouse under Section 3 (j) Regulation VII, 1890 also known as "Laws Relating To Slaughter Houses" was implemented on 5th October 1895. ⁴¹ All slaughterhouse owners belong to the government and licensed slaughterhouse in Kuala Lumpur were included in this law as approved by Sanitary Board Kuala Lumpur. ⁴² The implementation of this law comprised of infrastructure facilities that must be fulfilled while operating the slaughterhouse. Hence, all slaughterhouse owners must follow the guidelines before, during and after slaughtering.

In addition, slaughterhouse owner must follow the guidelines regarding the condition of slaughterhouse holistically. The owner must be responsible towards all damage at the premise of the slaughterhouse.⁴³ Besides, the owner must ensure the cleanliness of the premise. In order to ensure the level of cleanliness of slaughterhouse, two facilities must be emphasised. First, the water supply provided can be used to clean the residue and dirt from slaughtered animal. Second, the slaughterhouse owner must be responsible in moving all slaughtered animal within 3 hours. This procedure could ensure the optimum level of cleanliness of slaughterhouse if practiced.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, slaughterhouse condition must be maintained to be more hygienic and thus the owner must ensure that the premise byre and barn are in a clean condition. In this context, the health executive in charge must be permitted to always enter the slaughtering premise to examine the level of cleanliness there. The owner must ensure the dirt at the premise was cleansed within 24 hours after slaughtering ends. Also, all farmed animals must be examined twice by the health executive. The examination must be done before and after the process of slaughtering the animal. This measure was to ensure that slaughtered farmed animal had no disease and was safe for consumption. The furthermore, the hygiene condition was not the only focus at the slaughterhouse but a tax for slaughtered animal must be charged as well. Nonetheless, the tax rates charged upon were different according to the type of animal. As an example, the total tax is \$1 on each slaughtered pigs and 25 cents for each goat and lamb slaughtered at government or licensed slaughterhouse. Moreover, the tax charged upon each slaughtered buffaloes were \$1 in 1897 in Kuala Lumpur. In other words, the tax rates charged upon slaughterer depended on the type of anime to be slaughtered.

Since the Chinese population in Kuala Lumpur was high, at 13,927 in 1891,⁴⁸ the demand for pork was high.⁴⁹ Hence, special slaughterhouses for pigs were built in between High Street and Petaling Street. The owners of slaughterhouse who were not registered with the Sanitary Board of Kuala Lumpur fell under the Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Enactment.⁵⁰ It is important to control the slaughtering process to guarantee safe to consume meat that is free from bacteria. Cleanliness problem such as slaughterhouse at Rodger Road could be prevented by examining the slaughtering process.⁵¹

In general, the proper use of slaughterhouse is important to ensure that slaughterhouse owners follow the guidelines for slaughtering animals. The procedure to utilize slaughterhouse could be coordinated through implementing laws related to slaughterhouse. The laws focused on aspects related to slaughterhouse that should be followed by the government and licensed slaughterhouse in Kuala Lumpur. In other words, the laws could guarantee the final product of meat released followed the guidelines, high quality and safe to consume.

Management of Cold Storage

Cold storage or freezer is storage for raw meat to last longer. The correct way of storing raw meat in the cold storage assisted in minimizing spoilage. When the slaughtered meat is immediately stored in the cold storage, people could prevent spoilage of meat. Cold storage could store raw meat to remain fresh, long lasting and safe to consume. The presence of freezer boosted animal farming business in Kuala Lumpur since it could store and serve meat for people in Kuala Lumpur.

The first cold storage in Kuala Lumpur was in Medan Pasar Lama and owned by a German merchant named Schwartz. In 1909, the slaughterhouse in Kuala Lumpur started to provide cold storage of its own. ⁵² In 1911, slaughtering farmed animal had exceeded its limit. ⁵³ In this condition, the capacity and capability of huge cold storage was important to meet the demand of storing slaughtered meat in huge quantity. Bigger storage could fit more meat and storing could be operated efficiently. Meanwhile, ventilation had to be in excellent condition in cold storage. Cold storage must be placed far from sunlight and heat for the ventilation to work at its best.

The Kuala Lumpur Sanitary Board had approved 9 shop houses and buildings for cold storage at Mc Arthur Street to solve the shortage of cold storage.⁵⁴ Land appeal was received to build more cold storage in Kuala Lumpur. The opening of more cold storage eased slaughterhouse owners' effort in storing meat and thus preserved the taste and nutrients of meat. Singapore Cold Storage Company Limited was one of the companies which appealed for 5 acres of land from Sanitary Board Kuala Lumpur. However, only 3 acres of land was approved since the rest was given to Federated Engineering Company Limited much earlier. The premium rate charged was \$2,000 per acre.⁵⁵ The major issue that must be followed by Singapore Cold Storage Company Limited was the approved land must be used to build cold storage houses only.⁵⁶



Figure 1: Map of 5 acres of land appealed by Singapore Cold Storage Company Limited. Source: Sel. Sect. 1018/1921. 1 Mar. 1921. Land, 5 acres: Kuala Lumpur Mukim within Factory Area, Singapore Cold Storage Company Limited, ANM 1957/0176671, National Archives of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, p. 9.

The Sale of Raw Meat in Kuala Lumpur

The market became the best medium to sell raw meat. Kuala Lumpur had one of the most popular markets in Selangor that it was the centre for attention among merchants.⁵⁷ Besides, the tender offer for buffalo meat could fulfil the demand of meat on the market.⁵⁸ Slaughtered raw meat was stored in cold storage before selling it to the public through shops and markets in Kuala Lumpur. However, raw meat could only be sold in if it met certain criteria.

Merchants insisted that notice for tender offer for markets should be released to facilitate the sales transaction for farmed animal meat. To ensure the efficiency of transactions, sales notice had to be released to fulfil the demand for raw pork on the market. The notice had to be released with slaughterhouses so that the raw meat supplying process could operate smoothly.⁵⁹ All three notices could ensure that animal farming business could be realized effortlessly in Kuala Lumpur.⁶⁰ At the same time, merchant must possess a license before he is allowed to sell raw meat in Kuala Lumpur. As an example, only five shop owners were given a license to sell raw meat there. The total licences granted was limited as shop owners needed careful inspection from Sanitary Board Kuala Lumpur. This measure aimed to avoid dysentery and diarrhoea,⁶¹ which are caused by food poisoning through bacteria.⁶² Moreover, people in Kuala Lumpur could shop raw meat directly from the markets available there. There were 3 markets in 1890, 5 markets in 1895 and it increased to 6 markets in the beginning of 1901.⁶³

Apart from licensing, meat merchants in Kuala Lumpur must pay for the stall. The price rate charged upon buffalo meat seller was 30 cents per day in 1897. Meanwhile, pork meat merchant must pay 50 cents per day for each stall.⁶⁴ Even though the price of stall is different according to the type of animal the merchants had no rights to quote the retail price. Instead, the price of meat must be the same as the retail price at the market.⁶⁵ In other words, raw meat merchants could not carelessly quote the price of their product. The merchants could profit highly from quoting shillings for the meat. As an example, in 1904, the price of buffalo meat was 22 cents per pound at the market in Kuala Lumpur and it did not change in the next year.⁶⁶ Therefore, merchants could not retail the price of buffalo meat more than 22 cents per pound. Raw meat lover could rest assuredly for the fix price at that time.

Since there was a high demand for meat in Kuala Lumpur, frozen meat was imported to meet the market demand. Frozen meat was usually imported from Australia and sold by its locals.⁶⁷ The process of selling frozen meat was facilitated as the appeal to sell frozen meat at Central Market was approved for Cold Storage Co. Ltd..⁶⁸ This situation could guarantee the people to get raw meat supply faster in Kuala Lumpur.

Conclusion

The growth of population was an important factor in inspiring animal farming as the demand for meat continued in Kuala Lumpur, apart from the fact that farmed animal was entree at gatherings, sacrificed for holy celebration of 'Eid, buffalo fight, transportation and commercial business in Kuala Lumpur. The introduction of "Laws Relating To Slaughter Houses" on 5th October 1895 proved the existence of raw meat business organized and systematically. The slaughterhouse owner must follow the law to ensure that animal farming process can be executed effortlessly in Kuala Lumpur. Besides, the existence of slaughterhouse and management of cold storage further improved raw meat business that has been commercialized in Kuala Lumpur.

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- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
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- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ 1493/1898, Annual Report 1897, Sanitary Board Kuala Lumpur, ANM 1957/0076471, National Archives of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1898, p. 6.
- ⁴⁸ Manjit Singh Sindhu, *Kuala Lumpur and Its Population*, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1978, p. 13.
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