

The Making of Sabah

1865-1941

The Dynamics of Indigenous Society

Second Edition



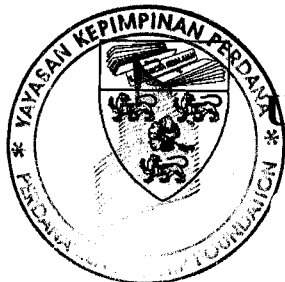
D. S. Ranjit Singh

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PREFACE

North Borneo or Sabah emerged as a state in its own right during the period of effective rule of the British North Borneo Company, (BNBC, or the Company) 1882-1941. As a consequence, and more often than not, most historians of Sabah history have tended to concentrate on the activities and policies of the said Company. Indigenous society, where examined, has been treated from the point of view of reaction from that society towards Company rule, rather than the perspective of its structure and dynamism. As indigenous society forms the backbone of the foundations of the state, it becomes imperative to study not only the role played by the Company in forging the fragmented territories and disparate societies into the apparatus of a new state, but also the nature and workings of indigenous society, its evolution, and its contributions towards this achievement. The formative processes also had their roots in the pre-Company setting and therefore the period of study extends from the second-half of the nineteenth century to 1941. Also with the attainment of independence in 1963, there has been a growing need for an autonomous history of Sabah using indigenous society as the base for the necessary reconstruction and reinterpretation. This work therefore seeks to look at the processes involved from "the bottom-up" as well as from the "the top-down", to show how, in both pre-Company and Company times, grass-roots circumstances modified political patterns which had been externally imposed.

In trying to understand indigenous society and its development during this crucial phase, the framework of co-existing and succeeding political systems has been used as the connecting link. The work thus examines first of all the various types of societies and political systems that existed before the establishment of the Company. Their economic, commercial and social patterns are examined and linked to indigenous administrative institutions which are identified. Changes brought about within indigenous society as a consequence of the impact of the influence of the Brunei and Sulu Sultanates and the Bajau and Illanun communities are emphasised.

During the period of BNBC rule, the Company's objectives, policy and administration are examined with a view of giving greater emphasis to change within indigenous society. An attempt has been made to study both the negative and positive aspects of Company policy in so much as it affected indigenous society and also the reaction of the latter. Finally emphasis has been given to the development of indigenous society in the aspects of socio-economic reforms, and particularly the development of indigenous administrative institutions, that is, the Native Chiefs, the Native Court and the Native Chiefs' Advisory Council which produced a viable elite administrative leadership group by the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. Company policy and rule not only fulfilled some of its core objectives such as the extension of western capitalist enterprise to Sabah, but also led to the strengthening of indigenous administrative institutions which together with their own dynamism and the functioning of the other apparatus and institutions of state administration, created the foundations of the new state. The "Making of Sabah" is a long and complex story, and no work can pretend to have presented a comprehensive view without also taking into account, inter alia, the role of the Chinese community, the issues of labour and immigration, and the development of the economy. These concerns are, however, beyond the scope of this work which has as its focus the dynamics of indigenous society in the formation of Sabah as a new state.

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