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Johore, 1910-1941

Studies in the  
Colonial Process

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of

Yale University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Christopher Stephen Gray

May, 1978

ABSTRACT

Johore, 1910-1941

Studies in the  
Colonial Process

Christopher Stephen Gray

Yale University

May, 1978

During the nineteenth century the Malay peninsular state of Johore emerged as an unusual adaptation of traditional and western ideas of government. Although nominal British control finally did come, under agreements reached in 1909 and 1914, it brought no significant changes either to the basic structure of the state or to the competition for power underlying the state's government. Indeed, the same four competitors who had dominated Johore politics through at least the preceding decade -- namely, the Malay Sultan, the Malay elite, a small "mercantile" community, and the British from near-by Singapore -- continued together to determine how its administration would operate until the Japanese conquest of 1942, with only slight, occasional adjustments in the balance linking them.

However, although the institutionalization of this competition was made possible by circumstances at the moment of colonial transition, and by a gradual perception thereafter of strong common interests, each of the four carried into the competition distinctive perspectives and resources. Each hoped to bring to pass a vision -- or a partial vision -- of what the state ought to be. Aided by intuition and sovereign right, the Sultan worked to preserve his inheritance and to maintain control

over its advancement. The elite, endowed with historical legitimacy of its own, had the use of conscience, but also had to reconcile its conflicting imperatives as a hereditary bureaucratic cadre and as a corps of Malay officials presiding over a multi-racial society. Visible and vocal, the "mercantilists," who were more a remnant of historical memory than a community, generally chose to support the Sultan and took as their role the chastening of expatriate officialdom. And, those British officers sent to the state, or involved in its governance, tried to apply expertise gained elsewhere in establishing a government apparatus capable of encouraging economic growth and then of managing efficiently consequent social and economic change.

Since no one of their competitors captured the sum of reaction or of reform, the policy decisions and initiatives of the government they helped to form usually reflected an evolving conservative consensus about development and the future. Unfortunately, almost from the outset there were some inconsistencies between consensus and action. Hard times in the 1930s, as well as a major political crisis which temporarily upset the political competitive balance, exacerbated these; gradually it became apparent that there were serious contradictions not only within the state's expanding corporate sense of social responsibility, but also between that corporate sense and the outlook of the competitors, taken collectively and individually. Issues, such as security, the rule of law, economic stability, moral obligation, and communal equity, steadily posed more and more questions which could not be answered satisfactorily. As a result the conditions which had allowed the competition for power to enhance political stability began to diminish in importance, bringing increasing hostility to the interplay inside the government. More, such