

EAST ASIAN HISTORICAL MONOGRAPHS

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A GAMBLING STYLE
OF GOVERNMENT

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The Establishment of the
Chartered Company's Rule
in Sabah, 1878–1915

IAN BLACK

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PREFACE

THE British North Borneo Chartered Company became the dominant power in Sabah—a traditional term for the north-eastern part of Borneo as well as the name of the modern Malaysian state—in 1881, by an Order in Council of Queen Victoria. The royal charter gave imperial legitimacy to the Company's founders, who had already acquired from the region's former rulers some territorial and administrative rights.

But many years were to pass, indeed more than half the Company's lifespan in Sabah of sixty years, before the Company would control all the territory and its people effectively. This work explores that faltering process of colonial occupation, and its consequences for the people of the area.

In consolidating their position in Sabah (termed 'North Borneo' by the Company) many factors hampered the new rulers—their own inadequate resources and the resistance of the territory to quick economic exploitation, the former political fragmentation of the region, the diversity of the territory's population, and not least the hostility aroused in the population by the Company's crude administrative policies. The Company's own political and financial problems and external relations have been discussed in this work only in so far as they affected its administration. Primarily the attempt here has been to create a history of Sabah under the Company, rather than a history of the Company itself.

To write about Sabah raises technical difficulties, however. It was, and remains, a country of considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity; the customs, economies and political histories of its people also varied greatly at the time of the Company's coming. Subsequently the impact of the Company

varied from community to community. For the most part the broad ethnic category-names used by the Company, such as 'Bajau' and 'Murut' have been employed here. Where the records specify 'Dusun' the preferred modern term 'Kadazan' has been substituted. This form of categorization has been adopted for simplicity's sake, and also because the sources rarely specify traditional group-names reliably. When dealing with particular communities their geographic locations have been indicated as clearly as possible.

In writing a coherent story, and reaching general conclusions, a detailed history of every community has not been possible. It is hoped that omission has not led to misrepresentation. Recently, interest has grown amongst Sabahans in researching their own history, particularly at the local level. This work is offered in the hope that it will stimulate that process. Local researchers will perhaps one day tell the story best.