



Indigenous
Political
Systems of
Western Malaya

J. M. GULLICK

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Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya

by

J. M. GULLICK

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Preface

This study was submitted and accepted as a thesis for the Academic Postgraduate Diploma in Anthropology of the University of London. Some minor alterations, mainly of internal arrangement, have been made in preparing it for publication.

The use of the term 'lineage' is dictated by lack of a suitable alternative. Malay aristocrats were more conscious of their individual status by descent than of group loyalties based on common descent. But, as is explained in Chapter 4, they were on occasion united in group solidarity against others when the political office which was the basis of their status was in jeopardy (see pp. 70-2).

I should like to express my gratitude to Professor Raymond Firth and to Dr. Maurice Freedman for their help and encouragement during the eight years of my intermittent studies for the Diploma.

J.M.G.

London
December 1956



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I

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyse the political institutions of the western Malay States as they were in the period just before coming under British control in 1874. The 'western Malay States' are for this purpose Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. Some additional data have also been taken from Pahang and Kedah.

So far as the use of purely documentary sources permits, the aim has been to present indigenous Malay political institutions of the period as a working system of social control and leadership in the same fashion as an anthropologist uses material obtained by contemporary fieldwork. This method has been used before, notably in Professor Firth's *Primitive Economics of the New Zealand Maori*, but so far as I am aware no study on these lines has been made before in the field of Malay studies.

There is of course a substantial literature on nineteenth-century Malaya. The Appendix¹ on sources acknowledges my reliance on the writings, especially the unpublished administrative records, of the first generation of British administrators in the Malay States after 1874. Much has also been written since by scholars (some of them also administrators). The contributions of R. J. Wilkinson and Sir Richard Winstedt in almost every field of Malay studies are so outstanding as to require no comment here. More recently modern historical research, especially by Dr. C. D. Cowan has added much to our knowledge of the course of events in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Previous writers have been mainly concerned with one or other of two themes. As a matter of straightforward history, political conditions in the Malay States in the years before 1874 contributed to the British decision to intervene and take control. In accounts of these matters the focus of interest has been upon the disorder and on the weakness of the Sultans as rulers. This situation tends to be compared with the reforms and the economic progress of the period after 1874.

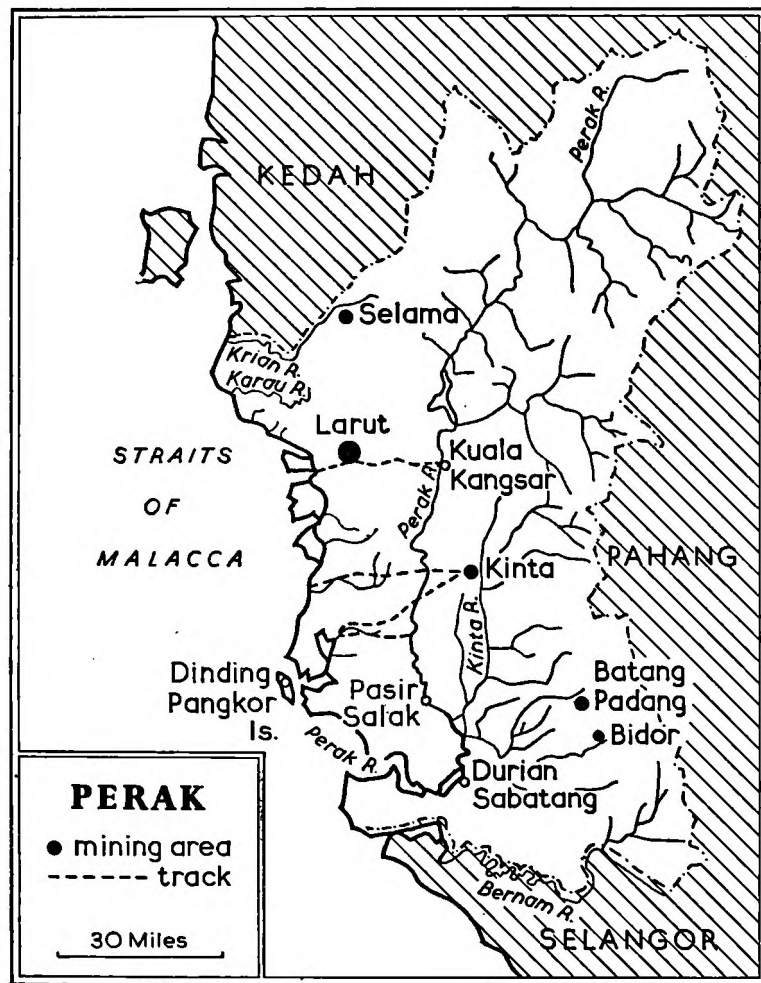
By contrast writers on Malay political institutions have rejected the 1870 period as an era of degeneration and have essayed to describe Malay institutions as they were believed to have been in their prime. The result is not history but a reflection of late nineteenth-century Malay tradition of what their political system was supposed to have been long ago. It is

¹See p. 144

an ideal pattern rather than an account of a situation which ever existed.

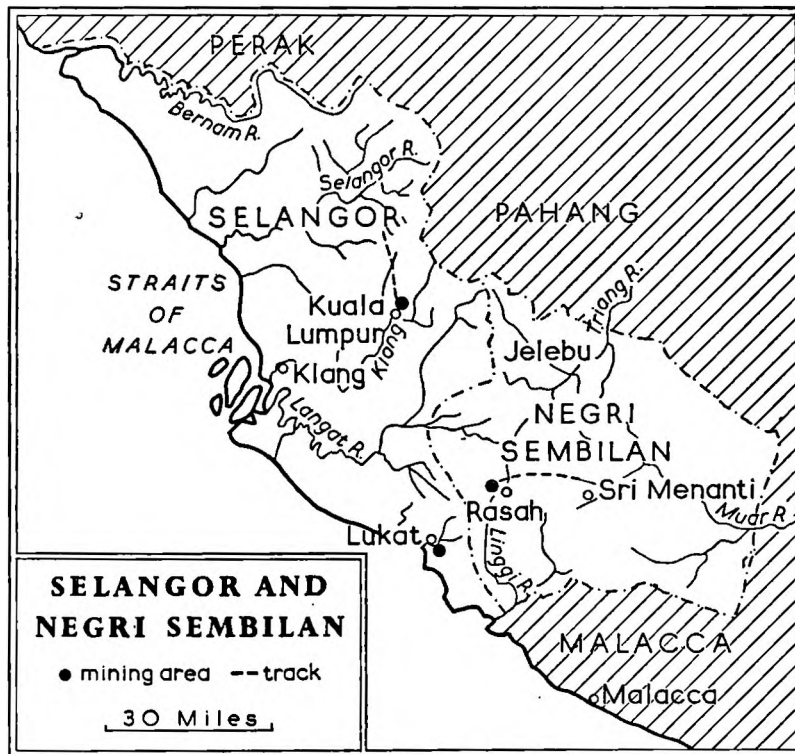
These two viewpoints taken together present a Golden Age, which like all social myths is timeless, followed by a Dark Age (c.1870) which is an interval between the passing of the heroes and the coming of the pro-consuls.

This study is concerned with the situation of 1870 as a working social system adapted to the needs of its community. Various factors described hereafter¹ led to a decentralized system of local government by district



¹ See pp. 17, 127, and 133.

chiefs. The Sultans exercised little real power. But the Sultanate and the ancient institutional forms of the State Government played their part in systems of symbolism and status. They were needed not as media for the exercise of power but as a 'charter' or justification for the political system



which gave power to others. The geographical environment and historical background are a necessary preface to further explanation of this hypothesis.

GEOGRAPHY

The main geographical feature of north and central Malaya is a series of ranges of hills 'which lie staggered *en echelon* and skew-wise across the peninsula on NNE-SSW lines'.¹ This central spine of hills forms the main watershed of the Malay Peninsula. Since the Malay States, the major political units, were centred on river valleys, the central watershed was

¹ Dobby (1950), p. 87.

also a political boundary. The western Malay States lie between the central ranges and the west coast.

The area of the three western states is:

STATE	AREA ¹ (<i>sq. miles</i>)
Perak	7,980
Selangor	3,166
Negri Sembilan	2,550
<i>Total</i>	13,606

The State of Perak takes its name from the Perak River and it consists mainly of the basin of that river which rises at a point just south of latitude 6° north and runs south to enter the Straits of Malacca at about 4° north. The axis of the state is thus north to south. In addition to the Perak River basin the State of Perak also includes a narrow coastal strip separated from the western limit of the river basin by one of the lesser north-south ranges. This coastal strip is the Larut/Krian area. Selangor, between 3° 50' and 2° 30' north, takes its name from the Selangor River, but in 1870 it comprised the basins of five rivers which run in a general east-west direction from the central watershed to the Straits of Malacca. The five rivers of Selangor were (from north to south) the Bernam, the Selangor, the Klang, the Langat and the Lukut² rivers. Negri Sembilan between 3° 20' and 2° 20' north covers the basins of the Linggi River and the upper reaches of the Muar River.

Although mountains (rising at their highest to 6-7,000 feet) were the most notable natural feature, they were empty spaces in terms of human settlement; the ranges were lines of division not of concentration. It was the coastal flats, the river banks and, to a lesser extent, the undulating land between hills and sea which attracted and supported human settlement.

The main features³ of the climate were, and are, (1) a uniformly high temperature throughout the year ranging between a daily minimum of 70°F and a daily maximum of 90°F without notable seasonal variation and (2) an extremely heavy rainfall spread over all months of the year. In most parts of the Malay Peninsula annual rainfall totals are between the limits 75-125 inches but in some places, including an area in Perak, annual rainfall is as much as 175 inches or more. The incidence of rainfall is somewhat affected by the monsoonal seasons with two peaks during the year in April/May and in October/November. There are however no dry seasons.

¹ These are the areas of the modern States. There have been some minor frontier modifications since 1870 but these have not significantly affected the areas of the states.

² Lukut is now part of Negri Sembilan.

³ Dobby (1950), pp. 92-5.

The significant aspects of the climate are the lack of marked seasonal change and the abundance of water both for agriculture and for keeping the rivers full and navigable to boats throughout the year.

The soil is generally poor and deteriorates rapidly, especially by water erosion on slopes, if the natural forest cover is removed. But in some valley and coastal areas there are very fertile alluvial soils accumulated by run-off from the higher ground of the interior owing to the erosive action of the rivers. The rivers because of their association with exceptionally fertile estuarial areas (among other reasons) were a most significant feature in the human geography of the 1870's.

At that time the natural cover of tropical rain forest had been little disturbed by a sparse population.¹ From the inland edge of the coastal fringe of mangrove swamps the jungle extended almost unbroken to the summits of the central ranges. The overhead foliage is sometimes dense enough to keep the ground beneath it clear of undergrowth but more typically there is a thicket of saplings, creepers and shrubs at ground level which makes the jungle impassable unless a path is laboriously hacked through it. In the 1870's, when there were no roads, everyone travelled by boat on the rivers if he could in preference to journeys overland. This factor also contributed to making the river lines very important.

The Malayan jungle is evergreen and if untouched persists unchanged for ever. But if the jungle is felled to clear land for cultivation and is later abandoned, a thick secondary forest appears (called *belukar* in Malay) consisting of young trees, ferns, grass and scrub. If however the soil has been badly eroded or impoverished before it is abandoned, it tends to become covered by an all-pervasive coarse, tall grass known as *lallang* (*imperata cylindrica*) rather than by secondary forest.

The last natural feature which requires mention is the alluvial deposits of tin. Tin ore (*cassiterite*) is found in gravels and sands, often buried some feet below an overburden of non-productive soil in various places (usually river valleys) of the low country. In the 1870's the main deposits being worked were at Larut and Kinta in Perak, at Kuala Lumpur in Selangor and around Seremban in Sungei Ujong (Negri Sembilan). The famous mining centre of Lukut had gone into a decline about 1870 as the deposits considered workable at that time were exhausted.

It is known that Larut at its peak before the outbreak of the miners' civil war in 1872 produced 800 *bahara* of tin per month.² This was an annual output of 1,700 tons worth £70,000 at the prices then prevailing. Output at Kuala Lumpur in the early 1870's was estimated at 1,000 *bahara* of tin per month,³ i.e. about 2,000 tons p.a. worth about £80,000.

¹ Over Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan together population averaged less than 10 persons per square mile.

² *JMBRAS* (1953), xxvi, pt 3, p. 93. A *bahara* was 400 lb.

³ Purcell (1948), p. 102.

Output at Kinta and Sungei Ujong was of the order of 1,000 tons of tin p.a. at each place.¹ In all mining areas however working population and output fluctuated sharply from year to year. In addition to the large and important mining centres there were innumerable other small mines up and down the country. But almost all the known tin deposits of the Malay Peninsula were in Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and (to a lesser extent) in Pahang.

Malay chiefs taxed tin mines in various ways and thus diverted into their own hands from a fifth to a third of the value of the output. Revenue from tin was the mainstay of the Malay political system.

Tin had been mined and exported from Malaya for centuries. Until about 1820 tin mining had been entirely in the hands of Malays. The Malay technique was to dig out the 'pay dirt' (known as *karang*) and to shovel it into a stream of running water. The heavy particles of ore fell to the bottom while the earth was carried away by the stream. The ore was then smelted in a charcoal furnace and cast into ingots. About 1820 the practice began of importing immigrant Chinese labour from the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien in south China to work as tin miners in Malaya. These Chinese worked full-time at the mines in contrast to the Malays for whom mining was often an intermittent occupation. The Chinese were able to work down to a greater depth because they were there every day to bale out the flood-water which was the bane of open-cast mining. Moreover they adapted the chain-pump and the waterwheel to make mechanical pumps for dewatering their mines. It may be that this apparatus was part of the agricultural equipment of their homes in China. By sustained labour and primitive mechanization the Chinese were able to work down to deeper and richer deposits than Malays.

Between 1840 and 1860 the major mining areas had passed into the occupation and use of Chinese miners under an accommodation with Malay chiefs to be described later.²

HISTORY

The history of the Malays formed a notable part of their culture. Their earliest written history (the *Sejarah Melayu*—'Malay Annals') was written about 1540³ and they had a large and varied literature beginning from that period but recording the traditions of still earlier periods. Their literature was in the romantic style—the encounters of kings and magicians, the exploits of heroic fighting men and so on. There is a

¹ It was reckoned (*JMBRAS*, xxiv, pt 2, p. 90) that on the average a miner produced two *bahara* of tin (800 lb) in the course of a year. At both Kinta and Sungei Ujong the working population fluctuated but was generally above 3,000—especially at Sungei Ujong.

² See below, pp. 24 and 126.

³ Winstedt, *JMBRAS* (1940), xvii, pt 3, p. 107. See also C. C. Brown's translation of the *Malay Annals* published as *JMBRAS* (1952), xxv, pts 2 and 3.

certain amount of historical fact embedded in it. But its main significance in the context of social analysis is that Malay literature and history served to transmit the traditions and values of the community, more especially of its ruling class.

The Malays were not the first-comers to the Peninsula. Long before their arrival there was a migration, apparently not on a large scale, of negrito, proto-Malay and other hunting and collecting tribes who were generally described by the Malays as *Sakai* and regarded as aborigines. These primitive peoples withdrew into the hills and had little contact with the later Malay immigrants. Malay chiefs in Negri Sembilan were wont to derive their titles to land from putative descent from Sakai ancestresses who were said to have intermarried with Malay immigrants.¹ The contacts of the nineteenth century consisted mainly of a little trading and some slave-raiding of Sakai by Malays.

The Malays are members of the Indonesian group of Mongoloid peoples. It is generally accepted² that the Indonesians migrated southwards from south-west China (Yunnan) some 3,000 years ago. The first areas of Malay settlement in the Peninsula were perhaps in the extreme north and south (Kelantan, Kedah and Johore) rather than in the central states with which this study is concerned. But traces of neolithic and bronze age cultures have been found in many places.³

Up to about 1400 a.d. Malaya lay on the periphery of various political units centred elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago or even further away. Early in the Christian era there were outposts in north Malaya of Hindu kingdoms centred on Annam in Indo-China and the Coromandel coast of India.⁴ In the seventh century the Malay Peninsula fell within the sphere of the Sumatran Buddhist kingdom of Sri Vijaya. In the fourteenth century the Javanese kingdom of Majapahit overwhelmed Sri Vijaya. About 1400 A.D. a Malay prince from Tumasik (the modern Singapore) established a dynasty at Malacca on the west coast. This event marked the beginning of an indigenous system of major political units in the Malay Peninsula.

The Malacca Sultanate was the heroic period in the historical traditions of the Peninsula Sultanates which succeeded it. It lasted only a century (c. 1400-1511) but its influence was immense. The later Malay States inherited from Malacca both a tradition in which some of their major values were expressed and also a pattern or form of political organization which it was their pride to preserve.

Certain aspects of the Malacca Sultanate are thus of considerable significance.⁵ The rulers of Malacca reproduced on a smaller scale the

¹ See, e.g., Gullick (1949), p. 8-9 for Sungei Ujong myths.

² Winstedt (1935). P. 14.

³ See Tweedie (1953), and Linehan, *JMBRAS* (1951). xxiv, pt. 3, p. 1.

⁴ Quaritch Wales (1940, 1947).

⁵ This brief account is based on Winstedt (1935) and Wilkinson (1924).

political system of the earlier kingdoms of western Indonesia. The head and centre of the system was a ruler drawn from a royal patrilineage, his authority buttressed by some of the 'divine king' attributes of earlier Hindu dynasties. Under the direction of the ruler and of other princes of the royal house the business of government was carried on by ministers or executives (*mentri*) from aristocratic but non-royal lineages. There was a hierarchy of greater and lesser offices. Among the more important of the officers of state were the *Bendahara* (Chief Minister), the *Temenggong* (Commander of Troops and Police), the *Penghulu Bendahari* (Treasurer), *Mentri* (Secretary of State) and the *Shahbandar* (Harbour Master and Collector of Customs).

The relative importance of the *Shahbandar* is a clue to the nature of the regime. Malacca and its rival States of the Straits of Malacca were essentially trade centres. For this purpose Malacca was well situated on the sea route from India to China. In the early fifteenth century the Malacca Sultans were sending trade missions to China. In the early sixteenth century the Portuguese were aided in their attack on Malacca by the defection of the Indian, Chinese and other foreign merchants of Malacca resentful at the exactions of their Malay rulers. The Malacca Sultanate was a compact and centralized political system which lived on the foreign trade of its port.

There were of course outlying districts and political officers for the administration of those districts. For example, one of the most famous of the Bendaharas of Malacca had, earlier in his career, been district governor of Klang at the mouth of the Klang River, a tin-producing area, while the foundation of the royal dynasty of Perak was ascribed to an elder son of a Sultan of Malacca sent into remote obscurity in Perak in order to leave the field clear for the succession to the throne of Malacca of a favourite younger son. These instances serve to show that the seat of power was at the centre—in Malacca. The royal dynasty and the great officers of state were all gathered there. The administration of outlying trade posts was of minor importance.

In 1511 the Portuguese captured Malacca and made it a strongpoint of their maritime empire. In 1641 the Dutch captured Malacca from the Portuguese and succeeded to their position as the dominant European power in the Straits of Malacca. The emphasis of Dutch administration was on the promotion of trade with the Malay States. In 1795 the British took Malacca. As a result of the settlement following the end of the Napoleonic War the British gained recognition of an exclusive sphere of influence among the central and southern states of the Malay Peninsula (the northern states were tributaries of Siam). The British position in Malaya in the mid-nineteenth century was based on the three Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore administered by a governor resident at Singapore. The Straits Settlements became highly successful centres of trade with neighbouring areas of the Malay Peninsula and of

Indonesia. Large mercantile communities, European, Chinese and Indian, grew up in British ports. It was they, especially the Chinese, who organized the development of Chinese tin-mining in the Malay States. It thus became inevitable that there should eventually be direct action by the British authorities in the Straits Settlements to protect the investments of their merchants in the Malay States. But, until late 1873, the British policy was to promote trade in the Malay States, to prevent the outbreak of war between States, but to abstain from anything more active than occasional missions of mediation to the Malay States.

The Malay Sultans of Malacca and their nobles after being expelled from Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511 eventually established themselves in Johore at the extreme southern end of the Malay Peninsula. From this base they fought desultory wars with the Portuguese and with their rivals among the trade states of the Straits of Malacca. Pahang became a sort of detached province under an independent ruler of non-royal descent who owed only formal allegiance to Johore. The Sultans of Perak, established in the State before the fall of Malacca, persisted as a weak but independent dynasty. At the start of the eighteenth century Bugis adventurers from the Celebes obtained control of the Johore Sultanate as 'underkings' (*Yam Tuan Muda*) to the impotent Sultans. A branch of this Bugis dynasty established itself at Klang and at the mouth of the Selangor River; this area was historically a dependency of the Malacca Sultanate. During the eighteenth century the Bugis rulers of Selangor obtained general recognition as a royal dynasty but only after much bitter fighting with Sumatran kingdoms.

Negri Sembilan¹ had developed on rather different lines. It had been a dependency of the Sultans of Malacca in the fifteenth century and they had appointed district headmen. After the fall of the Malacca Sultanate these headmen persisted and maintained formal relations with the Sultans of Johore. There was no focus of central government in Negri Sembilan itself at this time. In the sixteenth century and after there was a substantial immigration into Negri Sembilan of settlers from Menangkabau in Sumatra. The long-established ruling families became culturally assimilated to the matrilineal social system of the later arrivals from Menangkabau. Negri Sembilan thus became a loose aggregate of independent minor states (the name 'Negri Sembilan' means 'Nine States') ruled by chiefs whose lineages, like those of their immigrant subjects, were based on matrilineal descent. During the eighteenth century the Negri Sembilan confederacy became involved in wars with the Bugis warriors from Johore and Selangor. In order to have a single military defence commander in these wars the four principal district chiefs of Negri Sembilan (the *Undang* of the districts of Sungei Ujong, Rembau, Jelebu and Johol) invited over a prince from the royal family of Menangkabau to be their overlord (*Yang-di-pertuan Besar*) but with very limited powers. This was the

¹ Information from Wilkinson (1911). See also Gullick (1949).

B

origin of the office of royal ruler of Negri Sembilan. At first however it was not an hereditary office. The first three rulers were invited over from Menangkabau to hold office for life only. According to the tradition each married the daughter of his predecessor. At all events a royal dynasty gradually emerged and by the first quarter of the nineteenth century it was established, not without fighting, that the royal office was to descend within the royal patrilineage, generally to a son or brother of the previous ruler.

The political system of Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan was related to a common model despite considerable differences of detail. Perak may be regarded as conforming closely to the traditional norm. Its royal dynasty was (or claimed to be) descended from the Sultans of Malacca. The non-royal offices of state were organized on the standard basis of four chiefs of the first rank, eight of the second and sixteen of the third. Negri Sembilan and Selangor resembled Perak in constituting a state (Negri) as a major political unit with a royal ruler and a hierarchy of lesser office holders. Selangor however had a much smaller population than Perak¹ and for this reason could not support a large non-royal aristocracy in addition to the royal lineage. In Selangor therefore all offices of state were held by princes of the royal house. The royal house of Selangor contrasted with that of Perak in being of Bugis origin; it was thus invested with the aura of hostility and dislike which the Sumatran Malays had felt towards their Bugis enemies in the eighteenth century wars. This factor was important because a large part of the immigrant population in Selangor were of Sumatran origin. In general the Selangor ruling class had much less influence over their subjects than their opposite numbers in Perak. Negri Sembilan was different again. The powers of its ruling house were limited by a comparatively recent compact between the founder of the dynasty and the chiefs. In Negri Sembilan moreover the political system, except in the case of the royal dynasty, was based on matrilineal descent groups—a feature which did not appear in the other States.

Despite these contrasts Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan had more in common with each other than any of them had with other Malay States. Johore and Pahang lacked an acknowledged royal ruler (and all that went with such an office) until late in the nineteenth century. The Malay States to the north were nominal dependencies of Siam and their political system was affected by that fact. Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan were the main centres of Chinese tin-mining. They have been chosen as the subject of this study partly because of the accident that more information is available concerning their situation than of other States. But they are also instructive examples as a group in their similarities and in their differences.

The nineteenth century saw rapid changes in the political situation of these three States. Negri Sembilan, which had gathered a substantial

¹ See below, p. 23.

INTRODUCTION

II

immigrant Malaysian population earlier than the other two states, already illustrated one trend. In all States the immigrant population spread over a number of localities and earned its living by mining and agriculture—in contrast to the ‘trade centre’ pattern of settlement of the Malacca Sultanate. Dispersion of settlement made it inevitable that there should be a dispersed system of local control. In Negri Sembilan it had happened that such a decentralized system of district government had developed before there was any organ of central government at all; as a result the royal ruler was not only powerless but he governed under a constitution which was designed to yield that result. Perak and Selangor on the other hand had begun with a royal ruler and a concentration of power around that ruler in the tradition of the Malacca Sultanate. In these two States as the Malay population increased and scattered, an inevitable decentralization of authority began. Such was the prestige of the Malacca political system however that this decentralization of power was obliged to preserve the forms of central autocracy.

Chinese tin-mining as well as Malay immigration tended to produce a dispersal of power. So long as taxes on trade were the mainstay of government revenues, a Sultan residing at the mouth of the main river of the State might be able to collect more revenues than his chiefs and thus be stronger than they were. Chinese tin-mining however produced a source of revenue which could be tapped by local control.

A detailed account of dynastic history and civil war in the Malay States in the mid-nineteenth century must now be given.

PERAK

Perak had existed as a Malay State for several centuries. A process of disintegration, associated with mining development, began about 1850.

During the 1850's there was a civil war between the Sultan and certain of his chiefs. In this fighting the Sultan's son, Raja Yusuf, and a member of the Laxamana lineage, Mat Amin, particularly distinguished themselves. In 1857 the Sultan died. The Perak political system provided that in normal circumstances the Sultan should be succeeded by the Raja Muda; the Raja Bendahara became Raja Muda; the late Sultan's son became Raja Bendahara¹. Each Sultan's son, if he lived long enough, would become Sultan after members of the two other branches of the royal lineage had had their turn. This system was only two generations old in 1850 and it was by no means fixed and unalterable. On the death of a Sultan it rested with the chiefs to decide how to fill the three royal offices.

In 1857 the Raja Muda, an opponent of the late Sultan, acceded as Sultan Ja'afar. The former Raja Bendahara became Raja Muda Ali. Thus far according to norm. But the chiefs refused to appoint the late Sultan's son, Raja Yusuf, to the vacant office of Raja Bendahara. He was personally

¹ See below, p. 62.

unpopular, he had fought against many of them in the recent civil war, and he was likely to be an autocratic Sultan later on. The chiefs therefore appointed one Raja Ismail to be Bendahara. Ismail was a member of the royal lineage only through his mother. It is probable that there was no intention at that time of promoting Ismail from Bendahara to Raja Muda and then to Sultan. He was merely a stop-gap to keep out Yusuf.

Sultan Ja'afar appointed Mat Amin to the office of Laxamana. In this capacity Mat Amin was the most powerful chief in lower Perak for the next twenty years. Another new family was rising to prominence. One Long Ja'afar had been appointed about 1840 to collect taxes for his kinsman, the Dato' Panglima Bukit Gantang, in the sparsely settled and remote areas of Krian and Larut. Tin was found at Larut and Long Ja'afar imported Chinese tin miners to work these deposits. The mines were a great success and Long Ja'afar became immensely wealthy. He died in 1857 and was succeeded by his son, Ngah Ibrahim (incidentally the prefix *Ngah* indicates that he was not the eldest son). In 1862 Ngah Ibrahim was given the title of Mentri, previously held by another lineage then in decline. As Mentri, Ngah Ibrahim ranked as one of the four chiefs of the first rank in Perak. He is always referred to as 'Mentri of Larut'; more correctly he was Mentri (Secretary of State) of Perak and incidentally chief of Larut. His case illustrates how the titles of office of the State Government had become associated with local chieftainships. The Mentri was related to the chiefs of upstream Perak, around Kuala Kangsar, and he became the leading member of that local group.

In 1865 Sultan Ja'afar died. Raja Muda Ali, a nonentity, was duly promoted to be Sultan. Raja Bendahara Ismail, not being truly royal, was left as Bendahara. Raja Abdullah, son of the late Sultan Ja'afar, was appointed direct to the vacant office of Raja Muda.

In the late 1860's the weakness of the Sultan left the chiefs without any focus of central control. They divided into two opposing local groups. Raja Bendahara Ismail, who had a substantial interest in the tin mines of Kinta, and the Mentri of Larut, which was an important mining district, were the leaders of the upstream group. Laxamana Mat Amin and Raja Muda Abdullah led the downstream group. Mat Amin, in partnership with the late Sultan Ja'afar, Abdullah's father, had opened up the mining district of Batang Padang. The division between these two groups was still spanned by kinship ties. The Mentri was a son-in-law of the Laxamana. Raja Muda Abdullah was a son-in-law of Sultan Ali, himself of the upstream group.

Sultan Ali died in 1871 in his village in upstream Perak. There was the usual meeting of chiefs to conduct the funeral and to elect a new Sultan. Custom required that the new Sultan should be present to preside over the funeral of his predecessor. Raja Muda Abdullah did not dare to go up-river among the hostile upstream chiefs; moreover he had lost face among them by his acquiescence in the abduction of his wife by one of

their number. In his absence the Mentri persuaded the chiefs to appoint Raja Bendahara Ismail as Sultan. The immediate purpose was to install an ally as Sultan. It was also believed that the Mentri was intriguing for his own ultimate succession to the Sultanate. Ismail was elderly and not of royal descent on his father's side. When he died there would be a useful precedent in the Mentri's favour.¹

Thereafter there were two contenders for recognition as Sultan. Ismail, though not of true royal descent, had been constitutionally elected by a majority of the chiefs of Perak. Abdullah, with a better title by descent and by having been the Raja Muda of the previous reign, laid claim to be Sultan with the support of Laxamana Mat Amin and the downstream chiefs.

In 1872 serious fighting broke out among two factions of Chinese miners at Larut. The Mentri, originally committed to the Hai San men, gave his support to whichever side seemed to be winning at the time. This policy was an indication of the essential weakness of his position; he had failed to use his resources to build up an adequate police to enforce his authority. Fortunes fluctuated in the fighting at Larut and the Mentri soon lost by his turncoat policy whatever influence he had had with either Chinese faction. At the beginning of 1873 he was driven out of the Chinese mining area of Larut and took refuge in the northern Malay area of Larut around Kurau and Krian. Abdullah, who recognized that the Mentri was the mainstay of the upstream coalition of his enemies, tried to dislodge him from Larut altogether.

Early in 1874 Sir Andrew Clarke, Governor of the Straits Settlements, intervened in Perak. Clarke and his advisers had only an imperfect understanding of the complicated succession dispute and the factors underlying it. Abdullah agreed to accept a British protectorate in Perak if the British would make him Sultan. The Mentri was forced to accept Abdullah as Sultan as a condition of being allowed to hold his district of Larut. The position of Sultan Ismail was left undetermined. The British were at this time unaware of the claims of Raja Yusuf, who had been appointed Raja Muda by Abdullah when he himself claimed to be Sultan.

The first British Resident of Perak, J. W. W. Birch, encountered much passive opposition in his attempts to introduce central collection of revenues in Perak and to abolish debt-bondage. Adversity reunited the factions among the Perak chiefs in opposition to Birch. In November 1875 Birch was murdered at Pasir Salak, village of the Maharaja Lela. After a punitive expedition ('the Perak War') had encountered little opposition, there was an enquiry into the origins of the attack on Birch. Sultan Abdullah, ex-Sultan Ismail, the Mentri and the Laxamana were all found to be implicated to a greater or less degree and they were exiled to the Seychelles. The only notability who was not in the plot was the ever-unpopular Raja Yusuf. Raja Bendahara Osman, son of the late

¹ Swettenham (1895), p. 202.



This book offers an account of the way in which the traditional government of the Malay Sultans worked before the introduction of British rule in 1874, covering the whole political organisation, from village to state, of Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan, with some reference also to Pakang and Kedah. The study has no parallel in the Malayan field and contributes at the same time to the general understanding of political institutions outside modern Western society.

'The interest of the book goes beyond that of specialist Malay studies. To the best of my knowledge this is the first occasion on which the technique and concepts of the social anthropologist have been applied to historical source materials of this type.' E. R. Leach in the *British Journal of Sociology*

"Using documentary sources, the author manages to give a clear and excellently composed picture, not only of the political systems as such, but also of the interdependence of the political and the economic situation and the way in which kinship ties were utilised for political purposes.' P. E. Josselin de Jong in *Bijdragen*