

THE ROLE OF THE MALAY RULER BETWEEN 1850 AND 1950*

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This article attempts to show that the Malay Rulers under the British Residential system were not powerless puppets whose duties were confined to affixing their signatures and accepting financial positions. While performing ceremonial roles they also were able to disagree with their Residents and often their opposition to British policies was quite effective.

Rencana ini mencuba memperlihatkan Raja-raja Melayu di bawah sistem Residen Inggeris bukanlah sebagai boneka yang tidak berkuasa dan hanya menjalankan tugas untuk menurunkan tandatangan atau menerima gaji yang tetap sahaja. Sungguhpun memegang jawatan yang simbolik dari segi adat istiadat mereka juga pernah menyuarakan bantahan terhadap Residen-Residen dan banyak kali bantahan mereka terhadap dasar-dasar Inggeris berkesan.

By the middle of the 19th century the economic condition of the Malay States was beginning to change. Vaughan, visiting Kuala Terengganu in 1846, had met Baginda Omar, one of the most forceful and successful Malay Rulers of the 19th century. The Sultan came off to the British ship 'in great pomp, a fine-looking man' but, Vaughan adds, 'very plainly dressed' in 'a black velvet jacket slashed with gold thread, very shabby and worn-out'.¹ James Low, in Perak in 1826, had also noted the Sultan's very simple lifestyle.²

Yet tin mining in central Malaya, gold mining in the north-east and the export of produce such as camphor, gutta percha and rattans was increasing the inflow of money.³ Straits merchants, no longer content merely to purchase what was on offer, were beginning to risk capital, sometimes as loans and sometimes as direct investment, in the Malay States.⁴ With money to spend the Rulers of Johor and Kedah maintained houses in Singapore and Penang as accommodation during their frequent visits. Other Rulers also visited these towns.⁵ These contacts induced new and expensive tastes at Malay royal Courts.

Political prestige and power depended on control of revenue. This factor exposed the ambiguity of the Malay Ruler's traditional role, which had been essentially ceremonial and symbolic rather than executive. A Ruler reigned but he did not usually govern. In his name royal kinsmen and officers of state drawn from prominent families carried on the work of government. The Ruler formally conferred upon them their high offices - he was the fount of

honour, the apex of a hierarchy of rank and prestige.⁶ If he was adroit the Ruler might exert some real authority. But James Low noted that the public duties of the Sultan of Perak took up a very short time each day, after which he withdrew from his balai. Attendance at the mosque for Friday prayers was his other major, but formal, public appearance.⁷

Like all generalisations the description I have just given does not fit every case. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin of Kedah and Maharaja Abu Bakar of Johor were, for particular historical reasons, untrammelled by traditional delegation of executive powers.⁸ They appointed ministers (*menteri*) of their choice and governed in a style which was modelled, selectively, on colonial methods just over their borders.⁹ In a more traditional context Baginda Omar of Terengganu and Bendahara Ahmad of Pahang, by sheer force of personality dominated the power structure. Hugh Clifford wrote of Bendahara Ahmad of Pahang that 'no man in all that lawless State dared think above a whisper without his leave.'¹⁰

Yet even these autocrats ran into insoluble problems - in the context of their time - in managing money.¹¹ Money was also a problem in more traditional regimes, such as Perak and Selangor. There the Ruler's mighty subjects fought each other or defied him - over money. Sultan Abdul Samad of Selangor fell out with Raja Mahdi because Mahdi would not pay over the prescribed royal share of the revenue of the Klang district.¹² A witness at the Perak Commission of Enquiry of 1876 said that Raja Muda (later Sultan) Abdullah was indeed entitled by custom to certain revenues throughout Perak but the local chiefs would not let him collect them.¹³

Quarrels over power and money led to turbulence. In 30 years from 1839 every State of the Peninsula had suffered such an episode, often leading to usurpation of the throne or a civil war, or both.¹⁴ A trial of strength was of course a recognised mode of relieving dissension. 'They are both young men. Let them fight it out,' said Sultan Abdul Samad - and went back to his garden.¹⁵ But it was disturbing both to the Rulers, insecure if not impotent, and to the merchants of the Straits Settlements, whose money was at risk. And it tended to get worse as the years passed.

Fred McNair, whose book is a well-informed study of Perak in the 1870's, said that 'many of the Malay Chiefs have represented to me that what they want is an officer acquainted with their language, who would reside near them to give them countenance and support, who would teach them to collect and spend their money to the best advantage, to administer a better form of justice, and to maintain order in their country.'¹⁶ Sultan Abdullah seems to have thought that he was getting a sort of Comptroller of the Household, who would keep the royal cash flow moving in the right direction.¹⁷ He is hardly to be blamed

for failing to understand the Pangkor Engagement since the Malay translation of it supplied to him was grossly misleading.¹⁸

Let me pass over the conflicts of 1875-76 and come to the 'Residential system' of the FMS, established between 1874 and 1889. In 1894 Swettenham summed it up, saying that 'the power of the governing classes is in one sense, far less than it was when British assistance was invoked, but their influence is certainly greater.'¹⁹ Elsewhere he said of the Malay Rulers that they had an excellent grasp of matters affecting the development of their States and that 'they should be consulted before taking action, not after.'²⁰

The tone of these comments may jar on the modern Malayan historian but beneath the complacency they disclose a recognition by the colonial regime that it could only govern effectively by securing a measure of cooperation,
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However, the State Councils, established in Selangor and Perak in 1877 and later in other FMS States) brought the dispossessed and embittered ruling class into the process of consultation and influence. But it was only a brief flowering in the 1880's. By the 1890's the State Councils had begun to decline in importance, though not in the all-important personal prestige which they conferred on their members.²⁸

Although the colonial administrators did not intend to do so, the innovation of the State Council restored some of the traditional authority of the Malay Ruler. In the 1890's Sultan Idris of Perak presided over a State Council which included the Raja Muda, Mentri, Laksamana, Sri Adika Raja and Panglima Kinta. It was in form, though not in substance, a recreation of the gatherings in the royal balai at which the chiefs sought royal countenance for what they were doing. The presence of his traditional lieges strengthened the Ruler's hand. He could - and occasionally did - insist that on matters of Malay custom the High Commissioner, by the terms of the Pangkor Engagement, could not overrule his decisions, even if his decisions entailed State expenditure.²⁹

If the Ruler wished to resist a British proposal, a royal nod and a wink evoked dutiful but vehement protests. In one such case, in 1896, the Sri Adika Raja, confidant and righthand man of Sultan Idris, 'raised a chorus by remarking that the draft order appeared to set aside the country and the Sultan'.³⁰ The Sultan sat impassive while the storm raged - as did the Resident who, on this occasion, tacitly supported a Malay protest against a Colonial Office decision.

The Ruler did not have to use proxies to fight his battles, if he judged that the extreme sanction of a personal protest was required. In 1905 Sultan Idris made a speech to his State Council, reproaching the High commissioner with failure to abide by the terms of the FMS treaty of 1895. Anderson, a pillar of Presbyterian rectitude, was apoplectic with fury - all the more so because the Resident decided to let the storm blow over rather than aggravate it to a constitutional earthquake by arguing the point with the Ruler in the presence of his State Council.³¹

In 1908 the Resident invited the Perak State Council to approve proposals for Malay Reservations (of land). This measure was intended to halt sale of Malay holdings at high prices to rubber companies - and did not meet with Malay approval. The Council asked the Resident to circulate a Malay translation of this proposal within the state to elicit Malay opinion. Stripped of the formal courtesy the Resident was being told to get stuffed.³²

Before trying again the administrators persuaded Sultan Idris to give them his support. In 1913 at a meeting of the FMS Federal Council he spoke in support of the Malay Reservations Enactment, thereby virtually silencing its critics of all persuasions.³³ As the senior - and most forceful - of the four FMS rulers

of his time Sultan Idris played a prominent part in influencing policy during the first 15 years of this century. His effectiveness was due in part to his superb skill in judging how far to carry his opposition and in signalling that he was always ready to listen - and to reconsider his stance.³⁴ But he was not alone in this. I have mentioned the skill of Sultan Ahmad of Pahang in opposition by different means. Even the Yam Tuan of Negeri Sembilan, a lesser figure, could prove 'troublesome' on occasion.³⁵

However the death of Sultan Idris in 1916 removed from the stage the last among the first generation of Malay Rulers to experience colonial rule. The FMS Rulers were moving from a state to a federal forum of debate - a subject to which I will come later on.

Before that let me go back a little to pick up a different theme, i.e. the Rulers' part in what Dr. Khasnor Johan has called *The Emergence of a Modern Malay Administrative Elite* - and may I say how much I admire her book and draw on it in the following passage. She has told - and I need not repeat it - the story of the foundation of the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar which was to become the nursery of the evolving Malay Administrative Service, a process stimulated by the shortage of European staff in Malaya during the 1914-18 war.

The Malay Rulers, at their conference in 1903, had pressed for more effective measures to bring Malays of the old ruling class into the new bureaucracy. Their initial reaction to the Malay College was rather mixed. Sultan Idris, and the indispensable Sri Adika Raja, 'hailed it with delight.'³⁶ The Sultan asked that the new school might be sited at Kuala Kangsar, so that he might keep an eye on it. But when R.J. Wilkinson, whose brainchild it was, became Resident of Negeri Sembilan, he found that the local opinion was that 'the Malay College, which makes a point of training the character as well as the intelligence, was really a sort of reformatory for idle and refractory boys of good family.'³⁷ The English public school ethos is not readily transplanted to another culture. However, as we know, the Malay College in its own fashion soon became a cherished Malay institution throughout the Malay States - not least to the Rulers themselves. In the early 1920's Sultan Iskandar of Perak, entertaining the King of Siam, brought him to see the College mounted on 'a grandly caparisoned elephant with a beautifully decorated howdah on its back' and the major chiefs of Perak, in similar splendour, came behind.³⁸

Yet, despite the euphoria, the Rulers were troubled by two problems. The College was to them a gateway into the civil service for boys of aristocratic family. However from the 1920's a quota of places was reserved for open competition. The introduction of 'damned nonsense about merit' displeased some of Their Highnesses, one of whom formally objected to the admission of a boy whose forebears had been slaves, although the aristocratic former

slave-owners had themselves put him forward.³⁹ But there was no stemming this modest move towards equal opportunity.

The other issue also arose from conflicts between achieved and inherited status, i.e. the relationship between the Ruler, pillar of tradition, and Malay civil servants making their careers, even if they too began from a situation of inherited position (in most cases). Viewed from the *astana* the MAS Malay officer was a cuckoo in the nest, especially if he was from another State or worse still - of peasant origin. The MAS officer, by reason of his professional status and administrative powers was a high profile figure in Malay society. Yet he was also heir to the role of the district chief a figure now lost from the traditional hierarchy. If the Ruler and his circle were prejudiced, the MAS officer could be 'made to feel insignificant'.⁴⁰ It was the beginning of an uneasy relationship which took a new turn in the post-1945 Malaya, when the Rulers owed the recovery of their constitutional position to the leaders of UMNO, who were for the most part members, or former members, of the civil service. In earlier years however, just after the First World War, as the new MAS cadre began to emerge, the FMS Rulers were more sympathetically disposed to their ambitions. When Guillemard arrived as High Commissioner in 1920, Sultan Iskandar of Perak, who had himself been in the government service for 15 years, urged Guillemard to do more to improve the career prospects of the MAS.⁴¹

Up to this point I have concentrated on the Rulers of the FMS, upon whom the Residential system was imposed from 1874 onwards. It is time to consider the convergent but essentially different developments in what became, in 1909, the Unfederated Malay States. Each of the four States - I shall disregard Perlis - had its own sequence of events. I shall try to describe the common trends of the UMS as a group rather than the peculiar elements of individual States.

With the exception of Johor, very much a special case, the other UMS - in the north - were less subject to economic pressures and disturbances than the FMS. Siamese paramountcy, although irksome, was mitigated by the 'hands off' policy of Siam. Within the constraints of tributary status - symbolised by the triennial presentation of the *bunga mas* - the northern UMS Rulers were free to find their own way forward.⁴²

It was a situation which gave scope to able Rulers, such as Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin of Kedah, Sultan Mohamed II of Kelantan and Baginda Omar of Terengganu - to whom one may add Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor. Broadly, their objective was to adapt the government of their States, by the selective adoption of administrative practice observed in the Straits Settlements. In Kedah and Kelantan the arrival of Siamese Advisers - of British nationality - added impetus to the trend.

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Thus it was that, on the transfer of suzerainty in 1909, Anderson, the High Commissioner noted that in Kedah 'there is a fully organised central administration composed of Malays, some of them men of considerable ability and individuality'.⁴³ Graham, on arriving in Kelantan in 1903 paid tribute to the quality of its land system and Swettenham, visiting Johor in that year, was also surprised by some aspects of the regime.⁴⁴ Clifford, in Terengganu in 1895 had noted its sophisticated industry and foreign trade and a few years later the Ruler adopted an active, if perhaps imprudent, policy of granting concessions for mining and agriculture.⁴⁵

In the 20 years up to 1909 the UMS Rulers had viewed the situation in the FMS with misgiving. There was little doubt in their minds that, if the opportunity arose, Britain would extend the FMS regime to their States - a most unwelcome prospect. While there was time, they took steps to safeguard what Professor Sharom Ahmat called the 'Malayness' of their government.⁴⁶ The most effective buffer against British control was the adoption of a bureaucratic form of administration, through salaried officials, in place of traditional rule by hereditary dignitaries. It also entailed the introduction of some colonial practice, such as an embryo land registration system, which increased the cash flow into the hands of the ruling class, from peasants or from concessionaires, or both.

Nonetheless there was an element of sham in these innovations. In Kedah the new offices of State Auditor and of Inspector General of Police were little more than court sinecures.⁴⁷ When Graham became Siamese Adviser in Kelantan he found that the impotent Sultan's numerous uncles had assumed various offices. 'One of the uncles', he wrote, 'was already in charge of the rabble which passed as a police force, another was head of a rudimentary public works office, and a third controlled the land revenue (collected on crops)'. However he added that they were 'good enough men when taken individually' and 'it was proposed to continue these gentlemen in their offices' and to increase their remuneration.⁴⁸ There was a similar situation in Terengganu.⁴⁹ In Johor the standard of bureaucratic efficiency was higher but Swettenham remarked sourly on 'Malay officers pretending to carry on work, the details of which not one of them understood'.⁵⁰

The significant point to note is the frustration of British administrators confronted by an indigenous structure which they could not displace. Treacher had written of the FMS that 'the British arriving here found no native civil service'.⁵¹ As we have seen Anderson, in 1909, had to recognise that in the UMS there was a 'native civil service' in office. Its existence of both FMS and UMS, distinguished between the FMS Resident who 'administers' and a UMS British Adviser who 'advises the Ruler how to administer'.⁵²

Why was the 'native civil service' of the UMS able to hold its ground? Some, from Kedah and Johor, had been educated at Benjamin Keasberry's Malay residential school in Singapore - as much a nursery of Malay administrators as the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar, to which the UMS sent a later generation for education and training.⁵³ A few had been sent to England.⁵⁴ But the most outstanding figures of the early 20th century were men of a different type. Haji Nik Mahmud and Haji Ngah were respectively long-serving *menteri besar* of Kelantan and of Terengganu. Both were men of strong personality and outstanding ability. As their names reveal, both had made the pilgrimage to Mecca and had remained there for a period of Islamic study. Haji Ngah was very proud of his command of Arabic.⁵⁵ Dato' Ja'afar bin Mohamed, *Menteri Besar* of Johor for many years until his death in 1919 was a member of the Johor elite, educated at a Malay school in Singapore.⁵⁶

These men rose to power by royal favour but the strength of their position was that they combined proficiency in two power structures. The first British Agent in Terengganu disparaged Haji Ngah, then the Sultan's private secretary, as 'a typical priest', i.e. an *alim*. But a modern historian, with better understanding, describes him as 'a man of caniness and considerable executive ability, the most significant personality in Terengganu of this century'.⁵⁷

On the basis that the advice had to be accepted but the adviser could not take direct action both sides had to work out a basis of cooperation. In selected technical fields, such as the introduction of the FMS land system, British officials were even permitted to assume a limited executive role. If approached sympathetically the Malay regime was willing to adopt proposed changes with goodwill. Let me take an example from Terengganu, where the pace of change was slowest.

In the 1880's the Sultan had rewarded a favourite with the charge of the important Kemaman district, the main centre of economic development later on. Here the celebrated To' Drahman remained for 30 years, first as a district chief though he was (in 1912 restyled district officer. The change of label did not however significantly alter his style of administration. For example he treated the police contingent stationed in his district as a useful addition to his traditional following.⁵⁸

Elsewhere in Terengganu however younger men were appointed to the charge of districts. They had not grown up in the traditions of royal courts and authority. The British Agent (not yet Adviser Humphreys) - another celebrated figure during his 10-year stint in Terengganu - was able to get the new recruits attached to him for initial training. He himself had learnt his trade as an Assistant Adviser in Johor and the Sultan borrowed from him his copies of administrative reports on the Muar district.⁵⁹

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I do not wish to exaggerate the trend, which I have not examined in detail beyond 1920. But it does appear that the Anglo-Malay partnership of the UMS was more productive - for Malay progress - than in the FMS. When, years later UMNO was founded and rose to power, its leaders - with the exception of Tun Abdul Razak - came almost entirely from former members of the UMS civil service. Dato' Onn himself had been a member of the Johor civil service until 1929.⁶⁰ My point is that in the UMS the Malay administrator had more power and responsibility - and with it came confidence in his own ability. The Rulers deserve some credit for this result.

UMNO was in part the product of an increasing Malay sense of national unity, spreading across State boundaries. That is the next theme I propose to examine. It probably had its origin around the beginning of the century. Long before that Malay Rulers had occasionally visited each other and their dynasties sometimes intermarried. Throughout the region there was a sense of the 'Malay world'.⁶¹ But a new era began with the 1897 conference of FMS Rulers. It was such an unprecedented event that the administrators viewed it with some trepidation, predicting quarrels over precedence - which in the event did not happen.⁶² There are also signs that the Rulers were reluctant to become involved in such a novel assembly. Both Sultan Idris of Perak and Sultan Ahmad of Pahang had given polite reasons for declining to attend a conference which it was proposed to hold in the previous year.⁶³ However Idris was mollified by moving the venue (of 1897) to his State capital - Kuala Kangsar - and special arrangements were made to bring Ahmad round from the East Coast in the Governor's yacht. Even so it took some persuasion to get Sultan Abdul Samad of Selangor, then aged 93, to make a short journey to Perak.

The whole affair was a success despite a series of minor accidents and setbacks. When Ahmad reached the mouth of the Perak river he declined to proceed upstream in a small river launch - it was unfitting. Yam Tuan Mohamed of Negeri Sembilan was more compliant but the vessel on which his party was travelling grounded in the river and he arrived at the unreasonable hour of midnight. The next day it rained so heavily that the opening ceremony had to be postponed to the following day. The programme of entertainments went sadly astray - there was popular apathy over the sports, the boat races could not be held because visitors had occupied the boats as lodgings, and the fireworks were let off before the royal guests arrived to see them.

But the Rulers, and still more the large retinues who accompanied them, enjoyed themselves hugely - not least because Sultan Idris was a splendid host who put himself to immense pains to make a success of the occasion. For various reasons 6 years elapsed before the next such gathering of Rulers was held - in Kuala Lumpur in 1903. On that occasion the four Rulers and

their parties were handsomely accommodated in temporary buildings in the Lake Gardens. For the first time the assembly took on a political significance. Before Swettenham arrived as High Commissioner to preside, Sultan Idris held a private meeting of the Rulers and their advisers to discuss the protest which he planned to make against the centralising tendencies of the FMS federal government. Swettenham, getting wind of this conclave, got Sultan Idris into a corner and persuaded him to tone down what he intended to say.⁶⁴ But he could not remove the sense of common interest in opposing certain aspects of the FMS regime. The four days of discussion ranged over a variety of subjects, including the need for increasing Malay participation in the government itself, which led on to the scheme for a Malay Administrative Service, which I have already described.

The Rulers seem to have been of two minds. They found mutual reassurance in promoting common interests. On the other hand they wished to secure a return of power and influence from the federal centre to the States. The members of the State Councils, who came with them, also shared in a new sense of identity and common interest, arising from the opportunity of informal contact at the conferences.

In discussing the constitutional debate of the ensuing 30 years I will concentrate on the role of the Rulers. The consultations which preceded the 1909 FMS reorganisation are a story of mutual incomprehension.⁶⁵ Anderson, the High Commissioner, sought to wrench control of the federal bureaucratic machine from the hands of the too powerful Resident-General. The Rulers wished to see the R-G's powers dispersed to the States.

Sultan Idris suggested that, as the conferences of 1897 and 1903, the four Rulers should assemble, with the Residents, for collective discussion over which the High Commissioner would preside. This was to be a debate in confidence in an 'Administrative Council'. Anderson took up the idea as a means of securing frank discussion with the Residents, believing that in practice the Rulers, still reluctant to leave their States, would not often attend. Yet, for Sultan Idris, the whole purpose of the new body was that they should do so.⁶⁶ In the event the Colonial Office, which misunderstood the purposes both of Anderson and of the Rulers, vetoed the proposal for an Administrative Council altogether.

In agreeing that the new FMS Federal Council should legislate on matters common to the four States, Sultan Idris stipulated that the legislation, in draft form, should first be discussed by the State Councils. Yet, for the past 20 years, the State Councils had enacted, virtually without discussion, technical material of this kind, submitted to them in English, a language which many members of the State Councils did not understand - a few of them were illiterate.⁶⁷

Between 1909 and 1927, when the Rulers ceased to be members of the Federal Council, they attended its meetings - or were represented by their heirs - but very rarely spoke.⁶⁸ Although they took no open part in the prolonged and acrimonious discussion of the decentralization issue, they had a part in it. Again the parties were at cross-purposes, though there was a better understanding of what it was all about. Guillemard proposed a 'devolution of the Chief Secretary' powers to State Councils'.⁶⁹ The Residents supported his scheme with a view to the transfer of executive powers to them. Again there was a failure to understand that the Rulers had a real interest in these matters.

Yet the evidence to the contrary was there for those who were prepared to consider it. Guillemard, in many respects a clever fool, was astute enough to see that he needed the support of the Rulers, especially Sultan Iskandar of Perak, as a counterweight to commercial interests, who supported the autocratic Chief Secretary.⁷⁰ Iskandar himself came to London in 1924 and made a passing impression on the Colonial office, still convinced that he was a mere playboy.⁷¹

The Colonial Office was by now convinced that 'the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers (was) becoming increasingly shadowy and unreal'.⁷² Insofar as the Colonial Office attributed any political significance to the FMS Rulers, it regarded them as 'a reactionary force', who - since the days of Swettenham - had lent themselves to manipulation by the Residents to obstruct the enlightened policies of His Majesty's Government. This was to have momentous consequences - in the Malayan Union project.⁷³

Meanwhile the UMS Rulers observed the FMS decentralization Punch and Judy show of the inter-war period with distaste and detachment. As early as 1920 Young, then High Commissioner, had warned that neither Kedah nor Johor would enter a federation except 'under compulsion'.⁷⁴ When Britain sought in 1923 to put its relations with Kedah on a firmer footing than mere succession to the suzerainty of Siam, transferred in 1909, the Regent of Kedah insisted on a stipulation in the treaty that Britain would not 'merge or combine the State of Kedah... with any other State without the written consent of His Highness the Sultan in Council'.⁷⁵

As time is running on I will pass over briefly the years 1942-47 in which the Rulers were unhappy prisoners of circumstances beyond their control. In 1945 they were put under compulsion but the symbolic role which, apart from any lost political influence, they had always had - in British as well as Malay eyes, made them a key element in general Malay opposition to the Malayan Union. The price which the Rulers paid for their rescue was the adoption, within each State, of a written constitution, which in effect made them formally bound to accept the advice of Malay Ministers and State Councils of

a representative character. The theoretical absolutism of what Clifford, in 1927, had called 'Muhammadan monarchies' had gone and a new era had begun.⁷⁶

There remains a complex theme - all the more difficult to discuss because the sources available are fragmentary and inadequate - the position of the Malay Ruler as a 'Muhammadan monarch'⁷⁷. Whatever liberties the Residents took, they judged it unwise - in their own interest - to intervene in 'the Malay religion', expressly excluded from the ambit of their advice by the Pangkor Engagement.⁷⁸ However it presented insistent problems to the Ruler - and on occasion to the Resident also.

By tradition the Ruler was 'God's Vice-Regent on Earth'⁷⁹. As such it was his duty to observe and to uphold the faith, and in particular to enforce its rules of conduct. In pre-colonial times the Ruler could adopt a relaxed and hands-off approach since executive power was in the hands of fellow Muslims.⁸⁰ However the separation of church and state incidental to colonial rule created a new situation.

The Rulers' response was the creation, in the latter part of the 19th century, of a much more elaborate hierarchy of Islamic officials than had been required before. These were kadis, assistant kadis, mufti and syaikh-ul-Islam, whose salaries - and some legal powers - were given by the State government but who were essentially officials appointed by the Ruler or on his behalf. The Rulers showed much interest in the choice of the more senior figures of the new hierarchy.⁸¹ But, as Roff noted, this produced an 'authoritarian form of religious administration in the hands of a hierarchy of officials directly dependent on the Sultans for their position and power.'⁸²

If the ruler's subjects did not behave as they should or - a more heinous offence - if they disputed the rulings of his Muslim officials, what was he to do? As an example Raja Yusuf, Regent of Perak, threatened to fine or imprison backsliders who failed to attend Friday prayers at the mosque. But Hugh Low refused to support him, suggesting that the defaulters should be told that they would be 'guilty of sin and certainly be punished hereafter.' At this Yusuf 'looked sulky but I saw no more of the document.'⁸³

In time however colonial administrators yielded to royal demands that there should be sanctions in this world as well as the next. But this shifted the disputed ground without resolving the dispute. If the Ruler's State courts, administered for him by Europeans, were to deal with disputes and offences arising under Islamic law, that law must be acceptable by European as well as Malay standards. The Terengganu State Council once had to determine what sentence to impose on a woman taken in adultery. Humphreys, the British Adviser, led the Council, and the woman, down to a place in the town where road repairs were in progress. He pointed to a pile of stones and invited

the Council to stone her to death, as the Koran provided. He then departed - and so soon afterwards did they.⁸⁴ But the argument did not always go one way. When the British Adviser in Kedah invited the State Council to adopt the SS Penal Code as the law of Kedah, a Malay Councillor said that he would first wish to consider the Egyptian law, which might be a better model. In vain did the British Adviser expostulate that 'the Egyptian code is a crude thing'.⁸⁵ It is an episode which illustrates incidentally how British insensitivity hardened Malay resolve. The foundation of the famous Majlis Uğama in Kelantan was in part a mark of such resentment.⁸⁶

The Rulers themselves took the initiative in the search for a code more in keeping with the values and attitudes of their time.⁸⁷ Raja Muda, later Sultan, Sulaiman of Selangor, a much married man, produced his own proposals for a new code of matrimonial law.⁸⁸ But the ulama, as is the way with experts, proved contrary. After much discussion the Muhammadan Laws Enactment passed in 1904 dealt only with selected topics, mainly matrimonial, on which a modicum of consensus had been reached.

It is significant however that the new law required any person who wished to teach 'religious doctrine' to obtain a licence from the Ruler. Failure to do so, or teaching 'false doctrine', was punishable by a fine.⁸⁹ Roff has given a full and vivid account of the *Kaum Muda-Kaum Tua* disputes of this period. The *Kaum Tua*, or conservatives, were the hierarchy around the Ruler, acting in his name, to suppress what they regarded as heresy or subversion. The *Kaum Muda* reflected the tide of reformist opinion sweeping into Southeast Asia from centres of learning in the Middle East.

In these conflicts the Ruler's officials were sometimes more royalist than the king. Sultan Idris, who matured in his later years into a man of strict piety, drew into his circle one of the leading reformers, Syaikh Tahir. The Sultan sent the Syaikh round the mosques and surau of Perak 'to correct the kiblat the direction faced in prayer'.⁹⁰ Later he became a sort of personal chaplain to the Sultan and accompanied him on his trip to London in 1911.⁹¹

The Rulers also had some intermittent contact with the Middle Eastern centres of the reformist teaching. In 1893 Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor visited Cairo en route for Europe and had discussions with Sheikh el Bekri, who professed himself 'shocked' at what the Sultan inadvertently disclosed to him of lax Islamic practice in Malaya. The Sultan, with great tact, invited the outraged theologian to 'send them a professor to teach them their religion'.⁹²

Sometimes however the boot was on the other foot. In 1913 Sultan Zainal Abidin of Terengganu made the pilgrimage to Mecca - the only Malay Ruler of his time to do so. He was a man of great piety and learning, who had once asked his British Adviser for help in the study of astronomy, so that he might

proclaim the beginning of the month of fasting with scientific accuracy.⁹³ He fell ill in Arabia and was obliged to go to Cairo for medical treatment. There he was disturbed to find that middle-class Egyptians wore 'a neck-tie with a collar which is against Muhammadan law.'⁹⁴ There are photographs of the Sultan wearing a European suit, with a collar but no tie.⁹⁵

The outbreak of the 1914-18 war caused the Rulers considerable difficulty since Turkey, the leading Islamic power of the time, was among the countries with which Britain was at war. Some pressure was exerted on the Rulers to declare themselves in support of Britain as the protecting power. It fell to Sultan Idris, as the senior FMS Sultan, to make a suitable statement at a meeting of the FMS Federal Council.⁹⁶ British administrators believed that this declaration by a much respected Ruler had widespread effect on Malay opinion.

The main area of concern was in the north-east, where Islamic activity and the influence of the ulama were particularly important. Sultan Zainal Abidin of Terengganu assembled his people in the centre of Kuala Terengganu and led them in prayers for a British victory.⁹⁷ But it was a tetchy local situation. A shopkeeper in Kuala Terengganu put up the Turkish flag, to show his sympathies - and a European - took it down, thereby exaggerating the issue. In Kelantan the To' Janggut rebellion, a very minor affair in mid 1915, came just after the mutiny of an Indian regiment in Singapore - and the raid on Penang by the German cruiser "Edmen". Whether these local and remote events caused the Sultan of Kelantan to have doubts about the British cause is uncertain. But his British Adviser was indiscreet enough to let it be seen that he doubted the Sultan's attitude - and it was the British Adviser who was removed from the State - at the Sultan's insistence.⁹⁸

On the other hand Sultan Ibrahim of Johor, despite his long and bitter resistance of British intervention in his State, sent a detachment of his Johore Military Force to assist in putting down the Singapore Mutiny. Later, on being told that his son (the future Sultan Ismail of Johor), who was a student in England, wished to enlist in the British Army, he gave his consent.⁹⁹

One of the slow-moving developments of the period I have described was the growing awareness of the Malay Rulers of events in the world outside Southeast Asia. Sultan Idris, visiting London in 1902, had cited the Malay saying about a frog under a coconut shell (i.e. the local limits of Malay perceptions) to Clifford.¹⁰⁰ But it was already a somewhat out-of-date comment. At different times the Rulers of Johor, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang and Kedah visited England - and their discussions with the Colonial Office were sometimes more than formalities.¹⁰¹ Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor was a late 19th century globetrotter, who made five trips to Europe,

where he appeared at several royal courts and wintered at fashionable spas. He also made visits to Java, China and Japan. Sultan Idris too visited England three times. The Sultan of Kedah came to attend the 1911 Coronation and had to have Malay costume for himself and his party hastily run up by a Savile Row tailor, as British decorum would not allow him to appear in the procession in European uniform, as he had intended.¹⁰² The future Sultan Iskandar of Perak was educated in England.¹⁰³

I hope that I have at least given some reasons for doubting the opinion of King Chulalongkorn of Siam that the Malay Rulers became powerless puppets whose duties were 'confined to affixing their signature and accepting financial grants.'¹⁰⁴

NOTES

- * This is the text of a lecture delivered at the Universiti Sains Malaysia on 2 October 1991. According to Mr Gullick, it presents the highlights of his forthcoming book, *Rulers and Residents: Influence and Power in the Malay States, 1897-1920*, which is being published by Oxford University Press in Kuala Lumpur. Readers who wish to pursue further details in the notes of this paper are requested to refer to the bibliography in the book. - Ed.

1 Anon (almost certainly J.D. Vaughan), 'Journal kept on board a Cruiser in the Indian Archipelago in 1846', *Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, vol. 8, p.176.

2 J. Low. 'Observations on Perak', *JIA*, vol. 4, p.502.

3 J.M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century: the Beginnings of Change*, Chapter 7, and *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya*, Chapter 7. C.F. Bozzolo, Report on a Journey to Kelantan in 1888 enclosed with SSD 31 January 1889. H. Clifford, 'Report: Expedition to Trengganu and Kelantan', 1895, reprinted in *JMBRAS*, 34(1), para 172f, 204 and 209. W.E. Maxwell, Report on a Consular Tour to Kedah in 1889 enclosed with SSD 17 May 1889.

4 Khoo Kay Kim, *The Western Malay States 1850-1873: the Effects of Commercial Development on Malay Politics*, passim. Shaharil Talib, *After Its Own Image: the Trengganu Experience 1881-1941*, Chapter 4. J.M. Gullick, 'Kedah in the time of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin II 1854-1879', *JMBRAS*, 58(2) and *Rulers and Residents: Influence and Power in the Malay States 1870-1920* (forthcoming) (subject index entries 'Land - concessions').

- 5 Gullick, J. *Rulers and Residents*, Chapter 7.
- 6 Gullick, J. *Indigenous Political Systems*, pp. 71-72. A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, passim.
- 7 J. Low, *loc.cit.*
- 8 Gullick, J. 'Kedah 1854-1879', and *Rulers and Residents*, Chapter 4.
- 9 Gullick, J. *Rulers and Residents*, Chapters 4 and 5.
- 10 H. Clifford, *Bushwhacking and Other Asiatic Tales and Memories*, p.178. Clifford, 'Report', para 126. M.C.ff. Sheppard, 'A Short History of Trengganu', *JMBRAS*, 22(3), p.34.
- 11 Gullick, J. *Rulers and Residents* as Note 9. In Kelantan and Terengganu the central control of revenues achieved to some extent during the reigns of Sultan Mohamed II (d. 1886) and Baginda Omar (d.1876) was dissipated under weaker successors. *Ibid*, Chapter 5.
- 12 Wan Mohamed Amin bin Said, *Pesaka Selangor*, p. 64.
- 13 Evidence of Mahomed Esaak to the Perak Commission of Enquiry in 1876 (CO 273/87, p. 89).
- 14 Civil war in Kelantan (1839); usurpation by force in Terengganu (1839); succession dispute in Kedah (1854); civil war in Perak (1851-7); takeover of Johor (except Muar) by Temenggong Ibrahim (1855) and civil war in Muar (1879); usurpation by intrigue in Selangor (1857) leading to civil war (1867-73); civil war in Pahang (1857-63); civil war in parts of Negeri Sembilan (1848 and 1869).
- 15 Report by T.Braddell enclosed with SSD 24 February 1874, para 50. F.A. Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p.128.
- 16 Memorandum enclosed with SSD 24 February 1874 (McNair's advice to Clarke re intervention).
- 17 J.W.W. Birch, *The Journals of J.W.W. Birch First British Resident to Perak 1874-1875*, ed. P.L. Burns, p.241.
- 18 C.N. Parkinson. *British Intervention in Malaya 1867-1877*, p.137f. Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, Chapter 2. Supplementary Note B.
- 19 *AR Perak 1894*, para 70.

- 20 Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p.253.
- 21 R. Emerson, *Malaysia: a Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*, p. 140.
- 22 Gullick, J. *Rulers and Residents*, Chapter 8.
- 23 Parkinson. *op.cit.*, p. 312. E. Sadka, *The Protected Malay States 1874-1895*, p.196.
- 24 H.Low. 'The Journal of Sir Hugh Low, Perak 1877', ed. E. Sadka, *JMBRAS*, 27(4).
- 25 Memorandum by Hugh Low dated 28 May 1878 enclosed with SSD 13 June 1878. See Sadka, *op.cit.*, p.1031.
- 26 Unpublished diary of W. Bloomfield Douglas 1876-1882 (copy at Rhodes House Library, Oxford). See J.M. Gullick, 'Selangor 1876-1882: the Bloomfield Douglas Diary', *JMBRAS*, 48(2) and *Rulers and Residents*, Chapter 3.
- 27 Douglas, for example, took the opinion of Sultan Abdul Samad's private secretary before broaching to the Sultan the question of his making a Will. The preliminary sounding established that the Sultan did not object to discussing the subject but, in the ensuing interview, the Sultan politely deflected the proposal saying that he would think it over. Douglas diary 28 May 1881. Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p. 130.

Sultan Zainal Abidin of Terengganu also buried unwelcome proposals by saying that he had not yet reached a decision on them. British Agent's report for January 1915 enclosed with SSD 9 March 1915 (CO 273/425), p.389.
- 28 Memorandum by W.G. (Sir George) Maxwell (on the decline of the State Councils before the formation of the FMS in 1896) enclosed with SSD 18 February 1926 (CO 717/48). Swettenham, *British Malaya*, p. 227 (on the personal prestige of membership).
- 29 Sadka, *op.cit.*, p.189.
- 30 SSD 5 May 1896.
- 31 SSD 10 February 1906.
- 32 Lim Teck Ghee. *Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya 1874-1941*, p.109.

- 33 *Proceedings of the FMS Federal Council 1913*. B24 - an interesting speech.
- 34 *AR FMS 1916*, para 127 (a post-mortem tribute by the CS FMS).
- 35 SSD 2 September 1909. See J.S. Sidhu, *Administration in the Federated Malay States 1896-1920*, pp. 120-21.
- 36 SSD 17 September 1904 and enclosures.
- 37 *AR Negri Sembilan 1910*, para 57.
- 38 Datuk Mohamed Said, *Memoirs of a Menteri Besar*, p.156.
- 39 R.O. Winstedt. *The Malays: A Cultural History*, p.43. Khasnor Johan, *The Emergence of a Malay Administrative Elite*, p. 57.
- 40 Khasnor Johan, *op.cit.*, p. 173.
- 41 *Ibid.*, pp. 89-94.
- 42 Kobkua Suwannatat-Pian, *Thai-Malay Relations*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1988, especially Chapter 2.
- 43 SSD 1 September 1909.
- 44 *AR Kelantan 1903-04*, paras 51-52. SSD 19 October 1903 (on Johor).
- 45 Clifford, 'Report', para 173f. Shaharil Talib, *op.cit.*, Chapter 4.
- 46 Sharom Ahmat. *Kedah: Tradition and Change in a Malay State: a Study of the Economic and Political Development 1878-1923*, p.113.
- 47 C.W.S. Kynnersley, 'Notes of a Tour through the Siamese States on the West Coast of the Malay Peninsula, 1900', *JSBRAS*, vol. 36, p.49. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Peasant Robbers of Kedah 1900-1929: Historical and Folk Perceptions*, p.14.
- 48 *AR Kelantan 1903-04*, paras 9-10.
- 49 British Agent's Report for July and August 1909 enclosed with SSD 22 September 1909.
- 50 SSD 19 October 1903.

- 51 AR FMS 1902, para 68.
- 52 Memorandum of 22 November 1925 (CO 717/45) cited by Yeo Kim Wah, *The Politics of Decentralization: Colonial Controversy in Malaya 1920-1929*, p.139.
- 53 W. Makepeace., G.E. Brooke, and R.St.J. Braddell (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, vol. 1, p. 448.
- 54 Tunku Othman of Johor and Abdul Rahman bin Andak (the future Dato' Amar) were educated in London between 1871 and 1878. Raja Alang (later Sultan) Iskandar of Perak was educated in England between 1895 and 1902. Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, Chapter 4.
- 55 H. Sutherland, 'The Taming of the Trengganu Elite'. In R. McVey (ed.). *Southeast Asian Transitions: Approaches through Social History*, p. 52.
- 56 M.A. Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Haron, *Sejarah Johor Modern 1855-1940: Satu Perbincangan dari Pelbagai Aspek*, pp.53-57. Gullick, J. *Rulers and Residents*, Chapter 4.
- 57 As Note 49 and Sutherland, loc.cit.
- 58 *Report of the Commission appointed by His Excellency the High Commissioner to enquire into certain matters relating to Terengganu* ('the Bucknill Commission Report'), para 7. Sulong bin Zainal, 'Dato' Sri Lela di-Raja: Viceroy of Kemaman', *Malaysia in History*, 12(1).
- 59 British Agent's report for October and November 1915 enclosed with SSD 12 January 1916 (CO 273/444 p.269).
- 60 Mohamed Sarin bin Haji Mustajab, 'The Impact of Colonial Rule in Johor: a Case of Social and Political Adjustment', PhD thesis, University of Kent, p.311 and elsewhere.
- 61 Milner, *Kerajaan*, Chapter 1. This traditional 'Malay world' extended beyond the Malay Peninsula and was not identified with it.
- 62 AR Pahang 1897, para 74.
- 63 Report enclosed with SSD 20 August 1897.
- 64 SSD 25 September 1903.

- 76 *Proceedings of the FMS Federal Council 1927*, B113. Yeo Kim Wah, *op.cit.*, p. 40.
- 77 A.C. Milner. 'Islam and the Muslim State' in M.B. Hooker (ed.). *Islam in Southeast Asia*, analyses the complexity of a Malay Ruler's position as a Muslim monarch.
- 78 Allen, Stockwell and Wright, *op.cit.* vol. 1, p.391.
- 79 R.J. Wil So Studies', *JMBRAS*, 10(1), P.79. R.O. Winstedt, p ronement in Malay,' *JMBRAS*, 20(1). Winstedt, s - History, Chapter 4.
- 80 R.J. Wilkinson. 'Malay Beliefs', reprinted in S, 30(4), p. 6 (district chiefs). Sharom Ahmat, *op.cit.*, pp. 80- hulus).
- 81 Gullick, J. *Malay Society*, p. 2861.
- 82 W.R. Roff. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p. 72.
- 83 H. Low. 'Journal', p.85.
- 84 R. Heussler. *British Rule in Malaya: the Malayan Civil Service and its Predecessors 1867-1942*, p.215.
- 85 Minutes of Kedah State Council for January 1916 enclosed with SSD 6 March 1916 (CO 273/445, p. 33).
- 86 W.R. Roff, 'The Origins of the Majlis Ugama'. in W.R. Roff (ed.). *Kelantan: Religion, Society and Politics in a Malay State*, p. 130.
- 87 M.B. Hooker. 'Muhammadan Law and Islamic Law'. In Hooker, *op.cit.*, in Note 77.
- 88 Enclosed with SSD 25 September 1894: See Gullick, *Malay Society*, p.293.
- 89 *Ibid*, p. 294.

- ⁹⁰ Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, Chapter 3 (Kaum muda-Kaum tua). Ibid., p. 61 n 22 on Syaikh Tahir's tour of Perak.
- ⁹¹ Roff, *op.cit.* (Note 90), p.75 and see p 63 also.
- ⁹² W.S. Blunt, *My Diaries being a personal narrative of events 1888-1914*, vol. 1, p. 96. Blunt had introduced the Sultan to the Sheikhs.
- ⁹³ British Agent's report for March and April 1915 enclosed with SSD 2 June 1915.
- ⁹⁴ British Agent's report for January 1914 enclosed with SSD 16 February 1914 (CO 273/409 p.396).
- ⁹⁵ A.Wright and T.H. Reid. *The Malay Peninsula*, p. 70.
- ⁹⁶ Telegram at p.390 of Co 273/412 and *AR Perak 1914*, para 38.97. British Agent's report for September 1914 enclosed with SSD 22 October 1914.
- ⁹⁸ Report by W.G. Maxwell (sent to investigate by the High Commissioner) enclosed with SSD 2 June 1915.
- ⁹⁹ R.W.E. Harper and H.Miller, *The Singapore Mutiny*. CO 273/461 pp. 364, 366 and 525. Tunku Ismail's English tutor, to whom Ismail was devoted, had been called up for military service. Ismail wished to join him in the ranks of the British army. Nothing came of it.
- ¹⁰⁰ Clifford, J. *Bushwhacking*, p.193.
- ¹⁰¹ Sultan Abu Bakar visited England (and other European countries) in 1866, 1878, 1885, 1889-91, 1893 and 1895 (he died in London in 1895). During the 1885 visit he negotiated the Anglo-Johor treaty, a milestone in his reign (Thio, *op.cit.*, p.105f). Sultan Ibrahim of Johor was also a regular visitor.

Sultan Idris (not Sultan until 1887) accompanied H. Low to London in 1884 to assist him in negotiations with Siam in London over the Perak boundary. When he came to attend the coronation in 1902 he had an interview with Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State. He made his third visit in 1911 (also for a coronation). See Note 103 below on Sultan Iskander's visit in 1924.

Yam Tuan Mohamed came to England in the late 1920's and, in an interview with King George, raised the longstanding issue of his claim to be recognised as 'Sultan' of his State. Sultan Sulaiman of Selangor

came to London at the end of his reign (1898-1938) to discuss the vexed question of the succession to his throne.

On the visit of Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1911 see Note 102 below. Tunku Besar (later Sultan) Mahmud of Pahang (r. 1914-17) visited England in 1903 for medical treatment.

102 Mubin Sheppard, *Tunku - a Pictorial Biography*, vol.1, p. 20.

103 Sultan Iskander of Perak (r. 1918-1938) had been educated in England (1897-1902) and returned in 1924 to discuss the 'decentralization' question then in dispute in the FMS. See Note 71.

104 Kobkua, *op.cit.*, p. 104, citing a memorandum written by King Chulalongkorn in 1896. See also Emerson, *op.cit.*, pp. 337 and 249.