

KERAJAAN

Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule

A. C. Milner

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About the Author . . .

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PREFACE

This book is concerned with Malay political culture on the eve of colonial rule. I became interested in this subject because I encountered difficulties in analysing political change during the colonial period. But this study is intended to provide more than a background to British Malaya. In exploring the Malay material, I became aware of the intrinsic importance of investigating the political experience of pre-modern communities.

My examination of a Malay rebellion against the British demonstrated the importance of discerning the character of Malay political motivation. Although it was possible to establish a chronology of events, and to propose certain connections between them, I could not understand the bases of political action. To what extent the actions of Malay leaders or their subjects could be interpreted in familiar, modern terms was unclear. I saw indications of the influence of Western values, but, ignorant of the character of traditional political thinking, it was possible neither to explain the uprising nor to analyse its significance as an indication of political change. My difficulties, I concluded, were experienced by many historians of the colonial period. Colonial development is too often studied in a vacuum. Accounts of the dramatic transformation which is supposed to have taken place under European rule concentrate on the features imported rather than the process of change. Such accounts merely present fragmented mirror images of our own society because they are not grounded in an analysis of the political structure and forces present in pre-colonial times.

To obtain an understanding of Malay political motivation I turned first to J.M. Gullick's Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya,¹ a seminal work for both historians and anthropologists. Gullick was unwilling to accept the view of earlier European authors that the Malay states of the nineteenth century were anarchical and in general lacked any recognizable form of government. Trained in British anthropology in the early 1950's he applied the principles of functionalism to the investigation not of living communities but of historical documents.² For my purpose, however, Gullick's monograph had important limitations. The model which Gullick proposed left unanswered many of my enquiries regarding Malay motivation. His training led him to be less concerned with the variety of considerations leading men to act as they did than with analysing Malay politics in terms of 'political institutions', the 'essential functions of a political system'³ and the flow of 'real power'.⁴ Moreover, I was aware that, since Gullick wrote, functionalist anthropology had come increasingly under attack. Scholars have become particularly wary of applying models germane to Western experience to the study of pre-modern communities. I could not follow Gullick in viewing Malay government as a "working system of social control and leadership".⁵ I wanted to understand Malay political activity in Malay terms. In order to investigate the process of change during the colonial period, it was necessary to examine first not political institutions or the flow of 'real power', but what Clifford Geertz has described as the "meaningful structures"⁶ by means of which Malays gave shape to their political experience. I needed to explore Malay political culture.

Like Gullick, therefore I responded to a tradition of anthropology, but it is a tradition which emphasizes cultural rather than sociological analysis. It is concerned with the perceptions of actors rather than the models imposed by observers. I also began work on the type of sources which Gullick had used - European colonial archives and the unofficial accounts of Western visitors to the Malay world. From the standpoint of cultural analysis, however, it soon became apparent that these sources were less helpful for the study of political culture than for the study of institutions. The structure of this book records the process by which I became disillusioned with European sources and turned to Malay writings.

In the hope of eliciting Malay perceptions of their political actions I focused on the historical records of two very different regions of the nineteenth-century Malay world: the east coast of Sumatra and the east coast of the Malay Peninsula. The former, which became the rich *cultuurgebied*, the cultivation region, of the Dutch East Indies and the major export producer of independent Indonesia, possessed numerous tiny polities which were constantly at war with one another. The eastern Malay peninsula, which was to come under British protection, was a relatively stable area, containing large and ancient states. The east Sumatran states formed a Malay frontier bordering on the populous Batak lands of the interior; the Peninsula states were Malay heartlands. I chose these two regions, which have received little attention from scholars, because of their contrasts. The fact that they fell under the protection of separate European colonial powers allowed me to benefit from two European traditions of observation and analysis. But more importantly, as I had determined to proceed not by testing the models of social science but by investigating concrete situations, it was necessary to study political developments in contrasting parts of the Malay world; the discovery of features common to both these regions would provide a starting point for making more general observations on the character of Malay political culture.

The two political developments on which this study is based are the rise and expansion of the Sumatran state of Deli, and a civil war which occurred in the Peninsular state of Pahang and embroiled many of the neighbouring Malay polities. I chose these two developments because they appeared to throw light on the character of Malay political motivation and were well documented in European sources. But although the Dutch and British records contained much data relating to political and economic matters, and are essential in establishing chronology, they are of little help in the attempt to determine the way in which Malays categorised their political experience. They seldom quoted Malay views and their judgments on Malay political behaviour were often contradicted by the outcome of events. To achieve a fuller Malay perspective I began to explore indigenous writings from both regions.

Classical Malay writings have long been neglected by Western historians. The nineteenth-century orientalist, John Crawfurd's dictum that such works as the Malay Annals are 'worthless', being nothing but a 'wild tissue of

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fable⁷ is only a hyperbolic precursor of many modern judgements.⁸ When Malay *hikayats*, or histories, were investigated by historians at all, they were simply combed for hard data, particularly data relating to periods undocumented by apparently reliable European sources. By the late 1950's interest in Malay and other South-East Asian chronicles was at a low ebb; at a conference held in London it was noted that the number of students working on these texts was 'rapidly diminishing'.⁹ In an influential article, an historian explained why members of his discipline turned so rarely to Malay histories. The chronicles provided, he observed, 'no real idea of what [the individuals they describe] thought as distinct historical beings': they lacked 'a personality base'.¹⁰

The *hikayats* certainly present problems. Their authorship and provenance are uncertain and their standards of factual accuracy differ from those employed in modern histories. Despite their weaknesses as a record of events, however, the texts offer insights into Malay political thinking. By noting the qualities and values which they emphasize, the connections they make, the style in which they are written and the particular terminology they use, I located in the *hikayats* cultural values which had remained obscure in the European sources. An expanding vocabulary of Malay terms acquired from the texts began to shape my thinking about Malay political life, and I came to the conclusion that the answer to my questions regarding political motivation entailed an understanding of 'political' experience radically different from our own. The Malay writings disclosed a distinct form of centralized polity. It is less a political than a religious system, a system which involved a reciprocal process in which men were concerned not with 'real power' or 'social control' but with the maximization of spiritual rewards.

The present work explains why and how I explored Malay writings in order to discover Malay perceptions of their political motivation. It concludes with the explication of a particular Malay text, and it argues that the structure of political experience revealed in that document has implications for the understanding of political behaviour elsewhere in the Malay world. The book is a case study in political culture. It is not, of course, the first case study of this type in South-East

Asia: the work of Geertz¹¹ and Anderson¹² on Indonesia has been influential in shifting scholarly attention from institutions to culture. But my concern is solely with historical documents rather than ethnographic data, and the community I am investigating exists only in the past.¹³

The model I develop of Malay political experience aims first to illuminate the processes of change occurring in the colonial period. But as one of a growing number of studies of political culture it aims also to contribute to comparative research: the conclusions drawn from the examination of one community will sharpen the questions asked of another; gradually, perhaps, a classification of traditional polities in South-East Asia and elsewhere will emerge. In revealing structures of political experience, such studies serve a further purpose. They display in context the various 'webs of significance'¹⁴ in which men are suspended, and so test the claims of theory. The historian and the anthropologist, so often influenced by the theoretical fashions of their time, are in this sense pioneers. They are the first to encounter alien modes of thought, and in so doing help to extend, multiply and rediscover the categories of experience of our own society. The exploration of Malay culture can therefore challenge the categories which we employ in understanding our own political condition.

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A study of the nineteenth-century Malay world depends on the scholarship of pioneers. Such administrator-historians as Elisa Netscher, R.J. Wilkinson, W. Linehan, and W.H.M. Schadee established chronological frameworks for the region and their judgements on Malay political and social arrangements were often acute. In more recent years, Professor N. Tarling and Dr. A.J.S. Reid have explored and described British and Dutch archival collections dealing with East Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Finally, the student of Malay political behaviour may today benefit from a growing number of studies of political culture. Work carried out on Southeast Asia and other regions suggests new questions which might be asked of the Malay material. I think, in particular, of the writings of Maruyama on Japan,¹ Anderson on Java,² and Wolters on Cambodia.³

In writing the present study, I am indebted first to Professor O.W. Wolters, Goldwin Smith Professor of Southeast Asian History at Cornell University, who aroused my interest in Southeast Asian kingship. Professor Wolters contributed much to this book; I am especially grateful for his historical imagination and enthusiasm.

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GLOSSARY

(Foreign derivations are given where known. Arabic is abbreviated to "Ar.", Sanscrit to "Sk.")

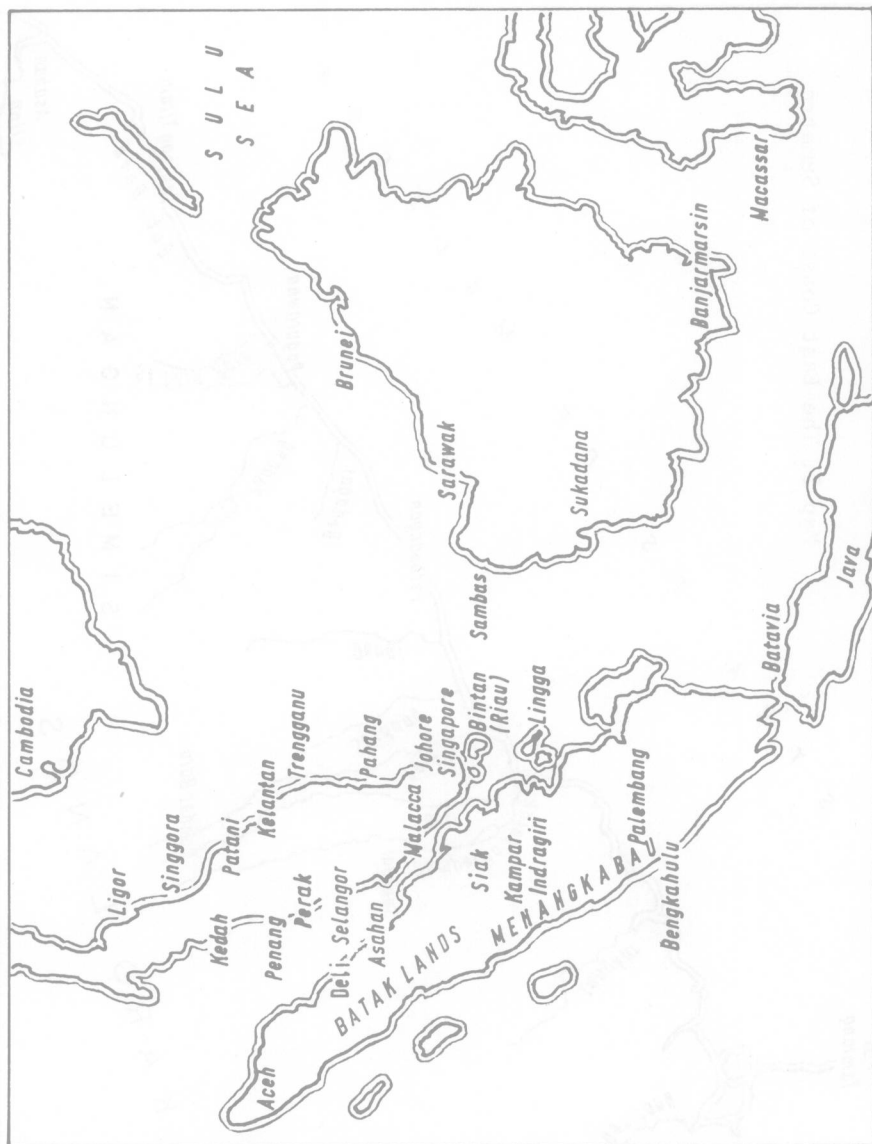
adat (Ar.)	custom, customary law
adil (Ar.)	impartial, just, equitable, propriety
bakti (Sk.)	loyal service, devotion; <i>berbuat bhakti</i> -- earn merit
bangsa (Sk.)	rank, caste, sort, kind, stock, family, race, nation, tribe
belanja (Pali)	money for current expenses, outlay, expenditure
derhaka (Sk.)	treason against the Ruler, God or the State
gelar	title, nickname
halus	delicate, refined, lenient, soft, invisible
hawa nafsu (Ar.)	sensual desire, lusts of the heart
huru hara, haru hara, huru buru, haru buru	confusion, uproar, turmoil
kaya (Sk.)	great, powerful, rich, wealth
kerajaan (Raja is a Sanscrit word)	the condition of having a Raja
kurnia (Sk.)	gift, bounty

lemah lembut	gentle, soft, delicate
malu	shame, embarrassment, shy
manis	delicate, sweet, graceful, charming
murah (the word may have an Arabic derivation. See Chapter III, n.70)	generous, charitable, merciful, cheap
nama (name, fame, reputation. Persian, <u>nam</u> : reputation)	name, reputation, title, denomination
pangkat	rank, standard, grade
patut	right, proper, fit, fitting, reasonable, lawful
perintah	order, jurisdiction, government
sombong	arrogance, self-assertion, pride
taraf (Ar.)	rank, position
tertib (Ar.)	correct conduct, order, ritual, arrangement, propriety

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BC	Boards Collections (India Office)
BEFEO	Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient
BKI	Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, and Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indie, published by the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde
BMJ	Brunei Museum Journal
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
CO	Colonial Office, London
CPD	Collections to Political Despatches to India, India Office, London
ENI	Encyclopedia van Nederlandsch-Indië
FO	Foreign Office, London
G.G.	Governor-General of Netherlands India
IO	India Office, London
JIA	Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia
JMBRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malayan Branch
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society

JSBRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Straits Branch
JSEAH	Journal of Southeast Asian History
Kol.	Ministry of Colonies, The Hague
Kol. Kab.	Kabinets-archief of the Netherlands Colonial Ministry
Kol. Op. Verb.	Openbare Verbalen (public archive) of the Netherlands Colonial Ministry
MHJ	Malayan History Journal
MR	Mail Rapporten of the Netherlands Colonial Ministry
Pol.	Political Despatches to India, India Office
SSFR	Straits Settlements Factory Records
TBG	Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde, published by the Bataviaasch Genootschap voor Kunsten en Wetenschappen
TNAG	Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap
TNI	Tijdschrift voor Neerlands-Indie
VBG	Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen



Map 1. The Malay World of the Early Nineteenth Century

