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PERAK DISTURBANCES 1871-75: BRITISH COLONIALISM, THE CHINESE SECRET SOCIETIES AND THE MALAY RULERS¹

This article is a re-interpretation of the history of 'power struggles', 'civil wars' and 'anarchy' which were asserted to have happened in Perak, one of the Malay states in the Malay Peninsula during the period of 1871-75. Up until now, historians tend to suggest that the 'Malay feudalism', i.e. the political disputes and the power struggle among the Malay rulers; were the main factors that prompted the Perak 1871-75 mayhem. This writing, however, finds that allegations of 'civil wars' and 'anarchy'; blamed for their so-called roles that pushed Perak to the brink of collapse and eventually led to British intervention, has not been credibly supported. By utilizing authoritative primary and secondary sources, the author argued that these are merely imaginary excuses invented by the British colonial officials to paint the negative perception that the disturbances happened at large in Perak and that the indigenous rule was deteriorating in shape. These excuses were made to simplify justifications by the British in its quest to intervene into the Malay states affairs in the late period of the 19th century.

Keywords: Malay states, Perak, Raja Abdullah, Ngah Ibrahim, British colonialism, Larut War, Chinese secret societies

Introduction

Historians in general have conceded that the scarcity of sources hinders comprehensive study on history of the Malay states in the 19th century. Much research on the subject therefore relies on past official records produced by the British colonial administrators as primary references. However, failure to balance the colonial historical perspectives gives rise to never-ending confusion that hampers thorough understanding of the actual historical developments taking place in Perak throughout the 19th century.

MacIntyre (1967:71) explains that the colonial reports emphasize the inordinate influence of colonial ideologies and the element of 'racial superiority' that as a whole represents how the European generally perceived the indigenous world. The non-European political regions, including Malay Peninsula, were invariably viewed as 'uncivilised' and 'barbarous'. The typical attitudes of the British towards the Malays can be deduced from a number of colonial records, for instance, by the words of Thomas Braddel, "The innate superiority of the ordinary Englishmen, in his sense of honour and justice,

is sufficient to dominate the inferior character of the Malays...” or Clifford (1989:71), “I, the European, the white man, belonging to one of the most civilised races in the Old World; the Malays, civilised too, but after the fashion of unchanging Asia, which differs so widely from the restless progressive civilisation of the West.”

There had also been views that envisaged the benefits and prosperity these ‘half civilised’ and ‘half wild’ Malays could enjoy if they were to be governed by the European powers. According to the British Governor of the Straits Settlements, Harry Ord, “...the subjection of these native States of the Peninsular to Powers greater and more civilised than themselves is an advantage to themselves and to all who have relations with them” (CO273/18 Ord to Buckingham 8 April 1873). He therefore emphasised the need for the inevitable intervention: “I feel that it would be greatly to the advantage of the Settlement if our influence could be thus extended over the Peninsula and I shall not fail to avail myself of any opening that may present itself for doing so” (CO273/18 Ord to Buckingham 8 April 1873).

Sullivan (1982:xvi) explains that the excessive influence of the colonial ideologies in the interpretation of the Malay states history in 19th century brought about two main after-effects. First, there were continued myths about the decline of the Malay states and the growing anarchy before the British came to the rescue. Kimberley, for example, emphasises the British role in Perak and other Malay states in the 19th century as “...to rescue, if possible, these fertile and productive countries from the ruin which must befall them, if the present disorders continued unchecked” (CO273/75 Kimberley to Clark 20 September 1873). Since the indigenous political system was functioning distinctively disparate to the perpetually glorified, the ‘ideal-typical’ European monarchy, it was viewed as the worst kind of monarchy for an ‘Asiatic’ society. Violence, disunity among the rulers and the seemingly unchallenged power of the local aristocrats were attributed to the incompetence of the indigenous ruling. These circumstances led to, according to Swettenham, “The sultan of Perak invited the British to teach him how to rule this unruly country...”, but then added, “...the circumstances alone made that interference the duty of the paramount power” (quoted in Sullivan 1982:xvi).

Second, the Malay Archipelago was seen as an object within the discourse of Orientalism that dictated how the European assessed the populating inhabitants. This is illustrated through the inclined portrayal by the European writers of the typical ‘Asiatic’ characters of the Malay—decadency, ignorance and the mischief under the indigenous autocratic rulers—assumed only to be happening outside of Europe.² At the same time, the introduction of the European-style ruling system was drummed up as the most practical solution to all the misery of the ‘Asiatic’ world.

In continuance, the myths extended to the indigenous historiography shape, which is said to be based on dichotomy before and after the colonial

era. Before the British arrival, the Malay states were supposed to be in decline and ‘anarchy’ (C. 1111 Anson to Kimberley, 19 October 1871:141). The whole of the Malay Peninsula, according to Ord, was in the hands of “...the lawless and the turbulent...” (C.1111 Ord to Kimberley, 10 July 1873: 30). while Swettenham (1983:178) alleged, “In each State the ruler, whether he was sultan, raja, or chief of lower rank, was supreme and absolute. His word was law, and oppression and cruelty were the result.”

The colonial era, on the other hand, was described as the beginning of the age of enlightenment. Clifford describes the British governance in the Malay states, which was said to have shattered the authoritarian rule and the tyranny, as an era that “...has brought peace, happiness, and prosperity to those to whom these things were formerly strangers; and has given to the Malays a new life – a life which for the first time in their history is a thing worth the living” (quoted in Kratoska 1983:248). The above presumption continues to be cultivated by the historians of subsequent generations. Mills (1925:170-173), for instance, described that the Malay states in the 19th century were committing political *hara kiri* among themselves. Winstedt and Wilkinson (1934:2), on the other hand, asserted that “...the most convinced supporter of the rights and customs of small people must admire the *Pax Britannica* in Perak and bless the work of British protection in bringing out of centuries of great tribulation this rich and beautiful country and her ancient line.” In 1991, a local historian, Cheah Boon Kheng (1991:16-17) elucidated that ‘Malay feudalism’ has brought about severe disunity among the Malays since the Malacca Malay Sultanate up until the 19th century.

Feudalism is the only element that allowed us to understand the reason the Malay governments in the Malay Peninsula were in constant chaos and rapidly declining during the 19th century, which eventually saw them falling into the hands of British, one after another...the discordance among the peninsular Malay states has been self-existence due to the feudalistic nature of the political and social system. If we focus our attention to the development of each of the Malay state since the Melaka Sultanate until the 19th century, the truth of this statement becomes more prevalent. For example, when the powerful Malacca government fell in 1511 and was replaced with the emerging Johor, the fights and disunity continued to haunt...Throughout the whole of the 19th century, no Malay state in the peninsular was spared from splits and power struggles: Kedah/Perlis 1821-1848, Terengganu 1831-1839, Kelantan 1838-1839, Johor 1840-1855, Pahang 1857-1863, Selangor 1867-1874, Negeri Sembilan 1869-1889 and Perak 1871-1877.³

The Perak Power Struggles in Malaysian Historiography

The ‘power struggles’ and the ‘civil wars’ that were claimed to have happened in Perak in 1871-75 were frequently referred to illustrate the decline of the Malay States in the 19th century. According to the British colonial version, the Perak crisis began in 1870s soon after the demise of Sultan Ali (1865-71). The late sultan left behind a few potential successors, all vying to ascend the throne. This sparked an ugly struggle for the Perak throne involving three possible candidates, namely Raja Abdullah (Raja Muda), Raja Ismail (Raja Bendahara) and Raja Yusof (Raja Di Hilir).

The colonial version has it that Raja Muda Abdullah was the rightful successor to the throne. Clarke described Raja Abdullah as “...a man of considerable intelligence, who was supported by all chiefs present [in Pangkor] except the Mantari” (C.1111 Clarke to Kimberley, 26 January 1874:71). However, Raja Abdullah was dismissed after failing to turn up for Sultan Ali’s funeral and his installation ceremony as the new sultan. Instead, Raja Ismail—an elderly man from Siak and not a direct descendant of the Perak royals—was appointed to succeed Sultan Ali. This decision created resentment among those who were opposed to the new ruler, and thus conflicts ensued.

The British colonial officials viewed Raja Ismail’s appointment as conflicting with the customary practice of the Perak Malay politics, and concluded this as an attempt to grab power through illegitimate means. Many of them, from W. H Read to R. O. Winstedt, believed that Raja Abdullah should have been the sultan but was denied by Raja Ismail and his followers. According to Read (1901:24), “The legitimate heir, Abdullah, was, by an intrigue, passed over, and Rajah Bandaharah Ishmael was appointed Sultan; but, the other chief having his partisans, civil war broke out in the country.” To Winstedt (1935:226): “He [Raja Abdullah] was the rightful heir and was intelligent and Europeanized and to disallow his claim because he had failed to attend a funeral seemed to Victorian rationalists frivolous.” Another British Governor of the Straits Settlements, W. R. Jervois blamed Raja Ismail’s actions that triggered a state of disorder in Perak, reiterating “...the anarchy of the country caused by Ismail’s claims” (C.1512 Jervois to Carnovan, 10 February 1876:8).

There were also assertions that a number of Perak chiefs had exploited the situation for their own gains. For instance, the Mentari of Larut Ngah Ibrahim was divulged as ‘the main figure’ that played a key role in getting Raja Ismail into power. His purpose of influencing the appointment of an elderly and someone who was ‘unrelated’ to the royals was to ensure that he could align himself as the next successor. The allegation that pointed Menteri Larut Ngah Ibrahim as the mastermind behind Raja Ismail’s attempt for state power was actually made firstly by a British officer, C. J. Irving (See SSR (G7) Irving’s memorandum, 30 April 1872).

The splitting up became more alarming as each side was said to be engaging help from the Chinese triads (namely the Hai San and the Ghee Hin)

in an attempt to usurp to power. Further impasse brought about total chaos and anarchy, which saw the Perak government rapidly deteriorating; the entire state was in absolute disorder, civil wars broke out, pirates were rampaging and people were killed to the extent that there was no longer peace and safety in the whole state (C.1111 Campbell to Birch, July 1874:10). Perak rulers were also said to be too weak to exert control on the chaos, which began to cause danger to British interests in Penang (CO 273/58 Report of A. N. Birch, 1 Mac 1872). These are the state of circumstances in Perak in the early 1870s that drove the then 'Perak Sultan' to write a letter to the British, appealing for intervention to save Perak and to assist him to govern the country.

Beginning of a Crisis: Sultan Ali's Demise and the Enthronement of Raja Ismail

All the descriptions put forward in the colonial officials' reports above are actually confusing. These descriptions tend to picture only the negative aspects on the indigenous discordance and put blame on the Perak Malay rulers as being power hungry. The actual events were never explained objectively and comprehensively, but rather interpreted from the perspective of British colonialism in favour of their interest. This created further confusion towards identifying the real cause to the political instability in Perak. This state of confusion can be articulated in further details when the actual developments taking place in Perak in the early 1870s are described in the subsequent sections.

The Perak crisis were said to begin when Sultan Ali, the ruling sultan, passed away in Sayong in May 1871. The Perak Malay customary tradition spelled out that Raja Bendahara, whose roles were to be an acting ruler and a custodian of the royal regalia, would be responsible to extend invitation to Raja Muda of Perak for appointment as the successor within seven days period. However, the legitimate successor, Raja Abdullah never responded to the invitation for both Sultan Ali's funeral and his appointment as a new sultan. No solid reason was made available for Raja Abdullah's action, although historians tend to explain that Raja Abdullah feared the threat of Raja Yusof, who was also the legitimate candidate for the throne.

Nevertheless, there have been other reasons that triggered the above situation. First, it was understood that Raja Abdullah and the late Sultan Ali had a history being in a long personal feud.⁴ Previous royal altercations indicate that it is common for disputing sides to boycott attending the ailing sultan and the funeral without jeopardising the appointment process of the successor (Raja Muda). Second, Raja Abdullah was suffering from loss of credibility after his wife, Raja Tipah eluded with a Selangor prince, Raja Daud. Raja Abdullah's failure to take stern action and re-possess his wife was an embarrassment to the whole Perak chiefs and this adversely affected his reputation as a legitimate

state ruler. Most likely, Raja Abdullah's hesitation to attend his appointment ceremony was due to humiliation. Moreover, Raja Tiphah's brother had sent a warning to kill him if he dared stepping his foot in Sayong (Burns 1976:12).

Notwithstanding, the *Orang Besar-Besar* (Perak Chiefs) were still hoping to appoint Raja Abdullah as the new sultan as opposed to the other two candidates, Raja Yusof and Raja Ismail. Raja Yusof was not favoured due to his known characters as a ruthless and vengeful person as was evident after the *coup* of his father's throne, Sultan Abdullah (1851-57) by Raja Ali (later Sultan Ali). Raja Ismail, on the other hand, was not preferred by the *Orang Besar-Besar* as a suitable candidate as he did not come from the Perak's royal family descendant. The *Orang Besar-Besar*' refusal to appoint Raja Ismail was acknowledged by, for example, Khoo Kay Kim who describes that the concerted decision of the chiefs when considering the appointment of a Sultan before 1874 was not to put forward Raja Ismail, even for the Raja Muda (Khoo Kay Kim 1975:135). Apart from coming outside of the royal ranks, he was not preferred due to his previous collaboration with Panglima Perang Semaun in a conflict that ended with the murder of Dato' Shahbandar.

Perhaps these are also the reasons Raja Ismail, despite being loyal and a close ally of Sultan Ali, was not appointed the Raja Muda when the latter was in power. Instead, Sultan Ali made Raja Abdullah as the Raja Muda, bypassing both Raja Ismail and Raja Yusof in the process. This move inferred that Sultan Ali was endorsing Raja Abdullah as the sultan in-waiting (Khoo Kay Kim 1975:135). One month went past after Sultan Ali's death and Raja Abdullah still had not shown any sign of securing his title. *Orang Besar-Besar* began to lose patience. They started planning to install another candidate, Raja Usman (Sultan Ali's son) as the new ruler, but the offer was turned down. Raja Usman was never interested to helm the state and suggested Raja Ismail instead.

Lack of other credible candidates left the Perak chiefs with little choice, and soon all collectively agreed to accept Raja Ismail as the new sultan.⁵ Raja Ismail himself was at first declined the offer, but later changed his mind after much persuasion. He ascended the throne with the official title of Paduka Seri Sultan Mu'abidin Shah. The whole process was so smooth; no resistance was made and no side had come public to renounce Raja Ismail's installation as the new sultan. In fact, days after Raja Ismail's selection, Dato' Laksamana, a close ally of Raja Abdullah and Raja Ismail's foe, was said to publicly acknowledge the appointment and '...would carry out all the obligations as instructed by the new Sultan, including the Shahbandar too.'⁶

Therefore, narratives that implied that the appointment instantaneously led to 'civil war' within the Perak Malays can be argued as rather baseless. Raja Ismail's ruling status was indeed recognised by the all parties, including the British,⁷Raja Yusoff and Raja Abdullah himself (Wilkinson 1923:116; Wyenne 1941:283). The issue of scrutinising the most qualified candidate for the new Perak sultan was finally resolved through collective agreement between the

Orang Besar-Besar, and the eventual appointment was well acknowledged by all parties. At this point Wilkinson wrote:

There was no question of any violent usurpation of the throne by [Raja] Ismail. He was not the rightful heir, it is true, nor was he even a prince of Perak in the direct male line; still he had done his duty by the heir and had been put on the throne with the full consent of chiefs and people. He was the de facto ruler and [Raja] Abdullah was only a claimant at the time when Sir Harry Ord left the Straits and was succeeded by Sir Andrew Clarke (Wyenne 1941:283).

Early Reactions Made by Raja Muda Abdullah

Soon after Raja Ismail's appointment, Raja Abdullah did not show any imminent sign of reacting towards challenging the former's legitimacy as the new sultan, despite quietly 'discontented' for being dismissed. He was believed to have kept quite and continue his normal life in Purbayan, (Hilir Perak) and never made any attempt to confront Raja Ismail openly and claim his own right.⁸

Raja Abdullah realised that he did not have any more legitimacy to the throne, and now was not in a position to change things. His political influence was limited and that a big proportion of those loyal to him were of weaker gender. He knew that he was in a rather powerless position to lead any sort of upheaval. As for the *Orang Besar-Besar*, who initially attempted to make Raja Abdullah sultan, the appointment of Raja Ismail as the new legitimate ruler must now be honoured and protected. The group even criticised Raja Abdullah's attitude, which had been an embarrassment to the royal customs. Disappointment led the *Orang Besar-Besar* to express that Raja Abdullah was not qualified to ascend the throne, "...all greatly blamed Rajah Muda saying that he was not fit to rule for there could not be shown one single instance of his having benefitted his Country" (Khoo Kay Kim 1975:161-162).

For a year, Raja Abdullah did not show his commitment to claim back his position as the sultan. But things gradually changed after he was hit with a serious financial adversity, mainly driven by his own extravagant style of living.⁹ It was during this time, some 'hidden hands' appeared to offer financial lifeline to him for their own agenda. Perak was a wealthy state and rich in natural resources; by exploiting the state's political fragility, this unscrupulous third party could make maximum gains through these resources. Raja Abdullah's ears were drummed with the idea of openly challenging the legitimacy of Raja Ismail. He was promised an undivided, powerful backing that included financial assistance and political interference.

Backed by this support, he went ahead to challenge Raja Ismail's position and made public his claim by writing to the British, alleging that: (i) Raja Ismail's installation as sultan was contradicting to Perak customary royal

tradition; (ii) invitation for his royal appointment was not done according to the way a next-in-line sultan should receive; (iii) Raja Ismail had been deceptive and forceful in getting himself into power; (iv) Raja Ismail was supposed to be the acting sultan for a certain time until his (Raja Abdullah) official appointment; (v) and he did not make any previous attempt to challenge Raja Ismail's status quo to avoid any chaos and disunity, which would adversely affect the British citizen and its trade interest in Perak (Buyong Adil 1971:62-65).

Raja Abdullah's Financial Problems and the Perak Sultanate Rights

The role of these 'hidden hands' behind the history of Perak's conflict in 1870s was important but nevertheless received lack of attention in historical writings. Local historians' writings barely touch on the subject of these 'hidden hands'. Their background and roles in Perak crisis were almost never been discussed. Arguably, without their intervention, conflicts and power struggle in Perak might not have happened.

These 'hidden hands' refer to the European-Chinese capitalist and the leaders of the Chinese triads in the Straits Settlements, and were closely linked to highly influential individuals such as Edward Bacon, W. H. Read and Tan Kim Ching.¹⁰ They are some of the many individuals who had interest in the capitalist activities of the British big companies in the Malay states, especially in Perak. They played a big role in triggering political conflict in Perak and were main players in the plot of making Raja Abdullah the new sultan. Furthermore, they had been actively engaging in campaigns to discredit the local political situation in an effort to urge the British to interfere. This *coup d'état* was smartly engineered by tactfully persuading Raja Abdullah and offering conditional support. Raja Abdullah's weakness and vulnerability made him an easy prey.

Raja Abdullah was seen as a puppet in a plot to monopolize Perak's economy and wealth. Through the guides of the parties-with-interest, Raja Abdullah made new claims, one after another. Envisaging himself as the new sultan, he began imagining taking the wealthy Larut back from Ngah Ibrahim and handing it over to a business group that would be willing to pay a high price. At the same time, he continued to lobby to the British to recognize him as the rightful sultan, despite knowing that this would antagonise the Perak chiefs (SSR (G7) Irving's memorandum, 30 April, 5 Jun and 8 August 1872).

In an attempt to weaken Ngah Ibrahim's position in Larut, Raja Abdullah began to collaborate with the Ghee Hin triad, which had previously defeated the Hai San group (backed by Ngah Ibrahim) in the Second Larut War. In January 1873, Raja Abdullah, together with Dato' Laksamana, Dato' Shahbandar and Raja Idris made a trip to Penang to make a pact with a Ghee Hin leader, Ho Gui Siu. An agreement was signed on 28 February 1873, which,

among others, gave acknowledgment for the triad to continue its involvement in the Larut War (Plunket 1876:2). In addition, if Larut could be successfully seized from Ngah Ibrahim, the Ghee Hin would be given a concessions and monopoly of the tin mines in Larut. In addition, Raja Abdullah committed to bear half of the expenses that the Ghee Hin spent during the armed conflicts with Ngah Ibrahim-backed Hai San group. In another meeting also in Penang, he even tried to sell the Kerian-Larut concession to Bacon. However, the British foiled the attempt under Ord's instruction. Ord, at that time, was in fully support of Ngah Ibrahim's position (Plunket 1876:2; Wynne 1941:270).

In truth, all attempts made by Raja Abdullah before 1871 to take over Larut from Ngah Ibrahim were never successful. He failed to get the backing of the Perak chiefs, especially those in Hulu Perak. His effort to get support from the British was also in vain despite numerous appeals. Without these supports, he was helpless and his ambition to seize power seemed coming to nought. However, a renewed confidence blossomed when he was introduced to a Singapore-based merchant, Tan Kim Ching. Also a member of the Ghee Hin, Tan had the motive to secure Larut's wealth for himself and was willing even to recognize Raja Abdullah as the new Perak sultan.

Tan sought help from his European business partners who had strong influence in the British administration in the Colonial Office and Straits Settlements such as Thomas Scott and Read. Promised by Raja Abdullah a lucrative 10-year concession of Larut, a plot to make Raja Abdullah the new sultan was charted. Read and Tan were two individuals responsible to bring Raja Abdullah's claim to Ord's attention, and later to Clarke, Ord's successor. The role played by the two and another British officer, J. G. Davidson was of particular importance. They were believed to have drafted a letter dated 30 December 1873 using Raja Abdullah's name, signature and official seal (C. 1111 Sultan Abdullah to the Governor of the Straits, 30 December 1873:85), requesting the Governor Clarke to act as 'umpire' in the 'power struggle' in Perak, accord British protection and suggested that British rendered personnel assistance in Perak's governance.¹¹

Through the plot between the European-Chinese capitalists, the leaders of the Chinese Secret Societies in Penang and Singapore, who took advantage of Raja Abdullah's financial fragility, and their own conspiracy with those in the Colonial Office, as well as the urge to interfere, Clarke had an inevitable decision to make. He decided that it was time for the British to intervene. Raja Abdullah was declared the official Sultan of Perak through the Pangkor Treaty signed in 1874. The treaty was seen as the first step towards a direct British intervention in Perak.

The Chinese Secret Societies, the Larut Wars and 'Power Struggle' in Perak

It is essential to reiterate that there had never been a genuine 'civil war' or 'anarchy' among the Perak Malays in 1870s until the interference come from external parties, which had ulterior motives. Conflicts, stirred by the external elements, began to surface involving a few select individuals, particularly between Raja Abdullah and Ngah Ibrahim, as the former tried to seize tin-rich Larut from the latter. However, this conflict was more personal in nature and did not involve the majority of the Perak chiefs and the Malay population. There had been no threat to the citizens of Perak, no major bloodsheds and certainly no anarchy that would intimidate the political stability of the state. In sum, 'Malay feudalism', 'civil war' and 'anarchy' that frequently asserted to had happen in Perak in the 1870s are just a mythical narrative invented especially by the British colonial officials to justify their intervention. Some historians who overlooked some key historical accounts and sources had accepted this myth.

Civil war can only be said to exist in Perak (or Larut) if it was viewed as armed conflicts between two opposing Chinese triads, the Ghee Hin and Hai San. This war had no connection whatsoever with the Malay conflicts and was in no way related to the power struggle between the Malay rulers. Instead, the whole saga was part of the quarrels that had been happening back in China mainland since before the turn of the 19th century. Major fights occurred near the tin mines, mainly in Larut, where the majority of the Chinese was populated.

These fights did not spread throughout all parts of Perak. In fact, Hulu Perak, which was a Malay-dominated settlement, was rather in a state of peace and stability. Nevertheless, there existed certain quarters who tried to connect the Chinese fights with the Malay political impasse. The British officials, in their reports, for instance, were inclined to view these fights between the Chinese as a conflict that happened because of the Malay rulers fighting for power and soliciting external helps. They explained the wars among the Chinese triads as "...a symptomatic of anarchic state of affairs throughout the state of Perak" (Sullivan 1982:14).¹²

In this context, the British colonial officers tend to put the blame on Ngah Ibrahim as the one who gave rise to the crisis. He was labelled as an 'opportunist', someone who would be willing to collaborate with any party that can help him remains in authority.¹³ From these officials' views, his obsession with power created 'anarchy' in Larut and eventually turned things to be out of control. As Birch put it, '...the *Mantri*'s evil influence was the principal cause of all the trouble, and Chinese disturbances' (Burns 1976:67). In truth, Ngah Ibrahim was a victim who had been caught in between of the two fighting Chinese groups.

The disturbances caused by the Chinese triads apparently created more trouble to Ngah Ibrahim. Caught in the middle, Ngah Ibrahim was left to choose between the two fighting groups, and he sided with the one that he

thought can win the war. He believed that the war would not last long and that Larut would return to an eventual peace under his ruling.

Since 1862, Ngah Ibrahim had been pledging his support to the Hai San, which was the earliest group of the Larut miners and had helped him with financial support. The group also had twice the number of Ghee Hin members, creating good odds in winning a war against the Ghee Hin. But he was wrong. In 1872, a shock Hai San defeat in the war against the Ghee Hin put Ngah Ibrahim in limbo. Worried that he might lose power and revenues, he switched his allegiance back and forth several times to the group that he felt was on the winning side. Wilkinson explained “It was a matter of indifference to him [Ngah Ibrahim] which side was the winner, so long as he continued to receive the revenues of Larut” (Wilkinson 1923:104).

The truth is that, if anyone were to be called opportunist—other than the British themselves—it should be the European-Chinese capitalists and the leaders of the Chinese triads. They took advantage of the Perak’s fiasco to manipulate it to their own gains through a number of ways. First, they interfered into the Malay politics by encouraging Raja Abdullah to submit claims that he was the legitimate Perak sultan. By lobbying Raja Abdullah, they expected him to pave way for them to grab the shares of the resources in return of their support. Second, they encouraged fights among the triads in Larut to the point that it was beyond containment. Weapons and immigrants were brought from China in a large scale, masked with ‘British citizenship’ to join the fights.¹⁴ Third, they manipulated their position and influence in the British administration since 1857 to urge a direct annexation by British on Perak and other Malay states, underlining political corruptions, wars, pirating and violence of the Malay rulers as their justifications and to protect their trade interest. They played an undeniably major role in laying the foundation that led to the eventual British intervention in the Malay states.

British Intervention and the Pangkor Treaty 1874

Apart from the European-Chinese capitalists who manipulated the Perak situation to expand their capitalist activities, the British had also their own share of hands in annihilating the political stability in Perak. During the 19th century imperialism, the British were the most influential side and were powerful enough to shape the political landscape of the Malay states. All parties acknowledged this colossal British power. They were made a reference by the Malay chiefs, the leaders of the Chinese Secret Societies and the European-Chinese capitalists to voice their grievances, solicit recognition or request for support when facing with certain conflicts. Those successful in getting the British sympathising with them would usually find themselves in an upper hand position. This was proven when the British supported and brought victories to Tengku Zhia’uddin (Kudin) in Selangor and Ngah Ibrahim

in Larut, Perak.

Notwithstanding, the British policy in interfering into other Malay states' affairs was motivated by their own interest and driven by the frequently inconsistent personal decisions made by the British officials. A Malay ruler could retain authority or be helped to grab power as long as the British could reap benefits from it. If a ruler were seen as a threat to their interest, the British would not hesitate to manoeuvre a move to oust this ruler and replace him with a pro-British ruler. This was what happened in Perak in the 1870s.

Under the Governor Ord, the policy of interference practiced by the British in Perak was mostly indirect, and occasionally, direct, with the British publicly pledging their backing to Ngah Ibrahim and acknowledging his ruling in Larut. In a letter dated 3-5 September 1873, Ord officially expressed his support to Ngah Ibrahim and indicated willingness even to offer military help to him and his ally group, Hai San.¹⁵ At one point, the British also made recognition to Raja Ismail as the legitimate Perak Sultan, though they quickly rescinded the acknowledgment when the claims by Raja Abdullah surfaced. Ord also had never recognized Raja Abdullah as the rightful sultan and had vehemently declined to fulfil the requests made by the Chinese merchants and the triads to intervene in Perak. In short, British support in Perak saw Ngah Ibrahim retaining power and halted Raja Abdullah's effort to rise to power.

However, the policies regulated by Ord made sudden turns when Clarke took over the Governor position in 1873. Clarke's appointment began what was seen as an era where the British policies were shadowed by the influence or the 'skilful pressure' of a number of British officials-merchants in the Straits Settlements and the Colonial Office in London. These policies were incorporated with much interest put on the British companies that supported direct interference (MacIntyre 1961:47-69; MacIntyre 1967:199-206). The urge for this intervention was made paramount through a petition by 248 Chinese traders in the Straits Settlements who were asking for British intervention due to the prevailing situation of Malay states of being 'lawless' and 'in the state of anarchy' (C.1111 Petition to Ord, 28 March 1873:30-32).

An order was issued by the Secretary of the British Colony, Earl of Kimberley to Clarke on 20 September 1873, requesting the latter to make a serious evaluation on the situation, expedite the immediate course of actions to restore order and to consider an establishment of a British residential system in the Malay states.¹⁶ Kimberly's written order, which amongst others, raised concerns on the interest of the investment of Read's company, was not primarily aimed to protect the British investment which was allegedly under threat, but rather aimed to seek a platform for new investment opportunities for the European-Chinese capitalists.

Soon after the arrival of Clarke in Singapore in November 1873, Read and Tan, who had been anticipating the new Governor's presence, made no delay to arrange a meeting with Clarke and hand over Raja Abdullah's

claims. At the same time, the opposing Chinese triads were also requesting appointment of a British Resident who could mediate and resolve their disputes in Larut. All these demands were timely, as Clarke had been waiting for the right opportunity to orchestrate implementation of the British intervention policies in Perak. Moreover, Raja Abdullah had also promised to comply with the British demands, which included accepting a Resident in Perak and introduction of any new system deemed necessary. To Clarke, these promises are a gift handed on a silver platter, and for that, he made the vital decision to support Raja Abdullah's claims.

At the onset of British intervention in Perak, Clarke persuaded the Malay rulers and the *Orang Besar-Besar* to attend a meeting in Pangkor in January 1874. Without providing the adequate opportunity for the chiefs to make due consideration and discuss among them for a decision, Clarke 'forced' these Perak chiefs members to sign the Pangkor Treaty in January 1874. This treaty had obviously been signed without the full consent of the majority of the Malay rulers, especially those in Hilir Perak, even though Clarke claimed the opposite.¹⁷ There were a number of delegations who had been forced to attend and signed the treaty due to threats.¹⁸ Jervois explained the real situation of the Pangkor meeting, inside a British warship and escorted by the fully armed military personnel, as the following:

In a British vessel, with a British man-of-war alongside, we collected together some Perak chiefs, to elect a sultan, when we just put down one who was absent and set up another who was present, that other being the wretched individual I have now described [Raja Abdullah] (quoted in Sadka 1970:11).

Perak Post-Pangkor Treaty

The Pangkor Treaty, signed on 20 January 1874, fashioned a dramatic effect in changing the political landscape in Perak. Through the treaty, Raja Abdullah was appointed as the new Perak Sultan. In return, under Clause 6, it was prescribed that a Resident, which would act as the sultan's adviser, was to be appointed and his advice "...must be asked and acted upon all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom" (Maxwell & Gibson 1924:28-29). The British also sent a letter to Raja Ismail (who did not turn up in Pangkor) that informed him that he was to be stripped off the sultan title but allowed to continue using the Raja Muda title.¹⁹ Ngah Ibrahim was no longer recognized as the independent ruler of Larut, but rather to be treated as one of the many equally ranked Perak chiefs under the purview of the new sultan.

After his appointment as the new sultan, Raja Abdullah did not wait too long to initiate the handover process of the concessions in Kerian-Larut to the Chinese capitalists in the Straits Settlements who had supported his quest for the state power all along. He drew up an agreement with Chee Ah Him, a

Chinese merchant and triad leader from Penang to develop a number of mining areas in Perak. Despite the earlier cautions by the British officials to obtain the Governor's consent before making any major decision, Raja Abdullah conveniently neglected the advice and proceeded with his own plan. July 1874, Raja Abdullah received an initial payment of \$13,000 (from the agreed \$26,000) from Lee Cheng Tee, who was Tan Kim Ching's agent. This was the reward agreed for authorising Tan to collect revenues in Kuala Sungai Perak (Plunket 1876:Appendix III; Burns & Cowan 1975:xxviii). Raja Abdullah fulfilled all his commitments as promised.

Although the treaty successfully mediated disputes between the Chinese, but failed miserably to reunite the Malays. In fact, the Malay politics was thrown into an even larger turmoil. Raja Ismail unanimously rejected the conditions of the treaty, which he felt made without full consent and consultation of Perak's *Orang Besar-Besar*. The British policy that abruptly recognized Raja Abdullah as the new sultan angered the Malay Perak chiefs, especially in Hulu Perak and contributed to an alarming crisis. Suddenly, Perak had two sultans, each claiming to be the rightful ruler. One was selected and appointed by the *Orang Besar-Besar* Perak and another was through the Pangkor Treaty of 1874.

In order to garner the Malays support, the British attempted their best to ensure that the official appointment of Raja Abdullah as the new sultan took place. Nevertheless, they were faced with tenacious resistance. Attempts to unveil Raja Abdullah officially as the new sultan were met with failures as Raja Ismail used all possible avenues to make known his reluctance in recognising the agreements penned in the Pangkor Treaty. He would also not easily relinquish his power and surrender all the Perak royal regalia, despite the umpteen efforts by the British officials asking him to do so. Many of the Perak Malay chiefs were also unwilling to cooperate with the British and acknowledge the treaty.²⁰ Followers of Raja Ismail viewed Raja Abdullah's recognition as illegitimate. Furthermore, majority of the Perak Malays still pledged their loyalty to Raja Ismail, who they considered their *de facto* ruler (C.1320 Birch to Braddell, April 1875:88).

As long as the Perak royal regalia were not surrendered to Raja Abdullah, he could not be officially unveiled as the sultan, and Raja Ismail would maintain his status quo as the rightful state ruler (C.1512 Jervis to Carnovan, 10 February 1876:12). This means Raja Abdullah could not be fully utilised by the British to gain support from the Malay chiefs and the Perak Malays for its policy implementation. The British administrators, especially the British Resident J. W. W. Birch, was not entirely aware that the supreme state power did not merely lie with the incumbent sultan, but also through strong support of the Perak chiefs. Without their support, Raja Abdullah would not have enough authority to fulfil the British demands.

Failure to understand the Malay customs and political tradition in Perak

explained why Birch blundered in his effort to mediate the Raja Ismail-Raja Abdullah conflict. Neither persuasion nor threats to Raja Ismail had worked to get the latter surrender the royal regalia and consequently acknowledge Raja Abdullah's appointment. Birch's economic policies, which had been exploitative, were also not favoured by the chiefs and the Malays, especially Raja Ismail's followers in Hulu Perak. Those on Raja Ismail's bloc also disputed Birch's rights and power to implement changes in Perak under the name of Raja Abdullah as Raja Abdullah himself was not recognized as the legitimate ruler. Birch was subsequently reminded to respect the position of all *Orang Besar-Besar* in Perak.

We inquire about our friend's having got *kuasa* (written authority) over this country of Perak, to become Resident and govern Perak, collecting all the taxes of the country. From whom did our friend get that *kuasa*? Our friend must let us know clearly. If our friend got it from Rajah Abdullah, we will in no way accept a single clause of it, for Rajah Abdullah is not the only 'Waris' (blood royal) of the country of Perak; there are many other 'Waris' better than he... Moreover, we inform the gentlemen in Penang, Singapore, and other places that the kingdom for which they have made a Rajah is in the hands of us all, the 'Waris' of the country of Perak; and that, as regards Rajah Abdullah whom they installed, we will in no way, any of us, accept him, for it is against (or perhaps "he is outside the pale of") Malay laws and customs. Moreover, the *kuasa* which you have received from Rajah Abdullah, we will none of us accept it. If you wish to use force to us, even then we will not accept it, but if it is only that you want the country of Perak, we will in no way resist you, for we none of us wish to fight with you, having no power to do so. Therefore you must show us plainly what is our fault towards you.²¹

Birch's ill-advised policies were not only met with lukewarm response from the Malay chiefs, many of whom in support of Raja Ismail, but also faced resistances from Raja Abdullah's patrons. This development began to make Raja Abdullah reluctant in fulfilling every request made by Birch. Raja Abdullah was himself maybe not an anti-British, but signs were growing that many quarters were opposing the British policies in Perak. Birch's attitude had also further antagonized the *rakyat* of Perak.

Raja Abdullah was concerned that if he were to agree to hand over all the tax collection rights to the British as Birch had requested, the Malay chiefs of Perak, many of whom had been relying on the earnings from the tax they collected, would lose their main source of income. He would therefore be regarded as a traitor, including by his own supporters. Raja Abdullah was also hesitating to endorse Birch's plans, as those would make him more unpopular among the Perak Malays, including people in Hilir Perak.²² The piling pressure and tensions that rose made him to begin realizing that he did not own absolute

authority in Perak, but rather was made part of a mechanism that would allow the British to exert control and power.

Anguished with Birch's continued pressure, in January 1875, Raja Abdullah acted to caution Raja Ismail not to sign the Pangkor Treaty nor surrender the Perak regalia to him. These actions, as according to Raja Abdullah, would only bestow Birch an even bigger room to exercise his authority.

If Mr. Birch asks for the Regalia, or desires to make me King, do not my royal grandfather give up the Regalia, or consent to my being nominated King. And should my royal grandfather give his consent that I be made King, on that day, of a truth, the country of Perak will be given over to the English, for my words have caused me to be very much indebted to the English (Lunket 1876:7).

Raja Abdullah's failure to fulfil the British requests had inevitably angered Clarke. On 22 April, Clarke delivered a letter to Raja Abdullah, reminding that he was obligated to comply with all the clauses as stipulated in the Pangkor Treaty. Clarke also raised warning for all quarters not to carry out tax collections without getting an approval from the British Resident (Plunket 1876:Appendix No. XVII). Although Raja Abdullah attempted to explain to Clarke that Birch's hurried measures were creating discontentment and pressure, he was severely castigated by Clarke (Plunket 1876:Appendix No. XVII). Raja Abdullah's last efforts to send his representatives to discuss with Clarke came without much success. Clarke was in no appetite for a compromise.

Things became worse after Clarke was replaced by a new Governor, William R. Jervois in May 1875. Jervois, who had an even more rigid stance, had taken actions without getting the necessary approvals from the British government.²³ Soon after his appointment as the new British Governor, he immediately arranged a visit to Perak in September 1875 to meet Raja Ismail, Raja Abdullah and the Chiefs of Perak, pressuring them to accept the policies being carried out by the British Resident. Nevertheless, Jervois' attempt failed as the Perak rulers would not budge from their position and defied his insistence.

As a result, Jervois considered Raja Ismail and Raja Abdullah as an obstacle to the British progress in the state. He was in the opinion that British power could only be realised in Perak and other Malay states through annexation and forceful means (C.1512 Jervois to Carnovan, 10 February 1876, p. 23). In an effort to strengthen the British grip on Perak, Jervois instructed Birch to forcefully make Raja Abdullah relinquish his power to the British. In return, the British would pay him a living allowance of \$2000 monthly. Again, this attempt was fruitless. Raja Abdullah rejected the idea. Not to be outdone, Jervois drafted three letters - two for Raja Abdullah, and another for Raja Yusuf- to be delivered through Birch to both of them. The letters stated that if Raja Abdullah did not transfer his power to the British, Raja Yusuf then would

be appointed as the new sultan to replace him.²⁴

The incessant pressure on Raja Abdullah began to crack him to a point that he was finally ready to sign the power transfer of tax collection declaration. Then, Birch continued to push with other declarations that include a surprise designation of British Resident as the state judge. This state judge position would be bestowed with absolute power on the laws and related matters, the appointment of administrators and chiefs, as well as the authority to collect all state taxes. Raja Abdullah considered this further demand unreasonable. He eventually signed the declarations, but through numerous excuses, did not accompany his signature with the official royal seal.²⁵ Birch, enraged with Raja Abdullah's actions, severely reprimanded the latter with all guns blazing in a meeting and reminded him about the letters that threatened to replace him with Raja Yusuf. Birch wanted him to know that he was at the mercy of the British and that they were serious. Soon after venting his anger, he chased Raja Abdullah away. Tension escalated when Birch violated the Pangkor Treaty by protecting indebted slaves, mainly women, who ran away from their masters and provided sanctuary for them in his residence in Bandar Baru (Plunket 1876:14).

This sparked an enormous outrage among the Malay rulers. Birch was now seen as not only disrespectful; he also created suspicion that grew by day on his real intentions and motives (Khoo Kay Kim 1965:33-47). The series of incidents, perceived as a reflection of Birch's irrational actions, triggered anger and resentment among all quarters in Perak. Nevertheless, the Malay rulers were still willing to negotiate and undertake the diplomatic route to urge the British to be more considerate in bringing about changes in the state. Fully aware that their inferior military capability put them in no position to respond in a combative manner, the local rulers resisted the British passively by according cold treatment and simply being uncooperative.

All these diplomatic and peaceful efforts failed to circumvent the British intention to continue interfering in the Perak state affairs. Persistent provocations by the British administrators such as Birch and Jervois compounded the predicament even further. Jervois, for instance, continued his insistence that the British should deploy a direct, military-backed occupation in Perak and was in favour to the use of force rather diplomacy (C.1512 Jervois to Carnovan, 10 February 1876: 12). The British arrogance inevitably began to push the local rulers to the edge. Tempers were boiling. With little option left, the Malay leaders decided to retaliate. This was culminated with two important events that followed: the assassination of Birch and the anti-British upheaval in 1875.

The revolt by the Malay chiefs in Perak was then fully utilised as an opportunity for the British to eliminate the resurging opponents, including supporters of Raja Ismail, Raja Abdullah, Ngah Ibrahim and other Malay chiefs. Raja Yusuf, a pro-British prince was later appointed as the Acting

Sultan. Birch's assassination and the Malay uprising in 1875 were used as the perfect excuse for the British to exert, retain and expand its power throughout the state of Perak. It was also a prelude to a direct intervention and the eventual British colonization of the Malay states at the end of the 19th century.

Conclusion

The discussion above has explained some major weaknesses discovered in the previous writings that discussed the political turbulence and crisis in the Malay states at the onset of British intervention in the 19th century. Generally, the past writings were inclined to view the conflicts in the Malay states as a manifestation of the so-called 'Malay feudalism' that is frequently referred to the disunity, power struggle and the decline of the Malay ruling system which had begun as early as during the Melaka Sultanate era.

Despite acknowledging the existence of some degree of power struggle and political conflict in Perak's history, this article accentuates the imperative need for historians to look at past conflicts beyond what had been previously communicated to facilitate profound understanding of historical events, and make analysis of all factors, internal and external. This present research also articulates that conflicts that occurred between the Malay rulers and chiefs had been personal in nature and were associated with small-magnitude opposing clusters. Moreover, these conflicts were never capable to trigger a large scale 'bloodshed' or 'civil war' as was alleged, that would create a total chaos, result loss of people's lives or threaten the downfall of the government of the day. Behind the negative perceptions that arise from the struggle for power among the Malay rulers, it was acknowledged that these events were to be a part of the 'purification' process of the Malay political tradition that consequently propagated a new, stronger and more stable political leadership than the previous era.

Nevertheless, this political 'purification' can never happen, if the state of concern is subject to external influences and elements that attempt to designs the political course, which subsequently agitates the balance of power and brings about crisis of higher magnitude. In the case of Malay political development in the 19th century, outside interventions and colonization by foreign power saw a creation of highly asymmetric power balance that continued to grow among the disputing Malay rulers. Previous conflicts had been resolved by assessing the support of the Malay chiefs and through diplomatic negotiations. However, as the third parties interfered, the situation was made more complex, with these third parties willing to lend support to those that could protect their own interest.

This can be elucidated with the case happening in Perak in the 1870s. The conflict between Raja Abdullah and Raja Ismail was actually solved with Raja Abdullah backing down after the majority of the Malay chiefs expressed

their collective preference in Raja Ismail. Nevertheless, a renewed conflict was sparked off again later mainly due to the provocation by the triad leaders and the European-Chinese capitalists in the Straits Settlements. These unscrupulous leaders and capitalists knew, by pledging support to a side favourable to their ambitions and making instability, they would make maximum gains in the form of wealth and economic power in Perak.

The political turbulence also became more complicated due to the British administrators' own stand, which had been generally in cohort with the capitalists' goals in the Settlements. They were more willing to accommodate these capitalists' needs and desires for a full-scale British colonization of the Malay states. By showing their support to the local group that could fulfil their conditions, the British orchestrated a direct engagement to bestow power to their preferred choice and triggered a political disorder. This was later used as a convenient excuse for the British to begin their quest to colonize the Malay states at the end of the 19th century.

End Notes

1. The author wishes to express his gratitude to Universiti Sains Malaysia for the funding made available through the USM Short Term Grant for this project for 2010-2012.
2. Some of the British officials for instance interpreted the ignorance and violence of the Malay rulers as "...the usual habit of all Orientals." CO 273/52 Extract from *The Times*, 13 September 1871.
3. See Cheah Boon Kheng (1991:16-17). Refer also to his other writings in English, "Feudalism in Pre-Colonial Malaya: The Past as a Colonial Discourse" (1994: 243-269). Similar view was shared by other local historian, for instance Wong Lin Ken (1965:21), who indicated: "Subsequent to the dissolution of the Malacca Sultanate, the Malay political structure gradually disintegrated in the course of the centuries. In the 19th century, Malay society in the tin states had become so degenerate and unstable that there was no central authority in any of them capable of controlling or powerful enough to control the whole territory."
4. The relationship between the two turned to conflict when Raja Abdullah tried to seize Ngah Ibrahim's source of income in the areas ruled by the latter in the Kerian-Larut areas. Raja Abdullah received encouragement by Edward Bacon, a Eurasian investor in Penang. As a result, Sultan Ali sought help from the Lieutenant-Governor A. E. H Anson to caution the Penang traders not to intervene or strike any deal with Raja Muda Abdullah. In 1870, Raja Abdullah continued to act beyond his power by endowing the Kerian revenues to Bacon and other investors in Penang. He attempted to justify this through a letter allegedly signed by Sultan

- Ali. Ngah Ibrahim was notified of this in 1871, and later, Sultan Ali rescinded the lease and indicated that Raja Abdullah's action was done behind his back. SSR (G7) Raja of Perak to Hatchell, 18 March 1871; SSR (G7) Raja of Perak to A. N. Birch, 25 April 1871.
5. According to Burns, "...there is evidence that the Mantri, along with the Sri Maharaja Lela and the Temenggung, favored the latter ruler's son, Raja Osman, against Ismail the candidate of Dato Nara, Panglima Kinta and Sagor and Maharaja Lela. When Osman refused nomination, his supporters accepted Ismail." Burns's view was based on the statements by Kuloop Rheo on 24 January 1877 in *Perak Enquiry Papers*, Vol. 3.
 6. SSR (G7) Mantri of Laroot to Governor, 20 May 1872. According to Burns, Dato' Laksamana agreed not to oppose to Raja Ismail's appointment as sultan in order to please Ngah Ibrahim, his son-in-law. See Burns (1976:12, footnotes 6).
 7. Soon after being made sultan, Raja Ismail delivered a letter to the British, informing his official appointment on 17 August 1871. The letter was sent to the Lieutenant Governor of British in Penang, A. N. Birch who eventually acknowledged and recognized his installation. SSR (G7) Sultan Ismail to A. N. Birch, 17 August 1871; SSR (G7) Lieutenant-Governor Penang to Sultan Ismail, 30 August 1871.
 8. According to Irving, "After the Raja Muda had become conscious of his real position, he appears to have taken no active steps to assert his rights for some months, but to have remained at Purbayan in great discontent, but without forming any plan as to how to better his position." C. 1111 Memorandum relative to the Affairs of Perak, 1872, p. 131.
 9. At the peak of his financial troubles, Raja Abdullah was living in desperation. He did not even have his own house and had to live in a boat. See Plunket (1876:2).
 10. Apart from them, there had also been other important individuals who were involved in the capitalist activities and interventions in other Malay states. These included Thomas Scott, Che Yam Chuan, Ho Ghee Siu, J. E. Westerhout, C. J. Irving and J. G. Davidson, who were merchants and leaders of the Chinese triads in the Straits Settlements. Some of them also had interest in British conglomerates, mainly those owned by Read. For further explanation about their involvements, see Khoo Kay Kim (1975:222).
 11. Read admitted to play a role in drafting the letter. See Read (1901:25-26). However, Plunket (1876:3) discovered that Tan Kim Ching was also involved. Apart from the two, another British colonial officer, J. G. Davidson, who had shares in the Selangor Tin Mining Company and later was appointed as the first British Resident in Selangor, also took part in drafting the letter. See Winstedt (1935:225), and Wynne (1941:283).

12. There was a widespread belief among the colonial officials that the power struggle between the Malay Rulers was not only a part of the fights among the Chinese triads in Larut to; it was this struggle that actually triggered the fights. For instance, as A. M. Skinner put it: "The dispute as to the Perak Sultanship has practically become a struggle for Laroot, a struggle in which the Muntri takes the place of the Bandahara [Raja Ismail]....The dispute about the Perak succession has tended to exasperate the Chinese factions, both the contending Malay chiefs having taken sides...The whole of the Laroot difficulty may in effect be traced to two causes: The inefficiency of the Malays to govern a subject Chinese population, and the tendency of the Chinese themselves to quarrel vi et armis about the smallest trifles, which makes it almost hopeless to look for peaceable self-government among them." See C.1111, *Precis of Perak Affairs* Skinner, No. 52, p. 119 and 125. On the violence triggered by the Chinese triads as the main cause of anarchy in Perak, Kratoska (1983:3) explained: British officials generally "... preferred to lay such matters aside, instead drawing attention to the supposed harshness and injustice of indigenous Malay government from which the population had happily been delivered by the introduction of British rule."
13. C. 1111 Clarke to Kimberley, 26 January 1874, p. 72; C. 1111 Instructions to Major McNair and Captain Dunlop, 7 January 1874, p. 77.
14. According to Wynne (1941:265), "Chinese in Perak, both *Triad* and *Tokong* members, claiming to come from Penang, were mostly regarded as British subjects, although in fact many of them were professional fighting men specially imported from China."
15. C. 1111 Memorandum to the Lieutenant-Governor of Penang, 3 September 1873; C. 1111 Letter to the Orang Kaya Muntri of Larut, 3 September 1873, p. 160.
16. C.1111 Kimberley to Andrew Clarke, 20 September 1873, pp. 38-39. Disorder and demands from the Chinese merchants in the Straits Settlements were made as the main reason for the intervention.
17. Clarke frequently alleged that the chiefs had chosen Raja Abdullah as the legitimate Sultan of Perak and voluntarily agreed to all conditions during the meeting with British in Pangkor. However, this allegation was vastly doubted since soon after the Pangkor Treaty 1874 was made, the majority of the Malay chiefs convened a series of meetings and collectively agreed to oppose the conditions set up in the treaty.
18. According to Buyong Adil (1971:72), Ngah Ibrahim for example was forced and threatened with military actions to get him sign the Pangkor Treaty. Similar view was also put forth by Burns and Cowan who indicated that Clarke had used forces and threats to silent Ngah Ibrahim's opposition in Pangkor and prevented him from influencing

- other Malay chiefs. See Cowan (1961:185-86); Burns 1976:75).
19. Letter from the Governor to the Rajah Bandahara Ismail, 20 January 1874 in Plunket, *Enquiry as Complicity* (1876), Appendix No. III.
 20. In February 1874, a meeting to oppose the Pangkor Treaty convened. It was chaired by Dato' Laksamana and attended by a number of other main Perak chiefs. In the meeting, the chiefs claimed they were unaware of the Clarke's real intentions in getting them to sign the treaty. In addition, in March 1874, Menteri Ngah Ibrahim hired a Penang-based lawyer, R. C. Woods for \$12,000 to initiate a legal suit of the opposition to the Pangkor Treaty to the British Parliament but was immediately vetoed by Raja Abdullah, worrying that his position as the new Sultan will be affected. See Wynne (1941:299).
 21. The letter by the Perak Malay chiefs found in Haji Ali's possession. See Plunket, *Enquiry as Complicity*, Appendix No. XXXIX.
 22. Jervois himself admitted that Raja Ismail's position in Perak was strengthening after November 1874. Many of the Malay chiefs including Raja Yusuf and Raja Abdullah's followers began to switch allegiances to Raja Ismail's side. C. 1503 Jervois to Carnovan, 10 February 1876, p. 10.
 23. Jervois's attitudes and policies was fiercely criticised by Carnovan. C. 1512 Carnovan to Jervois, 20 May 1876, p. 75-85.
 24. Plunket, *Enquiry as Complicity* (1876:71). Threats in the letter handed to Raja Abdullah carried the following words; "Now we propose to our friend that officers of the British Government shall govern the country in the name of our friend. If our friend agrees to this, our friend will still be recognized as Sultan and receive a large allowance, but if our friend does not agree to this, we cannot help our friend, and our friend will be no longer Sultan."
 25. Raja Abdullah explained that the official Perak seal was damaged to free him from being bound by the declaration. See Plunket (1876:14).

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