

## KEDAH-SIAM RELATIONS, 1821-1905

by

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Of the various foreign powers with which Kedah came into contact, that with Siam and the British proved to be the most significant to the future of the state. The nature of the Siamese overlordship over Kedah, and the significance of the *Bunga Mas* (The Golden Flowers), which were periodically sent to Bangkok have been differently interpreted by different people. But in practice, the history of Kedah-Siamese relationship bears out the accuracy of Newbold's comment that "... it seems after all that the Lord of the White Elephant (Siam) has as much original right as present power and ancient aggression can give him and no more..."<sup>1</sup> Thus, there were times during this relationship when Siamese suzerainty was irrelevant. For example, after Kedah became Muslim, the Sultan went to Malacca to obtain the royal insignia from a Malay sovereign rather than seek recognition from Siam. Likewise, the Siamese could do nothing when the Portuguese attacked Kedah in 1611, or when Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh conquered the state in 1619 and took its ruler into captivity. Neither did Siamese suzerainty make any difference during the period when the Dutch signed a commercial agreement with Kedah, or when the Bugis were brought in to play the role of king maker in the country's politics. Finally, when the Sultan of Kedah ceded the island of Penang to the East India Company in 1786, he made no reference to Siam and acted as a fully independent monarch. On the other hand, whenever Siam did make demands on Kedah such as for contributions in men, money and supplies for her war efforts, these demands were met in full. Thus the subjection of Kedah was effective so long as the suzerain had the power to enforce it; once this power waned, so too did submission on the part of the dependency.

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1) Newbold, T.J. *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, Vol. 2 (London 1839), p. 7.

The resurgence of Siamese control over Kedah began with the opening of the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> By this time Siam had recovered from her wars with Burma and so she could once again turn her attention to the Malay Peninsula. It was from this period that Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin constantly complained to the Penang government regarding Siamese demands and threats. Siam was not only demanding material help from Kedah, she also wanted her to subjugate Perak which had refused to send the *Bunga Mas* to Bangkok. The climax of the Kedah-Siam relations came in 1821 when in November of that year Siam invaded Kedah. The invasion was justified on the grounds that the Sultan had failed to send the *Bunga Mas*, that he had refused to comply with the Siamese demands for money and supplies, and that he was intriguing with the Burmese.

As a result of this conquest, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin fled to Penang for asylum and he was followed by thousands of refugees who escaped into the British territory. In Kedah itself, thousands were killed and many others abducted. The Sultan's favourite son Tengku Yaacob, who tried to escape, was captured and sent to Siam; the *Bendahara* (Prime Minister) was imprisoned and later poisoned. Besides the loss of lives, pillaging and the destruction of property took place on a large scale.<sup>3</sup> The economy of Kedah was disastrously affected for the trade of the country was now diverted from Penang to Ligor. Captain Burney, who visited "almost every river in the territory of Kedah", in 1825 observed that the Raja of Ligor (the Viceroy of Nakorn Srithammaraj) had made necessary arrangements for exploiting the resources of the state. And his son in Kedah made sure that the principal products of rice, timber and tin went to Ligor.<sup>4</sup> The Siamese Court in Bangkok also showed great interest in the Raja of Ligor's schemes regarding Kedah for they also received a share of the plunder. Besides guns and other articles, about 1000 Malays from

2) Tye Soh Sin, *Penang-Kedah-Siam Relations 1786-1826*. Unpublished B.A. Academic Exercise (University of Malaya 1957) pp. 16-19.

3) N. Tarling, *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago 1824-71*, *Journal Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 30 pt. 3 (1957) pp. 9-10.

4) *The Burney Papers* vol. 2 pt. 4 (Bangkok 1910) p. 17.

Kedah were sent to Bangkok to become slaves to the King, the *Wang-na* (Second King) and almost every Siamese Minister.<sup>5</sup>

The Siamese occupation of Kedah lasted for twenty-one years, during which time the Malays made several attempts to drive out the occupiers. In 1826 and 1829, two short-lived attempts were made by the Sultan's nephews, Tengku Mohamed Said and Tengku Kudin. Tengku Kudin tried again in January 1831 and this time succeeded in re-occupying Kedah for 10 months. In 1836, yet another Malay attack was launched but this was very swiftly beaten off. The final effort was made in 1838 under the leadership of Tengku Abdullah, the eldest son of the Sultan, and two of his cousins, Tengku Mohamed Said and Tengku Mohamed Taib. This was the most successful of the whole series of Malay counter-attacks and they held on till February 1839 before the Siamese once again pushed them out. By this time it became clear to Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin that he could not possibly regain his kingdom by force, especially when the British were not only unwilling to give Kedah any assistance but that they aided the Siamese every time. The Sultan, therefore decided to send his eldest son, Tengku Dai to Bangkok to beg for pardon and reinstatement. Governor Bonham gave Tengku Dai a letter for the *Phrahklang* (Minister of Foreign Affairs) in which the Siamese were asked to restore the Sultan because British help to maintain Siamese control in Kedah could not go on. By this time, too, the Siamese were more amenable to change. The King realized that all the years of Siamese control over Kedah had in fact produced more problems instead of getting any profit out of the occupation. The King therefore decided to send Phya Si Phiphat, the commander-in-chief of the Bangkok army, to Kedah with the purpose of taking all the necessary measures to ensure lasting peace in Siam's southern provinces.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Kedah, Phya Si Phiphat recommended a thorough reorganisation of the administration. The King was informed that as long as the Siamese officials directly governed Kedah, there was bound to be

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5) *Ibid.* vol. 1 pt. 1, p. 176.

6) C. Skinner, A Kedah Letter of 1839 in *Essays Presented to Sir Richard Winstedt* ed. J. Bastin and R. Roolvink (Oxford 1964) pp. 158-59.

trouble and so it was recommended that the state should be entrusted to Malays, preferably relatives of the deposed Sultan who were at the same time acceptable to Siam. Furthermore, it was recommended that the potential strength of Kedah should be weakened by breaking up the state into three separate territories. All these recommendations were accepted and the country was then divided into a much reduced Kedah with Tengku Anum<sup>7</sup> as its Governor, Kubang Pasu under Tengku Hassan and Perlis under Tengku Hussain. Finally, in 1842 the King of Siam restored Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin to the throne of the new Kedah.

This whole experience taught both Siam and Kedah some very valuable lessons which to a large extent guided their policies for the rest of the 19th century. Siam learnt that direct involvement in the internal affairs of Kedah would only bring about Malay resistance and this would be too costly to put down unless it obtained help from the British. But the British had made it clear that they were not willing to continue playing this role and in the context of European activity in the region in the late 19th century, Siam realized that she could not afford to alienate the British. The end result was the virtual independence of Kedah over the internal administration of the country. Kedah, for its part, learnt the futility of resistance against a more powerful country and the unhappy years of Siamese occupation made it decide that such an experience should not occur again. Hence, Kedah consciously strove to avoid any such recurrence and the result was a very stable, organized government which made it a model Malay state.

After 1842, the relationship between Kedah and Siam returned to the pre-1821 days with the great difference that Nakhorn Srithammaraj was no longer the predominating influence. From this period

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7) Tengku Anum was a distant relative of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin who had in the past shown that he could be relied upon to uphold Siamese interests. He had for instance attached himself to the Raja of Ligor (the Viceroy of Nakorn Srithammaraj), and in 1826 he led a delegation of Kedah chiefs who presented a petition to the Court of Siam, assuring the King that the Malay population were happy under Siamese rule, and that the deposed Sultan should not be restored.

onwards Kedah entered a new phase of peaceful co-existence with Siam which seems to have been enhanced by close personal ties between the royal families of both sides. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin was greatly liked by King Mongkut and he was often at the Court in Bangkok.<sup>8</sup> Sultan Abdul Hamid like his predecessor took part in the Water of Allegiance Ceremony<sup>9</sup> and he too was a constant visitor to the Court of King Chulalongkorn. In Bangkok the Sultan was always well treated; for instance he was allowed to stay in the Ministry of the South's new building which was considered to be a great honour. In return the Sultan knew how to stay on the good side of the Siamese. For example, when the Siamese Commissioner's office was established in Phuket, Sultan Abdul Hamid wrote to Phraya Thipkosa, the new Commissioner for the Western Seaboard Provinces, asking him to inform the King that Kedah would like to help finance the new office.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the Sultan was quick to respond to any call for help from Bangkok. In 1892 he wrote to the Governor of Songkhla, Phraya Wichiankhiri, requesting him to facilitate the passage of a boat bearing guns and ammunition to help the King against the

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8) Numnonda, T. *The Anglo-Siamese Negotiations 1900-1909*. (Ph.D. London, 1961) p. 52.

9) The drinking of the Water of Allegiance is considered to be one of the most important state ceremonies from the point of view of the upkeep of the established form of government in Siam. The rites take place twice yearly in the Chapel Royal in Bangkok, and also in one temple in each provincial capital. The water is previously hallowed by monks and on the day of the ceremony a Brahman reads out the oath and each official must drink the contents of a small cup which he has to finish to the last drop. See H.G. Quaritch Wales, *Siamese State Ceremonies, Their History and Function* (London 1931) pp. 193-198.

10) SC/13 Sultan to Phraya Thipkosa (date illegible). SC refers to the Sultan of Kedah's correspondence book; the number refers to the volume. This particular volume contains a series of letters from Sultan Abdul Hamid to various Siamese officials and vice versa. These documents which are in Thai are in a very bad state. The quality of the paper is poor and reading is made most difficult because the ink has gone through. I am most grateful to Dr. Tej Bunnag for the invaluable help he rendered regarding this volume.

French.<sup>11</sup> This co-operation was more marked in the case of Siamese projects in Kedah itself as in the instance of building a telegraph line right across Kedah into the British territories. District chiefs were immediately instructed to raise *karah* (forced) labour and to see to the successful completion of the job.<sup>12</sup> On a different level, the Sultan tried to secure his position with Bangkok by constantly reassuring them of his loyalty. When the Sultan heard that the Kralahome, the Minister of the South, had been complaining that he had not come to Bangkok to visit the King, he immediately wrote a letter explaining that illness had prevented him from doing so and taking the opportunity of reaffirming his absolute loyalty to King Chulalongkorn.<sup>13</sup> When the Siamese southern provinces came under the control of the Ministry of Interior and Monthon Saiburi (Kedah) was created, Sultan Abdul Hamid became Chao Phraya Ritsongkhram-ramphakdi and he was made the High Commissioner of the new Monthon.<sup>14</sup> The Sultan, on receiving the new honour and promotion, wrote immediately to the King expressing his gratitude and reiterating that he did "not think in two or three ways but concentrates on being a loyal subject to Your Majesty in this and in future generations."<sup>15</sup> This trend was maintained by Raja Muda Abdul Aziz when he was running the country. In fact he very frequently went to Bangkok to discuss various matters and sometimes stayed on for several months.

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11) SC/13 Sultan to Phraya Wichiankhiri, 17 Shawal 1310 (3 May 1893).

12) SC/13 Sultan to Kralahome, 12 Muharram 1311 (26 July 1893).

13) SC/13 Sultan to Kralahome (undated).

14) Between 1892 and 1899, the Ministry of Interior began to integrate the administration of the southern tributary states into the Thesaphiban system of administration. The Ministry was not satisfied with the partial integration of some of the tributary states and outer provinces and wanted to increase its control over them. It was hoped that this would help in the defence of the territorial integrity of Siam against French and British pressure. Furthermore, it would ensure their loyalty and also supply resources for the reforms undertaken throughout the kingdom at this time. Consequently, Kelantan and Trengganu were placed under the supervision of the permanent commissioner of Phuket in 1895. In 1897, Kedah, Perlis and Setul (Satun) were formed into Monthon Saiburi.

15) SC/13 Sultan to King Chulalongkorn (undated).

There were also some members of the Kedah royal family who lived permanently in Bangkok, like Tengku Thiauddin and Tengku Yusof. Yet others were sent to Bangkok to be educated and trained. The Sultan for instance wrote to Prince Damrong in 1897 asking the Siamese government to send back his brother so that he could assist the Raja Muda to govern the country.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of all these ties, the degree of autonomy enjoyed by Kedah was great and real.<sup>17</sup> In the economic affairs of the country, Bangkok did periodically ask for certain reports such as the number of opium dens in Kedah, and information on how the commutation tax was collected.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes too, Siamese officials came to check the finances of Kedah as when Prince Narathip Praphanphong, the Minister of Finance, visited the western seaboard provinces to inspect their financial state of affairs.<sup>18a</sup> Other than these occasions, there was no Siamese interference at all in Kedah's economic affairs. On the contrary the Siamese showed a great deal of tolerance and understanding regarding the country's economic policies. For instance, in 1857 and again in 1867 the British officials in the Straits complained to Bangkok that Kedah had infringed treaty agreements with the British by, among other things, levying too high a duty on cattle, grain and other exports to Penang and Province Wellesley.<sup>19</sup> The

16) SC/13 Sultan to Damrong 13 Jamadil Akhir 1315 (9 November 1897).

17) The tributary states like Kedah, unlike the inner provinces of the Siamese kingdom, owed allegiance to Bangkok because they could not withstand Siamese military power. But because these tributary states were far away from the centre, bordering on foreign controlled territories, the Siamese government was forced to tolerate the high degree of independence enjoyed by these states. See Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam from 1892-1915: A Study of the Creation, the Growth, the Achievements and the Implication for Modern Siam*, of the Ministry of the Interior under Prince Damrong Rachanuphap.-(D.Phil. Oxford 1968). pp. 56-66.

18) SC/13 Phraya Montri Suriwong to Sultan 15 August 1890.

18a) SC/13 Prince Narathip Praphanphong to Sultan 13 Ramathan 1310 (30 March 1893).

19) The duties imposed by Kedah were indeed much heavier than those of other states. For example, supplies of cattle came mainly from Patani, Songkhla (Singgora) and Ligor and these states charged a transit duty of 30 cents per head of cattle leaving their territory. Setul and Perlis levied a similar duty of 50 cents. But Kedah imposed three different levies on cattle before they were allowed to cross the Muda River into Province Wellesley. These were: (a) Hasil Raja (a levy for export) of \$1 per head of cattle  
 (b) Hasil Chap (a levy for burning a mark on the horn to indicate that the Hasil Raja has been paid) of 25 cents per head.  
 (c) Hasil Tebing (a levy paid to the Customs Housekeeper for leaving the bank to cross the river) of 3 cents per head.

CO237/13 Ord to C.O. 31 December 1867.

Siamese recognized that this was an infringement but as Phraya Suriwongse explained to the British Consul in Bangkok, Kedah was a small country whose trade was almost wholly with Penang and since the revenue derived from her own natural resources was limited, he requested the British to "have a little consideration for that country, so that she may not lose all the advantages which now accrue from her scanty resources".<sup>20</sup>

During the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid, he exercised absolute control over the financial affairs of the state. This was a fact which surprised the local British officials especially those who tended to look upon the Siamese as ruthless overlords. Even Swettenham, the most powerful and persistent critic of the Siamese, had to admit that Kedah did not have to send any part of her revenue to Bangkok. And despite various pessimistic British reports that Kedah's economic independence was bound to tempt Siamese intervention, this never materialized. In fact even during the years after 1890 when Kedah was slowly but steadily heading towards bankruptcy, Bangkok remained on the sidelines.

This did not mean, however, that Kedah never took the Siamese factor into consideration. The Kedah authorities were in fact very conscious that the Siamese could intervene if they wanted to and so, in some areas at least, reference was made to Bangkok. This was particularly so in the area of granting land concessions. In this field, the Sultan or the Raja Muda could issue land grants to whosoever applied for them, and the concessionaire needed only to get Bangkok's ratification. But in almost all cases such applications were referred to the Siamese whose decision was unquestioned by Kedah. One such example was the application of Behn Meyer and Company in 1899 for certain rights and monopolies on the island of Langkawi. The Raja Muda was favourably disposed to issue a grant but caution prompted him to forward a draft agreement to Bangkok first, who refused to give its sanction.

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20) CO273/Phraya Sri Suriwongse to Knox 9 October 1866.



As in economic administration, Kedah was also left almost alone as far as political control of the country was concerned.<sup>21</sup> But here too, there were several factors which worked towards making Kedah constantly conscious of the presence of the Siamese overlord. The Sultan, when explaining the state of affairs in Kedah to Swettenham, informed him that the Siamese did not interfere in the administration of the country although they often sent various orders for things to be done. Siamese influence, the Sultan said, would really be exercised and felt when a difficulty arose about succession or if there was a serious quarrel between members of the reigning family.<sup>22</sup> There were, in addition to the Sultan's description, certain other checks and balances which served to emphasize the Siamese ultimate authority. In the first place appointments of senior Malay officials in Kedah had to be sanctioned by Bangkok. A much more formidable factor was the presence of the Siamese Consul in Penang, which is only 60 miles away from Alor Star. That Kedah kept in very close touch with the Consul can be seen in the amount of correspondence between the two. It is clear too that the Consul was constantly consulted on a whole range of matters and his advice was asked for on both economic and political issues. In addition, Siamese officials made occasional visits to Kedah and the Kedah authorities also regularly went to Bangkok for consultation; all of which tended to keep the country in check.

Yet another link between Bangkok and Alor Star was the innumerable written instructions sent out by the Siamese. The Sultan's Letter Books are full of references relating to the arrival of *Surat tera* (official letters),<sup>23</sup> One such example was the Royal

- 21) Kedah and other tributary states, like the provinces, has control over the personnel of their governments. The Siamese allowed succession to pass to the most influential member of the family, and the Ruler then recommended the government to appoint his relations to the most senior offices in his administration. The Ruler did not, however, need to get approval in the appointment of junior officials.
- 22) CO273/162 Report of Swettenham's Visit to Kedah 23 November 1889.
- 23) The Malay letters unfortunately do not give any details of the Siamese official letters. References to them are generally indirect, in the form of instructions from Alor Star to district chiefs informing them of the arrival of the *surat tera*, and requesting them either to come to the capital, or to make necessary preparations in the districts,

Decree dated 16 November 1874 which was sent to all the southern Siamese Malay States regarding trading activities between these states and foreign powers. Apparently many confused agreements had been entered into, some of which conflicted with Siam's general treaties with other powers and this had created embarrassment and difficulty in Bangkok. It was to avoid further occurrences of this that King Chulalongkorn decreed that his southern provinces must distinguish two different classes of Agreements; Public Agreements that concerned Siam such as working of forests, mining and tax farming, and Private Agreements, relating to the buying and selling of different articles. In the case of Public Agreements reference must be made to Bangkok so that the relevant minister could ratify the agreement. Private Agreements could be entered upon freely provided they were not contrary to established laws.<sup>24</sup>

It is difficult to assess how seriously official instructions from Bangkok were taken in Kedah. Some, like orders to work on telegraph lines, the supply of an entourage and elephants to receive or send Siamese officials, were promptly carried out. Certain of the *surat tera* were received with pomp and ceremony in Alor Star; others demanded the presence of district chiefs and *penghulus* (village headmen) who had to be briefed about the instructions. The majority of these letters seemed to have been passed on to the district chiefs and here it is difficult to ascertain what action was taken. If they were in turn sent on to the *penghulus*, it is likely that no action was taken as most of the *penghulus* were illiterate. But if the Siamese letters contained information about the arrival of Siamese officials in Kedah, these at once received immediate attention. Orders went out from Alor Star for district chiefs to raise *kerah* labour for such works as building new structures, repairing bridges and roads, and preparing for celebrations. There were of course a great number of decisions taken by Kedah which ran counter to Siamese instructions. For instance the 1874 decree specifically forbade the signing of tax farming agreements without reference to Bangkok. But in Kedah many of these agreements

24) CO273/286 (Enclosure) Decree Concerning Provincial Governors who shall make Arrangements with Subjects of Foreign Countries, 16 November 1874.

were entered into directly between the Sultan and the Chinese revenue farmers. Likewise alterations to such agreements, particularly when the Sultan was in financial difficulties, were sometimes made independently of Bangkok. But there was also a limit to such independence; so long as Siam did not raise objections, Kedah felt safe enough to pursue her own way. But once opposition was shown, they were equally quick to step down. For instance, when the Khaluang (Governor) of Songkhla complained of the large numbers of undesirable elements entering his territory because gambling farms were mushrooming in northern Kedah, the Raja Muda immediately abolished these farms in places like Jitra, Teming, Sedau, Padang Terap and Tai.<sup>25</sup> Also there were some decisions which the Sultan felt better not to make on his own. For example, when the Resident of Perak wanted to construct a pipeline to bring water from Bukit Panchor in Kedah to Parit Buntar in Perak, the Sultan referred the matter to Bangkok. In this particular case, the Siamese authorities decided to leave the project to the Sultan's discretion.<sup>26</sup>

Over the question of succession in Kedah, the Siamese really exercised absolute control.<sup>27</sup> Both Sultan Zainal Rashid Muazzam Shah (1843-1854) and Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah (1854-1879) were appointed by the Siamese. The complete recognition of Siamese right in this matter was illustrated in 1879. In that year Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin died leaving behind two very young sons, Tengku Putra aged 16 and Tengku Hamid aged 12. It was known in Kedah that one or the other of the two princes would eventually become Sultan but in the meantime, during their minority, it was thought that one of the late Sultan's brothers would act as Regent. The immediate members of the ruling house were in favour of Tengku Thiauddin (the eldest brother of the late Sultan) becoming Regent. But at the same time they were unsure of Siamese reaction because the Siamese had previously appointed Tengku Yaacob (Sultan Ahmad

25) SC/7 Raja Muda to Tengku Yaacob 23 Zulhijjah 1314 (25 May 1897).

26) SC/1 Sultan to Swettenham, 26 Rabial Akhir 1307 (17 December 1889), 17 Rejab 1307 (18 March 1890).

27) This applied also to the appointment of Raja Muda. For example, when Raja Muda Abdul Aziz died in 1907, the Sultan appointed Tengku Mahmud to act temporarily while waiting for a decision from Siam.

Tajuddin's second brother) as Raja Muda when Tengku Thiauddin was the Viceroy in Selangor. It was decided that it would be wiser to let the Siamese settle this issue. So the three brothers wrote to Bangkok informing them that the two young princes would be going to seek an audience with the King. As an interim measure, the Siamese decided that Tengku Yaacob would act as Regent but as he too was coming to Bangkok, Tengku Thiauddin would act temporarily in that capacity.<sup>28</sup> In December 1879, the Siamese finalized their arrangements whereby all the three brothers of the late Sultan were elevated in status. Tengku Thiauddin and Tengku Yusof were appointed as "protectors and advisers" carrying out duties under the leadership of Tengku Yaacob.<sup>29</sup> This triumvirate governed Kedah till 1882 when Tengku Abdul Hamid was installed by the Siamese as the next Sultan.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, there is one other area which illustrates the nature of Siamese control over Kedah; that of the external relations of Kedah. The best example of this was when Sir Harry Ord in 1867 entered into direct negotiations with Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin for the purpose of amending the Treaty of 1800 relating to the questions of trade and the adjustment of the frontier with Province Wellesley. These negotiations had in fact started during Cavenagh's governorship but he had failed to make any headway. Ord was fortunate to have the services of the Siamese Consul in Singapore, Tan Kim Cheng, who was a trusted adviser of the Sultan of Kedah. It was through him that the Sultan was persuaded to go to Singapore to discuss the various problems in the relationship between Kedah and Penang. Out of this meeting a memorandum of agreement was reached whereby new scales of levies on exports from Kedah were fixed. In addition it was agreed that opium, liquor or gambling farms would not be allowed to operate within two miles of the boundary, and the boundary between

28) CO273/99 Chao Phraya Suriwongse Phra Kalahome to T.G. Knox, 13 August 1879.

29) CO273/100 Chao Phraya Suriwongse Phra Kalahome to Newman, 12 December 1879.

30) CO273/114 Chao Phraya Suriwongse Phra Kalahome to Tan Kim Cheng, 20 March 1882.

Kedah and Province Wellesley itself would be redrawn.<sup>31</sup> But this was as far as the Sultan felt that he could safely act on his own. When Ord met the Sultan again at Penang in December 1867, he brought with him a draft treaty which included not only what was agreed upon in Singapore but also a redrafting of those parts of the 1800 Treaty not superceded by the Memoranda, plus a new clause covering the mutual extradition of criminals and accused persons.<sup>32</sup> To this new document, the Sultan absolutely refused to put his signature, much to the annoyance of Ord. But this was really to be expected. The Sultan had not so far consulted Bangkok about the proceedings, possibly because he felt that the issues raised in the Memoranda were concerned only with local matters; but now, confronted with a full scale treaty, he simply was not willing to risk Siamese displeasure. The Sultan therefore asked for a copy of the new document so that he could send it on to Bangkok. Ord, however, interpreted this turn of events as a breach of faith on the part of the Sultan, and he promptly suspended relations with Kedah and stopped the annual payment of \$10,000 to her.<sup>33</sup> The whole affair soon reached the ears of the Siamese and it became necessary for them to intervene. King Mongkut in March 1868 wrote to the British Consul in Bangkok telling him that he had been informed by the "regent of the southern provinces Siam and of all the Malayan states which enjoy Siamese protection" of the dispute between Kedah and the Straits Settlements.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly he had appointed two commissioners to deal with the problem, having full authority to arrange and

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31) CO273/13. Memo of Agreement between H.E. Governor of the Straits Settlements and H.H. Raja of Kedah to be substituted for the treaty with Ligor (Siam) dated 2nd day of November 1831 which defines the eastern boundary of Province Wellesley and in modification of the treaty between Great Britain and the Kingdom of Kedah confirmed by the Governor General in Council in the month of November, 1802-19 September 1867.

32) CO273/13 (Enclosure) Treaty entered into by Sir H. Ord and Yang di-Pertuan of Kedah subject to the approval and ratification of the King of Siam in substitution of former treaties, 1786, 1791, and 1802 and also in cancellation of the treaty with Ligor, Siam in 1831. 31 December 1867.

33) CO273/13 Ord to C.O. 31 December 1867.

34) CO273/13 Mongkut to Knox 18 March 1868.

decide the questions of import and export duties, boundary difficulties and any other issue that needed settlement. After some delay, the two commissioners arrived in Singapore in March 1868 and having made certain changes in the draft treaty, both sides came to agreement. In the context of our discussion, what was significant to note was that in all these deliberations, the Sultan of Kedah, although he was present, neither participated nor was consulted in any way by the Commissioners. As Ord wrote in his report to the Colonial Office, "Kelantan like Trengganu and Kedah is understood to be tributary to Siam. I do not know exactly what is the authority exercised over it by the Siamese government but from the manner in which the Commissioners dealt with questions in which these states were involved, it is clear that they assumed the right to act for the Rajas without asking their consent and they anticipated no difficulty or defection on the part of these rulers... The Raja of Kedah who was present at the interview at Singapore took no part in the discussion and my offer to accept a modified boundary was acceded to by the Commissioners without their making any reference to him".<sup>35</sup>

The position of Kedah in relation to Siam was therefore one which was entirely dependent on the attitude of the Siamese. When they decided to leave Kedah alone, as was the case most of the time, Kedah enjoyed a tremendous degree of freedom. But when at times Siam did intervene in the country's affairs there was nothing which Kedah could do but to accept the will of the Siamese. The fact that the Siamese did not interfere much at all in Kedah seems to have been partly due to the belief that there was very little tangible benefit which Siam could derive from the State. As King Chulalongkorn wrote after his visit to the Siamese Malay states in 1891, "we have no particular interest in the states... If we lost them to England we would miss only the *Bunga Mas*. Apart from this there would not be any material loss. However, it is bad for the prestige of the nation. That is why we have to strengthen our hold over this part of the territory..."<sup>36</sup> Sultan Abdul Hamid was fond of giving a

35) CO273/13 Ord to C.O. 8 April 1868.

36) Quoted in Numnonda, *op. cit.* p. 200.

different impression regarding his country's relationship with Siam. For instance, in 1901, when he was in Singapore on the occasion of Chulalongkorn's visit, the Sultan had an interview with Swettenham. Among other things the Sultan said that Kelantan and Trengganu had only themselves to blame if Siam was hard on them because they had given way. According to him, the Siamese always advanced along the line of least resistance and pressed those who gave way, but that they had left Kedah alone because he refused to be interfered with.<sup>37</sup> The facts, however, have shown that in this matter the initiative did not lie with Kedah at all and the Malay authorities recognized this. Indeed, this was a predominant factor underlying Kedah's concern for stability and orderly government, so that the Siamese would stay out of her affairs and leave her in a state of virtual independence.<sup>38</sup>

The ability of Kedah to survive independently of Siam was not destined, however, to continue unhampered. From the last decade of the nineteenth century circumstances began to change and this period marked the beginning of the end to Kedah's political independence. In 1892 King Chulalongkorn introduced a policy of centralization throughout the country. One of the changes was the reorganization of the provinces under the direct control of the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>39</sup> The provinces were now grouped into Circles (Monthon) each with a High Commissioner (Khaluang Thesaphiban) appointed by the Minister of Interior. It was under this new scheme that Kedah, Perlis and Setul were regrouped into Monthon Saiburi with the Sultan of Kedah as its High Commissioner. In this same

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37) CO273/273 Swettenham to C.O. 23 July 1901.

38) The primary reason for Siam's decision to stay out of Kedah's affairs was because she was afraid that the British would be antagonized if she did not. The Ministry of the Interior was aware of the importance of pleasing Britain as Siam depended on Britain to maintain Siam's independence and territorial integrity. Prince Damrong saw the need to "cultivate and oblige Great Britain, so that she might help to protect (Siam) against France, and must carefully avoid any incident which might provoke her hostility". See Bunnag, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-46.

39) Prior to this, the Siamese provinces and dependencies were under the control of three Ministries, Ministry of War, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior.

context of administrative centralization, the Siamese government also began an extensive programme of railway construction connecting Bangkok with her provinces in the north, east and south-west. It was believed that, in addition to centralizing political control, improved communications would also bring economic benefits. By the same reasoning, the Siamese were also eager to push railway connections with her provinces and dependencies in the Malay Peninsula. This was made the more imperative as the only means of reaching these areas was by sea, which made them even more distant and therefore less valuable to Siam economically and politically.<sup>40</sup>

With particular reference to Kedah, the Siamese had been unhappy with the state of affairs there for some time. As H.G. Scott, the Director of the Siamese Department of Mines observed, the condition prevailing in Kedah, whereby the nature of the Sultan's status in relation to the Siamese and the British remained loose and undefined, could not go on without leading to serious difficulties.<sup>41</sup> He was thinking particularly of the position regarding the granting of land concessions as an area which could easily develop political complications which Siam would not be able to avoid. For although the Sultan had to refer all important issues to Bangkok, there was nothing to stop him granting tentative concessions, and this could put Siam in a delicate position should she choose not to sanction such a concession. In addition to this problem Kedah was at this time getting deeper and deeper into debt, and since Kedah's creditors were largely foreign nationals and companies, Siam was worried about the possible political implications of this economic mess.

For a long time Siam was reluctant to take any action for fear that it would bring about a reaction from the British. In this sense, 1902 proved to be a major turning point in Siamese policy. This was mainly due to a change in British policy towards the northern Malay states. The Anglo-French Declaration of 1896 had satisfied

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40) It took about four to five days to reach Kelantan and Trengganu from Bangkok by sea. In the case of Kedah the journey took twice as long as one had to go via Singapore and Penang.

41) CO273/303 Beckett to C.O. 29 October 1904.



the British that France would not be a threat to British interests in the Malay Peninsula. This was further enhanced by the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897. All this culminated in the Anglo-Siamese Agreement of 1902 relating to Kelantan and Trengganu. These developments also brought Siamese fear of British intentions in her Malay dependencies to a new height. There was fear, for instance, that the next British target would be Kedah, and so before the British could act, Siam decided to step in first. In October 1904, H.G. Scott<sup>42</sup> raised the question of the status of the Sultan of Kedah with Beckett, the British Minister in Bangkok. According to Scott, the situation in Kedah had become acute; the Sultan was half-mad, the state was heavily in debt, and instead of the revenues of the state showing any balance as they should, they were being mortgaged away. At the same time the Sultan was beset by concession hunters. As Siam did not interfere with Kedah's administration, she had no means of knowing what was being done there, and hence feared complications not only in connection with concessions, but also that the Straits government might persuade the Sultan to take some action which might be prejudicial to Siamese interests. Consequently, Scott indicated that the Siamese government was interested in proposing the appointment of a Resident or Adviser in Kedah with similar duties to that held by the Adviser to the Sultan of Kelantan.<sup>43</sup>

The reaction of local British officials to the Siamese proposal was one of apprehension. Barnes, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs in the Straits Settlements, suggested to Sir John Anderson that the British should quickly appoint an Adviser to the Sultan of Kedah and also to advance a loan to him.<sup>44</sup> The loudest opposition came from Anderson himself. Writing to Mr. Lyttleton of the Colonial Office, the Governor argued that Siam was determined to encroach on the independence of Kedah for fear that the British would extend their influence into the state. Furthermore, Anderson claimed that Siam

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42) Scott was on very close terms with Prince Damrong, the Minister of Interior, who constantly consulted him on a variety of political questions. In view of this, Scott's views were indicative of official Siamese policy.

43) FO422/58 Beckett to F.O. 29 October 1904.

44) FO422/59 Barnes to Anderson 21 January 1905.

was fully aware of the tremendous progress achieved in the Federated Malay States, while states like Kedah were in a deplorable condition under the Siamese, and fearful of their encroachment. Thus he believed that the appointment a Siamese official of British nationality in Kedah would be disastrous not only to the state, but also to British interests in the Peninsula.<sup>45</sup> The Foreign Office, however, viewed the situation differently. As they saw it, although the Siamese government had hitherto refrained from interfering in the internal affairs of Kedah, this did not retract the fact that Kedah was a dependency of Siam, and this was recognized by Britain. Lord Landsdowne therefore felt that if the Siamese wanted to send an Adviser to Kedah it would be very difficult for the British to oppose it successfully.<sup>46</sup> As a Foreign Office minute put it, "This country (Britain) holds towards Kelantan and Trengganu under the terms of the 1826 Treaty a position which she cannot claim to hold towards the other Siamese Malay states. Therefore, the British government can hardly deny to Siam in Kedah rights which had been conceded to her in states enjoying a far greater measure of independence".<sup>47</sup> This view was also held by Ralph Paget, the British Minister in Bangkok, who in commenting on Anderson's objections pointed out that, in the case of Kedah, the Siamese could well have proceeded without consulting the British at all. In any case, he could not see how the British government could effectively object to a proposal which was intended for the improvement of the administration of a part of their own dominion. Any objection would be the more ridiculous since the British had insisted on the appointment of an Adviser in Kelantan.<sup>48</sup> The Colonial Office alone took the view that no sufficient reason had been shown to justify any interference in Kedah. And since King Chulalongkorn himself had considered in 1901 that Kedah was exceptionally well governed, perhaps the British government should discourage the appointment of an Adviser.<sup>49</sup>

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45) CO273/303 Anderson to C.O. 30 November 1904.

46) CO273/303 F.O. Memoranda 27 December 1904.

47) CO273/314 F.O. Minute on Siamese Adviser in Kedah, 12 April 1905.

48) CO273/314 Paget to F.O. 25 January 1905, 8 March 1905.

49) CO273/303 C.O. Memoranda 30 November 1904.

The situation took a new turn in March 1905 when Raja Muda, Tengku Abdul Aziz, went to Bangkok with a letter from the Sultan together with other documents relating to the critical financial position of Kedah. Tengku Abdul Aziz saw Prince Damrong, through whom he sought a loan and the appointment of a Financial Adviser. In addition, because of the Sultan's ill-health, it was also suggested that a Council of Four should be created to administer the country.<sup>50</sup> As a result of this new development, even Governor Anderson had

50) A great deal of doubt exists regarding the spontaneity of the Raja Muda's mission to Bangkok. For one thing the Sultan's letter which was brought along by the Raja Muda asking for a loan, a Financial Adviser, and a State Council was unsigned. Considering the jealousy with which Kedah had always valued her independence, it was not likely that their rulers would have taken the initiative on such a radical measure. An indication of Siamese pressure in this matter was seen when Mr. Williamson, the Siamese Financial Adviser, in advising the appointment of a Financial Commissioner to Kedah, explained that this would be "a bitter pill for the Sultan to swallow". He also believed that as the financial situation of the state gradually improved, the Sultan and other members of the ruling family would grow reconciled to the partial diminution of authority which the proposal entailed. Even clearer evidence of this was manifested in two memoranda written by Williamson on the Financial Affairs of Kedah in April 1905. In these reports Williamson warned Prince Damrong that, in view of the financial mess which Kedah had got into, the Siamese government should not agree to any loan unless an arrangement could be made whereby the absolute control of the finances of the state be bestowed on an officer appointed by Siam. This according to Williamson was necessary in order to ensure a definite guarantee that the finances of the state would be properly looked after in the future, and that no fresh debts would be incurred without the prior knowledge and consent of the Siamese government. In the second memorandum, it was clear that Prince Damrong had told Williamson that the conditions of the loan would be the appointment of a European Financial Adviser, as well as the creation of a Council of not more than five members, whose duty it was to control the revenue and expenditure of Kedah. Furthermore, this had been explained to the Raja Muda by Prince Damrong. Although the Raja Muda thought that the Sultan would object to such arrangements, he promised to persuade him to accept them. Thus, the real position seemed to have been that Siamese apprehension of British opposition to their scheme made them fear that the Straits government would press for the absorption of the Siamese Malay states. Hence, they decided to act first, and in this they were invaluablely helped by Kedah's impending bankruptcy.

See, FO422/59 Williamson's Memorandas Respecting Kedah's Financial Affairs, 6 1905, 19 April 1905.

CO273/314 Paget to F.O. 31 March 1905.

FO422/59 Paget to F.O. 20 July 1905.

to admit that if the Sultan of Kedah was a party to the application, then the Siamese proposal could not be opposed. However, he insisted that the British government should see the terms of any agreement between the Siamese and Kedah. In particular he wanted the British to obtain assurances on three points; firstly that the government of Kedah be left in the hands of the local authorities; secondly, that the Adviser would be removed once the debt was repaid; and, finally, that the Adviser and his assistant must be of British nationality whose appointment and removal should be subject to British approval.<sup>51</sup> The Siamese accepted the first two demands but were rightly indignant at the third. As they explained, there was no need for such an assurance because the appointment had no political significance, but was merely a business precaution adopted to secure the Siamese government against loss in making the loan. The Foreign Office itself felt that Anderson's last demand was unreasonable, and that as long as the Adviser was of British nationality and the Siamese government consulted the British Minister in Bangkok, unofficially, in the case of each appointment, the British could ask for no more.<sup>52</sup> These guarantees were readily acceptable to the Siamese. Paget further assured the Foreign Office that he did not think the Siamese government would wish to impose undue interference in Kedah. On the contrary the Siamese General Adviser, Strobel, had informed him that Prince Damrong himself did not favour too much interference as he still wanted to keep Kedah as a buffer between Siamese and British influence in the Malay Peninsula.<sup>53</sup>

It was finally in June 16, 1905 that the Kedah Loan Agreement was signed. By this agreement, Siam undertook to lend Kedah a loan of \$2.6 million at 6% interest per annum. In return for this, Kedah was to accept, until the loan had been entirely repaid, the services of an Adviser to be appointed by the Siamese government who would

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51) FO422/59 Anderson to C.O. 29 March 1905.

52) FO422/59 Landsdowne to Paget 7 July 1905.

53) FO422/59 Paget to F.O. 21 June 1905.

assist in the financial administration of the state.<sup>54</sup> With the signing of this Agreement ended also the phase of Kedah history which began in 1842 when she had conducted her own affairs very much in her own fashion. In particular, this marked also the end of the absolute control of the Sultan over the affairs of his state.

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54) The British, in order to counter-balance this increase of Siamese influence, urgently revived the old idea of appointing a British Consul in Kedah in order to watch over British interests. So in December 1905, Mr. Meadows Frost, who had served in the Federated Malay States since 1898, was appointed the first British Consul in Kedah.

