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A HISTORY OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN SARAWAK: THE ORIGINS OF SUPREME COUNCIL AND COUNCIL NEGERI

Sanib bin Haji Said

THE BRUNEI PERIOD

It is not always known to the world that Brunei was once of the dominant early empires in the Malay Archipelago.¹ Perhaps from the 11th century Brunei had already became a huge empire that straddled from Sambas in the southwest to Luzon in the northeast of the Malay Archipelago. Strong and famous the Brunei Sultanate had political and economic relations with China. The other parts of the Malay Archipelago came under the Indonesian empires of Srivijaya and Majapahit in the south while the northwest was verily under Melaka and Johor-Riau empires throughout its history until the advent of European powers in the 17th century.

One of the Brunei Sultanate was the territory in the Sarawak river basin which was accordingly called Sarawak. Under the Brunei Sultanate administrative system Sarawak was classified as *kerajaan*, a territory directly under the reigning sultan. Administrative powers were given to the sultan, including the right to collect taxes and the discharging of laws.

Since the reigning sultan was preoccupied with ruling the whole of the big empire local chieftains were normally appointed to administer Sarawak. Hence the sultan created local administration by the appointment of Datu Patinggi, Datu Bandar, Datu Iman and Datu Temenggong.

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JAMES BROOKE AND THE MAKING OF SARAWAK

The 19th century Europe was at the height of the Industrial Revolution and overseas imperialism. Earlier colonies were extracted and exploited and there was the so-called scramble for colonies among European powers all over the world. Thus, it was a prosperous age for the Europeans and great advancement in sciences and arts. Young and ambitious new middle class were competing to make it into history.

James Brooke, the son of a fairly well-to-do family of British colonial servants was one of those ambitious young English. When his father died he seemed to inherit a comfortable shares of his father's estate. Born in India of mixed parentage, James Brooke was destined to be another soldier in the East India Company army in India. He was doing well until he was shot in the groin in a war in Burma. He recuperated back in England but found that he had lost his manhood. So ended his career in the army and his father also died while he was recuperating. Since then he took a new interest and planned a trip to the East which was then famous for spices, porcelain and other raw products to satisfy the industrial machines and people of Europe.

With the inheritance money James Brooke bought a brand new ship he named *Royalist* and a few crew members. His plan was simply to explore the East. He set sailed and reached Singapore in 1839. Providence had it that James Brooke was asked to convey the British government missive of thanks to Pengiran Muda Hashim in Sarawak for saving a few English sailors shipwrecked near the coast of Sarawak. He sailed to Sarawak and delivered the letter to Raja Muda Hashim and discovered that the Brunei's noble was facing a civil war. He was told that the civil war was just a child play and he left to continue his voyage to Sulawesi and the Spice Islands nearby.

On the way back the *Royalist* sailed to Sarawak because James Brooke wanted to see how his new-found friend, Raja Muda Hashim, dealt with the civil war. To his surprise the war was still