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THE MIRI *TULIN* AND A RAJAH'S PROMISE

Earl of Cranbrook

BACKGROUND

In 2008, during the clearance of a family house prior to sale, a small cheap brown cardboard suitcase was discovered in the attic. This proved to contain seventeen old files touching on aspects of Sarawak administration during the Brooke era and early years of Colony status. The owner of the house had no idea how these papers came into the possession of her late husband, who had never mentioned them. Knowing my interest in Sarawak matters, she handed the suitcase to me and asked me to deal with its contents appropriately.

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The first that I have looked at in detail, Chief Secretary's Office file no. 793, *Miri Cession Money*, provides the main subject matter of the following pages. Although much of the paper is foxed and some pages are very fragile, the file is in good order. The contents are numbered in sequence, in red crayon on the top right corner, from the oldest at the back. As might be expected, typical inclusions comprise originals of incoming correspondence or internal memoranda, sometimes with enclosures, and carbon copies of replies, sometimes annotated.

I am grateful to Dato Sri Haji Arni Lampam, Dr Robert Reece and Dr Jeyamalar K.Wells, who read and commented helpfully on a first draft of this paper; to Dyg. Masnah Badarudin, who provided information on usage of the appellation *Jawatan* in Brunei Darussalam, and to Michael Williams, who kindly abstracted information on past officers of the Brooke regime from Batty-Smith (1999).

Territorial accessions to Sarawak and *tulin* rights

According to Tarling (1971, p. 4) at the 19th-century court of

Brunei, the Sultan was assisted administratively by four senior officials, *wazir*, "with rather vague central governmental functions", Bendahara, Temenggong, Di Gadong and Pemancha, along with a number of lesser ministers or *cheteria* (like the *wazir*, being men of noble blood, i.e., *pengiran*) and some non-noble officers, *menteri*. At the local level throughout the territory under Brunei suzerainty along the northwest coast of Borneo, governance was ordered through a variety of personal rights.

The system was explained by Sultan Abdul Mumin himself, in 1881, in a letter to the then British Consul-General and Governor of Labuan, C. C. Leys (Brown, 1974). Some territories, rivers and subject people, designated *kerajaan*, were under the direct control of the Sultan as Ruler, who collected revenue from them. Rights to these locations remained crown property, and could only be passed to his successor. Other localities (and people) designated *kuripan*, were the Ruler's by default but allocated to a high officer of the state (*wazir* or *kepala menteri*) during his term of office. The remaining districts, denoted by rivers (or, on a smaller scale by *pengkalan*) and subject people, *tulin sungei* and *tulin hamba*, respectively, were appanages of the Royal House but, once gifted by a Ruler, thereafter became the hereditary entitlements of the recipients, normally members of the ruling family or other *pengiran*. A *tulin* owner therefore had the capacity, if not an obligation, to bequeath possession to his heirs¹. In the same letter, by listing his own inherited properties, the Sultan made clear that a Ruler would naturally own extensive personal *tulin* rights by descent². A *tulin* owner had exclusive rights to the collection of revenue and control of the populace. The extent of control by the Ruler in *tulin* properties lay solely in his ability to impress his wishes on the owner, who was expected to give effect to the royal command.

As a consequence of this devolved system of administration, in the course of negotiating successive territorial enlargements of Sarawak from 1882 to 1905, Rajah Charles Brooke was obliged to reach agreement not only with the Sultan in his capacity as Ruler