

ABU BAKAR AND THE SINGAPORE AUTHORITY: THE COLONIAL TRAJECTORY OF ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of Johor's economic dependence on the British in Singapore as a means of preserving the internal independence of Johor during the reign of Abu Bakar. It re-examines the general consensus among historians who credit Abu Bakar's distinctive reputation as the main reason for his ability to resist British intrusion into Johor despite the state's proximity to Singapore the seat of power of British imperialism in Southeast Asia. This general consensus is subjected to further examination as it suggests that relations between Johor and the British in Singapore were extensively preoccupied by political rather than economic issues. In reality, economic imperialism actually preceded political imperialism or colonial expansion. It is evident that the British authority as a whole was more concerned with the economic aspects as the main criteria in formulating their policy towards the Malay states. Hence, it is argued here that Johor was allowed to retain its internal independence as long as it became an economic dependency of the British in Singapore.

Keywords: Abu Bakar, colonial trajectory, economic dependency, Johor, Singapore.

Introduction

Johor, the southern-most state in Peninsular Malaysia, is a creation of the 19th century and not an ancient political entity. It was originally called Peninsular Johor, being one of the domains in the traditional Malay empire of Johor-Riau. However, in 1824, this empire formally collapsed when it was divided into two parts by the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty. Consequently, its domains in the Malay Peninsula, particularly Johor and Pahang, were left within the British sphere while Riau-Lingga came under Dutch control.¹ The British under the authority of the East India Company adopted the policy of promoting the Temenggong dynasty in Johor in order to demonstrate the legitimacy and independence of Johor as a counter to the other government under Dutch control in Lingga. This status-quo provided an opportunity for Johor to emerge as an autonomous and independent state under the reigns of the descendants of Temenggong Abdul Rahman; first his son, Daing Ibrahim (1825-62), and his grandson, Abu Bakar (Maharaja, later Sultan) (1862-95).

In this context, the relations between Johor and Singapore especially during Abu Bakar's reign is historically significant because it is related to his reputation in resisting colonial

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intrusion despite Johor's proximity to Singapore as the seat of power of British imperialism in Southeast Asia. Most historians such as Rupert Emerson, Eunice Thio, Keith Sinclair and J. M. Gullick have highlighted Abu Bakar's political talents in governing the state, his visits to England and his close relations with the English Royal House as well as his diplomatic skill against authorities in Singapore and the Colonial Office in London, as being mainly responsible for preserving Johor's internal independence.² Their view is perhaps justified by his ability to resist pressure from Governor Frederick Weld to appoint a British Resident in Johor in 1884-85 and a British Agent with Consular powers in 1886-87.³ However, the economic dependence of Johor on Singapore as an equally strong explanation in the preservation of Johor's internal independence is often overlooked. The significance of the economic element in this context is manifested by the fact that the British authorities in Singapore, India and London had adopted such a policy to promote a strong enlightened independent ruler who was able to accommodate their commercial interests. This was acknowledged by Turnbull but was not developed by her as she treated the historical development in the 1860s as a separate economic matter.⁴ C. A. Trocki, on the other hand, argues that Johor under Abu Bakar was virtually the creation of Singapore, as it was made to be economically dependent on Singapore although it enjoyed a greater degree of political independence.⁵ Hence, it can be seen that Johor was allowed to retain its internal independence as long as it became an economic dependency of the British in Singapore. This discussion is based on the historical development of the relations between Abu Bakar and the Singapore authority from the 1860s to 1880s.

Johor and the Question of Economic Dependency

Politically, Johor under Abu Bakar and his predecessor did exist as a separate entity from Singapore, as it remained independent in its internal affairs. Nevertheless, economically, Johor and Singapore could be perceived as one integrated entity as Johor became an economic extension to Singapore. The emergence of Johor and the growth of its economy were perceived by colonial interests as valuable assets to Singapore, as long as Johor continued to be subjected to it. Through the domination of Johor's economy, Singapore would enjoy the major proportion of the economic advantages that were derived from the transformation of surplus revenue from Johor to Singapore.

The prime concern of Singapore towards Johor's economy was mostly the revenue farm activity that was organised under the Kangchu system in Johor. It was operated through syndicates that were owned by the Chinese mercantile community in Singapore and were operated from there. In fact, almost the entire capital investment in the revenue farm sector in Johor came from them. Most of their capital investment was derived from loans from the European mercantile community in Singapore who were attached to the Singapore Chamber of Commerce.⁶ The revenue farm covered the export of pepper and gambier from Johor to Singapore, and supplies of liquor, opium and rice to the Chinese settlers in Johor. This group of Chinese merchants also had a monopoly in dealing with pawn-broking, gambling and prostitution among the settlers in the plantation area in Johor. In return, these syndicates were obliged to pay excise duty to the government of Johor.⁷ Trocki pointed out that since 1863 these Chinese merchants influenced the economic sector that was organised under the Kangchu system. They had become more dominant, because the Kangchu grants appeared to have been increasingly issued to them.⁸

The economic link between Johor and Singapore is evident through the opium and spirit farms from which most of the excise duties were derived. According to Trocki, before 1862, the entire structure of the Johor's opium and spirit farms were incorporated into the same farms of Singapore under the single institution, and the entire revenue farms of Johor and Singapore was held by only one syndicate from Singapore. This syndicate would then have to pay tax to both the Johor and Singapore governments.⁹ Since the proportion of the payment of duties supposedly received by both governments was determined by using the proportion of the consumption of the opium and spirit among the Chinese population, the Singapore government obtained the larger proportion. Indeed, it is notable that the Chinese population in Singapore was always larger than in Johor.

However, Temenggong Ibrahim, Abu Bakar's father, always sought to increase the amount of the tax revenue by using all means, while the Singapore government was not willing to permit the Temenggong a free hand in this matter. Turnbull noted that Governor Blundell refused the Temenggong's attempt in April 1855 to shake free of the joint farm and to put the Johor's tax farms up for public auction.¹⁰ Nevertheless, according to Trocki, the Temenggong was still allowed to obtain some increase. In 1855, the Temenggong received \$3,500 monthly from the tax of Johor's spirit and opium farms and in 1860 this increased to \$8,000 monthly.¹¹ Trocki also stated that the proportion of the tax farm payments paid to the Temenggong had been fixed by the Singapore Government at 22.2 per cent in 1857 and was increased to 25 per cent in 1860.¹² However, in 1860, the Temenggong tried to bargain with the Singapore government to increase the proportion to one-third.¹³ The proposal was not accepted and finally led to Governor Cavenagh's decision to break off negotiations with the Temenggong and to discontinue the joint farms with Johor.¹⁴

Cavenagh's decision to end the joint farms was influenced by the criticisms made in the *Straits Times* in April 1861. The writer claimed that the amount paid to the Temenggong under the joint farms was much higher than the gross sales of the Johor farms since the Temenggong received a payment of about \$5,000 monthly. The writer also revealed that during the period of the joint Singapore and Johor opium and spirit farms, the duties for Johor were paid into the treasury of the Straits Settlement, who acted as the tax collector to the government of Johor. Then, the Singapore authority would transfer the payments to the Temenggong's administration at Teluk Belanga. In addition, the writer presented a critical view by stating that Abu Bakar was trying to use this connection with the Singapore government and was using this money in his involvement in the crisis in Pahang.¹⁵ The report certainly caused some embarrassment to Cavenagh who was very concerned with Abu Bakar's involvement in the crisis. Cavenagh intended to avoid controversy with the Indian authorities that were not willing to see the British become involved in any local affairs at that time. In fact, no sanction was given for Abu Bakar to become involved in the Pahang affairs when this report was made public.

Trocki stated that as a result of the breaking of the joint farms in 1861, the Singapore revenue farmer at that time, Heng Bun Soon, was only required to pay around \$24,000, excluding the proportion which was to be paid to the Temenggong.¹⁶ It could be construed that the Temenggong himself preferred the Johor farm to be joined with that of Singapore, and to allow the Singapore government to collect his tax on his behalf, because he hoped by this means, the possibilities of violation such as excessive smuggling of opium and spirit between Singapore and Johor could be prevented. In fact, it was reported that

the problems of the smuggling of opium which was cheaper in Johor occurred shortly after the joint revenue farms ended.¹⁷ Trocki points out that in 1863, Abu Bakar made a proposal to re-establish the joint farms because he was not able to cope with the trouble of the smuggling of opium but it was refused by Cavenagh.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Johor's economy still continued to be dominated by Singapore because the base of Johor revenue farms was still laid in Singapore. Trocki believes that when Abu Bakar began to assume power, he was ambitious to end Singapore's domination of Johor's economy.¹⁹ This ambition, however, was obviously against the British will as they were determined to retain control. This move brought him into conflict with the Singapore authorities and his determination to resist the pressure was merely nominal. This historical reality is manifested in the conflict known as the Tanjong Puteri Controversy, which has been a subject of discussion by Turnbull and Trocki.²⁰ This controversy had provoked political tension between Abu Bakar and the Singapore authorities that were prolonged for more than a year (from October 1864 to January 1866).

The Tanjong Puteri Controversy

In October 1864, the Singapore Chamber of Commerce on behalf of over 100 gambier and pepper traders in Singapore forwarded their protest to the Singapore government over Abu Bakar's regulation requiring all boats to stop at Tanjong Puteri for the purpose of registration of their cargo. The Singapore merchants claimed this regulation was intended to divert the gambier and pepper trade from Singapore and to force them to move their businesses to Johor or forfeit repayment from their debtors among the Johor planters. To support their claim, they said that 20 Singapore traders had relocated their business at Tanjong Puteri by taking leases on buildings there. The Chamber of Commerce also supported the claim that this regulation was intended to divert the gambier and pepper trade from Singapore.²¹ Cavenagh responded to this protest by insisting Abu Bakar to repeal this regulation. Cavenagh argued that the regulation was contrary to Article 12 in the Singapore Treaty of 1824 which bound the Temenggong to permit free and unshackled trade within his dominion (Johor).²²

Replying to these claims, Abu Bakar issued a proclamation to Cavenagh explaining that the policy was basically designed to regulate the flow of trade between Johor and Singapore that was primarily associated with the revenue farms. He first explained the regulation requiring all boats travelling between Johor and Singapore to stop at Tanjong Puteri to obtain a pass and declare their cargo. According to the proclamation, there would be no charge for this, and the purpose of this rule was to allow the government of Johor to obtain a precise record of the state's imports and exports, and to prevent the illegal disposal of gambier and pepper by the boat people, as well as to prevent the smuggling of opium, liquor, and firearms. He also proclaimed other regulations requiring all planters to obtain grants or leases for their plantations and to register the sales of the plantations and the mortgages of the plantations. He claimed that this regulation was intended to provide financial security for the shopkeepers who had invested their money in the planters. In order to strengthen the case of requiring all boats to stop at Tanjong Puteri, he brought to the Singapore government two petitions from 22 pepper and gambier traders in Singapore and 34 Kangchus, who styled themselves as planters, both the petitions backed his new regulation for registering the sales of produce.

The pepper and gambier traders insisted that the Temenggong police the traffic at Tanjong Puteri to prevent the boatmen and planters from making illegal sales of produce intended to escape repayment of debts. They also insisted that the Temenggong should issue land grants to the planters, to be held by their creditors as security. They requested the Temenggong to grant lands to them at Tanjong Puteri to build their 'godowns'. Moreover, the Kangchus felt these regulations were necessary to prevent falsification with regard to the weight of produce. They claimed that this form of violation was regularly committed by their creditors who were the dealers in Singapore. They supported the regulation on the grounds that the centralisation of the traffic at Tanjong Puteri would enable the Temenggong's administration to confirm the weight of the cargo. They believed that this measure would prevent possible occurrence of this violation.²³ In the same proclamation, Abu Bakar denied the claim that he intended to divert trade from Singapore or to force the merchants to move their business from Singapore to Johor. He stated that he was willing to set up other centres along the coast of Johor although merchants were required to pay fees if they did not want to proceed to Tanjong Puteri, where no fees were imposed for registration. He then issued another statement that the Tanjong Puteri regulation was only voluntary and he would not impose any penalty on anyone who failed to comply.²⁴

It is clear that the cause of the controversy between Abu Bakar and the Singapore merchants and authorities is focused on the first provision in the regulation because the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and the Singapore government insisted that Abu Bakar only repeal the regulation regarding the requirement for all boats to proceed to Tanjong Puteri for registering their cargo. They felt this regulation would interrupt the flow of trade to Singapore because the boats would be required to move out of their direct route to Singapore. Thus, the Singapore parties viewed this particular regulation as Abu Bakar's attempt to monopolise or to centralise the Johor trade at Tanjong Puteri. Otherwise, there would be no controversy at all regarding other regulations in the same proclamation; the requirement to obtain grants or leases and the establishment of the register for the sales and mortgage of the plantations.²⁵

Cavenagh was still not convinced with Abu Bakar's statement that the Tanjong Puteri regulation was only a voluntary system of registration. He insisted that Abu Bakar repeal the regulation because it was regarded as law by Johor subjects. Moreover, the Singapore merchants also opposed the regulation because it would increase the cost of transportation, as well as add more difficulties in reloading the cargo at the ports. Cavenagh claimed that this regulation could be considered as a 'vexatious interference with trade' and could be seen as a violation of Article 12 in the Treaty of 1824 that bound the Temenggong to maintain a free and unshackled trade everywhere within his dominions. He also denied Abu Bakar's right to impose this particular regulation by claiming that Johor had no authority in the Johor Straits, in accordance with Article 2 of the same treaty, which stipulated that the cession of the island of Singapore, together with the adjacent seas, straits and islets within 10 geographical miles from the Singapore coast, to the British by the Sultan and the Temenggong of Johor.²⁶

However, Abu Bakar continued to express his resistance against Cavenagh. He perceived that the timing of the claim of jurisdiction over the Johor Straits by Cavenagh in accordance with the 'traditional usage', apparently referred to Article 2 of the 1824 Treaty, was an unfriendly act. He pointed out that this issue was not raised when his father established Tanjong Puteri as the capital of Johor, and at that time, no objection was ever made to

him and his father to exercise jurisdiction over the native craft who had been involved in the trade. He argued that if the British government were seeking to look upon the whole territorial waters of the Straits from bank to bank as under their exclusive dominions, they should have warned him and his father of the possibility of complication that would arise with the opening of Tanjong Puteri. After a large amount of money had been invested for the improvement of that part of his territory, he was dissatisfied when he was told by the British government that it was forbidden to ship produce directly from Johor shores to any country apart from Singapore.²⁷

Due to Abu Bakar's refusal to repeal his new regulation, Cavenagh then took the case to the government in India. He expressed his concern that Abu Bakar's new regulation might cause disruption to Singapore's trade. He explicitly claimed that the regulation requiring boats trading between Johor and Singapore to proceed to Tanjong Puteri for the purpose of registering their cargo was without doubt designed for the purpose of securing a monopoly of the trade for Abu Bakar and his associates. He explained that the produce from Johor was conveyed through the rivers to the coast, en route to Singapore, and that Tanjong Puteri was a point on the Johor coast almost exactly equidistant from both entrances of the Straits. Thus, he pointed out, to require a boat to Singapore to proceed to Tanjong Puteri before continuing its journey would necessitate a long and tedious passage. He believed that this would probably encourage the boat people to dispose the cargo upon reaching Tanjong Puteri if purchasers were available, because the owners of the cargo wanted to avoid the trouble of reloading the boat and recommencing the journey to Singapore. He argued that this would mean that the whole of the trade of Johor which was supposed to flow directly to Singapore would be diverted through Tanjong Puteri and all produce would be shipped from there. He feared that if this were to become reality, it would lead to the collapse of the trade in a very short time. Then, he even suggested that he had the right to adopt any measure for the protection of the trade of Singapore. He claimed that the Temenggong's regulation, which intended to draw the trade of the interior of Johor to Tanjong Puteri, was not justified just because it was carried by water route. Thus, he suggested that they should consider extending the authority of their jurisdiction to a port of Johor, in addition to the territorial waters between Tanjong Puteri and the island of Singapore.²⁸

The early sign for Abu Bakar's capitulation came when the Indian government apparently agreed with the claim brought by Cavenagh and gave support to the Governor in handling the issue, including the consideration of extending British claim of authority into the Johor port.²⁹ Following this development, there was no correspondence from Abu Bakar, indicating his response to the Singapore government. However, he had not yet agreed to repeal his policy as the Straits Government had insisted. This conflict became serious in January 1866 when W. H. Read, the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of Singapore reported to the Singapore government that two Chinese men were punished by Abu Bakar in Johor for having violated the regulation by their failure to stop at Tanjong Puteri and obtain their passes. Read claimed that one of them was fined \$150 and the other was beaten and was then sent to prison for having no fund.³⁰ This charge was denied by Abu Bakar and he regarded it as a baseless allegation. He then claimed that it was essential for him to maintain his policy in order to protect his subjects in Johor from possible violent treatment from their counterparts from Singapore. He claimed that the Chinese residing in Singapore had uncontrolled influence over the pepper and gambier planters in Johor, and checks should be interposed on them to prevent them from keeping the planters in the

state of dependence and poverty.³¹ However, the incident of the arrest of the two Chinese for having violated the regulation certainly attracted the attention of the Singapore authorities who expressed concern.³² This incident appeared to have put him in a difficult position because he once had promised the Singapore authorities not to impose penalty on anyone for having violated the regulation. Thus, he then issued a proclamation that designated five more registration centres that were to be established at Pendas, Kukub, Batu Pahat, Tanjong Surat, and Pengerang. There would be no registration fees imposed at these centres, which were similar to Tanjong Puteri or Johor Bahru.³³

It is fortunate for Abu Bakar that the Singapore government and the Chamber of Commerce agreed to compromise with Abu Bakar by accepting this solution instead of pressing ahead with their original demand to repeal the regulation of registration. Turnbull described Abu Bakar's decision to open alternative centres of registration in 1866 as 'simply a graceful retreat before inflexible British demands' and 'a face-saving capitulation'.³⁴ It is obvious that they were satisfied with this proclamation, because the boats were no longer required to stop only at Tanjong Puteri for the purpose of registration. This was later followed by the solution to the territorial dispute which was associated with the Tanjong Puteri regulation regarding jurisdiction over the Johor Straits. This settlement was revealed in their dispute regarding jurisdiction over Tanjong Surat. As was revealed in the correspondence from Singapore to the government in India, the Singapore authorities had considered extending its authority into the ports of Johor when Abu Bakar refused to repeal the Tanjong Puteri regulation.

At the same time, the Singapore authorities also originally claimed that Tanjong Surat, under Article 2 of the 1824 Treaty, belonged to the British, because the place was defined as an island due to its low-lying ground, separated from the mainland of Johor by a swamp. However, under this settlement, the British in Singapore eventually agreed to withdraw their claim to jurisdiction over Tanjong Surat but still retained sovereignty over the whole straits.³⁵ Here, the Singapore Government exploited the legal terms in the Singapore Treaty of 1824, which could be read as supporting the British position. In this case, the British would have a great advantage to force Abu Bakar to come to terms with them. They continuously maintained this approach to bring Abu Bakar into their lines, because they were not willing to use military force towards him. At least, their threat to extend their authority into the port of Tanjong Puteri was justified, because the port had access to the territorial waters of the Johor Straits that had been ceded to the British under Article 12 in the Singapore Treaty of 1824.

Although Trocki did not totally dismiss the suggestion that Abu Bakar, together with his Chinese associate, Tan Yeok Nee, intended to use the regulation to monopolise trade, he concurred with Abu Bakar's claim that registration was necessary to protect his Chinese subjects from exploitation by the Singapore merchants. Trocki, in his evaluation of the controversy, said that Turnbull also appeared to have overlooked the significance of the Singapore financial crisis of 1864, preceding the proclamation of the regulation. In June 1864, four months before the official protest was launched to the Singapore government, trade in Singapore was overshadowed by a financial crisis due to the stagnation of the market, mainly in the selling of imported manufactured goods. As a result, two European companies were on the verge of collapsing due to heavy debts and one of them was carrying liability of around Sp\$1 million. This crisis had also led to heavy failures among the Chinese firms. During that month, there was a foolish panic among the Singapore

Chinese who lost confidence in the security of the bank notes and actually converted the bank notes into silver.³⁶

Trocki argued that the Singapore financial crisis had a significant effect on Johor. He pointed out that at least two small pepper and gambier traders were caught in the financial crisis. He believed that many more pepper and gambier traders were involved. By studying the records in the Johor Archives, he also pointed out that a few months preceding the crisis, a large volume of capital investment had been injected into Johor, due to increase in the number of plantation areas as well as the reorganisation of the old ones. He suggested that by the end of 1864, the total amount of capital investment from Singapore in Johor was estimated about Sp\$1 million, and nearly Sp\$500,000 was invested between June 1863 and May 1864. During this time, Abu Bakar was attempting to expand the cultivation area by increasing the issue of Kangchu grants, which was reflected in the dramatic increase in capital investment in Johor. It was at this time that the financial crisis occurred, and hundreds of small speculators who were panicking in Singapore sought to retrieve their capital by demanding from the Johor planters repayment of their debts. Thus, Trocki argued that 'Had they been allowed to retrieve some of their capital, Johor could have gone under with them. The entire hastily constructed development programme could have been wiped out in a month or two'.³⁷

Trocki agreed that Abu Bakar's regulation could be regarded as his declaration of economic independence. However, Trocki also believed that it was an emergency measure to protect the Johor planters from the financial crisis. He suggested that this regulation was intended to prevent a vast exodus of capital from Johor, because the panicking Singapore merchants were demanding immediate repayment of their debts. However, Trocki did not justify how this regulation could prevent the withdrawal of capital. These pressures could have led the planters and the Kangchu into bankruptcy. In fact, Trocki went further to suggest that as many as 100 Johor planters were caught in this financial crisis and the Singapore merchants would prefer to have their money back even if Johor became bankrupt. Nevertheless, Trocki accepted that this was never revealed in any major historical sources. Thus, Trocki concluded that '... Abu Bakar's policy was somewhat hasty and perhaps unpremeditated. If he had been serious about monopolising the trade, would it not have been wise to wait until the expansion had been completed before attempting to put pressure on the merchants? The policy was not in his best interest and was therefore probably a stopgap measure which was maintained only so long as it was necessary to wait for the panic to be over and allow the new plantations to get started'.³⁸

Here, it is inaccurate for Trocki to suggest that the Tanjong Puteri regulation was imposed by Abu Bakar as an emergency measure in order to protect the Johor Chinese from the Singapore merchants, who intended to retrieve their capital investment from Johor as a result of the financial crisis in Singapore in 1864. Trocki failed to give a rational explanation of how the regulation could protect the Johor subjects from the Singapore financial crisis. He only presents the circumstances that the proclamation of the regulation requiring all boats travelling between Johor and Singapore to stop at Tanjong Puteri for the purpose of registration of their cargo was coincidental with the occurrence of the Singapore financial crisis: but in fact, those events had no connection with each other. Thus his suggestion that the new regulations were an emergency measure precipitated by the Singapore financial crisis cannot be accepted, for two reasons. Firstly, it is evident that the Singapore

financial crisis itself could not be associated with the Tanjong Puteri regulation because the regulation was not intended to react to the crisis. In reality, the regulation was intended to deal with the irregular practices in the trade, such as falsifying of the weight of the pepper and gambier transported by boats and the excessive smuggling of opium, liquor and firearms. Even these irregular practices could not be specifically associated with the financial crisis, because these troubles occurred before the crisis took place. The financial crisis occurred in June 1864 while the trouble of falsifying boat cargoes was brought to Abu Bakar by the merchants and the planters in May 1864. Moreover, according to the report in the *Straits Times*, the trouble of the excessive smuggling of opium had occurred since 1861, after the Johor opium and spirit farms were separated from that of Singapore, long before the financial crisis in 1864.³⁹ Secondly, it is evident that in principle and practice, there was no provision specifically designed to stop the Singapore merchants to retrieve their capital investment from Johor if they wished to do so. There is some truth in Trocki's suggestion that there was virtually no new injection of capital in the Johor economy due to the dramatic drop in the number of Kangchu grants issued after the proclamation, and the new injection of capital only resumed after the regulation was repealed.⁴⁰ In this context, it is obvious that the refusal of the Singapore merchants to inject further investment into Johor was due to their protest towards the Tanjong Puteri regulation. Thus, it can be assumed that the impact of the Singapore financial crisis on their decision is only marginal or even insignificant.

Trocki relates the significance of the Singapore financial crisis to other regulations in the same proclamation regarding the registration of sales of plantations and mortgage of plantations. It appeared that Trocki might have been influenced by his intention to dismiss Turnbull's argument, that the regulation itself is monopoly and not simply registration to protect the Johor Chinese. Certainly, there is some truth in Trocki's suggestion that the Singapore financial crisis had negative repercussions on Johor, due to the fact that the Singapore merchants intended to drastically retrieve their capital from Johor. Thus, Abu Bakar took the initiative to overcome this difficulty by imposing the regulation to register the sales and mortgages of plantations, in order to provide security for the capital investment of Singapore merchants, with the hope that they would not retrieve their capital from Johor. Nevertheless, this was not the case: the regulation to register the sales and mortgage of plantations was not a focal point of the controversy, and the merchants and the government in Singapore did not oppose this particular provision in the regulation.

The Tanjong Puteri regulation could be regarded as monopolistic because the regulation of the registration is not a comprehensive method since Tanjong Puteri was the only port to conduct this operation. Certainly, it is true to accept the claim from the Singapore authority and the Chamber of Commerce that Abu Bakar's motive would surely be to monopolise the trade. However, we have every reason to believe that Abu Bakar had no intention of monopolising the trade because he had expressed his willingness to loosen his policy from the beginning. From October 1864, Abu Bakar offered to establish alternative coastal stations for the purpose of registration, with the condition that the merchants would have to pay fees if they wished not to proceed to Tanjong Puteri where no charges were imposed on the inspection of registration of cargoes. However, the Singapore government, who was sympathetic with the Chamber of Commerce, was far from accepting this proposal and they still insisted on Abu Bakar to repeal the regulation of registration. In this respect, it could be construed that the proposal itself, in principle,

would at least remove the fundamental monopolistic element in the regulation, and the issue of the interference with trade would become irrelevant because the boats would not be obliged to proceed to only one port. Thus, it could be argued that the claims that Abu Bakar of having premeditated motive to monopolise and centralise the Johor trade at Tanjong Puteri through his system of registration became irrelevant, after he had proposed to remove the fundamental monopolistic element by suggesting the imposition of registration fees at a number of coastal stations in 1864.

However, Abu Bakar did not take any constructive steps to improve his bargaining situation in resisting the pressures from Singapore. He did not implement his proposal immediately and continued to impose the regulation only at Tanjong Puteri. Presumably, this was because he was reluctant to take responsibility in financing the expenditure which was to be involved in the operation of the registration at the proposed coastal stations. The delay of the establishment of the free registration at the coastal stations, which was later proclaimed in 1866, led to the continuous exploitation of the claim from the Singapore parties that Abu Bakar's premeditated motive was to monopolise the trade. This circumstance provided the opportunity for them to insist on Abu Bakar to repeal his policy, as a vexatious interference with trade. Nevertheless, there is no evidence indicating that Abu Bakar had taken any conclusive measures towards monopolising the trade, because in principle, according to the proclamation of 1864, boats carrying cargo were not prevented from proceeding their journey to Singapore. In fact, Abu Bakar was still committed in maintaining the trading link with Singapore, because he still permitted the trade to be operated under the Kangchu System that had longstanding business network with Singapore. There is no evidence to indicate Abu Bakar's intention to monopolise and divert the trade from Singapore, to transfer the operation of the trade to other channels would change the route of the trade to destinations other than Singapore.

There was no evidence to indicate that there was a tendency for the pepper and gambier trade of Johor to bypass Singapore. This is because even during this conflict, the pepper and gambier from Johor were still being transported to Singapore. Indeed, there was an incident that involved the arrest of two Chinese tradesmen after having found to violate the regulation by not stopping at Tanjong Puteri in 1865. However, this incident alone cannot be used to justify the accusation of monopoly because the enforcement of the regulation and the inspection of the cargo at the Johor port were supervised by representatives of the kangchus. There was no reason to divert the transportation of gambier and pepper from Singapore, because the kangchus were mostly residents of Singapore. Furthermore, during that time, Singapore was the place with the highest consumption level of these commodities in the region. Thus, from Abu Bakar's point of view, he was determined to impose the regulation of registration, because he still insisted that this regulation was specifically imposed as a measure to prevent the irregular practices in the trade, such as smuggling and falsifying the weight of the cargo. It was stated by Abu Bakar in his proclamation that this measure was a response to complaints from all merchants in Singapore and the planters in Johor about such violations. Moreover, Abu Bakar was very concerned with the occurrence of excessive smuggling of opium and spirit after the revenue farms were separated in 1861. In order to solve the problem, Abu Bakar used direct government control which included the supervision at the port of Tanjong Puteri as a temporary basis, before a comprehensive method of registration was formulated, as constituted in the Law of Kangchu of 1873.

In assessing the tension between Abu Bakar and the Singapore authorities, it cannot be denied that the controversy came to an end with Abu Bakar's capitulation. It could be argued that the reason for his ability to maintain his resistance for such a long time was that the pressure from the Singapore authorities was marginal. They adopted the policy not to use a harsh approach and were willing to end pressure towards him due to the fact that he was able to provide a solution, which did not result in Johor's economic independence from Singapore. Undoubtedly, the objective of the Singapore authorities to retain control over the Johor economy was supported by the government of India and this factor did contribute to Abu Bakar's capitulation.

Thus, Abu Bakar's capitulation clearly expresses the fact that the economic aspect continued to be the main element in British policy adopted by Singapore, the Indian government, or the Colonial Office in London. It means that Abu Bakar's capitulation to pressure from Singapore, especially the Governors of the Straits Settlements, was determined by the nature of British policy which was primarily concerned with economic aspects. It could be said that the British in Singapore and India were not interested in extending political control over Johor. From Abu Bakar's point of view, his willingness to accept capitulation gave more advantage for him to preserve the supports from the Singapore authorities especially the Governors of the Straits Settlements. After the controversy was over, Cavenagh suggested that Abu Bakar should visit England. Cavenagh was also responsible for introducing Abu Bakar to the officials in London who could help him and with the Governor's advice, Abu Bakar asked to be presented at the British Royal Court.⁴¹ During this visit, he received a warm reception from Queen Victoria and on his return from Europe; he received the Honorary Knight Commander of the Star of India. Winstedt argued that this event had partly influenced the outcome of the settlement of Tanjong Surat, which was in Abu Bakar's favour.⁴² This was later followed by the decision by Governor Ord to recognise his title of Maharaja in 1868.⁴³

The Prevalence of Economic Dependence

Accordingly, in early 1870s, Abu Bakar was highly dependent on his good relationship with Governor Ord. The Governor's support not only strengthened his position as an independent ruler of Johor but also enhanced his influence among other Malay rulers. Johor was excluded from the policy of intervention during the 1870s and the British authorities in London and Singapore were consistent in implementing their policy to support Abu Bakar as their ally as they considered it as a pragmatic measure to secure their colonial interests in Johor due to his commitment to promote peace and prosperity in the state. This was manifested in their decision to grant financial assistance to him by transferring his debts from the private firm to the Straits Government. In March 1873, Abu Bakar officially forwarded his application to Governor Ord for obtaining loan from the Straits Government. Abu Bakar explained that he was indebted to his agent, notably Paterson, Simons and Co. of \$65,000.⁶⁷ The debt was for \$25,000.⁶⁷ in an opened account, which was obtained from England through the company and \$40,000 as the mortgage for his private property in the town of Singapore. He asked the loan for \$45,000 that was to be repaid within three years starting from the end of 1874 until the end of 1876. He then offered the Johor's revenue derived from the opium farm as mortgage and security for the loan. He stated that the Johor's opium and spirit revenue farm in 1873 was \$11,000 monthly and would increase to \$14,500 monthly for the period from 1st January 1874 to 31st December 1876.

In order to justify his application, he stated that the transmission of the loan from the private firm to the Straits Government with the lower interest rate was necessary to relieve him from the financial difficulties of paying a high rate of interest for the debts from this private firm. He requested the loan from the Straits Government with the interest rate of five per cent per annum, which was half of the interest charged by the private firm. He claimed that Johor's revenue at that time was not yet sufficient to enable him to pay off his debts to the firm at once. He also claimed the payment of a high interest for the loan caused a certain degree of heavy financial liabilities that prevented him from developing his state. He justified his application by stating that any assistance from the Straits Government, which would contribute to the expansion of the prosperity of Johor, was directly linked to the interests of Singapore since the whole of the produce of Johor was transferred to the world market through Singapore. He also tried to convince the British authorities by stating that he always wished to govern his state as far as possible in accordance with the wishes of the authorities of the Straits Settlements.⁴⁴

The decision of the British authorities to ratify this application was not only based on economic criteria but also political consideration. We certainly could not deny that the approval of the loan by the Executive Council was based on economic grounds that were referred to Abu Bakar's ability to offer enough security for the repayment of the loan. When Governor Ord proceeded Abu Bakar's application for the loan to the Colonial Office, Ord informed them that the application was unobjectionable as he agreed to Abu Bakar's statement that the loan would be beneficial to assist Abu Bakar in his effort to carry out the developments in Johor. Governor Ord also informed them that the application was ratified by the executive council in Singapore based on Abu Bakar's terms.⁴⁵ The officials in the Colonial Office also took into consideration the political criteria in reaching the decision to ratify the application. It was stated in the minutes relating to this case, the ratification of the loan was also based on their consideration of Abu Bakar's status quo as a valuable ally to the British government. They also admitted that in principle in those days it was difficult for them to grant a loan to a foreign state but the Johor was an exception as they viewed the advancement of Johor as advantageous to them. It is curious that the Colonial Office authorities state that it was wrong in principle to grant a loan to the foreign state such as Johor during that time. Moreover, they made it clear that it did not intend to use the grant of this loan to Abu Bakar as a means to interfere in Johor's internal affairs.⁴⁶

Abu Bakar also realised the sentiments of the officials in the Colonial Office who did not want to permit the economy of Johor to succumb into the private mercantile monopoly. In 1878 and 1882, he had withdrawn his two attempts to grant charters to the private investors due the objections from the Colonial Office and the Straits Government. In 1878, Abu Bakar granted a charter to Johannes Mooyer from London through the initiative from Messrs. Rodyk and Davidson, who acted as Abu Bakar's legal advisers. This charter was granted to the corporation which would enjoy a virtual monopoly of the economic development of Johor and the duration of the concession was for 99 years. Under this charter, the corporation was given rights to conduct the financial and developmental aspects in Johor such as banking, plantation and mining, as well as the construction of railways, bridges and dams, and ferry proprietors. By this means, the corporation would receive preferential treatment to all public contracts, the rights to note issue and the government banking account. The government of Johor was to pay 6% interest on temporary loans from the corporation. In addition to the governmental loans, the corporation was also

to provide loans to planters and to hold one hundred thousand acres of land for its own plantation. It would have virtual monopoly and was to be exempted from all taxes. The capital of this new enterprise was to be \$500,000 with only \$50,000 of initial payment.⁴⁷ In this situation, the British authorities especially at the Colonial Office were very concerned with the prospect of the charter which would give authority to corporations, based in London to monopolise Johor's economy. This scheme received a protest from Sir Michael Hicks Beach, the Colonial Secretary during that time.⁴⁸

Consequently, Abu Bakar decided to cancel the 1878 Scheme. In 1882, Abu Bakar again appeared to have cancelled the revised Charter of 1878 due to the objection from the Colonial Office. At this time, the Colonial Office was mainly concerned with a particular provision in the charter which gave the Malay Peninsular Agency the sole right of issuance of Bank notes, which was to be the single legal tender in Johor. The officials in the Colonial Office, especially de Robeck, were also very concerned with the participation of Messers. Rodyk and Davidson in this agreement.⁴⁹ It was quite certain that the agency did not commence its operation because Lord Derby expressed his objection to Abu Bakar through the Governor about negotiating the convention without consulting the Straits Government. In the same despatch, Derby also stated that the British would not extend recognition to the company.⁵⁰

Thus, the submissive reaction from Abu Bakar towards the interference from the Colonial Office on the economic concessions in Johor should be regarded as the main factor in preserving the longstanding British policy of retaining Abu Bakar's status to enjoy substantial independence in Johor's internal affairs. The compliance of Abu Bakar with the demands from the Colonial Office to withdraw from commencing the operation of the economic concessions manifested the fact that Abu Bakar was not prepared to confront the Straits Government if it was supported by the Colonial Office. In principle, Abu Bakar had his rights to exercise his freedom on the economic concessions in Johor, because it was regarded as part of internal affairs. Thus, the British were not supposed to interfere in this issue. In fact, it was admitted by the officials in the Colonial Office that they had no legal rights to interfere in those two schemes, even when the schemes would virtually justify monopoly, and even more in the case of 1882, which established a separate banking scheme in Johor.⁵¹ As the conformity to the economic means of imperialism of the Colonial Office in London, Abu Bakar agreed to use the currency of the Straits Settlements as the legal tender in Johor as it was stipulated in Article IV Anglo-Johor agreement of 1885.⁵²

Conclusion

Having examined the relations between Abu Bakar and the Singapore authorities, it can be concluded that the application of the British policy on economic aspects towards Johor during the non-intervention period was consistent as they were determined to preserve Johor's economic dependence on Singapore although Johor was allowed to remain independent in its internal affairs. On one hand, most colonial ventures in the nineteenth century were economic imperialism that often preceded and prepared the way for colonial political dominance. Nevertheless, in the case of Johor under Abu Bakar, colonial political intrusion did not take place. It can be found that the British authorities as a whole were more determined to constrain Abu Bakar's resisting manner against the Governors on the economic rather than political matters due to the fact that the British refused to concur to the demands from Abu Bakar and his father, Temenggong Ibrahim on the issue of the

proportion of joint revenue farm between Johor and Singapore. This attitude can even be seen more clearly in the Tanjong Puteri controversy in 1864-6 when Abu Bakar eventually had to concede even though the promulgation of regulation relating to economic matters was Johor's internal matter. In fact, the compliance to such economic imperial means was given political recognition as can be seen in the willingness of the British authorities to acknowledge Johor's sovereignty over Tanjong Surat and Abu Bakar's visit to England in 1866. Furthermore, the British also contemplated using economic means as a tool to subjugate Johor into their imperial sphere by taking over Abu Bakar's loan from the private firms to the government of the Straits Settlements. The British were also determined to restrain the large scale economic concessions by the private concessionaires in Johor to prevent Johor from setting up a separate banking institution and to force Johor to use the currency of the Straits Settlements as legal tender in Johor. These shows that the British authorities as a whole were unanimously consistent in putting pressure on Abu Bakar in economic rather political matters. Abu Bakar's resistance in economic matters became weaker from 1866 to 1885 and this condition helped him preserve Johor's internal independence during his reign.

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