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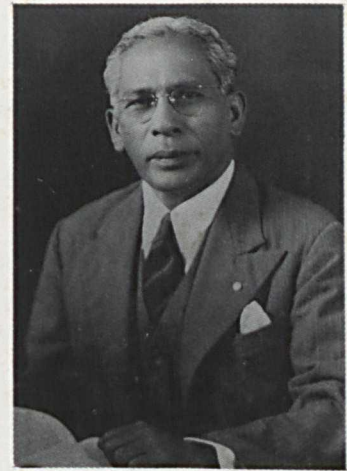
## Dato Eusoff: Panglima Kinta Seri Amar Bangsa DiRaja

Datin Ragayah Eusoff\*

**Abstrak:** Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff Yusuff adalah Panglima Kinta yang keempatbelas. Keturunannya boleh dikesan dari abad keenambelas. Waris-waris gelaran Panglima Kinta sebelum Dato' Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff telah memainkan peranan yang penting dalam sejarah negeri Perak. Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff memulakan kariernya sebagai seorang pegawai kerajaan. Sifat kepimpinan dan dedikasi Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff dalam perkhidmatan awam dapat dilihat dari lebih kurang lima puluh enam perlantikan sebelum Allahyarham meninggal dunia. Sebagai mengenang jasa dan sumbangan tokoh ini, Universiti Malaya telah menamakan sebuah asrama wanitanya 'Eusoff College'.

**Abstract:** Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff Yusuff was the fourteenth Panglima Kinta. His lineage may be traced to the sixteenth century. The previous holders of this hereditary title played important roles in the history of the State of Perak. Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff began his career as a civil service officer. His dedication to public service and leadership qualities resulted in his involvement in no less than fifty-six appointments by the time of his death. His contribution to education was acknowledged by the University of Malaya in a manner befitting an academic institution, that is to name one of its hostels after him. Today, Eusoff College stands as a proud testimony to his many achievements.

Nowadays not many people know about the hereditary title of *Dato Panglima Kinta Seri Amar Bangsa DiRaja of Perak* (Panglima Kinta for short). In the present civil list of Perak, the *Panglima Kinta* is entitled to an office and receives a state emolument. He is an influential figure in the upper class of the Malay society. He belongs to the group of eight major chiefs in Perak. Despite major changes in the feudal system since Independence, the Sultan continues to appoint his chiefs as his representatives. At present, the *Panglima Kinta* does not enjoy political or administrative powers; his position is mainly ceremonial in nature.



Dato Dr. Haji Mohd. Eusoff Yusuff

But life was different in the old days before the coming of the British. Perak was divided into various districts. Each chief acted as the

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ruler in his own district collecting revenue, settling disputes and passing sentence on the wrongdoers. As late as the nineteenth century, the tenth Panglima Kinta Mohamad Kulup was a very powerful man whose word was law in his district. Furthermore, his district was rich in tin ore and he had the right to ten per cent of tin extracted from the earth. At that time, the Malay feudal society was based on the concept of *daulat* - divine attributes of the Sultan and the blind loyalty of the chiefs and subjects to their ruler. Despite his elevated position, the Sultan was required to consult his counsels and chiefs before any major decision was made.

The social hierarchy consisted of the Sultan at the apex followed by the Royal Princes (Raja diHilir, Raja Kecil Besar, Raja Kecil Muda, Raja Kecil Tengah and Raja Kecil Bongsu), the Four Great Dignitaries, *Orang Besar* (Bendahara, Orang Kaya Besar, Temenggong and the Mantri); the eight chiefs (Maharajalela, Laksamana, Raja Shahbandar, Panglima Kinta, Panglima Bukit Gantang, Shahbandar Paduka Indera, Setia Bijaya DiRaja and Imam Paduka Tuan); sixteen minor chiefs followed by another thirty-two minor chiefs. The wealth and power of a chief depended on his ability to control the resources in his district. The peasants worked in his fields and his mines and helped to defend the district against enemies. To maintain his family and retinue, the chief collected revenue on the produce of the district, and imported and exported commodities such as tin. The Panglima Kinta was listed as number four in the group of eight chiefs. He ruled over the valley of the Kinta River and received a ten per cent royalty on all tin found in his district besides fines and fees. He had to send an annual tribute of tin to the Sultan.

Perak has an interesting history and was known as far back as the sixteenth century when a Portuguese, Tome Pires, who lived in Malacca, wrote of the "Perak Village" of two hundred inhabitants. In the fifteenth century, when the deposed Sultan, Mahmud Shah of Malacca fled from the Portuguese invaders, he went to Johore to set up a kingdom. When he died, his eldest son became the Sultan of Johore. His second son was later appointed the first Sultan of Perak in 1528 under the title, Sultan Mudzaffar Shah.

After the death of Mudzaffar Shah, Mansur Shah became the next Sultan of Perak. Acheh

attacked Perak in 1573, being attracted by the prosperity arising from tin ore found in the State. Thus began one legend of the origin of the Panglima Kinta. On his way to Acheh, the deposed Sultan stopped by an aborigines settlement and married an *Orang Asli* woman. This wedlock resulted in the lineage of the Panglima Kinta DiRaja.

Another version of the origin of the Panglima Kinta began with the arrival of the sea captain, Kulup Kinta, an imposing Sumatran, to the aborigines settlement of Reman in 1528. He married an *Orang Asli* woman and was appointed *Raja* of the area.

Haji Mohamad Eusoff bin Yusuff, the fourteenth Panglima Kinta was born in 1897 in Ipoh. His father, the powerful Panglima Kinta Kulup Mohamad Yusuff, had six wives and his mother, Hajjah Yun Arshad, was the fifth wife. Panglima Kinta Kulup was popularly known as Dato Panglima Kinta Paloh. He played an important part in maintaining peace with the British in the late nineteenth century.

When Raja Abdullah signed the Pangkor Treaty with the British in 1874 giving the British indirect rule over Perak in exchange for recognising him as the Sultan, the Panglima Kinta together with other chiefs protested. Although the Panglima Kinta objected to the signing of the Pangkor Treaty, he did not participate in the killing of Perak's first British Resident, Birch, at Pasir Salak in 1875. The British took immediate punitive action in what was called the Perak War. The two major chiefs, Maharajalela and Dato Sagor, were found guilty and hung while Raja Abdullah and some of his chiefs were banished to the Seychelles Islands.

The killing of Birch was a lesson to be learnt. While the British recognised the need to consult the Malay chiefs before major decisions were taken (even though the Sultan had agreed), the Malay Chiefs realised that they had to cooperate with the British who had the power to enforce their decisions on them. Clearly cooperation between the two parties was desirable. Panglima Kinta Kulup managed to get the British to agree that the Panglima Kinta could retain half of the tax collected in Kinta. He also obtained the agreement of the British that any law passed in the State must have the consent of the Panglima Kinta even though the Sultan had agreed.

In 1902, Panglima Kinta Kulup was included in the delegation accompanying Sultan Idris to England to discuss a new agreement with the British. He tried to retain the decreasing rights of the Panglima but could not get support for his cause. Disillusioned, he returned from England and died soon after that in 1903.

It is believed that the Panglima Kinta family started the kampong and later developed the town of Ipoh in the sixteenth century. Sir Hugh Low, the British Resident mentioned Ipoh in his correspondence around 1819. In the 1880s, the British noted the existence of Ipoh in a map which they issued.

Tun Tambak was the first Panglima Kinta. The Panglima Kinta owned most of Ipoh as well as Kampong Paloh. Panglima Kinta Kulup (the tenth Panglima) was popularly called Panglima Paloh. At the end of the nineteenth century, he played an important role in developing Ipoh peacefully by encouraging Chinese, Indonesians, and Indian immigrants to work in the tin mines and rubber estates. At that time, the villages around Ipoh were Kampong Paloh, Kampong Kucai, Kampong Sungai Senam, Kampong Sri Kepayang and Tambun.

Born to a rich aristocratic family, Mohamad Eusoff bin Yusuff, the son of Panglima Kinta Kulup, could have spent his time comfortably in pleasurable and leisurely pursuits. But he was a serious man dedicated to public service.

At the age of nineteen, he started work as a Land Settlement Officer in Taiping. Later he became an Assistant Collector of Land Revenue and Assistant Magistrate.

Haji Mohamad Eusoff became a pioneer member of several voluntary bodies in Malaya. For example, he became the President of the Ipoh Rotary Club in 1947, Committee Member of the Provisional Council to set up the Association of the Blind (MAB) in 1951, Committee Member of the Red Cross Society in 1952 and Chairman of the Ipoh District Committee in 1955, Chairman of the Scout Federal Council in 1955, President of the Perak Amateur Athletic Association and President of the All Muslim Missionary Society, Ipoh.

A turning point in Haji Mohamad Eusoff's life was when he retired at the age of fifty four, after much reluctance, from his post as the Assistant Commissioner of the Cooperatives to take up the prestigious title of the Dato Panglima Kinta Seri Amar Bangsa DiRaja in 1951.

His leadership and academic qualities were recognised when he, the only Malay, was appointed, in 1948, to be a member of the Carr-Saunders Commission (which was given the task to set up the first university in Malaya by merging the Raffles College and King Edward VII Medical College). In recognition of his services to the country in the field of education,



Dato Dr. Haji Mohd. Eusoff Yusuff meeting Tunku Abdul Rahman

he was the first Malay to be conferred the Doctorate in Law by the University of Malaya.

Other honours given to the modest and unassuming Panglima Kinta Eusoff were the appointments of the Justice of Peace, Selangor (1948), Justice of Peace, Perak (1953), Order of the British Empire (OBE) and Commander of the British Empire (CBE) from the Queen of England, Member of the Federal Legislative Council (representing the Aborigines), Member of the Perak Executive Council (1948), Member of the University of Malaya Court (1949), Member of Perak State Council (1952), Chairman of the University Council (1953), Member of Ipoh Town Board (1953), Pro-Chancellor of the University (1955) and member of the Perak Council of Regency (1955).

Of all his contributions to public service, Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff is best remembered for his dedication to educational development in the country. It must have given him a great sense of fulfilment to witness the solemn, yet colourful, opening ceremony of the University of Malaya in 1949. The first Chancellor of the University, Sir Malcolm MacDonald, said "This University enters the life of Malaya at a timely and auspicious moment... Hitherto, the country has been divided into several separate territories. Hitherto, the population has been divided between different racial communities... Let us today lay well and truly, the foundation of this University. Let us raise aloft the lamps and light them -- the lamp of knowledge, the lamp of wisdom, the lamp of beauty, the lamp of goodness."

After Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff's death in 1957, Ipoh recognised his contribution to society by naming one road "Jalan Dato Eusoff". Singapore commemorated his good services to education by naming the first and only ladies hostel "Eusoff College" in 1958. (I was among the first batch of hostelites to live there). In 1988, when the National University of Singapore moved to their new campus at Kent Ridge, the University authorities decided to retain Eusoff College as an off-campus hostel and named one of their six halls of residence "Eusoff Hall" in memory of a man for whom no sacrifice was too great to make to his beloved country. In January 1994, I was present at the official opening of the Eusoff Heritage Corner which the National University of Singapore had set up to enlighten and encourage the present generation about Eusoff Hall's origin and past achievements.

Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff died in July 1957 before reaching the age of sixty at the prime of his productive life. At the time of his death, he was reported to have held no less than fifty-six appointments. The Speaker of the Federal Legislative Council, Raja Sir Uda, in paying a tribute to him, said "there was hardly one field of honourable activity in which he did not take part. It is not easy to see how human limitations were able to accomplish so much. The secret of his success was his overpowering urge to serve."

Such a man was my father, Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff Yusuff, Panglima Kinta Amar Bangsa DiRaja. ■

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**Note:** Any one who knew Dato Dr. Haji Mohamad Eusoff Yusuff personally or has additional information is kindly requested to contact the writer of this article as she is preparing a biography of her father for publication.