

MALAY CONCEPT OF HISTORY AS  
UNDERSTOOD FROM THE CLASSICAL  
MALAY HISTORICAL TEXTS

BY

HUSSAIN OTHMAN

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY  
MALAYSIA

2006

PERPUSTAKAAN UTHM



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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Civilization

International Institute of Islamic Thought and  
Civilization (ISTAC)  
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SEPTEMBER 2006

## ABSTRACT

Studies conducted by western scholars on the history of the Malays since the beginning of the European colonisation had resulted in a number of undesirable outcomes. The works resulted from these studies were detrimental to the worldviews of the Malays and it was through these works that the misconceptions on Malay history mainly originated. The misconceptions rooted from two major factors. Firstly, the western bias views towards Malay history due to their pride over the superiority of their political power within the Malay region. Secondly, the rampant negative perceptions over the classical Malay historical texts. In order to counter their arguments and to reestablish a proper Malay concept of history, this study suggested a reinvestigation on the Malay classical texts using a proper and appropriate method.

This study aims at a redevelopment of the Malay concept of history as understood by the Malays from their classical historical texts. For the purpose of the study, three great books (*Karya Agung*) of Malay history, namely *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu* or *Malay Annals* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* were hereby selected to be the major sources from which the Malay concept of history could be unveiled and redeveloped.

Generally, this study employed a traditional historical and cosmological analysis method which is neither quantification nor psychohistory. Specifically, philological and the traditional cosmological methods were two major approaches utilized in order to unveil the concept of Malay history from the selected texts. In philological method, the main concern is to study the external contents of the classical Malay historical texts. While in the traditional cosmological approach, the internal aspects of the texts were analyzed by utilizing the traditional cosmological approach as practiced by the scholars in this field. Modern historical approach had indeed unable to explain most of these internal aspects of the contents particularly regarding the mythological and legendary aspects.

Through these approaches, a remarkable finding showed that the Malays owned a very special concept of history. Even the most unhistorical aspects of the classical Malay historical texts were finally discovered to be embodied a number of significant historical values. Some suggestions and recommendations had been made for further studies in the future.



## ملخص البحث

فإن البحوث عن التاريخ الملايوي التي قام بها المستشرقون والمؤرخون في الغرب، لازماً بُعِداً عن الحقيقة الصحيحة. والأثر من بحوثهم وكتابتهم، طلع أثراً سلبياً خصوصاً على رؤية الوجود (worldview) للملايويين. إنطلاقاً من هذا السبب، ظهر بعض الخلاف الفهم في مفهوم التاريخ الملايوي. ومن النظرة العامة على هذه القضية، وجدنا السببين الأساسيين الذان يُعَدَّان إلى هذا الخلاف أو الإنحراف. أولاً: إنحرف المستشرقين والعلماء التاريخ الغرب على التاريخ الملايوي لأجل سيطرتهم واستعمارهم على السياسة في الجنوب الشمال آسيا. ثانياً: سوءظنهم وحقدهم على النصوص الأدبي الملايوي الكلاسيكي. ولتصحيح هذا الإنحراف، ولرجوع الهيئة النصوص الملايوية الكلاسيكية، نقتراح كي نقوم البحث على النصوص الملايوية الكلاسيكية بجِدِّ واجتهاد ويضاف إلى ذلك، نستعمل المعيار المناسب لتوضيح حقيقتها وخاصيتها.

إن الغرض هذا البحث لبناء الصحيحة الفكرة والصوابية الفهم على التاريخ الملايوي مُتبعاً بالفهم الملايويين في تاريخهم. ومن أجل ذلك، اختار الباحث ثلاثة الكتب التاريخية الملايوية الكبرى لتكون المصدر والمرجع وهي، *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*، *Sejarah Melayu*، و *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*

عموماً، هذا البحث يستعمل الطريق التقليدي التحليلي الكلاسيكي وهو الذي لا يشتمل فيه البحث بالصفة الكمية (quantification) ولا (psycho-history). وبالتخصيص، إن هذا البحث مستعمل الطريق البحث علم اللغة (philology) والبحث في صفة الكائنات ونظامها (cosmology). منهج البحث علم اللغة (philology) يهتم بالأمر التي متعلقة بالناحية الخارجية في المحتويات النصوص التاريخية الملايوية الكلاسيكية فقط ولا يركز الباحث على قيمة الأدبية كما فعل الأدباء والنقاد في بحوثهم. وأما منهج البحث في صفة الكائنات ونظامها (cosmology) يركز على الأفكار التي تتعلق بالعنصر الداخلي في التاريخ الملايوي، يعني من ناحية اللغة والترتيب الأبواب وأهميتها. وأهم من المهم في الإستعمال هذا الطريق وهو الفهم بالعميق على جميع محتوياتها. والحقيقة أن المنهج العصري والحديث الذي مستعمل في البحث علم التاريخ لا يستطيع أن يكشف ويبين العدد الكبير من المحتويات النصوص التاريخية الملايوية خصوصاً في الأمور التي متربطة بالأسطورة والخرافة. والحاصل من هذا البحث، يدل لنا أن لدي الملايويين الفكرة التاريخية الخاصة المتميزة. وبعض المظاهر من تاريخهم التي تدعى لا قيمة لها من القبل في الحقيقة وجدنا القيمة الكبيرة العالية والغالية. ومن أجل ذلك، نعرض الإقتراحات لتقوم البحث في المقدم.

## ABSTRAK

Kajian-kajian yang dijalankan terhadap sejarah orang Melayu oleh sarjana-sarjana barat sejak awal zaman penjajahan tidak selalunya menghasilkan dapatan yang kita inginkan. Hasil-hasil kerja para sarjana barat ini sebenarnya didapati mengancam pandangan alam (worldview) orang-orang Melayu dan dari sinilah beberapa salah faham tentang sejarah Melayu berputik. Tinjauan awal kajian ini telah mendedahkan bahawa salah faham terhadap sejarah Melayu ini timbul akibat daripada dua faktor. Pertamanya ialah sikap berat sebelah orang-orang barat terhadap sejarah Melayu akibat daripada keangkuhan mereka di atas kekuatan politik yang mereka pegang sekian lama di rantau ini. Keduanya ialah persepsi negatif mereka yang melulu terhadap teks-teks kesusasteraan Melayu termasuklah teks-teks sejarah klasik. Untuk mematahkan hujah mereka dan mengembalikan semula konsep sejarah Melayu yang sebenarnya maka adalah dicadangkan agar teks-teks Melayu klasik dikaji semula secara bersungguh-sungguh dengan menggunakan kayu ukur yang sepatutnya.

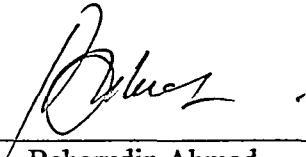
Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membina semula konsep sejarah orang Melayu sepertimana yang difahami oleh orang-orang Melayu daripada teks-teks sejarah klasik mereka. Untuk tujuan ini tiga buah buku Karya Agung sejarah Melayu iaitu *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu* ataupun *Malay Annals* dan *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* telah dipilih sebagai sumber utama.

Secara umumnya kajian ini menggunakan kaedah tradisional analisis sejarah dan kosmologi yang mana ianya tidak melibatkan kajian berbentuk kuantifikasi mahupun psiko-sejarah. Untuk menjelaskan konsep sebenar sejarah bagi orang Melayu daripada teks-teks terpilih dua kaedah utama digunakan iaitu kaedah filologi dan pendekatan tradisional pengkajian kosmologi. Dalam kaedah filologi, tumpuan utama kajian ini ialah mengkaji aspek luaran isi kandungan teks-teks sejarah Melayu klasik. Manakala kaedah pendekatan tradisional pengkajian kosmologi digunakan untuk mengkaji aspek-aspek makna dalaman teks. Pendekatan moden dalam kajian sejarah sebenarnya tidak mampu untuk menjelaskan kebanyakan daripada isi kandungan dalaman teks khususnya yang berkaitan dengan unsur-unsur legenda dan dongengan.

Penemuan kajian ini sungguh memberangsangkan dan telah menunjukkan bahawa orang-orang Melayu sebenarnya mempunyai konsep sejarah yang tersendiri dan sangat istimewa. Beberapa aspek yang sebelum ini dikatakan tidak bernilai sejarah sebenarnya didapati mempunyai nilai sejarah yang besar. Beberapa cadangan telah dikemukakan agar kajian lanjutan diteruskan.

## APPROVAL

The dissertation of Hussain Othman has been approved by the following;



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Baharudin Ahmad  
Supervisor



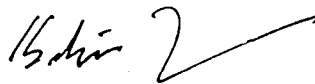
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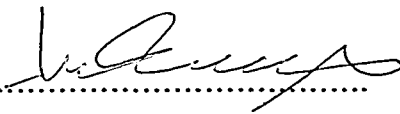
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except what otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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AS UNDERSTOOD FROM THE CLASSICAL MALAY HISTORICAL  
TEXTS**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. I thank Him for His mercy and blessing enabling me to complete this dissertation. Peace and blessing to the Prophet Muhammad s.a.w, the educator of mankind. First and foremost, my deepest appreciation goes to my respected supervisor, Associate Prof. Dr. Baharudin Ahmad for his expert guidance, critical ideas, continuous advice and useful suggestions for the completion of this dissertation. His ability to “see things beyond the things” had inspired my writing right from the very beginning to the end.

I owe a special thanks to the professors, lecturers and staffs at International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), IIUM for their assistance throughout my studies at ISTAC. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Prof. Emeritus Datuk Dr. Osman Bakar and Prof. Dr. Hashim Haji Musa for their professional advice on my research. My appreciation also goes to my grandfather Prof. Ali Taib whose life experience has set the standard at which I have to exceed.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my institution Kolej Universiti Teknologi Tun Hussein Onn (KUiTTTHO), the Rector and Deputy Rectors of KUiTTTHO and Department of Civil Servants Malaysia (JPA) for sponsoring my study. My acknowledgements would also be incomplete without extending my appreciation to all my colleagues, especially Dr. Berhanuddin for his motivating ideas, Ustaz Abdullah Sulaiman for his supportive guidance, Mrs. Salawati and Miss Mimi Nahariah for their patience of proofreading my dissertation and Ustaz Hisyam for his useful advice regarding the Arabic texts. Not to forget to all my colleagues in Pusat Pengajian Kemanusiaan dan Komunikasi and KUiTTTHO.

I am also deeply indebted to my family, especially to my mother Hajjah Che Amah Haji Ishak who has never given up praying for my success from the very beginning of my life. An equal appreciation is also extended to my beloved wife Mrs. Noor Azwa Muhaini for her moral support and patience and to my son Muhammad Hafiz Amzar who has missed much of my attention. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to my brothers Mohd. Suhaimi and Ahmad Zaki, my sisters Zaleha and Sakinah for their moral supports.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement)
DBP	Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
HMM	<i>Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa</i>
HRP	<i>Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai</i>
ISTAC	International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization
JIAEA	Journal of Indian Archipelago and East Asia
JMBRAS	Journal of Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society
JRAS GBI	Journal of Royal Asiatic Society Great Britain and Ireland
JRASSB	Journal of Royal Asiatic Society Singapore Branch
JSAH	Journal of Southeast Asian History
MBRAS	Malaysian Branch of Royal Asiatic Society
MS	Manuscript
MSS	Manuscripts
SM	<i>Sejarah Melayu</i> or <i>Malay Annals</i>

## ARABIC TRANLITERATION TABLE

ء	'
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ

ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	'
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y
ة	-ah
ال	al-

## VOWELS

	ا	ā
	آ	Ā
<b>Long</b>	و ي	ū ī
<b>Doubled</b>	ي و	iyy (final form ī) uww (final form ū)
<b>Diphthongs</b>	وَ يَ	au or aw ai or ay
<b>Short</b>	ا و ي	a u i

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Most of the modern approaches in the study of history founded by western historians had been in the practice since the collapse of western medieval thoughts.<sup>1</sup> These approaches were also applied on the study of Malay history. Thus, looking at the Malay history in the modern sense, there were a number of western worldviews outspread from the writings of the local and colonial scholars. With regard to their superiority in the economic, social, political and particularly the intellectual spheres during the period of colonisation, colonial scholars had easily dominated the study of Malay history. Almost every single text of the classical Malay history was studied and commented by these colonial scholars. Their commentaries became the most authoritative references to the later scholars including the locals. This fact led to the decline of the historical understanding among the Malays and had also caused a number of confusions on their historical worldviews. Colonialism and its intellectual understanding had indeed harmed the perspectives of Malay history, one of the most crucial parts of the Malay intellectual domain. This study therefore, is intended to reveal some important facts related to the issues of the colonisation and the study of Malay history. First, the fact that Malay history at large was inflicted by the rampant utilization of the modern western methods in historical study. Second, during their course of studies, most of the western colonial scholars as well as their local

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<sup>1</sup> One important aspect of the break between medieval and Renaissance is the role of scientific revolution beginning with Copernicus (1473-1543), for it was the scientific world view and its attendant technological progress which most decisively separated us from the Middle Ages. This so called "scientific world view" was also responsible for the rise of modern perspective on history, the perspective that casting away the traditional understanding of history. Classical Malay history was unfortunately one of the traditional understandings about history. See further William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View: An Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 317-319.

adherents, had mistreated and consequently misunderstood the classical Malay literature texts in general and the classical Malay historical texts in particular. Third, the classical Malay historical texts were in fact the products of the Malay excellent intellectual epochs. Last but not least, in connection to this third point, it was believed that all these classical Malay historical texts contained a firm and proper concept of Malay history. It was this concept that this study is intended to reveal and explore further.

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Discussion in chapter two focuses on some of the misconceptions on Malay history resulted from the studies and writings of western colonial scholars. It was proved that even in their early days of colonisation, western colonial scholars were actively involved in the study of the history of this region. However, the focus of their study was rather confined to their own colonial events and activities, and at the same time neglecting local sources and the presence of the Malays in history. The views related to this type of study should be called "*old view*" or appropriately referred as "*europocentric* or *eurocentric view*", the historical view concerned only to the presence of the colonial powers such as Portuguese, Dutch and British in the Malay region. The records, reports and books produced by western scholars during this period were rather prejudiced towards the Malays and their historical sources. In the next stage of their colonial intellectual interest, these colonial scholars began to sense the importance and the precious values of the classical Malay historical texts. Gradually, the interest to study these texts increased among the Portuguese scholars primarily through their contacts with the Malay royal families. This was the beginning of a "*new view*", the historical view which focused on the study of local history. The

interest subsequently increased faster when the Dutch scholars took control over the colonial intellectual hegemony in this region. The Malay literary manuscripts and historical records preserved by the Dutch during this period were indeed so immense in comparison with the Portuguese and the British. British scholars in another instance were equally excellent in expanding their intellectual domination and as a result numerous works on the local Malay history written in English language were published. In total, the contribution of the colonial scholars on the study of local Malay history became so enormous and inconceivable even by the Malays. The value of their contribution, though meaningful in terms of the number were unfortunately meaningless in terms of preserving and promoting a proper concept of Malay history. Review on the writings of Richard Winstedt in the middle of the second chapter proved this contention clearly. The misconceptions on Malay history resulted from the studies conducted by colonial scholars such as Winstedt were then found to be so rampant. Realizing these circumstances, the Malays were indeed left in a critical position either to keep quiet and be a passive disciple to the colonial scholars or choose to re-evaluate and to insert new understanding to these classical Malay historical texts. It seems that the latter option is more appropriate to be selected by the Malay scholars and researchers or otherwise no other educated persons could be relied upon in order to revive these invaluable legacies of the Malays. Therefore, a proper study on the classical Malay historical texts is so crucial at this moment especially for the purpose of unveiling a proper Malay concept of history.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENTS**

Many colonial scholars were not being fair in judging and evaluating the local Malay sources through local perspective throughout their course of studies on the classical

texts of Malay history. Instead, they used their own narrow methodologies and biased interpretations. Methodologically, colonial scholars believed that they had based their studies on a firm intellectual ground and had utilized the methods and guidelines which most of them perceived as the most advance and effective compared to others. During their course of studies on Malay history they had implemented the methods properly and followed the guidelines accurately and therefore the results of these studies according to them were always as expected. Thus, looking from their own perspective, there was no such misconception whatsoever resulted from these studies as contrary believed. However, if thorough observation being conducted on their modern historical method and how it was implemented during their course of study, the methodological defects would certainly be detectable. The classical Malay historical texts are the product of the Malay classical genius and not the product of modern historical writings. For that reason, it was apparently incompatible to use the modern yardstick in order to measure and judge these classical genius works. Take for example, what will we consider if we see someone attempted to measure the tallest building in the world by using a six-inch ruler? We would certainly consider the method to be defective. Similarly, we should also consider that the western modern methods on the study of history to be defective in evaluating the classical Malay historical texts.

In terms of the interpretation, it was believed that these colonial scholars and their local adherents were prejudice and bias towards classical Malay historical texts. Only a small number of them looked at the content of the classical Malay history from a more comprehensive perspective. The majority on the other hand, preferred to deal with those contents separately and as a result their views on Malay history were confined within the narrowed perspective as they had subscribed. They will pick the

small historical facts of the contents and conducted an extensive study on it without considering other facts related to the general contents. Thus, finally they had to struggle in dealing with those particulars and the result is the widespread of narrow perspectives on Malay history within their writings and commentaries. Many of them found themselves difficult to interpret and explain the Malay historical perspectives and facts thoroughly since their earlier historical understanding was narrowly confined.

The defective methods and narrow interpretations of these colonial scholars and their local adherents were basically resulted from two most important problems. First, their basic conception and understanding of history is modern and western in nature. Second, the approaches and methods implemented by them are rather narrow. Let us see how the first problem had caused the western methods to be defective. The concept of history according to their own perspective had been adopted in understanding the classical Malay texts of history. Collingwood's concept and definition for example,<sup>2</sup> had been generally accepted and adopted by most of the western historians. As a result, their bias views continued to confine them from focussing more attention on a deeper and broader understanding regarding the local sources of Malay history. Based on the view such as Collingwood's, many of these colonial scholars and local adherents had rejected the solid historical values of the indigenous works of Malay history such as *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Raja Pasai* and more especially *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. On the second problem, it was discovered that the colonial scholars and their local adherents are practicing a purely western methods and approach in studying classical Malay historical texts. In early

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<sup>2</sup> History was defined as an objective science, contains humanistic values, a rational discourse and a science inspired by the writer himself. See further R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 10-11.



stages they had brought the romanticism, pure philological and narrow comparative studies approach into the study of classical Malay historical texts. As a result, many classical historical texts were classified as only “romance history”. In addition, comparative study method, which was among the most popular approaches during this period, had blamed many texts as carbon copies of the legacies of Indian, Persian and Arabic literature.<sup>3</sup> In later a stage, they brought in the positivism approach, which was made possible for them to use a broader implementation of scientific knowledge in the study of literature. Based on this approach, only the objective aspects of the texts will be given the consideration. Subjective aspects such as the themes, the historical and intellectual impact of the texts and further intrinsic meaning of the texts were generally neglected. Finally, it was discovered that more classical Malay historical texts were considered as non-historical works.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, there were numerous extensive efforts in studying the classical Malay historical texts conducted by the western as well as local scholars. In spite of a number of advantages that could be gained from their works and commentaries, there were also numerous major misconceptions threatening the local Malay historical concept and perspectives. These misconceptions, if not properly corrected, will eventually destroy and demolish the conceptual aspects of the classical Malay history. Therefore this fact explained clearly the problem statement of this study.

This study intends to offer an appropriate approach to the classical Malay historical texts. However, during this course of study several problems and difficulties are also expected. First and foremost is the rare sources related to the topic of Malay concept of history. In this respect local sources are especially rare and difficult to

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<sup>3</sup> Siti Hawa Haji Salleh, “Teks Melayu Tradisional: Interpretasi dan Penilaian dalam Pengkajian Kesusasteraan Melayu,” in *Teks Cerminan Nilai Budaya Bangsa*, edited by Othman Puteh (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1994), 200-201.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-204.

access. In order to solve this problem several works of traditional local and foreign scholars such as Hamzah Fansuri, Nuruddin Al-Raniri, Frithjof Schuon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Mircea Eliade, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Joseph Campbell and many more are consulted. Although the perspectives of foreign scholars are not purely based on their understanding upon Malay historical and literary texts, their works take into consideration most of the basic understanding of traditional Malay history in which religion and history co-exist. Last but not least is the problem of the fusion of Islamic and non-Islamic ideas in the selected texts. The existence of this problem has brought the study to utilize both Islamic and non-Islamic sources during the course of discussion in chapter six.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Based on the above discussion and upon reaching its conclusion there are several important objectives of the study that essentially need to be achieved. The study is intended,

- i. To discuss the development of the study on Malay history since the early period of its establishment.
- ii. To unveil some of the misconceptions arose among the westerners and their local adherents during their course of studies on the classical Malay historical texts.
- iii. To discover possible reasons of the misconceptions in the study of Malay history and how they were then spread.
- iv. To rediscover the intellectual history of the Malays and how the Malays came to make contact with the great ideas from the great civilizations especially the Indian and Islamic civilizations.