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## Melaka: A Model of Malay Islamic States

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In analyzing Islamic development in early modern Southeast Asia, other studies have paid attention to [a], [b], and [c] as shown below. On the other hand, as mentioned in [d], several arguments have been made on the pre-colonial Malay political culture.

### [a] Melaka Model: An Exemplary Model

Major Malay port-polities in Melaka Strait area played a very significant role in developing Islamic civilization within Insular Southeast Asia. In this period, Pasai, Melaka, Aceh, Johor, and Riau-Johor (or Johor-Riau), in this order, each grew to be the center of trade and functioned as the center of Islamic learning in Southeast Asia. In the second

half of the 15th century, Melaka was an exemplary model of the Islamic state to the neighboring states and also contributed much to the spread of Islam through its trading network to the eastern islands like Java and Borneo.

### [b] Aceh Model: Another Exemplary Model

From the second half of the 16th century to the first half of the next century, Aceh became a center of Islamic learning and wished to achieve a more Islam-oriented state. While inviting Muslim scholars (of both foreign and local origin) who studied in West Asia, Aceh appointed them to top posts (*Syai' al-Islam*) in the Islamic administration. Those who held such posts played an active role in Islamic administration of Aceh, which supplied the neighboring Islamic states with a new exemplary model. This Aceh model was more Islamic-oriented than the Melaka model.

### [c] The 17th Century: A Turning Point in the History of Islam in Southeast Asia



Figure A Scene after the *Bersiram Tabal* (bathing) Ceremony on the *Panca Persada* Stage during the Enthronement Ceremony of Perak in Malaysia, Dated December 11, 1985. [Source: Jawatankuasa Panel Penulis Khas 1986: 43]

As the Aceh model suggests, the 17th century is regarded as a turning point in the history of Islam in Southeast Asia. Local Muslim people began to be loyal to Islamic norms from this century onward, although the first waves of Islamization in this region had already started in the middle of the 13th century. Their awakening happened due to the increase of European visitors as well as some other factors. Malay documents such as the Malay royal customary law of Riau-Johor suggest that Islam played a more significant role in local societies from the 18th century onward. This customary law shows that Islamic norms were set above the position of rulers in Malay society around this time.

#### [d] Arguments on the Pre-Colonial Malay Political Culture

So far, other studies have focused on traditional concepts such as *daulat* (divinity or supernatural power of Malay rulers), *derhaka* (treason against Malay rulers), and *nama* (fame of Malay rulers, titles of their people). Malay historians usually claim that people in the Malay sultanates were always loyal to their rulers for they believed in *daulat* and its effect on those who committed *derhaka*. On the other hand, although referring those two concepts as well, British scholar, J. M. Gullick thinks that the above-mentioned traditional view was no longer influential in the 19th century. A. C. Milner's view, that the pre-colonial Malay polity (*kerajaan*) was ruler-centered, is somewhat similar to that of Malay historians. His argument, however, claims that *nama* has been the most important concept in the Malay political life during the Islamic period. Although both these arguments differ in detail, such alternative views themselves suggest that the transformation of Malay political culture occurred during early modern times.

While recognizing the above-mentioned four points, the present study discusses the case of Melaka in order to examine state formation of the Malay Islamic states before the 17th century. For this purpose, we will approach the *Sejarah Melayu* and try to analyze factors that legitimize the position of the ruler. Our main interest here is to clarify such elements that support the divinity of a Malay ruler and their connections with Islamic factors. While reexamining the following seven aspects, I would like to point out some features of the Melaka model.

#### [1] Malay Political Contract (*Perjanjian*) in the *Sejarah Melayu*

The political contract between the Malay rulers and their people is regarded as the most significant political principle in the Melaka model. Both parties made this contract by taking a mutual oath and Allah was considered its witness. This contract includes Islamic norms and two traditional concepts, *daulat* and *derhaka*. At the same time, however, this contract stresses the predominance of Islamic laws over the concepts of *daulat* and *derhaka*. In other words, the supreme power of Melaka rulers is limited by Islamic norms.

#### [2] Criteria for Good Rulers

The *Sejarah Melayu* considers that *adil* (just, fair), *murah* (generous), and *saksama* (fair, careful) are the criteria for good rulers. In the context of Islam, *adil* is often stressed as important requirement of good ruler, as shown in the *Taj al-Salatin* (a Malay translation of Persian texts on statecraft, which was edited in Aceh in 1603). Therefore, it is certain that the criteria for good ruler in the *Sejarah Melayu* are also related to Islamic norms.

#### [3] An Important Question: What Measures Can Be Taken against the *Zalim* (unjust, unfair) Rulers by Their People?

The political contract states that the people do not have to keep their terms of the political contract any longer. Nonetheless, the same political contract does not allow the people to commit treason against the *zalim* rulers, since it mentions that Allah will punish those who depart from the terms of the contract. This interpretation accords with the part of *Sejarah Melayu* on the decline and downfall of Melaka. Yet, such a view of the *Sejarah Melayu* is more conservative than the answer given in the *Taj al-Salatin*. A more radical answer to the question is found only in the Malay document of the 18th century.

#### [4] Divinity of Malay Rulers (*Daulat*)

Only Islam is considered as the source of supernatural power in the *Sejarah Melayu*. In this work, those who possess supernatural power are limited to two groups of people. One is the *Saiyid* or *Syarif* people who ascend the Prophet Muhammad and the other is the Melaka rulers who ascend Raja Iskandar D'zulkarnain (Alexander of the Two Horns, a legendary hero who was active in spreading Islam). While the supernatural power of the *Saiyid* or *Syarif* people is mentioned through the Malay word *sumpah*, which also means "oath", a Malay word of Arabic origin, *daulat* is used for that of Melaka rulers. Although the idea of supernatural power itself dates back to pre-Islamic (or pre-Hindu) local society, such a pre-Islamic view is reformed to accord with Islamic values. It is noteworthy that the good genealogies or pedigrees (*bangsa*) functioned as significant elements in the Malay view on supernatural powers. These facts account for the difference in the concept of divinity between the Malay and the Javanese.

#### [5] Enthronement Ceremony

The *Sejarah Melayu* mentions the *panca persada* (a nine-layered stage for the enthronement ceremony), but does not describe the Malay enthronement ceremony in detail. According to the cases of Perak and Negeri Sembilan in the latter half of the 20th century, however, it is probable that the main events of the Malay enthronement ceremony have basically made up of two parts since the Melaka period. Whereas the second part (*Pertabalan* or *Menurungkan Daulat ceremony*) is characterized by Islamic factors and is done inside the court, the first part (*Bersiram Tabal* or *Bersiram ceremony*) is done on the *panca persada* outside the court, and looks like the *abhiseka* ceremony of Indian origin. If this is correct, it is reasonable to think that the ceremony of Indian origin has still remained as a sub-system in Islamized Malay enthronement ceremony. In that sense, the Malay view on supernatural powers has links to both Hindu and Islamic factors.

#### [6] Role of *Ulama* (Muslim scholars)

The *Sejarah Melayu* suggests that those *ulama* that bore titles of either *maulana* (a title for brilliant Islamic scholars) or *makhdum* (an honorific for Islamic intellectuals) were invited to the court as religious teacher or adviser, and the sultans and the dignitaries (*orang besar*) deepened their understanding on Islam under their guidance. This work also describes some activities of the *katib* (scribe) and the *kadi* (judge of Islamic court). However, the roles of *ulama* in the administration of Melaka are not so clearly indicated in the work. On the other hand, the *ulama* played very active roles in administration in the Aceh model.

#### [7] Concept of *Nama*

This concept is not clearly seen in the *Sejarah Melayu*, while the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* often mentions it. Since the edition of that work is traced back to around the early 18th century, the concept grew to be popular in

Malay society as the interest in Islamic norms increased.

So far, turning attention to seven aspects in its court history, the *Sejarah Melayu*, this paper has discussed the characteristics of state formation of Melaka. To conclude:

[ i ] It is likely that the main point of state formation of Melaka is the Malay political contract between rulers and their people. This contract is based on the Islamic framework, although it includes pre-Islamic (indigenous, Indian) traditional concepts. The Islamic framework is also clearly seen in criteria for good rulers.

[ii] As for supernatural powers, the *Sejarah Melayu* connects them only to the Islamic framework. Therefore, it seems that its view on supernatural powers does not accord with the fact that both Hindu and Islamic factors are still found in the Malay enthronement ceremony in the 20th century. However, the Hindu factors actually have remained just as sub-system in the ceremony.

[iii] Malay states in the pre-17th century, however, are not the same as those in the 18th century in that the latter respect the Islamic norms far more than the former. Its evidence can be seen in the following three facts. First, Melaka people were required to follow the unjust rulers. Second, the detail of Islamic administration is not described in the *Sejarah Melayu*. Third, *nama* did not seem to be popular concept yet in the Melaka society.

[iv] Melaka model played an active role in showing that the Islamic norms are not contradictory to the respect for the position of rulers and their genealogy. Therefore, the ruler-centered polity has been maintained in the Malay society until the 17th century. In other words, Islam did not play an active role in watching kingship yet in that period.

### Abbreviations

DBP: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka

JMBRAS: Journal of the Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

KL: Kuala Lumpur

MBRAS: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

OUP: Oxford University Press

SMD: A. Samad Ahmad (ed.) 1986 [1979] *Sulalatus Salatin: Sejarah Melayu*. KL: DBP.

SMr: Winstedt, R. O. (ed.) 1938 "Sejarah Melayu" *JMBRAS* 16-2, 3.

SMS: Shellabear, W. G. (ed.) 1975 *Sejarah Melayu*. Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti.

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