

The Importance of Learning Malay Sultanates in the Context of the Present Federation of Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This paper views the emergence of the present Malay Sultanates from the historical perspective. Furthermore, as it is one of the important elements in Malaysian history, a close study of the Malay Sultanates would enhance interest in Malay history and promote unity among Malaysian citizens. It is based on the Malay classical literary texts of Sejarah Melayu, Hikayat Johor Serta Pahang and Peringatan Salasilah dari Raja-Raja Johor hingga ke Riau Lingga, Singapura, Pahang dan Terengganu. It is also based on ancient foreign texts such as those by Alfonso De Albuquerque (1512) and Tome Pires (1512), both Portuguese.

Keywords

Malaysia, Malay Sultanates, Malay Classical Literary, Federation, Reconfiguration.

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Introduction

The central idea of this study is to prevail some of the historical facts that prove the formation of the present Federation of Malaysia was not exclusively by UMNO's independence struggle nor as the creation of the British per se as commonly believed. Instead, it was from the wisdom of the Malay Sultans who managed to maintain their sovereignty aftermath the Second World War. It has been a fashion among observers to advocate that Federated Malay States had been invented by the British in 1895 (Tamara Lynn Loos 2006: 82). After World War II (1941-1945), with Japan's defeat, the British returned once again to Malaya and sought to introduce a plan to nullify the sovereignty powers of the Sultans and give citizenship to all immigrants in the country. Malays were united in opposing the proposal which was ultimately abandoned by the British. The year 1946 saw the formation of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) and, in 1948, the Federation of Malaya was established (Jurkowi 1998: 354). On the contrary, this paper unveils the facts that a unified state encompassed the whole Malay States in the peninsula and its adjacencies in Sumatera and Riau had already existed since the emergence of confederacy of Melayu-Srivijaya at least in 6th century A.D. This unified state was then continued

by the Melaka Sultanate (1400-1699). This paper seeks to emphasize that long before the coming of foreign forces, especially the British and the Dutch, there was already a single unified indigenous federation. The political entity is known as 'Tanah Melayu.' Its existence had been the impetus of the present Federated Malaysia. In the late eighteenth-century, however, the unified Malay indigenous federation collapsed due to the death of Sultan Mahmud II in 1699. He had been the last blood of the Old Melayu-Srivijaya ruling house. With his death, all the former vassals or the auspice states under the Malay federation had free themselves and spring up to built their own sovereignty states. It had been from the collapsed of the Old Melayu-Srivijaya federation that had brought into being the present Malay States, encompassing Johor, Pahang, Selangor, Perak, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu. It had been during the dissolution period of the Old Malay federation, since the 17th century, the British came. Consequently, this paper enlightens that the emergence of present Federation of Malaysia should not be assumed as the British's creation. Instead, it had been a matter of re-emergence of the former indigenous Malay federation. The re-emergence of the former indigenous Malay kingdom is evidenced by observing the characteristics of the present Malay States. Although they are under a strong central

government, each state retains its own individuality and authenticity. The supreme head of the Federation is the Yang di-Pertuan Agong being the representative of the Malay Rulers, and the Malay Rulers themselves are the head of states at their respective states. The Federation of Malaya (later known as Malaysia) was established pursuant to an agreement signed between Her Majesty the Queen of England and Their Royal Highnesses. The Malay Rulers, neither UMNO nor Perikatan. It had been in this general framework the Malay Sultanates had played the great role as the impetus of the present Federation of Malaysian nation-building. This study would highlight how they came into being as they exist today. This would implicitly shed light on how the royal institution has become the basis of the modern nation-state of Malaysia. This study argues that the Federation of Malaya Agreement 1948 was a process of re-unification of the Malay Sultanates towards a self-governing, placed temporarily under the British advisory that include the Non-Federated Malay States, the Federated Malay States and the Strait Settlement of Penang and Malacca upon the abolishment of the Malayan Union. This study further argues that 31 August 1957 had marked the date where the Malay States were independent from the British administration and a self-governed Federation being established via the Independence Agreement 1957 entered by Her Majesty the Queen of England and Their Royal Highnesses The Malay Rulers.

Objectives

This issue is being addressed because it is one of the most helpful ways to re-examine our understanding on some of the complex issues in Malaysian studies such as the origin of the nation and how it came into being. This is because almost all the issues in Malaysia including its identity and origin, is either implicitly or explicitly related to the Malay Sultanates. Furthermore, as it is one of the important elements in Malaysian history, a close study of the Malay Sultanates would enhance interest in Malay history and promote unity among Malaysian citizens.

Methodology

This paper views the emergence of the present Malay Sultanates from the historical perspective. It is based on the Malay classical literary texts of *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Johor Serta Pahang* and *Peringatan Salasilah dari Raja-Raja Johor hingga ke Riau Lingga, Singapura, Pahang dan Terengganu*. It is also based on ancient foreign texts such as those by Alfonso De Albuquerque (1512) and Tome Pires (1512), both Portuguese.

Fall of Malacca Empire

There were at least four main factors that had brought about the dissolution of the political entity which had hitherto been exclusively referred to as the Melaka Sultanate: 1) internal disorders in the Kingdom of Johor during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II; 2) the weaknesses of Sultan Abdul Jalil Riayat Shah IV's reign, the successor of Sultan Mahmud II; 3) the invasion of Minangkabau Raja Kechik Siak who claimed to be the legitimate heir of Sultan Mahmud II, over Johor Kingdom's capital in 1703-1719; and 4) the resentment among the former Melaka tributaries, dependencies and vassal-states leaders over the influence of the Bugis in the Johor Sultanate's court .

History of the Malay Sultanates

It was a practice that once a kingdom had been established, the territory of such kingdom shall be within the authority of its ruler and his predecessors unless his whole territory had fallen into other authority or alternatively its ruler was defeated, dethroned or assassinated and a new Kingdom emerged. Andaya (1975: 285) observes:

Johor and Riau had now been abandoned because without a Raja, hence these sites had no importance. It was not the land which was important, but the ruler, without whose presence there was no negeri and no purpose or focus within the negeri.

Even though politically they re-emerged as the newly independent Malay Sultanates they maintained their ties with the old Melaka Sultanate, either through blood line or political realm legacy. In other words, the ruling houses of the new independent Malay Sultanates did not break their genealogical-politico ascribable structure with the Melaka Sultanate. Some of them had *kit and kin*, and the others of political ties with the old Melaka

Sultanate, *vis.*, the descendant of ancient Melayu-Sriwijaya Kingdom. Most of the present Malay Sultanates could in fact, trace their blood ties with the ancient kingdom of Bukit Siguntang. Notably the sultanates of Perak, Terengganu, Johor, Pahang, Riau-Lingga, along with Siak and Indragiri were the descendants of the Melaka ruling house. For instance, the founder of the Perak Sultanate, Raja Muzaffar, the prince of Sultan Mahmud I. The founder of the Terengganu Sultanate, Sultan Zainal Abidin Shah I was the younger brother of Sultan Abdul Jail Rakyat Shah IV of Johor. The founder of Pahang Sultanate, Bendahara Wan Ahmad was the descendant of Bendahara Abdul Majid (1747-1757), the grandson of Sultan Abdul Jalil Riayat Shah IV of Johor. For instances, Raja Kechik marrying one of Sultan Abdul Jalil Riayat Shah IV's princess after disposing the Sultan. Sultan Muzaffar Shah II (r.1636-53) of Perak was a prince of the Kingdom of Sumatra, it was through his consort that he acquired the Melaka bloodline since Sultan Salehuddin (r. 1630-36) demised without a heir. Of the latter, Maharaja Abu Bakar (r. 1886-95), despite being recognized as a Sultan by the British Government in 1885 still pursued the prior approval from Sultan Sulaiman Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Abdul Rahman before he was officially proclaimed Sultan of Johor on 13 February 1886. In Selangor, as stated in *Salasilah dan Perkara Berkenaan Datuk Engku Clang* (1935, MS 109: 9), Daeng Chelak, the father of Raja Lumu, the founder of present Selangor Sultanate, had sought the Sultan of Perak to give the nobat to his son. The reason is clear because the ruling house of Perak Sultanate had a direct line with Melaka Sultanate as the founder of the Sultanate was Raja Muzaffar Shah, the prince of Melaka Mahmud Shah I. Their kingship related to the Melaka Sultanate would maintain the prestige that the particular ruling house has *daulat*. It also proves that the Sultanate was a very old establishment which had its origin from a great ancient kingdom, not as a common entity. They called it 'berasal-berusul.' The fact that their ancestors were from Bukit Siguntang renowned maritime tradition of Melayu-Srivijaya entitled them with the legal sovereignty and warranted the obedience among their subjects. As Pahang, Terengganu and Johor evolved to become independent sovereignties from the collapse of the Malay central kingdom, they maintain their

identity by affiliation with Melayu as their states are called 'Negeri Melayu' in the sense that the states belong to the Ruler who descended from the Melayu ruling house or the state was formerly under/belong to the ruling house of Melayu while their subjects shall carry the reference as Orang Melayu-Johor (Johor-Malay), Orang Melayu-Terengganu (Terengganu-Malay), Orang Melayu-Kelantan (Kelantan-Malay), Orang Melayu-Pahang (Pahang-Malay), Orang Melayu-Patani (Patani-Malay) and so forth.

Constitution of Malaysia

The nineteenth-century British observer, John Crawfurd (1856: 251), had also acknowledged the existence of what is called as 'the Malay Territory', he wrote:

The Malays themselves call the peninsula Tanah Melayu, that is, the 'Malay land, or country of the Malays;' and they designate its wild inhabitants, speaking the Malay language, as the Orang banua, literally 'people of the soil;' or as we should express it, 'aborigines.' The term 'land of the Malays' is, however, given to the Peninsula by civilised Malays, perhaps only on account of its being the only country almost exclusively peopled by Malays; whereas in Sumatra and Borneo they are intermixed with other populations. The term 'son of the soil,' applied by these civilised Malays may in the same manner, be used by them only to distinguish the rude natives from themselves claiming to be foreign settlers. The expressions, however, would seem to imply that the civilised Malays considered the wild tribes, speaking the same language with themselves, as the primitive occupants of the land. But the same wild tribes, speaking the Malay language, although not distinguished as 'son of the soil,' exist also in Sumatra, and more especially on its eastern side opposite to the Peninsula: and they are found also, in several of the islands lying between those countries, extending even to Banca and Billiton. When the Japanese ousted the British from Malaya in 1941, the Japanese maintained the position of the Malay Rulers in the affairs of Islam and the Malay customs. In 1945, the British regained the control over the Malay states and placed them under the British Military Administration. On 1 April 1946, Malayan Union was introduced by the British, however the consent of the Malay Rulers were

unlawfully obtained which had resulted in the Malay Rulers sending their protest to London. The Malayan Union was later abolished in 1948 and replaced with the Federation of Malay States. All the sources clearly prevail that the British had never denied the sovereignty of the Malay Sultanates, the British shall adopt any trick or approach in order to secure agreements or consents from the Malay Rulers in order to validate their intervention in the affairs of the Malay States. Their position was designated as advisors or residents which related in civil administration of the Malay States. Such position took over the jurisdiction and power of a Bendahara in the Malay Traditional political hierarchy. In other words, the introduction of the Federation of Malay States or later known as Malaysia was not peculiar to the Malay political tradition. Its formation could be well illustrated by Gullick's (1987: 24), the authority in Malaysian history, it states:

The State Councils established in Selangor and Perak in 1877, and later in other states by the colonial regime, were an innovation in outward form and procedure. Yet they were—unknowingly perhaps—built upon foundations of Malay practice of informal consultation between a ruler and his court officers and chiefs.

It had been the practice of this informal consultation between a ruler and his court officers and chiefs which later been adopted by the British thus being incorporated into the relationship between the Malay Rulers and the British officers.

Conclusion

The re-emergence of the present Malay Sultanates as independent entities began with the fall of the Melaka Sultanate in 1699 and the dissolution of the Johor-Pahang-Riau-Lingga Sultanate in the nineteenth-century. Hence, at this point we could conclude that the introduction of the Federation of Malay States by the British was a copy of the old Melaka Sultanate. Its form had already been set up within the indigenous political setting. It is well said that the establishment of any central government in any manner shall not derogate the sovereignty of the rulers and no authority within the Malay Sultanates shall be legally vested in any other government whatsoever unless such authority was voluntarily delegated by the rulers.

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