

THE TRIUMPH OF RULER

Islam and Statecraft in Pre-Colonial Malay-Archipelago¹

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Abstract

Taking pre-colonial period as the subject of study, this article argues that Islam is part of Malay culture and politics. Islam strongly engaged in the formation of Malay kingdoms, mingled with maritime commerce, and contributed to the formulation of Malay ideas of power and political management. Yet, it should be noted that the important role of Islam is to be explained by the fact that the religion gave emphasis to the idea of omnipotent ruler (raja), as was expressed in the Islamized language of politics, such as khalifa (vicegerent) and zill Allah fi al-alam (the shadow of Allah on earth). It was the ruler, with Islamic honorific titles and attributes, which appeared as the most determinant actor in the statecraft of kingdoms. Being as such, Islam could not be conceived of as an evaluation for rulers' political conduct. Instead, Islam served as a religious justification for the rise of the absolutist kingdom of the archipelago, which culminated in the kingdom of Aceh in the seventeenth century. The ruler had paramount position over the subjects (rakyat) and the economic elites (orang kaya).

[Artikel ini membahas satu isu penting terkait Islam dan budaya politik Melayu. Mengambil kasus masa pra-kolonial, Islam sejak awal memang

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menjadi bagian dari pembentukan kerajaan, yang berlangsung bersamaan dengan perdagangan maritim, dan karena itu memberi kontribusi dalam perumusan gagasan kekuasaan Melayu. Namun, perlu dicatat bahwa peran penting Islam tersebut sangat terkait dengan fakta bahwa agama tersebut menekankan ajaran yang sejalan dengan ide raja adikuasa, sebagaimana terekspresikan dalam konsep politik semisal khilafah dan zil Allah fi al-alam (bayangan Tuhan di bumi). Dan kenyataannya raja memang tampil sebagai pihak yang sangat menentukan dalam manajemen politik di kerajaan Melayu. Bahkan, Islam menjustifikasi munculnya kerajaan absolut di Nusantara, yang mencapai puncaknya di kerajaan Aceh pada abad ketujuh belas. Raja sangat berkuasa tidak hanya atas rakyatnya, tapi juga menghancurkan orang kaya (elit ekonomi).]

Keywords: Islam, Malay identity, pre-colonial kingdoms, politics, ruler-subject relations, bourgeois.

A. Introduction

In this article, attempts will be made to examine the formation of Malay political ideas and practices during the pre-colonial period, the span of time when Islam was adopted as a leading substance in the political concepts and practices (statecraft) within the Malay kingdoms. In line with their involvement in the Muslim-dominated international maritime commerce, the Malay kingdoms of the period witnessed the condition in which Islam engaged since the initial process of establishment of Malay politics and culture.

The discussion of this article covers the period of the first two Islamic kingdoms in the Malay-archipelago, Samudra Pasai and Malacca from the late thirteenth to the early sixteenth century, and then the Acehnese kingdom in the seventeenth century. In Malay politics, this period is the time during which the integration of Islam, trade and politics emerged as a salient feature. They formed the main pillars of *alam Malayu*.²

² Taufik Abdullah, "Islam and the Formation of Tradition in Indonesia: A Comparative Perspective", *Itinerario*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1989), pp. 17–36; Anthony Reid, "Trade and State Power in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries Southeast Asia", *Proceedings Seventh International Association of Historians of Southeast Asia* (Bangkok, 1977), pp. 391–419.

Thus, in addition to the languages and concepts of politics expressed in Malay classical texts, especially *Sejarah Melayu* and *Taj us-Salatın*, the discussion of this article also deals with power exercise and management in the kingdoms, which appeared in the form of state regulation (*undang-undang*) concerning with socio-political and economic affairs. The issues on the relationship between ruler (*raja*) and subjects (*rakyat*), as well as between ruler and *orang kaya* (economic elite), will be examined.

This study will shed light on the way Islam worked in political statecraft of Malay kingdoms. Being as such, this study is expected to add our knowledge on Malay which is still missing from the previous works, called as “idealist”, which emphasize the central role of ideas in Malay politics, leaving its practical and operational aspects unexplored.³ Whilst, taking the economic power of ruler into discussion, this study also adds an important point which is minus in the so-called “functionalist” approach in Malay studies, which explain the power of Malay ruler in term of merely economic and institutional factors.⁴ In this article, the integration of the two approaches, the idealist and functionalist, will be employed, taking the ruler, with Islamic titles and regalia, as the agent who had both political and economic power. As I will show, it was in

³ A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson, Ariz: University of Arizona Press, 1982); A.C. Milner, “Islam and Muslim State”, in *Islam in South-East Asia*, ed. by M.B. Hooker (Leiden: Brill, 1983), pp. 23–49. In the context of Southeast Asian studies, to be included in this mode of study approach are the works by Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period, 16th to 19th Century* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1963); Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, “The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture”, in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. by Claire Holt (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 1–69; Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); H.G.C. Schulte Nordholt, *Spell of Power: A History of Balinese Politics, 1650-1940* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996).

⁴ J.M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya* (London: Athlone Press, 1965). To be mentioned in this respect are the works by Jan Breman, *The Shattered Image: Construction and Deconstruction of the Village in Colonial Asia* (Dordrecht: Foris Publication, 1988); Michael Adas, “From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Precolonial and Colonial Southeast Asia”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1981), pp. 217–247. For the discussion on these two approaches, Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Sumatran Sultanate and Colonial State: Jambi and the Rise of Dutch Imperialism, 1830-1907* (Ithaca N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2004), pp. 30–32.

the hands of the rulersthat the ideas of Malay politics were formulated, and the sea trading businesses were regulated. And Islam contributed to augment rulers' legitimacy to rule the subjects and to control the economic development in the kingdoms.

B. Islam and *Raja*-Oriented Politics

It should be stated that the central role of Islam in Malay politics and culture, as briefly noted, is to be traced back to the early period of Islamization in the thirteenth century, which proceeded in line with the state formation and commercial development. The three mentioned trends of development formed a peculiar feature in the historical process of Malay cultural and political formation. The geographical and climatic conditions had predestined the areas of Malay-archipelago to engage in maritime trade, they acted as intermediaries in intra-regional commercial development.⁵ Hence, the changing pattern of trade since the thirteenth century became a determining factor. Having been directly involved in the long distance trade, some areas of the Malay-archipelago experienced an intensive Islamization concomitant with its increasing political power. In long distance trade, the movement of people proceeded not merely in economic terms, but also in cultural and political formation.⁶ Viewed as such, Islam formed an inherent part of the formation of the kingdoms, and in turn the establishment of their cultural and political systems. And the ulama formed a leading social group presiding over the courts. Further to advising the rulers, the ulama contributed to strengthening the kingdoms' performance of Islam.

The above process can be seen in the establishment of three early Islamic kingdoms in the Malay-archipelago, i.e. Samudra Pasai in the thirteenth century, Malacca and then Aceh in the fourteenth and

⁵ M.A.P. Meilink-Reolofez, "Trade and Islam in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago Prior to the Arrival of the Europeans", in *Islam and the Trade of Asia: A Colloquium*, ed. by D.S. Richards (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer & University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 138.

⁶ K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 5; George Dalton, "Theoretical Background Karl Polanyi's Analysis of Long-distance Trade and His Wider Paradigm", in *Ancient Civilization and Trade*, ed. by Jeremy A. Sabloff and C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), pp. 63–132.

sixteenth centuries respectively. As is already discussed, the three Malay kingdoms just mentioned presented an historical phenomenon in which Islam, trade and politics were integrated.⁷ The conversion of Samudra Pasai's ruler to Islam, for instance, coincided with the process of its becoming a kingdom. Malik al-Saleh converted to become a Muslim at the same time as he held political power.⁸ The same pattern of state formation is also true with the case of Malacca. The travel accounts of Tome Pires provides us with information on the rise of Malacca as an important kingdom in the fourteenth century, which occurred alongside its becoming increasingly attractive for both regional and international Muslim traders, especially the Persians, Bengalis as well as the Arabs. The ruler of Malacca, Iskandar Shah, greeted the traders with warm services and provided them with facilities for both economic and religious activities.⁹ Iskandar Shah converted to Islam on the advice of the ulama

⁷ Jajat Burhanudin, "The Making of Islamic Political Tradition in the Malay World", *Studia Islamika*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2001), pp. 8–15.

⁸ It is important to stress here that the alleged year for the conversion of Samudra Pasai's ruler to Islam is 1297. It is based on the comparison between the reports of Marco Polo in 1292, in which he noted that at that time Samudra Pasai had not converted to Islam, and the evidence supplied by the gravestone of Malik al-Saleh, the first Muslim ruler of Samudra Pasai, which is dated 1297. Historians have then concluded that Islamization proceeded some times between 1292 and 1297. For a critical discussion on this theory of Islamization, see A.H. Hill, "The Coming of Islam to North Sumatra", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1963), pp. 6–21; K. Hall, "The Coming of Islam to the Archipelago", in *Economic exchange and social interaction in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Karl L. Hutterer (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1977), pp. 213–231. This opinion corresponds to the story provided in the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, in which Malik al-Saleh is described as the first ruler of the state to convert to Islam. The *Hikayat* relates that Merah Silu—the previous name of Malik al-Saleh—once had a dream that he met the Prophet Muhammad who asked him to recite the profession of the faith (*kalimah syahadah*). The Prophet then named him Malik al-Saleh. From that moment, Merah Silu converted to Islam with the title 'Sultan'. See A.H. Hill, "Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 33, no. 2 (190) (1960), pp. 1–165; Russell Jones, "Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia", in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. by Nehemia Levtzion (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), pp. 129–157.

⁹ Tome Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, vol. 2, trans. by Armando Cortesao (London: Hakluyt Society, 1944), pp. 240–241..

(*mollab*), who had settled in the kingdom during his reign.¹⁰

A similar process also applied to the formation of the Acehese kingdom in the sixteenth century. The Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511, which resulted in the dispersal of the Asian trade network, provided Aceh with opportunity to become a major trade center. The Muslim merchants in Malacca moved and settled in Aceh, and—as in the cases of Samudra Pasai and Malacca—contributed to the making of Aceh as a leading trading center in the Asian trade network. Ali Mughayat Shah (r. 1514-30) was the first ruler to lay the foundations for the development of Aceh as a powerful Islamic kingdom in the seventeenth century.¹¹

With the above process of becoming kingdoms, it is clear that Islam formed an essential element in the formation of Malay politics and culture. Yet, it must be stressed, Islamization is to be viewed in terms of the long-standing political culture of the Malay-archipelago, which viewed the ruler as the center of every aspect of life.¹² The ruler was not only regarded as the sole owner of the kingdom's territory and its subjects, but was also believed to be like a Buddhist enlightened being, the *bodhisattva*, who “renounces *nirvana* in order to remain in this world and to assist the spiritual liberation of his fellow beings”.¹³ In the Malay world, the ruler (*raja*) was regarded as embodying the existence of the state (*kerajaan*), and the people described themselves as living under a particular *raja*.¹⁴ It was in this framework of *raja*-oriented political culture that the early mode of translating Islam in the Malay-archipelago proceeded. This is obviously expressed in one of the most important Malay classical texts, the *Sejarah Melayu*.¹⁵ Although classified as belonging to a historical literature genre,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242.

¹¹ Denys Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh Zaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, trans. by Winarsih Arifin (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1986), pp. 8–17; M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1300* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 62–9.

¹² Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, 1956).

¹³ Milner, *Islam*, pp. 31-2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31.

¹⁵ *Sejarah Melayu* or Malay Annals is considered to be the best and the most important Malay literary work. This text was most likely written by a member of the *Bendahara* family in the Malaccan state, perhaps Tun Muhammad or Tun Sri Lanang. On the date of its composition, it has been agreed that this text was finished in 1612.

this text is of great significance to the Islamic political discourses of the pre-colonial Malay-archipelago. Considering both the period of its composition, at the time when Islam was already established as a social and political phenomenon,¹⁶ and the nature of its contents which reveal a strong familiarity with Islam, the *Sejarah Melayu* presents a clear account of encounter between Islam and Malay politics and culture.

Being as such, one of the central issues the *Sejarah Melayu* addressed is the genealogy of Malay ruler. The text claims that the rulers are descended from Raja Iskandar Dzulkarnaen, not from the breed of genies (*jin*) or fairies.¹⁷ Iskandar Dzulkarnaen is described in the text with great significance in the history of the world. He held political power from the West to the East; he conducted his rule on the basis of Islamic principles. The story of Iskandaris narrated in the *Sejarah Melayu* with such detail that the first part of the text is regarded as the “Iskandar episode”.¹⁸ What is of prominence here is that the story of Iskandaris directed to provide the Malay rulers with a religion-based political legitimacy,¹⁹ on the basis of which the rulers built a heroic image, that was needed as a means of establishing the *raja*-centered power within Islamized society.

For the discussion on this text, see Richard O. Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 158; R. Roolvink, “The Variant Versions of the Malay Annals”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 123, no. 3 (1967), pp. 301–312; Nūr al-Dīn Rānīrī, *Bustanu’s-Salatīn, Bab II, Fasal 13*, ed. by T. Iskandar (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1966), pp. 38–40; Tun Seri Lanang, *Sejarah Melayu*, ed. by W.G. Shellabear (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 3.

¹⁶ Vladimir Braginsky, *The System of Classical Malay Literature* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993), pp. 7-10.

¹⁷ R.O. Winstedt (ed.), “The Malay Annals of Sejarah Melayu”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol.16, no. 3 (1938), p. 56.

¹⁸ J.J. Ras, *Hikajat Bandjar: A Study in Malay Historiography* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), p. 129. It should be noted that the *Sejarah Melayu* is not the only text with the story of Iskandar. Almost all Malay classical texts, especially those belonging to the genre of court literature, report that the genealogy of Malay rulers goes back to Iskandar Dzulkarnaen. The story can also be found in for instances *Misa Melayu*, *Hikayat Palembang*, *Hikayat Andalas*, *Hikayat Aceh*, and *Undang-Undang Malaka*. See Mohammed Khalid Taib, “Sastera Sejarah in the Malay World: A Structural and Contextual Study of Folkloristic Elements in a Transitional Genre”, Ph.D. Dissertation (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1981), pp. 227–229.

¹⁹ Burhanudin, “The Making”, pp. 17.

Emphasizing the supernatural characteristics of the ruler, the story of Iskandar functioned to invest the royal figure with religious authority.

Next to the claim to genealogy, the *raja*-oriented politics was also expressed in a term *daulat*, a concept of politics that denotes the religion-based political authority. Coming from the Arabic language, *d-w-l*, with the root meaning “to turn, to alternate”, the term *daulat* has evolved as an Islamic political concept to signify the power of a dynasty and ultimately a state.²⁰ In the Malay political tradition, the term *daulat* has been employed to denote “the divine elements in kingship”,²¹ as a new meaning to the concept of *andeka* of the earlier Buddhist kings—“a word that meant the ghostly forces that lived around sovereign and smote with evil any reckless person who blasphemed their majesty”.²² Thus, *daulat* refers to divine quality which is inherent in the Malay rulers,²³ in the sense that they have a sort of “divinely-endowed power or gift” which enabled them to exercise political power over the subjects.²⁴

The above meaning of *daulat* is to be gleaned by the fact that the term is used together with the royal Islamic title, *zill Allah fi al-'alam* (God's Shadow on Earth). It is expressed in the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, in which it is stated that Malik al-Salih—the converted ruler who immediately assumed the title sultan—was bestowed with the title “God's Shadow on Earth”,²⁵ which was used together with *daulat*. The text states, “*Daulat dirgabayu Shah Alam zill Allah fi al-'alam*, O King, Lord of the Realm, God's Shadow on Earth, may you live forever”.²⁶ Hence, *daulat*, together with honorific titles, clearly mark a claim to divine right by the rulers as

²⁰ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 35–36.

²¹ R.J. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary*, vol. II (London-Macmillan-New York: St. Martin's Press, 1932), p. 261.

²² R.J. Wilkinson, “Some Malay Studies”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 10, no. 1 (113) (1932), p. 80.

²³ Shelly Errington, “A Study of Genre: Meaning and Form in the Malay *Hikayat Hang Tuah*”, Ph.D. Dissertation (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1975), p. 118.

²⁴ Taib, “Sastera Sejarah in the Malay World: A Structural and Contextual Study of Fokloristic Elements in a Transitional Genre”, p. 309.

²⁵ A.H. Hill, “Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 33, no. 2 (190) (1960), pp. 57–58.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

their power is derived from God.²⁷ The adoption of these royal Islamic titles had a significant impact on the power establishment. These titles dignified the rulers with divine attributes, credited them as having religious legitimacy to rule the kingdoms, endowed them with many rights and privileges, and placed them above the subjects.²⁸

The above notion of *raja*-politics was also supported by the Sufi belief of the “perfect man” (*insan kamil*), which appeared as the most celebrated Sufi thought in the development of Islam during the period of Acehnesse kingdom. As is known, the works of the leading Sufi ‘ulama of Ibn ‘Arabi and al-Jili, to whom the Sufi concept of perfect man has been credited, were frequently referred to and therefore influential in the Islamic discourses in the stage of Islamization in the Malay-archipelago.²⁹ And the idea of perfect man paralleled the *raja*-oriented-politics, both of which supported the idea of omnipotent rulers which resulted in the formulation of a “Sufi king” (*raja Sufi*). Here, the ruler was depicted in Sufi terms and was believed to have “fully realized his essential oneness with Divine Being”.³⁰ It was also this Sufi idea of *insan kamil* that constituted the substance of a poem by Hamzah Fansuri, a leading ‘*alim* of Sufism of *wahdatul wujud* in the Acehnesse kingdom. In his capacity as *shaikebul Islam* of the kingdom, he projected the ruler of Aceh, Alauddin Ri‘ayat Shah (1588-1604)—his patron—as having reached the highest station of the Sufi path. He credited the ruler as being “*wali*”, “*kamil*”, and “*kutub*”,

²⁷ Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, pp. 45–53.

²⁸ In the Malay world, the term *daulat* was therefore used in the opposite direction to the concept of *durhaka*, the state of disorder that threatened the power of the *raja*. Having been credited the rulers with divine qualities, with the *daulat*, the Malay political culture signified every attempt to rebel against the rulers (*durhaka*) is associated with the traitorous actions against God Himself. See E.U. Kratz, “Durhaka: The Concept of Treason in the Malay Hikayat Hang Tuah”, *South East Asia Research*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1993), pp. 68–97.

²⁹ See for instances A.H. Jones, “Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History”, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1961), pp. 10–23; Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1969); G.W.J. Drewes, “Indonesia: Mysticism and Activism”, in *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, ed. by Gustave E. Von Grunebaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 299–325.

³⁰ Milner, “Islam and Muslim State”, p. 39.

all of which indicate that one has reached the last stages of the spiritual experiences.³¹

This *raja*-oriented politics remains unchallenged as the call for *shari'ah*-oriented Islam began echoing in the seventeenth century, alongside the growing network with the Middle East, in particular Mecca and Medina. As is known, the relationship with the Middle East became stronger in the kingdom of Aceh. It was evidenced with the establishment of an 'ulama network, which then led to Mecca playing an important role in determining the intellectual discourses in the Malay-archipelago of the period. The works of Azra prove the significant role of Mecca in the area. The leading 'ulama of the period, Nuruddin al-Raniri (d. 1608), Abdurrauf al-Sinkili (1615-1693), and Yusuf al-Maqassari (1627-1699), were trained in Mecca. They formed "Jawi circle" with the Meccan 'ulama from whom they learned Islam, and were then responsible for disseminating the currently Meccan-based Islamic thought, neo-Sufism, to the Malay-archipelago.³²

The continued importance of *raja*-oriented politics can be gleaned from the text of seventeenth century Aceh, *Taj us-Salatin*, which is credited as having "great influence on Malay ideas",³³ and became the core element in the formation of Islamic political tradition in the Malay world.³⁴ Written by Bukhari al-Jauhari in Aceh, possibly in 1603, the *Taj us-Salatin* is one of the most important texts in Islamic political ideas of the Malay-archipelago.³⁵ This text is specifically dedicated to providing

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

³² Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulama" in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century* (Crows Nest, NSW: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin and University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

³³ Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, p. 97.

³⁴ Taufik Abdullah, "The Formation of a Political Tradition in the Malay World", in *The Making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Anthony Reid (Clayton, Vic: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1993), pp. 35-58.

³⁵ There are now two romanized versions of the *Taj us-Salatin*: one is transcribed and edited by Khalid M. Hussain (ed.), *Taj us-Salatin* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1992), and the other is by Jumsari Jusuf (tran.), *Tajussalatin* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan & Kebudayaan, 1979). For the purpose of this study I would refer to the two romanized version of Khalid Huassain.

religious guidance for the rulers. “Here is the great book”, so *Taj us-Salatin* begins its discussion, “to explicate the etiquette of the ruler (*raja*), court dignitaries (*menteri dan hulubalang*), every great people (*orang besar-besar*), the subjects (*rakyat*), and everything related to the kingdom”.³⁶ This text was used not only in Aceh, to which the text addressed its advice, but also in Java. Carey mentions that *Taj us-Salatin* was copied in the Kraton of Yogyakarta in Java in 1831, and was used by Sultan Hameng kubuwana I for his political exercises in the kingdom.³⁷ And this text was also popular in the Makassar Islamic state in South Sulawesi, where it influenced the composition of a political literary work to legitimize the newly converted royal aristocrats, “*Budi Istirabat Indra Bustanil Arifin*”.³⁸

In addition, what is of special importance to explain is that the content of *Taj us-Salatin* is similar in substance with the work of al-Gazali, *Nasiha al-Muluk*, showing the eagerness to make the book of al-Ghazali integrated to the *raja*-oriented politics of Aceh, and finally of seventeenth century Malay-archipelago. Although the Malay translation of the *Nasiha al-Muluk* is dated 1700,³⁹ it can be said that the book had already become an important part of *raja*-oriented politics. *Nasiha al-Muluk* sourced the *Taj us-Salatin*. Both texts presented the discussions that were directed to providing the ruler with “practical advice on the right behavior”.⁴⁰ Thus, the *Taj us-Salatin* was set to engage in voicing the need of putting Islam in the heart of *raja*-oriented politics of the Malay-archipelago.⁴¹

³⁶ Khalid M. Hussain (ed.), *Taj us-Salatin*, p. 6.

³⁷ P.B.R. Carey, “A Further Note on Professor John’s ‘Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet’”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 131, no. 2 (1975), p. 344.

³⁸ Christian Pelras, “Religion, Tradition, and the Dynamics of Islamization in South Sulawesi”, *Indonesia*, no. 57 (1993), p. 149.

³⁹ M.C. Ricklefs and Peter Voorhoeve, *Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 120.

⁴⁰ Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 69.

⁴¹ For the discussion on this text in Malay political ideas, see also Jajat Burhanudin, “Kerajaan-Oriented Islam: The Experience of Pre-Colonial Indonesia”, *Studia Islamika*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2006), pp. 33–66.

C. Strengthening Rulers' Power over the Subjects

In the Malay political tradition, as is commonly known, the ruler-subject relationship is formulated in a sort of a “covenant” between Sri Tri Buana (representing the ruler) and Demang Lebar Daun (the subjects), as is expressed symbolically in the *Sejarah Melayu*. The story began as Sri Tri Buana, the first ruler descended from Raja Iskandar Zulkarnean, intended to marry Wan Sendari, Demang Lebar Daun’s daughter. Demang Lebar Daun agreed on condition that Sri Tri Buana had to accept a covenant he proposed, that “the descendants of your humble servant shall be the subjects of your Majesty’s throne, but they must be well treated by your descendants”.⁴² It is the main substance in the covenant. Demang Lebar Daun—the ancestor of the Malay commoners—took the initiative in making a covenant with the ruler on behalf of the Malay society. They recognize their position as the “ruled”, but they at the same ask the ruler to rule the subjects on the ground of certain regulations.

However, examining the covenant in the *Sejarah Melayu*, it appears that ruler-subject relationship is characterized by the dominant position of the ruler; the oppressive and unjust behavior of the ruler does not by any means absolve the subjects from the duty to be loyal to the ruler. Loyalty to the ruler constitutes an important feature of the ruler-subjects relationship. In this respect, the *Sejarah Melayu* introduces the term *durbaka* (treacherous) in the mentioned relationship, that the subjects are obliged to accept the political power of the rulers, regardless of their misbehavior which inflict injustice upon the subjects.⁴³ It was this concept of *durbaka*

⁴² Winstedt, “The Malay Annals of Sejarah Melayu”, p. 57; C.C. Brown (tran.), *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 105. The *Sejarah Melayu* relates, “And the king replied, “I agree to give the undertaking for which you ask: but I, in my turn, require an undertaking from you, sir”. “...that your descendants shall never for rest of time be disloyal to my descendants, even if my descendants oppress them and behave evilly”. And Demang Lebar Daun said, “Very well, your Highness. But if your descendants depart from the terms of the pact, then so will mine”. And Sri Tri Buana replied, “Very well, I agree to that covenant”: where upon both of them took solemn oath to the effect that whoever departed from the terms of the pact, let his house be overturned by Almighty God so that its roof be laid on the ground and its pillars be inverted.

⁴³ Winstedt, “The Malay Annals of Sejarah Melayu”, p. 57; Brown (tran.), *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p. 105. The *Sejarah Melayu* relates as follow: “similarly it has been granted by Almighty God to Malay subjects that they shall never be disloyal or

which appears to be the main points the text of seventeenth century Aceh addressed. It is *Bustan us-Salatin* by Nuruddin al-Raniri (d. 1608), one of the leading ‘ulama of Malay-archipelago of the period.

Bustan us-Salatin, (hereafter referred to as *Bustan*), is described as an “encyclopedia of world history”.⁴⁴ It provides us with evidence of the way in which this neo-Sufi ‘alim dealt with the issue of *raja*-oriented politics. The *Bustan*, written in about the 1630s, was dedicated to his patron in the Acehnese kingdom, Iskandar Thani. In an introduction to his *Bustan* (Raffles Malay MS no. 8, 4), al-Raniri wrote that Iskandar Thani commissioned him to “compose a book [*kitab*] in Malay [*Jawi*] language concerning the deeds of the denizens of ... the earth ... to relate the deeds of the kings of former times and later”.⁴⁵ Being a text which belongs to the genre of *adab* or court literature,⁴⁶ *Bustan* is to be seen as a part of *raja*-oriented politics. And al-Raniri dedicated his *Bustan* to enhance the *raja*-oriented political culture, sharing the same languages as the *Taj us-Salatin* and the *Sejarah Melayu*. As the quotation below reveals, al-Raniri strongly urged to obey the ruler as a religious obligation:

Thus every treason-committed men (*yang khianat*) are indeed condemned by God the Highest and does come to them penalty for their such behavior, and so are the men who commit to treason to the *raja* will certainly come to them the condemnation of God (*murka Allah*) ... Hi, every servant of God, do not commit to treason to the *raja*.⁴⁷

The above quotation strongly suggests that the *Bustan* put the issue of ruler-subject relation in the framework of *raja*-oriented politics, as can be found in the *Sejarah Melayu*. Even more, the *Bustan* seems to have strengthened the concept of *durbaka*, in the sense that the text gives strong emphasis to the rulers’ power more than what can be discerned treacherous (*durbaka*) to their rulers, even if their rulers behave evilly or inflict injustice upon them”.

⁴⁴ Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Quoted from Catherine A. Grinter, “Book IV of the ‘Bustan us-Salatin’ by Nuruddin-Raniri: A Study from the Manuscripts of a 17th Century Malay Work Written in North Sumatra”, Ph.D. Dissertation (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1979), p. 10.

⁴⁶ L.F. Brakel, “Persian Influence in Malay Literature”, *Abr Nabrain*, vol. 9 (1970), p. 8

⁴⁷ Rānirī, *Bustanū’s-Salatin*, Bab II, Fasal 13, p. 46..

from the covenant in the *Sejarah Melayu*. This can be gleaned from the fact that the so-called moral duty of the rulers to treat their subjects with truth and justice—that “they (Malay rulers) never put their subjects to shame”⁴⁸—is absent in the *Bustan*. This text, as the quotation reveals, does not give anything to count the subjects in politics. The only thing the text emphasizes is their duties to give absolute loyalty to the rulers.

Being as such, the *Bustan*, like the *Taj us-Salatin*, launched an Islamic political notion that was in harmony with the political culture of the Malay-archipelago. The emphasis on the urgency of performing *shari‘ah* by the rulers is conveyed in *Bustan* and *Taj us-Salatin* in the same political notion that focused on the *raja*. Here, the political standing of the texts can be understood. As in the case of *Sejarah Melayu*, the loyalty and obedience to the ruler constitutes their main substance. The texts suggest that obedience to the rulers is tantamount to following the commands of God himself. In this way the rulers are credited as having legitimate political authority that Muslim people must recognize.

D. Ruler and *Orang Kaya*

Now we come to the issue of the way how the *raja*-oriented politics deals with the very practical aspect of politics, the relationship between ruler and economic elite (*orang kaya*). Having been engaged at International sea commerce, pre-colonial Malay kingdoms witnessed the rise of what is locally termed as *orang kaya*. Literally means “rich man”, the *orang kaya* emerged as economic elites which held such a central role in trade activities in the kingdoms. The existence of *orang kaya* can be traced back to the time of pre-Islamic kingdom Srivijaya, as there appeared non-religious elites which involved in trade activities and political affairs. They were among others called as *pratyaya* who was responsible for administering the wealth of royal family, *nayaka* who was in charge of collecting states’ revenues, and other elites with the task of administering remote areas of the kingdom territories in which the ruler had not an effective control.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Winstedt, “The Malay Annals of Sejarah Melayu”, p. 57; Brown (tran.), *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p. 105.

⁴⁹ J. Kathirithamby-Wells, “Royal Authority and the ‘Orang Kaya’ in the Western Archipelago, circa 1500-1800”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1986).

The existence of similar elites can also be found in the Malacca kingdom. Based on both Western and local sources, it is stated that secular affairs of the kingdom were in the hands of elites under the ruler, next to religious elite (*kadi*) which was responsible only for religious affairs. The above elites were called as Bendahara, Temenggung, Bendahari, and Laksamana. In the *Sejarah Melayu*, those elites—more especially Bendahara—are described in such importance in real politics of the kingdom.⁵⁰ Such depiction of mentioned elites can also be found in the travel accounts of Tome Pires. In addition to detailing such important roles of Bendahara, Laksamana and Temenggung, Pires also noted other elite, Paduka Raja, in the administrative structure of the Malacca kingdom.⁵¹

It should be stated that international trade activities of the Malacca kingdom, which was relied very much on the availability of commodities from many areas in the Malay-archipelago, created opportunity for the rise of a social group that came to be known as *orang kaya*. The trading process necessitated the capability of collecting materials from many areas to the power center—in this respect, the capital city of Malacca kingdom—in which foreign traders were already there for business purposes. As Pires noted,⁵² the Malacca kingdom had neighboring areas which provided the kingdom with supplies of commodities for international market. They were among others Klang, Pahang, Indragiri, Rokan, and Singapore. To be mentioned in this regards are the kingdoms in Java, Sulawesi and Moluccas that made the Malacca as the market for their produces.

In such condition, the rise of economic agents which were in charge of bridging the transaction between local rulers (and traders) and international traders became inevitable. This role arose because the royal power, including the Bendahara, could not be able to handle the trade process in the kingdom. The absence of salaried staff of the kingdom special for this task is another factor that contributed to the rise of economic agents, and in turn created the condition for the emergence of *orang kaya*. This was also supported by the legal system of Malacca

⁵⁰ Winstedt, “The Malay Annals of Sejarah Melayu”, p. 70.

⁵¹ Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, 2, pp. 264–5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 259–64

kingdom. The *Undang-Undang Melaka*, on which the rules in the kingdom was based, facilitated the rise of the above economic practices, as it stipulates the regulation that limited the involvement of royal power in trading activities. According to *Undang-Undang Melaka*, the royal power—in this respect Syahbandar—are allowed to make business only in the produce of tin and not exceed the values of 112,5 real.⁵³

As a result, in addition to political elites, the Malacca kingdom also witnessed the existence of other party that played a part in the trading business. Regarding the political elites, the *Sejarah Melayu* noted the engagement of Bendahara Sri Maharaja in economic enterprises, stating that “never once did he come to grief in any of his enterprises”.⁵⁴ The same picture can also be found in the travel accounts of Tome Pires, in which he noted that Bendahara engaged in managing the revenue for the state, including those from the traders.⁵⁵ Yet, as is already stated, the kingdom of Malacca had not sufficient men-power to deal with detail such process of trading business. Therefore, the involvement of other party was really needed. It was with this background that the *orang kaya* began to emerge, although they still had to have connection with the power holders. Thus, next to *orang kaya*, there appeared the so-called “*orang besar* (great men)”, referring to members of the royal family. This indicates that the trading activities of the *orang kaya* proceeded with the support of political elites who had access to power center in the kingdom.⁵⁶

In the context of Malacca kingdom, the engagement of royal elites in business seems to have been limited in scale, in that they focused much more in formulating regulations rather than in intervening the trading process. Hence, the economic affairs in the kingdom developed in a relatively natural way. Besides its geographical setting as a strategic stopping-place for a long-distance trade in the Indian Ocean—that the kingdom enjoyed the natural blessing of favorable monsoons and trade winds that enabled the traders from East and West to meet one another in

⁵³ Liaw Yock Fang, *Undang - Undang Melaka* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1976), p. 71.

⁵⁴ Winstedt, “The Malay Annals of Sejarah Melayu”, p. 184.

⁵⁵ Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, 2, pp. 264.

⁵⁶ Kathirithamby-Wells, “Royal Authority and the ‘Orang Kaya’ in the Western Archipelago, circa 1500-1800”, p. 259.

the heart of the Malaccan state⁵⁷—the rulers’ attempt to create favorable conditions for trading activities is much more important to consider. The remarkable achievement of Malaccan rulers in building the kingdom was dependent on their ability to assure the traders by providing political and legal regulations that guaranteed the safety of trade transactions from any disturbances.

Having realized that the development of the kingdom was, to any significant extent, dependent upon international trade networks, the rulers of Malacca pursued regulations which welcomed and protected foreign traders. There were official procedures for the reception of traders, a task which was entrusted to the *shabbandar* (harbour-master), but it had nothing to suggest that this protection involved any suspicions towards traders as foreigners.⁵⁸ The Malaccan rulers indeed entrusted the office of *shabbandar* to foreigners. They were commissioned to represent the merchants from various countries who came to the kingdom. Tome Pires reported that in Malacca there were *shabbandars* for the Gujarati, as “the most important of all”, Bengali, Pegus and Pasai; that for the Javanese, Moluccas, Benda and Palembang; and the *shabbandar* who was specially appointed for the Chinese.⁵⁹ As appointed court officials, the position of *shabbandars* were of central importance in the management of trade. The Malaccan ruler gave them jurisdiction over all matters concerning foreign merchants and other responsibilities pertinent to the trade regulations in the kingdom.⁶⁰

Thus, the Malaccan rulers indeed supported and stimulated foreign merchants to make business in the kingdom. Sultan Mansur Shah, for instance, is described as having built beautiful mosques to attract the Muslims traders and, more importantly, he lowered the duties on merchandise. For the merchandise from the Eastern areas of the Archipelago, moreover, the ruler freed them from paying anything,

⁵⁷ M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1962), pp. 37–8.

⁵⁸ Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz, “The Malay Sultanate of Melaka”, in *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief*, ed. by Anthony Reid (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 72.

⁵⁹ Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, 2, pp. 251.

⁶⁰ Liaw, *Undang - Undang Melaka*, p. 65.

with the exception of presents for the ruler and court officials who were appointed to administer the trade enterprise.⁶¹ The most noticeable aspect of the rulers' stimulation for ensuring business stayed within the kingdom is the codification of rules concerning the maritime trade, the *Undang-Undang Laut*. These maritime laws were deliberately composed to protect traders, especially ship's captains (*nabhkoda*), from any crimes both on land and at sea on the water of the vicinity of Malacca kingdom. Citing the words of the ruler, Sultan Mahmud Shah, the text in its preface states as follows: "We would like to set down the laws and commands to every ship captain (*segala nabhkoda-nabhkoda*) that is in the sea, so that every servant of God is protected with His blessing".⁶²

The implication of the setting forth the regulation is that the Malaccan rulers did their utmost to furnish the commercial activities with commodious facilities. The *Undang-Undang Laut* indisputably expresses the will of rulers to build Malacca into a commercial center for international maritime trade. The regulations stipulated in the *Undang-Undang Laut* were concerned partly with the matter of shielding foreign merchants from any transgressions in their economic activities. The laws deal, for example, with the punishment for killing a ship's captain, evading a patrol-boat at sea, fighting on board of a ship, and damaging the ships of traders. As well, the duties of the watch to keep guard at sea against enemies and to observe the winds are strongly emphasized in the text.⁶³

All those mentioned contributed to the formation of Malacca as one of the leading trading states in the Archipelago. Tome Pires described the condition of Malacca as "a city that was made for merchandise, fitter than any other in the world", in which "very often eighty-four languages have been found spoken".⁶⁴ The *Sejarah Melayu* describes the greatness of Malacca as "flourished exceedingly and many foreigners resorted thither".⁶⁵

⁶¹ Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, 2, pp. 272–4.

⁶² Richard Winstedt and P.E. De Jong, "The Maritime Laws of Malacca", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 29, no. 3 (175) (1956), pp. 22–59.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–45.

⁶⁴ Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, 2, pp. 269, 286.

⁶⁵ Winstedt, "The Malay Annals of Sejarah Melayu", p. 181; Brown (tran.), *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p. 151.

The picture of *orang kaya* came into its firm existence in the Acehese kingdom in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. In Aceh, the *orang kaya* could be identified in terms of socio-economic status and lifestyle. On the basis of travel account by Augustin de Beaulieu who visited the kingdom from 1620 to 1621, Lombard provides us with a detail information on the *orang kaya*. He noticed that those who is known in European literature as “*orancaya*” or “*orancayé*” are the people “who held special social status; lived in big houses with many maids and clients; whose stores (*lumbung*) were full of rice for speculative transaction and of pepper that were sold in the market only when they could gain profit as much as possible; and they made strong connection with the Indian and Chinese traders”. In addition, the *orang kaya* identified themselves different from the common people, in terms of dressing, food-eating, and lifestyle.⁶⁶

Above all those mentioned, not only did the *orang kaya* had a lot of material wealth—that they possessed hug land and were responsible for its inhabitants who were under his control—but also political influence among the ruling elites of the kingdom.⁶⁷ With their political connection, the *orang kaya* acted as “brokers” between trades and ruler. And this intermediary role changed into an economic “transaction”. The traders who wanted to meet the ruler (*sultan*) were required to spend some money to have “permission” from the *orang kaya*. Similar practice can also be found in the harbor, that the *orang kaya* involved in collecting customs from traders and—in reference to the kingdom rule in *Adat Atjeh*—had right to have an extra payment for their own. To be added in this regard is the involvement of *orang kaya* in security affairs of the kingdom; they had strong network with the police officers.

In the Acehese kingdom, the supremacy of *orang kaya* in politics culminated during the historical period up to 1589, which is called as “the great mercantile *orang kaya*”.⁶⁸ This condition started following the death

⁶⁶ Denys Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, trans. by Winarsih Arifin (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1986), pp. 74–5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶⁸ Anthony Reid, “Trade and the Problem of Royal Power in Aceh. c. 1550-1700”, in *Pre-Colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia: the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Bali-Lombok, South Celebes*, ed. by Anthony Reid and Lance Castles (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1975), p. 46.

of two firm rulers of Aceh—Sultan Alauddin al-Kahar (1539-1571) and his son Ali Ri'ayat Shah (1571-1579)—who greatly contributed to lay down a strong foundation for the rise of Aceh as a leading kingdom in the western part of archipelago in the sixteenth century. Since then, the *orang kaya* emerged as the real power holder which determined political affairs of the kingdom, including those who could become king as well as those to be dethroned. Again in reference to the travel accounts of Beaulieu, it is stated that the existence of *orang kaya* diminished royal authority; there was no ruler that could last in power more than two years, and if it was the case “it was with such exertion and such obligations towards several *orang kaya*, that nothing remained in his [ruler’s] dignity except the title”.⁶⁹

The above development should also be seen in term of economics. As Kathirithamby-Wells noted,⁷⁰ there appeared a significant changes in economic climate after the conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511. The increase of European pressure for produce, monopoly and treaty concession, led to the rise of new mode of economics that could no longer dependent on tributary system. The rulers had to manage affairs beyond the capital, such as the pepper-producing areas, and to organize the flow of natural produce—such as gold, tin, resin and benzoin—to the capital. It was in such condition that the rise of *orang kaya* can best be explained. They facilitated the flow of produce to the capital and economic transaction with rulers. With this strategic economic role, the *orang kaya* became so powerful and therefore posed serious threat to the royal authority, which was also—due to the political race with the Portuguese in Malacca—in the mid process of building military power and hegemonic policy on internal affairs of the kingdom.

As the matter of fact, the supremacy of *orang kaya* began to end with the rise of strong rulers of Aceh, Alauddin Ri'ayat Shah Sayyid al-Mukammil (1589-1604) and then Iskandar Muda (1607-638). Al-Mukammil is known for his centralistic policy, which made the supremacy of *orang kaya* in the Acehnese kingdom ended. He initiated a political process towards the formation of absolutist kingdom, which culminated

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁰ Kathirithamby-Wells, “Royal Authority and the ‘Orang Kaya’ in the Western Archipelago, circa 1500-1800”, p. 267.

during the reign of Iskandar Muda.⁷¹ Supported by strong military power, Iskandar Muda implemented both expansionist policy—that he conquered the areas in west Sumatra and in the Peninsula—and hegemonic control over internal affairs of the kingdom, in terms of socio-politics and economics.⁷² Therefore, the Acehnese kingdom in the seventeenth century witnessed the diminution of *orang kaya*. Their role was replaced by royal family. Since then, no did any trade transaction ever happen in the kingdom without notice of the ruler.⁷³

For the discussion on the policy of Iskandar Muda, let me start with a quotation from *Adat Atjeh*, one of the texts which dealt with regulation and custom (*adat*), including those related to trade affairs, in the Acehnese kingdom:

“It is in Friday 14 Rabi’ul Awwal 1407 (1635) at round 12.00, a good moment for the government of Sri Sultan Iskandar Muda (may God bless him), that a regulation is decreed concerning the ships that come to Aceh *Dar al-Salam* for trade. The regulation are as follow: the ships [traders] from England, Frances, Netherlands, Portuguese, Spain, Keling, Pegu, and others should know that if they do business activities in the harbors other than Aceh *Dar al-Salam* without permission from the Sultan (may God bless him), they make violation against the law and consequently will have penalty according to the law issued.⁷⁴

The above quotation is a regulation of Iskandar Muda who made an effective control to trade activities in the territorial areas of Acehnese kingdom. It was the case with the west coast areas of Sumatra, the Minangkabau region Iskandar Muda conquered not long after he assumed power in the kingdom for its local produce of pepper and gold which were highly in demand at international market. Whilst, the areas in the Peninsula (Pahang, Perak, Kedah and Langawi), which had provided Aceh market with mainly pepper, did not produce the goods any longer in sufficient amount. The same was also true with Pidier and Pasai north Sumatra. As a result, such areas as Tiku, Pariaman, Salida and Inderapura

⁷¹ Reid, “Trade and the Problem of Royal Power in Aceh. c. 1550-1700”, p. 48.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Quoted from Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, p. 136.

were under the control of Iskandar Muda.⁷⁵ The above regulation was to manage mainly foreign traders not the local rulers.

Moreover, the mentioned sultan's permission was also applied to Kota Raja, the capital city of Acehnese kingdom. The privileges foreign traders once had enjoyed for trading in the city and other areas of the kingdom—as the experiences of the Dutch Cornelius de Houtman (1599) and the British James Lancaster (1602) showed—stopped during the reign of Iskandar Muda. Both the English and the Dutch traders were requested to secure permission to trade in Aceh by giving present to the Sultan. Furthermore, he made business procedure become extremely complicated and in high price. In addition to paying tolls both before entering and leaving the port, the traders also had to give presents to the *shabbandar* and other officials, and 7.5 percent duty paid on all pepper exported and commodities and spice exported.⁷⁶ Thus, the permission of the sultan appeared to be the reason for royal elites to interfere the process of trading and other business transaction.

To be added to the above policy of Iskandar Muda is regulation on customs. Different from the previous rulers, who only obliged the traders to give fee to the kingdom, termed as *chappe*, Iskandar Muda requested them to pay any kinds of customs, ranging from registration fee to the duty paid on items of goods they carried.⁷⁷ With this new custom policy, revenues for the ruler increased significantly, but on the consequence that the burden the traders had to pay also augmented. As a result, the merchants of especially Europe who came to Aceh during the period complained on the rising charge of high tariff. This was especially the case with the Dutch and the British. They were charged with 7 percent of the goods they dropped off in the port, in addition to other 3 percent charges. The same treatment was also made to the Muslim traders. In spite of being exempted from paying toll as they were leaving the port, the Muslim traders were under close scrutiny as they delivered their

⁷⁵ J. Kathirithamby-Wells, "Acehnese Control over West Sumatra up to the Treaty of Painan, 1663", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1969), pp. 458–60.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 461; Arun Kumar DasGupta, "Aceh in Indonesian Trade and Politics, 1600-1641", Ph.D. Dissertation (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University, 1962), pp. 123-124-158.

⁷⁷ Lombard, *Kerajaan Aceh Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, pp. 137–8.

goods. They were also asked to pay tax, in the form of gold, of their goods but with the appraised price 50 percent higher than the normal price in the free market.⁷⁸

In addition, the ruler also implemented certain rule to monopolize the trading process in the kingdom. He was even described as “the first and the prime trader in the kingdom”, who looked for the profit as much as he could gain for himself, not for interest of the people as his subjects. For this purpose, Iskandar Muda frequently asked the officials in the harbor to keep the trade commodities in the store, and to take them out at the time when he or his traders were managing to arrange business transaction with foreigners.⁷⁹ Therefore, again in reference to the travel account of Augustin de Beaulieu, the ruler was depicted as to have controlled every aspect of commerce and gained profit share from every trade transaction. The commodities he had from the conquered areas of the kingdom were offered for sale with the price 50 percent higher than the market price.⁸⁰

In this respect, the experience of John Davis from Britain is illustrative of the way the above practice of monopoly worked in Aceh. From his journey to Aceh in 1599 as he joined the crew of Cornelius de Houtman, John Davis made a report on the price of pepper in Aceh, which was offered with 4 reals for one bahar. On this report, many British traders spent a lot of money for the expedition to the kingdom under the command of Sir James Lancaster. Yet, when he landed in Aceh in 1602, he was surprised as he found that the price became 20 reals already. Few months later, after leaving for Malacca, he was noted that the price climbed into 27 and even 30 reals. And the price continued to grow to the level of 54 reals when de Beaulieu visited Aceh in 1620.⁸¹

To the above development, it is important to emphasize that the increase of pepper's price was closely related to the economic policy of Iskandar Muda which interfered the commercial activities. It was the ruler, on the pretext of high demand at international market, who was responsible to increase the price as he wished and in turn to earn the

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139-140.

maximum profit. In this case, he acted as a businessman, not as a ruler who was supposed to make regulation as to assure that trading proceeded under the economic principles. In such condition, Aceh in the seventeenth century was under the so-called “royal absolutism”, that the ruler—with religious legitimacy—had absolute power in both socio-political and economic affairs. And Iskandar Muda was the ruler of Aceh with such picture explained above.

The *orang kaya* tried to emerge in Acehnese politics after the death of Iskandar Muda. During the reign of Safiyyatuddin Tajul Alam Syah (1641-75), it was reported that the *orang kaya* constituted a powerful body which determined the royal court’s political decisions. The political power of *orang kaya* became even stronger during the reign of three female rulers after the death of Tajul Alam in 1675; they crowned the queens and had them in the throne without having control of the state’s affairs. In such a situation, however, the *uleebalang* (war leaders) of the interior came to gain their political power in the Acehnese court. The increasing dependence of the capital on agricultural products, as trade began to reduce, created favorable conditions for the rise of *the uleebalang* in Acehnese politics *vis-à-vis* the *orang kaya*. Hence, Aceh experienced political instability, and the kingdom began to decline as a leading political power in the western part of the Malay-archipelago.

E. Concluding Remarks

From the above discussions, it is clear that Islam was formulated in the framework of Malay political notion that gave strong emphasis to the omnipotent rulers. This began a long historical process, which culminated in the Acehnese kingdom in the seventeenth century. In this period, in line with the rising Islamic network between Malay-archipelago and the Islamic heartland in the Middle East, Malay political culture became strongly Islamized. The Malay rulers were credited with divine attributes coming from the political tradition in the Muslim world. As a result, the Malay political ideas of ruler, as the core of *raja*-oriented politics, also strengthened.

The power of rulers was also augmented by their being able to make the kingdoms homes of trade transaction of both foreign and regional merchants. The cosmopolitan nature of maritime kingdoms

of pre-colonial Malay-archipelago seems to have contributed to make the rulers actively engaged in providing regulations (*undang-undang*) for the advancement of trading businesses in the kingdoms. Moreover, the rulers also took part, on behalf of their own, in business activities. The rulers of Malacca, for instance, are reported as to have “put his share in each junk that goes out, that is a way for the kings of Malacca to obtain large amounts of money, and hence there is no doubt that the kings of Malacca are very rich indeed”.⁸²

Being as such, the Malay rulers, with Islamic titles and attributes, had strong control of economic and hence political power. Although Islam was set forth as an important substance of the ideal ruler, it could not be conceived of as an evaluation for rulers’ political conduct. The subjects had no opportunities to put the rulers into question. Instead, Islam served as a religious justification for the rise of the absolutist kingdom of the archipelago, which reached the peak of its power in seventeenth century Aceh. In part as a response to the growing power of Portuguese in Malacca since 1511, the rulers were credited with absolutist elements; they were described as having “proclaimed supernatural status in their titles and rituals”, “claimed the right to dispose of the land and the wealth of their subjects”, as well as undertaken “arbitrary killing and dispossession of vassals who got in their way”.⁸³

The story of *orang kaya* is illustrative of the above trend of development. The position they had enjoyed as economic elites during the Malacca period had to confront the absolutist political attitudes of Iskandar Muda in Aceh. Although, it should be stressed, the so-called “royal absolutism” occurred as a response to the growing political power of *orang kaya* who once acted as king maker. Thus, the Islamicity of the kingdoms had almost nothing to do with the rising trend of politics that headed to the formation of absolutist kingdom. In the history of Malay-archipelago, it was the rulers who had ultimate power amid the rise of Islam as an established political ideology and the source of political ideas and concepts.

⁸² Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, 2, p. 251.

⁸³ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680: Volume 2, Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 251.

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