

# Some Thoughts on the Historical Pattern of Thai-Malay Relations: Towards Local Perspectives.

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## Reconstructing a pattern of relationship: historiographical considerations.

Throughout the twentieth century, our views on inter-state relations within Southeast Asia have been influenced by the concept of modern nation-state with its emphasis on territoriality, political unity and centralized control. Although it is generally understood that traditional polities of Southeast Asia had no fixed frontier and state's control over outlying areas was flexible and loosely exercised, there is still a tendency to look at inter-state relationships in the past within the scope of present-day state boundaries. Thus, we talk confidently about the historical pattern of Thai-Malay relations, about past relationships between Cambodia and Vietnam or between Malaysia and Indonesia, irrespective, for example, of the fact that countries we now recognized as Malaysia and Indonesia did not come into being until after the Second World War. This emphasis on nation-state framework influences our views on the 'ethnic minority' issue since the fixing of boundary and emphasis on national unity make the existence of small, independent communities along the border

of two countries inconceivable. In an attempt to classify peoples and places into a nation-state, the autonomy of local units, past and present, has often been compromised.

Pattani's position within a Thai nation-state can be used as a case in point. From the Thai point of view, Pattani is perceived as the part of Thailand which has 'an ethnic minority problem', - a separatist tendency which has affected the country's stability. The seed of this conflict rests on the fact that an attempt by the Thai state to build a unified nation does not accord with the wish of Pattani people who want to preserve their distinctive culture and community way of life. Moreover, the people of Pattani also hold a lingering belief that their land has been annexed against their will. Thai state, on the other hand, believes that it has a legitimated claim that can be traced back to antiquity, stressing the historical continuity of Thai hegemony and control over the area. The issue is further complicated when ethnic and cultural points of view are involved. Here, Pattani is perceived as the birthplace of the Muslim Malays who are more in affinity with the population of present-day Malaysia than with the Thais. The uniting force is Islam. Pattani has often been named 'the cradle of Islamic civilization' and therefore a part of the Malay-Muslim world in Southeast Asia. In time, each perception has become polarized, providing a respective standpoint from which the 'southern border problem' according to the Thais, and the fate of their 'unliberated brethren' according to the Malays, is approached.

The following excerpts provide examples of each perspective. Firstly, the so-called 'Thai point of view' is illustrated by the writings of Phraya Rattanapakdi who was the Governor of Pattani province from 1932 to after World War II. Writing on the history of Pattani in 1966, he asserted that:

Pattani from its origin was Thai, and from its beginnings, there also existed indigenous peoples of Thai nationality who adhered to the Hindu-Buddhist religion ... Later on, people from different towns came to settle here more and more; only then did misunderstandings occur, due to

personal ambitions and seditious thoughts induced by foreigners, and this has created problems of all sorts....

...It should be understood that Thais governed this land of Golden Khersonese, -the Malay Peninsula-, long before the rise of the Malay nation, that is to say, about a hundred years before the coming of Islam. ... Therefore, the Malays must realize that the Muslim people of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun are not Malay. They are Thai people who adhere to Islam. Whoever wants to become Malay can leave, but they cannot take the land with them. (Phraya Rattanapakdi 1966, 35)

For the second perspective, we can give as an example an editorial published in a weekly magazine in Kuala Lumpur on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1956 asking the international organization, -the Asia-Africa Forum-, to support the campaign for independence of all former colonial countries, such as British Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Pattani. For the last mentioned, it was alleged that Pattani wanted not only independence but also to be united with Malaya for the benefit of the Malay race. (Phraya Rattanapakdi 1966, 80) In another instance, the people of Pattani once sent a memorandum to the United Nations, stating that “Pattani became a great kingdom long before the rise of the kingdom of Melaka in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, it governed all eastern side of the Malay Peninsula. From that time up until 1832, Pattani was continuously and without doubt part of the Malay world.” (Phraya Rattanapakdi 1966, 181)

In an attempt to put Pattani within the larger framework of either Thai or Malay nations, not only the present-day local autonomy but also the autonomous past of Pattani will soon be lost. Panngam Ngaothammasan provides an interesting insight when she argues that the origin of Pattani ‘colonialism’ by Thai state is, to a certain extent, historiographically constructed. She points out the fact that the first time Pattani was ever actually mentioned in Thai chronicles was during the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Pattani people were drafted by the Thais to help fight the Burmese

war. Leading the Malay contingent was Sultan Mudhaffar Syah who, during his stay in Ayutthaya, attempted unsuccessfully to stage a palace coup. In this Thai chronicle, Pattani was regarded as a vassal state as can be seen by the use of such words as 'drafted' and 'rebellion'. This Ayutthaya-based account is in accord with the Ram Kamhaeng Inscription which states that Sukhothai, the forerunner of Ayutthaya, used to exert influence over the whole peninsular area, including, therefore, Pattani. (Panngam Ngaothammasan 1980-81, 31) By the beginning of Bangkok dynasty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pattani had, from the point of view of Thai national history, always belonged to the Thai state.

As in the case of Pattani, Thai perception of past Thai-Malay relations as a whole has been determined by the notion of integrated and continuous development of a nation. Once it is established that the Malay peninsular area used to be under the influence of the first Thai state, - Sukhothai kingdom-, subsequent relationships were naturally viewed in terms of the expansion or contraction of the Thai state, depending on the ability of the main political centers during each period -Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Bangkok- to assert their hegemony over the Malay vassal states. The basic overlord-vassal pattern was never interrupted until Siam transferred its sovereignty over the northern Malay states to Great Britain in 1909, the event which also marked the permanent demarcation between Thai and Malay countries.

For present-day Malaysia, which is a modern creation comprising of many geographically and politically fragmented units, the integrated view of nationhood is harder to be realized and maintained. Nevertheless, there has always been a strong cultural unity within the maritime Malay world, and recent scholars have begun to pay more attention to the cultural component of the nation. In the work by Leonard and Babara Andaya, for example, Malaysian history is successfully treated as a cohesive whole by tracing the origin of the Melaka sultanate to its Sumatran roots, and proceeding to explain not only the factors which contributed to the growth of that sultanate but also the beginning of the Malay political culture as we know it today.

Thus, although the power centers of the Malay polity moved several times during the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, from Palembang in Sumatra to Melaka to Johor-Riau kingdom, each center was a continuation of the Malay political and cultural prototype.

This integrated view of Malaysian history stresses the continuity of the 'Malay realm' where a successful prototype state took turns in becoming a focal point of Malay communities. Their sphere of power or influence, however, varied from center to center. The largest hegemony was Srivijaya whose power reigned over the Malayan Peninsular as well as parts of the Archipelagoes. The Melaka kingdom in its turn extended its power over both sides of the Melaka Straits but "its territorial control... was never as extensive as that credited to Srivijaya at the height of its power. The northern Malay states of Patani, Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah still acknowledged Ayudhya as overlord". (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 53) According to this view, the expansion of Thai power was the main obstacle to Malay integration, and the relationship between the two hegemonies came to be perceived as competitive. Andaya and Andaya state that "Ayudhya's ambitions initiated a long period of rivalry with Melaka and later Johor concerning hegemony in the Peninsular region", (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 66) and that "Ayudhya's continued expansion down the isthmus in the first half of the sixteenth century had thus impinged upon areas that had previously been under Melaka but where Johor, harassed by the Portuguese, was unable to enforce its claims." (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 67)

From the point of view of a "national" history, therefore, the northern Malay states or Siamese Malay states, whichever one chooses to call them, are often perceived as a bone of contention between two powerful traditional centers. This situation changed when the British became increasingly involved in the administration of the Malay states during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For British imperialists and propagator of a modern nation-state concept, it was imperative that the question of "sovereignty" must be settled. It was, however, not the sovereignty of those small Malay states but the sovereignty of the Thai

Kingdom over such states which was at issue. In the end, after much misunderstandings, intense negotiations and diplomatic manoeuvre, Thai sovereignty over the peninsular area as far south as Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu was accepted. Then, the transfer of that newly established sovereignty over those four Malay states to the British was affected. Borders were demarcated and community divided. From 1909, the process of nation building was intensified on both sides of the border, interrupted by the collapse of British colonialism during the Second World War only to continue with the rise of the Malayan and Malaysian nations in 1957 and 1963 respectively. During this process, the incorporation of local political units is firmly established.

It is to the force and counterforce of colonialism and nationalism that we owe much of our national framework and perspective on history. Within this framework, as stated earlier, the autonomy of local units is often glossed over. Such tendency, however, has to some extent been rectified by efforts of recent scholars who focus on the so-called tributary system as a regional concept underlining the pattern of inter-state relations in Southeast Asia. A tributary system, or “*prathetsaraj*” in Thai, represented a scheme of power relations known to scholars as *mandala*. According to O.W. Wolters,

[The] *mandala* represented a particular and often unstable political situation in a vaguely definable geographical area without fixed boundaries and where smaller centers tended to look in all directions for security. *Mandalas* would expand and contract in concertina-like fashion. Each one contained several tributary rulers, some of whom would repudiate their vassal status when the opportunity arose and try to build up their own networks of vassals. (Wolters 1982, 16-17)

Pre-modern Southeast Asian inter-state relations were, therefore, unequal and hierarchical. It could be a reciprocal relation regulated by the smaller and weaker polities’ acceptance of the bigger and more powerful centers in return for protection and peaceful co-existence. It could, on the other hand, be regulated

simply by fear of aggression and retribution from powerful overlords. In either case, the point remains that this concept is based on a regional world-view which was understood, shared and accepted by all. It is also a concept that has nothing to do with a national boundary.

Because the study of tributary system focuses not only on the relationship between two powerful overlords but, more often, also on the relationship between an overlord and its vassals, it allows local perspectives to emerge. Apart from certain obligations and gestures of submission, vassal states were free to conduct their own internal affairs. According to Thongchai Winichakul, they might themselves be regarded as separate kingdoms, which entitled them separate networks of hierarchical lordships. Thus,

Each king had his own court, administration and financial system, tax collection, army, and judicial system. We might say that these lesser kingdoms were generally regarded as having their own sovereignty. (Winichakul 1994, 82)

In her excellent work on Thai-Malay relations, Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian (1988) not only makes it clear that Thai policies toward the so-called Siamese Malay states were characterized by a high degree of local variation, she also demonstrates how each Malay vassal devised its own strategy in dealing with one or more powerful neighboring states, be it Thai, Malay, Burmese or British.

Nevertheless, the use of the concept of *mandala* and tributary relationship to explain the patterns of inter-state relations in the Malay Peninsula does not quite expel the notion that the area was fundamentally under two contending power centers, the Thai *mandala* which radiated downward from the center in the Chao Phraya delta, and the Malay *mandala* which was represented by the Melaka and the Johor empire in the south. This situation came about when the Malay power center of Melaka emerged in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Long before that, it was the Thai kingdom that had reigned over the whole area. Thus, Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian explains that:

As far as Siamese-Malay relations are concerned, there is much evidence which vouches for the long history of the system. The Ram Kamhaeng Stone Inscription states that the power of that great king reached the Malay Peninsula. Tome Pires confirms this when narrating the plight of Parameswara, the founder of Melaka, who was chased out of Singapore by a Siamese force because he had murdered the lord of that place, who was also a vassal of Ayudhya. (Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian 1988, 54)

The implication here is clear. Thai-Malay relations originated within a tributary system. Important changes occurred thereafter when the Thai sphere of power contracted after being countered by newly emerged Malay power center of Melaka and Johor. Nonetheless, these Malay power centers, although free from Thai influence, were not strong enough to integrate the Malay realm or to permanently challenge Thai presence in the South. Again, Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian notes that:

..the Siamese-Malay *prathesaraj* of Kedah, Pattani, Trengganu and Kelantan had all fallen into Siamese hands again by the closing years of the seventeenth century and they more or less stayed within the Siamese political ambit until the destruction of Ayudhya in 1767. That period coincided with political upheaval and chaos within the Malay world following the murder of the last legitimate ruler of the Melaka-Johor empire in 1699. For a time, the principal Malay power-center lay shattered by this great crime, leaving a void of power in the Malay Peninsula to oppose Siamese power. (Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian 1988, 6)

By placing small states in between two competing *mandalas* or two potential tributary lords, our attention is still focused on the power centers, their relations with one another, their relations with the areas under their influence, and less so on the local communities themselves and how they are related to one another. In this light, both the nation-state approach and the

tributary framework still leave some room for different approaches, one of which is an internal approach to the history of local communities and their relations to **what they perceived to be** the outside world (instead of **our** perception of their outside world).

### Towards local perspectives on Thai-Malay relations

In searching for a local perspective, we might just begin with the notion that there is no such thing as the Malay *mandala*, or at least no single Malay *mandala*. The Malay realm in the past was not so much a political but rather a cultural expression of a number of states and societies, large and small, which scattered across rough terrain of the Peninsula. Inter-state relations within the Malay realm may have been unequal, but did not necessarily conform to either a tributary system or a bureaucratic pattern (center and outlying provinces). Instead, relationships often oscillated between competition and co-operation or alliance, with kinship and marriage ties playing a crucial role. To see Thai-Malay relations in terms of competing *mandalas* may accord reasonably well with a relatively integrated Thai kingdom, but it does not fit in with the pattern of Malay society. Neither can it lead to a true appreciation of how a Malay nation evolves. In the following section, an attempt is made to examine the nature of traditional Malay polities which developed during the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century, paying particular attention to local or sub-regional differences and using their own perceptions as a guideline. It is hoped that by putting aside the notion of a nation and concentrating instead on sub-regional entities, we can put some new edges on our perception of Thai-Malay historical relations.

### Development of Malay States: Two kinds of polities

For those who are familiar with the vast delta plain and the great river-ways of mainland Southeast Asia, the Malay Peninsula south of Kra Isthmus presents different physical environment and settlement patterns. This narrow and elongated strip of land

surrounded by open seas is composed of mountainous interior, short river-ways running from mountains to the seas, and limited coastal plains. Early political centers were established along the rivers which have their origins in the inland ranges. The relatively lack of agricultural hinterland in the Malay Peninsula is compensated by its geographical location on the main east-west trading route. Located on the convergence of two major sea routes, it was linked to the great markets of India and China by the annual monsoon wind systems. Communities that settled in the Malay Peninsula were, as a result, so well attuned to the rhythm of international trade as to become active participants, an involvement that led to the emergence of several successful city-ports. Maritime trade, therefore, was one of the strongest forces which determined a dimension of historical dynamism in this area.

From Kra Isthmus to the upper Malay Peninsula, a number of ancient trading settlements emerged as far back as in the second century A.D. During this time, the transport of goods across Southeast Asia shifted to the sea, shipping from the southeastern coast of China to the Bay of Bengal via a land portage across the upper Isthmus of Kra. On the eastern side, merchants transited at the ports on the western edge of the Mekong Delta, believed to be under the authority of the early Southeast Asian state of Funan. By the early part of the third century Funan had extended its power westward along the northern rim of the Gulf of Thailand and down the Malay Peninsula as far as Kra Isthmus. (Shaffer 1996, 18-22) Continued increase in volume of trade passing through Southeast Asia encouraged the establishment of other trading settlements and ports. By the fifth century, the center of maritime activity seemed to have moved from the upper Malay Peninsula to a nautical passage through the Straits of Melaka and around the Java Sea, with southern Sumatra coasts assuming greater importance. This was the age of Srivijaya maritime state, which dominated straits commerce until the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. Under the leadership of Srivijaya, a pattern of riverine statecraft emerged which was built on alliances with Malay coastal population and balanced by an expanding inland power base.

Srivijaya's success was also due to its ability to protect sea routes from piracy, in recognition of which the Chinese granted that state a preferred trade status. (Hall 1985, 21-23) This Chinese connection was essential to Srivijaya's prosperity. All in all, the Srivijaya's age went down in the memory of Malay and maritime peoples as the golden era.

The Srivijaya economic hegemony ended abruptly around 1025 when the empire was attacked by the south Indian Cola dynasty. With this raid began a two-century restructuring of the patterns of Southeast Asian maritime trade. Merchants from all over the places began to penetrate Southeast Asian markets, moving more directly to the sources of commercial goods. (Hall 1985, 23) Meanwhile, the basically land-based Thai and Javanese states began to earnestly participate in maritime commerce. Both the kingdoms of Ayutthaya and Majapahit established their own ports and outside contacts during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. But the demise of Srivijaya left an important void of power in the vicinity of Melaka Straits, resulting in the rise of straits piracy which threatened the whole maritime commercial operation. It was the establishment of Melaka kingdom under the Chinese auspices at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century that filled up this void. By the 1430s, however, Melaka's success depended less on Chinese support and more on the interaction with Javanese merchants and Javanese commercial networks, (Hall 1985, 25) although the port also handled a great portion of other Southeast Asian trades as well. After Melaka's demise at the hands of the Portuguese in 1511, the era of Southeast Asian entrepot seemed to have ended for the time being. Between 1511 and the rise of Singapore in 1819, Southeast Asian trade was characterized by a large number of competing ports and several networks, both by maritime and mainland states, and with equal participation by the European, Asian, and Southeast Asian merchants.

With in this broad pattern of development affecting the Malay maritime world, we can further distinguish the rise of two types of Malay state in the Malay Peninsula. First, the ancient settlements on the Kra Isthmus and upper Malay Peninsula continued their commercial function, albeit less significantly,

after the fifth century. In fact, they were absorbed into the Srivijaya empire, which accounted for the mixed Hindu-Mahayana Buddhism cultural traits in that area. After the 13<sup>th</sup> century, this area was once again transformed, and from the ancient settlements such as Tambralinga and Langkasuka arose new political and commercial centers which became key players from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Four important centers, Ligor, Pattani, Kedah and Trengganu, were well known; their histories, to a large extent, entwined. What makes the relationship among these four centers really interesting is the fact that each of them developed into a distinctive society. Ligor (Nakorn Sri Thammarat) was a Thai settlement and a center of Buddhism. It was through Ligor that Theravada Buddhism from Sri Langka passed through to the Chao Phraya plain. Pattani was in the beginning a meeting place of the Malays, Thais and some aborigines before it became a Malay polity. Kedah and Trengganu were from the beginning distinctively Malay. Later on, Pattani, Kedah and Trengganu were further separated from Ligor once they became part of the Malay Muslim world. Despite the difference, these four states did share common natural resources. Their economic life was both oriented to agricultural production and trade at the same time because theirs were the only areas in the Malay Peninsula which had relatively extensive agricultural hinterlands. This common economic trait not only characterized them as a group but also distinguished them from their southern counterparts.

During the centuries when settlements, ports and towns on the upper Malay Peninsula were formed and transformed, little evidence pointed to any significant or permanent urban formation in the lower part of the Peninsula. Examining Chinese records pertaining to the 8<sup>th</sup> century leads Prof. Wheatley to the following conclusion:

... the situation was not essentially different from that obtaining in the third century A.D. Some seven city-states had emerged from the ruins of the Funanese peninsular empire and an eighth settlement had arisen probably somewhere in Johore. Thus economic and political activity was still virtually restricted to the

isthmus. The rest of the peninsula was an unproductive blank on the Chinese map with the exception of Lo-yueh at the southern extremity of the peninsula. This state is known by name but can have been little more than a collecting center for forest products. There is no evidence that it was a regular port of call on the route to India. (Wheatley 1961, 60)

During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese evidence pointed to the existence of a single port in the southern peninsular area. This was *Tan-ma-hsi* (Temasak) on the present-day island of Singapore. The record mentioned its population who, according to Wheatly, must be the *orang lauts* or coastal aborigines. They robbed junks that passed by and were greatly feared. (Wheatley 1961, 82-83) The fact that passage through Melaka straits became infested by piracy after the demise of Srivijaya may have induced the Thai kingdom to set up its vassal lord there, to fill up the void and to protect its seaward interests. As mentioned earlier, the presence of Thai control on the island of Singapore during the late 14<sup>th</sup> century was attested by records of the Melaka kingdom as well as by Tome Pires' *'Suma Oriental'*.

In the light of evidence, it can be concluded that the making of the kingdom of Melaka was that of a migratory community. The stories of Malay migration from Palembang in Sumatra to found a new settlement on the Malay Peninsula, its Chinese connection, its rise as Islamic center and its development into a great entrepot of its time in Southeast Asia are well accounted for. (Wolters 1970; Andaya and Andaya 2001) So are the stories of its demise at the hands of the Portuguese in 1511 and the subsequent migration of its Malay population to build yet a new base at Johor and Riau during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. What needs to be emphasized here is the fact that all these historical dynamism and experience give the southern Malay states different characteristics from those in the north. The people of Melaka and Johor were a mixture of coastal Malays, aborigine tribes including the famous *orang laut*, and a variety of foreigners who came to trade and finally made Melaka their home.

The way of life at the port, as well as the characteristics of the state, were sea-oriented, because their prosperity depended on the state's ability to function as an exchange center, to control trading route and to induce people from near and far to come to trade. For these maritime states, territorial acquisition and control were affected not so much for their productive value as for the control of sea-route, of trade and traders. For this reason, the fortunes of Melaka and Johor were more closely related to the maritime ports on the eastern coast of Sumatra on the opposite side of the straits such as Pasai, Siak, Jambi, Palembang, as well as to the settlements in the Riau-Lingga archipelagoes, than they ever were to the northern Malay states. This can easily be seen through the examination of stories which were recorded in *Sejarah Melayu*, the indigenous account of Melaka and Johor kingdoms. Thus, despite their common race and religion, the northern and southern Malay states, which developed during the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century, were different by nature, economic interests, and by political affiliations.

### Perception of past societies

Different nature and experience among northern and southern Malay states can be determined through a study of indigenous writings. Almost all Malay states have their own historical accounts, - a '*sejarah*' or a '*hikayat*'. These are historical records interwoven with fantastic tales, mythical and supernatural elements that tend to discredit their usefulness as 'historical works', especially in the eyes of early western scholars. Nevertheless, If we pay less attention on historical truth and more on what these stories reflect in terms of world-views, beliefs, and the people's perception of themselves and their societies at a particular time and place, these accounts can give a useful insight to past societies and peoples. Here, three important Malay literatures will be comparatively examined: the *Sejarah Melayu* of Melaka Kingdom, (Brown 1976) the *Hikayat Patani* (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970) and the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* or *Kedah Annal* (Low 1908). The main aim is to determine the extent to which these three chronicles reflect common Malay ethos, a sense

of belonging within a sphere of power or a ‘Malay *mandala*’; and to see how these three states are related to each other and to the outside world. Also, since the fifteenth-century Melaka Kingdom and its historical records, the *Sejarah Melayu*, have often been regarded as the prototype of Malay state and Malay historiography respectively, shouldn’t other Malay historical accounts indicate certain recognition of its importance or seek to share its glorious past? Can we detect a degree of closeness or commonality enough to justify our viewing of these three states as one political unit?

The most obvious shared element among these three literatures is Islam. There is no doubt that this imported religion was incorporated into the indigenous society and its way of life and, together, they became the foundations of Malay culture which gave a full meaning to being ‘a Malay’. The three accounts give the story of Islamic conversion a prominent place in history, a kind of landmark which turns embryo settlements into a state. *Sejarah Melayu* relates the coming of Islam to Melaka after the episode dealing with the origin of the dynasty and the founding of Melaka port. After Raja of Melaka adopted the faith and took the title of Sultan Muhammad Shah, he established the ceremonial of the court and ruled with “ a high degree of justice in his treatment of his subjects, and Malaka became a great city”.(Brown 1976, 49) In the *Hikayat Pattani*, the story of Islamic conversion is grouped together with two other stories, thus relating the origin of state and dynasty with the coming of Islam and the building of prestigious state cannon. Prof. Wyatt has given a useful insight into the function of these episodes by asserting that they are earmarked not so much as chronological events as being the chief symbol of Pattani’s greatness, thus “these three initial chapters on ruler, realm, religion and status symbol seem to provide us with the background from which the plot, so to speak, of the story of Patani can develop” (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 289-290). It is done intentionally and with a specific objective. In the *Kedah Annal*, the story of the religion’s establishment, which happened during the time of the first ruler, is placed right at the end of the chronicle. This again is not due to the author’s disregard of the concept of time; rather, it is done with specific symbolic

meaning. Here, Kedah had passed through a period of difficulties, having had a king who succumbed to bestiality, “eating the flesh, hearts and blood of men”. This reign of terror ended with the return of good governance and the glory of Islam. While there are differences in the actual accounts of Islamic conversion, the essence of the stories that Islam is associated with greatness of each state is equally strong in all three works. Thus, it is the religion that provided a cultural common ground and shared experience.

Cultural uniqueness, however, cannot hide the fundamentally fragmented nature of the Malay realm, composed as it was of several autonomous and semi-autonomous political units. This can be seen in widely different tales concerning the states and dynastic origins. *Sejarah Melayu* traces the origin of Melaka dynasty back to Prince Sri Tri Buana who miraculously appeared at Bukit Sri Guntang, in Palembang, Sumatra, which was once the center of Srivijaya kingdom. Sri Tri Buana in turn descended from the line of Sultan Iskandar Dzu'l-Karnian (Alexander the Great). Similar stories appear in some other Malay chronicles such as the Perak's *Misa Melayu* and the *Siak Chronicle*, but not in the *Hikayat Patani* and the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. In *Hikayat Patani*, we find similar motifs used in Malay story-telling, which reflect a common oral tradition, such as the stories of mouse-deer or of a prince going on a hunt and found a fertile land. Nevertheless, the chronicle does not connect the origin of Patani dynasty with that of Melaka or Srivijaya. *Kedah Annal*, on the other hand, relates the fantastic tale of Raja Merong Mahawangsa whose father descended from the gennis and his mother from the demigods. He conducted a diplomatic mission for the Ruler of Byzantium. On a voyage to China, he was attacked by the mighty Garuda, became stranded in Kedah and decided to settle there. Again, there is no reference to Sri Tri Buana or Bukit Sri Guntang. Virginia Matheson who studies the concept of Malay ethos in indigenous Malay writings comments on the *Hikayat Patani* and the *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* as follows:

This text [*Hikayat Patani*] is probably the earliest peninsular history from a non-Malacca linked court. .... There is no sustained attempt to present Patani as part of a wider cultural or ethnic unity. (Matheson 1979, 354)

The introduction to the HMM [*Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*] is very similar to that of SM [*Sejarah Melayu*]. Both state that the ruler...had commanded that a genealogy of all the Malay kings be compiled together with an account of their customs and traditions. There is no further similarity between the texts, and the HMM continues its narration using traditions which outwardly seem very different from those in other texts. (Matheson 1979, 354-355)

It seems, therefore, that despite an ethnic and cultural link, each chronicle was written basically from a local perspective. All three transmit the tales of independent origins, and their subsequent histories are connected but not integrated.

The nature of Melaka as a trade-based, sea-oriented city-port society, and that of the more territory-based Kedah and Pattani are also reflected in the three chronicles. Many stories in *Sejarah Melayu* recognize the wealth that flows from trade. Most important of all, its propelled notion of 'where there is sovereignty, there is gold' reflects the political economy of what has been termed 'a riverine polity' where power rested as much upon the ruler's ability to redistribute wealth as on the people's recognition that it was the ruler's sovereignty that legitimized the whole commercial operation. Because a trade-based polity, as typified by Melaka, depended on an advantageous location along a trade route, its center could be moved as circumstances dictated. Its vulnerability to open hostility and attacks by competitors was another reason for a greater degree of fluidity and movement. As one center was destroyed, a new one at a different location could be founded through migration and resettlement of its people. Thus, according to *Sejarah Melayu*, the Sri Tri Buana's dynasty moved from the center in Sumatra to

Temasak (Singapore) and then to Melaka when attacked by the Javanese and Siam. When Melaka fell to the Portugese in 1511, its center was again moved to Bentan in the Riau Archipelago, then, to Kampar, Pahang and finally to Johor. The perception of state, as testified by the *Sejarah Melayu*, was, therefore, not an integrated and expanding territory, since it was not so much a territory but the presence of ruler and his sovereignty that underlined its existence. Thus, the ministers of Melaka affirmed that “territory is territory even if it is only the size of a coconut shell! ”, (Brown 1976, 57) and that “every country has a Raja, and if your Highness is granted length of days, we can find ten countries for you! ”. (Brown 1976, 185)

The trade-based, outward-looking orientation of southern Malay states such as Melaka and Johor as depicted in *Sejarah Melayu* is different from that found in the accounts of *Kedah Annal* and *Hikayat Patani* with the latter two reflecting a greater degree of internal territorial expansion and the significance of agricultural population. The following passage where Raja Merong Mahawangsa of Kedah described the process of state building to his son is quite illuminating. It states:

My son, should you be blessed with children, it will be as well that you send a son to the north north west of Kedda, and another to the S.S.E. or nearly so, of Kedda, and third to the E.N.E. And do not you, my son, leave this country of Kedda, because there is a great extent of waste land still remaining to be cultivated, and a great deal has also been left dry by the sea, and besides, by doing so you will make my name famous throughout the world, as the settler and founder of this country.”  
(Low 1908, 69)

In *Hikayat Patani*, one episode deals with the digging of a canal at the river Tambangan in the reign of Queen Ijau (1548-1616). Prof. Wyatt believes that this canal construction is remembered in the history of Pattani as an important event. He states that the construction served two main purposes. The first was to provide the capital with fresh-water supply, which had

become a pressing problem as Pattani's population expanded. The other equally important reason was to increase the area of rice land or to improve the yield per square unit of land by irrigation. (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 245) This event was so important that the queen herself was officially present on the occasion of the breaching of the final dam and the opening of the canal. But most significant of all is the fact that Queen Ijau was to be remembered after her death as "Marhum Tambangan" in honor of her part in this auspicious event.

Episodes such as these are testimonial to a variant nature of Malay states with those in the north displaying the characteristics of a territory-based and an agricultural society to a greater degree than the southern city ports. This does not mean that Pattani and Kedah were not important Malay ports or did not engage in trade. Equally, it does not mean that Melaka or Johor had no agricultural basis. The point here is that by examining indigenous accounts more closely, one can see how they reflect different aims and concerns of each state.

Another way in which the identification of local "self" can be glimpsed is by looking at the ways in which each state perceived its relation to the outside world. In this respect, the three indigenous accounts offer some interesting insight. Among the three, *Sejarah Melayu* makes the most numerous references to Melaka's relationships with other states, and seems to take great pride in its expertise in foreign relations. Since one of the chronicle's main aim is to obtain external recognition and to establish Melaka as the leading court of the day, the annalists were particularly mindful about Melaka's status vis-a-vis other states. As a result, one can get a strong impression of their perception of Melaka's relations to the outside world.

Basically, the empires and states associated with Melaka fell into three categories. The first comprised areas with which Melaka had the closest contact. They formed part of the Melaka hegemony during its time of prosperity and power. This includes territories adjacent to Melaka such as Klang (in present-day Perak), Muar and Pahang as well as many islands in the Riau-Lingga Archipelagos and the Malay states along the eastern shore

of Sumatra. Some of these states and territories were Melaka's vassals while some other, such as Pasai and Aru, were regarded by Melaka as equals. Their stories were linked to Melaka by kinship, marriage, trade, as well as war and subjugation. The second group with whom Melaka had external relations consisted of Siam, Aceh, and the Javanese Kingdom of Majapahit. These states appear in *Sejarah Melayu* as powerful kingdoms that could become a threat to Melaka's sovereignty, but were at no time actual Melaka's overlords. Prof. Muhammad Haji Salleh who studies Siamese-Malay relations as appeared in the *Sejarah Melayu* concludes that Siam was present in the mind and subconscious of Melaka as a great country, an enemy which was threatening and aggressive. (Muhammad Haji Salleh 1995, 131) At the same time, Melaka saw itself also as a great nation, with colonies of its own, and thus regarded itself as an equal to any independent state including Siam. The last among Melaka's external relations were powerful empires of China, India and the Arabic Muslim world. They were revered by Melaka for their cultural superiority, their trade, and perhaps as protectors against Melaka's more aggressive neighbors.

How did the northern Malay states fit into these three categories? At the height of its power, Melaka's territories were said to have extended northward up to Trengganu, and *Sejarah Melayu* makes a single reference each to the position of Kedah and Pattani vis-à-vis Melaka. One story deals with the visit of Raja of Kedah to obtain recognition as the ruler from Sultan Mahmud of Melaka. (Brown 1976, 130-131) In another episode, *Sejarah Melayu* gives an account of Pattani's first ruler, Chao Sri Bangsa, who was a Siamese prince but after converted to Islam, went to Melaka to seek recognition as the ruler. (Brown 1976, 145-146) Both Kedah and Pattani were therefore perceived as Melaka's tributaries, states with independent rulers who accepted Melaka as overlord. Indeed, bearing in mind that Thai chronicles also regarded the northern Malay states as tributaries, the notion of Kedah and Pattani as an area of contention between Thai hegemony centered at Ayutthaya and Malay hegemony centered at Melaka does seem to be indicated in the perception of the past on both sides

But it must be through Kedah and Pattani historical accounts that local perspectives can be gained, and historical viewpoint balanced. Despite Melaka's claim of Kedah as its tributary, the Kedah *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* does not indicate any awareness of the Malay states to the south at all. Instead, in one of the early episodes when Raja Merong asked his ministers to recommend any powerful countries lying near, with prospect of forming a marriage alliance, the ministers named two places, Aceh and the country called "Kalangi" which referred to the Burmese kingdom of Ava. (Low 1908, 58-59) Both Aceh and Burma were known to have been historically involved with Kedah, either through commerce or war, and apparently, the memory strongly lingered on. Later on, in one of the most important episodes, Kedah's relationships with Siam, Perak, and Pattani were established in the form of kinship when Raja Merong sent his eldest son to found the Siamese kingdom, the second son to found Perak and his daughter to establish Pattani, leaving his youngest son to continue Kedah's royal line. (Low 1908, 72-74) This story in itself is interesting because it attempts to explain Siamese sezerainty over Kedah in terms of brotherly relationship. It shows how words and imagination are used to wipe out the humility of having to recognize enemies as superiors. For our purpose, however, stories in the *Kedah Annal* reflect the state's perception and awareness of countries with which Kedah had close contact. These were states to the north of the Peninsula as well as Aceh, which was on the opposite shore of the Straits of Melaka. Memory of the past is, to a certain extent, selective, and the absence of any mentioning of the Malay states to the south in the *Kedah Annal* does not mean that there was no established contact between these two areas. What it does is to reflect the country's preoccupation at that particular time.

Except for the first three chapters which deal with the origins of ruler, religion and kingdom, the *Hikayat Patani* mostly relates events that occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Pattani's contemporaries to the south were therefore not Melaka but Johor and Pahang. It becomes apparent that during these centuries, Pattani was increasingly involved in the politics of her Malay

neighbors. In the reign of Raja Ijau, the first Queen of Pattani (r.1584-1624), her sister married Sultan Abdul-Ghafur Mohaidin Syah of Pahang (1590-1614). Another queen, Raja Kuning (r. 1635-88?) was also believed to have been married to Sultan of Johor. (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 14-15) But Pattani's relations with Johor were not merely a response to Johor's increasing influence. It did not come about simply because of Johor's strength or superior status; it was a result of Pattani's own political strategy. The late 16<sup>th</sup> century was the period in which Pattani enjoyed its greatest prosperity as an international trading port. This was a period when the Portuguese had lost their grip over Southeast Asian trade, and during which the alternative trading route based on Aceh, Bantam, and Pattani was most profitable. Prosperity brings about confidence, and this is reflected to a great extent in the Pattani chronicle.

*Hikayat Patani* tells us about the time when Pattani, for reasons unexplained, adopted an anti-Siamese policy. The chronicle specifically states that Raja Ungu who succeeded to the throne around 1624 refused to allow herself to be called by the Thai title *Phra-cao*, and goes on to say that she arranged the marriage of her daughter to Sultan of Johor, despite the fact that her daughter had earlier been married to a Thai official. There followed warfare between the two states. The Thai accounts call Pattani's action a rebellion while *Hikayat Patani* considers this event a Siamese attack. (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 16) She apparently could hold her own against any neighboring centers of power. Under such circumstances, any memory of Melaka's claimed power over Pattani, if it had any historical basis at all, must have long been gone.

The reading of *Hikayat Patani* gives useful insight to Pattani's attitudes toward Johor, which was, at no time, regarded by Pattani as superior and sometimes, not even as equal. One story, as pointed out by Virginia Matheson, is of special interest since it shows that Pattani recognized Johor as a prototype of Malay state but did not consider it to be a role model for Pattani. In this story, Raja Lela, a respected Minangkabau trader in Pattani, was asked to lead a mission to Johor. When he arrived, Raja Lela

wanted his Johor adviser to correct any mistakes he might make in the matters of protocol. The Johor courtier could not believe that Pattani was so different from Johor. While Raja Lela conceded that the Johor protocol could be regarded as truly Malay, he said that it differed from practices in Pattani. He did not accept that Johor's adat was superior, it was merely different. (Matheson 1979, 361-362) Similarly, Prof. Wyatt offers the following comment on Pattani-Johor relationships as appeared in the *Hikayat Patani*.

As for the relationship with Johore, it is again clear that the author does not provide us with a factual report on this love-hate relation of long standing; numerous though his references to historical facts seem to be, his first aim is again to stress the essential pattern of this relationship, in which Patani is the superior party. There is a fundamental understanding between Patani and Johore on the basis of a common Malay identity, expressed in the affinal relationship. But Johore is politically, militarily, and morally second to Patani, and any claim to superiority on the part of Johore is vigorously denied from beginning... to end...(Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, 293)

In sum, the content of three indigenous historical accounts under examination bears witness to different viewpoints they held, both towards one another and towards the world around them. Their distinctive and individual perception of the past confirms the existence of strong "local identity" within the broad cultural context of the Malay realm. The historical accounts also reflect differences in the economic nature of the state and in their political orientations which underline two types of polity: one, the relatively land-based northern Malay states, the other, the sea-oriented southern city-ports. All in all, the strength of local identity within the so-called Malay *mandala* should act as a reminder that Thai-Malay relations in the past may have been too diverse by nature or too localized to fit in well with any kind of broad political, inter-racial or cultural model.

## Conclusion

The study of historical Thai-Malay relations has up till now been approached from the perspective of ‘the center’ more than ‘the local’. Whether the debate over the issue of sovereignty, or the working of tributary system, the focus is still firmly on power-centers, their relations to one another, and their relationships with areas under influence. To challenge the center-oriented or nation-state perspective, this study chooses to highlight the existence of strong local identity within the Malay realm during the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that during these centuries, the northern and southern Malay states originated and functioned largely independently of one another should lead us to a greater awareness of their autonomous past and development. Thus, the upper Malay peninsular region, for example, can serve as a unit of study in its own right, instead of being seen as an extension or contraction of Thai or Malay *mandalas*. The historical pattern of Thai-Malay relations, therefore, need not be relations between Ayutthaya and Melaka, or Ayutthaya and Pattani. It can be relations between Pattani and Ligor, Kedah and Phuket, or Songkla and Kelantan. It can also involve the study of local communities and polities in order to determine the way in which they made contacts with surrounding regions. It is equally interesting to see how the history of the region bordering two racial and cultural worlds has evolved.

For present-day Thailand, looking at history through local perspectives can be particularly meaningful in creating a balanced outlook concerning some contemporary problems. To insist, for example, that “the southern border problem” will continue so long as the people of the four southern provinces still aspire to join their true nation-state is only giving half of the picture, because happy people and content communities do not mind to which country they belong. The root of dissatisfaction always lies within the community; only when that root exists can it be magnified by external influences. For this reason, the understanding of past Thai-Malay relations at the local or sub-regional level may, hopefully, be able to give an insight, and perhaps suggest a fruitful approach to the problem.

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