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THE MELAKA SULTANATE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH "PIRATES"



Miss Thanattiya Potimu

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for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in Southeast Asian Studies

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
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วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มุ่งศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างรัฐสุลต่านมะละกากับกลุ่มชาวเลที่มีชื่อเรียกในภาษา มาเลย์ว่า "โอรัง ลาอูท" (Orang Laut) ในช่วงคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 15 จนถึงช่วงต้นคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 16 คือก่อนที่ โปรตุเกสจะเข้ามายึดครองมะละกาในปีคริสต์ศักราช 1511 พื้นที่ทางประวัติศาสตร์ของโอรัง ลาอูท จำกัดอยู่เพียง ในกรอบแคบ ๆ คือการเป็นชาวประมงที่มีวิถีชีวิตผูกพันกับทะเล เป็นชนเผ่าร่อนที่ไม่มีหลักแหล่งแน่นอน และ ประเด็นสำคัญอันเป็นที่มาของวิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้คือ ชื่อเสียงในด้านการเป็นโจรสลัด ปล้นเรือสินค้าที่เข้ามาใน ช่องแคบมะละกา และนำหน้าใกล้เคียงอันได้แก่ บริเวณคาบสมุทรมะละกา หมู่เกาะเรียวลิงกะและ เกาะสิงคโปร์

ผลการศึกษาพบว่ารัฐสุลต่านมะละกากับโอรัง ลาอูทนั้นสามารถอยู่ร่วมกันได้ ความรุ่งเรืองของรัฐสุลต่าน มะละกา ในฐานะเมืองท่าที่เป็นศูนย์กลางการค้าในคาบสมุทรมาเลย์ แท้ที่จริงแล้วส่วนหนึ่งเป็นเพราะการสนับสนุน จากโอรัง ลาอูท ดังนั้น จะเห็นได้ว่าความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างเมืองท่ากับกลุ่มคนที่ถูกเรียกว่า "โจรสลัด" ซึ่งก็คือ โอรัง ลาอูท ในยุคก่อนการเข้ามาของตะวันตกไม่จำเป็นต้องเป็นศัตรูกันเสมอไป แต่ความสัมพันธ์นั้นสามารถเป็นไปใน เชิงสร้างสรรค์ และช่วยเหลือเกื้อกูลกันได้ ซึ่งจะเห็นได้ในหลายรูปแบบภายใต้บริบททางการเมือง เศรษฐกิจ สังคม และความมั่นคง

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This thesis attempts to study the relationship between the Melaka Sultanate and so-called "pirates" or Orang Laut in the pre-Portuguese period (15th – early 16th Centuries). They were known as a group of sea nomads who caught fish, roamed the seas, and had no permanent settlements. Moreover, what leads me to conduct this thesis was their reputation as "pirates" who robbed vessels sailing to the Straits of Melaka, the Riau-Lingga archipelago, and Singapore for trade. At the present, the Orang Laut is known as a group of indigenous, almost primitive tribes, who has no status within many Southeast Asian nations.

The Melaka Sultanate and the Orang Laut could co-exist. The prosperity of Melaka port was actually supported by the roles of the Orang Laut. Therefore, pre-European "pirates" and port relationships were not necessarily oppositional. In the case of the Melaka port and the Orang Laut, their relationship was symbiotic and constructive. This symbiotic relationship could be seen in many forms under the political, socio-economic contexts, and also regarding the security issue at that time.

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CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT (THAI)	iv
ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF MAPS.....	ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II THE ORANG LAUT: “SEA NOMADS” OR “PIRATES”?.....	5
2.1 The General Background of the Orang Laut.....	5
2.2 The present-day Orang Laut of Malaysia.....	9
2.3 “Pirates” and “piracy”: Definitions and conflicts.....	11
2.4 Summary.....	23
CHAPTER III THE PLACE OF THE ORANG LAUT IN THE MELAKA SULTANATE.....	25
3.1 Introduction.....	25
3.2 The place of Melaka in “Malaysian History”.....	27
3.3 Melaka as an “Emporium”.....	30
3.3.1 The definition of “emporium”.....	31
3.3.2 The geographical location factors.....	32
3.3.3 Melaka as a “Cosmopolitan port”.....	36
3.3.3.1 The definition of “cosmopolitan port”.....	36
3.3.3.2 Commodities and traders.....	42
3.4 Political Bases of power of the Melaka Sultanate.....	51
3.4.1 The Government and administration of Melaka.....	51
3.4.2 The close relationship with China.....	58
3.5 The Orang Laut and their relationship with the Melaka Sultanate.....	61

	Page
3.5.1 The Political context: “Pirates” as fighting forces of Malay rulers.....	62
3.5.2 The Socio-Economic context: the Orang Laut as sea-farers/sea gypsies/fishermen and as buyers and suppliers at the port.....	64
3.5.3 The Security Issue: the Orang Laut as pirates.....	68
3.6 Summary.....	72
CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS.....	74
REFERENCES.....	76
BIOGRAPHY.....	87



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

LIST OF MAPS

Map	Page
1	Distribution of sea nomads in Southeast Asia.....7
2	Main pirates areas on the China Seas.....13
3	The voyage of Shih Fa-Hsien through the Straits of Melaka in the fifth century.....15
4	The seventh expedition of Cheng-Ho (January 1431 to July 1433).....17
5	Indian ports in the sixteenth century.....39
6	Melaka as one of the main ports in the spice route.....46
7	Commodities shipped to Melaka.....47
8	Commodities shipped from Melaka.....48
9	Melaka's trade in the fifteenth century.....49
10	The site of the Orang Laut settlements.....65

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Melaka's prosperity can be seen as essentially based on its being a maritime cosmopolitan emporium. Its history was inextricably linked with the story of Orang Laut or so-called nomadic "pirates". Contemporary arguments about "pirates" view them as opposed to or taking away from maritime trade and port prosperity. However, pre-European "pirates" and port relationships were not necessarily oppositional. In specified ways they were symbiotic and constructive.

This research aims to analyze the relationship between the trading port of Melaka and these so-called "pirates" or Orang Laut in the pre-Portuguese period. The definition of "pirate" and "piracy" will be reexamined to investigate whether "piracy" was always negative. Melaka and the Orang Laut, for example, co-existed. Their symbiotic relationship could be seen in many patterns under the political, economic, and social contexts at that time.

The interpretation of economic development focusing on maritime trade, emporia and cosmopolitan ports in the Malay world, especially Melaka, will be used. Modern analyses of piracy and its conflicting role with organized legitimate maritime commerce will be examined and compared with perceptions of piracy in the 15th - early 16th Centuries.

Purpose of study

- 1.) To explain the prosperity of Melaka as an emporium and cosmopolitan port during the 15th-early 16th Centuries

2.) To explore the activities and the roles of “pirates” in the commercial context of Melaka

3.) To study the relationship between the “pirates” and Melaka

Scope of Study

This study will mainly focus on the Melaka Sultanate established in the early fifteenth century and study its prosperity as an emporium and a cosmopolitan port in the Southeast Asian Archipelago. Therefore, it will mostly discuss the trade and merchants who came to Melaka as well as mention the definitions of what has been called ‘emporium’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ port. This study is limited by time and specific group of study. Only fifteenth to early sixteenth century Melaka’s story will be brought into analysis as well as the history and roles of the Orang Laut in Melaka. However, in order to make a comparison, some information will not be historical documents but also include present-day information.

Hypothesis

The Melaka Sultanate and the Orang Laut could co-exist. The prosperity of Melaka port was supported by the roles of the Orang Laut. Their symbiotic relationship could be seen in many patterns under the political, economic, and social contexts at that time.

Limitation of study

There is not much evidence that mentioned the Orang Laut in the fifteenth century in detail. However, many of the studies conducted about the Orang Laut concern these communities in the present-day. Moreover, there is not much documentation concerning maritime Southeast Asia in libraries in Thailand. The present study is thus limited by the above factors.

Significance and usefulness of study

This research will help provide knowledge and information about the activities and roles of “pirates” in Melaka within the commercial context of maritime Southeast Asia.

Methodology

Historical data analysis and interpretation are the main methods I used in conducting research for this thesis and in writing it. Both primary sources and secondary sources concerning the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th - early 16th Centuries and the history of the Orang Laut will be examined. Sejarah Melayu, Suma Oriental, and Documents written by João de Barros are three main primary sources. The story of the Melaka dynasty and the Orang Laut may be found in the Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals especially, the flight of the first ruler of the Melaka Sultanate with help from a group of the Orang Laut. The Suma Oriental written in the sixteenth-century by Tomé Pires also gives a clear picture of Melaka especially its history, governmental system, nature of trade. The Suma Oriental also introduces the Orang Laut under the term ‘Celates’ and their role in helping establish the Melaka Sultanate. The Portuguese document written by João de Barros is another source that elaborates the prosperity of Melaka although it does not mention about the Orang Laut. Most of the works written about the Melaka Sultanate emphasize its role and status as a prosperous port, such as those by Meilink-Roelofs, Anthony Reid, Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz, Leonard Y. Andaya and Barbara Watson Andaya. However, not many documents regarding the story of the Orang Laut in the fifteenth century exist. One article written by Chuleeporn Virunha explains the power relations between the Orang Laut and the Malay Kingdoms of Melaka and Johor during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. The book written by Leonard Y. Andaya, although mainly focus on the economic and political development

of the Kingdom of Johor, gives insightful details about the role of the Orang Laut that had existed since the Srivijayan Empire and the Melaka Sultanate period.

Organization of the Thesis

There are four chapters in this thesis. The first chapter is an introduction regarding the background of the study, the purpose of the study, scope of the study, hypothesis, limitation of the study, significance, and methodology used in this study.

The second chapter will chiefly be about the general background of the Orang Laut or sea nomads in maritime Southeast Asia especially in Melaka port both present-day and historical time. The words ‘pirates’ and ‘piracy’ will be defined parallel with an example of historical piratical activities in Southeast Asia.

The third chapter will mainly explain about the roles of the Orang Laut and their relationships with the Melaka Sultanate. The activities of Orang Laut in the port of Melaka under the political and socio-economic contexts as well as the security issue will be analyzed. This chapter will also verify the factors that turn Melaka into a prosperous emporium and cosmopolitan port in the Southeast Asian Archipelago.

This study will end with a conclusion which will sum up the relationship between the Melaka Sultanate and the Orang Laut in the fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries.

CHAPTER II

THE ORANG LAUT: “SEA NOMADS” OR “PIRATES”?

This chapter will try to establish the relationship between a group of sea nomad people named “Orang Laut” and its milieu. I put the word “pirates” in quotation marks because I intend to show that the terms “pirates” and “Orang Laut” are interchangeable and both are the same thing here. Although the story of the Orang Laut has not been studied and written about much, their roles and activities have been recognized and mentioned in most of the books concerning the establishment of Melaka in the early fifteenth century. However, other aspects of the Orang Laut’s life were rarely written about. The life of the people of Melaka was centred around the royal court, therefore, it is quite difficult to find any detailed account of the daily life of even an average Malay. (Zainal Adidin Bin Abdul Wahid 1970a: 19) Thus, the day-to-day story of the Orang Laut was totally unwritten. The point I would like to prove in this chapter is that the Orang Laut were branded as pirates who roamed and raided ships sailing in the Southeast Asian Archipelago especially the Straits of Melaka and the Riau Lingga Islands. However, the story of the Orang Laut as a pirate is not the same story as the problem of piracy nowadays. They actually had many other different roles besides being pirates.

2.1 The General Background of the Orang Laut

‘Orang Laut’ is a Malay word and it commonly means man of the sea. This term applied to all sea-faring populations and it is used for nomads, fishermen and pirates. (Ivanoff 1997: 7) In Melaka port, along the coastal mangrove forests and also in the areas of coral-reef habitat along the islands at the southern entrance of the Straits were the main areas activities of the Orang Laut were operated. (Anderson and Vorster 1983: 445) Orang Laut had another name. They were called by the Portuguese as ‘Celates’ which was derived from the Malay term ‘Selat’. ‘Selat’ means a strait so “Orang-Selat” means people who live along the narrow seas of the Straits and interchangeable with

the word “Orang Laut.” The Straits here were not limited to the Straits of Melaka only, however, because they also included the other seas such as the Straits of Singapore, the Malay Peninsula, the Java seas, Sumatra, and up to Sulawesi. Generally speaking, Orang Laut could be found living throughout the Southeast Asian Archipelago. (Joseph n.d.: 21) However, the Orang Laut group which particularly lived along the narrow seas of the Melaka Straits (Orang- Selat) will be a focus group in this study as there were many other groups of the Orang Laut living in the sea, not the Straits.

Their names are also various depend on their locations. Each place has different word to call them as Sopher (1965: 54-56, cited in Lopian 1984: 142) makes a study and reveals that the Orang Laut are found along the coastal areas started from the west coast of Thailand, eastern Kalimantan, Sabah, Johor, Sulawesi, the southern part of the Philippines, the Moluccas and the eastern islands of Indonesia. Either “Bajau” or “Sama” or both names are used to call the Orang Laut in almost every place mentioned above. Along the coast and islands of the Mergui in the Southern Burma, a group of Orang Laut lives there and they are called “Moken” or “Selung, Selong, or Selon” in Burmese language. (Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave 1964: 263-4) In Phuket, Thailand, there is also a group of “Moken”^{*} people who live their life as sea gypsies and have a little and easily-built hut on the beach. Therefore, the Orang Laut are not found only in the Malay Archipelago, Johor and Singapore. Their habitats are also in the Riau-Lingga Archipelago and the western Austronesian world. Nevertheless the Singapore islands, the west coast of Malaysia, Thailand and Burma have been densely occupied by the Orang Laut for many centuries. (Ivanoff 1997: 106-107) (Ma p 1)

Although there are many groups of the Orang Laut living in many different islands and seas, each group has its own way of life which may however share some common features. For example,

* The Moken survived during the Tsunami that struck the coastal of Andaman Sea in Thailand in 2004 as they have learnt and noticed the nature of the sea and definitely due to the fact that they are sea nomads.



- I Moken, Orang Sireh, Arang Laut Kappir, Urak Lawoy, Orang Lonta
- II Orang Kuala, Orang Selat, (Duano, Suku, Barok, Galang...)
- III Bajao (Sama and Samal)

Map 1: Distribution of sea nomads in Southeast Asia Source: Ivanoff 1997: 108

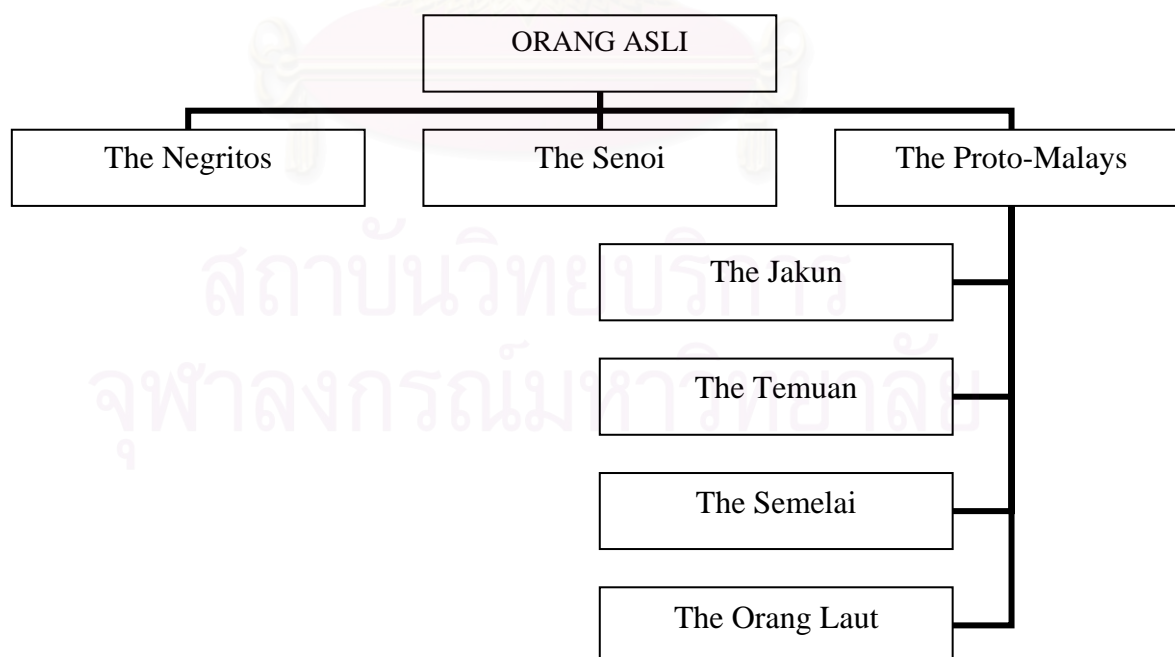
“Some communities have taken the path to becoming sedentary, following a fairly classic pattern: maritime nomadism, then forming groups in fixed floating villages whence their economic expeditions are launched, conversion to Islam accelerating the process of acculturation, with the construction of houses on the shore. Some, like the Besisi, have been known to retain a relative mobility while practicing limited agriculture; others, like the Duano, have become sedentary in adopting the fishing techniques of the Malays, with whom they have become culturally identified. On the other hand, other people, like the Moken, have intensified their nomadism in developing their naval technology and in rejecting agriculture and Islam...”
(Ivanoff 1997: 106)

It seems that the Orang Laut did not come from a single original group and then separate into many sub-groups later. On the other hand, each group has long practiced its own culture, language, beliefs, and way of life. Many indicators, such as linguistic and social characteristics, mode of living, environmental exploitation techniques and, finally, the distances that separated these groups, help confirm the fact that the Orang Laut have existed separately in many maritime centres. Hogan (1972: 208, cited in Ivanoff 1997: 107) states that “the Riau-Lingga Archipelago sheltered, therefore, maritime populations that were not differentiated, either geographically or socially, but each of whom was endowed with specific cultural characteristics prior to their coming together...” It means that the Orang Laut did not originally belong to one same group but each group has its own culture and way of life long before. It is partly due to the fact that they have been exposed to the maritime trade and met with different groups of people. Therefore, the interactions and communications between the Orang Laut and the outsiders, or among different groups of Orang Laut, may lead to cultural exchange and make them look similar. However, Sopher (1977: 47, cited in Ivanoff 1997: 107) argues that “all these boat people of the sea belong originally to one culture, a primitive one socially and technically.” He uses external factors like naval and fishing technology

to support his idea. In this study, it does not matter whether all Orang Laut come from the same origin because it would be almost impossible to prove “hard facts” with no clear evidence and study to prove that they are from the same origin even though they shared some similar cultural traits. (Lapian 1984: 142) On the other hand, only a group of the Orang Laut in the Malay Archipelago especially at the Straits of Melaka, their roles in the historic period and their relationships with the Melaka Sultanate, will be focused in this study.

2.2 The present-day Orang Laut of Malaysia

In most of the contemporary anthropological studies of the Malay people, the Orang Laut is classified as a member of the Orang Asli* group. In terms of geographical division, there are three main categories of Orang Asli: the Negritos in the far north, near the Thai border, the Senoi in the north and centre of the peninsula, and the Proto-Malays in the south. Here, the Proto-Malays will be discussed only as the Orang Laut is one of the major tribes. (Iskandar Carey 1976: 218) Please see the chart below.



*
Indigenous people

According to Iskandar Carey (1976: 219-221), the Orang Laut consist of two sub-groups; the Orang Kuala and the Orang Selitar. 'Orang Kuala' represents a group of people who live at the mouth of the river. In terms of number, the total amount of Orang Laut nowadays is around 1,800 and stretched out in many areas especially the west and south coast of Johor while a small number are also found in the Republic of Singapore. The majority of the population, around 1,500, are the Orang Kuala, while the rest belong to the 'Orang Selitar' group with small number of population only about 300. The Orang Selitar's way of life is that of genuine sea nomads because they do not have any houses but just live permanently in small boats.

Both Orang Kuala and Orang Selitar rarely have contact with each other and they also have different cultures and languages. The Orang Kuala claimed that they originally came from Sumatra and then settled down on the west coast of Johor. Although their own language has been replaced by Bahasa Malaysia in the present-day, they actually have their own language which can verify their Sumatran origin. (Iskandar Carey 1976: 268) The Orang Kuala are Muslims like the Malays and they also practice Malay customs. However, intermarriage between the Orang Kuala and the Malays are rare. Although the relationships between them are fine, it is hardly accepted among the Malays in terms of social status as the Orang Kuala is considered as primitive and less civilized than the Malays. Moreover, the Orang Kuala themselves also strictly practiced their own culture and preferred to take the intra-marriage within their own tribe. Therefore, their culture and way of life are still preserved without much influence from Malay culture except the religion and language that they share. (Iskandar Carey 1976: 276)

Regarding the Orang Selitar's way of life, they are quite different from the Orang Kuala as they are real sea nomads. They do not have houses or any permanent settlements but rather they spend their lives on small boats and move around the Southern coast of Johor and the Singapore islands. They spend no more than a few days at each place. Within the small number of the Orang Selitar, they are divided into three or four main groups. Most of them earn their living by catching fish and seafood to sell in Johor and Singapore. They also grow some plants like coconut. As I mentioned

before, the Orang Selitar are considered as genuine sea gypsies, therefore, the government cannot convince them to build their communities permanently on land. They have a very close tie to their lives on the seas and no experience with agriculture. (Iskandar Carey 1976: 277-279)

Nowadays, the Orang Laut are classified as the “minority group” among many. They are not yet integrated or just in the process of “becoming integrated”. To be integrated, the Orang Laut needs to meet with the criterion, which is the establishment of the permanent settlement. If they still live in a boat, they will be considered as minority group by the Ministry of Social Affairs. It is quite difficult to say whether they are or are not a minority people by just looking at their settlements, because some of them actually lead their life in boat-house but just settle down somewhere and build their high- pillars house on the water. They are in fact the Orang Laut by nature as the same. Moreover, regarding the term “Orang Laut”, some of them do not prefer to be called by this term as it refers to a kind of “under-developed” or “primitive” status. However, people know them from this word and they themselves also often use as the word “Orang Laut” itself actually contains the clear meaning of what it is. Most of the people in both inside and outside the region usually know these sea nomads people who live on boats and lead a nomadic life out at sea as the Orang Laut. (Lapian 1984: 141-142)

Although the Orang Laut in the present-day are considered a “second-class” population, their glorious roles already occupied the history of Malaysia since the time of the Srivijayan Empire in the seventh century up until the establishment of the Kingdom of Johor in the sixteenth century.

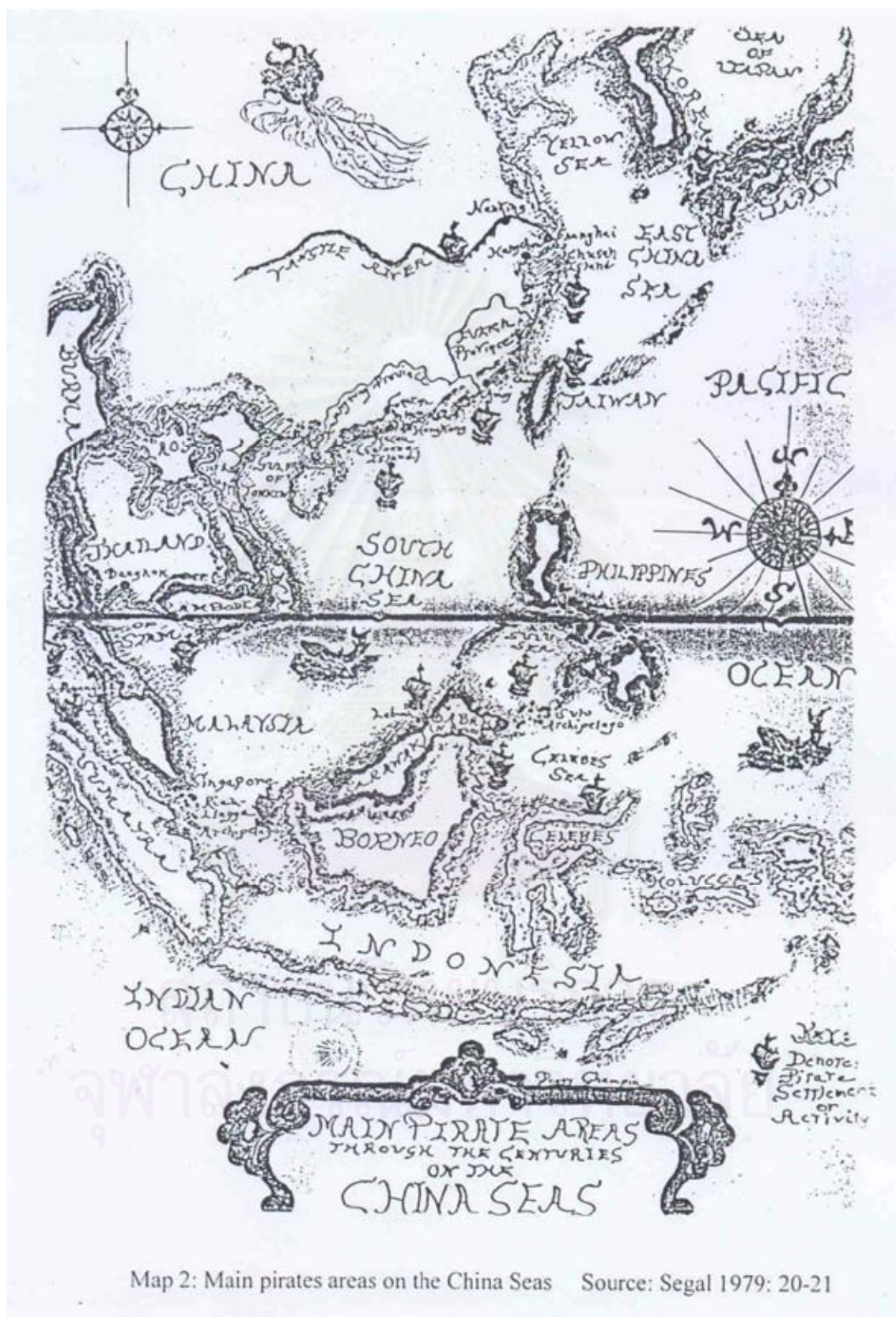
2.3 “Pirates” and “piracy”: Definitions and conflicts

The definitions of “pirates” and “piracy” must be formulated first because what I am going to discuss in this chapter is pirates and their activities in the historical time (the fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries), not pirates at the present time. This word “pirate” derives from the Greek ‘peirates’, which refer to an adventurer who attacked a

ship. An English criminologist named J. Vagg defines piracy as “equivalent to robbery or banditry with the sole difference that it occurs on water. In practice, piracy is similar to banditry, which is armed robbery using violence or the threat of violence in remote areas outside of effective government control.” (Vagg 1995, cited in Johnson, Pladdet and Valencia 2005: x)

Pirates are all around and found in many areas. In Europe, there were both individuals and groups of pirates, such as the Spaniards of southern Italy or the Moslems of North Africa. Many places were pirates’ bases such as Tunis, Algiers, Malta, and Livorno. (Scammell 1981: 136) The histories of pirates and maritime piracy in Southeast Asia have also been mentioned and recorded as early as the fifth century but they may have existed long before that time. Young (2005: 2) believes that the piracy activities have existed since 1,500 years ago and they were a basic part of an interconnected social network. Although piracy in maritime Southeast Asia seems concerned about economics and trade only, actually there was an element of politics as well. Nevertheless, the economic factor seems to be the most important reason for the acts of piracy. Piracy was considered as part of local culture in many parts of the world including Southeast Asia. Piracy was a normal phenomenon in maritime Southeast Asia because for some communities, their survival depended on money or goods gained from piracy. (Johnston and Ankana Sirivivatnanon 2002: 315-316) The Orang Laut, for example, were called ‘pirates’ but actually this was part of their way of life. They were also fishermen, traders, and formed part of the Sultan’s forces as well as helped watch out the piracy in the Straits of Melaka. They were not permanently pirates.

There is some evidence recorded about pirates in many different parts of East and Southeast Asia. (Map 2) The first evidence was probably written by Shih Fa-Hsien, the Chinese pilgrim who set sail for India by traveling through Central Asia in A.D.399. On the way return home via Southeast Asia in the year 413-4, he mentioned about pirates he had confronted along the sea-route he sailed, relating that “This Sea is infested with pirates, to meet who is death. The expanse of ocean is boundless, east and west is not distinguishable; only by observation of the sun, moon, and constellations is progress to be made...” (Wheatley 1966: 37-38) Unfortunately, he did not mention the



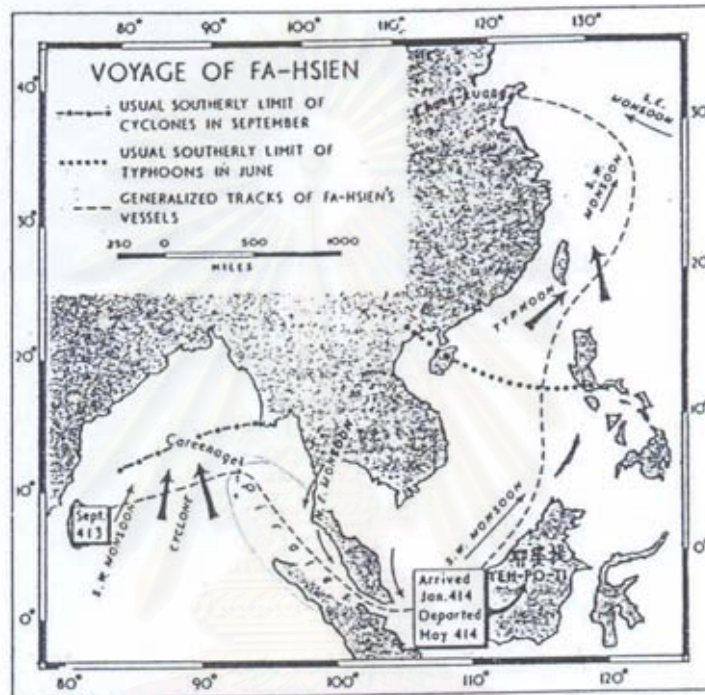
Map 2: Main pirates areas on the China Seas Source: Segal 1979: 20-21

name of the sea where he met with pirates but it is possible that this sea is somewhere on the way from India to China. However, one place that he clearly mentioned was the Straits of Melaka and this area was also occupied by pirates. (Map 3) Shih Fa-Hsien gave a reason that although the master of the ship did not want to sail through the Straits of Melaka, it was unavoidable as there were not many sea-routes from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to China. It shortened the distance to use the Straits. (Wheatley 1966: 39) The problem of piracy in the Straits of Melaka unavoidably obstructed the flow of trade through the Straits. Therefore, even the Javanese down south were also affected and they intervened when necessary. They considered piracy as a barrier to their ports' prosperity as well, because if there was any chaos in the Straits, the arrival of vessels and goods' transportation to Java would be delayed or blocked. (Hall 1981: 26)

Shih Fa-Hsien made a record of places his ship sailed past. His narrative generally concerned the geographical characteristics of each land, its people, and what he had seen and found interesting. Besides the Straits of Melaka, he had mentioned about another Strait named "Lung-Ya-Men" or Dragon-teeth Strait. He describes this Strait as follows:

"The strait runs between the two hills of the *Tan-ma-hsi*^{*} barbarians, which look like 'dragon's teeth'. Through the centre runs a waterway. The fields are barren and there is little paddy. The climate is hot with very heavy rains in the fourth and fifth moons. **The inhabitants are addicted to piracy.** In ancient times, when digging the ground, a chief came upon a jewelled head-dress. The beginning of the year is calculated from the [first] rising of the moon, when the chief [formerly] put on this head-gear and wore his [ceremonial] dress to receive the congratulations [of the people]. Nowadays this custom is still continued. The natives and the Chinese dwell side by side. Most [of the natives] gather their hair into a chignon, and wear short cotton bajus girded about with black cotton sarongs. Indigenous products include coarse lakawood and

*
Temasek or present-day Singapore



The voyage of Fa-Hsien, September 413–June 414. The arrows indicate the winds experienced on particular sections of the voyage, thicknesses of the shafts being in rough proportion to velocities.

Map 3: The voyage of Shih Fa-Hsien through the Straits of Melaka in the fifth century

Source: Wheatley 1964: 40

tin. The goods used in trade are red gold, blue satin, cotton prints, Ch'u [-chou-fu] porcelain, iron cauldrons and suchlike things. Neither fine products nor rare objects come from here. All are obtained from intercourse with Ch'üan-chou traders. When junks sail to the Western Ocean the local barbarians allow them to pass unmolested but when on their return the junks reach *Chi-li-men* (Karimon), [then] the sailors prepare their armour and padded screens as a protection against arrows for, of a certainty, **some two or three hundred pirate prahus will put out to attack them for several days.** Sometimes [the junks] are fortunate enough to escape with a favouring wind; otherwise the crews are butchered and the merchandise made off with in quick time.” (Wheatley 1966: 82)

Regarding the above record, the “Lung-Ya-Men” or Dragon-teeth Strait was also occupied by pirates. They roamed, robbed, and then ran away. The number of their boats which was as many as around two or three hundred shows how big their community and manpower were, which was possibly why they had the ability to do their piratical activities and control the Strait. It was believed that Melaka, located at the mouth of the Melaka river, was developed from pirates’ home and here was also a market place for selling stolen goods. (C.H. Wake 1983: 142) “Tan-ma-hsi” or “Temasek” or present-day Singapore was known as an abode of Orang Laut as well. (Wheatley 1966: 83)

Regarding the first expedition to Southeast Asia of Cheng-Ho (Zheng He) which took place in 1405-7, it had been mentioned that in this voyage, Cheng-Ho had confronted a group of pirates led by the Chinese Chief named “Ch'en Tsu-i.” The fighting took place at San Fo-ch'i (Srivijaya, Palembang) (Map 4) on the return journey. Cheng-Ho and his manpower could defeat this group of pirates and captured the leader “Ch'en Tsu-i” to present to the Emperor at Nanking (Nanjing). Ch'en Tsu-i was finally executed, while five thousand men under his control were killed in the battlefield, and seventeen ships were burnt down or taken with Cheng-Ho's fleet.

This story was considered as an outstanding incident of the first expedition. (Ma Huan 1997: 10-11) It is interesting that the Chief of the pirates' band, which was instead Chinese. To conclude from the evidence above, the Straits of Melaka, Singapore, and Palembang in Sumatra were areas frequented and lived in by the Orang Laut who conducted piratical activities. Besides the Southeast Asian Archipelago, East Asia was also another region which had a problem of piracy.*

* During the end of thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, pirate-traders from Japan, known as 'Wakō' or "Japanese marauders/bandits", were active in Korean and Chinese waters again. Their acts of piracy were operated in order to open the ports of Korea and China. Both countries' foreign trades as well as the coastal communities were damaged by unannounced attacks: the pirates robbed, and then ran away to their ships waiting in the sea. In Korea, people along the coastal areas had to leave their homes, move inland, or become pirates themselves as they were attacked by the Wakō. Japanese piracy also played an important role in troubling the Korean trade. These Japanese pirates were dwelling around the Inland Sea and their group was protected by the Central Authority. Therefore, they could operate both piracy and trade at the same time. Their activities had prevented Korea from participating fully in international trade since the thirteenth century. (Segal 1979: 18; Simkin 1968: 146) However, when a group of Japanese pirates could negotiate with the Korean dynasty, it was able to decrease piracy. The Yi dynasty or Choson Dynasty (1392-1910), the last and longest-lived imperial dynasty of Korea, could establish a kind of good relations with Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. (He was the third shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate who reigned from 1368 to 1394. There were fifteenth shoguns in the Ashikaga shogunate. More details please see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashikaga_shogunate.) He got an offer from the Yi dynasty to help suppress the Japanese pirates who raided against Korea in exchange with the trading privileges at the port of Pusan. It was mentioned that this agreement could help Korea suffer less from pirates. (Simkin 1968: 148) An agreement was signed by Korea and Japan in 1443. According to the agreement, "the Ashikaga shoguns were to keep the Japanese pirates under control. In return, the Koreans permitted entry of fifty Japanese trade ships into their ports each year." (Segal 1979: 18)

China also faced the problem of piracy. The Japanese pirate-traders together with some Chinese living along the coastal actively plundered along the entire coast. Therefore, the Ming Emperor, Hung-wu, thought of bringing Japan and its pirates to be a tributary state under the Chinese control. However, it failed. The Emperor, then, announced a policy in which the maritime trade was not allowed. This policy could not help solve the problem of piracy, either. Finally in the year 1392, Japan became a tributary state of China. China was quite sure that under the tributary system, the Japanese pirates would be eliminated. (Segal 1979: 18) The embassies were exchanged between both lands and the piracy suppression treaty was signed in 1405. According to the treaty, Japan needed to suppress pirates and she would gain a special privilege in monopolizing an official trade with China. Piracy significantly decreased and maritime trade in East Asia became prosperous again. (Simkin 1968: 149)

The problem occurs when our perception of piracy in the 15th -16th centuries is influenced by the 19th century's perception. The Orang Laut were known as 'pirates', and our present-day perception of pirates and piracy have led us to focus on the detrimental effects of Orang Laut activity. The study argues that within the historical context, Orang Laut piracy was just one aspect of their way of life, an aspect which could prove beneficial to the Malay Sultanate of Melaka if they could devise a strategy to handle them. But piracy aside, the Orang Laut had other roles that fit well with the needs of a maritime state such as Melaka. To see them simply as 'pirates' or robbers thus obscures not only their role in history but also the unique characteristics of the state and society to which they belonged.

Sea nomads or people who lived their lives along the coastal areas or roamed the sea, while they were local people, were nevertheless accused of being "pirates." However, piratical activity was just a part of a way of life. Piracy in the present-day is not comparable with historical piracy. Moreover, Southeast Asian piracy was dominated by western ideas of what has been called "pirates" and "piracy". Therefore,

"Local understandings of Southeast Asian maritime predatory activities were eventually changed by the coming of Europeans, beginning in the sixteenth century. Through the processes of imperialism and colonialism, particularly in the later half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European concepts of piracy of the time were overlaid on local traditions, criminalizing traditional maritime predatory activities. Thus the layers of meaning and interpretation applied to predatory maritime activities in Southeast Asia have blurred their original meanings, confusing the contexts from which they came." (Young 2005: 10)

In the 19th century, after the foundation of Singapore, the problem of piracy in the Malay world came to concern the Europeans, as these piratical activities disrupted the flow of trade to the port of Singapore. Therefore, “throughout the decade from 1826 to 1836, the topic of piracy, its causes, and how it could be suppressed came to occupy much of the thinking of the Europeans at Singapore.” (Trocki 1979: 63) However, the persistence of piracy was considered a way of life among the Malays as its story was mentioned in almost every contemporary account of the Malay world. (Trocki 1979: 63)

Nicolas Tarling mentions that most of the Malay political activities were considered as piracy in the eyes of the Europeans. The maritime Malay states were generally founded by insignificant chiefs. Their forces were set up at the mouths of rivers and drew a living by collecting tax from visiting merchants and upriver communities. Competition and monopolized trade here easily led to commercial disputes, and such disputes were seen as ‘piracy’ in the European settlements. Conflicts within these states or with other states, such as attacks on trade, were also considered piracy rather than interference with neutral trade. Tarling uses Johor as an example of an empire which practiced piratical activities as it rose under “warrior-chiefs” who subdued lesser states, taxed their trade, and forced ships into central entrepôts. These activities were not considered naval warfare and tax collection but were instead labeled as “piracy”. He finally points out that the decay of such a kingdom as Johor would leave the ruling class and its followers to “piratical means of subsistence, roaming the seas and attacking traders indiscriminately.” (Tarling 1969: 14-15, cited in Trocki 1979: 64-65) Therefore, the piratical issue in the 15th-16th centuries should be interpreted and understood without any influence from the 19th century perception, and it should be seen in the way it actually was. Before the Europeans came, the sea peoples took charge of patrolling these waters. However, they were not allowed to collect presents or port duties from the native and Chinese vessels anymore. Moreover, the allowances given to the Sultan and the Temenggong (a Police Chief) were not much enough to pay for their followers. Therefore, the sea peoples needed to turn to their old occupation, which was being “pirates”. It was thus the Europeans who forced them indirectly to be pirates. Moreover, when the state’s

food supply was scarce, the sea peoples had to make their living by becoming pirates. This was again viewed as a problem of “piracy” by the British. (Trocki 1979: xviii) In the Malay political system, the activities of the sea peoples which were violent but perfectly legitimate pursuits under the lead of the Sultan were a legitimate naval operation, not piratical activities. (Trocki 1979: 56) We can see the conflict of perception between the Eastern and Western worlds here.

To define “piracy” in maritime Southeast Asia was therefore not easy and it became a problem as most of the documents and historical records were written by foreigners who were travelling through the Southeast Asian Archipelago. Therefore, the interpretations of these people were various and influenced by their own culture, beliefs, and perceptions of their own political system, economic and social patterns that they were familiar with. Therefore, Southeast Asian pirates were interpreted through the eyes of outsiders, which has caused some difficulties and misunderstandings among people both inside and outside the region. (Young 2005: 7)

The definitions of “piracy” in the present-day are given when the world order was already set up, not like in the historical time. Therefore, they are very systematic. However, the definitions of what should be considered as piracy given by two maritime organizations are dissimilar. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) define this word differently.

The IMO follows the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982 UNCLOS), which inherited Article 15 of the 1958 Geneva Convention on the High Seas, declares piracy a criminal act in article 101 and states that piracy comprises of any of:

- “(a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed:
 - (i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft;

- (ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State;
- (b) any act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or an aircraft with the knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft;
- (c) any act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act as described in subparagraph (a) or (b).”

Johnston and Ankana Sirivivatnanon (2002: 329) state that the above definition of piracy contains some questionable and ambiguous terms. For example, in (a) private ship or aircraft means personal ship or aircraft which are not under state control. However, in reality, piracy is sometimes conducted by the state. Therefore, this definition legitimizes any state to be a pirate itself. The term “for private ends” also allows piracy inspired by the political reasons to be conducted because it is not for private ends. It sounds that all components in the IMO’s definition of piracy are questionable. Johnston and Ankana point out that piracy has to take place on the high seas or a place outside the jurisdiction of any state only, as high seas are considered as the property of all mankind and any states can share the seas for trade. Therefore, it again allows piracy within territorial waters to take place. The IMO then has to create an alternative term by defining criminal attacks with weapons on ships within ‘territorial waters’ as an armed robbery but not piracy. Moreover, to be considered as piracy as defined in the 1982 UNCLOS, Pirates need to use a ship to attack another ship. Thus, mutiny and privateering are not considered as the acts of piracy.

Because the IMO’s definition is rather vague and arguable, the more specific definition has been given by the IMB. For the IMB, piracy is “the act of boarding or attempting to board any ship with the intent to commit theft or any other crime and with the intent or capability to use forces in the furtherance of that act.” Here, ships in territorial waters or even at anchor or in port are included. (Johnston and Ankana Sirivivatnanon 2002: 338) It is clear that the term defined by the IMB is broader and covered all questionable points created by the IMO. No matter where the acts of piracy take place, on the high seas or in territorial waters, both are considered piracy. It is not

necessary to be just a ship-to-ship attack, even an attack from a raft or even from the quay are acts of piracy. The IMB definition also does not require that the acts of piracy need to be committed for private ends only; an attack on a ship no matter what the reason is meets the criteria of piracy. (Johnson, Pladdet and Valencia 2005: xi-xii)

The problem of no clear proper definitions of piracy stated above causes difficulties among states and governments especially in an economic zone like the Straits of Malacca.* Weak definition leads to weak tools in fighting against pirates because the definition of piracy in Article 101 of 1982 UNCLOS concludes that none of the attacks against ships in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore were piracy because they did not take place on the high seas or in the exclusive economic zone. Therefore, this law is obviously ineffective for preventing and suppressing piracy in maritime Southeast Asia. (Johnston and Ankana Sirivivatnanon 2002: 384-385)

2.4 Summary

Because of our 'present perception' of piracy, we tend to see the Orang Laut activity in a negative light. Actually, it was the West, particularly the British who concentrated on the negative aspect of the Orang Laut activity and branded them illegitimate and negative because it conflicted with 'their interest'. Apparently, the Malay Sultanate's perception towards them was not the same. Even if the Malay saw the Orang Laut as robbers, they did not seek to destroy them like the British. Instead, they harnessed the Orang Laut for their own use.

* Three of the areas that are of the greatest concern to the safety of international maritime navigation in Southeast Asia are the Singapore Strait, the Malacca Strait, and Indonesia. Indonesia and the Malacca Strait were mentioned in the IMB Annual Report 2000 as two most dangerous zones on the world for international maritime shipping. (Johnston and Ankana Sirivivatnanon 2002: 375)

The act of “piracy” is problematic especially in terms of its definition even in the twentieth-twenty-first centuries as mentioned above. Therefore, it was no exception in the case of the piratical activities in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. Moreover, although the Orang Laut in the Malay Archipelago were assumed to be a group of sea nomads that conducted piratical activities, they actually played other important roles in the Straits of Melaka and it was undeniable that the prosperity of Melaka was partly due to them.



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CHAPTER III

THE PLACE OF THE ORANG LAUT IN THE MELAKA SULTANATE

3.1 Introduction

Regarding the name “Melaka”, it is interesting that there are many legends^{*} mentioning about how this word became the name of the town. However, the legend that seems most important is the one recorded in the *Sejarah Melayu* as its story

* Tomé Pires (1944 vol.2: 234) gives another explanation that the origin of the word ‘Melaka’ comes from the establishment of Melaka when Parameswara told the *Celates* who persuaded him to explore the site of Melaka that “you already know that in our language a man who runs away is called a *Malayo*, and since you bring such fruit to me who have fled, let this place be called *Malaqa*, which means ‘hidden fugitive’; and since your intentions were such that you wished to find a place for me to rest in, I will order it to be examined, and if it is suitable, I will go there with my wife and house, and I will leave the fourth part of my people in Muar to profit from the land where we have devoted so much work to reclaiming it.”

In the book of Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (eds.) named ‘Melaka: The Transformation of a Malay Capital c. 1400-1980 Volume 1-2’, the origins of the word ‘Melaka’ are also mentioned in an introduction called “The Name Melaka”. There are three main stories regarding the origin of the word “Melaka”. Firstly, “Melaka” came from “malagas”, a kind of salted fish prepared and exported by the original inhabitants of the settlement. Secondly, its name derived from an Arabic root expressing the idea of ‘encounter’. “Melaka” was equated directly with the Arabic “*mulāqah*”, which means ‘a meeting, on the grounds that the port was a rendezvous for merchants from far and near.’ Apart from the fact that it is difficult to see why Malays should have adopted a term used by Arabs, who were not especially prominent in the early days of the settlement, it is unlikely that Arabic speakers would have referred to a *place* in this way. A form more in accord with Arabic usage would have been *multaqan*, denoting ‘a meeting-place’, ‘a gathering point’, or ‘a collecting centre’. The third story defined the name as a generic term for ‘myrobalans’ (*Malaca significa Mirabolanos*), the dried fruits and kernels of astringent flavour produced by two genera of Malaysian trees.

becomes the State Emblem. Melaka is the name of a tree as it was mentioned in the Sejarah Melayu that Sultan Iskandar Shah moved so many places and then stopped at Melaka. “And as the king, who was hunting, stood under a tree, one of his hounds was kicked by a white mouse-deer. And Sultan Iskandar Shah said, “This is a good place, when even its mouse-deer are full of fight! We shall do well to make a city here.” And the chiefs replied, “It is indeed as your Highness says.” Thereupon Sultan Iskandar Shah ordered that a city be made, and he asked, “What is the name of the tree under which I am standing?” And they all answered, “It is called *Malaka*, your Highness”; to which he rejoined, “Then Malaka shall be the name of this city.” (Brown 1970: 42)



It is stated in the official website of the Melaka State Government that

“The various colours of the state emblem are the colours of Malaysia. This indicates Melaka as being a part of Malaysia. The five keris or swords represent five famous and brave warriors of ancient Melaka: Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat, Hang Lekiu, Hang Lekir and Hang Kasturi. The crescent moon and star at the top centre are the symbols of Islam, the national religion. *The tree and two mousedeers symbolise the tale of Melaka's founding. Parameswara had witnessed a fight between a mousedeer and a dog whilst resting beneath a Melaka tree. Impressed by the intelligence and prowess of the small-bodied*

mousedeer, he decided to set residence there and named it Melaka. The state motto reads “Unity is Strength”.^{*}

In this chapter, I will mainly explain about the Melaka Sultanate as an emporium and a cosmopolitan port in the fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries and place the Orang Laut into this context. Their roles and relationship with the Melaka Sultanate will be the most important part in this chapter.

3.2 The place of Melaka in “Malaysian History”

Historical Melaka has been mentioned by many scholars. Sejarah Melayu, written in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, spoke in glowing terms of the splendour, power and extent of this Malay Empire. The account in the Sejarah Melayu is confirmed by Portuguese writers who wrote on Melaka in the early sixteenth century. Tomé Pires, for example, states that “Malacca is of such importance and profit that it seems to me that it has no equal in the world...It is a city made for merchandise fitter than any other in the world...” Duarte Barbosa, another Portuguese writer, came out with the statement, “Malacca is the richest seaport with the greatest number of wholesale merchants and abundance of shipping that can be found in the whole world.” (Zainal Adidin Bin Abdul Wahid 1970a: 18)

The prosperity of Melaka as an emporium and a cosmopolitan port in the fifteenth century has raised a new issue concerning the identity of Malays. The history of Malaysia has been written by looking backward to the history of Melaka by wishing to link the prosperity of Melaka at that time with present day Malaysia.

^{*} See more information about Melaka at <http://www.melaka.gov.my>

Leonard Y. Andaya (2004: 56) writes that

“...the fifteenth-century kingdom of Melaka was the cradle of Malay civilisation. Proper behaviour, customary laws and standards of government, language and literature derived from the oral and written traditions of Melaka became ‘primordial’ values associated with being Malay.”

Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya (1982: 7) also mention in their book ‘A History of Malaysia’ that

“Until the beginning of the fifteenth century AD, the history of what is now Malaysia is difficult to reconstruct with any real certainty. Because of the lack of information, historians have tended to regard the rise of a great entrepôt, Melaka, on the West Coast of the Malay Peninsula, as an identifiable starting point for Malay history. There is a consequent inclination to consider the centuries before 1400-the ‘pre-Melakan period’-as being of relatively little importance in the evolution of modern Malaysia. But Melaka’s rise from a quiet fishing village to a world-renowned emporium and centre of Malay culture cannot be explained unless one realizes that behind the splendour of its court and the vigour of its commerce lay traditions of government and trade which had evolved over centuries.”

The story of the court of Melaka in the fifteenth century was an essential part of the construction of the Melayu world through the *Sejarah Melayu* (The History/ Story of the Melayu). This document makes Melaka the ultimate measure of all things Melayu. The people who had lived long before the Pre-Melakan period were ignored

and excluded from being the population of the Melayu world. Only with the foundation of Melaka in the fifteenth century by Melayu immigrants from Palembang could the Peninsula become part of the Melayu world. Melaka, therefore, was emphasized as the centre of the Melayu world. (Andaya 2004: 71-72) Even the ex-Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Mohammed, used a quotation from the *Sejarah Melayu* to put in the final part of his book named 'The Way Forward'. He uses the reputation of Melaka as the greatest port in the fifteenth century to show that contemporary Malaysia will have a way forward like Melaka in terms of economics. (Hooker 2003: 58-59) *Sejarah Melayu*, however, should be used carefully as it was a history of the court and the rulers; not ordinary people. Therefore, the nature of the court's history more or less emphasized the sacred power of the Sultan as he was the center of the kingdom. "For the genealogist, the universe was the Malay world, and the court writer, in this literary tradition, had no more important duty than to supply his ruler with worthy ancestors within the framework of the Malay world." (Wolters 1975: 81) But in the context of this thesis, this "cradle" of Malay civilization was founded and prospered with the help of the Orang Laut, who in other contexts might be classified as being more "primitive", even "non-Malay" peoples.

In the debate on whether which kingdom should be considered as the centre of Melayu, it is undeniable that Melaka has been emphasized as the representative of 'Malayness' or 'Melayuness'. While both Melaka and Sumatra were claimed to be the heart of the Melayu lands, Melaka, inspired by the pattern of being Melayu by southeastern Sumatra and western Borneo, was in a better position because of its success as a centre of commerce, religion, and literary output. Melaka was in a sense of being the centre of Melayu civilization in the fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (Andaya 2004: 74-75) "Although communities in Sumatra and Borneo shared a common culture of trade, language and religion with Melaka, the latter controlled the Melaka Straits in the fifteenth century and set the standard for Malayness..." (Barnard 2004: 107)

3.3 Melaka as an “Emporium”

The fifteenth century has been recognized among scholars as part of the “Age of Commerce” in Southeast Asia, when maritime trade in this region was very active. Plenty of forest produce and food stuffs from hinterlands, and spices from the Molucca islands are the great incentive persuaded traders from India, China, and later Europe to sail here. Manufactured goods like cloths, porcelains, and silk were brought for sale here, too. Therefore, the Southeast Asian Archipelago became a market place for both local and foreign people. Interestingly, although the various ports were scattered from Ligor on the Isthmus of Kra in the Malay Peninsula to the islands of Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and throughout the Indonesian Archipelago long before this century, nowhere had developed to become an emporium like Melaka in the fifteenth century. (Joginder Singh Jessy 1985: 53; Reid 1988: 7) Melaka was named by the Portuguese the “Venice of the East” (Pires 1944, vol. 2: 284) and it was mentioned that

“...no trading port as large as Melaka is known; nor anywhere they deal in such fine and highly-prized merchandise. Goods from all over the East are found here; goods from all over the West are sold here. There is no doubt that the affairs of Melaka are of great importance and of much profit and great honour. It is a land [that] cannot depreciate, on account of its position, but must always grow. It is at the end of monsoons, where you find what you want, and sometimes more than you are looking for.”

(Pires 1944, vol. 1: 228)

3.3.1 The definition of “emporium”

Dietmar Rothermund (1991: 3) defines the word “emporium” as

“A market place in which *a variety of goods* is more or less continuously available and in which a *plurality of buyers and sellers* can meet without undue restraint under predictable conditions of supply and demand. In an incipient stage a seasonal fair may serve this purpose, but since goods may have to be stored for some time and ancillary activities such as transport, money changing and credit, insurance and the exchange of commercial intelligence grow around the market place, the emporium would emerge as a town, perhaps even a fortified one, to keep pirates and brigands at bay.”

To be considered as an emporium, two main characteristics are needed, according to the definition given above, which are a variety of goods and diverse groups of people both buyers and sellers. In the 15th century, there were many commercial centres located throughout the Southeast Asian Archipelago. Melaka was not the only grand maritime emporium at that time. Siam (Ayutthaya)^{*}, Patani, Java (Sunda), Sumatra (Aceh), Palembang, Brunei, Sulu, Champa and others were also recorded as prosperous ports in the 15th century (Pin-tsun Chang 1991: 16). Some of them had their own hinterland goods but not Melaka. In the case of Melaka, it could be considered as an emporium because of the factors listed below.

* It became a true emporium later (around the seventeenth century).

3.3.2 The geographical location factors

João de Barros (1993a: 43) records the geographical data of Melaka that it is situated at the latitude of two degrees north on the straits lying between the peninsula up north and the island of Sumatra down south. There was a river that divided Melaka town into two parts joined together by a bridge. Regarding the location of Melaka, it was situated in the *core area* that really helped contribute to its prosperity. The “core area” here means the place located in the middle of the trade route between China and India.

R.C. Majumdar (1986: 4) emphasizes that

“The geographical position of Malaysia [present-day] invested it with a high degree of commercial importance. Situated on the highway of maritime traffic between China on the one hand and western countries like India, Greece, Rome and Arabia on the other, it was bound to develop important centres of trade and commerce...The main volume of this trade must always have passed through the Straits of Malacca...”

Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya (1982: 10) also agree that because Melaka was “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.” Besides China and India, Melaka’s network of commerce also covered the whole Indian Ocean, starting from the Red Sea in the west and stretching a long way to the Maluku (Moluccas) in the east, as well as the South China Sea, as both were considered as a strategic passage for shipping. (Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz 1993: 71) Therefore, the first advantage of Melaka was its location. Meilink-Roelofs (1962: 60-88) states that once Melaka had been established, its settlement around the mouth of the Melaka River grew very quickly and it also controlled the trade between countries from the Eastern world like China, Japan, the islands of Indonesia, the Philippines, and the

coasts of mainland Southeast Asia and the Western world which covered the Indian Subcontinent, Arabia, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, and Europe.

According to Chuleeporn Virunha (2002: 148), there were two overlapping circles of trade routes that Melaka was playing a role in as an important port on the Straits.

“The first was a broad interregional trade, sometimes called the blue-water trade, between Southeast Asia and India or China. The second was the intra-Asian trade focused on the Straits. This latter trade carried staple foodstuffs from the relatively populous agrarian kingdoms such as Siam and Java, as well as the merchandise of the archipelago and the Malay Peninsula, such as tin and products gathered from the forests and seas...”

As Melaka was located in the Straits and could control both inter and intra regional trade routes, Melaka therefore could benefit from trade and easily became an emporium and cosmopolitan port in the fifteenth century. Moreover, Melaka was labeled as one of the *five major commercial zones*^{*} of Southeast Asia around the 1500s. It means that Melaka was considered as an important port that could link the other four zones together like a web of trading networks. These five commercial zones had

* The five key commercial zones are comprised of: the first zone, covering the Southern India, Coromandel Coast, the Bay of Bengal, Sri Lanka, Burma, the upper part of the Malay Peninsula, the northern tip and western coast of Sumatra. Melaka and the Straits were labeled as the second zone. Then, come to the third trade zone which included the upper Malay Peninsula's eastern coast, and the lower coast of Vietnam, the areas bordering the Gulf of Thailand, and the port of Ayutthaya in central Siam. The fourth zone was around the Sula Sea, the western coasts of Luzon, Cebu, Mindoro, and Mindanao of the Philippines. The Brunei on the Borneo's north coast was also included in this zone. The last major trade zone was consisted of the Java Sea, Java, the southern coast of Sumatra, the Lesser Sunda Islands, the Moluccas, Banda, Timor, the western coast of Borneo. (Kenneth R. Hall 1985b: 88)

emerged since the beginning of the fourteenth century. Each of them was wealthy and able to function by itself. Regarding the geography of the Southeast Asian Archipelago, Melaka was going to be the second commercial zone as it was located next to the first zone located at the western end of the Archipelago which consisted of the Bay of Bengal, the Coromandel Coast of Southern India down to cover Sri Lanka, and up to Pegu in Burma. The first zone also covered the upper part of the Malay Peninsula, and the northern end and western coast of Sumatra. (Kenneth R. Hall 1985b: 86)

Besides its location, Melaka could also provide a safe place for ships to stop and wait until appropriate winds came to bring them back home or continue their journey to another destination due to the fact that its location was in the equatorial zone which could protect vessels from harmful storms and winds. (Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz 1993: 71)

Teuku Ibrahim Alfian (1998: 97-98) explains that

“The harbour of Melaka became an ideal one because it was protected by the Malay Peninsula from the blast of the North East Monsoon wind, and it was also protected by Sumatra from the South West Monsoon that blew from the Indian Ocean...When the wind blew from the North East, merchandise were brought from Melaka to South Asia and West Asia, and when the South West wind blew in the next season ships would sail to Melaka. At that time, the vessels from Melaka weighed anchor with the destination to China or South Asia. The vessels from China reached Melaka when the northeast wind season came and at that time the vessels would start sailing to India and West Asia. Merchants and sailors who wanted to continue sailing to their destinations while waiting for the next season made Melaka a waiting place. Melaka therefore became a very crowded port.”

Because all ships could not sail freely but depended on the wind system, a good harbour for mooring their ships was essential. Melaka was considered a good harbour because the hill located at the estuary could protect vessels from strong wind. (Joginder Singh Jessy 1985: 18-19) Moreover, as Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya (1982: 40) mention, the Melaka harbour was “sheltered, free of mangrove swamps, with approaches sufficiently deep to allow large vessels safe passage.”

Besides being able to shelter a ship while waiting for a proper monsoon, Melaka was considered as a good place to put goods into safekeeping. Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya (1982: 42) explain that by using the underground warehouses as an example. In Melaka, underground warehouses were built for goods storage while waiting for new incoming cargoes. Underground warehouses could guarantee that the products kept inside were protected from fire and theft. Moreover, traders could also settle down in Melaka and do their business to seek their needed merchandise from different countries before returning home or sailing to the next destination. R.O. Whyte and the Editors of the book “Melaka: The Transformation of a Malay Capital c. 1400-1980” (vol.1 1983: 71) agree that ships sailing from China, India, or the Archipelago to the ports in Southeast Asia would begin their sea journey from home with one monsoon but return with the other. Therefore, an anchorage somewhere in the Southeast Asian Archipelago was required while waiting for the new coming monsoon. Although Pasai located on the north tip of Sumatra was also a famous entrepôt on the Straits, it was not be able to provide as good shelter for vessels as Melaka. (C.H. Wake 1983: 142)

This commercial style which existed in the port of Melaka was considered a great catalyst in the process of setting up a cosmopolitan community by traders from different homelands here. George Cho and Marion W. Ward (vol. 1 1983:624) state that besides the large number of Malays, Melaka’s population also consisted of Chinese, Arabs, Javanese, Gujaratis, Hindus, Persians, and Bengalis. Undoubtedly, “in the fifteenth century the streets of Melaka must have been as cosmopolitan as those of any city of the contemporary world.”

Because of its great location as outlined above, Melaka then became the place that the Portuguese wanted to occupy. The Portuguese chronicler, Duarte Barbosa, brother-in-law and possibly cousin of Ferdinand Magellan, stated that Melaka at this period was ‘the richest seaport with the greatest number of wholesale merchants and abundance of shipping and trade that can be found in the whole world.’ (Bastin and Winks 1966: 34)

3.3.3 Melaka as a “Cosmopolitan port”

3.3.3.1 The definition of “cosmopolitan port”

The meaning of the word “cosmopolitan” in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995: 306) contains one element which is specified as “being international.” A cosmopolitan place, for example, consists of people from many different parts of the world. Therefore, a cosmopolitan port means a port where traders from many different parts of the world come to conduct their commercial activity. In the case of Melaka as a cosmopolitan port, it is interesting that the cosmopolitan atmosphere occurred under a Malay-speaking environment. It does not mean that people who speak the same language have to come from the same place or homeland. However, it means that the Malay language was broadly used in the Malay Archipelago as a means for trading, and people who could speak Malay actually had different nationalities.

Anthony Reid (1988: 7) states that

“the most important central entrepôts had, moreover, for some time been Malay-speaking-first Srivijaya and then its successors, Pasai, Melaka, Johor, Patani, Aceh, and Brunei. The Malay language thereby became the main language of trade throughout Southeast Asia. The cosmopolitan trading class of many of Southeast Asia’s major trading cities came to be classified as Malays because they spoke that language

(and professed Islam), even when their forebears may have been Javanese, Mon, Indian, Chinese, or Filipino.”

Tomé Pires (1944 vol. 2: 269) states that 84 different languages were heard spoken in Melaka. The number stated by Pires sounds exaggerated. I come to doubt how he got this number and how he distinguished each language from a different one although he claimed that this number was affirmed by Melaka's inhabitants. However, we may assume that besides Malay, people also used their own language for communication either with people coming from their homeland or with others who know their language.

The rulers of Melaka also used another strategy to increase the volume of trade and number of merchants who travelled to Melaka. By looking at the success of Pasai, which adopted Islam since the thirteenth century and became an attractive port for Muslim traders, Melaka embraced Islam for that reason as well. (Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya 1982: 53) By converting to Islam, Melaka's ruler hoped to attract more Muslim traders and it worked because when Melaka embraced Islam in 1414 and Parameswara reportedly changed his name to *Megat Iskander Shah*, there were many Muslim merchants from Arabia and India who came to trade in Melaka. (Teuku Ibrahim Alfian 1998: 99) After adopting Islam, Pasai declined due to the fact that most of the Muslim merchants from Gujarat, Bengal, Persia, and Arab switched from Pasai in the north of Sumatra to trade with Melaka instead. (Pires 1944 vol.2: 238-243) Moreover, Melaka later on played an important role help spread Islam throughout the region. (Curtin 1984: 129-130; Gullick 1981: 14-15) However, Melaka still maintained the condition of being an emporium with no racial and religious discrimination, as it used to be before its ruling elite adopted Islam.

Regarding the number of traders sailing to Melaka, most of the scholars put an emphasis on the Indian merchants. Sinnappah Arasaratnam (1970: 6-7) writes that Indian merchants both Muslim and Hindu not only played a major role in trade but also got involved in politics of the Melaka Sultanate. As we can see that among four Syahbandars, two of them specifically took charge of trade and merchants

from Gujaratis, the Klings^{*}, and the Bengalis. (Map 5) It shows that merchants from that region were very important to the prosperity of Melaka. As the Syahbandar was chosen among the merchants from the same nationality, therefore, it would be some families that were very powerful and in high positions in the administrative sector. Some were married with the royal family and became dominant. Pires (1944 vol. 2: 254-55) mentions the number of Indian merchants in Melaka that, there were 1,000 Gujaratis, 4,000 Bengalis, Persians, and Arabs, maybe 1,000 Klings or Tamils, and thousands of Javanese. However, when he mentions about the number of Gujaratis sailors, the number seems too high and might be impossible. Pires (vol.1 1994, p.43) states that there were as many as 4,000 to 5,000 Gujarati sailors on the high sea between Melaka and their Gujarati ports annually. Kernial Singh Sandhu (1983b: 207), therefore, argues that the number should not come to more than one to two thousands. Kernial Singh Sandhu uses the record Pires did himself to make a contrast because in volume 2 of his work *Suma Oriental* (1944: 269-70), Pires states that only five ships sailed from Gujarat for Melaka each year. Thus, it means that one ship had to carry as many as about a thousand people or possibly even more, which seems to be overstated and impractical. I do agree with Kernial Singh Sandhu's point as this number, one to two thousands, was an estimated amount. There might be more or fewer people in a vessel. However, when the goods and belongings were included, it had more potential with its total weight that a ship could sail. Besides a large number of merchants from Southern India, Chinese junks were also very active here in Melaka. As Pires (1944 vol.2: 180) states that up to ten Chinese junks were annually sailed to Melaka and brought their goods such as brocades, silks, satins, porcelain, and copper to sell here.

* Klings or Kelings are the people who come from Southeastern India. Kling was also used to be the name of the ancient Indian Kingdom 'Kalinga'. Besides merchants from Gujarat, Klings have been recognized as another group of traders who play a major role in Melaka. They are also called Hindu Tamils. The ports of origin in Southern India that most of Klings set sail to Southeast Asian Archipelago are named Coromandel, Paleacate, and Naor. (Sanjay Subrahmanyam 1990: 19-21; Kernial Singh Sandhu 1983: 183)



Map 5: Indian ports in the sixteenth century

Source: Kernial Singh Sandhu 1983b: 182

Below are the merchants and people Pires (vol.2 1944: 268) found in the port of Melaka:

“Moors from Cairo, Mecca, Aden, Abyssinians, men of Kilwa, Malindi, Ormuz, Parsees, Rumes, Turks, Turkomans, Christian Armenians, Gujaratees, men of Chaul, Dabhol, Goa, of the kingdom of Deccan, Malabars and Klings, merchants from Orissa, Ceylon, Bengal, Arakan, Pegu, Siamese, men of Kedah, Malays, men of Pahang, Patani, Cambodia, Champa, Cochin China, Chinese, Lequeos, men of Brunei, Luçoes, men of Tamjompura, Laue, Banka, Linga, (they have a thousand other islands), Moluccas, Banda, Bima, Timor, Madura, Java, Sunda, Palembang, Jambi, Tongkal, Indragiri, Kappatta, Menangkabau, Siak, Arqua (Arcat?), Aru, Bata, country of the Tomjano, Pase, Pedir, Maldives.”

Although there were many ports in the Southeast Asian Archipelago, no port could better represent the “cosmopolitan” port as well as Melaka. The volume of trade, the number of traders and their nationality, as well as the products available in Melaka as I mentioned before were in evidence. However, it is interesting to make a comparison between the port of Melaka and Ayutthaya in the Kingdom of Siam because Ayutthaya was also well-known among traders as another prosperous emporium and cosmopolitan port and it was called the “Venice of the east” like Melaka as well. There are a few differences between Melaka and Ayutthaya I would like to analyse here

Firstly, regarding the period of time, Ayutthaya and Melaka were founded and developed at about the same time; however, they reached their peak in different centuries. While Melaka was founded in the early fifteenth century (1402) and developed to be a very prosperous port in the same century, Ayutthaya was established in the mid fourteenth century (1351) in the lower Chaophraya Valley.

Ayutthaya was a capital city of the Kingdom of Siam and became an important emporium in the seventeenth century. (Charnvit Kasetsiri 1991: 75)

Secondly, the location of Ayutthaya was far inside the mainland, not at the edge of the Straits like Melaka. Therefore, it was not as convenient for traders compared with Melaka. Charnvit Kasetsiri (1991: 75-76) mentions that “Ayutthaya is situated about 90 kilometers far from the coast, tucked away at the northern tip of the Gulf of Siam, making it some distance away from the main international sea-route which passed the straits between present-day Malaysia-Singapore-Indonesia.” Therefore, Ayutthaya is better termed a hinterland kingdom, not a maritime state like Melaka. Ayutthaya was very fertile and suitable for growing rice. As we have seen, Ayutthaya was an important rice and foodstuff exporter in Southeast Asia. Her natural products were brought to the port in order to be exchanged with manufactured goods from China, India, and later the west. Speaking in terms of Ayutthaya’s economy, she could survive by herself with her ability to produce food. Consequently, it seems that Ayutthaya did not need to rely on maritime trade that much compared with Melaka. Melaka, on the other hand, lacked an agricultural hinterland and had to rely on foodstuffs imported from Pegu, Siam, and other places. The nature of Ayutthaya as an agricultural kingdom made the people not expert in naval activities. Thus, most of Ayutthaya’s population were farmers and most of the trading activities were conducted by the Chinese^{*}, the Indians, the Persians, and the Malays.

* The overseas Chinese in Ayutthaya played an important role as an active partner of Siam and mainly served as a representative of the Siamese court in conducting maritime trade. They were professional in doing business, sailing, and shipbuilding. Moreover, the Siamese Court also looked for support and protection from the Chinese Emperor. By sending an envoy with tribute to the Chinese Court, Siam could establish a good relation with China and use this opportunity to run her business. As a tributary state, Ayutthaya could gain privilege and benefit from trade with China. The first half of the fifteenth century was considered as the peak of these tribute-trade relations between Ayutthaya and China, especially during the reign of three great kings of Ayutthaya, Intharacha (1409-1424), Boromracha II (1424-1448) and Trailok (1448-1488), which coincided with the foundation of Malacca in 1400 and the seven Ming maritime expedition 1405-1433. Charnvit Kasetsiri (1991: 77)

Lastly, the overseas trade of Ayutthaya was monopolized by the Royal Court since the beginning of the fifteenth century and this point put the port of Melaka in a better position. Melaka was a free port, without intervention from the Sultan or governors. Charnvit Kasetsiri (1991: 77) blames the monopoly policy of the Royal Court as a trading barrier for the overseas commerce. Moreover, those trading with the Siamese Court had to pay higher tax than Melaka's rate. While merchants were charged for tax on their goods as high as 10%, they only paid 3 - 6 % at the port of Melaka. (Charnvit Kasetsiri 1991: 78) All these difficulties could be considered as drawbacks of Ayutthaya and they decreased her popularity as an emporium and cosmopolitan port compared with Melaka.

3.3.3.2 Commodities and Traders

Traders came to Melaka with their own commodities for selling and also looked for goods from different place to buy back home. Therefore, commodities and traders cannot be separated from each other. Looking at both parts can generate a picture of Melaka as an emporium as well as a cosmopolitan port at the same time. João de Barros mentions that these traders who came to Melaka would not consider themselves rich unless they could exchange their three or four shiploads of goods with others within a day. Three to four shiploads of goods is quite a large number and it can show how big the volume of goods circulating in Melaka was. Barros (1993b: 85) confidently concludes that "Melaka is the largest port for the commerce of the richest commodities known in the world" because there were many vessels loading with their goods and sailing to Melaka.

"To this port come *perahus*^{*} loaded with gold
dust from Sumatra, from the Kingdom of Menangkabau,

* Sir Richard Winstedt (1953: 40) defines 'përahu' as native ship or house-boat. However, its meaning given by Leonard Y. Andaya (1975: 336) is Malay ship without deck.

also much pepper from the same island as well as from Malabar. Goods come from India-the Coromandel Coast, Bengal, Tenassarim, Pegu (from the last named expensive goods in large quantities); cloves from the Moluccas, coffee from Borneo, mace and nutmeg from Banda; sandalwood, both white and red from Timor. With trade in all the commodities that have been mentioned it is the richest port of call in the whole world.” (João de Barros 1993b: 87)

Among many local products sold in Melaka, Indian cloth was very popular due to the fact that it was very colorful and well-woven. Tomé Pires estimated the total value of cloth imported from Bengal, Coromandel^{*}, and Gujarat as much as 460,000 cruzados a year, equivalent to around 19 tons of silver. (Pires 1944: 269-272, cited in Tarling 1992: 471) While traders from Gujarat brought cloths and textile to sell in Melaka, they brought back “a large proportion of the spices which had been brought there-cloves, nutmeg, and mace from the Spice Islands, valuable woods like sandalwood from Timor, gold from Sumatra, camphor from Borneo and Sumatra, and tin from the Malay Peninsula.” (Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 65) The Coromandel merchants bought “white sandalwood, camphor, alum, white silk, Chinese porcelain, copper, tin, gold, pearls, pepper, nutmeg, mace, cloves, various damasks and brocades (Sanjay Subrahmanyam 1990: 20; Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 67) The Klings bought gold, large quantities of copper, a little tin, and some Chinese merchandise such as raw white silk, damask, and brocade...” from Melaka. (Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 67)

The direct trade between Bengal and Melaka brought “rice, sugar, dried and salted meat and fish, preserved vegetables and candied fruits like ginger, orange, lemons, figs and cucumbers as well as highly developed textiles to Melaka and

* Coromandel extends from Point Calimere in the south up to the Godavari delta in the north.

Much of the coastline of modern-day Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh is also encompassed. (Sanjay Subrahmanyam 1990: 18)

filled the Bengali ships out of Melaka with large quantities of pepper, cloves, mace, nutmeg, sandalwood, pearls, silk, white porcelain from China, green porcelain from Liu Kiu (Ryukyu) Islands, copper, tin, lead, quicksilver, opium from Aden, white and green damask, carpets, Javanese krisses and swords.” (Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 68-69)

The products imported from Pegu to Melaka comprised “luxury articles such as precious stones, rubies, from Arakan, silver, musk, lac, and benzoin, and partly of foodstuffs. The latter included butter, oil, salt, onions and garlic, but rice and sugar cane were the most important items.” (Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 70) The Peguans themselves bought “Chinese goods: earthenware, a coarse red kind in particular, textile made specifically in China for the Peguans, seed-pearls, quicksilver, copper, vermilion, small quantities of spices such as cloves, nutmeg and mace, some gold and tin...” (Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 70)

Chinese junks brought musk, rhubarb, medicinal root stock, camphor, porcelain, pearls, gems, gilded chests, rings, and other beautiful articles, a small amount of gold and silver, large amounts of raw and woven silk, expensive fabrics such as damask, satin, taffetas, loose and spun silk, brocade, and cotton materials, alum, saltpeter, sulphur, copper, iron, large quantities of copper utensils, cast iron kettles, and handicrafts. The Chinese junks, on the way back to China, they imported pepper, spices saffron, grain, drugs coral, vermilion, ivory, incense, tin, iron, quicksilver, valuable woods, like sandalwood, cornelian and cloth from Cambay, Bengal, and Paleacate and woollen materials from Melaka (Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 76; João de Barros 1993b: 85)

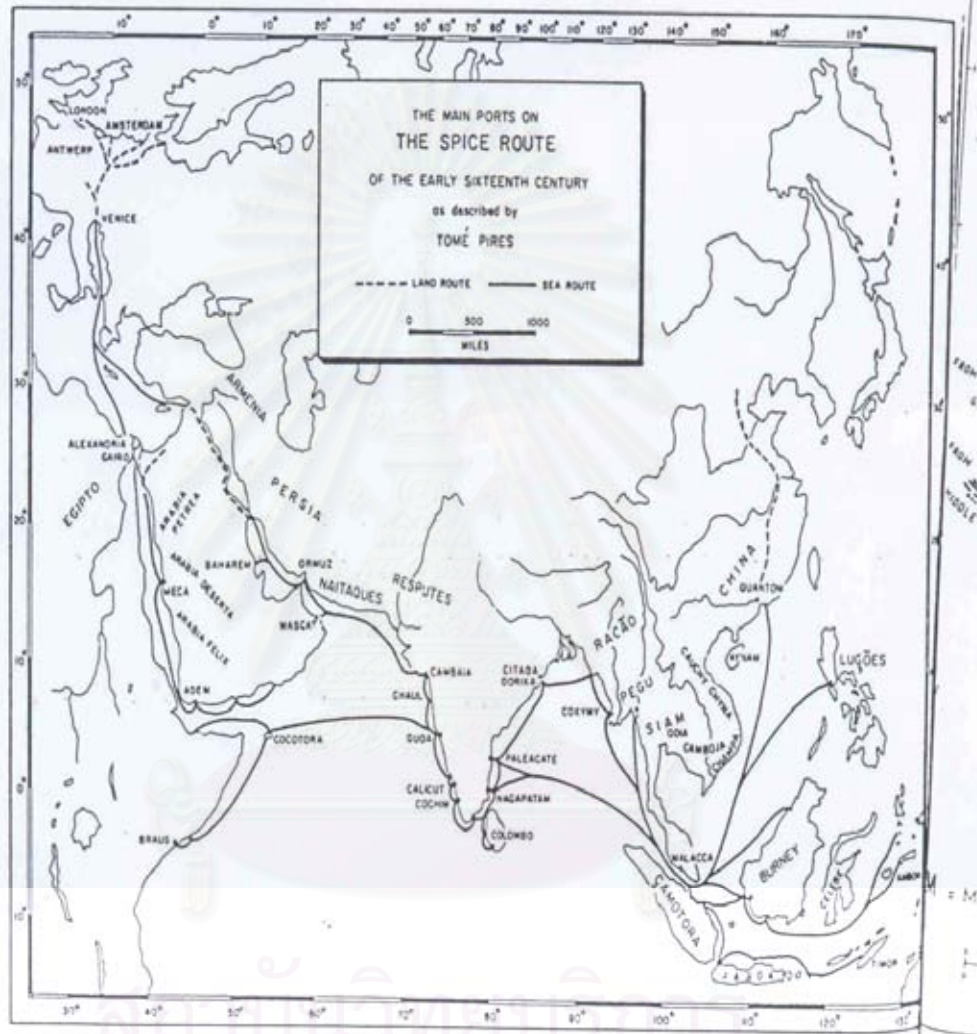
It is clear that spices became a highly demanded merchandise that most of the traders were looking for, as we can see from above, the merchants from China, Bengal, Coromandel, Gujarat, Pegu, (and later on Europe) wanted to buy spices like cloves, nutmeg, mace, and pepper and carry home. As the Southeast Asian Archipelago, especially the Molucca and Banda islands, well-known as the Spice Islands, were very fertile and suitable for growing spices, therefore, they could produce these spices in a large amount. Travelling to the Spice Islands was quite inconvenient

because it took a long time getting through all along the Straits. Therefore, spices were transported from the inner islands to Melaka because of its prosperity in trade. (Map 6) Merchants knew that when they sailed to Melaka, they would get not only spices but also hundreds kinds of other goods that were gathered there. Tomé Pires (vol.2 1944: 180) praises that “Melaka was in effect a collecting point for spices and other products of Southeast Asia and China coast, and a distributing centre both for the textiles and other Indian manufactured articles and also for goods from farther west.” The ability of the Melaka port in gathering all these numerous goods from both the East and the West side attracted large numbers of merchants to come here. (Anderson and Vorster 1983: 452) (Map 7, 8, and 9)

The Malay capital of Melaka, without any rice-growing hinterland of its own, was supplied by fifty or sixty shiploads (varying greatly in size, but perhaps averaging 30 tons) of rice each year from Central Java, and about thirty to forty each from Siam and Pegu (lower Burma). (Tarling 1992: 471; Reid 1984: 250-251) Melaka encouraged the merchants who carried staple food to Melaka especially rice from Java, Siam, and Pegu by exempting them from taxes and sometimes this privilege also applied to all goods these merchants carried. (Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz 1993: 71) It shows that Melaka really depended for its food supply on others. To give them trade duty free might help guarantee that Melaka would have enough food to survive. This policy was continued by the Portuguese and a full cargo from countries which could supply food was always 100% free of taxes. (Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz 1993: 86-87)

There were four main merchandises that were of interest to the Portuguese in Southeast Asia. They showed how prosperous Melaka indeed was. The first group contained the commodities from Southeast Asia: mainly spices, drugs, precious woods, other plant extracts, the most important being the cloves from the Moluccas, the nutmeg and mace from Banda, pepper from Sumatra and Sunda. There was also sandalwood from Timor, camphor from Borneo, benzoin from Sumatra and aloes from Sumatra and Cochin-China. To these plant products, must be added musk,

The position of Melaka on the spice route as it was described by Tomé Pires in the *Suma Oriental*. Place-names other than those of European cities preserve Pires's transcriptions.

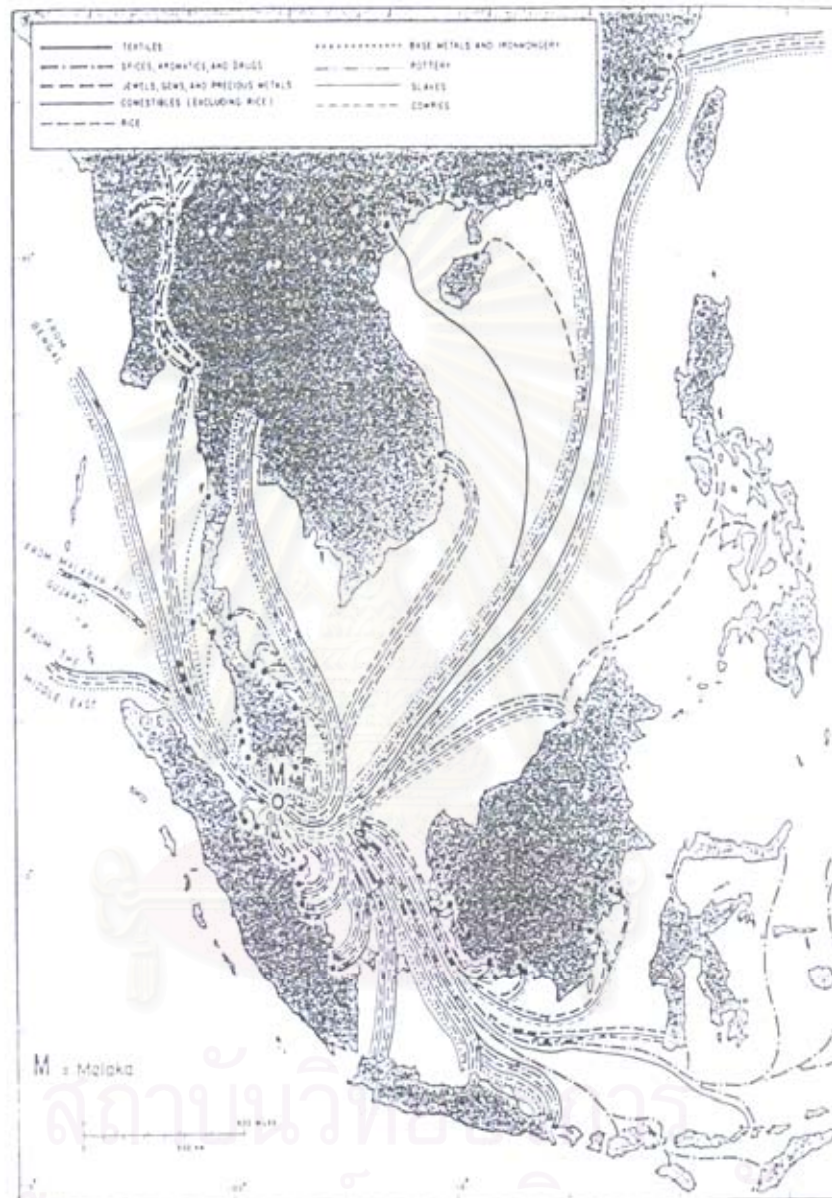


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Map 6: Melaka as one of the main ports in the spice route

Source: Kernal Singh Sandhu and Wheatley 1983: 502

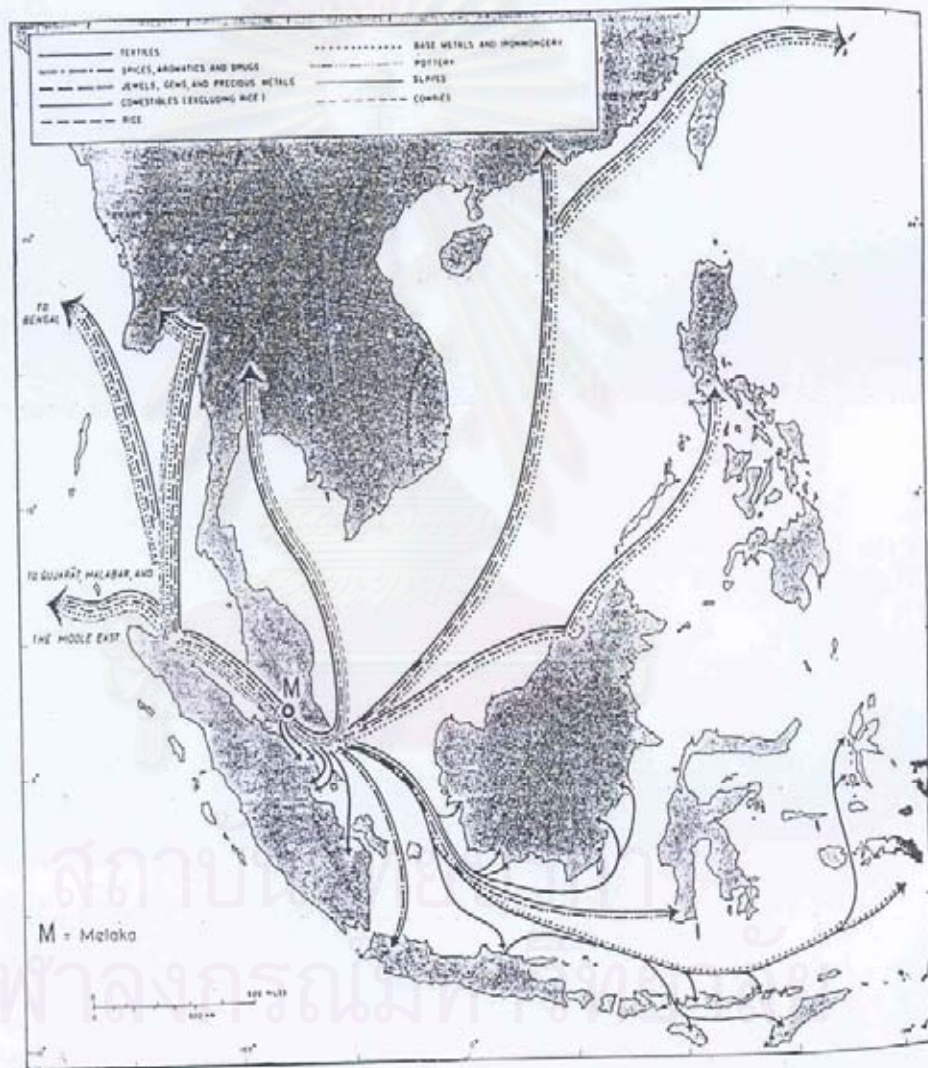
Commodities shipped to Melaka towards the end of the fifteenth century. Based largely (though by no means exclusively) on information in the *Suma Orientalis*.



Map 7: Commodities shipped to Melaka

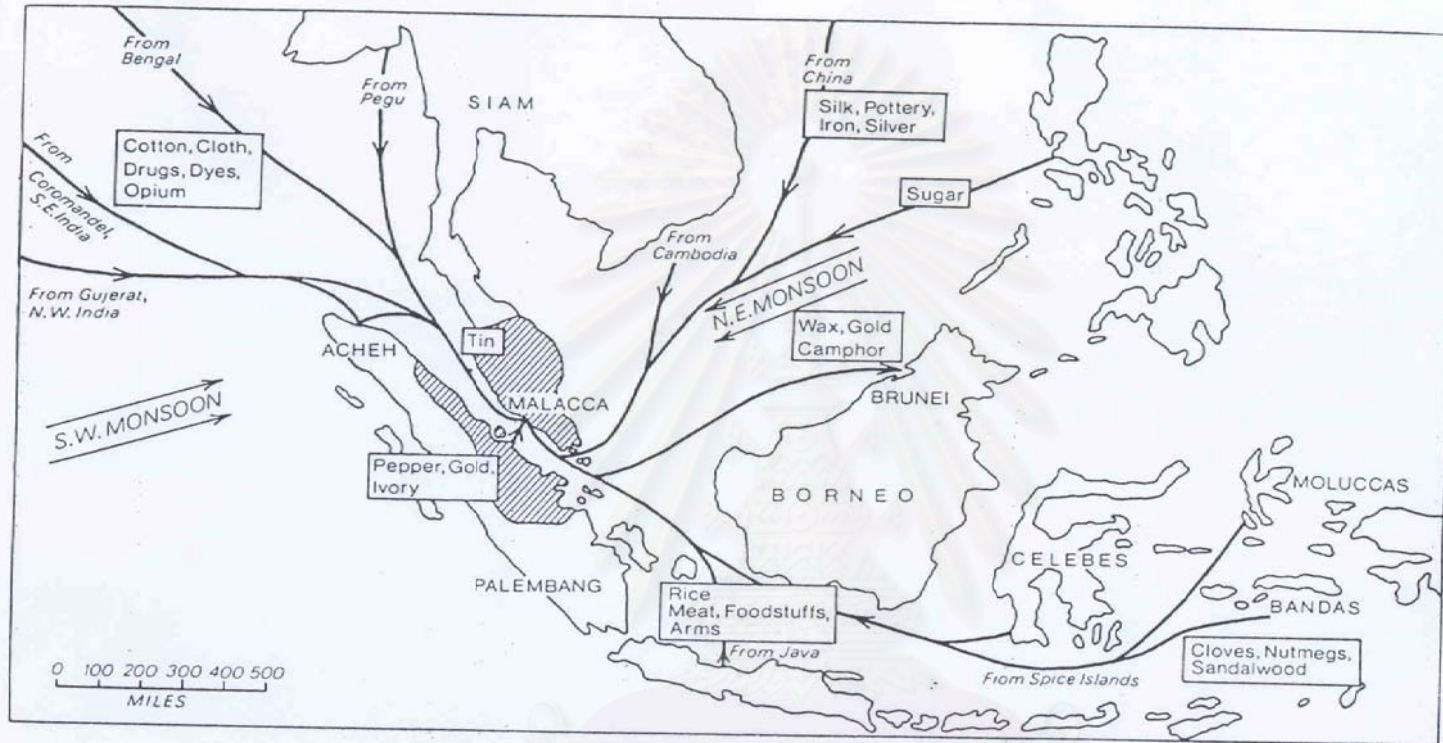
Source: Kernal Singh Sandhu and Wheatley 1983: 503

Commodities shipped from Melaka towards the end of the fifteenth century.
Based largely (though by no means exclusively) on information in the *Suma Oriental*.



Map 8: Commodities shipped from Melaka

Source: Kernial Singh Sandhu and Wheatley 1983: 504



Map 9: Melaka's trade in the fifteenth century

Source: João de Barros 1993: xxxiv

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

sealing wax and precious stones from Burma and North Siam, exported through Pegu, tin from the Malay Peninsula and gold from Sumatra. The second group comprises merchandise from China. These were manufactured goods: porcelains, silks, lacquer, jewelry and minted brass. A large part of these goods were only in transit through Southeast Asia, Melaka acting as relay between China and Malabar, from where the products spread to India, the Near East and Europe. From Melaka also, distribution lines radiated towards the islands of the Archipelago and to the bordering countries of the Bay of Bengal. The third group consisting of cotton goods from India was by far the most homogeneous group. Its importance to trade in Southeast Asia was enormous; drugs and spices from the Archipelago were obtained almost exclusively in exchange for Indian textiles. The three main weaving places were Gujarat, the Coromandel Coast and Bengal. The fourth group, more heterogeneous, is more difficult to limit: products from the Near East and the Mediterranean basin entered the Indian Ocean by the two classical routes of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Several of these, such as Persian and Arab horses, although they were of prime importance to India, never did reach Southeast Asia; others, such as opium from Aden, got much further and played an eminent but lesser role than the Indian cotton goods in the region of interest. Among the merchandise were metals such as iron, brass, lead and mercury, metallic compounds such as vitriol, alum and cinnabar, used for dyeing or for tanning, drugs such as rose water and saffron and manufactured goods such as silks, carpets and ornamented leathers. These products were sent principally through the relay of Cambay to Melaka; their importance may have diminished with that of the Gujarati merchants established in that town. In addition to these four groups of merchandise which formed the basic core of this large commerce, a fifth, slightly different one, must be acknowledged: foodstuffs. Basic supplies had to be brought in from far away: above all rice, but also oil, dried fish, fruits and vegetables. The vegetables were provided by the small neighboring ports on the Peninsula and from Sumatra or from the small islands in the surrounding, the rice was furnished by suppliers at a greater distance: Java, Siam, the Kingdom of Pegu. Although this trade was less lucrative than that of spices or cotton, it was nonetheless vital to the existence of the city..." (Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz 1984: 82-84)

Looking at the various nationalities of merchants who came to Melaka, there was a group of foreign merchants who stayed for several months in Melaka for trading as well as refitting and provisioning their vessels.

“The most numerous of these long-term visitors were the Gujaratis, whose numbers grew to about 1,000 by the late 15th century. Other major groups of permanent residents included Tamils, Javanese, Chinese, Bengalis, with smaller communities of Chams (from southern Vietnam), Parsees, Arabs, Burmese and Siamese.” (Hooker 2003: 62-63)

Those who settled permanently in Melaka worked as the middleman between other foreigners and local merchants, or as labourers, artisans, and mercenaries. Another group was those who stayed for a short time before continuing their trip to other places. Inter-marriage, therefore, was commonly found here in Melaka. Those who settled down such as merchants from Southern India, China, Java, Persia, Arabia, Burma, Siam, and Champa, would have their own community. Thus, Melaka became a very diverse society with people from different origins, races and religions. (Hooker 2003: 69-70) The above evidence proves that Melaka was an emporium and a cosmopolitan port indeed. The variety of goods and people in Melaka in the fifteenth century shows how prosperous Melaka was at that time.

3.4 Political Bases of power of the Melaka Sultanate

3.4.1 The Government and administration of Melaka

Melaka, like other states, was governed by the Sultan as the head of the Kingdom. He was assisted by a group of officials called the “orang kaya”.^{*} The

* The ‘orang kaya’ is literally means the ‘rich men’ of western Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula. It was a class that emerged with the prosperity of trade within their own areas. (J. Kathirithamby-Wells 1986: 256-7)

structure of the governmental system of Melaka was stated in the Undang-Undang Melaka^{*} (which included Undang Undang Laut Melaka^{**} or the Maritime Laws of Melaka) as follows:

“The ruler is the head of the kingdom. He must be merciful, generous, courageous, and able to give his verdicts decisively. He must appoint four high dignitaries to help him to administer justice, namely (1) the Chief Minister (Bendahara), (2) a Police Chief (Temenggung), (3) a Treasurer (Pengkulu Bendahari) and (4) a Port Officer (Syahbandar). The Chief Minister has jurisdiction over officials, court officers and children of high dignitaries. The Police Chief is in charge of crimes that are committed in the country, while the Port *officer is given control over all matters concerning foreign* merchants, orphans, those who have suffered injustice, and various kinds of vessels. The duty of the Treasurer is not defined.”
(Yock Fang Liaw 1983: 185-186)

Zainal Adidin Bin Abdul Wahid (1970a: 20-22) explains the main duty of each state official at the Court of Melaka that the Bendahara was the chief adviser of the Sultan. Two of the Bendaharas of Melaka became powerful figures. One was

* The Undang-Undang Melaka is a law initially written in the reign of Sultan Muhammad Syah (1422-44) and later it was enlarged by Sultan Muzaffir Syah (1445-58). It consists of five different laws as follows:

- (i) The nucleus of the Undang-Undang Melaka
- (ii) The Maritime Laws (in part)
- (iii) Muslim marriage law
- (iv) Muslim law of sale and procedure
- (v) The Undang-Undang Negeri
- (vi) The Undang-Undang Johor

see more information in Yock Fang Liaw, “The Undang-Undang Melaka,” Melaka: The Transformation of A Malay Capital c. 1400-1980 Volume 1 (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 182-185

** see details in.3.5.3 Security issue of Melaka

Bendahara Tun Perak and the other Bendahara Seri Maharaja. Tun Perak had been credited with not only administrative abilities but also diplomatic skills. He was regarded as the power behind the throne and was considered responsible for the defence and expansion of Melaka. There is no evidence about the monthly allowance paid by the government to the Bendahara or other officials of the Court of Melaka. However, the Bendahara would normally get a certain percentage of the taxes paid by the foreign merchants for entering the port. The Laksamana has been popularly regarded today as the equivalent of an admiral or chief-of-staff of the navy while the Temenggong is generally regarded as the chief police officer who was responsible for the maintenance of law and order. The Syahbandar^{*}, or harbour-master, also had the additional function

* The word 'shahbandar' is in the Persian language. In the Malay version, this word is spelled "Syahbandar". It literally means 'King of the Haven', Harbour-Master. This was the title of an officer at native ports all over the Indian seas, who was the Chief authority with whom foreign traders and ship-master had to transact. He was often also head of the customs. This word contains different meanings in each place. It can be interpreted as Ministers of State, Presidents of Republics, Consuls, and harbour-masters. The current definition of Shahbandar as harbour-master does not explain the literature of the period 1500-1625. (Moreland 1920: 517-533)

A harbourmaster, *Syahbandar*, was assigned to each of the four main trading regions: one for the Gujaratis; one for the Klings, Bengalis, Peguans and Pasai (on the north Sumatra); the third for all the Malay Archipelago from Sumatra, Java, Borneo, other parts of the Indonesian archipelago, over to the Philippines; and the fourth for China and Indo-China. When a ship arrived, each Syahbandar would meet with its captain at the dock and lead him to present gifts and customs tax to the Bendahara, the Temenggong and the Syahbandar before their goods were allowed to be carried by elephants into warehouses. Their cargoes were protected from fire and theft until they could be collected by ships in the next monsoon. With such a volume of trade, and by sound management, Melaka developed into a bustling port, whose wealth from foreign commerce was envied by all. (Winstedt 1969, 36-37; Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya 1982: 43; Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 42; Pires 1944 vol. 2: 265, 273)

The four Syahbandars, chosen among the foreigners themselves, were appointed directly by the Chief Minister or Bendahara of Melaka to take care of international trading affairs. Therefore, each of them were primarily responsible for taking care of his particular group's affairs, for example, overseeing them when the anchoring was taken place, weighing their goods, collecting taxes, and assigning warehouses to them. Each Syahbandar was also put in charge of security by having to settle all problems, be a judge when there were conflicts among merchants, and assist Melaka's ruler to arbitrate the quarrels between different foreign communities. (Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya 1982: 42-43; Datuk Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid 1983: 105)

of allocating store-houses and trading areas for the numerous groups of traders from many parts of the world who came to Melaka.

Regarding the structure of manpower control, the state was divided into three functional domains: the peasantry or *ra'ayat* (rakyat), the city, and the navy. The Bendahara, as a kind of Prime Minister, controlled the *ra'ayat* and the islands. It meant both the orang laut and the orang benua, or sea people and land people were controlled by the Bendahara. The sea and the islands, thus, were undoubtedly the most important as it was where the bulk of the population was located. (Trocki 1979: 5) In the Kingdom of Johor in the 19th century, the Temenggong also had the *ra'ayat* under his control. Traditionally, the Temenggong, a 'police chief', was also named as the prince of pirates because he had his own sea peoples as his "dependents". The main duties of these dependents were going around the town collecting taxes and watching over the port. Inside the port, the Temenggong's dependents included both blood relatives and employed non-natives such as Chinese, Arabs, Indians and Bugis. At sea, outside the port, his dependents were the Orang Laut. Their number was around 10,000 under the Temenggong's government. The people at the port passed information to the Orang Laut at sea whether they had not yet or had already paid their taxes. Then the Orang Laut would consider "who should be attacked, and how much they should be worth..." (Trocki 1979: 58)

Owing to the fact that most of the Malay kingdoms lacked land and also manpower, the Orang Laut, therefore, came to be the most important human resource. What was needed was to bring them into the administrative system. The Melaka Sultanate was no exception. The control of manpower for maritime states was considered the heart of the administrative policy because "Power on this context was always sea power. Thus traditional political systems emphasized the control of a majority of sea peoples and the management of the trade." (Trocki 1979: xvii) However, it was quite difficult to control the Orang Laut in reality because of their nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life. Chuleporn Virunha (2002: 147) explains that

the people in the maritime-based state were not settled like in an agrarian-based one. In peace time, the Orang Laut normally lived their lives out of a port, fished and foraged for food. They also worked as a kind of ‘security guard’ patrolling the Straits to protect or attack passing ships, or “escorting” them while coming for trade at the Melaka port. Nevertheless, the port was fragile, prone to surprise attacks, because the fleet needed to be mobilized, and was not yet ready whenever the Orang Laut were absent. Anyway, the Orang Laut were in this manner important as almost the only source of manpower in the maritime state.

“The coastal environment of the Melaka Straits did not support a large agrarian population. These local peoples-with their navigation skill, their ability to exploit coastal and swamp areas, and their reputation as fighting men-were highly valuable manpower.” (Chuleeporn Virunha 2002: 146)

Another reason for controlling the Orang Laut and harnessing them into the governmental and trading systems was because there were other ports that could compete with Melaka throughout the Southeast Asian Archipelago. Melaka was not the only prosperous port. However, there were also Mergui, Aceh, Ayutthaya, Patani, Java, and many more ports that also relied on maritime trade. Competition for trade was then very high and it was quite difficult to avoid an attack from other ports. Every Malay port, therefore, needed to control and harness its Orang Laut as efficiently as it could. Otherwise, the Orang Laut might switch to other ports and come to attack later. For the states, the existence of independent sea peoples could pose the danger that they might fall into the hands of competing centres. Moreover, piratical activities were part of the Orang Laut’s way of life. Any of them who carried out activities outside the control, knowledge and licence of the state, were dangerous for trade at the ports. (Chuleeporn Virunha 2002: 149)

In the other way around, the Orang Laut also needed protection from the Sultan. Due to the fact that there were many groups of Orang Laut, an attack or enslavement posed by other Orang Laut groups or warrior groups might happen. They then needed to be under the Sultan's roof. Moreover, to associate with a powerful state could provide many economic advantages to them, such as an opportunity for food access, legitimate piracy, or a better reputation as part of a state's army. Even during wartime, possibilities for plundering, slave-trading, and gathering loot were opened for them as well. The Orang Laut, therefore, "had everything to gain but nothing to lose by attaching themselves to the state." (Chuleeporn Virunha 2002: 149-50)

Chuleeporn Virunha (2002: 149) points out that

"the fundamental relationship between the Orang Laut and the maritime Malay polities, therefore, was determined by economic interdependence or ecological complementarity." For the state, the Orang Laut represented valuable and much sought after manpower. In peacetime, they played essential roles in collecting, trading, and working in the service sector of the port city's economy; in times of war, they became soldiers. For the Orang Laut, association with the port city offered access to food, especially during the scarcity of the monsoon season when collecting was difficult. It also provided a marketing outlet where they could exchange their gathered products for essential and luxury items."

Thus, the place of the Orang Laut in the government and administration of Melaka was in the service part. They worked as a guard, fighting force^{*}, or servants of the orang kaya (McRoberts 1991: 48). Chuleeporn Virunha (2002: 146) points out that the Orang Laut served the Melaka Sultanate just as the the Siamese ‘phrai’ and the Burmese ‘kyun’ served their royal court. She also states that the leaders of the Orang Laut would be appointed to be government officials first, then their people would later become rowers and fighting forces. Tomé Pires (1944: 234-235) mentions that the leaders of the Orang Laut were appointed to be mandarins as well as their daughters who married with the son of Parameswara. He was Muhammad Iskandar Shah, the second ruler of Melaka “who had been born in Singapore, and who was already almost a man, married to the principal daughter of the mandarin lords who had formerly been Celates.” (Pires 1944: 236) The loyalty and protection which the Orang Laut provided to the state were very important to the survival of Melaka, and also appreciated by the rulers since the Srivijayan Empire. I will elaborate more in detail in 3.6.1 when talking about their roles in the political context.



* There is no clear evidence on how the navy force was set up or formed. However, it was mentioned that the navy was maybe classified into two kinds, the extra-urban military force and the one formed by the sea peoples (Trocki 1979: 7) Therefore, we know only that the Orang Laut were part of navy but we do not know its structure.

3.4.2 The close relationship with China

In terms of the international relations of Melaka, it established good relations with a “Great Power” like China in order to gain support for both its trade and security. As Melaka was afraid of an attack from Siam and Majapahit, therefore, Parameswara^{*} went to China in 1404 to pay respect to the Chinese Emperor. Then, two years later, Melaka received a seal, a set of robes, and a yellow umbrella from China, as those things were Chinese symbols of kingship. (SarDesai 1994: 56; Hooker 2003: 60)

* Parameswara was the last of a line of kings who ruled at Palembang as vassals of Majapahit.

When Palembang was suppressed by the Majapahit, Parameswara fled to Singapore and killed the local Prince. He then moved to the Straits of Melaka and finally he established a town at the site of Melaka port. These events occurred in the last decade of the fourteenth century. By 1403, Melaka was already well established as a trading port and its prosperity attracted the Chinese court to send a number of naval missions to visit. (Wake 1983: 140)

It is debatable whether Parameswara and Mugat Iskandar Shāh were the same person. Sir Richard Winstedt wrote that Parameswara was the very same person as his successor, Mugat Iskandar Shāh, as *Sejarah Melayu* has noted. D.G.E. Hall, in his *A history of South-East Asia*, cites R.A. Kern as stating that in 1414 Parameswara’s son, Mohammad Iskandar Shāh, went to China to announce his father’s death but this would appear to be a mistake, which, as Sir Richard Winstedt points out, was due to the Chinese failure to realize that Parameswara had become a Muslim and had changed his name to Mugat Iskandar Shāh. According to the *Tai-tsung Shih-lu*, the Malaccan prince Mugat Iskandar Shāh came to China and reported that his father had died. The Emperor ordered him to succeed to his father’s title and become king. The Emperor bestowed on him gold, silver, brocade, fine gauze silk, a hat, a girdle, and a golden robe. It is almost impossible to take these two identities as representing one person, as Hall contends. In 1411 Parameswara himself came to China with his son, Mugat Iskandar Shāh, and they stayed for two months. China also sent envoys to Malacca five times between 1403 and 1414 during his reign. Cheng Ho and other Chinese foreign officials must have met the king and his son during their visits to Malacca. It is quite clear that the first king of Malacca is Parameswara, and that his son succeeded in 1414 and took the title Mugat Iskandar Shāh, as the second king of Malacca. Tome Pires wrote in his *Suma Oriental* that this second king married a daughter of Pasai and converted to Islam. Several wealthy Muslim merchants (from Persia, Bengara, and Arabia) moved from Pasai to Malacca. During this period many merchants from these countries came and involved themselves in big business and were very prosperous. These wealthy merchants brought in their trained Muslim scholars. Thus, it is likely to have been under Mugat’s reign that many Malaccan natives converted. (Israeli and Johns 1984: 8-9)

Chinese contacts with Melaka started during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in the reign of the Emperor Yong-Lo (1403-24) when he sent a number of naval missions to begin commercial relations with kingdoms in Southeast Asia. It was a two-way relation as expeditions were sent by both China and Melaka. After a visit in 1403 by Chinese, the ruler of Melaka gave a response by sending his envoys to China in 1405 and 1407 with tribute and presents to pay respect to the Chinese Emperor as well as to ask for protection for his land. Then, a fleet led by Cheng-Ho (Zheng He) was sent to Melaka in 1409 before Parameswara himself with his family went to visit the Emperor again in 1411. (Teuku Ibrahim Alfian 1998: 98-99) Many voyages continued to be sent by both sides. Melaka was also persistent in keeping in touch with China through tribute missions. (Reid 1993, vol. 2: 15) While China sent six missions to Melaka between 1403-1413, Melaka's ruler also reciprocated by going to China although it took three years to make a return journey. (Reid 1993, vol. 2: 206) Melaka with support from a great country like China could attract a lot of traders. The close relationship with China, therefore, helped increase the importance of Melaka as an emporium as well as a safe port under Chinese protection. Wang Gungwu (1964: 103) emphasizes that both the Chinese Court and the port of Melaka were interested in each other. While the Chinese Emperor Yong-lo saw how great Melaka was as an entrepôt and wanted to grant Melaka special status in 1405 in exchange for privilege in trade and a safe route to India, Melaka also looked for protection and support from the Chinese Court.

Regarding the threat from Siam, the interesting point is that the relationship between Siam and Melaka helps emphasize the fact that "there is no permanent enemy or friend." While Melaka was looking for support from China to threaten Siam back, Melaka also switched to be friends with Siam as rice and foodstuffs were imported from there. Melaka needed to maintain good relations with Siam, although two wars were waged against each other, because Melaka needed to ensure that plenty of rice would be supplied to the whole port. (Zainal Adidin Bin Abdul Wahid 1970b: 25) This phenomenon was normal and happened in many territories in Southeast Asia. The weaker state had to make friends with the stronger one when the neighbours were expanding their power. Moreover, when the weaker state itself became stronger, she

would try to decrease the dependence or influence that the greater country put on her like the case of Melaka, China, and Siam. Pires (1944: 108) mentions that the appearance of China had taken place when Melaka had not yet developed, therefore, the Melaka Sultanate felt insecure and unable to defend its territory alone against an attack from Siam.

“While it was confronted with this potential threat, an embassy from China arrived in 1403. Melaka made full use of the visit on this embassy to strengthen her position in Southeast Asia. By establishing diplomatic relations with China, the Sultanate gained a powerful friend and hence a protector against Siam. By manipulating the balance of power, Melaka was able to neutralize the Siamese threat by balancing it against the might of China.” Pires (1944: 108)

The prosperity of Melaka attracted not only a neighbour like Siam but also the court of China. Among the seven missions under Cheng-Ho, there were six voyages^{*} out of that number that sailed to Melaka. It shows that both had a good friendship and it also proves that Melaka was important in the eyes of China. Although Melaka and China were looking for different things, their relations would remain close as long as their mutual benefit was protected. While Melaka could provide a great market place for Chinese merchants, China also gave protection to Melaka. To maintain its sovereignty, Melaka did not care much about its formal position as labeled by China. Nothing was more important than being a free port without any threat from Siam although Melaka might be called by the Chinese a vassal state. Pires (1944: 108) records that

* The first expedition took place in 1405-7. Then, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh expeditions occurred in 1409-11, 1413-15, 1417-19, 1421-2, and 1431-3 respectively. See details of the whole journey led by Cheng-Ho in Ma Huan, Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores, trans. J.V.G. Mills 2nd ed., (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1997), pp. 1-33. and C. G. F. Simkin, The Traditional Trade of Asia (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 142-144.

“It was the practice of Chinese historians of that period to regard all other countries that had relations with her as her vassals. In the case of Melaka it can plausibly be argued that her rulers must have considered that, whatever interpretation the Chinese might place on the relationship, they were not unduly worried so long as their purpose was served, namely to counterbalance the threat from Siam.”

As João de Barros (1993c: 119) records, the Sultan of Melaka was very rich because he got a lot of revenue from trade and shipping in the Straits. Then, he wanted to ignore the authority of the Siamese king, not behaving as a good vassal should do. Interestingly, the Siamese king did not want to trouble Malacca any more as it had become a great entrepôt and a centre of import and export trade. The Chinese Court that backup Melaka might probably make Siam feel considerate to take serious action against Melaka. However, Melaka was also worried about its relation with Siam as rice and food were mainly imported from Siam. Therefore, to be guaranteed that Melaka would not face food shortages, Melaka needed to remain friendly with Siam. One example was in the reign of Sultan Mansur Syah (1458-77) when he made a decision to re-establish relations with Siam with his ministers' support. Although there was no war between them, relations were not that peaceful. Moreover, the commercial activities between them stagnated, too. Therefore, the Sultan of Melaka sent an envoy to Siam in order to improve the relationship between them. This event reveals that having friends is better than having enemies and there is no permanent friend or enemy in the world of trade and profit. What Melaka did reveals, at least, how important rice and food supply from Siam were toward the survival of Melaka. (Pires 1944: 108)

3.5 The Orang Laut and their relationship with the Melaka Sultanate

The Orang Laut were part of Malay history, and they had their own function in the Melaka Sultanate. Although in Malay history, they were not classified as Malays, on the other hand, they were recognized as an indigenous people. However, they were part

of the Melaka Sultanate's structure. The Malays made use of them and they were not considered dangerous like "pirates" nowadays.

3.5.1 The Political context: "Pirates" as fighting forces of Malay rulers

The greatest task that the Orang Laut undertook, and which earned them an honourable place in Malay history, was their help in accompanying the first ruler of Melaka, Parameswara, to establish the Melaka Sultanate in 1403.* Since the Srivijaya period (700-1300 AD), the Orang Laut had already formed the 'naval forces' of that Empire and they were also very faithful to the Srivijayan rulers. Later on, when the Srivijaya Empire was sacked by the Javanese of Majapahit, the Orang Laut, therefore, did not hesitate to support a new ruler named 'Sri Tri Buana' and they dreamt of bringing the glory of Srivijaya back and re-building the Empire again. Sri Tri Buana, then, left Palembang and went to Singapore, then Melaka. He was protected by the Orang Laut in both areas.

The Orang Laut, finally, found Melaka and convinced the ruler to move and settle there. After Melaka was established, the Orang Laut served the Melaka Sultans both in times of war and peace, as fighting men, weapon-makers, couriers and

* It has been popularly assumed that Melaka was founded around 1403. However, recent researches have shown that Melaka was founded earlier than 1403 and it seems that Melaka was found at the end of the 14th century. Professor Wang Gangwu has shown, from his studies of Chinese historical sources for this period, that in 1403 the Emperor Yong-lo "...sent the eunuch Yin Ch'ing and other with imperial messages to the kingdoms of Malacca and Cochin and also with gifts..." This Chinese imperial mission to Malacca is significant in that it was sent at a time when there had already been three missions dispatched by the Emperor of China into the Southeast Asian area within a period of two months prior to Yin Ch'ing's departure. In other words, it could be argued that by 1403 Malacca was sufficiently well-established to merit a somewhat special mission from China. This would also imply that Malacca had been founded earlier than 1403." (Zainal Adidin Bin Abdul Wahid 1970a: 18-19)

as crews for the Sultan's naval force to fight against enemies of Melaka for almost two centuries. It was clear that the Orang Laut really contributed to the stability and prosperity of Melaka's port, and later on the Kingdom of Johor, because of "their courage, skill as sailors, fighters and their absolute loyalty to their Malay Rulers." (Brooks n.d.: 120-121)

In terms of power, the Orang Laut may have seemed less significant than the Sultan. However, they also had their own power to deal with the Sultan although they were just sea nomads. When the Sultan tried to intervene in their business or penalize them, "they say they are free men of the sea, and if the king coerces them against their will, they say that they will leave the country." (Guehler 1959: 273) The Orang Laut considered themselves as people from the sea whose way of life was all about the sea. Therefore, they did not mind sailing around the Archipelago and spending their lives in boats as long as they could catch fish and collect sea products for their survival. They even became robbers; it was part of their way of life. They did not depend much on the state and was out of its control. They were, more or less, people who not only helped establish the town of Melaka but also become a loyal force that could help protect the local rulers and land since the time of the Srivijaya-Palembang Empire. Therefore, the relationship between the Melaka Sultanate and the Orang Laut was similar to the relationship between 'patron' and 'client', but based more on mutual cooperation and support. There does not seem to have been any exploitation involved. Although the Orang Laut served the rulers as soldiers or as a naval force, they probably worked with great pleasure as they recognized that the founder of Melaka was descended from the rulers of Palembang. Therefore, Parameswara deserved protection, respect, and loyalty from them, while Melaka also deserved peace, stability, security, and prosperity.

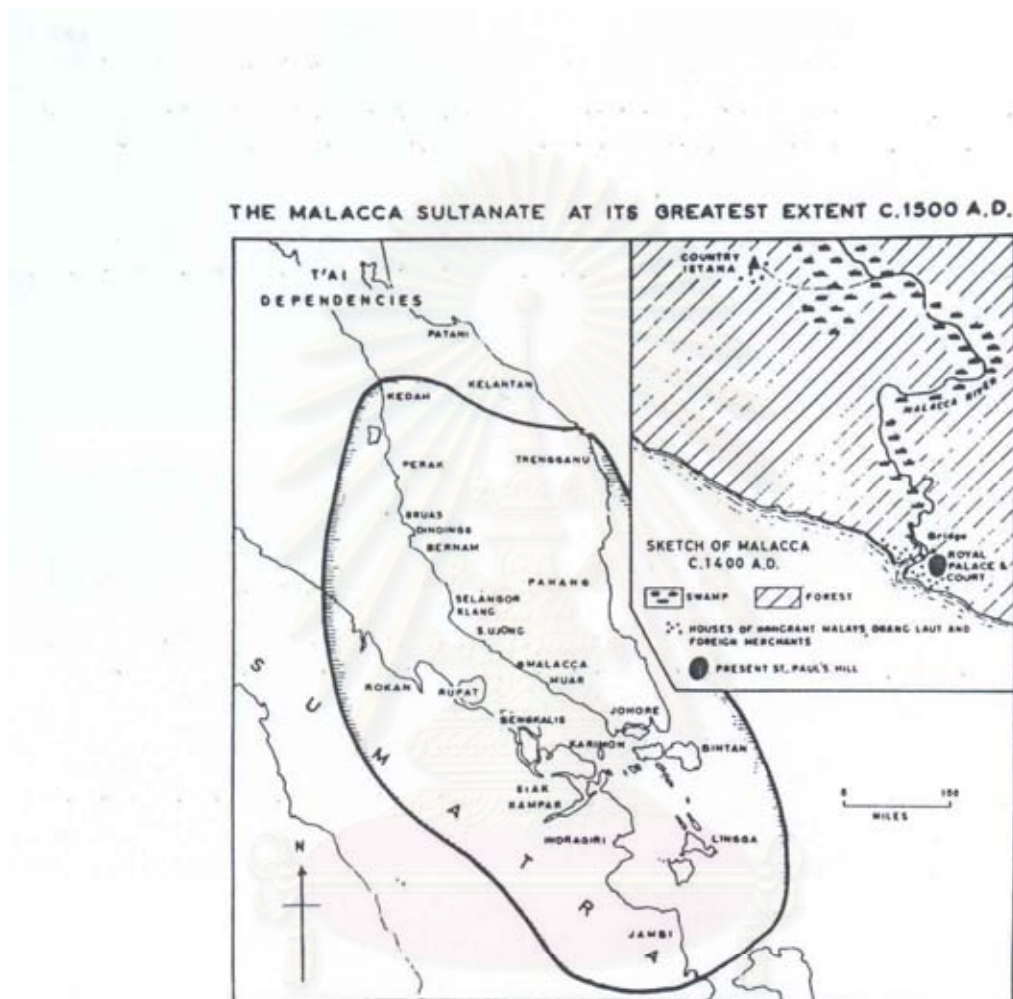
The Orang Laut themselves were also protected and looked after by the rulers in return. For example, Parameswara appointed 18 Orang Lauts to be his nobles, a kind of private guard, as mentioned by Pires (1944 vol.2: 235) that

“After the king made no more than 18 Celates, who came to him after discovering the land, *mandarins* which means nobles; the said fishermen having been made mandarins by the hand of the said *Paramjçura*, always accompanied the said king, and as he advanced them in rank they too recognized the favour which had been granted to them. They accompanied the king zealously and served him with great faith and loyalty, their friendship [being] whole-hearted; and in the same way the king’s love for them always corresponded to the true service and zeal of the said new mandarins...”

It shows that both the Orang Laut and the rulers of Melaka had a good relation with each other. While the Orang Laut were sincere and faithful to the rulers, they received protection, care, and support in return. Interestingly, although the Orang Laut were promoted by the founder of Melaka to be Mandarins, sent to live on the slopes of the Malacca hill (Map 10) to act as guards of the second ruler Muhammad Iskandar Shah (Pires 1944 vol.2: 237-8), most of them still lived a nomadic life as the same. To be mandarins, for the Orang Laut, means to provide the rulers descended from the Srivijaya-Palembang-Melaka-Johor dynasty loyalty, security, and safety.

3.5.2 The Socio-Economic context: the Orang Laut as sea-farers/sea gypsies/fishermen and as buyers and suppliers at the port

The geography of the Straits made the Orang Laut’s way of life closely related to the sea. They made their living by roaming the sea, catching fish and foraging for food. Under this context, the Orang Laut automatically became experts in navigational skills and sea routes. Their reputation went as far as the island of Mindanao in the Philippines as Malay adventurers related stories about the nautical skills of a relative of the ruler of Johor who sailed with his dependants (including sea peoples) to Mindanao not long after the Portuguese captured Melaka in 1511. (Wolters 1975: 12)



Map 10: The site of the Orang Laut settlements Source: Joseph n.d.: 25

The nature of sea nomad people was to make their living from the seas. Therefore, the sea became their home and also the most important resource of their food. The Orang Laut were described by Pires (1944 vol.2: 232-233) as

“men who go out pillaging in their boats and fish, and are sometimes on land and sometimes at sea, of whom there are a large number now in our time...As these *Celates* and robbers (who sometimes fished for their food, with their huts and their wives and children on the land) lived near the hill which is now called Malacca...these *Celates* had knowledge of the land as men who hoped to live peacefully there...”

What Pires mentioned above is that when Melaka had already become an entrepôt for almost a century, therefore, the way of life of the Orang Laut changed and it seemed that they already moved to live on land, no more a wanderer's life. However, I do not think that the Orang Laut would absolutely abandon their sea nomads' life. They still roamed the sea and caught fish as usual but their way of life might have changed to be more reliant on trade and less on being fishermen. Alternatively, we may see the “celates” of Melaka who served the Sultans as just a small group who became more land-based.

However, there is no clear historical evidence that mentioned in detail the Orang Laut's way of life as a fisherman. Nevertheless, the present-day studies of them by Iskandar Carey (1976: 268-271) states that the economic life of the Orang Kuala is based on the sea. They build their houses at the mouth of the river and also own small boats in order to go fishing conveniently and easily. Moreover, the Orang Kuala has as many as five different ways to catch fish. It shows that they are professional in this career.

“First, the Orang Kuala will use large fishing nets, or *jaring*, for deep-sea fishing. This is an effective method, but the required nets are expensive and in need of constant attention

and repair. A second and more popular method of deep-sea fishing, called *rawai*, involves the use of a long line of rope, baited with steel hooks. The third method is used for fishing near the seashore; this is called *sukor* and consists of a fishing net attached to two bamboo poles and operated by only one individual. Yet another method, called *pukat*, involves to use of a larger net, and is operated by the efforts of two men together. Finally, a fifth method consists of the construction of a *kelong*, which is a fairly elaborate fishing trap. The Orang Kuala has shown great skill in the construction of these traps.”

Although the above methods are the fishing techniques of the Orang Kuala nowadays and there is no evidence to show any linkage between them and the Orang Laut in the fifteenth century, they at least show that fishing has been practiced among the Orang Laut as a way to forage for food long before Melaka was founded and that it has been handed over to the next generations. Winstedt (1981: 122) mentions that “fishing is the other most primitive Malay industry and is certainly one of the most specialized for a race of people who are not generally specialists.” Winstedt also explains that rattan traps must have been the first fishing method that was used among the sea nomads as there were no string-nets at that time. Barbed thorns and rattan springs were also used to help prevent the escape of their fish and to take the fish out of the water. Regarding the fishing methods development, sharpened bamboo and whittled bone have been replaced by metal spears, barbed and unbarbed, tridents, and harpoons, with detachable barbed heads. The methods to catch fish as mentioned above obviously show that fishing at that time was for domestic consumption only, not for trade. However, their surplus was sent for selling at the market. The Orang Laut made trips by going out to sea with their small boats and easily-made weapons to catch fish in both salty and fresh waters. They also hunted tortoises and crocodiles, and collected coral and pearls underwater, too. By being a fisherman, the Orang Laut, therefore, might not have to rely on the state that much because they could make a living on their own and could survive with a self-sufficient economy except during the hard weather.

It is undeniable that the prosperity of the Melaka entrepôt was more or less because of the Orang Laut's role. Although they were not great in trade or specialized in commerce, they could help provide some goods, especially products from the sea, to the port of Melaka. In Chinese and Arab records, it was mentioned that China imported products from the Southeast Asian seas such as coral, tortoise shells, and pearls since the Sung period. The Orang Laut also provided dried salted fish, turtle eggs, mother-of-pearl, dried seafood, crabs, shellfish, snails, oysters, sharks' fin, birds' nests, mangrove bark and wood, honey and wax, rattan, eaglewood, gold and other items found in the seas and forests. (Anderson and Vorster 1983: 446-7; Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave 1964: 264; Luis Filipe Ferreira Reis Thomaz 1993: 77) These products were unique and they seemed to fit well with the capability of the Orang Laut in searching for them.

The Orang Laut was engaged in trade at the port of Melaka just for necessary goods for their survival, not for profit or any privilege. They needed staple foods such as rice, sago, sugar, wood, bamboo, cloth, and iron tools. (Lapian 1984: 144; Anderson and Vorster 1983: 447) Although the role of the Orang Laut as buyers and suppliers of products from sea and forests at the port of Melaka was very small compared with merchants from the international world of commerce, they could at least provide the port and merchants with all those unique and rare goods. Their buying power was little, but still quite important for the wealth of the Melaka port. The Orang Laut, then, could preserve their dependency and way of life because of their minor role at the port.

3.5.3 The Security Issue: the Orang Laut as pirates

Melaka could attract traders from almost all directions because of its good reputation as an entrepôt that could assure the safety of traders within the Straits. This was due to the fact that the rulers of Melaka, like those of Srivijaya, could cope well with the Orang Laut or sea nomads that raided ships along the Straits and throughout the Southeast Asian Archipelago. When the ruler of Melaka could establish good relations with the Orang Laut then they would help protect traders who came to Melaka. This guarantee of safety was an important element in encouraging traders to visit Melaka frequently, and not other ports in the Straits. (Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y.

Andaya 1982: 42) Under free trade conditions without the threat of piracy, many traders came to Melaka and ran their business independently. This was another one of the attractive points of Melaka as an emporium in the fifteenth century.

The Orang Laut in the Southeast Asian seas were written about negatively as a group of people who raided and plundered ships sailing to this region. As I mentioned earlier, the acts of piracy in the Southeast Asian Archipelago were remarked on as early as the fifth century by the Chinese pilgrim, Shih Fa-Hsien. The Orang Laut had a bad reputation regarding their piracy activities. However, piracy was a normal phenomenon which occurred in almost every sea and ocean in this world and there were many groups of people who also acted like pirates, not only the Orang Laut. An interesting point is that the piratical activities of the Orang Laut were able to co-exist with the maritime trade at the Melaka port as long as the rulers of the state and the Orang Laut themselves could compromise and establish a good relationship with each other. Otherwise, the Orang Laut themselves might revert to be pirates at any time they felt unsatisfied with the conditions offered by the state, which would in turn mean disaster for the port in the end, like in the case of the Srivijayan Empire.

Since the Srivijaya-Palembang period, the ruler of the Srivijayan Empire could establish a good relation with the Orang Laut by persuading them to join the port and giving them some port's revenues. The Orang Laut, then, became a good partner of Srivijaya and helped attract traders as there were no more acts of piracy in the areas dominated by Srivijaya. Moreover, this group of sea nomads also took care of the security issues in the various ports of Srivijaya, and fought against the state's enemies as well. Therefore, the prosperity of the Srivijayan Empire was partly due to the fact that it could provide safe sea lanes for traders as the Orang Laut had become part of its business. The cooperation between these two groups brought success in the elimination of piracy which was widespread throughout the Straits of Melaka. (Shaffer 1996: 48-49) However, when trade with the Chinese stagnated due to the China's closed country policy, the prosperity of Srivijaya dramatically declined and it was unable to convince the sea nomads to be in service with the port anymore. The Orang Laut then shifted from being an ally of the Empire to be an opponent, as a "pirate". (Hall 1985a: 23)

When we come to the case of Melaka in the fifteenth century, the good relationship between the rulers of Malay states in the Archipelago and the Orang Laut was reestablished again. It seems that this time the bond between these two groups was tighter than in the Srivijayan time. It was due to the fact that the port of Melaka was founded with the help of the Orang Laut who accompanied the first ruler of Melaka to flee from Palembang to establish a new town at Melaka. The sincere relations between the port itself and the sea nomads already existed since the time the port was founded. Therefore, it really helped increase the good reputation of the Melaka port and attracted all foreign traders to come here. Undoubtedly, the port of Melaka then became a very prosperous port and finally reached its peak as the most important port in the Southeast Asian Archipelago in the fifteenth century. This is an example of how Melaka and the Orang Laut could co-exist. Melaka was thus perhaps exceptional in its relationship with so-called “pirates”.

Being pirates may create a negative impression on people; however, it has been part of the way of life of the Orang Laut since at least the fifth century onwards. This was considered as their culture, and a way to survive as sea nomads. Piracy actually could tell us something regarding the situation at the port. Firstly, it shows how prosperous the port itself was because the Orang Laut always reverted to be pirates once the port could not guarantee their stability and wealth. Secondly, piracy was always rife when there was an interval between the fall of one significant trading center and the rise of another in the same neighbourhood. (Wolters 1999: 46) It means that the Orang Laut were free from any state’s control and they could operate their acts of piracy freely. “The ups and downs of the country’s prosperity were in close correlation to the existence of collaboration between the kingdom and the Orang Laut.” (Lapian 1984: 145) Moreover, piracy was actually all about “power”. It was about the competition between ‘the old’ and ‘the new’ centers of power, one was stronger, another one with lesser power but wanting to challenge the stronger one. (Anne Pérotin-Dumon 1991: 204) Like in the Orang Laut and their relationship with the Melaka Sultanate, there were no acts of piracy, partly because the Orang Laut did not feel that they had lesser power than the Melaka Sultanate. It means that they were happy to be ruled by the Sultan so that they could also provide him protection and respect. The

Sultan, in the same way, offered the Orang Laut good welfare. Therefore, I would like to call this relationship between them as a 'win-win' situation, from which both sides gained benefit together.

Besides the above agreement between the Orang Laut and the rulers, the awareness of Melaka toward the problem of piracy has been shown through the Maritime Laws of Melaka or the 'Undang-Undang Laut Melaka.' This law specifically focused on the security issues in the Straits, the safety of merchants and goods that needed to be protected from the harm of piracy. The Undang-Undang Laut Melaka was one component under the Undang-Undang Melaka. Yock Fang Liaw (1983: 183) explains about this law as follows:

“This section of the *Undang-undang Melaka* provides rules and regulations dealing with people rescued at sea, the recovery of boats drifting out to sea, and weights and measures. It must have been drafted not long after the codification of the nucleus of the *Undang-undang Melaka* to deal with problems arising out of the thriving trade of the city. Later on, these provisions were found to be inadequate and a separate *Maritime Laws (Undang-undang Laut)* was compiled. The *Maritime Laws* is said to have been compiled during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Syah.”

The Maritime Laws that were specifically drafted later show how important trade was for Melaka, and that it must be protected. The new law was written because the previous one was not able to cope well with the insecurity in the Straits. The Undang-Undang Laut Melaka, therefore, became an important tool in helping Melaka fight against piracy and keeping peace for merchants in the late fifteenth century, besides the help of the Orang Laut.

3.6 Summary

Melaka in the fifteenth century was the most prosperous and well-developed emporium and cosmopolitan port in maritime Southeast Asia due to the fact that Melaka was located at the narrowest part of the Straits of Melaka at the middle of trade route between two great countries: China and India. It was also a safe place to moor ships waiting for the proper monsoon before sailing back home. The volume of trade in Melaka increased after the middle of the fifteenth century because the Sultan of Melaka embraced Islam. Therefore, it attracted a lot of Muslim merchants from India and the Arab world. Moreover, Melaka also had close relations with the Chinese court. The latter's protection and support helped shield Melaka from Siamese and Javanese aggression. All the above factors, therefore, transformed Melaka into a port. Later on after Melaka was successfully established, it could attract merchants of various races and nationalities who came for trade, some settling down there. The Malay language, therefore, became widely used in the port of Melaka together with the foreign traders' own languages. Although there were many ports in the Southeast Asian Archipelago, no port could compete with Melaka.

However, Melaka could not have become an important emporium like I mentioned above if the Melaka Sultanate had not been able to co-exist and to certain extent control the Orang Laut. Their help in taking care of the port, their loyalty, and their small but important forest goods' supplies, really helped maintain the prosperity of Melaka. Moreover, their negative reputation as "pirates" must be understood as being part of their way of life. It is also necessary to separate the present-day pirates from the historical ones. Piracy was actually not considered as a permanent career in the historical time. The Orang Laut at Melaka port were actually professional fishermen. However, after the port was found, they played the role of heroes who helped the first ruler flee to Melaka, therefore deserving to be the Sultan's forces. The environment of port and market place allowed the Orang Laut to be traders as well. It was not necessary for the Orang Laut to be pirates anymore here. On the other hand, piracy in the port of Melaka dramatically declined once the Sultan could set up good and peaceful relations with the Orang Laut. The Orang Laut, then, helped watch out for the security of the port

and helped support the flow of trade in the Straits. Piracy is all about power and how to manage. It is about how the lesser power fights against, or challenges the greater one. Consequently, if both sides can negotiate and compromise, piracy can be eliminated.



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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The Orang Laut or sea nomads were considered as one of the major components of the port of Melaka in the fifteenth century. They were branded as a group of people who caused trouble in the Straits of Melaka because of their acts of piracy. It was due to the fact that historical documents mentioned pirates in the Southeast Asian Archipelago since the fifth century. Although it was unclear that they were the same group, the Orang Laut in the port of Melaka was believed that they were descended from those group of pirates. However, the acts of piracy normally occurred in most of the seas in many regions. It is true that the way of life of the Orang Laut consisted of being a pirate. Nevertheless, they also had other roles which were more or less important for the survival of the Melaka port. Interesting points I would like to point out here are:

1.) Piracy has been considered as the culture of the Malay world for a very long time. This was way of life of sea nomads' people who made their living in small boats roaming around the Straits. There were many different groups of sea nomads living in many different locations throughout the archipelago. They mainly survived by catching fish and foraging for food from the sea but their way of life was probably depended on the external factors and environment they lived. Therefore, it will be better to study specifically one particular group only and do not apply that outcome with either group.

2.) The Orang Laut in the port of Melaka, the main subject of study in this research, constitute a good example of how these so-called "pirates" lived their lives under the emporium environment. Regarding the fact that Melaka in the fifteenth century was a great port, the Orang Laut, therefore, had other roles at the port. As I mentioned in this chapter, they still practiced fishing and roaming the sea. However,

they also played a role as fighting forces of the Malay rulers and merchants at the port. They helped the Sultan protect the town, set sail, watch out the security of the port, as well as serve the port with products from seas and forests. In my opinion, the Orang Laut themselves were considered worthy of respect and attention by the Sultan.

3.) Regarding the problem of piracy, the key point here is that once any port can establish a good relation with the Orang Laut, then it will dramatically decrease. The port of Melaka is a great example. Since the port of Melaka was founded in the early fifteenth century, most of the documents similarly mentioned that there was no serious problem of piracy here. The reason why Melaka was not damaged by the acts of piracy was due to the fact that the Sultan of Melaka could establish and keep a friendly relationship with the Orang Laut. The Sultan could persuade them to be in service under the port's activities with good rewards in return. The Orang Laut themselves were also very loyal to the Sultan as he was the heir of the Srivijaya-Palembang rulers. Therefore, the problem of piracy occurred because of bad relationships between the state and the sea nomads with unsatisfactory conditions offered by the state. Therefore, the Orang Laut would then prefer to be pirates. It is undeniable that the prosperity of Melaka was partly derived from its good reputation about control over "pirates".

To conclude my research, pre-European "pirates" and port relationships were not necessarily oppositional. In the case of Melaka, it is clearly shown that they were symbiotic and often constructive.

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