

THE TRANS-INDIANICA MARITIME NETWORKS AND ITS IMPACTS ON MALAY CIVILIZATION: REVISITING THE HISTORY OF KEDAH KINGDOM

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Abstract

The rise of civilizations is not possible without human connectivity. Making contacts with people of other societies via commerce and trade, or cultural and diplomatic relations with other countries are foundations of the birth of kingdoms and human civilizations. This paper seeks to revisit the history of Kedah Kingdom by looking at the changes experienced by Kedah and its people resulting from the contacts with outsiders via the trans-Indianica maritime networks. Using mainly content analysis and qualitative research approach, the findings of this study will illustrate the various socio-cultural, economic and political impacts on Kedah resulting from the contacts, some of which are temporary while some are long-lasting. In doing so, this paper will highlight whenever necessary, the conducive factors that made it possible for the changes to take place and they include the geo-political state of Kedah as well as socio-economic landscape of the Kingdom which presently is the longest surviving Malay kingdom in the Peninsula since ancient times.

Keywords: Trans-Indianica maritime networks, Kedah, Malay Civilization, Oman, Gulf region, Malay Peninsula

Introduction

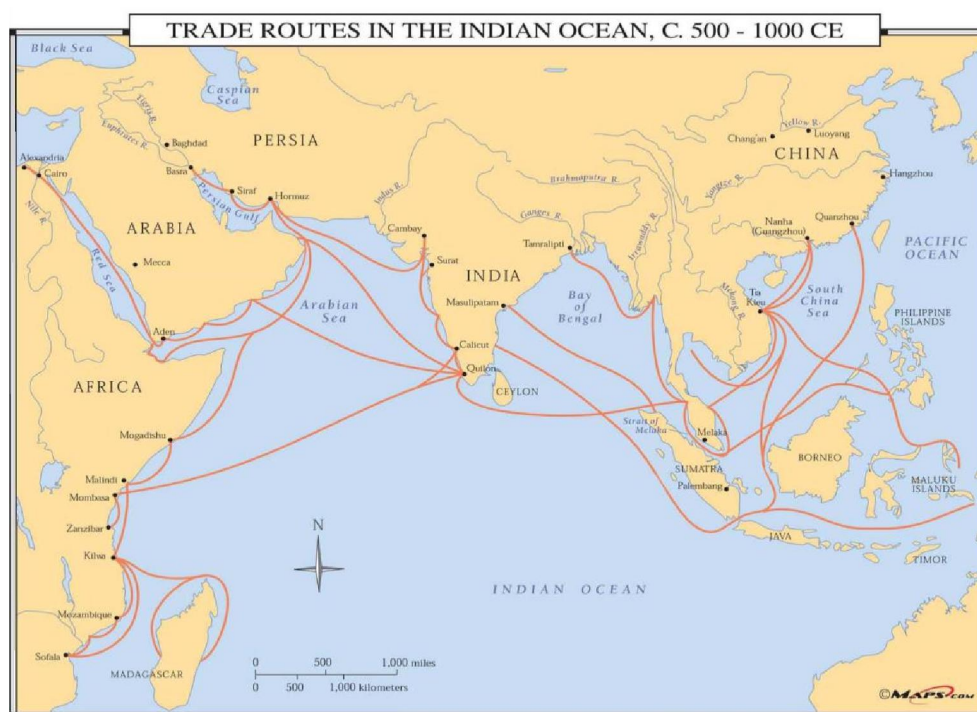
Long before the foundation of Malacca Sultanate (1400-1511), Kedah was a prosperous trading port in the Malay Peninsula, attracting scores of traders from different parts of the world particularly those travelling via the trans-Indianica maritime networks. Known as *KalahorQalha* amongst Arab traders and Kadaram amongst South Indian traders, Kedah which was founded in early 7th century BC and located in the north-eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula served as a major port for trading commodities as well as cultural exchange. Its strategic location coupled with a number of other reasons rendered Kedah a natural transit point for traders, travellers and preachers alike who, in their journey to the East, required local ports that were readily accessible mainly for re-supply purposes. There were also those who ended up settling in Kedah hence making the place as their final destination. Over time, the trade and cultural exchange led to the expansion of Kedah Kingdom and Malay Civilization in the Peninsula covering extensive areas of the modern day Kedah, Perlis and south-western coast of Thailand. With the advent of Islam to the Malay Archipelago, the once Hindu-kingdom of Kedah gradually experienced Islamization process beginning from the 10th century CE turning it eventually to become the first Malay Sultanate in the Malay Peninsula and possibly the earliest Sultanate in Southeast Asia by the 12th century CE.



Kedah Sultanate and other Malay kingdom in 1530-1730 CE

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kedah_Sultanate#/media/File:Map_of_Malay_Peninsula_1530-1730.jpg

On the importance of the trans-Indianica maritime networks, no doubt that the existence of Kedah substantially owed to the long established networks linking major waterways including South China Sea, Strait of Malacca, Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, Strait of Hormuz, Red Sea and Mozambique Channel which is a western arm of the Indian Ocean. The maritime networks enabled East Asian and Southeast Asian people and kingdoms being connected to the South Asian and Middle Eastern regions all the way to East Africa hence making ways for the distribution of numerous goods as well as cultural influence across different regions, the latter manifested for instance, in the advent of Hinduism, Buddhism and subsequently Islam to far and distant territories along the trans-Indianica maritime routes. With that in mind, this article analyses the significance of the maritime networks in the context of the rise of Malay civilization focusing on the case of Kedah Kingdom where various aspects of the kingdom namely political socio-cultural and economy will be assessed to determine the impacts of the maritime routes on the evolution of Kedah Kingdom.



Indian Ocean Trade Routes in 6th -11th century CE

Source: <https://www.ultimatelglobes.com/p/trade-routes-in-the-indian-ocean-c-500-1000-ce/>

Methodology of Study

The content-analysis and qualitative approach are used in scrutinising data in view of the historical nature of the matter under study. Several classical literature are useful as Kedah Kingdom particularly during its early history falls under the category of ancient kingdoms, most notably *Kedah Annals* also known as *HikayatMerongMahawangsa*, and *At-Tarikh Salasilah Negeri Kedah*. Other sources include secondary sources, printed and online some of which are translated works of Arab and Persian travelogues which contain their first-hand experience dealing with the people of Kedah during their journey to the Malay Archipelago or further East.

Literature Review

Muhamad Faiz bin Szali,Che Abdullah bin Che Ya, “KalbuQalha

Amelia Hashim, *KalbuQalha*,

Zalehabinte Syed Hassan, Sharifah. " History and the Indigenization

MaziarMozaffariFalarti, Malay Kingship

R. O. Winstedt, ‘History of Kedah’

Paul Wheatly, *The Golden Khersonese*

Historical Background

The people of Southeast Asia turned out to have given creative responses to rapid economic change, existence diverse social forms as well as political and intellectual possibilities.^[2] For example, in 1500, only in Siam, Arakan, the Burmese city of Martaban and Kedah shellfish were still valid for small-scale transactions.^[3] Although Aceh mussels seem to be only a unit of count, other countries printed gold and mussels from gold, and the gold is four times the value of a mussel. Johor and Kedah produced square currency eight at the end of the seventeenth century.^[4] This can be proved that Kedah had a very manageable political administration under the King's reign.

From the Middle Eastern side, around the 13th to 14th centuries, the Indian Ocean dominated world trade. We will begin at the city of Aden. Aden is a prominent commercial city in modern-day Yemen, located on the Arabian Peninsula at the confluence of the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea of the Indian Ocean. Because of its position, virtually everything from Northern Africa, the Mediterranean Sea, or the Middle East must pass through this city. Silks and spices from China, as well as gunpowder and concepts like paper money, enter the Mediterranean via Aden. It is predominantly dominated by Persian traders, who dominate international commerce via Islamic trade networks, and has even been visited by Chinese emperor's representatives. So, in Aden, a commercial ship picks up all of the European items such as the glass, wine, and minerals, and sets out. The east coast of Africa, which is currently dotted with Swahili city-states. The Swahili are African traders whose culture is a mash-up of African, Arabic, and Hindu practices as a result of their regular interaction with all of these cultures along trading routes. They live in intricate communities arranged around an urban centre and are eager to purchase wine, minerals, timber, and other commodities. In exchange, they sell gold from the Saharan gold trade as well as interior slaves.

The Muslim merchants and traders are the one who spread Islam in the Malay region. Islam was appreciated by the Malays because it respects everyone equally while also being somewhat easier to implement than Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. The social component of marriages was a crucial contributor to assimilation which happened between the preachers and the locals. Other teachings of Islam were equally simple to understand and implement, which explains why Islam was rapidly accepted and absorbed into Malay culture. Other aspects that contribute to the integration and maintenance of Islamic principles include the vital roles performed by the various mosques, suraus, and madrasahs across the Malay World.

Unfortunately, the Islamisation in Kedah was started in different ways. The establishment of mosque was unsuccessful by Syeikh Abdullah Qumairi. Although the mosque were established after his death, the teaching of Islam were still connected by his disciples. Kedah has its strategic location where it has been discussed in many Malay hikayats like *HikayatMerongMahawangsa* and were cited in Masudi's book that Kedah were stated as the fourth shores to the traders from Oman and other Arab traders as the stopping point.^[5] That is to be said, the establishment of the political government of Kedah had existed since the ancient maritime trade started between the Arab- Persian traders who were active in trading activities in the 3rd millennium BC. The early trans-peninsular routeway is part of the Spice Road marine trade route for Arab, Persian, Tamil Nadu, and India-to-China traders, since the route across the Straits does not appear to have been widely used.

Kedah till the end of 14th century was famous as a mart for tin consisting of people that claimed to be Buddhists, and the predominant influence was Indian.^[6] Besides the first Palembang and the Chula kings and then the great Javanese Kingdom of Majapahit claimed suzerainty over it.^[7] The *HikayatMarongMahawangsa* as known as Kedah Annals, records about the seven pre-Islamic rulers of Kedah bearing the Sanskrit-Siamese titles such as MarongMahawangsa, MarongMahapodisat, Sri Mahawangsa, Sri Indrawangsa, MahaParitaBaria (Raja Bërsiong), Phra Ong MahaPodisat, and of Phra Ong Mahawangsa who became the first Muslim ruler and his name was changed into Muzaffar Shah by Syeikh Abdullah Al-Qumairi Al-Yamani.^[8] Some of these titles are not Indian but Indo- Chinese which can be racked from the word 'Podieat' for example is 'Bodisat' and the change of sound from sonants to surds is neither Indian nor Malay but characteristically Indo-Chinese occurring in Mon, Khmer, Siamese and Burmese.^[9] This is evidence that Kedah fell, after the fall of Palembang and the decay of Majapahit, under the influence of its northern neighbour, the Siamese. The influence of Siam must have been significant for a Raja of Kedah to go to Malacca at the start of the 16th century to get patronage from a Malay suzerain, Sultan Mahmud Shah.^[10] Unfortunately, it was also insufficient to protect Kedah from a Portuguese onslaught.

Affliction arrived from another direction in 1770. After establishing themselves in Selangor, the Bugis attacked Kedah and burned the town down.^[11] Just prior to the Siamese invasion, Kedah attacked Perak on orders from Siam and claimed to have captured it in 1819. Treaties between the British and the Siamese in 1786 established Kedah as an autonomous state, and England acknowledged it as a subject to Siam in 1826. Penang and Province Wellesley were acknowledged as English nations under the treaty. It said that Perak was autonomous and should not be invaded, and that the Raja might send gold and silver flowers to Siam if he so desired.^[12] The English were not to enable the exiled Raja of Kedah to live in Penang, Province Wellesley, Perak, Selangor, or Burma, and the Siamese were not to leave Kedah. 6,000.^[13] Sultan Ahmad Tajud-din was exiled to Malacca in 1831. In 1836, he was granted permission to leave Malacca on a visit to Deli, and he travelled to Bruas, where he was preparing to attack Kedah, when he was arrested and sent to Penang by a British gun-boat. Kedah, the division, was restored to him under Siamese protection in 1843, and he returned to reign in Kota Kuala Muda, as Alor Star had already become covered with jungle. He died and his grave is at Langgar. Kubang Rusa was later returned to Kedah, however Perlis remains autonomous, and Setul remains a vassal of Siam. In 1909, the suzerainty over Kedah and Perlis was transferred by Siam to Great Britain.^[14]

Trade Relations

For millennia, commerce has been the primary means of cultural exchange throughout the Indian Ocean region. As a result, the first recorded interaction between the Iranian world and Southeast Asia was also related to this effort. The Parthian traders travelled the maritime trade routes across the Indian Ocean in the late 2nd and early 3rd century CE as far as the international entrepôts of Tun-Sun on the Malay Peninsula and Funan.^[15] By the 4th century AD, Iranian sailors allegedly increased their presence in the Indian Ocean commercial network even considers them to be "carriers" of the sea trade supported by the new Persian Sassanid dynasty (224-651), which was facilitated by a combination of their energy, navigation skills, and maritime technological innovations.^[16]

Oman has been proved to be the accredited seafarers by the historian who brings the merchants' goods from the Middle East to the other trading ports such as in Bengal Bay, Malabar Coast, Malay Peninsula coast area and China. Due to this, trade and commercial activities were widespread in Southeast Asian countries. The earliest port in the Malay world was established in Kedah, the important trade port for traders from China, India, and the Arabs. Although no precise records exist for Kedah until the seventeenth century, historical evidence suggests that it was a very successful commerce hub long earlier. The Chinese pilgrim known as I-Ching stayed in Chieh-cha, which was probably certainly Kedah, in the seventh century.^[17] From the eighth century, the existing reports also indicate that *Kataha* (certainly Kedah) was famous for its social attractions.^[18] It also stated that the Chinese ships met ships from Siraf (on Iran's Persian Gulf coast) and Oman in the tenth-century at the *Kalah*, which is likely to be Kedah.^[19] By the fourteenth century, foreigners including Muslims, Indians, and Persians were residents in *Kalah*.^[20] Thus, this is most likely that Kedah was the most attractive place for traders to stop by before continuing their journey to the next stop.

Given its strategic location in the coast, Kedah had a majestic ruler as the important trading port. Its extensive routes had given Kedah the specialties to control the riverine activities from India and China. That position of location can also be considered that the traders from the Arab coast also were included into the Kedah rulership in maritime activities at its sideline coast which provided them the safe facilities and accommodation. Unfortunately, the position takes Kedah in the hurdles situation with its extension of the problems. Kedah was always exposed to assaults from both land and sea. Throughout the last 500 years, the state has been attacked by invaders from Burma, Siam, Aceh, and Johor.^[21] It even fell under the control of Palembang- Srivijaya in the seventh century.^[22] As a result, the kings of Kedah have had to negotiate with sea peoples from both north and south in the Straits of Melaka.^[23] At the same time, it has been vital to preserve contacts with peasants in Kedah's rice plain as well as those from the interior's hills and jungles.^[24]

Despite that, Kedah managed to be an independent country and successful in getting lost from colonial rule and was known as the strongest rulership in the Southeast Asian countries. Related to the Arab and other traders coming to Kedah, it is because of the arrival of Islam, Kedah had been influenced by Buddhism before its Islamisation, particularly in the Bujang Valley area. According to the working document "Documentation of the Kedah Darul Aman State Historical Convention" at the Council Kedah State Culture, the historians think that Kedah

joined Islam as a consequence of the da'wah movement of Islamic traders and Islamic intellectuals from Arabia, Persia, China, and India.^[25] Archeological digs also show that Islam has been preached in the nation from the 10th century.^[26] These arguments are also supported by the historic text *HikayatMerongMahawangsa*, which indicates that a great Arab scholar, Sheikh Abdullah Yamani or Sheikh Ahmad bin Sheikh Ja'farQumairi, converted the first Maharaja DerbarPhra Ong Mahawangsa to Islam.^[27] On that point, Kedah had a platonian increase in economic changes due to the coming of more traders from Arab, India and Chinese.

Qalha, known as Kedah in the modern time, is a maritime kingdom where commerce and ports play a vital role in economic development. Merchants from Persia, Arabia, India, and other countries made the port of Qalha one of the most important ports in the commercial arena. This is due to the fact that the port of Qalha is an entrepot port. According to Amelia Hashim in her novel :

“SumberkekayaanQalha, iaituemas dan bijihbesimasihdilombong. Rakyatnya yang ramaitelahmempelbagaikansumberpendapatan. Ada yang menerokahutandijadikan sawah dan ladang rempah yang digemari oleh pedagang Arab dan Parsi. Tanamanpadimembekalkanmakananuntukrakyattempat dan para pedagang. Khazanahhutanseperti damar, gaharu, embalau, pala dan gadinggajahmenjadipilihan urusaniaga. InilahkekayaanbumiQalha yang menjaditumpuanramai. Pedagangdaripada China berterusanmembawapingganmangkukkaca dan seramikuntukditukarkan di situ”^[28]

On top of that, rice had been an important economic source for Kedah people until now where Kedah had been the prime rice processing in Malaysia. Besides that, under Hinduism influence, elephant hunting is very famous, and the elephant ivory were made for the warfare weapon and the elephant were made as the transportation in war. This is stated also in a novel known as *KalbuQalha* by Amelia Hashim:

“Kata bondaku, adapenduduktempat yang mengikut para pedaganginiberlayarke negeri sebelah timur dan sebelah barat. Perjalananmerekamemakan masa bermusim-musim. Selainitu, adapanglima yang mahirilmugajah. Merekainimasukkedalamhutanmenangkapgajah-gajah liar laludibawabalikkedalam kampung dan dijinakkan. Gajah-gajahinidijual dan diadikankenderaanapabilapergiberperang. Gadinggajah juga menjadipilihan para pedagangitu.”^[29]

Cultural Influence

Since trading was famous in the Arab world, the coming of the Arab to the Malay world were significant due to the flourishing of commercial activities in each civilization. Many researchers had recorded, such as Masúdi, Sulaiman Al-Tajir and Abu Khurdabih that Kedah was part of the trading port that was included in their resources. Following the Islamisation done by Syekh Abdullah Al Qumairi Al Yemeni on Maharaja DerbarPhra Ong Mahawangsa, the latter changed his name to Sultan Muazaffar Shah, consequently attracting the coming of Arab to Kedah year by year. Some of them also were sent to preach and teach Islam and later had intermarriages with locals and had produced into more the Arab descendant on the Malay World. These Arab descendants were diverse well in Malay society and culture throughout the development of the Malay region. Their influences were remarkable on the Malay society until they have to be acted like Malay during the British colonization due to discrimination between the Malay and the Arab people.

Their influences had been inserted in every section in the Malay region. Unlike the Arabs in Penang, who found a community that was prospering and lacked a developed Malay court culture, those who arrived in Kedah faced a ruler-oriented and agricultural-based society.^[30] The coming of Sheikh to teach about Islam had established a small school to teach Islamic regulations called *Pondok*. During this era of severe political instability, an Arab and well-known Islamic scholar named Syekh Abdul Jalil from Palembang, Sumatra, paid a visit to Kedah and became the Sultan's religious teacher and counsellor.^[31] Then, it comes to the inter-racial marriages that produced the Arab descendants which we can recognize by the title of Sheikh, Tunku, Sayyid, Sharifah Wan and others. In the 18th Century, Syekh Abdul Jalil and Syekh and Sayyid Harun Jamalullail from Palembang married to local Malay women in Kedah.^[32] Syekh Abdul Jalil did not make Kedah as his home and left his wife, Wan Zainab and his son

using the title Wan. After coming to the modern period, prior to colonisation, the essence of the Arabs in the Malay society were decreased and this came to the establishment of *Jawi Peranakan* which is for the significance of the descendants of the Arab that had been dissipated gradually.

There were so many reports such as by R.O Winstedt, by Paul Wheatly and other scholars on the archaeological and artefacts found in Kedah regarding the coming of Indian, Chinese and Arab to Kedah before the century. They suggested that the Arab traders had visited Kedah some 1000 years ago by the coins of the Abbasid Caliphate dated to 840 A.D found in Kuala Muda.^[33] Eighty-seven archaeological sites from the period between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500 have already been documented in south-central Kedah.^[34] The majority of them were concentrated around the trading hubs at Kampong Sungai Mas, PengkalanBujang, and Kampong Sireh, which prospered, as previously said, between A.D. 900 and A.D. 1500. PengkalanBujang and Kampong Sungai Mas had their peak prosperity during the ninth and fourteenth centuries, respectively.^[35] During the thirteenth century, Kampong Sireh began to gain prominence when both older settlements became landlocked, their harbours and river mouths silted up.^[36]

Conclusion

The strategic Kedah geography turns out to be the strategic port for traders internally and on the Peninsula. GunungJerai was the route for traders to pass throughout their journey to China while the sea routes made the seafarers easier which had Kedah as the stopping point while continuing a long journey to China. After the Siam attacked Kedah in the mid of 18th century and the rise of Francis Light power of the commercial activities in Penang, Kedah gradually declined in being the trading port and moved to Penang.

However, it did not make the Peninsula Malay region stop being the pinpoint for trading ports. Malacca continued as the most famed trading port and flourished with trades from the other region. It was reported in many historian resources, Malacca as the renowned commercial and trading port before the coming of the Portuguese in 1511. The systemized administration including the tax, Bendahara, and other officials made Malacca strategic and flourished with people who came as visitors and as merchants. Hence, it was not long after the coming of the Portuguese that they started to exploit every piece of the sources and demolished the existing systemized administration. Also, it was continued by the coming of Dutch, Japanese and British, and the through the demobilization and demodernization, the trade and commercial activities that give the wide connection between muslim countries had stopped.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THIS ARTICLE IS AN OUTPUT OF OUR FRGS19-030-0638 PROJECT FULLY FUNDED BY THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION MALAYSIA.

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