



**THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MALAY
HISTORIOGRAPHY**



**10TH SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES REGIONAL
EXCHANGE PROGRAM
8 – 9 DECEMBER 2005**

SEASREP 10th Anniversary Conference

Southeast Asia, A Global Crossroads

8-9 December 2005
Imperial Mae Ping Hotel
Chiang Mai, Thailand



Organized by
The SEASREP Foundation
(Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program)
with support from the Toyota Foundation and Japan Foundation

Paper

“The Characteristics of the Malay Historiography”

By
Hussain Othman
Tun Hussein Onn University College of Technology (KUiTTHO)
86400 Parit Raja, Batu Pahat,
Johore, Malaysia

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MALAY HISTORIOGRAPHY¹

By

Hussain Othman

Center for Humanities and Communication Studies
Tun Hussein Onn University College of Technology
Parit Raja, Batu Pahat,
Johor, Malaysia
hussain@kuittho.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The characteristics of the classical Malay historical writings are some what different in comparison with other historical writings. As a result, numerous scholars consider many Malay historical texts as "unhistorical texts". Some of these scholars argue that these texts were indeed non-historical texts due to their mythical and legendary contents. While some argue that these texts must be categorized only as "entertainment texts" and not "historical texts" since they were written in literary forms and artistic ways. However, these arguments are oftentimes put forward without a thorough and proper study on the classical Malay historical texts. This paper aims to expose a true understanding of these texts so that we could fairly judge them based on their nature, and not only on the surface. For the purpose of this study, *Sejarah Melayu* a classical Malay historical text was examined. A comparative analysis has shown that the text was indeed written in the spirit of the Malay historical writing. Therefore the text should be treated as historical texts in their own special characteristics: that is, the characteristics of the distinctive Malay historiography.

Introduction

It is insufficient to understand the classical Malay history without having a proper understanding of its writings. In order to get a proper understanding one has to identify the characteristics of these writings within their own nature. This paper is therefore intended to offer a proper approach to understand the characteristics of the Malay historical writings based on the classical texts of Malay history. For the purpose of this study two major approaches were selected; namely the reference on the views of the scholars and researchers and the textual reference. Through the first approach the views of three local Malay scholars and researchers on the topic were selected and discussed. While for the second approach the text of *Sejarah Melayu* or the Malay Annals, the greatest text of Malay history was selected to be a major textual reference.

General Characteristics of Malay Historiography

Soedjatmoko remarks, "*Now, philosophy of history happens to be an aspect of history which is most frequently and most congenially treated by non-historians... indeed historians rarely seem to concern themselves with philosophy of history.*"² Likewise,

¹ Paper presented at the SEASREP 10th Anniversary Conference, 8-9 December 2005, Imperial Mae Ping Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand. The conference jointly organized by SEASREP Foundation, The Toyota Foundation, Japan Foundation and Ford Foundation.

² Soedjatmoko, "*An Approach to Indonesian History: Towards an Open Future*", an address before the Seminar on Indonesian History, Gadjah Mada University, Jogjakarta, December 14, 1957.

the subject of the characteristics of Malay historiography, which is generally treated in the philosophy of history, was also rarely concerned by the historians. Most often, Malay literati or the Malay scholars of literature who dedicated their studies on the Malay historical literature are the scholars who concerned more on this topic. Since Malay scholars and researchers of literature who dedicated their studies on historical texts were also rare, their treatment on this topic was also scarce. Mohd Taib Osman, Zahrah Ibrahim and Siti Hawa Salleh are among the rare scholars and researchers who specifically discussed this topic in their writing, mostly in brief. Let us now proceed to their discussion on this topic in order to get further understanding upon the major characteristics of Malay historiography.

Mohd. Taib Osman has briefly elaborated some characteristics of Malay traditional historiography in his study on *Tuhfat al-Nafis* of Raja Ali Haji.³ First of all we have to bear in our mind that Malay traditional historiography generally includes the whole aspects of the Malay kings and their kingdoms. The historical writings concerning the Malay kings and kingdoms according to Mohd. Taib Osman would usually contain at least seven characteristics (see Table 1).⁴

No.	The Characteristics of Malay Historiography (Mohd Taib Osman)
1	No clear distinction between “ <i>sejarah</i> ” and “ <i>hikayat</i> ” in Malay historiography.
2	Parts of the classical Malay history contain myths and legends, which are much similar to that of the folklore and fables. The myths, legends and fantasies usually come with the motives which different from the folklore and fables.
3	The elements of wills from the king to his successor. ⁵
4	The stories about their origin and their genealogies. ⁶
5	Some particular major themes such as “ <i>anak Melayu pantang derhaka</i> ” (Malays will never revolt).
6	Dates and chronological aspects of the events are not important in Malay histories.
7	Identical styles of narration such as the cases of illustrating the greatness of a kingdom, the beauty of a princess and the state of affairs during a war.

Table 1: *The characteristics of Malay historiography according to Mohd. Taib Osman*

Republished under the Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Dept. of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1960, p.1.

³ Mohd. Taib Osman, “Tuhfat Al-Nafis - Corak Historiografinya - Persamaan dan Persimpangan Dari Tradisi Historiografi Melayu,” in Zahrah Ibrahim (ed), *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, pp. 248-251.

⁴ Ibid..

⁵ Often the kings will pass down certain words containing the wills for their successors and families before their death and it usually in a long passage. Interestingly, there is identical pattern of the wills contained in almost every text of the classical Malay history. Ibid., p.248.

⁶ Ibid..

While according to Siti Hawa Salleh⁷ the Malay traditional writing of history must at least contains five important characteristics (see Table 2);

No.	The Characteristics of Malay Historiography (Siti Hawa Salleh)
1	The origin of the rulers.
2	How the kingdom was established.
3	The genealogical roots of the rulers from the first king to the last.
4	The <i>islamization</i> of the king and the kingdom at large.
5	The last period in which the writing or copying process was most probably taken placed.

Table 2: *The characteristics of Malay historiography according to Siti Hawa Salleh*

Finally, according to a researcher Zahrah Ibrahim,⁸ we could at least discover six objectives and particular characteristics of the classical Malay historical works (see Table 3);

No.	The Characteristics of Malay Historiography (Zahrah Ibrahim)
1	The works were written by the author purposely to glorify the position of the kings by decorating their characters with magical elements.
2	The author tries to convey the morality and ethical aspects through didactic approach.
3	Malay historical literature tends to be more folkloric by emphasizing the myths and dynastic mythology.
4	The authors seek to beautify their works so that the texts become more literary than history.
5	The authors do not take into consideration the chronological aspects of the events; no actual and exact dates provided, different events from different period of times were often mixed together until some particular events have lost its historical values.
6	Most of the Malay historical literature works carried the title of " <i>Hikayat</i> ".

Table 3: *The characteristics of Malay historiography according to Zahrah Ibrahim*

Although expressed in slightly different perspectives, the views of Mohd. Taib Osman, Zahrah Ibrahim and Siti Hawa Salleh are generally completing to each other. Their views were also apparently not contradicted to each other. In brief, Siti Hawa Salleh's view has provided us with a general overview of the characteristics of Malay traditional history.⁹ While the views of Mohd. Taib Osman and Zahrah on the other

⁷ Siti Hawa Salleh (ed.), *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, Yayasan Karyawan and Penerbit Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1998, pp. lx-lxi.

⁸ Zahrah Ibrahim "Pengantar" in Zahrah Ibrahim (ed), *Sastera Sejarah: Interpretasi dan Penilaian*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, pp. xi-xii.

⁹ Siti Hawa does not explicitly list the issue of myths, legends and fantasies as one of the characteristics of Malay history and historiography as discussed by Mohd. Taib and Zahrah. However she says, in the writings, almost all of the mentioned five characteristics except the last one were

hand have provided us with a broader understanding upon the topic. Nonetheless, no specific view was given by Mohd. Taib Osman and Zahrah Ibrahim on the last two views of Siti Hawa, i.e. the story about the *islamization* of the king and the kingdom at large and the story about the period in which the writing was most probably taken placed. If we were to conclude altogether their views we might list among other characteristics of Malay historiography as in **Table 4**;

No.	The Characteristics of Malay Historiography
1	No distinction between " <i>Hikayat</i> " and " <i>Sejarah</i> ".
2	Mythological and legendary contents of the texts.
3	The story about the origin of the kings and their genealogical roots.
4	Containing some major themes; play the didactic role to the Malays.
5	Non-chronological order of the events and dates.
6	Written in form of literature and art.
7	The texts tell the story of the <i>islamization</i> of the king and kingdom at large.
8	The elements of wills uttered by the king to his successor.
9	The texts tell the story about the kingdom, how it was discovered, established, flourished and declined.
10	The texts should also comprise the story of the last period in which the writing or copying process was probably taken place.

Table 4: Summary of the Characteristics of Malay Historiography

R. Roolvink in another instance has divided these characteristics into two major parts; first, the part that contains myths and legends, which tells the story about the ancient times, the origin of the kings, states or villages, ceremonial activities and so on. Second is the part that is less myth legendary, more historic especially when the author tells the story about his times.¹⁰ Although there is no clear dividing line between these two divisions of the characteristics, it is worth to consider Roolvink's views since it can also facilitate our further discussion.

"*Hikayat*" is History

Before we discuss further the characteristics of *Sejarah Melayu*, it is better for us to clear up the discussion upon the first character (No distinction between "*Hikayat*" and "*Sejarah*") since this character correlated to most of the titles of the Malay classical historical texts including the *Sejarah Melayu* itself which is originally entitled "*Hikayat Melayu*". The titles of "*Hikayat*", *Sejarah* and "*Sulalat*" are indeed encompassed the meaning of history according to the Malays. The fact that other works of folklore and fables are using the title of "*Hikayat*" cannot be regarded as an indication that similar titles of Malay classical historical texts were also folkloric in nature. It is through deeper and thorough studies on them that their true nature of

furnished with myths, legends and fantasies. See further Siti Hawa Salleh (ed.), *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, p.lxi.

¹⁰ R. Roolvink, "Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai", in Zahrah Ibrahim (ed), *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, pp.20-21.

history can be explained and not only through supposition based on the title of "Hikayat" as unfortunately Bottoms has rendered,

"At present time, the preferred equivalent for English word "history" is the Arabic *tawarikh*." But Malays tend to use "*sejarah*" which originally means "family tree, now history generally), and this means history as the Malay has always seen it – a mixture of truth and legend, fantasy and fact, entertainment and instruction... From an oral process of this kind we naturally cannot expect accuracy or reliability. The third Malay word (from an Arabic word for "chain") very frequently used in connection with Malay histories – *salasilah*, *salsilah*, *silsilah* – meaning "genealogy," illustrates a particular type of history, dear to the Malays, which traces the descent of the families, particularly royal families, back as far as memory can stretch, and often, indeed back to Alexander the Great and in extreme cases, Adam."¹¹

In another instance Bottoms has also remarks, "The fact that the words *hikayat* and *cherita*, *chetera*, or *cheritera* (=story, tale) are also fairly indiscriminately applied to "histories" helps to indicate their partly fictional nature."¹² The title of "Hikayat" is also should not be associated solely with its foreign influences as most western scholars often stressed. De Jong for instance emphasized that the author of *Sejarah Melayu* has utilized a great number of foreign sources in his writing including *Hikayat Iskandar*, a foreign tale and legend.¹³ Winstedt in another instance was also early on maintained his view on the influence of foreign elements on *Sejarah Melayu*,

"His account of the origin of the title *Laksamana* and his invention of *Hang Tuah* being hidden instead of executed point to his acquaintance with the story of the *Ramayana* and to episode preserved in a MS. Of its Malay version, where ordered by Rama to slay *Laksamana*, Hanoman conceals him till Rama comes to his senses."¹⁴

For these western scholars, the original title of *Sejarah Melayu* which is *Hikayat Melayu*, might be much proper to be used in order to mark its pseudo-historical values. In fact the issue of the title of the text according to most of the Malay authors such as Tun Seri Lanang is really a matter of significant. But in terms of the differences between *Sejarah* and *Hikayat* it is really a matter of insignificant. Both can be used interchangeably as in the case of Tun Sri Lanang who, instead of retaining the title of "Hikayat", has preferred to use the word "*Sulalat*" to his new version of *Hikayat Melayu*. Thus we have certainly arrived at the conclusion that the title of the Malay historical works does not really describe its nature of folkloric. They are historical

¹¹ J.C. Bottoms, "Some Malay Historical Sources: A Bibliographical Note," in Soedjatnoko (ed. et. al), *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1965, (pp.156-193), pp.180-181.

¹² Ibid..

¹³ P. E. De Josselin De Jong, "The Character of the Malay Annals", in John Bastin and R. Roolvink (ed.), *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1964, p.235.

¹⁴ Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, p.130. The story of Hang Tuah being concealed by Bendahara contains in Chapter IX of *Raffles MS 18*.

works and therefore the English words “Chronicles” and “Annals” are among the most appropriate words that should be used to translate and represent their titles.

The Characteristics of *Sejarah Melayu*

De Jong has discussed in a quite lengthy discussion on the characteristics of *Sejarah Melayu* in his article “The Character of Malay Annals”.¹⁵ Among the characteristics of the text according to him are; first, the text has made used varieties of sources, local and foreign alike.¹⁶ Second, the text pictures Malacca as the center of the universe. Third, the author has glorified the kings but not typically extreme. Fourth, the text contains the mythological and legendary stories and they were however realistically mixed with the historical events. Fifth, the text contains almost the entire genealogical root of the Malaccan kings. Sixth, the text contains an ideological aspect of the Malays, unquestioning loyalty and submission to their kings. Seventh, the text also contains a didactic theme such as the good is rewarded and the bad is punished. And finally, the major characteristic of *Sejarah Melayu* is that it tells us about the rulers of Malaccan Kingdom. **Table 5** below has listed among other characteristics of *Sejarah Melayu* according to De Jong.

No.	The Characteristics of <i>Sejarah Melayu</i> (De Jong)
1	The text has made used varieties of sources, local and foreign alike (1)
2	The text pictures Malacca as the center of the universe (5)
3	The text glorified the kings but not typically extreme (3)
4	The text contains the mythological and legendary stories and they were however realistically mixed with the historical events (2)
5	The text contains almost the entire genealogical root of the Malaccan kings (3)
6	The text contains an ideological aspect of the Malays, unquestioning loyalty and submission to their kings (4)
7	The text also contains a didactic theme such as the good is rewarded and the bad is punished (4)
8	The text tells us about the rulers of the Malaccan Kingdom (3)

Table 5: *The Characteristics of Sejarah Melayu According to De Jong*

In comparison to the characteristics of the Malay historiography as discussed previously and as listed in **Table 4**, the first characteristic of *Sejarah Melayu* according to De Jong is comparable to the first characteristic of the Malay historiography (see the number in the brackets). The fourth De Jong’s characteristic of *Sejarah Melayu* is comparable to the second characteristic of the Malay historiography. The third, fifth and eighth characteristics of De Jong are comparable to the third characteristic of the Malay historiography. The seventh and sixth characteristics of De Jong are comparable to the fourth characteristic of the Malay

¹⁵ P.E. De Josselin De Jong, “The Character of The Malay Annals”, pp.235-241.

¹⁶ The utilization of the varieties of local and foreign sources which is the first characteristic of the writing of *Sejarah Melayu* according to De Jong has already discussed during our discussion on the title of “*Hikayat*”, “*Sejarah*” and “*Sulalat*” previously. See the discussion.

historiography and finally the second of De Jong's characteristic of *Sejarah Melayu* is comparable to the fifth characteristic of the Malay historiography. Five other characteristics of the Malay historiography were absent from De Jong's characteristics of *Sejarah Melayu*. First, he does not emphasize on the non-dating of the writing of *Sejarah Melayu*. Second, the literary style of the text was also not of his major concern. Third, the story of the *islamization* of the king and the kingdom is not essentially listed. Fourth, he has also missed to mention the story about the last period in which the writing was probably taken place and finally he does not stress upon the element of the wills. Instead of emphasizing on the element of wills he has focussed on the element of compact between the Sri Tri Buana – the first ruler – and Demang Lebar Daun – the ancestor of the Malay commoners.¹⁷ This element according to Ali Haji Ahmad is the major foundation of *Sejarah Melayu*.¹⁸

Myths and Legends in Sejarah Melayu

The text of *Sejarah Melayu* indeed contains the mythological and legendary stories. Even so as De Jong argued, they are realistically being mixed with the historical events, "There is no lack of fairy-tale happenings in the *Sejarah Melayu*, yet the whole atmosphere is realistic, even matter-of-fact".¹⁹ Now let us proceed to discuss these aspects of myths and legends in *Sejarah Melayu*. According to Yusoff Iskandar,²⁰ myth in *Sejarah Melayu* can be divided into four divisions. Firstly, myth related to the origin of the genealogical roots of Malaccan kings and several other kings who are related to Malacca such as Champa, Pasai and so on. The legend of Iskandar Dzulkarnain is well known to us as depicted by *Sejarah Melayu* with a legendary story, "The story of Raja Iskandar. He defeats Raja Kida Hindi and marries his daughter, with whom he has a son, Raja Aristun Shah. When Raja Kida Hindi dies, he is succeeded by Raja Aristun Shah."²¹ The genealogy of Iskandar was then connected to other kings especially to the descendants of Raja Shulan, Nila Pahlawan, Nila Utama and Raja Iskandar²² down to the genealogical tree of Malaccan kings. The story narrated about Raja Culan, son of Raja Shulan descended into the deep sea is obviously contains mythological values,

¹⁷ P. E. De Josselin De Jong, "The Character of the Malay Annals", pp.239-240.

¹⁸ Ali Haji Ahmad, "Menghayati Semula Teks Melayu Klasik," pp.269-270.

¹⁹ De Jong, "The Character of The Malay Annals", p.237.

²⁰ Yusoff Iskandar, "Mitos dan Legenda Sebagai Unsur Penulisan Sejarah Melayu," in Zahrah Ibrahim (ed), *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, pp.142-143.

²¹ The story of Iskandar Zulkarnain contains in chapter one of *Raffles MS 18*. C.C. Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals; A Translation of Raffles MS 18*, JMBRAS, Vol. XXV, Pt. II and III, 1952, pp.12-17.

²² Bichitram, Paladutani and Nilatanam are the descendants of Alexander and they tell Wan Empok and Wan Malini the story of Alexander's marriage with the daughter of Raja Kida Hindi and Raja Chulan's descent into the sea. *Ibid.*, pp.23-31.

*"The story of Raja Shulan of Nagapatam. He conquers all countries until he comes to Gangga Negara, where Raja Linggi Shah Johan resists him but finally is slain. Raja Shulan marries Raja Linggi Shah Johan's daughter, Onang Kiu, then returns to India and founds Bija Negara. By Onang Kiu he has a daughter, Cendana Wasis, whom he marries to Raja Suran Padshah, grandson of Raja Iskandar. On his death Raja Shulan is succeeded by Raja Chulan, who presently decides to invade China and gets as far as Temasek (Singapura). The ruse of the Chinese to discourage this venture. Raja Chulan's descent into the sea and his marriage with the daughter of Raja Aftabu'l-Ardl. His return to Kalinga and marriage with the daughter of Raja Kudar, ruler of Hindustan. He dies and is succeeded by his son, Adirama Raja Mudaliar, whose descendants still rule Bija Negara."*²³

Secondly, myth which is related to origin of the names of the states or places, its sacredness such as Bukit Siguntang at Gunung Mahameru, Padang Gelang, Samudera, Pasai, Singapura and Malacca itself. Bukit Siguntang was considered as a sacred place because of...

*"The story of Wan Empok and Wan Malini and the miracles that happened to the rice they had grown on a clearing on Bukit Si-Guntang Mahameru in Palembang. To this hilltop come Bichitram, Paladutani and Nilatanam, princely descendants of Alexander; and they tell Wan Empok and Wan Malini the story of Alexander's marriage with the daughter of Raja Kida Hindi and Raja Chulan's descent into the sea."*²⁴

Thirdly, myth related to the events of the *islamization* of the kings and kingdom including Malacca and other places. This point will be dealt in the next discussion on the topic of the *islamization* of Malacca.²⁵ Finally, certain common myths were later on turned into popular ideas and narrations and they were usually related to the events experienced by certain prominent persons and figures in a society including the stories of the origin of their heroic and natural abilities, their intelligent or how they were wisely acted such as the story of Badang who became a great strong man once swallowed the vomit of a demon.²⁶

The Genealogies of the Kings and the Greatness of Malacca

Although the mixture of myths and legends in the early part of *Sejarah Melayu* has brought certain difficulties to the historians in their efforts to determine the correct genealogical root of the kings in the text, most of the other later parts sufficiently provided us with the genealogical tree of the kings especially the Malaccan kings. De Jong remarks,

²³ Chapter two of *Raffles MS 18* recorded these stories. See further *Ibid.*, pp.17-23.

²⁴ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, pp. 23-31. See also Abdullah Jumain Abu Samah, *Seminar Fakta dan Fiksi Dalam Karya Agung Sejarah Melayu: Analisis Cetera Kedua*, 13 March, 1996, Jabatan Persuratan Melayu, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, p.18.

²⁵ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, pp.52-54.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.35-36.

*The major part of the Malay Annals, by contrast, obviously depicts real persons, with their foibles and idiosyncrasies, and by means of genealogies the Annalist links up the historical personages with his contemporaries. It is worth noting that the editor of the 1612 version went to great lengths in bringing these genealogies up to date, and thus enabled the Malay Annals to retain their character of being a link between the present and the past.*²⁷

Another characteristic of *Sejarah Melayu* as mentioned by De Jong is that the text pictures Malacca as the center of the universe. Right from its early days of establishment, the greatness of Malacca was described by the author including by using certain mythological elements,

*“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.”*²⁸

The author of *Sejarah Melayu* has also glorified the kings but not typically extreme and this has also brought us to understand that it is not the personification of the kings that is attempted to describe, rather he is intended to glorify the Malaccan kingdom and its dynasty. This aspect of glorification of the kingdom through the glorification of the kings is describe within this text,

“Throughout his long reign Sultan Muhammad Shah shewed a high degree of justice in his treatment of his subjects,”²⁹ and Malaka became a great city. Strangers flocked thither and its territory stretched westward as far as Bruas Ujong and eastward as far as Trengganu Ujong Karang. And from below the wind to above the wind Malaka became famous as a very great city, the Raja of which was sprung from the line of Sultan Iskandar Dzulkarnain: so much so that princes (kings) from all countries came to present themselves before Sultan Muhammad Shah,³⁰ who treated them with due respect bestowing upon

²⁷ P. E. De Josselin De Jong, “The Character of The Malay Annals”, p.238.

²⁸ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p.52.

²⁹ *The Annalist has glorified the kings but does not go to extremes in eulogizing Malacca’s sultans: a cliché or two serves him for paying his respects to their “justice” or their activity in “protecting their subjects” and some are not even awarded this off-hand compliment.* De Jong, “The Character of The Malay Annals”, p.237.

³⁰ As De Jong further remarks, “*The theme is of a succession of sultans, by no means ideal figures; on the contrary, they are ‘human, all too human’.* But the whole is more than the sum of the parts, and the power of the dynasty is greater than that of the individual rulers. It is the daulat of the supremely legitimate dynasty that makes Malacca the great centre it is depicted as being, able to withstand Java, Siam, and China.” De Jong, “The Character of The Malay Annals”, p.240.

them robes of honour of the highest distinction together with rich presents of jewels, gold and silver.”³¹

The Didactic Values of Sejarah Melayu

The text contains an ideological aspect of the Malays, unquestioning loyalty and submission to their kings,

*“The basic ideology or, as we might call it, the political ethic, of the Pasai Chronicles is the same as that of the Malay Annals: the subject’s unquestioning loyalty and submission to his king, and his avoidance at all cost of the unforgivable sin of derhaka; insubordination or treason”.*³²

Sejarah Melayu has also played an important role as a moral corpus. As Muhammad Haji Salleh remarks,

“The Sejarah Melayu is a moral history. It was written expressly at the request of Sultan Abdullah so that it may be known by all our descendants who come after us, that they may be conscious of it, and therefrom derive profit... the other function of Sejarah Melayu is to teach the lessons of history and life so that readers / listeners might benefit from them... the thread of history was often strung on the poles of values. Tun Seri Lanang and the original author saw the sweep of history with moral eyes and conscience.”³³

This aspect is especially illustrated through the “*waad*” (a covenant or compact) between Demang Lebar Daun and Sang Sapurba. The text recorded,

“Demang Lebar Daun answered, “Your Highness, the descendants of your humble servant shall be the subjects of your Majesty’s throne, but they must be well treated by your descendants. If they offend, they shall not, however grave be their offence, be disgraced or reviled with evil words: if their offence is grave, let them be put to death, if that is in accordance with syara’ law. And the king replied, “I agree to give the undertaking for which you ask: but I in my turn require an undertaking from you, sir.” And when Demang Lebar Daun asked what the undertaking was, the king answered, “that your descendants shall never for rest of time be disloyal to my descendants, even if my descendants oppress them and behave evilly.” And Demang Lebar Daun said, “Very well, your Highness. But if your descendants depart from the terms of

³¹ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p.59. “Sabermula berapa lamanya Sultan Muhammad Shah di atas kerajaan, maka terlalulah adil baginda pada memelihara segala ra’ayat. Maka negeri Malaka pun terlalu besarlah dan segala dagang pun berkampung, dan jajahan Malaka makin banyaklah, arah dari barat sahingga Beruas Ujong, arah timor hingga Terengganu Ujong Karang. Maka mashurlah dari bawah angin datang ke atas angin, bahawa negeri Malaka terlalu besar shahadan rajanya daripada bangsa anak chucu Raja Iskandar Dzulkarnain. Maka raja-raja pun sakalian datang ka Malaka mengadap Sultan Muhammad Shah. Maka oleh Sultan segala raja-raja yang datang itu semuanya dihormati oleh baginda dengan sapertinya dan dianugerahi persalin yang mulia-mulia dan dianugerahi arta dan emas perak terlalu amat banyak.” Winstedt, *The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu*, JMBRAS, Vol. XVI, Pt. III, 1938, p.88.

³² De Jong, “The Character of The Malay Annals”, p.239.

³³ Muhammad Haji Salleh, *The Mind of the Malay Author*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, pp.20-21.

the pact, then so will mine.” And Sri Tri Buana replied, “Very well, I agree I agree to that covenant.”³⁴

This *wa'ad* according to Ali Haji Ahmad is very important as comparable to the element of wills in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*.³⁵ That is because of the prosperous or the decline of Malacca depends heavily on the parties who involved in the *wa'ad*, i.e. the Sultans on one side and the commoners on the other side.

The text also contains a didactic theme such as the good will be rewarded and the bad will be punished. For instance if the kings were cruel to their subjects, an avenging justice will come from without. This theme obviously depicted in *Hikayat Raja Pasai* and *Sejarah Melayu* as De Jong concludes,³⁶

“In the Hikayat Raja Pasai the Javanese conquer Pasai after Sultan Ahmad’s tyranny has assumed the intolerable form of the murder of the Sultan’s own two sons; in the Sejarah Melayu Singapura is sacked by the Javanese after Sultan Iskandar not only put to death but wantonly shamed the daughter of Sang Rajuna Tapa,³⁷ and Malacca is captured by the Portuguese after Sultan Mahmud’s brutal assassination of the Bendahara and his family.”³⁸

According to Muhammad Haji Salleh, there are other forms of direct teaching in this didactic work. The most substantial form is that of the last words of a dying king or Bendahara. This method allows not only an advice but also a preaching brought to us in the last breaths of a man or men who have lived uncommon lives.³⁹ In *Sejarah Melayu*, the last words left by Sultan Mansur Shah to his son Raja Radin (Sultan Alauddin Ri’ayat Shah) is an example of a will of a Sultan purposely uttered to advise and teach his son,

“Then turning to his son Raja Radin, he said, ‘Upon you is laid the duty of faithfully cherishing those who are subject to you and of liberally forgiving any

³⁴ C.C. Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p. 26. “Maka sembah Demang Lebar Daun, “Tuanku segala anak chucu patek sedia akan jadi hambalah ka-bawah duli yang di-pertuan; hendaklah diperbaiki oleh anak chucu tuan hamba. Shahadan jika ia berdosa, sebesar-besar dosanya sakalipun, jangan ia difadhiatkan dan dinistakan dengan kata yang jahat-jahat; jikalau besar dosanya dibunuh, itu pun jikalau patut pada hukum shara’. Maka titah baginda, “Kabullah hamba akan janji bapa hamba, (tetapi hamba minta satu janji pada bapa hamba) Maka sembah Demang Lebar Daun, “Janji yang mana itu tuanku?, Maka titah Seri Teri Buana, “Hendaklah pada akhir zaman kelak anak-anak chucu bapa jangan derhaka pada anak-chucu hamba. Jikalau ia zalim dan jahat pekertinya sekalipun.” Maka sembah Demang Lebar Daun, “Baiklah tuanku. Tetapi jikalau anak chucu tuanku dahulu mengubahkan dia, maka anak chucu patek pun mengubahkan dia. Maka titah Seri Teri Buana, baiklah.” Winstedt, *The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu*, p.57.

³⁵ Ali Haji Ahmad, “Menghayati Semula Teks Melayu Klasik,” pp.269-270.

³⁶ De Jong, “The Character of The Malay Annals”, p.239.

³⁷ The story contains in Chapter VI of *Raffles MS 18*.

³⁸ The story contains in Chapter XXII and XXIII of *Raffles MS 18*.

³⁹ Muhammad Haji Salleh, *The Mind of the Malay Author*, p.21.

*offences they may commit, as we are bidden by Almighty God in the words 'Verily God is with them that shew forbearance.'*⁴⁰

Nevertheless, in *Sejarah Melayu* unlike in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, the element of *wa'ad* is visibly more significant compare to the element of wills.⁴¹ This is true although some of the wills contained in *Sejarah Melayu* are rendered from *Hikayat Raja Pasai*.

Non-Chronological Order of the Events

Another important characteristic of *Sejarah Melayu*, which De Jong in his article did not specifically commented upon is that the text contains no accurate and precise dates, and it also written without chronological order. This is another important aspect of the characteristics of the Malay historiography, which also made the writing of classical Malay history distinctive from other histories.⁴² Neither accurate dates nor proper chronological order of events were seriously reserved by the author of *Sejarah Melayu*. The story of the decease of the kings for instance, was recorded in a manner that no dates are provided and so with the installation of new kings. In the same way the duration of the reigns of the kings were also explained without any accurate date. For example the text mentioned,

*"Now as for Sultan Iskandar Shah, when he just completed three years on the throne, Singapura fell to the Javanese and he went to Malaka, where he was established as Raja for twenty years. And after had ruled in all for twenty-five years, then in the process of time he died and was succeeded on the throne by his son Raja Kechil Besar with the title of Sultan Megat."*⁴³

Though authored without any proper dating and chronological orders, *Sejarah Melayu* is indeed a great text which depicting certain major characteristics of the concept of time in Malay history and historiography. Equivalent to, if not greater than *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu* has tremendously contributes to the foundation of the Malay concept of time, the concept that is very much different from the modern concept of time as perceived by modern historical writings.

Written in a Literary Styles

Most of the classical texts of Malay history were written under a clear conscious patterning of the authors. The behest of the king as mentioned in *Sejarah Melayu* is

⁴⁰ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p.111 and Winstedt, *The Malay Annals*, p.137.

⁴¹ Ali Haji Ahmad, "Menghayati Kembali Teks Melayu Klasik," pp.269-270.

⁴² Although often this aspect was taken as a disadvantage to the writing of the *Sejarah Melayu*, it plays an important role in establishing a special feature of classical Malay history. See further Sanusi Samid, "Sejarah Melayu Sebagai Satu Sumber Sejarah", in Zahrah Ibrahim (ed), *Sastera Sejarah: Interpretasi dan Penilaian*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1986, p.71.

⁴³ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p.52. "Ada pun akan Sultan Iskandar Shah di Singapura kerajaan baginda baru tiga tahun, Singapura pun alah oleh Jawa lalu ka Melaka, maka kararlah baginda di Melaka dua puloh tahun: menjadi baginda di atas kerajaan dua-puluh lima tahun. Maka datanglah peridaran dunia, maka Sultan Iskandar Shah pun mangkailah, maka anakanda baginda Raja Kechil Besarlah kerajaan menggantikan ayahanda, bergelar baginda di atas kerajaan Sultan Megat" Winstedt, *The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu*, p.82.

not an ordinary command, the author has to dedicate himself, to use his ample skills and not to forget is to use whatever appropriate sources available. Above all, it is not so easy to accomplish the sacred command of the king and to fulfill his wish. As mentioned in *Sejarah Melayu*,

*"And the behest of his Highness was thus: 'It is my wish that the Treasury shall make a chronicle setting forth the genealogy of the Malay Rajas and the ceremonial of their courts, for the information of my descendants who come after me, that they may be conversant with the history and derive profit therefrom.'"*⁴⁴

The author then clearly mentioned "when he heard the word of his Highness, he took the command upon his head and his limbs were bowed beneath the weight of it."⁴⁵ The author was taken by two situations; to carry out his moral responsibility and to fulfill the wish and vision of the king (glorifying him and his kingship). Thus, in order to accomplish this heavy burden duty, he has to manage and manipulate his narrative skills into the highest level.⁴⁶ He also has to hide his own feeling until it cannot directly inflict the king's feeling, therefore it will not make the king furious about him and his descendants. Ordinary historical writing skills will not work in this environment and he was left only on one option, to opt for the artistic approach of the writing of a corpus through literary method. Only through this approach he could possibly accomplish his task completely and without harming any party involved in the history. As Noriah Taslim further remarks, "That is how the author exploits the techniques of maxims in the system of Malay traditional literature such as symbols, pantun, proverbs which usually contain double meanings."⁴⁷ Literature and art are the approaches that absorb the surface meaning into implicit meanings. Errington as quoted by Noriah explained,

*"... in the hikayat (unlike their place in historical writing), these events (history) do not stand outside the hikayat as something referred to but rather as material which the hikayat uses, much as it might use a tale of a raja losing his kingdom in a cock fight. Depleted of their historicity, they are absorbed by the hikayat into its own substance, for its own purpose."*⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p.12 and Winstedt, *The Malay Annals*, p.42. Demikian bunyi titah yang maha mulia itu, "Bahawa beta minta perbuatkan hikayat pada Bendahara, peri peristiwa dan peraturan segala raja-raja Melayu dengan istiadatnya sekali, supaya diketahui oleh segala anak cucu kita yang kemudian daripada kita, diingatkannya oleh mereka itu, syahadan beroleh faedahlah ia daripadanya."

⁴⁵ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p.12 and Winstedt, *The Malay Annals*, p.42.

⁴⁶ Noriah Taslim, *Teori dan Kritikan Sastera Melayu Tradisional*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1993, pp.21-22.

⁴⁷ Noriah Taslim, *Teori dan Kritikan Sastera Melayu Tradisional*, p.22.

⁴⁸ Ibid..

Indeed, the elements of literary have successfully absorbed much of the unexplained historical events and this is therefore among the specialty of the writing of *Sejarah Melayu*.

The Islamization of the King and the Kingdom

Comparable to the story of the *islamization* of Pasai king and kingdom in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, the *islamization* of Malaccan king and his kingdom was also illustrated in a mythological approach,

*“The king (Raja Tengah) had a dream of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) who taught him the words of the profession of faith and became a Muslim. When he woke up in the morning he was already been circumcised, a sign of his true dream and conversion to Islam. While his people was later on been converted to Islam by Saiyyid Abdul Aziz.”*⁴⁹

Apart from telling the story of the *islamization* of Malacca, *Sejarah Melayu* has also telling the story on how Pasai and other places accepted Islam. In regard to the *islamization* of Pasai, *Sejarah Melayu* has made some distinctive points from what was described in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. While *Hikayat Raja Pasai* narrated the story of Pasai being the first kingdom to accept Islam, *Sejarah Melayu* maintained that there were already a number of places accepted Islam before Pasai such as Fansuri, Lamiri, Haru and Perlak.⁵⁰ Moreover, while *Hikayat Raja Pasai* maintained that Merah Silau embraced Islam through his dream experience of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him), *Sejarah Melayu* maintained that the dream happened after Merah Silau was already embraced Islam on the hand of the fakir. Dream according to *Sejarah Melayu* is only a medium in which Merah Silau was then taught by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to read the Qur'an.⁵¹ According to Ali Haji Ahmad, this distinction is due to the cultural political setting in which the *Sejarah Melayu* was authored. The author of *Sejarah Melayu* intended to show that Malacca is the greatest kingdom in every single aspect of the historical event.⁵²

The Period of the Writing or Copying Process

Two versions of *Sejarah Melayu* have proved that the authors or the copyists who made additional facts lived during the period in which the reported events occurred. First, the author of *Hikayat Melayu* which according to Winstedt, “*The original nucleus was written by a Malacca man of the court of Mahmud, last Sultan of Malacca, a man who outlived the capture of that port by d’Albuquerque in 1511*”⁵³ and “*that this Malacca author lived and wrote down to 1535, and that Raffles MS. 18*

⁴⁹ C.C. Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, pp.52-54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.42. See also Winstedt, *The Malay Annals*, p.72.

⁵¹ Brown, *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals*, p.42 and Winstedt, *The Malay Annals*, p.72.

⁵² Ali Haji Ahmad, “Menghayati Kembali Teks Melayu Klasik,” p.273.

⁵³ Winstedt, *The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu*, p.27.

is a copy of the original annals.”⁵⁴ Further on Winstedt has provided many more evidences in order to prove that the original nucleus was drafted in Malacca during the reign of Sultan Mahmud up to 1535. Finally he said, “To sum up, all evidence points to the first draft of the *Sejarah Melayu* being written by a scholar...he outlived the Portuguese conquest of 1511 by enough years to romance about it.”⁵⁵ In this aspect we are in agreement with Winstedt since we believed that the author of the original copy must at least witness the events occurred during the final era of Malaccan Sultan. Therefore his writing especially in which describing his own period of time should be expressed in such a realistic way. Later copyist such as Tun Seri Lanang also made some additions on the text of 1612 authored by him. That is why the history of Malaccan royal family escaped to Johore was also recorded in the 1612 version or Shellabear version. This again proved that the author must have at least lived during which the final events occurred and then be able to report the events accurately. Thus we found that these final parts were usually free from myths, legends and fantasies.

Concluding Comments

Sejarah Melayu is indeed a *magnum opus* of Malay historical literature. Every single characteristics of Malay historiography as mentioned in early part of this article embodied in this great text regardless of the original nucleus which represented by *MS Raffles No. 18* or *1612 version*. Both versions were greatly expressed the characteristics of classical Malay historiography. Apart from carrying the characteristics of *Hikayat Raja Pasai* especially as contain in chapter 7 and 9 of *Raffles MS 18*, this text has also carries its own special characteristics which in certain degrees different from *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. For instance, *Hikayat Raja Pasai* contains the element of *wasiat* or will and this element is in fact the main theme of it. Although this element contains in *Sejarah Melayu*, the degree of significance is different. *Sejarah Melayu* stresses more on the element of *wa'ad* and this element play more significant role compare to the element of *wasiat*. In short, the text of *Sejarah Melayu* has proved that its characteristics indeed corresponded to the general characteristic of Malay historiography.

The characteristics of Malay historiography are obviously different from that of other historical writings especially the modern western historical writings. Apart from being distinctively different, it was also unique in its own nature. By referring to “the nature of Malay history”, we mean that Malays already inherited a vast majority of great ideas of the world especially from India, China and Middle Eastern. The ideas were then redeveloped and transformed into their own perspectives and worldviews. At this juncture, the ideas were naturally Malay’s in form and spirit. The uniqueness of the characteristics of Malay history is also significantly showed that Malays are indeed own a distinctive concept of history. The conceptual aspect of Malay history therefore is the most critical area of study that we should further on investigate in order to understand the distinctive characteristics of Malay history. Below (Table 6)

⁵⁴ Winstedt, *The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu*, p.27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.30.

are some suggestions on certain important concepts that should be further investigated based on the distinctive characteristics of the classical Malay history.

No.	The Characteristics of Malay Historiography	Suggested Concepts
1	No distinction between " <i>Hikayat</i> " and " <i>Sejarah</i> ".	Conceptual understanding of myths and legend
2	Mythological and legendary contents of the texts.	
3	The story about the origin of the kings and their genealogical roots.	Concept of man
4	Containing some major themes; play the didactic role to the Malays.	Concept of education
5	Non-chronological order of the events and dates.	Concept of time, space and motion
6	Written in form of literature and art.	Concept of education
7	The texts tell the story of the <i>islamization</i> of the king and kingdom at large.	Concept of conversion or transformation
8	The elements of wills uttered by the king to his successor.	Concept of education
9	The texts tell the story about the kingdom, how it was discovered, established, flourished and declined.	Concept of universe
10	The texts should comprise the story of the last period in which the writing or copying process was probably taken place.	Concept of education

Table 6: *Certain Suggested Concepts Understood from the Characteristics of Malay History*

Since these concepts are the products of the traditional understanding on history, the approaches and methods to uncover their understanding should also be taken from the traditional perspectives on history. These perspectives could most possibly be discovered in the writings of the traditional scholars such as Rene Guenon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Mircea Eliade, Frithjof Schuon, Hamzah Fansuri, Nuruddin al-Raniri and others. Thus, this paper recommends that the writings of these scholars should become among the major references in the future in order to provide a proper understanding on the conceptual aspects of the classical Malay historical texts.

References

Abdullah Jumain Abu Samah. 1996. Seminar Fakta dan Fiksi Dalam Karya Agung Sejarah Melayu: Analisis Cetera Kedua. Jabatan Persuratan Melayu, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, 13 March.

Ali Haji Ahmad. 1986. Menghayati Semula Teks Melayu Klasik. Ins. Zahrah Ibrahim (edit). *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*: 263 – 276. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Bottoms, J.C. 1965. Some Malay Historical Sources: A Bibliography Note. Ins. Soedjatmoko, Mohammad Ali, G. J. Resink and G. Mc T. Kahin (edit.). *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*: 156 – 193. New York: Cornell University Press.

Brown, C. C. 1952. Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals: A Translation of Raffles MS 18. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)* 25 (2 & 3): 1-276.

Jong, P.E. De Josselin. 1964. The Character of the Malay Annals. Ins. John Bastin & R. Roolvink (edit). *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*: 235 – 241. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Mohd. Taib Osman. 1986. Tuhfat al-Nafis – Corak Historiografinya – Persamaan dan Penyimpangan Dari Tradisi Historiografi Melayu. Ins. Zahrah Ibrahim (edit). *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*: 246 - 260. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Muhammad Haji Salleh. 1991. *The Mind of the Malay Author*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Noriah Taslim. 1993. *Teori dan Kritikan Sastera Melayu Tradisional*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Roolvink, R. 1986. Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai. Ins. Zahrah Ibrahim (edit). *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*: 17 - 33. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Sanusi Samid. 1986. Sejarah Melayu Sebagai Satu Sumber Sejarah. Ins. Zahrah Ibrahim (edit). *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*: 65 – 74. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Siti Hawa Salleh (ed.). 1998. *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan and Penerbit Universiti Malaya.

Soedjatmoko. 1957. *An Approach to Indonesian History: Towards an Open Future*. An address before the Seminar on Indonesian History, Gadjah Mada University, Jogjakarta, December 14. Republished under the Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Dept. of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 1960.

Winstedt, R.O. 1961. A History of Classical Malay Literature. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)*, 31 (3): 1-261.

Winstedt, R. O (ed.). 1938. *The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu*. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)*. 16 (3): 1 – 225.

Yusoff Iskandar. 1986. Mitos dan Lagenda Sebagai Unsur Penulisan Sejarah Melayu. Ins. Zahrah Ibrahim (edit). *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*: 140 – 164. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Zahrah Ibrahim. 1986. Pengantar. Ins. Zahrah Ibrahim (edit). *Sastera Sejarah; Interpretasi dan Penilaian*: v - xvii. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

