

# DIPLOMATIC CORPUS: BETWEEN THE DUTCH IN *TANAH MELAYU* AND THE NORTHERN MALAY COURTS, 1641-1699

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## ABSTRACT

The expansion of Dutch power in *Tanah Melayu* introduced a new concept of diplomatic corpus to the indigenous states in order to gain political and commercial influence in a particular state. Almost the entire diplomatic corpus of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was framed in the western tradition of treaty making with little or no attempt to accommodate local practices. To the Malays Courts, however, the political friendships and alliance represented an open declaration of a shift in the spiritual and political power relationships. Thus, these two different conceptions patterned most unstable 'diplomatic' relations between the Dutch and the Malay Courts. The Dutch relations with Perak and Kedah could not find a comfortable *modus vivendi*. This paper focuses on how and in which way the Dutch and the Northern Malay Courts developed their relations as a result of the expansion of the VOC activities in *Tanah Melayu*. The rulers of the Malay Courts selecting the best of their own society while accommodating the Dutch, chose what was considered necessary for survival in the ever complex world order and vice versa.

*Keywords: Tanah Melayu, VOC, Malay Courts, survival, and diplomatic relations*

## INTRODUCTION

In the fifteenth century, the people of *Tanah Melayu* had been locked into a web of exchange involving the exploitation of natural resources of the region with producers, collectors and distributors extensively. There developed a complex set of relationships and a structural dependency among the peoples and kingdoms of the Malay world. *Tanah Melayu* was penetrated by Asian trade from China, West Asia and India. Thus, the extensive Malay world trading networks grew in scale and complexity. *Tanah Melayu* responded to these new commercial advantages by expanding and linking the markets with the regional political and economic changes of Asia. The late arrival of European powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch and British in *Tanah Melayu* did not create commerce, but altered the existing regional networks and established new patterns of trade and political arena.

The establishment of the Dutch in *Tanah Melayu* was also intricately intertwined with the developments in the peripheral courts along the Malacca Straits such as Perak and Kedah. Collectively, they were part of the continuing historical saga of the Dutch post in *Tanah Melayu*. The primary concern of this paper is the relationship between the Dutch in Malacca and the main tin producing sultanates in Northern Malay Peninsula, namely Perak and Kedah, in the days of

the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the seventeenth century. It is confined to the political and commercial relations of Perak and Kedah with the VOC in Malacca from 1641 to 1699. This paper focuses on how and in which way both sides developed their relations as a result of the expansion of the VOC activities, a new European power in the Straits. An attempt will be made to examine the attitudes and objectives of the Dutch and the Malay courts.

## **ALLIANCE, NEUTRALITY AND STRUGGLE WITHIN A TRIANGULAR RELATIONSHIP**

In the seventeenth century, the three major ports that had controlled the Straits market networks were Aceh in the north, Malacca in the centre, and Johore in the south. Each was an independent state and they competed with each other for their own trade prosperity. In the same century, the northern west coast of the Peninsula became more important for traders due to the increasing world demand for tin. Specifically, Perak and Kedah became the principal suppliers of tin in the Peninsula, which provided the tin exports for the Indian market.

In the fifteenth and the first decade of the sixteenth centuries, Malacca was already famous as an international emporium, before its fall into Portuguese hands in 1511. According to Valentyn, Malacca became one of the most important Dutch fortresses in the Eastern Archipelago because of its strategic position.<sup>1</sup> In 1641 Malacca was seized by the Dutch with the help of their ally the Sultan of Johore, with whom they signed several treaties in order to get rid of the Portuguese from this port city. Administratively Malacca became subject to the Supreme Government (*Hoge Regering*) in Batavia. It had its own dependencies, which included Indragiri in Sumatra and the island of Riau (Bintan) at the tip of the Malay Peninsula. The capture of Malacca was considered a great victory for the Dutch and it was a milestone in their strategy to weaken the Portuguese and Spanish powers in the Eastern Archipelago. However, for years the town had been only a shadow of its former glory. Indigenous navigation and commerce had shifted to other ports along the Straits coastline such as Aceh, Johore, Kedah, Perak, Ujong Salang (Phuket) and Tenasserim.<sup>2</sup> Malacca remained a Dutch possession till 1795 when it was occupied by the British. It was restored again to the Netherlands in 1816 before it was ceded permanently to the English by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824.

There was an entire range of relationships that the VOC in Malacca had with the various Malay states in the Straits, ranging from relatively cordial (as in the case of Johore) to relatively hostile (as in the case of Aceh). In the beginning of the sixteenth century Aceh came to challenge the economic position and political hegemony in the Malay world of the Johore court and the Portuguese after 1511. Although the establishment of Portuguese influence in the Straits did not directly eliminate the political overlordship of the rulers of Malacca-Johore in the Malay world, the presence of the Portuguese in Malacca made possible the rise of Aceh. Aceh became a beneficiary of the Muslim and Chinese traders who called there to avoid Portuguese trading restrictions. Gradually the Achinese rulers extended their control down the coast of Sumatra and across the Malacca Straits to the small and vulnerable Peninsula peripheral courts whose resources could yield such great profits. Another political power in this delicate balance was Siam who kept claiming sovereignty over the northern Malay states up to the nineteenth century.

The coming of the Dutch in the Malay Archipelago in the early seventeenth century was to offer themselves as an alternative ally to the most powerful Malay kingdoms along the Straits of Malacca namely, Aceh and Johore. For instance, Johore sought Dutch assistance against Aceh and offered them a site to build a fort within the kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Aceh had asked the Company's assistance to attack the Portuguese in Malacca and in return in 1632, the sultan promised that the Company could trade in Perak without paying any toll for four years.<sup>4</sup> For the Dutch, influence in the Perak and Kedah courts would make it easier to control the tin trade route from Malacca to Ujong Salang and Bengari in the northern tip of Peninsula. The question of suzerainty over Perak and Kedah became an important matter since the fifteenth century because control over such states with rich tin deposits could bring large revenues to an overlord. The VOC's relations with Perak and Kedah were relatively awkward in the seventeenth century. There were occasional tensions in the relationship. The awkwardness provides an insight into the nature of statecraft in these peripheral Malay states. Perak and Kedah's refusal to comply one hundred percent with the Dutch terms, illustrates the tenacity of indigenous political life. According to the Bort's report, Perak was subject to Aceh, and Kedah was a rebellious vassal of Siam.<sup>5</sup>

In Tome Pires' words, Perak was a 'village' with a number of local inhabitants of about 2000 souls and a dependency of Malacca. Tin was used as an annual tribute to Malacca.<sup>6</sup> The Achinese had conquered Perak in 1575 after a long battle in the triangular war between Johore, Aceh and the Portuguese in Malacca. In the early 1640s, the Dutch official described Perak as 'Aceh's best milk-cow.'<sup>7</sup> However, dominated by the Achinese Sultanate, Perak had won a modicum of independence only to become a prey to periodic attacks from raiders and pirates. Besides its own tin source and the elephant trade, Kedah to the north of Perak, also prospered from the tin mining activities in Perak. In 1619, Aceh led the sultan of Kedah into captivity and Achinese influence lasted a few years. Although a vassal of Siam, the Siamese king did nothing to protect Kedah from the Portuguese and Achinese aggression during the sixteenth century. He nevertheless claimed suzerainty over it. Kedah was too far from Ayuthia to enjoy Siamese protection. In 1643, the King of Siam had sufficient control over the Sultan of Kedah. Until the end of seventeenth century, the Siamese king hoped and 'struggled' to maintain Kedah within his political sphere.

For the success of the VOC's monopoly of the tin trade, however, the Dutch needed to remain cordial with the tin producing states of Perak and Kedah. Although, the political weight of Perak and Kedah was of marginal importance, both states were the main tin exporters in the Malay Peninsula. Therefore, the Dutch needed to understand the political policies of these sultanates in order to gain access to the tin trade and control 'the smuggling activities' in the Straits. Only with this understanding could the VOC deploy its vast resources to good effect. As the VOC records indicate, the Dutch were well aware of the attitudes of the Perak and Kedah courts that could spark off wars and disruption to the vital trade. The VOC was forced to send missions, bearing letters and gifts to the local rulers and to negotiate commercial and political treaties with them. This had been done in order to prevent a deterioration of relations and to safeguard the Company against any unexpected changes of attitudes and policies vis-à-vis the Malay courts.

The increasing demand for tin in the international market was a more basic reason for Perak and Kedah's growth in the seventeenth century. As a commodity,

tin was also important as it could be used instead of bullion in the intra-Asia trade. There was a ready market for tin in India that made Europeans eager to acquire access to tin supplies, even though it was not in such great demand as spices, gold or silver. The intensity of the competition among the powers in the Straits had encouraged a policy of expansion for the Company of the sort that was actively pursued by important states in the Malay world before the European powers appeared in the region. The extension of trade control over Perak and Kedah that produced marketable products was essential to the Company in order to prevent the flow of tin to rival merchants such as Indians and other Europeans.

## **TREATIES AND POWERS: THE CLASH BETWEEN TWO CIVILISATIONS**

The VOC and these sultanates operated according to different interests and conceptions<sup>8</sup> of politics and trade, which in practice made it difficult for both parties to reach any agreement on equal terms. Thus, the Company and both Malay courts tried to maintain the basic structure of the old state system while manipulating each other in order to benefit financially. It became worse as Perak and Kedah always tended to annul the treaties for various reasons. Meanwhile, both before and after the invasion of Malacca, the VOC administration appeared to believe that the ruler of Malacca had the legal right to monopolize local trade.<sup>9</sup>

Trade was the dominating issue that soured political relations between the Dutch and both these sultanates. The Dutch made legal argument that they had inherited the monopoly rights of the Portuguese after they failed to get rid of their competitors, particularly the Indian and Chinese merchants in the northern Malay Peninsula.<sup>10</sup> However, the Dutch soon learned these rights were stipulated on paper only.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning, the Dutch always assumed their relations with the Malays was a sort of tribute trade to Malacca, not realizing the view of the peripheral Malay courts that Malacca had no claim on the surrounding territories without the prestigious sultans of the old line. Politics and trade in the Straits were actually quite fragmented. Since the fall of Malacca in 1511 to the Portuguese, politics and trade were decentralized.

The Company's interest and the strengthening of the Dutch power in the Straits were determined by the grand design (*groot oogmerck*) of VOC policies in Batavia. The draft provisions were carefully drawn up in the VOC headquarters. Dutch officials in Malacca received directives from Batavia that reflect the Dutch vacillation between strict reinforcement of monopoly practices and acquiescence to free and open trade. Batavia wanted to reorganize the states because this was essential in order to satisfy its economic demands. In general, the Dutch had little understanding and respect for traditional indigenous usage of commodities, which were often meant as a tribute. Like other European powers, the Dutch attempted only to monopolize commercial supply and distribution. At the same time, they did not want to become embroiled in the Perak and Kedah's political conflicts because that would be expensive and troublesome.

Nevertheless, the expansion of Dutch power into the Straits introduced a new concept of treaties to the indigenous states in order to gain political and commercial influence in a particular state. Almost the entire diplomatic corpus of the Company was framed in the western tradition of treaty making with little or no attempt to

accommodate local practices. A typical Dutch treaty was full of details about conditions of trade. However, trade as a central concern was totally alien to the concept of treaty making in the Malay Archipelago.<sup>12</sup> The Dutch detailed the acquisition and protection of Dutch trading advantages and the restriction of indigenous commerce.

Whereas the Dutch were concerned with even the smallest of details, the Malays considered it unnecessary to pour over the commercial items in the treaty since it was expected that both parties would seek mutual economic benefit and would not compromise each other's "sovereign rights". What was considered important was sovereignty with the inalienable rights of a state to its own ruler, customs and laws. To the Malay rulers the political friendships and alliance represented an open declaration of a shift in the spiritual and political power relationships. When circumstances needed it, the ruler freely re-examined his alternatives and made the necessary realignments to reflect the new power situation and his state's position within it. To the Company, however, the commercial aspects had priority on any negotiations, and it conceded with acquiring certain economic advantages.

Soon after the fall of Malacca to the Dutch, they made an agreement and contract for the first time with Kedah in 1642 and with Perak in 1650 to obtain tin.<sup>13</sup> Serious competition between the Dutch and other merchants to access Perak and Kedah's tin trade started in the 1640s and lasted up to the end of the seventeenth century. The Company's rivals were Indian traders and European merchants such as the Portuguese, English and Danish. The Indian traders were the greatest obstacles for the Dutch to establish an absolute monopoly of the tin trade in these sultanates. The people of Perak and Kedah always considered the Indian traders as their best customers. Indians from the Coromandel Coast came to Perak and Kedah in increasing numbers to exchange cloth for tin and elephants. Moreover, Indian merchants had attained a crucial place in the tin trade, setting up agencies in the courts of the Malay rulers. Their foundation was firm because under the Portuguese the pre-eminence of the Indian traders had been maintained as they were highly recognized during the glorious period of the Malacca Sultanate. In 1641, the Dutch tried to control the Indian merchants because they knew that most of the export and import activities in Perak and Kedah lay on them. As a result, the Indian traders were compelled to acknowledge the Dutch authority in the Straits by calling at Malacca before and after any visit to the ports in northern Peninsula.

The fragile atmosphere in the Perak and Kedah courts had led to an intense involvement in regional affairs. Both courts thought that they must seek out a strong ally that could protect them from outside threats. For instance, the Sultan of Perak used a delaying tactic when he found the Dutch demands were unreasonable. The sultan claimed that he could not take any further step before consulting and seeking approval from Aceh as an overlord. In the 1640s the Dutch used their military power in the Straits waters after they realized that their future control of the tin trade through diplomacy was uncertain. The Company applied the blockade method and patrolled the coast to ensure that tin would be delivered to the Company.

The Company was defeated by Perak and Kedah in its attempts to control the tin trade because of a wrong strategy. The naval blockade on the river estuaries did not effectively work as planned. For instance, tin was carried overland from the Perak River upstream to be exported from Kedah.<sup>14</sup> Besides, there were many

inlets and creeks in which “the indigenous smugglers” could easily escape and hide by using *perahu*. Because of their size the Company’s warships could not penetrate far upstream the rivers in Perak and Kedah to attack any smuggler or pirate. In the 1650s smuggling continued to be a profitable activity in Kedah.

Whoever controlled the state would dominate the commerce in tin and the wealth associated with international trade. The conflict between the chief’s alliance networks thus drew the merchants as active participants in this traditional struggle for local economic and politic hegemony. The initial efforts of Malay chiefs such as the *Bendahara* to “subordinate” the sultan who shared wealth from trade created social imbalances within the society. The powerful *Bendahara* had the tendency to draw and turn the loyalty of society under his authority.

In Perak, after the treaty of 1650, the Company was labelled as an enemy to the prosperity of the country. Under the leadership of the *Bendahara* as a master planner and with the assistance of the *Syahbandar* and *Temenggong*, anti-Dutch feelings grew among the locals. It turned into violence when the rumour spread that the VOC’s lodge under construction would be expanded to be a fort complete with guns.<sup>15</sup> Although it was against the Company, the *Bendahara* of Perak kept dominating and consolidated his position in the Perak Assembly for years after the massacre, in which 27 Dutchmen were killed and the Company’s lodge destroyed.<sup>16</sup> The Dutch considered him to be the biggest obstacle in Perak for the Company to force delivery of its tin quota. Moreover, the *Bendahara* even tried to obtain support from Kedah for the anti-Company propaganda in order to depose Aceh and the Company domination on Perak affairs.

The Dutch required the Sultan of Perak to pay 50,000 reals as compensation for their loss in the massacre. The sultan could not fulfil the demand because he had no cash for that large amount. In the treaty of 1659 between the VOC and Aceh on behalf of Perak, however, the Dutch agreed that the compensation could be paid by a reduction in the tin price from Perak. Instead of the previous contract price of 31 ¼ reals, the Dutch could pay only 30 reals per bahar.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately the treaty did not prevent the Sultan of Perak from selling tin to any trader who would offer a better price.<sup>18</sup>

In the treaty, the Company and the Aceh court shared 2/3 and 1/3 of Perak’s tin production respectively.<sup>19</sup> Although, the Dutch tried to obstruct the Indian merchants trading activities, they were often granted passes by the Achinese court to sail for the northern Peninsula coast from Aceh. Therefore, it was difficult for the Company to accuse the Indian merchants of “illegal trading activities” even if they operated on their own and not on behalf of Aceh.

## **ALIGNMENT AND REALIGNMENT OF THE POLITICAL BOUNDARIES**

It appears that as part of the struggle for political dominance between overlord and subordinate sultanates, the sultans themselves initially encouraged the Dutch or other foreign traders to move into their states as intermediate traders between the “indigenous traders”<sup>20</sup> and port markets. These foreign merchants were an alternative between the overlord and the commercial class of “indigenous traders” who had begun to control the sultan’s trading activities. For example, the Sultan of Kedah showed interest in an agreement with the Dutch for protection and to

expel the Indian merchants, who totally controlled the tin trade in his land. The VOC was encouraged by the gesture to obtain the promise of an exclusive tin trade. The Dutch mission to Kedah was received warmly by the court after they came to negotiate for the release of Commissioner Joan Truijtmán and others. Apart from the release, the mission met with little success to improve the relations. Meanwhile, Perak had never agreed to break off trade with the Indian trading communities and to deliver exclusively to the Company. The VOC gained entry to control the tin trade after the intervention of Aceh. However, it was soon clear to the Malay rulers that the unrealistically low prices of the VOC were not a profitable alternative to trade with the Indian merchants. The 'buy cheap, sell dear,' policy of the spice trade was also applied to the Malayan tin trade. Perak and Kedah's enthusiasm for doing business with the new power in the Peninsula quickly waned.

By 1660 threats from Siam appeared again in the Kedah court. As Kedah's prosperity increased, the Siamese kingdom forced the sultan once more to send the *Bunga Mas* and *Perak* to Ayuthia. It was hoped that this would solve the ever-nagging security problems created by an unreliable Kedah as a vassal. In the 1660s, Kedah was already a recognized commercial center for the English country traders sailing from Madras and the court enjoyed a comparable respect among English captains. In 1660 one of the captains, Edward Lock, was able to leave his ship in Kedah safely after the Dutch refused him a pass to carry tin to the Coromandel Coast. He escaped on a small boat to Aceh and then by a Moorish vessel to Masulipatam. The traditional friendly image of Kedah seems to have persisted amongst the Englishmen. In September 1668, Lock returned to Kedah to recover his ship and elephants, after the Anglo-Dutch war. Shipment of elephants from Kedah was very much an Indian speciality but the Company and English merchants also engaged in it. In the 1660s, in contrast to the Dutch, relations between Kedah and the English were stable and persistent through the Madras connection with Kedah by Indian merchants. The Company abandoned its office in Kedah by the end of 1660s.

From 1664 to 1675, the annual trade balances of Malacca showed a profit. It was a result of the more 'relaxed and friendly policy trade' of the Dutch to improve the tin trade situation. The deductions were abolished and the price was raised to what other merchants paid in Perak and Kedah. In order to prevent "smuggling" among the "indigenous traders", the people of Kedah were denied Perak bound trade although they had a pass. They were allowed, however, to bring provisions and some tin in their vessels to sell to the Company within the blockade in Perak or take it to Malacca. Meanwhile, the people of Perak voyaging to Kedah, could only bring on their return articles like rice, wax, iron and other similar trifling necessities without any quantity of piece goods or calicoes which were brought to Kedah from Malacca and Aceh in a more than sufficient quantity for them. The Dutch obtained less tin but their patrol fleet seized tin cargo from all the non-Dutch vessels without any payment. However, the traders were given a letter that promised whatsoever payment if they brought the rest of their cargo to Malacca and sold at 40 reals per bahar.<sup>21</sup> This stimulated 'voluntary navigation' to Malacca for transporting the tin and spent the money on the Company's textiles, which was another source of profit to the Malacca government. In spite of that, the Company also benefited from the outbreak of the second and third Anglo-Dutch wars. The English and Indian vessels sailing under British flags were reluctant to sail to the Malay waters. They were afraid of attacks by the Dutch warships.

After the violence the Dutch asked Taj al-Alam, the Queen of Aceh to sack the *Bendahara* from the Perak assembly. Afraid of losing the Perak tin trade completely and also the aggressiveness of the *Bendahara*, she dismissed him in 1661 only to be reinstated a few months later. As one of the consequences, the open smuggling was beyond the Company control. Again, the relations between Perak and the Dutch deteriorated.<sup>22</sup>

With the intention to oppose interference from the English merchants and to ensure their control of the tin trade, the Company established a post on Dinding Island (Pangkor Island) on 5 August 1670 after repeated requests from the Sultan. The people of Perak were forbidden to make any trade contact with the English and French ships to prevent them from bringing tin on board. The Achinese vessels were not allowed to sail upstream the Perak River. Sultan Mahmud wanted to maintain the relationships with the Company in order to free Perak from Aceh domination. Furthermore there were rumours about a Siamese invasion was likely to happen soon.<sup>23</sup> In 1678 Malacca reported that Perak treated the Company trading interests in a fair manner.

Although in the 1670s relations between the Dutch and Perak improved, the anti-Dutch feeling still existed among the people. The new *Bendahara*, appointed in 1674, was accused as the mastermind behind the violence that killed several Company employees. To the Dutch the inhabitants of the northern Peninsula were very treacherous, so that the Company should keep its men armed. The Dutch also urged the sultan to punish the *Bendahara* with the view of re-establishing good relations with Perak. The advice did not seem to have been realized as quickly as the VOC had desired.

In Kedah, the Company also kept blocking the Kedah river in the 1670s to prevent "misconduct and traffic" by the English, Indian, Portuguese and Danish merchants with the Kedah court and to inspect the indigenous vessels and *perahus* bound for Perak. The Company believed that Kedah traders emptied their vessels on mainland Perak but loaded tin in an inlet called Heckeren between Perak River and Dinding Island. However, the Dutch officials were ordered to handle the people of Kedah to keep the peace amicably. The Company maintained the blockades since the sultan and his nobles continued to deny the Treaty of 1642 that gave the Company rights on Kedah tin, refused to pay debts and take action to avenge the massacre perpetrated upon nine Dutch seamen on the Kedah River in 1659.<sup>24</sup>

By 1680 the Dutch trading activities were undercut by the English, Indian and Portuguese traders in Kedah. The increasing number of English and Indian traders bound for Kedah boosted the sultan's confidence that they would support him to get rid of the Company's trade activities in his state. The sultan himself whose debts with the Company amounted to f.55784.8.8 since 1652 pursued this policy to avoid payments and refused to supply any tin to the VOC traders at the same time. Thus, the Company's relations with the Kedah courts turned sour once again. In fact, the Dutch seemed not to be interested in improving the Company's relations with Kedah as nothing had been done since the Governor of Malacca, Balthasar Bort, suggested to Batavia of concluding a peace and trading contract with Kedah in 1676.<sup>25</sup>

In the late 1680s and 1690s the Dutch faced a serious problem because of pirate activities in the Straits of Malacca. It was claimed that the pirates had connection with some elite members of the court. The *freeburgers* of Malacca refused to sail to the north if there was no patrol by the Dutch warships. In 1689, it was

clear that the Dutch were unable to suppress the pirates when the VOC's fortress on Dinding Island was attacked and burnt by them, under the command of *Panglima Kulup*.<sup>26</sup> In August 1689, the Dutch garrison left the island. Furthermore, the Dutch also took the drastic step of withdrawing their blockade off the estuary of the Perak River as it was considered not useful to prevent smuggling activities. Since then, all enforcement by naval blockade according to the agreements signed since the 1640s between the Dutch and these Malay courts had been abandoned.<sup>27</sup> In June 1693, Malacca decided to withdraw the garrison completely. Probably, the Dutch were defeated because they underestimated the pirates' ability. The VOC's force should be no more than 50 men for the occupation of Dinding Island since it was reported in 1676 '...there is no more work to be done there.'<sup>28</sup>

Besides the local pirates, the Dutch were also threatened by the English pirates in the Straits. Piracy was a notable activity by British interlopers in the Malay waters at the turn of the seventeenth century. For instance, in 1697 the great ship belonging to Mola Abdoll Goffore of Surat, bound from Kedah to Malacca and China, was plundered and sunk off Penang by the British pirate ship *Makho Frigate*.

In the first half of the 1690s, it was difficult for the Dutch to reach any resolution regarding their future relations with Perak. A further attack by pirates on Pangkor Island made the Company anxious to avoid an open attack. The Dutch, however, sent ships to Dinding Island at regular intervals as it was considered to be Company property.<sup>29</sup> Generale Missiven, 8 October 1693, Vol.V, p.629; VOC 1557 Governor Vosburg to Batavia, 11 February 1694, ff.351v-4v.

In addition, the blockades and unrealistic tin price offered by the Company caused much disturbance in Perak, led by the elites of the Perak court. Some important members of the Perak Assembly believed the relations were not worth it, especially when it came to the economic terms. However, several attempts were made by the sultan to strengthen the friendship with the Dutch. Feeling insecure with the growing piracy activities along the coastline, the Sultan of Perak wanted a renewal of the good relations with the Company to combat piracy. Therefore he sent a mission to Malacca in 1692. The Company would only re-consider the matters if certain terms were met particularly on the tin trade quota. The mission, however, failed to reach any consensus.

## CONCLUSION

In the seventeenth century the position of the Dutch as the supreme power in the Straits had been challenged successively by Perak and Kedah. Conflicts always occurred in the political and commercial relations of the Dutch with Perak and Kedah. These courts never refused any interested merchant who seemed to benefit from the tin trade. The involvement of outsiders in these states had been a part of the court political and commercial climate. This patterned most of their unstable relations with the Company. Apart from that, the very nature of the Malay court system, essentially depending on the loyalty of officials to the sultan, also influenced the relationships. There was always room for an ambitious elite or nobleman to gain access to his own supplies of tin and set himself up as an independent power since ties of allegiance often proved delicate. Many of them learned to draw on their own trade rather than dance to the tunes of overlord.

The VOC was potentially useful as a commercial “middlemen” for the Perak and Kedah courts. They utilized the Dutch to neutralize the political and commercial powers of the overlords. Perak and Kedah as peripheral states within the Straits economic order forged a trade alliance with the Dutch that assured them an increase in wealth, security, and a status far beyond what they had enjoyed when they were political and economic subordinates of Acheh and Siam respectively. The rulers of Perak and Kedah selecting the best of their own society while accommodating the Dutch, chose what was considered necessary for survival in the ever complex world order. The success of the emerging political and commercial relations was due to the internal order and alliances between their commercial sectors and the rulers. For example, resulting from the political and economic alliance with the Company, the Sultan of Kedah was able to dismiss the Indian traders and monopolize the production and redistribution of major commodities for years. Moreover, because of the Company’s economic and political supremacy Kedah was able to deny subordination to Ayuthia’s interests.

The coming of the Dutch contributed to the demise of a developing Malay commercial class, but this demise was not due entirely to the Dutch initiatives. The Dutch were utilized by Perak and Kedah’s courts to neutralize the political challenge posed by their overlords or by the “indigenous” commercial communities that had become economically strong during the seventeenth century. The initial contracts provided opportunities for the Dutch to establish their control over the external commercial sector. Thus the Dutch were aware of the contemporary Perak and Kedah patterns of statecraft. They responded to the consistent refusal of the sultans to trade with them by destroying the local networks.

In general, the Dutch relations with Perak and Kedah could not find a comfortable *modus vivendi*. The position there was somewhat anomalous. The relationships between the Dutch and both courts was extremely fragile and imbalance. That is to say that in search of the political and trade boundaries with the Northern Malay Courts, the Company’s inability (or unwillingness) to control any disturbance in these states was seen in the eyes of these peripheral sultanates as the “weakness” of Dutch supreme power in the Straits. On the contrary, Perak and Kedah, kept searching for ties with the Dutch in order to secure their own weakness. Thus, it meant that they begged the Dutch to return.

After the Dutch occupation, Malacca’s primary task was to be a guard post protecting ships through the Malacca Straits rather than to be an international emporium as it had been in the past. It was hoped that Malacca could patrol the Straits effectively. The VOC seriously considered blocking key Indian merchant trading networks within the Malay Sultanates of Perak and Kedah through treaties. Batavia desired Malacca’s prosperity to revive in its new role as a subordinate port to Batavia. Batavia was at best partially successful. The only trade that the VOC freely encouraged in Malacca was the local Straits trade in which Batavia was not interested.

By the end of the seventeenth century, Malacca still failed to monopolise the tin export activities in Perak and Kedah. The VOC hardly made any profit from the trade activities in the Northern Malay courts. Admittedly, Malacca generally failed to function as a thriving port for the Straits waters. As it was pictured by the Governor General and Council in 1698, Malacca became more a residential area and garrison town rather than a trading port. The Company was defeated by its rivals, particularly by the Indian traders. Moreover, the attitude that profits could

be made through the “buy cheap, sell dear” commercial policy of the Company was not accepted and disregarded by the courts of Perak and Kedah and other traders.

### Glossary

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Bendahara           | The First (Prime) Minister of the Malay Sultanate |
| Bunga Mas dan Perak | A token of subservience from the vassal state.    |
| Panglima            | Malay title for the warrior                       |
| Perahu              | Malay ship without deck or boat.                  |
| Syahbandar          | Harbour master.                                   |
| Temenggong          | Police Superintendent.                            |

### Abbreviations

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| BKI    | Bijdragen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal, Land-en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsche-Indie. |
| JMBRAS | Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.                                       |
| JSBRAS | Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.                                       |
| JSEAH  | Journal of Southeast Asian History.   |
| MBRAS  | Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.                                     |
| VOC    | Collectie Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren van de VOC (ARA)  |

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Valentyn’s Description of Malacca,” *JSBRAS*, No. 13 (June, 1884), pp.49-52. Valentyn’s account of Malacca has been translated and published in this journal, No. 13 (June, 1884), No.15 (June, 1885), No. 16 (Dec.1885) and No.22 (dec.1890). He composed his voluminous work in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but part of his information dates from c.1660.

<sup>2</sup> W.Ph. Coolhaas, “Malacca Under Jan Van Riebeeck,” *JMBRAS*, Vol. XIIVIII, ii (Dec. 1965), p.175.

<sup>3</sup> P.A. Tiele, ‘De Europeers in den Maleischen Archipel’, Eighth Section 1611-1681, *BKI*, XXXV(1886), p.306.

<sup>4</sup> Generale Missiven, 15 August 1633, Vol. I, p.386.

<sup>5</sup> M.J. Bremmer, (trans.), “Report of Governor Balthasar Bort on Malacca 1678,” *JMBRAS*, Vol. V, p.133.

<sup>6</sup> Armando Cortesoa, (ed.), *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, (London, 1944), p.261.

<sup>7</sup> Dagh-Register, 1643-44, pp.133, 203.

<sup>8</sup> To the Malays, a traditional ruler of powerful lineage attracted trade. The essence of Malacca’s political power was it’s social superstructure, and the court. Rulers benefited their followers through the ruler’s theoretical favor in the realm of the gods. See O.W. Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya in the Malay History* (Ithaca, 1970), p.176.

<sup>9</sup> The idea that interstate relations between a European and Asian power occurred within a legal or semi-legal vacuum in 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and the colonials acted according to the European Legal Laws which gave the right of conquest and automatically transferred territorial sovereignty of the former authorities over a certain state is dispelled by C.H. Alexandrowicz, *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Nation in the East Indies*, (Oxford, 1967), pp.1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Tiele and Heeres, *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel*, Vol. II, (’s-Gravenhage), pp. 37, 105.

<sup>11</sup> *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, Vol. I, p.349.

- <sup>12</sup> Leonard Y. Andaya, "Treaty Conceptions and Misconceptions: A Case Study from South Sulawesi," *BKI* 134, (1978), pp.286-88. The old market mechanism is often dependent upon personal alliances and oaths of allegiance between suzerain and vassal state or coastal ruler and hinterland chief.
- <sup>13</sup> J.E. Heeres, *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch Gezag in Oost-Indie*, Vol. III, ('s-Gravenhage, 1885), pp. 106-8, 538-41.
- <sup>14</sup> Generale Missiven, 7 November 1654, Vol. II, p.751.
- <sup>15</sup> Generale Missiven, 19 December 1651, Vol.II, p.512-19.
- <sup>16</sup> Corpus Diplomaticum, Vol. II, pp.152-3.
- <sup>17</sup> Bahar: a weight used in certain parts of the East Indies, varying considerably in different localities, the range being from to pounds.
- <sup>18</sup> Generale Missive, 26 December 1662, Vol. III, p.419.
- <sup>19</sup> Op.cit., Corpus Diplomaticum, Vol. II, p.153.
- <sup>20</sup> In this context, besides the local traders, "the indigenous traders" also refers to the resident communities of Gujaratis and Klings (South Indians) who settled and married with the local people in Perak and Kedah. Many of them funded and facilitated the state's tin mining operations to insure the domination of the tin trade.
- <sup>21</sup> Op.cit., "Report of the Governor Balthasar Bort," pp. 145-6.
- <sup>22</sup> VOC 1236 Governor Thyssen to Batavia, 28 November 1661, fol. 705.
- <sup>23</sup> VOC 1415 Governor Slicher to Batavia, 25 September 1685, fol. 815-6.
- <sup>24</sup> Op.cit., "Report of Governor Balthasar Bort," pp.151-7.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp.141-2.
- <sup>26</sup> VOC 1471 Memorie of Aldert Hendricksz, 8 December 1669, ff.191v-192v; Generale Missiven, 8 December 1693, Vol. III, p.629.
- <sup>27</sup> Generale Missiven, 8 December 1693, Vol. V, p. 629.
- <sup>28</sup> Op.cit., "Report of Governor Balthasar Bort," p.149.

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