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Major Trends in the Study of Malay Statecraft Since 1900

Mohamad Hazizie bin Sulkafle¹

Abstract: This study aims to make a comprehensive survey on the existing literature related to Malay statecraft (*ketatanegaraan*) and the relevant studies that have been conducted and published in Malaya (then Malaysia) since 1900. Statecraft is related to the legitimacy and the idea and concept of the sovereignty of the ruler as understood and practised within the Malay society. Through this historiographical survey, this study has identified several major trends or approaches adopted by scholars in studying Malay statecraft. Among the trends that have been identified is studying Malay statecraft based on the specific genre of “Mirrors for Princes” literature. This trend was later expanded by studying the elements of statecraft that existed in Malay historical narratives, *hikayat* (folktale) and legal texts. These scholars have significantly contributed to enrich the materials in this field and were able to establish Malay statecraft studies as a distinguished field of study. Regardless, it has been identified that several aspects need to be improved and focused on by scholars to further widen the scopes and strengthen Malay statecraft studies. Hence, this study calls for the redefinition of scopes and frameworks for Malay statecraft studies to ensure its sustainability and relevancy in the contemporary era.

Keywords: *Karya ketatanegaraan*, “Mirror for Prince”, Malay statecraft, Malay historical narratives, Malay *hikayat*, Malay legal texts.

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Introduction

The study of Malay statecraft, or *ketatanegaraan Melayu*, is one of the important topics in Malay studies. Studies in this field began with specific works on the statecraft genre or “Mirror for Rulers” literature in the corpus of traditional Malay literature, such as *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*. This trend continued for several decades until the discovery of several other works, such as *Adab Raja-Raja*, *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, *Kitab Nasihat Raja-raja* and *Kitab Kumpulan Lekas Berbetulan Lekas*. The trend later expanded its scope by extending the discussion on works that have certain aspects of statecraft, such as Malay *hikayat* (folktale) and historical narratives. More recently, there have been efforts to further expand the scope by including Malay legal laws as part of the study of Malay statecraft.

Hence, this study aims to have an in-depth discussion on the historiographical development of trends in the study of *ketatanegaraan* or statecraft in Malaya (then Malaysia) since the early 20th century until the present day. In 1900, the earliest known study in this field was published by R. J. Wilkinson (1900). It is also important to note that only published works will be discussed in this study, including books, journal articles and paper presentations published as conference proceedings. M.A dissertations and PhD theses will not be included, except in cases where they have been published as a book. This limitation is important to keep the discussion focused and only highlight the important literature on this subject.

This study also aims to redefine the framework and scope of the study for *ketatanegaraan Melayu* or Malay statecraft. Towards the end of the discussion, this study will answer whether this field can and should be confined to the specific works of *Adab ketatanegaraam* or “Mirrors for Rulers” (such as *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*) or whether it can be expanded to other traditional Malay literature (such as historical writings and *hikayat*) and important and historical documents from and related to palaces (such as Malay legal texts, letters and *surat kuasa*). This redefinition is important in order to make this field of study continue to be relevant and related to the contemporary society. It also will shed further understanding on the concept of state and government as practiced by the Malay society in the past, and prove that Malay society is not

as regressive and uncivilised as claimed by certain groups of people, especially the colonial officers in the past.

***Ketatanegaraan* and Statecraft**

Before the discussion begins, it is important to understand the definition and framework of *ketatanegaraan* adopted in this study. Jelani Harun's definition of *ketatanegaraan* is adopted and expanded as the framework for this study:

[It is] a work about the state and statecraft, concentrating on principles for the guidance for rulers in carrying out their duties, a genre which is most identical to that of "Mirrors for Princes" in Islamic literature. (Jelani Harun, 2008, p. 91)

Jelani Harun's framework is further complemented by Mohd Taib Osman's framework, which states that *ketatanegaraan* is related to the legitimacy, idea and concept of the sovereignty of the ruler as understood and practised within the Malay society. It is also related to the willingness of the people in accepting the ruler's legitimacy and sovereignty (Osman, 2015).

What can be summarised here is that *ketatanegaraan* involves two aspects. The first aspect is the ideological and philosophical dimension, which involves: (a) the idea and concept of justice and ruler's legitimacy and sovereignty; (b) the ideal characters and responsibilities of the ruler and state officials and; (c) the advice to the ruler and state officials to govern the people with justice. Meanwhile, the second aspect is on the technical or practical dimension that concerns the structure and hierarchy of power and administration in the government to ensure the smooth running of the state and the well-being of the people. As discussed below, the majority of the studies on Malay statecraft are more concerned about the first aspect, which is the dimension of ideology and philosophy. Hence, it is the aim of this study to suggest a new approach that will cover both dimensions.

Accordingly, the closest term or the equivalent to *ketatanegaraan* is "statecraft", which can be defined as "the art of conducting state affairs" and "the skill of governing a country". (Statecraft, n.d.). Hence, the term "statecraft", which is adopted in this study, only refers

to these two literal definitions and excludes any conceptual, theoretical and philosophical discussion on this term, such as in political theory and international relations.

The Genesis of the Study of Malay Statecraft: *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*

Written in Aceh in 1603, *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* is regarded as the earliest work on statecraft in the Malay world. Also known as *The Crown of Kings*, this book is divided into 24 chapters. Bukhari al-Jauhari wrote it for the Sultan of Aceh, Sultan Alauddin Ri'ayat Shah Sayyid al-Mukammil (1588-1604). It is interesting to note that the Dutch in Netherlands East Indies (modern-day Indonesia) highly regarded this book and even instructed their officials to read it (Bukhari al-Jauhari, 1992: xii). Even Abdullah Munshi (1981) acknowledged its importance and recommended Malay rulers to read it. The first to study *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* was R. O. Winstedt in 1920. Meanwhile, the first complete Malay edition of *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* was edited by Khalid M. Hussein in 1966, and this edition has since been widely used in Malaysia. It is interesting to note that there is a kind of renewed interest in the study of *Taj al-Salatin* in recent years, which has brought new perspectives to its study. Among them are articles written by Wan Zainal Kamaruddin Wan Ali (2016, 2019), Syed Farid Alatas (2018), Azhar Ibrahim (2018), Basian Zulyeno (2018), Khairul Azman Suhaimy et al. (2018) and Awang Sariyan (2019).

Thirty eight years after the writing of *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, another statecraft literature emerged in the Sultanate of Aceh, which is titled *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*, also known as *Garden of Kings*. It was written in 1638 and completed in 1641 by Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri, the *Qādi al-Malik al-‘Ādil*, or Chief Judge of Aceh Sultanate, during the era of Sultan Iskandar Thani (1637-1641) (Auni Haji Abdullah, 2015). This expansive work consists of seven volumes, combining statecraft, history and other miscellaneous topics, such as wisdom, knowledge and medicine. According to Jelani Harun (2008), these seven volumes or books can be divided into: (a) universal history in Books I-II and; (b) adab writing in Books III-VII.

The first study on *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* in Malaya was done by R. J. Wilkinson in 1900 and followed by R. O. Winstedt in 1920. Later publications on *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* were done by Teuku Iskandar in 1966, which was later revised by Siti Hawa Haji Salleh in 1992, Russel Jones in 1974 and Naseer Sobree in 2017. However, these publications only involved certain books and chapters from *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*. Another interesting study on *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* can also be found in an article written by Hashim Ismail (1999). This article is based on two frameworks: (a) the general conception of the Malay people regarding the sovereignty of the rulers in their philosophical thought, worldview, cultural and socio-political setting and; (b) how their thoughts, conceptions and worldview were understood and interpreted by Nuruddin al-Raniri in *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*. Another article written by Nor Ashikin Md Noor and Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad (2017) provides an interesting discussion on the status of *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* as one of the important works on statecraft in the Malay world.

Additionally, the important contributions of Jelani Harun on the contemporary study of *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* must be acknowledged. He first pursued this study for his PhD thesis, which was completed in 1999 and later published in 2008 as *Bustan al-Salatin: A Malay Mirror for Rulers*. It is not exaggerated to claim that this book is the most comprehensive study on *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* until today. His contributions to the study of *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* was further strengthened through the publication of several other books and articles (Harun, 2004; 2006; 2008; 2019).

Entering the New Phase: Other Statecraft Literature in the Malay-Indonesian World

The studies in this genre have further diversified since the 1990s, with the emergence of newly discovered literature, such as: (a) *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk (Nasihat kepada Raja-Raja)* (ca. 1700); (b) *Adab Raja-Raja*, written in the first half of the 19th century; (c) *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik* (1856); (d) *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* (1857) by Raja Ali Haji; (e) *Kitab Nasihat Raja-raja*, written by Syeikh Duyong for Sultan Zainal Abidin III of Terengganu (1881-1918); (f) *Kitab Nasihat Segala Raja-Raja*, also known as *Sahibul Kitab Sultan Zainal Abidin* (1883); (g) *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas* (1910) by Raja

Haji Ali and; (h) *Nasihah Bagi Segala Raja-Raja* (1863) by Tuan Haji Muhammad Tayyib bin Mas'ud al-Banjari.

Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk, also known as *Nasihah kepada Raja-Raja*, which belonged to Imām al-Ghazālī, was written in Farsi between 1105 and 1111 for Sultan Muḥammad ibn Malikshah from the Saljuq Dynasty. Although this work was not originally produced in the Malay world, its Malay translation was available in 1700 when a copy of it was acquired by James Walker from one copyist named Haji Ismail. This copy is currently available at the University of Edinburgh under the code name MS Dc.6.73-74 (Jelani Harun, 2006). This manuscript was the reference material for Jelani Harun's edition of *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*, published in 2006, which is also referred to in this discussion.

Not much study was done on *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* since it was not originally written in Malay or written in the Malay Archipelago. However, its existence in the Malay world is still important since it provides some insight into the intellectual activities during that time. It is important to note that since it was translated into Malay in 1700, the arrival of the original work must be much earlier than that, perhaps as early as the 1600s, when interest in the writing of statecraft literature already took place in 1603 (*Tāj al-Salāṭīn*) and 1641 (*Bustan al-Salāṭīn*). It can be postulated that both Bukhari al-Jauhari and Syekh Nuruddin al-Raniri referred to this work as one of their sources. The Malay translation of this work also signifies the interest of the Malay masses, particularly the rulers and aristocrats, in reading this valuable work. More importantly, this work has attracted one contemporary young scholar, Fazril Salleh (2018), to summarise it and extract its important points for leadership guidance among youth movements in the contemporary world.

The discourse on statecraft was further enriched with the discovery of *Adab Raja-Raja*'s manuscript in Sri Lanka by a team of researchers from the National Library of Malaysia. This manuscript was eventually brought home in 1985. The first one to study this manuscript was Asma Ahmat (1994). According to her analysis, the title of *Adab Raja-Raja* was not the exact title of this manuscript since the manuscript did not have any title. It had been mistakenly labelled as *Adab Raja-Raja* by the National Library of Malaysia because the phrase "*Adab Raja-Raja*" on its first page was referring to one of the sources of reference,

not its title. However, she still accepted the title of *Adab Raja-Raja*, considering the content of this manuscript is on statecraft and ethics. A further comprehensive study on *Adab Raja-Raja* was done in 2006 by Mohd Taib Osman, a renowned scholar on Malay studies.

Other statecraft literature in the list include *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik* and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, which were written by Raja Ali Haji in 1856 and 1857 respectively. Among the earliest to study both works were Mahdini for *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* and Elmustian Rahman for *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*. Mahdini (1999) stated that there are three responsibilities that must be fulfilled by the state or rulers, according to *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*. These three responsibilities are: (a) to uphold justice; (b) to implement the laws and; (c) to ensure peace. Meanwhile, Elmustian Rahman (1999) in his article has provided a brief historical background of the writing of this work. Eventually, the first Malaysian to study both works as statecraft literature was Khalif Muammar A. Harris (2015; 2016; 2019) in several of his works.

Both *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik* and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* are significant as they were written at the time when the Sultanate of Riau-Lingga was facing numerous threats, particularly from the Dutch. Hence, to strengthen the sultanate and ensure its survival, Raja Ali Haji referred to these two works as guidance and a reminder for both the ruler and the aristocrats (Khalif Muammar, 2016). More interestingly, Khalif Muammar (2016) noted the continuity of tradition in the writing of statecraft literature when some parts of these two works showed some similarities with *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*. However, Raja Ali Haji did not explicitly mention both works among his sources of reference.

The discussion proceeds with two works that belonged to the Sultanate of Terengganu. These two works are *Kitab Nasihat Raja-Raja* and *Kitab Nasihat Segala Raja-Raja*, the latter also known as *Sahibul Kitab Sultan Zainal Abidin*. *Kitab Nasihat Raja-Raja* was written by Haji Wan Abdullah bin Haji Wan Mohd Amin (1802-1889), also known as Sheikh Duyung. He was a prominent *'ulama* (religious scholar) in Terengganu until he was entrusted with the office of the *mufti* (Islamic jurist) and served under three sultans: Sultan Omar (1839-1876), Sultan Ahmad I (1876-1881) and Sultan Zainal Abidin

III (1881-1918). This work only exists in the form of a manuscript, which is kept in the Terengganu Branch of the National Archive of Malaysia. The main content of this work is advice and guidance for the rulers on state governance. The first four pages introduce this work, followed by its main content from pages five to 20. Another interesting aspect of this work is that the main content on advice to the rulers is written in the form of question and answer. Jelani Harun (2003, 2017) contributed to the study of this work in his two respective books.

Regarding *Kitab Nasihat Segala Raja-Raja*, its manuscript is in the keeping of the State Museum of Terengganu. In his earlier study, Jelani Harun (2003) put its title as *Kitab Nasihat Segala Raja-Raja*. However, in his later works, Jelani Harun (2006, 2017) renamed it as *Sahibul Kitab Sultan Zainal Abidin*, based on its title on page two which reads as “*Sahibul Kitab al-Sultan Zainal Abidin ibni Almarhum al-Sultan Ahmad Rahmatullah Taala*”.

Both these works serve as an important intellectual heritage for the Terengganu Sultanate and Malay intellectual activities in general. This is because both works are proof that up to the 19th century, the Malay rulers were still concerned about good governance and continued to find an ideal way of governing the state according to the teachings of Islam. Perhaps, this was also a reaction of the Malay rulers, particularly Sultan Zainal Abidin of Terengganu, in facing the growing threats from the British people, who always sought an opportunity to set their foot in Terengganu. Upon witnessing each Malay ruler being forced to accept British interference in their respective state, Sultan Zainal Abidin III realised that it was his utmost responsibility to strengthen the sultanate and prevent British interference in Terengganu. It is unfortunate that these two works have not been published up to this day. However, Jelani Harun contributed significantly in highlighting the existence of both works and put them in their proper place among the corpus of Malay statecraft literature.

Accordingly, the final work under this sub-topic discussion is *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas*, written by Raja Haji Ali and published by Matbaat al-Imam, Singapore, in 1910. Raja Haji Ali, whose full name was Raja Ali ibn Raja Muhammad Yusuf al-Ahmadi, was also known as Raja Haji Ali Kelana, Raja Ali Bukit and Raja Ali Riau. This work contains both the genealogy of the rulers of Riau

Sultanate and the advice and guidance of governance or statecraft. Jelani Harun (2003) further divided this work into five parts.

Like the above-mentioned *Kitab Nasihat Raja-Raja* and *Kitab Sahibul Sultan Zainal Abidin*, this work was written during the period where the Riau Sultanate was under imminent threats from the Dutch. The Riau Sultanate at that time was on the brink of being dissolved by the Dutch. Hence, Raja Haji Ali hoped to record the history of his sultanate and advice the ruler on the importance of good governance and strengthening the sultanate in facing threats from the Dutch. This work was studied by Jelani Harun in 2001 and 2003 respectively. It is unfortunate that throughout the literature review, it seems that only Jelani Harun studied this literature and put it in its proper place among the corpus of Malay statecraft literature. As stated by Jelani Harun himself, this work was the last work written on statecraft in the Malay world.

Most recently, in 2022, a newly discovered statecraft literature was published. The literature, titled *Nasihat Bagi Segala Raja-Raja*, was written by Tuan Haji Muhammad Tayyib bin Mas'ud al-Banjari in 1863. The author served as a *mufiti* for Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah of Kedah (1832-1879). This text was studied by Muhammad Mustaqim Mohd Zharif.

Finally, there is another approach in studying statecraft literature, which is important but has not attracted much attention yet. This approach is found in the article by Muhd Norizam Jamian et al. (2017), which used a thematic approach in analysing the statecraft literature. The authors utilised four statecraft literature—*Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*, *Kitab Nasihat Raja-Raja* and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*—to analyse “the concept of justice in the leadership of the Malay rulers, which became the focus of discussion of traditional Malay state administration works” (p. 63). As reflected in the following section, this type of thematic discussion gained more attention when studying the aspect of statecraft in Malay historical narratives and *hikayat*, compared to the study of statecraft literature.

Statecraft in Malay Historical Narratives and Hikayat

In its later development, the trend in studying Malay statecraft included historical narratives and *hikayat* literature as part of the discussion. Throughout the literature review, it can be argued that the earliest known scholar who introduced this trend is Siti Hawa Haji Salleh in 1997, in her book entitled *Malay Literature of the 19th Century*. Siti Hawa Haji Salleh (2010) classified several *hikayat*, such as *Hikayat Isma Yatim* and *Hikayat Wasiat Luqman al-Hakim*, as part of statecraft literature. However, this does not mean that these two *hikayat* should be regarded as purely statecraft literature and need to be excluded from the *hikayat* literature genre. Instead, she argued that since the two *hikayat* have some aspects on statecraft, they should be put under the statecraft literature genre as well. After all, her main point in this book is that, instead of rigidly classifying Malay literature into specific genres and confining its discussion only to a particular genre, it is time for Malay literature to take a step forward by studying one literature under several genres or fields that are appropriate to it. This new approach will enrich the discussion in the study of traditional Malay literature and bring new insight into this field in order to highlight the relevance and sustainability of the study of traditional Malay literature in the contemporary world.

However, before discussing further the statecraft elements in *hikayat* literature, this discussion will look into the elements of statecraft in historical narratives in the Malay world. Throughout the literature review, it can be observed that not all historical narratives were studied in the framework of statecraft. Only certain works in this genre were studied under statecraft frameworks, such as *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn* or popularly known as *Sejarah Melayu*, *Hikayat Misa Melayu* and *Tuhfat al-Nāfis*.

Examples of studies on statecraft based on *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn* include those done by Zainal Abidin Borhan (2016) and Ramlah Adam (2019). Zainal Abidin Borhan (2016), for example, argued that the main element of statecraft in *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn* could be extracted from the will of the ruler on the brink of his death to his respective successor. This will usually contain advice to the successor regarding their responsibility and the importance of maintaining good governance of the state to ensure peace and tranquillity. Meanwhile, the discussion on

the aspect of statecraft in *Hikayat Misa Melayu* can be seen in articles written by Ramlah Adam (2019) and Jelani Harun (2019). While the former focused on the ruler's roles and responsibilities according to *Hikayat Misa Melayu*, the latter focused on the importance of a good and cordial relationship between the ruler and his people.

Meanwhile, examples of discussion on the elements of statecraft in *Tuhfat al-Nāfis* can be found in studies done by Arba'iyah Mohd Noor (2014) and Tatiana A. Denisova (2015). Tatiana A. Denisova's article is important because she contributed to the formulation of four concepts on statecraft according to Islam that can be found in the "Mirrors for Princes" literature:

Concept of Justice	Concept of Governance	Concept of Punishment	Concept of Hereafter
View on the definition of justice: to put things in their right place	Islamic view of government and its administrative aspects	Islamic view of just punishment and punishment from Allah for bad deeds	The pillars of Islam, the concept of death and soul, and life after death

Table 1. Four Concepts in the "Mirrors for Princes" Literature

Apart from studying the elements of statecraft in *Tuhfat al-Nāfis*, Tatiana A. Denisova (2007, 2012, 2015) also contributed to the emergence of another trend in studying the aspect of statecraft in historical narratives, whereby she selected certain important themes in the discourse of statecraft or good governance and analysed it in several historical narratives, such as *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*, *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn*, *Hikayat Acheh*, *Hikayat Siak*, *Hikayat Misa Melayu*, *Peringatan Sejarah Negeri Johor* and even *Tuhfat al-Nāfis*.

Returning to the discussion on the aspect of statecraft in Malay *hikayat*, although Siti Hawa Haji Salleh ignited the interest as early as 1997, the only known subsequent studies were in 2006 and 2007 respectively, which was done by Mohd Taib Osman and republished in 2015. Mohd Taib Osman highlighted the existence of statecraft elements in *Hikayat Pelanduk Jenaka* in these two articles. *Hikayat Pelanduk Jenaka*, which was written in 1736, perhaps existed in oral

form before committed into writing. This *hikayat*, which is also called *Syah Alam di Rimba*, is about the leadership of a mousedeer named Pelanduk Jenaka.

Other than *Hikayat Pelanduk Jenaka*, another *hikayat* that attracted the interest of the researcher is *Hikayat Isma Yatim*. Already in existence in the form of a manuscript as early as 1676, Siti Hawa Haji Salleh (2010) commented on this *hikayat* as follows:

The beauty of the story is clearly seen by the story of the king and his queen as well as a magical princess named Princess Nilakandi. The story is very interesting, and it is difficult to ascertain which elements draw the reader to keep reading the *hikayat* – the story or the advice and guidance on the constitution discussed by Ismayatim with all the people he met. Initially, Ismayatim wrote for children his age. Ismayatim's writing ability caught the attention of the minister and the minister took Ismayatim to have an audience with the king. Thus, began Ismayatim's duties in the palace until finally he gained an influential position by the king's side.

The statesmanship elements referred to in *Hikayat Ismayatim* are found in Ismayatim's advice to the people around him. The work-ethic principle held by him is that someone must be proud of the duty given to him and be obliged to carry out that duty with precision and full responsibilities. (pp. 245-245)

The study of *Hikayat Isma Yatim* was continued further with three other articles by Ayu Nor Azilah Mohd and Rohaimi Amin (2016), Muhd Norizam Jamian and Nor Asma Ab Aziz (2018) and Muhd Norizam Jamian and Zubir Idris (2019) respectively. Finally, there is also one article discussing the aspect of statecraft in *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain* by Nor Asma Ab Aziz and Muhd Norizam Jamian (2016).

Statecraft in the Corpus of Malay Legal Texts

Scholars have further argued that the elements of statecraft or *ketatanegaraan* also exist and can be extracted from the corpus of Malay legal texts. Abdullah Sani Usman (2005), for example, stated

that one of the three components that make up the contents of Malay legal texts concerns the power of the ruler and laws related to the administration of the country. Meanwhile, Harun Mat Piah et al. (2002) put forth their remarks on this issue as follows:

...the importance of the traditional Malay legal texts not only for those with an interest in legal history but also for those interested in Malay literature in the widest sense, and on the theoretical understanding of the state as found in classical Malay society...they also present the struggles of past thinkers to define a world of justice and well-being, in which the more human emotions are held in check by the application of the laws of God and man. (pp. 440-441)

The earliest known work that established this trend is *Warisan Persuratan Johor II: Perundangan dan Ketatanegaraan Melayu*, published in 1999. Out of 21 articles in this book, three of them dealt with the discussion on the aspects of statecraft that can be found in the corpus of Malay legal texts. In the context of this sub-topic discussion, Malay legal texts refer to all legal texts that have existed in the various Malay sultanates throughout history. The first one was *Hukum Kanun Melaka* in the 15th century, while the last one was compiled by the Sultanate of Terengganu in 1911 titled *Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk*, also known as *Undang-undang Bagi Diri Kerajaan Terengganu*. Three articles on these texts were written by Norazit Selat (1999), Sidik Fadzil (1999) and Ahmad Fawzi Mohd Basri (1999) respectively.

Norazit Selat (1999) considered *Undang-undang 99 Perak* as a kind of “constitution” for the Perak Sultanate. He argued that the articles in this legal text could be classified into three groups equivalent to the contemporary division of the power of the state, namely legislative, executive and judiciary power. He further argued that this legal text also laid down the hierarchy or bureaucracy of power in state governance. These elements were parts of “the art of conducting state affairs” that defined statecraft, as discussed earlier. It is important to note that Norazit Selat can also be considered as the earliest scholar who approached Malay legal texts as a type of state constitution and not merely a legal text that is only concerned about rules and punishments. Later on, this approach was adopted and expanded by Wan Ahmad Fauzi Wan Husin in his PhD thesis, which was published in 2018. Accordingly, other

studies on the aspect of statecraft in this legal text can be found in articles written by Jelani Harun (2003), Halimah Hassan (2019) and Mohamad Hazizie Sulkafle and Hafiz Zakariya (2020) respectively. Jelani Harun, in his article, argued about the importance of a ruler to have a good relationship with his ministers in order to ensure good governance and peace. Meanwhile, Halimah Hassan argued about the roles and responsibilities of the ruler and aristocrats in governing the state and maintaining peace and rule of justice.

Sidik Fadzil (1999) further discussed the influence of Islam towards the development of Malay political thought, which is reflected in several Malay legal texts, such as *Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk*. Compiled in 1911, this legal text was considered the second modern legal text in Malaysia after *Undang-undang Tubuh Kerajaan Johor* (1895). The main purpose of its compilation was to strengthen the status of the Terengganu Sultanate as an independent and sovereign state. Sidik Fadzil argued that with the coming of Islam, Malay rulers were held accountable for their actions to Allah S.W.T. It is their responsibility to rule with justice and to follow the command of Allah S.W.T. He further added that the ruler's criteria and responsibilities listed in *Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk* reflect the same criteria and responsibilities listed by previous Muslim scholars, such as al-Mawardi in *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah* and al-Ghazālī in *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*. Sidik Fadzil's idea was further expanded and discussed by Halimah Hassan (2006) in her article concerning the roles and responsibilities of the ruler and the aristocrats. The same line of argument can also be seen in the article by Hanif Md. Lateh in 2018.

Ahmad Fawzi Mohd Basri (1999), in his article, argued that the aspects of statecraft in *Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk* consist of three elements: 1) laws on the selection and appointment of the ruler and his responsibilities, which also involved the role played by the *Ahl al-Hal wa al-Aqd* in the selection process; 2 & 3) the hierarchy and the model for the state government, which involved the formation of the Cabinet (*Jemaah Menteri*) and Council State (*Mesyuarat Kerajaan*). It is also interesting to note that Ahmad Fawzi Basri also compared *Undang-undang Tubuh Kerajaan Johor* with *Itqān al-Muluk bi Ta'dīl al-Suluk* to show that both legal texts share the same ideas and frameworks that formed Malay political thought for centuries.

The growing interest in this trend also led to the study of statecraft elements in *Hukum Kanun Melaka*. In 2006, Liaw Yock Fang—an expert in Malay legal text, particularly *Hukum Kanun Melaka*—discussed this issue. He argued that, other than *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*, the sources of reference for Malay statecraft can also be found in Malay historical narratives and legal texts. *Hukum Kanun Melaka* should be studied as the primary source for Malay statecraft since it is the earliest Malay legal text and has significantly influenced subsequent legal texts, such as *Hukum Kanun Pahang*, *Undang-undang Kedah* and *Undang-undang 99 Perak*. Accordingly, his discussion is quite similar to Norazit Selat, where he focused on the status of *Hukum Kanun Melaka* as the constitution for the Melaka Sultanate and the division of power between the executive and judiciary, which is reflected in this legal text.

Another example for discussion of this trend can also be found in an article by Jelani Harun, which was written in 2006 and further revised in 2008. His study was based on a legal text from Kelantan titled *Hukum Maksiat*. This legal text is available in the National Library of Malaysia, under catalogue MS 783. The author and date of this legal text is unknown. However, throughout the discussion, Jelani Harun (2006) suggested a certain time frame for its writing and the potential scholar who might have written it. According to Jelani Harun (2006; 2008), this legal text can be divided into three parts and the elements of statecraft in this legal text are mainly in the introduction part. Among the advice that the ruler is reminded of are: (a) to be considerate to his people and not to pass judgement hastily; (b) to always observe and check the duties of his aristocrats, especially in the collection of *zakat padi*; (c) to always investigate the affairs of his people and; 4) to always control and check the weight measurement in business and prices of goods to avoid any manipulation.

Last but not least, Jelani Harun (2003; 2008) also initiated the study of statecraft in two other legal texts, namely *Undang-undang Raja Nati* and *Safīnat al-Ḥukkām*. He briefly mentioned these two legal texts in his book, *Pemikiran Adab Ketatanegaraan Kesultanan Melayu*, before making a more comprehensive discussion in his later book, *Undang-undang Kesultanan Melayu dalam Perbandingan*.

The Study of Malay Statecraft: Its Potential and Future

Other than the above-mentioned trends of studies, some other potential trends can be explored to further widen and enrich the discussion in the study of Malay statecraft. One of them is the idea discussed by Jelani Harun in a paper presented in 2001. In this paper, Jelani Harun (2001) argued that Malay legal texts should be studied alongside Malay statecraft literature. This combination of two genres will further enrich the discourse and bring new insight and perspective in Malay-Islamic civilisation studies.

Further examples for this combination of two genres can be seen in a study done by Abdullah Sani Usman (2005). The aspect of statecraft in *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh* can be seen from one part of this legal text that discusses the required qualifications to be a ruler and a palace official. The author further discussed the aspects of statecraft from both *Kanun Syarak Kerajaan Aceh* and *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* and their influence on the Sultanate of Aceh.

Interestingly, this combination of genres can also be seen in several studies, such as that of Muhd Norizam Jamian and Shaiful Bahri Md Radzi (2013). Both authors discussed the idea and concept of a just leader in Malay society through traditional Malay literature based on statecraft literature (*Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, *Bustan al-Salāṭīn* and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*), historical narratives (*Hikayat Raja Pasai*) and hikayat literature (*Hikayat Maharaja Ali*, *Hikayat Abu Syahmah*, *Hikayat Raja Jumjumah* and *Hikayat Ibrahim bin Adham*) as their references. Another interesting example is done by Rahimah Hamdan and Arba'ie Sujud (2018), who discussed the aspect of proper rules of conduct for the rulers in governing the state. This article was based on *Tāj al-Salāṭīn* and *Inilah Syair Tenku Perabu di Negeri Singapura Adanya* and was compared with the actions of Sultan Hussain Muadzam Syah of the Singapore-Johore Sultanate in governing the state. This article is significant as it is among a few studies that have compared the theoretical framework of the Malay statecraft in the corpus of traditional Malay literature with the real actions and conduct of the Malay rulers. It has analysed the extent to which the Malay rulers followed and adhered to the given advice, the idea of justice and proper conduct in governing their respective state. Meanwhile, Rahimah Hamdan and Siti Nor Hamiza Ibrahim (2019) in their article analysed *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*

and *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain* to answer the question, “Were the guidelines for rulers, as recorded in the *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, in line with the code of conduct (*adab*) for rulers and warriors in the epic *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain*?” (p. 115). This question is important since both works were popular and widely read among the Malay society, especially by the royals and aristocrats.

It is important to highlight that in the broader context of Islamic civilisation, the study of statecraft literature or “Mirrors for Princes” entered another phase towards the formation and conceptualisation of Islamic political thought. In this phase, instead of discussing the literature theoretically or within the scope and framework of literature (*kesusasteraan*), scholars started to seek a practical dimension by studying its influence and impact on the Islamic society in general and the formation of Islamic political thought in particular, which significantly influenced the course of history. The examples of works of this type can be seen in studies done by Ann K. S. Lambton (1981), Anthony Black (2001) and Mehrzad Boroujerdi (2017). The authors of these works included “Mirrors for Princes” in Islamic literature as well as *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah* by Al-Mawardī, *Kitāb Al-Sulṭān* by Ibn Qutaybah, *Kitāb al-Taj* by al-Jāhiz and *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* by Imām al-Ghazali as part of their references to formulate Islamic political thought and its impact on the Muslim society and the course of Islamic history.

This trend of study eventually gained its ground in Malaysia with the publication of several similar works. The earliest known work that can be considered under this trend is Chapter Eight of Jelani Harun’s PhD dissertation in 1999, which was later published as *Bustan al-Salatin: A Malay Mirror for Rulers* in 2009. Jelani Harun further explored this idea and trend in his work entitled *Pemikiran Adab Ketatanegaraan Kesultanan Melayu* in 2003. Another example is *Pemikiran Politik Islam dalam Sejarah Persuratan Alam Melayu* by Auni Haji Abdullah in 2015. This book is significant because it provides an in-depth study on the historical background of seven scholars in the Malay world, who produced their works and ideas on Malay statecraft and the way their works and ideas influenced the course of history. These scholars are Bukhari al-Jauhari (*Tāj al-Salāṭīn*), Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri (*Bustan al-Salāṭīn*), Syeikh Faqih Jalaluddin al-Asyi (*Safīnat al-Ḥukkām*), Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misri (*Bayan al-Asmā’*, which became part of *Undang-undang Raja Nati*), Raja Ali Haji (*Muqaddimah fi*

Intizām Wazā'if al-Malik and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*), Tok Sheikh Duyong (*Kitab Nasihat Raja-Raja*) and Sheikh Wan Ahmad Zain al-Fathani. Except for the works and ideas of Sheikh Wan Ahmad Zain al-Fathani, the other scholars' works are mentioned and discussed accordingly in the previous section. A study done by Shah Rul Anuar Nordin (2019) can also be included under this trend. In his book, he analysed the idea and concept of Malay statecraft in the Sultanate of Aceh based on three texts, namely *Tāj al-Salāṭīn*, *Sulālat al-Salāṭīn* and *Bustan al-Salāṭīn*. These three texts helped him to formulate the political thought of the Sultanate of Aceh.

Besides the works and literature that have already been mentioned, several other works related to Malay statecraft are also worthy of mention. One of them is *Kedaulatan dan Kekuasaan Melayu dalam Teks Sastera*, published in 2019. It is a compilation of 18 essays produced by a group of experts in Malay studies. This book has brought a new perspective in the study of Malay statecraft by exploring the idea and concept of sovereignty and power as understood by the Malay society based on historical texts. This has led to the formulation of Malay political thought, as remarked by Zainal Kling in this book (2019). He encourages interdisciplinary studies towards the corpus of Malay literature and considers this corpus not only as "literature" per se but as a source for Malay history, culture, intellectual tradition and civilisation and to match it with any relevant contemporary field of knowledge. This exposes the society to the application or practical aspect of knowledge and intellectual heritage in the corpus of traditional Malay literature in the contemporary world and places it as among the sources of knowledge for the contemporary world. The works done by Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad (2018) and Auni Haji Abdullah, as mentioned above, are among the prime examples for this approach. Other examples also can be seen from work done by Shaharir Mohamad Zain (2012) and Fazril Saleh (2018), which has also been mentioned earlier. All these works have tried to formulate and develop the idea and concept of statecraft, political thought and organisation management based on selected texts from traditional Malay literature as well as bridge the gap with contemporary knowledge.

Conclusion

From this lengthy discussion, it can be observed that the study of Malay statecraft began with the study of statecraft genre in traditional Malay literature, such as *Tāj al-Salāḥīn* and *Bustan al-Salāḥīn*, which was closely related to the study of “Mirrors for Princes” or “Mirrors for Rulers”. These initial studies were concerned with the idea of justice, the concept of sovereignty and the advice to rulers and palace officials on their responsibilities in governing the state according to the principles of Islam. This was achieved through numerous anecdotes from the history of old kings and ministers. Later on, the study of Malay statecraft further expanded its scope by including Malay historical narratives as well as *hikayat*, but with the same focus and themes of discussion. In addition to the Malay legal texts as part of the discussion on Malay statecraft, the focus was expanded to specifically include the hierarchy and division of power within the governance of the Malay sultanate as well as the responsibilities of certain palace officials, such as *Menteri*, *Penghulu Bendahari*, *Temenggong*, *Shahbandar*, *penghulu* and judges.

To conclude, this study would like to propose that it is time to redefine the scope and framework of the Malay statecraft to not only discuss the idea of justice, the concept of sovereignty, the advice to the rulers and palace officials and their ideal characteristics and general responsibilities, but also to include discussion on the idea and concept of state and hierarchy, and division and conferment of power in the governance of Malay sultanates. It should also include other relevant historical documents, such as treaties, palace officials’ documents and records, travellers’ accounts, letters and *surat kuasa*. This approach will lead to further understanding of the idea and practice of statecraft in traditional Malay society and the way Malay rulers perceived their sovereignty and governed their respective state. More importantly, this approach will also be able to bridge Malay statecraft with contemporary ideas on leadership, governance, political thought and nation-building.

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