

MALAY CONCEPT OF TIME,
SPACE AND MOTION AS UNDERSTOOD FROM
CLASSICAL TEXTS OF HISTORY

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Most of the classical texts of Malay history are said to suffer with the problems of dating, chronicling events and anachronism. Survey on most of the events in *Hikayat Raja Pasai* revealed that they were compiled without any accurate dates and in a haphazard chronological order, and shared some anachronistic problems. Likewise, it was also discovered that neither accurate dating nor proper chronological order of events was seriously taken into consideration by the authors of *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Some scholars argued that the problems arose due to the technical complexity that arose during the copying processes in which the involvement of various parties resulted in the factual contents of the texts having exchanged into various forms. However, there were other arguments that claimed that the authors attempted to expose a unique Malay concept of time, space and motion. This is the argument that this study intends to explore further. Some selected contents of the above mentioned classical Malay historical texts were analyzed through cosmological interpretation approach. The result shows that the Malays owned their distinctive concept of time, space and motion to their strong religious understanding.

Introduction

Surveys show that most of the historical events recorded in classical Malay historical writings are compiled without a proper chronological order and rarely provided with important and accurate dates. Evidently we could easily find this aspect in three great texts of Malay history, namely, *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. If we are eager to find some

historical dates in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, we certainly will be frustrated to see that not a single event was provided with an accurate date. Instead, the time concept was expressed by words such as “*selang beberapa lamanya...* (means; some time after this...)”, “... *maka pada sesaat itu juga...*” (Hence, at that moment too, Almost at once...), “*hatta beberapa lamanya*” (Hence, after some time, Some time after this).” (Jones, 1999: 4-6). The author seems to be more comfortable using other concepts of time in spite of the Islamic chronological and dating concept that he was already familiar with. Neither accurate dates nor proper chronological order of events were seriously reserved by the author of *Sejarah Melayu*. The story of the death of the kings, for instance, was recorded in a manner that no dates were provided and so too with the installation of new kings. Although there are explanations on the duration of the reign of certain kings, no accurate dates are given (Winstedt, 1938: 45 and 56). Similarly, no accurate dates are mentioned and stated clearly in *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. The events are arranged without any chronological order, and sometimes they are even confused with others especially in terms of location and period. Some events which originated from different places and period of times brought together as if they occurred in the same place and period (Siti Hawa, 1998: 1-2). These are some examples describing the problems of dating, non-chronological order of events and anachronism contained in classical texts of Malay history.

The Linear and Cyclical Concepts of Time

What is the most essential aspect of time, space and motion contained in classical Malay historical writings? In order to answer this question, we have to return to the concept of time in history as generally understood by most traditional scholars. Linear and cyclical concepts of time are two most important views in looking through the concept of time in history. Linear time is profane time, an ordinary temporal duration in which acts without religious meaning have their settings and it can be measured by clocks. Profane time constitutes man's deepest existential dimension and it is linked to