

From Tributary to Colonial System: Regional Order Shifts in the Rise and Fall of the Malacca Kingdom

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Abstract. At the beginning of the 15th century, the Kingdom of Malacca was established in Southeast Asia. It accepted the title of the Ming Dynasty and joined the “tributary system”, which obtained the external conditions for stable development, and gradually developed into an important trade port during Zheng He’s voyages to the Western Seas. At the same time, the Malacca Kingdom, which was deeply influenced by Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, also had the distinct characteristics of the local order in Southeast Asia, known as the “mandala system”, and formed a unique political and economic model. However, the traditional “tributary system” and “mantra system” was finally broken by the Portuguese, and Malacca was forced into the “colonial system” and became the stronghold of operation in the Portuguese Far East. The previous Southeast Asian native order was in fact a secondary order under the loose tributary system, lacking independence and relying on the protection of the suzerainty. With the advent of the colonial era, the suzerainty declined, and its economic and cultural advantages were no longer available. The original regional order of Malacca was unable to maintain and changed, which was a historical necessity.

Keywords: Malacca Kingdom, tributary system, mandala system, colonial system.

1. Introduction

Malacca is located in the Pacific and Indian Ocean, and is an extremely important channel between east and West trade. After the establishment of the Malacca Sultanate in the early 15th century, Malacca gained more favorable development opportunities. With its unique geographical location and flexible and effective internal and external policies, it gradually developed into the largest and most prosperous city in Southeast Asia.

On the one hand, the Kingdom of Malacca received the title of the Ming Dynasty and became a member of the Chinese tribute system. It had a more stable external development environment under the protection of the Ming Dynasty. On the other hand, Malacca had an independent side of the tributary system. Influenced by Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, Southeast Asia had its own local political and cultural order, namely the mandala system. The special geographical location made Malacca particularly obvious in this point. Countries and regions east of Malacca were the core circle of the tributary system. They were close to China and were more deeply influenced by China, while the tribute countries west of Malacca tended to have only trade contacts with China, with a weak cultural and political connection and a more independent political culture.

The establishment of the Kingdom of Malacca was already the eve of the age of great navigation. With the opening of the new route and the arrival of the Portuguese, the traditional tribute system and the mandala system collapsed, and Malacca also fell to the Portuguese colonists, passively involved in the colonial system, and the political, economic and cultural outlook changed many lots. Malacca became an important stronghold for Portuguese expansion and strategy in the East.

The rise and fall of the Kingdom of Malacca reflects the change of the regional order in Southeast Asia, and also the rut of the world from ancient to modern history. This paper relies on historical materials to explore the historical origin of the Malacca Kingdom and the tributary system, the characteristics of the local order in Southeast Asia where it is located, and the subsequent changes brought by Portuguese colonization. The paper reveals the historical motivation behind the replacement of the regional order.

2. Research Status

Studies on this issue can be roughly divided into three categories. One is based on the study of Portuguese colonial history, such as *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500-1700: Political and Economic History*, written by a French scholar [1]. The research on this field is relatively traditional and has achieved considerable results. However, these studies occasionally involve the Malacca Kingdom and do not make it the focus of research.

The second type is about the regional order change, discussing transformation of southeast Asia from a tributary system to a colonial system in a long period of history. For example, Ru Ying and Gong Yuzhen compared the East Asian Tribute System with the Western Colonial System; Hu Yuejiao examines the rise and evolution of the Ming Dynasty order and its relationship with Southeast Asia; Ma Teng investigates the changes and influence of Vietnam from the tribute to treaty system [2-4]. The other part puts forward a more novel theory of the Mandala system from the perspective of the ancient tributary system, proposing that there were indigenous orders different from the tributary system, which pushes the research to pay more attention to the local particularity. For example, Lu Zhengang's *Mandala System: A Study of the Regional Order in Ancient Southeast Asia*, *The Rise and Fall of the Mandala System: An Investigation centered on the Kingdom of Madjapahit in 1293-1527* [5, 6]. However, this trend only appeared for a short time and little has been studied based with examples, such as the Malacca Kingdom.

The third category is about the historical period of the political, economic and cultural status of the Malacca Kingdom, such as Yu Siwei's *the Malacca Port in the Fifteenth Century*, Lu Yusheng's *the Former Colonial Period of Malacca City Research*, Zhang Rong's *the Code of Malacca Kingdom and its Governance Culture* [7-9]. The studies contribute to the study of Malacca, but they are relatively isolated, failing to put the history of the kingdom of Malacca and larger category of regional order change together. Thus, this paper makes up for these deficiencies, putting the rise and fall of the kingdom of Malacca in the background of the China dominant tributary system, mandala system and Portuguese colonial system. It examines how colonial system replaced the tributary and mandala system and its later influence.

3. Malacca Kingdom under Tributary and Mandala System

3.1. Malacca Kingdom and Its Relationship with the Tributary System

In the early 15th century, the Kingdom of Malacca was established in the island region of Southeast Asia. The History of the Ming Dynasty says, "In October of the first year of Yongle, the emperor sent Central official Yin Qing to Malacca and gave people gold accounts and curtains. Malacca had no king and belonged to Siam. With Qing's arrival, the local lord sent envoys to the emperor. The emperor titled him as the king of Malacca [10]."

Malacca began as a remote fishing village, existing as a dependency of Siam (today's Thailand). Malacca took advantage of Zheng He's voyages to the Western seas to seek protection from the Ming Dynasty. Malacca took advantage of the Ming control and prestige over Siam, gradually got rid of Siam's control and developed into an independent state.

Therefore, during the over one hundred years of the existence of the whole country, the king of Malacca often sent emissaries to pay tribute to the Ming emperor. It can be seen that the tributary system of the Ming Dynasty played a great role in the process of the founding of Malacca. The conferring of the title of the king of Malacca by the Ming Dynasty was also the external stable factor of Malacca in the future, which greatly promoted it to become the central transit trade center in the 15th century.

In the early Ming Dynasty, the policy of sea prohibition was implemented. During the reign of Yongle, after more than 30 years of operation, the Ming Dynasty regime was stable and the production of commodities was also developed day by day. Zhu Di, Emperor Yongle of the Ming Dynasty, hoped to resume developing overseas trade and rebuild the tributary system. The Kingdom of Malacca was

located in the Strait of Malacca, the east-west traffic artery, which was an important checkpoint of the east-west trade route at that time. Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas used Malacca as a transit base on the long-term shipping routes. In addition to trading here, he also established warehouses for goods, money and grain. *Ying Ya Victory View* records: "Many Chinese treasure ship went there... they built warehouses with money and grain in it, waiting for the suitable south wind to sail and returned in the middle of May [11]". Zheng He took the Kingdom of Malacca as the cargo warehouse base and transit port of the merchant fleet, which played an important role in consolidating Malacca's political status, the improvement of its reputation and economic and trade development. It also attracted the attention of the eastern and western countries to Malacca, so that businessmen from various countries went to Malacca for trade.

3.2. The Native Order in Malacca Kingdom from the Perspective of Mandala System

The establishment and development of Malacca could not be separated from the protection of the tributary system, but it also had a localized order. The word "Mandala" is etymologically from Sanskrit. "panda" means "circular" and "essence". "la" means "container", "owner" in Hindu-Buddhism form. So, the word "Mandala" tries to convey the view - "Reality is empty, with no essence and no stable core [6]". In fact, the mandala system in Southeast Asia conveys that the pre-modern Southeast Asia was influenced by foreign cultures such as Indian culture and Islamic culture, and formed a multi-center and multi-level international system in the long-term political development.

Malacca was initially deeply influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism, but as a necessary place for Eastern-Western routes, Muslim merchants have arrived in the Southeast Asia since the middle and late 7th century. By the beginning of the 15th century, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam existed in Malacca.

The Kingdom of Malacca attached great importance to the revision of the law. By the end of the 15th century, the final version of the Malacca Code was published to regulate the behavior of all the inhabitants of the kingdom, focusing on strengthening the management of ports and ships and the protection of agriculture. Through the formulation of the Law of the Sea, more detailed provisions on maritime incidents were made to safeguard the interests of shippers and ship owners. The effective legal and administrative organs of the Malacca kingdom provided a predictive preparation for the development of commerce, which was quite important for the long-term trade of foreign merchants.

The effective and systematic management system of Malacca also greatly promoted the development of urban commerce. Countries based on trade attached great importance to commercial management and sea power. Three of the four first-level officials of the Kingdom of Malacca were directly involved in the management of commercial affairs. The Navy was an important force to ensure the passage of the Strait of Malacca. Malacca also set up a senior official Shabandar to manage port affairs, namely port officer. Sabbandar had a high status. In order to encourage the arrival of merchants and ships, Malacca usually appointed foreign businessmen regardless of race or religion.

4. The Fall of Malacca Kingdom and the Establishment of the Portuguese Colonial System

4.1. The Collapse of the Tributary and Mandala System in Malacca

The Malacca Kingdom was located at the maritime transportation hub of the tributary system, and was an important node connecting the inner and outer circles of the tributary system. More than two-thirds of the 63 tributary states loaded by the Ming Dynasty were located west of Malacca. Once Malacca was lost, the Ming Dynasty's painstaking outer tributary system was broken. In the sixth year of Emperor Zhengde of the Ming Dynasty (August 1511), the Portuguese first occupied the area.

History of the Ming Dynasty recorded the reaction of the Ming Dynasty: "The Emperor demanded that the Portuguese must give back the Malacca territory, otherwise the Ming Dynasty would unite other countries to fight back [10]." There is also a record that, "When the envoys from Malacca

arrived, the emperor sent officials to blame the Portuguese for their invasion [12]". The nominal attitude of the Ming Dynasty was to respect etiquette therefore using the force: They demanded the return of the land and threatened to call on the entire tributary system to fight back. The Portuguese apparently did not listen. But the Ming Dynasty did not send troops eventually by finding excuses of being invaded by the Mongolian.

Malacca was very important to the tributary system, but the Ming dynasty's support on Malacca is just oral protest. There was no actual action. By comparison, when Japanese occupied north Korea many years later, China sent troops immediately. Then it can be concluded that, far from China, although Malacca was occupied by the Ming dynasty tributary system, Portuguese invasion did not constitute a direct threat to the security of the Ming dynasty. This fully reflects the conservatism of the tributary system.

Although the Malacca Kingdom established a complete indigenous order before the arrival of the Portuguese, we can see little effective resistance in this war. The mandala system actually recognizes the existence of several small independent centers of power in Southeast Asia, but it does not form an absolute core of power. In the cultural sense, the political and economic mandala system is independent, but in the power level, it can be regarded as the secondary order under the tributary system, and its existence relies on the withdrawal of the suzerainty power.

4.2. The Portuguese Colonial Policy in Malacca

After occupying Goa in India and controlling the Indian Ocean route, Portugal's eyes turned to Malacca, the more important eastern trade center. Southeast Asia was the main producing area of spices. By occupying Malacca, it could further control Southeast Asia, the producing area and main market of spices, and obtain the stronghold of expansion to China and Japan.

After Portugal occupied Malacca, in order to monopolize the trade in the strait, it implemented the policy of forcing people to rely on the port and imposing high tariffs. In business, the Portuguese adopted a policy of autocratic monopoly, except that all ships passing through the Strait of Malacca must pay the entry tax. Later, it sent fleets to Java, Borneo, Sumatra and other places, requiring the spice trade and all merchant ships to be concentrated in the Malacca port, so as to control and monopolize the commercial trade. In addition to the high commodity tax, there were other various types of fees, such as the poll tax, license fees and so on [13].

In addition, Portugal also vigorously attacked the local Muslim merchants in Malacca. This was the conflict between the Portuguese Catholic religion and the native Islam of Malacca, and because the Muslim merchants were their strong business competitors. The Portuguese forced the Muslims to convert and confiscated and robbed their merchant ships. Under strong anti-Islamic sentiment, major merchants from Gujarat, the Malay Peninsula and Java fled from Portuguese-ruled Malacca. The extreme practice of the Portuguese actually went against their attempts to profit more in Malacca. This also set the stage for the Netherlands to defeat Portugal and capture the Strait of Malacca.

The Portuguese plunder, commercial monopoly and religious oppression made the merchants from China, Siam, Java, India, Arabia and other places refuse to go to Malacca to trade in succession. The rise of other port cities in the archipelago and peninsular areas formed an antagonism in the trade market. The Dutch made full use of the Southeast Asian hatred of the Portuguese, formed anti-Portuguese alliances with the local rulers to isolated the Portuguese, and gradually controlled the main markets opposite Malacca.

5. Historical Motivation of the Order Change in Malacca Region

5.1. The Lack of Independence of the Mandala System and the Looseness of the Tributary System

The relationship between the Mandala system and the tributary system can be reflected in the name "Mandala", half-independent and half-dependent. In terms of etymology, the word Mandala comes from Hinduism. From the perspective of cultural connotation, it was influenced by Hinduism and

Islam. The Mandala system influenced by Indian and Islamic culture had an independent cultural structure, which was different from the concept of tributary system with Confucianism as the core. In implication, the meaning of the word “Mandala” is the core of the lack of stability. It was more like the secondary system under the tributary system, and its members had a certain independence, but they were actually quite dependent on the suzerainty of the tributary system. Malacca kingdom itself depended on the title of the Ming dynasty to get rid of Siam neighbors. When the suzerainty China was prosperous and strong, Malacca under the tribute system could steadily develop their own political economy and culture. But once China declined, the whole secondary system would no longer have security, independence and peace.

The prototype of the tributary system can be traced back to the pre-Qin period in China (before Qin Dynasty). On the one hand, the three dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou had established the uniqueness of the central power, and on the other hand, the central government could only maintain limited control over the local forces. In a sense, the tributary system is the product of the extension of this old central and local relations. After the Qin and Han Dynasties, the original vassal “Yidi” (the surrounding area where minority nationalities live which cannot be directly controlled by the central government) became the new “Wang Ji” (central area of China where the emperor can directly control), and the more remote places became the new “Yidi”. In the eyes of Confucianism, the ethical hierarchy relationship between “China” and barbarian “Yidi” has not changed. The original “Wangji” became a wider China, and the old concept of Yidi extended to the surrounding nations and countries. The Chinese order with “Wangji” as the center in the Zhou Dynasty, finally formed an international system with “China” as the center [2]. In fact, it is the loose shape of the pilgrimage system that gives the secondary system room to survive.

5.2. The Backwardness of the Tributary System Compared with the Colonial System

Before modern times, the tributary relationship between China and the neighboring agricultural countries was generally very successful. Self-sufficiency is the basic feature of east Asian agricultural countries, so the exchange between countries was mostly the exchange of non-daily necessities between the upper class. However, with the development of productivity and the expansion of commodity exchange scale, the tributary system characterized by limited exchange was increasingly difficult to meet the needs of neighboring countries. The tribute state therefore constantly asked to increase the number of tribute times. The Ming and Qing dynasties strictly regulated the tribute period and the scale of the diplomatic missions, with the purpose of controlling the “thick to thin” tribute activities within the limits of China’s economic forces [14].

Compared with the tributary system that focuses on moral influences, the thinking of western civilization is more realistic, and essentially its expansionary thinking comes from profit-seeking. Colonial thinking is essentially a powerful, independent culture. However, this cultural difference was not the root of the colonial system replacing the tributary system. The tributary system reflected the long-term stable and stagnant level of social development of East Asian society. The tribute system was based on the cultural and economic attraction of the patriarchal state, and the necessary condition for its maintenance is that the patriarchal state maintains its economic and cultural advantages. Feudal civilization was at a disadvantage to capitalist civilization, which was an unchangeable historical trend. The fall of Malacca was just the beginning, and the bloody accumulation of capital would shake the whole old world.

6. Conclusion

By receiving the title of the Ming Dynasty, the Malacca Kingdom got rid of Siamese control and obtained the external guarantee of stable development. Zheng He’s subsequent voyages to the Western Seas facilitated Malacca to become a prosperous trade port. The existence of the “tributary system” was an important guarantee for the founding and growing development of Malacca. At the same time, the loose shape of the tributary system also gave the member states a huge room for

autonomy. Malacca itself associated the inner circle and the outer circle of the tributary system, and its history and culture were deeply influenced by Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Thus, it found its own position in the inherent “mantra system” in Southeast Asia and formed a unique local order.

However, on the one hand, the “Mandala system” in Southeast Asia was only a secondary order under the loose tributary system. Although it had unique and rich cultural connotation, it lacked a strong power core. Therefore, it was attached to the tributary system to a large extent. On the other hand, in the loose tributary system, the suzerain often aroused the actual defense mechanism when its own native security was threatened. The Malacca Kingdom was located outside the inner circle of the tributary system.

Faced with the eastward expansion of Portugal, the Ming Dynasty would not spend a lot of troops. At the same time, the monarchy itself declined, and its economic and cultural advantages were lost. The policies of the monarchy became increasingly conservative and shrinking, as the result of which the original regional order of Malacca was unable to maintain and change. It was finally forced into the colonial system and became an important stronghold of Portugal in the far East.

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