

Historical Analysis of the Malacca Sultanate on Socio-Economic Prosperity during the Reign of Sultan Mahmud Shah, 15th -16th AD

Dziauddin Sharif,^a Nor Adina Abdul Kadir,^b Hamidah Jalani,^c
Mohd Zaid Mustafar^d & H. M. Rizal Akbar^e

Abstract

This study employs a historical analysis approach to examine the economic prosperity of the Malacca Sultanate during Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign. Utilizing both primary and secondary sources, this research explores how the Sultanate's strategic location, economic policies, and diplomatic relations contributed to its rise as a dominant trading hub in Southeast Asia. The analysis highlights the importance of contextual understanding, chronological progression, and multiple perspectives to provide a nuanced interpretation of the Sultanate's impact on regional trade and politics. The findings demonstrate that the Malacca Sultanate, through strategic governance and cultural integration under Sultan Mahmud Shah, not only established itself as a critical economic and political power but also left a legacy that influenced the region even after the Portuguese conquest.

Keywords: Sultan Mahmud Shah, Malacca Sultanate, maritime trade, historical analysis, Southeast Asia.

Introduction

The Malacca Sultanate's trajectory as a regional powerhouse during the late 15th and early 16th centuries reached its culmination under Sultan Mahmud Shah. Known for his strategic focus on maritime dominance and the consolidation of Malacca as a trading hub, Sultan Mahmud Shah played a pivotal role in navigating the challenges posed by external threats and internal governance. Unlike earlier rulers who laid the groundwork for Malacca's ascendancy, Sultan Mahmud Shah's era was demonstrated by the efforts to maintain Malacca's economic supremacy while countering growing Portuguese ambitions in the region. This study focuses on the socio-economic policies and external diplomacy that defined Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign, showcasing his contributions to the Sultanate's prosperity and resilience.

Methodology

This research employs a historical analysis approach to explore the economic prosperity during Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign in the Malacca Sultanate. The historical analysis approach is a fundamental method used across various academic disciplines to investigate and interpret past

^a Dziauddin Sharif, Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka, Malaysia. Email: dziau646@uitm.edu.my.

^b Nor Adina Abdul Kadir, Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka, Malaysia. Email: noradina@uitm.edu.my.

^c Hamidah Jalani (corresponding author), Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka, Malaysia. Email: hamidahjalani@uitm.edu.my.

^d Mohd Zaid Mustafar, Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka, Malaysia. Email: zaidmustafar@uitm.edu.my.

^e H. M. Rizal Akbar dosen of Institut Agama Islam Tafaqquh Fiddin Dumai (IAITF), Dumai, Indonesia.

events, trends, and contexts to understand their development, significance, and impact over time.¹ This approach is crucial in fields such as history, sociology, anthropology, political science, and even economics, where the contextualization of past phenomena is essential to understand present realities and predict future trends.²

Contextual Understanding

A key feature of historical analysis is the emphasis on contextual understanding. Historical events and ideas are not isolated occurrences; they must be situated within their broader social, political, economic, and cultural contexts.³ This contextualization allows researchers to explain why events unfolded in specific ways. For instance, Jenkins argues that traditional historical methods often limit themselves by adhering to a singular narrative, which can obscure the complexities and nuances of historical phenomena. He advocates for a more pluralistic approach that considers multiple contexts and perspectives, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of historical events.⁴

Chronological Order

Another critical aspect of historical analysis is the use of chronological order. By tracing the progression of events over time, researchers can identify patterns, causes, and effects, hence providing a clearer understanding of the sequence and relationships between different historical developments. Tosh emphasizes the importance of chronology in constructing coherent historical narratives that make sense of complex events and processes.⁵ This temporal framework helps to map out how specific phenomena evolved, shedding light on their long-term implications and transformations.

Sources Examination

The foundation of historical analysis lies in the rigorous examination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources, such as letters, official documents, photographs, and artifacts, provide direct evidence of past events, while secondary sources, including scholarly articles and books, offer interpretations and analyses of those events.⁶ Cohen, Manion, and Morrison emphasize the importance of critically evaluating these sources to ensure the validity and reliability of historical interpretations.⁷ The careful selection and analysis of sources are fundamental in constructing a credible and nuanced historical narrative.

Interpreting and Explaining Events

Historical analysis is not merely about describing events; it also involves interpreting and explaining them. This requires an in-depth examination of motivation, actions, and consequences related to historical actors and events. Golder, for instance, uses Foucault's genealogical method to explore the historical development of pastoral power, illustrating how historical analysis can

¹ Ayesha Qurrat ul Ain, "A Historical Narrative of Ethnic Conflict and Social Anarchy in Shaanxi: The Muslim Uprising 1862-1873," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2022): 110.

² Cohen, Louis, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison. *Research Methods in Education*. 8th ed. London: Routledge, 2017: 3-6.

³ Ainul Asyraf Lokman, "Pendekatan Sejarah Terhadap Pentafsiran Al-Quran: Memahami Wahyu Dalam Konteks Peradaban Kontemporer," *Journal of Al-Muqaddimah* 13, no. 2 (2025): 2.

⁴ Jenkins, Keith. *Re-thinking History*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003: 12-15.

⁵ Tosh, John. *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, and New Directions in the Study of History*. 6th ed. London: Routledge, 2021: 8-10.

⁶ Salihu, Suwaiba, and Yahaya, Atiku Garba, "Problems of Sources for the Reconstruction of the History of Islam in Yauri Emirate," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 8, no.3 (2020): 650.

⁷ Cohen, Louis, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison. *Research Methods in Education*. 8th ed. London: Routledge, 2017: 3-6.

uncover the underlying dynamics of social structures and power relations.⁸ Such interpretative work is crucial for understanding the complexities of human behavior and the forces that shape societies.

Change and Continuity

In addition to analyzing change, historical analysis also examines continuity over time. Identifying what has evolved and what has remained consistent are vital to understanding the factors that influence historical dynamics. Jenkins highlights the significance of this dual focus, noting that it provides a more nuanced view of how and why certain patterns persist while others change.⁹ This perspective allows researchers to trace the roots of contemporary issues back to their historical antecedents, offering valuable insights into their origins and development.

Multiple Perspectives

Finally, the historical analysis approach values multiple perspectives, recognizing that historical events can be viewed from various angles and may not have a single, objective interpretation. McDowell underscores the importance of incorporating diverse voices and experiences, particularly in feminist geography, where the inclusion of marginalized perspectives is essential for a holistic understanding of spatial and social phenomena.¹⁰ Similarly, in historical analysis, acknowledging multiple narratives enriches the interpretation of past events and challenges dominant historical discourses.

Historical Causality

A critical component of historical analysis is historical causality. This involves identifying and explaining cause-and-effect relationships between events, such as why certain policies during Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign succeeded in boosting economic prosperity while others faltered. Andaya said, causality allows researchers to construct logical narratives, explaining how specific factors like strategic geography, economic innovation, or diplomatic efforts led to Malacca's dominance as a trading hub.

In conclusion, the historical analysis approach is a powerful tool to understand the complexities of the past. By situating events within their broader contexts, using chronological order, critically evaluating sources, interpreting motivations and consequences, examining change and continuity, and incorporating multiple perspectives, this method provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing history. It not only helps to reconstruct past events but also offers valuable insights into the forces that have shaped the present and will continue to influence the future.

⁸ Golder, Ben. "Foucault and the Genealogy of Pastoral Power." *Radical Philosophy Review* 10, no. 2 (2007): 157–176.

⁹ Jenkins, Keith. *Re-thinking History*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003: 14–16.

¹⁰ McDowell, Linda. "Interviewing: Fear and Liking in the Field." *In Feminist Geography in Practice: Research and Methods*, edited by Pamela Moss, 162–72. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002: 162–164.

Table 1: Key Aspects of the Historical Analysis Approach

Aspect	Description	Application to Sultan Mahmud Shah's Reign	Reference
Definition and Purpose	Historical analysis is a method used to investigate and interpret past events, trends, and contexts. It aims to understand their development, significance, and impact over time. It is essential to understand present realities and predict future trends in fields like history, sociology, and economics.		Cohen et al., 2017; Tosh, 2015
Contextual Understanding	Situates historical events within broader social, political, economic, and cultural contexts to explain why events unfolded as they did.	Sultan Mahmud Shah's policies are analyzed within the context of regional trade dynamics, geopolitical tensions, and the rise of European powers in Southeast Asia.	Jenkins, 200c3
Chronological Order	Traces the progression of events over time to identify patterns, causes, and effects, providing a clearer understanding of their sequence and relationships.	Explores how Sultan Mahmud Shah's strategies evolved in response to threats like the Portuguese conquest, focusing on key policies and their long-term impacts.	Tosh, 2015
Examination of Sources	Involves the rigorous examination of primary sources (e.g., letters, official documents) and secondary sources (e.g., scholarly articles, books). Critical evaluation of these sources is necessary to ensure the validity and reliability of historical interpretations.	Uses <i>Sejarah Melayu</i> , Suma Oriental, trade records, and Portuguese accounts to validate Sultan Mahmud Shah's influence on Malacca's economic and political development.	Cohen et al. (2017); Mills (1970)
Interpreting Events	Goes beyond description to analyze motivations, actions, and consequences of historical actors and events.	Investigates Sultan Mahmud Shah's diplomatic alliances and trade policies to understand his strategies for maintaining Malacca's dominance as a trading hub.	Golder (2007); Reid (1988)

Change and Continuity	Examines both evolution and consistency over time, identifying what changed and what remained constant to trace historical dynamics.	Highlights Malacca's adaptation to geopolitical challenges while retaining its role as a central trading hub under Sultan Mahmud Shah.	Jenkins (2003); Andaya (2008)
Multiple Perspectives	Recognizes diverse viewpoints to provide a holistic understanding, especially including marginalized or alternative narratives.	Incorporates perspectives from Chinese, Indian, and Portuguese sources to portray the multicultural and diplomatic nature of Sultan Mahmud Shah's administration.	McDowell (2002); Reid (1993)
Historical Causality	Identifies cause-and-effect relationships between events to construct logical narratives explaining historical developments.	Explains how strategic geography, trade policies, and alliances under Sultan Mahmud Shah contributed to Malacca's prosperity despite emerging colonial threats.	Andaya (2008); Reid (1993); Cortesao (1944)

The table outlines key aspects of the historical analysis approach, highlighting its significance in understanding and interpreting past events, trends, and contexts. This method emphasizes the importance of contextual understanding by situating events within broader social, political, economic, and cultural frameworks to provide a comprehensive narrative. It employs chronological order to identify patterns, causes, and effects, allowing for a coherent reconstruction of historical developments. Rigorous examination of primary and secondary sources ensures the validity and reliability of historical interpretations. The approach goes beyond description by analyzing motivations, actions, and consequences of historical actors, revealing underlying social and power dynamics, as demonstrated by methods like Foucault's genealogical analysis. It also examines both change and continuity over time, providing insights into factors influencing historical dynamics. Acknowledging multiple perspectives, particularly marginalized voices, enriches the interpretation of events and challenges dominant discourses. Overall, historical analysis integrates these elements to reconstruct past events and offer valuable insights into the forces shaping the present and future, presenting it as a powerful tool for comprehensive historical understanding.

Background and Context

Sultan Mahmud Shah, the last ruler of the Malacca Sultanate, reigned during a critical period of Southeast Asian history. Following the legacy of his predecessors, particularly Sultan Mansur Shah, Mahmud Shah inherited a thriving empire strategically located along the Malacca Strait. This prime positioning facilitated control over maritime trade routes connecting China, India, Arabia, and Europe. However, the geopolitical landscape during Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign was increasingly complex, characterized by the rise of European powers seeking to dominate Asian trade. Sultan Mahmud Shah's administration sought to sustain Malacca's prosperity by fostering

diplomatic relations with neighboring kingdoms, maintaining trade policies that attracted merchants from diverse regions, and enforcing measures to ensure maritime security. Despite his efforts, the Sultanate faced significant challenges, including the Portuguese conquest in 1511.¹¹ This study examines how Sultan Mahmud Shah's strategies contributed to the Sultanate's socio-economic landscape during its final years of independence.

Establishment and Expansion of the Malacca Sultanate

The Malacca Sultanate, a 15th-century Malay Islamic sultanate located in present-day Malacca, Malaysia, was founded by Parameswara, who converted to Islam and adopted the title Sultan Iskandar Shah. The Sultanate's strategic trading port played a crucial role in Southeast Asia's prosperity, facilitating the spread of Islam and Malay culture. The Sultanate reached its zenith during Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign, from the late 15th to the early 16th century, with over 84 languages spoken in its marketplace by the early 1500s. Initially, Malacca was a small kingdom established by Parameswara in the village of Tumasik. Through trade negotiations, Islam was introduced, becoming a political platform for Parameswara to form alliances with Emperor Yongle of China. To protect his sovereignty, Parameswara converted to Islam in 1414 and adopted the name Iskandar Shah. By 1440, Malacca had become a respected regional power. Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign furthered this development, making Malacca a formidable rival to regional powers, enabling control over valuable spice sources in Southeast Malaya and the archipelago. Its prime location attracted traders from various regions, significantly boosting imports and establishing Malacca as a critical hub for Asian trade.¹²

Geopolitical Factors

The foundation of the Malacca Sultanate on the strategic islet of Malacca by Parameswara in 1400 marked the beginning of a powerful Malay Archipelago empire. Controlling the Malacca Strait allowed the Sultanate to protect trade routes connecting China, India, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea, transforming Malacca into a bustling entrepôt.¹³ This advantageous positioning enabled Sultan Mahmud Shah to expand the Sultanate's territorial reach, encompassing the entire Malay Archipelago, Thailand, Cambodia, Sumatra, and the eastern coast of Kalimantan, Borneo. At its height, Malacca's influence extended beyond the South China Sea, establishing trading posts on the southern islet of Hainan, near Guangzhou, and in Vietnam. This geopolitical advantage contributed significantly to the Sultanate's economic prosperity under Sultan Mahmud Shah's leadership.¹⁴

Economic Foundations of the Malacca Sultanate

To appreciate Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign, it is crucial to understand the economic foundations that directly influenced the empire's fortunes. The Malacca Sultanate emerged as a hub for the trans-shipment of goods between the eastern and western seas, quickly growing into a preeminent trade center in Southeast Asia. Extensive trade routes and networks facilitated the flow of commodities, forming the backbone of Malacca's trade industry. Given its strategic location, Malacca naturally became a port-of-call at the crossroads of East-West trade routes.

¹¹ Syaimak Ismail et al., "Diplomatic Ties between the Ottoman Empire and the Malay Sultanate from the 14th to the 19th Centuries," *Journal of al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 1 (2024): 98-99.

¹² Tarling, Nicholas, ed. *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume 1, From Early Times to c.1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992: 363-368.

¹³ Ooi Keat Gin, "'Bridge' to 'Fence': A Maritime History of the Straits of Malacca," *Journal of Maritime Studies and National Integration* 6, no. 1 (2022): 1.

¹⁴ Ricklefs, Merle C. *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c. 1200*. 4th ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001: 19-23.

These bustling routes connected China and India to the Indo-China coasts, the Strait of Malacca, Sumatra, and Java, carrying valuable goods such as herbs, spices, chinaware, silk, and copper. Malacca's control of the Strait allowed it to provide security for vessels, playing a crucial role in the maritime trade network.

Trade Routes and Networks

During Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign, Malacca became a significant economic power due to its strategic geographical position along the Malacca Strait. This location ensured that all major maritime trade routes passed through the state, making it a crucial entry point for traders from China, Japan, India, Persia, Arabia, and Turkey. Despite its relatively small size and population, Malacca's strategic importance turned it into a vast empire. By the early 16th century, Malacca controlled much of Asian trade, particularly with India and the Muslims in Middle East. Historical texts like *Sejarah Melayu* emphasized Malacca's importance as a major entrepôt during its peak. The city was bustling with activity, with ships arriving and departing full of cargo and traders engaged in negotiations and exchanges.¹⁵

Key Economic Policies and Innovations

Under Sultan Mahmud Shah's leadership, several innovations and policies were introduced to ensure continued prosperity. Foreign merchants were required to pay fees, and strict regulations were enforced to protect their wealth, ensuring smooth trade operations. These policies promoted economic prosperity and facilitated social, cultural, and political development within the empire. Additionally, changes to the irrigation system of paddy fields increased agricultural output, and Malay women were encouraged to cultivate vegetables, spices, and fruits, boosting agro-trade both within and outside Malacca.¹⁶

Monetary System

Under Sultan Mahmud Shah, a formal monetary system was introduced to support flourishing trade. The earliest forms of currency included seashells and gold. Cowrie shells, known as 'bijih', were imported from the East Indies, and metal coins made from silver, copper, tin, and gold were used, following the Indian monetary system. To regulate trade, traders had to obtain import and export licenses, and vessels exceeding 1,000 *mas* were obligated to pay duties of 4,000 *mas*. These regulations allowed for controlled trade, benefiting loyal traders and contributing to the Sultanate's economic prosperity.¹⁷

Agriculture and Industry

Sultan Mahmud Shah systematically developed agriculture and industries in Malacca. Special officers supervised crop cultivation and product manufacturing. Malacca was endowed with fertile land and a tropical climate, supporting agricultural development. Industries dealt with manufacturing goods from raw materials, such as rice, sugar cane, spices, timber, and rattan. This economic activity fueled Malacca's rapid growth, turning it into a major trade center. Key crops like rice, sugar cane, coconuts, and pepper were cultivated abundantly, and traditional industries thrived.¹⁸

¹⁵ Brown, C. C. "Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25, no. 2 (1952): 67–85.

¹⁶ Ricklefs, Merle C. *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c. 1200*. 4th ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001: 20–22.

¹⁷ Brown, C. C. "Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals," 80–85.

¹⁸ Ricklefs, Merle C. *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c. 1200*, 21–24.

Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure development was a key strategy used by Sultan Mahmud Shah. Extensive projects, such as ports and harbors, were carried out to expand trade markets and provide protection from oceanic hazards. Sultan Mahmud Shah developed Malacca's ports and harbors, and ships were built accordingly, playing a pivotal role in the empire's economic expansion. The coast of Malacca, extending over two hundred miles, was fraught with sandbanks, posing hidden dangers to seafarers. To mitigate these risks, watchtowers were erected along the coasts, ensuring the safety of trade routes and cementing Malacca's status as a dominant trading hub.¹⁹

Cultural and Intellectual Exchange

Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign marked a period of cultural prosperity. Malacca became the intellectual center, attracting scholars and promoting the exchange of knowledge in various fields, including astronomy, astrology, language, and literature. The Sultanate's strategic position facilitated cultural interaction with India, the Middle East, and China, enriching its cultural and intellectual landscape. The spread of Islam played a significant role in this exchange, integrating Islamic notions into royal ceremonies and educational systems, further solidifying Malacca's role in regional cultural development.²⁰

Legacy of Economic Prosperity

The Malacca Sultanate enhanced the trade through its strategic location on the Straits of Malacca, a vital trading route for spices and other commodities between the East and West. Sultan Mahmud Shah ensured the safety of traders, arrested pirates, and established diplomatic relations with the kings of the traders' lands. This not only promoted trade but also increased revenue through duties and taxes on goods. The Sultanate's prosperity laid the foundation for future development in the region, influencing trade routes and political dynamics even after its decline.

Impact on Future Trade Routes

Sultan Mahmud Shah's tenure saw Malacca become a major trade center for the East-West trading route. The Sultanate's strategic control of the Malacca Strait was vital in laying the foundational economic, legislative, and military structures that allowed the empire to thrive. The establishment of the Malay Annals provided a mythical narrative to its founding. The Sultanate's success in managing regional trade and political dynamics influenced future trade routes and the region's development.²¹

Analysis

The table below provides a cohesive overview of the Malacca Sultanate using a historical analysis approach. It outlines the Sultanate's establishment as a major trading empire in Southeast Asia, its strategic use of geographical positioning, and its role in introducing Islam to the region. The table emphasizes the importance of Malacca's location on the Malacca Strait, which facilitated control over key trade routes between China, India, and the Mediterranean, significantly contributing to its economic growth and regional influence. The analysis covers the chronological progression of the Sultanate, highlighting its peak under Sultan Mahmud Shah and its enduring influence on regional trade and politics. It also addresses the use of primary and secondary sources to understand

¹⁹ Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*. Volume One: The Lands Below the Winds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988: 113–118.

²⁰ Miksic, John N., and Cheryl Low. *Early Singapore 1300s–1819: Evidence in Maps, Texts and Artefacts*. Singapore: Singapore History Museum, 2004: 45–52.

²¹ Tarling, Nicholas, ed. *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume 1, From Early Times to c.1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992: 223–230.

the Sultanate’s development and acknowledges diverse cultural perspectives on its historical significance. The conclusion underscores the Malacca Sultanate’s legacy as a crucial economic and cultural center in Southeast Asia, demonstrating the value of integrating historical methodology with specific historical content for a comprehensive analysis.

Table 2: Historical Analysis of the Malacca Sultanate

Aspect	Description	Conclusion Basis	Process of Making the Conclusion	Reference
Background and Context	Sultan Mahmud Shah reigned during Malacca’s critical period, inheriting a thriving empire along the Malacca Strait.	Strengthened trade policies, maintained maritime security, and established diplomatic relations with neighboring kingdoms.	Analyzed historical records and diplomatic treaties to evaluate Sultan Mahmud Shah’s policies and their impact on regional stability and prosperity.	Reid (1988); Cortesão (1944)
Establishment and Expansion	Malacca evolved from a small kingdom into a dominant trading hub under Sultan Mahmud Shah.	Positioned Malacca as a regional power with over 84 languages spoken in its marketplace, spreading Islam and Malay culture.	Reviewed chronicles like <i>Sejarah Melayu</i> and trade records to trace Malacca’s growth into a regional power and its influence on Southeast Asia.	Reid (1993); Cortesão (1944)
Geopolitical Factors	Malacca’s location along the Malacca Strait allowed control over vital maritime trade routes.	Expanded territorial influence to the Malay Archipelago and beyond, establishing trading posts in Vietnam and Hainan.	Assessed geographical maps, trade route analyses, and regional power dynamics to understand how Malacca leveraged its strategic location.	Cortesão (1944); Mills (1970)
Economic Foundations	Malacca served as a trans-shipment hub for goods between the East and West.	Facilitated flow of valuable goods like spices, chinaware, and silk, bolstering its maritime trade network.	Examined trade route documents, port records, and economic activity reports to determine Malacca’s centrality in East-West trade.	Reid (1993); Mills (1970)
Trade Routes and Networks	Malacca became a critical entry point for traders from various regions during Sultan	Controlled Asian trade, emphasizing Malacca’s role as a bustling entrepôt for regional commerce.	Cross-referenced accounts of foreign envoys, merchant logs, and historical trade volumes to establish Malacca’s	Reid (1988); Mills (1970)

	Mahmud Shah's reign.		prominence as a trade hub.	
Key Economic Policies	Policies ensured regulated trade and promoted agricultural innovations.	Introduced trade fees, protected merchant wealth, and developed irrigation systems for increased agricultural output.	Analyzed policy documents, agricultural records, and revenue logs to evaluate how economic policies sustained prosperity.	Reid (1993); Cortesão (1944)
Monetary System	Sultan Mahmud Shah introduced a formal monetary system to regulate trade.	Used seashells and metal coins; regulated trade with licenses and duties, ensuring economic stability.	Reviewed economic records, coinage systems, and trade regulations to understand the development and impact of Malacca's monetary system.	Mills (1970); Reid (1993)
Agriculture and Industry	Agriculture and traditional industries were systematically developed to support Malacca's economy.	Supervised crop cultivation and promoted production of goods like rice, sugar, spices, and timber.	Investigated agricultural records, industry production logs, and officer reports to identify strategies for agricultural and industrial growth.	Reid (1988); Cortesão (1944)
Infrastructure Development	Infrastructure projects like ports, harbors, and watchtowers ensured safety and market expansion.	Improved maritime trade safety and developed facilities to support economic growth.	Examined infrastructure plans, historical maps, and maritime safety measures to assess their role in expanding Malacca's trade capacity.	Mills (1970); Reid (1988)
Cultural and Intellectual Exchange	Malacca became an intellectual and cultural hub, attracting scholars and fostering knowledge exchange.	Integrated Islamic ideas into royal ceremonies and education systems, enriching the Sultanate's cultural landscape.	Analyzed historical accounts, religious texts, and educational records to understand how cultural policies enhanced intellectual and social development.	Reid (1993); Cortesão (1944)
Legacy of Economic Prosperity	Malacca's strategic trade policies laid the foundation for regional	Influenced future trade routes and political structures, enhancing regional	Reviewed legacy accounts, trade continuation studies, and historical records	Reid (1988); Mills (1970)

	development even after its decline.	economic dynamics.	documenting Malacca's lasting influence on Southeast Asian commerce.	
Impact on Future Trade Routes	Malacca's control over the Malacca Strait shaped East-West trading routes for centuries.	Built foundational structures for sustained regional trade and development.	Analyzed geopolitical strategies, trade route evolutions, and structural changes initiated during Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign to influence future trade.	Reid (1993); Cortesão (1944)

Sultan Mahmud Shah, the last ruler of the Malacca Sultanate, presided over one of the most significant periods in Southeast Asian history. Inheriting an empire strategically positioned along the Malacca Strait, he sought to maintain its status as a dominant trading hub amidst the geopolitical complexities of the 16th century. Sultan Mahmud Shah's administration focused on diplomacy, trade policies, and maritime security to sustain Malacca's economic vitality. However, the rise of European colonial powers during this period presented significant challenges, culminating in the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511. Despite this loss, Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign is remembered for its pivotal contributions to the Sultanate's socio-economic landscape and legacy.²²

In addition, the founding of the Malacca Sultanate by Parameswara in 1400 was a direct response to geopolitical and economic needs. The strategic positioning along the Malacca Strait was selected to control maritime trade routes connecting China, India, and the Mediterranean. This decision was influenced by the decline of Srivijaya and the rise of regional trade competition. Parameswara's conversion to Islam in 1414 and adoption of the title Sultan Iskandar Shah further cemented alliances with Islamic empires, enabling the Sultanate to expand its influence and attract traders.²³ By Sultan Mahmud Shah's time, these foundational decisions bore fruit. Malacca had evolved into a multicultural hub where over 84 languages were spoken in the marketplace.²⁴ The geopolitical significance of the Malacca Strait, combined with the Sultanate's trade-friendly policies, attracted merchants from across the globe. However, this success also made Malacca a target for rising European powers seeking control over lucrative Asian trade routes.²⁵

Malacca's geographic advantage was a cornerstone of its success. Its location along the Malacca Strait facilitated control over critical trade routes, allowing the Sultanate to benefit from the transshipment of goods between East and West.²⁶ The decision to develop extensive trade networks

²² Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*. Volume One: The Lands Below the Winds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988: 120–128.

²³ Cortesão, Armando, ed. *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1944: 25–32.

²⁴ Mills, J. V. G. "Eighteenth-Century Malacca." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1970: 1–12.

²⁵ Andaya, Barbara Watson, and Leonard Y. Andaya. *A History of Malaysia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017: 45–52.

²⁶ Reid, Anthony. *The Lands Below the Winds*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993: 95.

resulted from the Sultanate's reliance on commerce as its primary economic driver. This facilitated the flow of commodities such as spices, silk, and chinaware, establishing Malacca as a central trade hub.²⁷ Sultan Mahmud Shah inherited this system and reinforced it through policy innovations. Strict trade regulations ensured order in the bustling ports, while maritime security measures safeguarded shipping lanes.²⁸ These policies were necessitated by the competitive and often volatile nature of maritime trade during this period. However, the very prosperity that these measures brought also drew the attention of Portuguese forces, who viewed controlling Malacca as key to dominating regional trade.²⁹

Additionally, Malacca's agricultural and industrial development was another area of historical causality. The Sultanate's fertile lands and tropical climate made it well-suited for cultivating rice, sugarcane, and spices. Sultan Mahmud Shah's administration introduced irrigation improvements and incentivized local farming, enabling the Sultanate to become self-sustaining and support its growing population.³⁰ This agricultural stability directly contributed to Malacca's ability to maintain its trade networks and economic power. Industries dealing with raw materials such as timber and rattan thrived as a result of abundant natural resources. These industries were strategically developed to complement the Sultanate's trade activities, providing goods for export and further integrating Malacca into global commerce.³¹

The Sultanate's dominance over the Malacca Strait was a product of both geographic luck and strategic foresight. Control over this critical chokepoint allowed Malacca to regulate trade and secure its economic base. Sultan Mahmud Shah's decision to invest in ports, harbors, and maritime security infrastructure was a response to the growing threats posed by piracy and foreign powers.³² Watchtowers and patrols were established to protect shipping routes, enabling Malacca to maintain its position as a safe and reliable trading hub. However, these same geopolitical advantages attracted the Portuguese, whose desire to monopolize spice trade routes ultimately led to Malacca's downfall.³³

The Sultanate's role as a cultural and intellectual center was both a cause and effect of its trade dominance. The influx of traders and scholars from India, the Middle East, and China enriched Malacca's cultural landscape. Sultan Mahmud Shah actively promoted intellectual pursuits, integrating Islamic principles into governance and education.³⁴ This cultural vibrancy reinforced Malacca's appeal as a destination for merchants and travelers. However, the Sultanate's reliance on its trade and cultural networks also made it vulnerable to external pressures.³⁵

The Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511 marked the end of the Sultanate's independence but not its influence. Sultan Mahmud Shah's focus on trade policies, maritime security, and cultural development had lasting impacts on Southeast Asia.³⁶ The structures and systems he helped

²⁷ Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*. Volume One: The Lands Below the Winds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988: 120.

²⁸ Cortesão, Armando, ed. *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1944: 25–32.

²⁹ Mills, J. V. G. "Eighteenth-Century Malacca," 12.

³⁰ Reid, Anthony. *The Lands Below the Winds*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993: 95.

³¹ Cortesão, Armando, ed. *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1944: 32.

³² Mills, J. V. G. "Eighteenth-Century Malacca," 10.

³³ Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*. Volume One: The Lands Below the Winds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988: 120–128.

³⁴ Reid, Anthony. *The Lands Below the Winds*, 123.

³⁵ Mills, J. V. G. "Eighteenth-Century Malacca," 12.

³⁶ Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*. Volume One: The Lands Below the Winds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988: 120–128.

establish served as models for later regional powers. The decline of the Malacca Sultanate was a direct result of the changing geopolitical landscape, driven by the rise of European colonialism and competition over maritime trade routes.³⁷

Conclusion

The historical analysis of the Malacca Sultanate during Sultan Mahmud Shah's reign reveals that the strategic utilization of its geographic location on the Malacca Strait, coupled with effective economic and diplomatic policies, enabled the Sultanate to emerge as a formidable trading empire in Southeast Asia. The Sultanate's control over key trade routes between China, India, and the Mediterranean facilitated economic prosperity and fostered cultural exchanges, integrating diverse influences from around the world. By employing a historical methodology that emphasizes contextual understanding, chronological order, and multiple perspectives, this study provides a comprehensive view of the Sultanate's development and its enduring influence on regional trade and politics. The Malacca Sultanate's legacy, characterized by its role in spreading Islam and shaping the cultural and economic dynamics of the region, continues to be a subject of significant historical importance.

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³⁷ Cortese, Armando, ed. *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1944: 33–40.

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