

# *The Sulu Sultanate: Foreign Relations, Contacts and Collaboration with other Asian Kingdoms<sup>1</sup>*

Michael Vincent P. Caceres

Zamboanga State College of Marine Sciences and Technology, Philippines

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the importance of founding the sultanate which served as a significant instrument for the propagation of Islam, trade and cultural development in the Philippines. It explores the sultanates' relationship with traders, missionaries and dwellers from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, as well as the Hindu, Arabs and Chinese which shows the vitality of this far and away kingdom—the Sultanate of Sulu. The paper argues that while it remains as a debate whether or not Sulu and its sultanate was in a direct line of communication with the other kingdoms of the Old World, what is certain is that it was not totally isolated on matters pertaining to trade, missionary activities and politics particularly in the fourteenth century.

**KEYWORDS:** Datu, sultan, kutbah, slavery, Sulu sultanate

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## **Pre-Sultanate Society: Early Social Classes and Community**

Understanding the founding of Sulu Sultanate is a matter of understanding the social classes from the age of its conception. In Sulu genealogy, before the sultanate was established, the recognized leaders in the area around Buansa are composed of *datu*s, *tuans*, *sheikhs* and *orangkayas*. The datu was considered to have the highest political stature, followed by the tuan. The sheikh was a religious personage while the orangkaya was a commoner of means (Majul 1999, 378). This political hierarchy also reflected the social classes at that time.

The first class refers to datu, such as the descendants of Raja Sipad and Tuan Mashai'ka; the second class refers to the *sayk* ("shiek" in Arabic); and the third class includes orangkaya such as the Baklaya chiefs. According to Salleby (1963), the datu and orangkaya are considered to be of Malay origin, while *Raja* and *Baguinda* (Baginda) are Sanskrit. Baginda (as highest) was also referred to an emperor, while Raja to king.

In pre-sultanate times, Muslim merchants played a pivotal role in the success of Islamic penetration in Sulu. They established close relationships with the chiefs who had absolute authority over their followers. The latter obeyed whatever pleased their masters including conversion to Islam. These prompted the growth of larger communities in Sulu and the Manila Bay area. Trade contacts with the Asian neighbors further developed in the fifteenth and the mid-sixteenth centuries (Jocano 2001, 151) including those in Butuan, Panay, Cebu, Leyte, Manila, Bicol, Laguna Lake, and Pangasinan. Following the growth of barangays in the sixteenth century, Islamic conversion eventually reached Maguindanao. Consequently, territories that were influenced by Islamic teachings and practices were formed under one political system—the Sultanate of Sulu.<sup>2</sup>

### Formation of the Sultanate and the Introduction of Islam

Early scholars of Islam believed that Prophet Mohammad is said to be the first Sultan in Mecca and regarded as a messenger of God. This belief has become part of Islamic tradition, which also holds the belief that the sultan is God's representative on earth—a direct patrilineal descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. The sultan is believed to be the replacement of the prophet—a belief held by all countries under the sultanate system. As sultan, his behavior should ideally live up to the standards expected of a prophet (Kiefer 2003), who, as *nabi*, is God's messenger. Accordingly, everyone must be submissive to the sultan who inherits his power from God through Prophet Mohammad. Hence, the latter is considered as the first sultan based on religious context.

The word "sultan," believed to have been first used in the Ottoman Empire, originated from the Arabic word which signifies power, ruler, or a person with authority over a given territory or dominion. The word "sultanate" refers to the institution or domain ruled by the sultan. Later, the idea of sultanate found itself in the eastern part of Southeast Asia such as Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In the case of the Philippines, various sultanate kingdoms were formed in Mindanao, one of which was the Sultanate of Sulu.

The discovery of Tarsila, (or *Sarsilah*, *Salsilah*), associated with the Arabic word *Silsilah*, meaning chain or linkages, is an important source for the study of the Sulu Sultanate. It is the only primary written material pertaining entirely to the history of the Muslims of Mindanao or the Sultanate in particular, before the arrival of Spanish missionaries in Sulu (Salleby 1963). It provides for example, the *genealogical account* of royal family members of the Sultanate of Sulu. The Sulu genealogy shows the list of sultans of Sulu where the linkage between one sultan and another can be gleaned. As such, all succeeding sultans descended from the first.

The founding of Islam in Sulu contributed to the rise of the Sulu Sultanate. Without the Islamic religion, it would not have been possible for the sultanate to develop as an institution and as a system. The political basis of the sultanate follows the religious dogmas of Islam since the head of the sultanate is also the head of the Islamic religion in his dominion. All political, social and religious powers vested on the sultan are all covered in accordance with the Islamic law. The power and influence of the sultanate—be it political, trading and social—penetrated Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, China and as far as Saudi Arabia, and later, Britain, France, the Netherlands and Germany. At some point when the sultanate reached its political and economic vitality, it transformed Sulu as one of the most elegant kingdoms in Southeast Asia.

The expansion of the sultanate started along the coasts of Mindanao, spreading into some areas of the Visayas and Luzon (including Palawan). Consequently, Islam spread to other kingdoms in Luzon, as well as in Balayan, Bonbon, Cebu, Oton, and Mindoro. The tribes that accepted Islam were those from the Palawan group of islands and mainland Mindanao.

The ideology of the sultanate was based upon the Tausug understanding of Islamic political ideas unique to its own culture, and upon the conceptions of state and kingship common to Southeast Asia as these had filtered through Malay influence (Kiefer 2003, 12). The sultanate, then, is a form of government for the Tausug, who adheres to the law and worship God as an *ibadat* (in Arabic, *ibadat*, meaning duty of worship), in recognition of God's authority (Kiefer 2003, 13). For all Islamic believers, it is necessary to practice *ibadat*—a way of submission to Allah. Because the sultan is considered as a representation of God's authority, to be submissive to God requires that one must also be submissive to the sultan.

The Sulu chiefs were given the title *Paduka Batara*, which was based on the Ming Annals.<sup>4</sup> As part of the divine authority of the sultan, the title *Maulana* signifies that the first ruler was part of the religious hierarchy (Majul 1999, 378). The sultan constitutes part of *dar ul-Islam*. As a sultan, he shall take command in times of war or invasion, and protect his kingdom at all cost.

It was believed that without the sultan there could have been no community, nor system nor a Muslim to acknowledge God. It was the sultan who served not just as a political symbol but also as religious icon at that time. In the same way that every Muslim gives importance to God, s/he must acknowledge the sultan accordingly.

The political organization in Sulu was mainly represented by the *barangay* system based on kinship, with each *barangay* operating independently of each other and where *barangay* chiefs were under the jurisdiction of the paramount chief (Jimenez 2004).<sup>3</sup> The sultan resides either in Maimbung, Patikul or in Dungon in Tawi-Tawi where he controlled all the *datu*s.

The Muslims who settled in the various islands came to Jolo not only for trade but also for Islamic learning, an indication that the people of Sulu finally embraced Islam as a monotheistic religion.

### The Sultan and His Powers

The sultan was considered as “the mother-father of all the people. He would care for all his subjects who are considered his children to be treated equally (sic)” (Tan 2005, 47).<sup>5</sup> The sultan, therefore, exercised an almost absolute power over his subjects in all aspects of life as expressed in such specific terms as *huduldullah* (punishment imposed), *piagdatuan* (area of jurisdiction), *addat sarah* (customary law), *sapda sin nabi* (the prophet seal on him), *lambung sin Tuhan* (the shadow of God), and *ha lupah piagdatuan niya* (in the land he rules) (Tan 2005, 47).

On the other hand, it was also believed that the sultan was just a *datu*, like all the rest; however, he holds certain power to maintain order in his territory. Among other powers that he possessed, he had jurisdiction over domestic quarrels such as divorce, marriages, guardianship, dead man's estate and crimes.

It was also widely practiced that the public would kiss the hand of the sultan as a way of showing homage or respect. Kissing his hand was a form of acknowledging the presence of the *nabi* or prophet. “It is obligatory for the sultan to nurture the people who know the *Koran* (*Kor'an/ Quar'an*) and who know the customary law” (Tan 2005, 47). The sultan was, therefore, recognized as an *alim* or a religious leader.

The sultan had the religious power called *barakat* (charismatic grace), “his words and his commands (*tita*) ascended to the heaven where they would be heard by the dead as well as the living” (Kiefer 2003, 14). This took the form of giving blessings and graces received from God. In which case, the sultan played the role of a messenger, or a substitute of Prophet Muhammad.

During Friday's prayer, the *imam* (Muslim priest) would offer a prayer for the sultan. This prayer was included in *Kutba*, which was part of the Friday's ritual of worship. The written *Kutbah's* (or *Kutba*) of the *imam* was an important source of information in understanding the life and history of the earliest sultans in Sulu.

In accordance with the divine mandate, the sultan could not give or turn over the sovereignty of his territory: “No transfer or surrender of sovereignty

was possible from the Sultan to colonial power, except, to another Muslim” (Tan 2005, xxxiv).

All conversations or communications must pass to the *Julbahasa* or the interpreters commonly known as speakers before they reach the sultan. The sultan would be so inaccessible he would not even eat with the commoners (Kiefer 2003, 15-16).

In matters of protocol, it is the *quadi* who is tasked to carry the royal headgear and regalia. He would then approach and give these symbols of power to the sultan so that the latter could put them on. The *Datu Bendahara* would then proclaim the sultan but not without some prayers being said first by the *quadi* (Majul 1999, 394).

When the sultan would travel or perform state visit, he would do so by boat or on horseback. The sultan was escorted by an entourage of followers (*tindug*) covered by umbrellas. With him were “four bodyguards (*munari mukahil*) who normally stood next to the sultan in audience. They accompanied him on trips in complete fighting gear, including chain armor, guns, and swords. Ideally, they were younger datus who had houses near the palace” (Kiefer 2003, 16). Male slaves were evident in the palace of the sultan to ensure efficiency of serving him and the immediate members of his family.

The first wife (*asawa puun*) of the sultan was considered higher than the others, and ideally took the position as the headmistress of the house next to the sultan. She took care of the internal affairs of the house including the hosting of special ceremonies. Interestingly, many of the sultan’s concubines (*sandal*) were debt slaves; others were regular slaves who had been given to the sultan (Kiefer 2003, 16).

Samuel Tan (2005, 48) writes:

The sultan is free to give honor to anyone, even the small person, if his character and conduct exceed that of a big person; his conscience is always good and worthy emulation. It is proper that he should be included in any affair and be given respect because it is the will of God to express in the Koran *wa padhal na, bah dahum, ala’ pa din da rajat*. It means we shall increase half of what they are from half of what we are. That is why the Sultan can interpret the customary law *pa-alun limayasa* in the community he rules.

The actions and power of the sultan were basically guided by Islamic principles. The *imam muwallam halipa* was the highest religious title in the state commonly recognized by the sultanate—equivalent to the high priest. The same title was thought to be possessed by the sultan. He was considered as “the Caliphal representative within the community over which he ruled to establish the judgment of the Islamic religion and rightfully the one to govern according to customary law, all his subjects” (Tan 2005, 48). Pardoning was one of the special religious elements of the sultan. As such, he was providing a second chance to his subjects who committed sinful acts. It is a way of portraying God as forgiving.

The sultan has his local headmen appointed to the three lower ranks of the religious hierarchy: *Bilal*, *hatib*, and imam.

There was also the so-called regional or community headman that may be viewed as a petty sultan in his own domain. For some scholars, he is equivalent to a lesser sultan, while the real sultan was recognized as a powerful headman.

There was an important group of aristocrats serving as an advisory council of the sultan called the *wajil* or *wajir* (*wazier*). The *wajil* and the influential datus comprised the advisory assembly called the *Duma Bichara* (*Ruma Bichara*) or the house of speech. They literally spoke about potential problems, issues and suggestions including persuading both the sultan and other members of the *Duma Bichara* (Kiefer 2003, 16). The *Ruma Bichara*, the highest state council that was composed of the most powerful royal datus, had its share in the taxes imposed on all vessels trading in Jolo. There were the so-called *ulama* who supported the sultan for the centralization of power in order to ensure that political and military affairs were in good shape. The selection or election for the succession of the sultanate was participated by the *Ruma Bichara*, the *sharifs*, *panglimas*, chiefs of the interior of Jolo, and the most prestigious orangkayas (Majul 1999, 392).

*Sara’* (*shari’a* in Arabic) refers to laws, rules and regulations under the influence of the sultanate. This may refer to a law as a body of legal rules; it may also refer to the officials who enforced the law.

According to Tan (2005), “[i]t is obligatory for the sultan to order towards the attainment of good, to prevent the work of evil because it is the will of the prophet from the command of God *wah mulbil ma’ru wan ha ani munkal*

*was bilalama asabaka in na dalika la min hadz mil umul* which means ‘you order to do what is good oh! Muhammad and the omission of what is bad and submit to anything that happens to you.’”

With this power vested upon the sultan, he could command his subjects for the benefit of the entire populace under his jurisdiction. Grievances may be brought to the local headman or any other official. But it was the role of the sultan to mediate if internal feuding could no longer be resolved by a local headman. This indicated that the sultan was given the authority to decide on cases pertaining to his subjects within his dominion.

“The Sultan is the receiver of all his subjects’ concerns including all their business affairs from whatever origins and to take care of them so that they will not be hurt by people” (Tan 2005, 49). It is, therefore, accepted that public properties shall be under his jurisdiction as well.

Meanwhile, the financial resources of the sultanate may come in the form of *baytal-mal*, *sarakka*, piracy-slavery and trading. These are the various elements that in most cases supported the internal revenues of the sultanate. As in any other institutions or kingdoms, the sultanate would not survive without financial resources that are used to maintain order and implement policies and functions.

Baytal-mal refers to certain percentages on various fines such as bride wealth payment and divorce fees which were collected by the official in charge of the case. Normally, one-half of these fines and fees would be kept by the local headman, and the other half would either be given directly to the sultan or to a higher headman, who in turn would give a portion to the sultan. “Officials were not required to keep a record of fines, and there was no way for the sultan to know if his subordinates were cheating him or not” (Kiefer 2003, 24).

Additionally, the sultan’s religious status gave him the right and opportunity to receive gifts as a *sarakka* (voluntary alms). This may be in the form of money, food, cloth, gold or any other objects of great value (Kiefer 2003, 24).

The sultan is free to do anything he wishes for the community where he rules and even up to the outlying islands that recognize his sovereignty. Nobody can oppose him because he is conferred by the prophet as *asultano jullanda fiardi*, meaning that the sultan is the Shadow of God in the land that he rules (Tan 2005, 50).

The territories of the sultanate did not have well-defined boundaries. While its sovereignty was recognized beyond its boundaries, it was done only in relation to a center. This means that the power of the sultan was strong in the inner parts of Sulu and gradually decreased in farther places. The farther the place, the lesser was the chance for the power and influence of the sultan to be felt. In Basilan, for instance, it was mainly symbolic, and the Yakans recognized his authority insofar as they felt it vital to maintain their self-image as Muslims. His political power extended as far as North Borneo, Zamboanga, and coastal Basilan (Kiefer 2003, 27). However, such power was said to be symbolic in nature and did not provide a direct effect on the people.

The sultan held the right as the owner of all lands, extending to other lands according to the sound of his gong as he traveled. He was the direct owner, or the *tagamustak*, of all the lands around the capital.

The founding of the sultanate signifies that the royalty was as influential as the rest of its Southeast Asian counterparts. The sultan did not govern defined territories or population. Instead, he “exercised power based on individual ties with local leaders who, in turn, exercised power in similar but smaller segments of the Sultanate” (Salman 2001, 61). The sultan had charismatic charm that would attract members of his community in order to maintain power and prestige. Politicking was already evident at this point in time—from members of the royal family down to ordinary individuals, as their status would certainly affect their economic enterprise.

The sultan was then accepted as the supreme ruler of the land next to God as he makes the final decision, be it in the fields of politics, civil economics and civic affairs or on moral virtues.

### **Slavery, Trading, and Taxes in the Sultanate**

The presence of slavery in the sultanate was said to be more of political than of religious obligation. It was institutionalized by the sultanate as part of its formative years. Its presence was somehow supported by various sultans because of its beneficial effects to maintain the latter’s supremacy.

Islamic scholars argue that the acceptance of Islam is an acceptance of slavery as provided by the Islamic law, the *Sharia' ah*. Slavery was recognized but on a very strict condition. Fatawa Islamiyah (2002, 5 & 97) states: "...[T]hat the basis of slavery is only through prisoners-of-war or captives obtained when fighting jihad against the disbelievers." However, it was also evident at that time that slavery was already institutionalized in other parts of Southeast Asia, including those in Europe. Slaves were either captives from war, or bought from slave market, from debts, and those convicted of crimes. Slave raids and slavery, including piracy, were practiced by various ethnic groups from the south. Unsurprisingly, they were also evident among Hindu kingdoms in Luzon and the Visayas, as part of the natural order of the social structure.

The practice of slavery and trading provided gigantic opportunity for the sultanate to maintain its operations. Slavery provided human power for various commercial marine centers. Slaves were sold as human capital and women were particularly used as offerings to visitors or as concubines of public officials in the sultanate. The expansion of trading activities of the sultanate provided international linkages. This resulted not in market competitions but higher incidences of slaveraids which were necessary at that time. The stiff market competition also brought to the fore awareness on foreign exchange services and on the production of goods and their role in the economy. Above all, it provided the opportunity to collect taxes from visiting trading vessels in the Sulu Sea.

As regard taxation, taxes collected were used for the maintenance of the sultanate and other necessities. A percentage of the taxes also went to the *datus* to feed their wives, children, relatives, and paid servants. Other than taxes, it was also doctrinal that their participation in the war in the form of jihad was obligatory to all Muslim to protect the sultanate and, above all, to preserve and protect Islamic religion.

Because of this, Sulu then was at its peak of trading glory. Commercial rivalries and the quest for political and strategic control of the lucrative marine trade encouraged the entry of Spanish, Dutch, French, German and

the British traders. This somehow shaped the political, economic and cultural image of the Sulu Sultanate in Southeast Asia.

The sultanate of Sulu dominated the marine trading activities in Sulu, extending as far as the Celebes Sea. The sultan had the sole authority over the islands including the nooks and corners where the mother of pearls were located. The *datus* did not have the authority on such activities unless granted by the sultan (Tan 2005, 100).<sup>6</sup>

Undeniably, the growth of the economy brought greater demands for labor which resulted in slavery. However, development and infrastructure projects in Sulu would soon decreased, leading to the weakening Sulu's position in local and international markets, as Zamboanga, Cebu and Manila provided better facilities.

#### Recorded Contacts with Brunei

In 1369, Raja Narawangsa sacked Brunei and took with him two giant pearls from the kingdom of Brunei (Ututalum and Hedjazi 2002, 45). Decades later, Sultan Mohammad, the first Brunei Sultan, had a daughter but with no male heir. She married Sharif Ali, an Arab missionary from Saudi Arabia, who came to Brunei and established Islam. Sharif Ali's active participation in the internal and external affairs of the sultanate later made him the third Sultan of Brunei with the title Sultan Berkat.<sup>7</sup> It was said that Sharif Ali (Sultan Berkat of Brunei) arrived in Sulu, converted the Hindus to Islam, and later died in Jolo (Ututalum and Hedjazi 2002, 55-77).

The conversion of the Hindu Kingdoms to Islam in Sulu ended the reign of these kingdoms, leading to the eventual rise of the sultanate.<sup>8</sup> From the founding of the Sultanate of Sulu, other sultanate kingdoms were also established such as in Maguindanao and even as far as Lanao.

When Sultan Bolkia conquered Sulu (as a continuation of Sharif Ali's mission) during his reign in 1485, he took the ruling family (Alawaddin, his two sons and daughter) to Brunei (Ututalum and Hedjazi 2002, 80).<sup>91</sup> It was during this ruling family's exile in Brunei that Sultan Bolkiah married Alawaddin's daughter.

Interestingly, it was also this daughter who told Sultan Bolkiah about the two pearls that her father possessed. The said pearls, taken from Brunei in 1369, were handed down to her father, Alawaddin, by her grandfather Sultan Shariful Hashim during his coronation. Upon knowing this, Sultan Bolkiah ordered the return of the pearls and promised them freedom in Brunei.

After the sultan died, his successor Sultan Abdul-kahar set up a viceroy (an *Adipati* or *Batara*), who was stationed in Sulu and who controlled the archipelago.

### Recorded Contacts with Indonesia and Malaysia

The Malay tribes were grouped into distinct classes during Spanish colonization. These were the *Indios* (who have adopted the religion or faith and the manner of dressing of the Spaniards) and the *Moros* (Muslim converts) (Aguilar 1994, 4). In 876, thousands of these foreign merchants who were mostly Muslims flocked to Kalah in Malaysia (Majul 1999, 42) resulting in the economic growth in the region. Such economic flourishing was not only evident in Kalah but also in the west coast of Sumatra in Indonesia in 878. When Islam was established in Aceh in Sumatra (Indonesia), it signaled the rise of Islamic civilization in the region.

The Malays who came to the Philippines brought with them the cultural traditions and ways of life of the peoples of the Hindu-Malaysian states which were influenced by the Arab traders and missionaries (Zafra 1974, 5). Evidence also shows that there were trading activities that occurred in China with the presence of Arabs and Persians. Trading activities in the Visayas with Borneo did not clearly specify Muslim influence among the Visayans. Their main activities were purely commercial in nature.

### Recorded Contacts with India

The desire for greater wealth such as gold, spices and resources led early Indian traders to explore Southeast Asia, bringing with them the concepts of religion, culture and governance. The Tamil Indians occupied Java and then took over

the Sulu trade and directed the trading activities as far as western Asia, making China as a gateway. Another group of Indians, the Champas, took over the Sulu trade, ushering in the coming of the Srivijayan Empire. Srivijaya became the most powerful empire in Southeast Asia. Incidentally, the first mention of the datu system as a title was recorded in this period (Ututalum and Hedjazi 2002, 34-35).

The idea of datuship and rajaship in the Philippines came as early as the tenth century before the founding of the sultanate. Accounts of the popularity of datuship and rajaship were recorded in the seventeenth century. In fact, the datuship (Malay) co-existed simultaneously with the rajaship (Sanskrit) in the same period. Datu was an official Malay title meaning lord, or a powerful chief who was usually in charge of a region within the state. The title of datu was later used among the Sulu royalties to mean "prince." Later, the Srivijayan seat of power in Borneo became the Bandjarmasin that introduced kingdoms in the Philippines, and with it came the rajaship and the datuship before the end of the tenth century (Ututalum and Hedjazi 2002, 38).

Because of trade rivalry, a war erupted between the Javanese and the Srivijaya in the tenth century. The withdrawal of Srivijaya prompted the Philippines and Borneo to have a direct trade link with China. During the reign of the Madjapahit Empire from 1049 to 1369, there were no recorded direct contacts among Southeast Asian kingdoms with China. There was however, the establishment of the tributary states of Sulu (Soloo), a region near Lake Lanao and Salurong near Manila Bay.<sup>10</sup>

### Recorded Contacts with China

Based on various Chinese annals, the Chinese traders came to the Philippines centuries before the arrival of Islam and Christianity. When settlements were established along the river beds of Mayumbung and Dungun in Tawi-Tawi, there was no mention of any kings except in areas ruled by chiefs based on the Tang Annals. The richness of Sulu, particularly in pearls, attracted the Bandjarmasin and the Champa traders. Indo-China, Ofunan (Cambodia) and Champa (South Vietnam) played an important role in the Sulu trade and the expansion of its commercialization of sea products.

The Ming Annals reported that in 982, an Arab vessel from *Mai* (Chinese name for the Philippines) went to China for trade purposes. This gave the Chinese the idea of exploring farther the Sulu Seas. "The exploration of the pearl beds was not open to foreigners in ancient times until again by social contract the sultan and the people granted the first royal permit to a Chinese trader who came to Sulu. The Chinese trader was given *surat katarangan* or certificate of right on the condition that fees were paid to the sultan" (Tan 2005, xxxvi).

In 1011, Ali Bakhti, an Arab Muslim, went on a tribute mission to China. Sulu sent a tribute mission to China as well in 1370, and Brunei sent one in 1371 to meet China's demand for marine and forest products of Sulu and Borneo, respectively. The Chinese food market imported seaweed, shark fins, tortoise seashell, pearls and salt. The forest products included camphor, bird nest, pepper, clove bark, medicinal beetle nuts, rattan, bees wax and lumber.

A group of Chinese traders on board the *sampan* came to Sulu for trading purposes. They requested for as many mother pearls as possible. "This was the beginning of pearl extraction by the foreigner until nothing was left" (Tan 2005, 107).<sup>11</sup> There was no tribute mission coming from Java to China in 1293-1368. In 1368, the founder of the Ming dynasty sent Hung Wu to Java, Brunei and Sulu, asking these places to send tribute missions to China. At this time, the Madjapahit already became a tributary to China after the Mongol invasion in 1293.

The Ming Annals (Ututalum and Hedjazi 2002, 42) reported that:

[The] three kings from Sulu went on a tribute mission to China in 1417—Paduka Batala (Sulu east king), Maja Raja Kolamating (Chinese for Kamaluddin) of the West Country, and Paduka Palabu from Duon (Chinese for Dungun) state in Tawi-Tawi... Kalamuddin was proclaimed by the emperor as king of the west (because he lived in the western part of Jolo islands).

Paduka Batala, king of east Sulu, got sick and died in China. During the Ching dynasty in 1731, his descendants requested to be naturalized. The emperor granted them the family names of *Wen* and *An* and they became Chinese citizens (Ututalum and Hedjazi 2002, 42-48).

At any rate, the last tribute to China was sent in 1424, marking the end of the Sulu kingdoms and the beginning of the sultanate.

### Recorded Contacts with the Arabs

As early as the seventh century, Muslim Arabs and Persian missionaries introduced Islam in India (Gujerat and Bengal). By the eight century, they set up communities in Guangzhou (Canton) and other coastal cities where many Chinese were converted to Islam and were known as *hui*. Internal domestic conflict, including their foreign policy, made Arab trading activities difficult in China. The Arabs were forced to shift their trading network to Southeast Asia in 874. Another conflict in India in the tenth century prompted the influx of Arab traders in Southeast Asia.

Tuan Mashai'ka was believed to be the first messenger of Islam to arrive in southern Philippines. He married the daughter of a local chieftain, Rajah Sipad (George 1980, 16-17). A series of conversion drives took place, from Hinduism to Islam. Under the Islamic influence, the Sulu trade expanded as far as China, India, Arabian Peninsula and Morocco. Al Makhdum, whose full name was *Makhdum Ibrahim Al-Akbar Bin Malajuddin Al-Hussaini*, was the most prominent among all missionaries who made a strong conversion drive. Makhdum was also known as "sharif aw-iyā." He constructed the first and the oldest existing mosque in the Philippines, which is in Tubig Indangan, Simunul Island in Tawi-Tawi. The marker on the mosque and his tomb signify that he arrived in Sulu earlier than Abu Bakr.

The spread of Islam was made possible through trading activities, missionary outreach, marriages, alliances with the royal families and the conversion of local rulers. Contact with the Hindu, Chinese and Arab traders before the arrival of Spain made significant contributions to the development of Southeast Mindanao in the field of economics, governance and cultural enrichment.

## Concluding Note

The formation of the sultanate coincided with the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia, particularly in Mindanao. Islamic dogmas influenced the beginning of the sultanate. Meanwhile, the trading activities, missionary outreach, marriages, alliances with the royal families and the conversion of the local rulers also contributed to the spread of Islam. The acceptance of the sultan as a representation of God's authority to rule over them helped shaped the institutionalization of the sultanate. Likewise, slavery became part of the natural order present in other parts of Southeast Asia. It provided gigantic opportunity for the maintenance of the sultanate which made it strong enough to resist foreign invasion particularly from Spain in the late fifteenth century. Sulu's early contacts with Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and with the Hindu, Arab and Chinese traders strongly indicated its vitality in Southeast Asia.

## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> No literature can best identify as to the number of men/constituents governed by each leader. By estimate, early scholars simply said they were composed of family members. Furthermore, they do not rule in a defined territory—whatever they see becomes part of their territory.
- <sup>3</sup> This was the analysis of Rizal on Morga's book written by Jose Victor Jimenez (2004).
- <sup>4</sup> Attached to the title of the Emperor of China in the fifteenth century was Paduka Batara.
- <sup>5</sup> Surat 19 – The sultan on his authority and prerogatives, see Samuel K. Tan (2005). *Surat Sug: Letters of sultanate of Sulu, vol. I*. National Historical Institute, Manila. 47-52.
- <sup>6</sup> Surat 40 – Paduka Mahasari Maulana Sultan Hadji Jamalul Kiram II to the Governor of Sulu, Major Hugh Scott, 1904 (21 Ramadan 1322). See Samuel K. Tan (2005). *Surat Sug: Letters of sultanate of Sulu, vol. I*. National Historical Institute, Manila. 100-101.

- <sup>7</sup> During the reign of Sultan Mohammad and Sultan Ahmad (the second Sultan of Brunei), Sharif Ali served.
- <sup>8</sup> The sultanate of Sulu was established in the fourteenth century covering 1300-1400 as crucial years. Other sources suggest 1401, 1405, or 1450.
- <sup>9</sup> Sultan Bolkiah of Brunei (1485-1524) was known as Nakhoda Ragam (the singing captain), Amir Ul-Umara (the prince of princes-Arabic) and Maharaja Diraja. Sultan Bolkiah married the daughter of Alawaddin, Princess Putri Laila Menchanei.
- <sup>10</sup> When Tuan Mashai'ka arrived in Sulu, the chief of Maimbung (Baranuns) was worshipping the Hindu gods. He married Iddah, the daughter of Rajah Sipad and this gave him the power to rule.
- <sup>11</sup> Surat 44 – Sultan of Sulu Hadji Muhammad Jamalul Kiram II to the Civil Governor of Sulu, Major Scott 1904 (10-11 Shawwal 1322). See Samuel K. Tan (2005). *Surat Sug: Letters of sultanate of Sulu, vol. I*. National Historical Institute, Manila. 107-119.

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