

## Colonial Appropriation of Economic Authority: Dutch Control over Trade and Shipping in the Riau-Lingga Kingdom

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### Abstract

This study examines the process of economic authority appropriation by the Dutch colonialists in the Riau-Lingga Kingdom between 1830 and 1909, by analyzing a number of contracts. Instead of using physical conflict, the Dutch colonial government chose contractual agreements as an instrument to seize economic power. This research was conducted using historical research methods. The primary sources used were contracts between the Riau Lingga kingdom and the Dutch government, as well as the Perhimpunan Plakat and other sources collected from the Indonesian National Archives, digital libraries and the Balai Maklumat Pulau Penyengat. Furthermore, the historical facts findings were analyzed using a colonialism approach. This study found that the appropriation of economic power took place gradually through legal mechanisms such as customs and excise regulations, shipping permits, and symbolic regulations on the use of the royal flag. This process transformed the Sultan's position from that of an independent economic authority to a symbolic ruler under the control of the Resident of Riau. The main findings show that Dutch colonialism in Riau-Lingga was not merely political domination, but also a process of institutionalizing economic power through fiscal and shipping regulations. This research fills a gap in the historiography of political economy in the Malay maritime region and can be considered when examining colonialization in Indonesian history from a different perspective.

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## INTRODUCTION

Research on trade and shipping policy in the Riau Lingga region from the early 18th century to the early 20th century is important for understanding the dynamics of economic and political transformation in the Malay maritime world. After occupying Tanjungpinang in 1784, the Dutch colonialists began to exert their influence on the geopolitics of the region, especially in the economic sphere. When they first established a representative office and stationed military troops in Tanjungpinang, the Dutch did not yet have complete control over the economic resources in the Riau Lingga region (Borschberg, 2019; *Tractat van altoos durende, getrouwe Vriend en Bondgenootschap, November 10, 1784*). However, gradually, through a number of contracts, the sultan's income from the trade sector began to shift to the Dutch government (Anri, 1970).

The initial formal Dutch intervention took place through an agreement between Sultan Mahmud Riayat Shah III and the Dutch East Indies government in 1784. This contract marked the legal recognition of Dutch domination, in which the Johor-Riau Kingdom was explicitly referred to as a legitimate colony under the authority of the Dutch Empire. The contract also confirmed the kingdom's status as a Dutch vassal state, paving the way for further control over economic sectors (Borschberg, 2019; Ricklefs, 2013).

In the early 19th until early 20th century, there were several other contracts between the Sultan of Riau Lingga and the Dutch Government. Some of these contracts were made in 1830, 1857, 1858, 1868, 1888, 1897, 1905, and 1909 (Anri, 1970). Essentially, none of these treaties were new contracts, but rather renewals of existing contracts when there was a change of sultan in the

Riau Lingga Kingdom. However, the content of these treaties continued to change over time, including in terms of trade and shipping policies.

In relation to trade, the main policy issued by the Dutch colonial government was the imposition of taxes in the form of duties and excise on traded commodities. Initially, the collection of these taxes was the authority of the Sultan and Yang Dipertuan Muda (Crown Prince), but gradually this authority was transferred to the colonial government. In return, the Sultan and Yang Dipertuan Muda received compensation for the loss of this source of income, even though substantive economic control had shifted to the Dutch government (Netscher, 1854). This process shows a gradual and planned shift of authority through colonial administrative mechanisms.

The consolidation of Dutch economic policy in the 19th century was strengthened by the implementation of the European legal system as the basis for trade transactions and land ownership. This made it easier for the colonial regime to seize land and economic resources from the indigenous people and further strengthened colonial interests in controlling trade and production in the region. In practice, the Dutch government's economic monopoly in Riau Lingga not only targeted land and agricultural commodities, but also tended to target the trade sector, which had previously been a source of income for the Sultan.

This transfer of policy authority demonstrates a form of colonialism that prioritizes domination and control over all aspects of the economy. Horvath's definition of colonialism emphasizes that colonialism is a form of domination that involves control over territory and the behavior of other groups, and differs from other forms of domination in that it involves settlement and direct control by the dominant group (Horvath, 1972). Thus, from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Riau Lingga became a concrete example of Dutch economic colonialism in the Malay world. The transfer of trade policy authority from the Sultan to the colonial government took place chronologically through contracts, tax regulations, and control of shipping. This process indicates the transfer of local economic sovereignty to the colonial regime and marks the end of the Sultan's role as the main holder of trade authority in the Riau Lingga region.

Research on trade and shipping policies in Riau Lingga from the early 18th century to the early 20th century has significant historical urgency because it highlights the process of economic power transition from local authorities to the Dutch colonial government. Through an analysis of formal contracts dating from 1830, this research helps to explain how colonial domination was gradually institutionalized through legal mechanisms, taxation and shipping regulations (Eklund, 2023). Understanding the chronology of this intervention is important for seeing how colonial policies changed the structure of royal revenues (Dawson, 2004), limited the economic sovereignty of the Sultan, and created the foundation for colonial monopolies over resources and trade activities in the Malay maritime region.

The relevance of this research today lies in its contribution to the study of state-society relations in the context of resource management. Historical findings regarding the shift of trade authority from local actors to external powers offer an analytical framework for understanding contemporary dynamics, such as changes in land management rights, economic conflicts of interest, and the marginalisation of local groups in development policies. Thus, this research not only enriches colonial historiography, but also provides a critical perspective for the analysis of modern economic policy in Indonesia's coastal and island regions, particularly with regard to issues of economic sovereignty and control over strategic resources.

In recent years, studies on Riau Lingga and its trading activities have begun to be addressed by a number of researchers. Ken (1978) and Stapelbroek (2023) reviewed the trading success of the Port of Singapore and its connection to the surrounding areas, including Riau's failure to compete with Singapore's dominance. The distribution of *gambir* commodities in the Riau Lingga region to Singapore was also discussed by Boon (2021). Meanwhile, Yok (2023) mentioned the glory of the Riau port as an entrepot before the Dutch colonial rule in 1784. Melay (1999) identifies the positive impact of trade that occurred from 1784 to 1824, when Riau was still under the rule of the Johor Riau Kingdom. Swastiwi (2021) also analyzes Riau Lingga's maritime trade with reference to the

port aspect. Meanwhile, Arman (2019), who researched *gambir*, found that *gambir* was a leading commodity that was one of the sources of the economy in Riau Lingga. However, these studies tend to focus more on macro political aspects, free trade, or the role of Singapore's ports. Specific studies on Riau Lingga have also not addressed trade policy aspects comprehensively. It is important to examine this gap to see how the process of colonial power appropriation worked through formal policies.

This study offers novelty by filling a gap in research on how local economic authority in Riau-Lingga was gradually taken over by the Dutch colonial government through the theoretical framework of colonialism, something that has not been systematically discussed in previous studies. Unlike previous studies that emphasized commodity dynamics, port prosperity, or regional competition, this study focuses on the institutional and legal processes that enabled the transfer of trade and shipping authority from the Sultan to the colonial regime. Methodologically, this study uses a historical-critical approach based on colonial archives to trace the evolution of contracts, tax regulations, and administrative interventions, resulting in a new reading of the mechanisms of economic sovereignty takeover. In terms of subject matter, this study analyses the Sultan, the Yang Dipertuan Muda, and the colonial apparatus as actors within the colonial power structure, rather than merely as traders. In terms of object, this study not only examines commodities or port networks, but also analyses changes in the structure of economic authority as the main object. Thus, this study provides a new contribution in the form of an in-depth understanding of the colonisation of economic authority in Riau-Lingga and its impact on the political-economic transformation of the region.

Normatively, the Riau Lingga kingdom was still regarded as a sovereign entity with the authority to issue regulations related to trade and shipping. However, historical reality shows that this authority was gradually eroded by colonial intervention. The Dutch not only supervised but also controlled the implementation of regulations as an instrument to strengthen colonial economic hegemony in the region. Every regulation issued by the Sultan or the Yang Dipertuan Muda was always based on considerations from the colonial side. The difference between the kingdom's claims of sovereignty and the practice of colonial domination shows that there is a research gap that needs to be bridged. Furthermore, there are two main objectives of this study. First, to identify the forms of trade and shipping regulations issued by local and colonial authorities in Riau Lingga, and second, to analyze the impact of these regulations on the position of local Malay authorities in the colonial economic system. The analysis of trade and shipping policies as an arena for the struggle for authority, rather than merely as administrative instruments, is a novel approach in this study. This provides an understanding of how the Dutch government appropriated economic dominance in the Riau Lingga region from the Sultan.

## METHODS

This research was conducted using historical research methods consisting of four stages, namely heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Daliman, 2018). Heuristics is the stage of collecting historical sources which consist of various types (Abdurrahman, 2019; Kuntowijoyo, 2013; Syamsudin, 2020). The historical sources in this study refer to a number of primary sources from several types, such as official colonial sources, official local sources, and reports or records of European nations discussing Riau Lingga in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These sources include the agreement contract between the Sultan of Johor Riau and the Netherlands, the contract between the Sultan of Riau Lingga and the Dutch government, additional contracts, the *Perhimpunan Plakat* (1900), *Furu' al-Makmur* (1895), and so on. Technically, the primary sources in this study refer to the agreements between the Sultan and the Dutch Government, which have been inventoried and recorded by the National Archives of Indonesia (ANRI). In addition, primary sources were also traced from the Dutch government library through the website delpher.nl, as well as the scriptorium of the Balai Maklumat Pulau Penyengat.

Furthermore, the data collected from these sources was then analyzed at the source criticism stage. The source criticism or source validation stage is carried out to obtain historical facts. In addition to conducting internal and external criticism, comparisons are also made with other contemporary and relevant sources, such as local sources (Gottschalk, 2008; Hamid & Madjid, 2015). Historical facts related to trade in Riau-Lingga in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries needed to be analyzed to obtain accurate results (Ahlskog, 2021). Historical facts related to policies in trade and shipping activities in Riau-Lingga then became the starting point for looking at the patterns and impacts of colonial authority on local authority. Therefore, the interpretation section of this study analyzes historical facts from the perspective of colonialism. The final stage of this research is historiography, or the writing of history related to the transition of trade policy authority in Riau Lingga from 1830 to 1909.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Dutch Trade Policy in Riau-Lingga

The expansion of trade and shipping policies in the 19th century to the early 20th century demonstrated the strengthening of Dutch colonial dominance in Riau Lingga. The Dutch East Indies government gradually took over the Sultan's authority in managing trade, tax collection, and shipping. This relationship was recorded in a series of official contracts between the Sultan and the Dutch Government, which systematically limited the autonomy of the kingdom. A chronological study of these contracts shows how the Dutch changed the maritime political economy of Riau Lingga, from a sovereign kingdom to an entity subject to colonial interests.

The initial stage of the takeover of economic authority can be traced back to the *Contract met Riouw Lingga en Onderhoorigh* dated October 29, 1830. In articles 13, 14, and 18, the Sultan lost his absolute right to determine trade policy, including the determination of duties and taxes. This authority could only be exercised after obtaining the approval of the Resident of Riau, who acted on behalf of the colonial government (*Contract met Riouw Lingga en Onderhoorigh, October 29, 1830, articles 13, 14, 18*). Thus, since 1830, the Sultan's role in economic affairs was no longer fully autonomous, but was subject to colonial supervision. In addition to fiscal aspects, this contract also contained new shipping regulations. Both royal and civilian ships were required to have a sailing permit (*pas*) issued annually by the Resident. This permit records information about the name of the boat, its owner, the number of crew members, and the weapons it carries (*Contract met Riouw Lingga en Onderhoorigh, October 29, 1830, articles 18–19*). This policy reflects the Dutch effort to control maritime mobility in the waters of Riau.

The next intervention was seen in the *Contract met den Sulthan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden* dated December 1, 1857. Based on Article 24, the Dutch government began to take over tax collection in the areas specified in the 1852 contract. There were four main areas included in the colonial tax collection area: (1) The islands west of the Riau Strait and east of the Durai Strait, from the Singapore Strait to the Abang Strait. (2) The islands around Bulang. (3) The islands in the Tiung Strait (around Batam). (4) Bintan Island and its dependencies.

This contract strengthened the Dutch position in controlling important trading centers in the Riau Islands. Colonial control over trade policies (including the setting of discriminatory tariffs) essentially provided financial benefits to the metropolitan states, as well as strengthening the colonial impact on imports in the regions where they were implemented (Ayuso-Díaz & Tena-Junguito, 2025). Beyond fiscal aspects, this contract also regulates the prohibition of human trafficking, albeit with certain exceptions, namely if slaves are purchased to be freed according to religious law (*Contract met den Sulthan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, December 1, 1857, article 14*). Article 14 of the contract is written as follows;

Therefore, His Majesty the Sultan and his ministers promised not to allow within the kingdom of Riau Lingga the abduction and trafficking of people, and he also promised to prohibit their removal, as well as anything that was presented to His Majesty the Sultan or to the Ruler of

Riau by his family who lived in foreign lands ([Contract met den Sulthan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden. dd 1 Desember 1857](#)).

Eleven years later, through a contract dated September 30, 1868, the Dutch expanded the scope of tax collection to almost the entire territory of the Riau Lingga Kingdom. Article 6 stated that colonial taxation applied throughout the kingdom's territory, except for the Pulau Tujuh Island and the mainland of Sumatra ([Contract met den Sultan van Lingga-Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, September 30, 1868, Article 6](#)). This expansion took effect in January 1869. The 1868 contract shows a significant transformation: from partial control over several islands to almost complete control over the kingdom's taxation system.

Economic policy transformation continued with the *Suppletoir Contract met Lingga Riouw en Onderhoorigheden* dated January 26, 1888. At this stage, even the royal territories on the Sumatra mainland began to fall under the Dutch government's tax jurisdiction. Only the Pulau Tujuh islands remained under the Sultan's control. This situation persisted until the early 20th century, when the Pulau Tujuh area were still an autonomous region in terms of taxation ([Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, May 18, 1905](#)). Under this contract, the Sultan's sovereignty was further reduced, while the Dutch strengthened their fiscal position in almost all strategic areas of the kingdom.

Trade and taxation policies became increasingly detailed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Suppletoir Contract met den Sultan van Lingga en Onderhoorigheden* dated December 22, 1897 specifically regulated taxes on two main commodities, namely sago and forest products. The sago duty was set at 75 cents per 100 *tampin* (equivalent to 5 *pikul*), while forest products were taxed at 10 percent of the selling price. As compensation for the transfer of tax collection rights, the Sultan received compensation of f36,000 per year, paid in installments of f3,000 per month ([Suppletoir Contract met den Sultan van Lingga en Onderhoorigheden, December 22, 1897](#)).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Dutch government's fiscal dominance grew stronger. The *Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden* dated May 18, 1905 reaffirmed that the Sultan did not have the authority to change or set taxes without colonial permission. In fact, full authority was in the hands of the Dutch, while the Sultan only received compensation. Furthermore, the contract stipulated that every boat or ship sailing out of the Dutch East Indies was subject to a duty of 75 cents per 40 *pikul* of cargo. Sago was subject to a duty of 10 percent of the gross price and 5 percent of the net price. Foreign traders in Daik and Senggarang paid duties of between 20 cents and 1 dollar per month. Copra on Pulau Tujuh is subject to a 5 percent duty, while 1,000 whole coconuts are subject to a duty of 1.50 dollars. In addition, forest products are subject to a 10 percent tax, except for wood for gambier, which is exempt.

The Sultan's authority to collect taxes as stipulated in the 1905 contract was only valid until 1909. Through the *Suppletoir Contract* dated January 23, 1909, Riau Resident Willem Jaqob Rahder signed an agreement with Sultan Abdur Rahman Muazzam Shah II which clearly stated that the Sultan's authority to collect taxes was handed over entirely to the Dutch government. Effective April 1, 1909, the Dutch took over the right to collect taxes on opium, gambling, alcohol, and the slaughter and sale of pork on the Pulau Tujuh Islands. As compensation, the Sultan only received an annual payment of f 1,250, which began on April 30, 1909 ([Suppletoir Contract, January 23, 1909](#)). This compensation amount was much smaller than the compensation value in the previous contract, showing the Sultan's declining bargaining position in front of the colonial authorities. Thus, 1909 can be seen as the end point of the systematic process of the Dutch takeover of the kingdom's economic authority.

In addition to drafting detailed regulations regarding tax collection, the Dutch government also sought to create trade stability. Article 13 of the 1905 contract stated that the status of traders from Riau Lingga was equivalent to that of subjects of the Dutch East Indies government when they traded in the government's territory ([Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, May 18, 1905, Article 13](#)). This policy had two important implications. *First*, Riau Lingga traders could

enjoy legal protection and security just like traders in other parts of the Dutch East Indies. *Second*, this also meant that their political identity was absorbed into the colonial administrative framework, symbolically weakening the Sultan's sovereignty over his own traders.

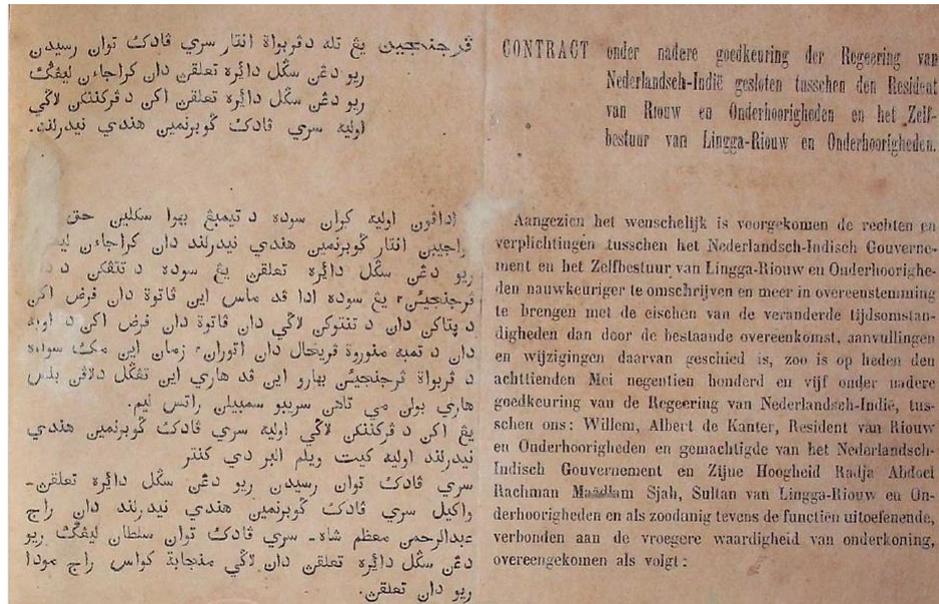


Figure 1. Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden – 18 Mei 1905

The prohibition of human trafficking contained in the 1857 contract was also an important part of colonial trade policy. Although the practice of slave trading was prohibited, the contract still allowed for exceptions, namely if the purchase of slaves was intended for emancipation in accordance with religious law ([Contract with the Sultan of Lingga, Riouw and Dependencies, December 1, 1857, article 14](#)). In this way, the Dutch presented themselves as a civilized colonial power that complied with international thinking against slavery, even though in practice the ban did not completely eliminate the old practices.

Table 1. The Transition and Intervention of the Riau Lingga Kingdom's Trade and Shipping Policies to the Dutch Government (1830-1909)

Contract/agreement	Transition and policy Interventions
Contract met Riouw Lingga en Onderhoorigheden – 29 Oktober 1830	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Sultan may only impose taxes and trade regulations after obtaining the approval of the Resident of Riau (articles 13, 14, 18).</li> <li>2. All royal and civilian vessels must have a sailing permit issued by the Resident each year (articles 18, 19).</li> </ol>
Contract met den Sultan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden – 1 Desember 1857	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The transfer of tax collection rights over the western islands of the Riau Strait to the Abang Strait, the islands around Bulang, the islands around the Tiung Strait, Bintan Island and its dependencies to the Dutch colonial government.</li> <li>2. The Sultan may not impose new taxes without Dutch approval (article 26).</li> </ol>
Contract met den Sultan van Lingga-Riouw en Onderhoorigheden – 30 September 1868	Starting in January 1869, colonial taxes were imposed on almost the entire territory of the Riau Lingga kingdom, except for the Pulau Tujuh Islands and

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	mainland Sumatra (article 6).
Suppletoir Contract met Lingga Riouw en Onderhoorigheden – 26 Januari 1888	The Riau Lingga Kingdom on the Sumatra mainland was incorporated into the colonial taxation system, leaving behind the Pulau Tujuh Islands.
Suppletoir Contract – 22 Desember 1897	Taxation on sago and forest products.
Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden – 18 Mei 1905	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The Sultan may not impose taxes without the permission of the colonial government (article 31)</li><li>2. The Dutch colonial government imposed rules and duties on ships entering and leaving the port of Riau, as well as taxes on sago, copra, forest products and foreign trade.</li><li>3. Annual permits (<i>jarpas</i>) for ships must be signed by the Resident of Riau; ships without <i>jarpas</i> may only sail within 3 miles of Riau.</li></ol>
Suppletoir Contract – 23 Januari 1909	All of the Sultan's tax collection rights were transferred to the Dutch, including taxes on opium, gambling, wine and pork on the Pulau Tujuh Islands.

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### Dutch Shipping Regulations in Riau Lingga

In addition to trade, shipping was also subject to intervention by the Dutch government. Through the 1830 contract, the colonial government stipulated that every boat or ship was required to obtain a sailing permit (*pas*). This permit was only valid for one year and had to be renewed periodically with the stamp and signature of the Resident of Riau. This rule applied not only to foreign ships, but also to ships belonging to the kingdom ([Contract met Riouw Lingga en Onderhoorigh, October 29, 1830, articles 18–19](#)). This policy directly limited the kingdom's independence in managing its own maritime traffic.

In the early 20th century, this rule was expanded to allow the use of *zebrif* or *jarpas* issued by the kingdom. However, this permit was only valid if accompanied by the signature of the Resident of Riau or his representative ([Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, May 18, 1905](#)). Thus, although the Sultan still appeared to have a role, real authority remained in Dutch hands. Royal vessels without a *jarpas* were only allowed to sail within 3 miles. If they wanted to go beyond that limit, they had to fly the Dutch flag.

Shipping regulations also cover symbolic aspects, particularly regarding the use of flags. The Sultan was required to use a white flag both on land and at sea, with the stipulation that it must be flown alongside the Dutch flag. On land, the royal flag could not be larger than the Dutch flag and had to be flown lower than it. When hoisted on a single flagpole, the royal flag is placed below the Dutch flag. Only at sea is there some leeway: the royal flag may be hoisted in a position of honor if it is technically impossible to place it below the Dutch flag ([Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, May 18, 1905, article 13](#)).

This rule demonstrates the symbolic political dimension of colonial domination. The kingdom's maritime identity was recognized, but visually it was always placed under the Netherlands. The Sultan's ships were allowed to continue using the *kruis* flag (black with a white cross), but in practice the presence of the Dutch flag was still mandatory. Thus, the flag became a visual instrument of colonial subordination.

In addition to regulating sailing permits and the use of flags, the Dutch also demanded that the kingdom be active in maintaining maritime security. The Sultan was required to provide assistance to ships that had accidents or difficulties in the kingdom's waters. The kingdom was obliged to protect goods from looting, and if a ship sank, the kingdom had to immediately report it to the

nearest Dutch official ([Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, May 18, 1905](#)). This rule placed the kingdom in a subordinate position, which also served as an extension of the colonial government to ensure the security of trade in the waters of Riau Lingga.

Furthermore, the Riau Lingga Kingdom, despite being under the strong influence of the Dutch colonial government, still had a number of powers in regulating trade and shipping in its territory. These powers were not entirely independent, as most of the decisions and policies made by the Sultan, the Yang Dipertuan Muda, and other royal officials were often based on contracts with the Dutch. Nevertheless, the regulations issued by the kingdom continued to emphasize the active role of the Sultanate in managing trade and shipping, whether through the Sultan's decrees, the Yang Dipertuan Muda's announcements, or official royal regulations.

Since the mid-19th century, contracts agreed between the Dutch and the Sultan of Riau Lingga have provided a legal framework for trade management. These contracts not only affirmed Dutch authority in supervision, but also established the Sultan's right to obtain income from various forms of taxes, excise duties, and customs duties. The main sources of income for the kingdom came from customs duties on goods, trade excise duties, and even customs duties on people ([Contract met den Sulthan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden. dd 1 December 1857](#)).

However, the Sultan's power in deciding matters related to taxation was not absolute. Any attempt to add or increase the nominal tax must first be coordinated with the Government. This was confirmed in article 26 of the 1857 contract, which stated:

The Sultan and his ministers shall not add to or increase customs duties and taxes beyond the rules of the country; if there are new tax rules, they must be attached to the agreement letter ([Contract met den Sulthan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden. dd 1 Desember 1857](#)).

The provisions regarding taxes and duties were then detailed in a supplementary sheet signed on December 30, 1857 (13 Rabiul Akhir 1274) by Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Shah II with Yang Dipertuan Muda (YDM) Riau Raja Abdullah. Several decades later, this document became the *Suppletoir Contract met Lingga Riouw en onderhoorigheden* on January 26, 1888. The supplementary sheet divided the types of duties and taxes into several categories, namely: trade duties, land rental duties, duties on persons, shipping duties, and duties on trade in goods that were considered *tiada lurus peggunaannya* (to have no direct use).

For general trade, the applicable duties included: seventy cents ringgit for each *koyan* boat that obtained a permit to sail outside the kingdom; 32 and a half cents for every hundred *tampin* of sago exported from Lingga (with 100 *tampin* equivalent to five *pikul*); three ringgit and 25 cents for every crate of opium entering Lingga; and 65 cents ringgit for every *pikul* of white tin entering the kingdom ([Suppletoir Contract, January 26, 1888](#)).

In addition, the kingdom also imposed taxes on activities considered inappropriate according to custom, such as the trade of opium, alcohol, gambling, and pawnbroking. The monopoly rights for these businesses were only granted to those who had paid certain taxes and obtained official permission from the Sultan. Thus, the kingdom's income came not only from the trade of legal commodities, but also from practices that were considered deviant according to custom, but were legalized through *pacht* ([Kelana, 1900, pp. 14-17](#)).

The Riau Lingga kingdom also derived income from marine commodities such as agar-agar. In a letter from the Yang Dipertuan Muda of Riau to the Resident of Riau, Frederik Nicholas Johannes, in December 1857, it was stated that the Sultan received an income of 60 *bahara* from the agar-agar excise tax collected in the Mapur Sea and surrounding islands. The Yang Dipertuan Muda received 20 *bahara* each season from agar-agar taxes collected on Tenung Island (10 *bahara*), Sugi Island (5 *bahara*), and Muruh Island (5 *bahara*) ([ANRI, 1970, pp. 146-148](#)).

The kingdom also issued regulations to suppress illegal trade. In 1877, Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Shah II issued a decree prohibiting the illegal trade of opium and candu, particularly in tax collection areas managed by the Dutch. In the decree dated 25 Zulqaidah 1294, the Sultan

emphasized that anyone caught engaging in illegal trade would be handed over to the Dutch Resident and punished according to colonial law, regardless of the social status or background of the perpetrator (Kelana, 1900, p. 4).

Furthermore, the kingdom also had fairly specific trade regulations for sago. In 1883, the last Yang Dipertuan Muda of Riau, Raja Muhammad Yusuf Al-Ahmadi, issued a circular regarding sago production in Ungar Buru. The circular emphasized improving the quality of sago and set regulations for the selling price of sago (Kelana, 1900, p. 30). On October 4, 1886, Raja Muhammad Yusuf again issued a decree regarding sago trade and shipping duties. Every boat with a sailing permit was required to pay 75 cents ringgit, while every hundred *tampin* of sago exported was subject to a duty of 32 and a half cents (Kelana, 1900, pp. 14-17).

About a decade later, YDM Raja Muhammad Yusuf issued a further announcement regarding the sago trade, especially that related to Sungai Teluk. The circular stated that sago business owners were allowed to export their goods in accordance with the regulations, while traders from outside who wanted to trade in Sungai Teluk were required to have a permit from the kingdom. This permit could be obtained from an official appointed by the Sultan without the need to pay an administrative fee. This rule was made to avoid disputes between outside traders and local residents who owned sago businesses (Kelana, 1900, p. 20). The full text of the regulation is as follows:

We hereby inform all those who have sago businesses in Sungai Teluk that we have granted permission to transport sago according to the rules of the country. Therefore, anyone who wishes to trade in the aforementioned river must first obtain a trading permit from the kingdom, which we have designated in Lingga. An official will issue this permit free of charge so that there will be no disputes between traders and our people who own the sago (Kelana, 1900).

In addition to trade, the kingdom also regulated shipping within its territory. On March 20, 1886, Sultan Abdur Rahman Muazzam Shah II issued a circular regulating shipping procedures for ships leaving the kingdom's territory. The decree stipulated that anyone wishing to sail was required to obtain a sailing permit or a letter of passage from the harbor master. This letter served as an official document regulating shipping activities and as a means of monitoring the entry and exit of ships from the kingdom's territory (Kelana, 1900).

### **Colonialism and Monopoly on Trade and Shipping in Riau Lingga**

Colonialism is essentially a system of domination involving direct control over territory and population by foreign powers. As Horvath (1972) argues, colonialism differs from other forms of domination in that it includes territorial control and direct intervention in the socioeconomic behavior of the conquered society. In an economic context, Gottheil (1977) asserts that colonialism is a set of structures that are consciously constructed to regulate and divert the distribution of income and international wealth for the benefit of the colonizing country. These structures are coercive because they are built on top of existing local economic systems, which are then transformed into part of a global production and trade mechanism controlled by the colonial center.

In practice, as explained by Sartono Kartodirjo (1990), Dutch colonial policy in its colonies in the early 19th century was conservative, oriented towards tribute (*upeti*), trade monopolies, and providing direct benefits to the Dutch empire (Adams, 1996; Wahid, 2012). In 1848, this pattern shifted to a liberal one, when the principles of "economic freedom" and individual rights were legalized. This shift did not mean a reduction in colonial control, but rather a transformation of economic control into a more systematic and covert form under legal legitimacy (Homan, 1966).

It is within this framework that the process of economic policy appropriation in the Riau Lingga Kingdom must be understood as a concrete manifestation of structural colonialism, which combines political coercion, administrative control, and the transformation of the local economy into a colonial capitalist system. From the early 19th century, the Dutch established the foundations of economic domination through a series of political contracts that limited the Sultan's autonomy.

The *Contract with Riouw Lingga and Onderhoorigh* dated October 29, 1830, marked the beginning of this transfer of authority. In articles 13, 14, and 18, the Sultan lost his full rights to determine trade, customs, and excise policies; all decisions had to be approved by the Resident of Riau, who acted on behalf of the colonial government. Through this regulation, the kingdom's economic system was placed under direct colonial supervision, illustrating a process that Gottheil (1977) referred to as forced economic restructuring for the sake of redistributing wealth to the center of colonial power.

In addition to fiscal aspects, the 1830 contract also introduced a system of sailing permits (*pas*) issued annually by the Resident of Riau. All ships—both royal and civilian—were required to have this permit in order to sail and trade ([Contract met Riouw Lingga en Onderhoorigh, October 29, 1830, articles 18–19](#)). This regulation was a strategic move to control maritime mobility and economic activities, which had previously been a source of power for the kingdom. By controlling shipping permits, the Dutch effectively subjugated trade distribution routes to colonial interests. This domination exemplified what Horvath (1972) referred to as “direct control over the behavior of other groups,” which was a fundamental characteristic of colonialism.

Efforts to expand economic control continued through the *Contract met den Sulthan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden* dated December 1, 1857. This fiscal policy demonstrated a pattern of colonialism that worked through tax administration as an instrument of economic control. Meanwhile, Article 14 contained a prohibition on human trafficking ([Contract met den Sulthan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, December 1, 1857](#)), which, despite its 19th-century European moral overtones, actually served to strengthen the political legitimacy of the Dutch as a “civilized” power in the eyes of the international community. Thus, this policy combined two dimensions of colonialism: economic hegemony and moral domination, both of which subjugated local authorities (Craven, 2012; Narayan, 1995).

The transformation of economic control continued with the *Contract met den Sultan van Lingga-Riouw en Onderhoorigheden* dated September 30, 1868, which expanded the colonial tax territory to almost the entire kingdom, except for the Pulau Tujuh Islands and the mainland of Sumatra (article 6). This marked a new phase of colonialism, in which economic intervention was no longer partial, but comprehensive and structured. By controlling the tax system, the Dutch controlled the kingdom's main source of income and at the same time determined the direction of the maritime economy of Riau Lingga. According to Gottheil (1977), this structure of control was the most effective form of economic colonialism: the takeover of local economic rights as a permanent mechanism for the redistribution of colonial wealth.

Through the *Suppletoir Contract met Lingga Riouw en Onderhoorigheden* dated January 26, 1888, Dutch control was extended to the mainland of Sumatra, while the *Suppletoir Contract* of December 22, 1897 regulated taxes on sago and forest products. In return, the Sultan received annual compensation from the Dutch. This policy marked a shift in the economic structure from a local agrarian base to an extractive system geared towards meeting the needs of the colonial market. In other words, the kingdom's natural resources were repurposed to support the Dutch economy, exactly as Kartodirjo (1990) explained that the colonial liberal system was in fact a tool for the expansion of European capitalism in the colonies.

Colonial economic domination reached its peak through the *Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden* dated May 18, 1905, and the *Suppletoir Contract* dated January 23, 1909. These two contracts explicitly revoked the Sultan's authority to set or collect taxes without the permission of the Dutch East Indies government. All revenues from taxes on opium, gambling, alcohol, and pork were handed over to the colonial authorities. The huge disparity between the economic value handed over and the compensation received shows the systematic operation of colonial exploitation, a form of economic domination which, in the words of Horvath and Gottheil, demonstrates complete control over local behavior, policies, and resources for colonial gain.

This economic intervention was also accompanied by political symbolism that reinforced the kingdom's subordination. Through article 13 of the 1905 contract, the Sultan was required to use a

white flag alongside the Dutch flag, with a lower position on land and parallel at sea only if it was not possible to place it below ([Contract met Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, May 18, 1905, article 13](#)). This symbol represented a form of colonial “symbolic power” that reinforced the hierarchy between local rulers and colonial authorities. Thus, the takeover of economic policy in Riau Lingga not only reflected administrative and fiscal domination, but also marked a shift in the meaning of political sovereignty to one of symbolic subordination that was completely controlled by the Dutch.

Overall, the process of economic colonization in Riau Lingga showed a pattern consistent with the theoretical definition of colonialism: direct control, restructuring of the local economy, and political subjugation through legal and symbolic mechanisms. Through contracts signed between 1830 and 1909, the Dutch gradually abolished the Sultan's autonomy and integrated the kingdom into the Dutch East Indies economic system. Thus, colonialism in Riau Lingga was a concrete form of structural domination that aimed to maintain the flow of wealth from the colonies to the metropolis through the takeover of economic authority that was legally legitimate but politically and structurally coercive.

The process of the Dutch colonial government's takeover of economic policy authority in Riau Lingga reflects the pattern of structural domination described in colonialism theory. Through legal and contractual mechanisms, the Dutch not only controlled the region but also influenced the economic behavior of the local kingdom, particularly in the areas of taxation, trade, and shipping. Although the Sultan and high-ranking royal officials still formally held administrative authority, the substance of economic policy was gradually directed to serve colonial interests, in accordance with the pattern of economic coercion mentioned by Gottheil (1977).

The contract between the Sultan of Riau Lingga and the Dutch government on 1 December 1857 was one of the agreements that demonstrated this shift in authority. In the contract, the Sultan's right to collect duties and taxes was still recognised, but any new policies had to be approved by the Government ([Contract met den Sulthan van Lingga, Riouw en Onderhoorigheden, 1857](#)). This provision effectively placed the fiscal functions of the kingdom under colonial supervision. Through article 26, the Sultan was prohibited from raising taxes without Dutch permission, demonstrating that fiscal sovereignty had been limited within the colonial legal framework. This principle was in line with colonial practices described by Kartodirjo (1990), in which local rulers continued to be used as extensions of the administrative system, but were directed entirely towards the economic interests of the Dutch empire.

The provisions of the contract were then reinforced through the *Suppletoir Contract* of 1888, which detailed the types of taxes and duties on trade, shipping and land leases. Duties on exports of sago, opium and tin showed that the kingdom's economy was geared towards supporting the production of commodities that were highly valuable for colonial trade. The kingdom did still have income, but it was derived from an economic system controlled by the Dutch. Even in the management of taxes on opium and gambling, the kingdom only acted as the administrator of a *pacht* system that provided additional profits for the colonial treasury (Kelana, 1900).

The synchronisation of laws between the kingdom and the colonial government was evident in the 1877 decree of Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Shah II, which prohibited the illegal trade of opium and handed over violators to the Dutch authorities (Kelana, 1900). This confirmed the subordination of the kingdom's legal authority under colonial jurisdiction. Similarly, in the sago production policies of YDM Raja Muhammad Yusuf Al-Ahmadi in 1883 and 1886, rules on pricing, sailing permits and exports followed administrative patterns controlled by the colonial authorities (Kelana, 1900).

The 1886 shipping regulations requiring a sailing permit from the harbour master were also a form of layered economic control. These permits were not only an instrument of the kingdom, but also a colonial mechanism for monitoring the flow of commodities and interregional shipping (Kelana, 1900). The takeover of economic authority in Riau Lingga did not take place through the formal abolition of the kingdom, but through a restructuring of policy that placed local economic

authority under colonial regulation and administrative control. Strictly controlled policies opened up opportunities for the Dutch colonists to capitalise on and dominate the trade and shipping sectors in the Riau Lingga region (Sulistiyono & Rochwulaningsih, 2013).

The trade and shipping policies of the Riau Lingga Kingdom were in a complex position. On the one hand, the kingdom still had the sovereignty to regulate taxation; but on the other hand, all policies had to be in line with the contract stipulated by the Dutch. The 1857 contract and the 1888 addendum became legal instruments that bound the Sultan not to impose new taxes or duties without the consent of the colonial authorities. Taking control of the tax system promised lucrative revenues for the colonial powers to finance their routine expenditures while providing a surplus for their investments (Booth, 2013).

However, in practice, the Sultan and the Yang Dipertuan Muda Riau remained active in issuing decrees, circulars and notifications to regulate the trade and shipping sectors. Thus, the trade and shipping policies of the Riau Lingga Kingdom cannot be viewed solely as instruments of traditional sovereignty, but also as a product of compromise with the Dutch. The application of taxes, excise duties, and shipping regulations demonstrates the kingdom's efforts to maintain its fiscal and administrative functions, albeit within a framework determined by the colonial powers. Various Dutch colonial policies in Riau Lingga were attempts to establish an effective administrative structure that prioritised centralisation and fiscal reform (Elson, 1992).

Furthermore, the colonial appropriation of economic authority in Riau Lingga followed a different pattern from other colonies. In Java and India, for example, the transfer of authority was rapid and coercive, whereas in Riau Lingga, the process was gradual, layered, and carried out through more subtle political mechanisms without direct military confrontation. This difference reflects variations in colonial strategies tailored to the social, political, and economic structures of each region.

In the context of Java, Mahamid (2023) explains that after the defeat of Mataram in the Java War, the Dutch immediately acquired sovereignty over local law, replacing the feudal system with a colonial capitalist system. The Governor General's Resolution of 31 August 1830 on the establishment of the Madiun Residency marked a radical shift, whereby economic policy authority passed from the king to the governor-general. In this case, a rapid and systematic pattern can be seen, in which economic policy became the main instrument for subjugating the local economy to metropolitan interests. In a short time, control over economic resources and labour was centralised in the colonial authorities.

A similar situation occurred in India under the East India Company, where the takeover of economic control over tax revenues took place quickly and directly. From 1767 onwards, the Company was required to pay an annual tribute to the British state, marking the transfer of economic authority from the Mughal emperor to the British colonial authorities (Travers, 2005). The monopoly system that was implemented showed that British economic colonialism was based on the assumption of tax exploitation without taking into account the welfare of the people. The consequence was a humanitarian disaster such as the great famine of 1770, which killed millions of people, demonstrating the direct link between colonial economic policy and the destruction of the local economy (Bhambra, 2025).

In contrast to the rapid and coercive pattern in Java and India, the takeover of economic authority in Riau Lingga took place gradually. After the London Treaty of 1824, the Dutch did not carry out military invasions or offensive expeditions as they did in Lombok, Aceh, or Jambi (Lindblad, 1989). Instead, the Dutch used administrative and political mechanisms, including intervention in the sultanate structure and the impeachment of sultans such as Mahmud Shah IV on 23 September 1857 (Netscher, 2002) and Sultan Abdur Rahman Muazam Shah II on 3 February 1911 (Dahlan, 2014; Matheson, 1985).

Colonial sources indicate that the impeachment of these two sultans was not directly related to economic or trade issues. Sultan Mahmud was impeached on grounds that targeted the Sultan personally, whereby Sultan Mahmud IV was described as a Sultan who abandoned his

responsibilities, enjoyed a life of luxury and ignored warnings from the Dutch (Eck, 1899). Meanwhile, Sultan Abdur Rahman Muazam Shah II was deposed on several charges, such as being accused of preparing a rebellion, not flying the Dutch flag as a form of colonial legitimacy over the Riau Lingga kingdom, and frequently violating agreements with the Dutch (Algemeen Handelsblad, Zaterdag, Maart 1911). Although not directly related to economic aspects, from a local perspective, there was essentially resistance from local rulers against Dutch colonialism, but this was quickly resolved by dismissing the two sultans. Therefore, colonial control in Riau Lingga was established through power negotiations and the symbolic removal of local authority, rather than through armed conquest.

The transfer of economic authority in Riau Lingga did not take place through open domination or military invasion, but through a gradual and layered process that was realised in a series of political contracts from 1830 to 1909. These findings show that Dutch colonialism built a structure of economic domination through formal legality, fiscal restructuring, control of shipping, and symbolic mechanisms that systematically reduced the Sultan's sovereignty. By positioning these contracts as instruments of structural colonialism, this study combines the theories of Horvath, Gottheil, and Kartodirjo to explain how colonial oversight worked through 'direct intervention in local economic behaviour' without abolishing the formalism of traditional power.

Technically, Dutch colonial practices in Riau Lingga took on a new form compared to other forms of colonisation. Bhambra (2024) proposes three forms of colonisation: *first*, colonisation by corporations since the 16th century; *second*, colonisation through the extraction of natural resources and a taxation system in the 19th century; and *third*, emigration colonialism. The pattern of colonialism in Riau Lingga basically corresponds to the form of colonisation involving the extraction of resources and a taxation system as described by Bhambra. However, technically, the pattern of colonisation in Riau Lingga was carried out gradually through a number of contracts and agreements.

Previous studies on trade in Riau Lingga have tended to focus on regional trade networks, trade commodities, regional political contestation, and regional trade dynamics in the Malay region. In contrast, this study makes an original contribution by identifying patterns of contract-based economic colonialism, which operated through fiscal restrictions, control of shipping, integration of tax systems, and symbolic mechanisms that subjugated the political authority of the sultans. Furthermore, this study emphasises that colonialism in Riau Lingga had a different character from that in Java and India, as it took place administratively and not through armed conquest. Thus, the novelty of this study lies in its historical explanation, which shows colonialism as a systematic and gradual legal-administrative process that transformed the economic structure of the kingdom into part of colonial capitalism without directly abolishing traditional institutions.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that the process of economic and maritime authority appropriation in the Riau Lingga Kingdom took place gradually, systematically, and was legitimised through a series of political contracts between the Sultan and the Dutch colonial government from 1830 to 1909. The main findings show that each contract not only regulated the administrative aspects of trade and shipping, but also functioned as a political instrument that structured colonial power relations. Through fiscal and licensing mechanisms, the Dutch gradually eliminated the Sultan's economic autonomy and integrated the Riau Lingga region into the Dutch East Indies colonial capitalist system. Trade and shipping regulations were not merely administrative instruments, but rather an arena for the struggle for authority between local and colonial powers. This study opens up a new perspective in the study of economic colonialism in Southeast Asia, highlighting how political contracts functioned as hegemonic mechanisms that simultaneously combined economic, legal and symbolic control. However, it must be acknowledged that this research relies heavily on colonial archives that reflect the Dutch perspective, so that the voices and resistance strategies of the royal court and local communities have not been fully explored. Further research based on local archives

and oral histories is needed to broaden our understanding of the internal dynamics of resistance to colonial economic domination in Riau Lingga. This study has limitations in that it relies predominantly on colonial sources and lacks data from local perspectives. The contractual approach also fails to fully capture socio-economic dynamics at the community level. Therefore, further studies are recommended to utilise non-colonial archives, expand regional comparisons, and integrate more multidimensional economic-political analysis.

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