

Introduction: Asian Maritime Networking Centered in Fifteenth Century Melaka

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Abstract

This introductory chapter and those that follow in this issue of *JESHO* celebrate the 500th anniversary of the c.1400–1511 strategic Melaka port-of-trade based Sultanate that controlled the Straits of Melaka maritime passageway connecting the Western and Eastern Indian Oceans to the China and Java Seas and beyond in eastern Asia until the Portuguese seizure of Melaka in 1511. As such, these studies update prior *JESHO* publications that have addressed Melaka's history since the *Journal's* inception.

Keywords

Melaka – Straits of Melaka – Indian Ocean – China Sea – maritime diaspora

Maritime Southeast Asia from Roman times had itinerant communities of networked upstream littorals, downstream river mouths, and multiple coastal seafaring diasporas. Oceanic sojourners based in strategic “home” ports and a networked series of intermediary and primary marketplaces and political centers were the base for vital agencies linking major ports-of-trade and maritime communities in regional river mouths and their adjacent upstreams. Downstream littoral and coastal naval vessels of assorted sizes collected and relocated products, as the participants of eastern Asia port-of-trade networks and multi-ethnic intermediaries in fifteenth century international and indigenous Indian Ocean, Java, South China and Sulu Seas, and Straits of Melaka marketplace transfers (Hall, 2018b; Tan, 2012; Andaya and Andaya, 2014).

This introductory study initially addresses the historical significance of multi-ethnic maritime sojourners in the overall configuration of early Southeast Asia Indian Ocean, South China Sea, Java Sea, and eastern Sulu Sea maritime trade.

The nature, importance, and consequences of a variety of regional maritime networking sustained international trade and the most prominent traders active in the Straits of Melaka East-West connective (Borschberg, 2019). This introduction and the following chapter studies are focal on the fifteenth century Indian Ocean, Java and South China Seas, and Straits of Melaka international and indigenous marketplaces c.1400–1511. Therein the profitable extended Western and Eastern Indian Ocean maritime trade networks and cultural exchanges intersected in the strategic Straits of Melaka prior to and in the aftermath of the Portuguese 1511 conquest of the Melaka (Malaka) southwest Malay Peninsula coastal port as depicted on the following late 16th-century map.

Revisionist historians have asserted that from the late thirteenth through early fifteenth centuries (eras of Yuan and Ming China dynasty sovereignty) China's enhanced diplomatic outreach into the Southeast Asia region confirmed China's regional sovereignty over the extended Eastern Indian Ocean maritime passageway. But the China realm was at that time more concerned with the solicitation of tributary trade that would supply China's and Southeast Asia's marketplace demands for Indian Ocean products. Therein a significant increased volume of taxable international trade took place in China's southern ports, with mixed consequences for the Southeast Asia and Indian Ocean regions (Swope, ed., 2019; Hall, 2019; Lockhard, 2010; Chang, 1991, 2019).

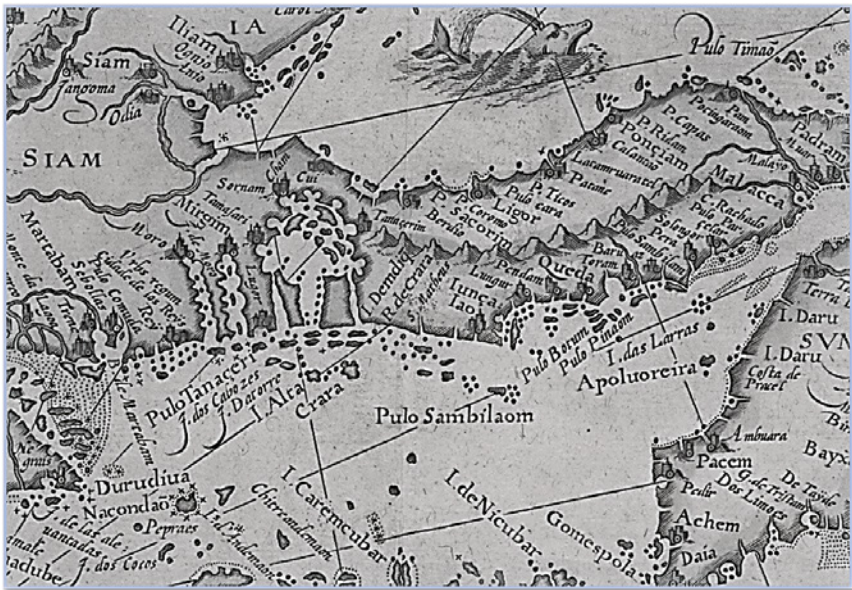


FIGURE 1 Extended southern Eastern Indian Ocean Straits of Melaka passageway (Van Linschoten 1596) (Melaka on the southwest coast of the Malay Peninsula across from northwest Sumatra)

Yuan (1279–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) court regional outreach initiatives were limited. In the aftermath of the fifteenth century Zeng He voyages, there was a generalized decline of China's maritime trade exports in favor of Indian Ocean imports. But China's courts were concerned that failure to actively engage in the Indian Ocean maritime exchanges would result in China's relegation to the periphery of the rapidly transitioning Indian Ocean maritime world. In response Yuan and early Ming monarchs supported diplomatic attempts to recover the lost trade volume that was going to China's Indian Ocean marketplace competitors, by insisting that representatives of the Indian Oceans realm periodically appear at China's court. Embassy delegations not only guaranteed China's access to the best and most in-demand international products (e.g., spices, regional specialties, and a variety of forest products), but also accepted China's political interests in stabilizing the inclusive Indian Ocean region and thereby maintained the profitable fluidity of the East-West maritime passageway as detailed in the following studies (Wade, 1997, 2004, 2005).



FIGURE 2 South China Sea, Java Sea, and Straits of Melaka extended Eastern Indian Ocean maritime trade routes based on navigability, c.900–1500
AUTHOR

At the beginning of the 15th century the Ming court selected strategic Melaka on the southwest Malay Peninsula coast as their preferred intermediary port-of-trade. Melaka became the prominent transitional marketplace at the intersection of the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, South China and Java Sea regional maritime and overland networks. Ming rulers supported the founding of Melaka, by sending a series of voyages to the west by the Ming eunuch Admiral Zheng He (1405–1433), and fulfilled the Ming dynasty's ambition to assert and revitalize the earlier Tang-era China-centered tributary trade system. However, Ming hegemonic initiatives ultimately failed, not just because of debate within China itself relative to the appropriateness of Ming China's assertive external initiatives that extended to the east Africa coastline, but because the outdated tributary system was no longer valid. Although many international historians once asserted that after the Zheng He voyages China could no longer "rule the seas"—a view characterized by revisionist scholars as "The Ming Gap"—the Chinese court could still dispatch fleets that included thousand ton junks that could sail to the east Africa and Middle East coastlines (Levathes, 1994; Thomaz, 2000; Brown, 2008).

Melaka's rise to prominence in the fifteenth century depended on that era's multi-centered Indian Ocean trade, increasing political authority complexity, and the practicality of establishing a single Southeast Asia clearinghouse for East-West Indian Ocean trade as Ming China's strategic Straits of Melaka preferential partner. It was appropriate that this central entrepot was in Southeast Asia—because Southeast Asia was geographically the fifteenth century Indian Ocean pivotal marketing center and strategic source of the then most-in-demand Indian Ocean commodities, notably spices, textiles, ceramics, and metals (Hall, 2021; Borschberg, 2019).

Melaka's initial court initiatives partnering with a mix of extended Indian Ocean maritime diasporas established the foundation for Melaka's international prominence as the legacy of the port-based Straits of Melaka sovereignties that had previously existed first in downstream Srivijaya in southeast Sumatra, then in Temasek on the south coast of the Malay Peninsula, and in Samudra-Pasai on the northeast coast of Sumatra. (Heng, 2019; Hall, 2017). From the beginning of the fifteenth century heavy naval traffic arrived at Melaka via the seasonal monsoons by way of both western and eastern Asia. India-based ships reached Melaka regularly from India's southern coastlines, Sri Lanka, and the wider Bay of Bengal (Mukherjee, 2021). Melaka marketplace commodities included luxury items from the Middle East such as rosewater, incense, opium, carpets, as well as seeds and varied grains, but the bulk of the fifteenth-century Western Indian Ocean cargoes was cotton cloth from the Gujarat (upper northwest) and Coromandel (southeast) coast India (Hall, 2012).

The Melaka highly populated marketplaces operated seasonally with foodstuffs, rice, cane sugar, dried and salted meat and fish, preserved vegetables and candied fruits, as well as locally dyed white cotton cloth fabrics. Malabar merchants from India's southwest Kerala coast arrived with pepper and Middle East and northeast India commodities. *Bago* (Pegu) polity mariners from lower Myanmar (Burma) and Thai Ayutthaya on the upper east-coast Malay Peninsula and downstream Chaophraya River basin entering the Gulf of Siam/Thailand also supplied foodstuffs—notably rice and sugar—and ships. In return spices, gold, camphor, tin, sandalwood, alum, and pearls arrived from Melaka, and re-exports from China included varieties of porcelain, musk, silk, quicksilver, copper, and vermillion (Aung-Thwin, 2017; Joll, 2019; Baker and Pasuk, 2017a, 2017b; Baker, 2003).

Although Ming China discouraged official tributary trade with the South after the 1430s, ample unofficial and privately financed trade by southern Chinese diaspora merchants sailed to and from south China ports and beyond on Chinese junks with stopovers at intermediary ports on the networked south and central Vietnam littoral and eastern archipelago coastlines (Hall, 2013; Whitmore, this study). There were onward maritime passages in the upper Gulf of Siam that included layovers initially in upstream Sukothai and subsequently downstream in Thai Ayutthaya on the downstream Chaophraya River (Baker, 2003). As an alternative to the Straits of Melaka maritime route, upper Malay Peninsula east coast ports-of-trade were intermediary bases for overland western passageways to the Bay of Bengal northeast coast Pegu/Begu (Burma/Myanmar), the upper Malay Peninsula, and beyond.

Regular Indian Ocean regional shipping transfers via intermediary Melaka came to and from Thai Ayutthaya, Begu/Pegu, Dai Viet, and Champa Vietnam, as also north-coast Java, coastal and upstream Sumatra and Borneo, and the eastern Sulu Sea Philippines and Spice Islands. Each supplied marketable foods, spices, jungle goods, textiles, ceramics, gunpowder and metallic weapons, and a substantial variety of other useful trade commodities (L. Andaya, 1999; Baker and Pongpaichit, 2017; Joll, 2019; Hall, 2008; 2013; 2018b; 2018a; Whitmore, 2019).

In the words of the early sixteenth-century Portuguese scribe Tomé Pires, reflecting on his travels in the Straits of Melaka region “at the end of the monsoon, where you find what you want, and sometimes more than you are looking for,” therein characterizing Melaka as “more than a marketplace.” (Corteseo, 1944, 2, 228). Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Melaka was a symbol of the wealth, luxury, and networked stability of Asia. Initially the post-1511 Portuguese (via the Western Indian Ocean) and Spanish (via the Pacific Ocean) were eager to circumvent the eastern Mediterranean Sea as the Venetians held

a monopoly on the then priceless international Indian Ocean spice and textile trade. The great wealth and luxury commodities available in this trade had induced them to sail halfway around the world to the East in their then tiny and uncomfortable ships—in contrast to fifteenth-century China’s 1000-ton junks. Thus, when the Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean in the early 1500s their objective was to seize Melaka, which they considered the then pivotal center of Asian maritime trade. An Asian fleet of ships crewed by mixed diasporas based in north-coast Java ports-of-trade were coincidentally preparing a similar attack on Melaka—only to have the Portuguese do it first. The following graphic characterizes transitional fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Southeast Asia subsequent to the establishment of “activity zones” in the fifteenth-century Straits of Melaka’ (Wade, 2010; Hall, 2018a, 2019; Borschberg, 2019; and Mukherjee, 2022).

Fifteenth-century eastern Asia port communities populated by downstream and coastal littoral multi-ethnic international oceanic sojourners—who by necessity laid over between annual monsoon wind-shift seasons—and thereby in a variety of ways mixed with continuing and seasonally transient port-of-trade sojourners and local residents. Seasonal Chinese merchant diasporas

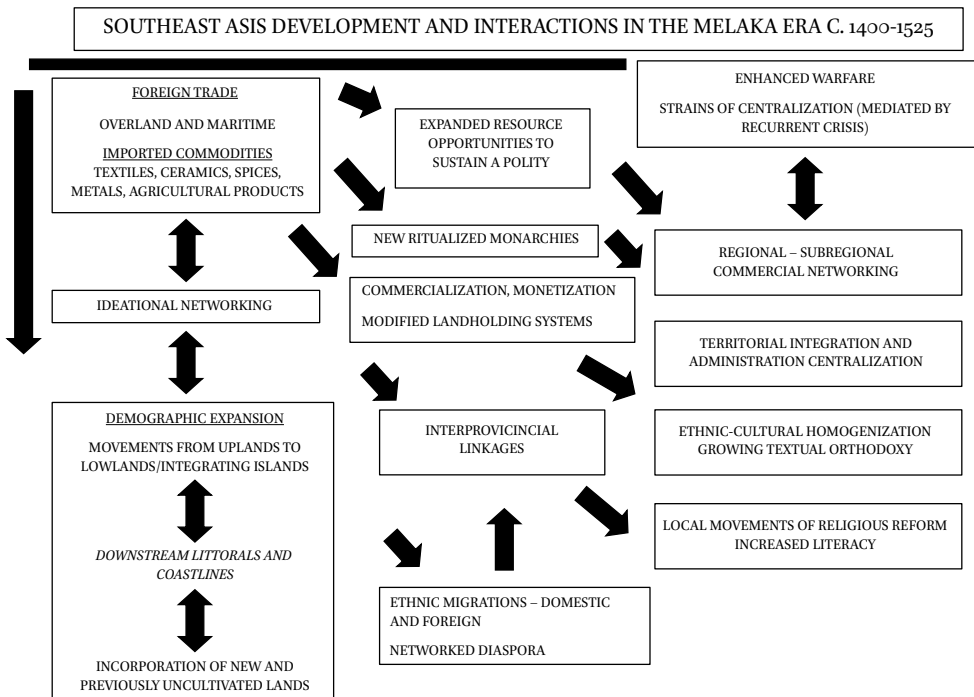


FIGURE 3 Contested agencies in the fifteenth-century Western Straits of Melaka

frequently married and had a network of wives and resident families in the Straits of Melaka, Indian Ocean, and China, Java, and Sulu Seas. These downstream wives and families looked after their networked interests when their transient male merchant sojourners sailed to a specific port or series of ports in the extended Indian Ocean (Chang, 1991; Manguin, 1991; Reid, 1999).

Local or regional intermarriages of these sojourning male merchants were also a means to establish some form of continuing community membership in the wider eastern oceanic realm. This is documented in the records of the then prominent transient Yemen Hadrami seafarers who sojourned from the mouth of the Red Sea in the west; northwestern Indian Ocean “Persians”; and transient Nile River- and Red Sea-based Jewish maritime merchant communities (Goitein, 1973; Ho, 2006; Lambourn, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2011). By the fifteenth century western Indian Ocean-based Hadrami diaspora merchants were resident in most of the major ports-of-trade between Yemen and Melaka, where their local presence was balanced by their responsibilities to and continued linkage with their networked intermediary port bases on the coastlines of northern Gujarat and southern Malabar western India. These Western Indian Ocean sojourners sailed on the seasonal monsoons from and to west-coast India and the eastern Indian Ocean Bay of Bengal. They ventured beyond via the east-west Straits of Melaka passageway to the coastlines of Champa in central and southern Vietnam, as well as to southeast China, the Java Sea, and port passageways further east towards the tropical Spice Islands and The Philippines (Hall, 2018b; Tibbetts, 1971; Lambourn, 2008; Ptak, 1992; L. Andaya, 1993; Ellen, 2003; Gaynor, 2013, 2016).

By the fifteenth century so-called “Persian” merchant residents and sojourners based in Masulipatnam, Chittagong, and other regional ports on the upper Bay of Bengal and the regional ports had ongoing east-to-west monsoon season networked connections to and from the Iranian littoral of the northwest Indian Ocean (Tibbetts, 1971, 395; Lambourne, 2011; Mukherjee, 2011, 2020, and her following chapter). This “Persian” maritime diaspora community dates to the earliest centuries of the first millennium, when Chinese diplomats transiting on Chinese ships between China and India repeatedly referenced competitive resident and itinerant northwest India-based Sogdian Persian merchants who were active in Southeast Asia ports-of-trade (Subrahmanyam, 1999; Sen, 2003, 2014).

Jewish Cairo Geniza records document the transactions of Egyptian Fustat-connected Indian Ocean Jewish merchants who from the eleventh century made a passage from the Nile River to the Red Sea and onward to the Western and Eastern Indian Oceans (Goitein, 1973; Gil, 2003). This was also the case among the prominent southeast India Tamil Hindu (*Keling*) and southern

and central Muslim (*Chulia*) east coast India Eastern Indian Ocean merchant diaspora communities. Among Southeast India inscriptions and the roughly contemporary fifteenth-century *Sejarah Melayu* Straits of Melaka court chronicle entries collectively document the continuing loyalties of early diaspora communities taking their maritime and overland passages (Hall, 2010; Borschberg, 2019).

Some historians to this day have argued that Southeast Asia's fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Islamic conversions were not primarily spiritually motivated but trade-related, undertaken to induce specific foreign traders to transact their business in newly Islamic ports. Subsequently there were resulting increases among local revenue collections implemented by regional monarchs who converted as co-religionists (Hall, 2001, 2018b). It is impossible to know why widespread Islamic conversion of Indian Ocean seafarers took place, and there is no reason to doubt the general sincerity of those who did. However, it is also clear from the various available documents and other contemporary sources that there were certainly positive implications consequent to historic religious conversions of individual traders, port populations, and/or rulers. There were tangible and ongoing economic benefits through a variety of mechanisms, most notably by contemporary Southeast Asia sovereigns seeking to attract Muslim sojourners.

By the thirteenth century Indian Ocean sojourner Muslim diasporas were preeminent on the international maritime route between the Middle East and China. These seafarers made transitional monsoon season layovers in Muslim ports at Samudra-Pasai on the northeast Sumatra coastline, Ayutthaya's southeast Malay Peninsula east coast on the upper "Bay of Siam," north coast Java on the Java Sea, and the southeast and central Vietnam Champa coastline. Southeast Asia shipping extended to southern China ports and beyond to the northeast China Sea and northeast Java Sea coastline ports that linked to the Eastern Indonesian Archipelago and Spice Islands. Highly visible Islamic conversions clearly offered or at least implied a favorable religious environment and the assurance of local acceptance of the Islamic moral code, as this applied to commercial and personal transactions (Hall, 2019, Joll, 2014; Borschberg, 2019).

Notably, Bay of Bengal coastal port-polity elites linked to those based in fifteenth-century Melaka were among the first converts to Islam—followed by their coastline and adjacent littoral hinterland populations (Heng, 2019). The upstream and highlands populations seemingly had little initial incentive to accept Islam since community membership retained traditional Hindu-Buddhist and local non-Islamic societal standards. Eventually upstream conversions to Islam took place reactive to the agency of downstream riverine

system rulers who encouraged local acceptance of Islam to legitimate regional authority. Islamic patronage by seasonal sojourners, resident merchant diasporas, and local converts to Islam seem to have initially made gestures meant to derive economic benefits as the base for sustained local sovereignty with increased flows of upstream hinterland riverine or landed produce to downstream ports (Wade, 2010). However, downstream “conversions” to Islam may have equally sustained Islam’s political and commercial potential to link diverse upstream, downstream, and coastal littoral population clusters into common upstream-downstream cultural communities. In a positive light, conversions to Islam could sustain political elites’ spiritual commitments and practical and constructive societal goals. (Morillo, 2011; Lambourn, 2003, 2004, 2008).

Historians have been reluctant to accept merchant sojourners as the “agent” sources of marketplace cultural transmission, but instead credited clerical priests, monks, and other “knowledge practioners” who had shared the maritime passage and subsequently taken residency in the newly evolving southeast India downstream littorals and coastlines (Morillo, 2011; Kulke, 1999; Hall, 2017; Sprey, 2017). While these documented residencies may have initially contemplated Christian salvation on southwest coast Malabar south India, local and multi-ethnic regional communities were variously associated with and patronized regional Western Indian Ocean Hinduism, Islam, and extended Eastern Indian Ocean Buddhist, Indic, and Chinese cultural realms that had societal connections that offered better regional opportunities.

The worldly Indian Ocean travels of merchants and mariners were certainly not devoid of culture, because their mixed oceanic and overland travels made them societally sensitive to the issues as well as agencies that encouraged societal inclusion rather than exclusion. Downstream and littoral diaspora populations financed temples, alters, retreats, and mosques to facilitate, promote, and substantiate communal membership in rightful ritualized communities. Local community support by these multi-cultural diasporas contributed to newly institutionalized societies rather than achievement of personal gain at the expense of others (Morillo, 2011; Park, 2011; Clark, 2011; Hall, 2011; Whitmore, 2011; Lambourn, 2011; Blackburn, 2015).

Newly arriving fifteenth-century Indian Ocean maritime diasporas were inclusive of Indic, Buddhist, Islamic, or Chinese contributions to societal order. Their mix of societal religious commitments and Eastern and Western Indian Ocean “knowledge transfers” were foundational to their sense of group legitimacy, and overall place in the new transitional Melaka Straits emporium (Heng, 2019; Acree, ed., 2016). Newly networked merchant diaspora communities—as recorded in early European and Chinese sojourners

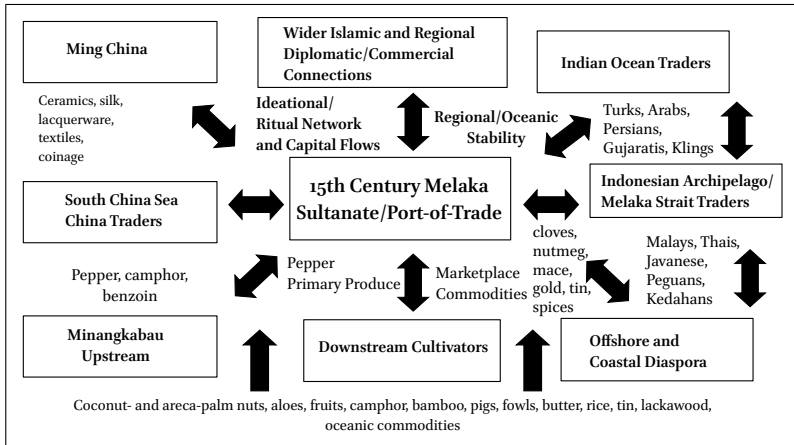


FIGURE 4 Fifteenth-century Straits of Melaka regional contested agencies

writings—were said to have neutralized initial local societal belief that had wrongly conceived that the newly arrived were obsessed with achieving personal gain rather than commitment to wider societal well-being. In time fifteenth-century multi-cultural international knowledge and commodity transfers that applied to the contemporary Melaka Sultanate port-polity are depicted in the graphic of Melaka’s fifteenth-century transitional networked multi-cultural agencies (Brown, 2008; Laichen, 2011; Hall, 2012, 2018a).

As noted, while the transitional fifteenth-century Western Indian Ocean networked Islamic and other western Indian Ocean religious diasporas factor in Melaka’s history there was also significant extended Eastern Indian Ocean Chinese maritime diaspora multidimensional presence in the Straits of Melaka realm. Based on the cited Southeast Asia evidence, recent revisionist scholarship asserts that from the late thirteenth- through early fifteenth-century (in the eras of Yuan and early Ming dynastic sovereignty) enhanced China’s diplomatic agencies in the Southeast Asia region were less focused on confirming Chinese regional sovereignty over the extended Eastern Indian Ocean maritime passageway. Instead, the Ming court solicited tributary trade to meet China’s marketplace demand for Indian Ocean products, as also increasing the volume of the Ming court’s taxable international trade that moved through China’s southern ports. Thus Yuan (1279–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) court regional outreach initiatives were less reactive to a generalized decline of China’s maritime trade, or to achieve China’s expansionist “empire” ambitions, and instead there was dynastic concern that China would be relegated to the periphery of the Indian Ocean maritime world. As previously noted, Yuan and early Ming monarchs supported diplomatic attempts to recover lost

trade volume that had shifted to China's extended Indian Ocean marketplace competition (Hall, 2018b). Above all, the early Ming encouraged the fluidity of the East-West maritime and overland passageways (Chang, 2005; Wade, 2005; Sen, 2015).

1 15th Century Melaka as an International Emporia

1.1 *Fifteenth Century Melaka on the Malay Peninsula Southwest Coast of the Strategic*

Straits of Melaka passageway provided a singular prominent urban marketplace at the intermediary intersection of the Bay of Bengal, extended Eastern Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and Java and Sulu Seas regional eastern maritime network operating in The Philippines and the Spice Islands. By means of providing economic and political support of Melaka, Ming rulers sustained Melaka's founding and continuing independence. As reported, voyages of the eunuch Admiral Zheng He (1405–1433) were the Ming court's attempt to assert and revitalize the Tang-era China-centered tributary trade system in the Straits of Melaka region (Wade, ed., 2015). However, in the long-term Ming initiatives failed not just because of court and scholarly debates within China, but by challenging the appropriateness of Ming China's external commercial initiatives (Whitmore, 1996; Cooke, Tana, and Anderson, eds., 2013). Instead, the Ming tributary system lost oceanic validity over the course of the fifteenth century consequent to the termination of the Zheng He voyages (Hall, 2019/2020; Borschberg, 2019: 28off).

Despite what many historians have previously proposed, by the mid-fifteenth century China could no longer effectively demonstrate that it could "rule the seas," even though the Ming court still had the capacity to dispatch fleets and receive regional Indian Ocean diplomats. Revisionist historians now depict Ming dynasty ventures beyond China's borders in the post-Zheng He period as an era of transition and its aftermath characterized by periodic failed attempts to reassert an idealized Chinese dynastic authoritarian presence in the Indian Ocean. Chinese imperial records document the periodic renewal but ultimately unsuccessful attempts by subsequent Chinese dynasties to reassert China's "rightful" authority over Vietnam and other China Sea regions (Hall, 2013; Brown, 2008; Whitmore, 2019).

Following studies assert that the integrity of the fifteenth-century Indian Ocean maritime trade was the result of wider Indian Ocean networking and less the product of the political, economic, or cultural initiatives of the then local or imperial elite. Instead, it was due to successful networking among the

sojourning merchants and wayfarers who traveled by land and sea to engage in trade at fifteenth-century Indian Ocean regional ports. The Melaka strategic port-of-trade linked via the extended Eastern Indian Ocean to China, Java, The Philippines, and Spice Islands to the east and Western Indian Ocean connectivity to the Middle East and east coast Africa.

Maritime diaspora histories provide a human perspective of early regional Indian Ocean developmental patterns centered in the fifteenth-century Melaka port-polity. In sum, fifteenth-century Melaka's globalization was a mix of Straits of Melaka and Indian Ocean diasporas, merchants, clerics, and maritime sojourning communities. The revisionist historical studies assembled in this set assert that Melaka court elite were engaged in quantitative marketplace and commercial movements of commodities, religions, and the formation of pluralistic multi-cultural societies with multiple loyalties and affiliations (Heng, 2019).

The Bay of Bengal's early maritime diasporas, as discussed in these studies, were the agents of early globalization who engaged in the movements of new commercial commodities and accompanying religious and cultural ideas; confrontations between alien cultures; and formations of pluralistic societies, dual loyalties, and multiple affiliations (Borschberg, 2019). When the Portuguese seized Melaka in 1511 many of Melaka's former networked secondary ports-of-trade negated their relationships with Melaka and to varying degrees became sub-regional centers of expansive Indian Ocean trade. Among the most prominent of the sixteenth-century maritime and downstream, and coastal littoral seasonal shipping stopovers were Thai Ayutthaya, several port-centered polities on the east coast of Vietnam, north Java coastline ports-of-trade, and northwest coast Aceh on Sumatra (also the center of Southeast Asia Islam). Banjarmasin on the upstream and coastal littoral of the southeast Borneo riverine delta and the northwest Brunei coastal downstream were post-1500 prominent ports-of-trade, as also the Spice Islands to the east and The Philippines to the north (Wicks, 1992; Tagliacozzo, 2007; Hall, 2008; Sen, 2017; Ptak, 1992; Leonard Andaya, 1993; Heng, 2006, 2008, 2021).

This collected set of recent studies addresses the Melaka era and its linked maritime Asia historical networking that includes the consequences of Portuguese seizure of Melaka in 1511. The first study by Peter Borschberg provides a significant revisionist study of the periods of Melaka's prominence as a strategic pre- and post-fifteenth century Asia maritime political, religious, cultural, and port-of-trade urban center—and especially addresses the consequences of the Portuguese sixteenth century aftermath. Subsequently, the second study by Rila Mukherjee highlights Melaka's western Bay of Bengal Eastern Indian Ocean oceanic connectivity to the variety of Western Indian

Ocean and seasonal monsoon maritime passages—and beyond to west coast India and east coast Africa, the Middle East, and Straits of Melaka Western to Eastern Indian Ocean networked-passageways. John Whitmore (recently deceased) addresses Melaka's fifteenth-century eastern maritime networked realms within the extended Eastern Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Whitmore highlights the role of long-term Vietnam coastline networked ports-of-trade as they linked with the Straits of Melaka in the west and southern China ports-of-trade to the north. Derek Heng's concluding study explains the significant available documentation of evolving fifteenth- to eighteenth-century China and Southeast Asia land and sea reciprocities, with focus on Melaka's significant networked fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century maritime East-West Asia prior to significant European presence.

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