

**Trade routes, ancient ports and cultural commonalities —  
a voyage into Southeast Asia's surprising past**

**T**HE PEOPLES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA have a long history of shared culture. From Myanmar to Papua, the inhabitants built wooden houses on poles, whether they lived in flooded coastal plains or in the highlands. Their diet consisted mainly of rice and fish. They engaged in pastimes such as cockfighting and sat enthralled at *wayang kulit* performances. Offering betel to guests was the cornerstone of hospitality.

How did such features come to spread across an area of 4.5 million square kilometres? For all its diversity of ethnicity, language and religion, Southeast Asia can best be understood as a region knit together by a network of trade routes over land and sea.

This revelatory new book traces the diffusion of cultures between the Bay of Bengal and the Java Sea, beginning from the last few centuries BCE, by looking at trade goods such as Indian textiles, Vietnamese Dong Son drums, Chinese ceramics, and spices from the Indonesian archipelago. The authors take us through a host of ancient port-cities and kingdoms, such as Srivijaya, whose fortunes were intimately tied to these trade routes, pointing out striking similarities in architecture, writing systems and everyday customs.

Richly illustrated with maps, drawings and photographs, *Between the Bay of Bengal and the Java Sea* takes you on a fascinating voyage into the region's colourful past.



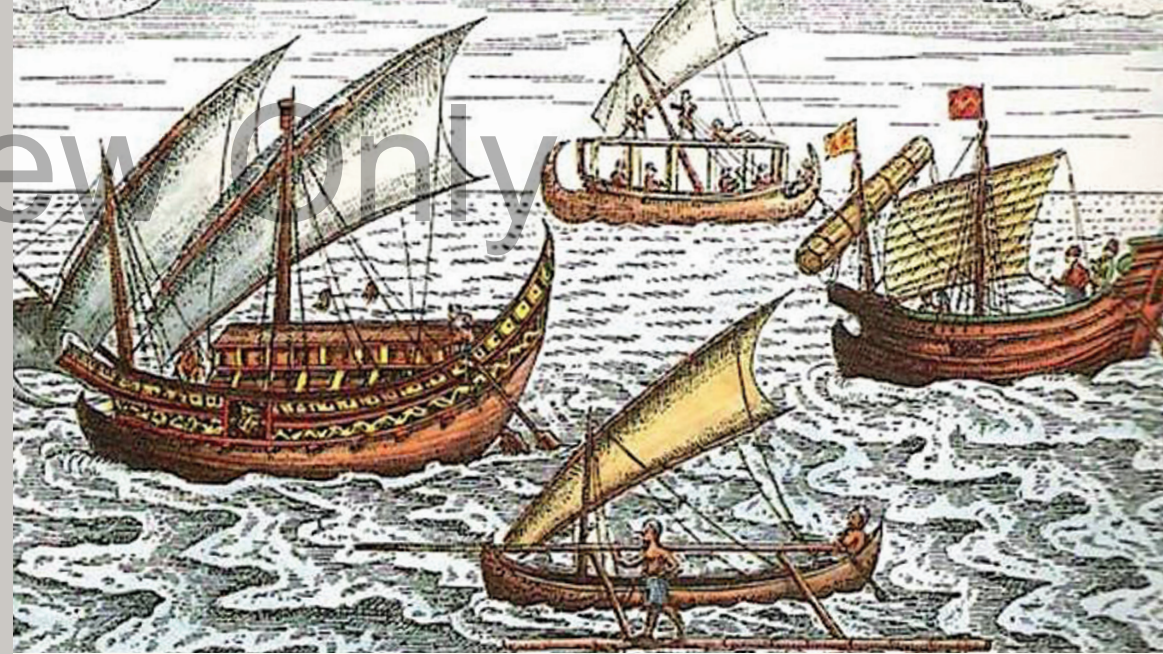
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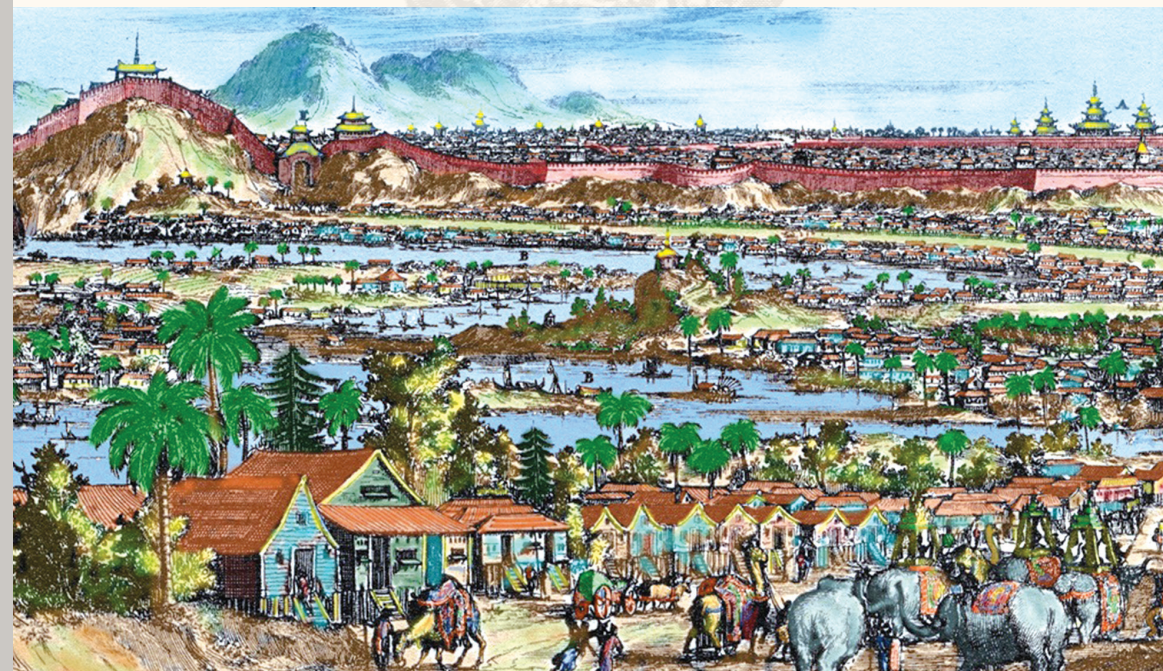


BETWEEN THE BAY OF BENGAL AND THE JAVA SEA  
MAGANJEET KAUR & MARIANA ISA

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**mc**



BETWEEN  
THE  
*Bay of Bengal*  
AND THE  
*Java Sea*  
Maganjeet Kaur  
Mariana Isa





For Review Only

BETWEEN THE

BAY OF BENGAL

AND THE

JAVA SEA

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*Trade routes, ancient ports & cultural  
commonalities in Southeast Asia*

MAGANJEET KAUR • MARIANA ISA



Marshall Cavendish  
Editions

# For Review Only

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE & PORTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

ONE OF THE MOST remarkable features of Southeast Asia is its diversity. This geographical region, which encompasses 11 modern nation states, is home to more than 1,000 distinct languages; its ethnic groups are equally diverse and belief systems multifarious. A closer look, however, reveals many cultural similarities. From Myanmar to Papua, people built wooden houses on poles, whether they lived in flooded coastal plains or in the highlands. The practice of chewing betel, an intoxicant made of areca nut, betel leaf and lime, became entrenched in traditions of hospitality and

▼ The *tongkonan* is the traditional house of the Toraja people of South Sulawesi. These houses are built high on stilts and have boat-shaped roofs. The form of these houses is said to be reflected in the motifs on Vietnamese Dong Son drums.



Stilt house on Inle Lake, Myanmar. Throughout history, houses across Southeast Asia have been built on stilts, raising the living area high above ground level. This protects the occupants from wild animals as well as from floods, while air circulation under the floor helps keep the interior cool. Those dwelling over the water could moor their boats in the space under the house.





► A lion head made of sandstone, dated to the 10th century, found at Tra Kieu, Quang Nam province, Vietnam. Tra Kieu was a Cham royal city and it was previously known as Simhapura, making it the first “lion city” of South-east Asia.



► A partial Dong Son drum from Sangeang Island, Indonesia. These large mushroom-shaped bronze drums take their name from Dong Son, a village in northern Vietnam. Four frogs are embedded on the drum’s tympanum – croaking frogs herald rain, important in an agricultural society.

► The Ngoc Lu drum, unearthed in 1893 in Vietnam, features intriguing motifs on its tympanum. Notice the house on stilts with a saddle roof at the centre of the drawing – these types of houses were common throughout Southeast Asia, e.g. the *tongkonan* houses of South Sulawesi. Observe also the procession of men carrying instruments and wearing feathered headdresses, which were also worn in parts of the southern islands.

wedding ceremonies. Founding stories based on the courage of weaker animals in the face of stronger ones, like Melaka’s mousedeer kicking a dog, echo across the region. The name “Singapura” (lion city) is not unique to Singapore but has been used for a number of cities across Southeast Asia.

This transmission of culture, beliefs and stories across the region took advantage of the numerous trade routes that criss-crossed Southeast Asia. Multiple trading networks, comprising both land and sea routes, intersected with one another, providing the opportunity for products and culture to be widely dispersed. Thus, two ancient prestige products from Vietnam – Dong Son drums and Sa Huynh pottery – have been found as far afield as Sumatra in the west and Bird’s Head Peninsula, West Papua, in the east. A carbonised nutmeg from the eastern Indonesian islands dating to 400–300 BCE found in northern India points not only to the antiquity of these networks but also to the participation of local products in international markets.

The wide dispersal of products and culture was no mean feat, considering that a large part of Southeast Asia is insular – that is, made up of islands. The key nodes in the trading networks were seaports and river

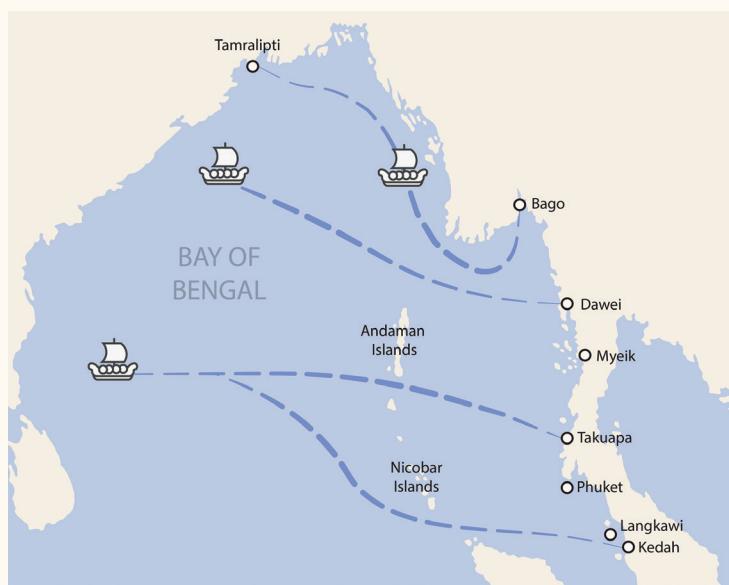




► Two monsoon seasons hold sway in Southeast Asia. Boats travelled to Southeast Asia on one monsoon and returned on the other. The north-east monsoon builds up in November and December across the South China Sea. The winds gradually weaken from February and start withdrawing at the end of March. There is a transition period in April when the winds bring boats towards eastern Indonesia. The southwest monsoon builds up in May and is in full force between June and August. The winds weaken gradually and disappear in November. The cycle then starts again.



► Sea routes from India to Southeast Asia. Boats from Tamralipti in Bengal tended to hug the coastline, taking advantage of the coastal ports like Bago. If crossing the Bay of Bengal directly from the northern coastline of India, boats would sail straight for Dawei on the Tanintharyi Peninsula. From South India, there were two options. Boats could either take the route between the Andaman and Nicobar islands to reach Takuapa, or the route between the Nicobar Islands and the Aceh headland to reach Kedah.



ports, which consolidated products from their hinterlands. Riding the monsoons to India and China, the boat-dwelling sea nomads then distributed these goods to markets outside the region, where Southeast Asian jungle and sea produce, such as tortoise shells, pearls, aloes-wood, sandalwood, camphor and spices, were considered exotic. The sea nomads were expert navigators, looking to the skies and the seas for guidance. The stars, winds, clouds, birds, sea animals and wave patterns allowed them to navigate safely the waters between Madagascar in the Indian Ocean and Easter Island in the Pacific. Their grit and pluck drew admiration from the Greek philosopher Pliny the Elder, who wrote that they were driven by “the spirit of man and human courage”. Their navigational skills would later be sought by the Chinese and Portuguese.

The 1st century CE saw increased trade in the region, stimulated by Indian traders turning their attention eastwards. India’s main trading partner had hitherto been Rome, but declining trade saw them look

▲ Bas-relief of a ship carved on a panel at Borobudur, the monumental 9th-century Buddhist temple in central Java. This ship is said to be a typical Southeast Asian vessel of the time. A Chinese document from the 3rd century describes the ships as 50 metres long and rising 4–5 metres above sea level, and able to hold up to 1,000 tons of cargo and 700 passengers. In 2003, the *Samudra Raksa*, a life-size replica of the Borobudur ship, was sailed from Jakarta to Ghana to demonstrate that these ships were capable of making open sea journeys.



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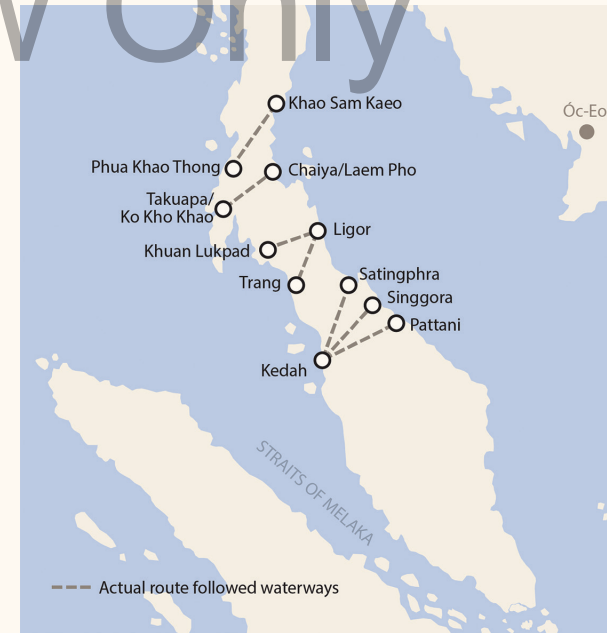


▲ A Roman gold medallion dating to 152 CE excavated at Óc-Eo. It depicts Emperor Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161 CE).

to China. They took the maritime route across the Bay of Bengal to Funan, a Southeast Asian polity centred at the lower Mekong delta, where Chinese diplomats and trade emissaries also congregated. Funan was the gatekeeper to China, and its main port Óc-Eo became a vibrant centre of trade. Products from around Southeast Asia, China and India were traded here. Even Roman coins have been excavated at Óc-Eo. A luxury trade in horses strengthened Funan's ties with China and increased the importance of Óc-Eo as an entrepôt. The horses came from Central Asia, brought by Indian traders via Bengal to Óc-Eo. They were then transshipped to China. Funan could also have been the distribution centre for these horses to destinations as far as Bali and Java.

Rather than sail around the Malay Peninsula to reach Funan, Indian traders disembarked on the west coast and cut across the peninsula, before taking another boat on to Óc-Eo. At the beginning of the first millennium, there would have been little activity down the peninsula to sustain merchants' interest, and adding an extra 2,500 kilometres to the journey would not have been profitable. In addition, the piratical activities of the sea nomads at the southern end of the Melaka Straits made this journey fraught with danger. Importantly, Funan had agricultural surpluses that could support traders from afar, who had to wait 3–5 months for the change in monsoon winds in order to return home.

The Malay Peninsula stretches around 1,700 kilometres, starting from Dawei in southern Myanmar to Johor Bahru in the south. On the other hand, it is only



◀ Transpeninsular routes linked the western coast of the Malay Peninsula with the eastern coast. Among the main connections in the middle section were: (1) Phu Khao Thong with Khao Sam Kaew; (2) Takuapa/Ko Kho Khao with Chaiya/Laem Pho; (3) Khuan Lukpad and Trang with Ligor; and (4) Kedah with Pattani, Singgora (Songkla) and Satingphra.

▼ Ruins of Wat Kaew, an 8th-century Buddhist temple in Chaiya, Thailand.







300 kilometres at its broadest and 40 kilometres at the Isthmus of Kra in southern Thailand. Thus, transpeninsular routes, utilising mainly rivers, provided a quicker alternative to sailing down the coast.

The first record of such a transpeninsular route comes from an account in the *Han Shu* (History of the Han), which details a trade mission sent by Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) to South Asia. Their objective was to source for products precious to the Chinese court, including gemstones, glass items and pearls. The Chinese officials boarded a Southeast Asian merchant ship that took them round the Indochinese peninsula and across the Gulf of Thailand. They landed on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula at a place called Shenli, believed to be Khao Sam Kaeo in Thailand. From here, they travelled for ten days across the peninsula and, on reaching the west coast, took a commercial ship to India. The overland route saved them nearly four months on the overall journey.

Around the 2nd to 3rd century, port-polities started arising along the Java Sea and the southeast coast of Sumatra. These ports consolidated and traded local products such as camphor, gharuwood, sandalwood, nutmeg and cloves. Traders also brought these products to Funan, where they entered the international market. A 3rd-century Chinese text, quoted in the 10th-century *Taiping Yulan*, specifies that Chü-li (Juli), believed to be located at the mouth of Kuantan River, was linked by a sea-route to Ko-ying (Geyang), either Karawang

in west Java or at the southeast coast of Sumatra. These ports bridged the divide between the mainland and the islands. To be closer to the main trading hub at Funan, traders from other parts of the archipelago started congregating on the southern coast of east Thailand and in southern Vietnam, giving rise eventually to the Langkasuka kingdom at Pattani and Champa in southern Vietnam.

Traders from the archipelago also started sailing to China. Hitherto, the Chinese had been getting their supplies mainly through Funan; in fact, they thought cloves were a Funanese product. Chinese traders themselves only started sailing to the archipelago, or Nanyang (Southern Seas), in large number during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). Direct foreign trade was forbidden, so trade was conducted through tribute missions in which foreign traders presented their goods at the imperial court. These traders thus gained access to the huge Chinese market without having to compete with local Chinese traders. The tributes were also a form of advertisement – they showed the type of products available, and in this way maritime Southeast Asians were able to introduce new products into the Chinese market.

Two products from West Asia popular in China were frankincense and myrrh; these products used to reach China via the overland routes. However, Nanyang traders managed to convince the Chinese to replace frankincense, an aromatic resin from which incense

▲► Replica of a 6th-century painting, *Portraits of Periodical Offering of Liang*. It depicts ambassadors from various countries sending tribute to China. The 6th figure from the right (see detail) is the envoy from Langkasuka, a Malay kingdom that was established near Yarang, south of Pattani in Thailand. Langkasuka was known to the Chinese as a rich kingdom whose citizens wore gold jewellery. The kingdom survived into the 15th century, as attested in Arab and Siamese texts.

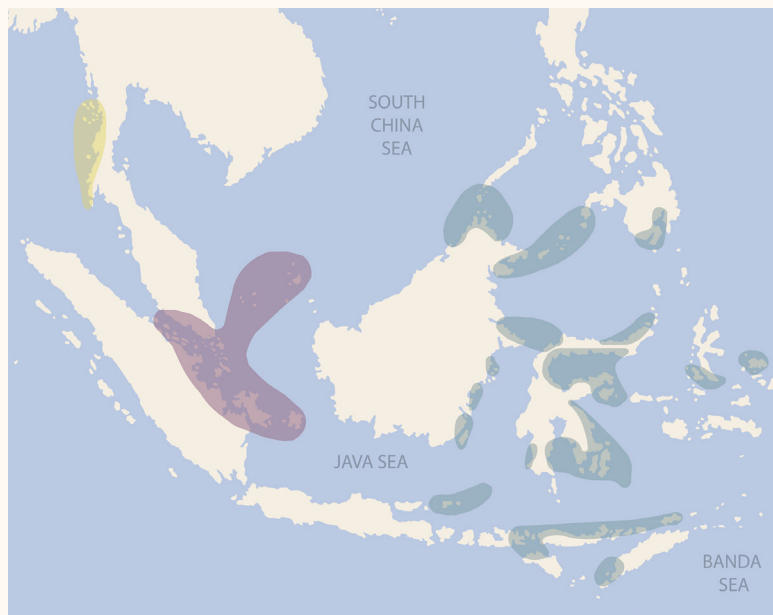




is produced, with the Sumatran pine resin, *Pinus merkusii*. Similarly, myrrh, a fumigant, was replaced with Sumatran benzoin, commonly known as gum benjamin. Camphor found its way into the Chinese pharmacopoeia in the early 6th century and became so highly valued in China that its price was on par with gold. As more products of Southeast Asian origin were introduced to the Chinese markets, the maritime Southeast Asians soon came to be in control of the trade routes.

By the 5th century, kingdoms such as Tarumanagara and Kantoli arose in the archipelago. They co-opted the services of the sea nomads, especially

► The sea nomads of Southeast Asia can be broadly classified into three groups. (1) The Moken inhabit the north-west corner of the Malay Peninsula, from the Mergui Archipelago in Myanmar to the northern border of Malaysia. (2) The Orang Suku Laut consist of a number of sub-groups, such as the Orang Seletar, residing chiefly at the southern end of the Straits of Melaka, the Riau-Lingga Archipelago and the estuaries in southeast Sumatra. (3) The Bajau Laut inhabit the most widespread area, from northeast Sabah and the Sulu Archipelago to Sulawesi and the Maluku and Lesser Sunda islands.



the Orang Suku Laut, thus bringing piracy along the Straits of Melaka under control. This, coupled with exotic products obtainable at Sumatra and Java, enticed Indian traders to sail down the Malay Peninsula instead of cutting across it. Camphor, for example, was traded with India from at least 400 CE and Sumatra became known to Indian traders as Karpuradvipa (Camphor Island). One of Southeast Asia's attractions for Indian traders was its large deposits of gold, a product India had previously obtained from Siberia. Southeast Asia became known to the Indians as Suvarnabhumi (Land of Gold), a name likely first applied to Thaton, on the Gulf of Martaban. The name parallels that of Ptolemy's Golden Chersonese (Golden Peninsula) as well as Laem Thong, an early name for Thailand, which also means Golden Peninsula.

A direct maritime route between India and China was now open, which increased trade traffic in the Straits of Melaka and the Java Sea. Buddhist monks, too, started going by sea instead of overland. For example, the Buddhist priest Gunavarman, on invitation from Emperor Wen (r. 424–453), sailed on a merchant ship from India to Java and, from Java direct to Canton

▲ A four-lobed oval gold bowl depicting the story of Ramayana in relief on its sides, with a gold water dipper behind it. These were among a collection of 9th-century gold and silver objects discovered at Wonoboyo, on the slopes of Mount Merapi in central Java. Java does not have gold deposits and the gold in this hoard would have come from other parts of Southeast Asia. However, Java was well-known for its skilled goldsmiths.





▲ A medallion carved on a railing post of the Bharhut stupa at Madhya Pradesh, India, dating to c. 125–100 BCE. The carving shows two sea vessels, one of which is being swallowed by a sea monster. It was common to depict huge waves as ferocious sea monsters. One example is contained in the *Kathasaritsagara*, an 11th-century collection of Indian folktales. King Gunasagara of Kataha (Kedah) sent his daughter, Gunavati, to India to marry King Vikramaditya. En route, the ship was swallowed whole by a large fish off the coast of Suvarnadvipa (Sumatra). Fortunately, onlookers killed the fish and, cutting its belly, rescued the passengers. Both the story and the medallion highlight the dangers faced by mariners.

(Guangzhou). The Chinese pilgrim Faxian returned to China in 413 via the maritime route. His journey was not smooth sailing, though, as his ship encountered two major storms – first in the Indian Ocean and then in the South China Sea – highlighting that seafarers were very much at the mercy of the elements. Unsurprisingly, from around the 5th century, the worship of Dipankara Buddha, protector of seafarers, started becoming prominent.

As trade became more dynamic, Southeast Asian polities adopted Indian cultural elements, including its script, language and religions. A common cultural framework with shared values made for better communication and cooperation, laying the foundation for increased trading activities. The three major Indic doctrines – Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism – were practised in Southeast Asia alongside indigenous religions. The use of Sanskrit spread with Buddhism. It allowed the learned communities across India, Southeast Asia, China and Japan to communicate with each other.

During the first 600 years or so, Indian cultural symbols, including writing and statuary, were adopted in whole with little to no modifications. However,



◀ This 8th-century stone sculpture of Lord Siva riding Nandi was discovered in Central Java, near Borobudur. This depiction of Siva and Nandi is unique to Java and shows the creativity of Javanese artisans in adapting Indian forms. In Indian sculpture, Nandi is typically shown as a reclining bull seated in front of Siva. The Javanese adaptation shows Siva riding Nandi, which is portrayed as having the head of a bull and the body of a human.

▶ A Ganesha statue from Candi Banon, an 8th- to 9th-century temple in Magelang district, Central Java. Ganesha is seated with his heels touching, a representation unique to Java.







▲ A tri-coloured (*sancai*) amphora from the Tang Dynasty. Tri-coloured ceramics were decorated with brown, green and off-white glazes, which were allowed to drip naturally so that they mingled. This tradition flourished in the Tang period during the 8th century but was only in vogue for a short period. The pottery pieces were mainly used by aristocrats as funerary objects.

the 7th century onwards saw the creative adaptation of Indic culture by the Southeast Asians, resulting in interesting local variations. As an example, the Javanese portrayed Ganesha with his heels touching each other, a depiction not seen in India or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Inscriptions were initially written in Sanskrit using the Pallava script but local languages and scripts started being used from the 7th century, for instance the Kawi script, which developed in Java in the 8th century.

Khmer incursions into its northern border considerably weakened Funan in the second half of the 6th century, leading to its complete dissolution the following century. Coupled with the growing importance of the maritime route, this saw Srivijaya rise to become a major maritime power during the later part of the 7th century. Srivijaya was strategically located at the bottom of the Straits of Melaka, giving it control of the sailing routes between east and west. The kingdom was able to exert dominance over neighbouring states partly because it received preferred trade status from the Chinese, making it lucrative for its vassal states to do business under the Srivijayan banner.

Increased trade in the archipelago can be traced through the increase in Chinese ceramics in the archaeological record starting from the Tang Dynasty (618–907). For example, on the island of Borneo, Chinese ceramics only started appearing in the archaeological record from the Tang Dynasty onwards. A 9th-century Arab dhow found wrecked in the Java Sea off Belitung Island, laden with some 60,000 pieces of



Chinese ceramics, shows the burgeoning trade between the Middle East and China during the Tang period. The earliest records by Arabian geographers that mention Southeast Asia date to the 9th century, although Arab traders could have been visiting the region prior to that.

In 1025, the Chola Kingdom of South India launched raids against Srivijaya, weakening the kingdom and loosening its hold on its vassal states. This raid could have been partly instigated by Tamil merchant guilds who felt hampered by Srivijayan control of the trade lanes to China. In South India, merchant associations such as Manigramam and Ainnurruvar had developed product-based monopolies and become powerful through their large networks and private armies. The first evidence that these Tamil merchant guilds had expanded their activities to Southeast Asia comes from a 9th-century inscription found at Takuapa, a port on the west coast of southern Thailand. Seven other Tamil inscriptions – six in Southeast Asia and one in China – date to after the Chola attacks, pointing to expanded Tamil presence and influence in the region.

The last days of Srivijaya were marked by the liberalisation of Chinese markets during the Southern

▲ An artist's impression of a shipwreck carrying Chinese ceramics. Timber ships disintegrate over time, leaving behind their ceramic cargo, which defy time. As the styles of Chinese ceramics have changed over time, they can be dated to specific time periods, making them important time markers.



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▲ Birds-of-paradise are found on the Papuan and Aru islands of Indonesia. They were hunted for their beautiful plumage and brought to the island of Seram in eastern Indonesia, where they were prepared for export. The plumes were traded in ports along the Java Sea as far back as the 1st millennium and exported to China, India and the Middle East.

Song, which saw the Chinese getting directly involved in maritime trade and Chinese traders coming to Southeast Asia in large numbers. This direct Chinese involvement possibly contributed to Srivijaya's demise. By the 13th century, which coincided with the demise of the Chola Kingdom, Chinese traders had become more numerous than their Indian counterparts in Southeast Asian ports.

New Chinese trade products started making their way into Southeast Asia. Chinese coil glass beads, for example, only entered the Southeast Asian bead market during the Southern Song period. They replaced the Indo-Pacific bead industry, which had collapsed with the demise of Srivijaya. In appearance, size and colours, the Chinese monochrome coil beads are similar to the Indo-Pacific beads, but compositionally, Chinese beads are high in lead and barium, which makes them heavier.

The demise of Srivijaya saw the rise of Java. Srivijaya had tightly controlled the ports through which foreigners could trade, but now foreign merchants – Indian, Chinese and Middle Eastern – started to travel directly to the Java Sea region, stimulating the growth of ports on the northern and eastern coasts of Java. These ports controlled the flow of spices from the eastern Indonesian islands. Spices had become among the most important trade items exported from the archipelago to international markets. Foreign goods including ceramics, textiles and iron arriving at the Javanese ports were taken to the hinterland and traded for local produce, especially rice. Javanese traders then took

the rice together with Indian textiles and exchanged these for spices at the eastern islands. The spices were brought back to the ports and exchanged for foreign goods, restarting the cycle.

The importance of eastern Java in the trading network gave rise to Majapahit. This kingdom was established in 1293 by Raden Vijaya (Kertarajasa) after he succeeded in warding off an attack by the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. In contrast to polities in maritime Southeast Asia, which were established at ports, Majapahit was centred at the inland town of Trowulan. It was serviced by two ports – Surabaya, a seaport, and Canggu, a river port – which were 42 kilometres apart and connected by the Brantas River. Canggu, located close to Trowulan, became Majapahit's primary gateway to the coast. Rice was the main product from Java's hinterland and it was brought to Trowulan to be exported via Canggu. Roads were built connecting Trowulan to regions not connected by river, giving rise to a well-developed road system throughout the kingdom. However, Majapahit was not very effective in controlling the waters of the Straits region, resulting in the rise of piracy.

Meanwhile, in Sumatra, although the centre of Malay power had shifted from Palembang to Jambi after the Chola attacks, southeast Sumatra ceased to be an important player in the regional trade after the 13th century. The island's northern coast, however, became active thanks to the increased demand for Sumatran pepper. An important polity there between the 13th and 16th centuries was Samudra-Pasai, comprising the twin



▲ Statue of Gajah Mada at Tasik Warna on the Dieng Plateau, Java. Gajah Mada was the colourful Prime Minister of Majapahit between 1330 and 1364. He famously took an oath, known as Sumpah Amukti Palapa, to abstain from the pleasure of eating any spiced food until he succeeded in unifying Nusantara, a word that loosely denotes the Southeast Asian archipelago.



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► Candi Tikus was a bathing place located in Trowulan, once the centre of the Majapahit kingdom. The miniature *candi* built at the centre of the structure represents the Mahameru mountain, home of the gods. It is also the source of life, and this is symbolised by water flowing from the 46 *jaladwara* (water spouts) along the base. Its name translates to “Rat Temple” – it was given this name in modern times when farmers, plagued by rat infestations, drew water from the tank believing it would repel the rats.





cities of Samudra and Pasai. The 15th-century *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* records that Pasai was founded by Merah Silu and named after his hunting dog after the dog was scared off by a deer. Merah Silu later converted to Islam, adopting the name Malik al-Salih.

Assuming control of the northern Sumatran pepper supply, Samudra-Pasai became the most important centre of commerce in the Straits of Melaka until the founding of Melaka at the start of the 15th century. The *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* claims that Merah Silu was able to turn worms into gold. This could have been allegorical, pointing to a local silk industry where silk cloth was exchanged for gold, pepper, camphor and benzoin with its hinterland. The polity was commercially linked to Bago and the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) Peninsula; these regions had seen tremendous growth during the 13th and 14th centuries. Samudra-Pasai was also linked directly to Bengal, Gujarat and China. Ibn Battuta, a traveller from northern Africa, noted the presence of ships from Pasai in China during the mid-14th century.

An important milestone in the trade history of Southeast Asia was the ban on private overseas trading issued in 1371 by the Hongwu Emperor, founder of the Ming Dynasty. This has come to be known as the Ming ban and it saw China retreat from direct trade in the region. During this time, many merchants and craftsmen, with their livelihoods under threat, left China to settle in Southeast Asia and Japan. They brought their technical know-how with them to their new homelands, where they established industries based on Chinese manufacturing methods. One example is



▲ A ceramic bowl for magic-medicinal uses dating to the 18th century. Such bowls were made in China for export mainly to Southeast Asia and India. In the centre of the bowl is a 4 x 4 magic square encircled with the phrase "There is no hero except 'Ali and there is no sword except Dhul-Faqar". The 'Ali referred to here is Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, and the "Father of Sufism". The bowls were used in the Islamic world as a talisman to ward off bad luck and cure illnesses.



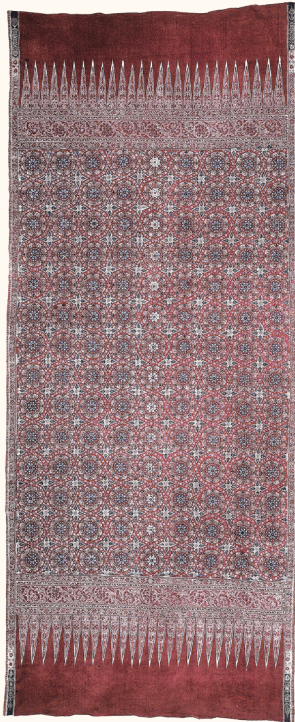
◀ A Sukhothai dish recovered from the *Longquan*, a Chinese vessel that sank off the coast of Terengganu c. 1400. The dish is decorated with an underglazed black floral motif, the black colour coming from iron. The Sukhothai kingdom, located in north-central Thailand, became active in producing ceramics for export in the 14th and 15th centuries.

► A porcelain plate commissioned by the Sultan of Aceh and believed to have been made in Swatow (Shantou), China, in the 16th–17th century. The nine circles in the design represent the Aceh royal seal, Cap Sikureung (Ninefold Seal). The large circle in the centre contains the name of the reigning sultan while the eight smaller circles surrounding it contain the names of his predecessors. These plates were also talismanic, containing verses from the Quran and the names of caliphs.



bead manufacturing, which was established by Chinese craftsmen at Banten in West Java. Similarly, Chinese potters set up kilns in Thailand and Vietnam, giving rise to the Thai and Vietnamese pottery traditions. Settled Chinese communities, cut off from China, assimilated with the local populace. Thus, when the Portuguese first arrived in Southeast Asia in 1509, the only Chinese community they noticed was at Ayut-thaya in Thailand.





▲ Patterned cotton cloth made in India for export to the Dutch East Indies. Indian cloth was in demand from the Mediterranean to China for its fine weave, vivid colours and fade-resistance. The main production centres were at Bengal, the Coromandel Coast and Gujarat. Indian cloth played an important role in Southeast Asian trade. The *Sejarah Melayu* recounts a mission by the Melaka ruler to South India to procure 40 types of rare cloth.

The Yongle Emperor (r. 1403–24) temporarily lifted the Ming ban. He sent envoys to India, Japan and Southeast Asia in a bid to re-establish diplomatic and trade relations. He still forbade private overseas commerce but encouraged state-run trading. He ordered sea-going ships to be constructed – 361 ships were built in 1403, with another 1,180 ordered in 1405. These were used in the famed voyages of Admiral Zheng He between 1405 and 1433. Melaka's rise to become the most important kingdom in the Straits of Melaka was linked to the support given by the Ming emperors. Similar to Srivijaya, Melaka was able to exert its influence over the Straits and bring piracy back under control.

However, the cost of the imperial voyages together with the lavish treatment given to foreign envoys bearing tribute put a serious strain on China's economy and the country retreated into isolation.

By this time, spices (cloves, mace and nutmeg) from the eastern Indonesian islands had become the most important products exported from Melaka. Java- and Melaka-based traders travelled to Banda, where they obtained spices from the Banda and Maluku islands. They took with them for exchange rice from Java, cotton and silk cloth from India, Chinese silk, and ceramics (Chinese and Thai). The spices made their way to Europe but the exorbitant prices charged by Arab and Venetian intermediaries prompted the European powers to seek out the source of these spices, leading to the annexation of Melaka by the Portuguese in 1511 and subsequently the colonisation of other parts of Southeast Asia by the various European powers.



▲ The motifs on this piece of *songket* shoulder cloth were inspired by those on the stone statue of Durga at Candi Singhasari, a 13th-century Hindu-Buddhist temple in east Java.

The maritime and trade history of early Southeast Asia is explored in the following chapters through 10 Southeast Asian ports that lie between the Bay of Bengal and the Java Sea. In addition, brief descriptions of 32 other ports have been included in the Appendix. Some of the ports, such as Kuala Selinsing, may have been small, but they were still important nodes in the regional trading networks. Port-cities such as Melaka became entrepôts, one-stop centres that consolidated products from not only within Southeast Asia but also from other regions. Regardless of size, the ports were vibrant centres of commerce where a multitude of cultural influences intermingled. These ports operated during different time periods, but they show the pivotal role of trade in shaping maritime Southeast Asia. ♦



# For Review Only

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

FOUNDERS OF Heritage Output Lab, Mariana Isa and Maganjeet Kaur are independent researchers of Malaysian and Southeast Asian history. Through their company, they provide research-based services to organisations and individuals requiring further background for print, audio and film projects. *Kuala Lumpur Street Names* (2015) and *Towns of Malaya* (2017, with Dr Neil Khor) are two of their notable publications. They were the heritage consultants for Kuala Lumpur's Heritage Trail Interpretive Panels, a project dubbed "KL Dulu", commissioned by the Kuala Lumpur City Council (DBKL).

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