

8 The Geopolitical Situation

The Commercial "Empire" of Śrīvijaya, 800-1250 AD and the polities of the Malay Peninsula.

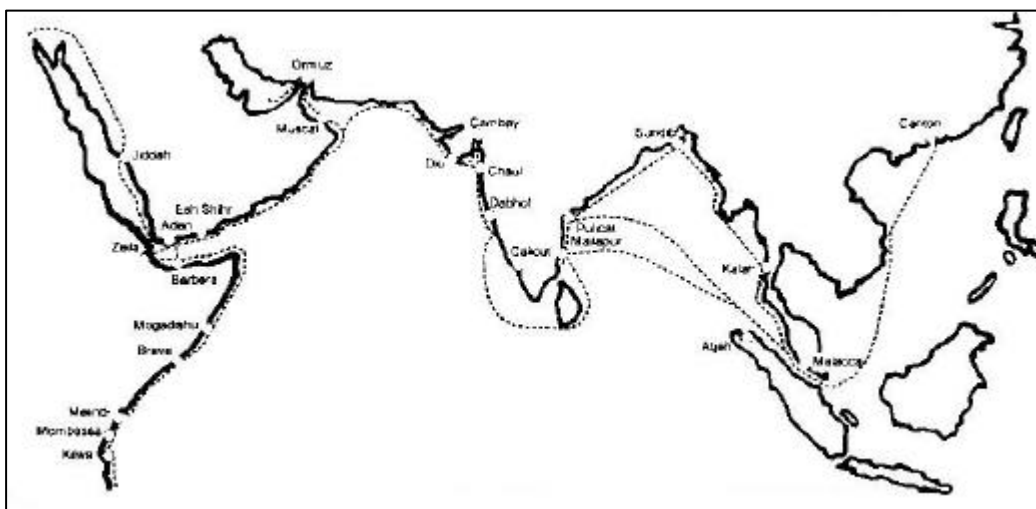
Reading: Oliver W Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce: A Study of the Origins of Śrīvijaya* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1967) EUL .382(9101) Wol. Oliver W Wolters, *The Fall of Śrīvijaya in Malay History* (London: Lund Humphries, 1970) EUL .9(595) Wol Indonesian Trade and Society Essays in Asian Economic and Social History by J C van Leur (The Hague: The Royal Tropical Society, Amsterdam, 1967), On Early Asian Trade, Chapters 2-3, pp 44-116. EUL .382 (91) Leu

Texts: F Hirth and W W Rockhill, *Chau Ju-kua, His work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, entitled Chu-fan-chî* (St Petersburg, 1911). W W Rockhill, "Notes on the relations and trade of China with the Eastern Archipeligo and the coasts of the Indian Ocean during the fourteenth century, parts 1-2", *T'oung Pao*, XV- XVI (1914-15), EUL Per. 9 Tou, which provides translations of Wang Ta-Yuan, *Tao-i Chih-lioh*, (1340); Fei-Hsin, *Hsing-ch'a Sheng-lan* or "Description of the starry raft" (1436) and Ma-Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan* or "The Overall Survey of the Ocean's shores" (1451). A new edition of Ma-Huan's, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan* (1451) entitled Ma-Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan. 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's shores' [1433]*, translated from the Chinese text edited by Feng Ch'eng-Chün with introduction, notes and appendices by J V G Mills (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, Extra Series, XLII, 1970) EUL G.161 Ma

Dynastic History and Main Historical Events

Ca 550/650-850 AD Southeast Asian maritime trading networks, as has been suggested in lecture 5, had undergone, during the years, ca 550/650-850 AD major changes. A "new" environmentally determined commercial-cycle ran its course, the seaways utilised by merchant vessels undergoing a major re-alignment. Alexandrine and Jiddah merchants, utilising the services of Hidjaz and Yeman shippers, once more pioneered new trade routes in the Indian Ocean, effectively eclipsing the activities of the Arabo-Persian merchant-shippers of the Gulf (map 8.1). The patterns of trade activity at this time are clearly revealed by Ibn Khurdadbih and the author of the *Akhhbār al-Sīn wa'l-Hind*, both of whom compiled their works from materials collected at the very end of the prevailing commercial-cycle. Passing out of the Red Sea by way of the Bāb al-Mandeb to Aden, ships then either coasted along the Arabian littoral and southern Persian seaboard to Daibul, in the Indus delta, before striking south, or took advantage of the monsoon and sailed directly to Quilon in southern India. They then rounded Ceylon and made for the Nicobar Islands where they took on food and water. From thence they sailed to Kālāh, on the Tenasserim River of the Mergui coast in the Malay Peninsula. The final stage of their journey took them either from Kālāh or directly from the Nicobar Islands through the Malacca Strait to ports in Champa. It was from here that they departed for their ultimate destination, the warehouses of *Khanfu* (Canton) in southern China.

The Chinese had, during the previous trade-cycle (ca 250-550/650 AD), regarded the Malay Peninsula as a barrier, impeding their access to the Indian Ocean, largely eschewing any attempt to navigate along the eastern leeward shore of the Malay Peninsula, and relying on a trans-isthmus portage to pass westward. Now (ca 550/650-850 AD) it proved possible for vessels to pass directly from the Indian Ocean travelling from Khedah through the Malacca Strait. On exiting the Strait they passed Northeast to ports in Champa. It was from here that they departed for their ultimate destination of Canton in southern China. The Chinese responded rapidly to the direct access afforded them, for the first time, to the barbarians of the “Southern Sea”. In 607 AD, an envoy of the Emperor Yang-ti, Ch’ang Chün was despatched to “open remote regions” and “attract the distant people (by enhancing the prestige of their culture)”. It was the beginning of a successful tributary trading system that involved maintaining and protecting the ports that “faced China” for all shipping. The southern barbarians did not particularly want to become vassals but did so for very practical reasons. The “new” China trade was the source of their power. The emperors thought they were manipulating their vassals by techniques of indirect control; the vassals were manipulating the China trade, the reality behind the tributary trade, to amass wealth as a means of asserting their authority in the highly fragmented societies of the “Southern Sea”.



Map 8.1

Arabian, Indian and China Sea Trading Systems, 550/650-850 AD

From the seventh century the tributary system flourished and the profitable relationship was normally only interrupted when the emperors were unable, owing to domestic problems, to control Canton. The *Chiu T’ang-shu* states that the successful T’ang tributary period was from 627-742 AD. Provincial unrest, after the An Lu-Shan rebellion of 755 AD and piratical attacks on the coast of Bac Bo and Champa may have seen the trade languish. In the first years of the ninth century, in the reign of Hsien-tsung (805-820 AD) however there was a short-lived improvement in maritime trade, though conditions in southern China again worsened from ca 820-850 AD.

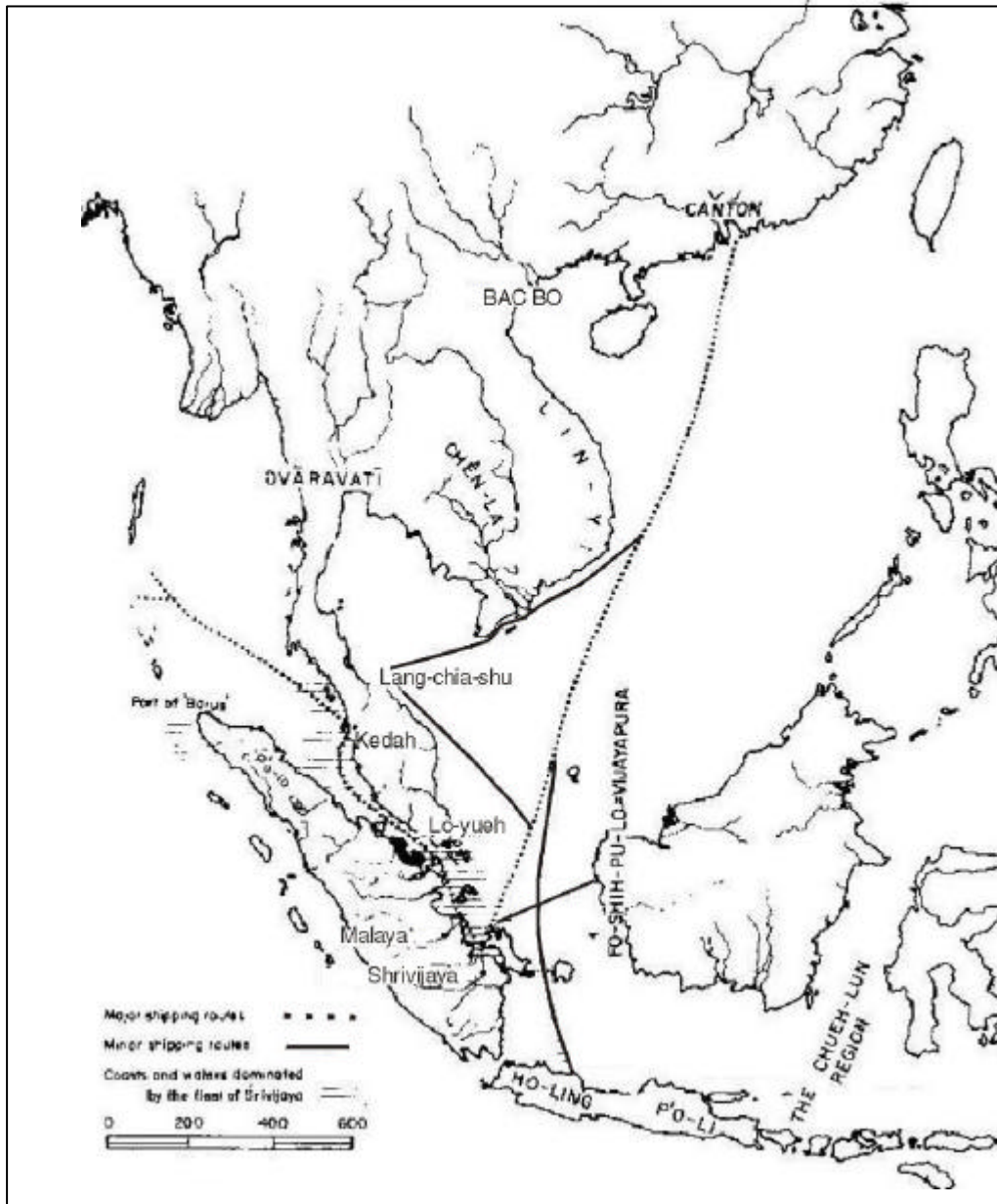
The six tributary kingdoms of Indonesia, which were brought into China’s orbit as a result of Ch’ang Chün’s 607-610 AD mission all lay south of the Malacca Strait on the coast of south-eastern Sumatra and northern Java. All - P’o-li (located south of western Borneo in eastern Java); Tan-tan, west of P’o-li in Central Java; **Ho-ling**

(discussed in lecture 5) and Mo-ho-sin (in western Java); To-p'ò-têng (in South-east Sumatra); P'ò-huang (Tulang Bawang in Southeast Sumatra)- had been important in the “Indian” trade of the years 250-550 AD. At that time large vessels had sailed from the sub-continent to the Coconut Islands (Nicobar Islands), a convenient re-victualling place for those aiming to make landfall in the Malacca Straits, before passing down the Straits to Chryse (the Malay Peninsula) and Suvarnavīpa (Sumatra-Borneo). It was, however, in the transition to the “new” environmentally determined trade-cycle of ca 550/650-850 AD, an area of declining commerce. Ho-ling, as we discussed in lecture 5, was in the mid-seventh century a small but rich “Heterogenetic” city-state situated not far (four or five day’s sailing) from Jambi and Palembang with extensive maritime communications. A hundred years later it had been transformed. The country was now much greater in extent and in the course of the expansion the ruler had shifted his capital. In the contemporary trading system, however it was changing from being a “Heterogenetic” trading city-state to a land-based *mandala* with an “Orthogenetic” focus. This change was finally recognised in the years 768-860/873 AD when the name Ho-ling disappears and is replaced by Shê-p'ò or “Java”, the *mandala*, ruled by the Śailendra dynasty, which, as discussed in lectures 6-7, created the great temple-complexes of Barabudur and Prambanan. By this time, however, it had long lost any commercial function (map 8.2), which had from ca. 666/670 AD succumbed to Śrīvijayan aggression. Each of these commercial states continued to send tributary missions- Ch'ih T'u (in western Borneo) in 608-610; Ho-ling in 640, 648, 666 and probably 670; and To-p'ò-têng in 647. But after 670 a blanket falls over the mission history of all these kingdoms.

Śrīvijaya now stood alone. The *Hsin T'ang-shu* states Śrīvijayan missions began in the 670-673 and in 683 a Chinese envoy was despatched to visit what was now the foremost trading nation in western Indonesia. Henceforth tributary missions were sent to China, in 702, 716, 728 and 742, throughout the period that the *Chiu T'ang-shu* describes the T'ang tributary as successful viz. 627-742 AD. Yet then they ceased during the troubled times that beset the “Celestial Empire” after 755 AD and were not resumed again until 902 AD.

During its heyday, ca. 650-750 AD, however, Śrīvijaya-Palembang became not only a powerful “Heterogenetic” city-state but also the focus of an extensive maritime empire. By an assertion of naval power in the Straits of Malacca the rulers of Śrīvijaya successfully nipped in the bud the challenge from newcomers in the China trade and safeguarded the Southeast Sumatran coast’s predominance in that trade. By 695 AD at the latest Kedah, at the western entry to the Straits, became a dependency of Śrīvijaya. The swiftness of Śrīvijaya’s reaction meant that P'ò-lo sent no further embassies after 669 because it’s rival’s fleet in the Straits prevented it doing so. In 686 an inscription found at Kota Kapur refers to rebels of the “land of Java” who unsuccessfully resisted Śrīvijaya’s attempt to restrict the trade of Ho-ling. By the end of the century, the victories of Śrīvijaya, chiefly in the form of naval battles reinforced by tight blockades, had effectively protected the prosperity of Śrīvijaya. Its empire the *Hsin T'ang-shu* describes as encompassing fourteen cities, a number of which had been rivals before Śrīvijaya struck them down. Its might impressed not only the Chinese, however, but also the Arabs, then sailing via the Straits to Canton in increasing numbers. Such was the importance of their trade that in 724 they despatched a mission to the Chinese court with gifts of Sumatran camphor and in 758

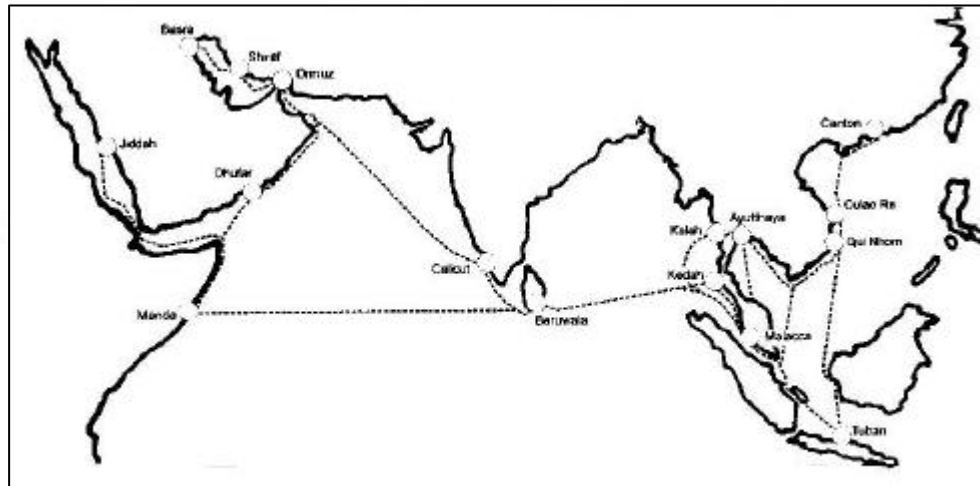
they were sufficiently numerous in the China trade that they were amongst those who sacked Canton. Drawing on the reports of these merchants, Ibn Khurdādhbih describes the Palembang Mahārājas as among the greatest kings of the world.



Map 8.2 Western Indonesia in 695 AD

Ca 815/50-1040 Nor did this situation significantly change when during the years, ca 815/50-1040 AD a “new” environmentally determined trade-cycle ran its course, in climatic conditions reminiscent of the years ca 250-550 AD (map 8.3). There was a renaissance of the older trading-systems but now these served as a subsidiary feeder-network. Thanks to a “revolution” in shipping technology in the China Seas, vessels no longer had to face the perils of running on a leeward Peninsula shore. They could now stand out far to the East, sailing due north-south either between Palembang and

Cambodia or between Tuban (Central Java) and Qui Nhom-Culeo Re (Champa), en-route to Canton. Henceforth trading activity in the Arabian, Indian and China Seas moved in accord with a distinct alternating rhythm. The “new” trading system of the years 815/50-1040 (map 8.3) repeated itself in 1270-1370 and 1570-1670 alternating with the system prevailing during the years, 550/650-850 (map 8.1) which repeated itself in 1070-1170 and 1470-1570.



Map 8.3

Arabian, Indian and China Sea Trading Systems, ca 815/50-1040

During the “new” environmentally determined trade-cycle of 815/50-1040 AD the China trade, the reality behind the tributary trade, thus far from declining, continued on its previous expansionary path. Following the disruption of trade at Canton during the years, 820-850 AD, the ruler of Jambi was able to send missions thence in 853 AD and 871 AD, years coinciding with the troubled time when the Śailendra Bālaputra, expelled from Java, became the Mahārāja of Palembang. The new ruler, moreover, had sufficiently established his authority by 902 AD that he also was able to despatch a tributary mission to China. Only two years later, moreover, a title was conferred on a Palembang envoy by the expiring T'ang dynasty. Between the fall of T'ang and the rise of Sung, corresponding to the first half of the tenth century, there was a brisk trade between the overseas world and the Fukien kingdom of Min and the rich Kuangtung kingdom of Nan Han. Palembang undoubtedly benefited from this, preparatory to the prosperity it was to enjoy under the early Sung. Writing in ca 903 Ibn Rusteh was so impressed with the wealth of Palembang's ruler that he declared one would not hear of a king who was richer, stronger or with more revenue. The symbol of the rich trade, which passed through the entrepôt at this time, was a wide range of aromatic produce, celebrated in the literature of the countries of the traders who utilised its facilities. Thus Mas'ūdī some fifty years later in 955 AD noted “the king of these islands possesses more kinds of perfumes and aromatics than any other king possesses”. During the years ca 902-1028 AD the Mahārāja of Palembang could truly style himself “the king of the ocean lands”. That this was a product of the China trade he recognised when in 1003 he despatched envoys to

inform the Emperor Chên-tsung that a temple was being built at Palembang to pray for his long life, and the emperor was invited to name it. Even when in 1028 Jên-tsung complained of a falling off of foreign shipping coming to Canton, a mission from Śrīvijaya happened to arrive, and the particularly generous gifts given to the envoys suggests that the Sung government gratefully connected this mission with the possibility of a trade revival. Palembang, even as the China trade was declining and the tributary-system was waning, was still regarded by the Sung officials as an important player in the commercial game.

Whilst Palembang-Śrīvijaya thus continued to enjoy an important place in the China trade during most years of the “new” environmentally determined trade-cycle of 815/50-1040 AD, a re-alignment of seaways at that time did pose it major problems. South Indian shipping from ports such as Quilon, now located in the Tamil-Cōla Empire (ca 985-1070 AD), once more (as in the years 250-550 AD) traversed those seaways which would carry them through the Straits and on to Borneo and the spice islands of the eastern archipelago. Under the Cōla dynasty the Tamils became one of the foremost trading peoples of maritime Asia. Already in the ninth century a Tamil inscription was erected at Takuapa in the Malay Peninsula. A special impetus was given to their activities, moreover, when Moslem merchants began to use the ports of southern India as an advanced base for the China trade. In 1015 AD the Cōlas sent their first mission to China, and in 1016 AD the Chinese emperor recognised them as a tributary kingdom. In the very next year war broke out between the Cōlas and Śrīvijaya. In 1025 AD they attacked the empire of Śrīvijaya at many points and captured its Mahārāja, wresting from him their right to trade throughout his domain, including Pramanam Java, which in 922 AD, just before its final collapse, had shaken off the Śrīvijayan commercial yoke. As a result centrifugal forces began now to rend the empire asunder. In 1068, according to a Tamil inscription, a revolt broke out in Kedah, and it was the Cōla ruler who restored the territory to the ruler of Śrīvijaya. In 1088 AD their unassailable position in the rich camphor-producing region of northern Sumatra is revealed by an inscription erected by a Tamil merchant guild in Labu Tuwa, near Pansur. At the end of the eleventh century centrifugal forces were beginning to render the Śrīvijayan Maritime Empire asunder.

Ca 1040/70-1240 AD During the subsequent environmentally determined trade-cycle of ca 1040/70-1240 AD these same centrifugal forces rent the whole territorial fabric of the Śrīvijayan Maritime Empire apart. This now, however, was not as a result of the actions of western Asian –Indian and Arab- traders but rather was due to fundamental changes in the Chinese economy, which caused the demise of the tributary trading system. “Real” and rapid economic growth in the Chinese economy, through a massive expansion of overseas trade transformed the maritime trades of Southeast Asia. In 971 AD the maritime customs service at Canton was reorganised to meet the requirements of the contemporary increase in trade. In the years immediately before 998 AD a General Customs Collectorate was established at Hangchou and in 999 AD “at the request, and for the convenience of, foreign officials,” inspectorates of custom were established at Hangchou, Ningpo and Ch‘üan-chou. Between 1049 and 1053 AD the annual import of elephants’ tusks, rhinoceros’ horns, pearls, aromatics, incense and similar luxury wares was some 53,000 customs

units of account. By 1175 AD it exceeded 500,000 such units. From ca. 1040-1175 AD commodity imports from the South Seas and Indian Ocean were increasing rapidly and the spatial extent traversed by Chinese shipping increased commensurately. As the State trading system of China fell into abeyance, private Chinese merchants began to corrode the monopoly of Śrīvijaya by trading where they wished. They seem to have been especially interested in the Java pepper trade. By 1178 AD ships from Canton were over-wintering at Lamuri in northern Sumatra. In the twelfth century Chinese junks sailed even as far westward as Quilon in Malabar. The Chinese paid for this growing volume of luxury wares mainly with gold, silver and copper cash, but major productivity changes in the export sector of Chinese manufactory allowed textiles and porcelain to find a place in the burgeoning export trade. In these circumstances, specie and commodity markets the length and breadth of the “Indian” and “China” Seas were transformed.

Yet even as trade expanded and Chinese, Arab and Indian merchants sought the commodities they required where they wished, Śrīvijaya continued to exert a profound influence over their activities. As a result of the re-alignment of winds and seaways during the course of this trade-cycle (map 8.1) it controlled a strategic position in Southeast Asian commerce. Of the maritime city-state Chau Ju-kua wrote in 1216 that it is:

“...lying in the ocean and controlling the straits through which the foreigners’ sea and land traffic in each direction must pass.”

How it exerted this control was made clear, almost half a century earlier in 1178 by Chou Ch’ü-fei, the assistant sub-prefect in the capital of Kangsi, when he declared that,

“... in fighting on land or on water none surpass them in impetuosity of attack; even the Ku-lin (Quilon on the Malabar coast) people come after them. If some foreign ship, passing this place (Palembang-Śrīvijaya) should not enter here, an armed party would certainly come out and kill them to the last.”

In a much larger China trade, whilst Chinese, Arab and Indian merchants might seek the commodities they required where they wished, all would have to pass through the narrow southern entry to the Straits, where they would be forced to enter Palembang and pay “harbour dues”. These dues in the opinion of the sub-prefect made the maritime city-state come only after the Abbasid caliphate and Java as the third greatest power in the world.

Ca 1240/1279-1368/1425 It was only during the subsequent environmentally determined trade-cycle of ca 1240/1279-1368/1415 (map. 8.3) that this situation changed. Once more there was a re-alignment of the seaways utilised, re-establishing earlier trading-systems. Tensions within the system, revealed at that time, reasserted themselves but now in very different conditions. South Indian shipping from ports such as Quilon, once more (as in the years 250-550 and 815/50-1040 AD) traversed those seaways which would carry them through the Straits and on to Borneo and the

Spice Islands of the eastern archipelago. At this time, however, they entered there a world within which the age-long struggle between Palembang and Java for supremacy was finally decided in favour of the latter. From late in the thirteenth century, 1286, Palembang became a province of the new Javanese Majapahit Empire, a branch of the ruling dynasty withdrawing and establishing a small *mandala* in the central Sumatran highlands of Minangkabau. Javanese Palembang did not prosper for long, however, for only some fourteen years after its annexation it was destroyed when a Mongol fleet harassed the area. Nor was recovery from this disaster quick for in its aftermath, Mohammedan merchants were able to gain a foothold in north Sumatra establishing the Islamised state of Pase on the Straits of Malacca. The increase in the power of this state was accompanied by an increase in Muslim convictions. The weakened Palembang, which now had a major rival on its doorstep, continued to be of more or less importance in the spice trade during the fourteenth century, but it was unable to prevent the shift in trade. As a result a number of the Hindu Javanese merchants who had lived there until that time abandoned the port and attempted to create a new commercial centre on the Peninsula, under the control of a member of the Minangkabau dynasty, at Singapore. Shorn of all political power and lacking any significant export commodity, Palembang, at the end of the fourteenth century was transformed into a nest of pirates.

During the course of environmentally determined trade-cycle of ca 1240/1279-1368/1415 events at Palembang, the focus of the once mighty maritime "empire" of Śrīvijaya, were but a side show. The real focus of economic activity had shifted elsewhere. At least until the Ming reinstatement of the tributary system, and the institution of state-sponsored voyages to "police" the China and Indian Seas in the period, 1368-1433, the private Chinese trade continued to expand. Chinese merchants in their own ships during the later Sung and in the Mongol period (1279- 1368) were themselves promoting the trade by visiting centres of production in Southeast Asia, by-passing the lines of communication on which the Mahārājas of Palembang had flourished for so long. They were joined moreover by South Indian and Arab shipping from ports such as Quilon, which once more traversed those seaways which would carry them through the Straits and on to Borneo and the Spice Islands of the eastern Indonesian archipelago. At this time, however, they entered there a world within which the age-long struggle between Palembang and Java for supremacy had finally been decided in favour of the latter and commercial activity was dominated by the newly emergent Javanese Majapahit Empire. This was able in the fourteenth century to achieve its greatest glory and furthest expansion, the memory of which has been preserved in the *Pararaton* and the Malay Chronicles as well as the *Nagarakertagama* (1365). Even though the poet Prapañca, writing in the fourteenth century, idealised the government of Majapahit by comparing the ruler's influence throughout the kingdom with the close supervision he exercised over his dependants in his capital city:

“The whole expanse of Yawa-land (Java) is to be compared with one town in the prince's realm. By thousands are (counted) the people's dwelling places, to be compared with manors of Royal servants, surrounding the body of the Royal compound”,

this was no simple land-based *mandala*, with an “Orthogenetic” focus.

Its rulers positively embraced the benefits, which derived from the Javanese spice trade, which expanded rapidly from the late thirteenth century under the impetus of intensified relations with China during the later Sung and in the Mongol period (1279- 1368). Up until the Ming reinstitution of the tributary system, and the institution of state-sponsored voyages to “police” the China and Indian Seas in the period, 1368-1433, Tuban the Javanese staple was the port of Majapahit and enjoyed a monopoly in its trade. Sedayu, Lasem and Brondong were always of only secondary importance as trading centres. Surabaya mentioned as early as 1365 remained at this time of lesser importance as an emporium. Javanese shipping from these cities dominated commercial activity at Timor and the Moluccas from whence they and the Malays obtained spices. These Javanese vessels indeed created a dense shipping network within the Indonesian Archipelago including Farther India, benefiting from the low harbour dues imposed by the Majapahit government and complementing rather than competing with the Chinese, Indian and Arab traders, who entered their sphere of influence.

The great flowering of the eastern Javanese coastal towns, however, was destined eventually to have a disruptive effect. The coastal regents, who had enjoyed a very large amount of freedom under Javanese royal sway, became more and more assured of their own power under the influence of the growing economic importance of their provinces. They became autonomous coastal potentates more and more independent of the weak bearers of royal dignity. The struggle of the commercial towns against the agrarian interior for hegemony – an opposition associated with the spread of Islam amongst the aristocratic trading classes of the commercial towns – came to a head in the late fourteenth century. When these tensions, which gave rise in 1377 to a Javanese expedition to confirm Javanese authority in the whole of the archipelago, including its western part embracing Pate, Singapore and Palembang, coincided with the Ming reinstitution of the tributary system, and the institution of state-sponsored voyages to “police” the China and Indian Seas, however, the results, as will be shown in the next lecture, were nothing short of disastrous.

The Nature of the Śrīvijayan Maritime Empire

Two clearly outlined forms of government characterised the polities of Southeast Asia. On the one hand, as discussed in lectures 6-7 were the land-based *mandalas*, with an “Orthogetic” focus, like the Javanese states, centred in the interior regions of the island in the plains between the volcanoes. They were difficult to reach from the coast and their power and wealth was based on the Indonesian agrarian civilisation of these regions. They assumed the form of a state based on levies and socage, with administrative machinery, expanding in patrimonial and bureaucratic forms, a state with a hierarchy of officials. On the other hand there was the Sumatran state, that is discussed here, a coastal state, a “commercial power”, a “sea power”, lying open on the river close to the sea, basing its might on the stapling of the international trade of Southeast Asia. It was an expansive maritime power, without any bureaucratic administrative hierarchy, but rather with a closed aristocratic community at its centre.

The royal authority based its power on the compulsory stapling it enforced upon the trade of Southeast Asia. Military and maritime force was used without hesitation to maintain their power. There were tributary overseas possessions and overseas predatory expeditions. The territories under the Mahārāja’s control comprised a number of often distant settlements on the estuaries of the eastern coast of Sumatra, in

the islands, of which the largest were in the Riau and Linangga archipelagos and in the Malay Peninsula. In the tenth century Mas'ūdī understood that more than two years in a fast sailing ship were needed to visit all the ruler's islands. All were on or close to the sea and the merchants therein, who enjoyed access to the rich natural resources of the interior, were prevented from selling their wares anywhere other than at the staple port- Palembang- which enjoyed a monopsonistic position in the trade.

To maintain these stapling powers, required, as has been suggested the use of force. Ships were owned by the ruler and the fighting forces of the state, consisted of a "militia" equipped by the nobility who operated along side the ruler's own troops. This "militia" was largely formed from the inhabitants of the eastern coast of Sumatra from near the south end of the Straits of Malacca towards Palembang, and above all from the numerous islands south of the Malay Peninsula and off Sumatra's east coast. Here lived the most loyal of the Mahārāja's subjects, inhabiting local spheres of power which were often measured by the number of three-masted cruisers at the disposal of the chiefs. Such was the scattered population who comprised the subjects of the Mahārājas. They were not a docile people. Chou Ch'ü-fei remarked that, in fighting on land and sea "non surpass [the inhabitants of Śrīvijaya] in impetuosity of attack; even the Ku- lin (Quilon in Malabar) people come after them. If some foreign ship, passing this place (Palembang- Śrīvijaya) should not enter here, an armed party would certainly come out and kill them to the last".

Their loyalty was ensured, as the Telagu Batu inscription reveals, by the Mahārāja's possession of "a treasury of gold and property". Abundant wealth, and the prestige and opportunities wealth conferred, enabled the ruler to maintain his overlordship by granting favours, a traditional instrument of government. The royal Treasury was one of the "seven constituents" of power in the *Laws of Manu*, where kings were instructed to bestow on "worthy men" what they had "augmented." Gold and silver were in plentiful supply in Southeast Sumatra during the heyday of the Mahārājas of Palembang who distributed it bountifully to ensure the loyalty of the chiefs who put their ships and men at their disposal. When they failed to do so, their "militia" dispersed, seeking alternative ways – piracy- to secure their sustenance.