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### ANCIENT PORTS IN MARITIME SOUTH EAST ASIA: THEIR ROLE IN ASIA TRADE FROM THE SEVENTH TO FIFTEENTH CENTURY

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#### **Abstract**

South East Asia region started trading with its neighbour countries and regions dated back in early days of history because of its predominantly geographic location. It had a significant role in east to west lifeblood transportation. The important channels including Sunda, Malacca... are the main passages which led to a huge market called Pacific Asia. The article will examine the role of ancient ports such as Sri Vijaya, Mojopahit and Malacca. in relation to trade development in maritime South East Asia from the 7th to 15th century. It then will generalise the development of Pacific Asia trade and the economic and cultural interactions between maritime nations and regions in the world.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Ancient ports showed important roles for economic and social development of societies in south east Asia region.

Hence, this paper will investigate the role of ancient ports such as Sri Vijaya, Mojopahit and Malacca. in relation to trade development in maritime South East Asia from the 7th to 15th century.

The paper structured with introduction, methodology, main results, discussion and conclusion.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study mainly use qualitative analysis, analytical, synthesis and inductive methods, combined with dialectical historicalism method.

## MAIN RESULTS

### *The Shift of Trade Route to Maritime South East Asia after the Seventh Century*

After the ancient nation Funan had been eliminated from the South East Asia map due to objective and subjective reasons, the trade route which was through South East Asia region shifted to maritime regions through the important straits such as Sunda, Malacca. This change was a result of the improvement and development of maritime technology and navigation skills of people in the region. Additionally after the voyage of the monk Phap Hien via channels in South East Asia, trade boats and people from outside started their voyages toward most southerly point of Malaya Peninsula in order to explore navigation to approach Chinese and Japanese markets. Therefore the traditional maritime route through Kra Channel lost its strategic position.

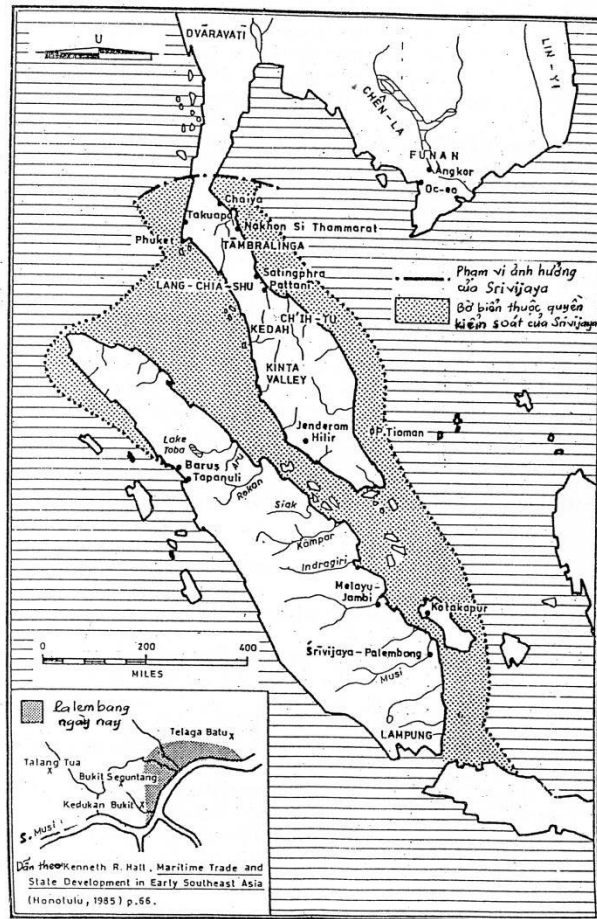
The commerce in South East Asia started developing from the seventh to fifteenth century comparing to Funan in early centuries. The role of Funan had been a transit port for international transportation where traders could stop for fuel refills and food supplies to continue their east to west journeys. The ports of Sri Vijaya, Mojopahit and Malacca on the other hand were busy regional trade centres where exchanges of goods took place between traders, standards of measurements and monetary systems became popular. The foundation of those ports contributed to the awareness and popularity of special spice in maritime South East Asia including clove, agarwood and nutmeg which gained the great values in exchange and trade in those ports and became sought after specialities for traders.

The establishment and development of the ancient ports significantly contributed to the creation of maritime trade in South East Asia. These ports also witnessed activities of cultural exchanges took place within the region, between regions and international approach. Futhermore, they even became religious states such as the foundation and development of Islamic Malacca in the fifteenth century is the predominant case in this sense.

### *Sri Vijaya - The First Trade Centre in Maritime South East Asia*

Due to strategic position in the maritime transportation which connected Pacific and Indian Ocean, Sunda and Malacca channels were the crucial point where trade boats had to pass through on the voyage from east to west. Sri Vijaya was formed by its ancient state called Kantoli which pursued an open trade policy with China. Therefore, the development of Sri Vijaya was a result of ancient Kantoli with two hundred years of history.

After the demise of Funan, Kingdom of Sri Vijaya vastly expanded its border which contained the whole Sumatra Island, southern part of Malaya Peninsula (from the Straits of Era toward the south). Moreover, it occupied the channel of Sunda. The nation established its governance on tribes in the controlled areas and focus its power on Palembang.



BẢN ĐỒ 3 VƯƠNG QUỐC SRIVIJAYA

Nguồn: J K Well "The Southeast Asia Port and Policity: rise and demise"

Sri Vijaya dominated maritime commerce passing through South East Asia between AD 670 and 1025. It was able to gain its status and trust from traders by the ability of controlling of the seas in the strait region, put down piracy in the most southerly point of Malaya. Meanwhile it also motivated exchange and trade with traders from countries in the east of Sumatra island such as Jambi, Palembang. Local supply that were popular and became sought after products were pepper, nutmeg, clove and Chinese silk. Furthermore, passing traders needed to stop in Palembang for food and water supply in order to carry on their east to west voyage. The name of Thất Lợi Phật Thệ became as trustworthy brand in the markets for Chinese and India traders. Sri Vijaya was the priority in exchange of local goods and silk in many different reigns of Chinese monarchy. Foreign trade was the strength of this nation and its existence based on the connection of nearby trade centres in which Palembang was the centre of the networking. Srivijaya was once thought of as a “federation of trading ports on the fringe of large areas of forest,... not a state with territorial boundaries, but a series of interlocked human relationships among harbor principalities and pirate lair based on patronage, loyalty, and power” (Hall, Kenneth R, 1985: 79).

Chinese traders called Sri Vijaya as Kim Chau –金州 (*the gold land*), they observed that people overlaid statues of Buddha with gold. In Chinese

historical documents, in 1082 AD, the delegation of envoys from this region carried tribute to Chinese Empire including.

This was also recognised by Arab traders: “on a daily basis, the king’s subjects ceremoniously threw gold bricks into an estuary. But they were not exactly throwing gold to the waters as one might toss money to the wind. When the king died, the gold would be dredged out, and his successor would then distribute it to the court’s allies and retainer; thus cementing their relationship to the new king in a critical moment of transition (Lynda Norene Shaffer, 1996: 38).

Palembang dominated in political and cultural perspective in maritime South East Asia due to its economic focus. The name Palembang originated from the popularity of Buddhism in this nation. The monk Nghia Tinh (AD 635 - 713) lived here for several years and believed this was a perfect stopping point for monks who wished to carry on their journey to India by sea as the king well treated the monks in this country: In the fortified city of Fo-che, Buddhist priests number more than one thousand, whose minds are bent on learning and good practices. They investigate and study all subjects that exist just as in Madhyadesa [India]; the rules and ceremonies are not all different (J.K. Well, 1990: 64)

The growth of trade in Sri Vijaya required the king to appoint a “*tuha anvatakurak*” who is a functionary with the responsibility of managing foreign trade. His main duties were to stabilise prices and initiate exchange forms in trade. They calculate first the value of their articles according to their equivalents in gold or silver, and then engage in (the) barter of these articles at fixed rates. As for example, one tong of samshu is equal to one tael of silver, ten tong being equal to one tael of gold (Hall, Kenneth R, 1985: 99)

Therefore, the rise of Sri Vijaya was the result of the ability of gaining control of the Straits of Sunda and Malacca for seven centuries, the trade on these ports were remarkably maritime trade. The role of the kingdom came to the end when it was invaded by Chinese and rebellions from minority tribes in the eleventh century.

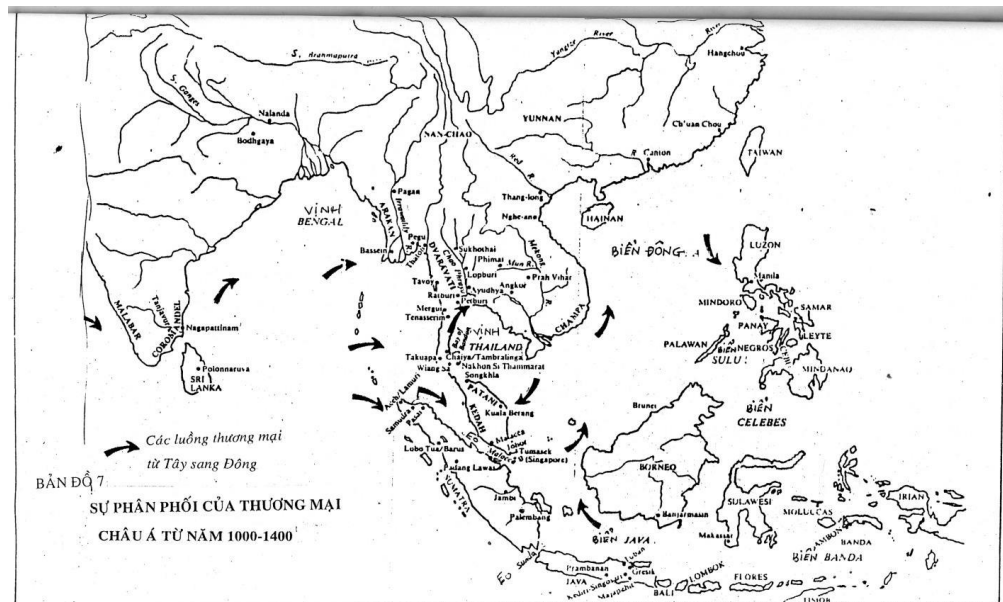
### ***Majapahit - The flourish of Java Trade***

There was an early state established in Java island called Trauma (western Java) which coexisted with the rise of Sri Vijaya in the island of Sumatra in the seventh century. In the early stage, Taruma was a vassal state of Sri Vijaya due to its small size and weak power. However Taruma benefited from fertile plain Kedu which advantaged in development of agriculture and growing spice plants. Trauma had not dominated on trade route though sea from east to west. Traders called this small country Kalinga.

In the end of the XIII century, Nguyen Empire required tribute from the king Kritanagara, but he declined it. Late AD 1292, Nguyen Empire took twenty thousands soldiers to invade Java as the punishment for his rejection. The Kritanagara led rebellion against Chinese invasion. After victory against Chinese, Kritanagara was crowned and based in Majapahit, began the rise of

regime in Java island. Mojopahit border included Java island, Sumatra, south west Kalimantan, Sulawesi island and Molucu island.

From the twelfth century, maritime commerce of Majapahit were famous for their local spice such as pepper, cinnamon and nutmeg. In the thirteenth century, due to significant demands for spice in Western markets, Majapahit and Java are destinations for Western traders. Maco Polo arrived in Mojopahit in this century and had noticed that: “Java....is of ...surpassing wealth, producing.... all.... kinds of spices,.... frequented by a vast amount of shipping, and by merchants who buy and sell costly goods from which they reap great profit. Indeed, the treasure of this island is so great as to be past telling” (Hall, Kenneth R, 1985: 210).



Nguồn: KR Hall "Maritime Trade and State Development in early Southeast Asia"

Canggu was an important trade centre on the Branta River, dominated trade in Majapahit and maritime South East Asia. Ma Huan - a Chinese ambassador described this place as “Changku” by sailing 70 – 80 li (twenty five miles) upriver on the Brantas from Surabaya on the coast, and from their one could reach the Majapahit capital by walking for half a day (Hall, Kenneth R, 1985: 235)

Pararaton known as the Book of Kings stated between the century of fifteenth and sixteenth Canggu was an inter-change centres which connect ports and inland cities. Mojopahit became wealthy for the east and west spice trade system. Java was also well known for its local spice under Mojoppahit regime. The trade activities took place in Bubad - a city located in southern Majappahit. There were many traders from various nations such as Ayuthaya, Combodia, Dai Viet, India, particularly Chinese traders outnumbered among them.

Foreign traders also observed that markets are set up in a huge square surrounding by buildings being covered with friezes which depicted famous

scenery from renowned historical poems of *Mahabharata*. The trade of Majapahit motivated Java to reach to its golden age of trade in history as it gathered all necessary factors which created a strong trade and leading economy in maritime South East Asia.

### ***The Golden Age of Maritime Commerce in South East Asia - Islamic State of Malacca***

The fifteenth century was considered as the golden age of trade in South East Asia. The internal and external relationship between nations significantly developed in this region. This catalyst motivated trade progress of China and South East Asia. The relation between Minh dynasty and Malacca that was driven by King's eunuch Trinh Hoa was the most remarkable correlation in this period of time.

The creation and rise of Malacca closely linked to Paramesvara - a prince of Sailendra in Sumatra island who married to a princess - a daughter of Hayam Wuruk - King of Mojopahit in Java island during 1350 -1389.

The marriage was an advantage of both countries in this region. In 1389 Hayam Wuruk died and his son became his successor. However, the new king had no confidence in monarchy due to the lack of reputation and capability that led to chaos and domestic division.

Paramesvara took an advantage of the circumstance to take over the crown from his brother in law, however his rebellion was defeated and he fled to Tumasik- now known as Singapore. After his arrival, he killed Sri Mahajara Paduka - king of Singapore to gain the throne. He reigned Singapura from 1392 to 1398, his strong character refused to be a vassal king under Thai dynasty - an influential power. Paramesvara was invaded by Thai King who accused him of killing his vassal king. In 1398. he left Singapura, wandered for 2 years and floated to fishing village of Malacca - a location in wrested Malaya Peninsula.

In 1403, Minh Emperor sent Au Kinh to promote maritime trade and relations with the countries in this region. In the early stage of new state establishment, Paramesvara requested to be a vassal under Thai King and was accepted. However the political changes in the region caused new king Paramesvara consider a strategic foreign policy which on one hand prevented the influence of Thai King and cooperated with Chinese traders, on the other hand integrated Islam into the country to gain close relationship with Muslim traders - an emerging power in the west. Eco-political relationship between China and Malacca was founded in significant changes in the region in the fifteenth century.

Paramesvara prioritised the political relationship with Ming Dynasty, moreover it emphasised on fundamental creation and development of trade between these two countries, especially in the time that it thrived for an economic power.

Trinh Hoa followed Au King journey and strengthened the eco-political correlation between China and Malacca. The nature of Trinh Hoa voyages was more political than economic, the main purpose was to observe and control maritime trade route through South East Asia. The recognition of Malacca was written in Man Thich Gia - Book -of Ming dynasty history. In the tenth month of Vinh Lac (永乐-Yongle), an envoy from the south brought precious tribute to ask for recognition of a state. The country had no king previously and was a vassal of Xiem La, now was persuaded by the reputation and power of the (Minh) dynasty. Therefore our Emperor conferred that Paramesvara was a king and the coronation would be in the capital next September.” (朱杰勤, 1991: 42).

Chinese traders were interested in Malacca from the early days. During Ming Dynasty (明朝), Ma Hoan (马欢) who assisted Trinh Hoa (郑和) during South East trips had written about Malaca, particularly emphasised on the economy of this nation in “瀛涯胜览” - a historical document. Ma Hoan (马欢) writing that was considered as an original version for generations of historians, has described:

1. *There was a river which connected to the coast in this country. The King of Malacca built a palace with more than twenty more chambers on the river; everything was traded here.*
2. *There are some specialties that were exchanging goods, and popular in Malacca market; Da Ma Nha Huong, Do Lo Tu and Hoa Tich. Among them Hoa Tich was used as money and was made up of pewter. Hoa Tich was moulded into block and divided into small cubes for the convenience of transportation. Each cube weighed about 1.8 kilograms. Ten cubes are packed into a small bag, 40 cubes made up a big bag. This type of pewter was used as a method of payment in the market.*

*Additionally, Ma Hoan described the warehouse and trade boats that were led by Trinh Hoa to this country. Chinese trade boats arrived here and gathered themselves to make a long line like a city wall which was designed with four empty floors at four doors and being nightly checked with the bell rings. There was a barrier built inside, resembled as a small city. Storages were built for urgent food and money supply for the Chinese boats. All the trade boats gathered here after finishing their trade in different countries, all goods were then transferred into big boats. They all waited for southern wind which went to the right direction and started their journey to home around mid May (高伟浓, 1995: 196-197).*

The expansion of Chinese traders in Malacca in this period marked a milestone of Chinese immigration influx into South East Asia. During seven times arriving Malacca, Trinh Hoa led 60 boats, 27,000 people from diversity of backgrounds and social status including farmers, nobles, servants, soldiers, scholars... contributed significant percentage in comparison to other countries. Those immigrants first came for trade then integrate into local lifestyle.

Nowadays Chinese people in Malaysia play an important economic and political role in South East Asia region.

### CONCLUSION

The history of trade in South East Asia is a long process of creation, development and demise of ancient trade centres and port markets. The establishment and evolution of those ancient markets related to the changes of regional history.

The role of ancient ports in maritime South East Asia was not only transit ports for Chinese, India and West Asian traders but also had significant influence on South East Asia and world trade such as ports of Sri Vijaya, Mojopahit and Malacca. They were not just the economic centres but also cultural ones where the exchange of cultural and civilisation took place during this period of history.

Predominant or non-predominant position in the changes of history had an principle role in the rise or demise of ancient ports in maritime South East Asia.

The development or collapse of the ancient port markets and trade centres in maritime South East Asia left the valuable legacy in history. The nations which appreciate and apply the historical legacy will develop.

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