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Hybrid Identities in the Fifteenth-Century Straits of Malacca

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Hybrid Identities in the Fifteenth-Century Straits of Malacca

Anthony Reid

Although present everywhere, hybridity has been little analysed as a category in Asian history. In many colonial and post-colonial societies it tended to be disdained in racial terms even while applauded in cultural ones (under labels like association or acculturation). There was a significant literature about separate phenomena, notably the mestizo (Chinese and European) in the Philippines, Peranakan and Indo in Indonesia, and Baba and Eurasian in Malaysia/Singapore. But the nature of plural or syncretic identities in Asia has not given rise to a significant analytic literature until recently, in contrast with the ‘creoles’ of the West Indies and Latin America.

The most helpful initiative among recent attempts to remedy this deficit was William Skinner’s use of the category ‘creolised Chinese societies’ to compare varied phenomena in the nineteenth-century Philippines, Java, and the Straits Settlements.¹ Skinner was encouraged in this direction by the increasing currency of creole as a technical linguistic term, meaning a syncretic language adopted as a mother tongue of some group though deriving from a pidgin *lingua franca*. Skinner was confident that each of the languages of his three creolised Chinese groups was “a true creole”, primarily based on the local Malay, Javanese or Tagalog but with significant Hokkien vocabulary.²

This paper takes some of Skinner’s argument back to the fifteenth century, before mutually exclusive racial categories had imposed themselves on host or migrant groups. I will adopt the looser term ‘hybrid’ in place of Skinner’s creole, which many linguists and anthropologists seek to limit to European colonial situations in which slavery played a large role. Data is insufficient from that period to be confident how far there was creolisation of language or long-term stability of hybridised culture.

¹ G. William Skinner, ‘Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia,’ in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, ed. Anthony Reid (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), pp.51-93.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 59-61.

I want to suggest that hybridisation of language, dress, food and material culture is indispensable as a means to understand identities in the ports of the Archipelago and the Straits of Malacca, and perhaps also Siam, before modern nationalist categories, even in their European colonial form, had had any influence. The fundamental factor here is that female emigration from China was prohibited as well as socially strongly disapproved of until the late nineteenth century, whereas male Chinese did migrate in large numbers at certain times. They set up households and ongoing communities in the ports of Southeast Asia, taking wives among the local population. As Zhou Daguan noted of Cambodia as early as the 1290s, “since rice is easily had, women easily persuaded, houses easily run, furniture easily come by, and trade easily carried on, a great many [Chinese] sailors desert to take up permanent residence.”³ In many cases before continuous trade to Southeast Asia was legalised in 1567, descendents of these migrants ceased to consider themselves Chinese when contact with China was lost. The fifteenth century is not the best documented period to analyse this process of hybridisation, but it may have been the most critical in its effect on the region. I want to suggest that hybridisation of language, dress, food and material culture is indispensable as a means to understand identities in the ports of the Archipelago and the Straits of Malacca, and perhaps also Siam, before modern nationalist categories, even in their European colonial form, had had any influence.

The two categories “Chinese” and “Malay” today coexist in Central Southeast Asia, notably Malaysia, Singapore, eastern Sumatra, South Thailand and coastal Borneo, as seemingly immutable destinies, stamped on identity cards and carrying different legal, educational and occupational implications. They are widely accepted by those who carry them as inherently opposed, “Malay” being seen as agrarian, rural and indigenous, and “Chinese” as commercial, urban and immigrant. These modern stereotypes are largely colonial creations, and when they appeared as categories in Dutch records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they represented rather similar polyglot diasporas of seafaring, trading people, having more in common with each other than with the agricultural peoples of the hinterlands.⁴

³ Chou Ta-Kuan, *The Customs of Cambodia*, trans P. Pelliot and Jilman d’Arcy Paul (Bangkok: The Siam Society, third ed. 1993), p.69.

⁴ Anthony Reid, ‘Understanding Melayu (Malay) as a source of Diverse Modern Identities,’ *JSEAS* 32, iii (2001), pp.301-2.

The argument of this paper is that the fifteenth-century antecedents of these and other categories emerged from a process of ethnic mixing in the ports of Central Southeast Asia. Those recognised by the first generation of Portuguese by labels such as “Jawa”, “Malay”, “Jawi” “Luzon” and “Siam” were maritime and commercial peoples with sufficient Chinese and other admixture on the male side to be considered hybrid categories. Subsequently these usages were stabilised, largely in terms of more exclusive European understandings of nation and race, and some of them imported back to their subjects as fixed and immutable categories.

Sino-Thai roles in Siamese origins

The best early European source for Thai traditions is Jeremias van Vliet, who relates a story told by Siamese scholars in the 1630s, that the first king of Ayutthaya was a Chinese exile, banished from China by his father the emperor after a rebellion, along with numerous followers. This prince toured various Southeast Asian ports including Jambi in the south and Champa, Cambodia and Phitsanulok in the north, before determining that Ayutthaya was the best location for his kingdom, which then stretched as far south as Jambi. He had first, however, to vanquish a poisonous dragon “living in a stinking marsh”.⁵ I read this early account in a similar way to Chris Baker, as “a legendary account of the importance of the Chinese in the foundation and development of all the port-cities of the Gulf, especially Ayutthaya.”⁶ In particular, however, it helps explain continuing Sino-Thai claims on the Peninsula and even Jambi, as a legacy of this quest for the rights to succeed Srivijaya in privileged access to the China market.⁷

The older Thai chronicles (none as early as Van Vliet) also include various stories about early contacts with China, though often in the more acceptable form of a Chinese princess sent south to marry the local king. The British Museum version of the Ayutthayan chronicles (1807) has two separate stories for Van Vliet’s one. Ayutthaya is founded in 1350 by a process which

⁵ Jeremias van Vliet, ‘Description of the Kingdom of Siam’ [1636], trans. L.F. van Ravenswaay, *JSS* 7, I (1910), pp.6-8.

⁶ Chris Baker, ‘Ayutthaya Rising: From Land or Sea?’ *JSEAS* 34 (1) (2003), p.50.

⁷ The Siamese link with South Sumatra continued, suggesting that Chinese or Sino-Thai networks continued to use Ayutthaya as a base for broader Southeast Asia-China trade. Tomé Pires (1515: 108) reported that the Siamese traded with China, but also with Sunda and Palembang. Dutch factors noted a Siam-based trade (salt and rice for pepper) on Jambi and Palembang in the seventeenth century, and in the 1680s Jambi was still sending the gold and silver flowers of vassalage to Siam in return for diplomatic and military support. Palembang threatened the Dutch that they might do the same in 1745 - Barbara Andaya, *To Live as Brothers: Southeast Sumatra in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), pp.55, 66, 108, 115, 123, 128, 135, 192.

does involve disease and the consultation of local ascetics, like Van Vliet's, and results in the seemingly immediate suzerainty over numerous principalities including Melaka and "Chawa" in the south.⁸ The contact with China, however, is put at the time of the mythical King Ruang of Chiang Mai, who reformed the Buddhist calendar to make a new beginning in 638 AD, and lived for over 200 years. He travelled to China amidst many marvels, was recognised as a man of prowess by the Emperor, who bestowed on him a princess as principal wife, 500 Chinese attendants and the "sea-dragon seal" which legitimated all subsequent Siamese tribute missions. This mission is portrayed as the source of the Thai ceramic industry, and of the smooth operation of the junk trade between the two countries.⁹ This shifting of the Chinese contact back to a wholly legendary past must have begun in the seventeenth century, but Van Vliet's information does suggest that a major Chinese involvement had much to do with the otherwise inexplicable emergence of an ostensibly Thai polity as a great naval power with influence over Melaka and "Jawa" (Jambi?).¹⁰

The Nakhon Si Thammarat chronicle is helpful in giving a non-Ayutthaya perspective from the south, which firmly links the rise of what later became Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim polities on the Peninsula to a moment of intense Chinese interaction. This occurred at the salt-exporting centre of Phetburi in the Gulf of Siam at a time (thirteenth century?) evidently pre-dating the rise of Ayutthaya. The ruler of Phetburi provides sandalwood to a visiting Chinese ship, and is rewarded by the Chinese emperor with his daughter (or grand-daughter) by a Champa princess, Candradevi. She is sent to Phetburi with nineteen ships and 7,400 servants and concubines to serve the king of Phetburi. He then sends out his sons and retainers, some endowed with Chinese consorts, to found other polities including Nakhon and the later Malay states of Patani, Kedah and Pahang.¹¹

⁸ *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya; A synoptic translation by Richard D. Cushman*, ed. David Wyatt (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2000), pp.9-10. If the "Chawa" of the chronicles was translated as Jambi by Van Vliet's informants, this would strengthen some of the argument below.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4. Only the British Museum version has this story. The oldest (1680) Luang Prasoet version of the chronicles begins only in the historic period with the unvarnished statement of the establishment of Ayutthaya in 1350.

¹⁰ The major study of Auyutthayan origins is that of Charnvit Kasetsiri, *The Rise of Ayutthaya: A History of Siam in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1976), esp. pp.51-72, who produces much circumstantial evidence, along with Van Vliet, to suggest that the founding king Uthong was to some extent Chinese.

¹¹ *The Crystal Sands: The Chronicles of Nagara Sri Dharmmaraja*, trans. David Wyatt (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1975), pp. 102-10.

This southern perspective helps to strengthen the argument of Chris Baker and to extend it to the Peninsula. Whereas previous studies of early Ayutthaya, including even Charnvit's revisionist view, had followed Prince Damrong in making Ayutthaya essentially a land-based state inheriting the mantle of Sukhothai and Angkor, Baker sees its roots as firmly maritime and China-oriented. He follows Geoff Wade in making the Chinese Xian not Sukhothai (as previous interpretations had it) but a maritime centre on the Gulf of Siam. This maritime Xian became home to 200 Chinese refugees fleeing the advancing Mongols in 1282, and of another prominent Song official fleeing the Mongols in 1289. It sent eight tribute missions to China in the period 1292-1323.¹² Already at that stage, before the conventional (chronicle) founding of Ayutthaya in 1351, it was sufficient of a maritime power to contest the mantle of Srivijaya as principal gathering-point for tropical produce for the China market. The information of the Nakhon chronicle suggests Phetburi as the likeliest specific location for this Xian of Chinese sources, particularly as its long-term role as provider of salt to all the states of the Gulf and Peninsula is well established.

Malay and Javanese origins in local tradition

When the terms Malay, Jawi and Java were first used by European visitors, a Chinese hybrid origin is curiously prominent. João de Barros relates the local memory in the strongest terms, particularly in speaking of Java:

Generally it is inhabited by an idolatrous people, who are called “Jawahs” [*Jaoa*] from the name of their country; the most civilized people of these parts, who according to what they say themselves came from China, and it appears that what they say is true, because in their appearance and in the form of their civilization they follow the Chinese closely, and have enclosed cities, and go by horse, and deal with the government of the land as they do.¹³

¹² Chris Baker, ‘Ayutthaya Rising: From Land or Sea?’ *JSEAS* 34 (1) (2003), pp. 41-62.

¹³ João de Barros, *Da Asia* (Lisbon, Regia Officina 1777; reprint Lisbon 1973) Dec. II, Livro ix, p. 352. Diogo do Couto, who succeeded Barros in chronicling the Portuguese discoveries, adds that “many of them [Javanese] pay respect to the Chinese, and claim that they came from there to Java” – Diogo do Couto, *Da Asia* (Lisbon, Regia Officina 1778; reprint Lisbon 1973), Dec. IV, Livro iii, p.169.

The chronicler of the first Dutch expedition to Java at the end of the sixteenth century was told the same thing:

When the Javanese themselves are asked about it, they say that they have their origin from China, from where they came to establish a colony in the island of Java, because they were overburdened by the heavy services which were levied on them in China; which can be more readily believed because they are very like the Chinese in physiognomy, with broad foreheads, large jaws, small eyes.¹⁴

The account of Tomé Pires (1515) is more ambiguous. Though usually more reliable than Barros and Couto, unlike them he wrote before Portuguese had much experience of Javanese except in Melaka.

They say that the Jawa used to have affinity with the Chinese, and one king of China sent one of his daughters to Java to marry Batara Raja Çuda [the puteri Cina story, see below] and that he sent her to Java with many people of China, and that he then sent money in the cash which are now currency, and they say that there was a junkload of them, and that the king was a vassal, not a tributary of the king of China, and that the Javanese killed all the Chinese in Java by treachery. Others say that it was not so...and that the Java cash were brought to Java for merchandise, because the Chinese used to trade to Java long before Melaka existed. But now they have not been there for the last hundred years.¹⁵

Later he makes the point that the “lord *patih*” who ruled the north coast city-states “are not Javanese of long standing, but they are descended from Chinese, from Parsees and Kling”.¹⁶

¹⁴ Willem Lodewycksz [1598] in *De eerste schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Cornelis de Houtman 1595-1597*, ed. G.P. Rouffaer and J.W. Ijzerman, Vol.I (The Hague: Nijhoff for Linschoten-Vereeniging, 1915, p.99. Rouffaer and Ijzerman footnote their belief that this passage was borrowed from a Portuguese source. Wouter Schouten was another seventeenth century Dutch source for the Chinese origins of the Javanese elite, while one of the earliest Dutch historians of Java, J. Hageman (1859) claimed that the saint-ruler (*wali*) who spread Islam to West Java, Sunan Gunung Jati, was Chinese – cited Hoessein Djajadiningrat, *Critische Beschouwing van de Sadjarah Banten* (Haarlem: Joh. Enschede, 1913), pp.104-5.

¹⁵ *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, ed. Armando Cortesão (London: Hakluyt Society, 1944), p. 179.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.182

Barros also has opaque but interesting material on Sumatra. It comprises heathens and Moors (Muslims), the latter being “foreigners who came for reasons of commerce and began to settle and populate the maritime region, multiplying so quickly that in less than 150 years they had become lords and began to call themselves kings.” The heathens took refuge in the interior, known as fierce Bataks in the north and more tractable “Sotumas” in the south. The people of Sumatra speak different languages but all understand Malay. They are well disposed and of good appearance, hence differing markedly from their neighbours the Javanese.

Most of the people of the island [Sumatra] call themselves *Jawi* [*Jaiüijs*] and among them are certainly found the Lords of this great island. But it was first the Chinese who controlled the commerce from there [Sumatra] and from India. Because of this striking difference in facial characteristics, which we have already discussed in the case of the people of Java, it seems to be demonstrated that they [the *Jawi*] are not natives of the land which they inhabit, but people who come from areas of China, because they imitate the Chinese in their civil institutions (*policia*) and in their mechanical ingenuity [later referring especially to arms].¹⁷

The term *jawi* was later used, at least by the seventeenth century, to refer to the Malay language especially in its written form,¹⁸ or as the adjectival form of *Jawa*, a term Arabic-speakers used to designate Southeast Asia’s islands and Peninsula as a whole. Raffles’ view, however, was that *jawi* originally had the meaning of creole, notably in *anak jawi*, meaning the child of a Malay/Indian marriage, or *bahasa jawi*, which he understood to mean “mixed language”, including when “the language of one country is written in the character of another.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Barros, *Da Asia*, Dec. 3, Livro v, pp.508-10. In rendering this difficult passage, I have been guided but not ruled by Mark Dion, ‘Sumatra through Portuguese Eyes: Excerpts from João de Barros’ *Decadas da Asia*,’ *Indonesia* 9 (1970), pp.143-4.

¹⁸ William Marsden, *A Dictionary and Grammar of the Malayan Language* ([1812], reprinted Singapore: OUP, 1984), I: 100-01; II: xii-xv. Michael Laffan, ‘Defining, redefining and refining *Jawa*: Shifting understandings of Southerast Asia and Southeast Asians in Arabic’, Paper presented to AAS Annual Conference, San Diego, March 2004.

¹⁹ Raffles, 1809, in Sophia Raffles (ed.) *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (London: Duncan, 1835) I, pp. 40-41. Raffles then view was that the Malays were a creole people formed in the encounter with Islam, like the Mapillas of Malabar or the Chulias of Coromandel. Like them the Malays were “gradually formed as nations, and separated from their original stock by the admixture of Arabian blood, and the introduction of the Arabic language and Moslem religion” (loc.cit.). The label *bahasa jawi* for the Malay language

Although it is to build much on little, Barros' *Jawi* may have been intended to refer to the traders of Jambi, Palembang, and the east coast more generally, known in his day as a hybrid Muslim people of Chinese, Javanese, indigenous and other origins.

The *Melayu* (Malay) category was encountered by the Portuguese in Melaka as the city's ruling group, though they used the term less often than "people of Melaka". They recorded the then tradition of the Melaka sultanate, which traced its origins to Palembang and Singapore. This tradition does not mention a Chinese connection until the time of the second ruler Xaquem Darxa, whom Pires describes travelling to the Chinese capital to present his tribute in person. After an absence of three years, this ruler was brought home by a great Chinese captain (a reference to Zheng He?), whose beautiful daughter he married. He also brought back the base system of tin currency used in Melaka, and the seal used in the tribute trade to China.²⁰ Given the very important role of Melaka as a Chinese depot for the Zheng He expeditions to the Indian Ocean, and the Chinese evidence that the first three Melaka rulers all travelled to China to be enthroned, this is a modest recognition of the Chinese role.

The 'Luzons' for sixteenth century Portuguese writers were merchants based in Manila or Brunei, or as a trading minority in Melaka. They operated large ships between their home ports and Melaka, while the leaders of the 500-strong Luzon community in Melaka sent ships to China, implying that at least some of them could still speak and write some form of Chinese. I have argued that this is another Sino-Southeast Asian hybrid group, which developed when direct contact between the important early Ming commercial communities of Brunei and Manila lost direct contact with Fujian in the late fifteenth century along the 'eastern route' past Luzon and southern Taiwan.²¹ They reoriented their China trade via Melaka, explaining the otherwise puzzling datum that Tome Pires qualified his information about Canton, "or so the Luzons say who have been there."²² Neither Portuguese nor Spanish in the sixteenth century recognised this group as any longer Chinese in any sense, but simply another kind of 'Moros' (Muslims).

as written in Arabic script was described by Wernrdley in the eighteenth century as the high literary language, and by R. Roolvink, *Bahasa Jawi: De Taal van Sumatra* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1975), as the common name for Sumatra-derived Malay.

²⁰ Tomé Pires, pp.242-3. Barros, *Da Asia*, II, vi, does not mention even this single visit to China in his account of Melaka history.

²¹ Reid, *Sojourners and Settlers*, pp. 23-25 & 32-36.

²² Tomé Pires, p.121. Also p.134

However one report of the 1560s did concede that “boats from Borneo [Brunei] and Luzon are called Chinese junks in these islands, and even the Moros themselves are called Chinese, but in fact Chinese junks do not reach here [Mindanao].”²³

Portuguese chroniclers also reported of the Maluku people of the spice islands of Ternate and Tidore, that they had lived like savages and made little use of the cloves until Chinese junks arrived, bringing the Chinese *cash* that became their major currency. Eventually “the Javanese also responded to the commerce, and the Chinese stopped”, reportedly because the king of China pulled them back to his country and abandoned the conquest of the East.²⁴

Such early European reports are valuable because they predate the racial antipathies of later times when Chinese origins could not be celebrated. While no more than suggestive in themselves, they require a more thorough examination of Southeast Asian and Chinese sources for clues to what gave rise to them.

In regard to Java, the Banten tradition represented in both the *Sadjarah Banten* and the *Hikayat Hasanuddin* attributes the origins of the rulers of Demak, the state which later conquered Majapahit and Islamised the Javanese heartland, to a Chinese minister or general (*patih*), originally sent off by the Chinese emperor to look for a magically powerful Muslim saint, Sheikh Jumadil-akbar.²⁵ The main Mataram chronicle tradition of Java features the Chinese merchant Wintang who was converted by Sunan Kudus, married the daughter of King Trenggana of Demak and presided over the mercantile Muslim settlement of Japara as Sunan Kali Nyamat (one of the nine *wali* credited with Islamising Java). When he died in the succession dispute following Trenggana's death, his widow succeeded him as the militant queen of Japara, Ratu Kali-Nyamat.²⁶

²³ Cited in Scott, *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain* (1982), p.37.

²⁴ Barros, *Da Asia*, III, i: 576-9. The same story is told in *A Treatise on the Moluccas (c.1544), Probably the Preliminary Version of Antonio Galvão's lost História das Molucas*, trans Hubert Jacobs (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute), 1971), pp.79-81, and the first Dutch account of Ternate - *De tweede shipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië 1598-1600*, Vol. III, ed. J. Keuning (The Hague: Nijhoff for Linschoten-Vereeniging, 1942), p.133.

²⁵ H.J. de Graaf and Th.G.Th. Pigeaud, *De eerste moslimse vorstendommen op Java* (Nijhoff for KITLV, 1974), p. 36. The *Hikayat Hasanudin* names this Chinese progenitor Che Kopo, and has him arriving with three junks - Jan Edel, *Hikajat Hasanoeeddin* (1938), p.122.

²⁶ Th.G.Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, Vol. II (The Hague: Nyhoff, 1968), p.363. De Graaf and Pigeaud 1974, 104. This Wintang story is interestingly woven into the Parlindungan version -- G.W.J. Drewes and H.J. de Graaf,

The Malay-language *peranakan* chronicle, which Mangaradja Parlindungan claimed to have inherited and then lost, goes much further than this. It establishes a Chinese Muslim role in the Islamisation of Manila, the north coast of Java, Sambas (West Borneo) and Palembang. It gives great prominence to the Muslim eunuch Zheng He, whom it portrays appointing leaders of Hanafi Muslim Chinese communities in all the ports of Java, who are identified with the ‘nine apostles’ (*wali sembilan*) who dominate Javanese memory of the fifteenth-century Islamization process. The Muslim Chinese of Tuban were the acknowledged leaders of this network and intermediaries between China and Java until contact with the Middle Kingdom was lost around 1450. The Muslim Chinese community then divided into the minority who abandoned Islam and built temples to Sam Po Kong, and the majority who became Muslim Javanese. Leadership of the latter group passed to a Sino-Cham who had come to maturity in Palembang and was presumed to be the Raden Rahmat or Sunan Ampel of Javanese tradition.²⁷

Sufficient corroborating evidence about some of the connections narrated in this chronicle has been assembled by Dutch scholars to give it some credibility as an independent source on the process. Nevertheless, scepticism is required by the bizarre way in which the text was brought to the world by Parlindungan.

The more widespread tradition in Java, for the most part recorded in the nineteenth century, compresses the contact with China into a story of a Chinese princess who becomes the queen of the last Majapahit king, Brawijaya. She is pregnant by King Brawijaya at the time he sends her off to Palembang in the trust of Arya Damar. There, in an increasingly Islamic environment, she bears the Majapahit king’s child, who eventually becomes Raden Patah, the Muslim ruler of

Chinese Muslims in Java, ed. M.C. Ricklefs (Melbourne: Monash University Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1984) , 30-31, 102-104, 116, 162-163.

²⁷ Ibid., pp., 13-36; Reid, *Charting the Shape*, pp.66-69. The “chronicle” was first presented as an appendix to an extraordinary, undocumented jumble of local and family history, myth, scatological story and speculation by Mangaradja Onggang Parlindungan, *Tuanku Rao: Terror Agama Islam Mazhab Hambali Di Tanah Batak, 1816-1833* (Jakarta: Tandjung Harapan, 1964), pp.650-72. He claimed the provenance of the Sino-Javanese Islamization story, as of much else in a book primarily concerned with nineteenth century Sumatra, was the Dutch Resident of Tapanuli, Poortman, who died in 1951 after sharing much of his information with Parlindungan’s father. Poortman was said to have obtained the text in the 1920s from the old Sam Po Kong temple in Semarang. Although there is much accurate detail in the book which it seems almost impossible for Parlindungan to have either invented or independently established, no-one has found any of the sources Parlindungan used.

Demak and conqueror of Majapahit.²⁸ This story appears to be a literary device to turn the memory of fifteenth-century Chinese prominence in both Palembang and the Java *pasisir* into a legitimization myth asserting (against much appearance to the contrary) the continuity of the new Islamic and commercial rulers of Java with the ancient dynasty of Hindu Majapahit.

The 1612 [Shellabear] version of the *Sejarah Melayu* is much more explicit about Chinese intervention in Palembang. It traces the Melaka and Minangkabau lines of kings to Sang Sapurba, a descendant of Alexander the world-conqueror and presumed epitome of the mighty kings of Srivijaya in Palembang. His glory was such that the King of China sent a fleet of 10 ships, carrying 100 Chinese men and 100 women, to request a princess in marriage. The ministers advise him to agree, for “is there any country greater than China?” His eldest daughter is sent off to become empress of China and source of the descent line of future Chinese emperors. Meanwhile a Chinese general (*ksatria*) is left behind in Palembang, supported by the other Chinese, marries a mythic representation of the upriver districts (*ulu*) and begets the subsequent kings of Palembang. Sang Sapurba himself takes his Malay retinue off to establish new kingdoms in the Riau Archipelago and Temasek (Singapore), the progenitors of the Melaka line.²⁹

This story, which approximates to a benign, mythic explanation of the 14th/15th Century disruption to Palembang (see below), was suppressed in the better-known Raffles version of the chronicles, presumably at a time when Chinese ancestors were no longer acceptable. This version is also silent about the fact (from Chinese sources) that its three first rulers each journeyed to China to present tribute in the early fifteenth century. It compresses the critical early Ming Chinese interventions into the more culturally acceptable story of a Chinese princess (*puteri China*), also seen in Java and many other parts of the Archipelago. It relates a story about how the Chinese Emperor sent one of his daughters, accompanied by five hundred high-born youth and hundreds of beautiful women, to Melaka to marry the exemplary Sultan Mansur.³⁰

²⁸ *Babad Tanah Djawi. Javaanse Rijkskroniek*, trans. W.L. Olthof, ed. J.J. Ras (Dordrecht: Foris for KITLV, 1987), pp. 20-22. Thomas Raffles, *The History of Java* (1817, reprinted Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1978), II: 116-17, 125-26.

²⁹ *Sejarah Melayu [The Malay Annals]* (Shellabear ed. 1961), pp.29-31. Also Barbara Andaya, *To Live as Brothers*, p.41.

³⁰ ‘Sejarah Melayu or “Malay Annals”’, trans. C.C. Brown, *JMBRAS* 25: ii/iii (1952), pp. 90-91.

Since Mansur reigned at a time (1459-77) when Melaka was prospering but the Ming court had lost all interest in it, this has to be a displaced and sanitized memory of the earlier contacts.

Further east, in Brunei, the chronicles compiled in the nineteenth century portray the founder of the ruling dynasty marrying a Chinese lady, daughter of the legendary Ong Sum Ping. This Ong Sum Ping also appears as a legendary ancestor figure in some traditions of the Dusun (Kadazan) people indigenous to northern Borneo.³¹ In the sixteenth century Bruneians still appear to have remembered the historic king of Brunei who went to China on a tribute mission in 1408 and died there, leaving a boy heir who was escorted back to Brunei by a large Chinese expedition and military commissioner. However these traditions, as collected by the Spanish, conflate two kings into one, a founder-figure who went to China and married a Chinese princess there, and gave birth to the ruling dynasty.³²

Yuan (Mongol) interventions and the role of Quanzhou

While there remains a great deal of mystery and speculation about the motives for the early Ming interventions in Southeast Asia and beyond, the Mongols were less complicated. They had an ideology of world-conquest,³³ and used the then limited Chinese and foreign knowledge of the South China Sea to mount the first large China-based naval expeditions. Kublai Khan not only sent massive expeditions by land into Burma (five times) and Vietnam (four), but he organised huge fleets against Japan (1274 and 1281), and then in 1292-3 his most distant venture to Java. Twenty thousand Chinese soldiers reportedly sailed on this expedition, and many fewer returned. “More than three thousand soldiers” were reported in the Chinese sources to have died in Java, but given what we know both about the habits of soldiers in general and of Southeast Asian warfare in particular, it is likely that most of them in fact surrendered or defected to make new lives there.³⁴

³¹ Owen Rutter, *The Pagans of North Borneo* (London: Hutchinson, 1929), pp.40-45 and 249.

³² Anthony Reid, in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin for ASAA, 1996), p.23.

³³ Jenggis Khan is reported to have declared, “Man’s highest joy is in victory: to conquer one’s enemies, ...to ride on their horses, and to embrace their wives and daughters” – Edwin Reischauer and John Fairbank, *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), I: 267.

³⁴ W.P. Groeneveldt, *Notes on the Malay Archipelago and Malacca compiled from Chinese Sources*, (Batavia: Bataviaasch Genootschap, 1880); Reid, *Sojourners and Settlers*, pp.17-18.

Although defections are not the stuff of imperial annals (Zhou Daguan had no such inhibitions, as we saw above), Wang Dayuan does report many Chinese in Southeast Asia about forty years later, living “mixed up with the natives”. Only in one case does he attribute this specifically to the Mongol invading fleet. This is at an island called Gou-lan shan (or in Fei Hsin, Chiao-lan-shan), on which he says many of the ships of the expedition to Java were wrecked. They salvaged nails and mortar from one of their ships, constructed “some tens of ships” from the abundant wood on the island, and sailed on. “Over a hundred men who were ill from the long beating about in the storm and were unable to leave were left on the island, and today the Chinese live mixed up with the native families.”³⁵

Wang Dayuan’s translator identifies this place as Gelam, a small island just off the southwest corner of Borneo. It is hard to resist, however, making a connection with the larger island of Karimata, especially as Fei Hsin says the two islands “gaze across at each other, being in the middle of the sea”.³⁶ If not these craftsmen, then their descendents or others from later Chinese ships, may have relocated to the rich iron deposits of Karimata, and helped develop it into the major supplier of steel, weapons and tools to the archipelago by 1600.³⁷ Other major iron-working centres on the route of Chinese shipping were Belitung, already prominent around 1600 but dominant as an Archipelago supplier two centuries later, and the delta of the Sarawak River, which Tom Harrisson showed to be an important source of iron over a period he estimated from the tenth to fourteenth centuries.³⁸ The great advances in metalworking of China during the Song Dynasty appear likely to have been passed to some of these most accessible maritime sites in Southeast Asia by Chinese settlers.

The Yuan period (1276-1368) also marked the apogee of the fortunes of the foreign, largely Muslim, commercial community in Quanzhou. This south Fujian port had come to dominate the

³⁵ Wang Dayuan (1349), translated in W.W. Rockhill, ‘Notes on the Relations and Trade of China with the Eastern Archipelago and the Coast of the Indian Ocean during the Fourteenth Century, *T’oung Pao* 16 (1915), p.261. A very similar story is in Fei Hsin, *Hsing-Ch’ a Sheng-Lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Raft* [c. 1433] trans. J.V.G. Mills, ed. Roderich Ptak (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), p.41, though he adds that the Chinese left behind, “brought up families” there.

³⁶ Fei Hsin (1996), p.92. Gelam and Karimata are about 200 km apart, making the Gelam identification questionable.

³⁷ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, c.1450-1680*, 2 vols (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1988-93), I: 111.

³⁸ Tom Harrisson and Stanley O’Connor, *Excavations of the Prehistoric Iron Industry in West Borneo*, 2 vols (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1969).

maritime trade of China during the previous Song dynasty (960-1276), when Chinese, Arab, Persian and Southeast Asia-based merchants divided the trade to Southeast Asia. The Muslim traders to Quanzhou had also begun leaving traces along their trade routes, including the probably Shi'ite tombstone of 1039 at the Cham port now known as Phan-rang in Southeastern Vietnam, and Fatimah's tombstone of 1082 in Leran, near Surabaya in Java.³⁹ Quanzhou itself boasts mosques older than any known in Southeast Asia, the oldest being the Ashab mosque built in 1009-10.⁴⁰ From the time it was accepted as one of the official Song maritime portals in 1087, Quanzhou flourished even further as a dynamic commercial centre, with a Muslim population so large it gave rise to the aphorism *hui ban cheng* – implying that Muslims were half the city.⁴¹

The most influential Arab-descended Muslim family of Quanzhou, that of Pu Shougeng, had themselves settled as traders in Southeast Asia before moving on to Guangzhou and finally Quanzhou in the thirteenth century. Pu Shougeng was one of the largest shipowners of the city at the time of the Mongol invasions in the 1270s, and had enough leverage over the local militias to be able to deliver the city to the Mongols in 1276, and defend it against Song counterattacks.⁴² Pu Shougeng and the Muslim merchant community more generally were rewarded with high office, and effectively dominated Quanzhou for most of the next century. The Yuan dynasty created a favoured position in general for Muslims, but this was particularly apparent in bringing the Muslim commercial group in Quanzhou to the peak of its power, wealth, and international connections.

The fortunes of mercantile Quanzhou, and particularly its mighty foreign Muslim community, crashed spectacularly after 1357. This year marked the outbreak of the Fujian Muslim revolt and civil war known to Chinese sources as the “*Yi-si-ba-xi* rebellion”. The term refers to the Quanzhou military garrison, dominated by Persian soldiers who came back with the Mongol armies from West Asia in the 1280s. The dominant reading traces the term to the Persian

³⁹ S.Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes to Malaysia* (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963), pp. 38-47.

⁴⁰ Hugh Clark, ‘Overseas Trade and Social Change in Quanzhou through the Song’, pp. 47-94, in Angela Schottenhamer (ed), *The Emporium of the World: Maritime Quanzhou, 1000-1400* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p.51.

⁴¹ Ibid. pp 51-54; Fan Ke, ‘Maritime Muslims and Hui Identity: A South Fujian Case’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 21:2 (2001), p.315.

⁴² Billy So, *Prosperity, Region and Institutions in Maritime China: The South Fukien Pattern, 946-1368* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp.108-12. Fan Ke (2001), pp. 315-16.

word *Ispah*, army – thus another “Sepoy rebellion”.⁴³ Having been mobilised to suppress the local rebellions which were a feature of this final phase of the Yuan dynasty, an army of predominately Persian Muslims led by two figures bearing the militant titles Saif ad-Din (Sword of the Faith) and Amir ad-Din (Commander of the Faith) took control of South Fujian in defiance of Imperial forces. The rebels overreached themselves in attempting to take Fuzhou itself, and when the tide turned against them in 1362 they fell into internal conflict. Their forces were crushed in a battle for Xinghua [Hsing-hua] in 1366, and the Fujian commander Chen Youding retook Quanzhou in the same year, inaugurating a decade-long witch-hunt against foreign Muslims.⁴⁴

Whether the Muslim ascendancy was ended by overambition, a millenarian holy war, or by conflicts either between old and new commercial elites, or between Arab Sunni and Persian Shi’a Muslims, is still being debated. The outcome however was clear. The local population turned against Muslims and foreigners, and the new Ming Dynasty (1368) blamed them for delivering Quanzhou to the alien Mongols. Persecution against them for 10 years more brought great misery upon the Muslim population. Violence against Muslims continued until at least 1407, when the Yung-lo Emperor commanded that it should stop.⁴⁵ The options for surviving Muslim merchant families were to try to blend in to a more Sinified pattern of Islam seen in some other parts of China, or to take their ships to foreign ports with which they had traded. In the second half of the fourteenth century there must have been a major flow of half-Sinified Muslim merchants from Quanzhou to safer areas in Southeast Asia where they could continue to use their capital, skills and contacts to continue the trade between Southeast Asian and South China ports. Quanzhou itself ceased to be a leading international port.

I have argued elsewhere⁴⁶ that the introduction of copper cash and of a large hybrid type of junk into maritime Southeast Asia were largely attributable to the Mongol military adventure

⁴³ On the other hand Fan Ke, ‘Maritime Muslims’ (2001), 329n46, following Liao Dake, prefers to derive it from Persian *Shahbandar* (harbourmaster), identifying the leading rebels as responsible for the Persian-style harbourmaster office (*fanfang*) instituted under the Yuan.

⁴⁴ So, *Prosperity* (2000), pp. 122-5; Ke, ‘Maritime Muslims’ (2001), pp. 315-17; Shinji Maejima, ‘The Muslims in Ch’uan-chou at the End of the Yuan Dynasty’, Part 2, in *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 32 (1974), pp.47-71.

⁴⁵ Fan, ‘Maritime Muslims’ (2001). pp. 316-17

⁴⁶ Reid, *Sojourners and Settlers*, pp. 17-21; Anthony Reid, *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1999), pp.56-62.

in Java in 1293. The above information suggests a range of other possibilities during the Yuan period. It also adds substance to another argument in the same publication, that Chinese ships were coming directly to the clove-producing islands of Ternate and Tidore during the Yuan period (1279-1368), especially from Quanzhou which we now know to have had good links with Borneo. Wang Dayuan, the first to give cogent information about the islands in 1349, stated: "They look forward each year to the arrival of Chinese junks to trade in their country."⁴⁷ As mentioned above, the Portuguese reported local memories that Chinese had pioneered the large-scale trade in cloves, but then stopped coming and were replaced by the Javanese. Having assembled the Chinese evidence, Roderich Ptak is reasonably confident that Chinese vessels travelled to Maluku for cloves by way of the eastern route past Luzon and Sulu during the Yuan, but ceased doing so in the Ming.⁴⁸

The expansionist policy of Majapahit's King Hayam Wuruk (1350-89) extended Java's maritime reach just as Quanzhou dissolved into chaos and the Yuan dynasty came to an end. It seems likely that the direct Maluku-China link by the Sulu route broke down at some point in the 1350s or 1360s. The extension of Majapahit's influence to Maluku, and the ending of direct shipping to Quanzhou, re-oriented the clove trade to Java and eventually Melaka, polities which continued to have good trade/tribute connections with China in the early Ming. Majapahit's naval expansion may have been facilitated by co-opting some of the Chinese and Sino-Southeast Asian shippers previously sailing to Fujian by the eastern route, or indeed based in Quanzhou themselves.

From Srivijaya to Palembang/Temasek/Melaka

For the Melaka Straits region, there are few sources covering the period of the Quanzhou rebellion and the end of the Yuan (1368), between the description of Wang Dayuan in 1349, and Ma Huan and other chroniclers of the Ming expeditions in the early 15th century. Nevertheless this transition in maritime China is much more critical for understanding Southeast Asian

⁴⁷ Wang Dayuan (1349) in Rockhill 1915, pp. 259-60.

⁴⁸ Roderich Ptak, 'China and the Trade in Cloves, circa 960-1435', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993), pp.8-9.

commercial history, Sino-Southeast Asian hybridities, and the establishment of Muslim beachheads in Champa and island Southeast Asia, than has been recognised.

The outflow of semi-Sinicised Muslim merchants came at the end of the Yuan period, when trade between Southeast Asia and China had been relatively unhindered. The evidence of Chinese ceramic finds in Southeast Asia is abundant in the Yuan period, and Wang Dayuan described a Southeast Asian world in which Chinese traders went everywhere. The devastating effect on this trade of the Quanzhou rebellion was compounded by the advent of the Ming (1368), who strictly forbade all maritime trade except that associated with tribute missions, and was particularly hostile to Muslims. Not only Muslims of various degrees of Sinification, but other Chinese merchants engaged in the Nanhai trade, must have shifted their operations to Southeast Asia at this time. They arrived at a time when Majapahit, Temasek, Palembang and a newly-established Ayutthaya were contesting control of the vital straits, and the heritage of Srivijaya as principal collecting point for the trade to China.

The Chinese sources are particularly interesting about Palembang, reported by Ma Huan to be identical to Java in language, food, dress and customs.⁴⁹ For much of the period from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, this had been the principal centre of the Srivijaya polity, the ‘San Foqi’ entitled through the Tang and Song dynasties to trade with China in the guise of tribute missions. For earlier and longer than any other Archipelago port, it had been in regular contact with the Middle Kingdom, visited by Chinese Buddhists on their pilgrimages to India and regularly gathering spices, aromatics and other tropical produce to send to the world’s richest economy. In the fourteenth century, however, the historically important Palembang site was weakened and contested, the dynastic heritage of Srivijaya had moved already to Jambi and from there up the Batang Hari towards the sources of gold in Minangkabau. Disarray in China presumably meant that no one entrepot could any longer monopolise the trade to China in the name of tribute. No more tribute missions were in fact sent to the Yuan by Srivijaya after 1309.⁵⁰ Two rising maritime powers, Java and Xian/Siam, were still in tribute/trade contact with China, however, and both appear to have sought to inherit the South Sumatra trade.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁰ O.W. Wolters, *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay History* (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), pp. 46-47.

Wang Dayuan (1349) relates that Siam was a powerful but piratical naval force, which took advantage of instability elsewhere to send fleets of “as many as a hundred junks” against them. Such a fleet of 70 junks had recently been sent against Temasek, but that settlement “resisted for a month, having closed its gates and defending itself”, until an Imperial envoy, or in Wolters’ interpretation a Javanese embassy to China, passed by and drove off the attackers.⁵¹ For Wang Dayuan, Temasek was the place of the Dragon-tooth Gate through which shipping between the two oceans had to pass – usually thought to be Singapore. Temasek itself had little of its own produce, “all they have is the product of their pillaging of the Quanzhou traders.” The Temasek people let them pass freely on their journey westward, but when returning fully laden “the junk people get out their armour and padded screens against arrow fire to protect themselves for, of a certainty, two or three hundred pirate junks will come out to attack them.”⁵²

This information, together with the Thai traditions claiming suzerainty over Melaka and “Chawa” from the very beginning of the Ayutthaya dynasty in 1350, suggests to me that rival Chinese or Sino-Southeast Asian commercial networks, operating at a moment of unusual fluidity, were involved in the origins of both Siam and Melaka, as well as the latter’s predecessor in Temasek/Singapore. Palembang and Jambi had both lost what capacity they once had to monopolise the trade to China and to curb “piratic” challenges to it. Singapore had become a more convenient alternative centre for focusing trade, and China traders from both Siam and Java were seeking to control it for their purposes.

In Temasek, Wang Dayuan says “the men and women dwell together with Chinese people” – which I take to mean there was no separate Kampung China, but rather much miscegenation between Chinese and local.⁵³ Although Wolters reported that “almost nothing is known of fourteenth century Temasek”,⁵⁴ thanks to John Miksic’s excavations we are now more confident about the status of Temasek/Singapore as a substantial fourteenth-century trade centre

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 78-9; Wang Dayuan (1349) in Rockhill, 1915, p.100.

⁵² Wang Dayuan (1349) in Rockhill, 1915, p. 132.

⁵³ Ibid., p.131. For translation of this important passage I am indebted to Geoffrey Wade, differing slightly from Rockhill.

⁵⁴ Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, p.78.

than about any of the rival Straits ports mentioned in Chinese sources and the *Desawarnana*.⁵⁵ Jorge d'Albuquerque reported that Singapore at its fourteenth-century moment of greatness referred both to the Strait through which all east-west shipping had to pass, and also to “a very large and populous city – as is witnessed by its great ruins which still appear to this very day”.⁵⁶

Melaka tradition, recorded in both the *Sejarah Melayu* and the earlier Portuguese recording of what was remembered in the 1510s, is clear in tracing the lineage of Melaka from its origin in Palembang (Srivijaya) through a period in Singapore to Melaka. The *Sejarah Melayu* has Sri Tri Buana leaving Palembang of his own volition “to found a city”, and eventually doing so “at Temasek, giving it the name of Singapore... And Singapore became a great city, to which foreigners resorted in great numbers, so that the fame of the city and its greatness spread throughout the world.”⁵⁷ One of this king’s descendents after five generations, Iskandar Shah, abandoned Singapore in face of a Javanese attack, and made his new capital at Melaka.⁵⁸ The Portuguese accounts, by contrast, have a single Palembang king, Paramaswara, flee that city in the face of an overwhelming attack by his brother-in-law the king of Java. He establishes his new headquarters at Singapore, where he has less trade and agriculture but a strategic site for plundering his enemies, until ejected from there in turn by another in-law, the King of Siam. Thence he flees to Muar and then Melaka.⁵⁹

Linehan went furthest in analysing the *Sejarah Melayu* as an historical source, and providing a chronology for it with reference to Chinese data. Counting back the reign periods, he had Sri Tri Buana founding Singapore in 1299, and the Javanese attacking in 1375. Wolters was sceptical of this attempt, and interpreted the primary role of the chronicle’s author as “to supply his ruler with worthy ancestors within the framework of the Malay world.” The text had to establish a link to Srivijaya, still remembered as Bukit Siguntang in Palembang, and to further supply genealogical links to Tamil Vijayanagar and Muslim Pasai, the stories about which

⁵⁵ *Early Singapore, 1300s-1819: Evidence in Maps, Texts and Artefacts*, ed. John Miksic and Cheryl-Ann Low Mei Gek (Singapore: Singapore History Museum, 2004).

⁵⁶ Albuquerque, Braz de, (1557), *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque*, trans. W. de Gray Birch, 3 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1877-80), III: 73.

⁵⁷ *Sejarah Melayu*, trans. Brown, p. 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.50-52.

⁵⁹ Tomé Pires (1515), pp.231-2; Albuquerque, *The Commentaries* (1557), III: 73-76.

obscure the embarrassing memory of Palembang's eclipse after the eleventh century.⁶⁰ Wolters seeks (implausibly, in view of later archeology) to compress the Temasek/Singapore episode to at most a few years in the 1390s.

Both these accounts appear to take inadequate account of the fundamental source of the wealth of the rival ports in the Straits, namely the capacity to control or exploit the rich trade to China. The main economic stories of the fourteenth century appear to be the collapse of Srivijaya's control over that trade, the growing importance of Chinese and Sino-Southeast Asian shippers in the South China Sea, and the new maritime power of Java and after 1350 of Ayutthaya – both probably based on the successful mobilisation of Chinese maritime networks. Let me try to tell the rest of the story from this perspective.

Ming Intervention

At the accession of the first Ming Emperor (1368), Palembang and Jambi had been diminished by the rise of Singapore, and more distantly by Majapahit (Java) and Siam. However Palembang remained important for the foodstuffs, aromatics, jungle produce and “cotton superior to that of any other foreign country” coming downriver from the highlands.⁶¹ Hence Majapahit probably did seek to control the entrepot in Hayam Wuruk's time (1350-89), which may have caused some dynastic elements to shift to Singapore. In the first Ming half-century, power in Palembang appears to have been contested by various Chinese commercial networks, by Muslims (sometimes also Chinese), by the predominately non-Muslim but Malay-speaking local populace (about whom we hear little), and by various representatives of China and of Majapahit.

As mentioned above, the recorded histories of Mataram seem designed to explain how a half-Chinese Muslim trader from Palembang could become the conqueror of Majapahit, the Muslim *wali* (saint) Raden Patah, and miraculously turn out to be the legitimate heir of Majapahit kingship. With his step-brother Raden Husin and step-father Arya Damar, he

⁶⁰ Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, pp.79-83.

⁶¹ Wang Dayuan, in Rockhill, p.136.

represented a Palembang connection often referred to in the legends of the Islamisation of Java in the fifteenth century.

What can be squeezed from Chinese records about this semi-legendary memory? As we have seen, the Quanzhou rebellion of 1357-66, combined with the Ming suppression of private trade, brought many traders from coastal China to Southeast Asia, and no doubt especially to those few states accepted by the Ming as legitimate channels of tribute. The process was a turbulent one. The contest would be intense to claim the legitimacy in imperial eyes of old polities licensed to send tribute in the Song and early Yuan, or alternatively to take the more difficult road of establishing a new kingdom (like Melaka) as legitimate in Chinese eyes by going in person to make the case in Nanjing.

The imperial court knew almost nothing of Temasek/Singapore, but in its conservative way remembered San Foqi (Srivijaya). This was the only polity in the Straits area to which it dispatched an envoy, in September 1370. Understandably the response was enthusiastic, since other channels of trade were becoming very difficult. Six tribute missions were sent in the name of San Foqi in the next seven years, including three from three different rulers in the period 1374-5. Apart from one mission that referred to its ruler as “Maharaja of Palembang”, we cannot be sure where the missions came from. Wolters favours the notion that most of them were from Jambi as the port of Adityavarman’s Minangkabau capital.⁶² I would favour agnosticism as to whether they were from independent states in Palembang, Jambi, or Singapore, or Sino-Javanese representatives of Majapahit at one of these ports anxious to cash in on the commercial opportunities. What seems clear, however, is that despite the previous decline of Palembang, and its probable subjection to Majapahit, the Ming intervention gradually re-established this entrepot (after several centuries in abeyance) as the San Foqi of old, and thereby attracted many more Chinese to flock there to take advantage of the opportunities. This probably marked the death-knell of Singapore as a Chinese trade centre, explaining why Ma Huan does not mention it. The fact that the unequivocally Palembang mission of 1374 was well supplied with interpreters⁶³

⁶² Ibid., pp.57-61. Geoffrey Wade, ‘The *Ming Shi-lu* (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty) as a source for Southeast Asian History – 14th to 17th centuries’, 8 vols (University of Hong Kong dissertation, 1994), II: 22, 28-9, 31, 46, 50-51, 53, 54-5, 62.

⁶³ Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, p.58.

is a further demonstration of the importance of locally-domiciled Chinese or Sino-Southeast Asians in making the renewed communication possible.

In 1377, the Imperial court sent off two envoys to invest the San Foqi ruler as a legitimate vassal, implying equality of status with Java, and equal access to trade privileges. These envoys never completed their mission. They were intercepted and killed by agents of the Majapahit king. He later justified the action to the outraged Emperor by saying that Java could not accept such an investiture since Palembang was a vassal of Majapahit. For the next twenty years China did not deal with Palembang, but did accept missions from Java in 1382 and 1393, implying that the Javanese view of the case had been accepted in Nanjing. Wolters seeks to explain this phenomenon in terms of political and status rivalry between Javanese and South Sumatran Malays.⁶⁴ We should not, however, overlook the economic factors, in terms of rival Chinese and Sino-Indonesian networks based in South Sumatra and the Javanese *pasisir* respectively. Each side had a huge stake in establishing that their trade channel to China was the legitimate one. Political hierarchies at both ends of the tribute exchange were there to be manipulated by the traders in between.

The later years of the Hongwu reign were a period of unusually low contact between China and Southeast Asia, with private trade banned and state missions coming to China only from the closer Mainland states. The only information in this period is a memorial to the throne in 1397, which places all the blame for the lack of appropriate tribute from the Archipelago on San Foqi. “Only San Foqi obstructs our culture...this petty country supports evil people.” The court appeared then to accept Java’s view that San Foqi was its own tributary. Nevertheless the Emperor feared to send an envoy to resume contact with Java lest San Foqi intercept it, implying that both networks were still actively competing. Instead he decided to send a message to Java through Siam.⁶⁵ Another Chinese source of this time states that Java had destroyed San Foqi and renamed it ‘Old Harbour’. “Great unrest existed there, and even Java could not control the whole of the country.”⁶⁶ Since we know that a Cantonese group was taking control of Palembang at

⁶⁴ Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, pp.56-76;

⁶⁵ Wade, *Ming Shi-lu*, II: 178-80.

⁶⁶ *Ming-shi*, cited in Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, p.71.

about this time, in the context of some further Javanese invasions, it seems likely that there was intense conflict between the two networks.

The Zheng He expeditions of the early 1400s appear to have had intense, and on the whole harmonious, relations with Java. Melaka, in some sense an offshoot of the mixed communities of Palembang and Singapore, played the China card brilliantly by sending successive kings to the imperial capital to seek investiture. But Palembang was the loser in this process, despite having probably the most Chinese caste to its population. Of Palembang, Ma Huan reported that it was the former San Foqi, but now subordinate to Java, whose customs theirs resemble. Its currency, like Java's, was Chinese copper cash.

Many of the people in the [Palembang] country are men from Guangdong and from Zhang[zhou] and Quan[zhou], who fled away and now live in this country. The people are very rich and prosperous . . .

Some time ago, during the Hung-wu period [1368-98], some men from Guangdong [province], Chen Zuyi and others, fled to this place with their whole households; [Chen Zuyi] set himself up as a chief; he was very wealthy and tyrannical, and whenever a ship belonging to strangers passed by, he immediately robbed them of their valuables.⁶⁷

In fact another Cantonese, Liang Daoming, was regarded as legitimately chosen to rule Palembang by Chinese sources. Liang's son went to China with the first envoy of the Yung-lo Emperor to reach Palembang, and Liang himself went in 1405, apparently in good favour. But in Liang's absence there was a conflict between Chen Zuyi and the person Liang had left in charge, Shi Jinqing. When Zheng He was in the area in 1407, Shih denounced Chen as a pirate, and Zheng He moved very forcefully against him. The Chinese annals recorded killing 5,000 of the enemy, burning or capturing seventeen ships, and beheading all the captives publicly in Palembang after again wresting control.⁶⁸ For half a century subsequent rulers of the city, at least

⁶⁷ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan [1433]*, ed. J.V.G. Mills (London: Hakluyt Society, 1970), pp. 98-9.

⁶⁸ Wade, *Ming Shi-lu*, II: 392. A. Kobata and M. Matsuda (eds.), *Ryukyuan Relations with Korea and South Sea Countries* (Kyoto, Kobata & Matsuda, 1969), pp. 131-3. Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, pp.72-75.

when they wrote in Chinese in trade/tribute relations with China and Ryukyu, described themselves not as kings but as officials or commissioners of China. In the Malay-speaking and Javanese worlds, however, they came to assume a major role in the wars by which the Muslim leaders of Demak, personified in the chronicles by Raden Patah, attempted to win the Java Sea for Islam. As Tomé Pires reported, “Palembang is the best thing Pate Rodim [Radin Patah, of Demak] has.”⁶⁹

What I take all this to mean for my present purpose is that the long-term Chinese connection with Srivijaya/Palembang (as with coastal Java itself) became much more intense in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, as it passed under the nominal control of Java. ‘Chinese’ in some sense became dominant within the maritime trading community of Palembang, but were deeply divided between those more and less localised and Islamised, and possibly also between Cantonese and Fujianese. The heavy intervention of Zheng He and imperial China on one side of these conflicts was probably involved in the removal of the more hybridised Sino-Indonesians and their allies to establish new (eventually Islamic) ports in Singapore/Melaka and in Java.

Java and Javanese

Ma Huan, the Muslim chronicler of Zheng He's voyages, is the most reliable source for the development of Chinese communities in the *pasisir*, presumably dating from the exodus of the 1360s. He documented substantial Chinese settlements on the north coast of Java, notably at Tuban, Surabaya and Gresik, the last having a Cantonese chief.

Tuban ... is the name of a district; here are more than a thousand families, with two headmen to rule them;⁷⁰ many of them are people from Guangdong [province] and Zhangzhou [prefecture, adjacent to Quanzhou] in China, who have emigrated to live in this place . . .

⁶⁹ Pires [1515], p.155.

⁷⁰ Rockhill (1915, 240) translates similarly, but Kobata and Matsuda (1969, 130) render this as "more than one thousand families, all under one chief", and Groeneveldt (1880, 47) agrees.

From Tuban, after travelling toward the east for about half a day, you reach New Village [Hsin-tsun], of which the foreign [Javanese] name is Gresik; originally it was a region of sandbanks; because people from China came to this place and established themselves, they therefore called it New Village; right down to the present day the ruler of the village is a man from Guangdong.⁷¹ Foreigners from every place come here in great numbers to trade . . . The people are very wealthy . . .

[Seven miles further east] the ship reaches Su-lu-ma-i, of which the foreign [Javanese] name is Surabaya . . . There is a ruler of the village, governing more than a thousand families of foreigners; and amongst these, too, there are people from China.⁷²

Zheng He's seven imperial fleets, each comprising more than a hundred vessels and tens of thousands of soldiers, must have provided them with political direction and served for a time to discourage assimilation. Five of his voyages in the period 1406-18 stayed the Gresik-Surabaya area for about four months each, to refit and await the eastern monsoon for the next stage of the journey.⁷³

From his Muslim Chinese perspective Ma Huan delineated three types of people to be found in the Javanese trading cities: Muslim traders from the west, who dressed and ate properly; Chinese from Guangdong and Fujian, many of whom were also Muslim and proper; and the local people described as non-Muslims eating improper foods, living with dogs and practising pagan rituals.⁷⁴ He does not mention the *lingua franca* between these groups, but it seems likely to have been a form of trader's Malay, spread from the formerly dominant port of Srivijaya. Since no Chinese brought women with them, and even Muslims from the Arab and Indian worlds brought none but occasional slaves, there must have been considerable intermarriage between men of the first two groups and women of the third, and the beginnings of a hybrid culture can be expected to have taken shape among their children. This hybridisation process is certainly

⁷¹ Rockhill (1915, 241) gives a similar meaning, but Kobata and Matsuda (1969, 130) translate this as "The wealthy people are Cantonese, and there are more than one thousand families" and Groeneveldt (1880, 47) broadly agrees.

⁷² Ma Huan 1433, pp. 89-90.

⁷³ Ma Huan 1433, pp.8-19; Wang Gungwu, 1981, pp.70-4.

⁷⁴ Ma Huan, 1433, pp. 93, and 89-97 passim.

connected with the adoption of Islam in Java, initially by the north coast ports which Pigeaud has shown to be the crucible of a new Middle Javanese culture.⁷⁵

The diaspora of the late fourteenth century for a time continued its intense relations with the Middle Kingdom through the then-flourishing tribute system. Some of the Chinese who remained in Java helped to man the tribute embassies from Java to China which were the approved response to the early Ming initiatives. The Ming dynastic chronicle recorded ten tribute missions from Java in the period 1370-1399, and an average of one per year in the first thirty years of the fifteenth century.⁷⁶ Javanese envoys were frequently commended for their special loyalty to the Middle Kingdom, and from 1410 were paid a higher allowance than others.

A third of the Java envoys, at least 16 of the 49 recorded in the chronicles for 1405-65, bore Chinese names, but were sufficiently Javanised to carry also the Javanese titles *Patih* or *Arya*. One example of the Sino-Javanese cultural broker *par excellence* was *Arya* Chen Yen-xiang, among the first to initiate diplomatic relations between Southeast and Northeast Asia. He is first recorded in Korean records as an envoy of the Siamese king in 1394. He reappeared in 1406 as an envoy from Java to Korea, sent back to Java by the Korean court because his ship had been taken by Japanese pirates along the way. Because another mishap landed him in Japan, whence he was returned to Java, he eventually also became the first envoy of Java to Japan, arriving in Hakata in 1412.⁷⁷ Another such broker was Ma Yong-liang, perhaps a Chinese Muslim, who led seven Java missions to China in the period 1434-53, first as *Patih* and later as *Arya*. On his 1438 visit, Ma revealed that he, as well as two official interpreters travelling with him, were natives of Longxi in Fujian, and wished to honour their ancestors there.⁷⁸

There is considerable circumstantial evidence of technological hybridity in matters of commerce, weights and measures, shipping, architecture and the arts of the fifteenth century Javanese *pasisir*. Chinese influence on the oldest mosques of Java has been widely argued, and de Graaf and Pigeaud make a case for Chinese architects.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Th.G.Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, Vol. I (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967), p.287

⁷⁶ *Ming Shi Lu*; and Groeneveldt 1880, 34-9; Kobata and Matsuda 1969, 151; Wang 1981, 70-8.

⁷⁷ Kobata and Matsuda 1969, pp.149-50. Reid, *Charting the Shape*, pp. 65-6.

⁷⁸ Reid, *Charting the Shape*, p.66; Kobata and Matsuda 1969, pp. 152-3.

⁷⁹ H.J. de Graaf and Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *Chinese Muslims* (1984), pp.150-4.

The picture of influential Chinese and Sino-Javanese communities around 1400 contrasts markedly with the picture given by the Portuguese a century later. They reported no resident Chinese or Sino-Southeast Asian communities of substance. A few China-based Chinese traders did make the voyage to Melaka and other ports, but most shipping to China was conducted by groups resident in and about Melaka, who bore the labels mentioned at the outset of this paper – *Jawa*, *Jawi*, *Melayu* and *Lucões* (Luzons).

The fact that they did conduct this trade on China is the best evidence for their hybrid origins. The Ming abandonment of state trading and progressive loss of interest in tribute after the 1430s, left Chinese communities little alternative than assimilation, while Islam provided a bond for the new identities being formed in the maritime cities. Because of the firm ban on private trade, direct China-based shipping had ceased to frequent Java, Borneo or the Philippines, so that the trade between China and the Archipelago as a whole was reoriented through Melaka. There, both the Melaka-China trade and the distributive trade from Melaka was primarily in the hands of the four groups mentioned above.⁸⁰ The *Jawa* the early Portuguese encountered were the people of the coastal *pasisir* ports, notably Demak, Japara and Gresik, whose origins historians now accept to be very mixed, with a Chinese element in their ruling dynasties. The reabsorption of this creatively syncretic and newly Muslim element into a modern middle-Javanese identity was a long story of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Malay hybridities

In the early 1500s, Portuguese used the term *Melayu* to describe the ruling group of Melaka; Malay sources employed it as an adjective attached to the kings or the customs of Melaka. Only after the fall of Melaka did ‘Melayu’ categorise a people, that is the trade diaspora who carried Melaka’s commercial and Malay-speaking cultural heritage.⁸¹ The ethnic and geographic origins of this Malay-speaking group were extremely diverse, but migrants from coastal Java

⁸⁰ This evidence for this argument is set out in Reid, *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Sydney, 1996), pp.21-37; and Reid, *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai, 1999), pp. 62-76.

⁸¹ Anthony Reid, ‘Understanding Melayu (Malay) as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities’, *JSEAS* 32, iii (2001), pp.297-300.

were the most numerous constituent of it. A number of authorities referred to Melaka's population as predominately Javanese,⁸² and even the *Sejarah Melayu* is scattered with Javanese phrases. Javanese were renowned as the carpenters and shipbuilders of the city, and Afonso de Albuquerque was so impressed with their skills that he took "sixty Javanese carpenters of the dockyard, very handy workmen" back with him to India to help repair Portuguese ships there.⁸³ When the Melaka chettiar Nina Chetu equipped trading ships to sail for Pegu, Pasai and South India under Portuguese auspices in 1512-13, Javanese also made up the majority of the crews.⁸⁴

The Melaka *Undang-undang Laut*, or Maritime Code, is the key indigenous guide to the system of trade and shipping in Melaka at its height. The code was originally authorised by Melaka's last ruler, Sultan Mahmud (1488-1511), but the text includes the following interesting passage about its authorship:

These rules arise from the rules of Patih Harun and Patih Elias and Nakhoda Zainal and Nakhoda Buri [or Dewi] and Nakhoda Isahak. They were the ones who spoke. Then they discussed it with all the nakhodas; after they had discussed it, they went to Dato' Bendahara Sri Maharaja [who obtained the Sultan's approval] . . . Then titles were bestowed on all these nakhodas by Seri Paduka Sultan Mahmud Syah . . . Nakhoda Zainal was given the title Sang Naya'diraja, and Nakhoda Dewa was given the title Sang Setia'dipati, and a third was given the title Sang Utama 'diraja.⁸⁵

The title *Patih* of the first two of these nakhodas suggest Javanese origins, as does the title *Sang Utama 'diraja*, also born by the largest Javanese merchant in Melaka in 1511.⁸⁶ The Maritime Code appears to have been the product of the city's Malay-speaking shipping magnates, among whom Javanese were the most numerous. One of the key concepts in that code is that of the *kiwi* (travelling merchant), who travels in a ship belonging to someone else and is therefore subject to the authority of the *nakhoda*. The *kiwi* had specified rights, however, such as to be

⁸² Ludovico di Varthema (1510), *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Arabia Felix, in Persia, India and Ethiopia, A.D. 1503 to 1508*, trans. J.W. Jones (London: Hakluyt Society, 1863), p.226.

⁸³ Albuquerque, *The Commentaries* (1557), p.168.

⁸⁴ Luis Filipe Thomaz, *De Malaca a Pegu: viagens de um feitor Português, 1512-1515* (Lisbon: Instituto de Alta Clutura, 1966), pp.193-4; Geneviève Bouchon, 'Les premiers voyages portugais à Pegou, 1515-20, *Archipel* 18 (1979), p.135.

⁸⁵ R.O. Winstedt (ed.), 'The Maritime Laws of Malacca,' *JMBRAS* 29, iii (1956), p.46.

⁸⁶ Pires (1515), pp.280-2; Reid, *Charting the Shape*, pp.75-76.

consulted when cargo was jettisoned, or on other matters which would affect the commercial outcome of the voyage. The term *kiwi* appears to have been borrowed in the fifteenth century from the Chinese term which in Amoy dialect is *kheh-ui* (*kewi* in pinyin), literally "passenger-space".⁸⁷

Other commercial concepts such as the *pikul* (Chinese *shih* or *tan*, about sixty kilograms), the *kati* (Chinese *kin*), for a hundredth part of a *pikul*, and *daching*, from Cantonese *toh-ch'ing*, were taken into Malay (and Javanese) from Chinese in this period. The *kiwi*, however, was a particularly central concept in the way "Malay" trade was conducted during this expansive age which ended in the seventeenth century, so that the term is an even stronger argument for the partnership of Chinese and Indonesian commercial methods in the heyday of Malayo-Javanese trade.

Direct relations between China and Java were in virtual suspension from the mid-fifteenth century to 1567. It appears that coastal trade to Champa, Ayutthaya and Melaka was in this period better able to evade the bans on overseas trade than the deep-sea voyages to the Philippines, Borneo and Java, all of which lapsed. The extensive trade between island Southeast Asia and China then took place only through intermediate ports on the Mainland—Melaka, and later Patani, Johor, Phnompenh and Ayutthaya. According to Pires, most of the Melaka-China trade was in fact carried by the Melaka-based traders described above, with very few China-based ships able to evade the restrictions. Throughout this long century, Chinese in the Archipelago had every inducement to integrate with a society and an identity which was still permitted to trade with China.

This phase ended in 1567 when the new Mu-tsung Emperor allowed China-based junks to be licensed to trade to Southeast Asia. From this point begins a continuous story of China-Archipelago contact, and a consequent boundary between Chinese and indigenous which had never been there before. When the Dutch and English arrived around 1600 there were Chinese quarters outside the Indonesian cities, and a sharp distinction between the two different categories of Chinese and Javanese; Chinese and Malay.

⁸⁷ Reid, *Charting the Shape*, p.76. Reid, *Age of Commerce II*: 50-52, 124-5.

