

Coastal civilization and maritime diplomacy in premodern Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This article explores maritime diplomacy as a relatively new field of research in the maritime history of Southeast Asia. It is argued that maritime diplomacy was an important element in the history of the region, whose natural character places the sea as a key factor in its historical evolution. The significant role of the sea in the past shaped coastal civilizations, which in turn preconditioned the development of maritime diplomatic links between political centres in Southeast Asia, leading to the integration of this region. During the premodern period, coastal civilizations were the means through which diplomatic negotiations between political powers were conducted in Southeast Asia. Although coloured by conflicts and competition, such diplomatic ties did not result in colonial relationships, as which occurred during the early modern era, when Europeans succeeded in gaining control of almost all of Southeast Asia's political and economic centres.

Keywords

coastal civilization, maritime diplomacy, maritime zone, trading networks

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Introduction

For centuries, Southeast Asia has been recognized as a maritime region. During the pre-modern period, mainland Chinese recognized presently Southeast Asia region as 'Nanyang.' Nanyang (or Chinese: 南洋 (*nán yang*)) literally means 'Southern Ocean,' and was the Chinese name referring to 'South Sea,' or present day Southeast Asia.¹ In the meantime, Southeast Asian people, especially the inhabitants of the Indonesian archipelago, recognized their lands as *negeri bawah angin*, which literally means 'the land below the wind.' They named foreign lands as *negeri atas angin*, or 'the lands above the wind.' These indicate the importance of the monsoon for maritime connections in Southeast Asia, as a maritime zone as suggested by Wolters.² The Southeast Asian region has a number of sub maritime zones embracing thousands of islands, and was actively involved in interregional as well as international shipping and trade before the presence of Westerners.³ According to Hall, there were at least five maritime zones in Southeast Asia. The first was the Bay of Bengal Zone, including the Coromandel (Southern India), Ceylon, Myanmar, and the northern and southern coast of Sumatra. The second zone was the Strait of Malacca. The third zone was the South China Sea Zone, covering trading activities of the eastern coast of Malay Peninsula, Thailand, and South Vietnam. The fourth zone was the Sulu Zone that covered the western coast of Luzon, Mindoro, Cebu, Mindanao, and the northern coast of Borneo. The last zone was the Java Sea Zone, from which gaharuwood, sandalwood, rice, and spices were dispersed among the Lesser Sunda Islands, the Moluccas, the eastern, western, and southern coast of Borneo, Java, and the southern coast of Sumatra.

Geographical location and the types of monsoons in Southeast Asian waters made it a natural crossroads and a key link in the chain of maritime commercial zones, both internal to Southeast Asia and to commodity exchanges in the wider world.⁴ A commercial sea zone is not an exclusive zone when the sea is an open medium of communication and transportation as the basis of trading network formation.⁵ There were always connections between commercial sea zones, linked by shipping, trade, and other kinds of connections. Traders from Maluku, Java, and Malacca never brought spices directly to Europe, indicating that the relationship among commercial sea zones had existed before the arrival of Westerners in Asian waters. It is not surprising that seafarers of a commercial

1. Eric Tagliacozzo, 'A Sino-Southeast Asian Circuit: Ethnohistories of the Marine Goods Trade', in Eric Tagliacozzo & Wen-Chin Chang, *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia* (Durham & London, 2011), 432; Wikipedia, Nanyang (Region), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nanyang_\(region\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nanyang_(region)), accessed 31 August 2016.
2. O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspective* (Singapore, 1982), 39.
3. K. R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 1985), 20–25.
4. Andre-Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Oakland, CA, 1998), 96.
5. Hans-Dieter Evers, 'Traditional Trading Networks of Southeast Asia', *Archipel*, 35 (1988), 92. Evers suggests that 'trading networks are social processes of exchange in the sense that social interaction takes place between persons with the primary purpose of exchanging goods over greater or lesser geographical distances.'

sea zone were better acquainted with their area than those beyond.⁶ The details of coastal regions in Southeast Asia during premodern period can be seen at Figure 1.

In that context, historians often analyse the history of Southeast Asia based on their own interests. Some historians treat Southeast Asia as a single unit of analysis.⁷ Reid considers Southeast Asia as geographical unit in the world of trading; spreading out from the mountainous area of eastern Himalayas in the north to Java, Sumatra, and Sumbawa in the south. This geographic unit not only includes mainland but insular regions as well, and conceptualises the oceans as bridges connecting them.⁸ Some historians treat the Indonesian archipelago as a feasible historical unit because it consists of a distinct set of islands lying at the crossroads between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, with Java as a centre. It is even said that the Java Sea is the core of the ‘Southeast Asian Seas.’⁹ The maritime character of Southeast Asian geographical conditions has preconditioned the emergence and development of maritime culture or coastal civilization or *peradaban pesisir* (Indonesian).

By using historical methods, this article tries to explore the development of coastal civilization in connection with diplomatic ties among some of political centres in Southeast Asia that led to the integration of this maritime zone before the premodern era. In this respect, coastal civilizations were used as a means of doing diplomatic negotiation among political powers in Southeast Asia. It is highly significant that before the coming of Europeans, there had long been interconnectivity and diplomatic ties between political and economic centres of Southeast Asia. Although coloured by conflicts and competitions, such diplomatic ties did not result in colonial relations as what happened during the early modern era, when the Europeans succeeded in gaining control of almost all Southeast Asian political and economic centres.

After tracing the development of coastal civilization in Southeast Asia, this article will then discuss some cases of maritime diplomacy connections in the history of Southeast Asia before the presence of Westerners.

Understanding the history of coastal civilization in Southeast Asia

The important role of Southeast Asia as a maritime world in its own right, and also its function as a crossroads of world trade, cannot be separated from its ecological condition. In this respect, the relationship between culture and ecology has long been the

6. Singgih Tri Sulistiyono, ‘The Java Sea Network: Patterns in the Development of Interregional Shipping and Trade in the Process of National Integration in Indonesia, 19870s–1970s’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Leiden University, 2003), 6–7.

7. For example see also D. G. E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia* (New York, 1968). See also C. A. Fisher, *South-East Asia: A Social, Economic and Political Geography* (London, 1964).

8. See Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680, Vol. I: The Lands below the Winds* (London, 1988) and Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, Vol. II: Expansion and Crisis* (London, 1993).

9. V. J. H. Houben, H. M. J. Maier & W. van der Molen, ‘Introduction’, in V. J. H. Houben, H. M. J. Maier & W. van der Molen, eds., *Looking in Odd Mirrors: The Java Sea* (Leiden, 1992), viii.

centre of attention of anthropologists. By using an ecological approach, anthropologists try to find the relationships between organisms (in this case human) and their habitat or environment. This approach has given birth to at least two forms of sub-approaches, namely the anthropo-geographic approach and possibilis approach. The former approach seeks to determine how and how far human culture was shaped by environmental conditions. However, such an approach cannot be fully considered as environmental determinism, because it recognizes that the influence of the natural environment influenced varying past cultures in different ways and to different degrees. Meanwhile, another possible approach looks at the environment not as a cause, but merely as a barrier and set of selectors. Geographical factors do not give shape to the human culture, but only set limits to the forms which possibly occur in a given environment at a certain period.¹⁰

Based on ecological factors, the general community of Southeast Asia can be divided into two, namely the coastal communities and inland communities. Until technological development brought them together the two types of society had very different cultures. In the early stages of development, the social groups that formed tribes within a certain time were finally able to develop the established social system (after experiencing the process of development in what are called the stone age, bronze age, iron age, and so on).¹¹ The process continued to grow with the arrival of various new cultural influences, namely Hinduism and Buddhism from India. Some regions in Southeast Asia were also influenced by Chinese culture. With the arrival of these new influences, their cultures were also increasingly well established and complete, which meets the 'seven elements of universal culture.' It is similar to C. Kluckhohn's contention that there are language, technology systems, livelihood systems (economy), social organization systems, knowledge systems, belief systems, and the arts.¹²

At first, the emergence of the ancient kingdoms in Southeast Asia was determined by the existence of a pre-Hindu political system. In this context, the emergence of the kingdom of Kutai in Kalimantan around the fifth century has been used to explain the transition of Indian influence. The founder of the Kutai kingdom, named Kudungga (a non-Indian name), alleged a kind of *primus inter pares*, a tribal chief. Furthermore, his son became king Mulawarman, who had an Indian lifestyle. Besides, the development of a maritime kingdom (marine-based polity) in Southeast Asia was also influenced by geo-strategic factors in relation to international trade networks. It is interesting that the same factor was also significant for land-based polities in the interior. Geo-strategic elements were also important for agricultural empires. Many agricultural royal capitals located on the banks of the great rivers had access to international trade, such as the Kediri kingdom at the edge of the Brantas river and the Ayutthaya kingdom on the banks of the Menam.¹³

10. Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 1963), 1–4.

11. See Peter Bellwood, 'Southeast Asia before History', in Nicholas Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Volume I: From early Time to c. 1800* (Cambridge, 1994), 90–126.

12. C. Kluckhohn, 'Universal Categories of Culture', in S. Tax, ed., *Anthropology Today: Selections* (Chicago, 1962), 304.

13. Hall, *Maritime*, 1–10.

In this connection there is the question of why the early Indianized states in Southeast Asia were usually located in the interior rather than in coastal areas. Based on written sources, some of the great ancient kingdoms in the Indonesian archipelago were located in the interior, such as those of Mataram and Pajajaran in Java. It is also found in mainland Southeast Asia such as Angkor, China, and the Ancient Near East. That period witnessed the emergence of a maritime empire facing major technological constraints, for example in the techniques of shipbuilding and navigation. This is why, at this time, in the eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago, which is geographically a maritime region, many people lived in an agrarian society. It also deals with the issue of technological progress. Therefore, the emergence of the maritime empire of Srivijaya was related to progress in the field of shipbuilding. In China, agricultural technologies developed earlier than maritime technology.¹⁴

In a further development, maritime technology in Southeast Asia experienced more rapid progress along with its interaction with international communities, particularly with India and Persia, and then China. Finally, maritime empires managed to destroy agricultural power centres. It can be seen from the destruction of the Majapahit kingdom located in the interior of East Java and the rise of maritime kingdoms on the north coast of Java, such as Demak, Banten, Tuban, Cirebon, and so forth. In the next period these kingdoms, except Banten, were re-conquered by Mataram, the central Javan interior kingdom. This land-based state tried to pool resources in its attempts to build a new cultural centre, which tended to be feudalistic.¹⁵ However, Mataram was eventually annexed by the VOC (Dutch Trading Company) as a new hegemonic maritime power in the Indonesian archipelago during the 17th and 18th centuries. In the following period, Western trading companies succeeded in dominating the political and economic life of the traditional Southeast Asian powers.¹⁶

Other political and economic centres outside Java also suffered the same tragic fate. A fierce war also marked the end of the rule of the kingdom of Makassar in South Sulawesi, which was controlled by the Dutch from 1667 through the treaty of Bongaya. VOC finally managed to impose a monopoly in Makassar.¹⁷ A few decades earlier, VOC had successfully established a monopoly on the Maluku islands like Ambon and Ternate in 1605, and Banda in 1609. Furthermore, the VOC eventually dominated the centres of culture, politics, and the coastal economy in the archipelagos such as Palembang, Lampung, Pontianak, Banjarmasin, and so forth. Malacca, the main port of the Malay Peninsula, had been successfully seized from the Portuguese in 1641.¹⁸

14. Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, 1984), 90–108.

15. Kenneth R. Hall, 'Economic History of Early Southeast Asia', in Tarling, *The Cambridge History*, 270–272.

16. F. S. Gaastra and J. R. Bruijn, 'The Dutch East India Company's Shipping, 1602–1795, in a Comparative Perspective', in J. R. Bruijn & F. S. Gaastra, eds., *Ships, Sailors and Spices: East India Companies and Their Shipping in the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries* (Amsterdam, 1993), 178. See also F. S. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC* (Zutphen, 2002), 57–65.

17. J. C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (Dordrecht/Providence, 1983), 195–196.

18. D. H. Burger, *Sociologisch-Economische Geschiedenis van Indonesia I* (Amsterdam, 1975), 25–32.

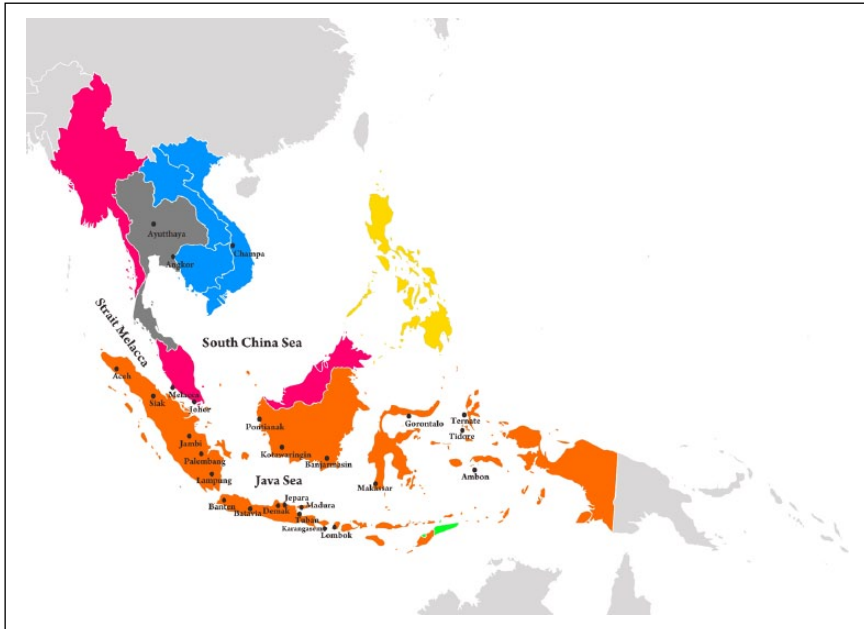


Figure 1. Southeast Asian Coastal Regions.

Various instances of competition and conflict exerted a major influence on the development of coastal civilizations. Mataram enmity against the northern coastal areas of Java was not only demonstrated through a series of conquests of lands that had once belonged to the old dynasties, but was also reflected in the government system, and even in culture. In the case of systems of government, the kings of Mataram put the northern coastal areas of Java under different administrations. The kings of Mataram divided its jurisdiction into several areas, namely Kutagara, Negara Agung, Mancanegara, Pesisir, and Tanah Sabrang.¹⁹ Mancanegara was a rural area that surrounded the Negara Agung, which was divided into districts. Each district was headed by a regent, who was expected to show loyalty to the Sultan of Mataram.²⁰ The long history of conflict between Mataram and coastal areas pushed Mataram to tightly control this area. Pesisir was a region of the Mataram kingdom; located in the northern coast of Java and ranging from Kali Pamali (bordering the Sultanate of Cirebon) in the west to the east end of the island of Java.

19. Selo Soemardjan, *Social Changes in Jogjakarta* (Ithaca, 1962), 24. See also Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period, 16th to 19th Century* (Ithaca, 1974), 112. Kutagara was the state capital region in which there was the palace where the king resided. Negara Agung was a region that surrounds Kutagara, which was an agricultural area and settlements. Kutagara was an appanage of the nobles and the king's relatives.

20. Denys Lombard, *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya I* (Jakarta, 2008), 37.

During the Mataram period (founded in 1588), the concept of *pesisir*, or ‘coastal area,’ referred not only to the geo-administrative region, but also had connotative meanings relating to culture. *Peradaban pesisir*, or coastal civilization, denoted a society rather different to the agrarian-feudalistic culture centred in the interior of central Java. In this respect, coastal civilization was acknowledged as a marginal culture. This dichotomy is perhaps suited to the concept initiated by Redfield on the great tradition that is centred in the palace and the little tradition that spread among people far from the palace.²¹ Marginalization of communities and coastal civilization can be seen in the expression in the Javanese language that represents the position of coastal communities, especially fishermen, namely ‘*Cerak watu adoh ratu*,’ which translates as ‘close to the stone, away from the throne.’²²

The Mataram era was a period in which the coastal communities were under pressure, thanks to a series of military conquests and cultural marginalization. Historically, the coastal civilizations had evolved long before the Mataram kingdom developed its feudal civilization. The centres of maritime civilization in Southeast Asia had dominated the history of of this region. It can be seen from the development of many great maritime empires, such as those of Sriwijaya kingdom, since the seventh century, which was followed by the Malay kingdoms and subsequently by Islamic kingdoms in the Archipelago such as Samudera Pasai, Demak, Cirebon, Banten, Banjarmasin, Ternate, Makassar, etc. They were the centres of political and maritime civilization in Southeast Asia. Even Majapahit, centred in Java, was an inland kingdom, but developed its maritime power in Southeast Asia.²³ Some Hindu relics are also found in various places on the north coast of Java, such as Banten, Pekalongan, Tuban, Jepara, Lasem, and so forth.²⁴ Moreover, recent research on heritage sites in Lasem found vessel relics dating from the Srivijaya empire around the seventh century AD. Meanwhile Surabaya had evolved as an important port on the north coast of Java in the 14th century.

Although maritime empires had emerged since the era of Sriwijaya in the seventh century AD, their development experienced ups and downs. However, according to Lombard, the rise of coastal towns had begun in the 15th century and into the 16th with the emergence of Chinese settlement, the initial conversion, and the establishment of the Sultanate of Demak. In the process of Islamization in the northern coastal areas of Java, the role of Islamic figures known as Wali Songo (the Nine Saint) is recognized as a representation of the development of coastal culture at that time. Similarly, the arrival of maritime expeditions of the Ming dynasty, headed by the Muslim Admiral Zheng He, created Islamic legends, which spread out around coastal areas in the western part of the archipelago and the Malay Peninsula. In Semarang, for

21. Robert Redfield, *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago, 1960).

22. Pujo Semedi, *Close to the Stone, Far from the Throne: The Story of A Javanese Fishing Community 1820s–1990s* (Yogyakarta, 2003), 301.

23. Keith W. Taylor, ‘The Early Kingdoms’, in Tarling, *The Cambridge*, 179.

24. Lombard, *Nusa Jawa*, 37.

example, the memory of Admiral Zeng He is preserved to the present day, embodied by the Sam Po Kong temple.²⁵ It was one of the military invasions of Japan, Vietnam, and Java that took place between 1273 and 1293.²⁶ Apparently the development of coastal cities had allowed the establishment of shipping and trade networks between them. Sea transport became very significant in the exchange process, because land transport had almost no significant function in the context of the exchange and spread of culture in Southeast Asia. In this connection, Lombard notes that what is called 'coastal culture' refers to the cultures that reflect a strong Islamic element, and the use of the Malay language, as well as the presence of elements of Chinese culture that spread out to a greater part of Southeast Asia.²⁷

Vickers prefers to use the concept of 'coastal civilization' rather than 'coastal culture.' According to Vickers, the concept of culture with a variety of artistic forms and structures characterize a unique meaning of certain groups, while the concept of civilization is more 'liquid' so that it can break through the boundaries of the definition of religion, ethnicity, race, and status. It may also provide an awareness of the world of culture and structure that embraces various elements.²⁸ In this connection, the so-called concept of 'Unity in Diversity' can be understood contextually. Southeast Asian communities that already have coastal civilization have an awareness of the same civilization and having cultural symbols that are mutually recognized. However, at the same time they still have differences of culture, ethnicity, race, and so forth. The differences are still recognized within the framework of the same civilization consciousness, which is a coastal civilization.

Maritime diplomatic connections

The study of the history of maritime diplomacy is still rare. Diplomatic history is usually concerned with studying the development of diplomatic relations between one country and another.²⁹ In this context, the history of maritime diplomacy refers to the study of the development of the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of states; rulers of two or more *thalassocracies* (maritime power-based

25. For studies on the development of Sam Po Kong temple in relation to the identity of the Chinese community in Semarang, see Singgih Tri Sulistiyono, 'Contesting the Symbol: Zheng He, Sam Po Kong Temple and the Evolution of Chinese Identity in Semarang', paper presented at *The First International Conference on Zheng He and Afro-Asian World*, Melaka, 5–8 July 2010.

26. Gang Deng, 'An Evaluation of the Role of Admiral Zheng He's Voyages in Chinese Maritime History', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 7, No. 2 (1995), 1–19.

27. Lombard, *Nusa Jawa Silang Budaya I*, 39.

28. A. Vickers, *Peradaban Pesisir: Menuju Sejarah Budaya Asia Tenggara* (Denpasar, 2009), 5.

29. In the modern sense, diplomacy can be defined as the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of states. It usually refers to international diplomacy for the conducting of international relations performed by a diplomat as the representative of a state with regard to issues of peace-making, trade, war, economics, culture, environment, and human rights. International treaties are usually negotiated by diplomats prior to endorsement by national politicians. See Ronald Peter Barston, *Modern Diplomacy* (Harlow, 2006), 1.

states) for the conduct of international relations, with regard to issues of shipping and trade relationships, ocean security, war, settling disputes concerning maritime reviews of their trading activities or spheres of influence at sea, ocean borders, cultural exchanges, and so on.

Maritime diplomacy is an important phenomenon in the history of Southeast Asia. Such diplomacy was closely linked with almost all aspects of societal life, such as those of economy (especially shipping, trade, and its related aspects), politics, military issues, and cultural ties. In this respect, the final aspect in this list was very important, especially in connection with the spread of coastal civilization in Southeast Asia. Through the distribution of the elements of the coastal civilization, diplomatic relations between the various political forces in Southeast Asia occurred. In this context, one of the interesting historical phenomena to be revealed here is the spread of the story of Panji.³⁰ This was in line with the development of maritime connection during ‘the age of commerce’ and also instability of political powers in this region. This process placed Java as the important element.

Vickers points out that Panji stories and different types of narrative text known as the ‘literary coast’ are among the most important elements of maritime or coastal civilization. Through the texts, several norms and cultural boundaries are distributed, modified, and re-created in Southeast Asia. As cultural documents, texts regarding the Panji stories provide a standard orientation ideal for high society in the area of coastal civilization, for example about clothing, etiquette, lifestyle, performances, rituals, and so forth.³¹ Thus the attitude of recognition, even the assertion of differences and a willingness to respect and coexist, were inherent characteristics of coastal civilization. It is also argued by Thohir that the general character of coastal communities are open, straightforward, and egalitarian.³² In this case, the inland feudalistic culture is more fanatical and has a high ethnocentrism. Mataram, for example, thought of people from outside Java as the ‘*sabrang*’, which in the traditional Javanese puppet show are people who are rude, have no manners, and are deemed as not behaving like a ‘Javanese’ (*njawani*) person would.

According to Vickers, Panji stories as an important element in the coastal civilization had spread in many areas in Java, Sumatra, Bali, Lombok, Sulawesi Selatan, and even in the Malay Peninsula, Thailand, Cambodia, and Burma.³³ Even Hildred Geertz noted a similarity spectrum of the coastal civilizations in this archipelago in more detail. He discovered similarities culturally in many coastal areas in the archipelago, among them the Malay Peninsula (mainly centred in Malacca), the islands of the Riau-Lingga, Palembang, Jambi, Aceh, Banjarmasin, the northern coast of Java, Madura, South Sulawesi, Gorontalo, Sumbawa, a number of areas in East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku,

30. Panji was a legendary prince from the Kediri kingdom period (around the 12th century) in East Java, Indonesia. Panji tales have been the inspiration of Indonesian traditional dances.

It has spread out from East Java to be a fertile source for literature and drama throughout the Indonesian archipelago, Malaysia, Thailand, and Cambodia.

31. Vickers, *Peradaban Pesisir*, 8. It is also described by Reid: see Reid, *Southeast Asia, Vol. I.*

32. Mudjahirin Thohir, *Orang Islam Jawa Pesisiran* (Semarang, 2005), 40.

33. Vickers, *Peradaban Pesisir*, 8.

especially some parts of Ternate, Tidore, Bacan, and Goram.³⁴ The development of this coastal civilization seems closely associated with the development of shipping and trade as well as the process of Islamization, which developed rapidly in the 16th century. The rise and fall of maritime kingdoms from the 15th century to the 17th century even caused a centrifugal movement, followed by the spread of coastal civilization to various regions of Southeast Asia.

Islamic education and missionaries also became the cultural foundation of coastal civilization influences from Java to other parts of Southeast Asia. Beside Aceh, Minangkabau, and the Malay Peninsula, the influence of Islam from Java in the Indonesian archipelago was also significant. Although the existence of Islam in Java itself was younger compared to Islam in Aceh (Samudra Pasai) for example, institutionalization of Islamic education in Java, i.e., Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) was more developed compared to other places in the Malay Archipelago. From the 15th century one of the cities on the north coast of Java, Gresik (Pesantren Giri), became the important centre of Islamic schooling in the Malay world. The pupils of this pesantren (*santri*) were not only from Java, but also from various regions across the Indonesian Archipelago, even from the Malay world. This *pesantren* was established by Sunan Giri (Raden Paku), one of the 'nine holy people' (*wali songo*) of Java.³⁵ It very interesting that some of *wali* had close connection with the Kingdom of Champa in present day Vietnam.³⁶

It is significant that the Javanese language, not Malay, was used as medium of instructions in *pesantren*. Pupils (*santri*) from various regions in the Malay Archipelago had to learn the Javanese language before studying Islamic laws in the *pesantren*. This meant that more people from outside Java learned Javanese culture, including the way Javanese people thought and behaved. When the pupils went back to their own homelands after completing their studies, they spread Islamic knowledge and the Javanese language, which blended with local languages. If Malay is recognized as the *lingua franca* for business activities, the Javanese language was used as the *lingua franca* of Islamic education in the Malay Archipelago.

It is important to note that the conflict and 'subjugation' carried out by Javanese kingdoms in the regions outside Java did not only cause pain to the local communities. This explains why Hall prefers to speak of political integration with tributary systems rather than centralization and conquest.³⁷ This differs from inscriptions issued by the Srivijaya kingdom, which were coloured by threats and curses against local powers who wanted to resist the central power. As yet there has not been found a similar inscription in the overseas regions issued by the Javanese kingdom. Javanese inscriptions concerning maritime diplomacy in their overseas territories were mostly connected with the king's gifts to the local kingdoms, political marriages, recognition, and the act of giving praise towards the glory of Javanese kings, etc.

34. Hildred Geertz, 'Indonesia Cultures and Communities', in Ruth McVey, ed., *Indonesia* (London, 1967), 10. About the influence of Panji tales in Maluku, see Leonard Andaya, *The World of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern Period* (Honolulu, 1993).

35. Umar Hasyim, *Sunan Giri* (Kudus, 1979).

36. Rie Nakamura, 'The Coming of Islam to Champa', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, LXXVIII, No. 1, (2000), 55–66.

37. Hall, *Maritime Trade*, 2.

It seems that, politically, the process of integration carried out by the Javanese kingdoms, in some cases, can be understood by some local elements as an external power that could give pride and authority to the local powers. They felt legitimated by Java's stronger political and military power. Some traditional and local historical sources from the region around the Java Sea tell of the local political powers' pride in being part of the Javanese integration. Besides, some local rulers in the region around the Java Sea were also proud that they could marry into the Javanese royal family and obtain titles of nobility from the Javanese king. The book of *Sedjarah Melaju*, which was probably written in Malacca after the fall of Malacca Sultanate in the 16th century, tells:³⁸

‘.... maka tersebutlah perkataan betara Madjapahit, maka baginda beranak dengan anak raja Bukit Siguntang itu dua orang laki-laki, dan yang tua Radin Inu Merta Wangsa namanya, maka diradjakan baginda di Madjapahit... terlalu sekali besar keradjaan baginda pada zaman itu, seluruh tanah Djawa seluruhnja di dalam hukum tanah Djawa itu semuanja di dalam hukum baginda, dan segala raja-raja Nusantarapun setengah sudah ta'luk kepada baginda. Setelah betara Madjapahit mendengar Singapura negeri besar, radjanya tiada menjembah banginda, dan radja Singapura itu saudara sepupu baginda, maka radja Madjapahitpun menyuruh utusan ke Singapura... [...it is said about the king of Madjapahit. He got married with the daughter of king Bukit Siguntang and had two children. The eldest's name was Radin Inu Merta Wangsa, and he was crowned the king of Madjapahit.... At that time the territory of Madjapahit kingdom was vast. All Java territory was under jurisdiction of the king and all kings of the Archipelago had become subjects of the Majapahit king. Knowing that Singapore had become a large kingdom and its king (the cousin of the Madjapahit king) did not honor the king of Majapahit, the king sent a delegation to Singapore....]’

It is important to note that Tome Pires, who visited cities along the north coast of Java in the early 16th century, heard by his own ear that the glory of the Majapahit kingdom was commonly known by the people. He says:³⁹

‘They say that the island of Java used to rule as far as the Moluccas on the eastern side and [over] a great part of the west; and that it had almost all this for a long time until about a hundred years ago, when its power began to diminish until it came to its present state... It is because of this power and great worth that Java had, and because it navigated too many places and very far away, for they affirm that it navigated to Aden, and its chief trade was in Banua Quelim, Bengal and Pase, that it had the whole (of trade) at that time...’

Sedjarah Melaju also tells of the king of Tanjung Pura (located in South Borneo) who was related to the king of Majapahit and one of their descendants married Sultan Mansyur Shah, the king of Malacca.⁴⁰ In the meantime, *Hikayat Banjar dan Kotaringin* describes

38. Abdullah, ed. *Sedjarah Melayu* (Djakarta, 1958), 145.

39. A. Cortesao, *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, Written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515* (London, 1944), 174. See also B.E. Colless, ‘Majapahit Revisited: External Evidence on the Geography and Ethnology of East Java in the Majapahit Period’, *JMBRAS*, No. 2 (1975), 124-161.

40. Abdullah, ed. *Sedjarah Melayu*, 125-135.

the origin of the Banjarmasin kingdom (located in South Borneo), saying that the king of this kingdom was the descendant of Majapahit. Puteri Jungjung Buih (Tanjung Buih), the ancestor of Banjarmasin kings, married Raden Surianata, the son of the Majapahit king.⁴¹

It is clear that marriage was one of the most important means of diplomacy and building of relationships among maritime political powers in Southeast Asia. Such diplomacy had been conducted by the Srivijaya kingdom in Sumatra with the Mataram kingdom in Java. It was also conducted by the Majapahit kingdom in Java and the Champ kingdom on the eastern coast of Vietnam. The same marriage diplomacy was also conducted with and by small political kingdoms in Borneo. In the previous period, the same policies were also pursued between the Singasari kingdom (predecessor of Majapahit) and Melayu kingdom in Sumatra. Intermarriage also one of the most important means of *thalasocracies* around the Straits of Melacca. Marriage diplomacy was also implemented during the Jambi-Johor wars in the 17th century, although in this case it failed. Johor expansion on the one hand and the development of Jambi on the other led to conflicts and even a series of wars in 1667, 1673, 1677–1679, and 1680–1681, which began to heat up again in the first quarter of the 18th century. In fact, they had the same culture, namely Malay.⁴² In addition they also had the same religion and identity, namely Islam.⁴³

Agreements on shipping and trade were very important components of maritime diplomacy. Although the written text of the various trade agreements between maritime empires in Southeast Asia cannot be found easily, secondary sources indicate that trade agreements existed. Tome Pires informs us that Javanese junks had for a long time sailed to Pase, and had established good relationships there. In Pase, a treaty meant that Javanese traders were free of export and import taxes, as the king of Pase was the vassal of Majapahit.⁴⁴

One important element in maritime diplomacy is the spread of a relatively dominant culture to the peripheral areas. It is one of the most important factors in the process of integration of Southeast Asia as a region, which has a different identity with the surrounding regions, namely India and China. It is also very interesting that the presence of the Javanese cultural elements in the regions outside Java were not only accepted as enriching local cultures, but also became a kind of symbol of prestige.⁴⁵ For example, items that in Java were just used as coin were worn as amulets in Kelantan. Local people described them as being Javanese amulets: *fetis Jawa* or *jimat Jawa*. They were believed

41. Elizabeth Tiora, *Hikayat Raja-raja Banjar dan Kotaringin* (Jakarta, 1993), 38.

42. See Leonard Y. Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka* (Singapore, 2010), 28. The Malay world was also interconnected by maritime trade, see Nordin Hussin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English Penang, 1780–1830* (Singapore, 2007), 5.

43. See Yety Rochwulaningsih, Singgih Tri Sulistiyono & Noor Naelil Masrurroh, 'Local Conflict and Colonial Expansion: Tracing the Patterns of Relation in the Early Modern of Southeast Asia', paper presented at the *1st International Conference on Southeast Asian Maritime World*, Semarang, 16–17 November 2016.

44. A. Cortesao, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: An Account of the East, 2nd series* (London, 1944), 239. See also Anthony Reid, 'Economic and Social Change', in Tarling, *The Cambridge*, 483.

45. For a study of the Java Sea region in a cultural context, see Houben et al, *Looking in Odd Mirrors*.

to be able to cure various illnesses.⁴⁶ It cannot be denied that the spread of elements of the coastal civilization in Southeast Asia benefitted the sea as a medium of communication and transportation. Thus, the sea in all its complexity became the driving force for the occurrence of maritime diplomacy in Southeast Asia, especially in the age of commerce before the arrival of Europeans.

Conclusion

In any maritime community, the sea has a significant function in the daily life of the people. The sea is not merely viewed as a natural phenomenon providing a livelihood to the community, but it also becomes a medium of communication that enables exchange between ethnic groups, political powers, and economic interests. It is the sea that provides unity, transport, and the means of exchange and intercourse. The maritime character of Southeast Asian has also preconditioned the emergence and development of maritime culture, coastal civilization or *peradaban pesisir* (Indonesian).

By benefiting maritime transport, *peradaban pesisir* was used as a means of maritime diplomatic connection among political centres in Southeast Asia. In this connection, Java had an important role in shaping coastal civilization in Southeast Asia. Within the context of premodern Southeast Asia, Java, which is located in the middle of the Indonesian archipelago between Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and Celebes, had a significant role in the exchange of culture and intercourse among ethnic groups, such as those of Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Balinese, Banjarese, Dayaks, Buginese, Makasarese, and even ethnic groups in Southeast Asia such as Malays and Champ, etc.

The relatively intensive interactions among ethnic groups in Southeast Asia through cultural contacts, wars, religious spread, and maritime trading networks preconditioned it as an integral part of a process in which maritime culture became a common identity. The identity of maritime culture, or *peradaban pesisir*, was therefore formed either through historical reality or myths taking place since the period of the Srivijaya, Hinduistic Mataram, Singasari, Majapahit, Malacca, Ayutthaya, Angkor, Khmer, and Demak kingdoms, and other Islamic polities. During this time, political conflicts and arrangements also occurred among local powers. Likewise, maritime diplomacy through cultural contact was also continually taking place in line with fluctuations in economic exchanges.

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46. A. Rentse, 'Majapahit Amulets in Kelantan', *JMBRAS*, No. 14 (1936), 300–304.

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