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Revisiting the Chinese Sources on Early Southeast Asian History

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Abstract:

Chinese sources have played a very important role in the writing of early Southeast Asian history. However, scholars have struggled to understand the information in those sources and over the past century, there have been countless different interpretations that have been put forward. In this paper, we revisit the Chinese sources on early Southeast Asian history and do not simply offer a new interpretation, but also attempt to demonstrate why previous scholarship has been inaccurate. In particular, previous generations of scholars failed to recognize the way that Chinese scholars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries distorted information about Southeast Asia by (arbitrarily) equating historical placenames with the names of contemporary kingdoms. In doing so, they made false connections between placenames, thereby leading later scholars astray. In this paper, we return to the earliest sources and build our knowledge from scratch. What emerges is a new picture of early Southeast Asian history and one that is free of the many textual problems and contradictions that scholars have struggled with over the past century.

Keywords: History of Southeast Asia; Chinese historical sources; History of the Malay Peninsula; History of island Southeast Asia; Trade in premodern Southeast Asia

Revisiting the Chinese Sources on Early Southeast Asian History

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Introduction

Chinese sources have played a very important role in the writing of early Southeast Asian history, particularly for the millennium from roughly 500-1500 CE. While stone inscriptions from this period likewise provide important information, that information can at times be more episodic and therefore difficult to connect to a larger narrative. The fact, however, that Chinese scholars recorded information about polities in Southeast Asia over time means that the information in Chinese sources can be employed to create a framework, albeit imperfect, for understanding the overall history of the region.

This is a fact that some of the first Western scholars who studied Southeast Asian history realized, and over a century ago, they set about translating Chinese sources. In 1876, for instance, Dutch Sinologist W. P. Groeneveldt published translations of information about Southeast Asia that he found in official Chinese dynastic histories and some other Chinese texts, such as the thirteenth-century *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands* by Zhao Rukuo.[1] That work was then translated in 1911 by German Sinologist Friedrich Hirth and American diplomat W. W. Rockhill.[2] Other important texts for understanding early Southeast Asia are two works that Chinese monk Yijing compiled regarding his journey to India in the seventh century. One of those, and the one that is less helpful for understanding Southeast Asian history, was translated by Japanese scholar Takakusu Junjiro in 1896.[3] Finally, French Sinologist Paul Pelliot published a new translation of

[1] W. P. Groeneveldt, *Notes on the Malay Archipelago and Malacca Compiled from Chinese Sources* (Batavia: W. Bruining, 1876),

[2] *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Entitled Chu-fan-chï*, translated and annotated by Friedrich Hirth and W. W. Rockhill (St. Petersburg: Printing Office of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911).

[3] I-Tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion: As Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (A.D. 671-695)*, translated by J. Takakusu (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896). Yijing's more important work for understanding

a work on Cambodia and also produced studies that introduced a great deal of information in Chinese sources about Southeast Asian history.[4]

These were all admirable first attempts at understanding some of the main Chinese sources for Southeast Asian history. That said, pioneering studies rarely stand the test of time. Further research inevitably reveals errors and misunderstandings in earlier works, and that research can then inform new translations that provide more accurate renderings of historical texts. However, that has not been the case in the field of early Southeast Asian history. Instead, these translations and studies have continued to serve as core sources of information for scholars right up to the present with very few attempts to revisit and update these early works.

While relying on first-attempt translations is problematic in any field, it is particularly an issue with the Chinese sources on early Southeast Asia because there is a fundamental conceptual problem with the received body of Chinese knowledge on the region. Let me explain. In the late Ming and early Qing dynasty periods, roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, certain Chinese scholars put forth interpretations of Southeast Asian history that were flawed. There were scholars at that time who took note of the various extant polities in Southeast Asia. They then noticed that there were placenames in historical texts that were different. These scholars then attempted to link historical placenames with the names of current kingdoms.[5] While we can find some evidence of this practice in earlier times, it became more prevalent in the late Ming and early Qing periods. This may have been because knowledge about Southeast Asia had increased with the Zheng He voyages in the early fifteenth century and later scholars then sought to understand how the information recorded at that time related to earlier records.

Southeast Asian history was published in India in 1986. See I-Tsing, *Chinese Monks in India, Biography of Eminent Monks Who Went to the Western World in Search of the Law During the Great Tang Dynasty*, translated by Latika Lahiri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

[4] Paul Pelliot, "Mémoire sur les coutumes du Cambodge" [Report on the Customs of Cambodia], *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 2 (1902): 123-177; "Le Fou-nan" [Funan], *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 3 (1903): 248-303; "Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde à la fin du VIIIe siècle" [Two Intineraries from China to India at the end of the Eighth Century], *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 4 (1904): 131-413.

[5] Liam C. Kelley, "Rescuing History from Srivijaya: The Fall of Angkor in the Ming Shilu (Part 1)," *China and Asia: A Journal in Historical Studies* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2022): 51-57.

So, for instance, during the Ming and Qing periods, there was a kingdom that Chinese scholars recorded as "Zhuawa" 爪哇, which scholars all agree is a term that refers to "Java." Meanwhile, in historical texts, there is a placename, Shepo 闍婆, which disappears from Chinese sources at the end of the fourteenth century. Scholars in the late Ming and early Qing periods connected these two names and stated that Zhuawa used to be called Shepo. Looking further, they found that there is one dynastic history that says that a place called Heling 訶陵 was the same as Shepo. They then equated that term, through its associate with Shepo, with Zhuawa as well, thereby making all of these terms indicate the island of Java.

However, these connections between placenames were not based on solid evidence, and some Chinese scholars in the early Qing period acknowledged this. We can see this in the following passage from the *History of the Ming* where the compilers of that text note the problem with equating Shepo with Zhuawa:

> 闍婆，古曰闍婆達。宋元嘉時，始朝中國。唐曰訶陵，又曰社婆，其王居闍婆 城，宋曰 闍婆 ，皆入貢。洪武十一年，其王摩那駝喃遣使奉表，貢方物，其後不復至。或曰爪哇即 闍婆。然元史爪哇傳不言，且曰：「其風俗、物產無所考。」太祖時，兩國並時入貢，其王之名不同。或本為二國，其後為爪哇所滅，然不可考。
>
> Shepo was in ancient times called Shepoda. During the Yuanjia era of the [Liu] Song [424-453 CE], it first made contact with the Middle Kingdom. During the Tang, it was called Heling and was also called Dupo. The king lived in Shepo Citadel. During the Song, it was called Shepo. In all [these periods] it presented tribute. In the eleventh year of the Hongwu era [1378 CE], its king, Monatuonan, presented a memorial and tribute. No one came after that.
>
> Some say Zhuawa is Shepo. However, the account of Zhuawa in the *History of the Yuan* does not say this, but states "There is no information about its customs or products." During the time of [Emperor Ming] Taizu [r. 1368-1398 CE], both kingdoms presented tribute simultaneously, and the names of their kings were different. Perhaps it was originally two kingdoms, and that one was later destroyed by Zhuawa. However, there is no information about this.

This is a rare instance in which Chinese scholars recognized that an early kingdom may have ceased to exist. Many of the other connections that were made at this time were not offered such explanations. What we see here in the case of Shepo and Zhuawa is that in the late fourteenth century, these kingdoms existed simultaneously. One, therefore, could not possibly have been an earlier name for the other, and yet, this idea took hold. In other connections that Chinese scholars made, there was even less evidence to build on. This is the conceptual flaw that we find in Chinese knowledge about Southeast Asian history. It is this problem where Chinese scholars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries equated current and historical placenames that were not the same.[6]

When Western scholars then began to examine the Chinese sources for Southeast Asian history, they accepted this erroneous view of the past. W. P. Groeneveldt, for instance, put any information about Shepo, Heling, and Zhuawa in the same category as all referring to Java. In doing so, he established a flawed foundation for the further study of Southeast Asian history. One of the first scholars to build on that flawed foundation was French scholar George Cœdès who relied on Groeneveldt's translation of Chinese sources in creating his theory about a premodern kingdom called "Srivijaya."[7] Over time this has led to a snowball effect as errors and misinterpretations have proliferated. And while there have been a limited number of new translations, those translations have been informed by the earlier studies that were built on the flawed foundation created by the first-attempt translations.[8]

It is therefore essential at this point that we return to the primary sources and build our knowledge from scratch again. That is precisely what this working paper will attempt to do. This, among other tasks, will necessitate the rather detailed process of examining placenames and attempting to locate them. It is often the case with Chinese sources that we find historical

[6] For a full list of the places that were connected, see the opening passage in Zhang Xie 張燮, *Dong xi yang kao* 東西洋考 [Examination of the Eastern and Western Oceans], (early seventeenth century).

[7] George Cœdès, "Le royaume de Çrīvijaya" [The Kingdom of Srivijaya], *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* Vol. 18, No. 6 (1918): 1-16.

[8] See, for instance, Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese: Studies in the Historical Geography of the Malay Peninsula before A.D. 1500* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1961) and Shao-yun Yang, "A Chinese Gazetteer of Foreign Lands: A New Translation of Part 1 of the *Zhufan zhi* 諸蕃志 (1225)." https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/39bce63e4e0642d3abce6c24db470760. Accessed 16 April 2023.

placenames mentioned in relation to other places. In deciphering placenames, there is then the risk that if one is determined incorrectly, then the places mentioned in relation to it will also be misinterpreted. This is precisely what happened, for instance, when W. P. Groeneveldt equated the historical names, Shepo and Heling, with Zhuawa/Java, as there are still other polities that are mentioned in relation to those historical places.

I should also note that from my experience of working with Chinese texts for the past twenty-five years, I have found that numbers and directions are two of the most unstable types of words. When scholars in the past copied texts, numbers and directions were the most likely to be copied incorrectly, particularly numbers. The rest of the content in texts was much more stable. I therefore never base an argument on a specific number or a specific directional indicator in a historical text. That said, in what follows, we will see that there are many numbers and directions in the Chinese sources for early Southeast Asian history, and in a very limited number of cases there will be numbers and directions that do not fit our interpretation. However, in these cases, the odd number that does not fit is accompanied by a large amount of textual evidence that supports the ideas in this paper.

Finally, in working through the information about early Southeast Asian history that we find in Chinese sources we will also build a new framework for understanding the past. Much of the extant scholarship on premodern Southeast Asian history have been conducted based on the assumption that travel through the Straits of Melaka was the norm throughout much of history and that many of the main polities in the region were coastal-based. As we will see repeatedly below, that was not the case. Instead, it was much more common than scholars have recognized for ships to only ply certain routes, such as between China and the Malay Peninsula or between Myanmar and the Malay Peninsula. These routes were then connected by transferring people and goods to local ships that sailed around the peninsula or by moving people and goods overland across the peninsula at various locations. Further, polities on both sides of the peninsula were often under the control of a single king. In other words, there were trans-peninsular empires. In what follows, we will introduce the most prominent trans-peninsular empire in early Southeast Asia, a place that I refer to as “Jaba.”

Heluodan, Shepo, Sheposha(da), and Yepoti

The Chinese sources on early Southeast Asia can be divided into different types. First, there are works that are still extant today that compiled together information about Southeast Asia, such as Zhao Rukuo's *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands*. Then there are works that are no longer extant but are cited in some famous encyclopedias from the Tang and Song dynasty periods. Finally, we can also find information about Southeast Asia in official dynastic histories. Dynastic histories contain information pertaining to the relations between Southeast Asian polities and a given Chinese dynasty, and they also incorporate information from other sources, such as the types mentioned above. Therefore, all these types of sources need to be examined, and we will do so in this working paper, however, dynastic histories are particularly valuable in helping to establish a chronological framework. That said, when we do so, we must be aware that the compilation of dynastic histories did not always occur in the same chronological order as the dynasties themselves.

For instance, if we look at official dynastic histories in the chronological order of the dynasties that they document, then the earliest information about kingdoms in maritime Southeast Asia appears in the *History of the Jin* (comp. 644 CE), which contains information about Linyi and Funan, kingdoms in the Cham and Khmer areas, respectively, on the southern end of the Indochinese Peninsula. If, however, we look at Chinese official histories in the chronological order in which they were compiled, then the earliest information that we have comes from the subsequent Northern and Southern Dynasties period (420-589 CE), such as the *History of the (Liu) Song* (comp. 492-493), the *History of the Southern Qi* (comp. 537 CE), and the *History of the Liang* (comp. 636 CE), all of which were compiled before the *History of the Jin*. That said, while there is some variation between these texts, their content is not dramatically different, and I treat them all more or less equally as our earliest Chinese sources for understanding Southeast Asia.

What do these works tell us about early Southeast Asia? The first of these texts to be compiled, the *History of the (Liu) Song*, records that in 430 CE, a place called the kingdom of Heluodan (Heluodan guo 訶羅單國) presented tribute.[9] Three years later, in 433 CE, the kingdom of Heluodan again paid tribute, along with a place called the island of Shepo (Shepo zhou 闍婆州).[10] Then the following year, in 434 CE, the kingdoms of Linyi, Funan, and Heluodan presented tribute.[11] A year later, in 435 CE, Funan again presented tribute, this time with a kingdom called Sheposhada (Sheposhada guo 闍婆娑達國).[12] The general locations of Linyi and Funan are well known. However, these other placenames have long been debated by scholars. Let us first note here that one of these names, Shepo, is categorized as an island, whereas the other two, Heluodan and Sheposhada, are listed as kingdoms. With that in mind, let us examine these names further.

Chinese official dynastic histories are divided into different sections. One section is called the "primary annals" (*benji* 本紀) and it provides information for each emperor's reign in chronological order. This is where the above information came from. Another section contains what we can call "biographies" or "accounts" (*zhuan* 傳). This section contains biographies of important people as well as accounts of foreign kingdoms. The *History of the (Liu) Song* divides its accounts of foreign kingdoms into different sections. As for Southeast Asia, there is a section on the "Southern Barbarians" (Nanyi 南夷) which includes Linyi and Funan, and then there is a section on the "Southwestern Barbarians" (Xinanyi 西南夷). This text mentions some kingdoms in India, beginning with what Chinese referred to as the "Lion kingdom" (Shizi guo 師子國), a reference to the Sinhala kingdom on the island of Sri Lanka. However, prior to doing so, the following places are mentioned:

[9] Shen Yue 沈約, *Songshu* 宋書 [History of the (Liu) Song], (comp., 492-93 CE). Benji 本紀, Wendi 文帝 [Emperor Wen], Yuanjia 元嘉 7.

[10] S Shen Yue, *Songshu*, Benji, Wendi, Yuanjia 10.

[11] Shen Yue, *Songshu*, Benji, Wendi, Yuanjia 11.

[12] Shen Yue, *Songshu*, Benji, Wendi, Yuanjia 12.

Characters	**Modern Mandarin**	**Sanskrit Pronunciation**	**Early Chinese**
訶羅陁	Heluotuo	Haradha	xa-la-t^{h}a
呵羅單 (訶羅單)	Heluodan (Heluodan)	Haradan (Haradan)	xa-la-tan (xa-la-tan)
媻皇 (婆皇)	Panhuang (Pohuang)	Bha-?? (Ba-??)	ban-vwaŋ (ba-vwaŋ)
媻達 (婆達)	Panda (Poda)	Bhadha (Badha)	ban-dat (ba-dat)
闍婆婆達 (闍婆娑達)	Shepopoda (Sheposhada)	Jababadha (Jabasadha)	dzia-ba-ba-dat (dzia-ba-ʂai-dat)

Table 01: Chinese names for some early Southeast Asian polities.

Some of these place names are written slightly differently in the accounts section than they are in the basic annals. I have indicated this by putting the way the words are written in the basic annals in parentheses. Further, some of the earliest Chinese travelers in the region were Buddhists who had a way to transcribe Sanskrit names into Chinese. I am therefore including a Sanskrit reading for these names in the case that they were of Sanskrit origin. This is followed by what I call an "Early Chinese" (EC) pronunciation. I will use that term in this paper to refer to historical reconstructions of the pronunciations of Chinese words that are documented in Edwin G. Pulleyblank's *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin.*[13]

It is not clear what "Panhuang/Pohuang" and "Panda/Poda," to use their modern Mandarin pronunciations, refer to. The only specific information that we gain in these texts is that these two places presented tribute and that their kings had Indic titles. As for, "Heluotuo" and "Heluodan," however, we may be able to decipher these names. I have a theory that when we find names of

[13] Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991).

places in Chinese sources that contain the same or a very similar sound but are written with different characters, then they are the same word, and the person who recorded these names, wrote them differently to better differentiate similar-sounding names. Taking the possible Sanskrit and Early Chinese readings above, I suspect that these two names might have come from the Javanese word, "kraton," the residence of a king. That information about these kingdoms is recorded in Chinese sources stems from the fact that these two kingdoms sent tribute to the Chinese court. Presumably, the envoys would have presented the Chinese with a full title of the kingdom, and such a name might have begun with the word "kraton." There is plenty of evidence in Chinese historical sources of abbreviated names and titles, and that may have happened here.

Whatever the case may be, the *History of the (Liu) Song* contains a brief account of one of those two polities, the kingdom of Heluodan. It notes that its king was titled Visa(?)-varman 毗沙跋摩 and it contains a letter that this king sent to the Chinese emperor. The account, however, begins with the following information about the kingdom:

> 呵羅單國治闍婆洲。元嘉七年，遣使獻金剛指鐶、赤鸚鵡鳥、天竺國白疊古貝、葉波國古貝等物。
>
> The kingdom of Heluodan administers the island of Shepo. In the seventh year of the Yuanjia era [430 CE], it sent envoys to offer such objects as a Vajra ring, a red parrot, Indian cotton and silk-cotton, and silk-cotton from the kingdom of Yepo.[14]

In the basic annals of this same text, it is recorded that the island of Shepo and the kingdom of Heluodan presented tribute in 433 CE. Now here under the account of Heluodan, we find that it "administers the island of Shepo." As such, there was a connection between the kingdom of Heluodan, or perhaps a kraton of unknown name, and the island of Shepo. Meanwhile, there was a different place that had a name that started with the same two characters that we find in the name, Shepo, and that is a place that is listed as Sheposhada in the basic annals and as Shepopoda in the account section. This second name is probably an error as the charcter for "*sha*"娑 is similar to the

[14] Shen Yue, *Songshu*, Liezhuan 列傳 57, Xinanyi 西南夷, Heluodan guo 呵羅單國.

character for "*po*" 婆, and it is extremely uncommon to find the same character repeated twice in a row in a Chinese transliteration of a foreign name. In fact, I cannot think of a single example.

In early Chinese, the two characters that we find in "Shepo" and at the beginning of the name "Sheposhada," would have sounded something like "*dzia-ba*," and that of course sounds remarkably close to "Java." Further, if there was a "kraton" that administered "the island of Dzia-ba," then that sounds like this text is referring to the island of Java. And it may very well be. However, there is another, similar-sounding name here, Sheposhada, and that name transformed over time. We see this in the later *History of the Southern Dynasties*, a text which appears to have been rather carelessly compiled as it contains many discrepancies with other texts. So, for instance, while the *History of the (Liu) Song* recorded that in 433 CE, the island of Shepo and the kingdom of Heluodan presented tribute, the *History of the Southern Dynasties* has the kingdom of Heluodan and the island of "Sheposha" (Sheposha guo 闍婆娑州) presenting tribute in 435.[15] Further, whereas the *History of the (Liu) Song* contained an account of a kingdom that it called Shepopoda (probably a mistake for Shiposhada, the name used in the basic annals section), the *History of the Southern Dynasties* had an account of a kingdom called "Shepoda" (Shepoda guo 闍婆達國).[16]

In other words, whereas the *History of the (Liu) Song* had made a clear distinction between the island of Shepo and a kingdom called Sheposhada, the *History of the Southern Dynasties* introduced new and confusing terminology. It is perhaps then not surprising to find that in subsequent histories, we only find one name, "Shepo," that is, only one "Dzia-ba." Further, the kingdom of Heluodan that the *History of the (Liu) Song* said administered the island of Shepo/Dzia-ba disappears from Chinese historical sources at this same time. There is a final passing mention of this polity in the *History of the Sui* (comp. 636 CE), and then there is no further mention of it. As such, it would appear that the "Shepo/Dzia-ba" that remained is the place that had previously been recorded with various longer names.

Finally, there is yet one more related name here. The account of Heluodan in the *History of the (Liu) Song* mentions "silk-cotton from the kingdom of Yepo." This name, Yepo 葉波, was

[15] Li Yanshou 李延壽, comp., *Nanshi* 南史 [History of the Southern Dynasties], (659 CE), Benji 本紀 2, Wendi 文帝.

[16] Li Yanshou, *Nanshi*, Liezhuan 列傳 68, Xinanyi 西南夷, Shepoda guo 闍婆達國.

pronounced in early Chinese something like "*jiap-ba*," which again is close to "Java." However, from the above account, we can see that this Jiap-ba was a different kingdom than Heluodan which administered the island of Dzia-ba. Meanwhile, in the early fifth century, there was a Buddhist monk by the name of Faxian 法顯 (337-422 CE) who journeyed to India and was blown off course on his return voyage to a place called Yepoti 耶婆提.[17] In early Chinese, the first two characters of that name could have been pronounced something like "*jia-ba*" and the final character was the first character in the transliteration of the Sanskrit word for island, *dvīpa* (*t[i]bipo* 提鞞波). Therefore, this could be indicating "Javadvīpa" or the "island of Java." As such, we have here still other terms that seem to point to two separate places.

Hence, in early Chinese sources, we find several placenames that sound similar. However, I would argue that these various terms ultimately referred to two separate places. Heluodan administered over Shepo/Dzia-ba, and this may be the place that Faxian referred to as Javadvīpa. That was one place. Then there was another place that initially had a longer name, Sheposhada/Dzia-ba-ṣai-dat, but which might have also been referenced in shorter form in the mention of "silk-cotton from the kingdom of Yepo." As we will see below, the first Shepo/Dzia-ba disappears from Chinese sources in the seventh century and does not re-appear until the thirteenth century, whereas the name of the other place came to be simplified as "Shepo/Dzia-ba," and Chinese sources document that polity as playing a very important role in the region until the thirteenth century. This will become clear below, but first, we need to determine the location of some other placenames.

Foshi and Maluoyu

In the second half of the seventh century, Buddhist monk Yijing 義淨 (635–713) journeyed to India, as Faxian had done some two centuries earlier. He spent eleven years there before returning and recorded information about both trips. This is what he wrote about the passage through Southeast Asia on his journey to India:

[17] Faxian 法顯, *Foguo ji* 佛國記 [Record of Buddhist Kingdoms], (early 5th cent. CE). CBETA Version. https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T2085. Accessed 13 April 2023.

未隔兩旬果之佛逝。經停六月漸學聲明。王贈支持送往末羅瑜國(今改為室利佛逝也)復停兩月轉向羯荼。至十二月舉帆還乘王舶漸向東天矣。從羯荼北行十日餘至裸人國。

In less than twenty days I reached Foshi. I passed six months gradually learning the Śabdavidya. The king bestowed support and sent me off to Moluoyu (This has now been changed to Shilifoshi), where I again spent two months and then turned towards Kedah. At the time of the twelfth lunar month, the sails were hoisted and I boarded the king's ship headed for India. From Kedah I went north for more than ten days and reached the kingdom of Naked People [perhaps in the Andaman Islands].[18]

Before we discuss this itinerary, let us first examine two placenames mentioned in it: Foshi 佛逝, or Shilifoshi 室利佛逝, and Maluoyu 末羅瑜. This first name, Foshi, appears to have been an abbreviated form of Shilifoshi, and in what follows, we will use the longer version. In the early twentieth century, French scholar George Cœdès claimed that Shilifoshi was the equivalent of a name that appears in a seventh-century inscription that was found off the southeastern coast of Sumatra – Srivijaya. Cœdès claimed further that this was the name of a kingdom based at Palembang. The fact that the place called "Moluoyu" that Yijing mentioned visiting sounds remarkably similar to the word "*melayu/malayu*" which is now the word for "Malay" and is found in the placename "Melayu Jambi," a place not far from Palembang, seemed to add support to this theory, and for more than a century now this idea has held sway over the scholarship on early Southeast Asian history.

That said, scholars have long struggled to get historical sources to fit this interpretation, and that is because Shilifoshi was not Palembang and we can find two names in historical sources that sounded like the term Yijing mentioned, Moluoyu. How do we know this? Regarding Shilifoshi, the amount of time that it took to reach there from China was far too short for it to be located on the southern end of Sumatra. Yijing claimed to have made it there in less than 20 days,

[18] Yijing 義淨, *Da Tang xiyu qiufa gaoseng zhuan* 大唐西域求法高僧傳 [The Great Tang Biographies of Eminent Monks who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions], (7th cent. CE), Juanxia 卷下. CBETA Version. https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T2066_002. Accessed 8 April 2023.

whereas he mentioned two other monks that made the same journey in a month and just under a month, respectively.[19] Further, as we will see below, we have no evidence of Chinese ships making the crossing from the southern tip of Vietnam directly south to the area of what is now Singapore and Sumatra in this period. Instead, Chinese ships followed the coasts. Additionally, we will also see passages below where Shilifoshi is mentioned in relation to other locations, and those descriptions will likewise make it impossible to place it on the island of Sumatra. Finally, "Shilifoshi" is unquestionably a transcription of a Sanskrit name and cannot be read as "Srivijaya." Instead, a Sanskrit reading of those characters produces "Sribhuja."

As for Molouyu, there is reference to a place with a similar-sounding name on the island of Sumatra. For instance, the fourteenth-century Javanese text, the *Nagarakretagama*, mentions a "Malayu" that had vassals around the island of Sumatra, from Jambi and Palembang in the southeast to Lamuri in the north and Barus in the west.[20] Meanwhile, in the early sixteenth century, Portuguese apothecary Tomé Pires recorded that there was a "Tana Malaio," or Land of Malaio, near Palembang.[21]

Chinese texts, however, mention a place with a similar-sounding name that appears to have been in a different location. They contain references to such similar-sounding places as Mulayou 木剌由, Moulayou 沒剌由, Maliyu'er 麻里予兒, Wulaiyou 巫来由/無来由, and Malaihu 馬來忽. For many of these references, we cannot identify a geographic location. However, some others offer hints. The *History of the Yuan*, for instance, records that in 1297 the kingdom of Siam (Xian 暹), sent envoys to the Yuan court to request that the Yuan dispatch envoys to their kingdom. As it turns out, the Yuan had already done so and had discovered that Siam had engaged in a conflict with Maliyu'er. At the time of the Chinese envoy's arrival, this conflict had reportedly ceased. Nonetheless, in 1297, the Yuan emperor issued an order to the Siamese envoys for their kingdom

[19] Ibid. The passages are 一月到室利佛逝國 and 未經一月屆乎佛逝.

[20] Theodore G. Th Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th century: A Study in Cultural History: The Nāgara-Kĕrtāgama by Rakawi Prapañca of Majapahit, 1365 A.D.*, Vol. 3 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff: 1960), 16.

[21] *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515; and, The Book of Francisco Rodrigues, Rutter of a Voyage in the Red Sea, Nautical Rules, Almanack and Maps, Written and Drawn in the East before 1515*, translated by Armando Cortesão (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1944), 158.

to not harm Maliyu'er.[22] Then two years later, in 1299, "the kingdoms of the Siam barbarians (Xian fan 暹番), Molayou 沒剌由, and Luohu 羅斛 each presented local items as tribute."[23]

Scholars believe that in this period the area of "Siam" consisted of multiple city-states. Here Luohu likely referred to Lopburi and Xian to Suphanburi, two of those city-states, both of which were located in the Chaophraya River basin. It is not clear from the *History of the Yuan* where exactly Malaiyu'er/Molayou was located. However, it is logical to assume that it must have been somewhere relatively near Siam.

Then there is a reference to a "Malāyur" in Arabic sources, with information about its location provided in a text by Ibn Sa'īd (d.1274). Ibn Sa'īd wrote about Malāyur in describing the western side of the Malay Peninsula from the perspective of Lamuri, a place on the northern end of the island of Sumatra. To quote, Ibn Sa'īd stated the following:

> In the south east corner is found the town of Kalāh [Kedah], well known to travelers and renowned for its *Kelāhi* tin. The latitude of this town is 154°12'.
>
> On the north east shore is the town of Malāyur, which is well known. It is a place of anchorage. Its longitude is a little more than that of Kalāh and its latitude is the same as Lāmurī. Each one of the towns of which we have spoken is on an estuary. The length of the island is about 800 miles. From the right to the left extent two capes, between which the sea is only two miles wide. The sea there is not deep. They call this place Bintan. There are found small islands out of which come black pirates armed with poison arrows and in ships of war. They rob men but do not take them away. But there are some who have been made prisoners by them. . . [24]

This is G. R. Tibbetts' translation. I have been unable to determine if the numerical latitude mentioned is accurate, however, if we follow the more general statements that it is on the "north

[22] Song Lian 宋濂 et al., comp., *Yuanshi* 元史 [History of the Yuan], (1370 CE), Liezhuan 列傳 97, Waiyi san 外夷三, Xianguo 暹國.

[23] Song Lian, Yuanshi, Benji 本紀 20, Chengzong 成宗, Dade san nian 大德三年.

[24] G. R. Tibbetts, *A Study of the Arabic Texts Containing Material on South-East Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 59.

east shore" of Kedah and that it is at the same latitude as Lamuri, then the coastal area of what is now Trang province in southern Thailand fits the above description very well. This, of course, is not an island, however, scholars agree that this term is used loosely in Arabic sources to also refer to places that one reaches by sea. In the case of the coast in Trang province, it is the site of an estuary. There are capes on both sides. There are also small islands nearby, and it would make sense that it was a place of anchorage because as we will see below, it was at one end of a trans-peninsular trade route, which also explains why there is information in the passage above about the length of this "island."

Map 01: The coast of Trang province. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

Finally, it is also important to note that the Malāyur in Arabic sources and the Maliyu'er in Chinese sources both end with an "r." I am not aware of any linguistic reason for that consonant to be added to a term like "*melayu*" or "*malayu*" and I have never found another example of a final "r" added to other placenames that end with a vowel. Again, what the above information indicates is that there were two places with similar sounding, but different names.

Returning to Yijing's itinerary, as well as the information that he provided about other monks, we can see that it took twenty days to a month to reach Shilifoshi from the southern Chinese coast. After spending six months there, the king of Shilifoshi then sent Yijing off to Moluoyu.

From Moluoyu, Yijing "turned towards" (*zhuanxiang* 轉向) Kedah. From Kedah, Yijing then boarded a ship that sailed across the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal to India. While Yijing did not provide details about how long the journey from Shilifoshi took, he did provide that information regarding another monk, Dyana Master Wuxing (Wuxing chanshi 無行禪師). Yijing stated that it took Wuxing a month to reach Shilifoshi from China, and that "Later, he boarded the king's ship and in fifteen days reached the island of Moluoyu. After another fifteen days, he reached the kingdom of Kedah."[25]

Let us now examine the information that Yijing provided about his return journey from India. Departing from a place called Tāmralipti 耽摩立底 on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, Here Yijing stated the following:

> 即是昇舶入海歸唐之處。從斯兩月汎舶東南到羯荼國此屬佛逝。舶到之時當正二月。若向師子洲西南進舶傳有七百驛。停此至冬汎舶南上一月許到末羅遊洲今為佛逝多國矣。亦以正二月而達。停至夏半汎舶北行。可一月餘便達廣府經停向當年半矣。
>
> [Tāmralipti] is the place where you board and ship and enter the sea on the return journey. From here I sailed for two months to the southeast until I reached the polity of Kedah. This is under the authority of Foshi. We arrived in the second lunar month. If you want to go to the island of Sri Lanka (師子洲 Shizi zhou), then you have to proceed by boat [from here] to the southwest for [the equivalent of] 700 courier stations.
>
> We waited here [in Kedah] until winter. Catching a ship proceeding to the south, in a little over a month we reached the island of Muoluoyu. This is now [one of] Foshi's many polities. It was already the second lunar month when we arrived. We waited until the middle of summer. Catching a ship headed to the north, in a

[25] Yijing, *Da Tang xiyu qiufa gaoseng zhuan*, Juanxia. The quoted passage is: 後乘王舶經十五日達末羅瑜洲。又十五日到羯荼國.

little more than a month we reached Guangfu (Guangdong), [the trip] having taken about a year and a half.[26]

Yijing's journey from India to Kedah is unproblematic. The remaining information, however, requires explanation. First, Yijing states of Dyana Master Wuxing that it took him fifteen days to travel from Shilifoshi to Moluoyu and fifteen days to sail from there to Kedah. Yijing, by contrast, stated regarding his return journey that the distances between these places were one month each, that is, one month from Kedah to Moluoyu and one month from Moluoyu to Shilifoshi.

While these times differ and can perhaps be attributed to travel in different sized boats, one point we can make with confidence is that Shilifoshi could not have been located at Palembang, as scholars have argued ever since Goerge Cœdès made this claim in the early twentieth century. We have seen above that there were two places with a name resembling Moluoyu, one near what is now Jambi and Palembang and one on the coast of Trang province. If the Moluoyu near Jambi and Palembang is the place Yijing mentioned, then it would be impossible for Shilifoshi to be located at Palembang because the travel time between those two places was, according to Yijing's text, too long (either thirteen or thirty days). If, however, the Moluoyu mentioned in Yijing's text was the Malāyur on the Trang province coast, then that would also not make sense, because that would make the travel time between that location and Kedah too long (again, either fifteen or thirty days).

The only way this information can make sense is if Kedah, Moluoyu, and Shilifoshi were equidistant from each other. And the only way that could be possible is if the Moluoyu mentioned in Yijing's text was the Moluoyu near Jambi and Palembang, and Shilifoshi was somewhere up the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula. Based on the textual information we will see below, I would argue that the most logical place for it to have been located was somewhere along the coast of what is now Surat Thani and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces in Thailand.

[26] Ibid.

Map 02: Locations of Shilifoshi, Moluoyu, and Kedah. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

Trans-peninsular Empires

There are other important details in Yijing's text. The passage on his journey to India contains an annotation noting that Moluoyu "has now been changed to Shilifoshi." Meanwhile, the passage about the return journey states that Kedah was "under the authority of Foshi" and again that Moluoyu was "now [one of] Foshi's many polities." The sense that this communicates is that during the period Yijing was in India, Shilifoshi had expanded its authority over Moluoyu and Kedah. In the *New History of the Tang*, we find additional information that supports this idea. In a section on Shilifoshi, that text states the following:

> 室利佛逝，一曰尸利佛誓。過軍徒弄山二千里，地東西千里，南北四千里而遠。有城十四，以二國分總。西曰郎婆露斯。

> It is 2,000 leagues past Mount Juntunong. From east to west, it is 1,000 leagues and from south to north it is 4,000 leagues distant. There are 14 citadels, and they are combined into two kingdoms. The western one is called Langpolusi.[27]

As we will see below, Mount Juntunong was Côn Sơn island at the southeastern end of the Indochinese Peninsula. From there, ships could sail parallel to the coast to the west and arrive in the area of what is now Surat Thani and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces. Meanwhile, "Langpolusi" appears to be the same place that is mentioned in some Arabic sources as "Langabālūs," an island to the west of Kedah.[28] Many scholars have concluded that this was an island in the Nicobar Islands. As such, we can see that Shilifoshi had a presence on both sides of the Malay Peninsula. Its political center may have been in or near what is now Surat Thani province, but it claimed authority over places on the western side of the peninsula as well. Further, while it was possible to cross the peninsula by land from the area of Surat Thani province to Phang Nga province, that was one of the longer trans-peninsular passages. It is therefore likely that Shilifoshi also maintained contact with its western dependencies by sailing around the Malay Peninsula. Indeed, as we saw above, Dyana Master Wuxing sailed from Shilifoshi to Moluoyu on the king of Shilifoshi's ship.

In the passage above, we also find information about the extent of Shilifoshi, namely, "from east to west, it is 1,000 leagues and from south to north it is 4,000 leagues distant." How was this information known or calculated? I would argue what happened is that mariners encountered Shilifoshi on both the eastern side of the Malay Peninsula at perhaps Surat Thani as well as on the western side of the peninsula at places like Langabālūs in the Nicobar Islands and made a rough calculation of the space that lay between those two places.

Let us now compare that information with similar information recorded about a place called "Langyaxiu," which scholars argue is a reference to "Langkasuka," a polity that existed perhaps in the area of what is now Pattani, down the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula from where

[27] Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [New History of the Tang], (1060 CE), Liezhuan 列傳 147 xia 下, Nanman xia 南蠻下, Shilifoshi 室利佛逝.

[28] Tibbets, 26.

Shilifoshi was likely located. Here is what is recorded about that polity in the seventh-century *History of the Liang*:

> 狼牙脩國，在南海中。其界東西三十日行，南北二十日行，北去廣州二萬四千里。
>
> The kingdom of Langyaxiu is in the Southern Seas. The borders of the kingdom are a thirty-day journey [apart] from east to west and a twenty-day journey from south to north. To the north, it is 24,000 leagues from Guangzhou.[29]

While the information about Shilifoshi indicated the extent of that kingdom, the information about Langyaxiu tells us how long it took to traverse that kingdom from its eastern to western borders. Further, it does not say that the travel was "by sea" (*shuixing* 水行) or by boat (*fanbo* 汎舶), as was common in other contexts. This same text contains similar information about another polity in the region called "Poli." To quote,

> 婆利國，在廣州東南海中洲上，去廣州二月日行。國界東西五十日行，南北二十日行。有一百三十六聚。
>
> The kingdom of Poli is on an island in the Southern Seas to the southwest of Guangzhou. From Guangzhou, it is about a two-month journey. The borders of the kingdom are a fifty-day journey [apart] from east to west and a twenty-day journey from south to north. There are 136 settlements.[30]

In a collection of translations of Sanskrit terms that was compiled a century earlier than the *History of the Liang*, Poli is listed in a section on kingdom names where it is also said to be called Poluo 婆羅 and Boli 波離.[31] Meanwhile, in a ninth-century text, it is said to be the place where

[29] Yao Cha 姚察 and Yao Silian 姚思廉, comp., *Liangshu* 梁書 [History of the Liang], (636 CE), Liezhuan 48, Hainan zhu guo 海南諸國, Langyaxiu guo 狼牙脩國.

[30] Yao Cha and Yao Silian, Liangshu, Liezhuan 48, Hainan zhu guo, Poli guo 婆利國.

[31] Bao Chang 寶唱, *Fan Fanyu* 翻梵語 [Translations of Sanskrit Terms] (ca. 500 CE), Juan 卷 8, Guotu ming 國土名.

camphor (*longnao xiang* 龍腦香) comes from.[32] One famous source of camphor in the region was Barus, on the western side of the island of Sumatra. Was Poli Barus? The above passage states that it took two months to reach Poli from Guangzhou. As we have already seen, it took roughly a month to reach Shilifoshi somewhere around Surat Thani province and another month to sail from there to Kedah. Poli, therefore, could have been somewhere around that region. Meanwhile, the *Old History of the Tang* provided the following description of Poli's location:

> 婆利國，在林邑東南海中洲上。其地延袤數千里，自交州南渡海，經林邑、扶南、赤土、丹丹數國乃至焉。
>
> The kingdom of Poli is on an island in the middle of the sea to the southeast of Linyi. Its land is several thousands of leagues in extent. From Jiaozhou one crosses the sea to the south, passing Linyi, Funan, Chitu, Dandan, and several other polities before reaching it.[33]

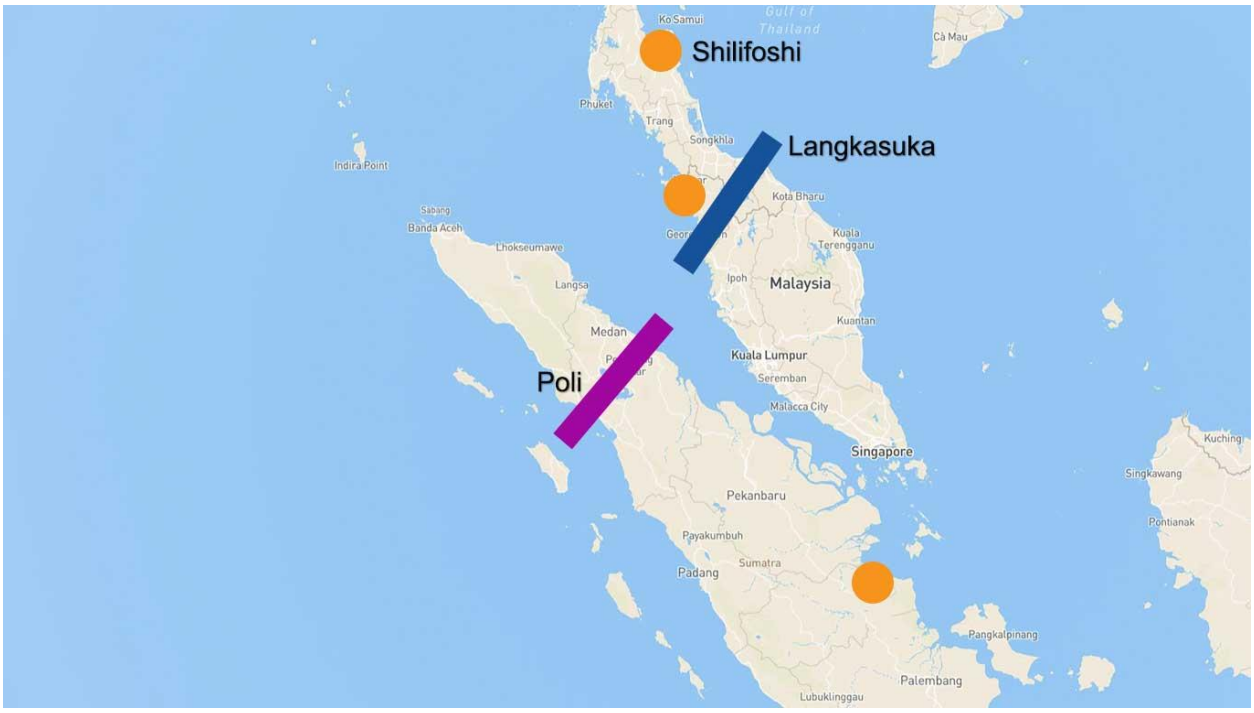
While this text places Poli to the southeast of Linyi the *New History of the Tang* has it to the south of that same area.[34] Meanwhile, this description of the journey to Poli could easily describe the journey through the Straits of Melaka and around the northern tip of Sumatra to its west coast. However, why was the earlier information in the *History of the Liang* about the length of time needed to journey from one border to the other recorded? I would argue that this information that was recorded for both Poli and Langkasuka could be because these kingdoms had a presence on both sides of their respective landmass. While Langsuka was on the eastern side of the Malay Peninsula, it was may have been at the eastern end of an overland trade route that went to the western side of the peninsula. Indeed, the Pattani river is the longest river on the Malay Peninsula, and although there are mountains somewhat obstructing passage to the west, that river could nonetheless transport people far across the peninsula. Further, while Barus was on the western side of the island of Sumatra, it likewise may have occupied the western end of an overland

[32] Duan Chengshi 段成式, *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 [Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang], (9th cent. CE). CBETA Version. Juan 卷 18. https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T2130. Accessed 13 April 2023.

[33] Liu Xu 劉昫, *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [Old History of the Tang], (945 CE), Liezhuan 列傳 147, Nanman Xinanman 南蠻 西南蠻, Poli guo 婆利國.

[34] Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *Xin Tangshu*, Liezhuan 147 xia, Nanman xia, Huanwang 環王.

trade route that crossed to the eastern side of the island. Further, the fact that it was known that there were 136 settlements in Poli/Barus likewise suggests that there were people who had crossed over a large area of land.



Map 03: Early Trans-peninsular/island empires in Southeast Asia. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

While this interpretation seems valid, I am unsure about the information concerning the amount of time it took to journey between the southern and northern borders. Perhaps this was generic information that was added to maintain textual parallelism, or perhaps it was a reference to sailing from one side of the peninsula or island around to the other, and mention of going by water or boat was left out to again maintain the textual parallelism with the proceeding sentences about journeying overland from east to west. Whatever the case may be, what is clear here is that this information is not about isolated coastal settlements that only interacted with the outside world through contact with passing ships. Instead, what it shows are kingdoms that had a presence on opposite sides of whatever landmass they were located on. In the case of Shilifoshi, that presence appears to have been established by bringing distant lands under its authority, thereby establishing what we can call a "trans-peninsular empire," whereas, for Langkasuka and Poli, it may be that

they simply maintained trade outposts. Either way, what we can see is that gaining access to trade across both water and land was essential for these polities.

Kedah

Between Langkasuka and Poli, on the western coast of the Malay Peninsula, was a particularly important trading port, Kedah. As we saw above, Yijing passed through Kedah, and on his return journey, he recorded that it was under the authority of Shilifoshi. Yijing referred to Kedah as "Jiecha" 羯荼. As far as I can tell, Yijing was the only person to use those characters to record the name of Kedah. Further, scholars have not pointed to another term used by later writers that they agree indicated Kedah. This is odd, because Kedah was one of the most frequently mentioned placenames in Arabic sources, and those sources indicate that it was an extremely important trading port.

In fact, however, I argue here that there was another name by which Kedah was referred to in Chinese sources, and that is as "Chitu" 赤土. These characters literally mean "red earth," and a lot of ink has been spilled attempting to determine where this polity was located, with some arguing that it could have been Kedah, but there is no scholarly consensus on that matter. That said, I would argue that "Chitu" is meant to represent the actual name, "Kedah." If we look up historical reconstructions of these characters, we get something like *kiet trɦa* for Jiecha and *ʈʂ^{h}iajk thuə* for Chitu. Those sounds are close, and I would argue that the reason why they are not identical is because Chitu is a name that attempts to capture both sound and meaning whereas Jiecha only indicates sound and therefore could be more precise in representing the sound, "Kedah."

More specifically, the sound *ʈʂ^{h}iajk thuə* approximates "Kedah" and the characters 赤土 mean "red earth." What is more, that meaning has an association with the place, as the soil around Kedah is reddish. Further, from the account of this kingdom in the *History of the Sui* and understanding that important polities in this region maintained a presence on both sides of the Malay Peninsula, we will see that Chitu was indeed located where Kedah is today. Here is how that account begins:

赤土國，扶南之別種也。在南海中，水行百餘日而達所都。土色多赤，因以為號。東波羅剌國，西婆羅娑國，南訶羅旦國，北拒大海，地方數千里。

The polity of Chitu is a variant of Funan. Situated in the Southern Sea, the area of its capital is reached after traveling by water for over 100 days. Its soil is very red, hence its name. To the east is the polity of Boluola. To the west is the polity of Puluosha. To the south is the polity of Heluodan. To the north, it fronts a large sea. Its land is several thousand leagues in extent.[35]

The opening statement that Chitu was a variant of Funan is, I would argue, a reference to the fact that both places were "Indianized" and that there were people from the Indian subcontinent in these locations. Early accounts of Funan talk about a foreign ruler surnamed Kaundinya arriving and taking control of the polity whereas, among many other details in the account of Chitu in the *History of the Sui* that show Indic influence, as we will see below, there were brahmans who served its court. Further, following my rule that if names sound the same but are written with different characters, they are the same word, I would argue that the first two characters in the names Boluola 波羅剌 and Puluosha 婆羅娑, mentioned above, are representing the common Austronesian word for an island, "*pulau*," and that these names were the names of two islands: Pulau La and Pulau Sha. It is not clear where these islands were, however, the place to the south, Heluodan, is the kingdom we saw above that administered over the island of Dzia-ba. This passage starts to give us a sense of where it was. However, with more information, its location will become clearer.

We get better geographical information in the account of Chitu in the *History of the Sui* when it presents information about a Chinese diplomatic mission to that kingdom in 607 CE led by an official named Chang Jun 常駿. This is what was recorded about his journey:

[35] Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al., comp., *Suishu* 隋書 [History of the Sui], (636 CE), Liezhuan 列傳 47, Nanman 南蠻, Chitu 赤土.

其年十月，駿等自南海郡乘舟，晝夜二旬，每值便風。至焦石山而過東南泊陵伽鉢拔多洲，西與林邑相對，上有神祠焉。又南行，至師子石，自是島嶼連接。又行二三日，西望見狼牙須國之山，於是南達雞籠島，至於赤土之界。其王遣婆羅門鳩摩羅以舶三十艘來迎，吹螺擊鼓，以樂隋使，進金鎖以纜駿船。月餘，至其都。

In the tenth lunar month of that year [607 CE], Jun and the others boarded a ship in Nanhai Commandery, and after sailing for twenty days and nights, they reached Scorched Stone Mountain (Jiaoshi shan 焦石山) and passing to its southwest, anchored at Lingaparvata Isle (Lengjiabobaduo zhou 陵伽鉢拔多洲), which to its west faces Linyi, and on which there is a shrine. Heading further southward, they reached the Master and Disciple Stones (Shizi shi 師子石). From here, there were islands one after the other. Traveling for two or three more days and looking to the west, the mountain of the polity of Langkasuka was spotted. Thereupon, to the south, Chicken Cage Island (Jilong dao 雞籠島) was reached, and they arrived at the frontier of Chitu.

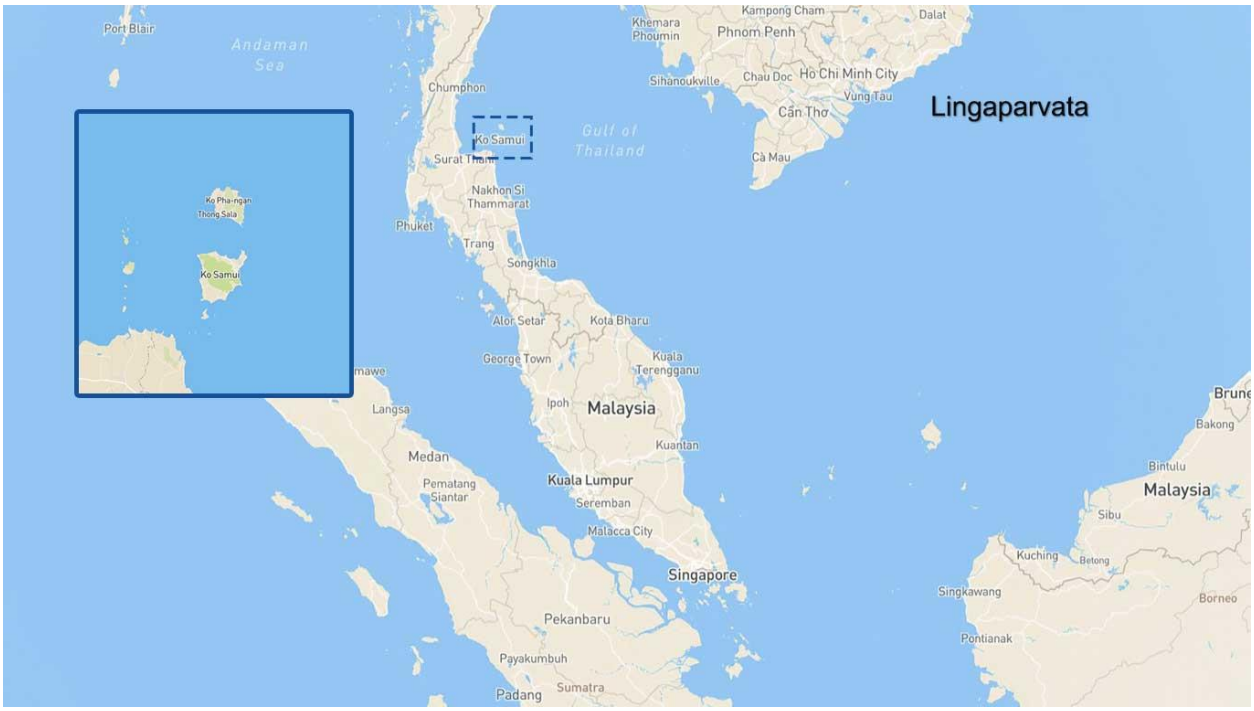
The king sent the brahmin, Kumāra (Jiumoluo 鳩摩羅) with thirty ships to receive them. Gourds were sounded and drums beat to entertain the Sui envoys. A metal chain was presented to moor [Chang] Jun's ship. A little over a month later they reached the capital.[36]

It is not clear where Lingaparvata was, other than that it was located in the larger Cham world. The term I am translating as "isle" here, *zhou* 洲, can mean, like the meaning of "island" in Arabic sources, both an island and a place on the coast that is approached from the sea. The more important place to discuss is the subsequent one, Master and Disciple Stones. Scholars, in general, have assumed that Chinese mariners sailed south from the end of the Indochinese Peninsula to the area of Singapore and then into the Straits of Melaka. I argue, instead, that before perhaps the thirteenth century, it was the norm for Chinese ships to sail closer to the coasts. Hence, from

[36] Ibid.

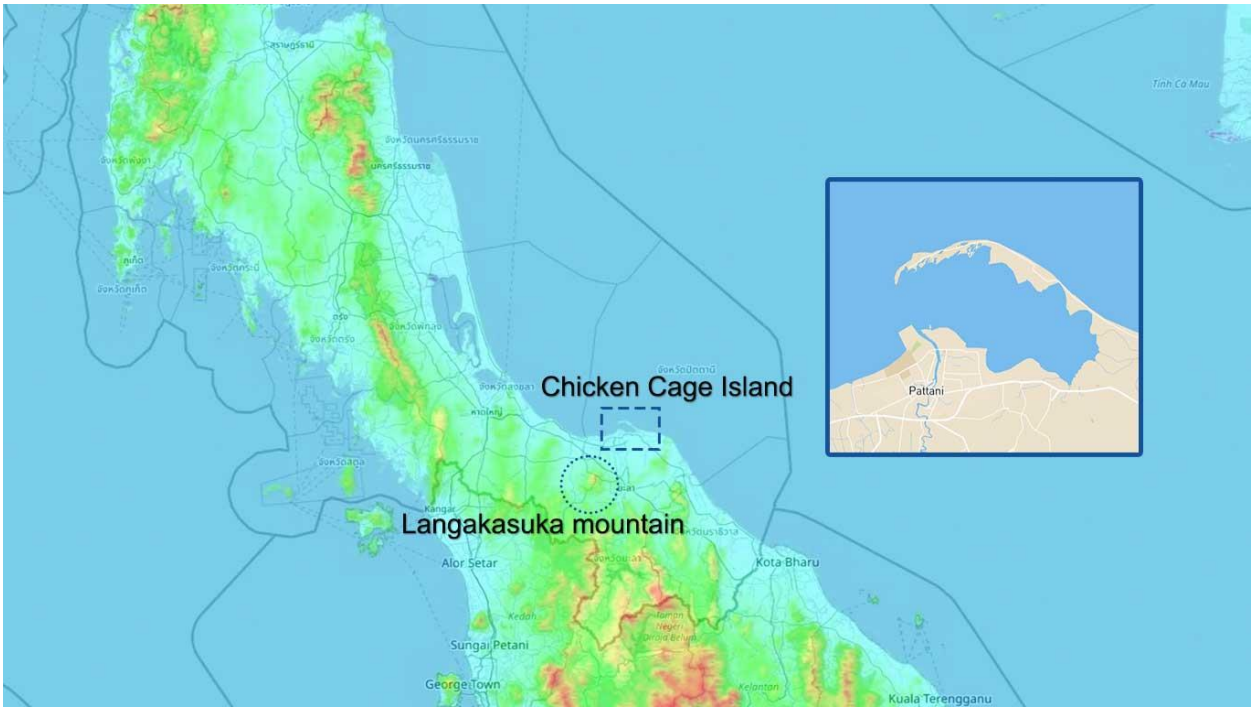
Lingaparvarta, Chang Jun's ship would have first sailed southward to the end of the Indochinese Peninsula and then would have veered westward to circle the Gulf of Thailand.

There are not many landmarks in the Gulf of Thailand. However, one that does stand out is the adjacent islands of Ko Pha Ngan and Koh Samui off the coast of what is now Surat Thani and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces. These two islands sit facing each other like "master and disciple" and stand out as a unique feature along what are otherwise indistinct coasts. In the seventh century, they were also probably a three-day voyage from Langkasuka, as the passage above indicates.



Map 04: The site of the "Master and Disciple Stones." Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

In the area of Langkasuka, Chang Jun spotted a mountain. As one travels down the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula, most mountains are quite far inland, however, there is one closer to the coast in the area of Pattani. In that area, there are no major islands. However, there is a landmark that could be imagined as a chicken cage. Right in the area that the above text is describing is where the Ta Chee Peninsula (Laem Ta Chee) wraps around creating an enclosed space or "cage." It is not an island (*dao* 島). However, there is no evidence that Chang Jun and his men explored this region and later texts do not add any further details, they simply repeat this same information. What is more, like the Master and Disciple Stones, it is a very distinct landmark.



Map 05: The mountain near Langkasuka and "Chicken Cage Island." Source: Author, based on the Malay Peninsula Topographic Map[37] and © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

According to the *History of the Sui*, this is also where the "frontier" (*jie* 界) of Chitu began, a kingdom that was "several thousand leagues in extent" and the capital of which took a month to reach. What was being described here? Scholars have struggled to explain this as they have been confused by the passage that mentions the brahmans from Chitu giving Chang Jun a metal chain. Some scholars have argued that this was used to tow Chang Jun's boat. However, following my translation above, I argue that this sturdy chain was used to moor Chang Jun's boat so that he could leave it safely anchored in the waters protected by the Ta Chee Peninsula, and then proceed to the capital of Chitu on one of the thirty ships that had arrived to greet him.

Where did those ships go? While, again, the Pattani River that flows into the sea right where Chang Jun moored his ship is the longest river on the Malay Peninsula, there is still mountainous terrain that one would have to traverse to get to the other side and given the many signs of Indic influence that we find in other parts of the account of Chitu, it is unlikely that this was a polity far in the interior or that Chang Jun traversed the peninsula. Instead, I would argue

[37] https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/map-4hsv1h/Malay-Peninsula/?center=6.92588%2C101.20909&zoom=10. Accessed 16 April 2023.

that Chang Jun was delivered to the capital along the coast, and the "little over a month" that it took to sail there roughly corresponds with the thirty days that it took Dyana Master Wuxing to travel between Shilifoshi and Kedah, roughly the same distance.

Map 06: The locations of Langkasuka and Chitu, and the possible location of Heluodan. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

Hence, it seems likely that Chitu was Kedah. Further, like Shilifoshi and Langkasuka, Chitu appears to have maintained a presence on both sides of the Malay Peninsula, as the "frontier" where Chang Jun was met could have been a Chitu outpost. Finally, from the above passage, we can also get a clearer sense of where Heluodan was. If it was to the south of Chitu, and Chitu to Chang Jun was a kingdom that extended for "several thousand leagues," a reference to the area he traversed on his journey from the frontier of Chitu to its capital, then this would place Heluodan, again perhaps meaning "kraton," somewhere to the south of there. It was recorded to administer the island of "Dzia-ba" (Shepo), and to the south of the Malay Peninsula is, of course, the island of "Java" where rulers governed from kratons. That, therefore, could be where Heluodan was located. Although it was far off Chang Jun's route, perhaps it was well known, and he recorded its basic location based on that fact.

Whatever the case may be, as we saw above, there was another placename that sounded like Dzia-ba. There was a place that initially seemed to have been called something like "Dzia-ba-ʂai-dat" (Sheposhada), but then in later dynastic histories was simply referred to as Dzia-ba (Shepo). Further, the above passing reference to Heluodan in the *History of the Sui* is the last time that name is mentioned in Chinese dynastic histories. So, where was this other "Dzia-ba"?

Jaba

To avoid confusion, I am going to refer to the "kingdom of Shepo" that is mentioned in sources from the Tang through the Ming as "Jaba," to differentiate it from the "island of Shepo" that is mentioned briefly in the earlier *History of the (Liu) Song*, and which I have been transcribing as "Dzia-ba" following its approximate pronunciation in early Chinese. The best geographical description of this later Jaba can be found in the thirteenth-century work entitled *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands* by Zhao Rukuo 趙汝适 (1170-1228 CE).

> 闍婆國，又名莆家龍，於泉州為丙巳方；率以冬月發船，蓋藉北風之便，順風晝夜行，月餘可到。東至海，水勢漸低，女人國在焉；愈東則尾閭之所泄，非復人世；泛海半月，至崑崙國。南至海三日程，泛海五日至大食國。西至海四十五日程，北至海四日程。西北泛海十五日，至渤泥國；又十日，至三佛齊國；又七日至古邏國；又七日至柴歷亭，抵交趾，達廣州。
>
> The kingdom of Jaba [Shepo] is also called Pujialong. It is to the south-southeast of Quanzhou. If one leaves in the winter months, one can take advantage of the northern winds. With favorable winds and sailing day and night, one can arrive in just over a month. To the east, it reaches the sea. The water gradually descends, and there [one finds] the Kingdom of Women. Further to the east, is the place where the accumulated water is discharged, and one is no longer in the human world.
>
> Crossing the sea for half a month, one reaches the Kunlun kingdom. South to the sea is a three-day journey. Crossing the sea for five days one reaches the Dashi kingdom. West to the sea is a forty-five-day journey. North to the sea is a four-

> day journey. Crossing the sea to the northwest for fifteen days, one reaches the kingdom of Boni. In ten days, one can reach the kingdom of Sanfoqi. In seven days, one can reach the kingdom of Guluo. In seven days, one can reach the kingdom of Chailiting, and one can reach Jiaozhi and arrive at Guangzhou.[38]

Zhao Rukuo never traveled to Southeast Asia. He got his information from earlier texts and from talking to mariners. Most of the above information about distances to places appears for the first time in the *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands*. Therefore, we can assume that this information came from mariners who had visited this place. Further, some of the information in this passage is incorrect, such as the statement that Jaba was "south-southeast of Quanzhou." That would place this kingdom somewhere in the Philippines and there is no evidence to support that.

If one attempts to locate Jaba by trying to find its location in relation to the places that are mentioned in the second half the passage, from Boni to Jiaozhi, then one will not succeed in identifying any place in Southeast Asia where all those directions and distances will match. That is not surprising, because again, numbers and directions are two of the most unstable forms of information in Chinese texts. What we must do, therefore, is to examine other, more general, aspects of this passage. This text indicates that from Jaba, the sea could be reached in all four directions. I have never found any other place mentioned in Chinese sources where that information was recorded. In other words, this was not commonly recorded information. Instead, there was something unique about the location of Jaba that led to the recording of that information. Further, while it was possible to reach the sea in four directions, this text made particular mention of places that could be reached from the east and south. From the east, one could reach a place called the Kunlun kingdom, while to the south one could reach the Dashi kingdom. Let us examine what these terms indicated.

A lot of ink has been spilled attempting to explain what the term *kunlun* referred to. In general, scholars have found the term *kunlun* difficult to identify with a single group of people or place but have nonetheless associated it with people like the Malays. Historian of Southeast Asia Leonard Andaya, for instance, has stated that "At various times in the past the Chinese have used

[38] Zhao Rukuo 趙汝适, *Zhu fan zhi* 諸蕃志 [Treatise on the Various Barbarians], (Early 13th cent. CE), Juan shang 卷上.

'kunlun' to refer to the most prominent of Southeast Asian inhabitants, including the Malayu."[39] Meanwhile, historian of China Don Wyatt has argued that "over several centuries the Chinese of premodern times affixed the appellation *kunlun* to an expanding array of peoples," but that "the peoples to whom the Chinese of the Tang and Song periods initially affixed the appellation *kunlun* were more or less, especially at the farthest western extremes, exclusively Malaysians."[40]

I disagree with these assessments and believe instead that we have enough evidence to argue that this term was initially used to refer to people around the lower Mekong region and that it continued to be associated with that area, even as the term also came to be used for other purposes. One of the earliest references to *kunlun* comes from the *Treatise on Extraordinary Objects from the Southern Isles* by a man named Wan Zhen 萬震, a work compiled under the state of Wu during the Three Dynasties period (220-280 CE). It states as follows:

> 《南州異物志》曰：扶南國在林邑西三千餘里，自立為王，諸屬皆有官長，及王之左右大臣，皆號為昆侖。
>
> The *Treatise on Marvelous Objects from the Southern Isles* states that "The kingdom of Funan is 3,000 leagues to the west of Linyi. It established itself as overlord and all its vassals have officials in charge. The king's chief ministers are all called *kunlun*."[41]

As for one of those vassals, a lost and undated text called the *Record of Funan* by a certain Zhu Zhi 竺芝 recorded the following:

> 竺芝《扶南記》曰：頓遜國屬扶南國，主名昆侖。

[39] Leonard Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008, 247, note 3.

[40] Don J. Wyatt, *The Blacks of Premodern China* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010), 4 and 35.

[41] Li Fang 李昉, et al., comp., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [Imperial Overview from the Taiping Era], Si Yi bu qi 四夷部七, Nanman er 南蠻二, Funan guo 扶南國.

Zhu Zhi's *Record of Funan* states, "The Dunxun kingdom is a vassal of the kingdom of Funan. Its ruler is called *kunlun*.[42]

The term that is being referred to here is unquestionably *kuruṅ*, a Khmer term meaning "city, town; king, realm."[43] It can be found in pre-Angkorian and Angkorian inscriptions where it is at times preceded by the Khmer term, "*mratāñ*," meaning "lord" and at times is followed by the name of a city/town. Hence, we find the following: Kuruṅ Kṛtajñavana (803 CE),[44] Mratāñ Kuruṅ Bhaktivikrama (934 CE),[45] Mratāñ Kuruṅ Vīrabhaktigarjita(962 CE),[46] Mratāñ Kuruṅ (969 CE),[47] Mratāñ Kuruṅ Vagvāl, (969 CE),[48] and Mratāñ Kuruṅ (1003 CE).[49]

While from these inscriptions it looks like the more accurate term for an official was *mratāñ*, or lord, for whatever reason, it is *kuruṅ* that entered the Chinese language. Further, from its original reference to an official, over time it came to be used as a more general term for people in the lower Mekong region who were different from the neighboring Cham in Linyi. The two Tang dynasty histories, for instance, include the following statements:

自林邑以南，皆卷髮黑身，通號為崑崙。

To the south of Linyi, [the people] all have curly hair and black bodies. They are collectively called "*kunlun*."[50]

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[42] Ibid., Si Yi bu jiu 四夷部九, Nanman si 南蠻四, Dunxun guo 頓遜國.

[43] Philip N. Jenner, *A Dictionary of pre-Angkorian Khmer* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 2009), 54.

[44] The transcriptions of these inscriptions can be found in the multi-volume work compiled by George Cœdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge* (IC). I will cite the inscription identifier and the volume and page number. This one is K.124, IC Vol. III, 172.

[45] K.735, IC Vol. V, 96.

[46] K.181, IC Vol. VI, 140.

[47] K.171, IC Vol. VI, 165.

[48] K.170, IC Vol. I, 145.

[49] K.693B, IC Vol. V, 204.

[50] Liu Xu, *Jiu Tangshu*, Liezhuan 147, Nanman Xinanman, Linyi guo 林邑國.

真臘國，在林邑西北，本扶南之屬國，崑崙之類。

The kingdom of Zhenla is to the northwest of Linyi. It was originally a vassal of Funan and is a type of *kunlun*.[51]

With this new association with "curly hair and black bodies," the term *kunlun* came to be applied to certain other peoples. In the period of the Tang and Song dynasties, "*kunlun* slaves" were brought to China, and some of these were likely of East African origin. As such, the name did come to be used to refer to an "expanding array of peoples," as Wyatt noted. Nonetheless, there is also a central and repeated focus on the area of the lower Mekong region. The above quotes make that clear, however, there are other pieces of evidence that we can point to as well. For instance, the area where the Mekong River flows into the sea came to be referred to as the "Kunlun Ocean" (Kunlun yang 崑崙洋),[52] and in the Yuan and Ming dynasty periods, the name *kunlun* was used to refer to the nearby Côn Sơn island (a.k.a., Pulo Condor). A mid-fourteenth-century text, for instance, recorded the following information about this place which it called "Kunlun":

古者昆侖山又名軍屯山。山高而方，根盤幾百里，截然乎瀛海之中，與占城、西竺鼎峙而相望。下有昆侖洋，因是名也。

It is the old Mount Kunlun, also called Mount Juntun. The mountain is tall and level, with its roots winding about for several hundred leagues. It rises sharply from the sea. Together with Champa and India, it forms the three legs of a tripod facing each other. Below it is the Kunlun Ocean where it gets its name.[53]

In other words, in Chinese sources, there is repeated mention of the term *kunlun* in connection with the lower Mekong region and its coastal area. Therefore, when the *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands* recorded that from Jaba "Crossing the sea [from Jaba] for half a month, one reaches the Kunlun kingdom," the only logical place that this could be referring to is the lower Mekong region. As for the kingdom of Dashi, this is a term that scholars have struggled to identify

[51] Liu Xu, *Jiu Tangshu*, Liezhuan 147, Nanman Xinanman, Zhenla guo 真臘國 [Kingdom of Zhenla].

[52] See the opening passage of Zhou Daguan 周達觀, *Zhenla fengtu ji* 真臘風土記 [Record of the Customs of Zhenla], (Late 13th cent. CE).

[53] Wang Dayuan 汪大淵, *Daoyi zhilue* 島夷誌略校注 [Brief Treatise on the Island Barbarians], (1349 CE).

clearly, as some have seen it as representing the "Arab world" while others have noted that at times it encompasses more than that. Here, I think it is best to simply look at how Zhao Rukuo understood it. In the section on Dashi in his *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands*, Zhao states that,

> 大食，在泉之西北；去泉州最遠，番舶艱於直達。自泉發船四十餘日，至藍里博易，住冬；次年再發，順風六十餘日，方至其國。本國所產，多運載與三佛齊貿易賈轉販以至中國。
>
> Dashi is to the northwest of Quan[zhou]. It is very far from Quanzhou, and barbarian ships have difficulty sailing there directly. Setting sail from Quan[zhou], in over forty days they reach Lanli [i.e., Lamuri on the northern tip of Sumatra] where they engage in trade and wait [until] winter. They then set sail again the following year and with favorable winds, they reach this kingdom in over sixty days.[54]

Zhau Rukuo got this information from an earlier text where this same information is about the journey from Quanzhou to Malabar (Maliba 麻離拔), a place listed in both of these texts as the first of many vassals of Dashi.[55] Nonetheless, rather than attempt to define what exactly Dashi was, as Zhao Rukuo's understanding of it was quite vague, let us take a step back and look at the overall picture that he provided regarding Jaba.

Jaba was a place from which the sea could be reached in four directions. Further, from the point of access to the sea in the east, one could cross the sea in fifteen days and reach the "Kunlun kingdom," an uncommon term but one that could only be referring to the area of the lower Mekong region and its coast. Then from the point of access to the sea in the south, one could cross the sea and in five days reach "Dashi," another problematic term, but one which again we can associate with places from the Malabar coast in India westward.

Is there a place in Southeast Asia that these basic points describe? Yes, there is. It is the area of the Malay Peninsula stretching from Songkhla, Phatthalung, and Sathing Phra in the east

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[54] Zhao Rukuo, *Zhu fan zhi*, Juan shang.

[55] Zhou Qufei 周去非, *Lingwai daida* 嶺外代答 [Representative Responses about Beyond the Passes], (1178 CE), Wangguo men xia 外國門下.

to Trang and Kedah in the west. From Songkhla and Sathing Phra one could cross the sea to reach the lower Mekong region, and from Kedah in the south one could cross the sea to Lamuri where the ships heading to and from Dashi stopped. As for the other two directions, there was a route from Phatthalung to the west through the mountains to Trang, and we will see evidence of that below, although it did not take forty-five days to cross. Meanwhile, the northern access to the sea may have been a reference to a passage through a canal from the Songkhla Sea to the Gulf of Thailand, for as we will see below, there is archaeological evidence of such ancient canals in that general area. Finally, given that the *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands* indicates that Jaba was close to the sea in the east, we argue that it must have been located somewhere along the coast in the Lake Songkhla region, such as around what is now Songkhla and Sathing Phra.

Map 07: The locations of Jaba, Kunlun, and Dashi. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

Zābaj and Harang in Arabic Sources

While the *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands* shows that ships heading to the Malabar coast and beyond departed from the northern tip of Sumatra, it is clear from Arabic sources that traders from that region also called at Kedah. Some of those texts also mention Jaba, which they refer to as "Zābag." One such text is Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī's *Accounts of China and India*. This text was compiled in the years after the Huang Chao Rebellion (874-884), during which time Arab merchants stopped visiting China. Instead, they sailed to Kedah and waited for traders to bring goods from China. Given that Jaba was a journey of just a few days from Kedah, it is not surprising that the most detailed account of that polity in Arabic sources was recorded at this time. Let us look now at what it said.

> The king of al-Zābaj is known as al-Mihrāj [the Maharaja]; it is said that its extent is nine hundred *farsakhs*, although this king also rules over many other islands, and his entire realm is spread over a distance of a thousand *farsakhs* and more. His kingdom includes an island known as Sarbuzah, whose extent is reported to be four hundred farsakhs; also an island known as al-Rāmanī, extending to eight hundred *farsakhs*, which is home to the places where sapan wood, camphor, and other such trees grow. In addition, his kingdom includes the peninsula of Kalah, the halfway point between the lands of China and the land of the Arabs, whose extent is reported to be eighty *farsakhs*.[56]

We see here that Zābaj was essentially an empire as its king claimed authority over various "islands," a term which we need not assume must refer to an actual island but could also refer to a place that is reached from the sea, and thus has the feel of an island. Nonetheless, the fact that Kalah (Kedah) is referred to as a peninsula, suggests that it was connected to Zābaj. As such, the above passage suggests that Zābaj and Kalah were on the same landmass. We know where Kedah is located, but the above passage does not inform us where Zābaj was.

[56] *Two Arabic Travel Books, Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī, Accounts of China and India*, edited and translated by Tim Mackintosh-Smith; *Ahmad Ibn Faḍlān, Mission to the Volga*, edited and translated by James E. Montgomery (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 89.

In another passage, however, we do get a better indication of Zābaj's location. In particular, a section on Cambodia, which Arabs referred to as Qamār, states the following: "Al-Qamār is situated opposite the kingdom of al-Mihrāj and, to be precise, opposite the island known as al-Zābaj; the sailing time to cross the open sea between them is between ten and twenty days, given a moderate wind."[57] This description places Zābaj exactly where we argue it was located, that is, on the eastern side of the Malay Peninsula, in the area of Songkhla and Sathing Phra. Further, the sailing time from Zābaj to Qamār is comparable to the sailing time from Jaba to the Kunlun kingdom as mentioned in the *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands*.

Finally, in another passage, where a story from the past is recounted, we find more information that appears to indicate the area of Songkhla and Sathing Phra. To quote,

> One of the more extraordinary reports that has reached us from this island known as al-Zābaj tells of one of their kings—al-Mihrāj, that is— in days long past. His palace overlooked a *thalāj* leading to the sea, *thalāj* meaning the tidal reach of a river such as the Tigris of Madīnat al-Salām and Basra, which fills with seawater at high tide and through which fresh water trickles out when the tide is low. Connected to this was a small pool, immediately adjoining the royal palace. Every morning, the king's steward would bring an ingot of gold which he had caused to be cast, several maunds in weight (I was not told how many); as the king looked on, the steward would place the ingot in the pool. When the tide came in, the water covered this and the other ingots collected together with it, and submerged them; when the tide went out, the water seeped away and revealed the ingots; they would gleam there in the sunlight, and the king could watch over them when he took his seat in the hall overlooking them.[58]

From this passage, we can see that the word "*thalāj*" is being presented as a foreign word. Initially, I thought that this might be a reference to the first part of the name that is used to refer to Lake Songkhla, *thalee saap* ทะเลสาบ, meaning a lake or inland sea. This is a Mon-Khmer term that later entered Thai. We find this same word in the name of the famous body of water in Cambodia,

[57] Ibid., 91.

[58] Ibid., 89-90.

the Tonle Sap. However, in Semai, a Mon-Khmer language on the Malay Peninsula, this word is pronounced as "*daneng*" and that is quite distant from *thalāj*, which leads me to think that this might not be the word that is referenced.[59] That said, there is a word in Kelantan and Pattani Malay, unique forms of Malay spoken in this central area of the Malay Peninsula, that is close to *thalāj* in both sound and meaning. That word is "*tĕladas*," a word meaning "shallow river-rapids over a sandy bottom."[60] Further, while we can only speculate here, there does seem to be a parallel between Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī's description of a *thalāj* and Zhao Rukuo's comment that to the east of Jaba "the water gradually descends."

The place where Lake Songkhla connects to the sea by what is now the city of Songkhla would appear to be the type of place that these texts are describing. However, there was another place nearby that also fit this description, and that was the area of Sathing Phra. Sathing Phra is a spit of land between the South China Sea and Lake Songkhla. In the 1970s, Archaeologist Janice Stargardt documented the existence of an ancient citadel there as well as the remnants of a network of navigable canals and reservoirs.[61] Perhaps there was some unique feature of this water network in this area that caught the attention of Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī's informant, and which he referred to as a *thalāj*.

[59] See the "Mon-Khmer Etymological Dictionary" at http://sealang.net/monkhmer/database/.

[60] See the "Malay Dictionary" at http://sealang.net/malay/dictionary.htm.

[61] Janice Stargardt, "Man's Impact on the Ancient Environment of the Satingpra Peninsula, South Thailand. I. The Natural Environment and Natural Change," *Journal of Biogeography* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1976): 211-228.

Map 08: Songkhla and Sathing Phra. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

In Arabic sources, two places are mentioned as being close to Jaba, and those are Harang and Salāhiṭ. In 1165 CE, for instance, Idrīsī recorded that "After this island [i.e., Kedah] are those of Jāba, Salāhiṭ and Harang. Each one is separated from its neighbors by about two parasangs. They all have the same king."[62] Ibn Rusta, meanwhile, writing around 900 CE, claimed that Harang was the name of the governor of that island, not of the island itself.[63] It is unclear if these details are true, however, it is significant that in Chinese sources, Jaba is associated with a place called "Heling" 訶陵, a name that resembles Harang. In particular, the *New History of the Tang* claims that Heling was also called "Jaba" (Shepo 闍婆), thereby implying that they were the same place.[64] However, it seems more likely the case that Heling was a polity that was nearby to Jaba, as Harang was to Zābaj in Arabic sources. If we look at where these names appear in accounts of itineraries through the region, we can see that they were in fact in the same area, and that was the region around Lake Songkhla.

[62] Tibbetts, 53. See also pages 28 and 41.

[63] Ibid., 53.

[64] Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *Xin Tangshu*, Liezhuan 147 xia, Nanman xia, Heling 訶陵.

Jaba and Heling in Chinese Itineraries

The *New History of the Tang* records one such itinerary, a route from Piao 驃, or what is commonly known as the Pyu kingdom in what is now Myanmar, to Jaba. That text records that the Pyu kingdom had eighteen tributaries, the last of which was Jaba. The route to Jaba began from a place called "Modibo" 磨地勃, a name which some scholars have claimed could be a reference to Martaban (Moke Ta Ma). This text then recorded that one first traveled by sea for five months until reaching the polity of Fodai (fhut-thay 佛代).[65] This number cannot be correct for three reasons. First, a five-month voyage from the southern coast of Myanmar would have taken a ship into the Pacific Ocean. Second, this is also one of the Pyu kingdom's vassals and it is highly unlikely that any premodern kingdom could have maintained control over a polity so far away. Third, as we will see below, the route being described clearly ends up in the area of Lake Songkhla.

From Fodai, one could then travel to Jaba, and this is how the *New History of the Tang* describes that leg of the journey:

> 越海即闍婆也。十五日行，踰二大山，一曰正迷，一曰射鞮，有國，其王名思利摩訶羅闍，俗與佛代同。經多茸補邏，川至闍婆，八日行至婆賄伽盧國，土熱，衢路植椰子、檳榔，仰不見日。王居以金為甓，廚覆銀瓦，爨香木，堂飾明珠。有二池，以金為隄，舟楫皆飾金寶。
>
> Crossing the sea, you are at Jaba. After then traveling for fifteen days, and crossing two mountains, one called "Zhengmi" [*tsiajng-mjiaj* 正迷] and the other called "Shedi" [*shia-tiaj* 射鞮], there is the kingdom. The king is called Sili Moheluoshe [Sri Maharaja 思利摩訶羅闍]. The customs are the same as in Fodai. Passing Duorongpuluo [Ta-rywng-pura 多茸補邏], a river reaches Jaba. After traveling for eight days, you reach the polity of Pohuijialu [Ba-xuaj-kya-lyə 婆賄伽盧].
>
> The land is hot. Coconut and betel nut trees are planted along the route. Looking up, you do not see the sun. The king's residence has gold tiles. Cooking materials

[65] Ouyang Xiu and Song , *Xin Tangshu*, Liezhuan 147 xia 下, Nanman xia 南蠻下, Piao 驃.

> are made of silver and porcelain. Ovens use fragrant wood. The chambers are ornamented with pearls. There are two pools with gold embankments. The boats and oars are all ornamented with gold and jewels.[66]

Similar to what we saw Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī state above, Jaba is described here as both a polity, which this text indicated was called Pohuijialu, and an empire. Both texts also state that the ruler was called the Sri Maharaja, and both texts also mention gold ingots/tiles when talking about the Sri Maharaja's residence.

To reach the polity of Jaba itself, one had to travel overland from the coast, and coming from Myanmar, that would be traveling eastward from the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. In doing so, one had to pass two mountains. There is a mountain range that runs from north to south between Trang in the west and Phatthalung in the east that contains an opening where one could pass through, with a mountain on each side. According to the itinerary, after passing the two mountains, one reached a place called "Duorongpuluo," or what I argue could be a combination of a local placename, which in reconstructed early Chinese could be something like "*ta-rywng*," with the Sanskrit term for a walled settlement, "*pura*," for "Ta-rywng-pura." This same name can also be found in an early-nineteenth-century text that was compiled by Vietnamese who traveled down the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula to Songkhla and then journeyed overland to Kedah. Along the way, they recorded information about a nearby place they referred to as "Ta Lung" and indicated that it could be reached by traveling up a river on the western side of Lake Songkhla.[67] This, I would argue, is precisely the route that this Tang-era itinerary is describing, but from the other direction. This would, therefore, place Jaba somewhere in the Lake Songkhla region.

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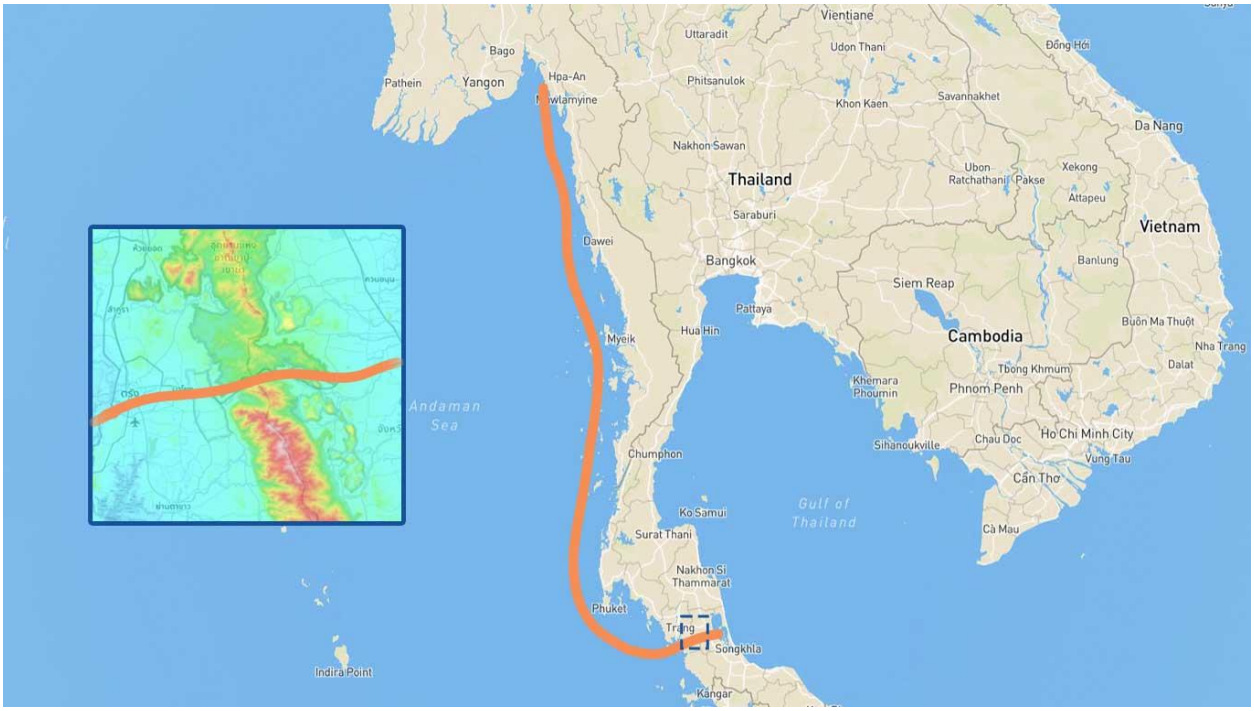
[66] Ibid.

[67] Chen Jinghe 陳荊和, comp., *Xiêm La quốc lộ trình tạp lục* 暹羅國路程集錄 [Collected Records of the Routes in the Kingdom of Siam] (Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhong wen da xue Xin Ya shu yuan yan jiu suo Dong nan Ya yan jiu shi 香港中文大學新亞書院研究所東南亞研究室, 1966), 87 and *Xiêm La quốc lộ trình tạp lục* [Collected Records of the Routes in the Kingdom of Siam], *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu và Phát triển* [Journal of Research and Development] No. 8, Issue 106 (2013): 70.



Map 09: The itinerary from the Pyu kingdom to Jaba. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap and the Malay Peninsula Topographic Map.[68]

A more well-known itinerary is one that was recorded by Tang dynasty scholar-official Jia Dan 賈耽 (730-805 CE). This itinerary was written about by French scholar Paul Pelliot over a century ago and scholars have relied on that study for an understanding of the region ever since.[69] That said, my reading of Jia Dan's itinerary differs from Pelliot's and those of subsequent scholars, so let us take another look.

> 廣州東南海行，二百里至屯門山，乃帆風西行，二日至九州石。又南二日至象石。又西南三日行，至占不勞山，山在環王國東二百里海中。又南二日行至陵山。又一日行，至門毒國。又一日行，至古笪國。又半日行，至奔陀浪洲。又兩日行，到軍突弄山。
>
> From Guangzhou you cross the seas to the southeast for 200 leagues until you reach Outpost Gate Mountain [Tunmen shan 屯門山]. Then you sail with the

[68] https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/map-4hsv1h/Malay-Peninsula/?center=6.92588%2C101.20909&zoom=10. Accessed 16 April 2023.

[69] Paul Pelliot, "Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde à la fin du VIIIe siècle," 131-413.

winds to the west until after two days you reach Nine Islet Crag [Jiuzhou shi 九州石]. After another two days to the south, you reach Elephant Rock [Xiang shi 象石]. Then after traveling three more days to the southwest, you reach Mount Zhanbulao [占 Zhanbulao shan 不勞山; Cu Lao Cham]. This mountain is in the middle of the sea, 200 leagues to the east of the Huanwang kingdom [Huanwang guo 環王國; Champa].

Then after a two-day journey to the south, you reach Mount Ling [Ling shan 陵山]. After another day's journey, you reach the Mendu kingdom [Mendu guo 門毒國]. After another day's journey, you reach the Guda kingdom [Guda guo 古笪國]. Half a day later you reach Bentuolang islet [Bentuolang zhou 奔陀浪洲; Panduranga], and after two more day's journey, you reach Mount Juntunong [Juntunong shan 軍突弄山; Côn Đảo].[70]

It is important to note that Jia Dan did not make this journey himself. Instead, he collected this information from others. Nonetheless, the information here is very clear. It documents the itinerary from Guangzhou to Mount Juntunong. This was the same place as Mount Juntun, mentioned above, a place associated with the name "Kunlun." Further, from the information in this itinerary, we can see that it precisely indicates the location of Côn Đảo island.

From this point close to the southern end of the Indochinese Peninsula, Jia Dan's itinerary continued as follows:

又五日行至海硤，蕃人謂之「質」，南北百里，北岸則羅越國，南岸則佛逝國。

After five days you reach a sea pass. The barbarians call this "*zhi*." From south to north it is one hundred leagues. On the northern coast is the kingdom of Luoyue, while on the southern coast is the kingdom of Foshi.[71]

---

[70] Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *Xin Tangshu*, Zhi 志第 33 xia 下, Dili 地理 7 xia 下, Jimi zhou 羈縻州, Lingnan dao 嶺南道, Zhu man 諸蠻, Fengzhou dudufu 峯州都督府.

[71] Ibid.

The scholars who have written about this itinerary have assumed that from Côn Đảo, the route went directly south to somewhere around Singapore and then on to Foshi, which they associate with the supposed kingdom of Srivijaya at Palembang. However, this itinerary does not indicate that one head directly south from Côn Đảo. It simply says that you travel for five days and reach a sea pass. If it was understood that one was to proceed along the coast, as I argue was the norm, let us see where that may have led.

Jia Dan recorded that "After five days you reach a sea pass." I deliberately translated the term here, *haixia* 海硤, as "sea pass" because the second character, *xia* 硤, is usually employed to describe a "pass" between mountains, and we will see a reference to such a pass below. When that term is preceded by the character for sea, *hai* 海, it can then mean a "strait," but ultimately it just refers to a passage between two higher pieces of land.

If one were to sail for five days westward from Côn Đảo parallel to the coast across the Gulf of Thailand, is there any "sea pass" that one might encounter? Yes, there is. It is the place that was recorded in the itinerary of Chang Jun's journey to Chitu as the "Master and Disciple Stones," that is, what I argue is a reference to the two islands of Ko Pha Ngan and Koh Samui off the coast of what is now Surat Thani and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces. According to this account, the locals called the passage between these two islands "*zhi*" 質. We can only speculate, however, Pulleyblank's historical reconstruction of "*tri*" for this term and the proto-Monic word for a "gully," *jrɔh*, point to a possible connection.

Jia Dan's account then mentions a long coast that stretched for 100 leagues from south to north, in the north was a kingdom called Luoyue 羅越 (not to be confused with the Luoyue 駱越 that refers to a people in what is now southern China in antiquity, a.k.a. the Lạc Việt), while in the south was Foshi, the name of the kingdom that Tang dynasty monk Yijing passed through, and which we have argued was in or near the area of what is now Surat Thani province. According to Pulleyblank, the name of the kingdom to the north along the same coastline, Luoyue, might have been pronounced something like *la wuat*. That gets us very close to Lavo, the name of an important Mon kingdom at this time which was based in the area of the Chao Phraya River valley, but which likely controlled areas down the Malay Peninsula as well.

To continue with Jia Dan's itinerary, the next stage was as follows:

佛逝國東水行四五日，至訶陵國，南中洲之最大者。

Sailing to the east of the kingdom of Foshi for four or five days you then reach the kingdom of Heling, the greatest island in the south.[72]

Here, again, this account fits perfectly with my argument that this itinerary was following the coast as well as my argument that Heling was located somewhere around the coast by the Songkhla Sea. For the scholars who have tried to argue that Foshi was located at Palembang, this is where this text starts to fail them, as it does not make sense to sail eastward from Palembang if one is attempting to reach India. The information that follows likewise makes the Palembang argument untenable.

Continuing the journey still further, Jia Dan recorded the following information.

又西出磖，三日至葛葛僧祇國，在佛逝西北隅之別島，國人多鈔暴，乘舶者畏憚之。其北岸則箇羅國。箇羅西則哥谷羅國。

To the west, a mountain pass emerges. In three days, you reach the kingdom of Gegesengzhi. This is a separate island in the northwest corner of Foshi. The people there often rob others. Passengers on ships fear them. On its northern shore is the kingdom of Geluo. To the west of Geluo is the kingdom of Geguluo.[73]

This detail about a mountain pass emerging has been overlooked by scholars. However, it is a very important detail. From Heling, this itinerary went westward. Jia Dan does not indicate how long one proceeded in that direction, but at some point, a mountain pass emerged, and then in three days a place called Gegesengzhi was reached. As we just saw, the itinerary from the Pyu kingdom to Jaba appears to have crossed through the mountain pass to the west of what is now Phatthalung. We argue here that Jia Dan recorded the same route from the other direction.

One way to see this is by looking at the places that he mentioned next. These were Gegesengzhi 葛葛僧祇, Geluo 箇羅, and Geguluo 哥谷羅. Following my theory that words that

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

sound the same but are written with different characters are the same word, I would argue that although the "*ge*" at the beginning of each of these names is written with a different character, it is referring to the same word, namely, the Mon word for "island." On the western side of the Malay Peninsula in what is now southern Thailand are placenames like Ko Libong, Ko Lanta, Ko Pu, Ko Yao Yai, and many other "*ko*" locations. All these placenames begin with the Mon word for island, "*kɔ*," and that, I argue, is clearly what the names Jia Dan recorded indicated with their repeated use of characters that represent the sound "*ge*" (EC, *ka*^{h}).

Map 10: Placenames beginning with "ko" on the west side of the Malay Peninsula. Source: Author, based on © Google Earth.

From Gegesengzhi, Jia Dan mentioned a few more places before one reached the island of Sri Lanka. To quote,

> 又從葛葛僧祇四五日行，至勝鄧洲。又西五日行，至婆露國。又六日行，至婆國伽藍洲。又北四日行，至師子國，其北海岸距南天竺大岸百里。
>
> Traveling four or five days from Gegesengzhi, you reach Shengdeng island. Then you go to the west for five days to the Polu kingdom, and another six days to the Po kingdom's Jialan island. Then you go north for four days and reach the Lion

kingdom [Shizi guo 師子國, i.e., Simhala]. Its northern coast is separated from the great coast of southern India by 100 leagues.[74]

The Polu 婆露 kingdom here is likely indicating Barus, on the west coast of Sumatra. This is the place we have seen referred to as Poli, as well as Poluo and Boli. There were still other variants of this name, such as Polou 婆婁, and Polü 婆律.

Map 11: The itinerary through Southeast Asia recorded by Jia Dan. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

Heling

From the itinerary recorded by Jia Dan, I would argue that it is possible to place Heling somewhere in the Lake Songkhla region, and there are other references to Heling in Chinese historical sources that can place it in that general area as well. The most detailed description of its location can be

[74] Ibid.

found in the two Tang dynasty histories. The *Old History of the Tang*, for instance, states the following:

> 訶陵國，在南方海中洲上居，東與婆利、西與墮婆登、北與真臘接，南臨大海。
>
> The kingdom of Heling is situated on an island in the south in the middle of the sea. It connects with Poli to the east, Duopodeng to the west, and Zhenla to the north. To the south, it faces a great sea.[75]

We argued above that Poli was likely Barus, on the west coast of Sumatra. As such, the statement here that Heling connected with Poli "to the east" requires explanation. Before we do so, however, let us first examine Duopodeng, as that is a placename that we have not yet discussed. Here is what the same text records about that polity:

> 墮婆登國，在林邑南，海行二月，東與訶陵、西與迷黎車接，北界大海。風俗與訶陵略同。
>
> The polity of Duopodeng is two months by sea to the south of Linyi. To the east is Heling, to the west it reaches Miliche [or Miliju], and to the north, it borders a large sea. Its customs are roughly the same as those of Heling.[76]

Sailing two months from Linyi could allow one to reach somewhere around Kedah. Following my idea that Heling was somewhere in the area of Songkhla Lake, Duopodeng could have been on the western side of the Malay Peninsula, accessible by the overland route through the mountain pass to the west of Phatthalung, and Miliche could have been at a place like what is now Ko Lanta, further to the west. To the north of this area is the Andaman Sea, which could be the "large sea" referenced above.

Returning now to this issue of Heling connecting "with Poli to the east," I think what the above passage is indicating are places that can be reached by traveling in different directions. What is more, these directions were not strictly geographic. Yes, Zhenla was more or less "to the north"

[75] Liu Xu, *Jiu Tangshu*, Liezhuan 147, Nanman Xinanman, Heling guo 訶陵國.

[76] Liu Xu, *Jiu Tangshu*, Liezhuan 147, Nanman Xinanman, Duopodeng guo 墮婆登國.

of Lake Songkhla, but you got there by first sailing to the northwest up the coast of the Malay Peninsula. Similarly, to get to Poli, you had to sail to the southeast along the coast of that same peninsula. As such, the "north" and "east" here had more of a navigational sense of "go left" and "go right" from Heling. Finally, the mention of Heling facing a "large sea" to its south would again fit with the idea that it was located somewhere around Sathing Phra, or perhaps further north, facing the Songkhla Sea.

Turning to some other references, we find mention in a Song dynasty encyclopedia of Heling presenting tribute during the Tang Dynasty period together with Fozhe 佛哲 (a variant of Foshi) and Luoyue.[77] These two kingdoms were mentioned in Jia Dan's itinerary just before reaching Heling, and we placed them on the western edge of the Gulf of Thailand, an area close to Lake Songkhla. In other sources, one gets the sense that there were many polities near Heling, and this again fits the environment of Lake Songkhla where the combination of abundant water, in the form of lakes, rivers, and seas, and territory connecting this water world, would have provided a fertile setting for human settlements.

Such a world is what Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī recorded in the late ninth century about Zābaj, the kingdom which he stated was very close to Harang, two placenames that I argue are rendered in Chinese sources as Jaba and Heling, respectively. To quote,

> A trustworthy informant reported that, when the cocks of al-Zābaj crow at daybreak to announce the time as they do in our lands, they answer one another over a distance of a hundred farsakhs and more, relaying the call one to another, so continuous are the villages and so regularly dispersed. He reported, too, that there are no barren areas on the island, nor any signs of dilapidation. He also said that when anyone traveling around their land sets out on his mount, he goes as far as he pleases, but if he gets bored or his mount tires, he can break his journey wherever he wishes.[78]

[77] Wang Qinruo 王欽若 et al., comp., *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 [Primary (divination) Tortoise of the Records Office], (1013 CE), Juan 卷 169.

[78] *Two Arabic Travel Books*, 89.

If we look now at a Chinese encyclopedia that was compiled roughly a century before Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī recorded the above information, we find Heling mentioned in proximity to several other kingdoms. In an account of a kingdom called Duomochang, this text states the following:

> 多摩長國居於海島，東與婆鳳、西與多隆、南與羊支跋〔華言五山也〕、北與訶陵等國接。其國界東西可一月行，南北可二十五日行。
>
> The kingdom of Duomochang [Ta-mua-trhiaŋ 多摩長] is located in the sea islands. It connects with kingdoms such as Pofeng [Phua-fuwŋ 婆鳳] to the east, Duolong [Ta-liwŋ 多隆] to the west, Yangzhiba [Jianŋ-tʂi-phuat 羊支跋] (called Wushan in Chinese) to the south, and Heling to the north. Its kingdom's borders are a month's journey from east to west and about twenty-five days from south to north.[79]

There is one name that we have seen before, and that is Duolong/Ta-liwŋ. This appears to be the same "Ta-rywng"-pura that was mentioned in the itinerary from the Pyu kingdom to Jaba, and which Vietnamese travelers mentioned in the early nineteenth century. Further, it is located here precisely where we would expect it to be. Following my argument that this is a description of places around Lake Songkhla, it fits that Heling would be somewhere to the north and Duolong/Ta-liwŋ/Ta-rywng would be to the west. As for the other placenames, it is not clear where they were. However, again, we see reference to travel times across Duomochang, and that makes sense because this part of the Malay Peninsula stretching from Sathing Phra and Songkhla in the east to Trang and Kedah in the west was precisely a region that was traversed by travelers and traders. Indeed, most Tang dynasty ceramics that have been found in Southeast Asia are from both sides of the Malay Peninsula in precisely this area.[80] That is a sign that this is a place where ships were stopping and moving goods over lakes, rivers, and land, and Heling was a key site in this trans-peninsular network.

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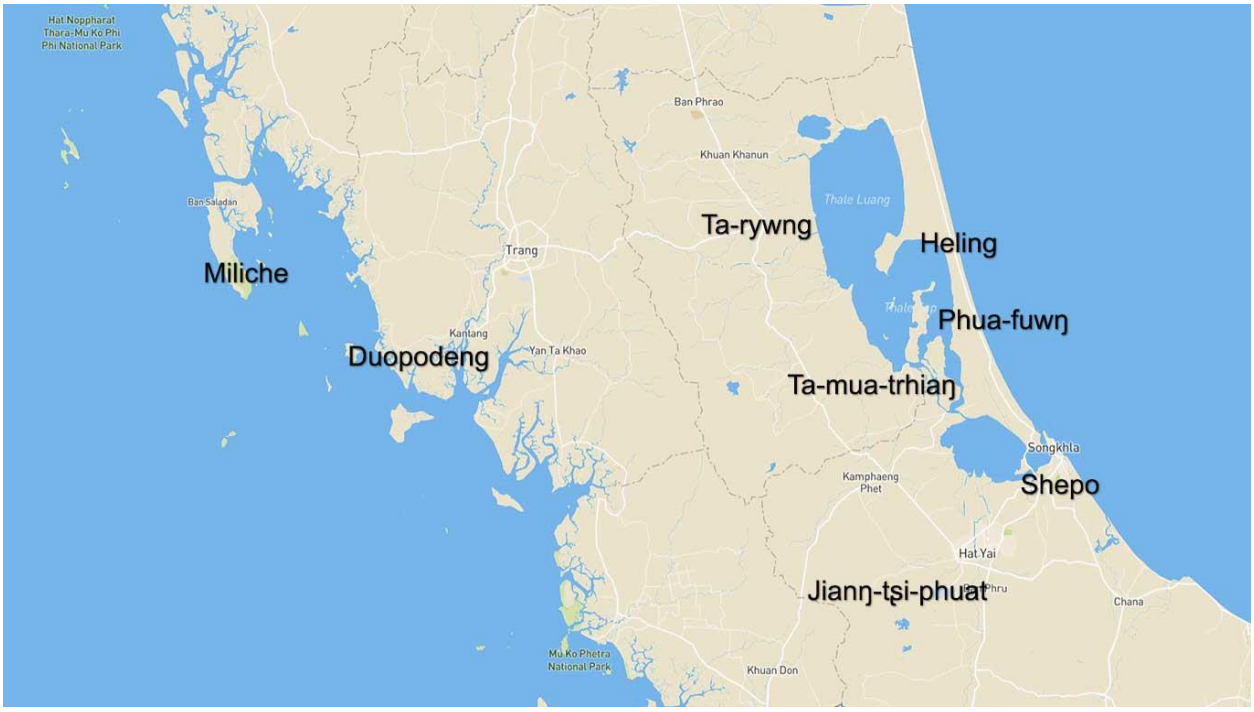
[79] Du You 杜佑, *Tongdian* 通典 [Comprehensive Statutes] (801 CE), Juan 卷 188.

[80] Derek Heng, "The Tang Shipwreck and the Nature of China's Maritime Trade during the Late Tang Period," in *The Tang Shipwreck*, edited by Alan Chong and Stephen A. Murphy (Singapore: Asian Civilizations Museum, 2017), 151.



Map 12: Speculative locations of polities around Lake Songkhla. Source: Author, based on © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap.

Sujidan and Zhuawa

It is also in this world that this place called Jaba was located. However, where exactly was it? This is difficult to determine because, among other issues, it appears that Jaba was a name that was only used by foreigners. We saw above that the *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands* indicates that Jaba was also called Pujialong (phuə-kja-lynŋ 莆家龍), while the Tang-era itinerary from the Pyu kingdom to Jaba implied that its center of power was called Pohuijialu (Ba-xuaj-kya-lyə 婆賄伽盧). These could be the same name, and that name is different from the Jaba and Zābag that we find in Chinese and Arabic sources, respectively.

What I suspect is that Jaba was not the actual name of a kingdom. Instead, it is a name that foreigners used to refer to a political center that claimed multiple other polities as its vassals. Further, that name may have been based on the Sheposhada/Dzia-ba-ʂai-dat that we saw in the early *History of the (Liu) Song*. In this sense, the name "Jaba" could have served a similar function

as the later term for what is now areas in Thailand, that is, "Siam," or "Xian" in Chinese. Foreign peoples used that term to refer to a political center in the Chaophraya River plain that claimed suzerainty over other polities whereas that same political center was known to the members of its elite by other names, such as Nakhon Sri Ayutthaya. What is more, in the case of Siam, we know that the political center moved in the late eighteenth century from Ayutthaya to Bangkok as a new dynasty was established following the Burmese destruction of Ayutthaya, and yet, foreigners continued to use the same name, Siam/Xian, to refer to those different kingdoms.

As such, it is highly possible that in the crowded world around Lake Songkhla, different polities may have been recognized as "Jaba" by foreigners at different times and we simply do not have the historical evidence to document this. Nonetheless, what I think the information provided above demonstrates is that this Jaba was indeed located in that region and was not a reference to the island of Java. However, when we get to the thirteenth century, the island of Java does begin to appear in Chinese sources, and as it does so, it is obvious that the information that gets reported is new information about places Chinese were not previously familiar with.

For instance, Zhao Rukuo's early-thirteenth-century *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands*, the same text that provides the most detailed description of Jaba's location, contains an account of a place called "Sujidan" 蘇吉丹 that was clearly a place on the island of Java. Here is how it is described:

> 蘇吉丹，即闍婆之支國；西接新拖，東連打板。有山峻極，名保老岸。番舶未到，先見此山。頂聳五峰，時有雲覆其上。
>
> Sujidan is a branch kingdom of Jaba. To the west, it connects with Xintuo, and to the east it joins Daban. There is a mountain that rises sharply up and is called Baolao Crag [Baolao'an]. Before barbarian ships reach here, they first see this mountain. From the mountain top rise up five peaks, and at times there are clouds that cover it.[81]

[81] Zhao Rukuo, *Zhu fan zhi*, Juan shang.

As far as I can tell, this is the only time that Sujidan is mentioned in Chinese sources, other than in later works that get their information from the *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands*. This is also the only time that I have found the expression "branch kingdom" (*zhiguo* 支國) ever used. And this is also the first time that Xintuo and Daban are mentioned, however, they do get referenced in later texts where they are written with different characters. Scholars have argued that Xintuo is Sunda and Daban is a place on the northern coast of Java called Tuban. Finally, I created the image below based on height maps generated from satellite imagery that I then modeled in Unreal Engine to show that as one approached the northwestern coast of the island of Java, the mountains there did appear to have five peaks.

Image 01: A view of northwest Java from the sea. Source: Author, based on Alos Palsar satellite imagery and modeled in Unreal Engine.

As such, this description of Sujidan does indeed appear to indicate a place on the island of Java. However, given that all the information here was new, how did Zhao Rukuo know that this was a "branch kingdom" of Jaba, whatever that word meant? We can see where he got that idea. In a passage where he talks about the coins that are used in Sujidan by traders, he notes that they are collectively called "Jaba gold" (Shepo jin 闍婆金). Zhao Rukuo then writes, "Here we can see

that this kingdom is none other than Jaba."[82] In other words, Zhao Rukuo, who did not travel to the region but compiled his work based on information in earlier texts and interviews with mariners, did not know what Sujidan was until he saw that the coins used there were called "Jaba gold." He then equated this place with a name that had long been mentioned in Chinese texts, Jaba.

In Zhao Rukuo's *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands*, numerous other places are mentioned for the first time. These include Palembang (Balinfeng 巴林馮), Jambi (Jianbi 監篦), and Muluku (Wunugu 勿奴孤). Zhao Rukuo records further that to the east of Daban/Tuban was a place called "Great Jaba" (Da Shepo 大闍婆), also called Rongyalu 戎牙路, still more new names. Having stated that Sujidan was a "branch kingdom" of Jaba, Zhao Rukuo did not explain how this "Great Jaba" was related. However, if we consider that the term "Java" had long been used on the island and can be found on stone inscriptions, and that to the east of Tuban was a powerful kingdom, Kediri, it is perhaps the case that a mariner had learned of this "Great Java" and Zhao Rukuo had recorded it as "Great Jaba." The coins used in Sujidan were probably also referred to as "Java" gold, but Zhao Rukuo likewise rendered that as "Jaba" gold.

What we see here is that for the first time since the perhaps fifth century, new information about the island of Java started to appear in a Chinese source. Further, in the *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands*, we can see that Zhao Rukuo struggled to make sense of this new information and equated it with a place that had long been mentioned in Chinese sources, Jaba. However, by the following century, Chinese had become much more familiar with the island of Java and began to use a different term to refer to it, "Zhuawa" 爪哇. This came about as there was increased contact between the Chinese and Javanese. In the late thirteenth century, the Mongol Yuan dynasty attacked the successor to the Kediri kingdom, the kingdom of Singasari, and there were Chinese who traveled to this area and recorded information about it as well.

One such person was a man named Wang Dayuan 汪大淵 (1311-1350 CE) who made two voyages to the region and compiled a book in 1349 about the places he visited and learned of. In this text, Wang Dayuan did not have an entry on Jaba, although as we will see below, a polity by that name did still exist at that time. However, he did have an entry on Zhuawa where he stated

[82] Zhao Rukuo, *Zhu fan zhi*, Juan shang. The quoted text is 可見此國即闍婆也.

that "this was the old kingdom of Jaba."[83] So, in other words, whereas in the previous century, Zhao Rukuo had claimed that Sujidan, a place on the island of Java, was a "branch kingdom" of Jaba, Wang Dayuan now claimed that Zhuawa was a kingdom that had replaced an earlier kingdom called Jaba. In fact, however, Jaba and Zhuawa were two separate places. As the abundant evidence presented above demonstrates, Jaba was a place on the Malay Peninsula. The place that Chinese came to refer to in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as Zhuawa was the island of Java.

This confusion that we find in Chinese sources can also be found in the writings from this period of other people as well. In the late 1200s, for instance, Marco Polo recorded the existence of a "Java Major" and a "Java Minor" while in the following century, Ibn Battuta mentioned a "Java" and a "mul-Java." Finally, the existence of two places with the same name in this period is also precisely the issue that the compilers of the *History of the Ming* could not resolve, as we saw in the opening passage of this paper. So, how do we explain the existence of these two polities with similar-sounding names at this time? Perhaps the best way to explain this is to step back and attempt to synthesize the information in this paper into a framework for understanding the past.

A New Framework for Early Southeast Asian History

In the early fifth century, Buddhist monk Faxian stopped at a place in Southeast Asia called Javadvīpa, "the island of Java." A few decades later, a kingdom called Heloudan, perhaps meaning "kraton," that administered an island of "Jaba" sent tribute to the Chinse court. That kingdom is last mentioned briefly in the account of Chang Jun's trip to Chitu in 607 CE. The information in that account provides some support for the idea that Heluodan was on the island of Java. However, with its disappearance from Chinese sources, we get no further mention of not only the island of Java, but also its environs, until the early thirteenth century. What happened in those intervening years?

We get a clue from the references to Shilifoshi that the Tang dynasty monk, Yijing, made in the seventh century, the same century that Heluodan disappeared from Chinese sources. While it is clear that Shilifoshi was located in or near the area of what is now Surat Thani province, Yijing

[83] Wang Dayuan, *Daoyi zhilue*. The quoted text is 即古闍婆國.

indicated that it started to lay claim to far-off polities such as Kedah and Moluoyu. That a polity on one side of the Malay Peninsula had a presence on the other side is a phenomenon that was quite common, as we have seen. Nonetheless, the places that Shilifoshi claimed authority over were quite distant, and this suggests that some element of force or conquest was likely involved.

Yijing made these comments upon his return journey in 687 CE. Interestingly, we have evidence of such attempts to conquer other lands from the previous year, 686 CE, in the form of a famous historical record known as the Kota Kapur inscription. This inscription was found on the island of Banka off the southeastern coast of Sumatra and was made on behalf of a kedatuan, the Malay equivalent of a kraton, of "Srivijaya." Further, there is mention in this inscription of a planned attack on Java. French scholar George Cœdès famously claimed that this Srivijaya was a polity on the island of Sumatra at Palembang. However, as we have seen in this paper, Palembang did not appear in Chinese sources until the thirteenth century, right as the island of Java started to get mentioned again. While Chinese sources certainly do not tell us the entire history of the region, I would argue that the interpretations of the sources that have been presented in this paper can help us resolve certain issues that have long perplexed scholars, such as the location of Srivijaya.

In addition to the Kota Kapur inscription, there is another inscription that mentions Srivijaya, as well as a dynastic line called the Shailendra that dates from 775 CE and was found near Nakhon Si Thammarat in what is now Thailand, not far from where I argue Shilifoshi was located. That inscription is known as the Ligor inscription. Additionally, there is also mention of a Srivijaya, sometimes written as Srivishaya, in inscriptions from South India that were made at the time that the Chola kingdom attacked the region in the early eleventh century.

Scholars have generally followed Cœdès in believing that Srivijaya was based in southern Sumatra and that the Ligor inscription is an indication of its northward influence. By contrast, I would argue that the new interpretations of Chinese historical materials in this paper make it much more likely that the reverse was the case. The Kota Kapur inscription represents the southward influence of a place called Srivijaya, with the planned attack on Java showing an intent to expand that influence still further. What is more, the fact that Heluodan, the one place that we can possibly identify with the island of Java in early Chinese sources, disappears from those sources at roughly this same time is perhaps an indication that the attack went as planned.

So, does this mean that Shilifoshi was Srivijaya? I do not think so, in part because the Kota Kapur inscription is in Old Malay and I would argue that Shilifoshi was located in a region that was probably inhabited by people who spoke a Mon-Khmer language. Some other points to consider here are the fact that inscriptions start to appear on Java and southern Sumatra around this period that are also in Old Malay.[84] In addition, there is evidence from the eighth century, again in the form of an inscription in Old Malay, of a kingdom on Java under a dynastic line known as the Shailendra, the same name that is on the Ligor inscription. This suggests to me an expansion towards Java of people from somewhere else, people who spoke or employed Old Malay.

Finally, when the Chola attacked the region, they conquered a place called "Srivijaya/Srivishaya" from where a Shailendra family line ruled, as well as other places that were all around the Malay Peninsula in the general region stretching from Sathing Phra and Songkla in the east to Trang and Kedah in the west, including Malaiyur (not the Moluoyu Yijing visited) and Langkasuka.[85] This is the very same region that we have seen mentioned over and over in the discussion above about the kingdom/empire of Jaba/Zābag. Further, it is the same general region where the Ligor inscription was found as well.

This leads me to suspect that Srivijaya was located in this region, but what exactly was it? The term, "*vijaya*/*vishaya*," indicated an administrative district. By adding the honorific, "*sri*" to that mundane name, I believe that the term that was created, "Srivijaya/Srivishaya," could have meant something like the "Honored District," and by extension, the "Royal District." It strikes me as sensible that the capital of Jaba/Zābag, the place that we have seen associated with gold in Arabic and Chinese sources and which the Chola also mentioned was "overflown with large heap of treasures," could have been referred to by members of its ruling family as "Srivijaya/Srivishaya," that is, the "Royal District."[86]

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[84] Arlo Griffiths, "The Corpus of Inscriptions in the Old Malay Language," in *Writing for Eternity: A Survey of Epigraphy in Southeast Asia*, edited by Daniel Perret (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2018), 281-82.

[85] Noboru Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu, "Ancient and Medieval Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions Relating to Southeast Asia and China," in *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia*, edited by Herman Kulke, K. Kesavapany, and Vijay Sakhula (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 280.

[86] Ibid.

While that is speculation, what is clear is that during the period of the Tang and Song Dynasties (7th-13th cents. CE), there were two great powers in Southeast Asia, Jaba and Sanfoqi 三佛齊. This latter name, as I have explained elsewhere, was, like the name "Chitu," a name that combined both sound and meaning and referred to "Kambuja," which at that time, was what we refer to as the Angkorian empire.[87] As one twelfth-century source stated,

> 諾蕃國之富盛多寶貨者，莫如大食國，其次闍婆國，其次三佛齊國，其次乃諸國耳。，不知其幾萬里矣。
>
> As for the wealth and prosperity and abundance of treasure of the barbarian kingdoms, there are none like the kingdom of Dashi, followed by the kingdom of Jaba, followed by the kingdom of Sanfoqi, followed by all the others.[88]

As we saw above, the account of Jaba in the thirteenth-century *Treatise on the Various Barbarian Lands* made a similar point in indicating that the two main places that could be reached from Jaba were Dashi and the Kunlun kingdom, a name that I argue refers to the lower Mekong region, including Angkor, and its coast. The reason why these two places in Southeast Asia were so important is, I would argue, because they were more than coastal trading ports. These are the only two places in Southeast Asia where you have large inland bodies of water and rivers that are connected to coasts. In Sanfoqi/Kambuja, you had the Tonle Sap, the Mekong, and other rivers connecting to the coast, whereas in Jaba you had Lake Songkhla, various rivers, and coasts on both sides of the peninsula. In an age when travel by water was more convenient and effective than travel by land, both of these empires had control of extensive water networks that gave them access to distant territories.

Further, both Jaba and Sanfoqi lay on the route that connected Dashi, which we can think of here in general terms as referring to everything to the west of Southeast Asia, and China. Their position and the geographic resources that they benefited from served them well for many centuries, during which time Jaba may have sought to extend its influence to the island of Java, leaving behind the Kota Kapur and other inscriptions in the process. The prosperity of these empires was

[87] Liam C. Kelley, "Rescuing History from Srivijaya," 81-82.

[88] Zhou Qufei, *Lingwai daida*, Hanghai waiyi 航海外夷.

also a source of envy. Jaba and Sanfoqi/Kambuja had a long-running feud, and the Chola invaded the area controlled by Jaba in the eleventh century.

While the Chola attack must have weakened Jaba, there were other developments that led to not only its downfall but that of Sanfoqi/Kambuja as well. I have a theory that the sudden appearance in Chinese sources of places on and around the island of Java in the thirteenth century coincided with the arrival at the Chinese court of spices, such as nutmeg and cloves, that come from the Spice Islands of what is now eastern Indonesia. Those spices were initially delivered through Jaba and Sanfoqi, but by the thirteenth century, Chinese merchants were starting to venture into that region, and that is why information about Java and other islands started to be recorded in Chinese sources.

In other words, at least two centuries before Westerners "discovered" the Spice Islands, the Chinese did the same. And as was the case with the Western intrusion into those lands, Chinese involvement also may have involved force and violence. In the late thirteenth century, the Mongols invaded Java and I suspect that this was related to the spice trade, and more specifically, was perhaps an effort to control trade routes. Whatever the intent, following that conflict a new kingdom arose on the island of Java, Majapahit, and that kingdom went on in the fourteenth century to extend its control and influence to other areas in the region.

In the second half of that century, Majapahit also sent tribute to the newly established Ming dynasty, as did Jaba. This is what confused the compilers of the *History of the Ming* in the early eighteenth century. By that time, there was no longer a place called Jaba, and some of their contemporaries claimed that the name Jaba (Shepo) in historical records was an older name of Java (Zhuawa). However, the compilers of the *History of the Ming* could see the existence of both kingdoms in the early records of the Ming dynasty. They, therefore, knew that Jaba and Zhuawa must have been separate kingdoms, but they did not know where Jaba had been located or what had happened to it.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

This paper has brought together considerable evidence to locate Jaba in the general area of Lake Songkhla. As for what happened to Jaba, that will have to be the topic of a future paper. However, we can provide a glimpse here. The expansion of Majapahit in island Southeast Asia during the fourteenth century was mirrored on the mainland in the same century by the rise and expansion of Ayutthaya. That kingdom would go on to conquer not only part of Sanfoqi/Kambuja but the area of Jaba as well. As a result, by the fifteenth century, those two centers of power and wealth based around internal lakes and river networks that were connected to coasts had been eclipsed by new empires and new trade networks. It is in the aftermath of their demise that the world of coastal polities like Melaka came into existence. While that world has come to symbolize premodern Southeast Asia to many today, it was a different world from the one that had long preceded it. This is what we can see by revisiting the Chinese sources on early Southeast Asian history.

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