

Chapter 1

SINO - MALAY INTERACTION IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM AD

Since the late first millennium BC, the Malay region has played a pivotal role in the international maritime economy that encompasses maritime Southeast Asia, the South China Sea region, and the Indian Ocean littoral. This role has been as much the result of the region's strategic location in maritime Asia as the geographical and demographic characteristics of the region's islands. Unlike land-based polities, which have internal economies based on agrarian hinterlands that enabled them to be self-sufficient, the islands of the Malay region have throughout history maintained two distinct types of societies—coastal societies and upland social groups. The polities of the Malay coastal region did not extend very far inland. The islands' mountainous interiors have been occupied by groups who were ethnically and even linguistically distinct from the coastal societies.¹ Although the coastal and inland groups interacted with each other economically, the prosperity and political stability of the coastal groups were determined mainly by their ability to capitalize on the international maritime trade that flowed through the region.

The ports of the Malay region participated in the international trade in three ways. The first was by acting as an entrepôt in the trade between the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, and island Southeast Asia. From the middle of the first millennium AD onward, the port-settlements

along the Strait of Malacca and the northeastern parts of the Java Sea were able to capitalize on the region's geographical advantages, under the leadership of a succession of port-polities that were able to project themselves as the key entrepôt in different eras.

They also traded by carrying transshipped products to states bordering the Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and island Southeast Asia. The key port-polities of the Malacca Strait and northeastern Java Sea were able to obtain and transship foreign products in high demand in the Chinese, Indian, and island Southeast Asian markets, supplying international products directly to the various Asian markets. Indigenous products that were in demand in these Asian markets were also collected by these ports, either from the hinterland through commercial exchanges with inland groups or from the region's feeder ports that fell within the sphere of influence of the key port-polities, and shipped by the region's ports to these foreign markets.²

Finally, ports in the region could make available key products to foreign traders who were passing through and could in that manner conduct some maritime trade by attracting some of the passing mercantile shipping to call at their ports directly. Ports located along less strategic stretches of the Malay region's coastline, such as those along the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula and the northern coast of Borneo, participated in international trade in this manner. This, however, depended on a high level of diffused trade taking place in the region and usually occurred during the transitional periods between the passing of a key port-polity and the ascendance of a succeeding one, a political and economic situation that often led to intense competition between the region's ports for external trade.

Given the middleman role that the Malay region's port-polities played in the international economic context, the commencement of relations with specific external regions or states, the importance of these port-polities in the diplomatic and economic arena, as well as the nature of the interaction they established with external regions or states, depended on the market demands as well as the diplomatic positions adopted by the key states of Southeast Asia, the South China Sea region, and the Indian Ocean littoral.

Exchanges between the Malay region and India appear to have commenced as early as the late first millennium BC. One of the earliest references to these contacts can be found in the Ramayana, a Hindu epic poem composed some time in the second half of the first millennium BC, which mentions Suvarnabhumi (Land of Gold), an early Sanskrit reference to the Malay Region. The coastal areas of India had historically maintained a maritime outlook and were by the first millennium BC traversing the Bay of Bengal and trading at ports located on the northern tip of Sumatra as well as landing along the western coast of the Isthmus of Kra, near the Andaman Sea, and engaging in trade with such Southeast Asian polities located along the Gulf of Siam as Funan.

The Malay region's interaction with China, on the other hand, began only in the first millennium AD. The lateness of China's engagement with maritime Southeast Asia and the Malay region, as opposed to India, was due primarily to China's development of its maritime orientation only from the third century AD. Even though, as early as the third century BC, China as a political entity had begun to encompass the southern Chinese coastal areas, it was not viewed by the Chinese court as imperative that China develop an external orientation beyond the mainland Southeast Asian states with which it shared a common border.

It was only after the collapse of the Han dynasty in AD 220, and the subsequent political fragmentation that ensued, that the need for this maritime avenue began to manifest. In particular, the kingdom of Wu, which was centered in the Yangtze delta and controlled the entire southern Chinese coastline until AD 280, began to establish links with maritime Southeast Asia, not only because it shared a common border with such mainland Southeast Asian polities as Vietnam, but also because the international maritime economy began to be regarded as a potentially important source of revenue for the Wu court. Indeed, the earliest record of economic or diplomatic interaction between China and maritime Southeast Asia appears only during the early third century AD, in the form of an account by the Chinese officials Kang Tai and Zhu Ying. Both were dispatched by the ruler of the kingdom

of Wu on a diplomatic mission to Funan during the 230s to ascertain the state of affairs in maritime Southeast Asia and presumably to establish economic links with that state, which until the fourth century AD maintained an important international port at modern-day Oc Eo, southern Vietnam, along the Gulf of Siam. This was the start of a pattern of external relations maintained by the southern coastal provinces of China, and by subsequent Chinese kingdoms or dynasties that regarded maritime linkages with maritime Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean littoral, and the Middle East as significant to their well-being, in particular when key parts of inland China were not accessible to them economically or when they could not access the states in India and the Middle East, and their respective markets, via the central Asian route. Products from these regions were shipped to China, and in return, such Chinese products as silk and ceramics were distributed to the markets of these regions.³

Despite some semblance of China's interest in maritime Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral, the political upheavals that China was experiencing during the early centuries of the first millennium AD appears to have caused this interest to appear to maritime Southeast Asian polities as being sporadic. Consequently, the linkages that these polities established with China were indirect, and no textual reference to direct contact between the two can be found. Whatever interaction that did exist was conducted via the ports and polities of mainland Southeast Asia.

By the fifth century AD, however, there was a further increase in interest, on the part of China, in the potential benefits that could be derived from its southward maritime linkages. In particular, the consolidation of southern China under a single rulership (the Liu Song dynasty, AD 420–79) appears to have provided a political and economic climate along the southern Chinese coast in which the southward maritime linkages grew to be regarded as a viable source of economic gain. The increased significance of the exchanges with maritime Southeast Asia even led, in AD 446, to the Liu Song court dispatching several punitive maritime patrols in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin to keep Cham piracy around the maritime approaches from Southeast

Asia to southern China in check, perhaps reflecting the viability and importance of the government in southern China investing in the security of this southward maritime route.⁴

The polities of maritime Southeast Asia quickly reciprocated this renewed interest, and they began to engage China directly. By the fifth century the names of maritime Southeast Asian polities had begun to appear in Chinese official records. These textual references were made in connection with state-level missions that were dispatched by these polities to China and most likely reflected attempts on their part to establish and maintain diplomatic and economic relations with China. The political consolidation of southern China under Liu Song rule appears to have provided the impetus for maritime Southeast Asian polities to begin investing in and wooing China into a direct economic and diplomatic relationship. Polities that began to engage China at the state level during the fifth century AD included Holotan, which dispatched six missions; Pota, which sent three; and Pohuang, which dispatched eight. Kantoli sent seven missions in the fifth and sixth centuries, while Poli sent five between the fifth and the seventh century.⁵ In addition, Topoteng dispatched a mission in 647,⁶ while Polo dispatched one in 642 and one 669.⁷

The diplomatic and economic links appear to have been established in tandem with direct shipping links. Although maritime Southeast Asian polities no doubt continued to gain access to the Chinese market via the mainland states that had economic ties with China, direct maritime links with southern China had already begun to appear. Traders, diplomatic representatives, and passengers were able to travel between the Indian Ocean littoral and China via maritime Southeast Asia. In particular, maritime passage to India and thence to the Middle East could be obtained via the Malacca Strait. This connection facilitated cultural interaction between China, maritime Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean littoral during the second half of the first millennium AD. Maritime Southeast Asia, and in particular the Strait of Malacca, became one of the main routes along which the exchange and transmission of Buddhism from India to China took place during this time. Thus, Fa Xian, a Chinese Buddhist monk who visited India

some time in the early fifth century and returned from India to China via the Malacca Strait, was able to obtain direct passage from Sumatra to Guangzhou.⁸

While southern China became increasingly engaged in diplomatic and economic relations with maritime Southeast Asia, there did not appear to have been any concerted state-level response or coherent foreign policy in this area of Chinese foreign relations. Chinese administration of maritime trade was also ad hoc, despite the consistent economic exchanges between China and maritime Southeast Asia occurring by this time. Few specific regulations concerning the administration of maritime trade were promulgated, and trade was subject to significant abuse by the local officials who handled the foreign traders arriving at the Chinese ports at which they were stationed. This led, in at least one instance during the seventh century AD, to maritime Southeast Asian traders complaining to the Chinese court concerning the corruption of Chinese officials at Guangzhou as a major factor inhibiting the smooth and profitable conduct of trade with China, culminating in the foreign traders taking such matters as the corrupt and extortionist conduct of Chinese officials at the ports into their own hands.⁹

By the late seventh century, however, China, under the Tang dynasty (618–906), did attempt to govern its maritime trade in a more accountable manner, a move that suggests that the Tang court was becoming increasingly aware of the growing importance of maritime trade both as an aspect of China's economy as well as a source of revenue for the state. Some time before 714, the post of superintendent of mercantile shipping was established at Guangzhou, the purpose of which was to appoint an official specifically tasked with insuring that maritime trade could be conducted unimpeded.¹⁰ The administration of maritime trade was consequently established as a separate area of jurisdiction from the other administrative functions of the Guangzhou prefectural officials. Presumably this move was an attempt to redress the long-standing problem of Guangzhou officials being involved in the trade in a clandestine manner, which was characterized by the abuse of their official authority.¹¹ It also provided for a state-level approach toward the handling of diplomatic and economic relations between China and

maritime Southeast Asia, which had clearly developed into a significant aspect of China's external economy, with Guangzhou becoming the most important Chinese international port during the Tang period.

To create a conducive environment for the conduct of international trade at its ports, the Tang court also undertook, at around the same time, a number of measures to ensure that the welfare of foreign traders who were arriving annually at these ports was taken care of. These included, in 695, an edict that provisions were to be made available for all foreign traders in China.¹² These measures were aimed at ensuring that trade with China was sufficiently profitable for foreign traders, in particular those who were arriving from or via maritime Southeast Asia, and thus to encourage them to continue to trade with China.

The more concerted policies that were instituted during the Tang period, as opposed to the lack of any coherent state policy toward maritime relations and trade during the preceding periods before the seventh century AD, appear to have had a fundamental impact on the manner in which maritime Southeast Asian polities regarded their relationship with China. A more coherent pattern of state-level missions dispatched from maritime Southeast Asia to China began to emerge. During this period, the overtures by several maritime Southeast Asian polities began to give way to a state of affairs whereby only two key subregions in maritime Southeast Asia were eventually engaged in state-level discourse with China—Java, representing the Malay Archipelago, and the Malacca Strait, representing the Malay region. Of the former, two polities vied for China's attention. Holing, a central Javanese kingdom, dispatched a total of ten missions to China between the seventh and the ninth century.¹³ By the early tenth century, however, a new Javanese polity appears to have taken over the mantle of initiating diplomatic relations with China. Shepo, which emerged by the tenth century as the chief polity in Java, dispatched four missions in the ninth century.¹⁴

In the Malay region, two polities began dispatching missions to China, competing for the Chinese court's attention. Melayu, a port-polity at Muara Jambi, in Sumatra, was recorded in Chinese texts to have dispatched only one mission. This occurred in 644.¹⁵ Melayu's attempt to assert itself as the regional port-polity of the Malay world,

however, appears to have been short-lived. According to the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Yi Xing—who sojourned at Srivijaya, a port-polity centered at Palembang in southeastern Sumatra, in 671 and again sometime between 685 and 695—Melayu was absorbed by Srivijaya by the late seventh century.¹⁶ In the second-half of the seventh century, Srivijaya began to initiate a series of diplomatic overtures toward the Tang court. Chinese texts note that this newly ascendant Malay port-kingdom dispatched six missions to China between the seventh and the ninth century—one sometime between 670 and 673, and then one each in 702, 716, 728, 742, and 904.¹⁷

Such missions from maritime Southeast Asian polities were often recorded to have presented many and varied foreign products to the Chinese court, and consequently have often been viewed by historians as one of the chief means by which these polities conducted trade with China. However, the occurrence of the missions suggests that they were more likely occasions spurred by diplomatic and economic motives and not necessarily dispatched primarily as commercial exchanges to be conducted at the state level. The points of time at which they occurred, which often coincided with important political changes or changes to the administration of maritime trade in southern China, suggest that such diplomatic overtures were more likely to have been attempts by the key polities in the Malay region and the Malay Archipelago at establishing, in the eyes of the Chinese courts, their political hegemony over the respective subregions or a means of reaffirming their economic position in the eyes of the new Chinese dynasties establishing their rule over southern China. Such missions were also occasions for these polities to advertise the products that they could obtain and transship to China. In the case of the Malay region, it would appear that by the eighth century, Srivijaya had quickly established itself, in China's eyes, as the preeminent polity of that subregion of maritime Southeast Asia. It became the only Malay polity to continue to maintain diplomatic ties with China by that time.

In spite of these diplomatic and economic developments between China and maritime Southeast Asia during the second half of the first millennium AD, China was by and large a passive partner in this

relationship. From the fifth through the tenth century, while tribute missions were being dispatched by maritime Southeast Asian polities to China, the Chinese court sent only one mission to the region. That was dispatched by the Tang court in AD 683 to Srivijaya.¹⁸ The absence of any other Chinese mission dispatched to maritime Southeast Asia suggests that China's perception of, and response to, the region would have almost entirely been dependent on the diplomatic and commercial efforts of the region's polities, and on the accounts of the state of affairs in their respective subregions, which their envoys presented to the Chinese court whenever their missions arrived and were received in China. The dispatch of the sole mission to Srivijaya also suggests that the Malay port-polity had managed to achieve a major political coup in China by the late seventh century, having convinced China that it was the most important regional polity in maritime Southeast Asia, and therefore of vital importance to China's foreign and economic policies toward that region and even such regions further afield as the Indian Ocean littoral. This perception was also evident in the policies that the Tang court promulgated concerning the ensuring of the welfare of foreign traders present at China's ports. As an example, Srivijayan traders were highlighted, in a 695 edict concerning the supply of provisions to foreign traders, as one of the groups of beneficiaries of this concession.¹⁹

China's reliance on the Malay region as a proxy between itself and the rest of maritime Asia was manifest in the cultural realm as well. Such Chinese travelers as the Buddhist pilgrim Yi Xing note that by the seventh century AD, Chinese pilgrims on their way to obtain sacred scriptures from the Buddhist university at Nalanda, in India, would sojourn at Palembang, the capital of Srivijaya, for a time to develop their language skills. Srivijaya had developed a level of exchange with the Indian subcontinent that was sufficiently intense to enable it to develop as a Buddhist center of learning that was renowned both in China and India. This cultural achievement would no doubt have been established by the economic and cultural interaction that Srivijaya, and the Malay region in general, maintained with India, and which came subsequently to be capitalized in Srivijaya's efforts to promote itself in the eyes of China's political and cultural elite.²⁰

The interaction between China and the Malay region, and the role of the Malay region as a proxy between China and the Indian Ocean littoral, appears to have been facilitated by ships from the Malay region as well as further afield. Two networks of shipping developed along the China–maritime Southeast Asia leg of the maritime circuit during this period. The first was maritime Southeast Asian shipping. The ability of maritime Southeast Asians to sail between China and the Malay region appears to have been based primarily on their time-honored seafaring tradition. Indian textual sources suggest that as early as the late first millennium BC, the expertise of these sailors had already enabled them to establish contact with the Indian subcontinent. Establishing contact and more permanent linkages with China would not have been a challenge for them. By the fifth century AD, Chinese texts were beginning to record maritime Southeast Asian vessels in southern Chinese waters. Chang Qingchen and Wei Shun, in the fifth and sixth centuries AD respectively, note that products were shipped by foreign traders to Tongkin and Guangzhou in vessels of *kunlun* origin,²¹ apparently referring to maritime Southeast Asian vessels. No distinction as to subregion may be inferred from the Chinese texts. By the seventh century, however, the term *kunlun* appears to have been used exclusively to denote the coastal people of western Indonesia, or the Malay region.²² By the ninth century, Malay shipping to China had apparently become vibrant. In the *Yiqiejing yingyi* (815), Hui-Lin notes that *kunlun bo*, or Malay seagoing vessels, were arriving regularly at the Gulf of Tonkin and along the southeastern Chinese coast.²³

Maritime Southeast Asian shipbuilding capabilities and maritime traditions are not well documented in historical sources. Some information, however, is available from archaeological research. The earliest known wreck of Southeast Asian construct comes from the Sambirejo site in southern Sumatra, dated to between AD 610 and 715. Constructed with the dowel-peg and lash-lug techniques, the ship has been estimated to have been almost twenty-three meters long and six meters wide, most likely a seagoing vessel of substantial displacement.²⁴ Such large seagoing vessels appear to have been used to ply the Sino-Malay route by this time. Xuan Zhang's account of the fifth century, for example,

notes that the vessel on which he was traveling from Palembang to southern China was carrying around two hundred traders.²⁵ Although most likely an exaggeration, the displacement of that particular vessel would nonetheless have been fairly significant, capable of carrying a fairly large number of passengers and their cargo.

The size and displacement of maritime Southeast Asian vessels appear to have grown larger through the course of the first millennium AD. Another wreck—the Intan—a tenth-century maritime Southeast Asian vessel that was probably on its way from Palembang to a Javanese port when it foundered in the northeastern Java Sea, was approximately thirty meters long and may have had a displacement of around three hundred tons.²⁶ The volume of shipping between China and the Malay region would have been fairly significant by the end of the first millennium.

The second network that facilitated the Sino-Malay trade was Indian Ocean shipping. In particular, Arab merchants and sailors stood out as an important group of traders who helped carry the trade between the Malay region and China in the first millennium. Chinese and Middle Eastern records of this period note that by the Tang period Middle Easterners had established a significant presence in southern Chinese ports, in particular Guangzhou, where a large sojourning Middle Eastern community thrived until 873, when a rebellion led by Huang Chao attacked the port and massacred many Middle Easterners and other foreigners.²⁷ The Middle Eastern presence at Guangzhou must have also contributed significantly to the facilitation of trade between China and the Malay region during the second half of the first millennium.

There is no known textual reference to Middle Eastern or Indian Ocean vessels throughout much of the first millennium. However, by the ninth century, Arab texts containing navigational information of the passage from the Indian subcontinent to China via the Malay region begin to emerge, with fairly detailed descriptions of the key ports in maritime Southeast Asia. In particular, accounts of a port in the Malacca Strait, known as Zabag to the Arabs, are provided in Arab texts from the eighth century onward, suggesting that Arab traders

and ships were by this time beginning to use the key port in the Malay region, most likely the regional port of Palembang, as a transit point between the Indian Ocean littoral and southern China.²⁸

Archaeological information pertaining to Arab shipping between the Malay region and China is presently available only in the form of the Belitung wreck, recovered just north of the Java Sea in the vicinity of the Belitung Islands in 1998 and 1999. Dated to the ninth century and identified as an Arab vessel, the ship was carrying a cargo of Chinese products, including ceramics, metal ingots, and metalware, and apparently en route to Srivijaya-Palembang when it foundered.²⁹ Arab vessels were thus sailing from the Indian Ocean to China by the late first millennium AD, with Arab traders aboard conducting some form of long-distance trade between the two bastions of the trans-Asiatic economy. The bulk of the cargo arriving in the Malay region from China, however, would most likely have been dispersed at a port in the region first, to cater to the region's demand for such Chinese products as ceramics, metals and metalware, and textiles. The absence of any discovery of any other Middle Eastern or Indian Ocean vessel in Southeast Asian or Chinese waters suggests that, although these vessels were used in trade between China and Southeast Asia during the first millennium AD, the proportion of the trade that they carried was most likely much smaller than that carried by Southeast Asian and Malay ships and that Middle Eastern traders operating between maritime Southeast Asia and China were likely to have relied heavily on ships from those two regions.

Malay and Indian Ocean shipping were the main channels through which the economic and diplomatic exchanges between China and the Malay region were conducted. It does not appear that Chinese shipping carried any of the trade between Southeast Asia and China throughout the first millennium AD. In addition, we know nothing about Chinese shipbuilding technology for this period.³⁰ Information on Chinese participation in maritime shipping to the Malay region is not forthcoming until the eleventh century, when Chinese provincial accounts, particularly in Fujian and Guangdong, begin to mention the Chinese sailing abroad for the purpose of trade.³¹ Archaeologically, no

seagoing vessel of Chinese construct, dating to before the thirteenth century, has as yet been discovered in Chinese or Southeast Asian waters. The passive stance of the Chinese courts in their diplomatic and economic interaction with maritime Southeast Asia appears to have greatly discouraged active Chinese participation in shipping between the two regions during this period.

Instead, the Chinese appear to have been eager recipients of whatever products were shipped to their shores, relying completely on the arrival of foreign ships for the inflow of foreign goods. Demand for specific types of foreign products would have been relayed to foreign traders through their representatives residing in the Chinese ports. This state of affairs was perpetuated by the administrative stance of successive Chinese courts concerning the conduct of maritime trade at the ports that they controlled. By and large, the Chinese courts appear to have maintained a state monopoly over the external and domestic sectors of China's trade in foreign products throughout the first millennium AD. The only people with whom foreign traders carried out commercial transactions at the Chinese ports were the Chinese officials.³² As a result, Chinese demand for foreign products appears to have been based largely on the demands of the bureaucracy and the imperial courts, even though the general Chinese market did exhibit some interest in foreign products. The Malay region, as a proxy between China and maritime Asia, became an important channel through which the Chinese political and social elites' demands for foreign products were fulfilled. The result was that the Malay region became one of southern China's most important foreign maritime trading partners.

By the seventh century, Malay traders had established a significant presence at the port of Guangzhou. The presence of Malay agents at the coastal port cities of southern China suggests that the volume and value of the trade between the Malay region and China was sufficiently high to warrant a more permanent presence at these ports. By the late ninth century Malay commercial operations in southern China were no longer confined to Guangzhou. A memorial issued by the Tang court in 896 notes that "island barbarians" (a reference to maritime Southeast Asians, including Malays) were by this time residing in the

provinces of Fujian and Zhejiang as well.³³ Malay ships, and the trade that they carried with them, were thus arriving at the Chinese ports along the length of the southern Chinese coastline. Diplomatic missions, however, appear to have been confined largely to Guangzhou, the chief Chinese port in the south.

Initially, the products shipped to China via the Malay region were mainly from the Indian Ocean littoral and the Middle East. These included such resinous aromatics as frankincense, storax (liquidambar), myrrh, and dragon's blood, glassware from the Middle East, ivory, gems, and such foodstuffs as rosewater and dates,³⁴ reflecting the sophisticated tastes of the consumers to which maritime trade was catering. These products were already familiar to the Chinese market, having been available via the central Asian route. The trade between China and maritime Southeast Asia was primarily a duplication of the transcontinental overland trade that had been established by the early first millennium AD. In the case of the maritime trade circuit, most of these products were probably transshipped by Malay traders to China, having first been obtained from Middle Eastern and Indian traders calling at the Malay region's key entrepôt port of Palembang. However, as ties between China and maritime Southeast Asia became increasingly firm over the second half of the first millennium AD, a number of products from the region began to be introduced to the China market. These included cloves and nutmeg, which originated only from the eastern Indonesian islands,³⁵ both of which were quickly regarded by the Chinese as high-value medicinals.

For China, the Malay region did not feature as an important source of foreign products during this period. Only a very select number of indigenous Malay products managed to be accepted in the Chinese market. These included such aromatics as gharuwood, and other products of lower value, including betel nuts and sappanwood (most likely used as a dyestuff). Three other products, however, appear to have made significant headway in the Chinese market. Camphor, a product from Borneo and northwest Sumatra, particularly Barus, began to be exported to China only in the sixth century. Benzoin began to be shipped to China and marketed as a substitute for Middle Eastern

storax some time in the second half of the first millennium, while at around the same time Malay pine resin appears to have been marketed in China as a substitute for frankincense.³⁶ These three products were traded under the category of aromatics and medicines and were regarded by the Chinese market as high-value items.

In return for the items brought to its ports, China exported such products as ceramics, metals, textiles and foodstuffs to its foreign trading partners. Chinese ceramics were a very important class of products demanded by maritime Southeast Asia and were imported in large quantities. *Yue*-type wares produced by southern Chinese kilns and such provincial ceramics as Changsha ware have been recovered from Malay sites, notably Palembang and southern Kedah, as well as in Java.³⁷ Other high-value ceramics, such as the *sancai*-type (“three-color”) wares, white wares, and unglazed blue-and-white wares produced by kilns in northern China, have also been recovered from the Belitung wreck.³⁸ The bulk of the ceramics exported to maritime Southeast Asia were produced in kilns near southern Chinese ports, although a small proportion of the ceramics exports appear to have been sourced from renowned inland kilns, which would have made them more costly to procure.

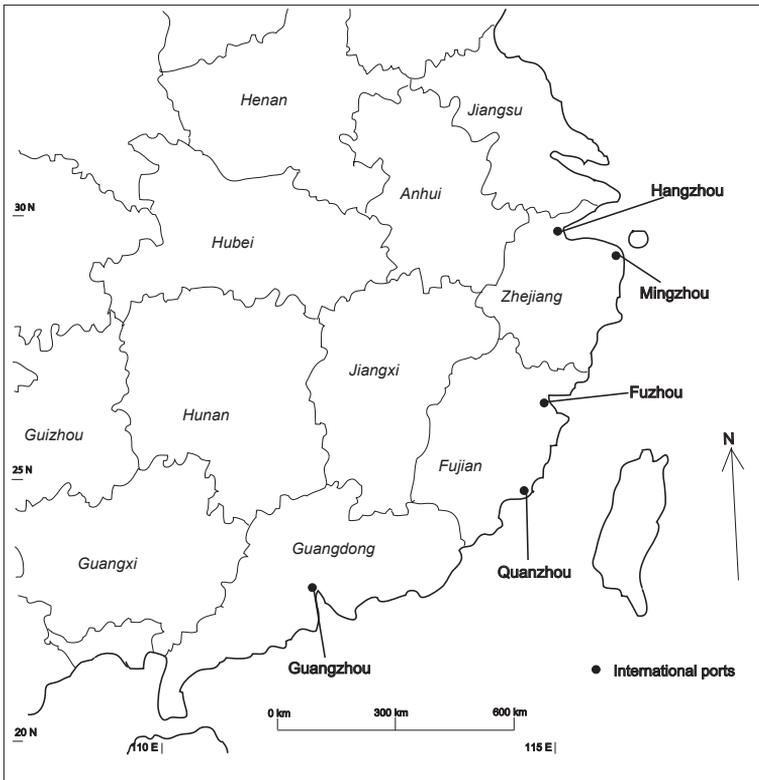
Metals were another important class of Chinese products demanded by maritime Southeast Asia.³⁹ While there is a dearth of textual information on the trade of metals, archaeological information, particularly the data accrued from the Belitung and Intan wrecks, indicates that by the ninth century, China’s export of metals—including lead, iron, copper, silver, and gold—to maritime Southeast Asia was already a well-established aspect of the trade between the two regions.

These metals were exported in workable as well as manufactured forms. Lead was exported to maritime Southeast Asia predominantly in the form of ingots, which often doubled as ballast on the ships that were used to carry them,⁴⁰ while copper, given its scarcity and the consequent high value placed on it by the Chinese, appears to have been exported exclusively as high-value manufactured items, such as bronze mirrors.⁴¹ Iron, on the other hand, was exported in the form of utilitarian items, such as cauldrons and cooking pots mounted on tripods, as well as such partially worked forms as bars and rods.⁴²

Chinese iron, which was cast-iron, was much poorer than the iron that was produced in India and Southeast Asia at the time. However, the economies of scale attained by the Chinese iron industry by late in the first millennium allowed Chinese iron to be produced and sold cheaply. This enabled China to serve as an important source of iron to places in maritime Southeast Asia, especially Java and Bali, that lacked natural deposits of iron ore. In particular, Java and Bali became reliant on China as a source of iron.

By the early tenth century direct economic links between China and maritime Southeast Asia were already well established, with Guangzhou as the chief port of call for ships arriving from the south.⁴³ Only two of maritime Southeast Asia's polities had, by this time, managed to maintain diplomatic and economic links with China—Srivijaya, in the Malay region, and Shepo, or Java, in the East Indonesian Archipelago. These two polities represented the general nature of the China–maritime Southeast Asia interaction by the tenth century—essentially that of two subregions maintaining their distinct links with China under the auspices of their respective preeminent polities.

The Malay region, in particular, under the auspices of Srivijaya, had established itself as strong in China's eyes. Chinese perception of Srivijaya as a vital proxy in China's economic and diplomatic policies toward maritime Asia remained unchanged in the face of the political upheaval unleashed by the Huang Chao rebellion at the end of the ninth century, which rocked China and eventually led to the collapse of the Tang dynasty in 906. In the ensuing interregnum, which lasted until 960 in northern China and the 970s in the south, the southeastern coastal provinces effectively became autonomous kingdoms. The fiscal needs of these kingdoms led their respective courts to continue to maintain as well as develop the maritime economic and political links that had already been established between China and the polities of maritime Asia.⁴⁴ In the early tenth century the kingdom of Min, in southern Fujian, began to develop Quanzhou and Fuzhou as major ports for foreign ships,⁴⁵ while the southern Han kingdom, with its administrative capital at Guangzhou, continued to maintain that port as the center of China's maritime economic relations with maritime



Map 1.1. International ports along the southern Chinese coast, late first millennium AD

Asia throughout the tenth century.⁴⁶ The foreign products arriving at these ports were redistributed to the rest of the Chinese market through domestic mercantile networks.⁴⁷

In this regard, the Malay region appears to have benefited from the vacuum left by the Huang Chao massacre of foreign traders at Guangzhou in 873, and apparently seized the opportunity amid the political upheaval in southern China to establish itself as a major player in the Asian maritime economy and an important trading partner of China. Malay representation at the southern Chinese ports, in particular Guangzhou, was regarded by the Chinese as having been important enough by the early tenth century to warrant the southern Han court to appoint as the foreign official of that port, in 905, the Srivijayan

envoy who had arrived in China on a diplomatic mission the year before.⁴⁸ The presence of sojourning communities from the Malay region at the southern Chinese ports, and Srivijayan official representation at Guangzhou, enabled the region, during the tenth century, to react and adapt to any changes in maritime trade policies, as well as to be attuned to shifts in the political situation in China, which often had a fundamental impact on the flow of maritime trade and the commercial and political position of foreign polities in the eyes of the Chinese court. This included its apparent awareness of the political changes that swept through China during the mid-tenth century, which culminated in the establishment of the Song dynasty in China in 960, a decade before the eventual extension of Song rule over the southern coastal provinces of Fujian and Guangdong in 970, when Song rule eventually began to have an impact on the administration of China's economic and diplomatic relations with the polities of maritime Asia.

Thus, upon the establishment of its rule over the coastal provinces of Guangdong and Fujian in 970, the Song court inherited a legacy of direct economic and diplomatic relations with the Malay region that had developed over the course of the first millennium AD. The Malay region began its relations with the Song court as one of China's important foreign trading partners, and as a state with which China had significant foreign relations. China had by this time also become an important factor in the political and economic life of the Malay region. The overall absence of a coherent state-level approach by China toward its relations with maritime Asia prevented it from having a more significant or active role in shaping the course of the Malay region's political and economic developments in the first millennium. It was only in the Song period that China's impact, particularly that of its maritime trade policies, on these aspects of the region's coastal societies and polities became more pronounced.