



by Elvan Tong

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Preface

“*Story of Malacca*” appeared as a three-part series in AMSA’s magazine *Passages* during 2009 and 2010. For the convenience of readers this is now consolidated into a booklet for easy reading and printing.

“*Story of Malacca*” is not an exercise in futility. It is but one of several attempts in the search for truth about the demographic, social and economic history of Malaya. It covers several themes – the origins of the peoples of Malaya; the influence of India and China; the early Indianised empires; the Malacca Sultanate; the Hang Tuah legend; the Portuguese occupation of Malacca; the Peranakan heritage.

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Finally, my thanks go to those who gave me encouragement in this endeavour. Whether you are a Malay, Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, Eurasian or other ethnic resident from Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia, be justly proud of being part of a multicultural society. Having lived in it you are in a unique position to understand and promote multiculturalism and live in harmony wherever you are.

Disclaimer

This booklet is strictly the responsibility of the writer. While all care has been taken in researching and verifying the facts, the opinions and assertions are that of the writer alone. The writer or his agents expressly disclaim all responsibility and liability for any consequence arising from the use of, or reliance on, the information contained therein.

1. Introduction

This booklet is about the history of Malaya (Malacca), from 3000 BC until the defeat of the Portuguese in Malacca by the Dutch in 1641 AD. It is written from a personal point of view, substantiated by research into various articles and books. It is also necessary to include her near neighbours, such as Indonesia to the south, and present day Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, Laos and Cambodia to the north. We also include her larger and more powerful distant neighbours like India, China, the Middle East and, much later, Europe. Why these distant neighbours should be included will become clear to readers as the story progresses.

Readers may be wondering why “*Story of Malacca*” and not “*Story of Malaya*”. For a start, Malaya did not exist as a separate and important entity until the 15th century when Malacca was founded. There had been few sources of reliable and verifiable information on early Malayan history. Where reliable sources of information did exist, they came from very early Chinese and Arab chronicles and later from Portuguese and other European records relating to the original three Straits Settlements of Malacca, Singapore and Penang. It is based on such sources that we attempt to present as accurate a picture as possible of Malaya’s early history up to the period of the fall of the Portuguese in Malacca.

The use of Malacca as the focal point in the history of Malaya in particular, and of South East Asia (S.E.A.) in general, is also based on a number of important facts:

- Malacca is located in the Straits of Malacca, the Straits that had long held a strategic position in trade between East (China) and West (India and the Persian Gulf), and which was to become the centre of much attention among neighbouring countries and major trading nations;
- Malacca essentially became the first state in Malaya to attract a polyglot of many different races and languages due to her prominent status as an entrepôt, and which subsequently enriched Malayan culture and heritage;
- Malacca was where early Indian and Chinese influences had been most profound in economics, politics, religion, culture and public administration, and which further enriched her indigenous culture;
- Malacca was where the spread of Islam first took hold in Malaya in the 15th century (after Sumatra) and which thereafter became entrenched as a solid religion followed by the majority of the people in the region;
- Malacca was the first port of call by the great Chinese Admiral Zheng-He of the Ming Dynasty who made several voyages of trade, political missions and discovery to the West during the early 15th century and which also contributed to Malacca’s prominence;
- Malacca was where Hang Tuah’s legend originated, to become a perennial Malayan folk hero to this day as evidenced by school books, movies and other media;
- Malacca was where the Portuguese first introduced Christianity into Malaya in the 16th century and introduced some other aspects of Western culture and civilisation into early Malayan society before British colonisation;

- Malacca was where a class of ethnic Chinese and Indians who embraced the native Malay culture emerged and came to be commonly known as Peranakans, and which brought along a unique blend of people, cuisine and culture to further enrich Malaya's already colourful heritage.

It will help readers to keep the above facts in mind when we trace Malaya's early history.

2. Geographical Background and Early Trade Routes

South East Asia (S.E.A.) is composed of countries made up of the Indo-Pacific Peninsula together with Indonesia and the Philippine Archipelago. The countries of the Indo-Pacific Peninsula are made up of present-day Vietnam (Tongking, Annam, Cochin China), Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma and the Malay Peninsula.

The countries north of Malaya (Indo-China) played an important part in S.E.A. history. Tongking, because as early as 150 AD was a terminus of the ancient sea route from the Red Sea; Annam, because it ruled over long periods and preferred Chinese to Indian culture; Cochin China, because of the fertile Mekong delta that made it the centre of the earliest empire of S.E.A., Funan; Cambodia, because of its rich plains that sustained the Kmer Empire; Siam (Thailand), because later in the 13th century it had decisive impact in the area, particularly in the overthrow of some early empires and her persistent claim of sovereignty over parts of the Malay Peninsula.

To the south of the Malay Peninsula lie the islands of Indonesia – at that time included Sumatra, Java, Bali, Borneo (Kalimantan), and the Spice islands comprising Celebes, Halmahera and the Moluccas. With Malaya, Sumatra forms the Straits of Malacca, whereas the Sunda Strait lies between Sumatra and Java.

There were two main trade routes between East and West at that time - the overland Silk Road through many hostile lands and the sea route through the Straits of Malacca to India and the Persian Gulf. The sea route therefore provided a very attractive alternative to the Silk Road for China during perilous and uncertain times.

The first Westerner to make an accurate account of the sea route between Rome and China was the Alexandrian Greek, Ptolemy, in 150 AD. He described the voyage from Rome to India, then to the Straits onwards to China. As far as Malaya was concerned, Ptolemy identified Trang as the chief port north of the Malay Peninsula; further south as Klang (Port Swettenham); then around the Peninsula and northwards to Patani on the north-east coast. From there Ptolemy crossed the South China Sea to other ports and finally to Hanoi in Tongking. Of course the ports named so far were named differently according to the Romans at that time. These ports and sea route already existed before Ptolemy's voyage. The history of this area would have been quite different had Rome continued to open the sea route. The Roman Empire collapsed around this time and so did the great Han Dynasty in China which disappeared in 220 AD. For the next 400 years China was distracted by civil wars until the rise of the Tang Dynasty in 618 AD.

During this breakdown of trade from China, Indian and S.E.A. sailors were able to sail freely over that part of the sea route that lay between India and China. This period also saw the great expansion of Indian culture and influence, and the emergence of Indianised states that dominated the Malay Peninsula for many centuries.

3. Early Settlers – Proto and Deutero-Malays

Many thousands of years before the arrival of the Indian traders in the 1st century, S.E.A. and Australia formed one solid land mass peopled by a race of dark-skinned and short Negritos. When the South China and Java Seas were formed as a result of rising waters from the melted Ice Caps, this land mass was divided into many islands. The Negritos were themselves dispersed in pockets in Malaya, Melanesia and Australia. Several tribes of the descendents of these early people are found in the Malay Peninsula today, the largest being the Senoi. As centuries passed, groups of people moved south from the interior of Asia through the Indo-Pacific Peninsula, to Malaya and beyond to the islands of the Pacific.

Anthropological sources suggested there were two main groups. Around 3000 BC, one group came from the neighbourhood of Yunnan province in China, just north of Laos and Vietnam. These people were Tibeto-Mongoloid in race and known as Proto-Malays. Their advance was a slow and steady stream of migration which took many centuries to move, towards the south. They drove the earlier settlers, the primitive Negritos, into the jungles and hills while they settled along the fertile coastal plains and banks of rivers. They made new settlements in the Malay Peninsula and, being a seafaring people, sent off boats across the oceans and seas to the islands of Sumatra and New Guinea in the south, the Philippines in the east and Madagascar in the west. They also settled in Laos and Cambodia along the way south from Yunnan province.

The Proto-Malays brought with them the new Stone Age Culture, evidenced by their stone buildings and axes in present-day Pahang and the Upper Perak River. The descendents of the Proto-Malays are the present-day Jakun.

The year 300 BC saw a new advance of migrants from Yunnan province. These were the Deutero-Malays, stronger and more powerful than the Proto-Malays, for they brought with them iron weapons. They in turn occupied and cultivated the fertile plains and valleys. As both groups were of the same basic race, they intermarried and from them came most of the native inhabitants of Malaya and S.E.A. The natives of this region itself may therefore be anthropologically described as Deutero-Malays, descendents of the original tribal Proto-Malays. The Indians had already traded with the islands as early as 600 BC, and during the course of 2000 years ethnic Indians, Arabs, Persians, Chinese, Thais and finally Europeans had settled in the area. Over time some of these other peoples intermarried with the original population. Although it had been written that the modern-day Malays were immigrants from Sumatra and Java, the inhabitants of the latter regions had similar background whose ancestors could be traced from the peoples who came from the north so long ago in the first place.

The Deutero-Malays were relatively civilised, having a definite social organisation and set of animalistic religious beliefs, such as woods and trees, streams and animals. Consequently they left no temples or structures of any sort, being outdoor worshippers. They were adept at agriculture and fishing, having brought this knowledge from the north; formed communities on fertile grounds at river mouths or along the coast. They formed villages and lived on staple rice and fish. The fact that they planted and irrigated rice fields as a community proved that they had an organised way of life that called for cooperative effort, a form of government and law and order.

Malaya in the 100 AD was unrecognisable. It did not have an independent existence until the 15th century. Kelantan and Trengganu were just names; Negri Sembilan did not exist; Johore and the southern part of Malaya did not become important until the Portuguese conquest; Malacca was only founded in 1403.

The population was very small, confined to coastal areas and river banks, the settlements were little more than clearings. The interior was impenetrable as there were no roads or paths but jungle. However, these early peoples had a form of civilisation similar to ancient India. As trade had existed as early as the 600 BC between them it seemed possible that Indian influence was comparatively easily spread throughout S.E.A. from 100 AD onwards.

4. Indian and Chinese Influence

Both India and China had a profound influence on S.E.A. at that time in history. India's influence was mainly cultural and religious, whereas China's was economic and political. That India's was particularly strong during the first 800 years AD could be evidenced in the rise and fall of many 'Indianised' empires in the area that characterised the political and military climate at the time.

China was acting essentially to guard her economic trade interests, and by virtue of her status as the great Middle Kingdom at that time was repeatedly asked by one kingdom or another to 'protect' it from each other. However, one fact that stood out was that neither country was out to colonise S.E.A. One was to trade and inadvertently to spread its culture; the other to maintain political stability in order to trade. Let's look at these two divergent influences and their effects on the fortunes of the area.

a) Indian Influence

The spread of Indian culture in S.E.A. was partly from Indian traders to S.E.A and partly from S.E.A. traders to India. Its culture took the form of religion, literature, art and government that affected the way of life of the people in the region. Although the ancient Indian religion was Brahmanism prior to 500 BC, by the time Indian influence reached S.E.A. Indian Buddhism had taken over. Not only was Buddhism widely practised in India (as Hinduism) but also in China. So long before the rise of Islam in S.E.A., Buddhism, of one form or another, had been firmly established, as evidenced by the existence of ancient Buddhist temples, tombs and statues in the region

Indianisation (or Hindunisation) was also facilitated by the existence of cross-country routes in the Indo-Pacific Peninsula, developed as an alternative to the long journey down the Straits and shortening the journey to China. In Malaya itself there was a network of rivers and elephant tracks linking parts to each other. Indian ships would unload goods at Trang (and later Kedah) in the west coast and carried overland to Patani in the east coast. From there the goods were transhipped to Hanoi or Canton. The reverse would take place for goods from China. These land routes were essential during the monsoon season.

However, the sea route through the Straits for ships was less cumbersome and quicker, despite the threat of pirates, typhoons and squalls. Ships from India would call on ports at the northern end of the Straits, including Trang, Kedah and later Aceh and Penang. Ships from China would call on ports at the southern end of the Straits, including Klang in Malaya, and later Palembang and Malayu in Sumatra.

The process of Indianisation was gradual and unplanned. Firstly, the Indian language did not take hold among the locals. Secondly, there was no surge of a new ethnic group as a result of intermarriage with the natives. Thirdly, Indian culture and religion were not spread by the Indian traders alone. S.E.A. traders also went westward and brought back a rich culture.

Lastly, the culture of the natives remained relatively intact. The influence of Indian culture in S.E.A. was quite pronounced nonetheless. This was reflected in the fact that almost all the native rulers of the various early kingdoms were converted to one or other of the Indian religions and adopted Indian names. Hence such names and titles as Sri Vijaya, Sailendra, Sanjaya, Kaundinya, Maharajah, Vishnu, Indra, Tambralinga, Singorasi, Majapahit, Parameswara and Sri Maharajah became well known.

b) Chinese Influence

Chinese culture, contemporary to that of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and that had flourished under the Han (202 BC - 220 AD) and Tang (618 – 907 AD) dynasties, did not affect S.E.A. as much as India. Her political influence, however, was sometimes quite immense. The Middle Kingdom had always considered itself far superior to its near neighbours and strived to insulate herself from enemies from afar. There was tacit recognition by all the states in the region that China was the sovereign authority, presiding over political stability among warring kingdoms. Consequently, these vassals sent emissaries and tributes to China to reaffirm their loyalty.

For a period of 400 years between the fall of the Han and the rise of the Tang dynasties, China ceased to attend to the outside world. It was preoccupied with civil wars. It was during this period that Indian culture developed fastest in S.E.A. However, China became strong again in the 13th century under the Mongols (Yuan Dynasty) after the fall of the Sung Dynasty. Mongol influence led to the downfall of the great Indianised state of Sri Vijaya in Indonesia. It was not until the rise of the Ming Dynasty in 1368 AD that the region became prominent again, with Malacca taking centre stage.

China's economic influence in S.E.A. was in the form of Chinese goods (mainly silks and porcelain) that other nations sought. The fact that S.E.A. laid on the direct trade route between China and the West benefited her greatly also. The ancient overland Silk Road in the north was intermittently made perilous for merchants to travel, and at times unusable until the Mongols made it safe.

Although Indian and Chinese influence affected S.E.A. considerably, neither succeeded in completely destroying the native cultures which persisted for centuries afterwards. The significance of Indian and Chinese influence will become apparent when we discuss the early empires in the region next.

5. Early Empires

Between the 1st and 15th centuries, before the emergence of Malacca as an empire, arose four notable Indianised (Hindunised) empires in S.E.A. among many other minor kingdoms. The cultural and political characteristics of these empires were distinctly Indian, but their economic fortunes were intertwined with the rise and fall of the great Chinese dynasties at the time.

Early Chinese chronicles tell us that the first foray of China into S.E.A. was a mission sent by the Southern kingdom of Wu in the 3rd century AD. The mission had important consequences, among which was the establishment of official relations. First among the Southeast Asian states to send missions to China were Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, the Malay state of Kedah and later the kingdoms of Java and Sumatra. Trade expanded rapidly in the centuries to follow, with intermittent political intercessions during the successive rise and fall of the Chinese dynasties.

a) Funan Empire (100 – 627 AD) – during Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD); rise of Tang dynasty (from 618 AD)

The most powerful of the early Indianised empires was that of Funan, founded in the 1st century. It was located on the Mekong delta in present-day Vietnam/Cambodia. According to Chinese chronicles it was ruled initially by a Queen, named Liu-Yeh, who later succumbed to an invasion led by Kaundinya (an Indian adventurer) who became King.

It was not until the 3rd century that Funan became a great state under Fan Cheman, when all neighbouring kingdoms on the Peninsula became his vassals. But only under the reign of the usurper, Fan Chan (Fan Cheman's nephew), was Funan eventually recognised by the great powers, India and China. Diplomatic and trade relations were subsequently established.

Among the conquests by Fan Cheman was a place called Tun-hsun (named in a Chinese Leang Shu chronicle) but was indeed the Malay Peninsula composed of five kingdoms. At that time Kedah and Klang were preferred ports of call, having existed since the 1st century. However, the important Indianised states in Malaya were Kedah and Langkasuka (Kelantan/Trengganu). Kedah became the most important settlement after 300 AD. There was no evidence that Funan had anything to do with the island states of Sumatra, Java, Borneo and Celebes at that time.

The Funan Empire represented the first period of Indianisation of S.E.A. and was to be a great achievement. She had command of the sea route between India and China. She realised very early the importance of the Straits of Malacca and established control by capturing Trang in the north and Klang in the south. She built a great fleet and imposed her rule on her scattered territories, thus providing a model for her successors, including her descendents, the rulers of Sri Vijaya and Sailendra in Sumatra and Java.

From 400 AD onwards the control of the Funan Empire was characterised by successive rulers, succession disputes, murders, intrigues and fruitless attempts by China to intercede. It was during this period that the great Funan Empire in the Mekong delta evolved into a new land power, Cambodia, in 802 AD.

b) Sri Vijaya Empire (683 -1292 AD) – during Tang dynasty (618 – 907 AD); Sung dynasty (960 – 1126 AD); rise of Yuan or Mongol dynasty (from 1263 AD)

In the middle of the 7th century several small states in Indonesia stirred from slumber after the demise of Funan in the north. During this period of relative calm the state to succeed Funan's role of sea power and control of the Straits of Malacca was a new and powerful Buddhist empire, Sri Vijaya, whose capital was Palembang in Sumatra. It was perhaps the greatest of all Buddhist empires in the region. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, I-Tsing, who actually visited Sumatra in 671 AD, described Palembang as an important centre of Buddhist learning, with more than 1000 monks devoting their days to study and good works.

The rise of Sri Vijaya in Sumatra coincided with the revival and expansion of world trade, following the decline of the Han dynasty and Roman Empire. After the civil wars that lasted 400 years, China was reunited under the Tang dynasty which started in 618 AD. Succeeding emperors under the Tang were anxious to develop sea trade, as at that time the Silk Road was under constant attacks of the Huns. China had built large ocean-going ships that would sail to India and Ceylon, and even as far as Ormuz, Baghdad and Aden, trading in silk, iron and porcelain.

In the West, Persia, under a new ruler, was equally anxious to increase trade with India, S.E.A. and China. Thus a new era in trade and cultural relations between East and West began. Sanskrit inscription in Ligor (south-east Thailand) shows that by 775 AD Sri Vijaya had control of northern Malaya, having conquered Kedah and a large part of the west coast. It finally gained control of the two passages between India and China, namely the Straits of Malacca from Kedah and the Sunda Straits from Palembang. It established friendly relations with China by sending ambassadors there in 695 AD and thereafter.

Meanwhile, Indianisation continued unabated and Sri Vijaya became the centre of Mahayana Buddhism. No other power in the region could rival her supremacy. There were no threats from the north (Camdodia) or from the east (Java), and Sri Vijaya was to dominate the Malacca Straits from Palembang in Sumatra for the next 400 years.

c) Sailendra Empire (Central Java, 732 - 832 AD) and Sri Vijaya Empire (Sumatra, 850 - 1292 AD)

In 732 AD there was a flourishing kingdom in Central Java ruled by a king called Sanjaya. Within a few years, however, this kingdom was taken over by a new dynasty called Sailendra, making Sanjaya its vassal. The Sailendras were apparently the descendents of the old Funan Empire up north who fled to the south to Java after its fall.

Sailendra was to become the greatest dynasty Java ever had, up until 832 AD, and after that the ruling house of a revived Sri Vijaya in Sumatra until 1292 AD. This dynasty was to be ruled by four kings up to 832 AD when Samaratunga was the last Sailendra king. Patapan, a descendant of Sanjaya, had again seized control from the Sailendras in 832 AD. Samaratunga's younger son, Balaputra, fled to Sumatra shortly after that and later succeeded to the throne to become the first Sailendra king of Sri Vijaya in 850 AD. This was made possible because of a dynastic marriage between his father, Samaratunga and a daughter of the Sri Vijayan house.

After 832 AD the Sanjaya dynasty emerged to re-enforce its might again and moved its capital to East Java. She continued to be a staunch enemy of Sri Vijaya in Sumatra under Sailendra. The latter, however, was to reach the height of her power by the beginning of the 11th century.

The gradual decline of Sri Vijaya, through internal turmoils and attacks from outside, also saw great events unfold in the north. The most notable was the emergence of the first Thai kingdom of Siam in 1283 in opposition to the Khmer kingdom of Cambodia. The Thais, at that time under the auspices of the Mongols, constantly attacked the south controlled by Sri Vijaya.

The rise of the Mongol Empire from 1263 AD and her ruthless ambition to subjugate the Indianised states of S.E.A. with the aid of rising Siam eventually resulted in the downfall of Sri Vijaya. At one stage the two empires of East Java and Sri Vijaya had joined forces to repel Siamese attacks and by implication, Kublai Khan of China. However, by 1292 AD the empire of Sri Vijaya had ceased to exist and that of East Java entered a new phase leading to the emergence of Majapahit.

Another factor contributing to the demise of Sri Vijaya was the emergence of Islam in Sumatra. Islam established its roots in India after the Muslim (Turkish) conquests in northern India during the 12th and 13th centuries. Indian traders who were Muslim converts (mainly Gujeratis) had spread it to Sumatra by the end of the 13th century. Islam eventually undermined the Buddhist foundation of the Indianised empires, although Indian culture continued to persist during the 15th century, in Malacca, Java and Burma.

d) Majapahit Empire (East Java, Madura, Bali, 1292-1403) - during Yuan or Mongol dynasty (1263 – 1368); rise of Ming or Manchu dynasty (from 1368)

The Hindu Majapahit Empire that emerged in East Java was the last Indianised state in Indonesia after the fall of Sri Vijaya in Sumatra. It had a rather long and convoluted history, involving a series of rulers the description of which would be odious. Suffice to say, from 1389 to 1401 the final conflict between two powerful opposing parties escalated into open war which was to last until 1406. Civil wars continued and famine completed the damage until the kingdom fell into pieces.

The decline of Majapahit was hastened by two events, the rise of Malacca as an indirect result of her warring activities and the expansion of Islam. A number of little states were formed along the northern seaboard when Majapahit became weak. Many princes of these states married daughters of rich Muslim traders from Malacca across the Straits and they themselves converted to Islam. After 1414 Malacca became the centre of Islam in Malaya.

By 1520 Indian Buddhism that had so long been a powerful influence on the Majapahit Empire and others before that, was completely destroyed. Only Bali remained with traces of the ancient Hindu religion to this day. However, the early Indianised empires left a living legacy, traces of which can still be found in the political ideas, social structures, rituals, language, arts and cultural practices of the Malays.

The fall of the Majapahit Empire saw the emergence of Malacca as a great port that attracted European interest.

6. Founding of Malacca (1403 - 1511) – during Ming or Manchu dynasty (1368 – 1644)

At this time Siam had already become a great power in Indo-China, having conquered Burma, Laos and Cambodia. By 1401 the Malay Peninsula was compelled to acknowledge the Siamese king.

The original site of Malacca had no cultivation of any sort except for its closeness to the Straits. The cultivation of rice has long been known only in Kedah and Kelantan by the Deutoro-Malays from the north. Southern Malaya remained almost uninhabited except for a few ports for the collection of tin and jungle produce.

The civil war that broke out in Majapahit in East Java led indirectly to the rise of Malacca. A Hindu Sumatran prince consort named Parameswara, who was married to a princess of the house of Majapahit, was forced to flee to Temasek (old Singapore) with a few followers. He sought and was given refuge in Temasek, but the treacherous Parameswara later murdered the host and seized his throne. As Temasek was a vassal of Siam, the Siamese king ordered another vassal (ruler of Pahang) to drive Parameswara out. The latter fled up the Muar River and into the jungle to the north with the help of sea gypsies. He eventually heard of the site of Malacca and moved there to start a small and insignificant settlement. Malacca's only advantage, discovered later, was its excellent geographic position as a port near the southern end of the Straits, although Kedah and, to some extent, Klang, had been the ports of call for early ships plying between India and China. Parameswara nevertheless established himself as a petty chief there while paying tribute to Siam. Over the next 100 years starting from 1403 Malacca grew in significance and this could be due to two main developments.

a) Expansion of the Ming Dynasty and Trade

It was not until 1403 that Malacca came into prominence, by the visit of a Chinese fleet under Admiral Yin Ching in the services of the newly emerged Ming dynasty. Parameswara immediately realised a powerful protector against Siam and accordingly paid tribute to the Ming. He was subsequently granted the status of king in 1406 for his avowed policy to retain Chinese support, a policy that was to stand Malacca in good stead for the next 100 years. Malacca consequently ceased to be a dependency of Siam.

Previously, the Mongol dynasty had maintained trade with the West as far as the coast of Malabar. They rebuilt old ports and established new ones within China. By the time the Ming drove out the Mongols in 1368 China's fleet and sea power were already considerable. However, in the early years of the 15th century the Tartar hordes of the northern Chinese plains had rendered the great Silk Road to the West untenable. Consequently, the sea route through the Straits assumed tremendous importance.

Many Chinese expeditions, led by the greatest of all Chinese admirals, Admiral Zheng-He (Cheng Ho), were made, bearing valuable gifts to kings and rulers in huge ships, and in return they paid tribute to the Ming Emperor. Admiral Zheng-He, a Chinese Muslim from Yunnan province, made many journeys to the West via the Straits, and these led to a great increase in trade between East and West, including Arabia, Medina, Aden, Mogadishu and Ormuz. Not only were the Ming interested in trade, they wanted to bring the S.E.A. states under China's tutelage from afar, without actually maintaining permanent presence. This was made all the easier by the political weakness of these states. Malacca, consequently, grew in strategic as well as commercial importance.

It was during this period of heightened trade and political activity that China saw a great need to protect her interests in the delicate trade route through the Straits of Malacca. It was in one of China's intercessions, so it is claimed, that Hang Tuah and his clansmen were sent to Malacca on a mission to assist the Sultanate to repel Siam. It is not certain what other factors underpinned the mission. However, three possible scenarios are presented later to throw more light on the claim.

b) Rise of Islam

Since the end of the 13th century the small kingdoms of Pedir and Pasai in north-east Sumatra had been the chief ports of call of Arab traders who also held a monopoly of the spice trade. The Arabs, of course, had embraced the Muslim faith a few centuries before. Inevitably before the beginning of the 15th century the rulers of these kingdoms had converted to Islam.

Malacca's dependence on its supply of rice had always been from these Sumatran kingdoms. As a result of increased trade between them, Islam inevitably crossed the Straits. The Arabs now had a new port of call. This not only led to further expansion of commerce and trade in Malacca but also the advance of Islam to Java, Borneo and the Moluccas.

As mentioned earlier, Islam took root in India following the Turkish conquest during the 12th and 13th centuries. Consequently, Indian traders also brought Islam to the S.E.A. region, almost in similar fashion to when Hinduism was brought over many centuries before, through gradual assimilation. As was the case of the Hindu religion, the first converts to Islam were from the aristocratic class. Once Islam was accepted by the rulers and chiefs as their new faith the common people followed. The spread of Islam by social contact through trade was also augmented by marriages and, significantly, through diplomatic marriages.

7. The Malacca Sultanate

There were six rulers (Sultans) and eight Bendaharas (equivalent to present-day Prime Minister) of note in the Malacca Empire over the 100 odd years before the arrival of the Portuguese. The chronological table below shows the complexity in the succession of rulers and Bendaharas and the significant events that took place during each reign.

Ruler	Period	Significant events
<p>1. Parameswara (Sultan Megat Iskandar Shah)</p> <p>First ruler of Malacca; Indian Hindu of noble descent; married a Muslim Princess of Pasai; converted to Muslim and took Muslim title of Iskandar Shah.</p>	1403 – 1424	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . local people in Malacca starting to embrace Islam; . powerful Muslim merchants made Malacca their headquarters, Indian traders already there; . Ad. Zheng-He’s visit in 1409; . Parameswara visited Emperor Yung-Lo 1414; . Parameswara started some reforms. . no Constitution yet
<p>2. Sultan Muhammed Shah (Sri Maharajah). Megat Iskandar’s son; married a Tamil Muslim; converted to Islam sometime after 1435 and changed from Sri Maharajah (Hindu) to Muhammed Shah (Muslim).</p>	1424 -1444	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . visited Emperor Yung-Lo in 1424 to re-affirm loyalty; . Malacca Constitution took shape; . two powerful factions within Bendahara emerged; . Tamil-Muslim Tun Ali became 4th Bendahara.
<p>3. Sultan Muzaffar Shah (Raja Kasim) Succeeded his half- brother, Raja Ibrahim, who ruled only 17 months; son of a common Tamil Muslim and took Muslim title of Muzaffar Shah; married Tun Kudu, Tun Perak’s sister.</p>	1444 – 1459	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . start of golden era for Malacca; . Malay-Muslim Tun Perak became 5th Bendahara in 1456, ousting Tun Ali ; king-maker, popular and power behind the throne for over 40 years; . tension growing between Tamil-Muslim and Malay-Muslim factions within Bendahara.
<p>4. Sultan Mansur Shah (Raja Abdullah) Son of Sultan Muzaffar Shah, 3rd cousin of Tun Perak; married Chinese Princess named Hang Li Po in addition to Javanese and Siamese wives, this last bore two future Sultans of Pahang.</p>	1459 - 1477	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . saw peak of Malacca ascendancy following many conquests of minor kingdoms; . successes mainly due to Tun Perak; . Malacca had 40,000 inhabitants of many races; . appearance of Hang Tuah as Malay folk hero
<p>5. Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah (Raja Hassan)</p> <p>Younger son of Mansur Shah; nephew of Tun Perak; chosen over his elder brother; died mysteriously in 1488.</p>	1477 - 1488	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . saw rise of Tamil-Muslim Tun Mutahir, son of Tun Ali, the old rival of Tun Perak; . Sultan Alauddin made many enemies.
<p>6. Sultan Mahmud Shah</p> <p>Only a child; figurehead, half-brother of Sultan Alauddin’s elder son; nephew of Tun Mutahir and grand nephew of Tun Perak; real power with Bendahara Tun Mutahir.</p>	1488 - 1511	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Tun Perak died in 1498 after having great influence; . Tun Mutahir finally became 7th Bendahara with real power from 1500 to 1510; . in Sept 1509 first Portuguese fleet appeared; . Tun Mutahir slain in 1510.

1) Parameswara (Sultan Megat Iskandar Shah)

He was undoubtedly the Hindu founder and first ruler of Malacca, after having escaped from Sumatra during the Majapahit turmoil. From 1403 he set about organising Malacca into some sort of hierarchy with himself as ruler. It is believed he married the daughter of the Muslim Sultan of Pasai, became a Muslim and proclaimed himself with the Muslim title of Mega Iskandar Shah. Henceforth Malacca became headquarters of powerful and wealthy Muslim merchants as they discovered the geographical advantages of Malacca's strategic position in the Straits.

Chinese and Portuguese chronicles mentioned Parameswara went to China in 1414 on one of Admiral Zheng-He's ships to pay homage to Emperor Yung-Lo. He died in 1424.

2) Sultan Muhammed Shah (Sri Maharajah)

He succeeded his father, Megat Iskandar Shah, in 1424. Again Chinese and Portuguese archives recorded his trip to China to re-affirm loyalty to China. It would appear that he married a Tamil Muslim, converted to Islam sometime after 1435 and thence took the Muslim title Sultan Muhammed Shah. The new ruler continued to pay tribute to China while Siam continued to be a threat.

It was during this reign that the Constitution of Malacca took shape. It was based on similar lines to that of other Indianised states like Java, Cambodia and Siam. The organisation of the state essentially composed of the Sultan as head assisted by a powerful Inner Council of Four. The leader of this Council, the Bendahara, though not of royal blood, was equivalent to a present-day Prime Minister, but with unbridled power. Consequently, the Bendahara, his family and cohorts gained great wealth and influence.

By the time of Sri Maharajah's death in 1444 two powerful factions within the Bendahara were vying for power. One was the old Bendahara of the Malay-Muslim faction (led notably by Tun Perak) and the opposition Tamil-Muslim faction (led by Tun Ali). Successive rulers after Sri Maharajah up to 1511 were somehow related to the Tamil-Muslim Bendahara, but behind it all was the powerful king-maker, Tun Perak, from the Malay-Muslim Bendahara. Tun Perak always ensured that each successive Sultan was either a relative or a relative married to the Sultan. He also played a leading role in the defence of Malacca against Siam, with constant appeals to China to intercede. Over time the Bendahara became all powerful, the Sultan a mere figurehead.

3) Sultan Muzaffar Shah (Raja Kasim),

The son of a common Tamil woman, he succeeded his half-brother, Raja Ibrahim who ruled for only 17 months before being murdered. Raja Kasim took the Muslim title of Sultan Muzaffar Shah. He married Tun Kudu, Tun Perak's sister. His uncle, the Tamil Muslim Tun Ali, was the powerful Bendahara for a time. Tension grew within the Bendahara. However, from 1456 Tun Perak, the Malay Muslim, was to rule 'behind the throne' as the Bendahara until his death in 1498. .

Sultan Muzaffar's reign saw the beginning of a golden era for Malacca and peaked during Sultan Mansur Shah's rule from 1459. In the 40 years since its founding Malacca steadily prospered and saw great changes under the protection of China. She was basically a great emporium where goods from trading countries were exchanged. Her chief sources of revenue were from customs duties, court fines, tolls on goods from inland villages and tributes from other Malayan states. The ruler himself was greatly enriched by various means.

4) Sultan Mansur Shah (Raja Abdullah),

Being Sultan Muzaffar's son and third cousin of Tun Perak, he succeeded his father from 1459 until 1477. This was a period of heightened activity against Siam and her Malayan vassals. Due principally to Tun Perak, the Siamese states of Kedah and Pahang fell. Eventually the Malacca Empire also included Johore, Muar and several Sumatran coastal kingdoms such as Rokan, Siak, Kampar and Indragiri. It was undoubtedly Malaya's most glorious period in history. Malacca was now a state of very great importance, reminiscent of its Sri Vijaya predecessor. Its inhabitants totalled 40,000 of many races.

Sultan Mansur Shah had three wives. The first was Javanese, possibly a Princess from the old Sri Vijaya Empire. The second was Siamese, possibly as a prize after the conquest of the Siamese vassal in Malaya, Pahang. This wife bore two future Sultans of Pahang, a fitting succession to the vanquished Siamese state. The third was a Chinese Princess, which invites speculation.

An interesting aspect of Malacca's relations with China was an account that the then Chinese Emperor gave Sultan Mansur a Chinese Princess as a bride to seal a strategic partnership. The Princess's name was Hang Li Po, apparently from a noble family. Another fascinating aspect was that this Princess was accompanied by an entourage of many servants and some very special bodyguards. It was the custom for the Emperor to ensure protection of an important personage. It was apparently an old Chinese tradition also that warriors or trusted servants were given the same surname as that personage, as decreed by the Emperor to signify that they belong to the owner of that surname, the Princess's. This brings us to the question of how the legendary Hang Tuah and his compatriots came to being at this precise moment of early Malayan history. Coincidentally, Hang Tuah, the ultimate hero and symbol of honour, loyalty and courage was made Laksmana (Admiral) by the Sultan for his part in the overthrow of many kingdoms mentioned earlier. We shall examine this development later.

5) Sultan Aluaddin Riayat Shah (Raja Hassan),

The younger son of Sultan Mansur Shah, he succeeded him in 1477 on the prompting of Tun Perak who was also his uncle. The older son and rightful ruler, Raja Mohammed, left in disgust for Pahang. Sultan Aluaddin Shah made many enemies among his ministers for his outspokenness and strong-mindedness. His mysterious death in 1488 could be attributed to his enemies or his disgruntled brother, Raja Mohammed. At this time too saw the rise of Tun Mutahir, the son of the old former Bendahara Tamil-Muslim, Tun Ali.

6) Sultan Mahmud Shah,

The younger son of Sultan Aluaddin, he took over the reign in 1488 instead of his older brother, Munawar Shah. Mahmud was only a mere child but had the king-maker, Tun Perak, who was also his grand uncle, behind him. Meanwhile, Tun Mutahir, the son of Tun Perak's old Tamil-Muslim rival, Bendahara Tun Ali, was waiting on the wings to grab power. All along Sultan Mahmud Shah was a mere figurehead as real power rested with the Bendahara, Tun Perak.

However, in 1498 Tun Perak died after 42 years of loyal and dedicated service to Malacca. He was succeeded by his brother, Tun Puteh who, however, lasted only two years before he too died in 1500. Thus open a new era in Malacca's history as Tun Mutahir achieved the victory he desired for so long. His reign as the 7th Bendahara from 1500 was to mark the beginning of the end of the Malacca Sultanate.

Despite internal problems under Tun Mutahir, Malacca continued to prosper and enrich the elite and its citizens. However, two events were to decide the fate of Malacca. The first was the Portuguese landing in September 1509, the first Europeans to do so. A small party of Portuguese on land was captured while the fleet got away. The second event was to do with the internal struggle between the Sultan and the Bendahara. It finally came to a head in 1510. With the support of Tun Perak's family and loyal supporters, Sultan Mahmud (now grown) had Tun Mutahir, his son, brother and most of his family slain. Once more the Malay family was returned to power and Tun Paduka, the aged son of Tun Perak, was made the 8th Bendahara. He was to be the last Bendahara because in 1511 the Portuguese fleet, under Afonso d'Albuquerque, returned to Malacca harbour to seek reprisal for the treatment of the Portuguese in 1509. This was to change Malacca's future forever.

8. The Legend of Hang Tuah

The legend of Hang Tuah and his exploits have been immortalised in the annals of Malaysian history. His absolute loyalty to his ruler, his courage and his prowess as a warrior had been unquestioned and provided a shining example for all and sundry in Malaysian society. Hang Tuah represents the ultimate Malay hero to this day.

There is no doubt that Hang Tuah and his compatriots existed in 15th century Malaya. There is no doubt that he was a hero. There is no doubt that his legend had spread throughout the country. There is no doubt that a man of such loyalty and integrity should be revered. The only doubt came to surface recently as to his origin. Let's see how this came about. A recent article with no known source that floated around on the Internet on 8th January 2009 essentially stated as follows (slightly edited):

In June 1998 the Malaysian Government commissioned a team of scientists, historians, archaeologists and technical staff to conduct research to complement historical studies undertaken in secondary schools. The objectives were:

- a) to find evidence that the Malays were the original settlers in the Malay Peninsula and that Islam was the first religion to be established there;*
- b) to substantiate this claim, they need to find the graves of Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat, Hang Lekiu, Hang Lekir and Hang Kasturi.*

Apparently the team finally found the graves of Hang Tuah and the rest. Their skeletons were analysed. Their DNA tests revealed, so it was claimed, that they were ethnic Chinese. The team even found graves in Kelantan which were at least 900 years old and tests of the remains revealed that they were also Chinese.

Following the findings, it was claimed that references to Hang Tuah, either partly or wholly, were withdrawn from Malaysian school textbooks in 2000.

The article also suggested approaching to The Federal Association of Archaeology and Research, Michigan, USA to seek verification. As far as we know, this Association does not exist. Furthermore, the objectives as stated above seem ill-conceived when the time factor is considered.

Readers can now see the purpose of this part of the "Story of Malacca". We have already accepted as truth that Hang Tuah and company came forth in the service of a ruling Malacca Sultan, that he was a folk hero, that he was loyal and performed good deeds. There are three possible scenarios:

Scenario one:

It has been claimed that Hang Tuah and his fellow clansmen were sent by the Chinese Emperor Yung-Lo and transported by Admiral Zheng-He to Malacca sometime during the reign of Parameswara (1403-1424) to protect the undeserving ruler. Like Admiral Zheng-He, they came from the Yunnan province and like the Admiral, they were Chinese Muslims.

This mission was apparently to lend support to the ruler against Siam that had been a constant threat to the fledgling state. Hang Tuah consequently could have stayed on to serve successive Malacca Sultans.

Our observations:

- the period in question (early 15th century) immediately runs counter to the alleged Malaysian Government's objective of using Hang Tuah's remains to substantiate that the Malays were the original inhabitants in Malaya. The ancestors of the modern Malays were already there as far back as 300 BC, among the Deutero-Malays who were from the Yunnan province. If Hang Tuah was used as point of origin then he would have been from the Bronze Age.
- Islam came to S.E.A. at the end of the 13th century across from India and the Persian Gulf to Sumatra. It spread to Malacca at the beginning of the 15th century. Long before that, from 100 AD, the region was firmly established as Indian Brahmanism and, later, Buddhism (Hinduism) among rulers.
- Parameswara had not yet reach a status high enough to warrant active Chinese involvement.
- It's unlikely that Hang Tuah and company would be sent from China to protect Malacca at the time. It was just starting to become a strategic port without a proper Constitution or system of government.

Our conclusion is that this account of Hang Tuah's first presence in Malaya is highly unlikely.

Scenario two:

Some plausible sources claim Hang Tuah and company were sent to serve Sultan Mansur Shah (1459-1477), a gap of at least 35 years from Parameswara's death. By then Malacca was truly established as an empire and of immense importance to China. She had also embarked on conquest after conquest of neighbouring kingdoms to rival and forestall troublesome Siam.

Sultan Mansur, so claimed, was given a Chinese Princess in marriage by the Chinese Emperor to seal a strategic alliance. The Princess's name was Hang Li Po. In deference to the Muslim Sultan the Princess was a Muslim also. The royal personage was accompanied by trusted warriors and servants to Malacca. It so happened that Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat, Hang Lekiu, Hang Lekir and Hang Kasturi were the warriors. In deference to the Sultan these warriors were Chinese Muslims as well.

At the time Sultan Mansur and Tun Perak were expanding the Malacca Empire and required loyal and able warriors. The Chinese Emperor had achieved a number of important objectives by one master stroke - a Princess to ensure allegiance; protecting China's trade interests; to help the Sultan with warriors in his conquests; to deter Siam from invading an empire with a Chinese Princess, thus incurring China's wrath.

Our observations:

- Malacca had reached a point that justified close and special attention from China.
- The Sultan's ambitious program of subjugation of other kingdoms called for brave and loyal warriors with proven prowess.
- That the Princess, Hang Tuah and his followers were Chinese Muslims is plausible, in deference to the Muslim Sultan and because there are many of them in China still.
- How did Hang Tuah and his warriors have the same surname? They could have come from the same clan in the same province in China or they could be brothers and cousins. A more plausible explanation is that an old Chinese tradition existed where the surnames of trusted servants or warriors of royalty were given or re-issued with surnames given by the Emperor. Since the warriors were part of Princess Hang Li Po's entourage, the Emperor had decreed they be given the same surname as hers.
- Chinese names always start with the surname first and given names last, so as to carry forward to the next generation. Hang is an odd name for a Malay person to start with. There is no surname in traditional Malay, usually it is 'the son of', so that the grandfather's name is lost in the generation after next. The Malay term 'Tuah' means elder, senior or head. Therefore, Hang Tuah could well mean the leader of the Hang warriors.
- Hang Tuah's absolute loyalty to Sultan Mansur is well documented. He was eventually rewarded with the title of Laksmana (Admiral of the Fleet). Why would he have received such a title if he was just a warrior assigned to Princess Hang Li Po?

Our conclusion is that this account of Hang Tuah's origin is the most plausible and believable.

Scenario three:

The third scenario comes from a dated textbook with accounts from Portuguese chronicles. This was when Malacca was under siege by Afonso d'Albuquerque and his forces in 1511. Sultan Mahmud Shah had resumed control again after slaying Tun Mutahir in 1510.

During the siege Hang Tuah and a few others kept up a series of harassing attacks on the Portuguese. If this was the case and Hang Tuah did survive from Sultan Mansur Shah's reign (1459-1477), he would be very old indeed. Assuming Hang Tuah was in his twenties when he served Sultan Mansur Shah at the beginning of 1459, he would have been in his seventies in 1511, still acting as Laksmana during the siege.

Our observations:

- Since no further account of Hang Tuah was made by Portuguese chronicles, do we dare to assume it was a matter of mistaken identity by the Portuguese?
- The Malacca Sultanate was in a state of turmoil at the time. Sultan Mahmud had escaped to Pahang and then to Bintang to leave Malacca to the Portuguese.

Our conclusion is that it is quite possible that Hang Tuah, loyal as he was, served his Sultans into his twilight years. He would have served the Malacca Sultanate for over 50 years and deserving of the reverence he commands as a true and loyal folk hero to this day.

Here's further food for thought. There are many provinces in China with Chinese Muslims, the most famous being Admiral Zheng-He. The surname, Hang, is also quite common among Chinese Muslims.

As recently as 18th March 2009, the Australian Financial Review featured an article on China's push to increase domestic consumption to combat the global financial crisis. This article showed a photograph of a farming family in a remote village of Niang, in Qinghai province, western China. Qinghai is in the north of Tibet and Sichuan province. The name of the head of the family was Hang Shengming who wore a Muslim skullcap. We could speculate if he was a descendant of Hang Tuah. There are many Hangs in the world including Australia, considering the extent of the Chinese diaspora. We have yet to come across a Malay name of 'Hang' arranged in similar manner as Hang Tuah and his band of trusty warriors.

9. Malacca before the Portuguese

Malacca was to have a profound influence on the rest of the country for many centuries. It was during the occupation of the Portuguese that Christianity and some semblance of Western culture took hold and was to have a lasting influence under the British in subsequent centuries. There also emerged a unique class of people (collectively known as *Peranakans*) of Chinese, Indian and Eurasian origin. This class of people embraced the local Malay culture, language and dress, married the locals and developed a unique blend of culinary cuisine, culture and traditions. They were concentrated in the Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang and Singapore at the time

By the beginning of the 16th century Malacca had become a great cosmopolitan seaport unequal in the world. Moors came from Cairo, Mecca and Aden on the Persian Gulf; Parsees, Gujaratis, Goanese, Malabaris, Klings came from the Coromandel Coast of India; merchants came from Siam, China, Java, Sumatra, Cambodia, Indo-China and the Moluccas. Over 80 languages were often spoken. The wealthiest traders from Arabia and India made their headquarters in Malacca. Merchants had different parts of the city allocated to them and port officials were appointed to look after groups from Arabia, India, East Asia, Indonesia and the Moluccas. Malacca had full control of the Straits, with the Sumatran states acknowledging her supremacy and Siam was no longer a threat.

Whilst many foreign merchants made fortunes, the main beneficiaries were the ruling class, deriving great wealth from every conceivable means. These included levies on ships' cargoes, taxes on local produce of small traders, fines, licences, bribes, probates, private trading among the elite, slave ownership, tributes from dependencies and valuable gifts from China.

The Malay upper class and Bendahara ruled supreme. Ordinary traders paid heavily for the privilege; there was no middle class to engage in retail trade; the peasant class was not encouraged to work to improve their condition; land tenure was too insecure to encourage cultivation; the slaves were completely ignored. Administration of the law was brutal and oppressive. None of the wealth of the ruling class was used to provide any form of social welfare for the community.

That Indian culture heavily influenced the development of this region in the early years is evident. Indian ideas of kingship and government shaped fledgling states through the ruling classes. Indian literature, art,

justice and religious customs and observances permeated local traditions. However, the culture of the native people endured and hence a subsequent mix of both emerged in later years.

The Chinese political and economic influence was no less immense. The early Indianised empires and their successors owed their prosperity to the Han, Tang and Yuan dynasties. Malacca's rise to power and her protection from foreign invasion was through the intervention of the Ming Dynasty. It was only due to the change in foreign policy of the Ming in the 16th century that the Europeans were able to establish a foothold in the region.

Islam, itself imported from India into the region, marked the beginning of a new culture. By the beginning of the 16th century Islam was already changing the religious outlook of the area. With the entry of the Europeans another culture was introduced.

10. Portuguese Conquest and Occupation (1511-1641)

The monopoly of sea routes on the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and across the Indian Ocean to India, S.E. Asia and China was held by Muslim powers. The Mediterranean was controlled by the Turks. In 1509 however, Portugal defeated the Egyptians and Indians at Dui, India, thus gaining command of the Indian Ocean (the 'back door to the East'). By 1512 Portugal had control of important bases at Ormuz on the Persian Gulf; Goa, Calicut and Cochin in India; Colombo in Ceylon; Malacca in Malaya. Later she had possession of Macao, China. The chief force behind this policy of capturing important seaports and building fortresses was a Portuguese nobleman by the name of Afonso d'Albuquerque. For a small country such as Portugal and with a small fleet, these conquests were nothing short of amazing. For the first time since the days of Ptolemy, Europe was able to trade once more directly with the East.

a) The Siege of Malacca

Portuguese attention to Malacca dated back to September 1509 when a small landing party of Portuguese led by Ruy d'Aruajo was captured, while the fleet got away with Diego Lopez de Sequiera. Two years had elapsed in her preoccupation with conquest of various ports before attention reverted back to Malacca by Afonso d'Albuquerque himself.

With a fleet of 18 ships and 1400 troops, d'Albuquerque sailed into Malacca harbour in July 1511 to prepare his siege. Malacca was already prepared for a long siege, with 20,000 well armed soldiers that included Malays, Javanese and Turkish mercenaries. The city itself was heavily fortified and the approach to it from the sea was very difficult. Sultan Mahmud Shah, the last of the Malacca sultan in that period, felt he could rely on the merchants, but only the Gujarati merchants provided the mercenaries.

The weaknesses of Malacca originated from within. The unpopular Bendahara, Tun Mutahir, who was slain in 1510, had shown that political tension still existed. Many merchants were discontented with the treatment they received from the Malay ruling class; the Javanese hated Sultan Mahmud; Chinese merchants were disgusted with the high levies and openly favoured the Portuguese; among the foreign merchants there was considerable friction; Malacca could starve since it had to import rich and other staples from neighbouring Sumatra and Java.

The Portuguese position was even worse. They were far from their base, heavily outnumbered and surrounded by their enemies. However, after a series of failed negotiations, d'Albuquerque launched a series of determined attacks with their longer range artillery bombardment and ground movements. Finally Malacca was overthrown on 24th August 1511. Sultan Mahmud and his son, Alauddin, fled to Pahang and later to the island of Bintang off Temasek (Singapore). Portuguese chronicles indicate that Hang Tuan, then the Laksmana of Malacca, and a handful of Malays fought a futile rearguard battle against the Portuguese.

b) Settlement, Fortification and Administration

As his policy was to build a series of forts to serve as ports of call throughout the Portuguese empire, d'Albuquerque at once set about building a fortress. The fortress was built in record time under much duress, such as the transportation of bricks from elsewhere, incessant attacks on supplies and famine. The finished fortification was so formidable that it withstood constant attacks by neighbouring rulers for 130 years until the Dutch captured it in 1641.

Nearing the completion of the fortress, d'Albuquerque left Malacca for Goa. After some mishaps he arrived at Goa with two ships and a few troops. The building of the rest of the settlement was to take many more years. Administration buildings, churches, hospitals, a prison and a bell tower were walled in with the fortress like a city, but the general population was dispersed among three suburbs.

By the time the Portuguese had completed their rebuilding tasks the population of Malacca was around 30,000, of which 7400 were Christians, the rest made up of other races from the East – Malays, Javanese, Indians, Chinese, Moors and Turks. Many languages were spoken although Malay was the *lingua franca*. It was truly a cosmopolitan city controlled by a meagre but determined garrison of 300 men. It was also a place of danger, divided loyalties, treachery, intrigues, plots and counter plots, never ending fear of attacks, peril of the sea, siege and famine.

c) Trade and Missionary Activities

D'Albuquerque wanted to restore Malacca as a great emporium and to repair the damage inflicted during the siege. He treated the traders fairly and sent them back to return again to trade. Soon embassies from neighbouring states began to arrive to offer friendship.

The strategic and economic importance of Malacca and the Straits can be summed up as follows. Portuguese ships, laden with European goods and Indian cloths, would sail from Goa (its Eastern headquarters) to Malacca. There they would dispose of some of their cloths and take aboard spices for the Far East. With spices and Indian silver they would buy Chinese silks to take to Japan. In exchange for Chinese silks, European goods, spices and Indian commodities, Japan would pay in silver. The Japanese would sell lacquer cabinets, boxes and furniture, painted screens, swords, pikes and copper which were high in demand in Europe. The ships would then return to Macao where they would use the Japanese silver to buy silks, pearls, ivory and porcelain for the Malacca, Goa and European markets. On the return trip to India they would load up at Malacca with spices; in India they would use Chinese and Malacca gold which was highly priced in India to buy Indian cloths. From Goa goods destined for the European markets, such as spices, silks, porcelain and Javanese ornamental goods that fetched high prices would be sent to Lisbon.

Over this immense system the Portuguese held a monopoly until the end of the 16th century. It was a system of direct trade between Europe and China, based on the key ports of Goa in the West and Macao in the East, with Malacca in between playing a strategic role. This system of trade caused much envy and animosity among the native states and European powers.

The Portuguese were also keen to spread Christianity in the region. Missionary activities began once the Empire was founded. However, there was little hope in the South East Asian region as most were already converted to Islam. It was not until the era of St Francis Xavier that greater success was achieved. St Francis Xavier, a Basque nobleman, made three separate visits to Malacca (1545, 1550 and 1553) while on his way to the Moluccas, Japan and China. He found Malacca wanting and much to do there. He also found greed and injustice among some Portuguese officials that wrecked his plan to introduce missionary work in China. In Malacca itself he did much work and as a consequence the Church there became the leading one in S.E. Asia. He started a school, had the Commandments and several prayers translated into Malay and converted many Hindus and Muslims into Christianity.

St Francis died in September, 1553 on the way to China, on the island of Sancian. His body was brought back to Malacca with great veneration and finally taken to Goa, its final resting place. He has been compared with St Paul as a great missionary in spreading Christianity in the East.

11. Downfall of the Portuguese

The achievements of Portugal as a small nation of no more than one and a half million at that time were remarkable. She was noted for her great voyages of discovery, her success in building her eastern Empire, her missionary enterprise and her colonisation of Brazil. Brazil lasted many centuries and Malacca lasted 130 years. In the East she faced unremitting hostility from native powers and from the might of other European powers hungry for control of the region.

The Portuguese were the first to establish a European empire in the East in modern times. In the process they paved the sea route from Europe to the Far East for other European nations to follow. They also set a model for empire building for other colonial powers.

Despite her achievements, Portugal's eventual downfall could be attributed to a number of reasons:

- a) Enmity among the native rulers, especially the ousted Malacca Sultan Mahmud Shah who fled and based himself in Bintang.
- b) Since Islam has been entrenched in the region for a hundred years before the advent of Portuguese Christianity this caused a lot of resentment among Muslim rulers.
- c) Local traders resented their trade monopoly being taken away by the victorious Portuguese.
- d) The Portuguese government failed to keep their monopoly intact but allowed private trading among officials that led to widespread abuse of privileges.
- e) Mismanagement and corruption of individual Portuguese officers and flaws in administration led to heavy drain on the treasury.

- f) The smallness of Portugal's population was a great weakness. Her chain of small fortified trading stations could only be supported likewise by small fleets. Her army had to be filled with criminals and mercenaries of doubtful character. The only garrisons in the region were Malacca, Amboina and Tidore in the Moluccas, a poor defence for trade among Asians.

The 130 tumultuous years of Portuguese rule in Malacca were characterised by determined effort for control from two main adversaries, their native and European enemies.

a) Native Enemies

From 1513 to 1590 Portuguese Malacca was subjected to constant blockades, boycotts and ferocious attacks from Java, Johore and later, Aceh. The Moors from the Persian Gulf were also furious at the loss of their monopoly of the spice trade and diverted their trade to Aceh in Sumatra.

Between 1513 and 1528 the exiled Sultan Mahmud Shah, based in Bintang, made repeated attacks on Malacca but was defeated each time. He continually damaged Portuguese trade not only by fighting but also by influencing rulers of the east coast of Sumatra, whose rivers were used for transporting gold, pepper and rice to Malacca.

After Mahmud Shah died in 1528 his son, Alauddin Shah, now based in Johore, continued with attacks on Portuguese shipping. In 1533 he attacked Malacca itself but was beaten off. Malacca's fortification was constantly extended and strengthened to withstand these and subsequent attacks.

In the meantime, Aceh had become a new power base of the Muslims and was to be Malacca's most dangerous native enemy. In 1537 Aceh launched a surprise attack on Malacca in a bid to gain control of the whole of Sumatra and the region. This move put fear in Johore, Perak, Pahang and the Javanese states. They combined with the Portuguese to defeat Aceh in 1539. So for a brief period Malacca had a breathing space. However, between 1547 and 1575 Aceh made several more attacks on Malacca but was repeatedly defeated, sometimes with the aid of Johore.

For nearly 80 years the Portuguese in Malacca faced formidable odds against determined enemies. If not for her splendid fortress Malacca would have fallen long ago. She was ringed by bitter native enemies on the same land who sometimes became allies to fight against an even bigger threat from across the Straits. It would appear that the struggle among themselves would go on indefinitely until the appearance of new foes, the Dutch and English.

b) European Enemies

During the period up to the fall of Portuguese power in the East there were great conflicts between three great European sea-powers, Spain, Holland and England, all vying for a piece or the whole of the lucrative spice trade.

During his famous voyage of circumnavigation (1577-80), Francis Drake's first appearance in the Moluccas was to have serious consequences for Portugal. He took a cargo of spices from the Moluccas back to a very receptive audience in England. His display of sea superiority in 1587, by the capture of a large, home-bound Portuguese ship *San Felipe* laden with rich cargoes further encouraged the English to explore the lucrative spice trade. The capture was a great blow to Portuguese prestige and proved that her monopoly could be successfully challenged. From then on no Portuguese ships to and from the East were safe.

In 1580 the Spanish annexation of Portugal was also to have a profound effect on the future of the Portuguese empire in the East. Spain was the sworn enemy of the Dutch and English, so its possessions in the East were in jeopardy. The local S.E. Asian states had also welcomed the newcomers against the Portuguese.

The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 by Francis Drake led to a series of voyages to S.E Asia by English ships. Subsequent English voyages by Cavendish, Fitch and Lancaster (1586-1596) led to the establishment of the East India Company in December 1600 to challenge Portuguese supremacy. However, the Dutch had already made their appearance in the region in 1595 and for a time up until 1613 were on friendly terms with the English against their common foe, Spain and hence Portugal.

By 1617 Malacca remained the last remaining outpost of Portugal in S.E. Asia. The attacks by the English and the Dutch on her bases along the sea routes in the Indian Ocean had reduced Portugal's dominance considerably. The Dutch had established Batavia in Java as their base in 1617 to by-pass Malacca and by 1630 had delivered a telling blow to Malacca as a Portuguese stronghold.

The Dutch had founded the Dutch East India Company in 1602 that not only had the power to oversee trading policies but also to act on behalf of the Netherlands Government. The Dutch then proceeded to evict Portuguese possessions in the Moluccas and Johore. By 1623, due to quarrels between them, the Dutch had driven the English almost completely from Malayan waters. However, the English were to return much later to establish a naval base on the Malay Peninsula and to renew trade.

England's contribution to Portuguese downfall in the East was considerable. She made concerted attacks on Portuguese bases in India; she captured Ormuz on the Persian Gulf in 1622; she harassed Portuguese shipping to and from the East that prevented communications and reinforcements to Malacca and elsewhere.

c) Dutch Invasion

The Dutch made their first appearance on the scene in 1595. Unlike the Portuguese the Dutch had as their sole aim, trade. Spain had conquered Portugal in 1580 and had closed Lisbon to the Dutch and English. The Dutch therefore had no scruples in attacking Portuguese possessions in the East.

In 1595 a small Dutch expedition led by Cornelius van Houtman sailed to the Straits of Malacca, called at Aceh in Sumatra and then to Bantam in Java. Between 1595 and 1601, 65 Dutch ships in 22 fleets sailed for the East. Spanish reaction to this was expected and several attempts were made to drive them out but failed. With the Javanese favouring the Dutch as rivals to the Portuguese, Dutch reputation in the East was firmly established.

In 1602 a Dutch trader, Jacob van Heemskirk, visited Kedah to establish a relationship that lasted until 1824. Another Dutchman, Jacob Buizsen, visited Johore to establish a factory there. In the Moluccas the Dutch received overwhelming reception. Throughout the Spice Islands Dutch reputation took hold. Even Aceh conceded Dutch presence. In time the Dutch became the most formidable enemy of the Portuguese.

The actual siege of Malacca by the Dutch was to take many years, between 1606 and 1641. In 1606 the Dutch Admiral Matelief concluded a treaty with Johore, promising to help the Sultan recapture Malacca. However, in 1610 Johore changed sides and allied with the Portuguese after Dutch failure to capture Malacca.

Meanwhile, Aceh in northern Sumatra became a bigger threat to Malacca. By 1615 the power of Johore was broken by Aceh and made a vassal. Malacca by now was surrounded by the vassals of Aceh and at sea by Achinese fleets. Between 1627 and 1629 Aceh intensified its blockade of Malacca and in 1629 decided to lay siege to prevent the Dutch from taking Malacca but did not succeed. Against all odds the Portuguese triumphed.

It was obvious however that the days of the Portuguese in the East were numbered. They had lost their foothold in the Moluccas, had attacks on their bases in the Indian Ocean by the English and Dutch. Constant blockades of Goa made reinforcements negligible, Dutch gunboats constantly patrolled the Straits of Malacca. By 1630 Malacca's significance had been taken over by a new port the Dutch had established in Batavia. This had completely by-passed the Straits of Malacca and Malacca itself. By 1636 no trade reached Malacca at all but diverted to Batavia, Jambi and Aceh.

After the death of Mahkota Alam of Aceh in 1636, its power declined. In 1639 the Dutch again made an agreement with Johore to lay siege on Malacca. It was not until 1641, however, in the new alliance with Johore, that the Dutch made a final assault. With reinforcement of 40 ships and 1500 men aboard from Johore they embarked on a month-long bombardment and cut off supplies. The Dutch finally occupied the surrounding suburbs of Malacca while the defenders took refuge in the fortress. Against formidable resistance from the Portuguese and with both sides afflicted by tropical sicknesses and famine, Malacca finally surrendered. From a total population of 20,000 only 3000 were left. Both sides suffered plague, malaria, dysentery and hunger. The siege had lasted five months and twelve days, thus ending the last stronghold of the Portuguese in the East.

The downfall of the Portuguese empire in the East was inevitable. Her small population had to support a relatively vast and widespread empire. She lost good men through shipwrecks, battles and tropical diseases. She had to recruit vagrants, mercenaries and convicts to replenish her dwindling troops. Her administration was hampered by long lines of communication and delays that also drastically affected reinforcements. Then there was the unremitting hostility of the native states, compounded later by the presence of other European powers.

Thus ends the story of Malacca up to the Portuguese downfall. For the remainder of the 17th century and into the next the Dutch and English continued to wrestle for control of the region. However, with the advent of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe late in the 18th and into the 19th century, Dutch Malacca passed into English hands. This was formally recognised with the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty in 1824. Penang was already founded in 1786 by Francis Light. Then in 1819 Stamford Raffles established Singapore as a settlement which further strengthened English influence in the region. Starting with Penang, the English ruled the Malay Peninsula for the next 171 years.

12. The Peranakan Heritage

The story of Malacca serves as a useful backdrop in explaining the origin of a rather unique class of people called the *Peranakans*. We already know that the social history of South East Asia in general and Malacca in particular rests with that vast migration of peoples from many lands over many centuries. With them came their particular cultures and characteristics, including languages, physical appearances, religions, dresses, social mores, customs, rituals, habits, ways of conducting social and business intercourse and many more. They eventually formed distinct communities that made Malacca truly a melting pot of many nationalities. From some of such communities emerged a distinct group called the *Peranakans*. One can imagine the fusion of such varieties that were to gradually enrich the social fabric of the wider Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian societies.

a) Peranakan Definition

The term *Peranakan* means ‘descendent’ in the Malay and Indonesian language. It does not by itself imply a particular ethnic descent unless accompanied by a qualifying noun such as Chinese, Indian, Indo-Chinese or European. However, through consistent usage, it now commonly refers to people of Chinese origin who embrace, partly or wholly, the local native (Malay or Indonesian) culture, in terms of language, dress and cuisine. This may be due to the predominance of Chinese who belong to this class. These Chinese Peranakans are also known as *Straits Chinese* by virtue of the fact that they had settled in sizeable numbers in the British-controlled Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang and Singapore, and the Dutch-controlled island of Java from the 18th century onwards. Their uniqueness lies in their customs and traditions, with glimpses of Chinese, Malay, Indonesian, Portuguese, Dutch and English. They had remained as distinct communities without being fully assimilated into the native population until around the mid 20th century.

There are also comparatively smaller Peranakan communities, such as Indian-Hindu Peranakans known as *Chitty* and Indian-Muslim Peranakans known as *Jawi Pekan*. Further away, in the Philippines, early Chinese immigrants (men) took native wives. Their descendants had established themselves as a separate community from the Chinese to call themselves *mestizos*. However, in the 20th century this group had come to identify themselves as either Chinese or Philipinos.

Chinese Peranakan males are called *babas*, a Malay honorific term for grandparents in Persian, but originated by Hindustani speakers who were traders at the time. The females are called *nonyas*, a Javanese honorific word from the Dutch or Portuguese meaning foreign married lady. This term came to be used for Straits Chinese women as well. From this observation one could surmise that the Peranakans might have originated from Java or even Sumatra, as Indonesian civilisation had preceded the Malayan.

b) Peranakan Origin

As we know, Indian traders were already present in the region from as early as the 1st century. This is evidenced by those powerful Indianised empires in Funan, Java and Sumatra that came into existence many centuries after the Proto and Deutero-Malays trekked down from the north. The Chinese made their presence in Indonesia around the 9th century. In the 10th century more Chinese came as refugees from Guandong and Fujian to settle in Java. We could therefore conclude that the Peranakans had their roots in Java and Sumatra, just as the ancestors of the ‘modern’ Malays had, by crossing the Straits of Malacca.

It was not until the 15th century that large scale migration of Chinese took place. Malacca was founded in 1403 by Parameswara and trade had reopened between China and the smaller states of the Malay Peninsula. Following several visits by the Ming Admiral, Zheng-He (or Cheng-Ho), himself a Chinese Muslim, trading flowed in earnest. So did waves of Chinese immigrants.

A notable period in Malacca's history was during the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah. In 1459 the Chinese Emperor had sent a princess, Hang Li Po, to the Sultan to ensure his allegiance. The princess and her entourage were initially settled in Bukit Cina on the outskirts of Malacca. This could have been the 'official' beginning of the Chinese Peranakans in Malaya. Admiral Zheng-He's ships also brought along many Chinese, including merchants, sailors, soldiers, scholars, artisans, farmers and tradesmen to settle in Malacca and elsewhere. Many of the Chinese were Muslims themselves and were therefore able to integrate easily into Muslim communities. Over time the Peranakans themselves migrated between Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia, which resulted in a high degree of similarity between them.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries under British rule in Malaya the Chinese Peranakan population continued to increase, with vast intakes of Chinese and Indians due to the beginning of local tin mining and rubber planting transported from Brazil.

c) Peranakan Culture

Let us now examine why this group of people are unique, by looking at some main aspects of their culture. For this purpose we would refer to the Chinese Peranakans (with no offence intended for other Peranakans) simply because they were and still are more numerous and their culture more visible, distinctive and pervasive.

Firstly, relating to marriage. In the early days, Chinese male immigrants in particular commonly took native wives, since single women were not allowed out of China until the 19th century. Indians, however, freely married Malay, Indonesian and Siamese women. Up to this day we see many notable citizens in Malaysia and Singapore of mixed ancestry whose predecessors had hailed from China, India, Thailand and Europe. Some of these people would deny this for their own reasons.

In later years the Chinese Peranakans preferred to marry within their Peranakan community or with those of similar stature. A classic Chinese Peranakan wedding ceremony, steeped in custom and tradition that stretches over 12 days, is an event to behold. There would be much singing, dancing, merry making and teasing of the bride amidst sumptuous food.

Secondly, relating to language. The language of the Chinese Peranakan (*Baba Malay*) is that of the Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu*) with a generous dash of the Chinese Hokkien dialect. With the advent of British and Dutch colonisation, however, most Peranakans became English or Dutch-educated, partly due to prestige and partly for economic reasons. As a consequence, most Peranakans were and still are trilingual, conversant in English, Chinese and Malay. Influence of Western culture also led many to convert to Christianity, shedding their Buddhist, Taoist or Confucian leanings.

Baba Malay is disappearing. In Singapore, the Peranakans are classified as ethnically Chinese and receive formal instruction in Chinese Mandarin as a second language. In Malaysia, the standardisation of Malay as *Bahasa Melayu* required for all ethnic groups will eventually lead to the disappearance of *Baba Malay*.

Thirdly, relating to clothing. Aside from food, clothing is a highly visible aspect of the Peranakan heritage. Although the attire of the male (*baba*) Peranakan is less distinctive, the female (*nonya*) Peranakan clothing is something else.

The traditional nonya's ensemble is usually composed of the following fineries:

- *Baju panjang*, which literally means long dress or tunic, is a costume of the older generation, genteel nonyas, but can sometimes be seen in more evening and formal settings. It is a light and delicate transparent long overblouse made with fabric like voile, worn over a cotton blouse and ankle-length sarong.
- *Batik sarong* is a wrap-around, ankle-length skirt printed with batik motifs. The older generation nonyas wear sarongs sewn up at one side, wrapped around the waist and tucked in front and folded down or fastened with a gold or silver belt. The younger generation nonyas wear *sarong kebaya*.
- *Kebaya*, normally worn with the *sarong*, is a hip-length blouse made with sheer fabric like voile and beautifully embroidered by hand. It is worn over a cotton camisole (under-bodice) that is embroidered along the top edge. Instead of buttons or press-studs, this body-hugging *kebaya* is secured at the front by a *kerongsang* (set of brooches) that usually comes in threes joined by a chain.

The *sarong* that goes with the *kebaya* is a little different to the *batik sarong*. It is hip-hugging and sewn as a fitted skirt with sewn pleats, sometimes with a slit in front. The combination of the body-hugging *kebaya* and the hip-hugging, ankle-length *sarong* had become known as “*baju nonya*” and is very popular among younger nonyas (not to mention admiring men).

- *Kerongsang*, as mentioned above, is a set of three brooches of silver or gold (sometimes embedded with diamonds or gemstones) joined by a chain, and used to fasten the *kebaya* at the front.
- *Kasut manek* are beaded slippers that were worn in the 1920's. They were hand-made with much skill and patience, with coloured beads strung together and sewn onto canvas. The flat beaded slippers were more akin to bedroom slippers that later developed with modern shapes and heels for street wear.
- Hairpins, usually of gold, silver and sometimes studded with gemstones, are a necessary accessory as the nonya is seldom seen with her hair loose. The older generation usually wear chignons (buns) secured with hairpins.
- Belts, also of gold or silver, would complete the ensemble.

The more prosperous nonyas wear striking *sarong-kebayas*, diamond studded *kerongsangs*, chunky gold belts and gold hairpins. Peranakan jewellery, like in many cultures, serves as a store of value, beauty, ornamentation and indication of wealth and status. Most of the jewellery is usually from family heirlooms or private collections and reflect a strong fusion of Chinese, Indian, Malay and European influences.

Finally, relating to cuisine. While other aspects of Peranakan culture may have disappeared or disappearing, Peranakan food, popularly known as *nonya cooking*, is the most enduring. Food, like music, is a universal language that can be appreciated by all and sundry. Why so with nonya cooking?

The subject of nonya cooking is extensive and is now a rage in some parts of the globe. Basically, it is a unique fusion of Chinese and Malay ingredients and methods of cooking. Chinese in that it uses pork and Malay in that it uses Malay styles of cooking as well as Malay spices. Add to this Indonesian, Indian, Thai, English, Portuguese and Dutch influences and you can imagine the result.

The base ingredients in nonya dishes are pork, chicken, fish, prawns, lamb and beef. However, the ‘secret’ to the exquisite flavour and taste in nonya cooking lies in the clever use and mix of spices, herbs and pungent roots. These include chillies, turmeric, tamarind, ginger, lemon grass, galangal (*lengkuas*), screwpine leaves (*pandan*), curry leaves, lime leaves, mint, shallots, and so on. Nonya curries normally use a curry paste (*rumpah*) made up of some of these ingredients and including shrimp paste (*blachan*), candlenut and top up with coconut milk for a creamy taste.

Equally renowned are *nonya kuehs*, the delicious cakes and sweets that are rich and varied. They are made from ingredients such as sweet potato, glutinous rice, sago, tapioca, yam, rice flour, coconut milk, together with palm sugar and pandan leaves (screwpine) for that exquisite flavour.

Food preparation can be quite complicated and meticulous, requiring many hours of ‘labour of love’ in cutting, chopping, skinning, pounding and grinding. Then there is the precise mix and apportionment of the right ingredients that makes or breaks a dish. The styles of cooking are *panggang* (smoke), *goreng* (fried), *tumis* (lightly fried) and *rebus* (boiled). Is it any wonder then that recipes of the most delectable of nonya dishes are never made public but stay where they belong – at home and passed from generation to generation?

Some say that the Peranakan culture as a whole is disappearing. Will the *babas* and *nonyas* become an endangered species? Remember, this class of people came into being through early globalisation, the melding of peoples and cultures many centuries ago. Will modern globalisation spell its demise? This will depend on the older generation Peranakans themselves, their determination to pass on the culture to their descendents and the latter’s continuing appreciation of its rich and unique heritage.

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