

THE "INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS" OF THE MALAY PENINSULA FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Pamela Sodhy

Sinopsis

Sebagai sebahagian daripada Empayar Srivijaya dari abad ketujuh hingga ke abad keempat belas, Tanah Melayu telah banyak mengadakan hubungan diplomatik dengan negeri-negeri asing, terutama sekali dengan negeri Cina dan India. Hubungan-hubungan ini kebanyakannya adalah berupa hubungan ekonomi kerana Srivijaya adalah sebuah empayar perlautan berdasarkan perdagangan. Faktor-faktor politik, ketenteraan dan ugama juga telah mempengaruhi hubungan diplomatik Tanah Melayu tetapi biasanya faktor-faktor itu adalah diatasi oleh faktor ekonomi atau faktor-faktor yang berkait rapat dengan ekonomi. Kedudukan Tanah Melayu yang strategik di antara India dan China telah meningkatkan lagi kepentingan perdagangannya. Pedagang-pedagang dari sekitar perantauannya betumpu di pelabuhan-pelabuhan Tanah Melayu dan dengan itu menjadikan pelabuhan-pelabuhan tadi sebagai 'emporia' yang makmur. Seperti mana tercatat dalam sumber-sumber bertulis dan kejumpan-kejumpan arkeologi, kebanyakan pelabuhan-pelabuhan itu terletak di Pantai Timur Tanah Melayu. Kepentingan perdagangannya bagi Tanah Melayu ketara dalam hal-hal kepentingan nasionalnya dan dalam faktor-faktor dalaman dan luaran yang mempengaruhi perhubungan antarabangsa Tanah Melayu — kesemua ini adalah berkisar dalam lingkungan perdagangan.

Synopsis

As part of the Srivijayan empire from the seventh to the fourteenth century, Malaya experienced much diplomatic contact with other countries, especially China and India. These contacts were mainly economic in nature because Srivijaya was a maritime empire based on trade. Political, military, and religious factors also influenced Malaya's diplomatic relations but they were usually subordinate to the economic reasons or closely related. Malaya's strategic location between India and China enhanced the importance of trade. Traders from the surrounding region congregated at Malayan ports which served as thriving emporia. Most of these ports, as indicated by written sources and archaeological finds, were situated on the East Coast of Malaya. The importance of trade to Malaya was also reflected in matters of national interest and in the domestic and external factors that

influenced Malaya's international relations — all these revolved around commercial reasons.

I

This paper attempts to examine the "international relations", briefly defined as "diplomatic contacts with other nations", of the Malay Peninsula during the period of the Srivijayan empire. The Srivijayan empire, which arose in the seventh century and declined in the fourteenth century with the ascendancy of the Majapahit empire, was a maritime power. The wealth and power of its ruler were based mainly on trade, on the dues, tolls, and taxes that he collected at the various ports (Wolters, 1970). Because of its control of the trans-Asian shipping lines, Srivijaya enjoyed a virtual monopoly of the commercial activities in the Southeast Asian region. The Malay Peninsula was considered a part of this empire, along with Sumatra and Borneo, and was likewise affected by trade (Hall, 1968: 56).

This paper is based on the premise that economic factors were the most important of all the many forces regulating diplomatic relations between the Malay Peninsula and other countries during the early period of Malaya's history. Political, military, and religious reasons also played a part in diplomatic contacts but they were usually subordinate to the economic reasons or else interrelated. Besides discussing these various reasons, the paper will examine the domestic and external considerations which influenced, to a large extent, the diplomatic relations. In addition, the paper will discuss the people involved in these contacts, the kinds of treaties made, the items traded and the places where these contacts took place on the Malay Peninsula. It is hoped that in presenting the case for the importance of commercial factors in the international relations of the Malay Peninsula, the paper will also show that while changes in the outward trappings of diplomacy have taken place with time, for example the terminology used and the institutions established to support diplomacy have become more sophisticated, the basic issues, however, have remained the same. Then and now, issues like national interest, self-preservation, national honour, and prestige underlie the diplomacy of a country. In the case of the Malay Peninsula, since it was part of a maritime empire based on trade, these issues revolved around mainly economic reasons.

II

In the Srivijayan empire, power was held by the ruler who was also the religious leader. He was based in Palembang in Sumatra from

the seventh to the eleventh century, when the capital was moved to Jambi, further north on the same coast (Wolters, 1970: 32). The Malay Peninsula was under the overlordship of the Srivijayan ruler. This ruler established himself at his Sumatran *kraton* (palace) and was surrounded by his chiefs or “datus” at court. These “datus” assisted the ruler in the administration of his empire as well as in the carrying out of diplomatic functions. Many of these chiefs possibly served as envoys of the Srivijayan ruler to other countries. They also provided him with naval power. With the “orang laut” and sea-gypsies who lived in the islands of the Srivijayan empire, they helped their ruler launch naval expeditions when necessary. Thus the ruler played an important role in foreign contacts and often ran a one-man show, assisted by his small circle of chiefs. He therefore, for the most part, conducted personal diplomacy. Since diplomacy was restricted to the ruler and some court officials, it took on a somewhat elitist tinge with the ordinary people in the hinterland left out of it. However, they did participate in the process in that they collected the resources for export, for example the hard and soft woods, the resins and the metals and prepared them for trade. As F.L. Dunn (1975) notes, the coastal communities must have had regular trading contact with the forest peoples of the interior.

The foreigners, mainly Chinese, Indian, Arab and Persian, who came to trade in the Malay Peninsula, stayed mainly in these coastal communities. Their accounts of their travels and of the trade carried out in the region constitute much of the foreign sources about the Srivijayan empire, there being only about six or seven indigenous inscriptions about that empire. Some of these accounts mention the *kraton* of the Srivijayan ruler as well as smaller *kratons*. F.H. Van Naerssen (1977: 33) has distinguished between two types of *kraton* — the *harbour kratons* which were dependent for their existence on sea trade, customs and tolls, and the *agrarian kratons* which were dependent on the taxes and statute labour of their own subjects, the peasantry. It was these *harbour kratons* that had contact with the foreigners. As J.N. Miksic has observed, “There is no evidence that foreigners penetrated inland, but Greeks and other foreigners certainly resided in the coastal emporia” (1979: 14)¹

The foreign traders were officially represented by their own envoys. The Srivijayan empire exchanged envoys with other

¹Miksic also notes that “These trading ports were sometimes linked to inland rulers, but more often they were politically separate from their hinterlands”.

countries, for example with China. There were no "ambassadors" as in present times but their equivalent can be found in these envoys. Like present day "ambassadors", these envoys were presented at court and held much prestige and influence. They were much admired and respected and the high position they held enabled them to get into trouble rarely. Chinese accounts tell of Chinese eunuchs being sent as envoys to the Java court while Malay princes were sent as envoys to the Chinese emperor (Resink, 1968: 194).²

Srivijaya's relations with China were vitally important as the Malay-speaking world was part of the Chinese tributary system. The Srivijayan ruler was therefore a vassal of the Chinese emperor. As a token of his regard, the Chinese emperor would sometimes confer military titles on the Maharajas or rulers of Srivijaya. For instance, in the year 904 a title was conferred on a Malay envoy by a ruler of the Tang dynasty, possibly as a reward for being loyal and dutiful towards China (Wolters, 1970: 41). Formal admission of vassal status was thus beneficial to the Srivijayan ruler. This vassalage system possibly acted as a kind of psychological instrument of foreign policy in that it created bonds between China and Srivijaya.

While these connections had political overtones, economic reasons appear to have been more important. As Wolters notes perceptively, "the Malays ... were prepared to allow the Chinese to regard them as vassals for a very practical reason. The China trade was the source of their power" (1970: 37). It was thus advantageous to the Srivijayan ruler to maintain friendly relations with China. As Wolters also points out, "The Sino-Malay relationship was a well-known fact in Asian commerce" (1970: 40). This close relationship enabled the Maharaja of Srivijaya, in 722, to send envoys to the Chinese emperor to protest the bad government in Canton caused by the behaviour of "border officials". The Srivijayan ruler's concern about the China trade no doubt motivated this complaint; he wanted no impediment to Srivijaya's successful foreign trade (1970: 40).

However, it was also to the interest of the Chinese emperor to maintain amiable relations with the Malays as the Chinese needed overseas kingdoms to protect strategic communications on their behalf. Thus, while "the emperors thought that they were manipulating their

²As Resink observes, trouble often broke out when a Chinese envoy was not treated hospitably. For example, in 1289 after King Kertanegara of Java sent back to China a Chinese envoy with his face mutilated, this led the Chinese emperor to send an expedition against the Javanese ruler as punishment.

vassals by techniques of indirect control; the vassals were manipulating the China trade, the reality behind the tributary trade, to amass wealth as a means of asserting their authority in the fragmented and restless Malay society” (Wolters, 1970: 37). Therefore, it was mutually beneficial to both sides to have friendly diplomatic relations — the Srivijayan ruler needed peace to conduct trade while the Chinese emperor needed allies in times of trouble. It was an interdependent relationship, as borne out by the evidence that when the tributary system was weak, the Srivijayan ruler suffered trade losses and revenue cuts. The Maharaja’s royal treasury, which was an important feature of his court, depended a great deal on the tolls and taxes that he could exact from commercial activities in his empire.

The strategic location of the Srivijayan empire, (the Malay Peninsula included) was a crucial factor in making it a successful commercial centre. It lay between China and India, and, as Cowan notes, “Its great asset was its strategic position, commanding the Straits of Malacca, and its incorporation in a wider international trading system stretching from India and the Persian Gulf to China” (1968: 3). Regarding the Malay Peninsula specifically, Paul Wheatley has written, “Despite the attraction of its gold deposits, the cardinal advantage of the Golden Khersones resided in its position” (1961: xxxiii). The strategic importance of Srivijaya in general and the Malay Peninsula in particular was thus seen in relation to trade or commercial advantage.

III

The initial points of contact that the Malay Peninsula had with other countries probably took place on the coast, at points where the traders congregated with their wares. Because the Straits of Malacca, since early times, was an important water-way in that region, it would have seemed likely that these ports would have been on the West coast of the Malay Peninsula. Moreover, the effects of the Southwest monsoon on the West coast are much milder than the effects of the Northeast monsoon on the East coast. However, before the fourteenth century, most of these ports, some of which were thriving emporia, were situated on the East coast of Malaya and not the West coast. The works of twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth century writers, such as *Ling-wai Tai-ta* by Chou Ch’u-fei in 1178, *Chu-fan-chin* by Chao Ju-kua in 1226, and the *Tao-i-Chih-lioh* compiled by Wang Ta-yuan in 1349, make many references to the East coast states of Kelantan, Trengganu, and Pahang and fewer references to the West coast states

(Wheatley, 1966: 62 — 86).³ Perhaps Wheatley is quite correct when he says, "The idea of an unpopulated eastern littoral is a myth, probably fostered by the fact that European marineers visited that region less frequently than they did the Bay of Bengal or the Straits of Malacca" (1961: xx). On the other hand, since it is predominantly the Chinese sources, for example, *Ling-wai Tai-ta*, *Chu-fan-chih*, and *Tao-i-Chih-lioh*, that refer to East coast ports, perhaps these Chinese travelers visited the West coast less frequently and were less familiar with developments there. What is more likely, however, is that the West coast, before the fifteenth century, was very undeveloped.

These Chinese sources make constant references to "Tun-Sun" and "Ch'ih-t'u" which Wheatley believes refer to the Malay Peninsula. Wheatley claims that Chinese envoys visited a state in the Northeast of Malaya and that the capital of "Ch'ih-t'u", known either as "Sung-Chih" or "Shih-Tzu", was Kelantan. To him, the "Red Earthland" or "Raktamrtika" alluded to in a Sanskrit inscription, refers to Kelantan (1961: 33) and not to Kedah as Quaritch H.A. Wales (1940) has suggested.

One very important port on the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula was "Langkasuka" which during the seventh century was a regular port of call on the sea route to India. The Chinese pilgrim, I-Ching, who stopped there in the latter half of the seventh century while on his way to India, considered it "the most popular port of call" (Wheatley, 1961: 45). Situated on the Northeastern coast of the Malay Peninsula in the vicinity of modern Patani, "Langkasuka" was a bustling trade centre producing mainly aromatic woods, ivory, and rhinoceros horn. It was one of the ports described at length by Chao Ju-kua (1911: 67) when he wrote on the medieval trade of the Far East, then in the hands of the Arab and Persian merchants. Although "Langkasuka's" influence waned in the ninth and tenth centuries,

³Chou Ch'u-fei in 1178 was Assistant Sub-Prefect in Kuei-lin, the capital of the maritime province of Kuang-hsi. In 1226, Chao Ju-kua was the Commissioner of Foreign Trade at Ch'uan-chou in Fukien province. Both authors, therefore, had opportunities to obtain much information about the countries that traded with China. Chao Ju-kua, in particular, held many discussions with Chinese and foreign sailors who visited Ch'uan-chou and he was able in his book to describe twenty-eight countries, including the Malay Peninsula. His compilation, *Chu-Fan-Chi*, was meant to be a trade hand-book and, not surprisingly, it serves as the best account of sung maritime trade even though it is also a conglomeration of information culled from preceding periods. Wang Ta-yuan was a Chinese merchant who traded in Malaya and many other foreign localities in and subsequent to 1330. For more information about these Chinese authors (see Wheatley, 1961: 62 — 63, 77, 111).

Chao Ju-kua, in the thirteenth century, still referred to it as a tributary of Srivijaya. The Chinese sources called that port "Lang-ya-hsiu". The most important piece of Chinese evidence about "Langkasuka" is the map in the *Wu-pei-chih (Notes on Military Preparation)*, by the Ming writer Mao Yuan-chi in 1621, which places "Langkasuka" at the site of the Patani River (Wheatley, 1961: 252 — 265).

In addition to the Chinese sources, Arab, Indian, and Javanese sources also refer to "Langkasuka's" location on the North eastern coast of Malaya. The *Kitab al-Minhaf al-fakhir fi'ilm al-bahr al-zakhir*, an Arab tract on navigation, placed what it called "Langashuka" on the East coast of the Malay Peninsula, between "Kelantan" and "Singora". The sole Indian reference to "Langkasuka", the Tanjore inscription of 1030, located "Ilangasoka" in the same vicinity as the Arab text. The *Nagarakrtagama*, a Javanese poem composed by court poet, Prapanca, in 1365 referred to "Lengkasuka" as a state in "Pahang". In Javanese terminology, "Pahang" meant an area in the Malay Peninsula comprising both East coast and West coast states. The East coast states included "Langkasuka" (Wheatley, 1961: 258 — 264).

Malay sources also referred to "Langkasuka" but from the viewpoint that it was located on the West coast of Malaya. The *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* or *Kedah Annals* alluded to "Langkasuka" as a West coast kingdom, the predecessor of modern Kedah. This Malay literature text placed the palace hall of "Langkasuka" at the foot of Kedah Peak. To Wheatley, the overwhelming evidence in support of "Langkasuka" being an East coast port outweighs the anomalous Malay sources. Wheatley points out, moreover, that it is unlikely that "Langkasuka" can be considered as Kedah because a kingdom, variously known as "Kalagam", "Kataha", and "Kadaram", occupied the territory now comprising Kedah. Not only was this kingdom never referred to as a dependency of "Langkasuka" but, whenever cited with "Langkasuka" in the same text, both were regarded as separate entities (Wheatley, 1961: 260 — 263).

Another important port on the East coast was "Beranang" or "Fo-lo-an" which Chao Ju-kua described as a dependency of Srivijaya. According to him, Srivijaya dan "Fo-lo-an" were the chief Southeast Asian entreports for the Arab countries. Whereas Chao Ju-kua has placed "Fo-lo-an" in Pahang, Wheatley has located it at Kuala Berang in Trengganu. Wheatley has based his decision about the location on the fourteenth century Trengganu stone inscription found at Kuala Berang. This inscription not only provides the earliest

record of Islam on the Malay Peninsula but also tells of early Roman spice trade in the area. Other East coast ports that were dependencies of Srivijaya included "Kwantan", thought to be north of Kra, and "Pengfeng", thought to be in modern Pahang. Chinese sources also refer to "Kwantan" as "Tan-Ma-Ling" while Indian sources refer to it as either "Tambralinga" or "Madamalingam" (Chao-Ju-kua, 1911: 67 — 70; Wheatley, 1967: 66 — 70).

Besides the above various Indian, Chinese, Arab, Javanese, and Malay references to different East coast ports on the Malay Peninsula, Greek sources also allude to East coast trading marts. The most important of these Greek sources is the *Guide to Geography*, believed to have been written in the second century by the ancient astronomer Claudius Ptolemy.⁴ This text locates, for example, "Kole Polis" and "Perimula" which Wheatley believes were situated on the coast of Northeast Malaya, and "Cape Maleoukolon" which is thought to have been on the South East Coast of Malaya (Wheatley, 1961: 152 — 155).

There were, however, some important ports on the West coast of Malaya though fewer in number. There was, for instance, "Takola" which Ptolemy described as a significant trading centre,⁵ and emporium (Miksic, 1979: 31). Ptolemy listed "Takola" as the first of the place-names within the "Golden Khersonese", his name for the Malay Peninsula (Wheatley, 1961 — 268). The word "Takola" has occurred in nearly a dozen other texts ranging in date from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries. Ptolemy situated the town at the head of a bay or estuary between two promontories. To Wheatley, this important port was located on the North-West coast of the Malay Peninsula, in the neighbourhood of present-day Trang (1961: 151, 268; 1964: 74).

Besides Ptolemy's account, Indian texts have also referred to "Takola" as a rich commercial centre. For example, the *Mahaniddesa* and the *Milindapanha*, both composed around the second or third century, described a town by the name of "Takkola" while the

⁴In the 1930's and 1940's, since the publication of Leo Bagrow's papers on the origins of the *Guide to Geography*, doubts have been cast on Ptolemy's authorship. In its present form, the text was probably compiled by a Byzantine author, of the tenth or eleventh century, who based his work on principles laid down by Ptolemy and who even incorporated some of the Greek writer's original writings (see Wheatley, 1961: 138).

⁵According to Miksic, Ptolemy used the word emporium in a restricted sense — as an authorized sea coast (not inland) mart in the Orient where non-Roman dues were levied by non-Roman authorities.

Tanjore Inscription of 1030 described a town called "Talaittakolam". These Indian sources indicate that "Takola" or "Takkola" was in existence on the Malay Peninsula between the third and eleventh centuries (Wheatley, 1961: 270).

Chinese accounts, moreover, have alluded to "Takola" by their use of the word "Ko-lu-lo", the Chinese equivalent. For instance, the *Hsin Tang Shu (New Tang Annals)*, by Ou Yang-hsiu in 1060, described "Ko-ku-lo" or "Takola" as a busy port and located it on the northern shore of the Straits of Malacca (Wheatley, 1961: 59). The *Sung-shih (History of the Sung, 1060 — 1279)*, by To'-To' in the fourteenth century, included the narrative of a Chinese monk who in 983 was given imperial letters of introduction to the rulers of Srivijaya and "Ko-ku-lo". According to Wheatley, these Chinese sources strongly suggest that "Ko-ku-lo" was a point of departure on the West coast of Malaya for ships setting out to cross the Indian Ocean (1961: 59 — 60).

Arab accounts have also made references to "Takola" or to "Qaullah" as they called that port. Abu Dulaf, an Arab court official who accompanied an embassy to China in the tenth century, wrote that "Qaullah" was a town on a promontory on the searoute from China to India. Another Arab writer, Ibn Battutah, described it in the fourteenth century as "a fine town with a wall of hewn stone" and as a rich producer of scented woods. To Wheatley, these accounts point to a port on the West coast of Malaya in the vicinity of the Kra Isthmus (1961: 224, 247, 307).

Another notable West coast port was the "Sabara" emporium which Ptolemy listed as the second emporium of the "Golden Khersonese". He situated it at the extreme southern tip of the Peninsula. In Wheatley's opinion, this "does not necessarily exclude a site on Singapore Island" (1961: 151 — 152). Yet another port was Kedah which was on the sea route from China to India. Kedah was also an important point of departure for the voyage across the Bay of Bengal. Many remains of Hindu-Buddhist sites have been found in the Bujang Valley in South Kedah by archaeologists Quaritch Wales and Alastair Lamb and by the Antiquities Division of the Malaysian National Museum (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi and Othman Mohd. Yatim, 1979: 12 — 15). Kedah, as Wales (1940) observed, owed its importance to its geographical position — it bordered the Straits of Malacca, the main sea route between the West and China, and offered suitable sites for the establishment of emporia and ports where merchandize could be transhipped. Also, its North West Coast

provided the first sight of land and a stop for rest to Indian travellers after their crossing the Bay of Benggal. In addition, as Wales notes, "Kedah combined the practical advantage of an excellent anchorage (estuary of the Merbok) with the spiritual attraction of being dominated by a high mountain (Kedah Peak) which to the superstitious Indian sailors must have appeared to be a home of the gods" (Wales, 1940). The archaeological excavations undertaken in Kedah have unearthed much evidence of trade, for example a good deal of Chinese porcelain has been found. To several historians, Kedah, along with Perak and Perlis represent the main centres of Srivijaya on the Malay Peninsula (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi and Othman Mohd. Yatim, 1979: 13).

These emporia on the Malay Peninsula were stocked with all sorts of goods and spices. Chao Ju-kua (1911) listed the native products that were involved in trading activities: ebony, incense, camphor, elephant tusks, rhinoceros horn, sandalwood and gharuwood. He also listed what were brought in as barter — items such as silks, samsu, rice, sugar, porcelain, lacquer ware and iron. He recorded that at "Langkasuka", foreign traders calculated the value of articles according to their equivalent in gold or silver and that these traders then engaged in the barter of these articles at fixed rates. He wrote too that at "Langkasuka" everything was estimated by bulk and not by weight and that the use of weights was apparently introduced by foreigners. He also noted that "Kwantan", "Langkasuka", and "Beranang" sent yearly tribute to Srivijaya, or "San-fo-tsi", as he called that empire (Chao Ju-kua, 1911: 67 — 69).

Chao Ju-kua's account of the bustling trade carried out on the Malay Peninsula is borne out by Paul Wheatley's (1957) monograph on Sung maritime trade. Wheatley has an impressive list of the 1411 commodities that were traded. There were 339 items of imports of which the most significant in value and volume were aromatics and drugs, for example, frankincense, myrrh, cloves, nutmegs, and sandalwoods.⁶ Southeast Asia and the Middle East were the chief sources of these spices, drugs and aromatics and Southeast Asia was the traditional home of spices and scented woods. Powdered aromatics

⁶Wheatley notes that to the Chinese the Peninsula states were sources of jungle products, mainly aromatic woods, spices, ivory and rhinoceros horn, the last being an important item in their pharmacopoeia. In return the foreign merchants supplied the indigenous people with three categories of goods — basic items such as salt, rice, iron and earthenware; luxury goods such as gold, silver, silks, porcelain and lacquer — ware for the members of the ruling class; and objects for ceremonial use, such as parasols and other luxuries.

and spices were in great demand as they were used in the preparation of food. Chinese imports included all these items plus textiles, metals, minerals and mixed wares, for instance slaves, rugs and precious stones. On the other hand, exports from China included silks, porcelain, and lacquer ware (Wheatley, 1957; 1961: 73).

That all these varied items were traded in the Malay Peninsula has also been documented by archaeological evidence. Excavations carried out at the Takuapa area in the region of the Kra Isthmus have yielded evidence of long-distance trading activity from the seventh to the tenth century, a period which coincided both with the Srivijayan empire and the Tang Dynasty. At Takuapa, Alastair Lamb has, for example, found Chinese and Arabic pottery, and Middle Eastern glass and beads (Miksic, 1979: 65).

IV

Although somewhat ironic, it should be pointed out that while trade was a very important factor in the "international relations" of the Malay Peninsula, the Malay Peninsula itself did not provide much of the produce traded there. As Cowan has aptly observed about Srivijaya as a whole, "It lacked a large labour force, produced little of commercial importance, and imported its rice from Java ... the remarkable thing about Srivijaya was that with such a slim economic base of its own it endured as a major power for several centuries" (1968: 3). On the other hand, however, perhaps this is not so surprising as modern entrepôts, for example Singapore, are not so much producers of goods themselves as they are collecting centres for trade. In the case of the Malay Peninsula, some forest products as well as some tin, gold and silver were produced, though not in enormous quantities (Dunn, 1975: 104 — 117; Wheatley, 1961: xxi).

Yet, while Srivijaya and the Malay Peninsula did not produce much of commercial importance, economic activity was the life-blood of the region. This is clearly seen in the tributary relationship that the Srivijayan empire had with China. This has already been discussed but its importance needs to be stressed to show that diplomatic contacts often centered on economic factors. Srivijaya's power was based on its "monopolizing the maritime trade" (Naerssen, 1977: 36), which in turn was made possible by the linkage the Srivijayan court had with its sea nomads who were faithful subjects to the ruler and helped him to keep Srivijaya a thalassocracy.

Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that some diplomatic contacts were not commercial in nature. Military and political alliances

also took place — between Srivijaya and its vassals and between Srivijaya and other countries. Sometimes, there was a breakdown in diplomatic relations and war broke out. For example, force was used to subdue neighbouring Jambi and Bhumi Java (thought to be West Java) because they were not submissive enough. An inscription says that Srivijaya thus sent an expedition against these states, to control them by force (Resink, 1968: 200).

Some of the alliances made also had religious connections for Srivijaya was, as I-Ching pointed out,⁷ a famous Mahayana Buddhist centre of learning (Wheatley, 1961: 45). Srivijaya even founded Buddhist monasteries to show its good will. For example, in 775, an inscription was erected at Ligor, on the Kra Isthmus, to commemorate the founding of a Mahayana Buddhist temple by the Srivijayan ruler (Miksic, 1979: 64). As noted earlier, archaeological excavations in Kedah have also revealed remains of many Buddhist and Hindu temples.

There were also marriage alliances, for example between the ruling families of Java and Sumatra, as borne out by the ninth century Nalanda inscription. To Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, an alliance through marriage “was a common form of political diplomacy in Southeast Asian history” (Nik Hassan Shuhaimi and Othman Mohd. Yatim, 1979: 6). The Dutch scholar Resink (1968) says that marriage arrangements, such as that between King Kamacwara (1117 — 1130) and Princess Kirana, which reunited Kadiri and Janggala, may be looked upon as a sort of treaty. Usually the alliances made were bilateral ones and not on an international scale. While in the modern day world treaties are, in theory, made among equals, this was not the case in olden times. The alliances were considered unequal ones, for example Majapahit’s relation with Pasai was a relationship that was not between equals for there was no equality in theory.

Because Srivijaya was a maritime power, some of the alliances undoubtedly must have centered on the sea lanes, (for example the Straits of Malacca), on territorial waters, and on fishing concessions. And these in turn, because they concerned economic considerations, must have influenced the nature of diplomatic contacts and given them an economic tinge.

While there were no sophisticated terms to describe international relations then, or elaborate institutions to support diplomacy, the

⁷I-Ching recorded that at Srivijaya he found more than one thousand other monks practising the orthodox Buddhist rule exactly as in India.

diplomatic affairs of the Srivijayan empire nevertheless revolved around issues of national interest. While it may appear incongruous to apply modern day terms such as "balance of power" to Srivijayan times, perhaps it can be attempted. Cowan has, for example, discerned a continuous "balance of power" relationship between the land power of populous and agricultural Java and the maritime and commercial power of the Straits area (Cowan, 1968). If the term "spheres of influence" needs to be applied, perhaps it too can be used for Srivijaya had its own realm of influence.

V

Both domestic and external considerations were factors influencing the international relations of the Malay Peninsula. Domestic considerations included the strength of the polity, its extent and power; the power of the ruler, his leadership and how he held his country together; the geographical position of the country; and the resources produced and the trade carried out in that region. Some of these factors have already been discussed. Regarding the strength and extent of the Srivijayan empire, it was a strong maritime power made up of riverine communities and it extended over a vast extent of territory. Through able leadership and help from his "datus" and sea nomads, the ruler was able to exert control over the whole region (Wolters, 1979). The Srivijayan empire encompassed the Malay-speaking world, which, with its common language, customs, dress, culture, occupations and literature, had a distinct homogeneity and inner coherence of its own (Milnes, 1977). Though there were several polities in the Malay speaking world, they did form one strong whole during certain times, for example under the Srivijayan empire. There was some turbulence in the sense of shifting capitals and migrating subjects but there was also a sense of Malayness, a sense of a common identity.

The external considerations influencing the international relations of the Malay-speaking world included its proximity to other countries, especially to India and China; the raids on it by others, for example by the Tamils; the overseas merchants who traded with Srivijaya, particularly the Chinese, Indian, Persian and Arab merchants; the Chinese tributary relationship; and piracy. In the case of the Malay Peninsula, as has been noted, it was much affected by its relationship with India and China, especially the latter with regard to trade. Piracy did not constitute a big problem until the tributary system was stopped and other means of enrichment had to be found.

Undoubtedly, there was constant overlap and interaction between the internal and external factors (for example, trade bridged the two)

as these determinants of foreign policy, which also acted as variables, were not static but dynamic and always changing. Even the giving of tribute to China was subject to change — from the seventh to the eleventh century the tributary system flourished after which for a period of about two hundred and fifty years the system fell into abeyance. Changes in the tributary system also had its own side effects. For example, when tribute was not given to the Chinese emperor, it meant the languishing of the China trade, which in turn led some of the Maharaja's subjects to resort to booty or piracy as an alternative way of gaining wealth. It led, moreover, to a reduction of the ruler's revenues and power. The temporary decline in the China trade also affected the Maharaja's authority — for instance, it enabled Jambi temporarily to escape control. This shows the close relationship between external and internal factors as well as the variables that acted upon the conduct of diplomatic affairs. When Srivijaya's trade with China was brisk, as during the first half of the tenth century, during the Sung Dynasty, the Malay speaking world including the Malay Peninsula stood to benefit.

VI

In conclusion, although for the early period the reconstruction of Malayan diplomacy has been hampered by the lack of concrete evidence about Srivijaya, what can be pieced together from the foreign accounts and from the several indigenous inscriptions reveal that commercial activities were very important to the region and that diplomatic contacts probably revolved around trade. Despite the Malay Peninsula producing only a fraction of the items traded, trade was nevertheless the cornerstone or lifeblood of the region. The strategic location of the Malay Peninsula, the presence of China and India on either side, the tributary system and the emporia where traders congregated, all enhanced the importance of trade in the region. It is not surprising, therefore, if economic reasons did shape, to a large extent, the "international relations" of the Malay Peninsula. That Srivijayan diplomacy was quite successful is evidenced from the duration of the Srivijayan empire, of which the Malay Peninsula was a part, for several centuries. According to Van Naerssen, "its foreign policy was so successful that it was acknowledged as a respectable state" (1977: 36). Srivijaya declined when it lost its monopoly of the China trade in the fourteenth century with the establishment of the Chinese mercantile fleet and with the ascendancy of the Majapahit empire. The rise of Malacca in the fifteenth century, however, exemplifies the basic continuity about the importance of trade in the Malay

Peninsula — for its survival and for its economic and political stability. More important, the rise of Malacca reinforces the stand that the “international relations” of the Malay Peninsula, in its early history, were based mainly on economic reasons.

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