

**Review: J. Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers, ed., *The Southeast Asian Port and Polity: Rise and Demise*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990.**

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The unifying theme which Jaya Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers have chosen to explore is the port-polity in Southeast Asia. They present this political and economic construct as an evolving and adaptable model that typified many of the trading centers that have flourished along the coasts of the South China and Java Seas since the emergence of Southeast Asian states. This ambitious work marks a real advance in our understanding of the region and demands careful reading, not only for its theoretical excursions, but also for its well-researched narratives.

The book is an anthology and hangs together better than most such volumes. Each essay presents a different example of one or a group of port-polities dating from the fourth to the nineteenth century. These include settlements on the Malay Peninsula, the coasts of Borneo, Java, Sulawesi, and in the Moluccas, Mindanao, and Siam. These case studies are focussed on the lesser-known states of the region rather than on the more well-studied centers such as Melaka/Johor or Aceh, with considerable attention being given to the earliest ports, both Srivijaya itself and the pre-Srivijaya states. Other emporia included in the collection are Banten, Ayutthaya, Makassar, Maguindanao, Sulu, Terengganu, Brunei, Banda, and Ternate. Despite the considerable range, there is no attempt at comprehensive coverage, though the pieces appear in rough chronological order. There is much more to be learned about these ephemeral yet enduring centers of trade, political power, and culture which have historically stood between the open seas and the forests of Southeast Asia.

Six of the twelve papers were first presented in two seminars held at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. The other six were solicited after the scope and rationale of the collection had been firmly established. As a whole, they provide an important antidote to the colonialist and nationalist tendency to divide Southeast Asian history into its current political categories and to project the modern state borders back beyond the colonial era. Instead, they show the vast array of political and cultural variety that predated the colonial era and also demonstrate that the "reach," in terms of political power, cultural influence, and economic impact, of these maritime entities was much more extensive than one would expect from the land-locked perspective of a Kuala Lumpur, a Manila, or a Jakarta in the twentieth century. One hopes that the volume will reach a wider audience than many other books published by the University of Singapore Press.

Kathirithamby-Wells has written an introduction that cogently presents the port-polity as a theoretical construct. Among the political patterns that have sustained these polities, she points to the significance of O.W. Wolters' charismatic/sacral ruler or "man of prowess." Such individuals have arisen on occasion and created political order out of chaos by dominating a collection of the quasi-autonomous regions controlled by *orang kaya*, datu, and other local chiefs. These rulers have parleyed regional authority and mobilized groups of *orang laut* or other sea peoples and secured effective control of long-distance and local trading patterns. Their ports have become formidable centers of political, economic, and cultural influence after the pattern of Melaka and Srivijaya, changing virtually the entire course of Southeast Asian history.

More frequently, such centers have served as local collecting centers where one or another local resource has been exploited to sustain a political unity. The port-polity was thus a multi-faceted and evolving archetype which included collecting centers, producing cen-

ters, and entrepot-empires. Until the nineteenth century port-polities rose and fell in various parts of the region, adapting to changing conditions, exploiting opportunities, and seeking hegemony. The final surge of European imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century effectively preempted the political and economic niches that had sustained these entities in earlier ages. The subsequent emergence of nation-states within the frameworks of colonial administrative structures will probably prevent the future appearance of port-polities, unless Singapore can be considered in such a category.

A sort of mosaic history of the rise and fall of the port-polity emerges in the volume's chronological treatment of this form of political economy. The early pieces show Southeast Asian port-polities developing from small regional networks of local collecting centers, feeder ports, and the larger emporia which were frequented by foreign traders.

The political and economic implications of this hierarchy of centers is the topic of Leong Sau Heng's and Jan Wisseman Christie's studies, which are based on the most recent archaeological evidence coming from sites on the Malay Peninsula, including Tanjong Rawa, Langat, Kelang, and Merbok. Both authors focus on the antiquity of these centers and on the exchange networks connecting them. Christie correctly stresses the importance of these networks and centers as necessary precursors to the processes of state building and subsequent Indianization in Southeast Asia. These themes are developed in Nik Hassan Shuhaimi bin Nik Abdul Rahman's review of Srivijayan history. All of these authors rely heavily on the formulations about the early history of maritime Southeast Asia developed by O. W. Wolters, and it is clear that his ideas about the rhythms of trade, political organization, and the state building process in Southeast Asia have become the mainstream paradigm for the early history of the region. Nik Hassan does not provide very much that is new, doing little more than competently integrating Wolters' ideas into the framework of the collection.

Villiers' pair of studies on the Spice Islands and Makassar stress the importance of the Melakan network and heritage as the sustaining element in the growth of powerful polities in Banda and Ternate during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He places emphasis on their adaptation of Melakan political forms as well as the adoption of the Malay language, Islam, and the external trading connections that had once depended upon Melaka. More specifically, he points to the cultivation of locally important economic resources as an underlying feature of port-polities after Melaka. This theme is echoed by Kathirithamby-Wells in her equally strong study of Banten. In both regions the attention paid to the monopolization and control of specific cash crops (spices in the Moluccas and pepper in Banten) was the key to success for the ruling houses of these principalities. These three pieces are the result of recent primary research and offer new information and new insights. Kathirithamby-Wells points to the development of the forced delivery system in Banten as an innovation in the commercialization process which was later developed by the Dutch in Java. Another practice pioneered in the areas under Banten's control was the incorporation of Chinese traders as tax farmers and as gatherers of produce in the countryside. Villiers points out, however, that, although the strategem of cash cropping was the basis of their power, these rulers were also vulnerable in the face of challenges from outside. Both authors show the ambitious goals of rulers in these territories, suggesting that had they not been opposed, destroyed, or neutralized by the Europeans, particularly the Dutch, they might have attained far more extensive political and economic influence.

Ruurdje Larhoven's discussion of Magindanao contains much new data on this kingdom's history during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but is often difficult to follow. Embarking upon the painstaking reconstruction of the state's history, he makes a useful connection between the domestic politics of the area and Magindanao's commercial expan-

sion, stressing the importance of manpower mobilization internally and the continuing struggle to maintain independence and neutrality in relations with foreign powers: the Spanish, the Dutch, and finally the British.

Although the contributions by Dhiravat Na Pombejra, James Warren, and Shaharil Talib do not add much to what can be found in their earlier publications, it is still good to have this information gathered in one place. Their articles are useful additions to the present collection, broadening the selection of examples and demonstrating the universality of the model. While Siam is not generally thought of as a port-polity, it is clear that the organization of Ayutthaya's commerce had much in common with that of the Malay ports. It likewise provided the monarch with a resource that gave him an advantage over his domestic rivals.

The Warren and Shaharil pieces show the persistence as well as the malleability of the port-polity paradigm in the nineteenth century. Sulu rose to prominence as a trading port on the route between China, the northern Philippines, and southern Borneo, the Spice islands, Sulawesi, and the Dutch territories in the Java Sea. Warren focuses on the expansionist nature of the polity as well as on its reliance upon slave raiding, slave trading, and the slave-labor economy. In the case of both Sulu and Terengganu it is clear that indigenous rulers responded to new opportunities created by the appearance of British country traders who were seeking to supplement their China cargos. Both continued to flourish as British commerce expanded after the establishment of Singapore.

S. D. Ranjit Singh's examination of Brunei and Sabah is a worthwhile study in its treatment of port-hinterland relations. He brings together information from a disparate array of sources and shows how relationships with interior peoples were maintained. Most interesting is the shift which took place on the Sabah coast when migrants from Sulu settled in Tempasuk and drew the interior trade away from Brunei. While he makes many excellent points, Ranjit Singh also makes a number of other somewhat questionable and often contradictory statements.

It is of interest that Terengganu, Sulu, and Brunei all benefitted from and lost to the British during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The earlier port-polities such as Makassar, Banten, and those in the Moluccas had a similar relationship with the Dutch. This type of relationship with an expanding European imperial power emerges as an important theme in many of the pieces in this book, but is never really met head on and dealt with as a specific point. The reliance on the favorable or unfavorable impact of outside forces has always been an important aspect of the maritime world of Southeast Asia. Conversely, it is clear that both the Dutch and British really emulated the political and economic policies and practices of the earlier port-polities and, in effect, replaced them. Singapore was only the latest and most successful example of the form, a point which I have suggested earlier in *Prince of Pirates*.

In general, although the papers do not maintain a uniformly high quality, the strong points of this collection outweigh its deficiencies. The volume shows the port-polity as a distinctively Southeast Asian complex of institutions creating commercial relations and, at the same time, establishing patterns for political organization with the rather scant strategic resources provided by the Southeast Asian environment. Each essay is enhanced by an excellent map that clearly shows all of the major geographical locations mentioned in the text. While it would have been useful to have a map of the entire region, showing interrelationships between various centers, it would have been difficult to make such a map historically correct. Nevertheless, one finishes such a volume wishing that some comprehensive

picture of the complex historical interplay of all the various Southeast Asian port-polities were available.