

Malay Civilization: Overview on Malay Peninsular as a Central Textiles Trade in the Region of Southeast Asia

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Introduction

The study of civilization of a certain place by analyzing past artifacts of previous society is one of the most effective methods since artifacts could last longer than society and culture. The study of culture of society and material culture always gives a picture about human life that could be related to culture and past history (Richardson, 1974). Ku Zam Zam (1989) also stated that a culture is created from the human needs. In this respect, the creation of textiles' products are always relate to human needs such as body protection and decoration. During a production of textiles, the expertise and professionalism were built in the form of philosophical ideas and from that the existence of civilization of a race. The creation of arts and materials by past society had shown posses by man prior to this. It is also could detect the stage of civilization and the mind of society at that time. Previous society is often associated with the environments since in the effort of understanding the world is foreign and feared had induced them to seek peace with the environments. It is done using by organizing transitional activities such as worships (Wan Abdul Rahman, 1996). This situation had made the Malay civilization to be more linked to the belief of the magic world.

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Malay Civilization

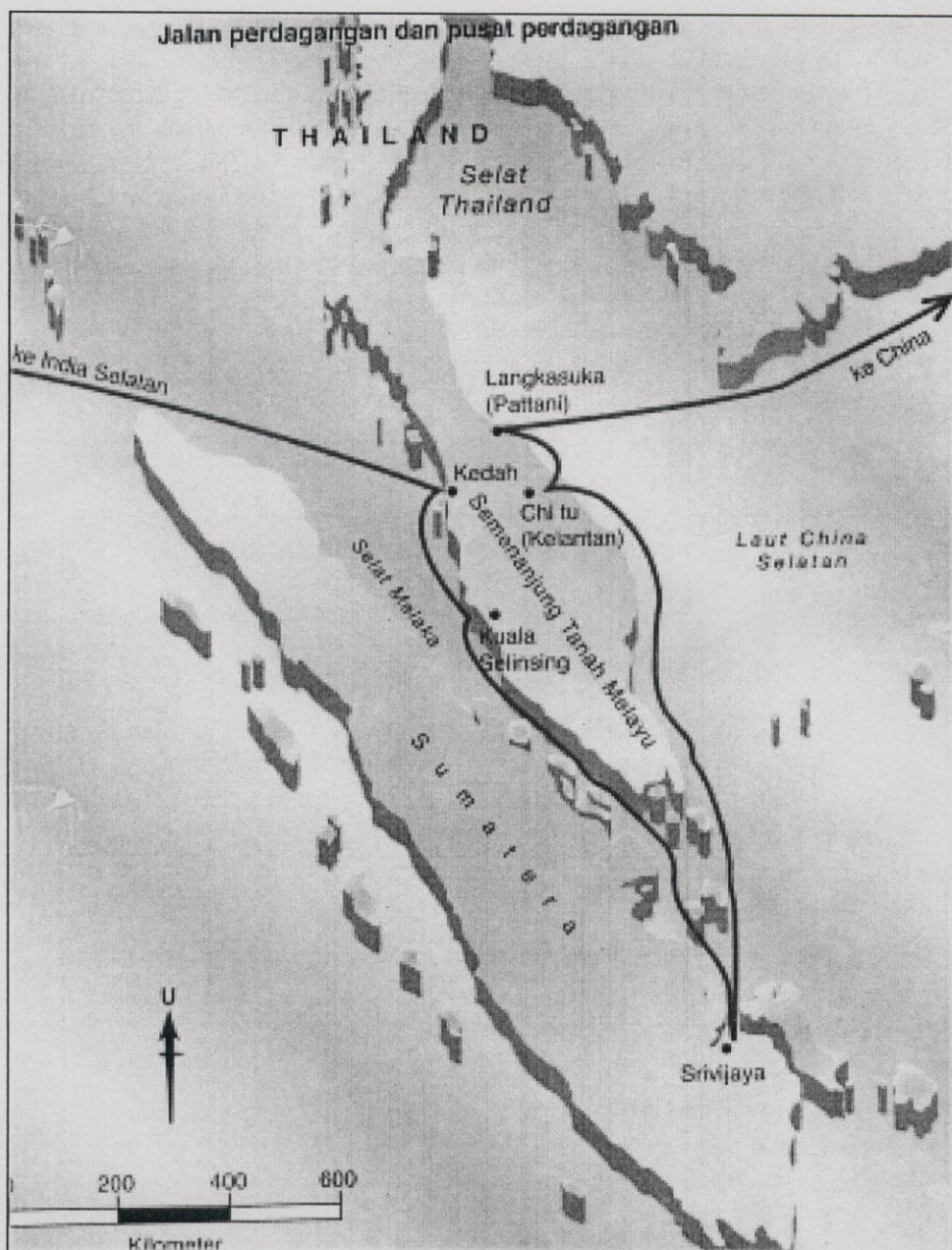
The areas encompassing the Malay civilization is defined by linguistic history expert as areas bordered by the Austronesia language that basically practiced similar cultures. In relation to this civilization, Nik Hassan (1995) associated the changes in the climatic conditions during the prehistoric period of the Malay world had brought modification of early human civilization. The approach used was based on a theory that was proposed by Donn (1970). The theory of changes in sea levels was hereby explained as caused the alteration in the world temperatures had delineated changes occurring during the prehistoric era of Malay Peninsular.

The theory of changes in sea levels during the Pleistocene period that occurred thousands of years ago (Dunn, 1970) had brought changes and splits within an ethnic culture group into a small group. The changes had brought the Malays to adapt with the environments, created new Malay society expert in navigational and also establishment of a Malay civilization that was concentrated towards the coaster areas. This expertise had created the transfer of ideas and trade relation in the areas of South East Asia in particular in Malay island.

The finding of artifacts such as stones, bones and food wastes of the cave dwellers in the south East Asia regions, including Malaysia, specifically in Cha Cave and Madu Caves, had proven that the Malay Peninsular had gone through the prehistoric Era (Rentse, 1947). These archeological findings showed the existence of culture disposal during the prehistoric era (cited by Heine in Nik Hassan, 1995). Wolters (1990) associated the Malay World civilization, specifically the Malay civilization and the Srivijaya Empire which at that time had provided good port facilities for contacts between the Middle East and China. The Malay where also expert navigators had enabled themselves to link with external countries in trade matters (Wolters 1990 & Nik Hassan, 1987 Heine in Nik Hassan, 1995). Wolters (1990). This situation had made the Malay regions as a trading center that becomes the focus by trades from India, Arab and China).

Malay Peninsular a Center of Trade

The Malay race had been exposed to the external influences including India, China and Arab based on its geographical location. The strategic position of the Malay islands had caused many foreign traders to trade in the Malay Peninsular (Slaseas, 1990). Similar to the Slatseas statement, the information sources available from China was quoted that that You-Chu-Li was the name for the Malay Peninsular that was a port and trading center with India since 280 to 22 A.D. (Bradell and Douglass, 1980). Based on Sanskrit records, small Hindu temples were also built in Kataha, which now Kedah since around the first century. Based also on these source of records, the Malay government was said to expanded in the south of the Isthmus of Kra which influences the south consisting of "Red Earth), believed to be located on the eastern part of the Malay Peninsular (Wheatley, 1980 and Nik



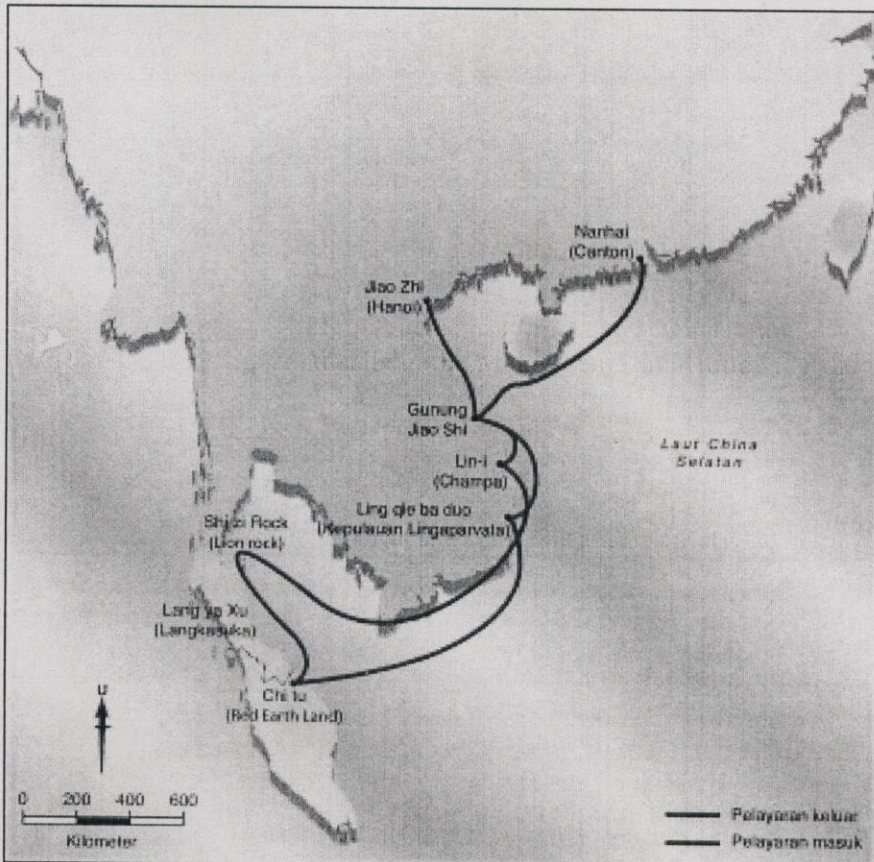
Source: The Encyclopedia of Malaysia (Volume 4, page 68).

Figure 1: Red Earth (Chitu) 607-610 A.D.

Hassan, 1998).

According to Sheppard (1972) and Slatseas (1990), the strategic place of the Malay Peninsular made it a meeting place from India and China to trade and visit. Trader using sailing ships and sails in the Malay Peninsular following the south west winds from June to September and the north east winds from November to April (Figure 2). In the Slatseas's (1990) writing it explained the importance of Malay Peninsular as the communication center in the Malay region as follows:

“As a result of theses geographical and climax factors, the Malay Peninsular was drawn into world history and as early as the 6th century BC, Indian literature and Chinese annals spokr of the Peninsular as the land with water on the two sides.” (Page 6).



Sources: The Encyclopedia of Malaysia (volume 4, page 7a).

Figure 2: The Malay Peninsular as Trading Center for India and China.

The Malay Peninsular as a Center of Trade

The position of the Malay Peninsular located in the area of the Isthmus of Kra, an important trading area has made it an area that is frequently contacted. At the same time, the Malay Peninsular is an area exposed to external relation such as China, Arab and India. The area is frequently visited since the Malay Peninsular located at the Isthmus of Kra had become an area for the exchange of goods from Indian, China and Arab (Bradell and Dounglas, 1980). As a trading center, the Malay peninsular was also probably a most important area in this region.

The Malay Peninsular being rich in gold also had made it become known as the 'Semenanjung Emas' (Golden Peninsular). Among the areas of gold ore in the Malay Peninsula were Galas Valley, especially Pulai village and the District of Sohor (Tanah Merah) were two areas that also become the place of cultural center.(Saad Sukri, 1971). In supporting this fact, Wheatly (1980) stated that it is undoubted that the "Golden Chersonese " was located in the Malay Peninsular until it is called the "Golden Peninsular". This was pictured in Ptolomey's Geography book which stated that the Peninsular Malaysia is position at 160° 30' E 4° 15' N (Bradell and Douglas, 1980).

Past Society and Textiles Activities

The product of textiles is an expertise and creativity of the Malays that were inherited from many generations, and it believed to be related with the past cultural history. The textile design are found in the Malay Peninsular on the whole has similarities with those found in other areas in Southeast Asia (Roger, 1986 and Arney, 1987). As such, heritage and development of textiles in the Malay environment in the past can be understood if the past history of Malay Textiles was understood as a whole, before focusing especially on textiles in the Malay Peninsular.

In relation to the past historical culture, Dunn (1970 & 1975) who studies on prehistory era society gave the opinion that in the "Pleistocene era" the mainland of Southeast Asia and the Malay Islands was an area that was not separated. This situation had made the early dwelling society in the mainland of Southeast Asia and the Malay islands a society that shifts continually. This encourages the spread of culture activities with ease and covering a wide area. Dunn (1970 & 1975) also gave the picture of the early human activities inhabiting the area of Southeast Asia as the Paleolithic and 'Hoabinh' culture society. They had the knowledge of forming stone tools that had been used since approximately 10,000 years ago. This indicated that the society at that time had already possessed the expertise to craft and decorate.

A number of archeological discoveries had been able to trace the important of textiles activities in this region. Among these, the archeological discoveries in several areas like Java, Sulawesi and Sabah showed that the society in these areas were involved in weaving activities based on the findings of "harvesting grain

crops" materials used for weaving (Heine-Gelden cited by Frazer, 1966). Besides this, in Ban Chiang, Thailand, stone roller were found, a tool that was believed to be used for producing patterns at that time (Frazer, 1966).

In relation to the used of weaving tools, is believed an "a back tension" or "back strap" on the "warp" shaped weaving tool made from bronze or iron that was brought from another area by group of people. The weaving tool is believed to originate from Dong-son Culture between 700 to 3000 years B.C. (Heine-Gelden cited by Frazer, 1966). Frazer (1966) viewed that the tool was believed to be the early stage development of "art style" that was establish in Southeast Asia.

According to a study on art style in the book, "Some Tribal Art Styles of Southeast Asian: An Experiment in Art History" by Heine-Geldern (Frazer 1966), two important characteristics were found to be related to the early history of textiles in that area. First, there is a wide relationship among the populations in that area; and secondly, the birth of new cultures within the area. In addition, the society in that area practiced material culture which was categorized in two forms, that is monumental and decorative. From that aspect of monumental style, it is related with the Megalithic culture. Based on the remnants of 'menhirs' stones, it was found that society used decoration that were related with their animistic beliefs like birds, animals, sun, and moon that provided peace in life and to their ancestor after death.

The use of decoration in this community was related with application of decorations on drums which were believed to originate from the Dong-son era, the large mainland of Southeast Asia which at that time was considered the most important trading objects (Frazer 1966). Among the motifs present on the drums were those that were shape as "interlock spiral", repeated "S" and "V" pattern, triangles and rice grain. Motifs produced had been in the most forms of arts, including Malay textiles. There were also motifs like birds, house and also boats that were related with the living conditions and also the beliefs of that society at that time was a means of important communication for the exchange of trading materials. The expertise on seafaring knowledge in the management of trade became important to that extent that Coed'es (1966) relate it to the indianisation process in Southeast Asia prior to 300 A.D. This communication facility had also encouraged trading between South East Asia, India and also middle east.

Trading between areas in Southeast Asia could be detected with the present of similarities in fabric decorations that resembles batik found in Egypt since the year 70 A.D. (McCable-Elliott 1984). However, According to Gettinger (1979), fabric produced in Asia were believed to originate from India based on the 'patola' or 'geringsing' textiles which were made by multiple knotted weaving methods with a scaled pattern. Gettinger (1979) also found that the creation of the shadow play in Indonesia was also related with Indian culture, and this had proven the relationship between India and Southeast Asia. This also related to the Ptolemy world map which stated the Malay Peninsular as the "Golden Chersonese", an

important area of trading focal point since the first century.

Textiles product is also associated with an area located at the Kra Isthmus in south Thailand which is also close to Malay Peninsular. According to Wheatley (1961), based on sources of records in China, a Malay government known as Langkasuka had existed there since the first century A.D. After 100 A.D. the area had become a port and trading center to several territories governed by one government influenced by Hindu like Khmer (Combodia), Srivijaya-Pelembang (Sumatra), Majapahit (Java) and Siam (Thailand). At that time the influence of Bhuddism and Hindu had began to be accepted by the Malay Peninsular population (Wheatley, 1961). The assimilation of Indian culture had contributed to the beliefs and practices such as myths, religious ceremonies, and also the arts (Sheppard, 1972). Based on sources from China, apart from Langkasuka, the "Red Land" believed to be located on the eastern of Peninsular (Wheatley, 1961) was a Malay state associated with a monarchy government that possessed and used clothing and clothing accessories which were extravagant and beautiful.

Since the first century A.D., the Malay state had been associated with civilization in Southeast Asia, India and also China. Between the years 700 until 1000 A.D., Srivijaya-Palembang was well known government that made the territories the port and place for the exchange of metallic materials and forest products with cotton clothing from India and silk, pottery and tea from China. The strength of Srivijaya had successfully monopolized the Strait of Malacca and indirectly also caused the positions of Kataha (Kedah) and Patani to become important. The relations between the Malay Peninsular and India, China and other countries in Southeast Asia had also influenced the development of traditional textiles in the Malay environment.

Conclusions

Textiles are always associated with civilization of a certain place. The importance of textiles cannot be denial since textiles is used as an outfit and also decoration. Talking of textiles decoration is always associated to how human weave and decorate motifs on it. Motifs created on textiles inspired from different sources of ideas and it is considered as a part human civilization. Besides that, textiles are also used as a source of trade in Southeast Asia, where people use textiles as a trade with other things. The relation of Malay Peninsular with India, China other countries in the region are also contributed development of textiles. Malay peninsular also had become a trading center since it situated in the middle of journey in between China, Arab and India. Other factor that made it become importance port is because of the strategic position as a meeting place from India and China to trade and visit. It is convenience since trader can sail in the Malay Peninsular following south west winds from June to September and the north east winds November to April.

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