

# THE TROPICAL FAR EAST AND WORLD HISTORY

By

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## *World History*

I need hardly say that I regard it as an honour to have been invited to address your Society. It is not only an honour but a debt of honour. In Burma we have a society with similar aims: the Burma Research Society. This is in fact a spiritual child of your Society. Somewhere about 1908 I came across an early copy of your Journal, and it inspired me to set about founding a Society on the same lines in Burma. So in addressing you this evening I like to feel that I am helping to repay the debt which every child owes to its parents.

Naturally I want to talk about some subject in which we have a common interest, and we certainly have a common interest in the history of this part of the world, the Tropical Far East, comprising the lands from Burma to the Philippines and from the borders of China down to Indonesia. In Burma the popular conception of history is derived from the Chronicles. But these, apart from tracing the spread of Buddhism, are narrowly confined to Burma. On the other hand, modern students of history may read books on the history of England or perhaps of Europe, but these contain little or nothing about Burma. I am told that it is much the same in this country, and probably in neighbouring lands. Even books on world history are written from the standpoint of an observer in the West. But if history is to come home to people here, they should read it from the standpoint of an observer in the Tropical Far East. When I was invited to address you, it seemed that an essay along these lines might be of interest.

This is an ambitious, perhaps an over-ambitious theme. An attempt to treat it within the limits of a single lecture requires drastic simplification and must risk the charge of superficiality. For such defects I must apologize and plead for lenient criticism. But the task does seem worth attempting. At the present time the

whole of the Tropical Far East is obviously and dangerously entangled in world history. Often it is suggested that this is quite a new thing. But I hope to show that our entanglement in world history is nothing new, but is as old as history, and that the past may not be without lessons for the present.

On still another point some of you may feel that an apology is due. This country is now known as Thailand, but I usually refer to it in this paper as Siam. This might seem justified on the ground that you still call yourselves the Siam Society. But there is another reason. I must go back to a time long before there were any Thai in this country or Burmese in Burma, and it is convenient to use the names Siam and Burma merely as conventional terms to signify the areas now within their respective boundaries.

### *Keys to History*

History, of course, is more than the narration of a series of events. One must seek for landmarks and a guiding thread. These may be found in the masterly treatise by Professor Coedès, *Les Etats Hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*.<sup>1</sup> After pointing out that these states derive their civilisation from India but fall within the political orbit of China, he summarizes the consequences:

"Most of these states have reacted to the great shocks that have disturbed the Indian peninsula and the Middle Kingdom. The conquests of Samudragupta in the Ganges Valley and South India in the 4th century, the expansionist policy of Chola emperors of Tanjore in the 11th century have had their repercussions on the other side of the Bay of Bengal. Even more markedly has the history of Further India been influenced by affairs in China. The Chinese have never looked favourably on the growth of strong powers in the southern seas, and it deserves notice that Fu-nan, Cambodia, and the Javanese and Sumatran realms reached the zenith of their prosperity during just those epochs when the great dynasties of

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I am greatly indebted to the work of Professor Coedès, and also to the comprehensive collection of references to Chinese authorities in the article by Mr. G. H. Luce in the *Journal of the Burma Research Society* for August 1924.

China were enfeebled. Also the countries of Further India are mutually linked together by numerous ties, geographic and economic, and every revolution in any one of them, by disturbing the whole region, has had repercussions on the others: the collapse of Fu-nan, the birth of the Sumatran Kingdom of Shrivijaya, the appearance of Anawratha in Pagan and Suryavarman in Angkor, the foundation of the Thai kingdom at Sukhothai, have all made themselves felt far beyond the frontiers of the land where these things happened. Thus in the history of Further India there are critical dates, corresponding to true turning points, which make it possible to delimit certain epochs, each with its own characteristics, marked by the imprint of a strong personality or the political supremacy of a powerful state."

Similarly Dr. N.J. Krom in *Hindoe Javaansche Geschiedenis* suggests links between the course of events in India and the spread of Indian settlements over the Tropical Far East. I wish to show that, for an explanation of the relations between the Tropical Far East and the outer world, we must look in the main to economic geography. This supplies us with two master keys: the China Trade and the Spice Trade.

For China there have always been two main lines of communication with the West: the land route across central Asia, and the sea route round the coast. Throughout the ages traders have followed whichever route seemed easier. Both routes, however, are liable to interruption. The land route is exposed to wild hordes in central Asia and to the results of political catastrophes in the Middle and Near East. The sea route can easily be blocked at its main gateway, the Straits of Malacca. Yet, when both these two main routes are blocked, there is still a byway. Traffic can still find a way down the great rivers of Southeast Asia—the Irrawaddy, the Salween, the Mekong, and the Red River—diverging when convenient to the shorter rivers, the Sittang and the Menam. Time and again these rivers, and especially the Irrawaddy, have played a part in history.

For the trade in spices from the Moluccas, the Straits of Malacca are of supreme importance; there is only one main route.

But this narrow channel can easily be held against outsiders. When it is blocked, however, there are two byways. One byway is through the Sunda Straits between Java and Sumatra; repeatedly throughout the course of history we find mention of Bantam under various names, and of places close to Bantam — Jakarta or Batavia, and Benkulen. There is also a second byway, from various points along the western coast of Burma and Malaya cutting across the mainland to the Gulf of Siam or continuing further to the Mekong and Annam.

Here, then, is a point deserving of particular attention. The Tropical Far East is of minor importance on each route; but it is significant as a byway along *both* routes, and it is sensitive accordingly to convulsions affecting the course of trade along either route. This significance is clearly apparent in the historical records of the past few centuries, and we are not exceeding the legitimate bounds of imaginative reconstruction if we use these keys for an understanding of the past during periods when the data for a conclusive proof are still inadequate. It is, then, to the course of traffic along these routes that we must look for an explanation of our past. Perhaps it may seem that the southern route to the Moluccas has lost its importance. The cloves and nutmegs of the Spice Islands are no longer so highly valued, and Java even imports cloves from Zanzibar. But what about Australia? In the modern world Australia occupies much the same position as the Moluccas in the old world, and just now Australia is keenly interested in the New Guineas and Indonesia. It is the old story in a revised edition.

Another clue to our history is more elusive. Everywhere throughout the region we find traces of a great variety of Hindu and Buddhist sects, and it is often suggested that formerly the same people worshipped at all these shrines indifferently. That was almost certainly true in some cases, but not always and perhaps not usually. On much the same evidence future historians might argue that the Europeans in these lands were all one people, indifferently Roman Catholic or Protestant, Anglican, Baptist, Wesleyan, or Adventist. We know, of course, that this is not the case, and that difference of creed often points to a difference of

nationality and origin. Presumably this was true also for early settlers from India. Also, until recently all the settlers were lumped together as *Pallavans*. Further study has revealed that they came from almost the whole of India, though mainly from the south. As yet, however, our knowledge is insufficient to track down the source of Indian influences; but I want to suggest that the rise and fall of empires in the Tropical Far East are closely related to changes in the course of trade, and that by working along these lines we can piece together in broad outline the relations between this region and world history.

Contact between East and West goes back very far – beyond the dawn of history. According to Sir Gilbert Murray, a piece of white nephrite (a kind of jade) found in the second city on the site of Troy and dating from about 2,000 B.C. must have come from China. How did it get there? I think we can find a clue in what is still happening at the present day. In parts of Burma markets are held every fifth day in convenient centres. In village *A* traders attend from similar market centres in villages *B*, *C*, *D*, and *E*. Traders from village *B* may take some goods from all these villages to their own market, held perhaps the next day, and attended by traders from villages *F*, *G*, and *H*. So the process goes on, over an ever widening radius, until goods from the market at *A* find their way to village *Z* and further. Not improbably it was by this kind of random trade that the piece of jade reached Troy from China. Gradually, however, goods for which there is a demand in widely separated regions tend to pass more or less directly from one centre to another; definite trade routes emerge by a process of evolution. By about 200 B.C. there were two such routes in Asia: one running from north to south by which gold from Siberia reached India, the other taking silk from China to the European border. These two routes crossed in the ancient bazaars of Bokhara, Samarkand, and Balkh in Bactria. About 200 B.C. both routes were closed by wild tribes in central Asia. It is to this remote region at this early date that we must look for the first light on the history of the Tropical Far East. For it was owing to the interruption of these high roads that traffic first sought a byway through Southeast Asia.

The subsequent course of history may conveniently be divided into three chapters: the Age of Discoveries; the Age of Contact through India; and the Age of Direct Contact between East and West. In each chapter one can trace a succession of turning points when changes in China or the West synchronized at least approximately with new developments in the Tropical Far East, suggesting the possibility, or even the probability, of a causal relation between the two series of events. That is the outline of the story I wish to tell. Obviously we must fly through the centuries at supersonic speed. For much of the time we must fly above the clouds, with glimpses of the land below only at infrequent intervals when the clouds are broken. But I hope to show that the course is clear upon the chart.

## The Age of Discoveries

### *Milestones of Progress*

After the barbarian hordes had severed the main lines of communications, the channels of trade were gradually restored in a series of distinct phases. The first step brought Europe nearer to India and central Asia by land. This was followed by an improvement in the communications between Europe and India by sea. During the ensuing phases the new route was carried beyond India to China, again first by land and then by sea. Finally it was extended to the Moluccas. Let us trace briefly the discovery of these new channels as they are revealed by Chinese historians, Indian reliefs, and Western geographers.

### *The Nearer Land Route*

When Wu-ti, the Han Emperor of China (149-89 B.C.), found that he needed help to guard his western frontier, he sent a mission, probably in 128 B.C., to obtain the cooperation of Bactria in suppressing the wild tribes between their borders. In the bazaars of Bactria the delegates saw products of China that must have come by some unknown southern route through Burma and India. Wu-ti contemplated opening this route, which might be more secure against barbarians. This first project of a Burma Road remained, however, a vision of the future. Meanwhile the pacification of

central Asia allowed representatives of Rome and China to meet in 104 B. C. in Parthia, the ancient Persia or Iran. Then for the first time these two great empires became known to one another. The sequel was an extension of the old silk road until it reached the Roman Empire along a continuous highway linking up East and West by land. The Latin authors of the classical age frequently mention the remote Seres as the home of silk. But they knew only the land route.

#### *The Nearer Sea Route*

Rome could now get silk from China; but India was still shut off from Siberia, and it made good the deficiency of precious metals by obtaining them from Rome. They became available in larger quantities when, about 50 A. D., Hippalos, a Greek pilot, discovered the secret hitherto known only to the Arabs: that by using the monsoons vessels could travel safely and regularly between the Roman Empire and India. The consequent drainage of bullion from Rome was so alarming that Vespasian (69-79) placed an embargo on its export. Yet, despite restrictions, the numerous Roman coins of the next two centuries found in South India demonstrate the constant traffic along the new sea route. Beyond India, however, the trade to China still went up the Indus to join the land route across central Asia.

#### *The Further Land Route*

Indians may already have turned toward the further East to supplement their stock of gold and silver, but the decree of Vespasian must have stimulated new expeditions to Burma and beyond: to Suvannabhumi, the Land of Gold, and Suvannadvipa, the Golden Island; the Golden Chersonese, Chryse and Argysa of Ptolemy, and Chin-lin, the Golden Frontier of the Chinese. At first they cut across Burma or followed the coast of Arakan. The search for gold led naturally to the development of trade.

Meanwhile China had been extending its control over the tribes along its southwest border, and by about the middle of the first century Wu-ti's vision of a road through Burma to India and

the West had been realized. Apparently it was along this route that in 97 A.D. an expedition from the Roman Empire reached China. Thus the earliest incident in the history of the Tropical Far East to which a date can be assigned is the opening of the first Burma Road, important then and for the same reason as in the latest chapter of its history before the recent war. A second expedition of 120-21, taking jugglers, dancers, and musicians from the Roman Empire to the Imperial Court, probably followed the same route, though it may have reached the Burma Road by sailing up the Irrawaddy.

#### *The Further Sea Route*

The mountain road through North Burma was difficult and dangerous; with seaworthy vessels it is easier and safer to sail direct from South India to Malaya. Suvannabhumi lay on or near the coast. During the first century Indian and Chinese mariners learned from the Persian Gulf the art of building large junks able to carry 600 or 700 passengers, and with these vessels it was possible to reach China from South India by sea. Accordingly the next stage in the process of discovery brought voyagers to Malaya, Siam, and, rather later, Annam. A mission from Rome in 131 A.D. went by sea at least as far as Malaya; and a subsequent mission in 166, ascribed to Marcus Aurelius, landed in Tonkin after passing through the Straits of Malacca, or perhaps by cutting across the peninsula and reloading on the further side.

#### *The Moluccas*

It seems improbable that traffic had as yet reached the Moluccas. These islands were the only source of cloves and nutmeg. Up to 250 A.D. there was a brisk trade between South India and Rome, but apparently cloves and nutmegs were unknown in Rome. Trade between the Moluccas and South India would pass naturally through the archipelago, and especially by way of Java. Yet, although both the Chinese and Romans were well acquainted with the mainland coast, they knew little or nothing of the archipelago beyond the bare existence of Java. The earliest information about Java dates from after 350 A.D., and we may perhaps assume that only then was regular communication between India and the Moluccas first established.



## Contact with the West through India

### *Main Lines of Traffic.*

During the Age of Discoveries the search for gold led to the foundation of trading centres at convenient sites along the coasts and main rivers of the Tropical Far East. In their subsequent history one may distinguish four periods characterized by diversions of the main lines of the traffic. During the first period, up to 650 A.D., contact was chiefly with South India by sea. There seem to have been two main waves of Indian colonisation: the first about 150 A.D., and the second about 350. After that the Indian settlers were gradually absorbed in the local population. Then a new era in the course of world relations originated in the birth of Islam in 638 A.D. During the second period, from about 650 to 1250, contact was largely by sea with North India, though new developments in South India and China about 1000 A.D. break the period into almost equal halves. The third period, from 1250 to 1350, saw the reopening of the land route across central Asia under the Mongol power in China. The fourth period, from 1350 to 1500, is dominated by the expansion of Islam in the Tropical Far East and the revival of the sea route, mainly through or around South India.

### *Indian Colonisation 100-650 A.D.*

The "great circuit industrial and commercial intercourse" about 100 A.D. has been compared to the world market of the early 20th century.<sup>2</sup> Rome communicated with the other great empire of the Hans in China by land up the Indus through the dominions of Kanishka and across central Asia, and by sea through or around South India by way of Malaya and the coasts of Indo-China. In the Tropical Far East Indian settlements were developing into petty kingdoms: in Malaya, in Fu-nan at the mouth of the Mekong, and in Lin-yi or Champa in the southeast of modern Annam. These were ports of call on the way to the Chinese markets in Tonkin and Canton. From the Chinese records it appears that all these settlements were exclusively Hindu or Brahmanist; they make no mention of the presence of Buddhism. The records suggest also that the settlers came from South India.

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<sup>2</sup> P. Vinogradoff, *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, i. 547.

With free intercourse along both the main routes by land and sea, there was little need for a byway through Burma except for purely local products. But this region produced *malabathron*, the source of the noblest Roman unguents. We are told how Rome got its supplies. Every year wild hill men from the surrounding neighbourhood gathered near the borders of southwest China for a festival, bringing, of course, their bedding. Doubtless, like hill men of the present day, they filled and emptied the flowing bowl, and apparently they forgot all about their bedding. It was collected however, by traders better acquainted with its value, and in due course it appeared in the Roman markets as *malabathron*. This probably explains the route taken by the expedition of 97 A.D., and also why the Burma Road continued in use even after the opening of the sea route. It was along the Burma Road that Buddhism reached Yunnan during the second century, and a party of Chinese monks took this road to India at the end of the third century.

But how far was there communication by land through Burma between India and the coastal settlements? The Chinese mention a Buddhist country Lim-yang, apparently in central Burma on the way to Suvannabhumi. The discovery of a Graeco-Roman lamp of the second century on the road between Burma and the Gulf of Siam suggests traffic along this road at a very early date, though the lamp may have been imported much later. The oldest surviving inscription in the Tropical Far East, at Vo-can in Champa, was formerly supposed to be of Buddhist origin, dating from 250 A.D. or even earlier, and some authorities identify the script with North India.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> According to Chabra, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1935, this Sanskrit inscription is not Buddhist, but records "an orthodox Bhramanical sacrifice". Majumdar's view (BEFEO xxxii, p. 127) that the script is North Indian has not found general acceptance. Sirkar (*Journal of the Greater India Society*, 1939, VI) remarks that, unless the script is North Indian, the use of Sanskrit points to a date much later than 250, and that the inscription is not wholly in prose but, at least partly, in a metre that did not come into use in East India until after 320 and in South India until after 375. Coedès appears at one time to have accepted the view of Majumdar, but subsequently agreed with Sastri (BEFEO xxxv, 234) that the script is South Indian. As regards this particular inscription, the arguments of Sastri do not seem to me convincing, and unless the points raised by Sirkar can be met the date of the inscription must be much later than was formerly accepted.

Relics, scanty though widely spread, show the influence of Amaravati at the mouth of the Krishna, where a school of Buddhist art flourished from the 2nd to the 4th century. But Amaravati influence was still strong in Ceylon and elsewhere up to the 7th century. Along the Irrawaddy and the Menam, Hinayanist Buddhism was so strongly entrenched by 500 A.D. as to suggest that it must have arrived much earlier, probably in its Sanskrit form. Beyond this, however, there is no satisfactory evidence of Buddhist penetration or of influences from Northern India during the first phase of Indian settlement; and on the other hand, the coastal settlements seem to have been exclusively Hindu.

The petty kingdoms that grew out of these early settlements, like their successors all through the centuries, were frequently at strife in an endeavour to monopolize the trade. Lin-yi was at a disadvantage through its rivalry with Tonkin, and the outstanding feature of the 3rd century was the emergence of Fu-nan as the earliest seat of empire in the Tropical Far East. The King equipped a fleet and conquered "more than ten islands", including apparently a large part of the Malay Peninsula, then and long afterwards regarded as an island. Here there was an important trading centre, where ten thousand Bhramins, married to native women, engaged in profitable commerce with Tonkin on the east and with India and Parthia on the west. "Precious things, rare merchandise," say the Chinese, "there is nothing that is not there." From the peninsula the King led his armies against Chin-lin, the Frontier of Gold, but owing to his death the expedition failed. It may not be too rash to speculate that, having obtained command over the sea route, he was aiming also to control the land route connecting Southeast Asia with Bengal through a region where Buddhism prevailed among settlers from North India along the Irrawaddy. It deserves notice that the expansion of Fu-nan coincided with the end of Han rule and renewal of trouble along the land route through central Asia. This first empire of Fu-nan faded out towards the end of the century, when India was relapsing into anarchy, the trade between South India and Rome was declining, and the Roman Empire was beginning to break up.

About 350 A.D. there was a second wave of Indian settlement, not improbably connected with the rise and expansion of the Gupta power in India. Pallavans from South India played a large part in this new movement, and architectural remains connect them closely with Fu-nan, which once again became predominant in the archipelago and seems to have controlled the Straits of Malacca. But the extent of Pallavan influence in the Tropical Far East as a whole has certainly been exaggerated. Emigrants from Kalinga have left a more certain, wider, and more lasting imprint. They gave their name to the Talaing region of Burma and to Ho-ling in Java; in the form of Talaing it long survived as the name by which the Mons were known to the Burmese; as Kling it is still the name generally applied to Indians in Malaya and Cambodia, and Indians from Orissa are known as Coringhis in Burma. Not improbably the Kalinga tribe in Luzon derives its name from the same source, and the survival of Indonesian traditions among the Australian aborigines suggests the possibility that the name of Kalinga, a suburb of Brisbane, has a similar origin.

One feature of this period is the beginning (apart from Vo-canb) of the epigraphic record. In Burma and Malaya the inscriptions are predominantly Buddhist; elsewhere they are almost exclusively Hindu. Despite the lack of epigraphic proof, the numerous Buddhist images and other relics of the Amaravati and Gupta schools provide ample evidence of the wide diffusion of Buddhism. Chinese records also testify to the spread of Buddhism in its Hinayanist form, and by the end of the 6th century there were flourishing Hinayanist schools in Ho-ling and at Malayu and Palembang in Sumatra. In Fu-nan Buddhism was not unknown, but Shaivism predominated. Another point worthy of attention is that the early Hindu inscriptions in Java are situated close to the Sunda Straits, just where centuries later the Dutch made their first settlement. It is not, perhaps, fantastic to suggest that the Hindu Kingdom in Fu-nan maintained contact with India through the Straits of Sunda in order to avoid Malaya where inscriptions almost contemporaneous with those of Java show that Buddhism was

favoured, presumably through a link with some other part of India. Fa Hien, about 414, and Gunavarman, a little later, both reached Java by the Sunda Straits. But one reason for preferring the Sunda passage to that of Malacca may have been that Sumatra was reputedly the home of cannibals. "In P'ich'ien (identified with Sumatra) they do not receive foreign merchants; if any happen to come they kill and eat them." On the whole the evidence seems to suggest that Burma, Siam, and Malaya still retained a connection by land with Buddhist India, and that elsewhere contact was closest with South India by sea and mainly with Hinduism in the form of Shaivism.

From about 400 onwards Buddhism in India was giving place to a Hindu renascence imposing more strictly the rules against oversea travel. It was from about this time also that Indian settlement declined. In the North of India, however, Buddhism still survived in its Mahayanist form, and there seems to have been contact, perhaps overland, with Burma. The decline of Buddhism in South India would seem to explain the growing contact between Buddhist Ceylon and Burma, of which there is ample evidence in their common use of Pali in inscriptions; elsewhere the earlier inscriptions, even if Buddhist, are all in Sanskrit. Another feature of this period, also due presumably to the lack of new arrivals from India, was the gradual assimilation of the Indian settlers in the local population. This final phase of Indian colonisation is clearly indicated in the use of the local dialect in the inscriptions; about 600 there is an inscription in *Cham*, the vernacular is first used in Burma about the same date or earlier, and in Sumatra old Malay first appears in 683.

#### *The Rise of Islam, 650-1250*

The land route across central Asia that had been closed since the middle of the 3rd century was reopened during the early part of the 7th century when the restoration of order in China by the T'angs allowed free access through the domains of Harsha to Byzantium. In the north of India Mahayanist Buddhism flourished under Harsha, and it is just about this time that we find the first

clear traces of Mahayanism in the archipelago and also a connection with the north rather than the south of India. In South India Buddhism was practically extinct, and the trade by sea appears to have been largely round the south of India in Arab vessels, which had reached Canton as early as the 4th century.

Then from 638 onwards a new era in world history opened with the birth and rapid spread of Islam. The first effect must have been at least a temporary dislocation of the course of inter-continental trade at its headquarters in the Near East and an occasion for it to seek unaccustomed paths. By 751 the Moslem forces reached the borders of China, where they inflicted a shattering defeat upon the Chinese army. Contemporary with the spread of Islam, and not improbably as an indirect result, was the collapse of Harsha's empire and the decline of the T'ang power. Out of the ensuing anarchy new powers arose and the channels of trade assumed a new pattern. Turmoil in China closed the land route, and from 730 the Palas came to the front in North India; Tibet and Nan-chao emerged on the southwest border of China; and Shrivijaya and the Shelendras achieved mastery over the archipelago. The diversion of trade along new routes is reflected by the spread of Mahayanist Buddhism.

Early Buddhism was Hinayanist throughout the Tropical Far East. Mahayanism may have reached Burma from North India about 600 A.D., and a surviving inscription shows that by that time it had also penetrated Malaya. In Sumatra and throughout the archipelago, Mahayanism is associated with the Shelendra dynasty, which at one time ruled the whole region from Shrivijaya (Palembang) where it commanded both the Sunda and Malacca Straits. From this centre it dominated the whole archipelago up to about 1050, leaving the magnificent Mahayanist temple of Borobudur as evidence of its temporary rule in Java; at the same time it controlled the mainland coast as far as Champa, and its influence may have extended to the Philippines. It certainly had close relations with the Palas and with the Buddhist University of Nalanda in West Bengal.

The Palas were not only in touch with Shrivijaya by sea; they were in touch also with China by the land route. During the early stages of the decline of T'ang power there were new developments in the region north of Burma, the emergence of the Kingdoms of Tibet and Nan-chao. Since 679 Tibet had been at war with China. Further south the tribal chieftans of Thai race between China and Burma had recently been consolidated, with the approval of the Chinese emperor, as a single state, Nan-chao. This new state came to the help of China against Tibet. But in 755, presumably as a result of the Chinese disaster in 751, it turned against the Emperor. During the next century it maintained close relations, amicable or hostile, with Tibet, where spiritual authority was beginning to dominate the secular power as Mahayanism was gradually transformed into Lamaism. Nan-chao stood across the Burma Road between China and India, and before long it gained control over the Irrawaddy route as far south as Prome and thereby reopened the road between China and the country of the Palas. Having thus obtained control over the land byway it invaded Annam, presumably with the object of levying toll on the profits of the China trade by sea. This, however, was beyond its strength. After capturing Tonkin it was soon driven out and relapsed into insignificance. The most permanent result of all this confusion on the borderland between China, Tibet, and India was the migration southwards of the Burmese into the land that now bears their name.

With the power of Nan-chao broken and the interior of China under the later T'ang a prey to rival war-lords, all the traffic between India and the Chinese seaboard as well as that with the Moluccas had to traverse the Malayan archipelago and pay toll to the Shelendra Maharaja, who was known to Arab merchants as "Lord of the Isles" and finds a place in western nurseries in the tale of Sinbad the Sailor. For over two hundred years the Shelendra flourished exceedingly until their power was challenged from a new quarter. From the welter of internecine strife in South India the Cholas eventually emerged triumphant and about 950 A.D. marched northwards against the Palas. At that time the Pala rule extended

over Arakan along the west coast of Burma. Although after a few years of eclipse the Palas rallied from the shock, they lost permanently their hold on Arakan. This suggests a dislocation of the established trade route which may have contributed to a decline in the Shelendra power. When the Shelendra in turn were attacked by the Cholas shortly after 1000 A.D., the result was the same as with the Palas: a temporary collapse followed by an incomplete recovery. Thus 1000 A.D. may be regarded as a turning point in the relations between the Tropical Far East and North India.

It is not without significance that the decline of the Shelendras coincides with the rise of Pagan. The Anawratha dynasty reopened the byway between China, where the Sungs had restored a measure of order after the anarchy of the Five Dynasties, and North India, where the Palas had re-established their ascendancy. At the same time, although the Shelendra still held the western gate into the archipelago, Java and Cambodia, the heir of Fu-nan, stood out, together with Pagan, as the leading powers in the Tropical Far East. Another point of great interest is the adoption by Anawratha of Hinayanism as the State Religion in place of the Mahayanism formerly predominant in Upper Burma. In view of the long contact of the Burmese with Nan-chao and Tibet during the rise of Lamaism, it is not impossible that Anawratha appreciated the danger of Mahayanism to secular rule.

*The Mongol Interlude, 1250-1350.*

The balance of power in the Tropical Far East lasted with various local ups and downs until the first half of the 13th century when the Mongol advance in central Asia introduced a disturbing factor. In 1206 Genghiz Khan established himself at Karakorum, south of Lake Baikal, as Khan of all the Mongols. By 1214 he had broken through the Great Wall of China. Although the Sungs still held the south of China, the north was governed by the Chin dynasty of Kitan Tartars, from whose name Europe came to know North China as Cathay. His successors ravaged Europe as far as the Adriatic and at the same time penetrated further into China, where Kubla was charged with the conquest of Yunnan. This gave



a new impetus to the southern migration of the Thai into Siam, Burma, and Cambodia. In 1259 Kubla succeeded to the Mongol leadership as the Great Khan, and moved the capital to Kambaluc, the City of the Khans, from which in 1279 he completed the subjugation of the Sungs. For the first time since the days of Harsha and the early T'angs, the land route between China and Europe was open throughout its length. Numerous missionaries and merchants found their way along this route, and the importance of the trade is suggested by the fact that a single merchant might carry goods to the value of £12,000 to be exchanged for the precious silks of Cathay. Marco Polo was only the most famous of a large company, and never again until the 19th century was Europe so well informed as to the interior of China.

But control over the land route did not satisfy Kubla. In 1271 he sent to demand the submission of Pagan and later, after defeating the Sungs, backed up his demand with an army. The outcome of this expedition was the temporary annexation of Upper Burma. Between 1278 and 1287 he invaded Cambodia and Champa, and soon afterwards sent a punitive expedition against Java for its temerity in encouraging Champa to resist. The Mongol incursion was only a passing episode, but it had lasting consequences; for by shaking or destroying the ruling powers, it left the mainland to be parcelled out among petty Thai princes, and a long heritage of anarchy. In Java, by a strange accident, it restored the ancient line which, gathering new strength, founded the empire of Majapahit. Although repeatedly harassed by Mongol forces from China, Majapahit established itself as master of the archipelago and, by conquering the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra, gained command over the sea route to the West. With the death of Kubla Khan in 1294 his empire began to crumble. After 1350 few Europeans reached Cathay. In 1368 a national movement in China cast out the Mongols, and the Ming dynasty attempted to reconstruct the country on its former pattern. But the land route to Europe was again closed, and a dark mist descended on the further East.

*The Expansion of Islam, 1350-1500*

The closure of the land route and the decline of Mongol power gave a new impetus to traffic by sea, and it was from 1350 that Majapahit rose to the zenith of its power. It was in the same year that Ramadhipati founded Ayuthia and unified Siam. An essay in Chinese expansion between 1400 and 1430 was merely a passing episode. "Ayuthia and Majapahit became the two poles, the first continental, the second insular, of Further India of which the greater part was divided between these two zones of influence."<sup>4</sup> Siam reached out towards the Malay Peninsula by land at the same time that Majapahit was consolidating its hold over Sumatra. The two powers met along the Straits of Malacca, but it was the Moslem Arabs who profited by their contention for this gateway.

During the successive hegemonies of Shrivijaya and Majapahit Moslem traders played a leading part in linking up Malaya with the West. The first reference to Islam in Sumatra is in 1281 when Malayu sent two Moslems on an embassy to China. In 1292 Marco Polo found a tiny Moslem kingdom in the extreme north of Sumatra. By 1400 Arab merchants had spread all along the coast of Java. Like their Indian predecessors they intermarried with the natives, formed a Moslem aristocracy, and became rulers of the petty coastal states recognizing the suzerainty of the local Hindu overlord who despised them as money-grubbing merchants. Hitherto the Straits had been dominated from the southern side by Malayu (Jambi) or Shrivijaya (Palembang), but shortly after 1400 a new city was founded on the north bank at Malacca, a bone of contention between Majapahit and Siam. Here, adopting a technique subsequently turned to good account by Europeans, the Moslems helped the ruler, a Moslem convert, to establish his independence. In Java two Hindu kings continued to enjoy a nominal supremacy, but by 1500 despite these survivals from the past, the archipelago had become a Moslem lake.

But, like the Mahayanist rulers of Shrivijaya and the Portuguese and other Europeans subsequently, the Arabs bypassed

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<sup>4</sup> Coedès, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

Burma and the mainland. With full command over the sea route from Europe to China and the Spice Islands, they had no need of byways. Thus the mainland remained a last refuge for Buddhism. The Venetian, di Conti, was one of the two or three Europeans who reached Burma at long intervals, and his account of it contains much that was true until quite recently. He seems to have been the first European to sample a durian. But he does not tell us if he liked it. "The taste varies," he says, "like cheese." If the Arabs had known more of Burma we might have missed a pleasant tale of Arakan. The King, they were informed, had twelve cities. In each city the Governor had to select annually twelve new-born girls and bring them up in luxury. At the age of twelve they were taken to the King. Then they were sent, well washed and in thin robes, to sit fasting in the full force of the sun until midday, "whereby they sweat so much that their garments were completely wet". The clothes were carried to the King, who smelt them one by one. He kept for himself the girls whose garments had a fragrant smell. Those that had not a good smell he gave to his courtiers.

Ibn Batuta, writing about 1350, gives an almost incredible picture of the luxury in which these merchants travelled. The ships were large and roomy, carrying as many as a thousand sailors and marines, living on board with their families, and cultivating ginger and vegetables in wooden boxes. For each merchant there was a cabin with chambers for his wives and slave girls. He refused a passage on one ship because the cabin had no private lavatory. Travel then must have been far more comfortable than with the strict discipline of modern airlines. But this luxury was too good to last. The Turks were pressing on Europe. Venice was no longer sitting at the receipt of custom. The hardy Portuguese embarked on their great adventure round the coast of Africa. Once again the interruption of traffic in the West changed the course of history in the Tropical Far East. The age of contact through India was drawing to its close, and the age of direct contact with Europe along the main sea route was opening.

*Colonisation, Old and New*

Here it seems convenient to call a halt in this breathless haste through history to comment on some aspects of early colonisation. First, one may note that Indian settlements were typically colonial in the old sense of foreign settlement without foreign rule. The settlers came as traders, intermarried with the people, acquired wealth and formed an aristocracy, gradually diffusing their own type of philosophic religion in place of, or on top of, the prevailing animism of the tribal peoples. They imparted their culture, the fruit of their own civilisation. And they did more than that. Among these peoples organized on tribal lines they introduced the idea of territorial kingship. The local people, by adopting a new religion and by the acceptance of a common kingship, were enabled in some measure to transcend the limits hitherto imposed by tribal life. The Indians introduced not only new culture, but also civilisation in its original and exact sense, the art of living together as neighbours.

Then, as new migration ceased, the Indian rulers and aristocracy were absorbed into the people. In the inscriptions, the language and written characters take on native forms, and the names of persons and places are no longer Indian but native. Similarly in the religious monuments and other buildings a native style is superimposed on the earlier Indian models; the absorption of the Indian rulers by the people is placed on record in brick and stone.

When Vasco da Gama dropped anchor off Calicut in 1498 he must have seemed like David challenging Goliath. In the tiny cockleshells, closely-packed sailors sustained life on a bare ration of unpalatable food, or died so freely of dysentery and scurvy that a voyage on which no more than a quarter of the crew succumbed was reckoned prosperous. One could hardly depict a more vivid contrast with the luxury in which Ibn Batuta travelled. But the Europeans, though worse lodged and fed, were better armed and, more important, better disciplined.

The Portuguese, like their Arab predecessors, bypassed Burma and sailed round the south of India directly to Malacca, where they established their headquarters and as soon as possible went straight on to the Spice Islands. This set the pattern of history for the next four hundred years. Each successive western power aimed to command the Straits of Malacca. Until it could achieve this it had to be content with control over the Straits of Sunda. Bantam becomes a strategic post for settlement or, failing Bantam, some point (Batavia, Benkulen) as near the Sunda Straits as possible. Only when unable to obtain access to the archipelago, or when driven out of it, did they seek consolation on the mainland where they could cut into the spice trade or hope to find a byway to China up one of the large rivers, preferably the Irrawaddy. The pattern of history that former ages have suggested, and that may have seemed too speculative or fanciful, is now printed in a clear cut design. I do not wish to suggest that Anawratha or Suryavarman when subjugating the Mons, or Nan-chao when pressing southward down the Irrawaddy and eastwards to Tonkin, were consciously animated by the clear design of Raffles to command the trade by sea; but there was loot in the rich trading centres along the rivers and the coast; and the commercial policy of the great sea-powers, Fu-nan, Shrivijaya, and Majapahit, was essentially the same as that of their successors, the Portuguese and Dutch.

From 1500 onwards we can trace more clearly the connection between the course of events in the Tropical Far East and developments in the outer world. This is well illustrated by the evolution of ideas as to the nature and purpose of a colony. Formerly a colony was merely a settlement in a foreign land and the settler had little or no political connection with the home land. The Indian and Moslem became foreign rulers, but they did not establish foreign rule. The Portuguese and Spaniards came as royal agents and with a warrant from the Pope to undertake both the conquest and conversion of the people. The old idea of a colony as a settlement survived; there were grandees with large estates, permanent immigrants of lower rank who married native women, and priests spending a lifetime in their parishes. But the colonies

were ruled by Governors from Europe. They were both settlers and rulers. The Dutch came merely as traders, but they could obtain tropical produce only in the form of tribute: economic circumstances required them to accept sovereignty on behalf of the home company and to rule the people indirectly through native chieftains, and also to settle permanently, though on a comparatively small scale, to supervise native cultivation. They were primarily rulers and were settlers only by force of circumstance. In the 19th century the English carried the process a stage further. Through the industrial revolution they had goods to sell, and the object of their policy was not tribute but trade. This required direct rule, but not settlement except in the ports. Finally with the growth of capitalism and the opening of the Suez Canal, the typical system of colonial development was by foreign capital with imported labour. Thus there was a process of development from the old colonial system of foreign settlement without foreign rule to a new system of foreign rule without foreign settlement. This process reflected the course of economic progress in the West. At the same time the political history of the Tropical Far East reflected the course of western international relations.

### Direct Contact with Europe

#### *Portugal and Spain, 1500-1600.* •

But we have outrun the historical sequence of events and must return to the Portuguese and Spaniards. The Portuguese reached India in 1498. As soon as they had secured their base in Goa they went straight on to Malacca, the market for spices, which they took in 1511. Forthwith they sent an expedition to the Spice Islands, founding a settlement in Ternate in 1517, and another just afterwards near Canton. From these two vantage points they could control both the China trade and the spice trade, and they bypassed the coastal Moslem settlements. This failure to secure their line of communication was one reason for their downfall. In 1580 the peoples of the eastern islands rose in a general insurrection, and the Portuguese were driven back on their base in Malacca. It was

then that Portuguese adventurers, no longer able to make a fortune in the islands, began to intervene in mainland politics, and we find them serving local rulers in Chittagong, Pegu, and Ayuthia. One of these adventurers in the early 17th century founded a petty kingdom at Syriam in Burma. Meanwhile, the Spaniards, sailing to the West, had reached the Philippines, capturing Manila in 1501. They also had a precarious settlement at Tidore near Ternate. Rivalry between Spain and Portugal ended in 1580 when Philip of Spain succeeded to the throne of Portugal, just in time to rescue Ternate from the rebels. The point of chief significance in this period is that only when the Portuguese were driven out of the archipelago did they expand over the mainland.

*Anglo-Dutch Rivalry, 1600-1700.*

The amalgamation of Portugal and Spain led to the expulsion of the Jews from Lisbon. Formerly the Dutch had obtained from the Jews of Lisbon the spices which they distributed over Europe. The normal line of trade was cut, and the Dutch adventured to the Moluccas on their own account. Malacca was still strongly held by the Portuguese, and the Dutch therefore resorted to Bantam on the Sunda Straits. The Dutch monopoly of pepper raised its price so extortionately in London that the English also formed a company for trading with the Indies. The English and French appeared in Bantam at almost the same time as the Dutch. Only when trade in Bantam became impossible did the Dutch move round the corner to found the settlement of Batavia in Jakarta. They regarded it merely as a stronghold and a rendez-vous for their shipping; their real target was "the islands where the nuts grow". To obtain rice and slaves they opened up relations with Arakan, and made tentative essays to explore the trade with China up the Irrawaddy. In 1623 they quashed the pretensions of their English rivals who from that time onwards could only pick up such crumbs as the Dutch happened to overlook. In 1641 the Dutch captured Malacca from the Portuguese and between 1650 and 1680 subjugated Macassar and completed their hold over the archipelago, dominating both the spice trade and the trade with China. Meanwhile the

English and, with less persistency, the French had tried to maintain a settlement in Bantam, but in 1683 they were both turned out of Bantam. Although the English retained a post at Benkulen, as near as they dared approach Bantam, the long years of naval rivalry in the archipelago ended in the complete supremacy of Dutch sea-power.

*Anglo-French Rivalry, 1688-1886.*

The rivalry between the English and Dutch at sea gave place to a contest between the English and French on land. The English, like the Dutch before them, were tempted to explore the Irrawaddy route to China, but found it unattractive. The main interest of both English and French was in Siam, where they could hope to cut into the China trade and could join forces with the native pirates and smugglers of spices. In 1680 the English sent a factor to Ayuthia and in 1682 the French countered more effectively with a bishop. One of the earliest incidents in this rivalry was the episode related so entertainingly by Mr. Collis in his book, *Siamese White*.

During the 18th century English sea-power increased so rapidly that they could disregard the Dutch opposition in the archipelago and Siam lost its strategical and commercial importance. But the struggle between English and French in India involved them both in Burma for their supply of teak, and they joined on opposite sides in the Mon rebellion against the Burmese from 1740 to 1750. Even after the French lost their hold on India they continued, up to the French Revolution, to entertain hopes of a base in Burma from which a French fleet could harass British power in India. The French Revolution contributed to a further development in the history of the Tropical Far East. When Napoleon established the Continental Blockade of British goods, he drove manufacturers to seek an outlet in the East for the products that, owing to the industrial revolution, could now be sold in Asia at a price that the peasants could afford. Thus in western relations with the tropics a new phase opened, characterised by trade and direct rule with imperial expansion as a natural corollary. England extended its rule over Burma, and France over Annam. French expansion, however, was dominated by political rather than by



commercial motives. Napoleon wanted cheap laurels and also aimed at increasing French influence in China. It was the Mekong that first attracted French interest as a byway into China, and when this proved impracticable, the next step forward was Tonkin, communicating with Yunnan by the Red River, quickly supplemented under French rule by a railroad. And then once again we find the Irrawaddy entering world politics, when French intrigues at Mandalay led to the annexation of Upper Burma by the British in 1886.

*The Latest Phase.*

The British, firmly seated since 1842 at Singapore, commanded the whole archipelago no less effectively than the Dutch in the 17th century. As late as 1870 the Dutch depended on English vessels for their mail to Java, and the Dutch mercantile marine in eastern waters was wholly manned by English, except for the Dutch skipper carried on the bridge merely to comply with legal requirements for ships sailing under the Dutch flag. Towards the end of the century German colonial ambition aroused Dutch apprehensions and they hastily introduced effective administration over the island empire that, except for Java and part of Sumatra, they had previously neglected. As a result of the opening of the Suez Canal, the Tropical Far East entered on a period of rapid economic development.

Then the revolution in Russia again cut off China from the west by land, and when Japanese aggression interfered with the normal course of trade by sea, we again encounter the classical situation involving the Tropical Far East as a storm centre in world politics. Shortly before the second World War the Burma Road came to assume the same importance as two thousand years earlier when it stirred the imagination of Wu-ti. Now, with trouble threatening from Burma to the Philippines and from Sumatra to New Guinea, we can with our own eyes see history repeating itself. It is an old, old story. Personally I have no desire to peep at the last chapter to see how the story ends.

*Bangkok, November 22, 1950; Rangoon, January 12, 1951.*