



The Singapore
Bicentennial
Conference

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Singapore within the *Negara* *Selat*

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Pre-Nineteenth Singapore in a Global and Regional Context

- Singapore was an important island in the *Negara Selat*, the “Realm of the Straits”
- The Negara Selat (and hence Singapore) was located in a crucial point in the international maritime east-west trade
- Singapore’s major role in both contexts was as an outpost of the *Orang Laut* or Sea People, who guarded the sea lanes as allies of the premier entrepot kingdom dominating the Negara Selat
- In the interim periods between such kingdoms, outposts like Singapore did emerge as temporary ports with ambitious local leaders

The East-West International Maritime Trade

Main body of water linking east and west through Southeast Asia was the Straits of Melaka within the Negara Selat



SOUTHEAST ASIA



The *Negara Selat*

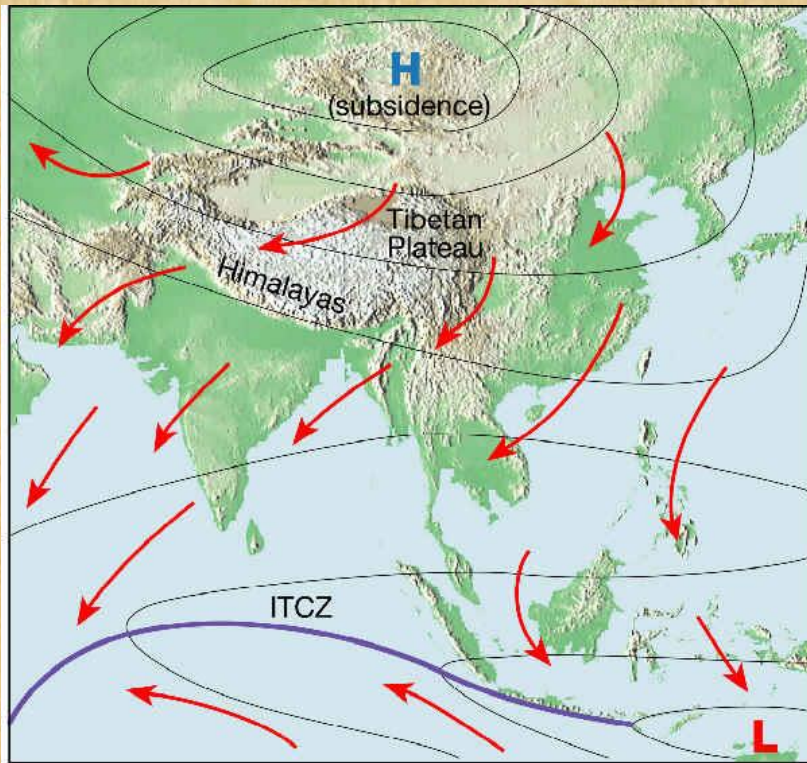
THE STRAITS OF MELAKA IN THE NEGARA SELAT



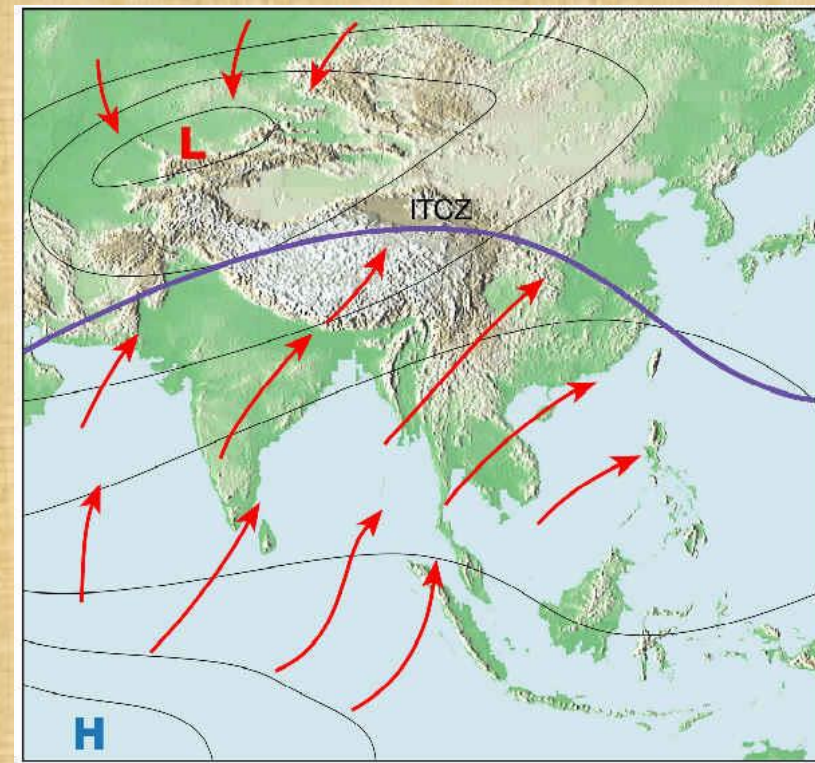
Winds and Currents in the Negara Selat

- Monsoon winds affecting Asian region

Jan to April (NE Monsoon)



July to Nov (SW Monsoon)



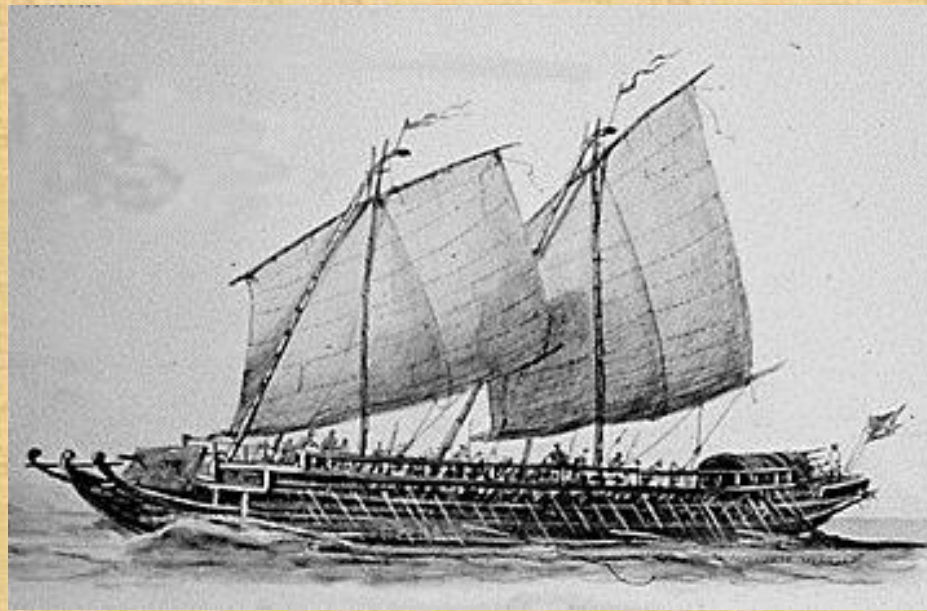
- Straits protected by mountains in Sumatra and Peninsula



Orang Laut in the Negara Selat

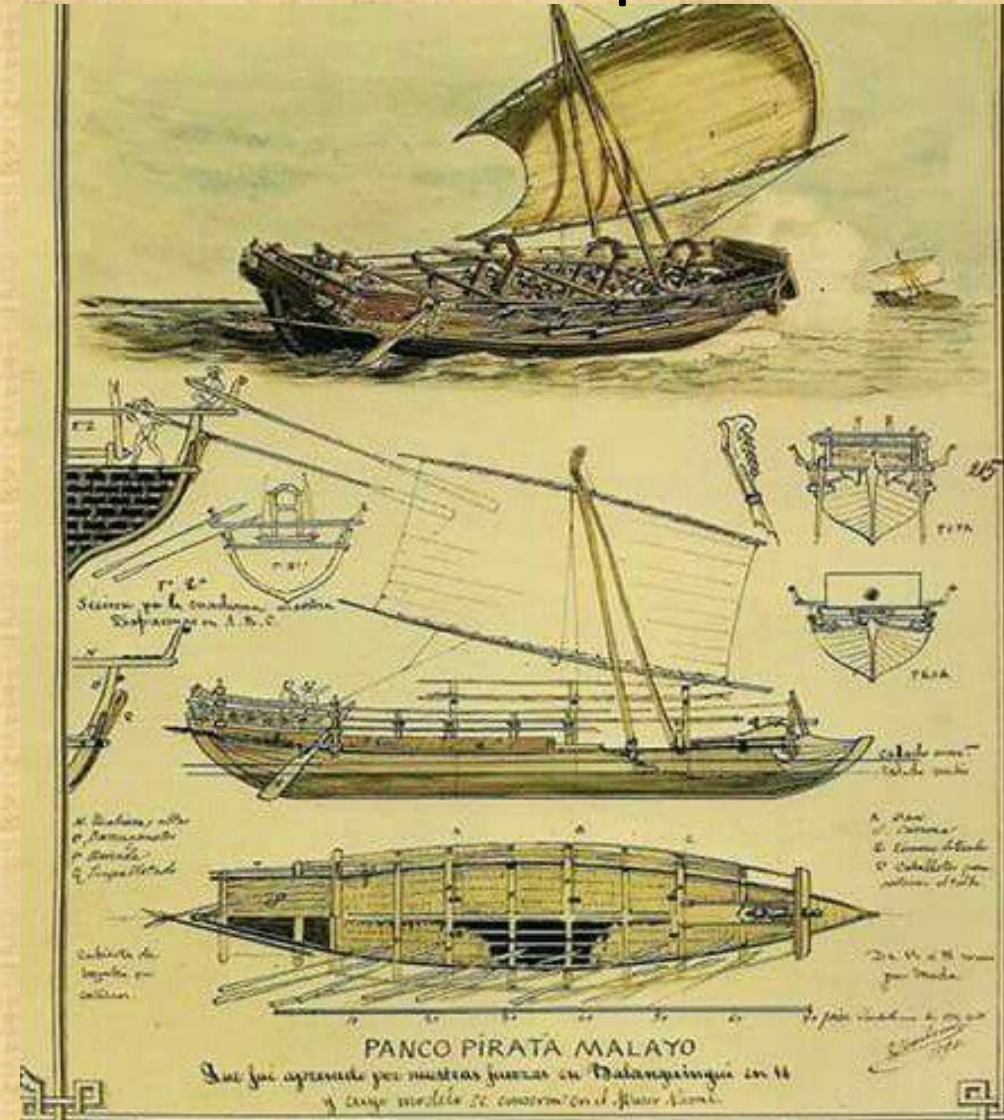
- Emergence of Orang Laut
 - New archaeological suggestion that “orang laut” formed in response to major economic opportunity
 - Rise of east-west maritime international trade may have been factor
- Orang Laut prospered in the Negara Selat
 - Euryhaline waters, mangrove swamps, coral reefs, seagrass beds provided subsistence and trade goods for Orang Laut
 - Orang Laut knowledge of treacherous reefs and currents of Negara Selat made them valuable as guardians of sea lanes for entrepot states

Ilanun warship



Larger Orang Laut boats for raids and long-distance collection of sea products

Houseboats of Sea Peoples



Complementary Relationship between Malays and Orang Laut

- Orang Laut had superior navigational skills and knowledge of the waters of the Negara Selat; Malays had superior organization in international trade and could attract traders
- Historical evidence of sea peoples helping to establish entrepot states to assure a market for Orang Laut sea products
- Successful relationship of the Orang Laut and the entrepot states of Gantoli (5th-7th centuries CE), Srivijaya (7th- 14th century CE), Melaka (c. 1400-1511), Johor (1530s-late 19th century) within the Negara Selat

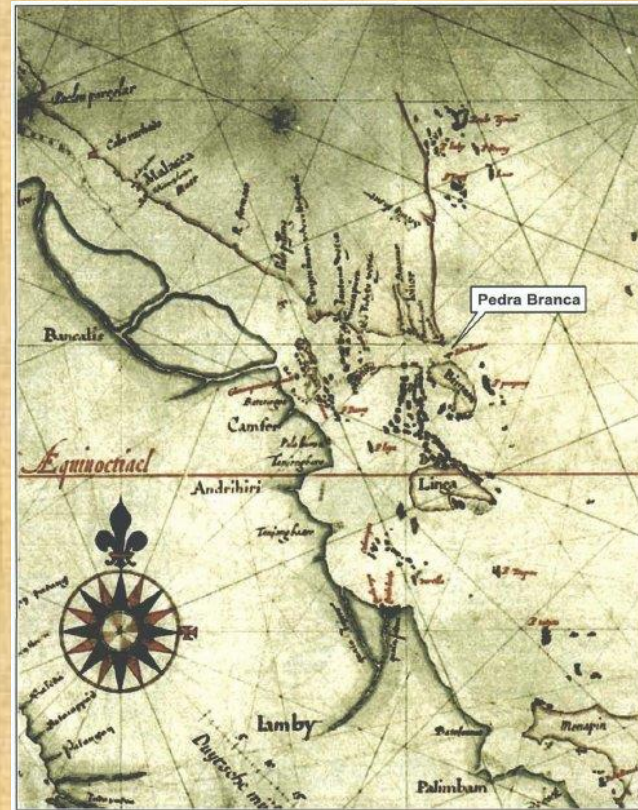
What was the role of Singapore in the Negara Selat?

Temasek/Singapore in Negara Selat

- Early references to Temasek and Singapore
 - In 1330 Vietnamese annals record coming of Malay-speaking envoys from Temasek
 - Wang Da Yuan (1349) mentions two settlements on Temasek: one of Chinese traders and “natives” (Orang Laut) and another (Malays?) on Ft. Canning Hill
 - Temasek mentioned in *Desawarnana* (Majapahit, 1365)
 - Singapore first used by Ibn Majid (1462)
- *Sejarah Melayu* (c. 1612) and *Suma Oriental* (c. 1513) mention expulsion of Malay settlement in Temasek (late 14th century?)
- Events occurred in interim between dominant entrepot kingdoms

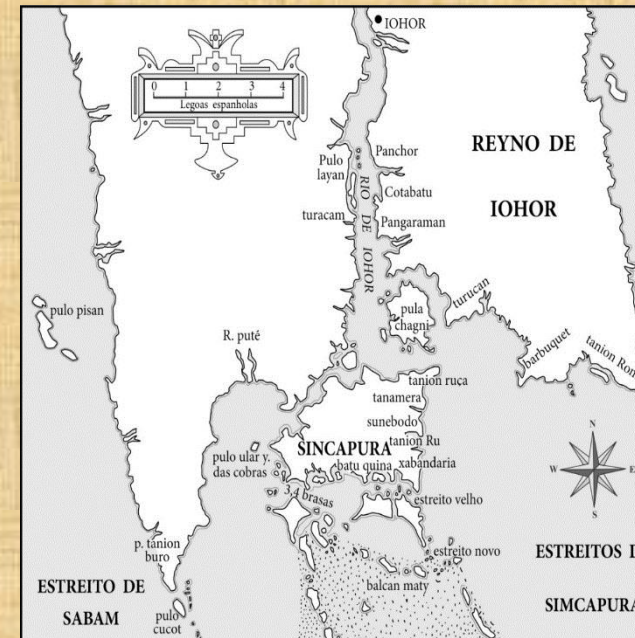
Singapore Remained an Orang Laut Base

- De Coutre (1595): [Singapore] few Malay inhabitants but many ‘*Saletes*’ (Orang Laut), ‘who knew all the many channels’
- VOC Matelieff mentions a Sri Raja Negara in 1610
- VOC (1719) report mentions a “Raja Negara [Selat]” as leader of Orang Laut based in Singapore



Portuguese map of 1619
Showing “xabandaria”

Gateway to the South China Sea through the narrow Straits at Pedra Branca, Middle Rock, and South Ledge



Conclusions

- Early mention of Temasek/Singapore suggests it was an outpost of Malay entrepot states and an Orang Laut base ideally located to patrol movement of traders through the Negara Selat
- From the nineteenth century Singapore is transformed to become an important node in Britain's India to China trade and as administrative centre in an export economy based on extractive industries on the Malay Peninsula and the Negara Selat