

# Malacca Case Study Questions BE6:Pan L2

## **BEFORE reading Handout 2.1 answer the following questions**

1. How do you think trade centers operated or worked considering that there were many people from different cultures there doing business? Was it chaotic? Orderly?
2. How are people treated? Fairly? Favoritism (some better than others)?
3. How did the people in these trade centers get along considering they were from different religions, ethnicities, and cultures?
4. Where did traders stay when they were in the trade centers?
5. How safe do you think the centers were? For individuals? For money? For goods?



**AFTER you read the Case Study of Malacca, answer the following questions. Use the trade map, reading, and your notes.**

6. Why was Malacca a successful trading post?
7. What is a *shabandar*?
8. In the reading, we learned that a diverse group of traders in Malacca seemed to get along because they shared “a common culture of trade.” Explain what you think that phrase means and how that “common culture” would influence the traders’ behavior toward one another?
9. In the Case Study, one religion appears to have been spreading along the trading network. What religion seems to predominate and why do you think this was the case?
10. Gifts and “tribute” had to be brought to the sultan of the trading port. What kinds of items do you think the sultan would have appreciated receiving?

## Lesson 2

### *Student Handout 2.1—Case Study of Malacca*

#### **Who were the people who traded at Malacca and from where did they come?**

We know about the way in which the trading center at Malacca operated because in the sixteenth century, Tomé Pires, a Portuguese visitor there, observed and wrote about the traders who represented many different peoples and societies. Trading networks throughout Afroeurasia had operated for centuries, and though there were many different ports throughout the region, the focus of this lesson is on Malacca. Because of Pires' description of his experience, historians have some idea of how the particular exchange network functioned.

Pires observed that many traders from all over Afroeurasia worked cooperatively side by side. Among the different traders who docked at Malacca, Pires identified:

Moors from Cairo, Mecca, Aden, Abyssinia, men of Kilwa, Malindi, Ormuz, Parees, Rumes, Turks, Turkomans, Christian Armenians, Gujaratees, men of Chaul, Dabhol, Goa, the kingdom of Decca, Malabars, Klings, merchants from Orissa, Ceylon, Gengal, Arakan, Pegu, Siamese men of Kedah, Malays, men of Pahang, Patani, Cambodia, Champa, Chochin China, Chinese, Legueos, men of Brunei, Lucoes, men of Tamjjompura, Laue, Banka, Linga (they have a thousand other islands), Moluccas, Banda, Bima, Timor, Maduyra, Java, Sunda, Pambang, Jambi, Tongkal, Indragiri, Jappatta, Menangkabau, Siak, Argua, Aru, Bata, country of the Tomjano, Pase, Pedir, Maldives.<sup>1</sup>

While only a few of those peoples and places named above may be familiar to us today, we can tell that this was a diverse group, representing many regions and religions, though followers of Islam predominated. Pires describes the traders as getting along well despite the fact that they represented different global communities because they all had a “common culture of trade.”<sup>2</sup>

At first, the key traders seemed to originate from China and India. The Indian ports of Gujarat and Cambay were well represented. According to Pires' observation, “Cambay chiefly stretches out two arms, with her right arm she reaches towards Aden and with the other, towards Malacca as the most important places to sail to.”<sup>3</sup> The traders referred to as “Gujaratees” had been Hindu, but as Islam had spread in the previous centuries, many had become Muslim. Gujarati traders from the coast of India continued to be active in this trading network until the late seventeenth century. Indian merchants from the Coromandel coast, that is, the southeastern eastern coast of India, as well as the southwestern, or Malabar coast, actively traded in the Malaccas as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Qtd. in Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Qtd. in Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, 122.

**The Chinese briefly dominated the region**

Between 1405 and 1433, the Chinese government sponsored a brief and spectacular overseas venture. The Ming dynasty commissioned over sixty vessels and provided over 25,000 men under the command of the Muslim admiral Zheng He (1371-1435). He led his fleet to Malaya, Ceylon, and southwest India before his return to China. On later voyages, he traveled to Burma, India, the Persian Gulf, southern Arabia, and the coast of East Africa. These voyages stimulated trade between China and other regions because Zheng He brought home luxury items such as agricultural products, gems, metal, medicine, and cloth, as well as animals such as the ostrich, giraffe, lion, tiger, and zebra. Zheng He also established Chinese colonies in Java, Sumatra, and the Philippines. His biggest ships were ten times the size of the ships that Columbus commanded. Though Zheng He was in a position of making direct contact with Europe, the government of China decided in 1433 to sponsor these voyages no longer. Internal problems within China made these expeditions too expensive to continue, and the Chinese possessed much of what they needed. Therefore, Chinese leaders saw no reason to continue to support these voyages. The result was that Chinese sea merchants continued to trade, but mostly on routes between China and the Strait of Malacca. And Muslim merchants continued to dominate the Indian Ocean trade.

Although the Chinese government no longer “officially” supported these sea-going ventures, Chinese merchants had already established themselves in various trading posts and settlements. The Chinese presence was felt keenly in Malacca and elsewhere in the region, partly because of the legacy of Zheng He’s travels. Also, the voyages gathered much knowledge about the Indian Ocean world. This knowledge was represented in route maps, manuals, star charts, and other materials that escaped being burned by Ming officials and which fell into private hands.<sup>4</sup>

**Why was Malacca a preferred trading post?**

Suppose you are a Gujarati trader with a cargo of cotton visiting Malacca. You intend to sell your cotton cloth and with the profit you will purchase a shipment of cloves and nutmeg to sell to merchants in India.

As a Muslim from India, you are comfortable in a trading system controlled by the Malaccan rulers, or sultans, who had recently converted to Islam. But you note that all traders seem welcome as well. As an Indian, you mingle with many other traders who represent markets in Asia and Africa. Perhaps you hear as many as eighty different languages spoken on the streets of Malacca, which are bustling with commercial activity. These other traders load cloves and nutmeg into their ships. A merchant approaches you about buying pepper, but you are not interested in pepper because it is produced on the Malabar coast of India as well as on Sumatra. So you can buy it in Malabar.

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<sup>4</sup> On the Zheng He voyages, see Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405-1433* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007); and Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994).

You have traded elsewhere but you prefer Malacca because the rulers are fair and impartial to the traders. This serves to encourage trade. The Malacca trading post is relatively safe and secure from marauders, and the fees the sultan charges for necessary business services are fair.

You need to feel safe because you brought a great deal of silver in order to purchase additional goods not covered by the sale of your cotton. Though gold is used, it is mostly silver that is an acceptable payment in this intercontinental trade.

Following your ship's landing, one of four *shabandars*, or officials from the sultan, will be assigned to you. The *shabandar* will direct you to a residential area within the city which is administered by people from your home society. In these areas, you can speak Gujarati, find suitable lodging, and eat your favorite native foods. Gujarati foods are strictly vegetarian and you cannot wait to eat dishes made from basmati rice and seasoned with the fragrant spices, almonds, and the fresh vegetables you enjoy. You hope that you can purchase some freshly made *chass* or *lassie*, a liquid yogurt drink. And you would like to buy *til gajak*, a snack of sesame seeds cooked in thick syrup and then rolled and spread into a thin film and cut into pieces. In the local café, you can relax and exchange valuable information about prices and opportunities with other traders from your region.

The *shabandars* offer other important services that you will need in Malacca. An elephant can be obtained to help unload heavy bolts of cotton from your ship's cargo hold. For reasonable fees, you can store your cotton cloth until it is sold. To make sure that your goods are safe and secure from thieves, you can buy protection services. All entrepôts charge fees for the privilege of doing business, but you believe that the fees and duties (taxes) that you are charged are among the fairest. Even the "gifts" you must bring to the sultan do not have to be as high in value as those required in other ports. A committee comprised of your own community members and Malaccan officials help ensure that you receive a fair price for your cotton. Should a problem or dispute arise, as often happens in trading cities, officials from your own cultural community have jurisdiction (authority) so your own laws with which you are familiar bind you. For all of these reasons, you enjoy trading at Malacca.