

PIECING TOGETHER THE EARLY HISTORY OF PAHANG THROUGH IMPERIAL CHINESE SCRIPTURE

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BACKGROUND

- Histories of Pahang and pre-modern Malaysian states have often been framed through a Euro-centric lens.
- This perspective has contributed to portraying Southeast Asia as a stagnant entity.
- Scholars like JS van Leur acknowledge the agency of certain actors in the region, indicating a more complex historical narrative.
- There is a growing desire to decentralize world and regional histories, leading to a re-evaluation of the Malay world.
- Emphasis on examining connections at macro and micro levels for a nuanced understanding of historical developments.



- Historian Geoffrey C. Gunn highlights the importance of micro-histories to capture intricate details of the region's characteristics.
- Pahang's history has traditionally been depicted in broad strokes, obscuring critical finer details.- The essay aims to apply a "microhistorical" approach to Pahang's pre-modern past, focusing on resource availability and exploitation.
- Utilization of Imperial Chinese documents to illuminate the complexities of Pahang's history.- The investigation encourages further scholarly engagement with Pahang, aiming for a comprehensive understanding of its role in Southeast Asia's historical narrative.
- The goal is to challenge entrenched Euro-centric perspectives and highlight the region's rich and dynamic past.

IMPERIAL CHINESE TEXTS



- *Taiping Yulan* (太平御覽) various authors, 977-983
- *Zhufan Zhi* (諸蕃志) by Zhao Rukuo, 1226
- *Daoyi Zhilue* (島夷誌略) by Wang Dayuan, 1330s
- *Xingcha Shenglan* (星槎勝覽) by Fei Xin, 1436
- *Ming Shi* (明史) various authors, Qing Dynasty



- *Pingzhou ketan* (萍洲可談) by Zhu Yu, 1116
- *Bencao Gangmu* (本草綱目) by Li Shizhen, 1578

"Kiang-chon-hiang (lakawood) comes from San-fo-ts'i (Srivijaya), Sho-p'o (Java) and P'ong-fong (Pahang); it is also found in the districts of Kuang-tung and Kuang-si. Its aroma is strong and penetrating; it counteracts bad smells."

LAKAWOOD

"They are very superstitious regarding demons and spirits, making their images of fragrant wood."
"They make human images of fragrant wood."

- Pahang was a significant exporter of lakawood (*jiangzhenxiang*), a highly valued aromatic wood, as noted in multiple Tang, Song, and Yuan imperial Chinese texts, including the *Zhufan Zhi*.
- The earliest mentions of lakawood trade from Pahang date back to at least 1226, indicating its established presence in international trade prior to the Song period.
- The *Zhufan Zhi* describes lakawood as "vine-like" with a strong, penetrating aroma, and it was known for counteracting bad smells, making it a sought-after commodity.
- By the time of the *Daoyi Zhilue*, Pahang's export shifted from *jiangzhenxiang* to a product referred to simply as *jiangzhen*, which may have indicated unprocessed lakawood or wood used for various purposes such as dyeing or carpentry.
- Historical texts, including the *Xingcha Shenglan* and *Ming Shi*, highlight the use of fragrant wood from Pahang for carving spiritual and human images, suggesting its cultural significance.
- The term *jiangzhen* may also encompass a variety of tropical hardwoods, including black hardwoods and woods used for dyeing textiles, reflecting the diverse applications of Pahang's wood exports.



HERBARIUM WANARISST
EAST KALIMANTAN, INDONESIA
(FLORA OF CENTRAL KALIMANTAN)

Sidiyasa, K. et al. 2596
14 Oct 2001

Leguminosae-pap. ✓

Dalbergia ~~sp.~~ *parviflora* Roxb.

Detby.: Sidiyasa, K. Oct 2001

Adena

Central Kalimantan, Kabupaten Kap

Katunjung village, kampung Mangku

Lat 2° 12'S Long 114° 25'E

Along Kapuas river.

Woody climber. Flowers dark p

Collected with Ambriansyah and Ar

LAKAWOOD SPECIES AND USES

The many uses of the products exported from Pahang known as lakawood give rise to the issue of determining what material lakawood was. The Chinese naming convention of products largely depended on the physical characteristics, thus the *jiangzhen* and *jiangzhenxiang* terms used for lakawood in Chinese sources may have been used to refer to different species of wood all together. This would also mean that the term lakawood refers not only to one species, but is rather a blanket term for a type of wood product of Pahang and Southeast Asia.

DYE AND INCENSE

- The term "teng" (藤), meaning vine, supports the identification of *D. parviflora*, while the use of "xiang" as a suffix indicates processed aromatics, consistent with the incense produced from this species.
- Archaeological evidence from a shipwrecked Song vessel in Quanzhou revealed strips of lakawood alongside other fragrant woods, suggesting *D. parviflora* was traded as *jiangzhenxiang*.
- The geographical distribution of *D. parviflora*, endemic to Southeast Asia and specifically Pahang, indicates its historical export as lakawood, a practice not recorded in neighboring regions until modern times.
- Modern references to *jiangzhenxiang* often incorrectly associate it with *Acronychia pedunculata* and *Macaranga tanarius*, while historical texts support *D. parviflora* as the most accurate identification for lakawood in imperial Chinese literature.

HARDWOOD

- The use of *jiangzhen* as hardwood would disqualify *D. parviflora* as the species described by Chinese traders as the vines would be unsuitable. Though, again, the naming conventions of traders allow for flexibility in the use of the *jiangzhen* terms when identifying the likely species exported from Pahang.
- If used for hardwood and timber, the species *Adenanthera pavonina*, or false red sandalwood, would be a likely candidate for being called *jiangzhen* as the tropical hardwoods such as sandalwoods and rosewoods were in highly demanded by Chinese traders between the late Song and Yuan dynasties.
- The timber of *A. pavonina* has a comparable dark red hue to that of *D. parviflora* and shares a similar scent of fresh wood, and this wood is also utilized for making red dyes, which might have caused Song and Yuan merchants to assume that the alike-looking goods originated from the same tree, mainly with the heartwood being crafted into *jiangzhenxiang* and the remaining wood being *jiangzhen*.

OTHER FRAGRANT WOODS

Sandalwood and Frankincense

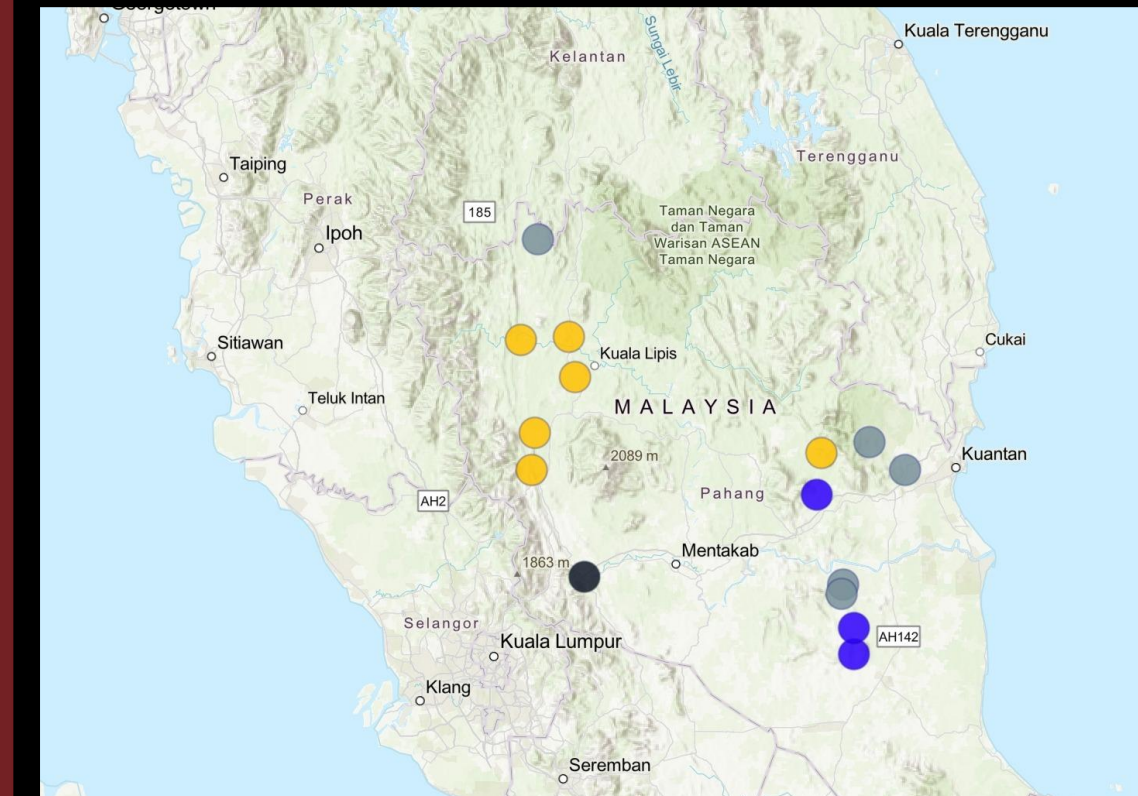
- Pahang was historically recognized by Chinese authors for its abundance of fragrant woods, particularly sandalwood and frankincense, which were significant trade goods in the region.
- The Pingzhou Ketan documents the trade connections between Srivijaya and Guangzhou, indicating that frankincense was delivered to China via Srivijayan ships, highlighting the region's role in the aromatic wood trade.
- Historians suggest that Pahang functioned as a tributary state to Langkasuka and later Srivijaya, which may have led to Pahang's exports being categorized as Srivijayan goods in historical texts.
- Sandalwood and frankincense were not native to Pahang or the Malay Peninsula but were imported from West and South Asia, emphasizing the significance of Indian Ocean trade routes in the exchange of these valuable commodities.

Camphor, Sapan, and Agarwood

- The Ming Shi documents Pahang's tribute to the Ming court, which included camphor, sapan wood, and various luxury goods such as sandalwood and olibanum.
- Pahang is known for its endemic species of camphor, *Dryobalanops aromatica*, indicating local production rather than importation, unlike the trading practices of Srivijaya.
- The *Aquilaria* genus, known for producing gharuwood (lignum aloes), is native to the Malay Peninsula, with several species, including *A. beccariana* and *A. rostrata*, facing critical endangerment due to overharvesting and habitat loss.
- Sapan wood, another item in the tribute, is likely sourced from the Malay region, specifically Pahang, and has historical significance as evidenced by its presence in a Quanzhou Song dynasty shipwreck.

MINERALS

Pahang and its people have long been associated with the region's wealth of mineral resources. This association, much like its exportation of aromatic woods, shaped Pahang's regional history, though unlike the rest of the Malay world which was known as a whole for incense and fragrances, Pahang was alone known for its plentiful precious metals.

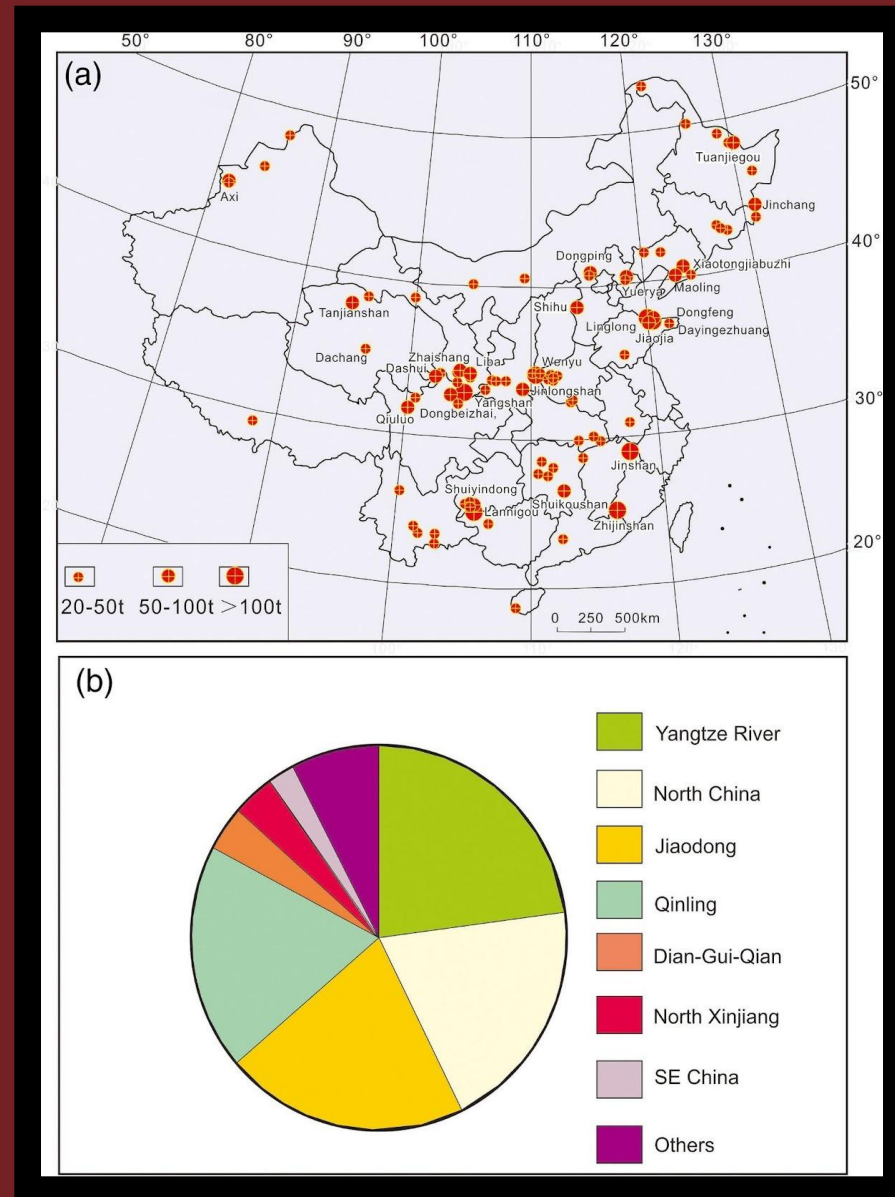


TIN

- - The name "Pahang" may derive from the Khmer word for tin, "bahang," as suggested by W. Linehan, who cites evidence of prehistoric tin mining in the region, particularly at the Sungai Lembing mines.
- Sociologist Geoffery Benjamin offers an alternative explanation, proposing that the name "Pahang" was applied to the southern part of the Peninsula by Majapahit and other pre-Malaccan sources, rather than being directly linked to tin.
- Despite the controversy surrounding the origins of the name, Pahang's association with tin is well-documented, including references in imperial Chinese texts such as Fei Xin's "Xingcha Shenglan," which lists tin as a major product of the region.
- Major tin deposits in Pahang are concentrated in the Kuantan and Pekan districts, with additional deposits found in Lipis and Bentong, highlighting the area's significant mineral wealth.
- Historical writings often emphasize the tin resources of the west coast of the peninsula, with limited acknowledgment of Pahang's reserves, although some scholars like Jacq-Hergoulac'h have noted the tin deposits in both the east and west regions.
- Archaeological records are limited, but references from the 9th century in Muslim sources indicate that Pahang was a notable supplier of tin, alongside gold and silver, underscoring its importance in the pre-modern tin industry on the east coast.

GOLD

- The Malay Peninsula, known as the “Golden Chersonese,” has been associated with gold since at least the 2nd century CE, as documented in Ptolemy’s Geographia.
- Pahang holds the majority of Malaysia's gold deposits, with six out of nine significant deposits located in the state, primarily running from Pattani to Melaka.
- Alluvial gold is found in Pahang's rivers, although some historians have debated the potential for economic development in the peninsula's interior due to its hostile environment.
- Historical records, such as the Ming Shi, reveal that Pahang's king sent a letter on a golden leaf to the Ming court in 1378, highlighting the region's wealth and tribute practices.
- The Raub district, known as the “gold capital of Malaysia,” gained prominence in the late 1800s for its gold ore, significantly impacting Pahang's historical and economic landscape.



The Song dynasty established a system continued by the succeeding Yuan dynasty in which prefectures and mines were taxed at a fixed rate or required to meet a specified annual quota.

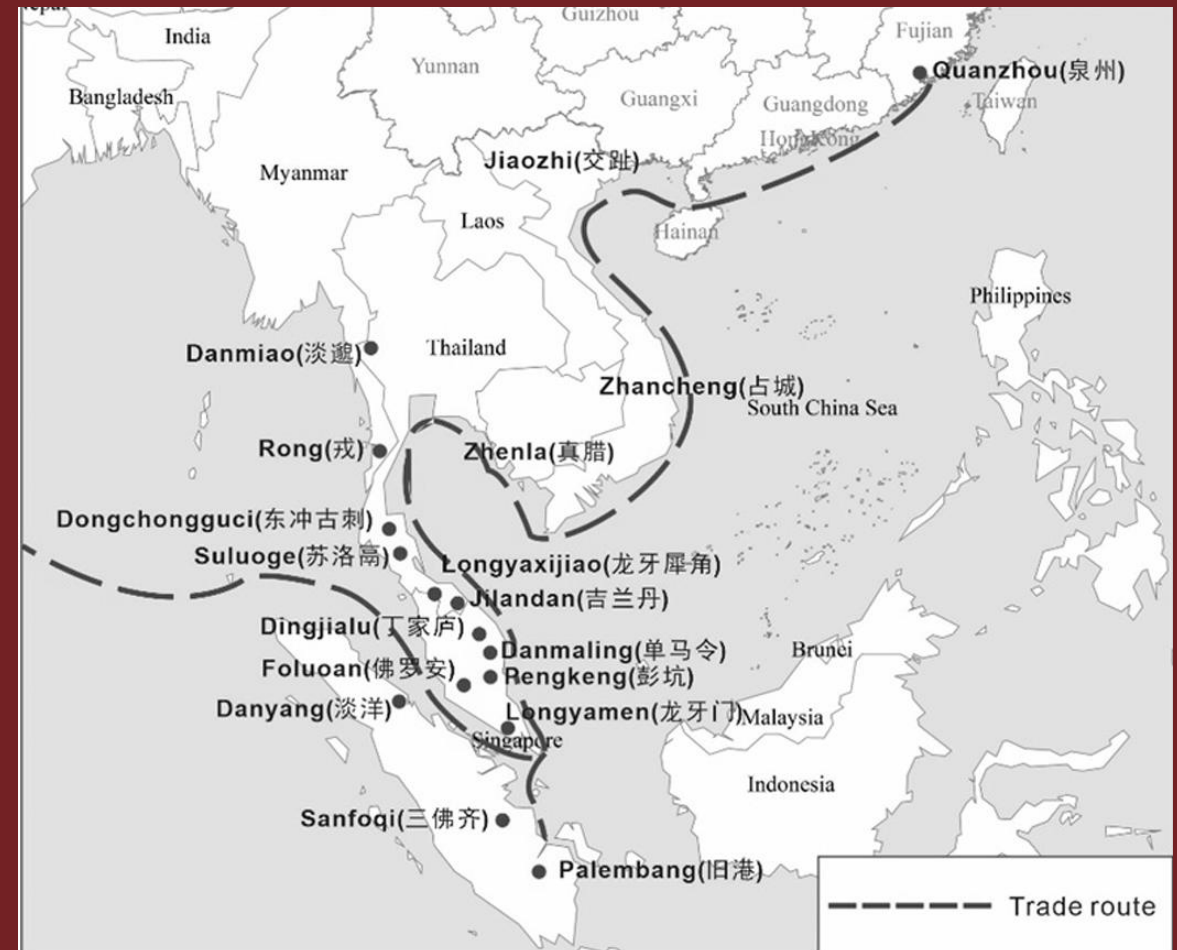
This extended to smelters and the post-mining processors of ores. Sun and Chen note that in some prefectures that ceased gold mining were still required to meet the annual quota, leading them to purchase gold from other producers.

Archaeologist Siran Liu notes that throughout imperial Chinese history governmental control over gold and silver trade was not as strict compared to that of copper, tin, and lead.

This in turn indicates that in the southern Chinese provinces with smaller gold deposits that had prominent smithing cultures during the Song and Yuan dynasties, such as Jiangxi, would have possibly supplemented gold in their smelting with gold sourced from Pahang via the entrepôts in neighbouring Guangdong and Fujian.

CONCLUSIONS

- Examination of imperial Chinese sources reveals significant insights into Pahang's history, particularly its resources and foreign trade.
- Pahang was an active participant in South China Sea trade routes by the end of the first millennium, thriving due to its wealth of natural resources.
- The region was a key supplier of fragrant woods used in Chinese incense production, including camphor, gharuwood, and lakawood.
- Pahang's abundant mineral deposits, particularly gold and tin, contributed to its reputation as a vital economic hub, earning the Malay Peninsula the nickname "Golden Chersonese."
- The narratives in historical texts may have inconsistencies, reflecting a complex relationship between the accounts and the actual historical context, yet they allow for a nuanced understanding of Pahang's role in regional trade networks.



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