



# LANGUAGE AND STATE POWER

## THE INEVITABLE RISE OF MALAY

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# THE RISE OF MALAY

- ❖ Historically, Malay began as the indigenous language of the eastern peat forest areas on the island of Sumatra.
  - ❖ Today, Malay has grown into one of the largest languages in the world, with over 250 million users.
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- ❖ Remarkable because

Malay never was the largest language in the area (Javanese, Sundanese) nor was it centrally located.

- ❖ Inevitable because

whenever it counted, there was no alternative.

# LANGUAGE SIZE: FACTORS

- ❖ Endangered languages:

  - Factors that lead to endangerment (Brenzinger 1991)

- ❖ Discussion of factors that make a language large have focused on individual speaker choice

- ❖ Today's point:

  - Languages grow large primarily as a result of them being adopted & promoted by a powerful state

  - Speaker take-up is an epiphenomenon of that.

# INSULAR SEA: THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO



# MALAY VERSUS MALAYSIA



Malaysia has 2 land masses:

- ❖ Northern Borneo

“Dayak languages”:

Iban, Kadazandusun, etc.

- ❖ “Malay peninsula”

Aslian languages: Austroasiatic

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- ❖ Coastal Borneo & Sumatra as the Malay homeland





# INSULAR SEA AT THE START OF THE COLONIAL PERIOD

- ❖ Portuguese arrival 1509
  - in search of the spice islands
- ❖ They discovered that 1 language was understood across the archipelago: Malay
- ❖ Q: Why was this so?

How did it get that way?

What had made this language, Malay into the lingua franca of the archipelago long before the arrival of the Europeans?



# THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM



- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> century AD: Buddhism enters China
- ❖ 4<sup>th</sup> century AD: Buddhism was well established in China
- ❖ Monks and others travelling to India
- ❖ associated trade in luxury goods
- ❖ Monsoon wind patterns required months-long layovers in Sumatra
- ❖ early stop: port of Malayu (600s)  
(= the indigenous name of the Malay language)



# SRIVIJAYA



- ❖ Srivijaya (700s) [I-Ching (Yiching) 671]
  - Buddhism. Even sponsoring temples and monasteries in China and India.
  - Port facilities, suppressing piracy, etc.
  - Trade: porcelain, jade, silk; textiles; spices, camphor, sandalwood, resins.
- ❖ Hegemon for 500 years
- ❖ Language: Sanskrit, Malay
- ❖ Cribb (2000:11) saw the reason why Southern Sumatra itself is so much less linguistically diverse than Northern Sumatra in this long domination by Srivijaya.

# THE TRAVELS OF I-CHING

Yijing was born **Zhang Wenming**. He became a monk at age 14 and was an admirer of **Faxian**, a famed monk who traveled to India in the 4th and 5th centuries CE. Provided funding by an otherwise unknown benefactor named Fong, he decided to visit the renowned Buddhist university of **Nālandā**, in **Bihar**, India, to further study **Buddhism**. Traveling by a **Persian** boat out of **Guangzhou**, he arrived in Srivijaya (today's **Palembang** of Sumatra) after 22 days, where he spent the next six months learning **Sanskrit** grammar and the **Malay language**. He went on to record visits to the nations of **Malayu** and **Kiteh (Kedah)**, and in 673 after ten days of additional travel reached the "naked kingdom" (south west of **Shu**). Yijing recorded his impression of the "Kunlun peoples", using an ancient Chinese word for Malay peoples. "Kunlun people have curly hair, dark bodies, bare feet and wear **sarongs**." He then arrived at the East coast of **India**, where he met a senior monk and stayed a year to study **Sanskrit**. Both later followed a group of merchants and visited 30 other principalities.

In 687, Yijing stopped in the kingdom of Srivijaya on his way back to Tang China. At that time, **Palembang** was a centre of Buddhism where foreign scholars gathered, and Yijing stayed there for two years to translate original Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. In the year 689 he returned to Guangzhou to obtain ink and papers (note: Srivijaya then had no paper and ink) and returned again to Srivijaya the same year.

## Yijing



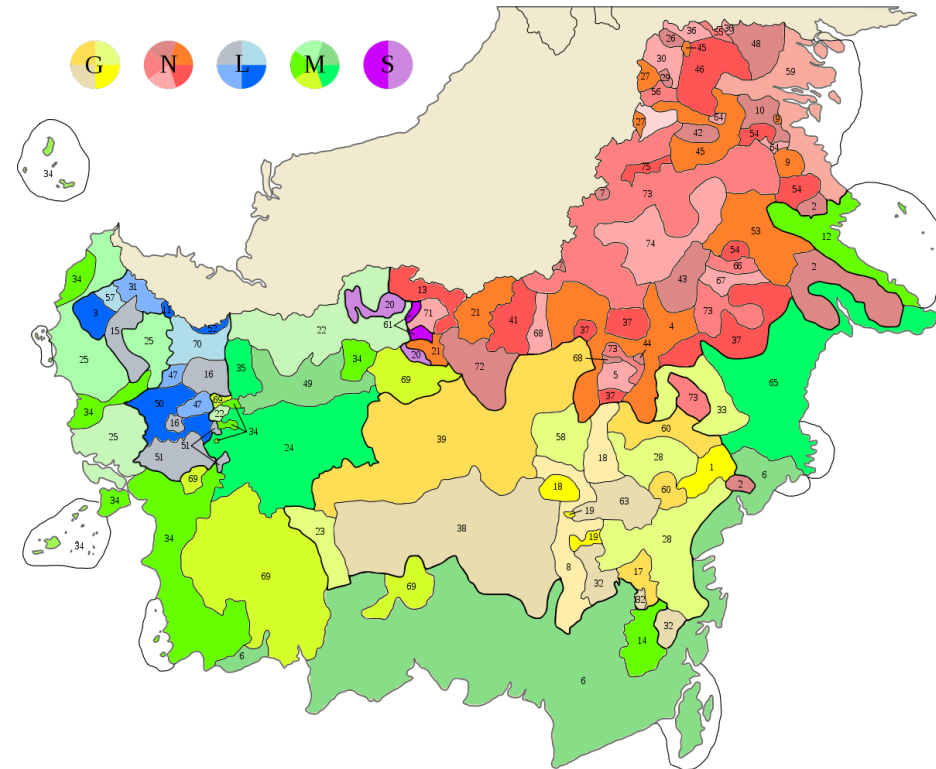
Excerpt of a scroll from Yijing's *Buddhist Monastic Traditions of Southern Asia*. Tenri, Nara, Japan

Traditional Chinese 義淨

Simplified Chinese 义净

# THE COMING OF ISLAM

- ❖ Srivijaya had made Malay the lingua franca of the region.
- ❖ 13<sup>th</sup> c.: Islam arrived, spread by trade/merchants
- ❖ Association of Islam with Malay language and ethnicity, which endures today.
- ❖ Malay becomes the main language of coastal regions.
- ❖ So now Malay was the principal language of coastal regions, of islam, of trade & of interethnic communication.



# THE DUTCH COLONIAL EMPIRE

## ❖ VOC

a commercial company with no interest per se in developing society

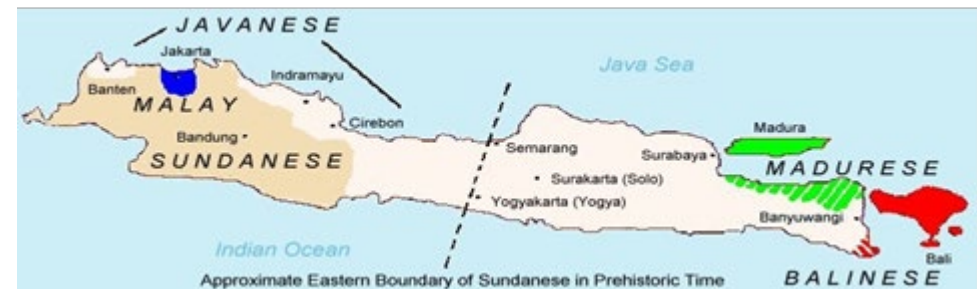
no desire or capacity for teaching Dutch

largest languages (Javanese and Sundanese) were geographically concentrated on Java.

adopting the established lingua franca, Malay

## ❖ Nederlands Indië

## ❖ Languages of Java



❖ Dutch colonial capital Batavia

❖ becomes Jakarta

❖ a Malay language island transplanted onto an island with much bigger indigenous languages



# INDONESIAN INDEPENDENCE 1945/1949

- ❖ 1928 Youth Congress pledge for
    - 1 country, Indonesia
    - 1 nation, the Indonesian nation
    - 1 language, the Indonesian language
  - ❖ The Congress, and the pledge, were of course in Malay and
  - ❖ The promised “Indonesian language” (*Bahasa Indonesia*) was Malay under a new name
  - ❖ Independence 1945/1949
- Malay (“Bahasa Indonesia”) today:
- ❖ sole national language
  - ❖ medium of all education above grade 3
  - ❖ highest literacy rate of all Muslim countries
  - ❖ almost all media
  - ❖ language of choice for discussing “the modern world”
  - ❖ interethnic lingua franca
  - ❖ national language of Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore

# THE MALAY LANGUAGE TODAY

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My Primary 3 class in 1969 somewhere in Sabah. I remember, amongst us, there were Bugis, Toradjas, Javanese, Brunei Malays, Burmese, Filipinos, Chinese, Kadazans, Ibans and other Groups from Borneo and the Malay Archipelago. English was the medium of instruction but Malay was our common language.



- ❖ Starting out as a small language spoken in a peripheral area. Only asset: Location favored by the monsoon winds
- ❖ it became the language of the dominant state, Srivijaya, (and later Malacca), turning Malay into the language of trade and interethnic communication
- ❖ making it the language of islam
- ❖ and the default language for the Dutch colonial government and, consequently, independent state of that followed
- ❖ turning Malay into the dominant language of the region.

# INDONESIA: TRUE SIZE

