



## Working Paper 129

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### Governing Maritime Space:

The South China Sea as a Mediterranean Cultural Area



Cover Photo: Ma-Tsu, goddess of the sea and guardian of seafarers and fishermen, Thean Hou Temple, Georgetown, Penang (photo: H.D. Evers 2013).

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# **Governing Maritime Space: The South China Sea as a Mediterranean Cultural Area<sup>1</sup>**

Hans-Dieter Evers

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<sup>1</sup> Draft of a paper read at a public seminar, 24-02-2014 City University of Hong Kong

## **Abstract**

Whereas many institutions are in place to govern urban and rural land, maritime areas are less well covered. This situation of a “governance void” has led to uncertainty and conflicts. Thus the South China Sea has become a contested maritime space. In this paper the cultural theory of Oswald Spengler will be applied to stress the importance of conceptions of space as a basis for maritime governance. By comparing it to other maritime spaces, like the Baltic and the Mediterranean Sea, lessons will be drawn from the “longue durée” of history, as analysed by French historian Fernand Braudel. Embedded in this larger theoretical framework special attention will be placed on the Malay and Javanese Nusantara conception of maritime space and its implication for governing the South China Sea.

Keywords: South China Sea, maritime space, mediterranean seas, cultural analysis, connectivity

# 1 Introduction: Understanding the Governance Problems of the South China Sea

This paper will look at the South China Sea from several perspectives. We will, however, not adopt the political science perspective on various events that have happened due to political tensions because of territorial demarcations, fishing rights and access to natural resources (Harada 2013). This perspective reflects the current discourse, found in most of the 16.200 books and papers touching on conflicts in the South China Sea (Google Scholar 1970 to 2012). Another approach will take a broad comparative historical view, comparing “mediterranean seas”. I shall argue that mediterranean seas share certain properties as they develop into integrated socio-cultural areas. The third perspective uses macro-sociology and cultural anthropology to classify and understand actions of the general population as well as political leaders when they ascertain property rights to mediterranean seas (Evers 2014).

“Since the end of the Second World War, the ocean has become a source of instability in the international system” (Yee 2011:166). Mediterranean seas, however, have been highly contested throughout history. The South China Sea has increasingly attracted the attention of politicians, journalists and scholars, when several clashes took place in the South China Seas. While in 1999 noted British political scientist Michael Leifer could still publish a book chapter about a “stalemate in the South China Sea” (Leifer 1999:1-9), the tension has accelerated shortly thereafter, leading to armed conflict. The basic outline of the South China Sea conflict has been well described in many publications. The situation can be described as follows.

The South China Sea is a “mediterranean sea”, surrounded by land belonging to different states: the ASEAN states (except Burma), Taiwan and China. Each (except Singapore) claim part of the South China Sea as their territory. Territorial claims are based on the law of the sea, which differs from land based property rights. Traditionally the sea was open to all nations and their ships except for a three mile zone (“as far as a canon ball could fly”), regarded as part of the national territory with all rights attached. This zone was extended to 12 miles and later on a 200 mile exclusive economic zone was added and accepted in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1977 (ratified and signed by all ASEAN states and China, but not by the USA). This zone gave exclusive rights for fishing and the exploitation of underwater resources, especially oil and gas, to a nation state. This regulation provides no major problems to oceans and their bordering states, but proves to be very tricky to mediterranean seas. There are overlapping claims, especially when islands are involved. Zones can be drawn around islands, if they are inhabited and equidistance is used as a principle to delineate boundaries. Article 121, paragraph 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) clearly states that “rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf” (Quang 2010). Erecting physical structures and placing military personal on barren rocks has become a tool to turn rocks into inhabited islands with a claim to suzerainty.

UNCLOS also allows the use of historical evidence to stake a claim to areas where equidistance lines or islands are difficult to delineate (Article 15).

Whereas the Philippines argues along the lines of article 4 of UNCLOS to claim parts of the South China Sea as their exclusive economic zone, China has argued along historical lines, namely that all of the South China Sea and its reefs and islands have been used by Chinese seafarers and fishermen for time immemorial, at least since a map produced around 1300. As Malay seafarers have dominated trade and shipping in Southeast and East Asia in line with their Austronesian ancestry, similar claims could be posted by most ASEAN states as well. Since 1973 many disputes, arising out of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) have been settled by the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea in Hamburg, Germany. The USA has not signed the convention. (A\*Star 2002)

The history of events and the failures of diplomacy have been well documented (Buszynski and Sazlan 2007; Harada 2013; Kivimaki 2002; Quang 2010; Yee 2011) and can be followed up in about 42.400 publications dealing with South China Sea issues (Google scholar as of 07-09-2012) that appeared since the 2009 clash between an US warship and Chinese vessels.

There is no dearth of papers and resolutions, like ASEAN Secretariat 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (<http://www.aseansec.org/13163.htm>). Nevertheless the disputes on the sovereignty over the South China Sea have not been solved so far. Why not? Any purely materialistic argument may not be sufficient to explain the growing impotence of diplomats and government agencies to hammer out a solution to the maritime problems of the South China Sea. We therefore attempt to look at the underlying problems and causes for the rather confusing situation of the governance of the South China Sea.

Figure 1: Claims of Territorial Waters, South China Sea



Source: BBC World News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21137144> 12-02-2013

Attempts to govern the South China Sea have, indeed, produced a very complex system of claims, counterclaims, diffuse boundary mapping, negotiations, public protests and press coverage.

To understand the underlying issues of problem solving we intend to step back and look at the underlying cultural and geographical patterns. In this we intend to follow the methods of the “Verstehende Soziologie” of Max Weber and the “Longue Durée” of history according to the historical methods of the Annales School of French historian Fernand Braudel and his followers (Braudel 1958; Braudel 1966; Braudel 1972).

Max Weber’s “Verstehende Soziologie”, often not quite correctly translated as “interpretative sociology” assumes that we need to understand the intentions, the underlying motives, the “subjektiv gemeinter Sinn” of actors but also the contexts in which actions take place to make sense of history, to understand, what happens. Braudel suggested that actors, including great historical figures, are often acted upon by the long flow of history, the physical realm, by spatial opportunities and constraints. In this paper I shall abandon “event-history” (l’histoire événementielle as criticized

by Fernand (Braudel 1958)). After his work on the Mediterranean, “Braudel became more and more attracted to the idea of quantification in economic history, the notion that history could become scientifically respectable through the use of graphs and tables and the collection of hard quantifiable data” (introduction by Oswyn Murray) (Braudel 1972). Long time series of data would reveal the long *durée* of history, if they are interpreted and used to explain historical trends. I will, later in this paper, follow Braudel’s advice and present some data on connections and networks of the South China Sea.

Another look at the classics of world history and cultural analysis adds credence to this approach. Oswald Spengler, author of the monumental work on the “*Untergang des Abendlandes*” (Spengler 1923, 1998), English “*The Decline of the West*” (Spengler 1932) argues against a linear development from ancient Greek to Roman, and to European history, claiming instead that cultures are living organisms, going through a cycle of birth, life and decline. Spengler does not mention Southeast Asia, but covers more or less the rest of the world, claiming that cultures share or are even determined by a particular conception of space, which forms the determining “*Ursymbol*” of Babylonian, Chinese, Classical Greek/Roman, Western, Arab and other civilizations. Though he does not mention Emanuel Kant’s epistemology, his argument appears to be in line with Kantian philosophy. Time and space are a priori categories of pure reason and therefore fundamental for the cultural constitution of each civilization.

According to Oswald Spengler, conceptions of space are a constant in the flow, in the “*Longue Durée*” of history. We shall follow Spengler only in so far, as we shall use his idea of spatial concepts as powerful forces determining the options open to civilizations and analyse Malay and other conceptions of space. This way we hope to “*verstehen*” (understand) the problems of finding solutions to the South China Sea governance debacle.

In this paper we will look at the long term cultural conceptions of maritime space as well as the physical space itself. In short we follow the often cited “*spatial turn*” that reintroduced space into social science research (Mishkova 2010). The “*social construction of space*” (Steinberg 2001), in this case maritime space, is determined both by cultural values and by the need and desire to exploit maritime resources. The “*spatiality of the capitalist economy*” has reached the “*free*” oceans and has become even more relevant to the maritime space of the mediterranean seas. The disputes over the South China Sea signify one major flashpoint of this process.



## 2 Mediterranean Seas

The South China Sea is one of many “mediterranean seas”. In contrast to oceans, mediterranean seas (from Latin *media*-middle and *terra*-land) are surrounded by land, with narrow outlets to oceans or other seas. The Baltic, the Mediterranean Sea, but also the South China Sea may all be classified as “mediterranean seas”. Southeast Asia is particularly rich in mediterranean seas. The Sulu Sea, the Celebes Sea, the Banda Sea, the Arafura Sea, the Java Sea, the Andaman Sea and last not least the South China Sea are well defined mediterranean seas, bordered by maritime ASEAN states. By throwing a glance on other mediterranean seas we may be able to put the issues surrounding the South China Sea into a better perspective.

This view is hotly contested by some historians. In his earlier writings Wang Gungwu argued that the South China Sea (called Nanhai 南海) could not really be compared to other mediterranean seas, as it was dominated by one great power, namely imperial China, whereas other mediterranean seas had several contesting powers (Wang 2008). He changed his in my view untenable view later and gave credence to changing conditions and the at times dominating position of Sri Vijaya, Majapahit, Brunei or Ayuthia. He then used the term “semiterranean sea” to describe the special features of the South China Sea (Wang 2012).

Mediterranean seas often appear to exhibit a basic physical cum geo-political structure. The Mediterranean Sea and the South China Sea measure both about 3400 km at their longest distance from shore to shore; the Baltic Sea about 1000 km. All three seas are surrounded by maritime states (“thalassic states” from Greek *thalassa*-sea), island states (“archipelagic states”<sup>2</sup>) and land-based states (“terranian states” from Latin *terra*). By looking at the “longue durée” of the well-researched history of the Mediterranean Sea we may discover some interesting parallels to the less well known South China Sea and the behaviour of the three types of states.

The ancient archipelactic Greeks battled the Persian terranian state. The Greeks could have conquered the whole Mediterranean, turning it into a Greek lake. Instead Alexander turned East. He defeated the Persian Empire, cutting it off the Mediterranean Sea, but his empire crumbled soon after his death in 323. During the second centenium BC the bitter conflict between Rome and Carthage raged for almost 200 years. Poet and Senator Cato (234-149 BC) closed his speeches in the Roman Senate, whatever their topic was, with the famous sentence “*ceteris censeo Carthaginem esse delendam*” (I further conclude that Cartage has to be destroyed). Hannibal of Carthage, “maritime state”, followed a “terranian” policy and tried to conquer Rome by taking the overland route through Gaul (Southern France) and across the Alps. The Carthagians failed, and Rome, also a “maritime state”, counter-attacked across the sea using its navy, destroying Carthage and razing the capital city to the ground. Rome remained the dominant power in the Mediterranean Sea for centuries to come.

To jump closer to the present: eventually an outside power made an inroad, when on 11th April 1713 Gibraltar was ceded to Great Britain, which subsequently took over Malta in 1800 and thus controlled the sea lanes through the Mediterranean, since 1869 after the opening of the Suez Canal all the way to Asia, but at the same time destabilising the whole Mediterranean region.

The door is open for speculation. Is Peking and Tokyo the equivalence to Rome and Carthage? Is Singapore the Venice of the South China Sea? Will the US Empire, controlling the Pacific Ocean, also try to govern the mediterranean South China Sea, or will China take over this role? Is Penang the

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<sup>2</sup> According to article 46 of UNCLOS (a) “archipelagic State” means a State constituted wholly by one or more archipelagos and may include other islands; (b) “archipelago” means a group of islands, including parts of islands, interconnecting waters and other natural features which are so closely interrelated that such islands, waters and other natural features form an intrinsic geographical, economic and political entity, or which historically have been regarded as such.

Malta of the East? A much more detailed research would be necessary to answer these queries and before a comparative picture would emerge.

All Mediterranean seas experienced periods of intensive trade relations, exchange of knowledge, economic prosperity and the flowering of science, religion and innovation. A common Mediterranean culture emerged around the Mediterranean Sea, centred at times on Athens, Alexandria, Rome and much later Venice. The same cultural integration took place around the Java Sea and later the Straits of Malacca, known at times as the “Sea of Melayu” (Andaya 2000)<sup>3</sup>. This “Austronesian” and later “Nusantara culture” extended to the shores of the South China Sea. It never encompassed all the areas surrounding the South China Sea, which never developed into a cultural mediterranean. Despite extensive trade, naval expeditions, like those of Srivijaya or much later the Bruneian thalassocratie (de Vivienne 2012) in the 16th century, or the Japanese Greater Prosperity Sphere, despite migration and religious missions, the South China Sea remained unified only in name, but never became a culturally unified region. The Thais, the Vietnamese and Chinese looked inward to their vast hinterland, and the highly fragmented Nusantara concentrated on their own Mediterranean seas, like the Sulu, Sulawesi and Java seas and the Straits of Malacca. With Western colonial expansion the South China Sea became an important shipping lane of European-Asian trade and some of the islands were envisaged as coaling stations for cargo ships, but the “South China Sea” remained a sea south of China and might as well have been called the North Brunei Sea, the Eastern Sea (Bien Đông in Vietnamese) or the Philippine Atlantic.

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<sup>3</sup> “The first reference to a ‘Sea of Melayu’ is from an Arabic document dated c. 1000, which noted that travellers ‘reaching the Sea of Melayu, were approaching the area of China’. While the location of the Sea of Melayu is not specified, the practice of naming a sea after a dominant people surrounding its shores suggests that this particular body of water must have been the Straits of Melaka.” (Andaya 2000).

### Three Mediterranean Seas

South China Sea (3462km)

Baltic Sea (1347km)

Mediterranean Sea (3255km)

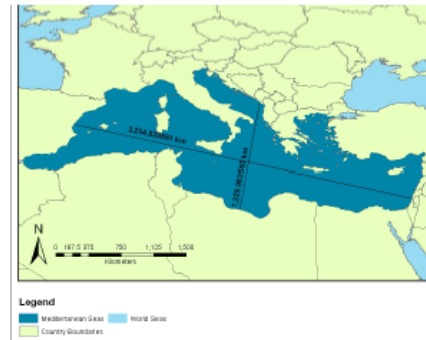


Figure 2 Mediterranean Seas in Comparison

Source: Author's map, produced by Anthony Banyuko

The South China Sea has been an important shipping lane for the past 2000 years. Its rich fish resources have provided livelihood for the surrounding countries for centuries. But since World War II the discovery of huge oil and gas reserves in the South China Sea “is producing a new geography of conflict in which resource flows rather than political divisions constitute the major fault lines” (Yee 2011). The positions of the governments of surrounding states have hardened, negotiations have largely failed and a solution is not in sight. Why has it not been possible to come to agreements as has been the case in the Baltic or Mediterranean Seas? Deep-seated cultural perceptions and values may be at stake, in addition to the lure of vast “treasures” of maritime resources. This hypothesis is pursued further in the following section.

### 3 Conceptions of Space

(a) Maritime space versus land-based space – what are the differences?

In popular view the sea is perceived as an open space without territorial, fixed lineal boundaries. Such boundaries are constructed only in relation to land: three mile zone and the two 12 miles international boundaries follow the coast line (UNCLOS - United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982). A further 200 miles exclusive economic zone gives states the right of using marine resources. The sea is otherwise perceived as an open space, accessible by all kinds of vessels in any direction.

Of course there are, in reality, restrictions by currents, wind directions, tides etc, but the perception of a free open space prevails. Sailors may have a more detailed perception of maritime space, but the general population draws a clear line between the “open sea” and the highly differentiated land area.

Land-based space knows bounded territories, landscapes, fixed natural or political boundaries. Space is structured by places and place names, small patterned named areas like valleys and mountains, rivers, settlements, roads, geodetic points etc etc.

Of course these generalized conceptions of maritime and land-based space are subject to variations. Cultural values and concepts are intertwined with these generalized concepts and yield a more varied epistemology of space. In fact one may surmise that the “generalized conceptions of maritime space” as underlying the current international law of the sea as promulgated by UNCLOS may be very much determined more by European culture than anything else.

Since the economic potential of oceans and the sea beyond fisheries and transport became evident, a movement towards “sea enclosure” has in fact started. Will the sea be exposed to “the tragedy of a transnational commons”?

(b) Terranian (continental) versus Maritime States

The states, surrounding mediterranean seas can be classified according to their maritime potential. States with a long coastline, deep rivers, natural harbours and long beaches have a natural potential to engage in maritime economic activities (Evers and Karim 2011). Michael Pearson has used the term “littoral societies” for the coastal population of these “maritime states”. He makes the case “that we can go around the shores of an ocean or a sea, or indeed the whole world, and identify societies that have more in common with other littoral societies than they do with their inland neighbours” (Pearson 2006:353). A maritime state will have littoral as well as inland societies. This may cause tensions and pull the state into either a maritime or terrestrial direction; not necessarily in day-to-day politics but rather in the “longue durée” of history.

Other states with a large landmass at their disposal may envisage the sea less attractive. A special case will be island states or states consisting primarily of islands of different shape and size. Mediterranean areas tend to show a similar physical structure. There are bordering states with a small coastline relative to their landmass, others will be prone to engage in maritime activities due to their high maritime potential, whereas there is, at least in the three Mediterranean seas under consideration, at least one state spanning the islands of an archipelago. We therefore propose to classify mediterranean states into three categories:

- Archipelagic states (e.g. Indonesia, the Philippines, Maldives),
- Thalassic states (UK, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam),
- Terranian (land-based, continental) states (China, Russia, Laos).

For the purposes of UNCLOS, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea:

“(a) "archipelagic State" means a State constituted wholly by one or more archipelagos and may include other islands;

(b) "archipelago" means a group of islands, including parts of islands, interconnecting waters and other natural features which are so closely interrelated that such islands, waters and other natural features form an intrinsic geographical, economic and political entity, or which historically have been regarded as such”.

Thalassic (or maritime) states are states that make good use of their maritime potential. This attention to the sea may vary over time, but usually their economy is tied to shipping, fishing, harbours and overseas trade. A “Maritime Potential Index (MPI)”, developed in another context can be used to add a more objective measure to classify states or regions accordingly. The following table exhibits the classified ASEAN states, most of them surrounding the South China Sea.

Table 1 ASEAN Land-based and Maritime States

Country	MPI
<b>TERRANIAN 0-20</b>	
Laos	00.00
Myanmar	12.36
Cambodia	22.68
Thailand	22.75
<b>THALASSIC 26-75</b>	
Vietnam	54.98
Brunei	60.98
Malaysia	72.39
<b>Archipelactic 80-100</b>	
Indonesia	86.54
Philippines	96.96
Singapore	100.0

As Fernand Braudel has suggested the geographical physical conditions of a Mediterranean area will have an impact on the flow of history (Braudel 1972). We have followed his advice and looked at coastlines and landmass as a clue to the maritime potential of nations. Equally important appears to be the cultural dimension of the flow of history, of the “longue durée”. Cultural anthropologists will agree that cultural values are generally more difficult to change than political boundaries or economic systems. I will therefore look at conceptions of space as a cultural trait of great permanence. Given the high degree of ethnic diversity in the South China Sea region, this appears to be an almost impossible task. I will nevertheless try to draw some general lines that may at least produce propositions to guide research on the predicaments of the South China Sea.

(c) Malay Conceptions of Space

The countries surrounding the South China Sea can be divided into three cultural areas: China, Taiwan, Singapore and Vietnam share many cultural characteristics, as do Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Thailand forms a distinctly different cultural area. The distinctions are

not clear-cut, as all these countries have a multi-ethnic population, but there tend to be politically dominant ethnic groups that have determined long-term political processes.

Concentrating on two big blocks, the Nusantara (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines) and the Sinic block (China, Taiwan, Singapore and perhaps Thailand) we will try to distinguish between their respective cultural conceptions of space. The cultural interpretation of maritime space will thus be defined as part of the *Longue Durée* of history (Braudel). Through this methodology we hope to enhance our understanding (in the sense of Max Weber's interpretative sociology) of current debates on the South China Sea by searching for basic cultural concepts and constructions (arch types according to Spengler).

Malay and Chinese conceptions of space appear to differ considerably as outlined in an earlier empirical study (Evers 1977). Chinese space shows clearly defined boundaries (Evers 2013). Village houses in Southern China are arranged in a row; ancient cities are enclosed by a wall and tend to conform to an ideal pattern, as described in Paul Wheatley's "pivot of the four quarters" (Wheatley 1971). In contrast Malay kampungs consist of scattered houses, built on land or water without clearly demarcated boundaries.

Figure 3 Malay Kampung Ayer (water village), Labuan, Malaysia



Source: Google Earth and IAS-UBD

Graves on Chinese graveyards are structures arranged in rows facing the same direction as demanded by geomancy, the “science” of location and direction. Graves in Malay graveyards, except perhaps for the nobility, are scattered and arranged without any clearly visible pattern. There is no conception of urban space. In Malay language, modern urban areas are designated as “port” (Bandar), “fort” (kota) or market place (pecah). There is no original word to designate a “city”. Power emanates from the Sultan’s palace that may have been fortified by a stockade or wall, but the *rakyat* lives traditionally in kampongs scattered around the *istana*. The Javanese principalities of Yogyakarta and Solo may serve as an example. There was no clear-cut boundary, delineating the realm of each sultanate. Villages showing allegiance for either of the two sultans may be located next to each other, resulting in a chequered pattern of different authority, rather than bounded space. The *mandala* principle of governance points into the same direction. Power is ritually and actually concentrated in the person of the sultan and his *istana*, surrounded by the *mancanegara*, the directly ruled area where the royal retainers live, defined by their duties as warriors or servants for palace duties rather than as urban citizens. The realm of sultanates becomes diluted the further away from the ritual centre of the state (often described as the *paku alam*) an area might be, resulting in fussy border areas with overlapping suzerainty.

Figure 4 Territories of Javanese States after 1830



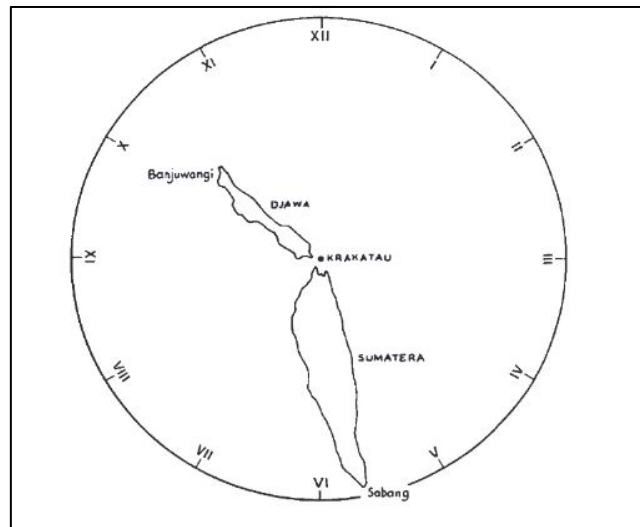
Source: Cribb, Robert. 2010. *Digital Atlas of Indonesian History*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, [map/vorstenlanden1830.html](http://map/vorstenlanden1830.html)

One of the scarce Javanese maps depicts the islands of Java and Sumatra as a clock, where both islands rotate about a centre marked as Krakatau. This island between Sumatra and Java erupted as a fiery volcano and thus marked, in Javanese mythology, the centre of the world.

The outlay of today's Bandar Seri Begawan and its surrounding area, the Muara District follows very much the Malay conception of space. Sultan Omar Mosque, the Sultan's palace, a parade ground and some banks and the Gadong Mall are a sort of city centre, but the rest of Brunei's urban area has no clear structure, assembling neither a colonial nor a Chinese grid structure. Shopping centres, housing blocks, modern kampungs, a national university and some hotels are scattered over the whole district, connected by large four lane highways. Urban Brunei appears to consist of largely unplanned urban kampungs, surrounding the royal complex of istana and masjid.



Figure 5 Javanese Map of Java and Sumatra, ca 1665



Source: "The Concept of Space and Time in the Southeast Asian Archipelago." Pp. 85-100 in Anthony Reed and the Study of the Southeast Asian Past, edited by Geoffrey Wade and Tana Li. Singapore: ISEAS, page 96. (Lombard 2012)

The emphasis on a centre as the seat of vitality and power appears to be a key Austronesian concept (Waterson 1993:230), found in many Southeast Asian societies. Power radiates from the centre and is diminished with distance. Barbara Andaya's paper on Malay sounds and authority points to the same direction (Andaya 2011). The sound of the drum (*nobat*) emanating from a centre, the Sultan's *istana*, is heard at a distance and then slowly disappears further away from its origin. Authority and power is strong at the centre but peters out at the fringes. No clear boundary is marked by the sound of the Malay drum of authority, which fades away in the distance.

In this context it is interesting to note that no maps are found in classical Malay manuscripts, whereas "many guides and descriptions of sea routes existed in China" (Schottenhammer 2012; Schottenhammer and Ptak 2009). Malay seascapes are described rather vaguely by referring to places, rocks and promontories (*tanjung*), but no pre-modern Malay sea charts have ever been found. Even Bugis maps, described by LeRoux and Sense (Le Roux and Cense 1935) and by Amarell (Amarell 1999) are probably copies of Dutch maps rather than original Bugis works. Some notes on maps are found here and there, but none of these maps have ever surfaced (Ferrand 1918; Gelpke 1995; Holle 1877). Lombard refers to some maps, but has to admit that none of them could be traced (Lombard 2012). Apparently Nusantara conceptions of space do not lend themselves for drawing Euclidian space and maps<sup>4</sup>, though there may be differences between Malay, Bugis and Javanese concepts.

Denis Lombard has provided a good overview of Javanese concepts of time and space (Lombard 1986), however, "a cultural history of Indonesian imaginings of the sea is yet to be written" (Cribb and Ford 2009).

All this was, of course, changed and regulated by the respective colonial administrations, following their Western concepts of clear boundaries, but the original conceptions of space still linger on as cultural traits and way of thinking (as we discovered, doing field research on patterns of landownership in Malaysia and Indonesia) (Evers 1975a; Evers 1975b; Lee and Evers 1978).

Another related aspect of the Malay conception of space is its focus on water. Nusantara designates the maritime space between the islands, *hulu* and *hilir* (up-stream and downstream) are important

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Hermann Kulke, Pierre-Yves Manguin, Bernd Nothofer, Yabit Alas and James t. Collins, who gave valuable information on this topic.

Malay geographical concepts. Chinese thinking, however, appears to be land based and their relationship to the sea was ambivalent. "The ancient Chinese always had a complex psychic relation to the vast ocean: longing, but disdain" (Sun 2010). The traditional Chinese coastal defence concept of "alongshore defence" was changed by Deng Hsiao Ping in the 1970ies/80ies to the strategic concept of "offshore defence", which differed from China's traditional passive defence idea of defending land territory (Sun 2010:334).

"But for Malays and many other sea and riverine peoples, the focus was on water, not land, and entities were formed by seas and rivers joined by short land passages" (Andaya 2000). The classic Malay states around the island of Borneo had their capital at the estuary of a major river, or as in the case of Brunei Darussalam or Pontianak on a water village (*kampung air*) right in a river (King 1994). Their wealth derived from trade with upriver forest products and the trading networks across the sea to other principalities, kingdoms, or sultanates (Hall 1985). Power was concentrated in the *istana* and vanished upriver or farther away across the sea.

The Nusantara concentric *mandala* conception of space differs from the Chinese conceptions of bounded space. Fuzzy boundaries versus clearly defined boundaries, the Malay *hulu* of distant, undefined areas far from the centre versus the "Great Wall" concept guide the perception of the South China Sea. The Nusantara concept is basically a **maritime** conception of free and undefined space; the Chinese appear to view the South China Sea as a bounded territory, of their exclusive sovereign territory. The two concepts of space are not compatible. As cultural concepts they are difficult to change. A modern gold miners passion for natural resources is married to ancient cultural values; a situation that has a profound impact on negotiations about the South China Sea and its resources.

## 4 Connectivity: Networks across the South China Sea

Following ideas proposed by Denis Lombard on Javanese crossroads (Le carrefour javanais) and the Asian Mediterranean (la Méditerranée Asiatique) we will have a preliminary look at what connects the countries surrounding the South China Sea. Sociologically “connectivity” is defined as the frequency of interaction between actors, in our case the ASEAN states and the East Asian states surrounding the South China Sea. By building networks the South China Sea constitutes itself as a social and cultural area. Showing increasing connectivity indicates an increasing “mediterraneanism” and a tendency to develop a mediterranean type culture, combining common features with high cultural, social and ethnic diversity.

There are many aspects of “connectivity”, of which we have identified the following<sup>5</sup>:

### A. “Classical” forms of connectivity

1. Patron-client relations
2. Family business networks
3. Cronyism
4. Diasporas

### B. Modern forms of connectivity

1. MNCs
2. Production networks
3. Out-sourcing
4. ITC networks

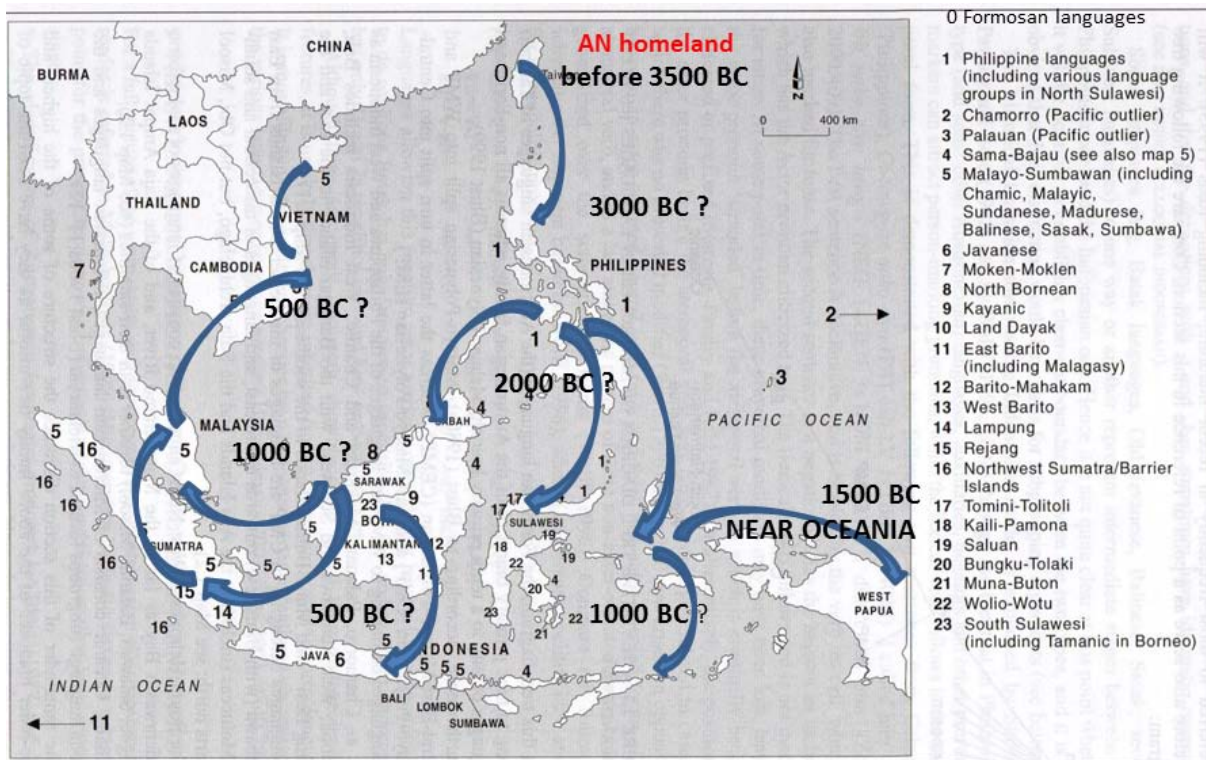
There are other forms of connectivity, specific to certain areas. Both classical as well as modern forms consist side by side, albeit in different relative importance.

Migration across the South China Sea has a long history. Based on linguistic evidence, a pattern of circular migration can be identified.

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<sup>5</sup> Connectivity is a central concept of an ongoing research project at the University of Brunei (UBD) “Networks of the South China Sea” under the direction of Hans-Dieter Evers and Syamimi Arif Lim

Figure 6 Circular Patterns of Migration across the South China Sea in ancient times



Another more modern example of networks across the South China Sea is the cooperation of universities and research institutes. The following map shows the number of joint publications (journal articles 1990-2000) as an indicator of science networks across the South China Sea.

## 5 Conclusion: Conceptions of Maritime Space and the “Nusantara Model”

The Chinese government’s position on the South China Sea may very well be driven by the Chinese conception of space. In Oswald Spengler’s terms the Chinese conception of space is an “Urtyp”, a deeply rooted cultural complex. The whole Sea is claimed as Chinese territory and a clear boundary is drawn far into the South, ignoring the chequered patchwork of claims of the ASEAN states. From an ASEAN point of view the South China Sea looks very much like the territory of the Malay or Javanese Sultanates. Bruneian, Malaysian, Philippino and Indonesian claims are stacked next to each other. This does not seem to worry Malaysian or Indonesian politicians too much, as long as respective claims are recognized. Not so the Vietnamese and Chinese. For the latter the position is made unmistakably clear. The South China Sea is ours, like the “mare nostrum” of the ancient Roman republic. There is a clear boundary with no loops and deviations. Of course the hunger for energy resources, oil and gas, may be the driving force behind China’s claim, but this could also be satisfied by a negotiated settlement, resulting in a patchwork of boundaries – probably a horrendous proposition to the Chinese mind and its conception of bounded space.

I am well aware that I am driving the cultural analysis perhaps too far. Not everything can be explained by cultural values, nor are cultural traits fixed in eternity. They are, however, persistent and difficult to change. It is much easier to expand the economy and drive the GDP than to change cultural values. This, at least, should be taken into account when proposing easy solutions to complex culturally determined problems.

The words of noted Malay scholar Prof B.A. Hamzah can be quoted to show the clash of cultural conceptions in regard to the South China Sea: “There are parties which have claimed almost the entire South China Sea as their own on the basis of history. Such area claims cannot be serious nor treated with much respect. In my view such area claims are as frivolous and ludicrous as the Papal Bull of 4 May 1493 dividing the world’s oceans between Spain and Portugal” (Hamzah 1993:97). This statement shows clearly the incompatibility of two different conceptions of maritime space.

The “Nusantara model” of sharing of resources, a patchwork of claims that are differentiated according the type of resource (fisheries, oil & gas, rights of passage) appears to be the best and fairest solution. Whether or not the Chinese terrestrial conception of bounded space can be changed into a maritime conception to allow a Nusantara type solution of the claims to the South China Sea may turn out to be an impossible dream, but the dream of a realm of peace, of an Asian “Maritime Darussalam” may eventually become a negotiable proposition.

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