Buddhist Voyaging in Monsoon Asia utilizing Austronesian Sea Craft

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Serving to Facilitate for Local and Scholarly Exchange
This presentation is based on Buddhism voyaging in stage transit from Southern Asia to Southeast Asia.

Buddhist monks and merchants not inhibited by Vedic restrictions for sea travel commissioned Austronesian-speaking navigators to sail in sea craft—wood plank haul lashed and stitched together with outrigger—across the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea.
Destinations were to seats of kingdoms and trade centers where the Buddhist word and its faith developed in a healthy or vigorous way, esp. as the result of a particularly congenial environment in Southeast Asia.
Accounts suggest that seafaring South Asians and islanders sailed to the ocean linking emporium with emporium.
My research is about trans-ocean sailing craft and Buddhist landings from the Subcontinent and Sri Lanka eastward across Monsoon Asia.

As far back as two millennia ago people in the trappings of this new international spiritual authority at the time introduced a web of connections forming a world trade system in a tropical region of peninsulas and islands.
Austronesian (Malay-Indonesian) built ships transporting people and cargo across the Indian Ocean that continued up to the early part of last century.

As the Southern Ocean currents have washed the shores from Arabia Saba to Java, there have been voyages of the earliest people who have laced the seas from East to West and West to East. The Sinhala and Tamil chronicles of South Asia allude to the overseas people approaching their shores as being Eastern, Javaju, and Western, Yavana.
By the rhythm of the monsoon, seafarers found their way to South Asia from Southeast Asia and Southwest Asia. Merchandise, small and valuable, circulated by the ancient Sabean line that ranged over Southern waves in stages to the East Africa, Persian Gulf region, Gujarat and Malabar Coast in primary voyages then on to Southeast Asia in secondary sails.

In return, Southeast Asian islanders carried forest and seashore items from the isles of spice to emporiums around Malaya and then beyond to South Asia.
Round Cape Comorin of South Asia to Southeast Asia, the lateen sail craft gave way to ocean vessels with outrigger. Navigators hoisted up banana fiber sails in the middle sea with coconut-husk fibered rope and secured the lines to planks sown together and joined with breadfruit pitch.
With a new wind capture, the navigator widened his stance to take the up-swell smoothly. While on the steep water, he scanned the horizon to a distant cloud pile that revealed a green tint beneath. Adjustment was made in course by easing off on his steering paddle. The bearing was then held according to a particular pattern of “time” swells that lifted the stern without rolling the hull.
QuickTime® and a TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
QuickTime® and a TIFF (LZW) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
Elements of Research

Archaeology / Inscriptions

Stories and Legends

Ethnography

Sailing Craft Technology

Mapping Routes

Destinations
Excavations of ancient ports and settlements reveal timber of hull and planks of large vessels in South Asia and Sumatra.

Inscriptions: for example on stone in Malaysia at Bujang Valley a salutation was given to the Buddha for safe passage from Sri Lanka by Buddhagupta (Sinhala).
Palembang, Srivijaya, was piled above an inland tidal mangrove delta of the Moesi River which exhaustively unraveled itself in a thousand ribbons to the sea that commanded the great spice trade.

Minor Tun-sun and the Red Earth Land (Ch’ih-T’u) rested along the East Malayan coast as isthmus city-states in federation with continental Fu-nan.

In the series of trade circuits there was a portrait of metropolitan territories—like the night sky clustered with stars rendering a different magnitude, hue, galaxy, life length, dimension and relative primacy, they all comprised the whole.
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Stories and Legends

Sanskrit and Prakrit literature, evolving from earlier oral traditions, has made numerous allusions to the lands reaching toward the sunrise. Southeast Asia and the islands held promise of princely wealth behind golden walls and gates. There, scattered lands of rugged mountain and forest terrain exhausted themselves to the sea.

Stories of the *Jataka (Lives of the Buddha)* tell of princes and merchants bound for Suvarnabhumi to trade.
The bodhi tree given by King Asoka arriving by ship for planting in Sri Lanka.
Ethnography

Ethnological research based in the present tells of the “ethnographic present” tracing back three to five generations. This information shares an edge with earlier patterns. For example the making of sea craft in the region.
QuickTime® and a TIFF (LZW) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
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Photo ID: 101
Caption: Boat Making
Site: Diura fishing village, Batan
Date of Content: Modern
Description:

Image Source: Steve Martin
Sailing Craft Technology

The making sea craft log hull and stitched plank is done infrequently these days. Therefore its best now to document this technology that dates back to the origin of boat construction technology.
Oru

The *oru* as a craft described as a log based dugout canoe with single-outrigger.

Apart from that form, there are two other related forms: double outrigger and double hulled craft. Both single and double outrigger canoes are to be found, in the global context: (a) Madagascar and the east coast of Africa, (b) in and around Sri Lanka, (c) Indonesian archipelago, and (d) across the Pacific.
Oruwa sailing,
coast of Sri Lanka.
Yāthrā dhōni plank-hulled, transport cargo ship with outrigger. c. 1930s
Mapping Routes

Sea faring routes explore voyaging methods in the rhythm of the Monsoon and against the wind sailing techniques that give lines of direction for mapping across open seas.
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Destinations

Landings are given as descriptions in legends and charted on maps. There is a rich literature that points to cartographic locations.

These place references unfold societies including their ways of living, local environmental utility, and beliefs.
Borobudur, is a 9th-century grand Buddhist monument, Java.
Spatial data partially based on Wurm and Hattori, eds. 1981 and 1983
Figure 1
Distribution of the Austronesian Language Family and Major Subgroupings. Adapted from the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, National Australian University. Structure of the Austronesian Language Family from Blust.