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John N. Miksic is Professor in the Southeast Asian Studies Department, National University of Singapore. He received his PhD from Cornell University based on archaeological fieldwork in Sumatra. He spent four years in Malaysia as a Peace Corps Volunteer, worked as a Rural Development Advisor in Sumatra for two years, and taught at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, for six years. In 1987 he moved to the National University of Singapore. He served on the board of the Centre for Khmer Studies from 2000 to 2015. He is an academic adviser to the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Sub-Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts. He received a Special Recognition Award from the Ministry of Information, Communication, and the Arts, the *Pingat Bakti Setia* from the government of Singapore, and the title of *Kanjeng Raden Haryo Temenggung* from the Susuhunan of Surakarta (Indonesia). His specialty is the archaeology of maritime trade in Southeast Asia. He has served on committees of the National University Museum and the Asian Civilisations Museum. He has served as consultant to the National Parks Board, the Singapore Tourism Board, and the Maritime Experiential Museum (Singapore). He has supervised 20 M.A. and Ph.D. theses. Current research includes the archaeology of ancient ports on the shores of the Straits of Melaka, and early cities in Indonesia, Cambodia, and Myanmar.

Location isn't Everything; the Mobility of Southeast Asian Ports

Different phases of Southeast Asian history have been marked by changing locations of major ports on long-distance routes. The main international hub in the region has shifted from the isthmus of Kra to the Mekong Delta to the Straits of Melaka to west Java. For the past 100 years Singapore has occupied this position. How important is geographical location in favouring the locations of ports? It is obviously not the sole determinant. What other factors are important in determining the rise and fall of ports in addition to geography? What does the word "strategic" mean in this context? Some other variables to consider include technology, political conditions both within and beyond Southeast Asia, military organization and security, the state of the regional economy, and bureaucracy.

This long-term picture of instability is comparable to that found in other regions of the world. If port sites have no stability, what is their heritage? Do individual ports have no heritage, or at least no long-term identity? Is heritage inherent in particular places, or in a network? How can one capture and represent maritime heritage to the public if port sites are impermanent? The institutions of the maritime silk road have been very stable over 2,000 years. Is it possible to create an interesting museum without major physical structures? What other kinds of maritime heritage institutions and displays in addition to static exhibitions can be devised? What are some characteristics of the most successful maritime heritage centres in the world? Can they be replicated elsewhere? If maritime heritage is conceived of as dynamic rather than static, what is the best way to convey it to the public?

Our knowledge of maritime history and tradition is much weaker than our knowledge of land-based kingdoms in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Port sites are notoriously difficult to study and preserve, and funding for archaeological research on maritime traditions has been scarce. Will governments fill the gap? Are public-private partnerships feasible?

