

Ancient Malay and Spice Trade Routes: A Study of Ancient Malay from the Perspectives of Linguistics and Archaeology

Authors : Totok Suhardijanto, Ninie Susanti Tedjowasono

Abstract : This paper discusses the relationship between the distribution of Ancient Malay inscriptions and Spice Trade Route, especially in the relation with material cultures that accompany them, to understand how Malay could spread out around the archipelago beyond its original native-speakers' region. The archipelago was known as the Spice Islands from the very beginning of the first century due to mace, cloves, and nutmeg that were originally exclusively found there. According to the Indian record, since the 2nd century, there has been a contact established between Indian and Indonesian people. A Chinese document from 3rd Century has mentioned Wangka (now widely known as Bangka) an island near Sumatra where some Chinese expeditions had visited. All of these records supported the existence of a maritime trade system and route between the archipelago and other countries during the first millennium. This paper will discuss first the Ancient Malay inscription spread around the archipelago from the perspectives of language variation and writing system style. Analyzing language variations of inscriptions certainly is not as easy as studying current spoken language variations in modern sociolinguistics. A huge amount of data is available for such kind of studies. On the contrary, in language variation research with inscription texts as an object, data is insufficient. Other resources will be needed to support the linguistic analysis. For this reason, this research made use of epigraphical evidence in the surrounding areas of the inscriptions to explain the variation of language and writing style. The research next expands the analysis to figure out the relationship between language variation and inscriptions distribution to the Spice Trade Route that spreads from the Molucca Sea to Mediterranean Sea. Data in this research consists of six different inscriptions: Kedukan Bukit, Koto Kapur, Dapunta Salendra, Sang Hyang Wintang, Ligor, and Laguna from the 7th-9th Century and found in Sumatra, Jawa, and the Philippines. In addition, as a comparative resource, this research also used Hikayat Tanjung Tanah, the first-founded Ancient Malay manuscript. In language analysis, we conduct a sociolinguistic method to explore the language variation and writing style of the inscriptions. For dealing with archaeological data, we conducted a hermeneutic method to analyze the possible meaning and social uses of the data. Language variations and writing system style in this research can be classified into two main groups. The language, epigraphical, and archaeological evidence explain that Ancient Malay had been widely used in the Eastern area of Spice Trade Route because it played an important role in the region as a lingua franca between people from different ethnic groups with different languages.

Keywords : Ancient Malay, Spice trade route, language variation, writing system variation

Conference Title : ICSRD 2020 : International Conference on Scientific Research and Development

Conference Location : Chicago, United States

Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020