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CERAMICS ALONG THE SPICE TRADE ROUTE IN THE INDONESIAN ARCHIPELAGO IN THE 16th-19th CENTURY*

KERAMIK DISEPANJANG JALUR PERDAGANGAN REMPAH-REMPAH DI KEPULAUAN INDONESIA ABAD KE 16 - 19

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Abstrak

Perdagangan rempah-rempah, merupakan aktivitas komersial yang telah berlangsung sejak masa lampau. Wilayah Nusantara sebagai salah satu penghasil rempah-rempah telah terkait dengan jaringan perdagangan ini khususnya pada abad ke 17 - 18. Munculnya bandar-bandar besar sebagai pelabuhan utama niaga, yang saling terkoneksi satu dengan yang lain, menandai puncak lancarnya perdagangan rempah-rempah jarak jauh, baik antara India, Timur Tengah, Cina, maupun Eropa. Aktivitas ini juga ditandai dengan keberadaan komunitas asing di Nusantara, untuk mencari komoditi itu. Keberadaan komunitas tersebut, berdampak pada variabilitas komoditas yang mereka bawa dari tempat asalnya, salah satunya adalah keramik. Keramik menjadi kunci penting sejarah pelayaran dan perdagangan, karena kita tidak hanya mengenal perdagangan rempah-rempah hanya dari berbagai sumber tertulis, tetapi bersamaan dengan keberadaan keramik, kita menemukan bukti-bukti yang meyakinkan untuk lebih memperjelas gambaran tentang proses perdagangan itu. Dalam konteks kapal karam, keramik dan hasil alam, merupakan bagian dari muatannya. Melalui bukti-bukti komoditi itu kita dapat mengetahui darimana dan bagaimana jaringan antarkomoditas itu terjadi. Tulisan ini, secara khusus akan mengamati jejak aktivitas perdagangan rempah-rempah yang berdampak pada keberadaan barang komoditi lain, yaitu keramik. Keberadaan keramik dan sumber rempah-rempah di Nusantara, dapat dikaitkan sebagai bukti adanya jaringan perdagangan antara negara produsen dan konsumen. Paling tidak pembuktian ini dapat ditelusuri melalui penelitian arkeologi.

Kata Kunci : *pelayaran, perdagangan, rempah-rempah, keramik*

Abstract

The spice trade was one of the world's ancient commercial activities. The Indonesian Archipelago (Nusantara), as spice producer, was crucial in this trade network, particularly in the 17th – 18th century. The emergence of big ports as the main trade harbours marks the peak of the thriving long distance spice trade connecting India, the Middle East, China, and Europe. The trade was also marked by the existence of foreign communities in the archipelago in their search for spice. The presence of foreigners influenced the types of commodities that they brought from their homelands, among which is ceramics. Ceramics were key to the history of sea navigation and trade. The presence of ceramics offered additional detail of the spice trade and evidence of reciprocal relations between spice producers and their consumers. For example, in shipwrecks, we find ceramics and natural product in their cargo and these commodities prove the reciprocal trade relations that took place. This article will particularly discuss the spice trade, which had an impact on the existence of other types of commodities, including ceramics. This can be carried out by means of archaeological investigations.This mode of research can be viewed as one of the regional–interregional studies to be used as a foundation to reconstruct the ancient trade network.

Key words: sea navigation, trade, spice, ceramics

Introduction

The waters of the Indonesian Archipelago is one of the regional–interregional trade routes, known as the centre of spice trade, both in its eastern and western parts. The eastern part of the Indonesian Archipelago was among the global sea navigation routes because it was a centre of the spice (cloves, nutmegs, and cinnamon) trade, while

the western part became part of the spice trade route due to its position as the centre of pepper trade. Such condition was made possible by the strategic geographical location and the existence of a transportation network that facilitated the distribution of its main commodities (see map 1). It encouraged the emergence of big cities with interconnected large trade ports (Wibisono, 2004).

Map 1. *Map of Trade Route*

It can be assumed that both areas represent the peak of trade in the Indonesian Archipelago within the period of 16th – 19th century. Both were thriving as trade centres in the context of each location–east and west–especially as the main trade agents of pepper or spices and other spices, as well as various natural produces, such as: damar resin, rattan, camphor, sandalwood, gaharu wood, sugar, rice, tripang (sea cucumbers), gold, diamond, tortoise shells, and pearls. More specifically, there seems to be similarities in exported goods such as ceramics from China, Europe, Thailand, Vietnam, and Japan. Therefore the archipelago was the primary location to retrace the trade systems and routes during the 16th – 19th century or even until early 20th century (Harkantiningsih, 2006)

The spice trade in Indonesia attracted traders who came to buy the valuable commodity (NN 1990; Harkantiningsih, 2006). They brought with them various types commodities to trade with spices (Blusse, 1984; Groeneveldt, 1960; Volker 1954), among which were ceramics. Through ceramics we find evidence in the Indonesian Archipelago of short and long distance trade. *Short distance*: between sites/regions or between islands (interinsular) and *long distance*: between states/countries continents. Ceramics were found in large amounts proving more clearly the flow of goods from the producers to the consumers, which are the dispersed sites all over the Indonesian Archipelago, other Asian countries, Middle East, and Europe (Harkantiningsih, 2006, 2010). In recent developments, we know about the discoveries of ceramics and other trade commodities in shipwrecks in the waters of the Indonesian Archipelago, which support the evidence of the navigation and trade processes (Harkantiningsih, 2010).

Identification of the qualitative and chronological aspects of the ceramic wares from various ship wrecks, show similarities to those found at the areas that produce spices, which make the relation between spice trade and ceramics more obvious. Spice and ceramic trades were increased since the coming of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which dominated the spice trade and at the same time distributed ceramics for Europe through Buton and Makassar as the VOC centres in East Indonesia and through Banten and Batavia as the VOC centres in West Indonesia.

The Eastern Part of the Indonesian Archipelago

In this discussion, the eastern part of Indonesia includes Mollucca (Banda, Ambon, Ternate, Tidore, Halmahera, Bacan), Makassar, and Buton.

Pic. 1,2,3. *Every eye could see plant: cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon*

The Indonesian Archipelago has been known as the centre of spices and other natural products since centuries ago. Today, this area is still recognized as the source of spices–clove, nutmeg, mace (*fuli*: nutmeg's skin), and cinnamon–which are its main commodities (see pic. 1,2,3). Initially this area was

part of the silk route, but then it became the spice trade network. In terms of spice trade, this area was inseparable from other related areas, and serves as the producer, buffer zone, distributor, transit harbour, as well as consumer (Harkantiningsih 2006; 2008; 2010). The spice trade network is evidenced by the many traders who came to get the main commodities. The trade process involved a number of actors: producers and consumers, process of transaction, as well as distribution process of the trade goods from the place where they were produced to the consumers.

For instance trade ships from China, Malaya, the Middle East (Arabia), Britain/United Kingdom, Portugal, and Spain sailed to the Indonesian Archipelago, among others to Banten, Batavia, Mollucca, and Buton. Buton was the producer of damar resin, rattan, gaharu wood, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmegs. Therefore many parties tried to colonize it mainly for the sake of trade by the kingdoms in the eastern part and the VOC. From then on there was trade agreement between the VOC and Buton; the trade agreement was made in 1637 and Buton became a loyal ally of the VOC, Makassar, and the surrounding areas. Sea navigation and trade from Mollucca came using two routes, which are: land route from Mollucca to China (silk road) and the Middle East; and sea route from Mollucca – Java – Malacca – India (Gujarat) – the Middle East (Arabia) – the Persian Gulf. During 16th century Portuguese and Spanish sailors raced to find the places where spices originate from. The Spainish sailors sailed westward and reached Ternate. As a producer of cloves, Ternate was famous for its oldest clove trees, named *Avo*, which are now a popular destination for tourists and researchers. They are 500 – 250 years old with an average diameter of about 3 meter (Tim, 2007; Harkantiningsih, 2008). In 1521 through the Philippines, while the Portuguese sailors sailed eastward up to Banda and on to Hitu in 1512. During this time, the networking that involved the Mollucca reached its golden period (Huliselan, 2010; Tanudirdjo, 2010).

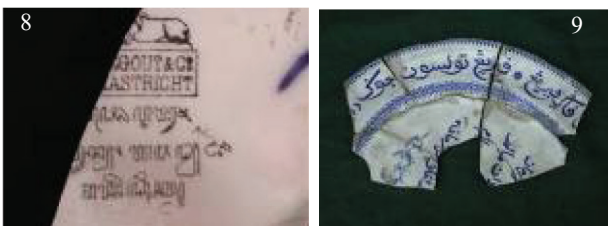
Foreign traders dominated the waters of Southeast Asia, including the Indonesian Archipelago, until their decline in the middle of 20th century, with Japanese colonization. But many foreign traders stayed on in the area, especially in areas that were centres of commodities and government administration. Spices (see pic. 4,5,6,7) had put the Indonesian Archipelago (especially the eastern part) to its key position, but had also sparked many conflicts. Many parties wanted to monopolize the spice trade. The conflicts resulted in the building of fortifications to guard political and economic interests. Trade was carried out there. As a result, there are many fortresses in this area, evidence of the high point of spice trade during the period (Harkantiningsih, 2008; 2010; Tim penelitian, 2006).

Pic. 4,5,6,7*. Cloves, Nutmeg, Mace (Fuli), Cinnamon*

Foreign trade also influenced the different types of ceramics. The diversity of ceramics from various sites in the eastern part of the Indonesian Archipelago, began in the 12th–14th century (Song-Yuan Dynasty) although only in limited numbers. It increased in 15th-16th century and reached its peak in around the 16th century and declined in 19th centrury. Most of them came from China and were made in Jingdezhen, Fujian, and Guangdong; they originated from the Ming Dynasty (16th century) up to the Qing (17th – 19th century), for example Wanli, Swatow, Batavian Ware, and Kitchencing.

The types of the ceramics are identified as plates, bowls, *cepuk* (covered box), urns, tea-pots, jars, *gacuk* (coin-shaped ceramic), *buli-buli* (gourd-like pot), figurines, bottles, cups, and spoons. The dominant colours are blue and white as well as some polychromatic ones. Later Japanese ceramics were introduced. The coming of this type of ceramics in the 17th – 18th century was due to an uprising in China. When demand increased while production from China was decreasing, the discrepancy had to be replaced by ceramics from other places, particularly Japan, to meet demands from Southeast Asia, West Asia, and Europe.

The discovery of green celadon Hasami and Karatsu wares from around 17th century and blue and white Hizen plates or–not exported wares–in Buton, was the second type outside Japan, after the discovery at Surosowan, Old Banten (Banten Lama). This type of similarity indicates that there was trade between Banten and Buton, Banten was the centre of a sultanate and VOC in the western part of the Indonesian Archipelago, while Buton was the centre of a sultanate and VOC in the eastern part of the archipelago, both directly and indirectly. Another type of ceramics, the Hizen ware from around 17th-18th century is characterized by *kraak* blue and white or *fuyohde* from Arita. Some of them, which were made in 1690-1700, are found



Ceramics with Javanese (pic 8) And Arabic Scripts (pic 9)

with the insignia "VOC" written on the interior part of the bases. A large number of blue and white bowls with fish and ocean wave decorations, which are known as *araisomon*, are also found, as well as covered vases with handles on both sides and peony-*botan*-fruit tree decorations. The presence of Hizen wares, which were produced after 1660's in large amounts, marks the golden period of ceramic trade in the Indonesian Archipelago. Those ceramics were specially made for the European market with VOC as the distributor in the Indonesian Archipelago (Ohashi, 1992; Sakai etc, 2000, 2007; Harkantiningsih, 2007; 2010).

During the VOC and Dutch colonization period in early 19th century, European ceramics were introduced in forms of plates, cups, shot glasses, tea-cups, and bowls. Most of them are blue and white and some are polychromatic. Some of the blue and white ceramics are decorated with typical Dutch motifs, which are windmills as well as floral and geometric designs. Some of them have factory names–such as Maastricht, Petrus Regout & Co.; Sphinx – or Javanese and Arabic scripts written on them (see pic. 8 and 9). There are also plenty of brown coloured Dutch bottles from the 19th–20th century, with the factory name Rotterd (Am) written on them. We believe that this type of wares were also specially made or gifts for local rulers.

Thailand's urns made in the kilns in Sukhotai, Sawankhalok, Singburi from around 15th – 17th century were also found, as well as Vietnamese ceramics from 15th – 16th century in forms of dark blue and white bowls and covered boxes and also multicoloured dark blue and white *covered boxes* made of enamel (Sakai etc. 2000; 2007) .

Towards the end of 19th century AD, ceramic trade began to decline. Blue and white Hizen bowls in paper print style from early 20th century, which are popularly known as Setomino and Tebo ware, were then found. This phase was also characterized by the presence of Chinese and Dutch ceramics from early 20th century. The ceramics in the eastern part of the Indonesian Archipelago were evenly distributed, but most are found in Buton. This condition is due to the fact that trade activities were centered in Buton, because of its very strategic location and role as the producer and distributor of spices and other natural products from the Moluccas, as well as being the centre of VOC administrative authority.

Most of those ceramics were found in the fortification sites, and it proves that VOC had wanted to ensure the safety of their trade commodities both from internal threats (the local inhabitants) and external ones (other foreign traders). Archaeological investigation also yield Chinese and Dutch coins, which prove of the use of foreign currencies–for payment or selling and buying and trading purposes–depending on the ethnicity of the traders. The ceramic chronology, as well as the presence of foreign traders and spice commodities, confirm the period that refers to the peak of global trade in that area. People from abroad came because they were fascinated by the spices. To smoothen and safeguard their trading business, they cooperated with the local Sultans, among others by bestowing gifts. The gifts include ceramics, which until now are still being kept as the collection of the Sultans of Ternate and Tidore (Tim Penelitian, 2006).

The Western Part of the Indonesian Archipelago

In this discussion, the western part of the Indonesian Archipelago includes among others: Banten, Pandeglang, Batavia, Lampung, Palembang, Bengkulu, Aceh, and Bangka. Besides cloves, nutmegs–mace, and cinnamon, there was

also pepper (see pic 10,11,12), which came from the western part of the Indonesian Archipelago. Today, there are still plenty of pepper plantations, especially in South Sumatra and West Java.

Pic. 10,11,12*. Pepper Plantation*

In the 16th century, the centre of pepper trade was in Banten. Because of high demand for pepper and an insufficient supply, Banten extended the plantations to Sumatra (Schrieke, 1955). As Banten dominated the entire pepper trade; some of the Sultans had even issued laws regarding pepper. The Sultanate of Banten was therefore very prosperous due to its role as the distributor of pepper to China and Europe (Leur, 1960). During his visit to Banten in 1513, Tome Pires noted that Banten was one of the ports that exported rice, other kind of food, and pepper. In 1522 Banten and Sunda Kelapa had flourished into quite significant ports that produced 1000 *bahar*s (1 *bahar* = 3 *pikul*s, and 1 *pikul* = 137 lbs) of pepper annually (Cortesao, 1944; Chijs 1880; Mei1ink-Roe1ofsz 1962; Nurhakim & Fadillah Moh Ali, 1990).

The peak of pepper trade in Banten occurred in 16th century, when Banten carried out trade with Persia, India, Thailand, Vietnam, China, the Philippines, and Japan. In 1603 259,200 pounds of pepper and 8,440 gunny sacks were exported from Banten to the European market. Later, in 1618, ten Chinese ships with tonnages of 1000-1500 tons carried pepper back to their mother land. The Chinese traders even doubled their purchase of pepper by buying directly from the farmers in the interior areas (Chijs 1881; Blusse, 1983). In 1682 the VOC took over the monopoly of pepper trade in Banten. It, amongst others monopolized the trade of 24,000 pikuls (24,000 x 137 lbs) of black pepper that were sent from Lampung and were bought in Banten. Pepper was also brought to Banten from Palembang (Knaap, 1996). In the world market, the most well-known black pepper came from Lampung, while the most sought after white pepper came from Muntok, Bangka (Vuuren, 1920).

Banten was the centre of regional and interregional trade. It was here that the Dutch first landed in the Indonesian Archipelago in the early 17th century (1602) and established the East Indian Company, which played a role as the distributor of ceramic wares, spices, and other natural producers from Asia and Europe. After the fall of the Malacca Strait to the Portuguese, the role of Banten was shifted to Batavia. The city of Batavia was built based on trade monopoly, centre of city administration, and the headquarters of the VOC. Trade transactions connected Batavia and the interior areas as the producers of pepper and other natural product, as well as the harbours within the trade route in the Indonesian Archipelago. On the outskirts, the VOC built warehouses to store the commodities before being shipped to the Netherlands or other countries in Europe and Asia (Blusse 1984).

In the Western part, the activities that involved ceramics occurred earlier than in the eastern part. Results of archaeological investigations reveal that the oldest ceramic wares were found at the sites of Banten Girang and Palembang, which are Yue (Yue Ware) from the 9th–10th century. At these sites, the ceramics were dominated by olive green celadon wares from the 10th–14th century or from Song to Yuan dynasties. The various products from the two dynasties consist of plates, bowls, covered boxes, figurines, urns, jarlets, and jars. Furthermore, there were white-coloured ceramics

Pic. 13,14,15. *Gauda pipes, Batavian ware, and Hizen ware-Karatshu ware*

known as Dehua; bluish or greenish white ceramics of Qingbai type; and also coarser type of ceramics made in Guangdong/Fujian kilns. Evidence shows that the typology, style, chronology, and ware are similar to those in the eastern part of the Indonesian Archipelago. An interesting type of artifact among the European ceramics are smoking pipes made in a factory in Gauda (see pic. 13). The smoking pipes are often found not only in fortification complexes, such as Speelwijk in Banten, where the Dutch community resided, but also within royal courts of local sultans. Apparently smoking pipes had become part of the lifestyle in this part of the archipelago. The presence of Chinese, European, and Hizen wares (see pic. 15) in abundance indicates trade connections between this area and ceramic producers at that time, for instance between the Indonesian Archipelago and Japan; the Indonesian Archipelago with its harbour, Banten, and Japan with its harbour, Nagasaki.

There was also a type of ceramic that we found in Banten, although scantily, which are the Persian wares from the Middle East (around 18th – 19th century). From the few and fragmented samples, we are able to identify the type of the ceramics, which are blue and white plates. The very small amount of Persian ceramics still poses some unanswered questions. As in the eastern part, Chinese and Dutch coins were also found during researches, which indicate the use of foreign currencies in accordance with the ethnicities of the traders. Local currencies were also used in Banten as proven by the writing on some coins: Ratu ing Banten, which means the King (ruler) of Banten (see pic. 16).

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Pic. 16. *Local currencies: Ratu ing Banten*

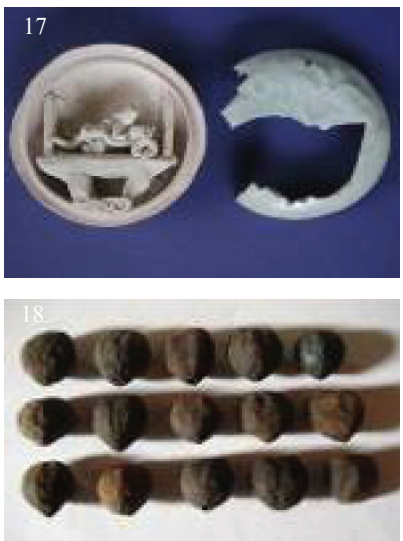
The ceramic chronology, the presence of foreign traders, and the existence of pepper enable us to confirm the period of thriving global trade in this area.

Correlation with Cargo of Shipwrecks

In this section the correlation between ceramics and shipwrecks will be briefly discussed. Between the 15th and 20th century, the ceramics that entered the Indonesian Archipelago became more diverse. They not only came from China, but also from the kilns in Southeast Asia and East Asia. Chinese products from the Ming up to the Qing dynasties were among the cargo of shipwrecks, among others Nanking Cargo and Tek Sing Wreck that sunk in the waters of South Sumatra; as well as Teluk Sumpat and Heliputan, which sunk in the waters of the islands of Riau. The commodities were widely distributed and brought ceramic trade in the Indonesian Archipelago to its peak. This period was also characterized by the presence of ceramics from Thailand and Vietnam, which were distributed at the same time with Chinese wares – although for shorter period – around the 14th – 17th century. The discovery of shipwrecks in the waters of Subang, the Blanakan Wreck, proves that there was shipment of Thailand and Vietnamese ceramics (NN 2003). Within the same period (17th – 19th century) Japanese ceramics also came in large quantities.

The trade of Japanese ceramics was depicted in the sea route of Chinese ships in early 17th century, and thereafter Japanese ceramic export increasingly flourished. The ships carried Japanese ceramics among their commodities from the port of Nagasaki to Asia and Europe. During that period the monopoly of ceramic trade was in the hands of the centres of VOC in Nagasaki for Japan and Banten and Buton for the Indonesian Archipelago. Both of the latter locations were also the centre of authority of the VOC as ceramic distributor to Europe. Despite the fact that until recently there has not been any indication about shipwrecks with Japanese ceramics in its cargo, based on a sea navigation map in *The Voyage of Old-Imari Porcelains and Coastal Shipping Routes,* we can see the sea navigation routes from ceramic producers in Asia to Europe through the Indonesian Archipelago (Fujiwara, 2000). This phase was also marked by the coming of European ceramics around the 19th-20th century, particularly in the centres of spice and foreign colonies, among others Bengkulu, Banten, Batavia, Makasar, Buton, and the Moluccas. Their presence marked the same time of the increasing western influence and colonization, whose initial aim was to search for spice. An evidence of shipwreck with

ceramics in its cargo is the Karang Batang Wreck in the waters of Jepara.



Pic. 17, 18. *Covered box and Candlenuts commodity goods in the cargo shipwreck*

The networks of sea navigation as well as trade of ceramics and other commodities were supported by the discovery of ceramics in burials at Semawang, Sanur, Bali. The ceramic was from a very rare type, which is a Chinese covered box from the Yuan dynasty, Qingbai ware, from 13th–14th century. Inside the box was a statuette of a man and a woman in intimate position (see pic. 17). Its rarity led us to assume that this ceramic was a special item, a limited edition. Before it was used as a burial gift, it was probably a family heirloom or a special ordered gift. It is assumed that such rare items were obtained in the context of tributary trades that were common during the Song-Yuan period (13th century). Similar type of ceramics was also found in the cargo of the Java Sea Wreck (William M Mathers & Michael Flecker 1996). The Intan Wreck, aside from having ceramics in its cargo, also has candlenut (see pic. 18), mortar and pestle (grindstone and roller), wood, ivory, and simbar antler (Flecker, Michael 1997). It is possible that they were brought from the Indonesian Archipelago. The chronology of both wrecks are earlier than the other shipwrecks, which confirm the written sources, which mention that spice trade activities had occurred before the 16th century.

The discovery of various ceramic wares and other commodities in the context of shipwrecks proves that there had been a trade network–short distance (between areas within the archipelago) and long distance ones (between countries or continents)–in the past.

Conclusion

Based on the history of sea navigation and trade, there is a hypothesis about the emergence of harbour cities as a consequence of those activities, both short and long distance ones. The hypothesis about the harbour city is often called the gateway city. We are of the opinion that the Indonesian Archipelago was a place where harbour cities emerged. This indication is based on historical sources and archaeological evidences, particularly local and foreign commodities. Ceramics from different producing countries can be one of the indicators of sea navigation and short and long distance trade activities. The similarities between products and chronology in the producer countries (China, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Europe) and the consumer country (the Indonesian Archipelago) confirm our assumption. Furthermore, ceramics in shipwreck cargo are an assemblage within the same period of time, which is highly valuable data. It is at this point that ceramic study plays an important role to reveal the sea navigation and trade activities in the past. The distribution pattern, as well as qualitative and chronological comparisons on ceramics show similarities to the results of archaeological investigations at several sites in the Indonesian Archipelago and outside, such as in Japan (Yamamoto, 1994), the Philippines (Ronquillo, 1994), and Thailand (Srisuchat, 1994).

The comparisons and distribution are important because based on those facts we will be able to understand more about the market and variabilities. Therefore we believe that based on the distribution pattern, the networking of global trade within the Indonesian Archipelago and between the archipelago and other countries can be better understood. The presence of imported wares in a place can only be possible if the place is part of an active trade network with simultaneous access by means of sea navigation. The activities were the impact of a worldwide spice trade, which occurred in the Indonesian Archipelago during the period. The region that was made into the centre of VOC authority will at least have similar commodities, because the VOC was the authority and distributor

of commodities from Asia to Europe through the Indonesian Archipelago. The intervention of foreign communities in the activities is confirmed by the burial places of Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese people in the archipelago. The presence of those communities show how important the Indonesian Archipelago was in trade so that the foreign traders had to reside in this place until they died.

The role of the Indonesian Archipelago in the spice trade has been proven by written sources and the spice plantations that exist up till now. The asset that has attracted foreigners to visit the archipelago is spice, apart from other natural products. Advancement in technology along the sea navigation route has made the Indonesian Archipelago part of a short distance and long distance trade network. The exclusive commodities provided by the area has put the Indonesian Archipelago in an important position in the trade network. The Indonesian Archipelago as the source of spices and other nature's products is widely known in the world. In addition ceramics, spices, and local and foreign communities are inseparable because they are interrelated in a network of sea navigation and trade.

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