

The Culture of Outrigger Boat in the Malay Archipelago: A Maritime Perspective

Ismail Ali

ABSTRACT: *Many discussions by the Western scholars on the history of traditional boats in the Malay archipelago focus on one specific territory or country. Apparently, there has been no effort in doing a total review on these discussions. Vague facts on the prehistoric history of maritime in the Malay archipelago, Pacific and Indian oceans as well as the blind passion of the countries in Southeast Asia in promoting their great historical "bahari" culture have made it difficult for us to solve the question on the actual origin of boats and outriggers that are still being used and become a proud maritime heritage of some countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Oceania Islands. Therefore, the objective of this article is to review the history of the early origin and culture of boat and outrigger in the Malay archipelago before the 15th century during the reign of traditional governments and before the coming of Western powers such as Portuguese, Dutch, English and Spanish. According to archeological records and traditional maritime of the Malay archipelago, boats and outriggers were first used by sailors and traders in the Malay archipelago sea in order to carry various goods, mainly spices to be traded in other territories in the Malay archipelago as well as Madagascar and west coastal Africa.*

KEY WORDS: *culture of boat and outrigger, Malay archipelago, traditional governments, and native sailors and traders.*

INTRODUCTION

During the British and Dutch reigns, Southeast Asia was known as maritime territories and also famous for its unique history (Reid, 2004:204). Unlike America, which was claimed to be found by Christopher Columbus (Portugal), Tanjung Harapan by Vasco de Gamma (Portugeese) and Australia by James Cook (British) and many others, the Malay archipelago was not discovered by traders and travelers. Even before the Western discovered

Associate Professor Dr. Ismail Ali is a Senior Lecturer at the Programme of History, School of Social Sciences UMS (Malaysia University of Sabah), Beg Berkunci, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. He can be reached at: ismailrc@ums.edu.my

the meaning of “the Age of Exploration” and “the Age of Voyages” that are to travel all over the world and to conquer and gain various commercial commodity in the 15th century (Mahan, 1965); the Malay archipelago has been occupied since long ago by people of high civilization and it had become the stop for travelers and traders.

From the perspective of prehistoric culture, territories in the Malay archipelago have been occupied by people since 500,000 years ago during the migration of people from Africa to the Malay archipelago in Pleistocene era. It was said that during those times, the lands were attached and were parts of Southeast Asia. The people were still lived primitively. The second migration happened in 5,000 – 2,000 BC. Based on the Wave Theory, massive migration was believed to take place by Austronesians of Indochina and Taiwan, who traveled to the south that is to peninsular Malaya and Oceania Islands. They brought along with them their Dongson culture which was based on steel or known as *Perunggu* era. These people were believed to be the ancestors for the modern people of the Malay archipelago and they are known, according to Djoko Pramono (2005:3), as the *mainland culture*.

During the Mesolithic era, the expansion theory of axe and metal culture has shown the birth of a civilization which was based on rice, pigs and cattle rearing, boat or *perahu* making and others. Bellwood (1985), who uses linguistic and archeological approaches, states that in 4,000 BC or before, Taiwan was occupied by Austronesian culture and many Austronesians had migrated to Philippines in 3,000 BC. From the Philippines, they migrated again to Borneo islands, Maluku, Sulawesi and western parts of Indonesia, including Malaya. According to Bellwood, this whole migration process ended around 2,000 - 500 BC and surprisingly, they used boats to migrate.

Other theory of prehistoric of the Malay archipelago states that the ancestors of the Malay archipelago were not descendants from Indochina but they were from the Malay archipelago. Archeology study shows the existence of people in the Malay archipelago, which was based on *bahari* culture, with the findings of outrigger paintings on cave walls in *pulau* Muna, Seram and Arguni and these paintings are believed to be 10,000 years old, and believed to be painted even before the Austronesian migration. This is further supported by prehistoric evidence of Aborigines in Australia, who are believed to have lived in Australia around 25,000 BC, and this is similar to other evidence found in the Malay archipelago, mainly in Indonesia. This shows that people of Austronesian of Indochina, the ancestors of the Malay archipelago, had made contact with the Aborigines of Australia through sailing or *bahari* medium.

In addition, other archeology evidence shows that sailors of the Malay archipelago had sailed until Madagascar even before the beginning of century. This is another historical truth about the birth of human civilization in the east which was not initiated in the Malay archipelago but in India and China, which has to be accepted among historians. In fact, many scholars agree that India and China, not Europe, are the birth place for human's early civilization. As the earliest and great civilization in Asia, it is difficult to ignore that the civilizations in India and China had influenced the Malay archipelago civilization.

FRAMEWORK OF REVIEW

Boat and outrigger are among the historical inheritances and until today, they have become a part of the Malay archipelago maritime culture. Today, the range of boats and outriggers can be seen clearly in a few island based countries in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia (Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi and Borneo), Malaysia (Sabah) and the Philippines. Although many studies on the maritime culture and heritage in Southeast Asia have been conducted, scholars are still having different views on its history. The 5th century is regarded as the end of prehistoric era of *mainland culture* with the findings of various records or carvings written on stones or copper which show the concept of *bahari* culture in the Malay archipelago. For instance, record on stones of the Kedukan Bukit was found in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia in 1920 which stated, "In the year of *Saka* 605, on the eleventh day of *Waisakha* month, the King had used a boat to look for magic". This has become the oldest evidence on the existence of boat in the old Malay language which has spearheaded the history and culture of boat in the Malay archipelago (Coedes, 1975:241-252). Yet, the record does not show or explain the type and design of the boat.

From the archeological point of view, the change from Paleolithic and Neolithic eras to Mesolithic era has discovered the making of dug-out canoe and its various evolutions according to need and age. Therefore, the objective of this article is to review the history of the early origin and culture of boat and outrigger in the Malay archipelago before the 15th century during the reign of traditional governments and before the coming of Western powers such as Portuguese, English and Spanish. According to archeological records and traditional maritime of the Malay archipelago, boats and outriggers were first used by sailors and traders in the Malay archipelago sea in order to carry various goods, mainly spices to be traded in other territories in the Malay archipelago as well as Madagascar and west coastal Africa. Some evidence shows that the earliest existence of boats

and outriggers can be seen in Borobudur shrines in Java which has been existed since 8th century during the reign of Syailendra dynasty.

During the first century, a Romanian historian named Pliny wrote about a sailor from the Malay archipelago who came to Africa carrying spices and cinnamons in an outrigger. The route that this sailor had used was then named *the Cinnamon Route* which started from Indiana sea to Maladewa Islands – Madagascar – Cape Town – Tanjung Harapan until Ghana in the west coastal Africa. Until today, many theories on the origin of boating and existence of outrigger in the Malay archipelago have been presented. Based on archeological theory, the origin of boat making and culture in the Malay archipelago as water transportation started in Neolithic era. During that era, the boat was made of wood which resembled a canoe and it was known as dugboat or *boomstamkano* (Pramono, 2005:103).

Through the evolution of time, especially when the Malay archipelago entered the Bronze Age and the rise of trading in the Malay archipelago in the early 7th century, outrigger had been installed by the side of the canoe to upgrade its ability and later this attachment was used to name the boat, i.e. *outrigger-kano*. The finding of wooden oar and boat in Kampung Sungai Lang, Selangor, Malaysia during the 5th century has answered the question on when a wooden boat was first used (Peacock, 1965). However, it does not clearly tell us the origin and structure of this outrigger. It only gives us the general view of the boat. Thus, it can be concluded that this theory does not help to explain the origin of boat and outrigger in the Malay archipelago and it has been debated by scholars until today. To today's historians, the difficulty to find the answer has becoming more complex when the culture of boat and outrigger becomes the identity of many sailors in the Malay archipelago, be it in Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia (Sabah), even though the names and designs differ from each other.

The first arising question that needs to be addressed here is the origin of the boat and outrigger in Southeast Asia. Do these boats and outriggers come from the Malay archipelago or originate from outside Southeast Asia such as Europe, Africa, and Persian, India or China (Yunan and Taiwan) and other world civilizations? There are theories and views on this matter. According to the Malay archipelago prehistoric theory, the Indonesian historians believe that boats and outriggers originate from the Malay archipelago ancestors and not from Yunan and Taiwan (Indochina). Based on their archeological research, they found the existence of people in the Malay archipelago who practiced *bahari* culture due to the findings of sailboat paintings on cave walls in Pulau Muna, Seram and Arguni in Indonesia which age is estimated to be around 10,000 BC even before the Austronesian migration (Lapian, 2008).

This claim is strongly supported by prehistoric evidence of the Aborigines in Australia, which had lived in that continent around 25,000 BC. The evidence shows similarity in the pre-historical evidence found in the Malay archipelago, mainly in Indonesia. In other words, the ancestors in the Malay archipelago had long ago interacted with the Aborigines in Australia through *bahari* medium or sailing. According to this theory, the migration of the Austronesians to Oceania islands in 2,000 BC was actually referred to the *homo sapiens* who came from Sunda in the Malay archipelago during the ice age (10,000 – 8,000 BC). There is archeological evidence showing the Malay archipelago's sailors had traveled until Madagascar even before century. Although there are archeological evidence of 10,000 years old sailboat paintings on the cave walls in Pulau Muna, Seram and Arguni in Indonesia, the Indonesian historians still fail to confirm that the paintings were actually from a type of boat and outrigger (Lapian, 2009).

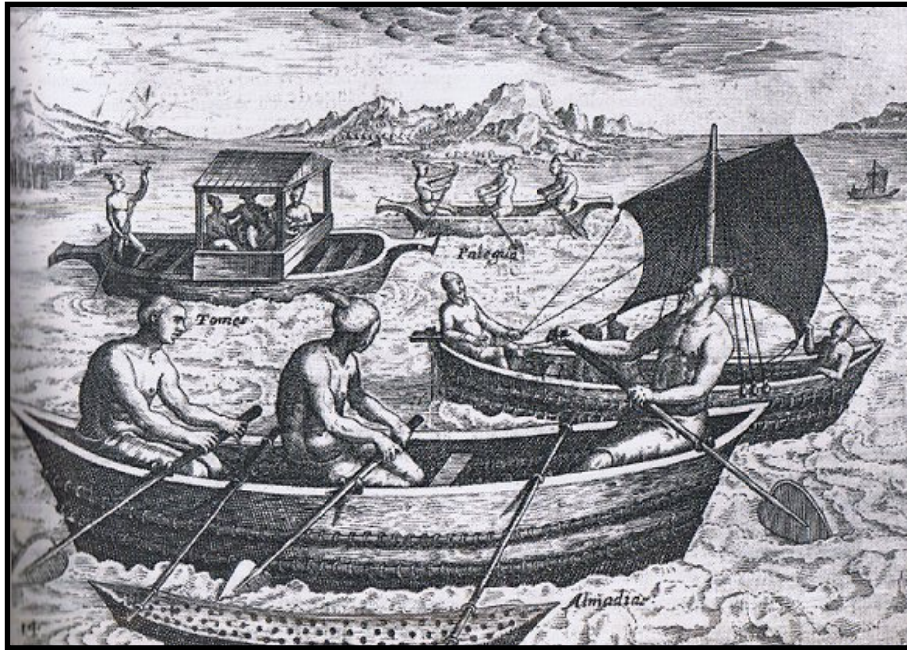
According to the traditional origin of boats proposed by J. Hornell (1946), the outrigger found in the Malay archipelago was originated from Southeast Asia and it cannot be found elsewhere in this world. Also, Adrian Horridge (1981) hypothesizes that the outrigger culture belongs to Indonesians. Yet, these hypotheses cannot be used to explain the origin of outrigger because they do not take into account the maritime and existence of other outrigger in other countries in Southeast Asia and they are simply generalizing. Moreover, the hypothesis on the outrigger's origin from India cannot also be used, even though there is evidence of its making and culture there which is known as *palegua* and *tomes* during the 6th until 4th centuries of BC. According to Sean MacGrail as follows:

A longboat found in the bed of the river Kelani near Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1952 and now in the National Museum in Colombo has recently been dated by radiocarbon assay to 2,300 – 100 BP, that is to the sixth to fourth centuries BC. This boat has several paired holes near the top of the sides which may be where a single outrigger was fitted (MacGrail, 2001:226).

Since there has been no record showing that Indian travelers and traders are responsible to introduce the making of this outrigger to the people of the Malay archipelago, the hypothesis is invalid. Moreover, the meeting of Indian and the Malay archipelago cultures through trading as well as religion activities (Hindu-Buddha) was only taken place in the early century and this contradicts with the history of outrigger existence which happened earlier than that date. Some historians try to relate the existence of outrigger in the islands of the Malay archipelago with the migration theory of the African and Austronesia people even before century (Lapian,

2008 and 2009). These archeological evidence shows that the Africans (Phoenicians) had migrated to the Malay archipelago during the ice age – thousands of years ago when the mainland and the Malay archipelago were still attached as a big land and they were also said to have settled in north Australia. Nevertheless, there is no evidence showing that the Africans had used water transportation. They were said to be using land because the mainland and Southeast Asia at that time were still attached.

Figure 6: Illustration of Outrigger in India



Source: Sean Macgrail. *Boats of the World from the Stone Age to Medieval Times*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 267.

Apart from the above theories, the migration or wave theory, which was proposed by Peter Bellwood (1985) and Robert Blust (1999), states that outrigger originates from Yunan and Taiwan. However, this theory is more anthropologic and linguistic in nature. Therefore, it cannot be used as evidence. The word “Austronesia” used by Peter Bellwood and Robert Blust does not refer to an ethnic but to a state where Austronesia Language was spoken by its people of Taiwan, the Malay archipelago (including Philippines), Micronesia, Melanesia, Polynesia, and Madagascar. In reality,

“Austronesia” means “Southern Islands” and it is originated from *Latin* word, *Australis*, which means “south” and in Greek, it is called *nesos*, which means “island” (Lapian, 2008).

According to migration theory, there were two phases of the Austronesian’s migration to Oceania islands, namely *first*, from the mainland Asia (Yunan) in 10,000 – 6,000 BC during the ice age or Pre-Austronesia and from Taiwan in 5,000 – 2,500 BC during the melting of ice, which had separated the Oceania islands with the mainland Asia, heading towards Oceania and Pacific islands; *second*, or also known as the second wave, the Philippines (Luzon) and met the early settlers of Philippines, i.e. Australo-Melanesian, who were said to have lived in Luzon in 23,000 BC. From Luzon, they sailed to other islands in the Philippines, Sulawesi, Borneo, Maluku and Java around 2,000 BC. From Maluku, the sailors traveled to other islands in Melanesia and Micronesia mainly to Sumatra and Malaya, which were not yet inhabited by humans at that time in 1,200 BC (Kanumoyoso *et al.* eds., 2009).

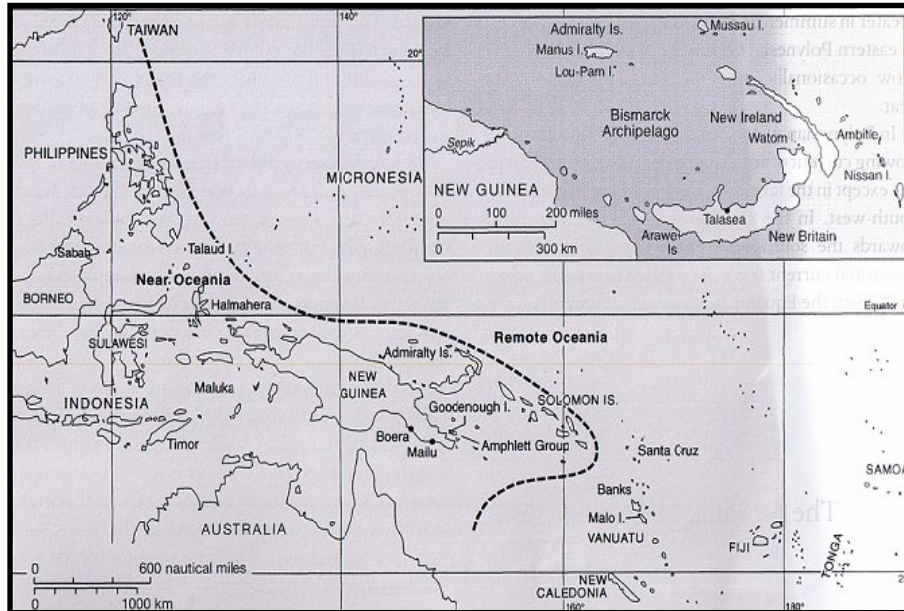
During their journey from Melanesia and Micronesia, they were said to have arrived in Polynesia islands such as Easter Island (300 M), Hawaii (400 M) and New Zealand (800 M) in 1,000 BC. During their sailing to Indian Sea, they were said to have arrived in Madagascar and Africa in year 200 M. Although Peter Bellwood and Robert Blust’s migration theory is significant in tracking down the early origin of the history and culture of outrigger in the Malay Archipelago, the use of “Austronesian people”, which they said to originate from Taiwan, is not relevant to be used as the basis in the overall conclusion of the outrigger’s origin.

They merely used this term to show comprehensively the same speaker of the same geographical area from the linguistic perspective. From the maritime perspective, it is inaccurate to regard everyone in Oceania Islands, Southeast Asia islands, Madagascar and Africa as *Austronesians*. Even though it is undisputable that migrated people are great sailors in Pacific Ocean and they are far better than the Vikings in Europe as well as have high civilization (land civilization) in the making and sailing of boats and ships, still there are no historical or archeological records showing that they had used outrigger to migrate from Taiwan to Oceania Islands. Instead, they had used sailing log raft or junk to sail (MacGrail, 2001:351).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the early migration of the Taiwanese to Oceania Islands after the ice age was done with sailing log raft or junk because they had existed in the maritime history even before this ethnic migrated to the islands again. To ensure that this review has achieved its objective, Peter Bellwood and Robert Blust’s use of Austronesian people

in the migration theory should not be highlighted for the time being in order to avoid confusion. As an alternative, the theory should use state or territories in Oceania Islands to represent the ethnics which were divided into four, namely the Australasia, Melanesia (black island), Micronesia (small island) and Polynesia (many islands).

Map 2: Austronesia Migration to Oceania Islands

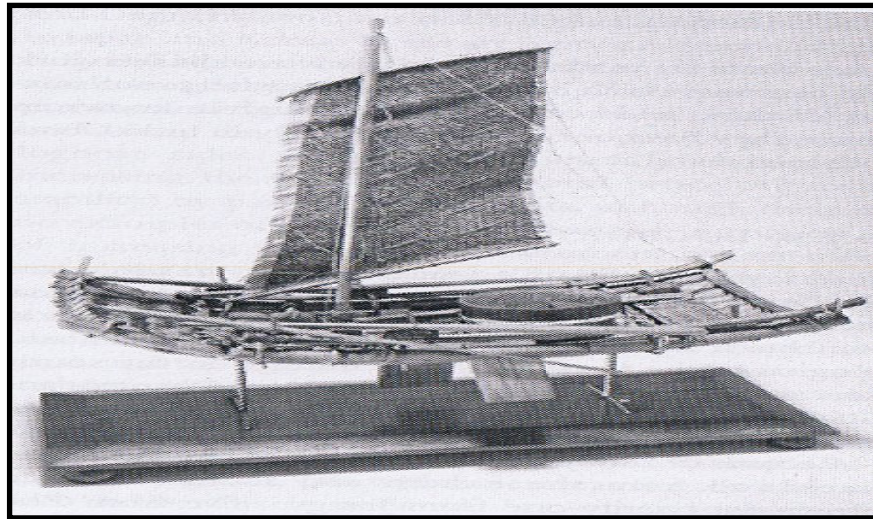


Source : Sean Macgrail. *Boats of the World from the Stone Age to Medieval Times*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 313.

The second wave proposed by Peter Bellwood and Robert Blust shows that the final destination of these migrated people, who originated from Taiwan, towards the end of BC, is Oceania Islands in Pacific Ocean. Starting from this unclear theory of defining the history and origin of outrigger in the Malay Archipelago, a review on this matter should be done because the history of boats and outriggers' origin is not inherited and brought in by travelers from Taiwan as proposed by Peter Bellwood and Robert Blust, neither it is brought by traders and sailors from Europe, Persian, India, Africa and China. Its history was created by the people of Austronesia (Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia) who came from the Oceania Islands (Southern Islands) in Pacific Ocean and these people were originally come from Taiwan.

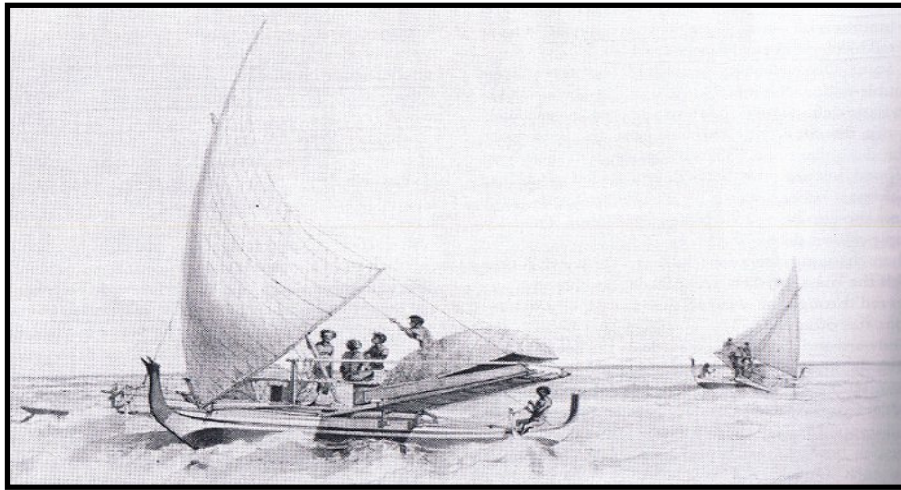
Due to time evolution, these people are no longer known as the Taiwanese. They formed new ethnic according to the territory they lived in, which is totally different from their ancestors in Taiwan. This statement is proposed after a detailed review on the history of migrated people from Taiwan to Oceania Islands, the history of the making and sailing used in Taiwan, as well as the comparison done by scholars such as A.B. Lewis (1932), J. Hornell (1964), Adrian Horridge (1978), G. Irwin (1992), and Sean MacGrail (2001) on other world maritime civilizations are done. This proposal is further supported by many excavations, petroglyphs, British Museum collections, linguistics evidence and early report of European travelers and sailors such as Dampier, Cook, Magellan, del Cano's and others during their voyage on Pacific Ocean in the 17th century. With the change and evolution of time, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia's sailors of Oceania Islands (Southern Islands) in Pacific Ocean began the modification of sailing log raft or wooden boat by installing a single or two outriggers at the side top of their boat for various reasons, i.e. for the suitability of the coastal area and balancing purposes, so that they can travel safely from one territory to another (Kanumoyoso *et al.* eds., 2009). It is very clear that the people who migrated from Taiwan to this island had started a boating culture and passage in Pacific and Indian Oceans as mentioned by Irwin (1992) as voyaging corridor.

Figure 7: Illustration of *Sailing Log Raft*



Source: Sean Macgrail. *Boats of the World from the Stone Age to Medieval Times*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 351.

Figure 8: Illustration of Outrigger using Sail



Source: Sean Macgrail, *Boats of the World from the Stone Age to Medieval Times*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 328

CONCLUSION

Many discussions by the Western scholars on the history of traditional boats in the Malay archipelago focus on one specific territory or country. Apparently, there has been no effort in doing a total review on these discussions. Vague facts on the prehistoric history of maritime in the Malay archipelago, Pacific and Indian oceans as well as the blind passion of the countries in Southeast Asia in promoting their great historical *bahari* culture have made it difficult for us to solve the question on the actual origin of boats and outriggers that are still being used and become a proud maritime heritage of some countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Oceania Islands.

Surprisingly, the “open” review and write up of the maritime history in the Malay archipelago, Indian and Pacific oceans by scholars have indeed given us useful information on the history of the outrigger’s origin and culture in the Malay archipelago. However, a review from the prehistoric realism needed to be done on the early theory and it should not be based solely on the description of the facts of modern history. A collective acceptance by scholars on migration theory of the Austronesians from Southeast Asia to Oceania islands and the Malay archipelago has unsolved the complexity of the early theory and history as well as culture of outrigger in the Malay archipelago. The hypotheses and theories on the origin of outrigger are finally refined.

Based on early prehistoric evidence and relevant sources, reviews and write ups have concluded that the tradition of outrigger is indeed belong to the sailors of Southeast Asia and Oceania Islands. It is also concluded that the origin and technology of these boats and outriggers in the Malay archipelago come from the new ethnic formed in Oceania Islands, namely the Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia, who are different from their ancestors in Taiwan. Many of the designs and structures of this type of boat are influenced by the surrounding factors of Oceania Islands.

It is believed that the spread usage of this type of boat in the Malay archipelago territories in the early and end of the 1st century started when the Melanesia's traders and sailors of Solomon and surrounding islands sailed and expanded their influence to the Malay archipelago until Indian ocean, i.e. Madagascar and Africa in the early century. Their influence has established openings of new settlements, mainly in Sumatra and Java which have become their main stop before they sailed to Indian ocean and this eventually made them the ancestors for the Malay archipelago's people when they set up famous ancient governments such as Srivijaya in Sumatera and Majapahit in Java.

Another interesting point about this cultural history of outrigger is that the traditional making and culture of this type of boat are famously known in the Malay archipelago's territories and not in its birth place that is Oceania Islands. This can be seen in the trading development among Europe, West Asia, India, Funan and China which have used the Malay archipelago's sea as the trading road or passage. The establishment of various governments and *enterport* along the trading passage had marginalized the importance of Oceania's territories and islands as the trading road to connect west and east.

However, the Malay archipelago's physical structure and its growth as the trading centre and port for the West-East merchants in the early century until middle 18th century has enabled the use of boats and outriggers, and contributed to the civilization in the Malay archipelago. This outrigger heritage and culture should be preserved and regarded as "world heritage" for countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in order to avoid it from getting lost in the rapid development of water transportation as well as for the benefits of future generation.

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