Maritime New Century: The Re-Rise of the Spice Route and the Re-establishment of the Straits of Malacca in Regional Trade in Indonesia

Widya Nugraha
{widya.nugraha@kasn.go.id}

Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara, Indonesia

Abstract. As one of the spice-producing centers in the past, Indonesia has a vital position in the global commodity trade wheel, which is still very much considered today. In addition, the existence of the Malacca Strait as one of the main routes of international trade seems to have a significant impact, especially in increasing economic growth. The start of a new maritime era marked by the generation of the ancient silk route by the People's Republic of China opened opportunities for Indonesia to become a part of the global trade arena again. This article aims to find out 1) the Potential for the revival of the spice pathway, 2) The Potential for collective utilization of the Malacca Strait for the surrounding countries, and 3) the Alleviation of overlapping in the management of trading areas. The method used in this paper is qualitative, with source analysis and a historical and international relations approach.

Keywords: Spice producing center; straits of malacca; ancient silk road

1 Introduction

For approximately two millennia, the Malacca Strait and the surrounding areas have become a trade route for various commodities, such as raw materials, to local diversity that is not found in other areas. With the existence of this route, and the easy availability of commodity materials that sell well in the world market, significant developments for civilization took place, from cultural exchange and political influence to the spread of religion [1].

As the times progressed, until before the start of the century of European exploration, various powers took turns controlling the region. From the Malay Kingdom[2], the Sriwijaya Kingdom, the Chola Kingdom, the Dharmasraya Malay Kingdom, and the Majapahit Kingdom to the Malacca Sultanate. Due to its strategic location and an axis of power already standing, a more significant force also participated in controlling the route. These forces ultimately made the Malacca Strait one of the centers of the Mandala, which in its concept is explained as a metaphor for the center of the Solar System, which in Southeast Asian mythology is called the macrocosm[3]. With its successors, the Chinese Empire continued to set its sights on the route so that its influence in the region was strengthened, and the rulers of the area were subservient [4].

The importance of the Chinese Empire for centuries was to secure the silk trade route from West Asia to Europe. Not only through the land silk route that divides Central Asia to the Middle East, but the sea route from the South China Sea through the Malacca Strait route to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea is also very important to be safe from all threats [5]. After the period

SHIMBA 2022, September 18-20, Tanjung Pinang, Indonesia

DOI 10.4108/eai.18-9-2022.2326036

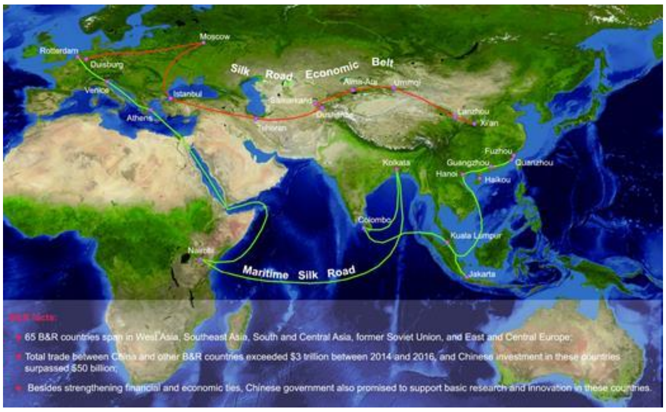
of the Empire in China ended, the route was entirely under the influence of the great European Colonial powers who controlled the surrounding areas. Moreover, entering the late 20th century, after the European colonial powers declined one by one, the great forces of China under the banner of the People's Republic of China began to pioneer and sought the revival of the ancient sea silk road, which passed through the South China Sea, to the Indian Ocean, through Malacca Strait. Therefore, the resurrection of the old silk route, which also influenced the revival of the ancient spice route, is essential for the areas it passes, especially areas in the Malacca Strait, such as the islands in the Riau Archipelago Province and the east coast of the island of Sumatra.

With this background, this paper aims to enrich the point of view of the importance of the spice route in global trade. The most significant entry point for Indonesia is the Malacca Strait. The writing of this paper is also expected to explain the importance of the Malacca strait for the revival of the spice route and the new role of the course. as a trade liaison throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

2 Result and Discussion

2.1 Spice Path Revival Potential

The revival of the spice route today cannot be separated from the extensive program of revitalizing the ancient silk route area initiated by the PRC through the One Belt One Road (OBOR) program and other buffer programs in the Belt Road Initiative (BRI). As the recipient of the second largest BRI project development based on 2021 data[6], Indonesia, which since the days of the Dutch East Indies has been the world's spice-producing center, has the opportunity to revitalize the spice route which was once famous for contributing to the colonial prosperity of the Dutch East Indies.

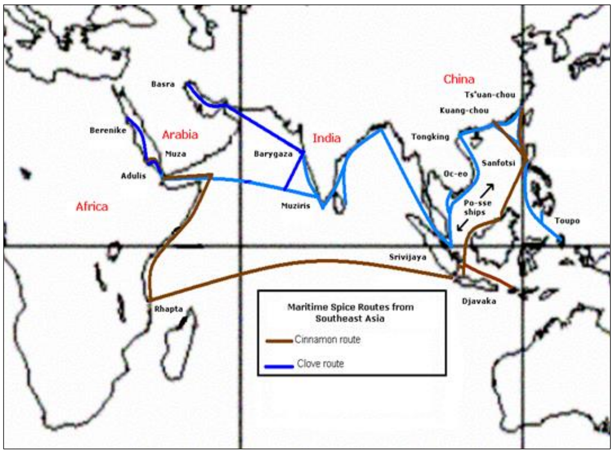


Picture 1. Path Map One Belt One Road (OBOR) (source: National Science Review, Volume 4, Issue 4, July 2017, Pages 652–657, https://doi.org/10.1093/nsr/nwx096)

The long-established Maritime Silk Road encompasses many elements and generally refers to China-centred transportation and trade routes between Asia, Africa, and Europe by sea and land. The ancient Maritime Silk Road mainly facilitated the trade of silk, porcelain, and spices between regions. Still, it significantly reduced cultural exchange and social interaction between different areas of the world, especially in historical contexts. The South China Sea Ring is the center of the maritime Silk Road region from southern and southwest China to Southeast Asia. Through a complex process of inter-ethnic social interaction and communication, the area has developed a cultural landscape in which all parties depend on each other [7].

In the formation of the cultural landscape, the meeting between the maritime silk route and the spice route took place. In the cultural landscape in the Straits of Malacca, especially in the center of the Malacca sultanate, this is a common occurrence. Anthony D King's opinion about the Port of Malacca landscape after being controlled by Europeans is that "the first characteristic of the colonial city is the product of a situation of contact between at least two different cultures"[8]. This commercial port city came under the control of three different European powers: first the Portuguese in 1511, then the Dutch in 1641, and finally the British (first temporarily in 1795, then from 1824 as part of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty, under which the city it was exchanged for Bengkulu in Sumatra). Malacca continued to be an important place of symbolic, cultural, and material exchange under European colonial control. Within the city were extended sites reused with each new ruling group; In the community, there is also an exchange of language, culture, and religion that creates a distinctive ethnic and regional identity. Despite the shift in the European economy away from the spice trade, the city retained a symbolic value beyond its usefulness as an economic asset to its colonial rulers.

With the crossing and overlapping civilizations of the two trade routes between the maritime silk route and the spice route, the development of the region in it developed rapidly enough to invite colonial powers to come and dominate. Until the end of the 19th century, the trade route was quite busy being used by the British, Dutch, and French, who wanted to trade or control the area along the coast of South China to India. Entering the period of independence of Asian nations after World War II, the spice route began to shrink until it lost contact with the maritime silk route, which turned into an international trade route.



Picture 2. The Maritime Silk Road Intersection with the Spice Route in the South China Sea (source: http://www.silkroutes.net/SilkSpiceIncenseRoutes.htm)

The division of entities around the Malacca Strait after the independence of the Asian nations, especially the independence of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, caused the spice route to be divided so that it could not significantly follow the flow of world trade routes that pass through the Malacca Strait. In addition, the spice commodities that thrive in the

Archipelago Archipelago are less able to be absorbed and transported on international trade routes. Therefore, the generation of the Maritime Silk Road in the One Belt One Road program initiated by the People's Republic of China (PRC) triggered a revival of the spice route and all its Potential.

2.2 Effects of the OBOR Initiative

In 2013, after he was appointed President of the People's Republic of China, during his first foreign visit, Xi Jinping announced in two different speeches in Kazakhstan and then Indonesia about the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road", which later called One Belt One Road or Belt and Road. The term Belt refers to a series of roads, pipelines, railroads, and other infrastructure that pass through Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East to Europe. At the same time, the road refers to a series of ports and maritime trade routes that pass through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to the Middle East, the east coast of Africa, and so on to Europe. Indonesia is one of the countries traversed by the "Road" [9].

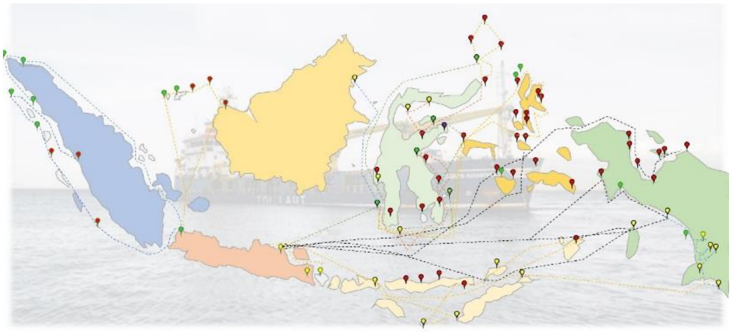
The OBOR initiative is built on history, experience, and practice. Historically, the Silk Road was a trade route that had existed for thousands of years, and China has taken the initiative to revive this route. As an experience, the values of "peace and cooperation, openness and inclusion, mutual learning and mutual benefit" have been ingrained along the Silk Road from generation to generation. They have promoted the prosperity and development of countries on this path. In particular, the international and domestic conditions of countries in orbit are increasingly complex, and global economic growth is still weak. Therefore, the People's Republic of China took the initiative to rebuild the Silk Road to aim that countries along the route could cooperate for mutual benefits in facing international economic, social, and political challenges [10].

The main objectives of OBOR fall under the "four basic concepts": peace, cooperation, development, and mutual benefit. The development strategy launched by the Chinese Government aims to promote economic cooperation between countries along the OBOR roadmap to promote free economic mobility, efficient allocation of resources, and promote market integration and create a regional economic cooperation framework that can benefit the global economy. Furthermore, the OBOR initiative is said to be able to revive the flow of capital, goods, and services from Asia to the rest of the world by involving multinational companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) [11].

Indonesia is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that is part of the land or sea route of the OBOR initiative launched by China. Since 2013, Indonesia had received more attention from the People's Republic of China in the project, mainly when Xi Jinping chose Indonesia to launch the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" concept. According to a 2017 Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, the People's Republic of China provided non-financial direct investment under the OBOR route. It contributed US$14.36 billion, most of which was invested in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Laos, Pakistan, Vietnam, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Cambodia. This amount is equivalent to 12% of China's total investment in 2017. However, compared to Pakistan and Malaysia, Indonesian investment was still relatively low in that year [12]. Over time, the number of OBOR investments in Indonesia has increased to US$3 billion in 2022[13].

2.3 Construction of the Sea Highway and Revitalization of the Spice Line Culture

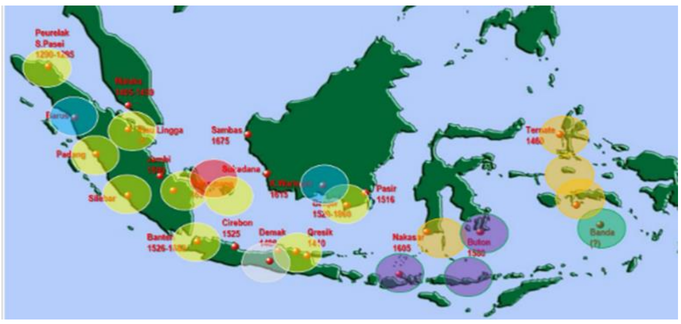
With such a large flow of investment funds from the OBOR initiative, it seems to spur the large-scale maritime development that the Government has launched during the leadership of President Joko Widodo. One of them is the construction of the sea highway, which was built based on the spice export route during the Dutch East Indies era, which connected the eastern region with the western part.



Picture 3. Sea Highway construction network in 2022
source: https://hubla.dephub.go.id/home/information-prosedur-pelayan/11156/tahun-2022-kemenhub-tetapan-34-rute-tol-laut

The idea of the sea highway development, rolling out in 2014, was motivated by the gap in infrastructure development, causing different prices between the islands of Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and Papua[14] and mainly related to logistics distribution and outreach to raw material centers, concentrated primarily in the eastern part of Indonesia. With the emergence of the sea highway construction, the spice route's revitalization as a past international trade route will be realized. Besides that, it will also reconnect the trade chain between the spice route in the Indonesian archipelago and the maritime silk route in the Malacca Strait.

Apart from economic development and infrastructure, the revitalization of the spice route is also supported by the preservation of cultural heritage and historical sites through the "Spice Route Cultural Goods" program initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. In addition to collecting archaeological traces related to the spice trade along the Indonesian sea coast, the program also preserves the culture resulting from trade interactions along the spice trade routes in Indonesia [15].



Picture 4. Archaeological traces of trade along the spice route

As a leading area and included in the center of spice production, the Riau Islands region is very strategic in reconnecting the spice route with the maritime silk route. The position of the Riau Islands, one of the producers of gambier in Indonesia, makes it very potential. Although not the main center of gambier production like West Sumatra. Gambir, produced by the Riau Islands, supports Indonesia's exports to several countries, such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, France, and Switzerland. Gambir is also recorded in the long history of the Riau Archipelago as a commodity and the glue of relations with other islands [16]. Thus, the generation of spice routes and reconnection to international trade routes that coincide in the Malacca Strait is significant for the sustainability of the economy in the surrounding area. Moreover, using the course for the common interest will have a considerable impact. Therefore the sustainable development of the revitalization of the spice route will continue to be encouraged for mutual prosperity.

Picture 5. Pepper producing center in the Java Sea to the Strait of Malacca.
Source: S.C. Wibisono, in webinar material on processing spice trail archives, 4 December 2020.
National Archaeological Research Center

2.4 Utilization of the Malacca Strait for surrounding countries

The areas adjacent to the Malacca Strait have now become Free Trade Zone (FTZ) areas, especially Indonesian areas, such as Bintan, Batam, Tanjung Pinang, and Karimun. Moreover, the site can be seen as developing the sector and the economy. This section will explain the use of these areas for Indonesia and several other regions, which are also the basis for the benefits of Malaysia and Singapore.

Indonesia

The development of a free trade area in Indonesia began in 1970 when the central Government designated the Sabang area as the first free trade area in Indonesia based on Law Number 4 of 1970 concerning the Free Trade Area and Free Port of Sabang. The main reason why Sabang is designated as a free trade area is that since the Dutch era, Sabang has been a maritime transit area and an international sea route from Southeast Asia to various parts of the world. However, in the end, the Sabang Free Trade Area did not develop as expected because the APBN budget allocation did not support the development of government infrastructure and facilities. So, in 1985, the Government revoked the status of a free trade area through Law Number 10 concerning the Revocation of the Free Trade Area and Free Port of Sabang.

Batam Agency. The Indonesian Government is also considering the designation of Batam Island as a free trade zone because Batam is also located on international shipping lanes. During the reign of President Suharto, the central Government provided funds for infrastructure development in Batam through the Agency, which became known as Batam Island Industrial Development Agency, now known as the Batam Island Industrial Development Agency. Prof. BJ Habibie led Batam's authority at that time. At the same time, the Government is also developing the North Bintan area within the Bintan Regency area as an integrated area. Along with the times and political changes, especially after the Indonesian Government implemented reforms, fundamental changes have occurred in the free trade area. While the whole of Indonesia is experiencing the worst investment climate in Indonesia's history, it has made the crisis affect the free trade area [17].

Picture 6. Free Trade Area and Free Port.
Source: FTZ to KEK Riau Islands Province 2020

In 2000, the Government issued Law no. 37 of 2000, which redefined Sabang as a free trade area and free port. Then, based on Law 37 of 2000, the Government enacted Law 44 of 2007 on Free Trade Areas and Free Ports after making several changes. With the issuance of Law Number 44 of 2007 concerning Free Trade Areas, the Government announced the implementing regulations are Government Regulation Number 46 of 2007 for Batam Free Trade Areas, Number 47 of 2007 for Bintan Free Trade Areas, and Number 48 for Karimun Free Trade Areas and Regulations Technical Government Regulation Number 02 of 2009 and Regulation of the Minister of Finance Number 45, 46 and 47 regarding tax, excise and customs administration.

Following the promulgation of Government Regulation 47 of 2007 concerning the Bintan Free Trade Area, Presidential Regulation Number 10 of 2008 concerning Bintan and the Council of the Free Trade Port Area was also issued. The regional council established a Bintan free trade area based on the presidential decree. A free port management authority was established with the presidential provisions for the Bintan free trade zone and number 01 of 2008 regarding the Bintan free trade zone and free trade.

In Government Regulation Number 41 of 2017, regarding the amendment to Government Regulation Number 47 of 2007 concerning the Bintan Free Trade Area and Free Port, it is stated that the Free Trade Zone and Free Trade Area of the Bintan port include part of the Galang Batang Industrial Estate, the Lobam Island Marine Industrial Estate, and part of the Tanjungpinang City Area, including the Senggarang Industrial Estate and Dompak Darat. The development of the Bintan Free Zone and Free Port is challenging for the Regional Government to formulate strategic policies to transform the regional economy, attract foreign investment, and look at the different issues in the free trade zone and the free port in Bintan. Bintan Island is a potential area for investment. Government Regulation Number 41 of 2017 concerning Amendments to Government Regulation 47 of 2007 concerning the Free Trade Area of Bintan and Freeport has not yet been implemented. Complete show in Bintan. Many investors still have not invested in the free trade area.

Malaysia

Malaysia, the most rapidly industrialized nation in the subregion, has had very high economic growth since its independence in 1957. During independence, Malaysia was an agrarian economy with a heavy dependence on rubber and tin exports and trade businesses centered on free trade around the ports of Singapore, Penang, and Malacca. Given the risks associated with over-reliance on commodity trade, the Government began to diversify its economic base by promoting manufacturing with Special Economic Zones as the core of its national development strategy. In general, three major phases of the industrial process can be identified in Malaysia in the evolutionary changes in the economic zone.

Immediately after independence, Malaysia began industrialization through import substitution [18]. During the first development phase (1957-1970), specific industries were promoted mainly by protecting tariffs and quotas and building basic infrastructure for the domestic market. In 1958, the Pioneer Industry Regulation was introduced, which allowed companies granted pioneer status to enjoy tax benefits, including customs protection. Unlike in Indonesia, establishing business parks (GEZs) in Malaysia is a critical component of the industrialization strategy in the first growth stage. The 1960s saw an increase in the number of pioneering import substitution firms. Still, widespread unemployment and social unrest in the late 1960s forced the Government to shift its development plan from growth to growth with social restructuring and regional equity [19].

Components for trade-based growth and job creation to accelerate economic growth in the second phase (1971-1990), the import substitution regime was complemented by export-oriented policies in specific sectors, creating Economic Potential Zones (EPZs), which attract labor-intensive assembly-line activities from imports. To achieve the goal of regional equity, the Government establishes industrial estates in underdeveloped areas. Kedah was the only underdeveloped state to have industrial estates in 1971. However, by the end of 1980, 20 of the 76 industrial estates were in the economically backward states of Kedah, Kelantan, Pahang, Sabah, Sarawak, and Terengganu. 1981–1985, Malaysian Government 1981). After the 1985

Plaza deal, a wave of FDI occurred in the second half of the 1980s from Japan and the newly industrialized countries of Asia, increasing competition to attract foreign investors. This has led to a reorientation of policies favoring growth with competitiveness and efficiency.

Towards that goal, in the late 1980s, private investment was utilized to establish economic zones. Subsequently, to improve logistical efficiency, free commercial zones (FCZs) of the FTZ variety were introduced with the EPZ, which was initiated in 1971. In addition, the approach to EPZ has also changed. For the first 15 years, the Government separated EPZ from the rest of the economy, where it continued to follow an import substitution regime. In 1987, the country adopted its first Industrial Master Plan and sought to integrate EPZs with other economies by facilitating the backward linkage of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) with other economies.

In 1991, Malaysia launched Vision 2020, initiating the third phase of economic development to drive a structural shift from low to high-value-added activities through information and knowledge-driven growth along with equity. This led to the creation of high-tech parks and the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) modeled after Silicon Valley. Efforts to improve competitiveness were intensified after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. In 2006, the Malaysian Government announced five regional economic corridors to unlock regional Potential through micro-planning and to build competitive cities by integrating economic zones into urban planning. With a drive to promote a high-productivity society supported by infrastructure, industrial investment, and innovation, a high-density integrated cluster development approach was adopted in the 10th Malaysia Plan 2011–2015 (Government of Malaysia 2011).

Based on the principle of complete decentralization set out in the National Physical Plan-2 (Government of Malaysia 2010), this approach has dominated Malaysia's broader industrial strategy since then [20]. According to Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA) statistics, Malaysia has created more than 600 different economic zones during the three phases of economic development. Types (MIDA), of which 247 are critical facilities developed by various government agencies such as state economic development companies (SEDCs), regional development authorities (RDA), port authorities, and municipalities [21].

Singapore

For Singapore, the Singapore Malacca Strait also has enormous strategic significance, including (i) Geographical and natural resource limitations that force Singapore to develop its city-state by trading in goods and services, as well as the availability of information for all who pass through the Singapore Malacca Strait; (ii) The strength of the Port of Singapore Authority, which competes with the Hong Kong port and the port of Rotterdam [22]. (iii) The flow of world trade offered by the Singapore Malacca Strait is balanced with Singapore's readiness and foresight in capturing every business opportunity that passes through it. Making this city-state exists as the most substantial economic power in ASEAN [23]. Its position is the most critical transportation route in Asia and benefits from the increasingly congested trade and shipping lanes in the Singapore Strait of Malacca.

2.5 Settlement of Overlapping Trade Zones in the Straits of Malacca

The narrow, shallow, tortuous, and congested Straits of Malacca make the strait even more limited for giant oil tankers to pass through, increasing in size, not decreasing in number. This strait has many sections with a depth of fewer than 23 meters. This shallow depth is dangerous for large ships with a tonnage exceeding 19 meters. Currents in the Strait of Malacca can also reach 3 miles at varying speeds [24]. In the form, a collision is also a common possibility that occurs in that place. This accident caused losses for ship owners but also caused catastrophic marine pollution, which impacted the preservation of the marine environment and the lives of people in coastal countries around the strait.

The narrowing of the strait also affects the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundaries. Where the determination of maritime boundaries is not always easy, such as in the exclusive economic zone between Indonesia and Malaysia located in the Malacca Strait, it is clear that delimitation remains unresolved. The cause of this EEZ limit is still undetermined due to overlapping claims. These overlapping claims are rooted in the bilateral and tripartite agreements Indonesia signed with its neighbors in 1969 regarding the continental shelf and territorial sea. This was intended to establish customary law before the 1982 ratification of UNCLOS [25].

Regulations related to the sea were also developed, and with the ratification of UNCLOS in 1982, it was necessary to adjust the EEZ because this sea area is new. This is the leading cause of the emergence of overlapping regions. Indonesia claims the middle line between Indonesia (Sumatra) and the Malaysian peninsula as the EEZ boundary line. Meanwhile, Malaysia unilaterally believes that the boundary of the continental shelf that has been completed previously is also the boundary of its exclusive economic zone in the Malacca Strait. The legal basis for Indonesia's lawsuit is Article 3 (2) of Law no. May 1983 on the EEZ. The legal basis for Malaysia is Article 3 (2) of Law 311 of the Malaysian Special Economic Zone Law 1984. Demarcation can be carried out to overcome the problem of overlapping special economic zones between Indonesia and Malaysia. The delimitation of maritime boundaries between countries is the determination of territorial boundaries or power between one country and other (neighboring) countries at sea [26].

In UNCLOS 1982, the EEZ is regulated in Chapter V, especially in Article 74 paragraph (1), which is defined as the determination of the EEZ boundary between countries whose coasts are opposite or bordering. Paragraph 1 reads: "The delimitation of the exclusive economic zone between States with opposite or adjacent coasts must be carried out by agreement based on international law, as provided in paragraph 1. Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, to reach a fair settlement." Indonesia, based on Article 3 of Law no. 5 of 1983, states that "if Indonesia's EEZ overlaps with the EEZ of another country whose coast is opposite or bordering Indonesia, then the EEZ boundary between Indonesia and that country is determined by agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and the country concerned."

Litigation. Malacca is a central line or a center line. Furthermore, Malaysia is based on Act 311 of Malaysia's EEZ Act 1984, where in Part 2 Paragraph 3 (2) of this Law it is regulated regarding the determination of the boundaries of the EEZ, namely "if there is an agreement in the matter between Malaysia and a State whose coasts are opposite or adjacent, then matters concerning the delimitation of the EEZ will be resolved by the provisions of the agreement. However, if you look at the agreement signed by Indonesia and the Philippines on the EEZ boundary, the determination of the boundary is done with understanding and friendliness. Therefore, this can be used as a reference to complete the conclusion of the Indonesia- Malaysia EEZ demarcation line in the Malacca Strait[27].

There is no clear EEZ delineation between Indonesia and Malaysia. Therefore a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Government of Malaysia regarding general guidelines for fisherman management. This Memorandum of Understanding is intended to establish procedures for agreement on fishing activities between the two parties, with particular emphasis on ensuring the welfare of fishermen on both sides.

3 Conclusion

The revitalization of the Spice Route cannot be separated from the resurrection of the Ancient Silk Road, which stretches along the Indian Ocean to the North Natuna Sea. With the significant investments in the countries it passes, every old trading center can come alive and live again. In this modern era, these routes are not only for one commodity but also for other commodities and geopolitical interests. Besides that, the revitalization of the course raises old issues, and no agreement has been set. The Malacca Strait is the central point where the Spice Route and the Silk Road and their revitalization meet. There is also an overlap between the EEZ boundaries between 3 countries, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Simultaneous use, cultural approach, and mutual tolerance in the past are possible in maintaining harmonious relations between users of trade routes in the Malacca Strait.

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