



Fig. 2 Passage to and from China.

became secondary trade and provisioning marketplaces for ships regularly putting into Cham ports prior to their entry into Guangzhou and other south China harbours.

Vietnam Coastline South China Sea Shipping Passageway

The Cham coastline's effectiveness in controlling regional piracy was intermittent; in 605 CE a Chinese general tried to forcibly deter piracy on the Cham coastline using mixed-ethnic ships and soldiers.¹ According to Chinese sources the Cham realm reacted favourably and Cham ports soon became regular stopovers servicing shipping and sailors traveling between the Straits of Melaka region and Guangzhou. At that time, the prevailing Cham capital was located at Trà Kiệu near present day Hội An, and by 758 CE the Chinese reported that the Cham state, which they mistakenly viewed as a unified polity, had also developed secondary commercial centres at Kauthara (present day Nha Trang) and Pāṇḍuraṅga (present day Phan Rang), both of which were semi-independent port-polities. At this time the Chinese began to call what they perceived to be the Cham state Huan-Wang.² According to Chinese sources, around 875 CE a new Cham dynasty came to power at Indrapura (Quảng Nam), and reference in Chinese accounts is henceforth made to Zhan Cheng, 'the Cham city' or Champapura.³

Early Cham epigraphy documents productive downstream rice agriculture centres. Scholars are currently agreed, based

on the considerable archaeological work done in the former Cham realm over the past twenty years that Champa was never a centralized single state except in the minds of the Chinese, but instead was a series of variable networked river valleys that sometimes worked as allies, and at other times were in competition.⁴ We know from archaeological and epigraphic evidence that Champa had a river valley focus to its agriculture. Politically, the late fourth century leader of a Cham riverine network centered in the Mỹ Sơn temple complex took the Indic name Bhadravarman and practiced Indic-inspired statecraft, initially drawing legitimacy from local Śaiva-Buddhist cults that emphasized the Cham king's association with Śiva Bhadrapatiśvara. Indic temples were often responsible for bringing the lands of the Cham political elites under cultivation.⁵ By the seventh and eighth centuries the Cham realm had evolved into a loose balance between its wet rice economy and its participation in the international trade. An important factor necessitating this balance was that the Cham coast was by then strategically located on the principal maritime route between the Śrīvijaya Melaka Straits-based realm and China, a position that allowed the Chams the opportunity to take advantage of the economic benefits offered by participation in the trade as it heightened in the Tang and Song eras (618-1279).

In the eyes of the Chinese, Champa, though important, was ultimately a region of intermediary ports, the last stopover between Śrīvijaya in the Melaka Straits and China before ships reached south China's ports of trade. In time, however, the Cham realm would become increasingly important as a source of commodities desired by the Chinese elite.⁶ A rare oblique reference to external commerce comes from eighth-century Cham inscriptions reporting two sea raids that threatened the state's local lords. A Sanskrit inscription from Nha Trang informs that in 774 CE 'ferocious, pitiless, dark skinned men born in other countries, whose food was more horrible than corpses, and who were vicious and furious, came in ships . . . took away the [temple *linga*], and set fire to the temple', thus desecrating the Po Nagar temple near Nha Trang in the Kauthara region.⁷ This was followed by a second raid by a similar group in 787 CE, when a Pāṇḍuraṅga temple to the south was burned.⁸ The desecration of these temples represented the