

**INDONESIA'S MARITIME TRANSFORMATION: FROM MARITIME HERITAGE TO SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study analyzes Indonesia's maritime transformation from its historical maritime heritage to the implementation of a sustainable Blue Economy. Employing a qualitative descriptive method through literature review, this research integrates historical and geopolitical approaches using content analysis. Primary sources include government policy documents, while secondary materials consist of historical literature, academic journal articles, and reports from international organizations. The findings reveal that the legacy of the Spice Route and the Asia-Africa maritime trade network shaped Indonesia's maritime identity, though colonialism redirected development toward a continental orientation that weakened maritime capacity. The revitalization of maritime strategies through the Global Maritime Fulcrum and Blue Economy has promoted sustainable utilization of marine resources including fisheries, marine tourism, renewable energy, and biotechnology, despite facing challenges in regulation, technology, and ecosystem conservation. These developments have enhanced Indonesia's geopolitical leverage in the Indo-Pacific region, strengthened maritime sovereignty, and supported national diplomacy. The Blue Economy framework offers substantial opportunities for Indonesia to optimize its maritime potential while maintaining environmental sustainability and supporting coastal communities' welfare.*

*Keywords: Indonesian maritime history; Nusantara maritime heritage; maritime transformation; sustainable Blue Economy; Global Maritime Fulcrum.*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic nation with over 17,504 islands and a coastline spanning 99,093 kilometers, occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan, 2020). With a maritime area of 6.4 million square kilometers representing approximately 75% of its total jurisdictional territory, the sea constitutes a vital element of national identity and strategic power (Bappenas, 2021). This geographical configuration positions Indonesia as a global maritime fulcrum with strategic roles in regional trade and geopolitics (Kusumastanto, 2019).

Historically, the Nusantara possessed a robust maritime tradition from the era of maritime kingdoms such as Sriwijaya and Majapahit through Islamic maritime sultanates that controlled the spice trade routes (Lapian, 2008). The Spice Route established Nusantara as an international trading center with ports such as Malacca and Ternate functioning as *entrepôts* connecting merchants from various civilizations (Sulistiyono, 2017). However, the Dutch colonial era transformed development orientation from maritime to terrestrial through the forced cultivation system (*Cultuurstelsel*), resulting in the marginalization of domestic maritime capacity (Ricklefs, 2008). Post-independence, development orientation remained dominated by a continental approach focusing on agriculture and land-based industries (Dick, 2002).

In the era of globalization and Indo-Pacific geopolitical dynamics in the 21st century, Indonesia faces new challenges demanding the revitalization of maritime orientation. Threats such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing causing economic losses of up to USD 20 billion annually, along with climate change impacts, urgently require Indonesia to strengthen its maritime sovereignty and governance (World Bank, 2017). The Indonesian government launched the Global Maritime Fulcrum policy in 2014 with five main pillars: maritime culture development, marine resource management, maritime infrastructure and connectivity development, maritime diplomacy, and maritime defense force development (Kemenko Kemaritiman, 2017).

Aligned with this vision, the Blue Economy concept emerged as a sustainable development paradigm emphasizing efficient utilization of marine resources while maintaining ecosystem conservation (OECD, 2019). The Blue Economy encompasses sustainable fisheries, marine tourism, marine renewable energy, and marine biotechnology sectors that potentially contribute significantly to national economic growth (World Bank, 2017). Indonesia, with the world's highest marine biodiversity, has tremendous opportunities to develop the Blue Economy as a main driver of national development (Conservation International, 2018).

Academic studies on Indonesia's maritime transformation from historical perspectives to Blue Economy implementation remain limited and tend to be partial. This gap demonstrates the need for integrative research connecting historical maritime heritage, maritime orientation changes due to colonialism, and Blue Economy concept implementation within the modern Indo-Pacific geopolitical framework. Based on this background, this research aims to: first, analyze the contribution of historical maritime heritage in shaping Indonesia's character and strategic strength; second, identify factors driving maritime orientation changes from the colonial period to the early independence period; third, examine modern maritime policy dynamics in strengthening the sea's role for national development and environmental sustainability in the 21st century.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach aimed at explaining Indonesia's maritime transformation from historical perspectives to modern policy implementation. The qualitative descriptive method was chosen for its capability to provide in-depth explanations of social phenomena, policies, and historical developments through interpretation of conceptual data, official documents, and academic literature (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2017).

The research focus is directed toward tracing relationships among Nusantara's maritime historical heritage, maritime orientation changes due to colonialism and national development policies, and Blue Economy concept implementation as a sustainable development paradigm in the contemporary era. Library research is used as a data collection technique by examining relevant scientific sources and official documents (Magdalena et al., 2021).

Research data sources include: first, primary sources comprising government policy documents such as the National Blue Economy Action Plan 2021-2045, Global Maritime Fulcrum policies, and marine regulations; second, secondary sources including maritime history books, national and international academic journal articles, and reports from international organizations such as the

World Bank, OECD, and Conservation International. Analysis techniques include content analysis with historical and geopolitical approaches to explore maritime concepts and theories, construct theoretical synthesis of Indonesian maritime policy evolution, and assess the Blue Economy's contribution to contemporary maritime transformation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Maritime Heritage and Nusantara's Maritime Identity**

The Nusantara possesses an extensive maritime heritage, evident from the glory of maritime kingdoms that dominated international trade routes. The Sriwijaya Kingdom, centered in Palembang from the 7th to 13th centuries, was a *thalassocracy* controlling the Malacca Strait and trade routes between India and China (Lapian, 2008). Beyond being a trade center, Sriwijaya also served as a center for spreading Mahayana Buddhism. Inscriptions such as Kedukan Bukit and Talang Tuo demonstrate that Sriwijaya possessed a powerful naval fleet capable of conducting expeditions to the Malay Peninsula and Kalimantan (Casparis, 1956).

Majapahit, from the 13th to 15th centuries, continued the maritime tradition by controlling vast territories, including nearly the entire Nusantara archipelago, the Malay Peninsula, and parts of the Philippines. Majapahit constructed large ships for long-distance voyages and developed important ports such as Tuban, Gresik, and Surabaya as spice trade centers (Ricklefs, 2008).

During the Islamic kingdom era from the 15th to 17th centuries, the Malacca Sultanate became Southeast Asia's most important port with more than 2,000 merchant ships arriving annually. In Maluku, the Ternate and Tidore Sultanates controlled the clove trade, while the Gowa Sultanate in South Sulawesi established trade relations extending to Siam and Cambodia. This trade network was cosmopolitan, involving various ethnicities and religions living in harmony (Sulistiyono, 2017).

Nusantara societies developed advanced maritime technology. Pinisi ships from Bugis-Makassar were capable of sailing to Australia and Madagascar, demonstrating high navigational capabilities. Additionally, customary regulations such as Panglima Laot in Aceh governed sustainable marine resource utilization (Amir, 2025). Spiritual traditions such as reverence for Nyi Roro Kidul in Java and sea offering ceremonies demonstrated harmonious relationships between communities and the sea.

The arrival of Europeans in the 16th century transformed Nusantara's maritime dynamics. The Portuguese seized Malacca in 1511, followed by the Dutch establishing the VOC in 1602 to monopolize the spice trade. The VOC destroyed clove and nutmeg trees outside its territories and conducted *hongji* voyages to suppress smuggling. These policies damaged Nusantara's maritime economy and weakened maritime traditions developed over centuries (Reid, 1993).

### **Shift and Reorientation of Indonesian Maritime Affairs**

Since the Dutch colonial era, development orientation in the Nusantara underwent major changes from a maritime to an agrarian-continental base. After the VOC's dissolution in 1799, the colonial government implemented the *Cultuurstelsel* in 1830, requiring farmers to plant export commodities such as coffee, sugar, and indigo. This policy shifted the economy from maritime trade toward agricultural production and transformed cosmopolitan port networks into plantation areas in interior Java (Booth, 1998).

Colonial infrastructure development such as roads, railways, and irrigation was directed toward connecting agricultural centers with export ports, so that ports like Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya primarily functioned as shipping points for agricultural products to the Netherlands. This shift marginalized coastal communities and weakened long-distance maritime traditions (Dick, 2002).

Post-independence in 1945, maritime orientation had not fully recovered. In the 1950-1960s, Soekarno's government began paying attention to the maritime sector through the 1957 Djuanda Declaration affirming inter-island seas as inland waters. This principle subsequently gained international recognition through UNCLOS 1982, which established Indonesia as an archipelagic state with an EEZ of 2.7 million km<sup>2</sup> (Djalal, 1996). However, development orientation shifted again during the New Order era, emphasizing agriculture and land-based industrialization, particularly on Java Island, while the maritime sector's contribution remained only about 3-5% of GDP (Booth, 1998).

The 1997-1998 crisis opened pathways for reform that increased attention to the maritime sector. The establishment of the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries in 1999 demonstrated efforts toward more integrated marine management. During President Megawati's administration, Indonesia

reasserted itself as a maritime nation and strengthened the legal foundation for coastal area management through Law No. 27 of 2007 (Kusumastanto, 2003).

Maritime revitalization reached new momentum under President Joko Widodo's administration since 2014 through the Global Maritime Fulcrum vision aimed at restoring the sea as national identity. This policy emphasizes five pillars: (1) maritime culture development; (2) marine resource management; (3) maritime infrastructure and connectivity strengthening; (4) maritime diplomacy; and (5) maritime defense (Laksmana, 2019).

### **Blue Economy Implementation in National Development**

The Blue Economy concept emerged as a sustainable development paradigm integrating economic growth with marine ecosystem conservation. The term "Blue Economy" was first popularized by Gunter Pauli in 2010 but gained broader meaning in the maritime context through the Rio+20 Sustainable Development Conference in 2012 (Pauli, 2010). According to the World Bank (2017), the Blue Economy is defined as sustainable utilization of marine resources for economic growth, livelihood and employment improvement, and marine ecosystem health.

Indonesia, with its vast marine resource potential, possesses strategic opportunities to develop the Blue Economy. Indonesia's marine economic potential includes: capture fisheries with sustainable potential of 12.5 million tons annually (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan, 2020); aquaculture with 17.8 million hectares of potential marine cultivation area; marine tourism with 3,973 potentially touristic small islands and more than 50 marine national parks; marine renewable energy with potential reaching 49 gigawatts; and marine biotechnology with the world's highest marine biodiversity (Conservation International, 2018).

The Indonesian government has formulated the National Blue Economy Action Plan 2021-2045, setting targets to increase the maritime sector's contribution to GDP from 7.6% in 2014 to 10% in 2030 and 15% in 2045 (Bappenas, 2021). Development focus is directed toward seven priority sectors: sustainable fisheries, marine tourism, marine renewable energy, maritime industry and logistics, coastal and marine ecosystem services, marine biotechnology, and ocean-based circular economy.

In sustainable fisheries, Indonesia adopts ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) principles and Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification to ensure responsible fishing practices (Pitcher et al., 2009). This program includes catch quota establishment based on scientific stock assessment, environmentally friendly fish aggregating device development, destructive fishing gear prohibition, and small-scale fisher empowerment. However, field implementation still faces constraints such as limited fish stock monitoring data, weak at-sea surveillance, and conflicts between traditional fishers and industrial vessels (Bailey & Sumaila, 2015).

The marine tourism sector is rapidly developing by utilizing Indonesia's underwater natural beauty, located at the center of the Coral Triangle with more than 590 coral species and 3,000 fish species. Marine tourism destinations such as Raja Ampat, Wakatobi, Bunaken, and Derawan Islands have become favorite international tourist destinations. The government is developing marine tourism clusters concepts by integrating conservation, local community empowerment, and supporting infrastructure development (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019).

Marine renewable energy development represents an innovative sector utilizing wave, tidal, ocean current, and ocean thermal energy conversion potential to generate electricity. Indonesia, with the world's second-longest coastline, possesses enormous marine energy potential that remains underutilized. Pilot projects such as the Tidal Current Power Plant (PLTAL) in Nusa Penida demonstrate prospects for marine energy development as renewable energy sources. However, main challenges lie in high initial investment costs, technology and human resource limitations, and unclear regulations.

Marine biotechnology has become a new frontier in the Blue Economy, utilizing marine organisms to develop high-value products such as pharmaceuticals, health supplements, cosmetics, and functional food ingredients. Indonesia, with marine megabiodiversity, possesses thousands of species whose bioactive potential remains unexplored, including marine sponges, tunicates, algae, and marine microorganisms producing bioactive compounds for anti-cancer, anti-microbial, and anti-inflammatory applications. However, research commercialization remains hindered by limited research infrastructure, weak industry-academia collaboration, and absence of regulatory frameworks supporting bioprospecting and intellectual property rights protection.

Blue Economy implementation also faces governance and inter-sectoral coordination challenges. Marine space utilization involves various stakeholders with often conflicting interests (Cicin-Sain & Knecht, 1998). Indonesia has adopted a Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) approach through the Coastal and Small Islands Zoning Plan (RZWP3K), which regulates integrated marine space allocation for various functions (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan, 2018). However, MSP field implementation remains weak due to lack of accurate spatial data, weak law enforcement against zoning violations, and authority conflicts between central and local governments (Douve, 2008).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Indonesia's maritime transformation represents a long journey beginning from the glory of maritime kingdoms such as Sriwijaya and Majapahit, which dominated international trade routes and developed advanced maritime technology. However, during the colonial period, development focus shifted toward agrarian and land-based industrial sectors, eroding maritime traditions and marginalizing coastal communities. Only in the modern era, particularly since President Joko Widodo's administration, has Indonesia reasserted its identity as a maritime nation through the Global Maritime Fulcrum vision emphasizing maritime sovereignty strengthening, infrastructure development, sustainable marine economic development, and active diplomacy. In realizing this vision, Indonesia adopts the Blue Economy concept integrating economic growth with marine ecosystem conservation through sustainable natural resource management. Various sectors such as sustainable fisheries, marine tourism, marine renewable energy, and biotechnology are developed with policy synergy involving defense, diplomacy, and human resource empowerment. Strengthening maritime patrol capacity, law enforcement against illegal fishing, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation form part of the national strategy. To achieve these objectives, several strategic recommendations are required: first, strengthening regulations and law enforcement in marine resource management; second, increasing investment in marine technology research and development; third, strengthening inter-ministerial and institutional coordination in maritime policy implementation; fourth, empowering coastal communities and small-scale fishers through access to capital and technical assistance; fifth, enhancing international cooperation in marine conservation and addressing transnational maritime threats. Through comprehensive and integrated approaches, Indonesia can realize its vision as a sustainable and prosperous global maritime fulcrum.

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