History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives

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A remarkable development in Southeast Asian studies since the Second World War has been the steadily improving knowledge of the region's prehistory. The best known discoveries, made possible by scientifically conducted excavations and the tools of carbon dating, thermoluminescence, and palaeobotany, are signs of bronze-working and domesticated agriculture at certain sites in northeastern Thailand attributable to the fourth millennium BC. Iron-working, too, seems to have been under way at one of these sites by about 1500 BC. Moreover, by the second half of the second millennium BC at the latest, metallurgy had become the most recent stage in a local cultural process over a sufficiently wide area in northern Vietnam to permit Vietnamese archaeologists to broach sophisticated sociological enquiries.

For my purpose, the important consequence of current prehistoric research is that an outline of the ancient settlement map is beginning to be disclosed. The map seems to comprise numerous networks of relatively isolated but continuously occupied dwelling sites, where residential stability was achieved by exploiting local environmental resources to sustain what is sometimes called continually expanding "broad spectrum" subsistence economies. The inhabitants' original skills were those of "forest efficiency," or horticulture, although during the second millennium BC domesticated modes of wet-rice agriculture were probably appearing in the mainland alluvial plains.

These tendencies in prehistoric research provide helpful perspectives for historians of the early Southeast Asian political systems, for they are now being

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2 See Donn Bayard, "The Roots of Indochinese Civilisation," p. 105, for an evaluation of the evidence of rice-cultivation techniques.
encouraged to suppose that by the beginning of the Christian era a patchwork of small settlement networks of great antiquity stretched across the map of Southeast Asia. For example, no less than about three hundred settlements, datable by their artifacts as belonging to the seventh and eighth centuries AD, have been identified in Thailand alone by means of aerial photography. Seen from the air, they remind one of craters scattered across the moon’s surface. The seventh-century inscriptions of Cambodia mention as many as thirteen toponyms sufficiently prominent to be known by Sanskritic names. The multiplicity of Khmer centers, for there were surely more than thirteen, contradicts the impression provided by Chinese records of protohistoric Cambodia that there was only a single and enduring “kingdom of Funan.” “Funan” should not, I shall suggest below, be invoked as the earliest model of an “Indianized state” in Southeast Asia.

The historian, studying the dawn of recorded Southeast Asian history, can now suppose with reasonable confidence that the region was demographically fragmented. The ethnic identity and remotest origins of these peoples are questions that I shall eschew. Before the Second World War, prehistorians framed hypotheses based on tool typology to argue that culturally significant migrations into the region took place from the second half of the second millennium BC. These hypotheses have now been overtaken by the disclosing chronology of much earlier technological innovation established by means of prehistoric archaeology. Rather than assuming migrations from outside the region, we can be guided by Donn Bayard’s view that prehistoric Southeast Asia was a “continually shifting mosaic of small cultural groups, resembling in its complexity the distribution of the modern hill tribes.” The focus of attention must be on what some of these groups could do inside the region and what they became.

The ancient inhabitants of Southeast Asia were living in fairly isolated groups, separated by thick forests, and would have had powerful attachments to their respective localities. I shall have occasion later to discuss the continuation of the prehistoric settlement pattern in historical times, and I shall content myself here by noting that in Java, for example, local scripts and local sung poems survived through the centuries. Or again, Malyang, a small principality in northwestern

3 I am grateful to Srisakra Vallibhotama for this information.
5 Bayard, “The Roots of Indocheinese Civilisation.” p. 92. Recent excavations at Ban Chiang in northeastern Thailand have suggested a movement of people into the alluvial plains in the millennium after the transition to wet-rice cultivation at Ban Chiang; ibid., p. 105.
Cambodia during the seventh century, disappears from the records after the late eighth century but reappears in the late twelfth century as a rebellious area when Angkor was sacked by the Chams in 1177. The modern names of villages and subregions are also often identifiable in early written records.

The multiplicity of settlement areas, each of which could go its own way, means that the historian should be cautious before he decides that any part of the region once occupied only a peripheral status in the general picture. Everything depends on what the historian is looking at in particular times in the past. For example, one still knows very little of the early history of the Philippines, but one should not conclude that these islands remained on the fringe of early Southeast Asia. Their inhabitants did not perceive their map in such a way. They are more likely to have looked outward to what is the Vietnamese coast today or to southern China for the more distant world that mattered to them. Every center was a center in its own right as far as its inhabitants were concerned, and it was surrounded by its own group of neighbours.

The ancient pattern of scattered and isolated settlements at the beginning of the Christian era would seem to suggest little prospect that the settlements would generate more extensive contact between themselves. The tempo of communication was probably slow even though linguists have been able to delineate major and overarching language families. The languages of the archipelago can be conveniently defined as belonging to the “Austronesian” language family. The language map of mainland Southeast Asia is much more complicated. In early times, the Mon-Khmer, or “Austroasiatic,” family of languages stretched from Burma to northern Vietnam and southern China. The Tai and Burman languages were wedges thrust into the Mon-Khmer language zone. But the reality everywhere in Southeast Asia is likely to have been that the major language families were represented by numerous local and isolated speech variations. Only in later times did some variations take on the characteristics of neighbouring speeches, a development that gradually led to a more widely used standardized speech. Linguistic similarities were not in themselves cultural bridges. When, therefore, we enquire how these scattered settlements were able to reduce their isolation, we have to consider other cultural features with greater possibilities for creating more extensive relationships within the region.

There are, in fact, several such features, though we must bear in mind that not all societies can be attributed with identical features. Exceptions can always be found. Moreover, similar cultural features did not in themselves guarantee that extensive relationships would develop across localities as a matter of course, even if their inhabitants came to recognize that they had something in common.

One well-represented feature of social organization within the lowlands in the region today is what anthropologists refer to as “cognatic kinship,” and we can

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9 This generalization does not include important groups such as the Chams and Minangkabau. I am referring, for example, to the Burmans, Thai, Khmers, Malays, Javanese, and Tagalog. I follow Keesing’s definition of “cognatic” as meaning: (a) a mode of descent reckoning where all descendants of an apical ancestor/ancestress through any combinations of male or female links are included; (b) bilateral kinship, where kinship is traced to relations through both father and mother. See Roger M. Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc., 1975), chapter 6 and the glossary. Sometimes examples are found of nuclear families and neolocal residence. The *Sui-shu*, referring to Cambodia in about AD 600, states: “When a man’s marriage ceremonies are completed, he takes a share of his parents’ property and leaves them in order to live elsewhere.” See O. W. Wolters, *Khmer
suppose that this feature was present throughout historical times. In simple terms, the expression means that descent is reckoned equally through males and females and that both males and females are able to enjoy equal inheritance rights. The comparable status of the sexes in Southeast Asia may explain why an Indonesian art historian has noted the unisex appearance of gods and goddesses in Javanese iconography, whereas sexual differences are unambiguously portrayed in Indian iconography.11

A notable feature of cognatic kinship is the downgrading of the importance of lineage based on claims to status through descent from a particular male or female. This does not mean that early settlements were egalitarian societies; prehistoric graves with sumptuary goods and status symbols reveal hierarchical distinctions evolving from before the beginning of the Christian era. Moreover, the principle of cognatic kinship by no means implies that kinship ties are unimportant. The contrary is the case. Kinship ties are the idiom of social organization in the region and part of its history. For example, when the Khmers founded or endowed religious cult centers, their commemorative inscriptions mention a variety of male and female kinship relationships over several generations. Nevertheless the forebears, members of the devotees' kin (kula), are not presented as a lineage. Certain forebears are singled out for their personal accomplishments but the focus of the inscriptions is always on those who are performing and commemorating their own acts of devotion. One inscription explicitly excludes the devotee's parents from enjoying the fruits of his devotion.12

The relative unimportance of lineage means that we have to look elsewhere for cultural factors which promote leadership and initiative beyond a particular locality, and I suggest that leadership in interpersonal relations was associated with what anthropologists sometimes refer to in other parts of the world as the phenomenon of "big men." Here is a cultural trait in early Southeast Asia that seems to offer a helpful perspective for understanding much of what lay behind intra-regional relations in later times.

The leadership of "big men," or, to use the term I prefer, "men of prowess," would depend on their being attributed with an abnormal amount of personal and innate "soul stuff," which explained and distinguished their performance from that of others in their generation and especially among their own kinsmen. In the

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10 The nuclear family was the typical family in the Lê legal code, and both husbands and wives enjoyed property rights; see Insun Yu, "Law and Family in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam" (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1978). The Chinese census statistics in Vietnam during the early centuries of the Christian era purport to reveal an increase in the number of households rather than in the total population, and one would expect this evidence in a society practicing bilateral kinship. I am grateful to Keith Taylor for the information.

11 I owe this observation to Satyawati Suleiman. For a discussion of female property rights and the appearance of women in negotiations with royal representatives, see J. G. de Casparis, "Pour une histoire sociale de l'ancienne Java principalement au Xème s.," Archipel 21 (1981): 147.

Southeast Asian languages, the terms for "soul stuff" vary from society to society, and the belief is always associated with other beliefs. The distinctions between "soul stuff" and the associated beliefs are so precise and essential that they can be defined only in the language of each society. 13 Nevertheless, a person's spiritual identity and capacity for leadership were established when his fellows could recognize his superior endowment and knew that being close to him was to their advantage not only because his entourage could expect to enjoy material rewards but also, I believe, because their own spiritual substance, for everyone possessed it in some measure, would participate in his, thereby leading to rapport and personal satisfaction. We are dealing with the led as well as the leaders.

The consequence of what Thomas Kirsch has referred to in the context of the mainland hill tribes of Southeast Asia as "unequal souls" 14 was that men of prowess, after their death, could be reckoned among their settlements' Ancestors and be worshipped. Ancestors were always those who, when they were alive, protected and brought benefits to their people. Sometimes they were worshipped with menhirs, and a Javanese scholar has recently suggested that Javanese temples should be identified as the successors of the menhirs. 15 No special respect was paid to mere forebears in societies that practised cognatic kinship. 16 Ancestor status had to be earned. Sites associated with the Ancestors, such as mountains, supplied additional identity to the settlement areas.

Men of prowess in earlier times may sometimes have anticipated their future status as Ancestors. Pedro Chirino, a Spanish missionary of the early seventeenth century who was familiar with Tagalog society in the Philippines, tells us that those who had distinguished themselves would attribute their valour to divine forces and take care to select burial sites that would become centers for their worship as Ancestors. 17 This is the conceptual framework in which I am inclined to interpret the meaning of the much discussed devaratja cult inaugurated by the Cambodian ruler, Jayavarman II, on Mount Mahendra in 802. The cult, established by tantric procedures of initiation and only after a long series of triumphant campaigns in

13 Anthropological studies about "soul stuff" in a regional context do not seem available at the present time. Indeed, James Boon remarks in respect of Indonesia that "the ultimate comparativist accomplishment would be to plot the various soul-power terms—semangat, roh, and so on—against each other across Indonesian and Malay societies"; see James A. Boon, The Anthropological Romance of Bali 1397-1972 (Cambridge, England and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 240, n. 7. See Appendix A: Miscellaneous notes on "soul stuff" and "prowess."


15 Soekmono, "Candi, fungsi dan pengertianya. Le candi, sa fonction et sa conception," BEEFO 62 (1975): 455. Soekmono believes that the significance of menhirs should be understood in terms that apply equally to the "continental" Southeast Asian menhirs.

16 Francisco Colin, a missionary in the Philippines in the seventeenth century, provides an excellent account of what could happen to undistinguished sons of distinguished fathers: "the fact that they had honoured parents or relatives was of no avail to them. . . ."; see F. Landa Jocano, ed., The Philippines at the Spanish Contact (Manila: MCS Enterprises, 1973), pp. 176-79. In Bali, where kinship is very important, the achievement of founding a new line of descent is emphasized rather than that of perpetuating an old one; see James A. Boon, "The Progress of the Ancestors in a Balinese Temple-Group (pre-1906-1972)," Journal of Asian Studies 34 (1974): 24.

17 F. Landa Jocano, ed., The Philippines at Spanish Contact, p. 142.
many parts of the country, assimilated the king’s spiritual identity with Śiva as “the king of the gods,” a definition of Śiva that matched the overlord status that the king had already achieved. To this extent, Jayavarman’s *linga* cult, except for its unique name, could not have been different from the earlier rulers’ personal *linga* cults, to which I shall refer below. But his cult, I believe, was also something else. He realized that his achievements had guaranteed his status as an Ancestor among all those Khmers who were connected with his kinship group, which was bound to be an extended one because it was organized in accordance with the principle of cognatic kinship. He therefore made arrangements, as the Sdok Kak Thom inscription of 1052 describes, for the perpetuation of the cult to enable future kings to invoke additional supernatural protection from their deified Ancestor. The consequence he had in mind was that Cambodia would always have a *cakravartin*, as he had become on Mount Mahendra. And, indeed, the kings continued during the tenth century to venerate the *devarāja* according to the rite established in 802; they did this even though each of them had his own personal cult.18 Jayavarman’s foresight can be likened to that of the Tagalog chiefs mentioned by Chirino.

What situation did the king foresee that would require the later kings to be protected by his cult? He would have assumed that, in the future, members of different branches of his extended kin would sometimes struggle to seize the kingship, and he intended his Ancestral cult to provide a focal influence in preventing Cambodia from being permanently torn apart, depriving the country, of a *cakravartin*. Feuds would be composed after the successful prince worshipped the Ancestral cult and thereby announced his claim to lead his kin in his generation and the right to appeal to their loyalty.

Sindok’s cult may provide another instance of an efficacious Ancestral cult. Sindok was an eastern Javanese ruler in the tenth century. Erlangga, the conquering king of the eleventh century, worshipped at Sindok’s shrine early in his career some years before he began his campaigns. Perhaps he was invoking additional divine protection and, at the same time, assuming the political initiative by identifying himself as the rising leader in his generation over all those who could claim descent from Sindok. In this way, he would have rallied distant kinsmen to his side in preparation for the adventures that lay ahead.19

The cultural phenomenon of “men of prowess” brings with it the possibility of mobilizing extended kinship ties within and outside a settlement or network of settlements. Those who had the highest expectations when they were attracted into a leader’s personal entourage, whether as relatives or dependants, were those who believed that they, too, were capable of achievement. Characteristic regional attitudes towards “public life” would develop. Public life in a leader’s service would become the only prestigious way of life for those who did not wish to remain anonymous. As the Bendahara of Malacca puts it, “work for the Raja” or “go and dwell in the forest, for shoots and leaves make a good enough meal for a man with a small appetite.”20 Public life would also be the stage for open competition for pre-

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18 H. Kulke has shown that the *devarāja* cult must be distinguished from the personal cults of later Angkorian rulers. The cult declined in prominence after the tenth century; see Hermann Kulke, *The Devarāja Cult* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1978).
eminence. Leaders and followers alike needed to validate their status by continuous achievement, and achievement often involved adventures into neighbouring settlement areas. As signs of a leader’s favour, achievement and meritorious deeds were rewarded with titles and other gifts. The leader established hierarchy in the public life of his day, and one consequence was that many of the Southeast Asian languages developed special forms of speech for addressing superiors. Finally, and very important in the extension of communications between networks of settlements, leaders in neighbouring areas would recognize the higher spiritual status of a man of outstanding prowess and seek to regularize their relations with him by means of alliances that acknowledged the inequality of the parties. In this way more distant areas would be brought into a closer relationship with one another.

Cognatic kinship, an indifference towards lineage descent, and a preoccupation with the present that came from the need to identify in one’s own generation those with abnormal spiritual qualities are, in my opinion, three widely represented cultural features in many parts of early Southeast Asia. With this cultural background in mind, I shall now suggest a reification that lay behind a particular episode in the region’s early historical experience and something that has attracted a great deal of attention for nearly a century.

I am referring to what is often called “the Indianization” of Southeast Asia. Rather than assuming that “Indian” influences introduced an entirely new chapter in the region’s history, I prefer to see the operation of specific “Hindu” and therefore religious rather than political conceptions that brought ancient and persisting indigenous beliefs into sharper focus.21

The first inscriptions, usually in Sanskrit, show that there were numerous small territorial units, several of which a man of prowess could sometimes bring under his personal influence by attracting supporters and by developing alliances. But his overlordship did not necessarily survive his death. The earliest Southeast Asian polities, even when Sanskrit inscriptions were beginning to be written, were the personal and somewhat fragile achievements of men of prowess, and had not been transformed by institutional innovations in the direction of more centralized government. A polity still cohered only in the sense that it was the projection of an individual’s prowess.

Into this cultural situation—for political systems are expressions of culture—Indian influence arrived, travelling in specific circumstances which will probably remain unknown but which were certainly in the wake of expanding international trade in the first centuries of the Christian era. What is important to note is that, during these centuries when historical records begin to become available for a few

21 For a discussion of this question in a Khmer context, see O. W. Wolters, “Khmer Hinduism” in Early South East Asia. The antiquity of the Southeast Asian connection with India may be greater than I have supposed. H. B. Sarkar has recently suggested that the “Niddesa, a Buddhist text hitherto attributed to the second century AD, should be considered to be in existence not later than 247 BC, and that the Southeast Asian toponyms, such as Java and Suvarṇabhūmi, which appear in the Niddesa, were known to some Indians by that time; see H. B. Sarkar, “A Geographical Introduction to South-East Asia: The Indian Perspective,” Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (hereafter cited as BTK) 137,2-3 (1981): 297-302. Sarkar’s suggestion will not surprise those prehistorians who envisage sailing by Austronesian-speaking people in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean in general from the second half of the second millennium BC; see Wilhelm G. Solheim II, “Reflections on the New Data of Southeast Asian Prehistory: Austronesian Origin and Consequence,” Asian Perspectives 18,2 (1975): 155-57.
parts of the region, the dominant impulse in Hindu religious beliefs was a "devotional" and personalized one (bhakti), organized around popular cults in honour of Śiva and Viṣṇu and also by means of élite teacher-inspired sects whose members strenuously sought to participate in the grace of these great gods. The sects, the best known of which was the Pāsūpatas, insisted that an individual could with personal effort, which would include ascetic practices and the pious cultivation of his faculties of volition and imagination, achieve under a guru's instruction a close relationship with the god of his affection. Hindu sectarianism is the religious influence which, in my opinion, explains why the ascetic ideal—an ideal that exemplifies heroic prowess—is emphasized in the earliest Southeast Asian inscriptions written in the names of chiefs and overlords, all of whom would have performed heroic warrior roles in intra-settlement relations.

I believe that Southeast Asian constructions of sectarian modes of Hindu devotionalism contributed in two ways to the development of Southeast Asian notions of political authority.

In the first place, a heightened perception of the overlord's superior prowess was now possible. The overlord's reputation for ascetic achievement, no matter how it was gained, could be seen as exemplifying the closest relationship with Śiva of anyone in his generation. Śiva was the patron of asceticism and the Hindu god most frequently mentioned in the early inscriptions. In seventh-century Cambodia, the effects of the close relationship was expressed in two ways. The overlord Jayavarman I was said to be a "portion" (āṃśa) of Śiva while Bhavavarman participated in Śiva's sakti, or divine energy, which enabled him to "seize the kingship." Both references to kingly prowess are framed in language considered to provide appropriate Sanskrit equivalents of spiritual achievement.

The second consequence of Southeast Asian constructions of Hindu devotionalism has a close bearing on the pattern of intra-regional relations in the succeeding centuries. Śiva was also the sovereign deity who created the universe. Thus, the overlord's close relationship with Śiva meant that he participated in Śiva's divine authority. His day-to-day exercise of power would have been constrained by the norms of his own society, but his spiritual authority was absolute because Śiva was its author. He participated in sovereign attributes of cosmological proportions, and his supporters could come to realize that obedience to their leader was a gesture of homage that implied religious rapport, or bhakti. Their leader, a sovereign, partook of divinity and could therefore offer them the means of establishing their own relationship with divinity. "Kingship," signified by the personal Śiva cult of the man who had seized the overlordship and not by territorially-defined "kingdoms," was the reality that emerged from the "Hinduizing" process, but this does not mean that widely extending territorial relations were not possible. On the contrary, there need be no limit to a ruler's sovereign claims on earth. The chief's prowess was now coterminous with the divine authority pervading the universe, and this is how I interpret Jayavarman II's spectacular achievement and significance. He never tried to institutionalize the royal succession; the down-grading of lineage in the Southeast

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22 As early as the seventh century Jayavarman I, a Cambodian overlord, was described as a "portion" of Śiva; see George Coedès, Les Inscriptions du Cambodge (IC), I (Paris: Boccard, 1937-1966), p. 8, v. 3. Kulke also notes Angkorian references to kings as being "portions" of Śiva; see H. Kulke, The Devadasi Cult, pp. 22-36. For a ninth-century Javanese identification of a king as a "portion" of Śiva, see J. G. de Casparis, Prasasti Indonesia, II (Bandung, 1956), p. 227.

23 A. Barth and A. Bergaigne, ISCC, p. 69, v. 5.
Asian cultures would have inhibited him from attempting to do so. On the other hand, his record of military success during a quarter of a century qualified him to institutionalize the contemporary criteria of leadership by proclaiming that he was a cakravartin. He formulated his status by means of his personal cult, the devārajā cult, and foresaw that he would be regarded as an Ancestor by his kinsmen. The criteria for kingship that he established were never upset during the Angkorian centuries.

A sudden reduction in the number of subregional centers was not the inevitable consequence of divine kingship, but more sustained efforts could be made to bring relatively distant subregions under the influence of particular men of prowess.24

This sketch of the “Hinduizing” process is only one approach to the subject of Southeast Asian protohistory, but it may be closer to the realities behind the early political systems of the region than if the point of departure is the establishment of “Indianized states,” with the assumption that a state should exhibit certain recognizable characteristics. Protohistoric change, as I interpret it, took the guise of heightened self-perceptions by the chieftain class in general rather than of far-reaching institutional changes in the status of a particular chief in a specific subregion, who now became a rāja. We need not imagine an almost conspiratorial manipulation of foreign ideas for promoting the interests of a few enterprising chiefs who were beginning to realize that their material resources were in world-wide demand, with the result of the conspiracy being that the royal beneficiary of “Indianization” was able to get permanently outside and above his own society and move closer to the gods who “legitimatized” his new status.

Difficulties are bound to arise in studying continuities in early Southeast Asian experiences when one thinks of “states,” as I have done for too long.25 Even prehistorians, when they are correcting earlier misapprehensions about what happened during the several millennia before the beginning of the Christian era, may tend to reinforce earlier dogma about appearance of “states” during protohistory. Prehistorians are interested in “incipient state formation and political centralization” prior to Indian influence, but, while they can now show that Indian influence did not move into a vacuum when it brought a “state” like Funan into being,26 they still cannot rid themselves of an awareness of discontinuity between prehistory and protohistory. The reason is that they take “Funan” as their model of the first fully-fledged state and attribute to it such features as “the ruler’s strategy of monumental self-validation” and “time-tested Indian strategies of temple-founding, inscription-raising, and support for brahmanical royal cults.”27 A state, according to this line of

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24 In seventh-century Cambodia, the overlord Jayavarman I seems to have recognized the obligation of bringing northwestern Cambodia under his influence in order to make good his claim to overlord status; see Wolters, “Northwestern Cambodia,” pp. 383-84.

25 Virginia Matheson, writing about the inhabitants of the Riau-Lingga archipelago as they are described in the Tuhfat al-Nafs, addresses this matter of terminology: “... I can find in the Tuhfat no evidence for the existence of the state as a concept, an abstract ideal above and beyond the ruler, which was to be sustained and protected. What does seem to have existed was a complex system of personal loyalties, which it was in the ruler’s interest to maintain”; see Virginia Matheson, “Concepts of State in the Tuhfat al-Nafs [The Precious Gift]” in Pre-Colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia, ed. Anthony Reid and Lance Castles (Kuala Lumpur: Monographs of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, no. 6, 1975), p. 21.


thought which owes much to Van Leur’s ideas in the 1930s, must be distinguished from anything else in prehistory. The effect is that a new lease of life is given to the significance of Indian influence.

I suggest that a gap persists between prehistory and protohistory represented by “Funan” because different terminologies are used when discussing each period. An outline of “incipient state formation” depends on such Western terms as “fairly extensive trade relations,” wet-rice, iron technology, and “probably increasing population density and political centralization in some of the alluvial plains of the mainland.” These terms, taken by themselves, signify economic developments that would be accompanied by the appearance of more complex political systems. Nevertheless prehistorians have to deny prehistory the achievement of “statehood” by indigenous processes because of what they believe is known of the fully-fledged “state of Funan.” The elaboration of the features of a “Funanese” typology, however, depends on an altogether different set of signifiers that owe their origin to Chinese documents and are therefore influenced by Chinese preconceptions of a “state.” The Chinese supposed, for example, that any state should be associated with rules of dynastic succession and be described by fixed boundaries. No such polity existed anywhere in earlier Southeast Asian history except, as we shall see below, in Vietnam. Yet the Chinese were unable to conceptualize “Funan” as being anything other than a “state,” albeit an unstable one, and, because of this Chinese perspective, “Funan” has become the earliest Southeast Asian example of what sociologists refer to as a “patrimonial bureaucracy,” a model that does not seem to fit the prehistoric evidence.

The two sets of signifiers—Western and Chinese—have precise meaning only in cultural contexts outside Southeast Asia, and the result of linguistic confusion is that the passage of the region from prehistory to protohistory reads in language that is bound to give the impression that the Southeast Asian peoples could graduate to statehood only with the assistance of Indian influence. The same reading may even lead scholars to postulate a lag in the process of state formation in some parts of the region, exemplified by the “impermanence” of certain polities, or to assume that particular geographical circumstances influenced the pace of the graduation to statehood.

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29 Ibid., p. 107. Karl Hutterer, studying how far the lowland societies of the Philippines had reached urban and state formation on the eve of the Spanish intervention, observes that “there is no evidence whatever for the formation of bureaucratic structure that would have been interjected between the chief and the daily affairs of politics, commerce and religion, as is usually found in state societies”; see Karl L. Hutterer, “Prehistoric Trade and the Evolution of Philippine Societies: a Reconsideration,” *Economic Exchange and Social Interaction in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from Prehistory, History, and Ethnography*, ed. Karl L. Hutterer, Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia, no. 13 (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1977, c. 1978), p. 191.
In other words, the criteria for incipient and fully-fledged states are established by an arbitrary vocabulary drawn from an archaeology with an economic bias and from Chinese conventions transferred to a part of the world which was virtually unknown to them. The result is that one is in danger of looking for what could never be there in either prehistoric or protohistoric times. If, however, we think simply of "political systems"—a neutral expression—the way is open for considering other cultural phenomena such as religious and social behavior that can be expected to affect political and economic activities in both prehistory and protohistory. No evidence at present exists for supposing that unprecedented religious and social changes were under way in the protohistoric period that sharply distinguish it from late prehistory. For example, there is no evidence to suppose that a chief's small-scale entourage in late prehistory was different in kind from the large-scale entourages of the historical period that supplied rulers with practical means of exercising political influence. In both periods, services are likely to have been rewarded with gifts of honor, posts of responsibility, and produce from the land. All these gifts would be valued because the recipients knew that they participated in the donor's spiritual authority.

The territorial scale of a political system is certainly not the correct measurement for describing and defining it. Instead, we should think of sets of socially-definable loyalties that could be mobilized for common enterprises. This was the case in protohistoric times, and it would be surprising if these loyalties did not have their origin in prehistory. In late Balinese prehistory, for example, persons were buried according to their rank on earth, which indicates some kind of hierarchy, with one person in the neighbourhood perceived as the point of reference for distinguishing ranks. This prehistoric background may be reflected in a Sanskrit inscription from western Java in the fifth or sixth century. The inscription has been translated as referring to a ruler's "allies," but the term used is bhakta ("worshippers" or "princes devoted [to him]"). Khmer chiefs in the seventh century also frequently referred to themselves as bhaktas and venerated their overlord because of his spiritual relationship with Śiva which brought spiritual rewards to those who served him. The Javanese inscription may refer to a chief's entourage with "prehistoric" features but described in the Sanskrit language.

The peoples of protohistoric Southeast Asia retained, I suggest, much more than vestiges of earlier behavior, though their behavior would not have been identical in every locality. But their cultures are unlikely to be entirely illuminated by artifacts recovered from graves or by Chinese evidence of commercial exchanges in the protohistoric period. Tools and trade represent only fractions of a social system.

I have dwelt on definitions partly because I believe that the time is now promising for a re-examination of the passage of Southeast Asia from prehistory to protohistory in terms of continuities rather than of discontinuities. But I am especially anxious to indicate the origins of the early political systems that furnish

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31 Van Naerssen suggests that the origin of the Javanese raka can be explained in ecological terms. The raka was responsible for the equitable distribution of water over a number of agrarian communities (wanua), and he therefore had the right to dispose of the produce and labor of his subjects; see F. H. van Naerssen, The Economic and Administrative History of Early Indonesia, pp. 37-38.

32 Soejono, "The Significance of the Excavation at Gilimanuk (Bali)," p. 198.

the appropriate background to later tendencies in Southeast Asian intra-regional relations. I shall now glance at the style of intra-regional relations when evidence becomes more ample.