

OF TIDAL FLATS AND INLAND FLOODING

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AN ESSAY IN COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

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The history of Mainland Southeast Asia, like that of other parts of the world, is to a certain extent shaped by geographical circumstances, such as the height of mountain ridges, mean temperature and precipitation. Of the multitude of geographical factors two outstanding ones may be singled out, that – depending on the level of technological achievement – at varying periods of history became crucial. One of these is that the region is well endowed with rivers, four of these ending in large deltas. (Circling the coast, beginning in the Northeast we encounter four major such river mouth systems.)<sup>1</sup> The other is the regular annual movements of the monsoon that not only powered trading vessels to distant regions, but also forced those traders to accept its seasons.

One feature that has been often remarked upon is the fact that up to early modern times the Mainland as a whole has carried a relatively small human population. The reasons put forward are manifold, some note the area's relative difficult access, the possibility of disease, or dangers from predators. I suggest we add the factor, that environmental controls were very demanding in pre-historical times.

There are two overriding aims in this paper. In the first place I hope to present an up-to-date summary description of human settlement, taking a very broad time-frame (necessarily glossing over many details). In the second place a proposal will be made to look at the date with the help of a particular perspective framework, based on the principle of differing degrees of accessibility. It will be argued that this framework has explanatory value.

#### Water and early human settlement

The relationship between humans and water has always been a complex one, particularly after the expansion of agricultural communities, that came with the invasion of peoples who are believed to have been speaking early Austronesian languages. These largely supplanted but probably also partially absorbed earlier hunting and gathering populations. This earliest intrusion of such rice growers has been variously dated, but modern surveys of Mainland Southeast Asian archaeology come to the conclusion that this technology reached the mainland (as also the Island Taiwan) relatively recently, dating this to have occurred around 2300 B.C.<sup>2</sup> It may not be accidental, that at roughly the same time a similar invasion of rice-growing peoples reached Japan.<sup>3</sup> These newcomers became established particularly in those parts of the plains, where annual natural flooding took place. Notably the internal rivers with their annual large increase of size and concomitant flooding have provided an ideal

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<sup>1</sup> The four deltas are clockwise from the northeast, the Song-Koi Delta, the Mekong Delta, the Chaophraya Delta and the Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) Delta. Each of them has its own characteristics, notably there are vast differences in volume of water during the rainy season, size and depth of the delta regions. The extraordinary plurality of the region, where, for instance Vietnamese, Khmer, Thai and Burmese have languages that are mutually unintelligible, each maintaining its own script, is related to the fact that the region has these four disparate deltaic regions. Each of them has a different environment, and thus a different history of human settlement. One feature, now almost forgotten is that the southern three deltas originally looked very much alike when approached from the sea, the outer tidal part being shielded from the impact of the sea by a cover of mangroves. There are some ten species of mangroves in the world, two-thirds of them in Southeast Asia. It is a wood growing up to 20 metres high, notable for its breathing roots that allow them to live in tidal waters and grow in salty environment. Unusual in that they develop new trees in the crown, fully developed treelets drop in the mud and grow on. Thirty years before a felled tree is fully regrown. The importance of mangrove forests as protection for the hinterland, as breeding ground for fish and shrimps, as trapping and holding sediment have until recently not been widely understood.

<sup>2</sup> Bellwood 1985: 213-21, 240; Higham 2002: 352.

<sup>3</sup> Olson: 2003: 133.

environment for the early rice growing human population. In locations adjacent to areas that regularly became flooded agriculture has been practised for as much as four thousand years without major interruption up till the present. These agricultural peoples at first lived exclusively in what must have been autonomous villages, of which hundreds of sites have been found. A look at the distribution of prehistoric agricultural sites in the Mun and Chi River systems shows that such villages were all built in the proximity of flowing water (see Illustration 1).<sup>4</sup> These sites are characterised by a protective round or oval earthen wall.

Up till the present only two archaeological sites have been found that are markedly larger, namely Ban Chieng Hian, a mound covering a massive 38 hectares (the site being distinguished by a double set of moats and a reservoir) and the now no longer existing site of Non Chai. Both these sites were at the edge of a large flood plain, and it takes little imagination to note that the annual flooding provided an exceptionally good circumstance for producing a large surplus of rice to feed a much larger population. The size of the communal facilities of Ban Chieng Hian is only possible with a good degree of communal planning and large-scale cooperation. However, the uneven distribution of grave goods indicates an absence of a strict hierarchical structure that may be associated with the development of a state.

A close look at the geographical distribution of prehistoric agricultural sites shows that the four deltas (that at present are the focus of the most intensive human use) were at first not the preferred regions of settlement. The reasons why deltas were not attractive to the early rice-growing communities are not difficult to guess, some parts must have been too swampy, others may occasionally be subjected to a sudden unusual flooding, large parts of the delta regions were too saline, in addition we should not forget the discomfort of myriads of mosquitoes or the dangers of crocodiles. Thus it should not surprise us that three of the four deltas yield no sign of early permanent occupation or exploration. The shift from inland river systems towards the deltas has hitherto not received proper attention. In this paper, it is suggested that this shift has not been adequately studied, and that it may have direct bearing on the debate on the origins of statecraft in Mainland Southeast Asia.

Almost a thousand years after the technique of casting bronze was introduced to the agriculturalists there occurred in the Red River delta, in the North-eastern part of Mainland Southeast Asia what has been termed the rise of a new civilization. I refer here to the so-called Dong Son culture which has been dated roughly between 600 and 100 B.C.<sup>5</sup>

The Dong Son culture arose in the Song-koi Delta, which lies on the southern edge of a subtropical region, the southern tip becoming tropical. The delta is fed by three main streams, the main one Red River flows through a narrow trench, the Song-bo (Black River) a little south also from a trench. From the north the delta is fed by the Song-lo (Clear River). This is the reason why the sediment plains of the latter are relatively small. The apex of the delta is not far from where the Song-bo (Black River) and the Song-koi (Red River) converge. The depth of the delta is some 140 km. The Delta is relatively moist throughout the year. The Song-koi and Song-bo carry much sediment, particularly during the annual flooding as a result of the monsoon rains this brought a fertile soil over the flooded region, enriching the environment and regenerating it for permanent agriculture. During the period of the Dongsonians none of these rivers had been regulated.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Based on Higham, p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> So named after the site where bronze artefacts were first discovered.

<sup>6</sup> The earliest dikes were constructed during the period of intensive Sinization, not long after the beginning of the common era.

One aspect that tends to be overlooked in maps showing archaeological sites is that the tropical rivers such as the Song-koi and Song-bo carry immense amounts of sediment not only to annually enrich flooded regions, but also to deposit much into the sea, causing the delta itself to be gradually extended. When we take the delta growth to be 30 metres per annum, the shore line during Dong Son times must have been some 70 km inland, and when we take into account that the sea level may at that time have been at least one metre above the present level, the shore line and access to the South China Sea must have been very close to Co Loa, the largest Dong Son site.<sup>7</sup>

These Dongsonians were agriculturalists, using buffaloes and bronze ploughshares to prepare their rice fields. A look at the distribution of Dong Son sites demonstrates that they built their villages along the river banks, making use of the flood plains to grow rice. At the same time they kept sufficient distance to the open sea to avoid the saline tide. What is remarkable, however is that almost at the furthest point of habitation, near the chief exit towards the China Sea, there has been an excavation near Co Loa, revealing an exceptional Dongsonian settlement. Co Loa covers an area of no less than 600 hectares, and is surrounded by two oval-shaped ramparts, each strengthened by a moat. In addition there is a third inner rampart of rectangular shape. Co Loa's location demonstrates the outward-looking nature of the Dong Son culture.

Although it has become fashionable to describe the social organisation of the people who developed the Dong Son culture to have been a sort of 'primitive communalism', the accumulated evidence suggests that the situation may well have been much more complex. The Dong Son economy thrived on a long period of monopoly of high-quality manufactured bronze material, together with a network of rivers providing the means for efficient distribution. Among their products were practical goods, such as a great variety of metal weapons and ploughshares. The most spectacular of their manufacture in the form of bronze drums found their way throughout the Indonesian Archipelago, apparently these were highly prized religious and symbolic goods.

When the first evidence of the existence of the Dong Son culture was discovered in 1924, nobody expected its broad extent and deltaic distribution. Now, more than eighty years later a fairly differentiated picture of the Dong Son has emerged. The very size of Co Loa points to a centralised organisation and the massive walls demonstrate a capacity to control large numbers of people. The manufacture of a great number of large and complex bronze objects was only possible in a human organisation where trades had developed, from the miner, the charcoal maker, the ore-smelter, the person transporting ingots of metal over hundreds of kilometres from the copper and tin mines to the places where the proper mixture of metals were again smelted, moulds were made and the finished products were cast. The decorations on various bronze objects show formal headdress and clothing. The grave goods demonstrate that some individuals accumulated great wealth.

The presence of vast amounts of kauri shells that derive from the Indian Ocean, the fact that Dongsonian goods have been discovered in many places of the mainland, in the Malay

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<sup>7</sup> The shoreline in other parts of Mainland Southeast Asia also lay far inland in the period under consideration. Recent research funded by the Australian Institute of Nuclear Science and Engineering established that around 2000 years ago in the Gulf of Thailand the western and the northeastern coastline some 5 km inland. In addition it was suggested a new sealevel curve, after a high of 3.5 metres at 6500 B.P. rapidly fell to around 4000 B.P, then fell gradually further to the present level. This contrasts to previous reports, suggesting two high levels, one at 6000 B.P. 5 metres high and a second peak of 3 metres 3000 B.P. (Sinsakul et al, 1985).

Peninsula and in many islands of the Sunda Archipelago indicates that Dong Son was connected to the larger world by an intricate trade network. It can hardly be denied that the Dong Son culture at its height was a sophisticated, complex, hierarchical society, its wealth based on a surplus of production, having at least one central place. The only feature that prevents us from referring to Dong Son culture as having been Mainland Southeast Asia's first state (one that formally ended by the Han conquest in 43 A.D) is the absence of writing that is inalienably connected with the formalisation of a bureaucracy. Maybe the label "chiefdom" or even "tribal state" can be used to describe that what has been found in the Red River Delta in the second half of the first millennium B.C.

Less spectacular than Dong Son, but nonetheless of great importance for the development of the state in Mainland Southeast Asia is the cultural complex that has been labelled Sa Hyunh. Sa Hyunh is also dated to the period of the second half of the first millennium B.C. Geographically it was found along a stretch of the Vietnamese coast of approximately seven hundred kilometres, roughly in the region where later the Kingdom of Champa was found. Since their burial customs are quite different from the Dongsonians and their material culture differs markedly from that of Dong Son and since these correspond closely to practises in the Indonesian Archipelago, it is assumed that the Sa Hyunh culture was carried by an Austronesian speaking people.<sup>8</sup> Sa Hyunh is distinguished by a sort of pottery that is unique for mainland Southeast Asia as well as for the manufacture of some remarkable types of earrings. The Sa Hyunh people were skilled in making bronze and iron artefacts and are seen as the most likely source for the dissemination of iron-smelting throughout the archipelago. Sa Hyunh type goods have also been found in Borneo and the Philippines. All evidence points to the idea that along this coastal tract the Sa Hyunh culture was the product of a sea-faring, trading culture, most likely the ancestors of the Chams themselves.

While inland rice-growing communities continued without perceptible change their life in their wall-protected villages, and while the Red River Delta had for the time being become the southernmost part of the Chinese system of government, a quite different form of polity, suddenly appears around the year 100 A.D. without any previous sign of indigenous developments in that direction. This is the state known to us with its Chinese name of Funan. This abruptness, together with its major characteristics did not cause any qualms to the first researchers describing this state. They interpreted the archaeological remains to consist of Indian-style temples, Indian symbols, Indian statues and Sanskrit inscriptions as being the result of a physical appearance of Indian people. Among these researchers it was quite common to refer to these early states as "colonies". Thus LeMay wrote in 1954 "...colonists from India began to cross the seas, and enter the lands of Indonesia from the beginning of the Christian era onwards..."<sup>9</sup> Indian "princes", we are told, set up their courts, Brahman priests were brought over and these introduced into Southeast Asia an Indian universe of religion, architecture, literature, symbols and the very concept of the state. It was the beginning of the Greater India tradition popular in the fifties.

Since the 1960s the concept of the Indianized State has been questioned, examined and opposed. It is now widely held to be demeaning to depict Southeast Asians as being mere recipients of a higher culture, it was wrong to depict the role of local people as passive and docile. The "local genius" school of thought came into being and gradually this has become the dominating idea. The modern description of the beginning of state-formation in Mainland Southeast Asia usually follows the idea that indigenous traditions have set the conditions and

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<sup>8</sup> Bellwood, pp.275-276.

<sup>9</sup> Thus R. LeMay describes the „colonizing activity of Angkor. See R. Le May, the Culture of South-East Asia, the Heritage of India, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1954, Pp. 28-29

pattern in which alien concepts were adopted. When Indian traders played a role in the process of state formation, they simply stimulated Southeast Asian populations to develop their own form of rule.

Sympathetic to Southeast Asian nationalistic sentiments such a presentation of history may be, a dispassionate look at the evidence shows a somewhat different picture. The first appearance of Funan began with the port that in the 1940s was named Oc-Eo by Louis Malleret. This port and the related developments inland had no precursor in the region and that there is no sign of local Southeast Asian initiative or “genius”. The grid of canals in the direction of Angkor Borei, the evidence of long-distance trade goods, the remnants of rectangular stone constructions, all point to Funan being an Indian trading post. The inscriptions found in the region closely follow trends in continental South Asia.<sup>10</sup> As for the indigenous contribution, these Indian traders employed indigenous labour to make a settlement of that size function. Hence we find in the Chinese description of Funan in the History of the Southern Ch’i: “They abduct and make slaves of inhabitants of neighbouring towns who do not pay them homage”.<sup>11</sup>

The broader perspective confirms the picture: Indian traders, making use of the monsoon winds had discovered a route whereby they could supply the Roman empire with luxury goods from China, in particular silk cloth. These traders were compelled in particular on the return journey from China to India to select a landing point where they could stay three or four months. It is this geographical circumstance, the fact that anyone travelling with a simple sailing craft from China to India is compelled to wait for the changing of the monsoon. These long-distance traders not only had to secure a safe harbour, where they could store their valuables, but also they needed to develop its hinterland in such a way that they could live there comfortably and refurbish their ships.

When we accept that the considerable buildings and canal system that extended from the harbour Oc-Eo were planned by the Indian trading community, belittling or underplaying the Indian character of Funan is tantamount to twisting the historical record.

Since the term ‘Indianization’ is now felt to be denigrating and therefore is no longer acceptable in order to describe what sort of polity arose in Funan, I suggest that in order to allow for its separateness from the rest of Mainland Southeast Asia we call it an Indian traders’ enclave, or an Indian entrepôt. Indeed it may be useful to free our thoughts for this early period from the idea of a centralised state. Claude Jacques has argued that behind the Chinese report of what happened in Funan may well be found to be various centres, or even “a multitude of little realms and principedoms”.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time it would seem that the inland rice-growing populations deep inland, for example those along the Mun and Chi rivers apparently remained for many generations unaffected by Funan and its trade. I suggest that the reason must be sought in the fact that the Funanese sought their trading goods further afield, and for them the inland peoples were of little interest.

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<sup>10</sup> Sheldon Pollock, „The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300-1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization and the Question of Ideology“, in J. E. M. Houben (ed.) *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit, Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 219.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Coedès, 1968, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> C. Jacques, „Funan‘, ‚Zhenla‘: The Reality Concealed by the Chinese Views of Indochina“, in R. B. Smith and W. Watson (eds.), *Early South East Asia, Essays in Archaeology, History and Historical Geography*, New York, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 376.

This situation may be viewed in terms of two opposing strategies that relate to geographical location in mainland Southeast Asia that may be applied throughout the period of long-distance trade with sailing ships that lasted over two millennia. On the one hand there are the inland communities, not isolated, but linked to long-distance trade. These inland peoples can pick and choose for themselves what they find of interest in the trickle of objects and ideas coming from afar. They tend to regard far away regions with complacency and tend towards self-sufficiency. On the other hand there are many communities that live on the very edge of Mainland Southeast Asia, but directly on the main long-distance trade route between India and China. Here we think of peoples long the edges of the Malay Peninsula and, with a jump across the Gulf of Thailand along the Cambodian and Vietnamese coastline. These communities are dependent on what happens far away, they are more open to change, being used to the fact that they depend on their ability to seize opportunities. The first group may be called the peoples of the core of the mainland, the second group are the peoples of the rim.

In prehistoric times, the walled sites in the Mun and Chi River basin may be seen as typically core communities; the Dongsonian and Sa Hyunh peoples and we may safely assume some not yet found prehistoric settlements on the Malay Peninsula, represent the peoples on the rim. Therefore it should not surprise us that within a few generations after Indian traders created their enclave that we call Funan, there arose an indigenous Southeast Asian trade emporium on the rim of the Mainland. This culture directly adjoining the Funan enclave a little further along the route to China is known to us from Chinese sources with the name Linyi. The origins of Linyi have been traced to the first half on the second century A.D.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Funan, there is ample evidence that Linyi was ruled an indigenous Southeast Asian people, the Chams. These Chams, it may be assumed, were stimulated by Funan, built religious monuments inspired by Indian tradition.

In the inscription from Dong-ven-chau (dated at the end of the fourth-century) there is a segment of text written in the Cham language.<sup>14</sup> This makes the Chams the first Southeast Asian people to write a local language in Indian script, indeed a sign of the selective capacities and adaptability of the Chams. It has generally been overlooked that the Chams built their towns and derived their wealth, like Funan, from trade.

It is here suggested that the presence of the Funannese long-distance trading enclave stimulated the Chams to extend their already existing trade network (mentioned above under the rubric Sa Hyunh) that it is likely that they ventured West, along the same routes that Indian traders had exploited in order to reap vast profits. When the Chinese sacked the Cham capital in 446, no less than 48,000 kg of gold was taken,<sup>15</sup> which may be taken as a sign of its previous prosperity. The Chinese account of Ma Touan-lin makes clear that these Chams had a stratified society, a complex organisation presided over by a ruling family. Indeed we find all the hallmarks of the early Southeast Asian State that was inspired in its rituals by the cultural accomplishments brought from India.

Scholars agree that Funan disappears around the 7th century and that a new state, known as Chenla (territorially more or less present-day Cambodia) thrived in the 7th and 8th century, preparing the way for the beginning of Angkor in the early 9th century.<sup>16</sup> While recognising

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<sup>13</sup> Coedès, 1968, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Coedès, 1968, p. 48, Higham, 2002, p. 275.

<sup>15</sup> Higham, 2002, p. 275.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia. The 7th-8th Centuries*, Tokyo, The Toyo Bunko, 1998, p. 43.

the splendour of such developments, I suggest in this contribution that we refrain from assuming that a parallel development must have taken place among the peoples living in the Mainland's core.

#### The preconditions of city development

A seminal, but largely overlooked study related to the early history of human development in Mainland Southeast Asia is Robert Ng's "The Geographical Habitat of Historical settlement in Mainland Southeast Asia".<sup>17</sup> For a large portion of Mainland Southeast Asia Ng first identified those areas that were highly suitable to rice growing using the various strategies of rice growing of the first millennium, then he mapped those areas with access to potable water, finally he superimposed these two with a map of major historical settlement centres. The resulting map provides a very convincing correlation.

This map is of interest to us for not only does it draw attention to those areas that were able to maintain larger population centres, but it also shows the extent of territory that, prior to the early modern period was not suited to sustain cities. Here I would add the core-rim framework suggested above. Peoples directly connected to the major trade route could acquire wealth and sustain larger populations by buying rice rather than growing it themselves. For the core, however, Ng may well have drawn our attention to the fact that the possibilities were much more limited. Notable is the scattering, as well as the distances between suitable habitats. For the period roughly between the 6th and the 12th century, so it is taught in all history books that deal with this period, in the Mainland's core we find indigenous states that are known to us by names such as the Kingdom of Chenla, the Mon Kingdom of Dvaravati, the Pyus, or the Early Burmese Kingdom.

The warning that Claude Jacques gave us in regarding early Funan, namely that we should not necessarily perceive early Funan in terms of a single unified state may well be extended towards the political units in the core of the mainland. We do not really know where the King of Dvaravati lived, whether it was in Si Thep, in Phra Pathom, in Phong Tuek or in another place where Mons had built their towns. It is not at all sure whether there existed such a person as a King of Dvaravati or even whether Dvaravati ever had a capital city. It may well be that Dvaravati is an appellation from outsiders to designate an agglomeration of towns where Mon was spoken.

For the core peoples there is in the first millennium no evidence of a functioning supra-regional state-like organisation. It would be quite possible that during the latter part of the first millennium small city-states were connected by arrangements such as pacts, but such regional linkages would have left these centres virtually autonomous.

The idea that in the core of Mainland Southeast Asia political power could have existed for long periods without the development of strict hierarchical supra-regional structures has been little considered, for it has been assumed that, once complex states such as Champa or Angkor had developed, this phenomenon would have been taken over very quickly by the inland states. In the model of core and rim suggested above, we argue that the different human condition allows us to study the core states separately from those at the rim.

The lack of a central authority in the core of the mainland is apparent when we note that at the end of the thirteenth century separate tribute missions were sent to the Chinese court from

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<sup>17</sup> Robert C. Y. Ng, „The Geographical Habitat of Historical Settlement in Mainland Southeast Asia“, in Smith and Watson, op. Cit., pp. 262-272.

places like Ayutthaya and Lopburi<sup>18</sup> (various dates), from Phetburi (in 1294) and Sukhothai (1299).<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, even as recent as the end of the thirteenth century we may question the nature and size of what is generally described as the state of Sukhothai. We may safely assume that the lengthy inscription of King Rama Khamhaeng is genuine. It is this inscription that yields the information upon which historians have based their notions of the size and power of the Sukhothai Kingdom. I maintain that a careful reading of the inscription does not allow us to conclude that the direct administrative power of the ruler of Sukhothai extended beyond a radius of – say – a hundred kilometers. Nationalistic historians would exclaim that the Inscription is absolutely clear in describing Rama Khamhaeng's conquests.

It is worth while to read the relevant parts of that inscription with a dispassionate and open mind. The presumed size of the realm, glorified in nationalistic historical maps as covering the larger part of the Mainland, derives solely from the epilogue on the fourth side of the inscription, an epilogue that generally has been accepted to have been added after the death of Rama Khamhaeng. In it there are indeed several sequences of towns that Rama Khamhaeng subdued (Thai: *prap*). One of these sequences includes Suphanburi, Ratburi, Phetburi and Nakhon Sithammarat. Taking into account the large distances involved it is highly improbable that this refers to a conquest in modern terms. Instead I suggest the statement should be interpreted as part of a posthumous eulogy, telling us that Rama Khamhaeng's status and allure had reached such a degree that he received tokens of submission from such far-away places as listed. The sequence also shows stages in the journey that a Sukhothai trader took when he wanted to go to China, catching a boat eastwards in the Peninsula. Sukhothai traders wanting to journey westwards towards Sri Lanka went by elephant to Martaban and there they boarded a ship that plied the east coast of the Indian subcontinent. Such long-distance travel was not uncommon. While not denying the degree of sophistication and accurate knowledge of a large part of the world that came to Sukhothai, we should not forget that there is no evidence whatsoever that a Sukhothai state-like structure had come into being in the thirteenth century that effectively ruled the places that Rama Khamhaeng had "subdued".

That statecraft in the Mainland's core was until the end of the fourteenth century centred upon city states rather than large regional ones is also clear when we read the pact between Sukhothai and the nearby city-state of Nan.<sup>20</sup> The rulers of Nan and Sukhothai address each other as equals.

Eventually, also in the core fully-fledged states that covered more than one river basin did develop. Thus in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth century Ayutthaya gradually extended its direct rule over a wide area. This is, however, later than standard works would have us believe.

Adopting the framework of a distinction between core and rim peoples helps explain the distribution of Islamic and Buddhist faith on the Mainland. Islam arrived at the beginning of the second millennium, its presence can be seen from the earliest arrival onwards in the Malay Peninsula and in the Champa region along the Vietnamese Coast, typically connected with the

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<sup>18</sup> Hsien-lo has been wrongly interpreted as referring to Sukhothai, historians not yet being aware that Ayutthaya existed prior to the beginning of the new dynasty in 1351.

<sup>19</sup> E. Thadeus Flood, *Sukhothai-Mongol Relations: A Note on Relevant Chinese and Thai Sources* (With Translations), *JSS*, Vol. 52, Pt 2, July 1969, pp. 220-227.

<sup>20</sup> See, A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, „The Pact between Sukhodaya and Nan, Epigraphic and Historical Studies , No. 3“, *JSS*, Vol. 57, Part 1, January 1969, pp.57-107.

trade orientation of the peoples on the rim. Inland, however, Muslims had access to the main centres in the core, they did not get a hostile reception, still they did not convert the core populations.

The core-rim framework is useful as long as the heart of Mainland Southeast Asia remained difficult to reach, that is to say, as long as the chief means of communication in Southeast Asia was the sailing boat. It helps explain the thrust and direction of the dangerous European colonial powers. These also followed the monsoon winds and the chief trade routes. The Mainland was colonised at first at what we have called the rims, first in the Peninsula and the southern tip of Vietnam, then the southern part of Burma, Cambodia and the Red River Delta. The remarkable fact that Thailand escaped colonisation has often been discussed, whereby some would say that Siamese royalty played an important role, others that disagreements among France and Britain on how to divide up the country may have been crucial. Following the thrust of the argument in this contribution, the fact that the Siamese heartland did not lay directly on the trade route should not be overlooked.

### Conclusions

In this contribution I have suggested that it may be opportune to abandon viewing the history of Mainland Southeast Asia during the last two millennia with a mono-developmental, diffusionist model in mind. Instead I proposed adopting the concept of a core-rim dichotomy, a heuristic device with which some established historical myths may be exposed. Thus there seems no ground to suppose that names such as Dvaravati, or Pyu refer to complex states. Even Sukhothai in its heyday may not have exercised political control over a wide region. Historical maps depicting for the first millennium kingdoms in the core region are anachronistic and proffer false information.

In this paper I have argued for inclusion of a variety of geographical factors for those writing human history over a longer period of time. The energy and shifting directions of the trade winds, it is argued here, was a major determining force in Southeast Asian history from the earliest long-distance trading ships around the beginning of the Common Era till the era of steamships. The monsoon was important in bringing wealth and ideas to specific regions. I have no doubt that doing a similar exercise, selecting for a particular period a different geographical factor, such as the distribution and accessibility of rare commodities may bring unexpected new insights in the history of this region.