

4 The Geopolitical Situation

Indianized and Sinicized Territories

Reading: Charles Higham, *The Archaeology of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) chapter 5§1 pages 242-245 EUL DS 523 Hig; Paul Wheatley, *Nagara and Commandry. Origins of Southeast Asian Urban Traditions* (Chicago:UC, Dept. of Geography, Research Papers Nos. 207-208, 1983), chapters 7-8. EUL HT147.A785 Whe; F D K Bosch, "The Problem of the Hindu Colonisation of Indonesia" in *Selected Studies in Indonesian Archaeology* (The Hague: Koninklijk Instituut vor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, V, 1961), pp. 1-22 EUL .913 (91) Bos

Texts: H A Giles, *The travels of Fa-hsien 399-414 AD* (Cambridge, 1923,reprinted London, 1956) EUL .91(31:34) Fah; Hsüan-Tsang, *Si-yü-ki*, translated Samuel Beale (London, 2 vols., 1884) EUL .29432 Hsu

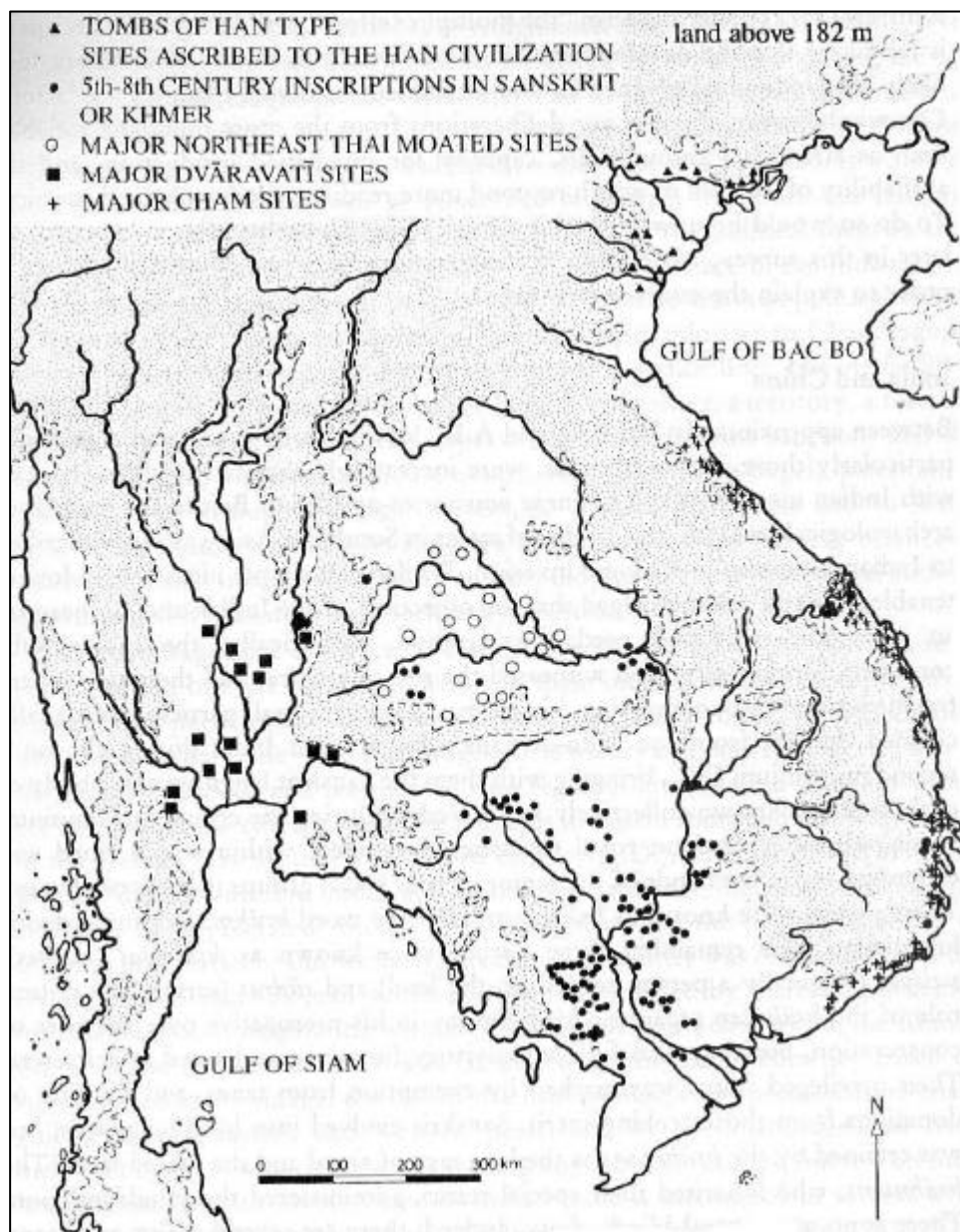
In the previous lectures we have shown how in South-east Asia, constantly changing environmental forces (lecture 1) shaped societies, undergoing a process of fundamental structural change as a new agrarian regime- the wet-*paddy* technology complex (lecture 2)- and maritime commercial system (lecture 3) created a new infra-structural order. During the first half-millennium AD cities and villages began to be established on the extensive river or lacustrine plains of the Mekong, Red, Chao Phraya and Irrawady Rivers, the Khorat Plateau and Central Javanese Plains. This was associated, moreover, with the development of new *mandalas* (polities), societies which began to structure themselves in such a way that a highly ranked, central echelon established dominance over dependent settlements and was able to affirm a universal acceptance of their superior status (map 4.1). In order to understand the nature of these polities it is necessary to adopt an approach shorn of western or Chinese ideas of what a state ought to be- with fixed boundaries and a bureaucratic apparatus. The Southeast Asian *mandalas*, whose nature will be discussed in later lectures (lectures 5-9), were fluid in terms of territory and therefore without fixed boundaries, having at their fringes, shading-off areas of influence. They centred on the court of the overlord, whose sway turned on attracting deference and obligations from other lords in his orbit through his ability to win alliances and overtake enemies. His position was also dependent on his ability to affirm a universal acceptance of his superior status amongst his subjects. How he did this, through the adoption of exotic religious ideologies, is the subject of this lecture (lecture 4)

The Sinicized Territories

China brought to Southeast Asia its own distinct mature form of statehood. This had been forged in a distinctive pattern of political changes as a series of highly centralised dynastic polities alternated with periods of regional fragmentation and conflict. Between the end of the Zhou dynasty in 403 BC and unification under the Chin in 221 BC China experienced the period of the "Warring States". It was during this period that iron became the predominant metal, with applications in both agriculture and warfare. The brief period of Chin rule, which saw initial work on the Great Wall, was followed by four centuries of relative internal peace under the Western and Eastern Han (ca 206 BC-220 AD). The central authority at this time set in train wars of territorial conquest in both the Northwest and Southern border territories. This process impinged on Southeast Asia when the Red River Delta (Bac Bo), which had its own polity down

to 110BC, was seized, and incorporated as a province or “commandery”, remaining subject thereafter to direct Chinese rule until ca 900 AD.

The end of the Han saw the formation of the Southeast Chinese state of Wu in 220 AD. This state was cut off from the northern trans-Asian trade route to the West by intervening states, a situation which fostered interest in a southern maritime route and the earliest surviving description of mainland Southeast Asia originated in a mission despatched by the Wu Emperor in ca 250 AD. It is at this juncture, moreover, that the maritime peoples of the region came under the influence of an expansive Chinese state. Unlike the direct political control exercised by the Chinese over Bac Bo (northern Vietnam), however, within those polities located within the Chinese commercial network spanning mainland and maritime Southeast Asia, the relationship to the Celestial Empire was a tributary one.



Map 4.1 Distribution of the Major *Mandalas* in Mainland Southeast Asia

Indianized Territories

Historically, the Indian sub-continent during this period witnessed the rise of empires and their subsequent fragmentation into competing kingdoms. The principal participants usually claimed descent from Indo-Aryans who invaded India during the mid-second millennium BC bringing with them the Sanskrit language and a body of oral tradition known collectively as the *Vedas*. Over the next millennium small polities centred on royal dynasties developed, within which ritual and ceremony resided in the hands of four social groups – or *varnas*. These comprised the *brāhmins*, the priests possessing divine knowledge, followed by the *ksatriyas*, nobles, from which the royal households were later drawn, and *vaiśyas*, originally persons settled on land but also including merchants and the *sūdras* or serfs, condemned to work for the twice-born. The critical role of the *brāhmins* regarding kingship lay in their prerogative over the rites of consecration, but they also fulfilled advisory functions and acted as ministers. Their privileged position was marked by exemptions from taxes, and by gifts or donations from those seeking merit. Sanskrit evolved into local languages, but was retained as the language of ritual and sacred texts.

The *brāhmins*, who inherited their special status, administered the **HINDU RELIGION** within which there is no single deity but a pantheon of gods, thirty named in the origin-myth the *Vedas*, each of whom might manifest itself in several guises.

During the first millennium of the Christian Era Śiva and Visnu were the principal deities. Śiva, who began as the wild god Rudra in the *Vedas* can be recognised by his unruly hair and three eyes- one being the Sun, another the Moon and the third Fire. His mount is the ox Nandin and he carries a trident in one hand. He is the destroyer of the world and is the principal god of asceticism. He dwelt not on Mount Muru, the home of the gods, but on his own mountain, Kailasa, with his consort Parvati and was symbolised by the *linga*, the stone replica of his phallus. Vishnu, whose mount is the half-eagle, half-man Garuda is considerably more benign than Śiva, functioning as the saviour and preserver of the Universe. In his ten earthly re-incarnations he was the benefactor of mankind at critical moments. In one of these he was Rama, the ideal of princes. In another he was Krishna, a man/god created to rid the world of monsters. The Churning of the Sea of Milk took place at the Creation of the Universe and was the work of Vishnu. For a thousand years the *devas* (gods) and *asuras* (demons) had been contending to produce the divine elixir *amrita* but without success on either side. Vishnu resolved the matter by having them work together, using the serpent Vasuki as a rope and a mountain as the pivot. For another thousand years they churned the sea in order to manufacture, not only the elixir but also Lakshmi, the three-headed elephant Airavata, and the nymph-like *asparas*, among other prodigies.

In Hindu cosmology, time is not linear as in the West but circular, there being great cyclical epochs- called *kalpas* which are but one day of Brahma, the Creator. Creation takes place at the beginning of each *kalpa* when the god Visnu rests on a serpent lying on the water of the primal ocean. Brahma, the Creator is born from a lotus growing from Visnu's navel. At the end of each *kalpa* the world is destroyed by fire, invoked by the dancing of the god Śiva. Over the centuries, many mystical texts, collectively called the *Upanishads* were composed as commentaries on the origin-myth of the *Vedas*, which focussed on the nature of reality and of the self. Absolutely central to the Hinduism of the *Upanishads* and to Buddhism, which sprang from them, is the idea of *samsara* or reincarnation. This suggests that every living creature is reborn after death, and that what one is reborn into is determined by one's *karma*, the cumulative effect of one's good and bad actions. To break out of the endless cycle of rebirths, knowledge is sought and renunciation practised by adepts- *rishis*- dedicated to a life based on poverty, celibacy and meditation. Also shared with Buddhism is the concept of *Dharma*- the moral order of the

Universe, which involves a balance of good and evil, between gods and their enemies, the demons –*asuras*- and between the human world and the world of the gods. The gods live on Mount Meru, a mythical peak in the Himalayas. This is a three-dimensional *mandala*, a cosmic diagram, and is golden and bejewelled, with perfumed breezes- a heavenly home of supernatural beings, who are attended by nymph-like celestial dancers (*apsaras*). Surrounding Mount Meru are seven seas of different liquids and from its summit flows the holy river Ganga, an ever-renewing source of purification. The ideal Hindu temple is a recreation of Mount Meru, a home for a particular god or group of gods. The *deva* or *devi* resides in the form of an image cared for by a *brāhmin* priest and the god must be awakened daily, bathed, fed with offerings and allowed to rest. Devotion to deities, mediated through icons and holy persons, provided refuge in times of crisis and even liberation from action (*karma*) and the cycle of reincarnation.

BUDDHISM evolved from Upanishad Hinduism in the mid-first millennium BC when the historical Buddha having adopted a life of renunciation, asceticism and Yogic meditation, came to realise that the path to enlightenment was not through extreme self denial but a middle way between asceticism and the world. His sermons, together with commentaries, became the “Pali Canon,” which declared that all forms of existence are subject to *dukkha* - suffering, unsatisfactoriness, disease and imperfection. *Dukkha* is perceived as a product of desire and the Eight-Fold path of Enlightenment is the way to extinguish desire, and achieve a state of *Nibbana*- the extinction of all Self. In all schools of Buddhism there are the “Three Jewels”: the Buddha, Buddha’s teaching –the *Dhamma*- and the community of monks – the *Sangha*. All Buddhists consider monasticism a superior way of life and respect is paid by all lay persons, both kings and commoners, to those wearing the robes of the monk. Since members of the monasteries do not work, they have few material possessions and are totally dependent on alms given by those who wish to obtain merit. In this way the *Sangha* is closely tied to the laity of the community, whose children they educate and for whom they conduct life-cycle ritual.

Initially in the mid-first century AD the major branch of Buddhism – the *Mahayana* or “Great Vehicle” – split off. It is centred not only on the historical Buddha but on a host of supernaturals of whom the most important are the *Bodhisattvas* or “beings of wisdom” on their way to becoming Buddhas. Buddha himself, the *Mahayanists* believed had lived many lives before becoming the Enlightened One. Just as the Mahayanist Buddhists centred their beliefs not only on the historical Buddha but also on a host of supernaturals, so also Hindu thinkers held Buddha to be an avatar of the god Vishnu, the gods Indra, Vishnu and Śiva being considered as protectors of Buddhism. In such a manner the two belief systems could co-exist. In relation to *Hinayana* (or the “Lesser Vehicle”) otherwise known as *Theravada* Buddhism, such was not the case. It remained close to the original “Pali Canon” and is mainly concerned with meditation, concentration and the *Sangha*. *Mahayanists* consider it is really an agnostic philosophy rather than a religion.

In the Chinese-occupied territories of the Red River Delta (Bac Bo) therefore concepts of statehood evolved in terms of a pre-ordained template imposed by the invaders. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Indianization, whether in the form of Hindu-*Mahayanist* Buddhism (Cambodia and Central Java) or *Theravada* Buddhism (Thailand, Burma and amongst the Mons) was a much more complex process involving the adoption of belief systems.

This process of the adoption of belief systems has given rise to much debate, historians putting forward hypothesis, which were more rooted in the political prejudices of their own time rather than in any historical reality. In the “Colonial” Era of the Twentieth Century the process was couched in familiar terms involving a Hindu colonisation, combined with an imported Hindu culture. Vast fleets of daring adventurers, were conjured up, who crossed the Indian Ocean and settled in Southeast Asia. There these navigators founded colonies, built fortresses and towns and developed a trade with the motherland, which prospered for centuries, whilst talented artists

arrived from India erecting the matchless monuments of the region. Subsequently this argument was refined and rooted more firmly in historical sources. A common theme in the chronicles of Central Java, Sumatra, Malaya and Cambodia, is the coming of an Indian *ksatriyas* by sea in order to found a kingdom or to conquer an important position in an existing one by marrying a princess of those lands. In such a manner the main Southeast Asian royal dynasties came into existence. Hindu *ksatriyas* by marrying native women of high standing called into existence a prosperity of mixed blood, an exclusive race of native Hindus who resembled their fathers in their general conduct but transmitted to it influences from their mothers. Once again therefore the role assigned to the Indian *ksatriyas* perpetuates the idea of the establishment of a foreign authority over the native peoples of Southeast Asia, relations between Indians and native being that of dominators to dominated.

Subsequently towards the end of the “Colonial” epoch in Southeast Asia a new perception of the process began to emerge, which saw the acceptance of Hindu civilisation by the native higher classes as resulting from contacts with Indian merchants who, after permanent settlement, entered into relations with the natives. Just as later, in the propagation of Islam, the contracting of marriages is seen as one of the most efficient and reliable ways of introducing the new culture. Such a theory, which might be called the “*vaiśya*-hypothesis”, however, continues to share with the “*ksatriyas*-hypothesis” the supposition that certain territories were colonised by Indians. In such a manner a great number of culture bearers, belonging to a distinct caste, settled in the area on and close by the busy trade route connecting India with China via Malaya. There they transferred their religion, art, and governmental institutions and everything belonging to the Hindu culture to the native population; a transfer involving the inter-marriage of the foreigners with the Southeast Asian higher classes. Yet, again and again in Southeast Asian Hindu civilisation one meets with elements of a theoretical and scholastic character, elements which recall the manuscript, codes of law, the hermit’s cell and the monastery. These are as alien to the world of the warrior (*ksatriyas*) and merchant (*vaiśya*) as they are in harmony with a world of scribes, scholastics and initiates in the Holy Scriptures and legal sciences.

It was only in the Post-“Colonial” epoch, however, that this was recognised. In a hypothesis which did not eschew the importance of the trading activity of India with China via Malaya, the order of “clerks” (*brāhmins*), the bearers and representatives of religion, were placed centre stage in explaining the introduction and establishment of Hindu civilisation in the overseas countries. The merchants trading along the seaways connecting India with China via Malaya transported not only commodities but were also conveyers of spiritual goods, among which Buddhism was undoubtedly the most important. In the first centuries of the Christian epoch, when *Hinayana*- had broadened into *Mahayana*-Buddhism and had made the preaching of the highest Buddhist Ideal a duty and a calling, a missionary force, far larger than any before, arose. The experiences of these preachers were broadly similar. When the preacher arrived in a far-off land his fame had very often preceded him and he was warmly welcomed at court. There he preached the Law and sooner or later conversion took place, after which the whole realm often followed suit. An order of monks was founded which enjoyed links with the Buddhist mother country. Acting in their own initiatives, or by order of the king, a large number of native *bhiksus* took up the bronze-topped pilgrim’s staff and set out for the holy land of Buddhism in the Ganges Plain. Here they performed the circuit of holy places, finally to stay for some time in one of the monasteries located in these lands –such as Nālandā, situated near Rājagrha, the capital of Maghada. Enriched by both the religious and artistic learning obtained at such monasteries they finally returned to the monasteries of their native land whence the streams of their wisdom spread far and wide.

The explanation of the spread of Hinduism is more difficult to elucidate. For unlike Buddhism which has developed into a world religion, Hinduism is an Indian particularity. No one has accession or can be converted to the religious beliefs known collectively as “Hinduism”.

One *becomes* a Buddhist, but one *is* a Hindu. In such circumstances it is difficult to see how it came to penetrate the lands of the Archipelago, Cambodia and Champa. Certainly having been pushed by Buddhism into the shadows during the first three hundred years of the Christian era, Hinduism underwent a revival from the fourth to sixth century. It enjoyed powerful protectors in the Gupta dynasty and was able to win back large parts of the territories previously occupied by Buddhism including lands in Southeast Asia. The form of Hinduism, which enjoyed this renaissance, however, was very specific- Śivava-Siddhānta- possessing doctrines of salvation, which preached the redemption of the individual soul from the cycle of rebirths and its final union with the highest principal. This was an esoteric religion and was transmitted orally from guru to disciple. As a rule the adept was of the *brāhman* caste and only if he possessed a thorough theoretical knowledge and had studied the holy scriptures for many years might the initiate receive the sacrament of ordination out of the hands of his spiritual father. By virtue of this ordination he became blissfully redeemed in Śiva already during his life. It is this characteristic which explains the individual's position of unequalled importance in Southeast Asian Hindu society. In the first place he holds all offices which in the Indian conception can only be held by a seer: king's advisor, court poet, chief justice, astrologer, supreme authority in religious matters, initiate and keeper of the holy traditions. He also confers the higher, Hindu consecration on all feasts and ceremonies prescribed by popular religion. It is this small group, of a few privileged people to whom, on account of their birth and knowledge, it was reserved to be initiated in the Siddhānta doctrine and to transmit from generation to generation the secret it contained as a precious good. It must be assumed that the expansive power of Hinduism about the fifth century induced relatively small numbers of Siddhāntas to expand the sphere of influence of their doctrine beyond the Indian mainland. It is equally highly probable that the Indian impulse to expansion was counterbalanced by an equally strong Southeast Asian desire to participate in the blessings of the new means to salvation. Just as pilgrims set out by order of the native rulers to receive the *amṛta* of the Good Law in the Buddhist centres, other messengers of the same rulers, in search for the means of immortality, came into contact with the Siddhānta. Thereupon a small number of Indian initiates in that doctrine, either by their own desires or urged by those messengers, undertook the voyage to Southeast Asia. Here, having been invested with all those offices which in the Indian conception could only be held by a seer, they became the living nuclei from which Hinduism spread over the country conferring the higher, the Hindu consecration on all feasts and ceremonies prescribed by popular religion