

Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This article examines inter - regional trade and social interaction as the process that encouraged socio - political similarities in maritime Asian polities in the early historic period (c. the fifth to the tenth centuries AD) using the concept of peer polity interaction proposed by Colin Renfrew. This article argues that not only did the early maritime Southeast Asian polities share similar material cultures such as artifacts, statues, and architecture, but they also shared similar political organizations, which has been called the mandala political system. Archaeological and historical evidence from a variety of localities in maritime Southeast Asia are examined in order to offer a general overview of cultural and structural homologies in this region, without ignoring the fact that each culture has its own uniqueness as well.

Keywords: Mandala, Peer Polity Interaction, Maritime Southeast Asia

บทคัดย่อ

บทความชิ้นนี้มีจุดประสงค์ที่จะวิเคราะห์การค้าและการปฏิสัมพันธ์ทางสังคมข้ามภูมิภาคในฐานะที่เป็นกระบวนการที่กระตุ้นให้เกิดความคล้ายคลึงกันในรูปแบบทางการเมืองและสังคมในหมู่รัฐในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ภาคพื้นสมุทรในสมัยประวัติศาสตร์ตอนต้น (ราวพุทธศตวรรษที่ 10 ถึง 15) โดยใช้แนวคิดการปฏิสัมพันธ์ของรัฐที่เท่าเทียมกันของโคลินเรนฟรู บทความฉบับนี้เสนอว่า รัฐรุ่นต้นในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ภาคพื้นสมุทรไม่เพียงแต่มีความคล้ายคลึงกันในเชิงวัฒนธรรม เช่น โบราณวัตถุ รูปเคารพ และสถาปัตยกรรมเท่านั้น แต่ยังมี ความคล้ายคลึงกันในเชิงโครงสร้างทางการเมืองในภาพรวมที่อาจจะเรียกได้ว่า ระบบมณฑล ที่เสนอโดยโอลิเวอร์โวลเตอร์อีกด้วย แม้จะมีความแตกต่างกันในรายละเอียดอยู่ก็ตาม บทความฉบับนี้ได้ใช้หลักฐานทางโบราณคดีและประวัติศาสตร์จากแหล่งที่มาที่หลากหลายในภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ภาคพื้นสมุทร เพื่อนำมาวิเคราะห์ให้เห็นถึงความคล้ายคลึงกันในทางวัฒนธรรมของภูมิภาคแห่งนี้ โดยมิได้ละเลยข้อเท็จจริงที่แต่ละวัฒนธรรมก็มีเอกลักษณ์ของตนเอง ในรายละเอียดด้วยเช่นกัน

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I. Introduction

It is now widely accepted that the socio-political development of early historic maritime Southeast Asia was closely associated with east - west trade and that social interaction began to flourish around the fourth century BC (e.g. Bellina and Glover 2004; Manguin 2004). This international maritime trade was preceded by the intra - regional Southeast Asian exchange system of the Iron - Age and played a crucial role in the socio - political development of maritime Southeast Asia throughout its history. Trade and social interaction

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

formed a network of communication and allowed maritime Southeast Asian societies to interact with other regions as well as with one another. Archaeological and historical studies reveal that early maritime polities that participated in this network had developed similar material cultures and political systems. However, the relationship between inter - societal interaction and the socio - political development of maritime Southeast Asian polities deserves more investigation and, therefore, becomes the focus of this article.

This article defines maritime Southeast Asia as the parts of the Southeast Asian region that embrace the vast body of the Southeast Asian seas and communities that were situated on the coasts or close to the coasts. The Seas of Southeast Asia extend from the Indian Ocean in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. Maritime Southeast Asia includes communities in both insular and coastal continental Southeast Asia and houses a variety of groups of people. Communities in continental Southeast Asia that had immediate access to the coasts through riverine networks can also be included in this region. Maritime Southeast Asia, in fact, had multiple interaction spheres that overlapped one another but these spheres were connected and formed a single large maritime socio - political and commercial network offering maritime communities an opportunity to participate in it.

This article examines inter - regional trade and social interaction as the process that encouraged socio - political similarities in maritime Southeast Asian polities in the early historic period (c. the fifth to the tenth centuries AD) using the concept of peer polity interaction proposed by Colin Renfrew (1999). This article argues that not only did the early maritime Southeast Asian polities share similar material cultures such as artifacts, statues, and architecture, but they also shared similar political organizations, which has been called the mandala political system (Wolters 1999). Archaeological and historical evidence from a

variety of localities in maritime Southeast Asia will be examined in order to offer a general overview of cultural and structural homologies in this region.

II. Social Interactions in Maritime Southeast Asia

Before examining the mandala structure as a shared socio - political characteristic of maritime Southeast Asia, this article will mention the long-standing trade and social interactions that created a network connecting societies in the region and linked the region to other regions in the world. This maritime network finally became a main factor that encouraged the cultural and organizational similarities in this region.

Trade and social interaction in the region have been intensively studied by several scholars (e.g. Bellina and Glover 2004; Francis 2002; Glover 1996; Hall 1982; Jacq - Hergoualc'h 2002; Manguin 2004; P. Noonsuk 2001a; Ray 1996; Veraprasert 1992; Wheatley 1966, 1975). The social interaction in the trading network has been discussed in relation to the process of socio-political development in Southeast Asia. Various explanations have been offered for this process. The most famous debate on this subject is perhaps Indianization versus Localization. Coedès (1968: 15) proposed the concept of Indianization. It describes the process of state formation of Southeast Asia as a consequence of the expansion of Indian organized culture and their conceptions of royalty and religion through migration of Indian people to the Southeast Asian region. This concept was elaborated on by Wolters (1999) who suggested that Indic elements tended to be fractured and restated, and were adopted by indigenous people through the process of local selection. He coined the term "Localization" for such a process.

Similar to the concept of localization that emphasizes the local processes of development, Kulke (1990) suggests that there existed

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

complex pre - Indianized polities in this region prior to the Indianization of the first millennium AD. He also proposed that the centralization of polities in India and Southeast Asia took place at approximately the same time in the mid - first millennium AD and he calls this “convergence hypothesis” (1990: 28).

Whether one believes in the concept of Indianization or that of Localization, one cannot refute the idea that the process of acculturation and socio - political development in the region was closely associated with maritime trade networks (Bellina and Glover 2004: 68). Wheatley (1975: 238 - 240) explained that political development in maritime Southeast Asia in the late centuries BC was related to maritime trade between the West and China in which the rulers of local chiefdoms who controlled the trade activities between their local communities and foreign merchants developed their new perceptions of the world, set their new life goals, and acquired organizational skills from the foreign countries. In the early centuries AD, they adopted Indic ideologies to extend their power by institutionalizing their god - king statuses and dynastic traditions. This idea was taken by Hall (1982: xiii) who stated that the selected items of Indian statecraft acquired through maritime contacts were used to consolidate the rule of the leaders locally as well as control the hinterland.

The trade system in maritime Southeast Asia had its roots back in the prehistoric period (Bellina and Glover 2004) and did not only involve economic activities but also created a network of social relations among participating communities. Trade was a means for maritime communities to interact with one another economically, socially, and politically. However, we may not assume that the relations between maritime polities were always peaceful since we also see maritime warfare and piracy throughout Southeast Asian history.

The long - standing maritime trade network from the late prehistoric period to the early historic period allowed maritime polities to interact with one another to create social relationships, facilitate the circulation of goods and ideas, and encourage cultural and organizational similarities among them. This peer polity interaction was a mechanism that encouraged cultural and organizational homologies and deserves a detailed discussion in the following section.

III. An Application of the Concept of Peer Polity Interaction

The concept of peer polity interaction was proposed by Colin Renfrew (1999) for studies of socio - political change and development. According to Renfrew (1999: 114), peer polity interaction included imitation and emulation, competition, warfare, and the exchange of material goods and information among autonomous socio - political units within a single geographical region. He uses the term “peer polity” to avoid models that emphasize core - periphery relations or secondary state formation. The socio-political and economic development of peer polities cannot be considered in isolation, since they always interacted (Renfrew 1999: 114).

Renfrew defines “polity” as the highest order socio - political unit in a region, such as a chiefdom. Autonomous political units have neighbors which are comparable in scale and have structural homologies. Structural homologies, according to Renfrew, are the product of interaction among peer polities over a long period of time (Renfrew 1999: 119). He notes that structural homologies might possibly be confused with those that are the product of convergent trajectories of development in similar environments. Thus, Renfrew is interested in comparing specific aspects of peer polities, instead of their generalized structures. These include, for example, specific

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

architectural forms, symbolic systems, and numerical systems (Renfrew 1999: 121).

Renfrew discusses two types of change: exogenous and endogenous (Renfrew 1999: 121 - 124). Exogenous change is the change that occurred outside, or came from outside of, the area of a polity, while endogenous change occurred within a polity. He concludes, however, that both types of change are likely to transpire in neighboring polities of equivalent scale and organization (Renfrew 1999: 121). Change is conceptualized as emerging from a constellation of interacting polities in a region. Because of this interaction, uniformities in cultural features may emerge and have a significant role in influencing patterns of future development, such as the process of ethnic group formation that would become the foundation for the emergence of the nation state (Renfrew 1999: 124).

The value of the concept of peer polity interaction is not that it simply explains distributional patterns of material culture or traits across the region, but that it explains changes in the degree of complexity within and among societies. Renfrew (1999: 125) suggests that when one polity is identified in the archaeological record, other polities of comparable scale and organization will be also found in the same region. When one polity undergoes an organizational change and an increase in complexity, or creates new institutional features and innovation, we will also see similar kinds of change in neighboring polities. The transformation of one society is not only a result of internal processes tending towards intensification, but also a result of peer polity interaction. Such interaction may include warfare, competitive emulation, symbolic entrainment, transmission of innovation, and an increase in the exchange of goods (Renfrew 1999: 126 - 130).

Renfrew's concept of peer polity interaction somewhat coincides with Kulke's convergence hypothesis (1990: 22) which explains the simultaneous

socio - political and cultural development of principalities of equivalent scale and status around the Bay of Bengal and in Southeast Asia. Kulke (1990: 22, 32) proposes that the first millennium AD saw a very similar trajectory of the process of state formation on both sides of the Bay of Bengal in which rulers of the maritime polities sought solutions for similar challenges to legitimize and strengthen, with the assistance of Brahmins, their claim to superior authority and power, the kind of power that cannot be acquired from older tribal political traditions. According to Kulke (Kulke1990: 22, 28), the advance chiefdoms in Southeast Asia, therefore, acquired the Indian model of politics and royalty not from the truly imperial Gupta of Northern India but from the princely states of comparable scale of South and Eastern India through a complicated network of relations creating the convergence of their social evolution.

The ideas of Renfrew and Kulke clearly suggest that the cultural and socio-political similarities among maritime polities in Southeast Asia and around the Bay of Bengal were made possible through the peer polity interaction which had deep roots back to at least as early as the protohistoric period starting around the fourth century BC. Although there is no doubt that the Indian influence encouraged the social change in maritime Southeast Asia, we should keep in mind that the Indic cultural elements was adapted to fit into the local ecological circumstance, technological practice, and human experience of this region (O'Connor 1986a: 8). Southeast Asian people, indeed, had abilities to develop their own art schools. Only few centuries after the first spread of Indian temple architecture to Southeast Asia, people in this region created monumental temple architecture such as Borobudur and Angkor Wat that have no equal in India, suggesting the mastery by local people of Indian - inspired art (Kulke 1990: 31).

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

Maritime Southeast Asia is a significant region for the study of the peer polity interaction and the convergence of socio - political development as mentioned above. This region was the threshold of exotic goods, technological knowledge, and Indic ideas to the inland areas of Southeast Asia and was the region that initially developed the so - called Indianized political system, except the region of upper Burma that had direct contacts with North and Eastern India and developed as the Buddhist polities probably since the first half of the first millennium AD (Kulke 1990: 24). However, it is not surprising to see the development of complex polities with similar organizational characteristics as those in the maritime region in the inland areas of Southeast Asia since these inland polities interacted with and received Indic ideology through the maritime polities without direct participation in the South - Southeast Asian maritime network. In maritime Southeast Asia, we can witness the emergence of various autonomous political units probably since the late prehistoric period. These polities were comparable in scale and degree of complexity. They developed through time and did not develop in isolation. Instead, they actively communicated with one another through a long - distance exchange networks that began by at least the late prehistoric period. This vast network formed a single interaction sphere across maritime Southeast Asia and it created a new regional identity that was shared by a number of politically independent groups. This identity was noted in early Chinese accounts that refer to the region as “the kingdoms of the South Seas” (Wheatley 1966).

As a result of peer polity interaction, we can see cultural similarities not only in material terms but also in organization. The organizational homologies were encouraged by the process of competitive emulation among maritime peer polities which faced similar challenges (Kulke 1990: 22; Renfrew 1999). They participated in similar trade networks and competed with one

another to elevate their power and status. In the competitive atmosphere, each polity tried to develop its organization so that it could succeed in the region. Therefore, if there are more sophisticated organizational concepts or more advanced technological innovations created or adopted by one polity, other polities in the same region will also adopt and improve them, or if there are or more advanced styles of art and architecture created or adopted by one polity, other polities will also adopt and refine them. Chinese records also suggest that this process transpired when the Funanese selected a person with sophisticated political knowledge from Pan - pan, namely Kaundinya, to be their king and thus improve their socio - political structure to conform with that in India (Wheatley 1966: 48).

These examples may explain the adoptions of Indic religions, political ideologies, writing systems, and art styles in maritime Southeast Asia during the late protohistoric and early historic periods. They may also be seen as the characteristics of present - mindedness that is one of the important features of Southeast Asian cultures (see Wolters 1999: 114 - 115). It is not the Indianization, but rather it is the adoption of more sophisticated cultural and socio - political features that enabled them to compete with other polities in the interaction sphere. It seems that Indic cultures were the most appropriate ones since local people and Indians had close relationships for a long period of time and the Indian rulers of princely states were still facing similar challenges as the Southeast Asian elites to establish their authority, enhance their power, and domesticate their people (Kulke 1990: 28).

This article proposes that the similar organization shared by maritime polities in the early historic period was the mandala political system. Despite the fact that ancient Southeast Asian people did not offer us any clue on whether they called their political system a “mandala” or not, this

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

article will use this constructive term to refer to the alliance - based political system described by Wolters (1999) and the multi - centric political landscape that shall be discussed in detail later on in our case study.

IV. A Concept of Mandala

Since this article proposes the mandala political system as the organization shared by maritime polities in the early historic period, it shall review the mandala concept proposed by Wolters.

The concept of mandalas was proposed by Wolters (1999) as a framework for the study of socio - political organizations of pre - modern Southeast Asia, and he did not claim that ancient inscriptions in kingdoms in this region explicitly stated the term mandala as their political structure. In fact, the term mandala was not usually used in the ancient inscriptions, so that Wolters only used this term as a conceptual model to suggest that pre-modern kingdoms in this region had a mandala - like political structure. He defined the term mandala as circles of kings and involved continuous networks of loyalties between rulers and the ruled (Wolters 1999: 25,114), like the Hindu - Buddhist paintings or texts depicting mandalas, in which the main figure would be in the middle and be surrounded minor figures in somewhat circular fashion. Structurally, in each mandala, one king who is identified with divine and universal authority would claim personal hegemony over other rulers in his mandala who were his allies or vassals (Wolters 1999: 25). However, in practice, the mandala model often represents an unstable political situation of a vaguely defined geographic area without fixed boundaries. The smaller centers under the god - king could search in all directions for protection from other god - kings and also tend to build up their own network and power to renounce their tributary status. Mandalas would expand and contract from time to time. Yet, only

the mandala overlord had the right to receive tribute - bearing envoys and he would also send officials who represented his superior status (Wolters 1999: 28).

In Wolters' view, two most important skills for the mandala overlord are present-mindedness and diplomacy since all interactions among polities in that period depended on personal ties (Wolters 1999: 30). The sacral power of the overlord or the man of prowess acquired through the Bhakti cult was shared by his kinship group and followers in his administration. This political system is based on inherited cultural traits from prehistory which highlight cognatic systems, an indifference towards lineage descent, and therefore the importance attached to personal achievement in particular generations (Wolters 1999: 38). The mandala structure was multi - centric in nature, so that there was an enduring multiplicity of centers (Wolters 1999: 39).

This article would like to stress that the mandala system was associated with Brahmanic and Buddhist ideology as the self - evident, religious term of mandala or the sacred circle suggests. Although we can see mandala - like political systems in some societies that were not associated with Brahmanism or Buddhism, this article limits the definition of the mandala system to polities related to Indic religions in which their rulers associated themselves with Indic gods and established a sacred landscape in their polities.

Since the mandala political system is alliance - based and depends on personal relationships rather than bureaucratic institutions in its management, it is imbued with internal contradictions. One contradiction in this system is the contradiction between symbolic belief and political practice in which the mandala overlord claimed universal authority through his divine identity and symbolic power over his subordinates. However, in reality, he depended largely on personal relationships to convince and attract his followers using his charisma. Therefore, when we study the mandala political system, we must be

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

careful not to equate what appeared to be in the symbolic level with what happened in political reality. Another important contradiction in the mandala political system is the relational contradiction between the center and its vassals. The center always wanted to retain its vassals under its power but the vassals always desired to renounce their tributary status whenever the chance presented itself. In this field of power dynamics, it is always possible for a vassal to become a center. Changes occurring in a vassal in a periphery area would also cause changes to the whole system and made the center to reorganize itself. However, the mandala political system requires the existences of both center and vassal although they had opposite interests. Without one of them, there would be no mandala system. This dialectical relation was the integral part of mandala institution and meant that the mandala political system was always in flux and full of tension, so that this system was dynamic rather than static and the ability of a center to maintain its status relied on the ability of its ruler.

V. Mandalas in Southeast Asian Maritime World

Due to the space constraint in this journal, this section succinctly describes mandalas, in Wolters' sense of the term, in some regions in maritime Southeast Asia that developed during around the second half of the first millennium AD. These regions include (1) the lower Mekong delta and (2) southern Sumatra. These mandalas demonstrate the similarities in multi - centric organizations of space and the coexistence of Buddhism and Brahmanism, which were the characteristics of the mandala political system and landscape.

1. The Mandala in the Lower Mekong Delta

Based on the Chinese documents, the area of lower Mekong delta seems to be the homeland of a polity named Funan which thrived around the

first to early seventh centuries AD and was succeeded by Chenla thereafter (Vickery 2002: 3). It has hitherto been believed that the kingdom of Funan was defeated by the kingdom of Chenla from the Dangrek area in the north; however, Michael Vickery, based on his examination of local inscriptions in the period from the sixth to the middle of seventh century AD, recently suggests that Funan and Chenla were not separate kingdoms since the kings of Chenla were successors of the kings of Funan and, indeed, that there was an attack northward by the Funan princes, Bhavavarman and Citrasena - Mahendravarman, who were grandsons of Rudravarman – the last king of Funan known to the Chinese. They then retreated southward again to establish a new capital at Bhavapura-Isanapura, currently known as Sambor PreiKuk (Vickery 2002: 21). This idea indicates a political continuity in this area rather than a radical change.

According to Vickery (2003 - 2004), Funan consisted of a number of ports and was considerably prosperous in the maritime trade network. However, when the pattern of trading routes between China and maritime Southeast Asia changed in around the fifth century AD when ships were sailing directly from insular Southeast Asia to Vietnamese coasts and South China shortcutting the Mekong delta, the trading economy of Funan declined and the kingdom shift its economic base to agriculture in the inland area, a short distance from the coast (Vickery 1998: 326).

This historical description is supported by archaeological record found in the Mekong delta in which we see a network of ports or trading communities on the coast interlinked to the agricultural communities situated a short distance inland through canal systems (Bishop et al. 2003). Archaeological study on settlement patterns of sites in “Oc Eo culture” in Vietnam’s Mekong delta demonstrates that there were as many as ninety groups of sites,

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

distributed in different geographical zones. Some of them have large size and temples and, thus, may perhaps represent their pre - eminent status in their groups (Miksic 2003: 11; Vo Si Khai 2003: 47 - 68). One prominent site in this area that has yielded a large number of archaeological items related to the international maritime trade network is Oc Eo, which was highly probably one of the most active ports in maritime Southeast Asia at least during the mid - first to mid - third centuries AD, when it may also have acted as an urban and industrial center in this area (Manguin 2004: 291 - 292; Miksic 2003). Recent study at the Oc-Eo/Ba The area also suggests that during the fourth to sixth centuries AD there existed a large religious complex (Manguin 2004: 298 - 300). Having considered the importance of the Oc - Eo complex, it is, therefore, possible to assume that it may have represented an economic, religious, and political center in the lower Mekong delta which may indeed have had multiple centers.

In the Cambodian part of the lower Mekong delta, we also see settlements scattered into several groups. Recent archaeological study in this area suggests that there may have been satellite settlements of Angkor Borei, a significant center in this area, distributed along Takeo river, in which some of their monuments have been dated to the seventh to tenth centuries AD by luminescence dating technique (Stark et al. 2005: 6). The area within the city wall (luminescence dated to the first to sixth centuries AD) of Angkor Borei yields a number of earliest dated Khmer inscriptions, religious artifacts, and monuments, and nearby the city there is the Phnom Da religious complex that derives the earliest Vishnu images in Khmer art (Stark 2003: 93 - 94; Stark et al. 2005). This suggests that not only was Angkor Borei an urban center but that it was a crucial political and religious center in this area in the early historic period as well.

According to archaeological and historical record, both Buddhism and Brahmanism coexisted in the lower Mekong Delta in the early historic period (Vickery 1998; Vo Si Khai 2003: 78). Paul Lavy (2003) proposes that prior to the seventh century AD the rulers in the lower Mekong delta employed the image of Vishnu to express their style of rule, whereas those in the northern Cambodia used that of Siva and during the seventh century AD there existed an attempt to unify these political ideologies of Vishnu and Siva together by creating Harihara image (half Vishnu - half Siva image) by the defeating rulers in the north. However, although we see a good number of Vishnu images that suggests the popularity of Vishnu in the lower Mekong deltaic area, we also observe Saivaite items and inscriptions dedicated to Siva or referring to elites who had Saivaite names dated to the sixth to seventh centuries AD in this area (Vo Si Khai 2003; Vickery 1998: 99 - 136). If we believe that Rudravarman was the king of Funan in the early sixth century who resided in the deltaic area and who (and/or whose family) was Saivaite as he bore a god Siva's name "Rudra", then we may have to accept that Saivism must be important in this area at that time. Also, if we believe that Bhavavarman and Mahendravarman, who were all Saivaite and moved northward to rule in Sambor PreiKuk, were successors of Rudravarman from the south, then it is probable that the Saivism (and other Indic ideology) in the north had, in fact, its root from the south.

These clues imply that both beliefs of Siva and Vishnu were significant in royal institutions in the lower Mekong delta and that the rulers in this area may have associated themselves with both Siva and Vishnu. In fact, a king can support the creations of architecture and sculpture of both Siva and Vishnu, whether he was a Saivaite or Vaishnavait, if there ever was such a distinction. This hypothesis is supported by Inscription K. 549 from the Angkorian period found at Phnom Da, refers back to the time of King Rudravarman indicating

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

that he set up one image of Vishnu in a cave, probably at Phnom Da hill (Vickery 2002: 11).

2. The Mandalas in South Sumatra

According to historical record, the area of south Sumatra in Indonesia was the homeland of an early historic kingdom named Srivijaya, which flourished in the trans-Asian trade network between the seventh to thirteenth centuries AD (Wolters 1967; Manguin 1993: 23). Although how far extended the boundaries of Srivijaya's power was is still a subject of debate, this polity was probably "an alliance of harbour principalities under the leadership of a ruler based initially in the seventh centuries at Palembang and after the eleventh century at Jambi" (O'Connor 1996: 596). In a competitive atmosphere of peer polity interaction in the international maritime trade, the Maharaja (king) of Srivijaya was encouraged to amass followers and vassal entities against his neighboring kingdoms, and to flaunt the number of his vassals to the Chinese court in order to insist on his superior status among China's vassals and to attract Chinese traders to the ports of his kingdoms (Wolters 1999: 132).

Wolters (1999: 129) and Miksic (2004: 239) propose that the political structure of Srivijaya was characterized by the mandala political system in which its political management was based on personal relationships between rulers and subjects and its political landscape may have represented "a gigantic mandala, a replica or cosmos, with Mount Meru at its center", a model that is echoed in this article. This model of organization of space is also demonstrated in Kulke's article on "Kadatuan Srivijaya", based on his structural analysis of Srivijayan inscriptions found in various sites in south Sumatra (1993). Kulke suggests that there were several spatial concentric circles of political authority surrounding the kadatuan (royal center or palace) of the datu

(ruler) of Srivijaya including (from inner to outer), vanua (kadatuan's immediate surroundings), samaryyada (surrounding neighborhood), and mandala (outlying tributary chieftaincies) which together constituted the Bhumu (land or country) of Srivijaya (1993). The model of political landscape proposed by Kulke is, therefore, rather similar to the mandala model described earlier in this article. However, it is important to note that the definition of the term "mandala" in Kulke's article is different from that in this article. Mandalas in Kulke's context only mean outlying tributary chieftaincies which were rather independent but ruled by local datus who were loyal to the datu of Srivijaya residing at the kadatuan, while the term mandala in this article refers to a specific type of political system and landscape in general.

Previous archaeological research on settlement pattern in south Sumatra also demonstrates that there are a number of early historic sites distributed along major rivers and its tributaries, especially those of Musi and Batang Hari Rivers, with a pattern that appears to McKinnon as "a dendritic mandala with its roots set well back into the hinterland among the rich sources of alluvial gold and valuable forest products" (1985: 36). Some of these sites provide major statuary and bricks which, according to McKinnon, indicate religious centers linked to the establishment of political power by local chiefs who presumably played a crucial role in the upstream - downstream exchanges between hinterland groups and coastal centers with rivers as the major means of communication (1985: 36). Although there still exists a debate about the location of the capital of Srivijaya, archaeological study at Palembang somewhat supports its candidacy since the site yielded a massive amount of Chinese and local ceramic sherds in an amount that has never been discovered at other sites in this area, together with Buddhist statues and monuments (i.e. possible stupa structures) (Manguin 1993). This definitely signifies its

**Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia**

status as a crucial urban, trading, and religious center, if not the capital of Srivijaya.

It has been broadly accepted that Buddhism was pre - eminent in Srivijaya as suggested by the Chinese sources and local inscriptions (Wolters 1967; Manguin 1993: 31). Kulke states that, based on historical record, the datu of Srivijaya may have claimed Bodhisattvahood as well as associated himself with local or ancestral deities to legitimize his rulership and establish the position of his status and his political center as *primus inter pares* amongst the other datu and centers (1993: 166 - 167). However, Brahmanism was also regularly practiced in this polity since a Saivaite temple complex dated to around the ninth to tenth centuries AD was discovered at Tanah Abang on the Lematang River, some 80 km upstream from Palembang, and slightly upstream from this site another site, now vanished, also provided a Vishnu statue (Manguin 1993: 29, 31). We should also note that a Brahmanic community has also been found at Kota Kapur, on Bangka Island across the Strait of Bangka from south Sumatra, the site that yielded a Srivijayan inscription, a stone temple, four Vishnu images, and a statue of Durga Mahisasuramardini (a form of Uma) that can be dated to the late sixth to early seventh centuries AD which predates Srivijaya (Soeroso and Manguin 1998: 77 - 78). This community may have been a part of Brahmanic influence in Srivijaya in the later period.

VI. Conclusion

On the basis of historical and archaeological evidence provided above, we see a long-standing peer polity interaction among societies in maritime Southeast Asia and between these societies and other regions in the international maritime trade network that flourished in around the fourth

century BC. Both intra - and inter - regional social interactions allowed goods and ideas to be circulated among participating societies, and encouraged the development of similar cultural and organizational characteristics in maritime Southeast Asia.

Around the mid - first millennium AD, the mandala alliance-based political system and multi - centric political landscape in which there were multiple concentric circles of settlements started to be seen more clearly throughout maritime Southeast Asia. These mandalas were related to both Brahmanism and Buddhism in which their rulers associated themselves with Siva, Vishnu, and Bodhisattava. Despite some minor differences due to the process of local selection in particular localities, the similarities in cultural traits and the mandala system were apparent. Therefore, it seems that the long - standing social interaction which took various forms such as trade, inter - marriage, pilgrimage, and even warfare encouraged the cultural and organizational similarities among interacting polities through the process of competitive emulation in which each polity needed to constantly improve itself socially and organizationally to compete with their neighbors and to maintain its political and economic status in the interaction sphere of maritime Southeast Asia.

The hypothesis proposed in this article will be supported or refined in light of future evidence. Given the fact that archaeological record in this region is destroyed daily, the author of this article strongly encourages archaeological projects to be conducted intensively in the near future in order to investigate the socio - political development and to rescue our cultural heritage in the region.

Exploring the Mandalas: Preliminary Observations on Peer Polity Interaction
and Socio - Political Development in Early Maritime Southeast Asia

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