

Thoughts on Land and Sea Peoples in Southeast Asia and Their Possible Relationships To Initial Settlement of Micronesia

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Abstract—The earliest dates so far reported for initial settlement of Micronesia are from the second millennium B.C. I have hypothesized that by this time in Island Southeast Asia there was a very active maritime network carried on by people I have called the Nusantao. In this paper I look at present day and historic maritime cultures of Southeast Asia which probably developed out of the early Nusantao and find a great variety in these cultures. Some of them are centered on maritime trade but many combine part-time agriculture on land with part-time fishing or trade by sea. I suggest that the primary settlers of Micronesia—not necessarily the very first people in the islands—were Nusantao from the Philippines and eastern Indonesia who were at home both on the land and on the sea.

Introduction

Initial settlement of Micronesia could have come from north, south, east or west. Hypotheses have been advanced for each of these directions providing the initial source of settlement for one or more of the islands. For instance, interpretation of recent physical anthropological data suggests the possibility that the early Jomon population of Japan and the early Okinawan population provided the ancestry for Micronesians and Polynesians (Turner 1984, Brace personal communication). I have at one time or another hypothesized that the earliest manufacture of pottery and of lenticular or cylindrical polished stone adzes in northern Melanesia was brought there by people moving through western Micronesia, originating from Japan (Solheim 1964, 1968a). I have never pursued this hypothesis but still think that it is a possibility to account for *initial* Micronesian settlement (as opposed to primary settlement).

Initial settlement of Micronesia by “Lapita” people from Melanesia (to the south) has been suggested, and the linguistic relationship of Eastern Oceanic suggests this possibility as well (Craib 1983).

Hyerdahl (Voitov & Tumarkin 1967) has hypothesized that the first settlement of Polynesia was in Hawaii, by Southeast Asians coming by way of the Japan Current, and that the rest of Polynesia and Micronesia was settled from Hawaii. This hypothesis has not been generally accepted but it is mentioned here simply to show that initial settlement of Micronesia from the east has been suggested.

Island Southeast Asia has long been thought to be the source of initial settlement of Micronesia. Recently Howells (1973) has returned to this possibility, referring to the Philippines as the source, and Spoehr (1957) and Pellett and Spoehr (1961) have proposed this as well. Major reasons for Spoehr’s proposing the Philippines were his assumption that the first settlers in the Marianas made Marianas red pottery and the similarity of this

Marianas red to potsherds from Masbate, Philippines (Solheim 1968b) which suggested the Philippines as the source area. Rather similar decorated pottery has been found in Tawian, the Cagayan Valley of northern Luzon, and western Sulawesi, dating to the second and third millennia B.C. This is sufficiently early to be "ancestral" to the Marianas red pottery. I have also suggested that the Southeast Asian method of pottery manufacture using paddle and anvil was brought to Yap from the Philippines. This introduction could have brought the Marianas red pottery manufacturing techniques as well (Solheim 1964). Others have suggested early population movement from the Philippines or eastern Indonesia into western Micronesia (Voitov & Tumarkin 1967, Craib 1983). Whether settlement of Micronesia came first from insular Southeast Asia or not, there appears a reasonable likelihood that there was early, if not the earliest, settlement of some islands in western Micronesia from the Philippines and/or northeastern Indonesia.

The Earliest Micronesian Cultures

A quick look at dates for first settlement of different portions of Micronesia suggests that this took place sometime between 4000 and 3000 B.P. The earliest date anywhere is about 4000 B.P. from Bikini Atoll in the Marshalls (Streck this volume). As this is the only date from its level, more, similar dates are needed for confirmation. Spoehr's date for Marianas red at about 3500 B.P. is on shell and is not taken as definitive (see Bellwood 1979, Kurashina & Clayshulte 1983). The earliest date for Marianas pottery is from the Tarague site on Guam, between 3000 and 3500 B.P. This date has been questioned, however, by Athens (1986). A plain, brown pottery seems to have been present earlier than the Marianas red (Moore 1983). There appears to have been a pre-pottery occupation at some of the sites with early pottery, the recovered artifacts including polished shell adzes made from *Tridacna*.

The Early Nusantao

I have hypothesized that a flaked and stone tool industry characterized the early Nusantao in their first movement north out of their homeland in eastern Indonesia and southern Mindanao at around 5000 B.C. and that edge-grinding of shell adzes soon became a part of this assemblage and further, that a plain brown pottery and polished shell adzes had become a part of their tradition by around 3000 B.C. (Solheim 1976, 1981, 1984). Red slipping of pottery and decoration with impressed circles and short lines of punctuations became a part of this tradition not long after the inclusion of the plain brown pottery.

I have recently redefined the term "Nusantao" and need to repeat this definition here (Solheim 1984: 85–86), ". . . I now define Nusantao as natives of Southeast Asia, and their descendents, with a maritime oriented culture from their beginnings, these beginnings probably in southeastern Island Southeast Asia around 5000 B.C. or possibly somewhat earlier. A majority of the people with this culture, at any one time, probably spoke a pre-, proto- or Austronesian language but there was no doubt a varying sized minority of them, from time to time, who did not speak an Austronesian related language. At any one time there were also many other Austronesian speakers living in the interior of the larger islands who were not maritime oriented, and I would not consider these as Nusantao. The

Nusantao and the non-maritime Austronesian speakers no doubt were constantly mixing genetically, culturally and linguistically. Their genetic ancestry no doubt varied from time to time and place to place to include Southern Mongoloid—probably as a central core—and Melanesoid and I would suggest that this may well have been the case from their very beginning.”

The people who were the primary manufacturers of the Sa-Huynh-Kalanay pottery were Nusantao. This includes people along the coast of Viet Nam but not at any distance into the interior. According to the Vietnamese, the Sa-Huynh Culture goes back into the second millennium B.C. along the central coast of Viet Nam (Tan 1984). The distribution of the two-headed ear rings (*lingling-o*) in Taiwan, the Philippines, southern Viet Nam, and Thailand, with their largest number having been found in southern Viet Nam, suggests that traders from this area had a wide territory by the first half of the first millennium B.C. (Solheim 1982).

The beginning of the spread of the Sa-Huynh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition and the often-associated practice of jar burial goes back into the second millennium B.C. The earliest Sa-Huynh-Kalanay pottery outside of Viet Nam is not particularly similar to the Sa-Huynh pottery of the same time. Rather, it more closely resembles the second millennium B.C. pottery of northern Viet Nam and the southern end of Viet Nam. The Nusantao probably were distributed along the Viet Nam coast, where there were harbors, from sometime in the fifth millennium B.C. until the recent past (Solheim 1984).

Recent Maritime Populations of Southeast Asia

There has been a considerable variety of maritime cultures in island and coastal mainland Southeast Asia during the recent past. Unfortunately these cultures are relatively little known to the West. Until recently, anthropologists were not attracted to them; and historians, political scientists, and economists were not interested since they were considered “marginal,” had low status with no political power, and were, for the most part, very poor. At one extreme there were the Sea Gypsies or *Orang Laut*, with no political power whatsoever. They live in the mangrove swamps in Malaysia and Indonesia near Singapore and on the small coastal islands up the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. At the other extreme, in the not far distant past, the Bajao and Bugis of Malaysia were a maritime people with considerable power in the seas around Indonesia and Malaysia, but for the last few hundred years they have been based on land. The Bajao, or a trading people with the same name, were traders along the coasts from South Africa to southwestern India, and their Malay language was the most widespread of the coastal trade languages (Ottino 1974, Solheim 1975). These people were, no doubt, the first settlers of Madagascar, probably around A.D. 100 or soon after (Solheim 1965). The Samal of the southern coast of Mindanao were fully maritime but recent political events have virtually eliminated them as maritime people. With the Samal whole families lived constantly on their boats but traded with and provided services to people living along the coast (Spoehr 1973).

I have visited with or seen from a distance fishermen in the central Philippines and on small islands in eastern Indonesia, just west of the western tip of Irian Jaya, who live on land but who take off in their boats to fish for several months each year, without returning to their homes during this time. They help with the preparation of the land for agriculture

but their wives and families do most of the farming. There used to be boat people living on their boats in Guangjou (Canton), Hong Kong, and Hanoi who shared many elements of culture. There are still small populations of these people living in Hong Kong, on the river in Canton, and in Hue and Hou Gai, Ha Long Bay in Viet Nam that I have seen in 1986 and 1988. Except for the boat people of Hong Kong, these peoples have not been studied to my knowledge. In the recent past, and possibly until today, probably there were such boat people living in most major harbor cities up the coast of China and in southern Korea and possibly in Kyushu, Japan.

The Cham speaking people, today pushed back into the mountains of southern-central Viet Nam, historically were adapted to both the sea and the land. While there is a moderate amount of historical data on the land-oriented Cham, there is very little, if any, information on the maritime Cham. The Cham are the major Austronesian-speakers in Viet Nam and Kampuchea. Linguists say that they are recent arrivals to mainland Southeast Asia from island Southeast Asia. Cham is considered to be closely related to the Malay languages; its closest relationship in island Southeast Asia is with the Achinese in northern Sumatra (Blust 1984). They are the first known historic people from the area where the late prehistoric Sa-Huynh Culture had been. At this time there is no indication that the Cham moved into this area and displaced the earlier makers of the Sa-Huynh pottery, so Vietnamese archaeologists, as well as myself (Solheim 1979), feel that the people of the Sa-Huynh Culture were the primary ancestors of the Cham.

There are several groups of quasi-maritime people living in the small islands off the southeastern tip of Sulawesi. Hans Dieter-Evers gave a talk at the University of Hawaii a few years ago on research that he had done on one of these groups. Ordinarily they were farmers but most of the men were also experienced sailors. An older, experienced sailor with the necessary contacts would hire a seaworthy boat for a share of profits from trading. He would bring together a crew of farmers whom he trusted, who were farming on his island, to join in the venture. With shared and borrowed capital, they would sail to a major port in eastern Java and sell and trade their first cargo for a different cargo. From there they would sail to the Moluccas or the Kei Islands in eastern Indonesia, or even to the south coast of Irian Jaya, to trade this cargo for a different one. At each stop they might sell some of their cargo for cash and trade the rest of it for the new cargo. They would make a round of five or six ports and then repeat. They would not necessarily repeat all the same ports, and at least once, when the winds were right, the captain, on a whim, took the boat to the north coast of Australia. The sailor/farmers would be away from home for about three years, returning with a good profit. On return they would go back to farming. After five or more years at farming, this would happen again but not with the same crew. Each time a "captain" organized such a trip he would have a different crew. The trading voyages were done as much for adventure as for profit.

Dieter-Evers reported that he had located a diary of a Portuguese adventurer who had stopped at this same island off Sulawesi during the sixteenth century. In this diary the description of what he found there differed very little from what was going on when Dieter-Evers was there. He further reported maritime trading and agriculture among people in another small group of islands nearby, except that the general route they took was from the Sunda Islands to the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. He said that there were many

such networks of part-time sailor-farmers, covering different routes that among them formed a network over most, if not all, of Indonesia, the Philippines, and much of coastal Mainland Southeast Asia.

Summary and Conclusions

There were several varieties of maritime peoples in island Southeast Asia in the past—from peoples living in boats with their lives almost totally on the water, to people living on the land most of the time but with the men going to sea for extended fishing trips of several weeks or months, to men going to sea for two or three years of trading and adventure and then returning to an agricultural life. All of these varieties, with the possible exception of the *Orang Laut*, however, shared knowledge of life both on the land and on the sea. Those people who lived on boats were trading and interacting with the land-oriented people and knew a great deal about their cultures; they were probably symbiotic. These lifeways are no doubt specializations from the early maritime cultures that first moved into the Micronesian islands. But the shared lifeways of these variants suggest that these first settlers were at home both on the sea and land and that while continuing in their voyaging they also quickly set up viable settlements, taking advantage of the riches of the new ecosystem they had discovered.

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