

A Note on the Identification of a Group of Siamese Port-polities along the Bay of Thailand

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Since 1924, the year that Prince Damrong Rajanubab presented a seminal lecture at Chulalongkorn University on the periodization of Siamese history,¹⁾ a unilinear view on Thai history has become widely accepted in which the sequence of events begins with the establishment of the northern kingdom of Sukhothai during the 13th century, followed by the emergence of Ayutthaya as a Siamese kingdom during the mid-14th century in the lower basin of the Chao Phraya river, after which expansion further south along the river to Thonburi resulted in the establishment of a new capital during the interregnum in 1767 after the destruction of Ayutthaya by the Burmese. Finally, the move was made to Bangkok on the opposite side of the river, where the present dynasty was founded in 1782. With such a perspective, the nuclei of political power are seen as having moved from the inland north to the deltaic south. In other words, the further north, the more ancient and the further south, the more recent.²⁾

Along with traditional Thai chronicles which begin their narrative with the foundation of Ayutthaya in C.S. 712 (1351 A.D.),³⁾ there exist much earlier Sukhothai inscriptions, in particular, Rama Kamhaeng inscription which attracted scholarly attention since the 19th century. This latter inscription was first discovered in 1833 by Prince Mongkut, who then was a monk and was on a pilgrimage to various cetiyas in and around Sukhothai. In 1855, after ascending to the throne as King Rama IV, he gave the visiting British envoy Sir John Bowring a lithographic copy of the inscription. Bowring wrote in his *The Kingdom and People of Siam* that despite the effort of the learned king, the decipherment of the said inscription had not been successful. From that time on, both Thai and western scholars followed the royal precedence until 1924, when the most authoritative translation was rendered by G. Cœdès and was published in his *Recueil des inscriptions du Siam, première partie*. The Rama Kamhaeng Inscription listed in the book as "Inscription No. 1" and dated 1214 *saka* (1292 A.D.) is now considered to be the oldest known Thai document in existence. The king whose name appeared in the inscription as Sri Indraditya was identified by Prince Damrong to be "the first king to rule the Sayam Prathet or

Siamese Prathet (Kingdom of Siam).⁴⁾

In addition to such epigraphic and historiographical sources, scholars have long noticed references in the Chinese dynastic histories to the term *Xian* 暹. As early as in 1904 P. Pelliot proposed that *Xian* coincided with Sukhothai. Since that time, this hypothesis has earned wide acceptance until recently. For example, G. Cœdès writes in his authoritative history of Indianized Southeast Asia:

In the twelfth century, the bas-relief of Angkor Wat represent at the head of the great procession of the southern gallery a group of warriors who wear a costume entirely different from that of the Khmers and whom two short inscriptions identify as *Syām*.⁵⁾ They were very probably Thai of the middle Menam, for it was to the kingdom of Sukhothai that the Chinese applied the name Sien [= *Xian*], used for the first time by the *History of Yuan* in connection with an embassy of 1282 sent by sea... by 1292, the probable date of his stele and also of his dispatch of a golden letter to the court of the Mongols, Rama Kamhaeng had already created a sort of hegemony over a great number of Thai tribes.⁶⁾

However, the plausibility of this identification of *Xian* with Sukhothai should be challenged in accordance with the passage in the section on *Xian* in the *Dao-i zhi-lüe* 島夷誌略 (1351) written by Wang-da yuan 汪大淵:

俗尚侵掠。每他國亂、輒駕百十艘以沙糊滿載、舍生而往、務在必取...近年七十餘艘、來侵單馬錫。

(People [of *Xian*] are aggressive. Whenever they see other country being in a state of disorder, they immediately dispatch as many as one hundred ships full of sago to invade it... Recently more than seventy ships invades Tan-ma-yang.)

The above passage implies that the people of *Xian* used ships full of *sago* 沙糊, a starchy farina or meal derived from the soft interior of the trunk of the palmtree, to invade other country. "Sago trees are most abundant in the eastern parts of the Malay Archipelago, as the Moluccas and neighbouring islands, with New Guinea and Borneo, and in the Philippines, Mindanao. In all these, they are more or less the bread of the inhabitants. From these countries, they are believed to have been introduced into Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula."⁷⁾ It is therefore most unlikely that *sago* was used as a staple by people living in such an inland country as Sukhothai, which was located 400km from the Bay of Thailand.

In 1989, YAMAMOTO Tatsuro discovered some convincing evidence to refute the long believed hypothesis about the identity of *Xian* with Sukhothai in the *Da-de Nan-hai zhi* 大德南海志, a gazetteer of the Canton area, compiled dur-

ing the Da-de period (1297-1307 A.D.) of the Yuan dynasty.⁸⁾ In the section about "Barbarian [Foreign] Countries" in the same work we find the following passage:

暹國管
上水速孤底
(*Xian guo guan*
Shang-shui-su-gu-di)

Shang-shui means "up water," whereas YAMAMOTO regards, su-gu-di, as equivalent to Su-gu-tai 速古臺 which appears in the history of Yuan dynasty (*Yuanshi* 元史). Leaving scrutiny of the meaning of the verb *guan* aside, the above sentence clearly indicates that *Xian guo* (the kingdom of *Xian*), the subject of the passage, could not be the same as its object *Shang-shui-su-gu-di*: showing that these two toponyms must refer to different places. Combined with the above passage from *Da-de Nan-hai zhi*, it becomes doubtful that *Xian* referred to Sukhothai in the Chinese sources. If so, the question is where was *Xian* actually located?

In the biography of Chen-yi-zhong 陳宜中 in the history of Sung dynasty (宋史 *Songshi*) we find, "In the 19th year of the Zhi-yuan reign (1282-83), the Great Army attacked Champa and [Chen] Yi-zhong fled to *Xian*. He subsequently died there... (至元十九年、大軍伐占城。〔陳〕宜中走暹、後沒於暹。)" Chen-yi-zhong's flight to *Xian* might refer to the fact that the place known to the Chinese as *Xian* had become, after the collapse of Srivijayan regional commercial hegemony, an entrepôt in Southeast Asia, which Chinese traders at the days may have frequented in search of precious tropical products then in great demand in China. It is not unlikely that this situation motivated the defeated Sung minister to choose *Xian* as a haven for a political asylum, where he hoped to find his compatriots.⁹⁾ This being the case, there is the growing probability of *Xian* being a kind of port which has an easy access for the ocean-going ships.

Recently Stuart Robson published in the Dutch journal *BKI* a brief, but important, piece of research entitled "Thailand in an Old Javanese Sources."¹⁰⁾ where he reexamines several toponyms of mainland Southeast Asia found in Canto 15.1 of the old Javanese text of *Deça-Warnana*, popularly known as *Nagara-Kertagama*. The relevant portion of the text is as follows:

Tuhun tang syangkâyodhyapura kimuta ng dharmanagari
marûtma mwan ring rājapura nguniweh singhanagari
ri campā kambojanyât ī yawana mitrêka satata

(On the other hand, the Siamese of Ayodhya and also of Dharmanagari, Marutma, Rajapura as well as Singhanagari,

Campa, Cambodia and Annam are always friends)

Prior to Robson's study, Th. Pigeaud, in his monumental study of *Nagara Kertagama*, indicates *syangkayodhyapura... dharmanagari* as representing three separate toponyms: viz. *syangka* being Siam, *ayodhyapura*, Ayuthia and *dharmanagari*, Ligor.¹¹⁾ Robson reads them differently as "the Siamese of Ayodhya and also of Dharmanagari." He regards *syangka* to be the same as the Syam found in a Cham inscription of the mid-11th century and also in Khmer inscriptions of the 13th century. The ending *-ka* is interpreted as the adoption of the Sanskrit suffix *-ka*.¹²⁾ According to Robson's reading, *syangka* and *ayodhyapura* are two separate words, the first referring to "either the ethnic groups or the country as a whole and the second to a specific place, namely Ayodhya."¹³⁾ This new reading assumes that the term *syangka* before *dharmanagari* was omitted by inserting the conjunctive *kimuta* ("also"). This new reading might free us from the preoccupation of *Xian* as a single locality, since we now realize that *Xian* or Siam could be both Ayodhya and Ligor.

As for the probability of a single Chinese term denoting plural localities, FUKAMI Sumio has argued that the Chinese concept of San-fo-qi 三佛齊 might have referred to either individual or all the port-polities along the Strait of Malacca that were sending tributes to China.¹⁴⁾ Chris Baker also believes that *Xian* "was clearly located close to the gulf, either as one *muang* or as a confederation."¹⁵⁾

This being the case, which localities could be considered as the candidates for *Xian*? Ligor or Nakhonsithammarat, mentioned in the 14th century Javanese poem should come to the fore first. This principality was under the political influence of Srivijaya until the end of the 13th century; but during the 1290s. it might have already been under the aegis of the Siamese king of Rama Khamhaeng whose celebrated inscription counted it among his southernmost principalities. Another possibilities are Phetburi (Bejapuri) and Ratburi (Rajapuri), both of which are mentioned in the Rama Khamhaeng inscription. Suphanburi, the present site of which was founded later in the 15th century¹⁶⁾ is also referred to in the same inscription as Suphannaphum (Subarnnabhum). This could be another candidate, although the exact site of this principality at that exact time is not known, but it should not be far from the principality which is referred to in the history of the Ming dynasty (*Mingshi* 明史) as Su-men-bang 蘇門邦. Today, Suphanburi is located over 100km up the Tha Chin river but it may have been nearer to the mouth of the river judging from the attached **Map A** for the early Dvaravati period.¹⁷⁾

Judging from its subsequent development, the most important principality should be Ayutthaya, which YAMAMOTO Tatsuro proposed to identify with the Chinese *Xian* 暹 in stead of long accepted Sukhothai.¹⁸⁾ Ayutthaya then probably known as Ayodhya as the Inscription No. 11 suggests, soon became

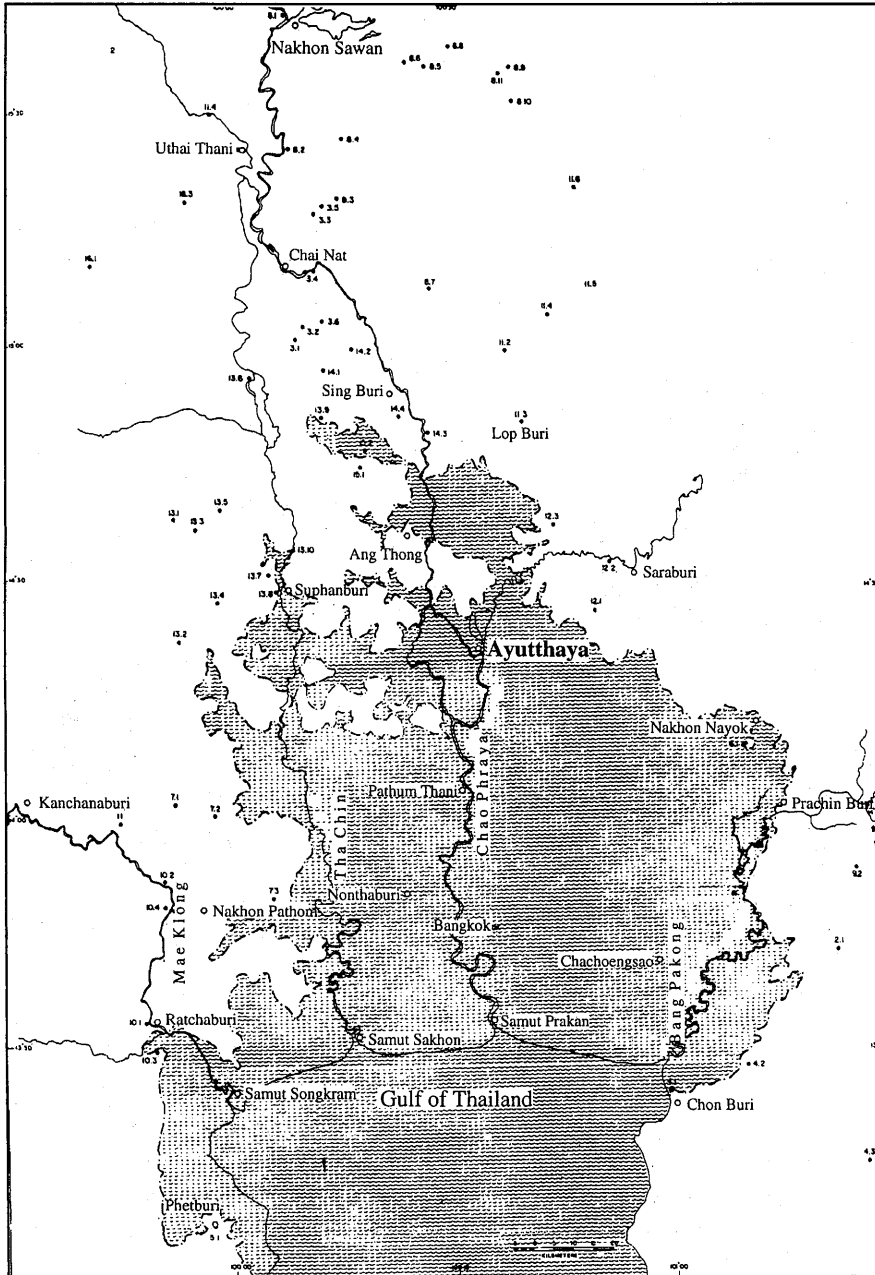
stronger by the merger with Lopburi in 1349 and then came to be known to the Chinese as *Xian-luo-hu* 暹羅斛 or simply *Xian-luo* 暹羅. According to the *Ming-shi-lu* 明實錄, a tribute was sent to China under the name of the King of Suphanburi of the principality of Xian-luo-hu (暹羅斛國蘇門邦王) as late as 1398¹⁹⁾ and this fact might safely be taken as a remnant of the composite nature of the former *Xian*.

Notes

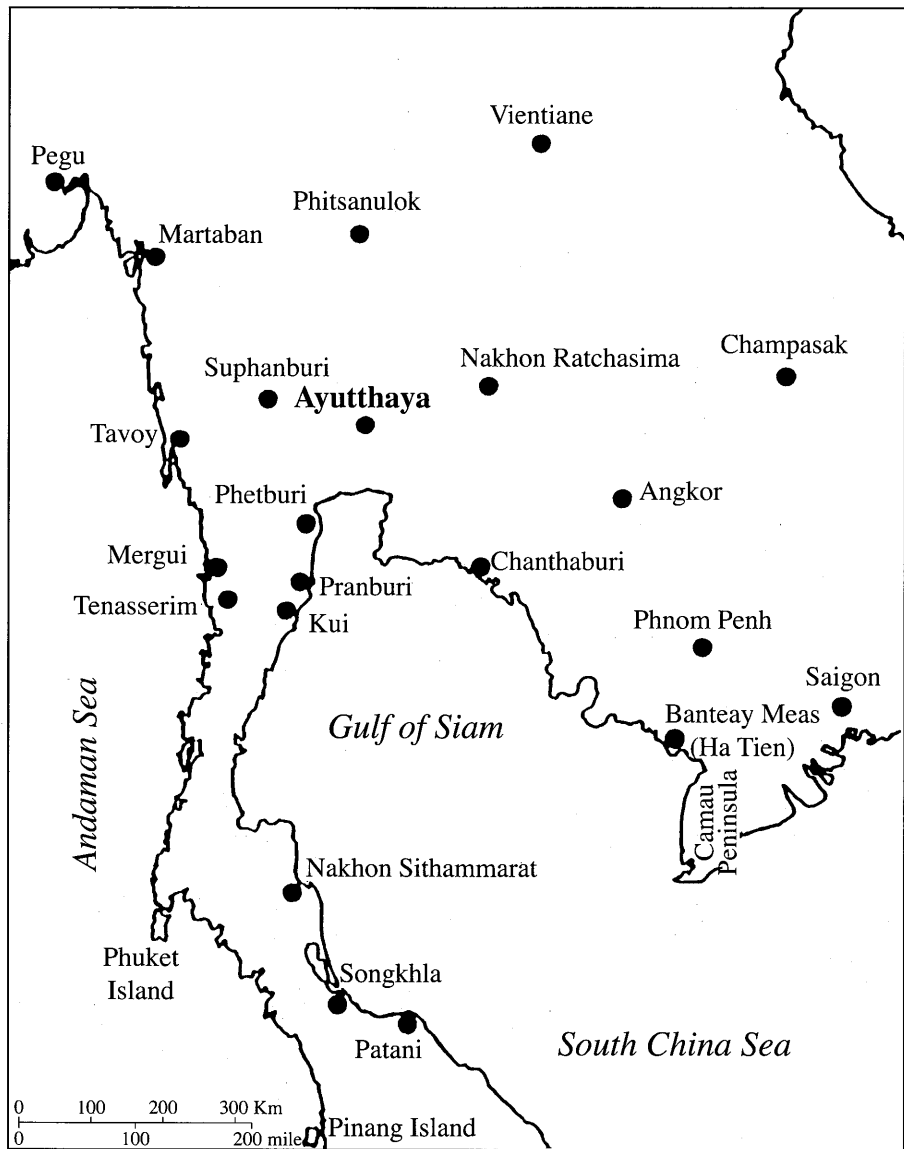
- 1) Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, *Sadaeng Ban'yai Phongsawadan Sayam*. Bangkok, 1924.
- 2) What follows is a revised version of a keynote address delivered at the 8th International Conference on Thai Studies, Nakhon Phanom, 9-12 January, 2002. The main argument here happily coincided with that of Chris Baker, whose presentation was published later as "Ayutthaya Rising: From Land or Sea?" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34 (1). pp. 41-62.
- 3) There are at least two exceptions. One being the Luang Prasoet version in which earlier year of C.S. 686 or 1324 A.D. is given as the date of installation of the image of Phra Panæng Chæng, while the other, represented by the British Museum edition includes a long introduction passage on the history of Siam prior to the foundation of Ayutthaya.
- 4) Cœdès had proposed, earlier in 1921, that the Sukhodaya (Sukhothai) dynasty was "the first historical Siamese dynasty." G. Cœdès, "The origins of the Sukhodaya Dynasty," *Journal of the Siam Society*. vol. 14 (1921), pp. 1-11.
- 5) The identification of Syam Kut with Siamese was recently challenged by Bernard-Philippe Groslier, *Syam Kuk*. Bangkok: The Foundation for the Promotions of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbook Projects, 2002. 117p.
- 6) G. Cœdès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. tr. by S. B. Cowing. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1968. pp. 191, 204.
- 7) John Crawford, *A descriptive dictionary of the Indian Islands & adjacent countries*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971. p. 371.
- 8) YAMAMOTO Tatsuro, "Thailand as it is referred to in the *Da-de Nan-hai zhi* [大德南海志] at the beginning of the fourteenth century," *Journal of East-West Maritime Relations*. vol. 1. Tokyo: The Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan, 1989. pp. 47-58.
- 9) O. W. Wolters writes: Chinese merchants in their own ships during later Sung times and in the Mongol period were themselves promoting the trade by visiting centres of production in South East Asia, by-passing the lines of communication on which the Maharajas had flourished for so long. The decline of Srivijaya is therefore consistent with that one would expect as a result of a change in its commercial environment, when the services of a single entrepôt in western Indonesia were no longer indispensable." O. W. Wolters, *The fall of Śrīvijaya in Malay history*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1970. p. 4.
- 10) Stuart Robson, "Thailand in an Old Javanese Source," *Bijdragen tot de taal, land- en volkenkunde van Neerlandsch Indië* 153-III (1997), p. 431.
- 11) Thomas Pigeaud, *Java in the 14th century, a study in cultural history*. vol. 4. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962. pp. 35-36.
- 12) *Syanka* appears also in Deça Warana: 83.4 as one of the enumerated names of country.
- 13) Robson, 1997, *loc. cit.*
- 14) FUKAMI Sumio 深見純生, "Sanbussei no saikentō: Marakka kaikyō kodaishi

kenkyū no shiza tenkan” 三佛齊の再検討—マラッカ海峡古代史研究の視座轉換 (Reexamination of San-fo-ch'i: Change of Perspective of the Study on Early History of the Western Part of Insular Southeast Asia), *Tōnan Ajiā Kenkyū* 東南アジア研究 25-2 (1987).

- 15) Chris Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- 16) Prasert Na Nagara & A. B. Griswold, “The inscription of King Rama Gamheñ of Sukhodaya (1292 A.D.)” in Prasert & Griswold, *Epigraphic and historical studies*. Bangkok: The Historical Society, 1992. p. 281, n. 130.
- 17) See the attached **Map A**.
- 18) YAMAMOTO, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- 19) FUJIWARA Riichirō 藤原利一郎, *Tōnan Ajiashi no Kenkyū* 東南アジア史の研究 (A Study of the History of Southeast Asia) (Kyōto 京都: Hōzōkan 法藏館, 1986), p. 30.



Map A: Map of the Early Dvaravati-Period Coastline and Archaeological Sites
 Prepared by Phongsri Vanasin & Thiva Supajana quoted by Kennon Breazeale (ed.), *From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya's Maritime Relations with Asia*. Bangkok: The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 1999. p. 58.



Map B: Important Ports and Other Towns Near Ayutthaya

Based upon Kennon Breazeale (ed.), *From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya's Maritime Relations with Asia*. Bangkok, 1999. XIII [Suphanburi added by ISHII]