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State Formation and Social Integration in Pre-modern South and Southeast Asia: A Comparative Study of Asian Society

Coordinators' Report

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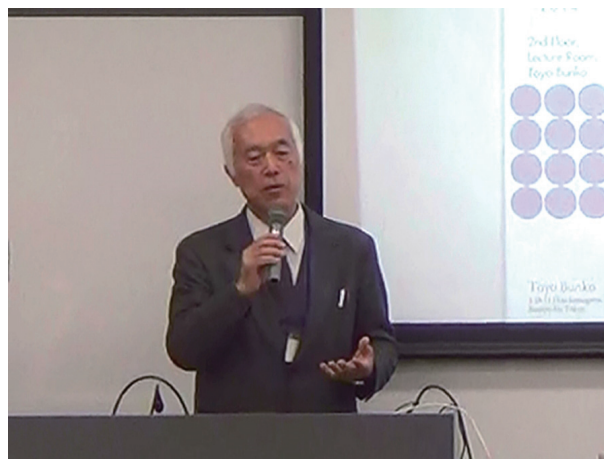
Purpose of the Symposium

The purpose of this symposium was to comparatively examine state formation and social integration during the pre-modern period in two regions of Asia. The regions compared were South Asia and Southeast Asia, and the two topics of focus were: a) a re-examination of the concept of 'Indianisation' of Southeast Asia during the ancient and medieval periods, and b) an examination of the concept of 'Islamicisation' and its application to medieval society in South and Southeast Asia.

European scholars began researching Southeast Asian history during the Western colonisation of this area. The interpretation by early scholars who pioneered these studies was that a highly developed Indian culture was 'transplanted' in Southeast Asia during an ancient period. Later Indian nationalist scholars further reinforced this notion through concepts such as 'Greater India' or 'Hindu Colonies'.

In the 1940s, however, a new concept 'Indianisation of Southeast Asia' was introduced by George Coedes. Since then many scholars have discussed various aspects of 'Indianisation', taking up, for example, a comparative study of temple architecture, writing systems, religious rituals, etc., and the notion of

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'transplantation' continued to be the leading view in Southeast Asian historical studies. Only in the 1970s did a new trend emerge emphasizing indigenous development of Southeast Asian states and society. The scholars who adopt this view are called indigenists and the indigenist view has been widely current among historians.

A recent, important development, the advance in pre-historic archaeological studies in Southeast Asia and

South Asia, reveal indigenous development of Southeast Asian society even before the beginning of the Common Era. Consequently now, most scholars are satisfied with the discovery of the process of autonomous development before the 4th century. They, therefore, without hesitation, tend to regard the period after the 4th century as the period of 'Indianisation' when advanced states were formed on the basis of an Indian model under the influence of Buddhism or Hinduism.

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Another development was the 'Convergence theory' put forward by H. Kulke toward the end of the last century. According to him, a similar process in early state formation was seen on both sides of the Bay of Bengal, namely the eastern coast of Indian Peninsula (East and South India) and Southeast Asia during the first half of the first millennium. Kulke suggests that the 'social nearness' between the two areas brought a certain 'convergence' in the state formation.

Recent archaeological discoveries in various sites as well as the theory of convergence as put forward by Kulke have greatly advanced the study of ancient and early medieval history of Southeast Asia. While we discussed these topics in the symposium, we also wanted to discuss another point on this occasion, and that is the meaning of 'Indianisation' itself.

As stated earlier, most scholars on the indigenist side distinguish the early process of state formation from that achieved later in the 5th century and after. They regard the latter process as 'Indianised' state formation. We, however, wonder whether the states established in Southeast Asia under the influence of the culture of India can be regarded as 'Indianised' states. Of course, it is possible to perceive Indian influences, but did these states have the same socio-political features as the states that were formed in East and South India during the same period? As far as Kulke limits his discussion to the 'process' of state formation, his 'convergence theory' is fully acceptable, but it does not necessarily follow that the states that formed on either side of the Bengal Bay had the same socio-political features to allow us to call the Southeast Asian states 'Indianised states'.

For this reason, comparative studies are necessary to re-examine the appropriateness of the concept of 'Indianisation' of Southeast Asia. So far, scholars have paid attention only to the similarity of the state and society between Southeast Asia and South Asia, but there are also differences between them that need to be noted. For example, though we find Brahmin participation in state governance in both regions, there appear to be differences in the role they played in the two regions.

For the purpose of comparison we invited R. Gurukkal and R. Champakalakshmi from India and P. Manguin and Kulke from Europe. Together with Japanese specialists we discussed the development of state from chiefdom to regional, and finally to centralised state. In this process, ideology such as *bhakti* and caste (*varna*) system appears to have had utmost importance in South Asia. However, their non-implantation in Southeast Asia, as also an ecological difference between the two regions, seem to have caused a difference in state formation and social integration in the two regions. We discussed all of these points.

The reason for taking up, in this symposium, the so-called 'Islamicisation' of South and Southeast Asia during the medieval period is as follows. In South Asia during the period from the 14th to the 17th century the Vijayanagar state flourished in the south ruling a large area. The kings of this state followed Hinduism although they were

tolerant of other religions. Despite this, past historiography reveals that certain ardent Hindu scholars praised the state for having defended South India from the attack and spread of Islam by fighting against the sultanates to the north. P. B. Wagoner, however, expresses strong opposition to this religiously biased understanding.

According to him the kings of this state were, though followers of Hinduism, fully aware of the spread of Islam and Islamicate culture and their importance in the outside wider area. They differentiated Islamicate culture from Islamic religion as can be seen in their using the title '*hinduraja suratarana*' (sultan among the Hindu kings) for themselves. Wagoner argues that the Vijayanagar kings sought legitimation of their rule from the Delhi sultan who defeated many South Indian kings. In recent studies on medieval Deccan history Wagoner proposes the concept of a 'Persian cosmopolis', borrowing the idea from Sheldon Pollock's 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' to understand their interactions in the Deccan. We wanted to discuss this interaction.

Sunil Kumar has been studying the rule of the Delhi sultans and the society under their rule in the northern part of the subcontinent from the 13th to the 16th century. It is well known that Sufism played an important role in the spread of Islam and establishment of Muslim rule in North India. According to him, however, past historical studies of the Delhi sultanate period were flawed as it treated Sufism only synchronically and monolithically. Instead, he suggests that we should study the role of Sufism diachronically paying attention to the change in the relation Sufi *shaikh*s had with political elites including the sultan. According to Kumar a study of this change or transition enables us to understand better, the reason for, and process of, the people's acceptance of Muslim rule during the period from the 13th to the 16th century.

These two aspects studied by Wagoner and Kumar are somewhat different from and independent of each other, but if we look at them together, we understand better the spread of Islam and establishment of Muslim rule in South Asia in general. This in turn should urge us to examine the situation in Southeast Asia, where Islamic states emerged in the 13th century. Since then Islamic religion and Islamicate culture have been playing a very important role in Southeast Asia too. That is the reason we also took up the topic of 'Islamicisation' in this symposium by inviting Wagoner from U.S. and Kumar from India.

Papers, Comments and Discussions

On the first day intensive discussions followed the comments by A. Tanabe on the four reports delivered in Session 1 concerning 'Islamicisation'. Similarly nine reports in relation to the so-called 'Indianisation' of Southeast Asia in Session 2 and 3 were followed by comments by H. Kulke and further concentrated discussions on the second day. For details of the reports and comments, please see the abstracts of papers and commentator's reports included in this web report.

The difference between South and Southeast Asia was stressed upon even on the first day of the symposium in a comment by Tanabe and also in the discussions. Tanabe emphasized two points, one, ecology and the other, the way of integration; while in South Asia sedentary agriculture and social integration by caste system were prevalent, in Southeast Asia there were ecological difference between coastal and inland areas in some parts and there existed many different ethnic groups that were not integrated or were loosely integrated as a whole. These conditions were responsible for the differences in state formation and social integration between the two regions in pre-modern period.

Though a variety of topics was discussed over the two days, we may group them roughly under the following four heads: 1) early state formation, from chiefdom to state, 2) the role played by ideology and caste (*varna*) system in the later state formation, 3) Mandala state theory and *samanta* system, and 4) Sufis, sultans and

commercial network in the 13th to the 16th centuries. The discussions that took place under these heads are as follows.

1) Early State Formation, from Chiefdom to State.

In Session 2, M. Yamagata reported on the development of Linyi polity in Vietnam, and R. Gurukkal on the Satavahanas in the Deccan and early polities in Tamil Nadu, South India. Gurukkal insisted on differentiating these South Indian polities from the state regarding the former as chiefdoms on the basis of no development class relation and sedentary agriculture. In Linyi though there was a change in the influencing agent, from China to India, probably in the 2nd century, her report on its early state formation seems to confirm 'social nearness' and 'convergence' in early state formation in South Asia and Southeast Asia pointed out by Kulke.

The examination of the early state formation was further carried out by three scholars who studied the regional state formation of Bengal, Thailand and Sumatra. R. Furui stressed on the regional difference in development within Bengal itself before the emergence of a centralised state there. E. Nitta talked about the formation of Dvaravati state based on the network connecting port-cities and inland area. This point was extensively discussed in relation to a similar type of state formation in Sumatra. Though there remain many unclear aspects in the state formation of Srivijaya, the city-state formation based on the river system was suggested by Manguin. With respect to this, many participants pointed out the importance of recognizing the different ecologies in Southeast Asia itself (for example, Java and Sumatra).

2) The Role Played by Ideology and Caste (*Varna*) System in the Later State Formation.

R. Champakalakshmi explained the part played by the ideology (Puranic religion and *bhakti*) in the process of later state formation taking up the Pallavas, Pandyas and Cholas for the period from the 5th to the 13th centuries. She emphasized the merging of the North Indian Brahmanical tradition with the local religious tradition in the Tamil country, which affected the religious policy of these states. She stressed upon the difference between the Pallavas/Pandyas and the Cholas with regard to the degree of importance given to the local Tamil tradition (vernacularisation), and though others shared her view, the time when the change occurred (since when in the Chola rule—from the beginning or from the time of Rajaraja I) remained debatable.

F. Matsuura explained change in the concept of kingship during the Angkor period by examining inscriptions and referring to studies by G. Coedes, I. W. Mabbett, H. Kulke and M. Vickery. The Cambodian concept of *devara-ja* invited discussion regarding divinity of kings not only in Southeast Asia but also in South Asia and Kulke denied divinity in both regions in his concluding comment. T. Aoyama studied state and social integration of Majapahit in Java. Through the analysis of an old Javanese narrative, *Desawarnana*, he emphasized that the Majapahit kings depended on the Indic (Hindu) ideology for the integration of state and society. Though many participants accepted his interpretation of the centralisation of Majapahit state based on sedentary agriculture, questions regarding how such integration was possible despite the non-functioning of caste system (*varnasramadharma*) in Java arose during the discussion. This aspect of his presentation awaits further studies.

3) Mandala Theory and *Samanta* System.

In their reports and in discussion Manguin and Aoyama expressed their dissatisfaction with the mandala state theory applied to Southeast Asian states by O. W. Wolters and others. Manguin argued that city-state formation depended on the river system in Sumatra and Aoyama favoured the interpretation of a centralised state for Java.

Though we did not have any time to discuss the segmentary state theory similar to that of mandala state, M. Mita referred in his report to the *samanta* system in India, which had been discussed extensively by Kulke, B. D. Chattopadhyaya and others. This reference gave rise to many questions in discussion; although the *samanta* system functioned as an important state integration system in early medieval time, did it continue to function in a later period, say in the 13th century? Was it applicable to the states in South India too, particularly those in the Tamil country? The distinction between the concept of *samanta* and its actuality was also discussed. Further studies are required on these points. Mita also referred to the concept of *chakravartin* in combination with the *samanta* system. Participants shared the understanding that the *chakravartin* concept was accepted, but the *samanta* system did not work in Southeast Asia.

4) Sufis, sultans and commercial network in the 13th to the 16th centuries.

In Session 1 on the first day, S. Kumar described a change in relationship between the sultan (political power) and Sufi saints (Chishtis) by taking up *malfuzat* (table talks), which record the teachings of Nizam al-Din Auliya (late 13th century) and Gesu Draz (early 15th century). Early Sufi saints kept a distance from the political powers, but later in the 15th century relations between the two became much closer as Sufism gained power among common people. One of the reasons for this can be attributed to the Timur invasion at the end of the 14th century, but post presentation discussion focused on the socio-economic cause and the relation Islamicisation had with vernacularisation of the society.

The above point relates to the topic studied by P. B. Wagoner who discussed Sanskritisation of 'Persian cosmopolis' by pointing out the spread of Vijayanagar (Hindu) coins in the sultanates of northern Deccan. The interaction of the two civilisations represented by Sanskrit cosmopolis and Persian cosmopolis respectively has so far been studied in relation to elite culture of the state, but Wagoner's study extended it to the activities of diverse social groups and the market inviting further discussion on the vernacularisation of the state rule.

As for the Islamicisation of Southeast Asia, M. Hirosue studied the case of Pasai state established in the northern Sumatra in the 13th century. The ruler of the state living in the port-city, which was connected to its hinterland through rivers, accepted Islam. The hinterland provided agricultural products for the maintenance of city dwellers and forest goods for export in the East-West maritime trade. Although Islamicisation of the port-city can be explained by the development of trade network built by Muslim merchants, the point whether hinterland people accepted Islam or not invited discussion.

K. Nishio examined *Sejarah Melayu*, a court history of Melaka state, and emphasized the remnants of Malay traditional elements in the relationship between the ruler and people as a substratum under the Islamic surface for some centuries after the Islamisation of the state in the 14th century. According to Nishio only in the 17th century, when *Sejarah Melayu* was written, did a change occur. Afterwards Islamic norm became more substantial in state rule defining a just ruler and the guiding principle of his governance. Some of the points that came up in the discussion included the post-Tamerlane change in the world economy system and the start of the age of commerce in Southeast Asia.

In relation to the emergence of Muslim state and Islamisation/Islamicisation of the society, there are two interrelated points that invited discussion. One was the difference in the roles played by *ulamas* and Sufi saints in the establishment of Muslim state, particularly the relation between each of them and the people and sultan. The other was the way in which commercial network and merchants Islamised/Islamicised the people and their rulers facilitating the formation of a Muslim state. The discussion was focused on the difference between South

Asia and Southeast Asia in this process of Islamicisation. In South Asia we find the society mainly integrated under Hinduism and in Southeast Asia society was integrated variously according to different ethnic groups and ecologies. S. Kumar pointed out the close relation of merchants with Sufism in South Asia and this point awaits further studies.

In Conclusion

In this symposium we examined the issues concerning Indianisation of Southeast Asia and Islamicisation of the state and society in South Asia and Southeast Asia and were able to understand better the formation of pre-modern states and societies in both the regions and also the cultural and economic interactions between these two important Asian regions. In the past, studies were focused on the similarity in states and societies between these two regions, which is thought to have been caused by the introduction of Indian culture into Southeast Asia, but in this symposium for the first time discussions were about and able to clarify the differences between the two regions to a certain extent. This is the main achievement of this symposium.

However, many important aspects of the interaction remain yet to be clarified. In Southeast Asia there were the regional differences deriving from diverse ecologies and ethnic groups, which created differences in the state formation and social integration and also in the acceptance of Indian traditional culture as well as Islam, though we can notice the 'convergence' in the early stage of state formation on both sides of the Bengal Bay. However, in Southeast Asia, the non-acceptance of some aspects of Brahmanical ideology and caste system with which Indian society was basically integrated, gave the former state individual features in structure and social integration, thus creating a difference between the two regions.

For further clarification of these points we have to additionally study the formation of various states and the social integration in both the regions and examine their pre-modern development in general from a broader point of view covering various regions in Asia and beyond.

Session 1
The State and Society in the Islamicate World (13th–16th Centuries)

Transitions in the Relationship between Political Elites and Sufis under the Delhi Sultanates

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My paper draws attention to the teachings of two Sufi saints, Nizam al-Din Auliya from the turn of the thirteenth century and Gesu Daraz from the turn of the fourteenth. These were two sufi saints who belonged to the mystical fraternity described as the Chishtis, arguably one of the more famous schools of mystical instruction in South Asia. One important reason why I chose to study these two preceptors is because of their temporal location; they flourished during critical junctures of the Delhi Sultanate—The late thirteenth century, the years of its greatest glory on the one hand, and on the other, the early fifteenth century, the decades of its political fragmentation.

I have, however, chosen to study these two preceptors not just because they cover a con-venient historical time span; there is also an extremely rich textual tradition that surrounds them. The disciples of these two saints produced valuable textual compilations of their teachings that were described as *malfuzat* or 'table-talks'. A