TAIWAN, COASTAL SOUTH CHINA AND NORTHERN VIET NAM AND THE NUSANTAO MARITIME TRADING NETWORK

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Abstract

The primary concern of this essay is to present details of the development of the Nusantao Maritime Trading Network between Taiwan, coastal South China and Northern Viet Nam from a bit before 7,000 B.P. until about 2,000 B.P. The Nusantao Maritime Trading Network is seen as a very widespread trading and communication network which came to cover all of the Pacific Ocean, the coastal areas of the China Sea and Japan, the coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean as far as Madagascar, and Island Southeast Asia and the coastal area of Mainland Southeast Asia. Having begun in eastern Island Southeast Asia a few hundred years before 5000 B.C., it expanded from there to the north through the Philippines to Taiwan and coastal South China and then north along the coast of China to western and southern Korea and finally to Kyushu in Japan, starting here just before 3000 B.C., but becoming best developed in Korea and Japan during the first millennium B.C.

The maritime culture of Southeast Asia has been a focus of my research since 1949, but my first specific publications on the subject were in 1975 (Solheim 1975a, 1975b). In the first of these papers I referred to the people who developed this culture as Austronesians or Austronesian speakers (Solheim 1975a:151-157). I changed this to Nusantao for the following reason:

The use of the word Austronesian and/or the compound Malayo-Polynesian for a people and a culture is very awkward, and is incorrect as well. Both terms are for a language family and should not be used for other purposes. Because these people share both a basic culture and a language, it should not be difficult to coin a word for the people and culture from reconstructed protoforms of the language. As these are the people of the islands, I propose the term Nusantau for these people and cultures. (I would like to thank George Grace for giving me the root words nusa for island and tau for man or people) (Solheim 1975a:158).
My concept of the Nusantao (and its proper spelling) has evolved over time:

I now define Nusantao as natives of Southeast Asia, and their descendants, a maritime oriented culture from their beginnings, those beginnings probably in southeastern Island Southeast Asia a bit before 5000 B.C. A majority of the people with this culture, at any one time, probably spoke a Malayo-Polynesian language but there was no doubt a varying sized minority of them, from time to time, who did not speak a related language (Solheim 1975a:158).

The Nusantao were no doubt directly associated with the development and spread of Malayo-Polynesian languages. At any one time there were also many other Malayo-Polynesian 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 Malayo-Polynesian 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 and I would suggest that this may well have been the case from their very beginning (Solheim 1984-1985:85-86 revised). My definition of Southeast Asia for many years has included South China (Solheim 1967a: 3; 1973: 25; 1975a: 154; 1975b: 108; 1979: 200; 1984-1985: 13; 1992).

_Nusantao culture_

There are many examples of Nusantao ethnic groups living today and in the recent past. Good examples of these in Island Southeast Asia are the Bajao, Samal, and Tausug of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. I have written about their lifestyles, that their living on boats, which no doubt evolved from their early history as Nusantao, must therefore bear considerable resemblance to the early Nusantao (Solheim 1990: 243-245). Similar groups have been reported from coastal Viet Nam, South China, Okinawa, and Japan (Solheim 1995). In his conclusions about these people from Japan and Okinawa, Yanagita Kunio (1976; Solheim 1995) wrote:

As far as our country is concerned, it appears that we have had people living their lives on boats since the time of Emperor Onin or for about 2000 years. The history of boat people in some other parts of Asia seems to be even earlier. With the Malay peninsula as center, an area including the Dutch Indian Islands, the Burmese Islands, and the Andaman Islands shows traces of similar people. There is a lot in common among the peoples
who live their lives on the water. However, almost no written documents concerning them exist.

The development of the Nusantao concept

The first data which suggested to me a maritime trading network in Southeast Asia were several pottery vessels from a site in the Philippines and from another site on the west shore of the Gulf of Siam. These, though unusual and distinctive in form and decoration, were almost exactly similar in spite of the sites being about 2700 km apart by air and considerably more by sea (Solheim 1964:200-205, Figs. 1-2). When I first noted this striking similarity I did not think of the explanation in terms of a maritime trading network.

Within Southeast Asia itself I feel the most compelling evidence for a widespread maritime trading network during the first millennium B.C. is the distribution of jade earrings, called lingling-o, and much rarer, but related, a probable earring or pendant two-headed animal made in jade. These jade objects are distinctive and have been found in Botel Tobago off southern Taiwan, the northern Philippines, Palawan in west central Philippines, Sarawak, coastal central and peninsular Thailand, but most commonly in coastal Viet Nam (Loof's-Wissowa 1980-1981; Solheim 1982-1983). In addition, the considerable overlapping in time and space with the early distribution of carnelian and early glass beads and bracelets in Southeast Asia, probably at first brought in from India, seemed to me to strongly suggest a very widespread trade.

The early trade, or barter, did not make anyone wealthy, but provided a living for many people of varying but similar cultures. It presented a communication network that could pass around ideas, tool types, and elements of many different shared technologies. It provided a method of movement of portable luxury products and some relatively rare materials needed for tools, such as obsidian, which was traded very widely in Island Melanesia, and even into western Indonesia from Melanesia, by the Lapita people from around 1500 to 500 B.C.

Relationships between Southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan

Physical anthropology, linguistics, and archaeology point to a close relationship between the peoples and cultures of prehistoric Japan and Korea with the peoples and cultures of Southeast Asia. The best way
to explain how this relationship came about is, in part, through the communication brought about by the Nusantao Maritime Trading Network.

Christy Turner II (1976; 1979; 1985: 49-50; 1989) has proposed two general and related tooth types for the Mongoloid peoples, these being Sinodonty for the northern Mongoloids and American Indians and Sundadonty for the southern Mongoloids, including the peoples of Southeast Asia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The Sundadonts included the Jomon peoples of prehistoric Japan, from about 12,000 to 2000 years ago, after which dental types changed to Sinodont, like the peoples of Korea, northern China, and Siberia (Turner 1989: 91; Hanihara 1990a, 1990b). This development from Korea within Yayoi Culture should be seen as connected with the Nusantao Maritime Trading Network. While Turner, Hanihara, and others consider that the relationship of the Ainu, Okinawans, and prehistoric Jomon with the peoples of Southeast Asia resulted from a movement north towards the end of the Pleistocene, long before the Nusantao Maritime Trading Network, Brace (1990:341-343) thinks it more likely that the movement went south and that the Jomon people were ancestral to the Micronesians and Polynesians. I agree with the former (Solheim 1993a).

The origins of the Japanese language are still controversial. The most widely accepted opinion is that it is an Altaic language, probably related in some way to Korean. Murayama (1976: 419), along with a few other Japanese linguists, has hypothesized that Japanese is related to Austronesian, which he usually refers to as Malayo-Polynesian. Murayama (1976: 427) further suggests that the original location in Japan where the language started was in the northern portion of Kyushu. Martin (1966; taken from Murayama 1976:428) has attempted to relate Japanese to Korean. Concerning this Murayama (1976:419) says, “As one rereads Martin’s work on this question, one is struck over and over again by the presence of important Malayo-Polynesian elements in the vocabularies of the two languages that he has compared.” He has further suggested that to study the relationship of Korean to Japanese it will be necessary to include Austronesian in such a comparison.

I hypothesize that a major portion of the Austronesian element of Korean and Japanese was brought north by the Nusantao traders, and that this involved a long period of contact and intermarriage, from about 4000 B.C., of the Southeast Asian traders with peoples living along the China and western and southern Korean coast. This continued strongly until about 1000 years ago and no doubt to a lesser degree until the recent past. Paul Benedict (1990) has gone in to this linguistic relationship in great detail proposing that Japanese is an Austro-Thai language, and further believing that Japanese is not directly related to Korean.
Much of the archaeological evidence for this Korea/Japan-Southeast Asia relationship is in Solheim (1989), where I wrote:

The complex of artifacts associated with rice cultivation in Korea has been noted before, in part (Kim Won-yong 1964; Kaneko 1966:18-21; Kim Jeong-hak 1978:78-81; Solheim 1990, 1992) . . . Kim Won-Yong (1964) brings together rice, the semi-lunar stone knife, and the stepped adze. . . . The artifacts that appear to me to be a part of the rice associated complex include: the table and capstone dolman, cist grave, double burial jar, semi-lunar or crescent stone knife, stepped adze, pediform adze, perforated disk [probably a spindle whorl], stone dagger, concave based and long-stemmed polished stone arrow- or spearhead, the so called plain pottery of Korea, and relatively rarely carved-paddle pottery.

I hypothesize that rice agriculture was introduced into western Japan from Korea, but also, the artifacts associated with the beginnings of rice agriculture in both Korea and western Japan were, for the most part, brought north from northern Mainland Southeast Asia (South China in particular) by the Nusantao maritime traders not as a complex but element by element over one to two thousand years.

Mark Hudson (1990: 68-69) states that most Japanese archaeologists see rice agriculture coming from South China, and in particular from around the mouth of the Yangtze River, either directly to Japan or by way of Korea. “There can be no doubt, however, that most of the concrete parallels are with Korea rather than coastal China (cf. Harunari 1990; Wang 1989).” Hudson (1990:69) also feels that the spread of rice agriculture east along the Japanese coast of the Japan Sea during early Yayoi times was through the agency of a maritime culture.

I propose that the east coast of China between the mouth of the Yangtze and the eastern tip of the Shandong Peninsula was the homeland of the Yayoi Culture and that it was brought to Kyushu, Japan, by the Nusantao Maritime Trading Network, not as a full-blown culture, but element by element over several thousand years, forming the Yayoi Culture in Japan.

Taiwan, coastal China, and northern Viet Nam

The Dapenkeng 大坌坑 Culture of Taiwan is the earliest Neolithic culture to be found on Taiwan and as such is probably the culture of the first proto-Austronesian speakers on Taiwan. The dating for the Dapenkeng Culture on Taiwan is not yet solidly established, but it probably began considerably earlier than the following prehistoric culture, securely dated as beginning around 2500 B.C.
Tsang Cheng-hwa (1992a) has recently reported on his extensive excavations on the Penghu Islands off the west coast of southern Taiwan. These would be a logical stepping stone between the south coast of China and Taiwan. The earliest dating for the Dapenkeng on the islands, however, is around 5000 B.P., following the lowering of sea levels after the Middle Holocene Transgression. During the Middle Holocene Transgression very little of these islands would have been above sea level. It appears likely that the first Dapenkeng settlements on Taiwan were earlier than this and in the southwestern coastal area of Taiwan. It is most likely that the first contact with and settlement of these islands came from this coastal area of Taiwan.

Tsang (1992b) reports that the artifacts and dates of the Dapenkeng Culture on Taiwan and the islands are much the same as those from the sand dune sites on the opposite Fujian and Guangdong coasts, suggesting that the most likely source of the Dapenkeng Culture is in that area: “By 7000 years B.P. or later, these cultures, characterized by cord-marked, basket-marked, shell-edge-impressed and painted coarse sandy pottery, chipped pebble tools, and roughly polished axes and adzes, were formed on the southeastern coast of China” (1992a: 269). Tsang further writes that the finds from these coastal sites, on shellmounds and sand dunes, indicate that fishing, hunting, and gathering were the most important economic activities, with some cultivation added to these.

Tung Wan Tsai is a site of this sort in Hong Kong. “The variation in the cultural deposits reflects the potential range from [sic!] use of the site as a minimal short-term encampment to a longer-term base camp by maritime adapted peoples under changing circumstances” (Rogers et al. 1995). Concerning the material culture of the people using this site, Rogers et al. (1995: 150) continue, “A maritime adapted toolkit will be filtered to suit a mobile lifestyle where numerous possessions would be a burden, with a resulting material culture that is small, multi-purpose and easily transportable.”

The pattern of this site has been found at numerous sites in Hong Kong: “scattered and isolated deposits, often small and exhibiting a high degree of maritime dependence; a conservative material culture of unmodified or minimally modified pebbles and a tradition of continuing coarse ceramic types; and a lack of structural or midden features. This pattern is found on sandbar sites dating from the mid Neolithic onwards” (Rogers et al. 1995: 150). Starting in late Bronze Age times and continuing well into the Han dynasty, Tung Wan Tsai’s “... evidence points to the casual and temporary structures characteristic of a mobile boat-based population...” (Rogers et al. 1995: 151).
I have been in disagreement with Peter Bellwood for some time on the movement of Austronesian speakers from South China into southern Island Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Bellwood (1984-1985:115) proposed that a migration of people probably from Fujian crossed to Taiwan during the fifth millennium B.C. These proto-Austronesian speakers established cereal agriculture in which rice was of major importance. I have previously argued against the importance of rice in the movement of Austronesian speakers from coastal China to Taiwan and south through the Philippines (Solheim 1984-1985: 84). If rice came to Taiwan it would have been *Oryza sativa* japonica, the type of rice grown in China at this time. I have shown that it is likely that the earliest rice in Taiwan and the Philippines was javanica and not japonica and that this rice not only came from Indonesia, but continued through the Philippines and Taiwan to Japan where it amounts to 7% of the rice grown today in Japan (Solheim 1993b).

Based on the current archaeological evidence mentioned above, I do not agree with Bellwood (1979: 207) that “Taiwan is a potentially vital area for the transmission of cultural innovations from the Asian mainland into the islands,” because he chooses to emphasize the importance of the Corded Ware Yuanshan cultural tradition. Since the homeland of this tradition was most likely on the coast of the mainland between Fujian and Viet Nam, as I mentioned previously, I would postulate that the Austronesian languages were probably transmitted into insular Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands along the eastern coast of the Southeast Asian mainland rather than through the island of Taiwan.

**Conclusions**

I hypothesize that the Early Nusantao Maritime Trading Network, after advancing from south to north through the Philippines, reached southern Taiwan and coastal southeastern China sometime shortly before 5000 B.C. Nusantao peoples made contact, cultural and genetic, with the Middle Neolithic people of southeast China. This included the peoples up the lower Yangtze River, for I hypothesize that any time that maritime people in their explorations would come across the mouth of a large river, they would have moved up the river making contact with the local inhabitants and not have stayed totally along the coast. Thus, it would have been these Nusantao maritime traders, who, while continuing to have contact with southwestern Taiwan, brought back the seeds of the Dapenkeng Culture to Taiwan.
I would also hypothesize that these people were very adaptable to new conditions. With their knowledge both of the ocean and of land-based economic activities such as hunting, gathering, and horticulture, they quickly incorporated the new cultural elements they came into contact with, forming a somewhat new and different culture in their sand dune and shell mound located sites. I hypothesize that these Middle Neolithic sites along the China coast were the land portion settlements of the Nusantao. Due to their rapid amalgamation with the local cultures with which they came into contact, their material culture in their land settlements would have varied from site to site as they moved north and south from southeastern coastal China. This Nusantao combination of land settlement and expanding maritime trading network is, to my knowledge, unique in the world, so there is no existing model which can be looked to, except for the no doubt much evolved maritime cultures still in existence in Asia and the Pacific.

Furthermore, I agree with Tsang that the movement of Austronesian speakers, now Malayo-Polynesian speaking Nusantao, from southeastern China was along the coast of Viet Nam. To present my reasoning for this, I must move to the Pacific and the earliest, widespread pottery tradition there, the Lapita Pottery Tradition.

On the basis of linguistics, physical anthropology, and archaeology it is now generally agreed that the ancestors of the Polynesian peoples were the bearers of the Lapita Culture of Melanesia and that the ancestry of the Lapita peoples came from eastern Island Southeast Asia somewhat before the middle of the second millennium B.C. It is argued that an important element of the Lapita Culture that led to the colonization of the Pacific islands was the extensive long distance trade carried on by the Lapita peoples (Kirch 1988; Wickler 1990). It has generally been felt that this long distance trade developed in the islands of the Bismark Archipelago. While I have not expressed it in this way before, I would say that this long distance trade element of Lapita Culture came with the ancestors of the Lapita people from Island Southeast Asia carried by their Nusantao ancestors (Solheim 1976; 1984-1985: 84-85).

For many years in the study of the Lapita Culture, the primary identifying archaeologically recovered artifact was the Lapita pottery. I have noted the relationship of Lapita pottery to the Sa-huynh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition of Island Southeast Asia (Solheim 1976: 35-36). Before the Lapita pottery was classified as such, I had pointed out the relationship of this pottery to that of the Sa-huynh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition of the Philippines and Viet Nam (1964: 206-209; 1967b: 167) and proposed that it belonged to the same tradition. As soon as radiocarbon dating became somewhat common in the archaeology of the Pacific and Southeast Asia, it became apparent that this could not be so, as
Lapita pottery had somewhat earlier dates than the Sa-huynh-Kalanay pottery. They were so similar, however, that I pointed out that the two pottery traditions must have a common ancestor (Solheim et al. 1979: 126-129). Though no one else has remarked on this, I still support this contention, as while the two traditions are distinct, they share a great majority of their forms and decoration. Both the forms and patterns of decoration were present in both north and south Viet Nam well before 2000 B.C. This strongly suggests, at least to me, that the ancestry of the Lapita pottery came from Viet Nam (Solheim 1976: 145-146), brought by Nusantao traders, who were probably also the ancestors of the Lapita people (Solheim 1979:197). This would mean that the Nusantao Maritime Trading Network developed towards the south from southeastern China along the coast of the China Sea, across to Borneo and either around the north coast or the south coast of Borneo, or both, into eastern Indonesia and then out to the Bismark archipelago. On the other hand, Micronesia would appear to have been settled from the Philippines by a different variant of the Nusantao Maritime Trading Network.

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