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INTRODUCTION

Re-connecting Histories across the Indo-Pacific

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1. Origin of This Volume

This volume is the result of a collaborative project that culminated in the conference “Cultural Transfer in Early Monsoon Asia: Austronesian-Indic Encounters”, organized by Andrea Acri and Alexandra Landmann in December 2013 at the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.¹ The event brought together fourteen scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds and regional expertise, in the attempt to provide the widest possible framework to synthesize and (re-)assess the broad subject under investigation. Besides providing a venue for dialogue

¹ Although Roger Blench was not able to make it to the meeting in Singapore, he was invited to join the editorial committee in view of his multidisciplinary experience in the field.

between various disciplines, it has aimed to (re-)focus scholarly attention on cultural phenomena side-by-side with linguistics, archaeology, and genetics.

Conceptually, the conference sought to foreground a “borderless” history and geography of South, Southeast and East Asian littoral zones that would be maritime-focused, and thereby explore the ancient connections and dynamics of interaction that favoured fruitful “encounters” among the cultures found throughout the region stretching from the Indian Ocean littorals to the Western Pacific, from the early historical period to the present. A hallmark of its intellectual framework has been to transcend the artificial spatial demarcations and imagined boundaries of macro-regions and nation-states, as well as to bridge the arbitrary divide between (inherently cosmopolitan) “high” cultures (e.g. Sanskritic, Sinitic, or Islamicate) and “local” or “indigenous” cultures. Indeed, many “local” small-scale societies and cosmopolitan cultures in the region stretching from Eastern India and Southeast Asia to China and Japan were already plural from the earliest times, yet retain some remarkable common features, such as wet-rice monoculture and houses on stilts (Abalahin 2011, p. 661). Religion, too, shows common forms, in terms of dual organization and a focus on an ancestor cult, often vaguely defined as “shamanic” or “animist” (Reuter 2014). Remarkably similar head-hunting and burial practices characterize the religion of Nāga tribes of Eastern India, as well as the past religions of some Tibeto-Burman and Austroasiatic-speaking ethnic groups settled in Myanmar, and might have been once widespread in maritime Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and the whole of Oceania (Brighenti 2009, p. 92; Hutton 1928, pp. 406–7). A shared core of cultural identity or *Weltanschauung* across Southeast Asia and Melanesia includes narratives of multiple origins, the importance of precedence, clan and social binding systems, small-scale societies, autonomy for women, and a specific close interconnection of spatial, social and religious differentiation marking centre and periphery. Many authors (see reviews in Fox 1993; Bellwood, Fox and Tryon 1995; Fox and Sather 1996) have noted the persistence of dualism, i.e. culturally defined oppositions that include poetry, house-form, clan structures and much else. Ironically, these dichotomies appear to reflect models proposed by

Levi-Strauss more closely than the Amazonian societies he chose to study.

One of the main hypotheses discussed in the forum is that despite the rich ethnic, linguistic and sociocultural diversity, a shared pattern of values, norms and cultural models occurs throughout Monsoon Asia—a vast geographical area inhabited by speakers of numerous language phyla, where the circulatory dynamics of cultural transfer, interaction, acceptance, selection and avoidance can be discerned. For millennia, this region has been an integrated system of littorals where crops, goods, ideas, cosmologies and ritual practices circulated along the sea-routes governed by the seasonal monsoon winds. Some of the questions asked during the forum included: what were the translocal cultural dynamics before (and beyond) “Indianization”? What were the flows and interactions across the Indo-Pacific area? Did a common cultural matrix exist in the region stretching from the Bay of Bengal to the Western Pacific? Can we reconstruct an early shared matrix or common source for widespread cultural traits that we observe empirically today throughout the region?

Adhering to the spirit of the intellectual enquiry informing the conference, this multidisciplinary volume encourages both an “oceanic turn” and a *longue durée* approach to the study of the fluid and complex translocal dynamics governing historical processes that transcend the boundaries of both nation-states and macro-regions as they are commonly framed in the Area Studies paradigm. In focusing on Monsoon Asia, we encourage a widening of the geo-historical framework through which cultural phenomena linked by a shared history going back to a remote past are to be investigated. In so doing, we advocate a change of paradigm in studying the cultural exchanges between premodern South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia—as if those concepts were actual distinctive entities, with intrinsic, clear-cut and enduring geographical and ethno-linguistic boundaries—as well as a disciplinary de-parochialization. At any rate, it is important to remind us that the Area Studies segregation of region-bound separate and self-contained fields of study is a modern construct. It creates imagined boundaries and, as rightly noted by Ali (2009, p. 11), obscures rather than reveals:

When speaking about pre-modern cultural interactions... the ways we conceptualise these often has as much to do with the ‘onward historical developments’ which culminated in the formation of modern nationalism as with the cultural, economical and political flows which traversed the pre-colonial world.

Our perspective posits the occurrence of circulatory dynamics of globalization and diverse intercontinental, cross-cultural human relations that have configured trajectories of the existing cultural patterns in the area. These were formed and accommodated in prehistoric and early historical times, and constitute processual continuities that are still being negotiated in the modern period. By focusing on agency, interaction, and multi-directional transfer, our perspective aims at avoiding both essentialism and extreme fragmentation, thereby achieving greater depth in historical analysis.

2. (Re-)connected Histories: Conceptualizing Monsoon Asia

Kauz (2010, p. 1) highlights the interconnected and cosmopolitan nature of the premodern Indian Ocean trade network, noting that it has emerged as a “largely coherent structure, and has been a space which served as a huge stratum connecting the various kingdoms and cultures adjacent to it, causing interchanges in all possible fields and certainly mutual influences”. Asking whether the history of the civilizations around and beyond the Indian Ocean exhibits any intrinsic and perceptible unity, expressed in terms of space, time, or structures, Chaudhuri has found “a basic underlying structure, the ground floor of material life, which remained invariant while displaying variations within certain limits” (1993, pp. 1, 7). Andre G. Frank (1998) has considered the Indian Ocean area as extending to the South China Sea, and as having been central in global history for at least five millennia up to about 1800.

Starting from these ocean-focused premises we imagine Monsoon Asia as a vast geographical, historical, and environmental space characterized by great variation and, at the same time, an underlying unity. From a geographical perspective, this space may be conceptualized as the belt of territory spanning from the eastern shores of the Indian Subcontinent

(and their hinterlands) in the west to the South China Sea, the Philippine islands and Papua New Guinea in the west.² Its fulcrums are the littorals of peninsular and mainland Southeast Asia, and what is now the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago or Nusantara. Cutting across the natural boundaries and barriers of continental topography as well as the political borders of modern nation states, and transcending such constructed geographical divisions as South/Southeast/East Asia, this largely maritime expanse—which encompasses the environmental region of the “Indo-Pacific” and the “Indomalaya ecozone”—was influenced by environmental and climatic factors, such as the seasonal monsoon winds. Monsoon Asia can be theorized as an environmentally unified space and also as an interconnected and integrated network that—just like Eurasia (Lewis and Wigen 1997, p. 143)—presents the characteristics of a cultural ecumene. What Reynolds (2006, p. x) calls “the geoenvironmental metaphor of Monsoon Asia” could be translated into a “human-environmental metaphor” indeed, which here is offered as an heuristic device for the purpose of suggesting a commonality of cultural traits and epistemes against the background of millennia of human interaction—or, to say it with Abalahin (2011, p. 664), to frame “a series of world-historical developments that bring together histories that have customarily been viewed apart”.

Monsoon Asia, by virtue of its maritime corridors, formed a natural space that favoured the long-distance movement of people, commodities, languages and ideas across the Indian and the Western Pacific Oceans. While a great deal of scholarly attention has been traditionally devoted to the phenomenon of “Indianization” of Southeast Asia, the past two or three decades have witnessed intensive archaeological research into its early history, which has resulted in the formulation of new paradigms in the study of South and Southeast Asian exchanges (Bellina 2002, 2003; Smith 1999; Theunissen, Grave and Bailey 2000). These paradigms are taken by Gupta (2005) as the basis for conceptualizing

² If we strictly apply geoenvironmental criteria, and at the same time take into account historical and ethnolinguistic factors, Korea and Japan would belong to Monsoon Asia as its “appendices” or “edges”.

the Bay of Bengal as an “Interaction Sphere” in the period from 1000 BC to 500 AD. Abalihin (2011), discussing the non-Sinitic, i.e. (proto-) Austronesian identity in the pre- and proto-historic periods of what we now call “China”, has connected—and at the same time dissolved—early Southeast Asia and Inner/North/East Asia into the macro-region called “Sino-Pacifica”. Using these innovative models as sources of inspiration, the collective body of work presented here intends to emphasize processes of cultural exchange and integration, and to raise the question as to whether these dynamics may have extended to an even wider geographical area over a longer period of time. By taking the “early” as our main chronological frame, we focus on the crucial transitional proto-historic period from 1500 BC to 500 AD, while at the same time taking into account earlier periods that paved the way for later historical developments, as well as modern phenomena that may give us a key to access and reconstruct an older layer of resilient cultural frameworks.

The idea of an interconnected and integral Monsoon Asia is not new. As pointed out by Yule and Rath (2000, quoted in Gupta 2005, p. 22), already in the 1920s, “eastern India came into the spotlight of world archaeology as the westernmost link in a complex of prehistoric cross-cultural relations which extended as far east as Japan”. At the same time, French scholars like Paul Mus, Sylvain Lévi, Jean Przyluski and George Coedès—whose studies at a later date inspired the proponents of the Greater India perspective—hypothesized the existence of a cultural substrate, labelled “Austroasiatic” or “Austic”, common to South, Southeast, and parts of East Asia. An “Austroasiatic culture” that included ancestor worship and funerary practices, matrilineal dualism, and structural analogies of myths was inferred on the basis of evidence from linguistic, mythology, art history, and archaeology. Mus (1975, pp. 8–9 [1933]) posited the “existence in ancient times of a certain unity of culture throughout an extensive zone in which India, Indo-China, Indonesia, a Pacific islands fringe and doubtless southern China are to be united”. Further, Mus rightly emphasized the “borderless” character of long-distance cultural transfer in Monsoon Asia, favoured by its unique maritime geography:

The wide distribution over the surface of the globe of the regions I have just mentioned is not as absolute a barrier as you might be tempted to believe at first. For too long, ethnography has proceeded by purely continental groupings.... A hundred, two hundred or a thousand kilometres of sea, especially where there are prevailing winds, are a distance much less considerable than a hundred, two hundred or a thousand kilometres of land, divided by mountains, forests and hostile tribes... whenever sea lanes establish communication, it is reasonable to expect a cultural unity, and it makes more sense to speak of a religion of the monsoon zone of Asia than to speak of Indian religion, or Chinese religion, prior to the civilizations which were later to give meaning to these words.

Following Mus' idea of Monsoon Asia as an integrated cultural zone, Coedès (1968, p. 15) espoused an analogous perspective by stating that Southeast Asian people were "endowed with a civilization that had traits in common with the civilization of pre-Aryan India", and that there existed, "under an Indian veneer, a base common to all of monsoon Asia", which made the spread of Indic cultural elements throughout Southeast Asia so quick and productive.

The rise of post-WWII Area Studies paradigm reflecting current geopolitical trends relegated the approach of the earlier generation of scholars to an intellectual dustbin. Attempts to revive the Monsoon Asia perspective have remained sporadic and isolated at best; these include, e.g., Ian Mabbett's (1977*a*, 1977*b*) idea that "Indianization of Southeast Asia" is a "confusion of categories", suggesting as it does that South and Southeast Asia already shared common socio-cultural traits before "Indianization"; Chihara's (1996, p. 7) hypothesis concerning a "substratum of pre-Aryan culture" shared between India and Southeast Asia, which made it easy for the waves of Indianization to penetrate Southeast Asian societies "as if by osmosis"; and the case-studies by Emigh (1996), Jordaan and Wessing (1996, 1999), and Dentan (2002*a*, 2002*b*, this volume), which have attempted to unravel the intricate relationship between "Indic" and "autochthonous" phenomena (and their ultimate origin) from a wider-ranging Monsoon Asia perspective (see Acri, this volume).

As a reaction to the “Indianization” or “Greater India” paradigm in vogue around the first half of the twentieth century, which stressed the civilizing role of India and West–East dynamics of transfer, the Area Studies paradigm has insisted on Southeast Asian agency in regional “localizations” of Indic phenomena. This perspective is the hallmark of the influential model proposed by Wolters (1999 [1982]), who took into account the Southeast Asian region as a “broadly based community of outlook”, or a distinctive “mosaic of literary cultures characterised by foreign and local features fitting into various text-like wholes” (p. 65). While we recognize Wolters’ masterful contribution to the field of Southeast Asian studies, his characteristic focus on literacy does not do full justice to the concept of “cultural matrix”: whatever was responsible for the unity of the Southeast Asian area, it was certainly not a relatively late external factor such as literacy.

Some scholars attempted to refine the theoretical parameters of both extremes adding a new element of complexity. For instance, de Casparis (1983) put the emphasis on the fact that this process of cultural exchange was hitherto analysed in too simplistic a way, implying on the contrary “a complicated network of relations, both between various parts of each of the two great regions and between the two regions themselves” (*ibid.*, pp. 18–19). He further considered that in analysing the phenomenon of Indianization one could hardly avoid focusing on either India or Southeast Asia, implying that one area “gave” and the other “received”, whereas the picture is much more complicated by the mosaic of different cultures which characterized both regions (*ibid.*, p. 2). Kulke (1990) suggested an (independent) socio-cultural “convergence”. Calling India and Southeast Asia “partners of mutual ‘processes of civilisation’ which comprised both sides of the Bay of Bengal”, Kulke (2014, p. 10) posits a socio-economic and political convergence in both regions during the early centuries AD that enabled similar solutions to similar problems of social change.

A recent trend in contemporary scholarship has been the emphasis on cosmopolitan phenomena. Such is the case of the “Sanskrit Cosmopolis” model advanced by Pollock (1996, 2006), which has developed a critique of the “civilizationalist indigenism” of Wolters and any “defensive indigenist” approaches that see an undeterminable cultural matrix in

Southeast Asia, i.e. an *echt* “Southeast Asianness”. However, Pollock’s model is limited to Sanskrit and “Cosmopolitan vernacular” languages and literatures, and therefore biased towards high cultural, top-down phenomena; the supralocal dynamics shaping bottom-up phenomena that do not fit the model, such as e.g. magic, folk religion, ritual, and performances remain largely to be investigated. As noted by Ali (2009, p. 16), “the full implications of Pollock’s theory have yet to be explored and may still help us reconceptualize the nature of linkages between South and Southeast Asia in ways perhaps consonant with Kulke’s suggestive remarks”. One cannot but agree with Lombard’s (1995, p. 15) hope that one day the historical reconstructions made by archaeologists, linguists, geneticists, and scholars of culture “will give way to a true consideration of synchronisms, that is to say to a comparative theory, which will examine parallels between the evolutionary paths of the different ‘layers’ or ‘sectors’”. (Lombard was a follower of Heine-Geldern (1932*a*), for whom the synchronisms of the Dongsonian period and its bronze drums and the so-called “Indianized” period, characterized by state formation and dissemination of the Indian script and Sanskrit languages, seemed significant, although we now know this was a chronological accident.) This perspective may be compared to Lieberman’s (2009) “strange parallels”, i.e. synchronous developments between geographically distant regions in Southeast Asia and the wider Eurasian area.

It is worth commenting here on the significance of bronze drums, since they are so widely—yet unwarrantedly—cited by so many authors as somehow typical of the Southeast Asian region and the period of “Indianization”. The most recent summary of the archaeology and ethnography of bronze drums is Calò (2014). The drums, which were manufactured in workshops in Northern Vietnam and possibly adjacent Laos from 400 BC onwards, were traded widely across the region for nearly a millennium. A radically different type, the *moko*, began to be manufactured and spread in Indonesia from 600 AD (see Figure 1.1). We have no idea who the makers of the drums were and why this particular object was so widely diffused. Other products of the Dongson culture, such as the daggers and the bronze vessels, largely stayed on the mainland. In later periods, the bossed gong, originally from China,

FIGURE 1.1

**Moko and Classical Bronze Drum**

Source: Roger Blench.

replaced the bronze drum. Bronze drums are rich markers of early trade routes, but in the end cannot be regarded as being characteristic of the Southeast Asian region.

In a recent appraisal of the dynamics of early interactions and cross-cultural exchange between South and Southeast Asia, Manguin (2011, p. xx) argues that the “relationship between Southeast Asian and Indian societies had already come a very long way” before the first Indian-inspired archaeological, linguistic and cultural vestiges begin to appear between the third and fifth century CE. This fact prompted him to formulate the question, was Southeast Asia Indianized before Indianization? If so, the preceding period “would then only be considered as a contact and exchange phase with South Asia, allowing for a variety of comparable but variable processes at play”. While this formulation shifts the chronological parameters of the issue at stake, it does not introduce a substantial change in the theoretical framework. Whether the “comparable processes” constituted independent developments, as in Kulke’s “convergence” theory, or stemmed from an early common source or civilizational configuration, as in the “Monsoon Asia” paradigm, remains to be investigated.

3. The Genesis of Early Seafaring in the Southeast Asian Region

Much of the historical writing on Southeast Asia has failed to read the literature on the prehistory of the region. Archaeology has now demonstrated that the maritime history of Southeast Asia is virtually coincident with the earliest human settlement of the region. Australia was settled from Timor around 55,000 BP, a voyage which cannot be explained as accidental drift (O’Connor 2003). Burials on the islands of the Ryukyus, the chain stretching north of Taiwan to Southern Japan, indicate inter-island traffic as early as 35,000 BP (Pearson 2014). Bednarik (2003) reviews the evidence for inter-island voyaging in island Southeast Asia in the Pleistocene, as well as attempting to reproduce a possible vessel of the period and test its feasibility. Bulbeck (2008) has shown that inter-island transfers of trade goods in island Southeast Asia long predate the Neolithic. Regrettably, we do not know the

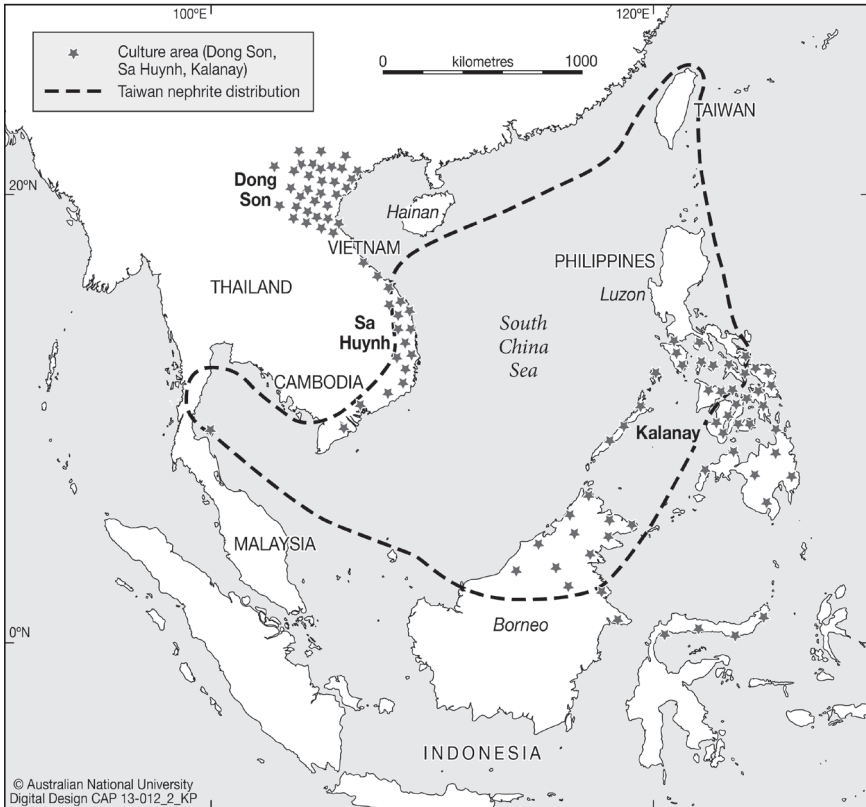
identity of these early voyagers, nor what languages they spoke or the types of watercraft they used. But we can say that the dramatic expansion of sea-voyaging following the Austronesian dispersal had antecedents in deep antiquity (Mahdi, this volume).

After 4,000 BP it can be fairly said there was a revolution in ship construction that made possible long distance and large-scale inter-island traffic (Bellwood 1995, 2007). Neolithic sites in island Southeast Asia multiply rapidly and by 3,500 BP, the Austronesians have reached the Marianas, some 3,500 km east of the Philippines. The first archaeologist to point to similarities around the South China Sea indicating early maritime contact was Solheim (1957) who identified the remarkable Kulanay complex which joins the Philippines with the Southeast Asian mainland. Solheim (1984–85) later went on to model the similarities defining the Austronesian culture area as the “Nusantao”. Although this model has been quite influential, Solheim never really engaged with the linguistic data, in contrast to Bellwood, and his concept of Austronesian as a trade language is no longer considered viable.

With these skills, trade goods, such as nephrite from Taiwan, began to diffuse throughout the whole Southeast Asian area, both mainland and islands (Hung et al. 2013). The advantage of archaeology over vague speculation is that the geography of finds can provide concrete evidence for both shared cultural elements and chronology. From the distribution of shared ceramic types and motifs, we can see how improved maritime skills stimulated a web of connections across the South China Sea from 3,500 BP onwards (see Figure 1.2). Only later do Dongson artefacts enter the record, spreading out from workshops in what is now Vietnam. Such maps provide graphic evidence for the complete independence between the evolution of a Southeast Asian shared culture and the later impact of Indianization.

Parallel developments were taking place on the mainland at exactly this period. A revised chronology using direct dates from a sample major of sites from Southeast Asia (Higham et al. 2011) has indicated the Southeast Asian mainland Neolithic was confined to a small window, from

FIGURE 1.2



Kalanay and Dongson Culture Areas

Source: Adapted from Hung et al. (2013)

3,800–4,100 BP. It is difficult not to associate this with the dispersal of Austroasiatic (cf. arguments in Sidwell and Blench 2011) and possibly also Tai-Kadai languages. Austroasiatic at least seems to have been an aquatic dispersal, driven by improved rivercraft, following the main watersheds of the region.

A consequence of this period of parallel expansions is a “community of culture”. Austronesian in particular is characterized by a raft of common cultural features, which can be identified from Taiwan to New Zealand (Bellwood et al. 1995). Austroasiatic societies and cultures are more

diverse, presumably due to their fragmentation caused by subsequent incursions from speakers of Tai-Kadai and Sino-Tibetan languages. Even so, the significance of improved boats in exploring the inland waterways of mainland Southeast Asia created a similarly rapid expansion. The intense circulation of ideas in parallel with material culture goes a long way towards explaining the consensus culture which characterized the region long before the arrival of the first ships from South Asia.

A second maritime revolution seems to have occurred with the evolution of new ship types (Manguin 1993). Moving away from simple boats to larger outriggers constructed with nails meant that much larger cargoes and crews could ply regular routes. Figure 1.3 neatly illustrates this transition, showing the contrast between the flimsy construction of earlier boats (left) compared with the large trade ships (right) in the friezes at Borobudur (eighth/ninth century AD).

FIGURE 1.3



Two Types of Boat Shown at Borobudur

Source: Andrea Acri.

This period sees the genesis of the Srivijaya thalassocracy which begins to move trade goods, ideas and languages around the region. The frontiers of exploration reach as far as the east coast of Africa westwards and to Papua in the east. The multilingual crews that reached East Africa and went on to colonize Madagascar (Adelaar, this volume) mark the entry of Southeast Asia into the world system, pioneering the trans-Indian Ocean trade (Blench 2010).

South Asian contact had begun prior to 0 AD, but with a strong focus on religion, and with impacts typically on architecture and iconography. There is very little evidence for technological transfers, and it seems that shipbuilding techniques were most likely indigenous to the region. What can be said is that the pre-existing networks of the region were already adapted to the pioneering of new trade routes, and for this reason there were significant transfers of crops and maritime technology to South Asia (Mahdi 1999). The imbalanced picture presented by scholars focusing on writing and stone architecture is gradually being rectified as archaeology and cultural analysis demonstrates ever more clearly the existence of two-way traffic.

4. The Contribution of Linguistics

Linguistic data has shed new light on cultural contact in the Indian Ocean from the mid-second millennium BCE. The online Austronesian Comparative Dictionary of Blust³ reconstructs over 5,000 forms and is accompanied by an interpretative commentary, providing a resource unequalled even in Indo-European for understanding regional history. The advanced knowledge of seafaring testified to by numerous nautical terms in Malayo-Polynesian languages from Malaysia to Hawaii suggests the existence of reconstructible forms in proto-Malayo-Polynesian (Pawley and Pawley 1994). While there is increasing evidence of the traces left by Southeast Asian seafarers on the Western Indian Ocean shores (Blench 2010), the impact of Southeast Asia on India remains

³ URL: <<http://www.trussel2.com/acd/>> (accessed 20 September 2015).

poorly understood, in terms of the dispersal of cultigens, languages, and ideas. Mahdi (1999) is one of the few scholars to discuss this topic in detail. Connections can be discerned along two quite distinct routes, the sea-routes to the east coast of mainland South Asia and the overland trade routes passing through Yunnan into the valley of the Brahmaputra. Potential links include megalithic traditions and cultural practices of the northeastern region of the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia (*ibid.*, p. 4). For example, it has recently been discovered that the rice domesticated in India (*Oryza sativa* var. *indica*) was subject to early introgression with the *japonica* varieties domesticated in East Asia (Castillo et al. 2015). This can only have occurred in the corridor linking China to the valley of the Brahmaputra via Yunnan. There can be little doubt the Austroasiatic-speaking Munda peoples, who arrived in the northeastern region of the Indian Subcontinent from Southeast Asia with a fully-realized agricultural package, played a major role in this meeting of traditions.

The ever-increasing body of linguistic, genetic and archaeological evidence unearthed in the past two decades can tell us much about the origin and dispersal of population across the Indo-Pacific (Lansing et al. 2011). There is little doubt the Austronesians originated in Taiwan, although their ancestral source was clearly the Chinese mainland. What remains controversial is whether this was a demographic expansion driven by agriculture (the Bellwood model) or rather a seaborne dispersal motivated by trade and the quest for aquatic resources (Bulbeck 2008; Blench 2012*b*). Recent dates for the Neolithic of island Southeast Asia point ever more strongly to a very rapid expansion favouring the second interpretation (Spriggs 2011). Genetics indicates that the “Asian” component in western Island Southeast Asia is overwhelming and Lansing et al. (2011) provide a useful model of how marriage patterns and cultural dominance all but eliminated the traces of pre-existing resident populations.

On the mainland, there was a meeting of four major language phyla. An important chapter in this saga is the debate over whether a “Neolithic package” of rice cultivation was superimposed on a substrate of vegeticulturalists (van Driem 2001, pp. 324–7, 2012; Diffloth 2005; Ferlus 2010). The core language group in the region is evidently

Austroasiatic, spreading both along the Mekong and parallel watersheds westwards, as well as down the Thai Peninsular and on to the Nicobar Islands (Sidwell and Blench 2011). However, as the map shows all too clearly, Austroasiatic has been fragmented by the subsequent southward spread of Sino-Tibetan and Tai-Kadai languages (Blench 2011*b*, 2013*a*). The homeland of Sino-Tibetan is disputed, but the broad consensus is that it must have been in the west, Nepal, Bhutan and Northeast India, where the diversity is greatest (Blench 2014*a*). The dispersal eastwards seems to have occurred multiple times; isolated languages such as Tujia and Bai testify to these early movements. The ancestors of the Chinese apparently moved to North China, where they picked up millet and other cold weather crops from the resident Altaic speakers. It is likely that they subsequently moved south to the valley of the Yangtse, displacing the resident Hmong-Mien speakers. Rice is domesticated (as opposed to the management of wild rice) at about 6,500 BP and it becomes a core cultural concept of Sinitic society, fuelling the massive demographic increase which allowed the Han to dominate a vast geographical region.

5. Cosmopolitanism *vis-à-vis* Indigenism

Area Studies scholars, ethnographers, historians and philologists in the past fifty years or so have tended to analyse Southeast Asian cultural phenomena in terms of a synthesis or hybridization between foreign elements/influences and “local” or “indigenous” phenomena. The former have been regarded as intrinsically cosmopolitan, whereas the latter as intrinsically embedded or vernacular. Thus, elements of the Indic/Sanskritic, Sinitic, and Islamicate high culture would have been localized along the prevalent place-specific socio-cultural and linguistic coordinates. Even when a higher degree of agency and dynamism is accorded to the pre-existing civilizations of Southeast Asia, those civilizational configurations are too often only vaguely defined through such self-explanatory labels as “local” or “indigenous”—without a clear definition of what is to be understood as local or indigenous. For example, to describe Southeast Asian varieties of imported religions and their mixture of Indic (or Sinitic) elements and pre-existing indigenous

(e.g. “shamanic” or “animist”) cultural features, such vague notions as “hybrid”, “assimilated”, or “syncretic” are often invoked, yet hardly ever explained. No detailed comparative research has unravelled whether there had been or not a common civilizational configuration prior to “Indianization”, and what the features of such a civilizational configuration might have been.

The concept of “local genius” has been popular among Indonesianists, and especially art historians, who generally speak of an “indigenous Indonesian spirit” (Holt 1967, p. 29); yet, it is not entirely clear in what exactly this indigenous spirit consists of, and where its “local” boundaries lay. Edi Sedyawati, when referring to premodern Central Javanese dance, rightly notes that “the adjective ‘local’ and ‘indigenous’ are ambiguous terms used to denote anything which does not belong to ‘standard’ classical Hindu (*sic*) dance style” (1982). Similar considerations can be made with respect to religious ideas and practices, which are often deemed to be “local” but may in fact be part of a shared heritage that circulated through networks of folk practitioners—or what scholarship has tended to call “shamans” (see Acri 2014). In short, we feel that there is a need to realize that features that are often perceived as local or indigenous have turned out to be the product of circulatory dynamics, whereby local developments took place against the background of translocal exchanges. In other words, the “local” was already, at least in part, “cosmopolitan”: compare Pollock’s concept of “Cosmopolitan vernacular”. This is the case, for instance, of the “Austronesian cultural package” that seafaring voyagers spread as they gradually settled through Southeast Asia, and which eventually was localized.

The last two decades have witnessed the emergence of a focus on a linguistically and archeologically defined Austronesian shared background of the people inhabiting mainland and insular Southeast Asia, as well as Oceania. New findings from genetics and physical anthropology, point to a more nuanced model of migration. A combined approach to reconstruct the history and evolution of ideas that integrates and moves beyond linguistics, archaeology, and genetics, could produce and connect new insights by delving into the hitherto little explored domains of production and transfer of knowledge, mythologies,

ancestral legal systems and religious beliefs, as well as aspects of material culture such as trade, navigation technology, etc.

Fox (2006, p. 1 [1996]) lamented a “localization” of interests and disciplinary/areal parochialization reflected in current academe. Going against this trend, Bellwood, Fox and colleagues, in many publications stemming from the “Comparative Austronesian Project”, have drawn together different disciplinary approaches for the study of the Austronesian-speaking populations and to elaborate a general framework for the interpretation of the complexities of the Austronesian heritage across Southeast Asia and the Pacific Ocean. They have compared features traceable to a common heritage beyond language despite millennia of interaction and change, namely a “Southern Mongoloid” genetic ancestry for Austronesian-speakers. These include widespread cultural features such as tattooing, use of outriggers on canoes, features of ethnographic and prehistoric art styles, and social norms concerning siblings’ rank and a reverence for ancestral kin group founders (Fox 2006, p. 6). In spite of these common features, however, “there is little which can be characterised as exclusively and uniquely Austronesian held widely today in common among all the Austronesian-speaking regions” (2006, p. 3). This state of affairs suggests that a polythetic approach is needed to evaluate the complex issue of origin, dispersal, and transformation of the “Austronesians” and their “cultural package(s)” through millennia (see Landmann, this volume).

In the short manifesto “Towards an integrated comparative study of Austronesian Cultures”, Edi Sedyawati (2011, pp. 54–5) has noted that by comparing cultures and their respective culture bearers it would be possible to discern whether they are related, and therefore presumably share the same origin. Blench (2012*b*, p. 135), discussing the pervasive and highly distinctive set of iconographic elements in figurative art that is widely spread across the Austronesian-speaking areas, argues that this strongly religion-associated imagery may be “a manifestation of *adat*, the traditional religion of I[sland] S[outh] E[ast] A[sia] prior to the spread of world religions”. The curious irony is that this type of regional cultural comparison is the major feature of what is now considered outmoded or bypassed *Kulturkreislehre*, the typical pattern of North European ethnology from about 1890 to the 1950s. The careful

mapping of comparable features of culture was typical of this period and monographs such as Speiser's (1923) work on Vanuatu illustrate the value of these approaches. The authors of these studies had no archaeological chronology to guide them and were hobbled by interpretations which emphasized cultural "layers". Nonetheless, the comparative side of their work could well be emulated by modern scholars concerned with the identification of a common Austronesian cultural core.

6. Where Do We Stand?

Monsoon Asia constitutes a geographical arena with a shared, millennia-long history of migration of people, long-distance trade, linguistic contact and dispersal, and cultural transfer. Gupta (2005, p. 21) distinguishes interactive, long-distance "processes of human dispersals and technological diffusions (including the Neolithic expansion from southern China into Southeast Asia) and short term movements of men and material inspired by trade opportunities", arguing that the latter were usually effected through conduits opened by earlier expansions. More evidence of prehistoric contacts between South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia has turned up in recent years. The presence of jar burials along the Indo-Pacific arc suggests the possibility of interactivity and sharing of religious ideas and practices from East to South Asia, while studies on the distribution of ceramics, cultigens, and nautical terms and devices, have highlighted the regular maritime links between early farming communities in South and Southeast Asia since at least the first millennium BCE (Gupta 2005, p. 22, Hoogervorst 2013, p. 102).

As noted by Hoogervorst (2013, p. 12), there is an increasing awareness that "literary references to commercial activities between these state-level societies [across the Indian Ocean] only reveal the culmination of much older networks", which in the case of South and Southeast Asia go back to at least the second half of the second millennium BCE. Intra-regional Southeast Asian circuits of interaction preceding an "Indianization" period have also been deduced from the distribution of Dongson drums, Sa-Huynh ornaments and jar burials, and agate and carnelian beads (Theunissen, Grave and Bailey 2000). Nephrite artefacts from Southeast Asia and Taiwan, dating to between

3,000 BCE and 500 CE, have been unearthed through much of mainland Southeast Asia and the Philippines, thus providing evidence for extensive sea-based trade networks across the South China Sea (Hung et al. 2007). Long-range contacts between North China and the South China Sea or even the Indian Ocean are suggested by the findings of shell cowries in elite burials of Northern China as early as the second millennium BCE (Li Shuicheng 2003, Liu 2004). Blench (2013*b*) has hypothesized the existence of an arc of vegeculture as early as 10,000 BP, characterized by tubers, Musaceae, sago exploitation and sugar-cane stretching between Melanesia and Eastern Nepal, correlated with linguistic evidence as well as a suite of material culture items and, perhaps, ideas. Certain Austronesian cultural and religious features have been detected in premodern Japan (Abalahin 2011, pp. 661, 676), while an argument in favour of an early direct influence from pre-Indicized Java to Japan has been made by Kumar (2009); other intriguing similarities in the realm of the performing arts from Java, Bali and Japan have been pointed out by Coldiron (2005*a*, 2005*b*). Many specialists in the region are sceptical of these (in some cases) rather vaguely defined similarities and we must be wary of assuming these represent a scholarly consensus. The possibility of pre- or early-historical exchanges and commonalities between South and Southeast Asia in the realm of religion have been proposed by Dentan and Aciri (see their respective chapters in this volume). An attempt to revise the mainstream historical paradigm concerning human dispersal across Monsoon Asia and the Pacific Ocean has been made by Oppenheimer (1998) and Santos (2005), who have traced the ultimate origin of the Austronesians back to the Sunda shelf or Sundaland; although these works remain highly controversial, they reflect the uncertainty—and openness—of a field that promises exciting discoveries, and which makes an increasingly important contribution to global history.

Given the paucity of records, research on cultural elements going back to a remote past is bound to be fraught with uncertainty; however, it needs to be pursued with renewed vigour as it could help us to link together, and make sense of, data drawn from linguistics, archaeology, and genetics.

7. The Present in the Past

Modern visitors to Southeast Asia often express frustration at the rush to modernity; traditional architecture demolished, older clothing styles discarded and musical traditions displaced in the hurry to reach the twenty-first century on schedule. Angkor or Borobudur are valued, not much for their artistry or their place in the identity of the present residents of the area, but as tourist and commercial opportunities. Perhaps the fact that both were forgotten, covered by the humid forest, and had to be uncovered by European visitors, points to a local perception of impermanence of the material world. Culture is politics in Southeast Asia and the unfolding perception of the region's past is being rapidly incorporated into the narrative of the present (Glover 2006).

Nonetheless, perhaps characteristically, both the Sinitic and "Malay" areas have begun to recognize the importance of history and culture in constructing national identity. Mobile phones can be made anywhere, but distinctive regional cultures which can re-inspire architecture, writing and build national consciousness are beginning to be valued. The National Museum and Asian Civilisations Museum of Singapore are striking examples of this approach. While Singapore is largely a colonial construct, recent archaeological excavations have unearthed its precolonial heritage, which has been integrated into the national master-narrative of the (old and modern) port-city at the crossroads of the maritime routes connecting India and China via Southeast Asia (Miksic 2013). But the bulk of the heritage must be bought in and so it has been, on a considerable scale, to the benefit of international auction houses. The three major communities which make up the population—the Chinese, Malay, and Indian—are all represented by artefacts from their ancestral areas, the emphasis being on the harmonious relations between them.

A somewhat different approach can be seen in Taiwan, the ancestral home of the Austronesians. Inhabited from roughly 25,000 BP by diverse peoples from the mainland, the island was revolutionized by the appearance of Neolithic migrants at around 5,500 BP. These spread out and diversified into every possible ecozonal niche. Han migration began in the seventeenth century, encouraged by the Dutch, and by the

period of the Japanese occupation, the indigenous Austronesians had been swamped demographically, and many lowland populations assimilated. During most of the twentieth century, these “aborigines” were disdained and marginalised. In a disgraceful act of indifference, the Nationalist government turned Lanyu, the home of the Yami people, into a nuclear waste dump. However, the evolution of democracy in Taiwan in the 1990s, began an almost magical transformation. The notion of Taiwan as the seat of ancestral Austronesian culture suddenly implied the indigenous populations were to be respected if not entirely understood. Literacy programmes were rolled out, museums were opened or expanded, international conferences were funded, foreign scholars who had taken an interest in Austronesians in Taiwan invited. In 2016, the Taiwanese Government issued a formal apology to its indigenous populations for their treatment. Welcome as this was, it was not entirely disinterested; it was clearly intended to reflect an identity separate from mainland China. The requirement for Taiwan to be seen as distinctive, not simply another province of the People’s Republic, clearly underlies the rather sudden interest in the Austronesians. Sadly, it is too late for many languages. Kavalan and Pazeh have disappeared in the late twentieth century and some others are set to follow. Meanwhile Taiwanese logging companies are complicit in the logging and eviction of Austronesian speakers in the highlands of northeastern Cambodia. The rise of the nation state entertains a wide variety of ironies.

A recent phenomenon of “Pan-Austronesianism” involving the valorisation of Malayo-Polynesian origins and identity can be witnessed in Malaysia and Indonesia. This can be charitably divided into what might be called the “lunatic fringe”, the alignment of Austronesians with the inhabitants of the lost continent of Lemuria proposed by the Theosophists, which would be coterminous with the submerged continental shelf of Sundaland (a link between Lemuria or Atlantis and Java was theorized by the Theosophist Leadbeater in 1951). More recently, the above-mentioned studies by Oppenheimer and Santos, as well as the discovery of allegedly man-made early structures on Gunung Padang in West Java, have fuelled a wave of historical/historiographic revisionism in the Malay-Indonesian world—both in scholarly press and

on social media, mainstream press and TV. Alas, the ensuing body of work is characterized entirely by a nationalistic agenda, and therefore is more interesting as a socio-cultural phenomenon than for its potential to revolutionize the current historical paradigms.

More mainstream are the groups headed by academics and public intellectuals to bring together the so-called “Malay race”—which would include all Malayo-Polynesian language speakers, as far east as the Māori. There is nothing wrong with this idea in principle, although the framing of Austronesian as a type of Malay expansion goes back to the long-discredited Proto- and Deutero-Malay model espoused by Heine-Geldern (1932*b*). These groups are also elaborating a (trans-)national narrative that revives and re-evaluates the Austronesian roots of the Malay people and culture by linking them to an ancestral “lost civilization” that would predate the earliest known vestiges of the Sumerian and Chinese civilizations. This has rather odd consequences: some of the papers in a volume on the Austronesians of Sulawesi suggest that some ethnic groups are “more Austronesian” than others (Simanjuntak 2008).

8. Summary of the Contributions

This volume includes seven of the fourteen papers presented at the conference, with the addition of four papers from invited contributors. The aim of our intellectual enquiry is to investigate the cultural flows, interactions and agencies across the seas and land masses of Monsoon Asia. The chapters reflect the disciplinary perspectives of History and Historiography, Linguistics, Ethnography, Archaeology and Art History, and Religious Studies. They discuss various expressions of cultural trajectories, shared commonalities, and continuities before, during and after the Austronesian ethnolinguistic and cultural expansion. They interpret its encounter with an indigenous substrate of Austroasiatic-speaking cultures on the one hand and Indic Cosmopolitan polities on the other—a process of cross-fertilization that might have occurred over a millennium. Taken collectively, they try to transcend the traditional paradigm of “Indianization”/“Sanskritization” vs. “local genius”, and explore the possibility of the existence of supra-local

cultural formations both before and after the emergence of the so-called “Sanskrit Cosmopolis” around 500 AD.

The discussion is opened by two closely-related chapters that, situating themselves in the “Monsoon Asian approach” advanced by early twentieth-century French scholarship, tackle the controversial issue of a shared religious matrix in early Monsoon Asia. Robert Dentan’s “Fearsome Bleeding, Boogeyman Gods and Chaos Victorious: A Conjectural History of Insular South Asian Religious Tropes” tries to reconstruct the religious situation current among Austroasiatic-speaking populations of islands across South and Southeast Asia around 1500 BC—that is, before Indian thought took solid form in the Vedas and Austronesian-speakers dominated the islands. Drawing from his previous comparative work, Dentan hypothesizes a common ancestry between Nkuu’, the thundersquall-God of the Semai ethnic group in highland peninsular Malaysia, and the fierce Vedic Rudra, on account of their similar nature and common features.

Andrea Aciri’s “Tantrism ‘Seen from the East’” raises the question as to whether the socio-religious current we now call “Tantrism” may represent a wider Monsoon Asian areal phenomenon, with roots in a past that predates the common era. Being directly inspired by, and engaging with, the work of Robert Dentan, this chapter evaluates his theory of a common religious base in South and Southeast Asia. It focuses on the hypostases of the Vedic god Rudra-Śiva and the related Śaiva and Śākta Tantric traditions that arose in South Asia in the mediaeval (Post-Gupta) period, and adds evidence from premodern and modern South Asian, Javano-Balinese, and Malay contexts. The presence of similar religious tropes and a shared vocabulary suggest long-standing historical connections between South and Southeast Asian societies, which cannot always be explained in terms of influences of the former over the latter but are rather suggestive of a complex process of exchange, and perhaps of a common ancestry.

Next come three chapters dealing with the tantalizing relationship between ethnolinguistic, socio-cultural, and archaeological features over mainland and island Southeast Asia. Alexandra Landmann’s “Can We Reconstruct a ‘Malayo-Javanic’ Law Area?” advances a hypothesis

concerning the reconstruction of a posited ethno-linguistic Malayo-Javanic cultural and law area, and pinpoints lines of evidence to delineate the boundaries of such an area. On the basis of secondary literature, and previous fieldwork on indigenous and traditional legal systems (*adat*, *pikukuh karuhun*, *dresta*) in Bali, Banten and Central Kalimantan, it uses historical anthropology and a triangulation of linguistic, archaeological and biological evidence to reconstruct a cultural and legal complex that would be shared by several ethnic groups of the Western Malayo-Polynesian linguistic area.

In his “Ethnographic and Archaeological Correlates for an Mainland Southeast Asia Linguistic Area”, Roger Blench argues that the broadly-recognized linguistic convergence area of mainland Southeast Asia must also have material and social correlates. Setting out the evidence for musical instruments, the crossbow, house types and dress, he considers whether this area can also be connected with the Southeast Asian distribution of sumatraliths. Finally, the chapter speculates that the type of linguistic similarities reflect a “consensus” culture, where sounding and behaving like neighbouring peoples is desirable, while underlining minor differences.

“Was There a Late Prehistoric Integrated Southeast Asian Maritime Space? Insight from Settlements and Industries” by Bérénice Bellina investigates the hypothesis that the strong spatial and human integration in Southeast Asia that we can see in modern times is the outcome of much earlier dynamics of maritime Southeast Asian globalization, possibly dominated by Austronesian speakers. Recent archaeological excavations have indeed demonstrated that the second millennium BC populations actively interacted within the South China Sea, establishing networks that could have laid the ground for common practices and cultural affinities by 500 BC. To answer the question as to whether there is evidence for shared patterns of values, norms and cultural models during the late prehistoric period that could be indicative of an ancient regional integration, the author discusses two sets of data. The first are the settlements of Co Loa in northern Vietnam and the Khao Sam Kaeo in the Thai-Malay Peninsula, where processes of urbanism emerged in the late prehistoric period, that is well before

the emergence of early States. The second are the two types of industries found within maritime networks, i.e. stone ornaments and the “Sa Huynh-Kalanay” ceramics. These archaeological datasets throw light on the socio-political and economic dynamics that many populations were facing in Southeast Asia at that time, which arguably prefigure later historical configurations.

The ensuing two chapters extend the correlation of linguistic features, social mores and material culture to the issue of human dispersal. “Looms, Weaving, and the Austronesian Expansion” by Chris Buckley focuses on a fascinating and important aspect of the material culture of mainland and island Southeast Asia and Southern China, namely the distributions of the body-tensioned loom and the *ikat* weaving technologies for making decorated textiles. The author attempts to interpret the present-day distributions of these technologies stemming from the premodern past by contrasting it to the archaeological record, and elaborate a theory about prehistoric dispersals by comparing the looms of the mainland with those of the Austronesian-speaking peoples of island Southeast Asia. He concludes that it is difficult to explain the present-day distribution of looms and *ikat* weaving according to the popular “out of Taiwan” model, and that these characteristically “Austronesian” technologies appear to have originated directly from the Asian mainland.

Waruno Mahdi’s “Pre-Austronesian Origins of Seafaring in Insular Southeast Asia” is an enquiry into an important yet poorly understood chapter of global history, namely the earliest sea crossings and offshore fishing. On the basis of archaeological and linguistic data, Mahdi argues that island Southeast Asia was the area where these activities could have originated, around 45,000 BP. Using biogenetic data that place the populations of Taiwan and island Southeast Asia closer to one another than either of them to that of the Chinese mainland, the author argues that early navigational technology was acquired from ancestors of present-day “Negritos” who, retreating before the rising seas, travelled to Fujian and then Taiwan. By correlating these findings with linguistic data, Mahdi makes a case for the existence of early maritime networks spanning from the South China Sea to the Bay of Bengal.

An approach to cultural transfer and human migration from the disciplinary perspective of linguistics is the hallmark of the next two chapters. In “The Role of ‘Prakrit’ in Maritime Southeast Asia Through 101 Etymologies”, Tom Hoogervorst presents a novel contribution to the study of language contact between South and Southeast Asia, in particular the oft-neglected “Prakrit” or Middle Indo-Aryan loanwords that were borrowed by Malay, Old Javanese and many other Southeast Asian languages during the first millennium CE. While scholarship on the exchange of vocabulary between South and Southeast Asia has traditionally prioritized the role of Sanskrit and the “high culture” carried by it, a focus on (North) India’s historical spoken languages reveals a vernacular dimension of interethnic contact, challenging scholars to reconsider the shape, structure and nature of the maritime networks that have shaped Asia’s pre-colonial past.

Alexander Adelaar’s “Who Were the First Malagasy, and What Did They Speak?” offers a glimpse of island Southeast Asia and Madagascar as parts of an interconnected world by investigating what the Malagasy homeland in Borneo looked like from a geographical, social, and political perspective. Adelaar discusses what the linguistic information about Malagasy and other members of the Southeast Barito language family in South Borneo tell us about the time when Malagasy became a separate language. Several linguistic developments (the abundance of Malay, Javanese and Sanskrit loanwords, the slightly different ways in which certain consonants have changed, and the adoption of the Javanese politeness marking prefix *ra-*) set Malagasy off against other Southeast Barito languages. They show that it is not a direct continuation of any of these languages. On the contrary, it had already undergone a separate evolution before the migration of its speakers to East Africa. This has possible implications for the way we should view the social position of these speakers. Rather than slaves obtained from communities that have persisted until today in any of the existing Southeast Barito speaking groups, they may have been vassals who lived on a relatively equal footing with members of the Malay metropolis (nowadays Banjarmasin) and were on their way to become assimilated to that metropolis.

The two chapters closing this collection elaborate on the interplay between the cosmopolitan and the local in Southeast Asia and the wider Western Malayo-Polynesian/Austronesian worlds. “*Śāstric* and Austronesian Comparative Perspectives: Parallel Frameworks on Indic Architectural and Cultural Translations Among Western Malayo-Polynesian Societies” by Imran bin Tajudeen investigates the nature of the interplay between autochthonous and Indian elements in the formation of Southeast Asia’s Indic cultures. The author describes the translations of *śāstric* sources into architecture and art forms according to patterns that integrated Indic and Austronesian paradigms. Early architectural examples from Central Java, Sumatran sites and Kedah prompts us to reconsider some existing assumptions on processes and phases of “Indianization” resting upon a dichotomous conception of Indian and indigenous elements that assume a separation between them and their juxtaposition as distinct elements accessible to “stratigraphic” scrutiny. Neither the “Sanskrit Cosmopolis” perspective nor the opposite reactionary emphasis on “localization” or “indigenization” is adequate, since they do not go beyond the presumption of a model of centre-periphery relations that presume Indian agency and indigenous passivity followed belatedly by a “vernacular” response. Thus, Imran argues, the analysis of the Austronesian-Indic cultural encounter and its outcomes in architecture and art should seek to identify the interaction and mutual transformation of the autochthonous and Indic simultaneously.

Robert Wessing’s “The Lord of the Land Relationship in Southeast Asia” focuses on a figure whose position, though locally referred to by various titles, can be characterized as “the Lord of the Land”, and whose referent can vary from a spirit, the founder of a community, the head of a village or localized descent line, or a king. In his capacity as leader of this descent group, this figure fulfils a role that encompasses land-rightly, priestly, and politico-administrative tasks. Rather than attributing the differences to local variation, Wessing tries to link together the ideas that—at least in the past—underlay and unified these usages throughout Southeast Asia. His findings pave the ground for further comparative study of this apparently translocal trope in the wider Austronesian world.

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