

INTRODUCTION



Southeast Asia in World History

Macrohistorical Considerations and World System History

Southeast Asia in World History

Southeast Asia's place and contribution to the world economy prior to the 1500s, especially in the early millennia of the current era (first century AD),¹ have been much overlooked by scholars.² Sandwiched between India and China, Southeast Asia has often been viewed as a region of just peripheral entrepôts, especially in the early centuries of the current era. Its geographic location and most of the type of products it exported from its mainland and islands further reinforced the perceived peripherality of the region. From the perspectives of most scholars analyzing and comparing the Indian, Arab, Chinese, and later European civilizations, Southeast Asia has been viewed mostly as a way station on the vast Maritime Silk Roads of the world trading system. The region's trade ties have been understood and viewed historically as being connected to the two (then) core centers (China and India) of the world economy that it has geographic proximity to, and thus further underscoring its assumed peripheral status. In world historical analyses, even by those like the late Abu Lughod (1989) whose work has shown sensitivity to the rise and fall of world system hegemonic dominance dating back to the twelfth century, Southeast Asia is not given its due.³ For Abu-Lughod, following others, Southeast Asia is also viewed as a peripheral region that is no more than a set of trade entrepôts. However, such widespread perceptions do not mesh with recent archaeological evidence and assemblages that show established and productive polities existing in Southeast Asia in the early parts of the current era and long before. In order to reorient these commonly shared views of Southeast Asia's peripheral socioeconomic and political status, a recalibration of the interactions of Southeast Asia with other parts of the Eurasian world economy is required. To do this, it is necessary to place Southeast Asia in the dynamics of a world history

of an evolving world economy (economy of the world). For the period between 200 BC to AD 500, it was a time of large volumes of trade exchanges occurring via land and sea in an increasingly connected Eurasian world. In Southeast Asia's case, the region was connected by land and sea routes crisscrossing its mainland land mass and its archipelago and islands. Southeast Asian goods thus were shipped mainly on the Maritime Silk Roads for exchanges between the East and West of the Eurasian world, and such exchanges rose and fell following the rhythms of expansion and contraction of the Eurasian world system.

To reset the commonly accepted position and status of Southeast Asia in the world economy then, this book proposes to reexamine the past. The object is to offer a revisionist interpretation of Southeast Asia's place in world history. From recent archaeological findings and historical literary accounts, a world system of trade connections involving Southeast Asia has existed by perhaps 200 BC or earlier. Such findings on trading goods being exchanged between the Mediterranean and South Asia and eastward to Southeast Asia and China have revealed a set of trading contacts between ports of these regions. Such a system connected Europe, the Mediterranean, the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, the Persian Gulf, central Asia, South Asia, Ceylon, Southeast Asia, and China through a series of both land and sea trading routes, commonly known as the Silk Roads. Trade exchanges via land and sea, along with the movement of peoples, defined this system. China was at one end, with the Roman Empire at the other end, and central Eurasia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia geographically somewhat in the middle of the system.

In view of the above, we can define the extent and coverage of this world system of trading connections in operation from mid-prehistory onward as extending across seven regions: Europe/Mediterranean, East Africa, Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf, South Asia, Southeast Asia, central Asia, and China/East Asia. Given the scope of these trade connections extending over seven regions of the world, excluding the Americas that were not part of the system at this point in time, this historical economic linkage can be viewed as the "first Eurasian world economy" in terms of geographic extent. Thus, this book will highlight Southeast Asia's participation in this world trading system and the importance of its trading goods as commodities for consumption in the first Eurasian world economy. For by then, the Southeast Asian region was an important node of this world trading system.

By no means can an in-depth examination of Southeast Asia's participation in the Eurasian world economy be attempted without considering the rhythmic socioeconomic trends of expansion and contraction that underlie the dynamics of a world economy, and their influences on the socioeconomic and political structures and the economic trends of Southeast Asia. *Pari passu*, the expansion of Southeast Asian socioeconomic activities exporting commodities to a growing Eurasian world economy also further transformed the volume of

consumption and habits of the other parts of the system, especially in the core areas. Such expansion of commodities consumption, in certain ways, turned what was previously elite luxury consumption to the level of mass consumption with the expansion of the world economy, and the concomitant rise in urbanization and population levels throughout the system. The consumption of Southeast Asian incenses, spices, medicinal plant products, etc., for example, before considered commodities only for the elites, increasingly became mass consumption items utilized in religious practices and health prescriptions. This transformation was reflected in the volume of exports to meet the needs of China, India, and other parts of the Eurasian world economy, such as the Roman Empire.

Besides the above, Southeast Asia's dynamic economies and polities led to technological innovations in the area of seafaring. These technologies were transferred to the neighboring regions of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Furthermore, some of Southeast Asia's crops were transplanted, though much earlier than my period of study, to the Indian Ocean region, as recent studies have shown.⁴ At the regional level, Southeast Asia's coastal trading ports, its riverine communities, and its agrarian kingdoms located on the mainland were always interconnected, even much earlier to my period of investigation as evident by the distribution of the bronze Dong Son drums, for example, throughout the mainland and islands of Southeast Asia. Such connections fostered a regional trade network stretching from Burma to the Philippine Islands whereby varied commodities were exchanged throughout the region.

Macrohistorical Considerations and World System History

Macro Structure and Duration

Prehistoric socioeconomic and political connections between regions that are separated by rivers, mountains, seas, and oceans spanning from Europe, central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and China have long been identified and pinpointed by archaeologists, historians, historical geographers, sociologists, and ethnographers (see for example, Kristiansen 1998, 2005; Algaze 1993; Beaujard 2005, 2010; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Chew 2001, 2007, 2015; Earle and Kristiansen 2010; Frank 1993; Higham 2002, 2006, 2011; Higham and Higham et al. 2011; Higham and Kijngam 2010; Ratnagar 1981, 2004; Rowlands et al. 1987; A. Sheratt 1997; Wilkinson 2000). Rather than viewing the social evolution of these social communities in the above regions as transforming within their ecological and natural environments apart from other social systems, the identification of such prehistoric linkages and connections suggest a social evolutionary process that is not only interactive within the specific particular locale's natural and ecological environments, but also be-

tween different locales/regions. The uncovering of such connectivity occurring during prehistory further suggests that these linkages are not necessarily time dependent whereby the connections only emerged later in the historic period, as exemplified by the European voyages of discovery or as a result of advances in technology and knowledge that enables such linkages. Instead, these structural connections have existed in certain regions of the world—depending on the state of social evolutionary capacities of the social systems—for at least five thousand years.

Given such identifications and evidence, the theoretical and methodological arguments for an overarching structural framework that circumscribes and conditions the social evolutionary process of these socially connected human systems not only provides an explanatory dimension but also offers a more holistic understanding of the evolutionary trajectory of world history. If, however, only an isolated locale-dependent methodological approach was pursued, certain dynamics and tendencies would otherwise have not been mapped and captured for our overall understanding of the social evolutionary processes at the world historical level. Increasingly therefore, we need to address the flows and connections that link human systems over world history so that we can explain the historical patterns that determine the trajectory and forces that conduce the human enterprise, in other words, a world system history.

With the increasing efforts to explore and understand the dynamics and character of the social evolution of human communities along such lines of connectivity and interactions within and between regions over the course of world history, a careful articulation of the theoretical and methodological framework(s) will place my presentation of historical information and dynamics of Southeast Asia in a clearer light. Therefore, using a historically informed theoretical perspective to decipher the historical patterns and dynamics will give us a theoretically informed account of Southeast Asia in world history. It will enable us to recast our interpretation and understanding of the received history of Southeast Asia.

The positing of macrohistorical structures such as a world system/economy can be found in the writings of the French Annales School of historians, for example. Their approach covers several levels of analysis, stretching from deep structures to specific *conjunctures* and events. Such a methodological approach honors the role of time or duration and the specific concatenation of events and structures (such as climate and geography) in the explanation of historical outcomes. One of the Annalists, Fernand Braudel (1972, 2001), in trying to understand the dynamics of the trajectories of the societies and civilizations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, revealed how this region's transformations were shaped by its structural dynamics, which were physical, socio-economic, political, and temporal in character. This structural whole underlies the material basis of the reproduction of the socioeconomic and political aspects

of an area which the structural unit encompasses geographically and temporally.⁵ For Braudel, this structural whole has its dynamic histories of *la longue durée, conjonctures, et événements*. This historical structural whole for Fernand Braudel (1981, 1982, 1984) became categorized as a “world-economy” with a set of dynamics and trends when his studies moved beyond the Mediterranean Sea to document the history of world transformations, capital accumulation, and the rise of capitalism.

Braudel’s macrostructural framework for explaining world historical transformation was embraced by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1988, 2011), who adopted the Braudelian structural whole (with its trends and dynamics) as an analytical concept and a tool to account for the course of world history from AD 1500 onward, and to explain how world transformations occurred within the dynamics of this world-system/economy, which had its origins in western Europe. With his choice of the temporal starting point (sixteenth century AD) for the rise of the European world-economy, and that this system was capitalistic in nature, the assumption for Wallerstein was that this world-system existed only from the sixteenth century onward and not before. This belief fits well with most contemporary scholars at that time, especially when the system is assumed to be capitalistic, and that capitalism as a “mode of production” is not supposed to exist prior to this period as feudalism is supposed to hold sway in western Europe then. That is the standard understanding of most Marxist and non-Marxist scholarship then and now, and this also included contemporary economic historians’ interpretation of the making of the modern world. However, this time bracketing and the pinpointing of the nature of the mode of accumulation (capitalism), if it stays unchanged, pose a methodological conundrum for historical materialist studies in the social and historical sciences that adopt a macrohistorical structural approach but wish to focus on the prehistoric economic and political relations in world history.

How then to proceed? The late Abu-Lughod’s work (1989) mapping an earlier world-system of global trade connections stretching from Asia to Europe and developing by the mid-thirteenth century prompted a reconsideration of the timing issue for the emergence of the world-economy. If there was an earlier system, as Abu-Lughod (1989) has insisted, it expands our understanding of the evolution of the world economy.⁶ It opens up the possibility of considering that a macrohistorical structure was evolving through time, encompassing and connecting geographic space and human communities. Of course, like any academic finding and debate, such an articulation of a/the world economic structure existing three hundred years earlier than that posited by Wallerstein (1974) further prompted questioning of the emergence, evolution, and formation of the world system by a number of scholars (see, e.g., Denmark et al. 2000; Frank and Gills 1993). Questions—such as has there been only one world-system or were there several successive world-systems, or has there been

only a single world system that has been evolving for the past five thousand years—were raised (Abu-Lughod 1993; Beaujard 2005, 2010; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Frank and Gills 1993; Modelski and Thompson 2000; Wilkinson 2000).

Notwithstanding the deliberations over the existence of the number of world systems existing at a given time, another dimension of the intellectual discourse—besides the accusation of Eurocentrism because of the AD 1500 dating of the emergence of the world-system by Wallerstein—covers the debate on the nature of capitalism and its timing of emergence and transition to the capitalist mode of production. Basically, there were two main strains in the debate, one by Gunder Frank and Barry Gills (1996, 2002), who argue that capital accumulation (in this context, capitalism) has existed for thousands of years, and the other expounded by Wallerstein, who suggests otherwise (1991, 1999). In the latter's case, capitalism has been in operation only for the last five hundred years. This debate has implications for my present study as the debate attempts to clarify the specific characteristics and nature of the concept of capitalism and the period of its emergence. Over the last three decades, these latter questions and debates were addressed by various scholarly treatises that have been published on these issues concerning the formation and evolution of a/the world system(s) and the nature of capitalism (see, e.g., Wallerstein 1974, 1991, 1999; Abu-Lughod 1989; Amin 1974, 1991, 1999; Arrighi 1994, 1999, 2007; Beaujard 2005, 2010; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Chew 2001, 2007; Denmark et al. 2000; Ekholm and Friedman 1982; Frank and Gills 1993; Modelski and Thompson 2000; Wilkinson 2000).

In the context of this book, with my interest in locating Southeast Asia in world history, it is very clear that the encompassing process or incorporation of regions via trade exchanges structure the linkages of the world economy. Trade by no means is only an exchange of goods; along with it comes an exchange of knowledge and belief systems (religion, for example) as well. In other words, in a broad sense, as Habermas (1981, 1989) puts it, production occurs conjointly with communication. If this is the case, the different regions of the world that are connected by trade have exhibited a synchronized developmental pattern, perhaps even cultural hybridization, therefore underlining the systemic nature of their relations. This means that we are witnessing the outlines of a world system with a structure and trends.

Looking for global trade connections as an indicator of the formation of a world economy can perhaps be the first indicator of world system formation in a historical materialist sense. This by no means is the only evidence of the formation of a world system. It would be the minimal indicator that a system is in operation whereby global exchanges are taking place between and within regions of the world (see also Frank and Gills 2000). With the existence of

trade relations, it also means that a (global) division of labor exists. My earlier studies (2001, 2007, 2008) along with others (see, e.g., Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Frank and Gills 2000; Kristiansen 1998; Kristiansen and Larsson 2005; Modelski and Thompson 2000) have shown this international division of labor existing as early as 3000 BC.

If we examine world history in terms of trade connections, we can trace the contours of a regional world economy encompassing the Eurasian region of Mesopotamia, the Arabian Peninsula, Levant, Anatolia, Iran, the Indus Valley, and Egypt by 3000 BC (Chew 2001, 2007). Beaujard (2005, 2010) has identified three possible regional world systems from 1000 BC onward. For him, there was the Western world system, the Eastern world system, and the Indian world system during the Iron Age, with growing interactions between these systems from 350 BC onward. Regardless of whether it is a single world system that started in the Fertile Crescent and over time encompassed other regions of the world, as postulated by Frank and Gills (2000), or Beaujard's (2010) three regional world systems coalescing into one world system, what is clear is that by the turn of the first century of the current era, we find a world system encompassing Europe, East Africa, and Asia (South, Southeast, and East) (Beaujard 2010; Chew 2001, 2007). In world history, we can conceive of it as the first Eurasian world economy as the only major region that has not been connected at this point in world history is the Americas.

This Eurasian world economy during the time period of examination also experienced crisis and restructuring, the result of the various trends and tendencies of the nature of the world system. I have argued in earlier writings (see, e.g., Chew 2000, 2001, 2007), along with others such as Thompson (2006) and Beaujard (2010), that climate, scarcity of natural environmental resources, ecological degradation, and diseases should be added to the usual socio-economic and political causes for this restructuring.

The Nature of the Structure

I use the term world economy instead of world-economy because the latter has been used by world-systems specialists for a historical structure that has a certain set of socioeconomic and political attributes and trends, "capitalistic" in nature, that do not necessarily cover a wide geographic space. To world-system specialists, this historical structure of a world-economy is a world in itself, hence the hyphenation between world and economy (Wallerstein, 1991). In our case, a world economy is not distinguished necessarily by a mode of production other than it covers a global geographic space with multiple cores/regions linked at a minimum by a trading system. It is an evolving global economy "of the world." Depending on the temporal sequence, an economy of the

world encompassing different chiefdoms, kingdoms, civilizations, empires, and states in a global division of labor, technology, and knowledge circumscribed by different cultural patterns.

Along this vein, in European archaeology, a number of prehistoric studies such as those by Kristian Kristiansen (1998, 2005), Michael Rowlands (1987), and the late Andrew Sheratt (1997) utilizing a theoretical-methodological framework that we have described above have arrived at some revealing patterns, trends and tendencies of prehistoric European Bronze Age that a specific processual site investigation would have missed. These studies reveal the exchange of knowledge, information, and technologies through migratory processes following climate changes, environmental transformations, wars, trade, diseases, and accumulation processes. Similar studies of the Fertile Crescent and South Asia's prehistoric connections with the Arabian Peninsula by, for example, Guillermo Algaze (1993), Shereen Ratnagar (1981), and my work (2001, 2007) have also uncovered patterns and tendencies of social, climatological, and ecological interactions between these regions and the eastern Mediterranean and central Europe. Similarly, trade, wars, accumulation processes also underline the trajectory of social system transformations, expansions and contractions.

For Southeast Asia and China, Glover (1991) has made reference to how Southeast Asia's exchange systems became linked to a vast network of trade connections to a Wallersteinian world-system at the dawn of the Christian era, and the significance of this to the socioeconomic development of Southeast Asian societies. Other than this fleeting theoretical-methodological reference of Glover on early Southeast Asia in a world economic context, the archaeological studies of the prehistoric and early historic periods undertaken were focused mainly on processual studies of mainland and island Southeast Asia. Here, the rich seminal studies of Charles (C. F. W.) Higham (1996, 1998, 2006, 2011) on Bronze Age Mainland Southeast Asia and its relationships in terms of technological transfer between China and mainland Southeast Asia needs to be noted.

Archaeological and historical studies of the prehistoric period of these regions (China and Southeast Asia) tend to be more regionally focused with the exception of studies examining the relationships and connections between South Asia and Southeast Asia, and also the latter with China. Guided by art history and excavated finds, the thesis of the Indianization of Southeast Asia has been pursued, underlining the connections between these two regions without any reference to the dynamics of the world economy. The early work of G. Coedes (1966, 1968) is an example that comes to mind, and it has influenced studies on the socioeconomic and evolutionary transformations of Southeast Asia. There are others as well, perhaps with a more emphatic stress on autonomous Southeast Asian development, such as Van Leur (1967),

Wheatley (1961), and Wolters (1967), that fall within this genre of regional studies of Southeast Asia that will be covered in the following chapters.

China's linkages with Southeast Asia have also been subjected to numerous studies, though in this case, besides cultural artifacts and archaeological finds, Chinese texts and accounts have also been used to reveal the Sinicization of Southeast Asia. Wang Gung-Wu's seminal work (1958) remains the key reference point for my understanding of the prehistoric trade connections and exchange. Reid's (1988, 1993) two-volume work on Southeast Asia and its relations to the maritime world, though focusing on a later period (AD 1450–1680), follows the Braudelian framework of a Mediterranean world, and views Southeast Asia within the context of a connected region, with its varied landscapes of mainland and islands determining its socioeconomic transformations.⁷ Somewhat along similar lines is the work of Lieberman (2003, 2009). Veering away from the early studies of Coedes (1966, 1968) and proposing a framework that incorporates Reid's Braudelian model and extends it to account for local interactions with global trends and forces, Lieberman has tried to show some of the linkages of the region and world systemic trends especially in Europe at similar points in time. Unfortunately, his work focuses mostly on Southeast Asia around AD 800 onward, and does not cover my period of investigation, which is the formative time period in which Southeast Asia socioeconomically developed as a connected region participating in the Eurasian world economy.

Do the socioeconomic and political structures that formed then determine the arc of socioeconomic and political transformations that Lieberman has delineated for the later periods of Southeast Asian socioeconomic and political landscapes? Of consideration also would be the need to assess systematically the weighting in which world systemic forces and trends play in the dynamics of socioeconomic changes of Southeast Asia within the long periods of global expansion and contraction of the Eurasian world economy between 200 BC and AD 500. Rather than viewing the transformations between Europe and Southeast Asia as "strange parallels" when we use a comparative historical approach, we need to consider the socioeconomic evolution of Southeast Asia as occurring within the trends and dynamics of world economy depending on the state of its linkages within the system. Can we find the synchronous development of socioeconomic and political patterns that result from such interactions between Southeast Asia and the other core regions of the Eurasian world system? Undoubtedly, strong linkages of a region like Southeast Asia with the core regions at a specific time period will undoubtedly reveal the synchronicity of such "parallel" transformations and vice versa. If such is the case, we need to be careful how we explain so-called parallel development, and consider the position that it is not just local regional transformations that determine the arc of the regional political and socioeconomic landscapes, and

that the world-systemic and world-historical events and trends also shape the Southeast Asian landscapes. This will help us to navigate between the Scylla of externalist historical interpretations and the Charybdis of autonomous historical explanations.⁸

Given the above, what follows is my attempt to trace Southeast Asia's place in the patterns of history, a place that has been generated from a world economy circumscribed by trade, climate, and other socioeconomic activities.

Notes

1. Some of the sources used in this book have indicated dates only in the form of BC or AD without any clarifications of whether these dates are carbon dated. I have used BC and AD datings for the whole of this paper so that they reflect the original sources from which the citations were taken.
2. There are exceptions, such as Lieberman (2003, 2009). Even Lieberman starts his analysis from AD 800. For the period post-1500 this has not been the case. See, e.g., Reid (1988, 1993).
3. Abu-Lughod's dating of the emergence of a world economy is different from that of Wallerstein (1974). Wallerstein (1974) perceived the emergence of a world economy in the fifteenth century.
4. See the publications of the Sealinks Project led by Nicole Boivin at the University of Oxford. Some of project members' publications have been cited in the chapters of this book (Fuller 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011).
5. Wang Gung-Wu (2008, n.d.) has assessed such a model of Braudel for Asia and Southeast Asia. See also Sutherland (2003).
6. The use of the hyphenated "world-economy" conforms to the practice of some world-system analysis scholars who view the structure of the world-economy as a world in itself, hence the hyphen. Such a use is based on the belief by these scholars that the world-economy is distinguished by a singular mode of production (Wallerstein 1991). Whereas others also examining the evolution of this world economy do not utilize the hyphen. The latter scholars do not assume that there is a singular mode of production that depicts the nature of the world economy. See the next section of this chapter for a fuller explanation on the use of the hyphen. The reader should note that the use of hyphenated "world-economy" or non-hyphenated "world economy" in this book is intentional to reflect the scholarly beliefs and understanding of the practitioners of the world-economy or world economy approach.
7. Wang Gung-Wu (n.d.) has also framed Southeast Asia within a Mediterranean complex but termed it as a semiterranean one in view of its historical development. See also Sutherland (2003).
8. For an explanation of these two different interpretations and approaches to writing and explaining Southeast Asian historical development, see Lieberman (2003).