

## Burma in Early Thai Sources: An Essay on Models of Perception

All fields of history are constructed, all periodization is arbitrary ...  
(Sears 1993, 4)

### The Power of Temporal Divisions

Before examining the way in which the region now known as Myanmar is mentioned in early Tai<sup>1</sup> sources we should examine the temporal frame in which such historical information has been presented to us. First and foremost we ought to distance ourselves from the simplified historical model that has dominated Thai history for more than seventy-five years.

Part of the emerging national consciousness of the Thai ruling class in the 1920s was the notion that the Thais also had a glorious past. At that time the history of the world was often depicted in terms of the history of nations, and therefore the budding chauvinists especially welcomed the discovery that there were signs of early Tai 'empires', such as the empire of Nan Chao which existed for a little over six hundred years in the area now called Yunnan from the middle of the seventh century AD until the year 1253, when Kublai Khan incorporated the region into the Chinese realm. The Thais of Nan Chao took pride of place in W.A.R. Wood's *History of Siam*, first published in 1925 and the idea was developed further in 1928 with Khun Wichitmatra's prize-winning Thai history book *Lak Thai*. Although the Tai dominance of Nan Chao was disproved as early as 1934 by Credner,<sup>2</sup> followed by many other scholars, the myth of a Tai Nan Chao had firmly established itself in Thai government publications. In this vein the first of a series of historical maps depicts the extent of what the Thais assume to have been a direct precursor of later 'Tai empires' (see Map 2). It also was written into the school history curriculum and nationalistic movements of the 1970s embraced and expounded the concept of the Tai empire of Nan Chao.

<sup>1</sup> In much of the literature the word Thai is used to refer to the Siamese of Thailand, while an unaspirated Tai is used for all speakers of Tai languages, including the Thai. While I do not wish to convey the impression that the people who conquered Sukhothai in the 13th century can be identified as Thai, I have chosen to attach the more general label to them.

<sup>2</sup> While it cannot be excluded that Nan Chao, during the times that its influence reached far eastwards controlled some of the ethnic groups which we now identify as Tai, this does not warrant the notion that Nan Chao was Tai.

Notably historians of Burma seem to have learnt very late, if at all, that the kingdom of Nan Chao (Nan-Zhao) was not dominated by the Tai. In his seminal article 'The Early *Syam* in Burma's History', while cautiously remarking that Nan Chao in the 9th century must have been ruled by predominantly Lolo or Tibeto-Burman peoples, Gordon Luce (1958, 141) still assumes that at some time after the ninth century it became Tai. Htin Aung (1967, 66-67) also takes for granted that Nan Chao was the chief Tai kingdom until Kublai Khan's occupation in 1253. Even in the third edition of Hall's *A History of Southeast Asia*, we read of the 'old T'ai kingdom of Tali, or Nanchao...' (Hall 1970, 123).

Let us return to the year 1925, which we may regard as a key year in the formation period of the predominant model of Thai history. In this year the Thais prepared a document to present their nation to an international public and a large part of this document deals with a presentation of the Siamese past. In this document the last 700 years of Thai history were divided up into three eras (Thai: *yuk*),<sup>3</sup> namely the Sukhothai Era (1257-1350), the Ayutthaya Era (1350-1767), and the Bangkok Era (1768 - the present) (Anon. 1925, 9-10).

Basing themselves largely upon the laudatory remarks in what has become known as the Rama Khamhaeng inscription of 1292,<sup>4</sup> the Sukhothai Era was depicted in terms of an empire where basking in to the wise and unselfish rule of a paternalistic king, the populace lived in prosperity. Reputably its extent was remarkable, stretching particularly in a southern and eastern direction far beyond the present-day Thai borders. Such views have been adopted and enlarged upon by generations of nationalistic historians as well as by textbook authors and through sheer repetition they have gained widespread acceptance.

For someone skilled in interpreting thirteenth century documents it is not difficult, however, to recognize that, for example, the statements in the Rama Khamhaeng inscription about the exemplary conduct of the king are couched in standard phrases that are also used with reference to some other rulers. This makes it likely that they comprise a statement that depicts the conduct of an ideal king, possibly intended as a blueprint to encourage meritorious deeds by those in command and to pre-empt the contrary behavior of would-be tyrants, rather than a record of a blissful political state and perfectly balanced economic reality.

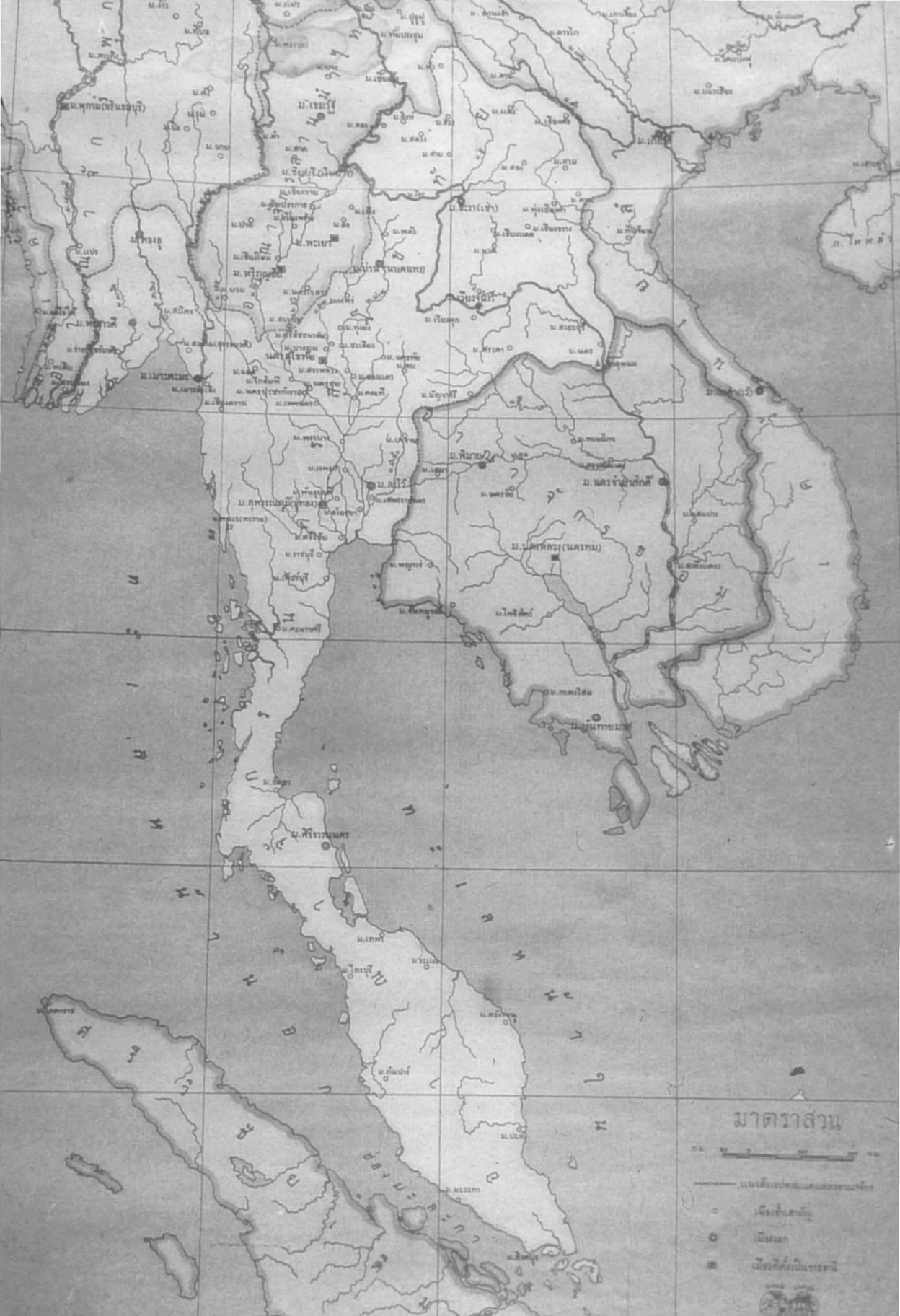
Some skepticism may also be in order with regard to the extent of Rama Khamhaeng's 'empire' as it has been depicted in Thai history books. The only evidence for the above-mentioned, much publicized geographical spread is a list on the fourth side of the inscription. This fourth side is written in a different hand and epigraphists judge it to have been incised not long after the reign of King Rama

<sup>3</sup> From the Pali: *yuga*.

<sup>4</sup> The idea which has recently been posed by some scholars that the Rama Khamhaeng inscription represents an early nineteenth century fake must be firmly rejected. There can be no doubt that the text on the first three sides was written at the end of the thirteenth century. This is not the place to address the various points raised by Dr Michael Vickery and Dr Piriya Krairiksh, who adduced the hypothesis of a fake. It should suffice here to point out that much information in the inscription, such as the name of Rama Khamhaeng's brother and father, was utterly unknown in the early nineteenth century and was later confirmed in inscriptions that have been found in the twentieth century.

---

*Map 2: Precursor of 'Tai empires' according to a Thai historical map.*



มาตราส่วน



- เส้นเขตแดนประเทศและเขตจังหวัด
- เมืองสำคัญ
- เมือง
- เมืองที่ขึ้นกับประเทศไทย



Khamhaeng. This geographical listing must also not be seen in terms of a solid empire, as is shown in Thai historical maps, in which Rama Khamhaeng's territory is indicated by a uniform color stretching from Luang Prabang to Singapore and from the Irrawaddy delta to the Trans-Mekong regions into what is now Vietnamese territory (see Map 3). Instead of subsuming a single territory, it would seem more appropriate to interpret the list as a series of political centres that recognized, at least at a particular moment of time, presumably at the end of Rama Khamhaeng's reign, the supremacy of Sukhothai. It should be borne in mind that the political structures of the late thirteenth century as well as the slowness of the means of communication at the time may well have been of such a nature as to suggest that the relationship between Sukhothai with the furthest-away centres might well have been in the form of 'nominal vassalage' rather than part of a polity under control of Sukhothai.

This geographical list in the inscription is of interest to us not only because it includes the first reference to Pegu in Thai sources, but also because it provides a picture of the long-distance connections of an inland mainland Southeast Asian polity at the end of the thirteenth century. It consists of four sequences of political powers which Rama Khamhaeng had been able to subdue. The relevant phrases may be paraphrased as follows:

The places whose submission he received on the east include Sraluang, Song Khwae [Phitsanulok], Lumbacai, both banks of the Mekong up to Vientiane. To the south Khanthi, Phrabang [Nakhon Sawan], Phraek [Chainat], Suphanburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and [Nakhon] Si Thammarat as far as the coast of the ocean. Westwards, Chot [Mae Sot], ...n [Pan near Martaban]<sup>5</sup> and Hangsaphadi [Hamsawati, Pegu], ending at the sea. To the north, Phlae [Phrae], Man, N... [Nan], Phlua [Pua] and across the Mekong as far as Java [Luang Prabang].<sup>6</sup>

It is indeed a remarkable list of towns which deserves to be noted with some care. It comprises four geographical sequences each beginning from Sukhothai and ending in a major centre of power, in a manner listing the main halting places on an outward journey. Eastwards the last political unit is Vientiane, northwards it is Luang Prabang, southwards Nakhon Si Thammarat, and westwards the polity named Hamsawati, or Pegu, distances as the crow flies respectively, of approximately 370, 410, 1100, and 400 kilometers.

Interestingly, the extension westward towards Martaban and Hamsawati is confirmed in the Mon annals which have been translated into Thai under the title *Rajathirat*. The relevant part of the *Rajathirat* may be summarized in the following words:

<sup>5</sup> For the location of Pan, see Griswold 1967, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Inscription 1, Side 4, Lines 23-26. For the identification of these places I rely on Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1971, 218-220. Upon reading this list, Dr G. Wade of Hong Kong University remarked that the name Man is of interest while the Ming annals note that 'troops of the country of Man' helped save Laos from a Vietnamese invasion.



มาตราส่วน



กรมแผนที่ทหารบก

- เมืองชั้นสำคัญ
- เมือง
- เมืองชั้นพิเศษ





Magato, a merchant from Martaban, whose father also had been a trader, set out with thirty followers on a trading venture to Sukhothai. After concluding his trade, Magato decided to settle, sending his followers back. He took service with the King of Sukhothai and rose to be governor of the palace. Then there came a time when the King of Sukhothai had to wage war with Khaek Java [possibly Malays]. In the king's absence, Magato commenced a love affair with one of the king's daughters and persuaded her to elope with him. They took seventy members of the palace guard as well as a large number of servants and they fled towards Martaban. Magato wrote to the King of Sukhothai, begging his forgiveness. When Magato arrived back in Martaban he was warmly welcomed. Magato's sister, Un Ruean, married the Burmese governor of Martaban, and when the latter plotted Magato's assassination, Magato reacted by killing the governor and becoming ruler of Martaban. He then wrote another letter to the King of Sukhothai, placing himself under the overlordship of Sukhothai. The King of Sukhothai then gave Magato the title of Chaofa Rua (Wareru) and sent him appropriate regalia. Later Chaofa Rua conquered Hamsawati and was ruler of the whole of Ramañadesa.<sup>7</sup>

Various versions of this story also found their way into Burmese chronicles. While one account asserts that Wareru was of Mon descent, all the others identify him as being Tai (Phayre 1967, 65; Harvey 1960, 110; Bennett 1971, 5). There can therefore be little doubt about the fact of the westward expansion of the influence of Sukhothai. Apparently Sukhothai kept the region under vassalage during the turbulent reign of Chaofa Rua's brother and nephew, but his brother, Chao Chip, no longer put himself under Sukhothai protection.

One very pertinent point is the remark that Wareru began his career as a trader. In the Burmese annals his family is also depicted as being traders. In his case trading meant traveling between Martaban at the coast and Sukhothai, deep inland. The information in the Rama Khamhaeng inscription regarding the westward expanse and the journey of Wareru between Martaban and Sukhothai would appear to me to be connected, if we think in politico-commercial terms, in particular long-trade connections.

It is also relevant to note that the Sukhothai political alliance of Rama Khamhaeng in the late thirteenth century stretched west and south, far beyond Hongsawadi [Hamsawati] and Nakhon Si Thammarat. The reason for this was that it provided Sukhothai with very long trade routes over land and sea, connecting the city directly with the outside world. Sukhothai's most important long trade route ran westwards over land now falling within Burmese territory, giving it the opportunity to conduct long-distance trade with India and Sri Lanka. This had a lasting influence upon the cultural history of the region.

The corpus of Sukhothai inscriptions and later historical literature produces ample evidence of the importance and regular use of this long-distance westward connection. In contrast, the connection with China is not referred to in the inscriptional record.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed translation, see Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1972: 41-43.

Inscriptions 2 and 11 both date from the middle of the fourteenth century and they are almost wholly concerned with the life and actions of the Venerable Sisattha, whose family had played a crucial role at the time the Tais conquered Sukhothai, several generations earlier.<sup>8</sup>

In Inscription 2 the Venerable Sisattha's meritorious deeds are enumerated, and a prominent place is given to his pilgrimage to Sri Lanka. He made this long journey traveling overland to Martaban where he embarked upon the long sea voyage that ended in Sri Lanka. On his return journey to Sukhothai he brought with him two precious relics of the Buddha as well as many artisans. His outward itinerary is specified in Inscription 11 (Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, 1972, 137): first overland to Fang, Phlae, Raphun, Tak (...several words missing), where he reached the forest and set his elephant free, then on to Nakhon Phan (Martaban), then obviously by ship to Kalinga, Patalipu(tra), ...burana, Chola, Malala, and on to Sri Lanka. On the return journey he sailed from Sri Lanka directly to Tavoy<sup>9</sup> from where he crossed the Peninsula and then proceeded northwards via the Chao Phraya river system up to Sukhothai (Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1972, 142, fn.29).

Inscription 4 gives an account of a high-ranking Buddhist monk traveling from Sri Lanka to Sukhothai. In 1347, when Luethai, the grandson of Rama Khamhaeng, was finally confirmed as King of Sukhothai (having driven away a usurper) he used this occasion to enshrine what he believed to be a genuine relic of the Buddha, which had been brought from Sri Lanka. Some seeds of the Mahabodhi tree under which the Buddha had sat when he attained his Enlightenment were also planted (Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1973, 95). Besides this, in Inscription 93 at the end of the fourteenth century the queen mother is reported to have received two relics from Sri Lanka.

Inscription 8 was written in the late 1360s. It records the renaming of a local hill after a Sri Lankan mountain, on the occasion of the establishment of a copy of the footprint of the Lord Buddha. Some emissary had been sent there to make a copy and had traveled all the way back to enshrine this footprint on the renamed Tai version of the famous place of pilgrimage (Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1973, 118-23).

In the *Mulasasana* (a book composed at Chiang Mai by a monk named Bud-dhañana in the 1420s), there is a passage describing how the King of Ramaññadesa (Pegu) had heard of the virtues of the Venerable Mahathera Kassapa and, desiring to have him nearby, he fitted out a junk and sent men to Sri Lanka to invite him to come. The Mahathera did not come in person but sent a monk named Anumati instead accompanied by his own nephew and twelve monks, all natives of Martaban in the year 1331. Anumati caused Buddhism to flourish in Martaban and was given a new name, Udumbarapuppha Mahasvami...

<sup>8</sup> An English translation of the relevant part of the inscription can be found in Griswold and Prasert na Nagara (1972, 117-134).

<sup>9</sup> The importance of Tavoy prior to the first Anglo-Burmese war can be adduced from the fact that Tanaw was designated a *mueang tho* (town of the second rank), on par with Nakhon Si Thammarat, Kamphaengphet, Sawangkhalok, Sukhothai, and Phetchabun in the Kotmai Tra Sam Duang (1973, 175). Its chief was Okyachayathibodi Narongkhrachayaphiriyabora, with a *saktina* (power ranking) of 10,000 fields.

At that time there were two senior monks, natives of Sukhothai, one named Anomadassi and the other Sumana. Many merchants had told them about the virtues of Udumbarapuppha Mahasvami and therefore the two Sukhothai monks went to Martaban to be re-ordained in the community of Udumbarapuppha Mahasvami. They studied the Three *Pitakas* and their interpretation for five years, and then took leave of the Mahasvami to return to Sukhothai. The Mahasvami gave them the name of Nissayamutta, saying: 'From now on you have no need of support. When you have returned to Sukhothai and remained there for five years, come back to see me again, and I will make you Nissayamuttas with the title of Mahathera.' Having listened to the Mahasvami's injunction, the two monks undertook to observe the thirteen *dhutangas*. Then they went back to reside in Sukhothai as before.

They remained there for five years; and when they returned to the community of Udumbarapuppha Mahasvami (about 1341 or 1342) they took eight monks with them, namely the Reverends Ananda, Buddhasagara, Sujata, Khema, Piyadassi, Suvannagiri, Vessabhu, and Saddhatissa, who when they arrived at the community, asked to be re-ordained. ...

They lived in the community of Udumbarapuppha Mahasvami for about three months... (were sent back to Sukhothai to preach). (The two *mahatheras* planted *sima* (border) stones, and ordained people, the one in Sisacchanalai, the other in Sukhothai). From the other eight, one went to Ayutthaya, one to Luang Prabang, one to Nan, one to Chiang Mai, and one to Phitsanulok.

These citations from inscriptions and the *Mulasasana* show a regular and varied contact between Martaban and what is now northern Thailand. This also helps explain why there was such a flourishing Pali school in the Lanna region in the fourteenth century.

### **The Route Southwards and Early Ayutthaya**

To return to the Rama Khamhaeng inscription: not only does it contain the first mention of the link all the way to Martaban, but also here is the only record of his conquest of the much longer route to the south. The reference to the seashore at Nakhon Si Thammarat may be interpreted – not as nationalists would have it, that the whole of the Malay Peninsula was subject to Sukhothai's control – , but simply that this was the region from where it was possible to travel on by ship, namely to China.<sup>10</sup> The political control of Sukhothai consisted, exactly as the inscription says, of a series of towns, namely Chainat, Suphanburi, Phetchaburi, and Nakhon Si Thammarat, four fortifications at key locations to the south. Sukhothai's access to the southern port of Nakhon Si Thammarat takes a route that runs through the Tha Chin River. It may be highly relevant for historians to note that this route circumvents the whole central Chao Phraya delta, in particular the region controlled by Lopburi and pre-1351 Ayutthaya, both towns notably absent from the list of centres under Sukhothai's control.

<sup>10</sup> See the legendary parts of the oldest preserved record based on Thai annals (Van Vliet, 1975, 56.7).



The notion of a pre-1351 Thai Ayutthaya has long been unthinkable to Thai historians, largely as a result of the sequential empire model (Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Bangkok), described above, which has been firmly embedded into their minds.<sup>11</sup> Flying in the face of wishful thinking, evidence of an early Tai presence in Lopburi and Ayutthaya has been mounting. A key role in this new awareness of a pre-1351 Tai-dominated Ayutthaya comes from a critical re-reading of various Chinese sources which give information about Xian (Hsien in older sources, using the Wade-Giles transcription) by which it would now appear, Ayutthaya was meant, an Ayutthaya co-existent with and independent of Sukhothai, well before the 'founding' date in 1351. This view implies that the standard historical division of time into a Sukhothai Era, followed by an Ayutthayan Era is no longer tenable.<sup>12</sup>

Several historical puzzles would be solved by ridding ourselves of the sequential empire straight-jacket. For instance, the presumed death of Rama Khamhaeng in 1298 would then refer to the demise of a ruler of the Ayutthaya Xian – not Sukhothai<sup>13</sup> – and the Thai attack upon Cambodia, mentioned in Ju Takuan (Chou Ta-kuan) as having taken place not long before 1296 may well have been organized from that early Ayutthaya. Its failure to feature in Sukhothai inscriptions need no longer surprise us.

The evidence suggests that even at the time when Sukhothai under Rama Khamhaeng may have attained its greatest extent, the political scene of the Thai peoples was one characterized by plurality, in which various polities existed simultaneously. For the region that now is called Thailand at the end of the thirteenth century, it consisted of three different polities: one the Sukhothai alliance, one being an northern Lanna agglomeration eventually taking the new city of Chiang Mai as its centre and the third was the Ayutthaya-Lopburi alliance. The latter successfully waged war against the Khmers and never formed an alliance with Sukhothai. Therefore there can be no question of a unified Tai political system or anything resembling an empire during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

This will help explain why in the Ayutthayan chronicles with its many references to military raids, most of them directed towards the north, there are no early references to the Burmese region because between the fourteenth and sixteenth century Ayutthayan raids did not reach beyond Chiang Mai. Before the sixteenth century, the Burmese regions simply fell outside Ayutthayan scope. The growing economic might of Ayutthaya depended largely upon providing an entrepôt for the Chinese market. We have seen how Sukhothai derived most of its precious relics, footprints and scholars from Sri Lanka, in contrast Ayutthaya was much more connected to China.

<sup>11</sup> Chamvit (1976, 76ff) notes that scholars have found evidence of a city of Ayodhya, prior to Ayutthaya, but has shied away from the obvious conclusion that the names Ayutthaya and Ayodhya are one and the same.

<sup>12</sup> In Chinese sources for the period of the last two decades of the thirteenth and the first two of the fourteenth century, we find mentions of Xian once undated before 1282, then twice 1282, 1292, 1293, 1294, 1295 three entries, 1297, 1299 two entries, 1300, 1314, 1319 and 1323, Lopburi undated before 1282, 1297, Phetchaburi 1294, and Sukhothai is mentioned only one single time, namely in 1299 (Flood, 1969, 220-27).

<sup>13</sup> As in Griswold and Prasert na Nagara (1972, 21), where it becomes clear that this demise does not fit in with what has been established of Sukhothai history.

## The Spatial Dimension: Broadening the Perspective

While it is refreshing to do away with the fiction of the Sukhothai Empire and its era, the picture of a country divided up by three Tai conglomerates, Lanna, Sukhothai, and Ayutthaya-Lopburi is also not wholly satisfactory. One of the problems in using this separation into three political groups lies with the retrospective acceptance of the present-day borders. When we extend our perspective beyond these frontiers, we note that exactly at the time of the greatest extent of Sukhothai, other Tai political centres also enjoyed prominence.

When applied to the region of mainland Southeast Asia during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, large political units labeled empire, state or nation are a chauvinistic construct, an anachronism projected into the past. During this period the Tais themselves did have a notion of ethnic or linguistic unity, for in various inscriptions they use the epithet *Tai* when they refer to the *Tai* method of counting units of time, as distinct from Khmer chronological elements. However, there is no evidence of the idea of a united *Tai* polity, as it would seem that in this period they could not maintain more than temporary alliances, dominated by a few strategically well-placed centres.

The beginnings of the *Tai* political dominance of the wider region can be reconstructed with some accuracy. There is inscriptional evidence indicating that Sukhothai and its surrounding towns underwent a change from being centres ruled by the Khmer to *Tai* cities during the first half of the thirteenth century. Lopburi and Ayutthaya had become *Tai* at some time before 1282, when they are mentioned in Chinese sources. In the region around Haripuñjaya (present-day Lamphun), the year 1288 marks the sudden break from being Mon to becoming *Tai*. Before the end of the thirteenth century the so-called Shan brothers were active in what is now Upper Burma, controlling Kyaukse and conquering Pagan in 1298.

In the course of the thirteenth century over all of mainland Southeast Asia a major change appears to have occurred, namely the appearance of *Tai* peoples, and wherever they first appear, they take political control in autonomous principalities. The evidence is that before the end of the thirteenth century, the *Tais* have gained a series of cities ranging from Yunnan to Nakhon Si Thammarat and from Vietnam deep into Burma.<sup>14</sup> This is usually couched in terms of the end of an era such as the end of Cambodian Empire, the end of Pagan, but it may be a refreshing change to view this from the perspective of the beginning of something, namely the arrival of the *Tais* with a remarkably different style of life.

The nature of the coming of the *Tai* is often depicted as having been peaceful. Coedès (1966, 102) speaks about a slow process of 'infiltration', a 'gradual inundation' of *Tai* peoples. However, the allegedly peaceful character of the *Tai* expansion needs to be qualified. There can be no doubt that in the thirteenth and fourteenth century the *Tais* had to fight in order to establish themselves. Sukhothai's transition from

<sup>14</sup> Tradition will have it that they did reach Assam early in the thirteenth century but for various reasons which fall beyond the topic of this paper I would prefer to consider that that conquest took place some time later.

Cambodian to Tai rule which took place around the middle of the thirteenth century has been described in an inscription, which has been dated around 1345. There is every possible reason to think that this conquest was a well-planned and carefully executed military exploit, during which several Tai chieftains formed a military alliance.<sup>15</sup>

At the end of the thirteenth century the Tais show a remarkable series of military exploits. Speaking of the Cambodian heartland in 1296 Ju Takuan reports a recent devastating military confrontation with the Tais. The Mons lost their cultural centre Haripuñjaya to the ruler of Chiang Rai in 1292, not of their own free will but because the Tai army besieged and took it. The Burmese lost Pagan to the Tai-Shan after an armed contest in 1298.

In Burmese historiography, the decline of Pagan is usually seen in connection with the Mongol threat and warlike confrontations with Mongol-led armies.<sup>16</sup> The Mongols sent envoys in 1271, consequently Wareru's rebellion is seen as a result of his taking advantage of the tensions confronting Pagan on its northern border (Aung-Thwin 1985, 195). While it is true that a series of military confrontations with the Mongols took place, I would like to challenge the evaluation of these warlike confrontations as being the trigger that caused the Shans to take advantage of a weakening Pagan.

The Shans, I would suggest, did not need any help, directly or indirectly, from the Mongols to attack the Burmans. With the other Tais these Shans share the same organization as those who took Haripuñjaya, who conquered Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and who won a devastating battle against the Khmers. The same Tais later conquered all of Assam, against great numerical odds. Therefore I assume that the idea that the Shans took advantage of the moment when the might of Pagan was temporarily weakened, as Burmese historiography tends to claim, is inspired by a Burmese-slanted history writing. Instead I pose the hypothesis that the broad perspective suggests that the Shan expansion was a fundamental confrontation of different political and military organizations which was already underway before the Mongol conquest of China and that had not yet run its course when the Mongols had withdrawn from their direct intervention in the region. The spread of Shan power did not depend upon alliances with the Mongols, nor was it necessary for the Mongols to weaken Pagan for the Shans to take military control.

A related problem in Burmese historiography is what I would describe as post-Pagan nostalgia. There is a common trend bewailing a fourteenth century 'loss of political unity' (Bennett 1971, 20), as if Pagan had really assumed the characteristics of a modern empire. Directly connected with this is the notion that Shan rule ushered in a kind of Dark Age. Instead, the evidence of Sukhothai inscriptions cited above suggests that whatever loose alliances were at work, a flow of trade and ideas was maintained over long distances and over the centuries.

<sup>15</sup> An English translation of the relevant part of the inscription can be found in Griswold and Prasert na Nagara (1972, 110-11).

<sup>16</sup> In a recent study concerning Pagan, Lubeigt (1998, 176) traces the fall of Pagan directly to the 'Sino-Mongol expansion' and apparently sees the Shan expansion as somehow linked with that of Kublai Khan.

The Tai conquest of large parts of mainland Southeast Asia in the thirteenth century implied the establishment of a different style of government, supported by a different economic basis. Apparently the Tai system was highly effective, for it was a one-way process: the indigenous peoples appeared unable to resist. It can be cogently argued that a key to understanding the Tai success could well lie with their military style of organization, a later version of which developed into their famous *saktina* style of government, and is also reflected in the indigenous ranks and titles. Remnants of this military structure are still visible in the older legal texts and in some of the names of ranks and titles of pre-modern times, such as *phan* (literally: thousand [-men]) and *muen* ([leader of] ten thousand). The first three articles of one version (Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1977, 147-48) of the old legal code attributed to King Mangrai read:

For every ten *phrai* [free men] let there be one *nai sip* [master of ten] and one *kwan* [government agent] to act as go-between and to direct tasks. For each five *nai sip* let there be one *nai hasip* [master of fifty] and two *kwan* [government agents], one for the left side and one for the right. For two *nai hasip* let there be one *nai roi* [master of a hundred]. For ten *nai roi*, let there be one *chao phan* [master of a thousand]. For ten *chao phan* let there be one *chao muen* [master of ten-thousand]. For ten *chao muen* let there be one *chao saen* [master of a hundred thousand]. Let the country be administered in this way so as not to inconvenience the king.

In battle if a man deserts his *nai sip*, he shall be killed; if a *nai sip* deserts his *nai hasip*, he shall be killed; if a *nai hasip* deserts his *nai roi* he shall be killed, if a *nai roi* deserts his *chao phan* he shall be killed; if a *chao phan* deserts his *chao muen*, he shall be killed; if a *chao muen* deserts his *chao saen* he shall be killed; if a *chao saen* deserts the king he shall be killed. The deserter's family and possessions shall all be forfeited without any exception, so that no one will follow his example. Let him be tattooed on the forehead as a sign that his master will no longer keep him in service. Let him be ashamed.

If a *chao muen* abandons a *lam muen* [an officer a rank lower than *chao muen*], he shall be killed, if a *lam muen* abandons a *chao phan*, he shall be killed; if a *chao phan* abandons a *lam phan* or a *lam phan noi*, he shall be killed; if a *lam phan* or a *lam phan noi* abandons a *lam bao*, he shall be killed; if a *lam bao* abandons a *nai sip* he shall be killed; if a *nai sip* abandons a *phrai* he shall be killed. Their families and possessions shall all be forfeited so that no one will follow their example.<sup>17</sup>

These first three articles appear to represent a strict hierarchical organization in which loyalty is deemed to be of the utmost importance, not simply loyalty upwards

<sup>17</sup> The text continues with the remark that these measures reflect the ancient rule, but that a more lenient procedure had been introduced

to the king, but each level being responsible to the level above it and those who are given a responsible job in this system are also held responsible towards those in their charge. Part of the sixth article (Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1977, 150) may also reveal some of the reasons for the military success of the Tai way of doing battle.

...If during a siege somebody succeeds in cutting off the head of an enemy, he shall be given 300 pieces of money as a reward for each head; he shall be given land to live on and cultivate and he shall be promoted. If a foot soldier gets the head of a cavalry man, he shall be promoted to cavalry man; if a foot soldier gets the head of an elephant soldier, he shall be promoted to elephant soldier. Let him be given an honorific parasol, a wife, gold utensils, a golden bracelet and noble dress...

Hitherto I have not found another mainland Southeast Asian people with a comparable military organization.

Wherever the Tai armies conquered a region, they established large rectangular cities, surrounded by a high earthen rampart or brick wall and fortified gates. Chiang Mai, founded 1296, may be taken as a good example of such a planned walled city. Inside these cities was a strict evenly divided grid of roads. The grid is also symptomatic of a strict and efficient organization.

These large fortified towns were generally called *mueang*, the Tai word not only for town, but also for country, region. The concept *mueang* may, in its widest sense, be taken for the organized world (in contrast to the Tai word *pa*, the forest or wilderness). There were also other words for fortified *mueang*, such as *chiang* and *viang*. The rectangular grid-cities form a real break with the past, each plot of land large enough for a titled official, his household, some farms and houses for his slaves. From this city grid, the surrounding lowland villages were supervised and exploited. Cities controlled the surrounding valley but, since these valleys themselves had no natural defense, they had to accommodate themselves with neighboring valleys, securing a fragile peace by making alliances or, if that proved impossible, by acknowledging a *primus inter pares*. In this manner we should understand the legendary pact between the rulers of Phayao, Chiang Rai, and Sukhothai of 1287, or the inscription with the text of a pact between Sukhothai and Nan, dated 1393 (Griswold and Prasert na Nagara 1969).

While there is so much evidence of the Tai military conquest of much of mainland Southeast Asia, it may well be asked why is it that this break with the past is not generally acknowledged and why is the advent of the Tai usually depicted in terms of mass migration and peaceful infiltration rather than a military conquest. The reasons for this seem twofold. In the first place some legends of a much earlier Tai presence may have blurred some historians' perception. Secondly it should be noted that the conquered peoples continued to exist – the Burmese, Mon and the Khmer were not driven away. Notably the long-established local religious traditions were certainly not suppressed. On the contrary, various Buddhist sects and local cults flourished.

Even though there is no dramatic break with many of the accomplishments of the preceding cultural traditions, the coming of the Tai seems to have introduced novel



features. The Tais learnt the local scripts and writing. In Sukhothai they wrote many inscriptions at least partially in Cambodian and Sanskrit. However, it did not take them long to adapt such writing systems for their own language, in Sukhothai accompanied by the remarkable innovation of indicating tonal signs. Nor did they slavishly accept ancient scholarship, and the coming of the Tais coincides with the end of the pre-eminent position of Sanskrit and the rise of Pali.

## Conclusions

It has become clear that the region now called Burma was non-existent as such in early Thai sources. Only the delta and the peninsula parts are mentioned and those only occasionally. References to these regions are limited to information that comes from Sukhothai and Lanna. At the same time, it has been shown how the little Thai data that are available to us have been interpreted in such a manner as to fit conceptual models that were created during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Burmese data have also been shown to fit preconceived, often long internalized models of thought. Therefore it has been argued that the role of the Shan in the 'fall of Pagan', which usually is described as the Shan taking advantage of a temporary weakness of the Burmese ought to be viewed anew. In addition, the depiction of the period from the late thirteenth century to the fifteenth century as an interlude between Pagan and the resurgence of the Burmese, a period marked by Shan rebellion and relative lawlessness, may well have been inspired by a Burmese nationalistic mode of thinking. It has been shown that this was a period during which fundamental change took place, not only in Burma but in a much larger region of mainland Southeast Asia. The large-scale invasion of the various Tai peoples, which seems to have taken place between the mid-eleventh and the fourteenth century, is the first large-scale population movement in Mainland Southeast Asia that is historically documented.

It has been shown that the coming of these Tais was a military invasion, not the relatively peaceful intrusion that is the standard depiction of this event. It has been argued that the Tais reformed the old political structures they encountered, they re-ordered their towns and cities, and they provided society and its goals with new definitions.

In this paper some attention has been given to the links between Sukhothai and the wider world. It has been shown how during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries this inland town was dependent upon a few, well-established long-distance trade routes. Westwards there was a commercial route which led from Sukhothai via Tak and Mae Sot to Moulmein on the coast, and from there by ship to the coastal ports on the Indian Subcontinent and finally to Sri Lanka. Another route led southwards following the river split at present-day Chainat, via Suphanburi to the Gulf of Thailand, from there southwards, via Phetchaburi and Pranburi, then crossing the Peninsula towards Mergui and by ship on to Sri Lanka. From the time of the rule of Rama Khamhaeng at least to the end of the fourteenth century, these were the chief connections to the areas of the world where the roots of Buddhism were explored and new schools of thought were introduced. The connection via the Gulf of Thailand and the Peninsula also made possible a linking up with the eastern trade to China.

Such long-distance trade connections were crucial to the flow of ideas and the flourishing of scholarship, but also they provided the network that made possible the ceramic industry that must have brought so much wealth to the region during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Finally it has become clear that a critical examination of the very categories in which historical data have been presented is needed, some of the conceptual frameworks themselves are no longer tenable, old-established truths ought to be reconsidered in order to boost our understanding of the past.

## References

- Anon. 1925. *Thi Raluек Sayamrathaphiphithaphan Suan Lumphini, Phraphutthasakarāt 2468, The Souvenir of the Siamese Kingdom Exhibition at Lumbini Park*. B.E. 2468.
- Aung-Thwin, Michael. 1985. *Pagan. The Origins of Modern Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Bennett, Paul J. 1971. *Conference under the Tamarind Tree: Three Essays in Burmese History*. Yale University: Southeast Asian Studies (Monograph Series No 15).
- Charnvit Kasetsiri. 1976. *The Rise of Ayudhya. A History of Siam in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Coedès, G. 1966. *The Making of Southeast Asia*, translated by H.M. Wright. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Credner, W. 1934. 'Kulturgeographische Beobachtungen in der Gegend von Tali (Yünnan) mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Nan Tsao Problems (Cultural and Geographical Observations made in the Tali (Yunnan) Region with Special Regard to the Nan Chao Problem)', translated from the German by E. Seidenfaden, *Journal of the Siam Society* 27 (2): 135-51.
- Flood, E. Thadeus. 1969. 'Sukhothai-Mongol Relations: A Note on Relevant Chinese and Thai Sources (with Translations).' *Journal of the Siam Society* 57 (2): 201-258.
- Griswold, A.B. 1967. *Towards a History of Sukhodaya Art*. Bangkok: Fine Arts Department.
- . 1971. 'The Inscription of King Rama Gamhen of Sukhodaya (1292 AD).' *Journal of the Siam Society* 59 (2): 179-228 (Epigraphic and Historical Studies No 9).
- . 1972. 'King Lödaya of Sukhodaya and His Contemporaries.' *Journal of the Siam Society* 60 (1): 21-152 (Epigraphic and Historical Studies No 10).
- . 1973. 'The Epigraphy of Mahadharmaraja I of Sukhodaya.' *Journal of the Siam Society* 61 (1): 71-178 (Epigraphic and Historical Studies No 11, Part 1).
- . 1977. 'The 'Judgements of King Man Ray'.' *Journal of the Siam Society* 65 (1): 137-160 (Epigraphic and Historical Studies No 17).
- Griswold, A.B., and Prasert na Nagara. 1969. 'The Pact between Sukhodaya and Nan.' *Journal of the Siam Society* 57 (1): 57-108 (Epigraphic and Historical Studies No 3).
- Hall, D.G.E. 1970. *A History of South-East Asia*. London: Macmillan (third, revised edition).
- Harvey, G. E. 1925. *History of Burma*. London: Cass. (reprint 1967).
- Htin Aung, Maung. 1967. *A History of Burma*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kotmai Tra Sam Duang. 1973. Bangkok: Khurusapha.
- Lubeigt, Guy. 1998. *Pagan, histoire et légendes*. Paris: Kailash Editions.
- Luce, G.H. 1958. 'The Early Syam in Burma's History.' *Journal of the Siam Society* 46 (2): 123-214.
- Phayre, Arthur P. 1883. *History of Burma including Burma Proper, Pegu, Taungu, Tenasserim, and Arakan. From the Earliest Time to the End of the First War with British India*. London: Susil Gupta (reprint).
- Sears, Laurie J. 1993. 'The Contingency of Autonomous History.' In *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John Smail*, edited by Laurie J. Sears. Madison-Wisconsin (Wisconsin Monograph 11).
- Van Vliet, Jeremias. 1975. *The Short History of the Kings of Siam*, translated by Leonard Andaya and edited by David K. Wyatt. Bangkok: The Siam Society.

