Abstract

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

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

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

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

The Nusantao were no doubt directly associated with the development and spread of Malayo-Polynesian languages. At any one time there were also many other Malayo-Polynesian speakers living in the interior of the larger islands who were not maritime oriented, and I would not consider these as Nusantao. The Nusantao and the non-maritime Malayo-Polynesian speakers no doubt were constantly mixing genetically, culturally, and linguistically. Their genetic ancestry no doubt varied from time to time and place to place to include Southern Mongoloid and I would suggest that this may well have been the case from their very beginning (Solheim 1984-1985:85-86 revised). My definition of Southeast Asia for many years has included South China (Solheim 1967a: 3; 1973: 25; 1975a: 154; 1975b: 108; 1979: 200; 1984-1985: 13; 1992).

_Nusantao culture_

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

As far as our country is concerned, it appears that we have had people living their lives on boats since the time of Emperor Onin or for about 2000 years. The history of boat people in some other parts of Asia seems to be even earlier. With the Malay peninsula as center, an area including the Dutch Indian Islands, the Burmese Islands, and the Andaman Islands shows traces of similar people. There is a lot in common among the peoples