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SIPPANAN NUANLA-ONG: SRIVIJAYA INFLUENCE AND HIDDEN HERITAGE  
AROUND BAN DON BAY: CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATED WITH CULTURAL  
TOURISM. THESIS ADVISOR: PROFESSOR ROSS KING, Ph.D. 260 pp.

Chaiya on Ban Don Bay in Thailand's Surat Thani Province, together with its surrounding area, retains architectural and other traces from the Srivijayan age (7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE). The Srivijaya empire ceased to exist in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in part due to the expansion of the Javanese Majapahit empire, and was largely forgotten. Its existence was postulated only in 1918 by French historian George Coedès. It seems that Chaiya was established around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE and became a significant regional capital (of the Srivijayan empire?) from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century; some Thai scholars even argue that it was the principal capital of Srivijaya although this is disputed. The importance of Chaiya was in its control of one of the major trade routes of that era: it was at the eastern end of the overland route between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The difficulty in disentangling the 'real' story of Srivijaya (and thereby of Chaiya and the Malay Peninsula) in that era resides in the absence of written records – there are no texts against which to place the archaeological evidence.

*The dissertation*

In a context of such uncertainty, the present research has three interlinked components:

(1) In the absence of historical records, the present dissertation turns instead to the abundant ancient myths and chronicles. Here the accounts range from the relatively established accounts of Chinese journeys to the region, to less reliable chronicles of the various kingdoms of those times, to the more fanciful myths and legends. The fragmented nature of these data is accepted on its own terms; accordingly, data are presented as something of a collage or mosaic. The methodological uncertainty of this approach is acknowledged.

(2) As the focus is on the place of Chaiya in the Srivijayan age (and thereby on the place of Chaiya in seeking an understanding of *present* Southeast Asian identity), fieldwork has focused on the cross-isthmus route from Chaiya to the Indian Ocean coast. Surveys have been made of (a) the Srivijayan-era relics in Chaiya itself and on the land route to the ocean, and (b) other, later elements in the built and natural landscape that can help us to understand something of the *present* geography of that world. Again, a methodological issue is acknowledged: what can a present cultural landscape tell us of the landscape of a past empire?

(3) This methodological problem – equating a present with a past cultural landscape – leads into the issue of heritage interpretation: how is one to interpret a cultural landscape to its observers (present residents, tourists) when what we see is, for the most part, largely *after* the period of interest (that is, post-Srivijaya) and where the 'history' is mostly myth and, what is more, contested (advocates of Palembang versus those of Chaiya)? Hence the project addresses aspects of heritage interpretation and presentation.

*Significance of the research*

Two constructions can be placed on the claim (mostly from Thai historians) that the centre of Srivijaya was at Chaiya rather than near Palembang:

(1) The claim by Thai writers is merely to be dismissed as that of vain Thai nationalists asserting an imagined superiority. However, against that:

(2) Srivijaya may have had more than one centre and the principal centre (capital) was in different places at different times. This could relate to long-term changes in the technologies and economics of trade: when east-west trade was by very small ships, the trans-isthmus route via Chaiya was important; larger ships may later have permitted trade via the monsoons and around the peninsula (or perhaps both routes operated simultaneously) and hence control from Palembang would have become crucial; when ships became even larger at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and river silting isolated Palembang from the sea, the control of the Melaka Straits shifted to Melaka.

There is another significance to be found in a scholarly interpretation and presentation of the Chaiya and linked heritage. As academic scholarship had long discounted the possibility of a large, united kingdom in Southeast Asia before Majapahit, surviving evidence of Srivijaya is significant to the very idea of a Southeast Asian identity. Rather than demonstrating some grandeur of ancient Thailand, the region instead tells of a greater Southeast Asia and of a certain regional unity and – less convincingly – of an ancient tolerance and cosmopolitanism.

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