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Abstract	The interplay between nation and cosmopolis will continue in the 21st century, but we can be sure that the pressures will be different. As was always the case in the past, the economic and cultural progress of cities in this part of the world, even more than elsewhere, will be closely tied to the managing of cosmopolis.

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Cosmopolis and Nation in a Plural Peninsula
Anthony Reid

In using the term cosmopolis, I acknowledge a debt not to the cosmopolitan-heartlander dichotomy of recent Singapore discourse, but to my current ARI colleague Joel Kahn, whose pursuit of a 'cosmopolitan anthropology' is leading in a healthy direction (Kahn 2003). Behind him and some others working on this theme stands Immanuel Kant and his newly fashionable *Towards Perpetual Peace* (1795), where cosmopolis is used to denote a world system where differences between communities are accommodated in a kind of federal structure (Held 1995; Archibugi 2002). But my agenda is more modest than Kant's universal one, and my use of the term is restricted to an urban context. I use it to describe a form of urban formation relatively well-developed in the Peninsula, and in the central core of Southeast Asia more broadly, where a necessarily plural community is governed through leaders themselves cosmopolitan or plural in culture and able to mediate between groups. I will however endorse one finding of Kant, that while religion and language separate nations, "the spirit of commerce unites them", so that the task of cosmopolis is to mediate these two contrary impulses.

As a kind of antithesis of cosmopolis I place the familiar modern idea of nation, imagined as a homogeneous self-governing community, of which the territory should coincide with the culture. Some antecedents of nation were known to Southeast Asians before the twentieth century's love affair with nationalism, but in general I will argue that this was a concept imposed by Europeans and alien to the essential character of the Peninsula. One of the features of 20th century nationalism was to try to impose the nation backwards onto a cosmopolitan past, claiming a great trading city such as Melaka, Brunei, Ayutthaya, Srivijaya or Majapahit as an 'empire', ancestral to the modern nation-state. In this construct cosmopolis is embarrassing, and where it cannot be avoided has to be put down to aberrant colonial schemes to divide and rule. I want to proceed in the opposite direction, tracing the cosmopolitanism of what appear quite ancient times forward to the point it is overtaken by nation in the 20th century.

As for the Plural Peninsula, the third element of my title, it is a striking geographical feature with an identity problem. In geographical reality it is the world's longest peninsula, extending the Eurasian continent a further 1500 km southward almost to the equator. The high year-round rainfall, thick vegetation and mediocre soils made this in the *longue durée* a region difficult to develop for rice agriculture, so that hunter-gatherer populations, as well as tigers and elephants, dominated the hinterlands. On the other hand the Peninsula was the source of about half the world's tin, as well as a lengthy barrier to maritime trade between the East Asian civilizations and those of the rest of the old world. It was therefore a necessary site of entrepôts and portages—a quintessential meeting place of different peoples. The entrepôts which developed at strategic locations in the Peninsula took for granted that they would import most of their food staples by sea. Only in the modern times were its malarial lowlands harnessed in a significant way for permanent agriculture, though it continues to import food in a manner that would seem unnatural in most other parts of the world. I have elsewhere labeled the Peninsula the

centerpiece of a slightly broader region, the historically “empty centre” of Southeast Asia, the corridor extending from Bangkok and Ayutthaya in the north to West Java and Jakarta in the south, which contained none of the significant agricultural populations of Southeast Asia until recently, but most of its long-distance trade centres and cosmopolis. Only in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries did this region, and more particularly the Peninsula, begin to have significant non-urban concentrations of population. Despite substantial modern efforts to build irrigated rice systems, the Peninsula remains today what it has been throughout recorded history, one of the most urban regions of Asia.

The identity problem I mentioned is the label ‘Malay’ now carried by the Peninsula in English, and to some extent in recent Malay. This label was first applied at a time when the English term had a much wider meaning (as also in the Malay Archipelago), as the area where the Malay language was a dominant lingua franca, and/or where languages of what used to be called the Malayo-Polynesian family predominated. But it is difficult to deny that “Malay” and “Melayu” in the nationalist century narrowed in meaning to become an ethnic adjective, increasingly used in an ethno-nationalist spirit to exclude the other long-term inhabitants of the Plural Peninsula, now labeled Thai, Chinese, Mon-Khmer, Indian or smaller groups. In pursuit of some alternative label, let me digress for a moment into the history of naming this geographical feature.

Asian sources

It is surprisingly difficult to find evidence of consciousness in the Asian sources preceding European influence that this was a peninsula at all. As Crawford said of Malay-speakers, “For a Peninsula, which it truly is, they have no name,” though sometimes referring to the several states of the south as “Malay lands” (*tanah Melayu*).¹ Peninsula terms such as current Malay/Indonesian *semenanjung* or Thai *Laem* appear to be essentially recent creations to translate the European terms..

It is particularly surprising that Thai elites, profoundly involved in Peninsula affairs and having to deploy forces on both coasts, appear not to have conceptualized the geography in this way.² The Chronicle of Nakhon Si Thammarat in fact sets out the geography of the Peninsula at the outset, in the form of twelve tributaries of Nakhon each corresponding to one of the years of the animal cycle. They extend from Chumphon and Kra in the north to Kedah and Pahang in the south.³ But there appears no awareness in the text that this area constitutes a peninsula or isthmus; on the contrary some voyages appear to switch from west to east coasts heedless of geography.⁴ The two graphic Thai

¹ John Crawford, *Dictionary of the Indian Archipelago* (1853), p. 253.

² It is not clear to me whether the Thai term *Laem Thong* (“Golden Peninsula”) is purely a translation of European usage. The term has been well known among Thai scholars since being adopted for Charles Keyes’ comprehensive, *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (first published Macmillan: 1977). It is today a popular term for the south and the name of a bank, and was adopted in English in a book by M.C. Chand Chirayu Rajani, *Towards a History of Laem Thong and Sri Vijaya* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Institute of Asian Studies, 1987).

³ *The Crystal Sands: The Chronicles of Nagara Sri Dharmmaraja*, trans. David Wyatt (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1975), pp.84-85. Chand Chirayu Rajani, pp.87-105.

⁴ *Crystal Sands*, p.88, n.6.

representations that have survived in the Traiphum manuscript of 1776 show in one case the Peninsula polities on a large island in a delta of various large rivers, and in the other a gentle protuberance rather than the dramatically elongated peninsula we know.⁵

There are other Asian toponyms which either embrace the Peninsula, as the vague Suvanabhumi (Gold-land) of some early Jataka-tales may have done; or are situated within it, as most widely were Arab Kalah and Chinese Tambralinga, Langkasuka and Pan-pan (Wheatley 1961). The fifteenth century Arab pilot and geographer Ibn Majid saw the ports of the western side of the Peninsula as a collectivity, but called it simply “the Siamese coast” (*Barr al-Siam*). The less familiar eastern side of the Peninsula was classed with the “Coast of China”.⁶ The 14th Century Javanese Desawarnana also saw a collective identity in at least the southern Peninsula, but called it “the territory of Pahang”, in contrast with Malayu which applied to Sumatra.⁷

Even the Chinese, with a long tradition of a kind of graphic representations of routes and ports, never called this feature a Peninsula nor described it as a geographical collective. They too saw it as part of two different coasts, in Sung times described as the ‘Upper’ (northeastern) and ‘Lower’ (southwestern) coasts.⁸ In short, there were no Asian labels for the Peninsula because there was no sense of Peninsula in the first place. In searching for some alternative label to its present unsatisfactory one, the Asian sources do not provide much help.

European sources

As with so many of the larger geographical features, it was European map-makers who had most use for wider geographical terms. In marked contrast to the Asian writers, Europeans were conscious of the Peninsula from the first contacts, Barbosa (c. 1516) already describing it well. Ptolemy famously identified it as the ‘Golden Peninsula’ (Lat. *Aurea Khersonesus*; Grk. *Khryse Khersonesos*), a usage copied by classically-oriented writers of the sixteenth century like Linschoten and Eredia. In his Report on the Golden Khersonese, written around 1600, the first of the Peninsula’s sons into print on the matter, Godinho de Eredia, correctly identified it as Ptolemy’s Peninsula, extending from Tenasserim in the north to Singapore and Ujung Tanah (Land’s end, or Johor) in the south.⁹ In his better-known later work, *Declaracam de Malaca*, however, he perversely applied the Khersonese to Sumatra and invented a former land bridge across the Melaka Straits to justify this. In that publication he consistently used the term Ujung Tanah for

⁵ Pictorial Manuscript of the Traiphum: Thonburi version, reproduced as Fig.2 panel 8 and fig.4 panel 4 in Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

⁶ G.R. Tibbets, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1981), pp.187, 483-6.

⁷ Stuart Robson 1995: 34.

⁸ Wheatley, *Golden Khersonese*, pp.63-64; Geoffrey Wade personal information.

⁹ ‘Report on the Golden Khersonese or Peninsula... drawn up by Manoel Godinho de Eredia’ Cosmographer’ [1597-1600], in *Eredia’s Description of Malaca, Meridional India and Cathay*, ed J.V. Mills (1930, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, MBRAS, 1997) p.228.

the whole Peninsula, although Malay usage appears to have reserved this for the tip of the Peninsula.

Some later Europeans referred to it as the ‘Ultra Gangetic Peninsula of India’ (*Peninsula Indiae extra Gangem* – La Loubere 1693: 7). But by far the commonest designation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in all European languages was simply ‘Malakka’ after its most famous city. Dutch and German-speakers continued this usage through most of the colonial era, although in French the influence of English example gave rise to some use of “Presqu’île Malaise” alongside “Presqu’île Malacca” on French maps of the late nineteenth and twentieth century.¹⁰ Even official Siamese publications in English early in the twentieth century were using the “Malay Peninsula” term,¹¹ which found its way even into Thai translation (as Laem Malayu) by the late nineteenth century.¹² The one writer I have found who resisted the trend was Colonel G.E. Gerini, the first twentieth century scholar to reexamine Ptolemy’s Geography of the Peninsula.¹³ In his Siam catalogue for the Turin Exhibition he insisted on the usage “Siamo-Malay Peninsula”.¹⁴

The English idea that the Peninsula was particularly ‘Malay’ appears to have begun in the eighteenth century. In *The History of Sumatra* (1782), William Marsden already complained that the European idea of the Peninsula as ‘Malayan’ or ‘Malay’ had confused many into thinking of the Peninsula as the place of Malay origins.¹⁵ The term ‘Malaya’ goes back as far as Alexander Hamilton writing in the 1720s, especially in the phrase ‘Coast of Malaya’ to indicate the ports of Kedah and Perak.¹⁶ As the British became more concerned with the Peninsula after the founding of Georgetown at Pulau Pinang in 1786, they certainly rejected the old Arab designation of the coast opposite as “Siamese”, and began to refer to both the coast and the Peninsula itself as ‘Malay’ or ‘Malayan’. Raffles and Crawford frequently did so. Once the London Treaty of 1824 restricted British activity to this Peninsula they were much more disposed to see it as a coherent unit under one of these labels. The first book explicitly on the subject, that of P. J. Begbie in 1834, used ‘Malayan Peninsula’ in the title but ‘Malay Peninsula’ in the accompanying map.¹⁷

¹⁰ Compare Brau de Saint-Pol Lias, *De France à Sumatra* (Paris, 1884); and M.J. Errington de la Croix, *Les Mines d’Etain de Perak (Presqu’île de Malacca)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1882).

¹¹ The volume for the Siam section of the St Louis Exhibition of 1904 has this use. So does the semi-official work, graced with Chulalongkorn’s portrait as frontispiece, of the first Siamese Resident of Kelantan, W.A. Graham, *Kelantan: A State of the Malay Peninsula* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1908).

¹² Information from Dr Titima Suthiwan.

¹³ G.E. Gerini, *Researches on Ptolemy’s Geography of Eastern Asia* (London: 1909).

¹⁴ G.E. Gerini, *Siam and its Productions, Arts and Manufactures: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Siamese Section at the International Exhibition of Industry and Labour held in Turin April 29 – November 19, 1911* English edition 1912 (reprinted Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000).

¹⁵ Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, p. 326.

¹⁶ Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, ed. William Foster (London: Argonaut Press, 1930), Vol. II, p. 41. Valentijn, writing at a similar period, also referred to the west coast of the peninsula as the ‘Malay coast’, and appeared to see this as the heartland of ‘true Malays’. Sweeney, *A Full Hearing*, p. 59.

¹⁷ P. J. Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula* (Madras: Vepery Mission Press, 1834; reprinted Kuala Lumpur: OUP, 1967).

Cosmopolis

I want here to recall here some evidence of how exceptionally cosmopolitan the Peninsula in fact always was. The interactions of Malay, Thai, Burmese, Chinese and Indian in the Peninsula were not some kind of messy accident of history, but part of the necessary role the Peninsula played in the Asian economy. The time is overdue to reassert the nature of the Peninsula as one of the world's great crossroads, where the reading backwards of contemporary ethnic and national boundaries is particularly inappropriate.

The first point to make is the untamed nature of the Peninsula's interior, especially in the mountain chain that dominates it at many points. The high year-round rainfall and inaccessible terrain made the Peninsula in the *longue durée* almost impossible to tame through agriculture in the way Europe, China, or much of Java and Bali were many centuries ago. Here is our first plurality. Hunter-gatherer populations of extreme antiquity, the Negritos, coexist with larger numbers of forest-dwelling speakers of Austratic or Mon-Khmer languages, now (2000) reduced to just 57,000 in southern Thailand and Malaysia. Further south still-tribal speakers of Austronesian (largely Malayic) languages, particularly Temiar and Jakun, still number a further 36,000.¹⁸ By comparison with the speakers of Thai, Malay and Chinese and Mon dialects who now dominate most of the Peninsula these are the truly plural people, and the ones who have dominated the largest parts of the Peninsula for the longest time. More surprisingly, even the thousands of islands that dot the western coast of the Peninsula, particularly in its currently Burmese north, as well as those of the Straits, harbour boat people, sea-gypsies and *orang laut* who resisted incorporation into settled agricultural society with almost equal determination, and who likewise spoke numerous mutually unintelligible dialects.

Up until the seventeenth century most of the Peninsula's population was constituted by these very varied hunter-gatherers (by sea and land) and shifting cultivators on the one hand, and the inhabitants of port-settlements, cosmopolis, which will occupy most of my attention henceforth. The entrepôts which developed at strategic points on especially the western side of the Peninsula, took for granted that they would import most of their food staples by sea. Yet the Peninsula was commercially vital. It stood between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, and all traffic between the two areas had to go across it or around it. If across there needed to be a port and a portage route across it; if around, goods were still transhipped in a Peninsula port while awaiting the favourable monsoon wind to pursue the next stage of the long-distance journey. Temasek, Melaka, Patani, Nakhon Sithammarat, Tenasserim, Johor, Phuket, Penang, and Singapore were able to profit from this pattern, replacing each other with the fluctuations of war, piracy and brigandage.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Benjamin, 'On Being Tribal in the Malay World,' in *Tribal Communities in the Malay World: Historical, Cultural and Social Perspectives*, ed. Geoffrey Benjamin and Cynthia Chou (Singapore: ISEAS, 2002), p.22.

The foundation of Penang in 1786 marked the rise of British naval power, and the definitive shift to the modern overwhelming dominance of the sea routes. Before this, however, those who wanted to avoid the Straits route, either because of piracy or because it was dominated by their enemies, used the many cross-peninsula routes. Paul Wheatley called the whole long period between about 550 and 1400 AD ‘the Isthmian Age’, because of the importance of little port-states at both ends of the portages across the Peninsula.¹⁹ David Wyatt has pointed out that the Theravada networks that linked Sri Lanka to Siam and Cambodia tended to go by way of the northern Peninsula (especially Trang and Nakhon Sithammarat/Ligor), while the Muslim ones used the southern portages or Straits.²⁰ Despite the often-exaggerated dominance of Melaka around 1500, Tomé Pires reported that the pepper of northern Sumatra as well as the tin and gold of the Kedah area went to China by the route from Kedah to Siam, “three or four days by land.”²¹ In the early seventeenth century it was also very common for Muslim cloth merchants from Masulipatnam to avoid the European-dominated Straits and sail to Siamese territory much further north at Tennasserim (Mergui), whence it was usually two or three weeks’ journey overland to Ayutthaya. This was no doubt the more usual route, but the importance of Patani for the Chinese trade in the early seventeenth Century made the Kedah-Patani portage also attractive – about 10 days.²²

Curiously, even at a time when European Christians were well established in the Straits (at Batavia and Melaka), French Catholics found the Isthmian portages the safest route to travel. Not only did they have to avoid the militantly Protestant Dutch, but even Portuguese ports and shipping was closed to them because they were seen to be violating the monopoly of missionary activity claimed by the Portuguese crown through the *padroado*. When the Vatican allowed the Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris to send missionaries to Siam, Vietnam and China in the 1660s, this marked a major break with the *padroado*. Hence the first missionaries travelled with Muslims, for the most part, through India, across the Bay of Bengal to Siamese Tennasserim. From there they would go by foot and bullock-cart across the peninsula, the carts being “designed rather to torment travellers than to relieve them. They seemed to be more like coffins than carriages, for these machines at their widest point were no more than three feet.”²³

Pre-colonial Cosmopolis

The origins of polities in the Peninsula are poorly researched, and their ethnicities so uncertain that the very question appears inappropriate. The earliest polities associated with the Peninsula—Langkasuka, Tambralinga, Pahang and so forth—may have had Austronesian, Khmer or Mon associations alongside the usual outsiders, but it is scarcely helpful to claim them as ancestors of any of the modern nation-states.

¹⁹ Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1961), chapter 19.

²⁰ David Wyatt, *Crystal Sands: The Chronicles of Nagara Sri Dharmmaraja* (Ithaca: 1975), pp.2-3.

²¹ Tome Pires, p.106.

²² John Anderson, *English Intercourse* (1890), pp.39-40; Floris, 1615, p.67.

²³ M. de Bourges, *Relation du Voyage* (1666), as translated in Reid, *Age of Commerce* II: 57.

Many of the entrepots which have left physical evidence as trade centers have been linked by archeologists under the umbrella of Srivijaya, considered in Chinese records as a single tribute-sending polity. Most of what we know of its largest metropolis is from inscriptions in the Palembang area, and Chinese and Arab sources which also appear to apply to a large entrepot there. The earliest inscriptions in the Malay language are here, and they are in the form of curses, threatening horrible things if the diverse groups who took the oath at the stone failed in their duty of loyalty. It was, in other words, a very plural polity, held together by magical means.

Although we know little about Srivijaya and still less about other entrepots on the Peninsula linked to it, there is interesting evidence also in the memory of it in Malay texts. The Hikayat Hang Tuah records a long-standing concept of Malay sovereignty, that a charismatic ruler attracts trade and population.

It became known among all nations that Bukit Seguntang had a king whose demeanour was exceedingly kind and courteous, and who cared for all foreigners. After this was heard in all countries, people from all places started gathering at Bukit Seguntang, and they came from overseas as well as from overland. (cited *Indonesia Heritage I*: 49).

The surest historical evidence for the diversity of foreigners who spent time in Srivijaya, however, was the description of the city by the 7th Century Chinese monk I Qing. He insisted that there were more than a thousand Buddhist priests in its monasteries, and advised pilgrims from China to spend time there to master Sanskrit and Pali before traveling on to the holy places of India. Where there were Indian and Chinese monks maintaining these language abilities, there must have been Indian and Chinese commercial communities maintaining the monks. Chinese trading communities are also likely to have helped manage the tributary trade between Srivijaya and Tang China, so important for the commerce of the whole region.

One of the heirs of Srivijaya was 14th century Temasek, of which Wang Dayuan reported that “the men and women dwell together with Chinese people” – which suggests there was not yet a developed cosmopolis with separate ethnic quarters, but rather a mixing tending towards hybridity (Wang Dayuan 131).

The evidence of the Nakhon Si Thammarat chronicle, one of the oldest Peninsula literary productions is intriguing as to the very plural origins of what eventually became Thai Buddhist and Malay Muslim polities on the Peninsula. The origins of the peninsula dynasties are there traced to a moment of Chinese interaction with the salt-exporting centre of Phetburi in the Gulf of Siam at a time evidently pre-dating the rise of Ayutthaya – perhaps thirteenth century?. The ruler of Phetburi, himself possibly a Khmer with origins in Angkor, provides sandalwood to a visiting Chinese ship, and is rewarded by the Chinese emperor with his daughter (or grand-daughter) by a Champa princess, Candradevi. She is sent to Phetburi with nineteen ships and 7,400 servants and concubines to serve the king of Phetburi. He then sends out his sons and retainers, some endowed with Chinese consorts and *Khèk* (likely to be Austronesian, and/or possibly Khmer) auxiliaries, to found other polities including the predecessor of Nakhon. The

principal son, ancestor-figure of the Nakhon line, in turn sends out *Khèk* in boats to become rajas of the *Khèk* principalities further south, including areas we now know as Trang, Songkhla, Patani, Kedah and Pahang.²⁴ The text never uses modern terms such as Thai or Malay, but leaves no doubt as to the essentially plural origins of all polities.

What we know of the ports of Melaka, Phuket, Penang and Kedah on the west coast, Nakhon Sithammarat, Songkhla and Patani on the east coast, in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries is of a population so mixed that visitors had trouble identifying who they were dealing with.

For Melaka the sources are the most helpful. We know that a hybridised Malay-speaking Muslim elite ruled over an intensely cosmopolitan entrepot by developing a ritualised charismatic monarchy, and by putting the highest possible priority on succeeding Srivijaya as the privileged tributary gateway from Central Southeast Asia to the China market.

Tomé Pires (1515: 269) reported that 84 distinct languages were spoken by the people of pre-Portuguese Melaka. The most important commercial communities, each settling in their own districts with wealthy bilingual headmen over them, were Gujaratis (1000), other North Indians, Arabs and Persians (3000), South Indians (unspecified, but more numerous than the former); Javanese (10,000 settled in Upeh), Mons from Pegu, Luzons from Manila and Brunei, Ryukyuans, Chinese and various peoples from the Archipelago (ibid.: 254-5, 281-2).

The Thai-ruled cosmopoleis in the northern half of the peninsula were also known for their intense variety of trading groups. When we have fuller descriptions in the 17th century, Choisy (1687: 242) claimed that “almost half of the kingdom is populated by Peguans, taken in war...there are also many Lao”. The royal guard was Chinese and Muslim; and the standing army composed in equal measure of Thai, Mon, Khmer and Lao. La Loubère also emphasized both the hybrid nature of the dominant population, and the great influx of foreign traders. It was the freedom of its commerce, he related, that attracted to Ayutthaya

a great multitude of strangers of different nations, who settled there with the liberty of living according to their own customs, and of publicly exercising their several ways of worship. Every nation possesses its own quarter...Moreover every nation chooses its chief (La Loubère, 1693: 112, also 10-11).

Bangkok continued this trend in the early nineteenth century. Though population estimates of the flourishing cosmopolis’ total population vary, everybody agreed that Thais were a small minority in a rich tapestry including Mons, Chinese, Lao, Vietnamese

²⁴ Wyatt, *Crystal Sands*, pp. 102-10. One of the *Khèk* tributaries thus founded is intriguingly listed as Aceh. Wyatt (see 104n5) translates *Khèk* throughout this section as Malay which, though politically more correct, means imposing a modern ethnic term backwards to a pre-Muslim period when no such term was known. *Khèk* literally means guest or outsider, and has come in modern Thai to be used somewhat disparagingly for Malays, and darker people and Muslims more generally.

and so forth. An early nineteenth century traveler across the Peninsula reported around 1820,

In Bangkok the Siamese ... like and respect foreigners very much, and protect them in an astonishing way. Here (Nakhon Sithammarat) the government is Siamese, but the people consist of three nations: Siamese, Malays and Chinese.²⁵

But the term nation, used here by a Frenchman in the aftermath of the Revolution which had given new substance to the concept, was wildly premature for the Peninsula. Malay was the lingua franca in most ports, it appears, and hence place names were expressed to foreigners in their Malay variants – Ligor, Singora, Ujung Salang or Junk Ceylon; not Nakhon, Songkhla and Phuket. The ruling family appears to have been basically Thai in Nakhon and Malay in Patani, but the elite was probably bilingual, and there were any number of Chinese and Indian high officials at both places.

At Warwyck's visit to Patani in 1602 the most important figure in commercial and military affairs was said to be the Datu Seri Nara, a *peranakan* Chinese, or in the Dutchman's terms, "a Malay of Chinese origin", converted to Islam.²⁶ Early observers agreed that the Chinese trade was the life-blood of the city, ever since 2000 Cantonese "pirates" (according to Ming annals) made it their base in the 1560s. J. van Neck drew a sharp dichotomy. The Malays were the natives of Patani, concerning themselves with agriculture and fisheries, and lived simply on rice and fish. "All other affairs, offices and commercial activities are mostly conducted by the Chinese, and their mestizos or descendents [*peranakan*], who are great traders by sea."²⁷ Patani was then the kind of base for the Chinese Southeast Asian trade that Bangkok, Batavia and Singapore later became, with their ships sailing throughout the Archipelago as far as Makasar, and to Ayutthaya and Hoi An (Cochin-China). When Olivier van Noort discovered Chinese traders in Brunei in 1601, he found they were a community that had fled or been banished from China, and presented themselves as still very Chinese even under their own Patani king, with "the same laws as exist in China".²⁸ But Patani traders in eastern Indonesia a generation later were classified as a kind of Malay, and it seems safe to assume that a considerable number of them did assimilate to the mobile Malayo-Muslim commercial elite which featured in all the ports eastward of Sumatra in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In Pukhet, too, though for different reasons, the Governors appointed by Ayutthaya were "generally Chinese" in the early eighteenth century according to Hamilton (1727, II:37), and at other times Chulia Muslims.²⁹ The later career of Chinese mercantile pioneers in building and governing other cities such as Trang and Songkhla has been well documented by Jennifer Cushman and Michael Montesano.

²⁵ Pecot 1821, in SME

²⁶ Warwyck 1604: 43.

²⁷ J. van Neck, 1604, in *Begin ende Voortgang* II, pp.16-17.

²⁸ *De Reis om de wereld van Olivier van Noort 1598-1601*, ed. J. W. Ijzerman (The Hague: Nijhoff for Linschoten-Vereniging, 1926), p. 124.

²⁹ Alexander Hamilton (1727), II:37.

Francis Light, the pioneer of what became the British hegemony of the Peninsula, was appropriately fluent in both Thai and Malay, and had his principal base in Phuket before becoming the first Resident of Penang in 1786. Though a mariner above all, he several times made the overland crossing to negotiate with the Siamese establishment in Bangkok, usually crossing from Takuapa (then a tin-mining centre) to Phanom and Ao Ban Don.³⁰ His infant settlement began with a diversity typical of the Peninsula. “Our inhabitants are composed of Chinese, Malays, Christians, Chulias, Siamese and Tannoos,” he wrote a year after its foundation.³¹

Cosmopolis, in other words, was built into the very fabric of Peninsula’s character, to an extent hard to match by any other area of comparable size on our planet.

The entry of nation

Nation became important for Europeans from the 16th century, though in much higher degree in the 19th. If we exclude the eccentric imperial project of the early Ming emperors and the Zheng He fleets, it was the quarrelling Europeans who brought to the Indian Ocean for the first time the idea of using military force to support the commercial aims of one’s own nation as against its competitors. Especially when projected into foreign, Asian waters, this concept rested on the novel enlightenment idea that one’s own “nation” could be better trusted to fight on one’s side than hired foreigners.

The Portuguese and Spanish set out on their voyages of discovery at almost the exact moment when, in 1492, by expelling the Jews and Muslims from their lands they had realized the nationalist project of homogeneity at home. To Southeast Asia they introduced a spirit that is often described as crusading. It might be closer to the mark, as well as to my current theme, to say they were for the first time projecting overseas the early nationalism of a small and compact people. The visceral enemies of the Portuguese were first the “Moors” whom they had fought down the Iberian Peninsula, but secondly the Castilians with whom they bitterly contested exclusive rights in Asia, and then of course the Dutch, who replaced the Muslims from the moment of their arrival in the east as enemy number one.

Tomé Pires (1515: 279, Port. 504) may have been the first to write the word nation in a Southeast Asian context when explaining why the classic cosmopolis of Melaka, ready as always to use Gujarati and other merchants to defend it, had fallen before a handful of passionately nationalist Portuguese.

The people did not back the king of Melaka, because in trading lands, where the people are of different nations (*nacões*), these cannot love their king as do natives (*naturall*) without admixture of other nations. This is generally the case, and therefore the king was disliked, though his mandarins fought.

³⁰ Ian Morrison, *The Connection Phuket Penang and Adelaide* (Bangkok 1993), p.27.

³¹ Cited K.G. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya* (Tucson, 1965), p.46. Tannoos suggests a refugee community from Tenasserim, a west coast port recently conquered by Burma from Siam, though since they are later described as Muslim it would have to represent a [predominately Indian] Muslim commercial element of the city.

I believe the ruling elite of Melaka would have had great difficulty understanding this point, since the most useful forces for every monarch had been to some extent culturally different from himself, whether thinking of the orang laut, the Gujarati shippers, the Cham and Luzon Muslim refugees, or even the exemplary warrior Hang Tuah with his admission of being “Hybridised Malay [*Melayu kacukan*], mixed up with Majapahit Javanese” (*Hikayat Hang Tuah*, 1971: 175). Malay accounts of the fall of Melaka are essentially about cosmic retribution for the king’s having fractured the contractual basis of the polity. When identity is at issue, it is about royal lineage, not anything that could be translated as nation. I would like to quote a Melakan defense of pre-colonial cosmopolis, but the best I know is that of the Thai King Narai, defending pluralism against a mission from King Louis XIV of France which conveyed the king’s request that he become a Catholic Christian. He expressed surprise that King Louis was concerned about something God himself seemed to leave to human discretion

For would not the true God that made Heaven and Earth, and all things that are therein, and hath given them so different natures and inclinations...if he had pleased, also inspired into them the same sentiments for the religion they ought to follow, and for the worship that was most acceptable to him, and make all nations live and die in the same laws?... Ought not one to think that the true God takes as great pleasure to be honoured by different worships and ceremonies, as to be glorified by a prodigious number of creatures (cited Tachard 1688: 223-24).

This early nationalism won the Portuguese some battles, but largely killed the golden goose of cosmopolis, which the Portuguese essentially sacrificed to their initial sense of nation having to exclude Muslims. Titling himself “Lord of the conquest, navigation and commerce of Ethiopia, India, Arabia and Persia”, King Manoel was too much prisoner of the national idea to allow his servants to play the necessary neutral role in the would-be Portuguese entrepôts. On the key sectors of trade where it had influence the Portuguese crown sought to monopolise trade in the hands of either the crown itself (increasingly unable to cope with the demands) or merchants licensed by the crown. Only in Macao and Nagasaki, where the Portuguese were too weak to apply their dangerous ideas of nation, could the Portuguese make substantial profits by presiding over a kind of cosmopolis.

European nation ruling Asian cosmopolis

Of course not all the cosmopolis was on the Asian side, or nation on the European. Firstly the Portuguese onslaught onto Muslim shipping caused a reaction, whereby the expelled or injured Muslim merchants rallied behind rulers, particularly Aceh, willing and able to stand up to the Portuguese. We could trace a kind of nation response in Aceh, which notably injured cosmopolis there by excluding not only the Portuguese in the 16th century, but the Chinese in much of the 17th and 18th. The 17th century law against Thai women marrying foreigners is another such contradiction of the long-term tolerance which appears to mark Thai management of foreign traders (Smith 286-7).

Secondly, the Europeans learned quickly of the enormous advantages of cosmopolis, and built their own versions, with a touch of nation in the way they ruled it. The Portuguese were less successful at this than their successors, largely because each wave learned from their predecessor's mistakes and successes. Manila was wholly dependent on its Chinese residents for both production and trade, and flourished almost precisely insofar as cosmopolis was preferred to nation as way of building the city.

The belligerence with which the Portuguese attacked Muslim shipping in their initial phase in the Indian Ocean alienated this vital group in particular. On the contrary they specifically sought out alternative ports which could provide effective opposition to the Portuguese. The Spanish learned something from Portuguese mistakes, but basically they were extraordinarily lucky. Though dreaming of spices and souls, Legazpi's conquistadors arrived in the Philippines just as China for the first time licensed its shippers to trade to the south legally, in 1567. Since the anti-Muslim bias didn't get in the way of this arm of trade, the Spanish moved their headquarters in 1571 to the principal Chinese trading base at Manila, and took advantage of the boundless enthusiasm of the Chinese for Mexican silver. Manila managed to become both the most important single Southeast Asian destination for Chinese traders until about 1640, and the most important for Japanese until about 1610 (when Hoi An took over), despite the paranoid outbreaks of Spanish nationalism that constantly threatened to kill this golden goose also. By 1603 there were about 20,000 Chinese residents in the city, largely self-governing, as well as 1500 Japanese (de la Costa 1967: 68, 205; Boxer 1951:302).

J.P. Coen learned from the Spanish and did even better with Batavia, establishing Chinese, Moor, and Malay quarters, employing Indian, Bugis and Ambonese mercenaries alongside his Dutch, and having a blind *natio* response only to the Catholic Portuguese and Spanish. An early British factor complained, in fact,

I cannot imagine what these Hollanders meane, to suffer these Maleysians, Chinesians and other Moores of these countries, and to assist them in theyr free trade through all the Indies, and forbidde it theyr own servants, countrymen and bretheren (Floris 1615, cited Fernandez-Armesto: 182).

British cosmopolis

By the nineteenth century Britain was certainly a nation-state, and the British imposed many of the fundamental monopolies of the nation-state in Asia. One of the first steps had to be clear boundaries within which British sovereignty was absolute and British laws, currency and institutions prevailed. The nineteenth century was unprecedented in the way the map of southern Asia (China-Korea-Vietnam had got there first) was painted in different colours, with lines demarcating one sovereignty from another. Burney, for example, pointed out to the Chancellor [Kalahom] of Siam:

the advantage of having regular boundaries established as soon as possible between the Siamese dominions and our conquests on the coasts of Tenasserim....I added that the English earnestly desire to live in the vicinity of the Siamese as good friends and neighbours, and not in the same unsettled

and unsocial terms as the Burmese had done; that for this reason we are anxious to have the boundary and rights of each party fixed, so as to prevent all chance of mistake or dispute between our subordinate officers”

Journal of Burney, 15 Feb. 1826, *The Burney Papers* I: 85-6.

But being sated with nation in India and Burma, the British saw the merits of cosmopolis in Central Southeast Asia, and certainly did not rush to turn them into nations.

Siamese cosmopolis into Thai nation

Siam transformed itself into a nation by drastic means in the 1930s, and notably the 1932 revolution. The trouble was that nation proved less tolerant to pluralities and diversities. King Prajadhipok was not wholly wide of the mark in his abdication speech, complaining that he was “willing to surrender the powers I formerly exercised to the people as a whole, but I am not willing to turn them over to any individual or any group to use in an autocratic manner without heeding the voice of the people.” (Prajadhipok, 2.3.35, cited Batson 1974: 102; 1984: 317).

The Japanese-aligned extreme nationalist government of Pibun Songkran in 1938-44 went out of its way to impose nation on the cosmopolis of the Peninsula and elsewhere in the most traumatic way. A single Thai identity was defined, with prescribed patterns of western dress and behaviour, Chinese and Malay newspapers and schools were almost all closed, and the separate system of Islamic inheritance and marriage law was abolished in favour of a uniform Thai system (Skinner 1957: 261-72; Thanet 2004: 44-45).

Straits Settlements to Malaysia/Singapore

The ports on the Peninsula side of the Straits were in the 19th and 20th century the archetype of cosmopolis, relatively lightly touched by the needs of nation. By adding to the Dutch receptivity to Asian entrepreneurial migrants the concept of a free port. Once the Napoleonic Wars were over, Penang and Singapore were open virtually to anyone to settle in, and they naturally attracted a diverse population. The numbers who could be considered “British” (though that category was not emphasized in censuses) never exceeded one percent in Penang and Singapore, though English and Malay became the *linguae francae* of an exceptionally mixed population. Of similar demographic weight in Penang in the 19th century were populations of Sumatrans, Burmese and Siamese. Arabs (142 in 1833), Parsees or Zoroastrians (51) and Armenians (21) were smaller but distinctive groups sustaining their own social and religious institutions. No culture could be said to dominate Penang at that time, and the largest categories in the census of 1833 – 40% Malays; 22% Chinese; 20% “Chulias” and 3% “Bengalis”—were in practice much divided into different linguistic and cultural groups. In Singapore the British rulers were similarly dwarfed by Bugis, Javanese, Balinese, North Indian and South Indian census categories, as well as the bigger catch-all categories of Chinese (40% in 1833) and Malays (34%) (Newbold 1839: 54-5, 284-5). Arab, Jewish, Armenian, German communities were smaller but economically and socially significant, with their own

religious and social institutions (the German club was established before Germany was, in 1856 – Buckley 629-70). In the twentieth century Russian and Japanese communities became significant, and increasingly also a French-speaking one. Religious festivals, marriages, funerals, national days, and visiting troupes from external homelands were the occasions of each group's celebrating its culture and to varying extents putting it on show for the cosmopolitan audience.

The story is well known of how ideas of race and nation made their impact on these extremely diverse cosmopolises in the 20th century, and most traumatically in the turbulent period between 1942 and 1965, when the conviction was universal that nation-states were the only viable form of polity. A political cliché became established in the racial bargaining of that time that populations were divided into Chinese, Malays and Indians, all in process of negotiating their way on contested terms into some nation state called Malaya, Malaysia, or Singapore. National celebrations of culture uneasily interacted with, incorporated or replaced the extraordinary mosaic of cultural forms which cosmopolis had always sustained.

Nevertheless cosmopolis continued to flourish, and to revive more vigorously as increasingly global competition created an international context where it was more necessary than ever. By the end of the 20th century the public rhetoric of nation appeared both less necessary in itself and less opposed to cosmopolis. Public leaders appealed to make Singapore, "a cosmopolitan centre, able to attract, retain and absorb talent from all over the world" (Lee Kuan Yew, 2000, cited Yeoh 2004: 317). Some of the post-Mahathir signs point Malaysia more cautiously in the same direction.

Population figures show an intriguing turnaround in the last decades of the nationalist century. The foreign-born proportion of the populations of Peninsula Malaysia and Singapore, an important measure of the strength of cosmopolis in the mix, has usually been among the highest in the world. But the proportion showed a consistent decline throughout the twentieth century, as migration from China, India and Indonesia largely ceased, domestic birth-rates soared, and the pressures of nation made themselves felt. The proportions fell progressively from a world-beating 43% (Malaysia) and 72% (Singapore) in the 1921 census to 16% and 35% in that of 1957 and 4.6% and 21.8% in that of 1980. Since then, however, the foreign-born proportions in both countries have progressively risen. Peninsula Malaysia's has been modest but significant, from that 4.6% to about 5% in 1990 and 6% in 2000.³² In Singapore the rise was more substantial, from 21.8% to 24% in 1990 and 33.6% in 2000, almost back to the level of 1957 (Saw, 1999: 33, supplemented by 2000 census).

The interplay between nation and cosmopolis will continue in the 21st century, but we can be sure that the pressures will be different. As was always the case in the past, the economic and cultural progress of cities in this part of the world, even more than elsewhere, will be closely tied to the managing of cosmopolis.

³² I owe these estimates for the Peninsula to Gavin Jones, based on the higher all-Malaysia figures of 5.6% (1990) and 8.0% (2000). The 24% foreign-born in Sabah (2000) skew the national figures higher than the Peninsula ones.

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