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ON PO-NI: THE SANTUBONG SITES OF SARAWAK

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Trading patterns of coastal states in maritime Southeast Asia

The trade of early coastal states in the maritime portions of Southeast Asia appears frequently to have comprised three basic segments, each dealing with a different set of merchandise, but all focused upon the port-capital. The populations involved encompasseda variety of interior-dwelling export-producing groups, the inhabitants of the port and associated riparian settlements which acted as stapling points, and the regional and overseas trading partners connected to the state by its seaborne trade (Bronson 1977). The exports which provided the state's major source of revenue were, to a large extent, items which were either gathered or mined by hunter-gatherer and farming populations of the interior, most of whom did not identify themselves directly with the coastal polity and were normally beyond the effective political reach of the coast. The populations of the port-capital and settlements on the lower reaches of the state's riverine backbone, while organizing and controlling the export of interior's produce,seem rarely to have added to it any commodities which were sent beyond the immediate region. Ports were, however, often major industrial centres which produceda wide range of goods used in trade with neighboring states and,more importantly, with the interior-dwelling populations upon whose exportable produce the economy of the state depended.

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The prestige goods imported from abroad played a major role in maintaining the internal stability of early coastal states. Most of these items were consumed either in the immediate region of the port or at the major district centres on the lower course of the river, largely by the ruler's clients and supporters, who comprised a large portion of the capital's population, as noted by a number of foreign observers (Keppel 1847: I, 30: St. John 1863: II, 248). Few imported goods seem to have penetrated into the interior, especially before the fourteenth century. Even at primary stapling centres upstream, the number of imported ceramic remains dating to the Sung period or earlier is extremely limited. The dates proposed for the green-glazed stonewares found at Niah cave in Sarawak are uncertain, and are probably in most cases too early (Chin 1981). The 'Yueh' ware, upon which early dates for penetration of imports into the interior have been based (Harrisson 1961: 224), is as yet not a well defined or easily dated class, and so must be discounted. Most items so identified are almost certainly of later date. The noticeable paucity of early Chinese ceramics, characteristic of interior sites of Sumatra and Borneo, and so different from those of Java, reflects a pattern of internal trade which persisted to some degree into recent centuries, despite a gradual increase in imports amongst the goods sent into the interior after the fifteenth century.

Sung dynasty ceramics do not appear to have been carried far into the interiors of such states as Srivijaya or Po-ni, both of which handled substantial volumes of foreign trade between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Yet clearly this foreign trade was supported by a thriving domestic trade which brought forest products from the hinterland to the coast. This seeming contradiction of historical and archaeological data is, however, more apparent than real. Trade patterns within later states of the region have produced similar distributions of trade goods. In the early nineteenth century a study of the local trade centred on the port of Palembang in South Sumatra noted that hundreds of residents of the port were employed in local industries, producing iron wares, jewelry, cloth, krises and other items, most of which were sent upstream to supply trade items in the interior. The greatest demand for cloths, iron, and jewelry came from the regions producing gold and forest products (Praetorius 1843: 383–98). This pattern was repeated up and down the Sumatran coast and in Borneo as well. Crawfurd states that the major trade item inland from Matan, Pontianak and Banjarmasin was locally smelted faggot iron, *besi ikat* (Moor 1837: 8). Other domestically produced items were equally important on the north coast of the island, where it was stated that:

> "The most numerous class are the Daya . . . They are principally employed in collecting the useful products of their forests, mining, and the cultivation of *ladangs*. A small strip of coarse cotton cloth . . . and head handkerchief forms their dress; beads and brasswire their ornaments, salt their luxury, tobacco their passion, and iron is necessary for their tools and arms. These articles are taken to them from the lower parts of the rivers." (Moor 1837: 9)

At the same time other, more frequently imported, goods were consumed at the downstream end:

> "In addition to the articles mentioned as consumed by the Daya and Chinese, the Malayu, Ugi [i.e. Bugis], and Arabs require a few finer Indian and European piece goods, Celebean and Javanese ditto, raw silk, manufactured silks, and a little broad cloth." (ibid: 10)

These and other imported items were not traded for coastal products, but for products of the interior:

> "Agriculture affords but little to pay for these imported articles . . . the principal returns . . . are gold, diamonds, wax, rattans, dammar, wood and tankawan oils, with a little rice and coarse sugar." (ibid)

This trade situation exactly parallels that of early nineteenth century Palembang, as described by Praetorius. Palembang's imports of that time included Siamese dried fish, oil, sugar, gumlac dye, raw silk, salt, tea, Chinese