Introduction

As some of you will remember, during the years when I lived here, I worked on the minutiae of pre-Muslim peninsular history, particularly on the primary problem of place-name identification. Now that I live on the other side of the world and am to a great extent cut off from the genius loci which inspires such studies, it would be presumptuous of me to come here to talk on such a topic to experts, some of whom in any case know the Malay terrain far better than I do. However, it may not be inappropriate for me to introduce this symposium by trying to set prehistoric history in its wider South-East Asian context, with some emphasis on its economic and social aspects. This, then, is not so much a resume of received knowledge as a survey of some of the many topics which require investigation.

Prehistory

Let us begin with that modification of what the kulturkreis school calls the Old Plantation complex -- namely in South-East Asia the Dong Son culture. I am aware that we thus ignore nine-tenths of Malayan prehistory. And let us leave to one side the contentious views as to the precise spectrum of its culture. What does seem certain is that South-East Asia lacks very far the heart of this culture. Karl Baer has drawn attention to the intrinsically lacrimal and fibre-using gardening complex -- emphasizing the colouring of food, person and clothing -- which radiates outwards from South-East Asia and presumably dates from the Neolithic. It seems probable that, by the close of the Neolithic in the centuries immediately preceding the Suka era, parts of the Malay landscape had received the agricultural imprint which they were to bear until the beginnings of commercial farming in the nineteenth century. The unit of settlement was the kampung, within and around which plants of different kinds, growth habits and uses were assembled in the same cultivated patches, simple gardens in effect. At first the ground was dug with a planting stick. By the Dong Son period Heinrich Luhn and some Dutch scholars seem to imply that the ox- or buffalo-drawn plough was used in irrigated fields. I personally doubt this, but even if it were true, it could have applied to only very limited regions within Malaysia. There can be little doubt that dry padi featured among the crops, together possibly with fritail (Setaria italica) and Job's tears (Coix lacryma-jobi), as well as taro (Colocasia esculenta), Yams (Dioscorea sp.) birch (Aleexis macrophila), bananas, sugar-cane and cocoa, with the sago-palm laid under contribution by those folk who inhabited approximately moist localities.

Any discussion of authority relationships in prehistoric Malaya must depend on still more tenuous inferences than do the conclusions in regard to ecological adaptation, for there is a complete absence of direct information. However, among the earliest farmers, political leadership could only have been inchoate and weak. Judging from the remnants of such societies as do exist in the modern world (an unsatisfactory procedure), rule was predominantly oligarchic, the prerogative of family heads. Lodang cultivation does not appear to have been capable of supporting an non-farming elite (though an embryonic chief- ten class may be discerned among some contempor ary shifting agriculturalists in other parts of South-East Asia). Subsequently
an intensification of farming must have induced the emergence of stable and sedentary farming communities, thus concentrating populations in discrete and sharply defined units which have been compared by Professor Geertz to the pre-Spanish barangay on the coastal lowlands of the Philippine Islands. These constituted labour pools which could be manipulated by an emergent ruling group in which was institutionalized the fusion of political status and control over labour. And we must remember that in the early centuries, central over-labour was the social-political basis of authority. As to the ideological framework within which these developments took place, we can say little with certainty. It has been postulated that in the earliest times the root-crop gardeners had already acquired a deep respect for their ancestors and a belief in the existence of both remote deities who controlled the elemental forces of nature and local spirits of more limited power and unpredictable temperament. At a succeeding stage, among paddang farmers, there arose a warrior's ethos of head-hunting, while among others, contemporary, or possibly later, groups head-hunting was replaced by ritual sacrifice. These two ways of obtaining scalps were mutually exclusive in South-East Asia, but in both the shrunken head was regarded as a talisman of fertility, power and health. Nor is this all speculation and analogy. Dong So'n bronze drums not uncommonly portray exultant warriors in the tall feature head-dresses which even today distinguish successful Malaysian head-hunters, and Professer Heine-Geldern has claimed to recognize the objects which some of the warriors carry in their righthands as the skulls of defeated enemies. With the stabilizing of settlement and the consequent attachment of groups of agriculturalists to the gods of specific localities, religious thought seems to have become more complex. It is hazardous to speculate on the degree of sophistication which Dong So'n religion may have attained at its apogee, but its relatively complex cosmological dualism of heaven and sea, its burial customs and cosmological dualism of heaven and sea, its burial customs and its stone monuments testify to a considerable degree of theological speculation.

It is uncertain to what extent the Dong So'n culture affected Malay, but, judging by the distribution of metal finds on the peninsula, it was best developed round the coasts and in some of the larger river valleys; that is, on the alluvial zones which have had a monopoly of population, wealth and power throughout peninsular history.

Period of Indian Influence

At about the beginning of the Saka era the culture of the northern half of the peninsula was transformed by an infusion of traits from the Indian subcontinent. Petty traders, working their way from village to village through the archipelago and mainland, had for long familiarized South-East Asians with the products of India and the greaest aspects of her material culture. The generating factors are obscure but the most credible current hypothesis is probably that proposed by Professor Coedes, who attributes a re-orientation of Indian commercial interests to changing political conditions in the Malayan Peninsula and Central Asia.

Subsequently there was established between the ruling varna of India and the tribal chieftains of South-East Asia a cross-cultural link which revolutionized authority relations in the latter region. The process by which this link was forged still affords material for debate. Even before Professor Coedes had completed his statement of what may be called
the classical interpretation, it was challenged by Van Lour and R. F. Bosch. Now, the problem seems to be swinging back a little under the influence of Professor Geeta's ideas. In any case, these theories are well known and there is no point in me repeating them here.

Glimpses of this process by which supra-village political units emerged first in Campa, the lower Mekong valley and on the isthmus of the Malaya Peninsula, and later in Java and Borneo, are afforded by Chinese dynastic histories and encyclopedias. At the core of this transformation, which replaced culture with civilization, was the concept of the deva-raja or god-king. Holding power by virtue of a manifest divinity that transcended the idat of the tribe, the deva-raja was liberated from the traditional constraints that had limited the personal power of the tribal chieftain. In other words, his inherent divinity as a visible form of the godhead was reflected in the absolutism of his political authority. Such divine incarnation, characteristic of Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist kingdoms, was obviously incompatible with the theological premises on which the Theravada states of later times were founded. Here the justification of kingship was the monarch's good karma, that is, his religious merit acquired in previous lives. But both theories of monarchy were easily subverted in the interests of usurpation. In a Hindu state he who could demonstrate that he was an incarnation of Siva or Visnu was ipso facto justified in seizing supreme power; in a Buddhist kingdom a would-be ruler who could display a karma of great strength was virtually entitled to the throne even though he acquired it through the blackest treachery.

Numerous examples of this can be culled from the dynastic annals of Campa, Cambodia and Malaysia, but our information is seldom detailed enough to enable us to select examples from the Malaya Peninsula. However, something of this is hinted at in the tale of the Langkaukan kshatriya who manifested supernatural power by breaking his fetters, and was subsequently raised to the throne by brahmans and ministers of state:

In the king's household there was a man of virtue to whom the populace turned. When the king heard of this, he imprisoned the man, but his chains snapped unaccountably. The king, then, took him for a supernatural being and, not daring to injure him, exiled him from the country, whereupon he fled to India. The king of India gave him his eldest daughter in marriage. Not long afterwards, when the king of Lang-ya died, the chief ministers back the exile, and made him king. [Liang shu, chap. 54 and several subsequent records]...

It also appears, of course, even more clearly in the assumption of power in Funan, by a divinely inspired brahman from the isthmian state of Plan-plan (A.D.): Chiao Chen-ju (Kaundinya)... was originally an Indian brahman who received a divine sign to reign over Fu-man. Chiao Chen-ju rejoiced in his heart. He arrived at Plan-plan to the southward. When the Fu-nanese heard of him, they all welcomed him with delight, went before him and chose him as their king. Once more he modified all the laws to conform with the usage of India. [Liang shu].
The legalization of a monarch's status as a deva-nija required the ministrations of a staff of priests of the brahman varna, who alone could consecrate the king and, by means of an appropriate ritual, ensure the concentration of Siva's (or Visnu's) cosmic essence within the royal body during its lifetime. I need not remind you of the prominence with which brahman chaplains or purohitas featured in Cambodian inscriptions. A death of epigraphic records prevents our obtaining such a detailed knowledge of events on the Malaya Peninsula, but there are abundant references in Chinese histories to the important role of brahman ministers in the isthmian kingdoms. Here I need only draw your attention to the college of brahmans, more than 1,000 strong, in Tun-sun (田) :—

There are more than 1,000 Indian brahmans. The people of Tun-sun practise their doctrine and give them their daughters in marriage; consequently many of the brahmans do not go away. They do nothing but study the sacred canon, bathe themselves with scents and flowers, and practise piety ceaselessly by day and night.

References to apparently Indianized courts are not lacking in Chinese literature relating to the Malaya Peninsula.

(1) Cp., for example, the Hindu ritual at the court of Ch'ih-t'u (赤土) (as related in Chap. 82 of the Sui Shu) and several other texts and the Sanskrit official titles used there:

ś-rdhakāra = assistant (cards)
Dhanada = dispenser of blessings (dhanada)
karmika = agent (karmika)
Kul pati = head of the house, i.e. superior of a religious institution (kula pati)
nayaka = guide (nayaka)

(ii) At the court of Plan-p'an, the chief retainers knelt befor
the king their hands crowed and resting on their shoulders. "There are numerous brahmans come from India in search of wealth. They are in high favour with the king." (Wen-Hsien T'ung K'ao, from various earlier sources). Although I must record that three of the four chief ministers had apparently Khmer titles, incorporating the element Kurun.

(iii) At the court of Ten-tan were eight high officers of state, who were brahmans. In this connection I may mention that Sir Richard Winstedt has drawn attention to a preoccupation with the astrological numbers 4, 8, 16 and 32 at various South-East Asian courts.

(iv) The ruler of Ko-lo had the title of Sri Paramapara / Shih-li-po-lo.
The ruler of Tan-tan had a title beginning with the honorific Sri. The ruler of Chi'ih-t'u seemingly name of Gautama (guna).

The fact that the maintenance of these clerical and military staffs was beyond the competence of a village chief, fore-shadowed subsequent territorial developments. Certain chief ministers of personal or kinship superiority, began to emerge as leaders among their class and the central regional chieftains, consolidating their control with the cement of their personal divinity and consecrated stratification of social status among their subjects. In this context there began to develop competition among emergent god-kings for control of neighboring villages, not for the sake of their territories as such but for the purpose of controlling their labour reservoirs—what Professor Geertz in a perceptive study has called those "traditionistic ally bound packages of labour." Thus arose the nuclei of the isthmian kingdoms which are he dominant feature of peninsular history in the first millenium of the Sraka era. Possibly the period of transition can be discerned in the Chinese ambassador's account of Tun-sun, a state in the far north of the peninsula, in which fove territorial chieftains acknowledged the supremacy of a kurun. Subsequently, from the Meklong in the north to the Merbok in the south nearly every coastal plain at one time or another afforded a base for a miniature kingdom. In the north the narrowest sector of the peninsula constituted the territory of a state known only by the Chinese reduplicated transliteration of Plan-plan. Southwards, as the peninsula broadened, it was possible to distinguish a dual succession for king one, one series focussing on the east coast, and one on the west. In the east were Tambralinga, Langkasuka, the Red-Earth kingdom and Ten-tan, together with, at a later date, Kelantan, Trengganu and Pahang. In the west were Alakah Takala, Tockwroo and Kedah (H), associated with the development of these Indianized kingdoms was a new landscape feature, the town. Where Hinduism prevailed, the old spirit-house of the Dong-So'n village was transformed into a temple housing the sacred linga, the palladium of the state, which also marked the axis of the kingdom. In the typical case— or as exemplified in some of the states of peninsular South-East Asia—adajcent to this nitional sanctuary was the palace of the god-king, a nearly commensurate with his cosmic statu as the resources of the king on permitted, and grouped round about were the residences of the brahman ministers, the barracks of the royal guard and the royal rice granaries. Beyond these clustered the quarters of the artisans who ministered to the needs of the court. Whatever possible the walls enclosed a reproduction, either natural or artificial, of Mount Meru, the cosmic mountain of ancient...
India, round which sun, moon and stars revolved, and atop of which was located the national shrine. By thus constructing the city as a world in miniature, the state was brought into accord with the cosmic harmony, and the national welfare and the national welfare and prosperity linked to the great parallelism which held between Man and the Univ rec. Typically the walls of such a city faced squarely in the direction of the four sacred winds, roads, official buildings, and even the dwellings of officers of state were oriented in the same direction, and at the centre rose the eminence that was Mount Meru, for the ancients did not distinguish effectively between symbolism and partiskation. In Java, Cambodia and Burma these attributes of the city are readily recognizable in archaeological and epigraphic remains, but on the Malay Peninsula where specific evidence is lacking we can only surmise that the city-states were laid out on the principles which obtained wherever Indian culture set its stamp. However, we do find a few pertinent remarks embedded here and there in Chinese histories and other early sources, of which the following are fairly typical.

(i) The earliest peninsular reference of which I know relates to the city of Song-chih (susui), capital of the peninsular Shu, and its description is concerned with the palace precinct. (Chap. 32)

(ii) In P'an-p'an at much the same time, we are told, "The people live mostly by the water-side, and in default of city walls erect palisades entirely of wood." (Hsin T'ang Shu, chap. 222c).

(iii) The T'ung Tien relates that there were more than 20,000 families (= 60,000 people) in the capital of Tan-tan.

(iv) The city walls of Ko-lo7 are of piled stones; palace, and houses are walled with step. (Hsin T'ang Shu, chap. 222c).

(v) Kalah Abü Dulaf (10th. century), "When I arrived at 'Elah I found it very great, with high walls, numerous gardens and abundant springs." It was clearly the capital of a populous and prosperous region.

(vi) Langkasuka was surrounded by walls to form a city with double gates, towers and pavilions. (Chap. 54 and several later sources).

(vii) In the 13th. century Tumbrali ga was surrounded by wooden palisade some 6-7 feet thick and over 20 feet high, which could be used as a platform for fighting. (Chu-fan-chih, pt. 17).

(viii) At the same time in Fo-lo-on we know that there were Buddhist temples tiled with bronze and ornamented with gold. (Chu-fan-chih, pt. 17).

Another topic which merits study concerns the extent to which the charismatic power which centered the realm through the medium of the god-king percolated down the social scale. In other words, to what extent were Professor Geertz's la bour packages affected by the process which is called "Indianization"? As far as I know this question has not been seriously investigated. It is almost as though, faced with the fact that in South-East Asia both archaeological remains and literature mirror only the life of an elite, historians have thought the question impossible of answer. I certainly don't propose to supply an answer here and now, but I might
venture to call your attention to a few of the many points which could profitably be investigated.

(i) In the first place there are the apparently anomalous burial customs of Tun-sun (\textsuperscript{1}) as related in T'ung Tien and T'ai-p'ing Yu-lan. Here the superior man, surprisingly, was honoured with a reserved burial in an amphora, while the inferior person had recourse to cremation.

In Ch'ih-t'\u{u} (\textsuperscript{1}) in the early 7th century, on the other hand, only cremation is mentioned; as is also true of Ko-lo (Hsin T'\ang Shu\textsuperscript{2}).

(ii) Then our texts are not entirely silent on the topic of food prejudices and taboos. For example, at a state banquet in Ch'ih-t'\u{u} in 608 beef and pork were eaten, as well as mutton, fish and turtle. It seems the court had absorbed the outward attributes of Indian culture but not its taboos. In fact even as late as the 14th century, at a royal banquet in Majapahit, buffalo meat was freely enjoyed by all, while "the forbidden meat of dog, donkey, mice and frogs was eaten by many of the common people who in their gluttony did not care about the commands of the gods" (\textsuperscript{3}).

(iii) Occasionally we find such a statement as the following: The Chiu T'ang Shu claims that "the people of P'an-P'an all learn the brahmanical writings," but this presumably refers only to the literati of the court. The Wen-Hsien T'\ang K'ao (drawing on earlier sources) adds: "There are ten monasteries where Buddhist monks and nuns study their canon. They eat all types of meat but abstain from wine."

(iv) Occasional traits among some aboriginal tribes can possibly be interpreted as of Indian origin. In contrast to aboriginal material culture, this practice has been explored hardly at all, but among my notes I find numerous examples apparently lending themselves to this treatment. One will suffice to indicate the sort of thing I mean. Among the Jakun of South Malaya at least one group was reported to "believe in the existence of one God, Pirman, who made the world and everything that is visible, and at whose will all things continue to have their being. Pirman dwells above the sky, and is invisible". This is an uncommonly sophisticated concept for aboriginal peoples, in which, if Pirman be equated with Brahma, we may perhaps be permitted to discern a degraded relic of Hinduism. In any case, some source must be sought for such an anomalous belief, and if the Jins, intermediate between Pirman and man, are derived from Islam, why not other concepts from Hinduism?

It must not be assumed that these phases of socio-cultural development proceeded uninterruptedly throughout the whole of what I have called the Isthmian Age. Boundaries were unknown but frontiers fluctuated constantly, and states underwent a continual process of absorption and fission as charismatic rulers competed for control over labour in the villages scattered peripherally around the capitals of the city-states. Of one Isthmian state achieving a permanent hegemony over its neighbours there is no evidence whatever. Such qualified political unity as does from time to time gleam through the obscurities of our texts was invariably imposed from without, and never wholly enveloped the peninsula. Even Kedah in its heyday as a nerve centre of the Sri Vijayan thalassocracy could extend its dominion no further north than Kra. From the dissolution of the Funanese empire in the middle of the 6th century A.D. until the southward advance of the Tai in the second half of the 15th century, the isthmus was politically divided, first among a group of contending city-states, and then between the continental power of the Khmers in the north and the thalassocracy of Sri Vijaya in the south. Throughout
this period the southern half of the peninsula remained a land of forest and swamp, inhabited by aborigines whose ancient adat preserved its character essentially uninfluenced by alien cultures. We may note here parenthetically that even in the city state of P'an-p'ên in the 6th or 7th century the arrows were tipped with stone points — Hain T'ong Shu, chap. 222C/1.

With the passage of time a retraditionalizing process began to make itself evident in the aesthetic style of Cambodia, Java and Java. This was a measure of the pervasive success of Indian acculturation, an example of what Max Welser called the routinization of charisma, and signified not simply, as some writers have believed, that local genius was reasserting itself against a foreign influence, but that Indian culture had thoroughly pervaded the courts of South-East Asia. In other words, it denoted the depth, not the superficiality, of Indian acculturation. The fact that Indian cultural influence was strongly represented on the isthmian tract at an early date might have led to the expectation that a specifically peninsular aesthetic spirit would manifest itself during the first millennium A.D. The reason that Malayan historians have failed to distinguish such a manifestation lies in the political history of the isthmus which, for most of this period, was subject to the dominion of outside powers. This is well exemplified in the late twelfth century, for example, by the famous Hinayana Buddha and Naga from Wat Hua Vieng, which represent competing Cambodian and Mon aesthetic styles.

THE MALAK SULTANATE

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries an expanding demand for Asian luxuries in the cities of Renaissance Europe induced a quickening of international trade throughout Malaysia, which in turn induced the emergence of a series of bazaar cities on both shores of the sea-route through the Indian archipelago. For a time in the fourteenth century the inland Javanese kingdom of Majapahit made strenuous efforts to assert her authority over this developing commerce, in which attempt she was succeeded in the fifteenth century by the bazaar cities of the North-Javanese coast. But no Javanese state, neither the territorial empire of the interior nor any of the port-kings of the north, was sufficiently powerful to overcome the incubus of a relatively disadvantageous geographical location, and primacy among the port cities of 15th-century Malaya passed to Malaka, located on the strategically critical sector of the trader route stretching from the Moluccas to Venice and beyond. Founded — or rather commanded — more or less fortuitously by a regicide from Singapura at the head of a band of corsairs, in less quarter of a century, the fishing village had become the chief entrepot for the whole of Malaysia. There the commerce of India was fused with that of China and the Archipelago. Even more crucial for Malaka's prosperity than this focal situation was for ability to control the spice trade passing between the Moluccas and the Mediterranean, Through the Archipelago, and again through the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, spices could be shipped by many routes, but to the narrow funnel of the Strait of Malaka there was no practicable alternative. The power that ruled the Strait was in a position to apply a tourniquet to the world's major artery of trade, and the whims of a Malay ruler would be the ultimate arbiter of prices in the Hansa ports of North-West Europe. This was the situation which Tome Pires had in mind when he coined his famous phrase: "quem for sor De malaqa tern a maao garganta a veneza."

Into the new port flocked Malays from the Archipelago, Gujaratis, Parsis, Klings and Arabs, merchants and adventurers from all the trading ports of South and East Asia. And it was impossible for a foreigner of comparatively humble origins to attain to high office (Raja Kasim is, of course, the outstanding example). The cosmopolitan heterogeneity of Malaka, where a
its customary law and its welfare rather than to the city of Malaka. Malays were jealous of Javanese, Gujaratis of Arabs, and all were suspicious of the Hindu Tamil. The foreigners, in any case, more often than not transients with no permanent stake in the town, were residents in, but not citizens of Malaka and they resented the Malay elite as existing parasitically on the profits of their commerce. In other words, the town was a mosaic of communities each pursuing its own interests which, in normal times, were polarized into a common orientation by the coercive forces of commerce. But when the very success of Malaka's monopoly of the spice trade induced the intervention of new forces from outside the Asian realm, and the polarizing force was thereby disrupted, then the loosely assembled mosaic fell apart, and a troop of half-hearted, scurvy-ridden soldiery was able to overthrow the premier city of South-East Asia.