

Project Title The Development of States in Mainland
Siam 6th - 12th Centuries

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Abstract

The study will examine and consider various factors pertaining to the existence of states during the period of the 6th - 12th centuries A.D. in mainland Siam. Chenla in the Northeast and Sri Dvaravati in the Central are considered to have played an important part in the historical development of early Siam and Southeast Asia. Much light is shed on facts and dimensions concerning early Thai history which are more concised than the vague theory of migration from Southern China which has previously often been proposed. As a result, this study helps to provide new perspectives on the historical development of early Southeast Asia which, up until now, has suffered from a lack of documentation and systematic research.

Sri Dvaravati, a state in the Chao Phraya River Basin, was one among a number of indigenous political entities which was able to absorb foreign cultural influences, and yet at the same time, forge its own distinct cultural identity. The origin of Sri Dvaravati state was due to her economic and cultural intercourse with seafarers from the South China sea the Gulf of Thailand. They transported both new techniques and artifacts. Thus they were the influencing force for

the later development of populated centers in to states. The state of Sri Dvaravati in particular grew out of the various early coastal centers. Its growth helped to bridge the gaps that existed between the Indianizing influences and the local or indigenous cultures. Through selective acceptance and assimilation there gradually came into existence a clearly Buddhistic culture. Sri Dvaravati grew as a result of the process of developing and unifying the variety found in coastal centers.

Since the 7th century A.D., inhabitants of ancient communities in the Northeast had communication with the centers of political power both in the Chao Phraya River area and Mekhong River area. This resulted in their adoption of cultures relating to Buddhism and Hinduism. Chenla state developed from the prehistoric settlements in the low-lying areas of the lower Mun and Chi Rivers in the Northeast. The state of Chenla existed from 7th to 9th centuries A.D. The history of Chenla involved the conquest of local people called Kamphu (the Khmer-Cham people) in small political entities which scattered over a wide area. This area extended from the Northeast down to the south of the great Dong Rek mountain, the great inland lake of Cambodia toward the Eastern region of Thailand.

From about the 11th century new towns emerged along the land routes and new water routes. Some replaced former cities near the rivers i.e. muang Suphanphum or Suphanburi on the Suphanburi River, Ratchaburi near the Meklong River.

More hinterland centers appeared at this time. Some new states emerged from the old centers. The Sukhothai state developed in the 12th century and Chiangmai in the North developed later. Indeed the development of Buddhism in the Dvaravati period formed the basis for a Buddhist society and state in mainland Siam represented by Ayutthaya State from the 14th century onward.