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# Thai-Malay Peninsula and South China Sea networks (500 BC–AD 200), based on a reappraisal of “Sa Huynh-Kalanay”-related ceramics

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## ABSTRACT

From 500 BC to AD 200, cultural exchanges in the South China Sea were emphasized by the expansion and intensification of long-distance interaction networks. Various archaeological objects, exchanged or imitated, provide evidence of multiple contacts. Interactions in relation to ceramics are attested through the so-called Sa Huynh-Kalanay-related ceramics, whose decorations allow significant stylistic comparisons between sites of the Thai-Malay Peninsula, Vietnam, the Philippines, Borneo and Eastern Indonesia. This paper aims to explore the various modes of circulation of Sa Huynh-Kalanay-related pottery and to define whether they involved the movement of goods and/or of people such as merchants or craftsmen. The analysis focuses on pottery assemblages from fifteen sites recently excavated by the Thai-French archaeological mission in the Thai-Malay Peninsula. The reconstruction of various *chaînes opératoires* and the identification of pottery traditions reveal some Sa Huynh-Kalanay-related pottery were produced by local groups while others have an exogenous origin. Results highlight the socio-cultural and political complexity of groups in line with the production, circulation, and use of the pottery.

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## 1. Introduction

In mainland Southeast Asia, the period from 500 BC to AD 200 corresponds to deep socio-cultural and political transformations characterized by the emergence of early forms of political centralization and urbanism, as shown at Khao Sam Kaeo in peninsular Thailand (Bellina and Silapanth, 2006; Bellina et al., 2014; Bellina, in press) and Co Loa in northern Vietnam (Kim, 2013). The early historic period, by the beginning of the 1st millennium AD, witnesses the development of cities and states, such as the kingdom of Funan, in southern Vietnam and Cambodia (Stark, 2006; Bourdonneau, 2007; Manguin, 2009). As a corollary to these evolutions, long distance-exchange routes usually named as “Maritime Silk Roads” developed, thus connecting coastal populations surrounding the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. For the early historical period, and more recently for the late prehistoric period, Southeast Asia exchanges with South Asia and the

West have been well investigated, especially to document the Indianisation process (to cite only a few recent publications: Bellina, 2007, 2014; Bellina and Glover, 2004; Manguin et al., 2011; Smith, 1999). The external impetus on Southeast Asian cultural evolution has been a matter of intensive debate, which finally ended during the eighties with mixed paradigms conciliating both local creativity and dynamism and external stimulation. However, until recently, very little was known on Maritime Southeast Asian populations' socio-political and economic developments when the region became part of the Maritime Silk roads chain of networks. In the absence of texts, long distance interactions are attested by the growing circulation of valuable goods in the South China Sea networks, characterised by elaborate and exotic technology and styles previously unknown in the region. Those include glass beads and dishes (Lankton et al., 2006; Dussubieux and Gratuze, 2010; Borell, 2012), nephrite and carnelian ornaments (Hung et al., 2006; Bellina, 2007, 2014; Hung and Bellwood, 2010; Hung and Iizuka, 2013; Hung et al., 2013) as well as various metal artefacts such as gold ornaments (Pryce et al., 2008), “Dong Son” bronze drums (Calo, 2009; Pryce et al., 2014), high-tin bronze artefacts (Pryce et al., 2008; Reinecke et al., 2009; Pryce et al., 2014) and Han

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bronze mirrors (Yamagata et al., 2001; Reinecke et al., 2009; Pryce et al., 2008, 2010).

Pottery was also moving throughout the networks. Some arrived from neighbouring regions, South Asia (Bouvet, 2012) and from Han-China (Favereau, 2015; Péronnet et al., forthcoming). In Southeast Asia and the Pacific, it has been thought that regional exchange is indicated by the so-called “Sa Huynh-Kalanay” type of pottery. The expression Sa Huynh-Kalanay was coined by Wilhelm G. Solheim II to express the striking similarities in decorative motifs between Metal Age ceramics from the site of Kalanay in central Philippines and from the site of Sa Huynh in central Vietnam (Solheim, 1964a). The Sa Huynh-Kalanay decorative style is characterized by diagnostic designs, such as scallop designs on carinations and rims, friezes of paired diagonals, sequences of alternating triangles and horizontal “S”, interlocking triangles and rectangles, and repeated scrolls or waves (Solheim, 1964b, p. 13). Subsequently, such decorations have been reported elsewhere in Vietnam, the Philippines, peninsular Thailand, Indonesia, Borneo and Cambodia, and the term Sa Huynh-Kalanay was re-used to underline the stylistic link between the various sites (Fig. 1). For Solheim, the Sa Huynh-Kalanay decorated pottery provided at the beginning evidence on the origin and spread of Malayo-Polynesian-speakers groups (Solheim, 1964a, p. 196). Later, it constituted the grounds to explain zones of favoured cultural exchange, the basis of his “Nusantao Maritime Trading and Exchange Network” hypothesis, an alternative to the migration theory developed by Bellwood (1997). Solheim (2006) used it to explain the formation of shared maritime-oriented cultural traits amongst Southeast Asian and Pacific populations, including Austronesian- and non-Austronesian-speakers. To Solheim, shared elements of culture were spread in all directions in the Asia-Pacific region through some sort of trading, and not by migrations, which he thought would have entailed a unidirectional spread (2006, p. 77). Sa Huynh-Kalanay pottery is associated with several major issues of Maritime Southeast Asian and more globally, Asian prehistoric developments. Because these critical issues are at stake, a reappraisal of ceramics bearing this style appears necessary now that some corpora with well dated contexts have recently become

available. The Sa Huynh-Kalanay term has limitations, as it has been developed on the basis of morpho-stylistic similarities, which not only overlooks ceramic diversity but also does not necessarily reflect the reality of interactions.

This research wishes to look beyond the “family resemblance” of these ceramics by investigating their production and distribution networks. What did the exchange consist of? Were the Sa Huynh-Kalanay decorated potteries really exchanged or imitated? Were potters moving from place to place? In other words, what really circulated: pots, technologies and/or styles? If technologies or styles, who transmitted them? Did they come as part of big or small groups? What were the groups involved in such circulation composed of? What may have been their main activity (trade, craft production ...)? Can we trace their provenance? Finally, can we provide explanations on their production in social terms considering the extended area?

## 2. Material and method

The research presented here focuses on assemblages from the Kra Isthmus in the Thai-Malay Peninsula, as part of a wider reappraisal including comparisons with assemblages from the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia (Favereau, 2015). The Kra Isthmus, the upper part of the Thai-Malay Peninsula, corresponds to the westernmost extension of the Sa Huynh-Kalanay ceramic distribution in the South China Sea and where its distribution becomes sparser. Based on the Thai-French Archaeological mission recent dating, the Sa Huynh-Kalanay style appears from c. 500 BC and bears no comparison with earlier assemblages. During this period, the Peninsula was an extremely dynamic region, where local, regional and long distance networks coincided as they traversed transpeninsular routes connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea, or the so-called early Maritime Silk Roads. The material studied comes from fifteen sites recently excavated or surveyed by the Thai-French archaeological mission, including early port settlements and caves used for funerary purposes. They are located either on coastal plains or inland (Fig. 2).

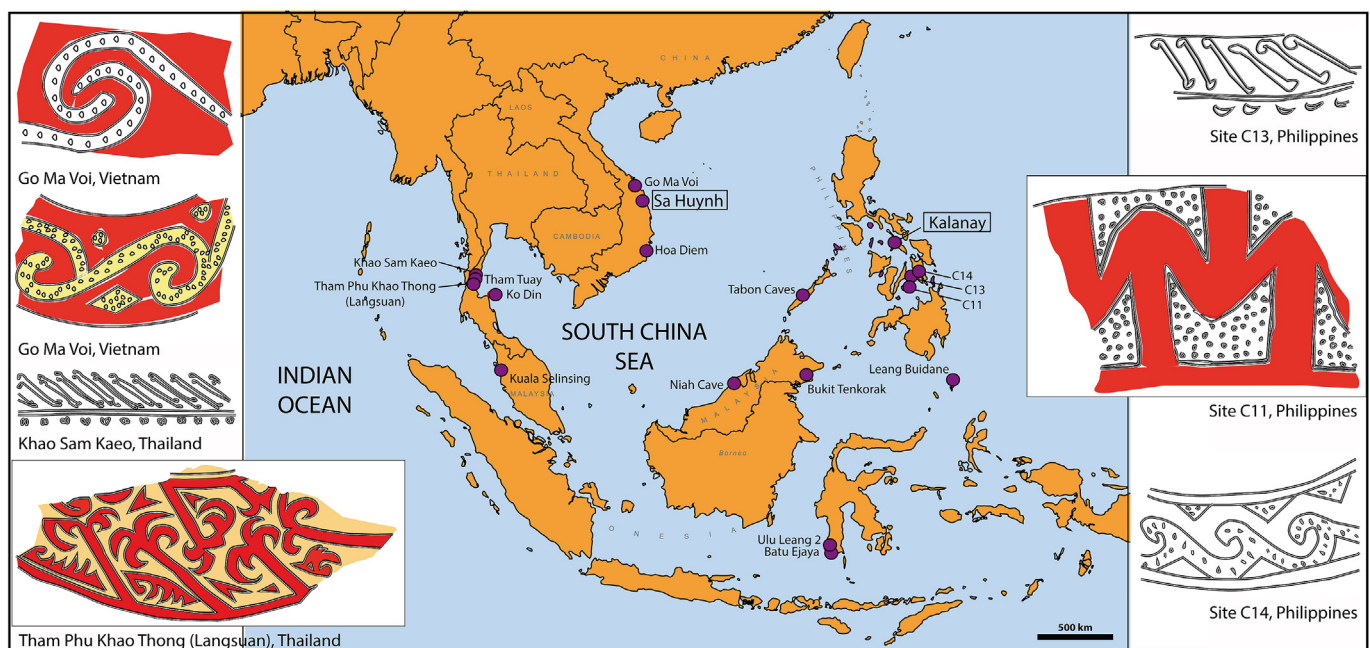


Fig. 1. Map of distribution of some Sa Huynh-Kalanay type potteries in Southeast Asia and examples of typical Sa Huynh-Kalanay-inspired decorations.

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