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A Short Introduction to Champa Studies

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Is Central Vietnam a dry area?

Central Vietnam is famous for the heavy rainfall (see map 1). Annual rainfall of Hue is 2,890mm, that of Play Ku on Central Highlands is 2,684mm. However, it rains much less in South-Central plains: Qui Nhon, 1,647mm; Nha Trang, 1441mm, for example. Finally, average rainfall at Phan Rang is no less than 695mm! You will be astonished at the desert-like view, with nothing but cactus, around the last Champa temples in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan provinces. At Phan Rang (Ninh Thuan), only 49 days are rainy in a year (from September to November) (Le Ba Thao 1977; Pham Ngoc Toan & Phan Tat Dac 1978). These two provinces, located in the southernmost part of Central Vietnam, are nothing but dry areas.

There is another problem for the entire region. Southwest or west monsoon blows over Central Vietnam from May to September. After passing Truong Son mountains, it often causes a foehn phenomenon on the coastal plains. Thus, rainy season only begins in September with Northeast monsoon. Then, it rains so heavy that rivers running down narrow plains are rapidly flooded. Both the foehn phenomena and floods are most violent in the northern part from Nghe An down to Hai Van pass.

Table 1 climate in Hue

month	temperature	rainfall			
		average	days	maximum	minimum
Jan.	20.1°C	187mm	14	492mm	5mm
Feb.	21.4	62	9	194	6
Mar.	22.9	78	9	546	2
Apr.	25.9	48	8	197	3
May	28.1	96	9	374	4
Jun.	29.2	85	7	185	16
Jul.	29.2	91	7	341	8
Aug.	28.9	107	8	312	13
Sep.	26.9	439	14	1,343	113
Oct.	25.0	666	19	1,516	39
Nov.	23.3	673	21	1,674	92
Dec.	21.0	358	19	751	55
annual	25.0	2,890	144	4,349	1,822

source: (Pham Ngoc Toan & Phan Tat Dac 1978: 304)

When Viet people occupied Central Vietnam, they tried to plant rice twice a year as they had done in their homeland in the North. However, they had many difficulties, especially in the region to the north of Hai Van pass. Their *lua mua*, or rainy season rice, should be harvested in September before the too violent floods, while it is usually harvested in November in the North. However, the rice,

planted in May or June, is often damaged by foehn winds. In many places, therefore, peasants are only capable of planting *lua chiem*, or dry season rice, from November to April (or December to May), which in turn, relies upon the unstable rainfall and temperature in these months. Draughts, not floods, are often disastrous for the region. In this context, the entire Central Vietnam, or at least the northern part, can also be regarded as a dry area.

New trends of Champa studies I: history

For a long time, Champa history and culture were studied in the framework of the *Indianized States*¹. However, recent works, of which the most important ones appeared in France², revealed many new features. Vietnamese historians and ethnologists³, as well as Japanese archaeologists and specialists of architecture, have also begun to re-examine Champa, which was once regarded as a trivial subject.

1) Archaeological studies on Sa Huynh culture, famous for jar burials and ling-ling-o type ear rings, have been developing. Now it seems quite likely that Lin-y polity, which would become the Indianized Champa several centuries later, emerged in the 2nd century A.D., based on Sa Huynh culture (Yamagata & Glover 1994). The old theories of Indianization and Indian colonies, as far as the primary cause of state formation are concerned, are no longer maintained. In other words, the 'first Indianization' of Coedès in the 1st-2nd centuries did not occur, though the 'second Indianization' in the 4-5th centuries did occur so that the already emerged Lin-y polity might 'complete' their process of state formation.

2) In the old framework, Champa state, without wide plains, was so weak that it was always oppressed by more powerful neighbors such as Dai Viet in Northern Vietnam and Cambodia. Now we know that both Dai Viet (before the 13th century) and Cambodia were rather *maṇḍala*-like non-centralized polities, which were seldom interested in territorial expansion. On the contrary, that Central Vietnam port cities within Champa *maṇḍala* were major entrepôts in the South-China sea trade network was of great importance in early Southeast Asian context. Thus, we no longer need to regard the entire Vijaya period (the 11-15th centuries) as the declining period. The Indianized culture declined indeed. As for trade, however, it seems that, though sometimes plundered by Dai Viet and Cambodia, the period from the 10th to the 14th century was most glorious in Champa history⁴, as the *Intra-Asian trade* was rapidly growing. Only in the end

¹ An annotated bibliography of almost all the works concerning Champa and Chams written in Western languages and in Vietnamese, though lacking many written in Japanese and Chinese, is published in France. See Lafont et Po Dharma eds. (1989).

² See Manguin (1979), Po Dharma (1987), Centre d'histoire et civilisation de la péninsule indochinoise (1988; 1990; 1991), for instance.

³ Along with the famous Museum of Champa sculpture in Danang and the recently-reorganized Cham culture research and training centre in Phan Rang, the Bureau of Culture and Information of each province in Central Vietnam is interested in Champa studies. Even in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city, Champa study is now 'fashionable'. Thus, many reports and articles can be found in the major journals such as *Khảo cổ học* (Journal of Archaeology), *Nhung phat hien moi ve khao co hoc* (Annual reports of new archaeological discoveries), *Dan toc hoc* (Journal of Ethnology), *Nghien cuu Dong Nam A* (Southeast Asian Studies), *Vietnam Social Science*...

⁴ A new issue is that in the 14th to 15th centuries, as were the cases of Northern Vietnam and Thailand, Champa appears to have begun to produce export ceramics, sherds of which were discovered even in Egypt. See Yamamoto et al. (1994).

of the 14th century did Dai Viet begin the real territorial expansion, the famous *nam tien* (southward march) after a Chinese-modeled state with extensive hydraulic works was established in the Red River delta. (Momoki 1992; 1994)

3) In the framework of Indianization, Champa history ended in 1471 when 'capital' Vijaya was seized by the Le troops. However, Champa and Cham people, partly Islamized, were still very active in the maritime world during the 'Age of Commerce'. Cham traders were found in every port cities in the region. The vigorous activities of Bugis and Makassarese in Cambodia and Siam in the 16th - 17th centuries were often accompanied by Chams (Manguin 1979). The Cochinchina polity of the Nguyen lords in the 17th-18th centuries seems to have had a situation, in which less Viet people ruled more Chams (and Chinese), without whom the government could not participate in the maritime world. Only when the 'Age of Commerce' ended in the late 17th century, came the real decline of Champa. When the 'Age of production on the earth' or the 'age of peasants' came in the 18th century, Champa was reduced to an insignificant vassal of Cochinchina, which was eliminated in 1835.

New trends of Champa studies 2: state and society

The old image of Champa, such as 'an Indianized state' of 'Cham nation', located on the 'Central coast of Vietnam', is no longer adequate.

1) Champa was not a single, centralized state, but a loosely integrated mandala which comprised many local leaders, among whom the strongest called himself *raja di raja*. The mandala usually covered the whole coastal area of what is now Central Vietnam. The three most important local polities were *Amarāvati* (located in Quang Nam-Da Nang province), *Vijaya* (in Binh Dinh province), and *Pāṇḍurāṅga* (in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan). The first two areas would become the most favored agricultural zones in Central Vietnam for Viet people, while *Pāṇḍurāṅga* occupied the driest zone, where Viet people would pass on their way marching southward to go directly to Dong Nai-Saigon area.

Besides, the mountainous area, which supplied the lowland leaders with many kinds of export commodities such as eaglewood, cinnamon, elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns, was also indispensable for the mandala. People living in Truong Son mountains and Central highlands (see map2) were also involved in the Champa mandala, though the other mandalas as Cambodia and Laos, too, often claimed suzerainty over them (Hickey 1982). Some kings and queens of Champa were highlanders, while the maritime network gave Champa queens from Java and Ryukyu³.

2) Little is known about the agriculture of Champa, though the *Champa rice* is famous in Chinese history, which is said to have grown without enough rainfall or irrigation. Vietnamese also have *lua chiem* (Cham rice) which grows in the dry season from December to June in the North, and from November to May in the Central.

³ *Sejara Melayu* (Malay annals) tells that the queen of the very Champa king that was defeated by Vietnam in 1471 was a daughter of the king of Rakio (Ryukyu). Marrison (1951:94) thought the Rakio meant Formosa, but I believe it was Ryukyuan kingdom because both *Ming shi-lu* and *Rekidai Hoan* recorded the communication between Champa and Ryukyu in 1470s. See Kobata & Matsuda (1969: 119)

There is a widespread view that Champa agriculture was totally insignificant. A 12th century Chinese material *Ling-wai tai-ta* 嶺外代答 said: All the soil is white sand, thus land to cultivate is quite rare. Large sand dunes everywhere in Central Vietnam coast, as well as the white sandy soil around the 17th parallel, are quite impressive. However, behind coastal sand dunes lie many alluvial plains, though not so wide, most of which are now intensively cultivated, at least twice a year, with modern irrigation system. No hydraulic works but a few dams in Phan Rang area, which is said to have been built by Champa kings, are known. However, it is difficult to suppose that no intensive wet rice cultivation was done during Champa period to feed the developing cities.

3) Archaeologists have already found many Champa settlements with remains such as pottery and ceramic sherds. They are very interested in and eager to make large-scale archaeological research on walled centers (usually square-shaped, several hectares wide, surrounded by moats) which are located on the alluvial plains, usually served as political centers. In the vicinity of Hue, for example, there remain two big sites: Thanh Loi of the Lin-y period and Thanh Hoa Chau of the Chan-ch'eng period. On the other hand, they have been making successful efforts to find port city sites of Champa, such as Hoi An (Faifoo) (The National Committee 1991), Thi Nai (near Qui Nhon), Cua Viet (Quang Tri)... The religious centers at My Son, Dong Duong, Po Nagar... have already been well studied by French scholars. It is obvious that many of Champa centers were inherited by Viet people and Vietnamese dynasties as Vijaya capital became Qui Nhon citadel, Po Nagar temple with the Champa deity became a Vietnamese temple...

Based on these, Vietnamese scholars are now interested in the relations among political centers, port cities and religious centers. Though some religious sites in the southern provinces as Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa (famous Po Nagar), Binh Thuan, are located near the coast, scholars now tend to emphasize a prevailing model of riverine polity, in which a religious center (usually near/in the mountainous area), a political center (on the alluvial plain), and a port city were linked each other by water. A typical case was found in Quang Nam-Da Nang province, where My Son (religious center), Tra Kieu (political center) and Hoi An (port city) are all located on the Thu Bon river. Champa mandala must have, first of all, been the federation of such riverine polities, and such a situation appears to have reflected in *Chu-san chih* 諸蕃志, a Chinese book (famous with the title of English translation: *Chau Ju-kuo*) compiled in the early 13th century, which lists several of Champa, seemingly from the North to the ^{South} Tran Quoc Vuong, the leading figure of Champa studies in Vietnam, listed ten such riverine polities after his own archaeological surveys (Tran Quoc Vuong 1995), though he has not studied on the Central Highlands, where also can we find many religious sites and at least one walled center at Quay Kinh (in Ayunpa district, Gia Lai province).

4) The framework of Indianization results in overlooking the close relation between Champa and China, which the development of the trade routes from Canton and Fukien via Champa coast to the strait of Malacca guaranteed. The Buddhist art of Dong Duong (late 9th century) includes many Chinese-style sculptures (Boisselier 1963). Along with Muslim merchants, Chinese merchants also extended their network to Champa, which helped many Chinese took refuge in Champa when Mongol eliminated the Southern Sung.

The memories of Champa remain everywhere in Malay-Indonesian world, concerning the Islamization of Java, for example. There appear some confusing figures such as Raden Patah, the founder of the first muslim kingdom of Demak. In one tradition, he was married to a daughter of Raden Bonang (one of *wali songo*, or nine muslim saints who introduced Islam to Java), the latter's father having come from Champa. In another tradition, however, his mother was a Chinese queen 'who had come from Champa'. This suggests that Champa was 'a gate of Chinese world' for Malay-Indonesian people, while it was 'a gate of Indianized world' for the Philippines and Vietnam⁶.

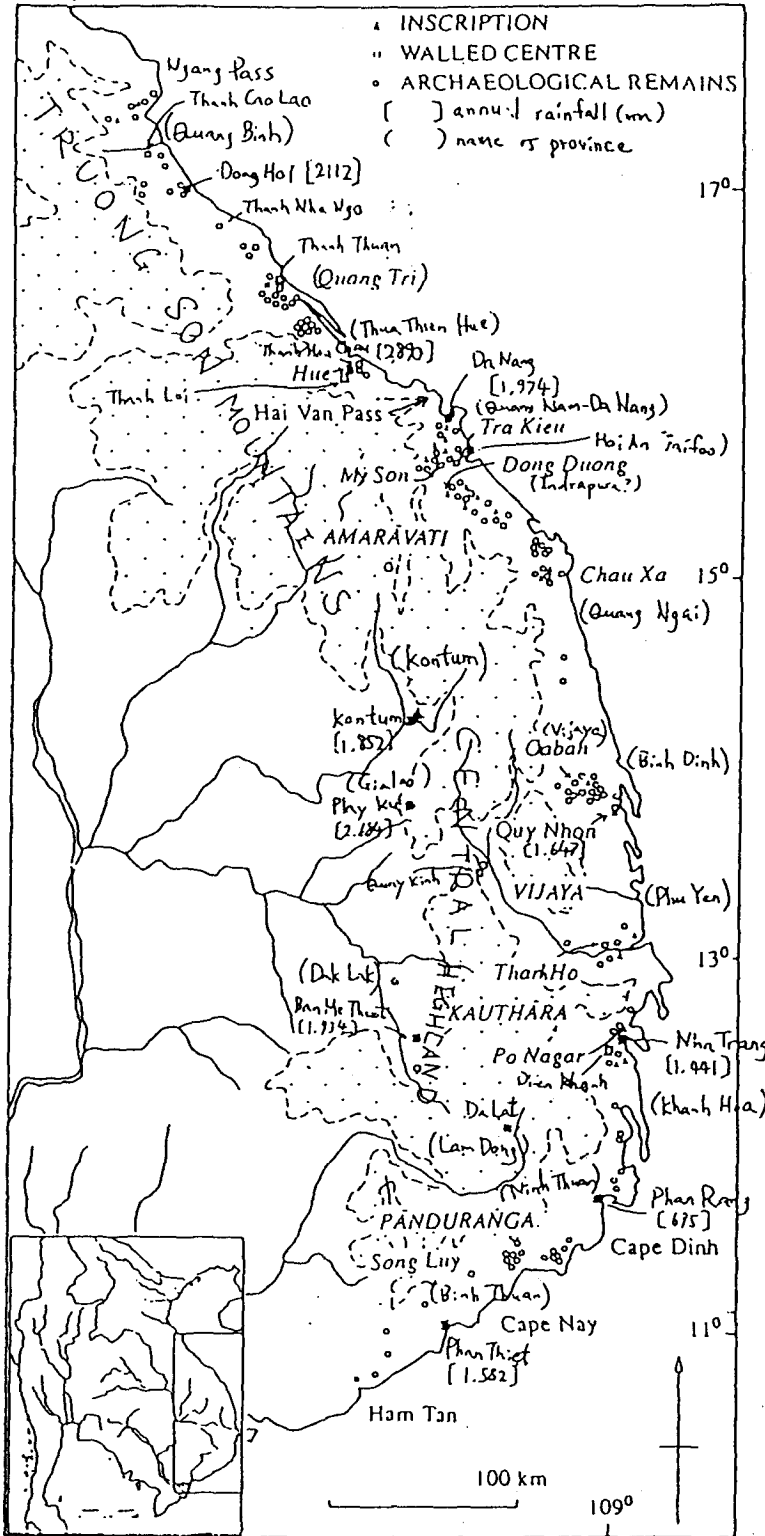
There remain many problems and topics to study Champa. ~~My~~ Cham society in Ninh Thuan-Binh Thuan area (Pāṇḍuraṅga) with more than 60,000 population, for instance, has already attracted historians and ethnologists, linguists, specialists of culture and literature... but little attention has been paid about the ecological side of the society. I think that Champa is now requiring at least one historian, one ethnologist, one archaeologist and one specialist of agricultural science to devote themselves. And it indeed deserves to be done.

⁶ Scholars of Vietnamese history and culture are now interested in the influence of Champa culture on the culture of Northern Vietnam and the process of Vietnamization of Champa culture and Cham people in the Central. For example, see Nguyen The Anh (1995)

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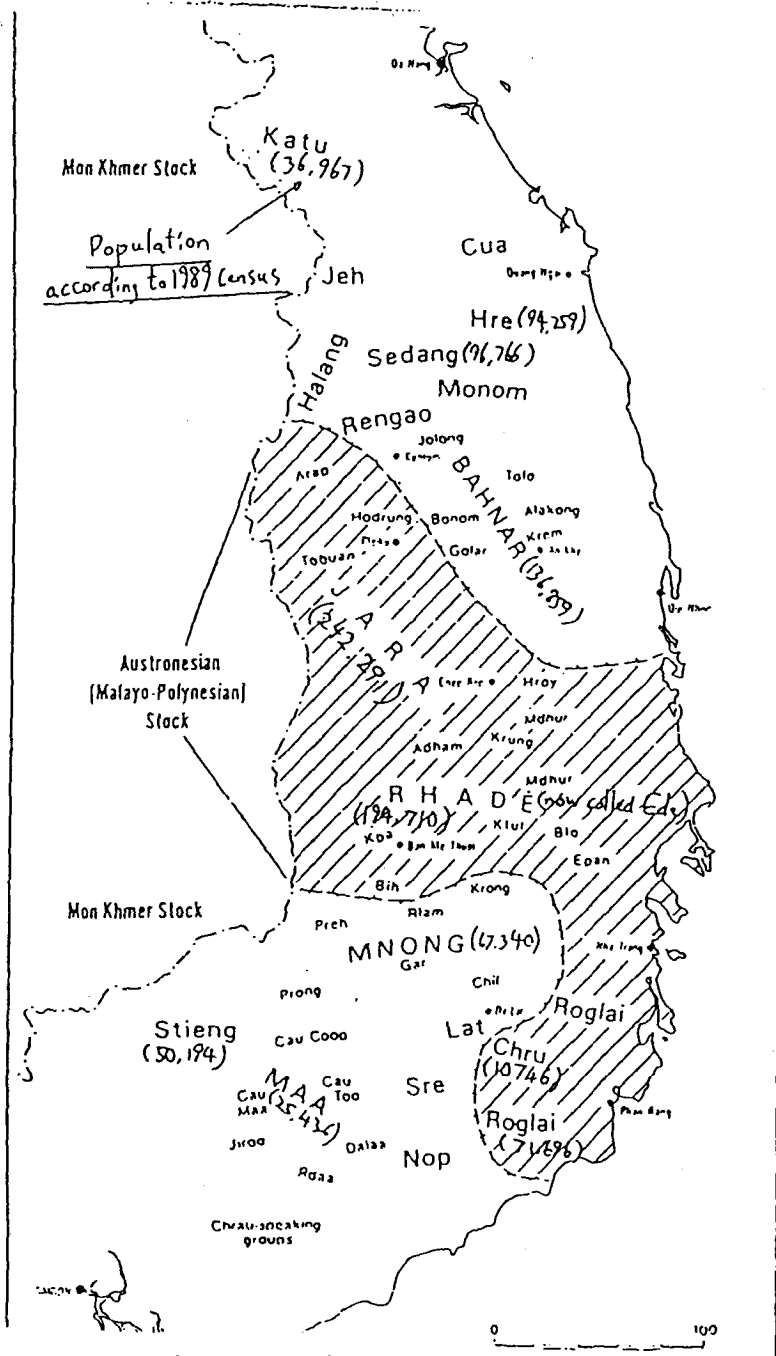
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Map 1.



5.20 Cham sites occupy most of the Vietnamese littoral south of Bac Bo. Stippled area: land above 300m. [adapted from Higham 1989: 299]

Map 2.



(adapted from Hickey 1982: 459).