

The Rise of Dvārāvati in Ancient Thailand: Some Observations

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Abstract:

In the early centuries of the Common Era, some part of present Thailand was subject to the kingdom of Funan, which held the power in Mainland South East Asia. After the fall of the Funan, Dvārāvati emerged as a powerful state in the Mainland South East Asia. Xuangzang refers it as '*To-lo-po-ti*'. Dvārāvati flourished until the tenth century C.E. The cultural relations between India and Dvārāvati in Thailand, in particular, has been evidenced by the representation of the material cultures with Indian style and content, which was embedded in inscriptions, sculptures, architecture, etc. In the case of cross-cultural/transcultural scenario like Dvārāvati and India.

Keywords: Dvārāvati, Thailand, Buddhism, Xuangxang, South East Asia

Introduction:

“Dvārāvati” has been referred to in I-Tsing and Zuan Zang’s travelogues as *To-lo-po-ti*. It has been located between *Srikasetra* (Myanmar) in the west and *Isānapura* (Cambodia) in the east. Dvārāvati was abbreviated from the word ‘*Sri Dvārāvati svarapunya*’ written in Pallava script and Sanskrit language which means the meritorious deeds of the lord of Dvārāvati. It is inscribed on the silver coins found in some cities in the central region of Thailand such as the ancient city of Nakhon Pathom in Nakhon Pathom province, U Thong in Suphan Buri province, Khu Bua in Ratchaburi province, Khu Mueang in Sing Buri province, Phromthin in Lop Buri province, Dong Khon and U-Tapao in Chainat Province.

The geography of Dvaravati covers the Central Plain of Thailand, the Khorat plateau and peninsular Thailand. Lower Central Plain of Thailand, until the early Dvaravati dated the 6th-7th century CE, was a palaeo-gulf,¹ the northernmost shoreline of the Gulf of Thailand was in Ang Thong province and east-west from Chachoengsao to Nakhon Pathom.² The Lower Central Plain of Thailand also called the “Lower Chao Phraya Basin”³ is the most fertile area with the siltation from the confluence of the Ping, Wang, Yom and Nan rivers which form Chao Phraya river at Nakhon Sawan province.⁴ The four rivers which empty into the Gulf of Thailand are the Chao Phraya from the north, the Mae Klong and the Tha Chine from the west, and the Bang Pakong from the east⁵ The Peninsular Thailand is located between Andaman Sea of the Indian Ocean to the west and the Gulf of Thailand to the east. The western coast is mainly limestone, which has been eroded into many steep hills. The main characteristic of the peninsular is the number of mountain chains ranging from the north to the south.

Background of emergence of Dvārāvati:

The emergence of Dvārāvati state in central Thailand during the 6th-7th century C.E. is the culmination of both the internal and external factors. The internal factor is the development of neighbouring states in the region such as Champa in Vietnam, Funan, Chenla in Cambodia, and Sri Kshetra in Myanmar. These are likely to be the main driving forces for the convergence in the central Chao Phraya to form the Dvārāvati State.

The external factor for the emergence of Dvārāvati was the ‘Second Golden Age’ of the sea trade. After the Roman-China trade in the early Christian Era, due to the re-opening of the Silk Route during the 7th century C.E.¹ followed by the ‘Perfume Route’, the commerce between China and the Middle East along the South-East coast around the 8th-9th century C.E.² flourished and brought prosperity to Thailand. The policy to promote maritime trade with the Pallava Dynasty of India in about the 6th-7th-century C.E. catalyzed the Second Golden Age during Dvārāvati period.

Some historians believe that the major factor behind the rise of Dvārāvati state was the availability of metals in the region which was instrumental not only for the growth of agriculture but it is also essential for the rise of empire.

The central, western and southern regions of present Thailand have abundance of mineral resources, which have been in high demand since about the late 2nd millennium BC (Bronze Age), such as copper and tin. Copper mining in Khao Wong Prachan Valley in Khok Samrong District and Mueang District,

Lopburi and copper ore at Khao Thap Kwai in Khok Samrong District Lopburi Province, Khao Phukha, Khao Phra Ngam, Khao Pha Daeng, Khao Phrabat Noi in Muang District, evidence of copper smelting was found at the Non-Pa Wai in Khok Samrong District and the Ninkhamhaeng Reservoir. In addition, Khao Thap Kwai in Khok Samrong District was also an iron smelted site since prehistoric times.

Wat Phra Ngam inscription inscribed with Pallava script of the 5th and the 6th centuries C.E. the Sanskrit language was praising the King for his winning the battle bringing wealth and prosperity to the family and his homeland which also mentioned the cities of Timirinka, Hastinapur, and Dvārāvati. This inscription is significant evidence representing that Dvārāvati is aware of the war as well. Since their neighbours such as Champa, Funan and Chenla are constantly fighting.

According to Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett's definition the qualification of the Urbanism that "the Intra-regional trade, finance, agriculture, a diversified production base, a currency system, the idea of surplus, none of these could be present without urbanization". Moreover that the international trade in Dvārāvati is proved with the amulet or stamp as the clay seal depicting Indian god and goddess such as *Gajalakshmi* and *Ganesha*, *Shiva*, *Sri-Lakshmi*, god's vehicle and weapons such as trident, lion, hump bull, and *garuda*. U-Thong in Suphanburi Province, Sub-Champa and Phromthin in Lopburi Province, Chansen in Nakornsawan Province are the hub of these clay seals. These urban cities were probably port cities or the trade centre that controlled the imported goods such as tin and copper from the Tanaosri Mountains and Wong Phrachan Mountains, as tin is in great demand in India due to the shortage there.

The urban centres of Dvārāvati emerged along the trade routes, transportation hub and mineral-rich areas which were strategically located supporting the emergence of urban settlement. The extraordinary and invaluable evidence and the unique works of art such as the religious monuments, Buddha sculptures, Hindu idols, *Dharmacakras* are represented the superior as found in these follows cities:

Nakhon Pathom:

Ancient Nakhon Pathom is situated near the ancient coast; The inscription recently found at Wat Phra Ngam, Nakhon Pathom Province, firstly praises the talented King and mentions the name of Dvārāvati. The huge numbers of the high-value art and unique style of Dharmacakra and the master pieces of Buddha sculptures also witness in National museums at Nakhon Pathom and Bangkok. Besides that the number of outstanding Dvārāvati monuments such as Wat Phra men, Phra Phrathon, Chunla Phrathon and Wat Phra Ngam are in Nakhon Pathom.

Lop Buri:

Lop Buri in central Thailand is related to the area's economic base, such as Khao Wong Prachan Valley, the largest mining and copper smelting site in Southeast Asia since about the late 2nd millennium BC (Bronze Age) till the late 1st millennium BC (Iron Age). Khao Wong Prachan Valley was also an important iron mine from the late Metal Age - Dvārāvati period (late 3rd millennium BC to the 6th century CE). The iron tools had been found from Non Pa Wai, Nil Kham Haeng, Non-Mak La, Tha Kae, which were located around the Khao Wong Prachan Valley. Ban Di Lung in Lopburi Province was the nearest iron production site.

U-thong:

U-Thong, in Suphanburi province, is also considered as an important strategic link with tin mine from the Tanaosri Mountains area.

Robert S. Vicks has proposed to use the Silver coin, which is inscribed with the word "*Sri Dvārāvati svarapunya*" in determining the administrative boundaries of Dvārāvati. Due to that reason, Vicks cut off Lop Buri from the boundaries of Dvārāvati because the silver coin with the inscription "Lawpur" found in U-Thong.⁶ Mudar argued that U-Thong was smaller than other Dvārāvati urban sites.

Dvārāvati cities:

Dvārāvati cities, which were assumed to be the centers or important sea ports, were located at the junction for all the transport; U-Thong, Suphanburi province and Ancient city of Nakhon Pathom, Nakhon Pathom province in Ta Chin river, Kuboa, Rachburi province in Mae Klong river, Srimahosot, Prachin province in Bang Pakong river, and Sritep, Petchabun province in Pa Sak river. These four main rivers debouch into the Gulf of Thailand. Besides is Muang Bon, Nakornsawan province, located near the joining of the Tha Chin and Chao Praya rivers.

As these cities as the junction of the community and transport as above mentioned, many cities are noticeable by the hill as Kokmaidaen hill as the landmark of Muang Bon, Khao Thamor Rat of Si Thep and KhaoThamtheiy of U-Thong. Therefore, it is evident that the rise of state of Dvārāvati in the Mainland South East Asia amid powers such as Myanmar and Cambodia is the collective result of various strategic factors which were identified and utilized prudently by the ancient thai people resulting in the emergence of the mighty state of Dvārāvati.

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