

1 *Dynamics of human diversity in mainland Southeast Asia: Introduction*

N. J. ENFIELD

1 Introduction

This book explores human diversity and its dynamic causes and consequences with reference to the mainland Southeast Asia (MSEA) region during the Holocene (the last 10,000 years). Global history combined with a unique human capacity for environmental adaptation, ethnic distinction, and cumulative culture has given rise to the rich diversity of cultures and languages that we now observe worldwide. Mainland Southeast Asia is a good case study, with greater linguistic, genetic and cultural diversity than almost anywhere else outside Africa. Here we ask: What is the nature of this diversity? How has it come about?

MSEA—that is, the present day location of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and peninsular Malaysia, along with bordering areas of Burma and China—has long been recognized as having a special degree of cultural and social diversity. It has been both a buffer region and a crossroads between the major modern historical areas of South Asia, China, and the Pacific. For a range of reasons explored in this book, the human population of MSEA shows a remarkable kind of socio-cultural diversity and historical dynamicity in world terms. The book examines the nature of this diversity and its dynamic modes of development, as a case study for all scholars interested in global human diversity today.

Human diversity is a product of dynamic processes of dispersal, interaction, and change in the history of our species. The social, environmental, and cultural causes of diversity are measured by all the tools of anthropology—drawing from archaeology, human biology, linguistics, and ethnography—making the study of human diversity a truly interdisciplinary affair. Recent advances in the different disciplines are helping to define the mechanisms of human history in parts of the world including Europe, the Pacific, and more recently East Asia and areas of Africa and the Americas. While MSEA itself has been less studied than other areas, the last ten years have seen exciting and significant developments, particularly in the rapidly developing fields of archeology (including bioarchaeology), human genetics, and linguistics (see Glover & Bellwood 2004; Sagart et al 2005, Oxenham & Tayles 2006). The key challenge now is to continue bridging the gaps in our understanding of both empirical and theoretical advances **across** anthropological disciplines.

N. J. Enfield, editor.

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MSEA is an excellent focus as a microcosm for universal questions of human diversity and its dynamics because of (a) the nature and degree of its diversity, characterized by the presence of at least five distinct major ethnolinguistic families represented in hundreds of different ethnic groups within a relatively small geographical region, (b) the fact that MSEA is relatively understudied in comparison to neighbouring Island Southeast Asia, and (c) new data and methods that have arisen in each of the anthropological disciplines, enabling more nuanced interpretations.

The chapters of this book are, in part, based on presentations that were given at a closed workshop held in Siem Reap in 2009. This workshop was conceived and organized by the editor together with Joyce C. White (U. Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology), with funding support from a Wenner-Gren Foundation workshop grant awarded to Enfield and White, as well as funding from the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen. A number of participants contributed with funding from their universities and affiliated institutes. The workshop proposal written by Enfield and White formulated a core set of research questions on the dynamics of human diversity in MSEA. With these questions as a frame for what we envisioned for the workshop, contributions were invited from ideal contributors. After the workshop, several further contributions were invited for the book, to complement those that had been aired at the workshop. The resulting roster of contributors to this book are experts from all fields of anthropology, whose empirical and theoretical work has contributed significantly to key areas of understanding the dynamics of diversity in this well-defined geographical and historical region.

2 Questions posed

There are two overarching types of question that have shaped the chapters presented here. First, there are questions about the empirical facts and analyses of MSEA human diversity: What is the nature of human diversity in MSEA? How did it come to be this way? What are the dynamic aspects of this diversity? Second, there are questions concerning the relationships among respective theoretical and empirical approaches to answering these first questions: To what extent do different data and assumptions determine the way we think about the emergence of human diversity in MSEA? How can we best communicate our empirical and theoretical concerns across the sub-disciplines?

Following are the substantive sub-questions that the workshop organizers circulated by way of preparation for the drafting of chapters. While this book does not answer, or even directly address, all of these questions, they are listed here for two reasons. The first reason is to contextualize the chapters and point to connections between them. The second is that we want to register these questions as being among those most important for ongoing interdisciplinary research in this field, where so much work remains to be done.

State(s) of the art(s): For each branch and sub-branch of anthropology concerned with the dynamics of human diversity in MSEA, what is the current state of the art? What is well established in each field, and what remains unknown? What is commonly agreed and what remains controversial? What are the hot topics, and why these? What are the key puzzles? Where are the current gaps in research?

Peopling (the process by which people of a social group move into a region they previously did not inhabit): What evidence do we find in the different disciplines for peopling activities? Who moved, to where, when, and from where? Can disciplinary disagreements of fact and interpretation be resolved? A special concern of the Siem Reap

workshop was to critically examine a prevalent macro-scale theory among archaeologists that posits agricultural dispersal as the prime mover for bringing mongoloid populations and Austroasiatic languages to MSEA in the late third millennium B.C. Does the latest evidence in archaeology, genetics, palaeodemography, osteology, linguistics, demography, ethnography, and the palaeoenvironment support this scenario? If not, what alternatives are indicated for the relationships among dispersal of populations, languages, and agricultural technologies, and what evidence is needed in future research to resolve discrepancies among the subdisciplines?

Genetics: There are clear genetic parallels for Holocene agriculturally-associated north-south cultural flow within MSEA, providing some possible explanation for the presence of Austroasiatic languages among culturally diverse aboriginal populations far south in the Malay Peninsula. However, these are relatively minor and most of the genetic landscape of MSEA and Malaya (and ISEA) was in place well before the Holocene, thus challenging for a conventional model of agricultural Holocene replacement in MSEA from South China.

Language: What is the state of the art of the chronology for processes of development, convergence, and differentiation of language families in MSEA? This volume pays special attention to Austroasiatic language family, since languages of this family had the earliest presence of languages currently spoken in the area. Can current chronologies be correlated with archaeological evidence? MSEA shows the highest degree of structural convergence of languages in the world (and hence lower diversity in one sense)—what is the cause? Current developments in the methodology of analysing historical-comparative language data might affect our interpretation of the linguistic facts of MSEA, as should the flood of new descriptive data. Further questions will require new approaches: Do new theories of language contact force us to change our way of thinking about the MSEA language situation? Are there ways to determine whether past contact situations might have involved stable bilingualism? Are there sensible ways to speak of linguistic processes reaching back more than 5000 years in time? Linguists are increasingly looking to combine methodologies, including well-established approaches to historical-comparative linguistics and new applications of quantitative methods developed in biology.

Social structure: What do we know about comparative social structure in MSEA? Is there the same degree of structural convergence in social structure as found in linguistic structure? To what degree do patterns of social organisation such as kinship and marriage in MSEA resist ‘horizontal’ transmission (that is, borrowing through contact between social groups)? Different cultural mechanisms must have influenced the maintenance of bio-cultural diversity versus homogenisation and integration in MSEA. What role has been played by marriage rules, demography, ecological/subsistence adaptation, material culture? And what can be said about the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations in a pre-nationalist MSEA? This last question is particularly important since most of the area’s diversification has taken place prior to the emergence of states, and most of the relevant data from other disciplines (archaeology most obviously) relates to time periods well before nationalism.

Dynamics of micro-macro relations: Can an understanding of micro-scale processes (for example, marriage patterns, epidemiology, trade, ritual) be successfully incorporated into larger scale discussions of regional diversity? Dynamics at the scale of small population demography and disease patterns, ritual relations, sub group identity formation, and regional agricultural responses to environmental risk likely underlay larger scale patterns

such as gene flow and population movements. What evidence among the subdisciplines exists for smaller scale processes and their impact on larger scale outcomes? What osteological and archaeological evidence exists for small group identities, settlement and breeding population stability and/or flexibility? How might language formation be related to population-formation processes?

Interdisciplinarity: To what extent are the interdisciplinary findings compatible? New empirical findings (for example from new analyses of skeletal remains, genetic data, or new language data) may challenge current wisdom, and they may help us to decide among competing hypotheses. What puzzles arise from incompatibilities? What theoretical syntheses can arise? Empirical and theoretical research on the dynamics of human diversity in MSEA in the coming years will require an ongoing process of scholarly investigation and dialogue.

3 Organisation of the book

Each of the book's four parts contains a set of chapters which approach the above questions in related ways, either in terms of a common 'granularity' of perspective (Part I), a common focus on certain kinds of data and methodology (Parts II and IV), or a common focus on a particular empirical domain as a case study for many of the above questions (Parts II-IV). Part I offers overviews of human diversity in MSEA from complementary points of view across the range of disciplines represented in the book. Part II features recent empirical and analytic advances in archaeology, with some attention to their broader disciplinary consequences, and with a special emphasis on bioarchaeology. Part III focuses on human diversity by tackling a critical case study of local diversity within one broad ethnolinguistic group, namely the Aslian speakers of peninsular Malaysia (see also Chapter 5). The three chapters each delve deeply into new areas of empirical and theoretical work. Part IV deals with the problem of origins and dispersal of human groups, again by taking a common focus on a critical case study, though with notably different views of what happened and how. Each of the four chapters assesses the origins and diversification of the Austroasiatic language family.

4 Envoi

It is our sincere hope that this book will complement other edited volumes of similar orientation that have appeared over the last ten years, books that are oriented more broadly toward East Asia and Island Southeast Asia, mostly with a focus on Austronesian groups (see Jin et al 2001, Glover and Bellwood 2004, Sagart et al 2005, Sanchez-Mazas et al 2008). Additionally, they cover a temporal span going back into the late Pleistocene, while here we are mostly constrained to the Holocene. Another volume focuses on latest developments in one research sub-discipline—bioarchaeology—in the region (Oxenham and Tayles 2006). Here we pay special attention to Austroasiatic groups, with many contributors sharing a special interest in the 'nonstate' peoples of the uplands of MSEA (Scott 2009). While much previous attention has been paid to the origins and diversification of Tai and Austronesian groups, the earlier presence of Austroasiatic groups, descendants of whom are now scattered through the uplands of the MSEA area (excepting those who speak the national languages of Vietnam and Cambodia), has been presupposed but is in need of a good deal more discussion. The better we understand these

earlier groups and their descendants, the better we may understand the dynamics of human diversity in MSEA.

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