

ARCHAEOLOGY, NATIONALISM AND POLITICS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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“Our experience of the present very largely depends on our knowledge of the past.” (Connerton 1989: 2)

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I want to address various topics related to this general theme of ‘Archaeology, Nationalism and Politics in Southeast Asia’. At its most basic level, the question I want to address is, ‘what is the use of Archaeology’. Is it just a pleasant pastime for a social class with money to spend and time to fill in – an academic equivalent of golf? Or does it serve some social purpose of value to communities and nations throughout the world at many levels of economic and social development?

We might think it does, given the proliferation of museums, and courses in archaeology and related fields such as heritage management and cultural resources management and when in Manila I was impressed by the number of museums there, many new or newly refurbished. But I wonder if many of the people working in these and teaching the thousands of courses throughout the world often stop to wonder what they are doing. What good does it serve beyond providing them with jobs? I was teaching prehistoric archaeology for nearly 30 years in London University and only came to question its purpose after quite a number of years.

The great historian Eric Hobsbawm (1994: 3) has argued that “the destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one’s contemporary experience to that of

earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth century. Most young men and women at century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in."

OUR RELATION TO THE PAST

In order to cope with this dilemma all modern nations attempt to create discourses with the past in order to legitimize or strengthen their position. This is especially true for the post-colonial states of Africa and Asia which, in most cases do not correspond to 'natural' nations based on a common language, coherent cultural traditions, shared ethnicity or long and centralized dynastic rule. The borders, indeed the very existence of the great majority of nation states in the present world were created as a result of competing spheres of influence of the European and American colonial powers in the 19th century. This is true even for Thailand, never a European colony but whose present borders were forced on to a modernizing monarchy by France and Britain at the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, the concept of delineated borders within which a single political authority claims unique authority is, in Southeast Asia as in many other areas, a product of the 19th century colonial experience.

Archaeology, with history plays a role in developing these discourses with the past, however 'writing history' (read archaeology) in modern Southeast Asian countries is always problematic since it is yoked to the political demands of the present.

In order to see how this came about I want to look back a little at the beginnings of archaeology which – with a few exceptions such as Classical Roman, Chinese and 18th century Japanese antiquarianism – developed first in Europe.

THE EUROPEAN INVENTION OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology is the systematic investigation of our past through studies of the material by-products of behaviour: abandoned settlements, burials, and all objects, whether of great artistic value or not, tools and weapons, manufacturing debris, food remains and

even faeces, which survive from the past, usually buried in the ground. The development of archaeological methods for discovering new facts about the past is very much the product of the European Enlightenment and the growth of the natural and social sciences in the 19th century.

Modern archaeology has its roots in antiquarianism, in particular the discovery between the 15th and 17th centuries of the roots of European culture in the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. This awareness permeated the middle and upper classes of Europe, and considerable knowledge of the classical past was expected of the educated and politically powerful families of Europe, whose houses and gardens were filled with statuary and decorative designs modeled on those of antiquity. Political power depended on classical allegories for its expression and the antiquary played his part in establishing the rules of the game.

Another factor in the growth of archaeology came with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century with its emphasis on progress and reason for bettering the human condition. Renaissance scholars were unable to resolve the question of whether the cultures of antiquity were superior to their own. The philosophers of the Enlightenment had no doubt and proposed many hypothetical schemes which traced human progress from savagery to civilization – the ancestors of the programmatic frameworks of Morgan and Engels which later entered Marxist archaeology. In developing these schemes the eighteenth century savants drew heavily on the accounts of ‘primitive societies’ gathered by travelers and explorers in the Americas, Africa and Asia. By the later nineteenth century this purely intellectual interest in cultural evolution had absorbed Darwinist concepts of biological evolution, and was expressed in aggressive social evolutionary terms by writers such as Herbert Spencer, who saw progress resulting from ‘the overrunning of the less powerful and less adapted by the more powerful and more adapted’ Greene (1963: 85). This provided a comforting philosophy for the (largely European) nations which were then overrunning much of the world.

It is no coincidence that the nineteenth century also saw the spread of nationalist and racist ideas among European intellectuals, who were increasingly inclined to view cultural differences between ethnic groups as being based in their biological inheritance. First explicitly formulated by the Comte de Gobineau (1853-55), the Darwinian view of cultural evolution underlay the whole structure of, for example, John Lubbock’s

enormously influential *Prehistoric Times*. Lubbock (1865) argued that technologically less advanced peoples were morally and intellectually inferior to civilized ones, and that within European society the criminally inclined and lower classes were biologically inferior to the middle and propertied classes. Thus biology was thought to explain both inequalities in Western societies, and the perceived superiority of European societies over all others Trigger (1989).

This geographical expansion of European knowledge and power brought the realization that the Enlightenment concept of an orderly progress towards civilization could not be reconciled with the abundant evidence brought back to Europe of societies coexisting at every 'stage of development'; naked hunters and primitive cultivators of the tropical forests, such as the 'tribal peoples' of India or the Hill Tribes of Thailand and Burma, the '*Montagnards*' of Laos and Viet Nam, all living in close proximity to sophisticated urban civilizations and rooted in one or the other of the great religious traditions of Asia. To explain this anomaly, distinctions were made between progressive (usually Western) societies and static Asian, African and American ones, and between 'outward-looking' coastal peoples and those of the mountainous and forested interiors of continents with their 'limited intellectual horizons'. Social, biological and geographical determinisms of this sort proved attractive to many European writers. These were particularly strong in Germany, and provide a major theme in, for instance, Gustav Klemm's *Universal Culture History* (1843), and in the writings of Friedrich Ratzel (1894-95), who provided one of the most explicit formulations of the role of diffusion and migration in creating the patterns of cultural plurality which faced the early ethnographers. Also influential at this time were the culture-morphological ideas of Leo Frobenius, who argued that cultures were like living organisms and had stages of childhood, maturity and senility (Kriel 1973). The presence of the monuments of Indianized Southeast Asia such as Borobudur, Prambanan and Angkor, abandoned or in decay at the time of colonial settlement, confirmed European prejudices that Southeast Asian civilization had declined from a period of greatness and needed revitalization by the introduction of European culture and technology.

COLONIALIST ARCHAEOLOGY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

It can, I think, be accepted that the whole concept of prehistory was a European one and its development within Europe was profoundly influenced by the social, political, and commercial links between Europe and the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In order to understand the way European prehistory has influenced, and been influenced by, the experience of investigation in non-Western countries, Trigger's (1984) distinction between what he calls 'modes of colonialist, imperialist and nationalist archaeology' provides a useful framework for this exercise. See also Bray and Glover (1988); Glover (1986, 1993 and 1999) for an examination of these concepts for the archaeology of, respectively, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

In the colonial territories of Southeast Asia ruled by France, Britain and the Netherlands, some investigation of prehistoric remains started in the late nineteenth century, often as a sideline interest of colonial administrators, surveyors and geologists. People such as G. W. Earl in Malaya; François Garnier, Ludovic Jammes and Henri Mansuy in Cambodia and Vietnam; L. Wray and I. H. N. Evans in Malaya; Fritz Noetling in Burma; and the Sarasin cousins in Sulawesi; they all observed, and occasionally excavated, in caves and shell middens, despite the fact that the great monuments of the classical Indianized kingdoms attracted most attention Higham (1989).

Professor Bruce Trigger characterized colonialist archaeology (Figures 1-2) as a distinct mode of archaeological thought (ibid. 360-3). During the colonial period, archaeologists and ethnologists regarded the tribal cultures of Africa, Asia and the Americas as a living museum of the past which could help explicate different stages in the development of European society. The first generation of prehistorians working in Southeast Asia all adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, this dominant mode of thought as well as the European archaeological procedures of the early twentieth century. These involved the concentration on material form and typology for the recognition of culture groups and culture areas, and an explanation of all changes in the archaeological record as the result of the diffusion of techniques or the migration of peoples from one culture area to another. This may have satisfied contemporary European perceptions of the structure of social processes, but it meant little to the people of Southeast Asia. The paradigm, almost universally held in the heyday of European colonial rule in Asia and Africa, that societies

do not change without external stimulation, played a part, if a minor one, in giving intellectual support to colonialism. It denigrated indigenous cultures, characterized them as uninventive and static, and put them on a level with ‘primitive’ phases of European development thus helping to justify the ‘civilizing mission’ of Europe in bringing ‘backward peoples’ up to the cultural level of the 20th century.

In an earlier article, Bray and Glover (1988), I examined the role of foreign archaeologists in developing a prehistory specifically for Thailand, and more generally for Southeast Asia, in the context of generalized notions of ‘cultural imperialism’, and the influences of colonial rule and Western archaeology in developing countries. The main question posed was this: should the research of Western archaeologists working in Southeast Asia be viewed as the legitimate application of an objective and universally valid scientific method of understanding the past? Or is it no more than a form of cultural imperialism, part of the intellectual apparatus whereby predatory Western capitalist states manipulate and control other people’s knowledge of their own past (Gero and Root 1990)? This might seem to be an extreme position to take, but it is an argument being put forward in cultural situations as different as Aboriginal Australia, Black Africa, Hispanic America, and by some Amerindian groups in the United States (Hamil 1987).

My own concern with these problems comes from my involvement in prehistoric research in Southeast Asia over the past 35 years, an appreciation of the very different value given to archaeology by both national governments and educated people, and the intensity of archaeological research in these countries: Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Burma. Arising out of this is the question of whether we could ever expect to see the emergence of a single coherent discipline of archaeology (in the sense that physics, chemistry and geology are single disciplines), which could be applied to the material remains of man throughout the world. I hope to return to this question later in the paper. Before this, however, I will look at some of the relevant aspects of the development of prehistoric archaeology in, respectively Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam – the three countries in Southeast Asia where I have been actively involved in research.

Indonesia

In 1980 at a conference in Bern devoted to the cultural links between Europe and Indonesia I argued (Glover 1986) that archaeology, and especially prehistoric archaeology, was an alien European concept and practice introduced into Indonesia in the days of Dutch colonial hegemony and refurbished in a period of European and American intellectual dominance in the mid-20th century. I argued then that Indonesian prehistory as reflected, for example, in the books of H. R. van Heekeren (1957, 1958 & 1972) or in the most recent regional prehistory by Peter Bellwood (1997), was an abstract mental construct, satisfying certain concerns of Western bourgeois society, but of no significance to more than a handful of Indonesians. Following from this was the implied conclusion that research into prehistory by the few Indonesians undertaking it was likely to be a derivative and sterile occupation with no roots in Indonesian culture, satisfying none of the desires many Indonesians have, to know more about the past of their own societies. This rather pessimistic appreciation of the state of prehistoric archaeology in Indonesia has not been overthrown by what I have read, or seen of research there, over the past few years. I argued that European contributions to the prehistory of Indonesia, though many in quantity, have not been very significant. Although we have constructed some sort of 'Prehistory for Indonesia' it is for external consumption only and of little relevance to Indonesian interests in their own past. I am still uncertain as to whether this pessimistic and negative view of the state of Indonesian prehistory is recognized and accepted by local researchers. In trying to account for this, several factors seemed significant.

The pioneers of Indonesian prehistory were the Swiss naturalists and ethnographers Fritz and Paul Sarasin and Alfred Bühler, a number of Dutch scholars, especially the Indologist, P. V. van Stein Callenfels; a former airline pilot A. N. J. van der Hoop; and a former tobacco planter, H. R. van Heekeren. The intellectual environment of early 20th century continental Europe profoundly influenced the direction of these early studies. This first generation of prehistorians working in Indonesia all adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, the dominant mode of archaeological procedure of the early 20th century as set earlier. Even today European researchers have carried out a very large part of the investigations into Indonesia's prehistoric past. Peter Bellwood (1997) has presented the latest and most authoritative interpretation of Indo-Malaysian prehistory, a British-born, Cambridge-trained prehistorian now working from Australia. Nothing comparable has yet been produced within Indonesia. This intellectual and material contribution of Europe, creating, in effect, an Indonesian prehistory, was the main theme of that earlier lecture.

After a long hiatus systematic research into Indonesian prehistory by foreign archaeologists started again with my own research in East (then Portuguese) Timor in 1966-67 (Glover 1986) and the 1969 Australian-Indonesian Expedition to Sulawesi (Mulvaney and Soejono 1970). Research by Indonesian archaeologists had been kept going through R. P. Soejono's surveys and investigation of stone cist burials in Bali (Soejono 1969), but it was not until the excavations at Gilimanuk in West Bali from 1963 (Soejono 1977) that research by Indonesians into their own prehistory gained some independent momentum.

The work, of the foreign archaeologists at least, was now undertaken with a rather different research mentality. In place of the colonialist view that all change comes through diffusion or migration from outside, a neo-evolutionary adaptive model was generally followed, in which all societies were seen as dynamic and changing over time, seeking to manipulate natural environmental systems in such a way as to maximize the rate of energy flow into culturally preferred directions. A sort of uniformitarianism of social processes was accepted, but the forms and structures of society were seen as being transformed over time by the interaction between accumulating knowledge and the forms of organization and technology specific to particular places and times.

Trigger (1984:363-64) characterized this new approach as part of the 'Imperialist Archaeology mode,' particularly as influenced by the New Archaeology of the 1960s. By stressing internal change and adaptation it eliminated previous tendencies of colonialist archaeology which stigmatized native peoples by failing to recognize their independent creativity. Yet the new approach sought to use the archaeology of various parts of the world simply as data with which to establish generalizations about human behaviour. It denied the intrinsic value of national traditions or local cultures in much the same way as colonialist and evolutionary archaeology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a value in the 'primitive' cultures of Australia, Africa and the New World only to the extent that they helped Europeans to understand their own past.

Prehistory in Thailand: the beginnings, 1960s-1975

In Thailand, in contrast to the situation in the European-dominated territories of the region, an interest in prehistory was late in developing. Archaeology was, until the early 1960s, largely confined to art-historical studies of sculpture, temples, painting and fine

arts, and was mainly the prerogative of aristocratic, Western-educated Thais on the fringes of the royal clan (Higham 1989: 25-7). Structurally, archaeology is still almost exclusively taught and studied at the Fine Arts University (*Silpakorn*) or at the Government Department of Fine Arts. This slow start to prehistoric archaeology in Thailand can be explained by the fact that, alone of the Southeast Asian countries, the kingdom was never the colony of a Western power. Not having been subjected to alien rule with their political institutions overthrown, Thais could more easily than, say, Vietnamese or Indonesians, take their past for granted. Critical historiography, in Thailand, was not well developed, and the country was an agrarian, quasi-feudal state.

There were some casual observations on prehistoric sites and materials in Thailand by foreigners in the 1930s (Evans 1931; Sarasin 1933), and during his enforced residence in western Thailand from 1943-44 as a guest of the Japanese Army, the self-taught Dutch prehistorian H. R. van Heekeren who made the first significant contribution to the prehistory of Thailand through his observations of pebble choppers, which he had found in caves and along the banks of the Kwae Noi River (Heekeren 1947). However, it was not until the early 1960s that the systematic investigation of Thai prehistory was initiated by a series of joint field projects. Until about 1980 most sustained work in Thai prehistory was carried out by overseas researchers and was published in English, usually in international journals or monographs published overseas.

Most of the foreign archaeologists working in Thailand and elsewhere in Southeast Asia from the 1960s onwards, worked of course with a rather different research mentality than that of the colonial era. The one characterized by Trigger (1984:363-4) as 'imperialist archaeology' was particularly influenced by the American 'New Archaeology' of the 1960s. During the years Thailand underwent dramatic social and economic transformations the country became more urbanized, secondary and tertiary education was extended widely and, following the political upheavals in neighboring countries and some within Thailand itself, a new generation of Thais has emerged who require new explanations of their past. With relatively few historical sources, many Thais have been looking with enthusiasm to archaeology to provide them with this new understanding, but of course the questions they seek to answer from archaeology are not necessarily those favored by overseas archaeologists. In particular, as I understand it, Thai archaeologists show rather little interest in generalized explanations couched in terms of evolutionary processes, and not very much in comparative archaeology outside Thailand. If there is

one thing, which they are seeking to achieve at the moment, it is documentation and conservation of the wealth and variety of the material remains of man in Thailand over the past four or five thousand years. As in Indonesia, but in marked contrast to what is happening in Vietnam, most resources devoted to archaeology in Thailand go into the reconstruction of the great temples and ancient cities of the Khmer, Sukhothai and Ayutthaya phases of the Thai medieval period. This is archaeology in the service of both nationalism and business, for Thailand is a country where tourism is a major industry.

Prehistory in Thailand: the second stage, 1975-1990s

By about 1980, quite a number of those Thai archaeologists who had gained experience of Western-style archaeology through participation in foreign-led field programs, and who had studied in America, Europe and India, started to take the lead in pre- and protohistoric field research in Thailand. They were joined by Charles Higham of the University of Otago, surveying on the Khorat Plateau, excavating with Gorman at Ban Chiang, and later on his own account at Ban Na Di, Khok Phanom Di, Nong Nor, and at Ban Lum Khao, Non Muang Kao, and Noen U-Loke west of Phimai, with myself excavating at Ban Don Ta Phet in western Thailand, and Marielle Santoni and her colleagues at Obluang and other sites in the northwest. Quite a number of the 'pioneering' western researchers, such as Per Sørensen, Donn Bayard and Chet Gorman, continued their fieldwork, although usually at a reduced level. Gorman's work was cut short by illness and his premature death in 1981, aged only forty-three. In the 1980s these researchers were joined by Vincent Pigott, Anna Bennett and Vanessa Coote, specializing in archaeometallurgy, and the Italian team led by Roberto Ciarla from IsMEO, Rome, researching at Ban Tha Kae on the junction between pre- and protohistory in central Thailand.

By the late 1980s prehistoric archaeology in Thailand had more than made up for its late start and substantial achievements seemed to have been made. Sites such as Spirit Cave, Non Nok Tha and Ban Chiang were known internationally, as well as within Thailand, and regional, though often disputed, chronologies were emerging, especially in the northeast where most work has been done (Bayard 1984). The idea that Thailand was one of the places where an early and indigenous transition to settled village agriculture was made, had been aired – though not settled – by Gorman's work at Spirit Cave and other sites in Mae Hong Son province (Gorman 1970; Yen 1977). It was being strongly argued by some Western researchers that an early and independent tradition of bronze metallurgy

had developed in northeast Thailand in at least the third millennium (if not fourth) BC – one which owed little or nothing to parallel developments in North China and Western Asia (Solheim 1968; Gorman 1976; Bayard 1979).

Only in Vietnam, of all the Southeast Asian countries, had more prehistoric sites been surveyed, excavated and written about than in Thailand, although very little of this was known to Western (or to other Southeast Asian) archaeologists at the time because of difficulties in obtaining and reading Vietnamese publications. In Higham's (1989) synthesis of (primarily) the prehistory of mainland Southeast Asia, work in Thailand had the dominant place, and this is reflected in the teaching on Southeast Asian prehistory in courses in London, Canberra, Otago and, probably, in several university departments in the United States.

In view of what I have said above we might think that Western involvement in the prehistory of Thailand has been an unqualified success. From a position of almost total ignorance in 1960, we are at a state where reasonably accurate textbooks can be written and attractive and informative museum displays on Thai prehistory mounted (e.g. White 1982). Numerous Thai students have received undergraduate and postgraduate training (the latter mostly overseas), and they are now, within a single generation, setting the direction and pace of field research, while more senior university and Fine Arts Department staff have been publishing numerous well-illustrated books and articles in Thai for a public that seems to have a lively and increasingly well-informed interest in its past. Despite this there are, I believe, grounds for unease concerning the development of prehistoric archaeology in Thailand, and the relationship between Western and Thai archaeologists. To understand this we need to consider Trigger's 'third mode' of archaeology.

NATIONALIST ARCHAEOLOGY

In some newly independent countries, and where native peoples appear to be being denied the right to their cultural identity, forms of nationalist archaeology have developed in reaction to the colonialist and imperialist modes. Trigger (1984:358-60) believed that prehistoric archaeology has, almost everywhere, arisen out of an attempt to satisfy nationalist aspirations. Without accepting that this is the only inspirational source, it is

clear that the development of European prehistory was much stimulated by the post-Napoleonic surge of Nationalism and Romanticism. This is particularly well exemplified in the case of Germany, where the humiliation of defeat and occupation by France led to glorification of supposed ancient Teutonic military values whose physical remains were eagerly sought and displayed in the cause of a revived German Empire. In Ireland, Israel, Mexico, Iran before Khomeini, Vietnam and the Libya of Gaddafi, among other places, it is easy to see how archaeology has served, if not been created by, a growth of national consciousness. Nationalist archaeology is strongest amongst peoples who feel threatened, insecure, or deprived of their political rights by more powerful nations, or in countries where appeals for national unity are being made to counteract serious divisions along class or ethnic lines. Nationalist archaeology tends to emphasize the more recent past, and to draw attention to the visible, monumental architecture and centralized political structures. Earlier prehistory, or the archaeology of small-scale preliterate communities, tends to be ignored by nationalist archaeology, which, not surprisingly, is inclined to replace colonialist or imperialist archaeology in newly independent countries. The popularity of classical and Islamic archaeology in Indonesia, the focus on the Late Bronze-Iron Age, Dongson Culture of northern Vietnam, and on the archaeology of Sukhothai in Thailand, are cases in point.

The assertion that only native peoples ‘can properly interpret their own past’ that it is their exclusive property – found very explicit expression a few years ago in Zimbabwe. Some years earlier, the Director of Antiquities of the time, Peter Garlake, had been forced to resign on account of his refusal to interpret the ruins of Great Zimbabwe in a way acceptable to the white settler government of Rhodesia, which saw them as proof of ancient white settlement in southern Africa. In independent Zimbabwe, an attempt was made to appropriate these monuments for the narrower purposes of Greater Shona nationalism. It was claimed by Dr. Ken Mufuka, the first African Director of Museums and Monuments, that not only does Great Zimbabwe belong to the indigenous African past – a point agreed by all professional archaeologists since Randall MacIver’s excavations there in 1904 – but that ‘only black Africans can properly understand and interpret the monument’ (Garlake 1984).

The archaeology of New Zealand, enthusiastically developed by white settlers earlier this century, has increasingly become an area of confrontation between Maori and Pakeha as Maori determination grows that they should define, interpret and control their present and

past culture. ‘Almost without exception, scholars of Pakeha descent are seen as raiders from another culture’, and those archaeologists that do not come to terms with Maori interests risk being seen as ‘little more than birds of prey feasting on the carcass of [someone else’s] culture’ (O'Regan 1990: 99).

Australia too, once the happy playground of colonialist imperialist archaeologies, provides a pertinent example. Since the late nineteenth century Australia was seen by European archaeologists as a sort of Palaeolithic theme park, a continent-wide experimental laboratory where hypotheses relevant to European stone-age archaeology, and law-like generalizations about culture process, could be tested by Cambridge graduates making their academic reputations, and on their way to well-paid jobs. White Australian archaeologists have recently been forced to compromise with aboriginal interests. I quote from a representation by R.F. Langford on behalf of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community:

‘You say that as scientists you have a right to study and obtain information on our culture. You say that because you are Australians you have a right to study and explore our heritage, because it is a heritage to be shared by all Australians, black and white – we say that you come as invaders, you have tried to destroy our culture, you have built your fortunes on the lands and bones of our people and now, having said sorry, want a share in picking over the bodies of what you say is a dead past. We say that it is our past, our culture and heritage, and forms part of our present life. As such it is ours to control and it is ours to share on our terms’ (Langford 1983:2).

Clearly the academic discipline of prehistory, exported from Europe, and successfully grafted on to white Australian society, was decisively rejected by the people whose past archaeologists seek to study. It has been rejected on the grounds that European notions of history, biological and cultural evolution, as enshrined in archaeological practice, are quite different from Aboriginal ones: that archaeological work does not serve Aboriginal interests, which are to gain control over land, and thus their own destiny; and that Aborigines, passionately interested in the specific details of their own past, resent having their heritage serve as an experimental ground where white academics can test general theories and advance their own careers.

Nationalist tendencies in Thai archaeology

Despite not suffering from the post-colonial traumas that affect most of its neighbors, Thai archaeology has recently shown some signs of cultural nationalism with claims that foreign archaeologists have sent home antiquities without declaring and recording them, that items have ‘disappeared’ and no reports produced, and that incompetent foreign post-graduate students came to study for their theses and had to be taught archaeological methods by senior Thai students. Some were said to ‘be taking advantage of the low cost living [in Thailand] and turning up drunk twenty-three hours a day. Some had affairs with native girls’ (Sukphisit 1991). Most of these xenophobic rumblings have appeared, not surprisingly, in Thai language newspapers, or in periodicals designed primarily for home consumption such as the *Muang Boran Journal*, but some of the discussion has been aired in Thailand’s English language newspapers such as the *Bangkok Post* and *Nation*.

What are we to make of this? The claims that foreign academic archaeologists have actually been stealing ‘cultural property’ is almost certainly false and mischievous. If one wants to acquire antiquities in Thailand or on other countries in Southeast Asia, you do not go there as an archaeologist registered with the Fine Arts Department or other national bodies, but as a tourist, with a full wallet and a few introductions, and you will find local nationals only too willing to sell their cultural heritage to foreigners, as they do to wealthy local politicians, officials and businessmen who have most of the best collections.

Nevertheless there are regular conflicts of interest between foreign and local archaeologists - not only in Thailand - which can be summarized thus:

-Work by local scholars is ignored by visiting researchers, is seldom reviewed in international journals, is slow to get into foreign textbooks, and in some cases is simply disbelieved.

-Foreign missions sometimes attempt to circumvent, rather than to collaborate with, the local officials and researchers, do not readily communicate their results, forget to send copies of the publications, and often do not send back material allowed out on loan.

-Individual foreign archaeologists, with careers to make in their home countries, publish outside and in English, French or German and are reluctant to become involved with the academic life of the host country.

A colleague of mine, Warwick Bray, nicely put the imbalance in the relationship between foreign and local archaeologists:

‘How would you feel, he was asked, ‘if a boatload of Incadorians spent three months cruising up the Thames, and then returned to write the definitive ‘study of British culture’? This, Bray thought, would probably be no sillier than some of the things we write about ourselves, but his second question was much more serious:

‘What will happen’, he enquired, ‘if an Incadorian mission puts in an application to excavate Stonehenge or any comparable major British site’? One day Incadoria will have its oil: its National University will create a department of European prehistory, staffed perhaps by people trained in England and who feel that they have a right as scientists to investigate in their chosen area. If that application ever comes – and Bray foresaw a day when it could – then British archaeology will be put to a test that confronts Third World countries several times each year. In spite of the sincerely held belief that ‘Science Has No Frontiers’, Bray predicted that the decision would not be an easy one. (Bray and Glover 1987: 124)

I have characterised nationalism in archaeology as a divisive, even malign influence which I believe it has been in many cases. However, a perceptive article by Victor Paz (1998) (read after I gave the lecture on which the present paper is based) made me rethink my position on this. Paz argues that despite the many excesses of nationalist archaeology, it can be a positive force helping to strengthen, in what may be rather recent and artificial national communities, exactly those continuities with the past, the lack of which Hobsbawm (ibid.) so regretted. I consider this proposition in regard to Viet Nam a little later.

Paz also argued that when a nation state actively supports archaeology and provides resources and leadership this can lead to major advances in knowledge of the past

which can be used for purposes other than the creation of xenophobic national and ethnic consciousness and he cites the case of the archaeology undertaken by the Marxist and Nationalist Czech state between about 1950–89. Whatever we may think of the political ideology and social policies of socialist Czechoslovakia during this time the technical quality and observational objectivity of its archaeology cannot be denied.

Archaeology in the service of totalitarian nationalist state can also lead to development of innovative methodological procedures. It is an uncomfortable fact that the practice of large open-area excavation introduced into Britain after the second World War was first developed in Nazi Germany by special ‘politically correct’ archaeological teams (the *SS-Ahnenerbe*) using forced labour to investigate the interface between the settlements of the Germanic peoples and their Slavic neighbours to the east (Figure 3) – the despised *Untermensch* of their political leaders (Kater, M. 1974; McCann 1988). Its dubious origins notwithstanding, the techniques there developed have been put to other purposes with beneficial effects on settlement archaeology in many parts of the world.

The case of Viet Nam

It is a paradox that a country materially so poor, barely recovering from over fifty years of war against the French, Japanese, Americans and Chinese, has devoted so much attention to archaeology. Perhaps we should say even 2000 years of warfare, for Vietnam was colonized by Han China in the first century AD, gained its independence only in the tenth century, and suffered repeated invasions from China before falling under French domination in the mid-nineteenth century. The past has a moral force in Vietnam, unequalled perhaps anywhere in the world, and in the process of trying to reassert a Vietnamese nationality, archaeology plays an important part. The Vietnamese see in their Bronze Age, what they call the Dong Dau, Go Mun and Dong Son Cultures (from the late second to late first millennium BC) the first flowering of native Vietnamese genius, the creation of a territorial political state, or states, with high levels of technical and artistic skills, before their subjection to Han Chinese imperialism. The practice of modern archaeology was introduced to Vietnam by the French early this century and today it is rather a mature discipline, guided by a Marxist-Leninist philosophy, put to the service of nationalism. Scholarly debate and inquiry, however, seem not to be stifled by this

political framework and I was heartened to find that Vietnamese archaeologists disagree with each other just as much as we do in the West.

French Colonial Archaeology in Vietnam

From the 1840s, France, following the example of Britain, was determined to acquire a colonial empire in the tropics in order to generate raw materials for her rapidly developing industries. The early years of French expansion and rule in Indochina, starting soon after the attack on Tourane (now Da Nang) in 1858, brought to the attention of French scholars the remains of much earlier civilizations. These scholars found the remains of the Cham people extending from around Hue, south to near Sai Gon, with its temples, sculpture and inscriptions, and, of course, the great monuments of Cambodia, especially around Tonle Sap – the Great Lake—especially interesting. The monuments of Cambodia were re-discovered by Henri Muhot in 1860 (Rooney 1998) as part of the French drive for a riverine route into South China, to bypass the British control of the Yangzi Valley trade, and the explorer/scholars of the Mission Pavie revealed the material framework of early historic Indochina.

A learned society on the model of the Royal Asiatic Society, the *Société des Etudes Indochinoises* was founded in Sai Gon in 1865 to provide a forum for colons and administrators to learn about their new acquisition; however, it was only with the establishment of the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO) between 1898 and 1900 that a sustained archaeological program for the investigation of pre- and protohistory was possible. French scholars approached Indochina through their knowledge of India and China and, not surprisingly, paid most attention to the monuments of 'advanced' civilizations, such as that of the Indianized Cham (2nd-15th centuries AD) of central and southern Vietnam.

Taking a typically colonialist attitude, many French scholars saw the Vietnamese, Annamese and Cambodians as having relapsed from a former higher level of culture, long ago brought from China and India, and now requiring infusions of foreign modernizing ideas and institutions. This, of course lent intellectual support to their own 'mission civilisatrice'. Nevertheless, one cannot say that this was the primary motivation behind the work of the researchers of the EFEO which was fortunate in the appointment of a series of brilliant scholars: Louis Finot, the first director; Etienne Aymonier; Bergaigne; Barth; Paul Pelliot; Aurousseau; Georges Coedès; and the great Henri

Parmentier, whose work on the documentation, conservation and publication of the monuments of Champa and Cambodia was an outstanding achievement.

Early perceptions of the Dong Son Culture (c. 6th century BC – c. AD 200)

These French scholars were working within the liberal tradition of European scholarship and did not, I am sure, see their work as no more than an intellectual prop for a quite ruthless extractive colonial regime. Nevertheless, their interpretations were unashamedly colonialist in slant. When objects from what we now call the Dong Son Culture of the Red and Ma River Valley first came to their notice it was thought to be intrusive. The Swedish sinologist Bernard Karlgren (1942) saw Dong Son as basically Chinese, while Heine-Geldern (1937) derived the culture by a series of complex migrations from an ancestral homeland somewhere in Southern Russia and the Caucasus – his Thraco-Cimmerian migration (Figure 4). Olov Janse (1958), who actually excavated the Dong Son in the 1930s, could still describe the graves he found as ‘Indonesian’ as had Louis Pajot who had worked there in the 1920s (Figure 5) in contrast to the brick-built Han and Tang Chinese tombs at the site (2nd and 7th-9th centuries AD). It was left to a later generation of Vietnamese archaeologists to identify the Dong Son Culture with the ancestral Lac Viet peoples whose roots lay back in their traditional homeland, in a series of Neolithic and bronze cultures (Phung Nguyen, Dong Dau and Go Mun) stretching back at least 2000 years.

The Cham Civilization

Further to the south, pioneering French scholars had also revealed the ruined towers of the Cham peoples, whose alien origins seems more secure; their language belonged to the Austronesian family, closely linked to the languages of northern Borneo and perhaps Sumatra. Their rulers at least, were heavily Indianized, built temples dedicated to Shiva, used Sanskrit for their inscriptions (Figure 6) and gave themselves Indian names such as Bhadravarman, Rudravarman and Indravarman. Likewise their cities were called Simhapura or Vijaya; their polities, Amaravati, Kauthara and Paduranga.

The Cham, like their neighbors in Cambodia, provided the French a perfect example of how cultures could wither and decay without external stimulation. Inspired by the flowering of Indian Hindu culture in the early centuries of the Christian Era, it appeared to the French that the Cham and Khmer people had declined into a slothful apathy. Jean-Yves Claeys, archaeologist and ethnographer who worked extensively in the old Cham

territories of Central Vietnam in the 1920s-30s, contrasted their present miserable state with past greatness. Some Europeans were at first unwilling to accept that the ‘backward’ native peoples they encountered in Indochina could have been responsible for the great temples of Cambodia and Champa. A later generation saw them as the result of stimulation and assimilation of tribal society following the arrival of more civilized (Indian) peoples.

Post-colonial archaeology in Vietnam

Both under, and following, French rule archaeology has been dominated, if not quite monopolized, by state organizations; first the EFEO, and since independence in 1954 the Institute of Archaeology and the National Museum of History in Ha Noi (formerly the Musée Louis Finot of the EFEO). In newly independent Vietnam, though, priority was placed on nationalist and Marxist perspectives, and students of archaeology were sent for training in China, Russia and eastern Europe. Archaeology thus secured its place in rebuilding the national identity. The main focus of the new research of the 1950s and 1960s was to identify the ancestral cultures of the Lac Viet peoples in their homeland on the plains of the Red River Valley where the Late Bronze-Iron Age Dong Son Culture was seen as the ‘glorious product of the Vietnamese people before their subjection to Han Imperial hegemony’. Archaeology was thus used to show that the Vietnamese peoples had achieved political maturity and high standards of cultural expression before the Chinese invasions. A recurrent theme in recent Vietnamese historical and archaeological writing has been its long resistance to Chinese cultural hegemony. For instance, Van Trong (1979: 6) argues that the presence of imported bronzes from China in Dong Son assemblages ‘only heightens the vitality of the Vietnamese culture, an independent one, of deep and solid basis having resolutely refused to be submerged by Chinese culture while many other cultures were subjugated and annihilated’.

In summary, Vietnamese historians have characterized Dong Son as the formation period of the Vietnamese nation. This period is closely identifiable with Van Lang, the first kingdom of Vietnam, and the line of eighteen Hung Kings. The nation was ruled with a royal dynasty and a professional administrative class from the capital of Co Loa. Ha Van Tan (1991) argued that ‘Dong Son was a state’.

Post Dong Son Vietnamese histories, at least those written until the last few years, tend to leap over the ‘Feudal period’ (2nd-10th centuries AD) and emphasize the ethnic,

linguistic and social continuities from the Dong Son to the medieval era of the independent Ly and Tran Dynasties (10th-14th centuries).

SYNTHESIS

Earlier in this paper I referred to the question of whether we could ever expect to see the emergence of a single coherent discipline of archaeology which would be applied to the material remains of man throughout the world, and which would develop the same sort of data and interpretations whether it was undertaken by, say, Eskimo archaeologists in Africa, or Vietnamese in Ecuador. Trigger's (1986) conclusions, which I entirely agree with, were that, whereas the technical procedures of archaeology will become increasingly standardized, the problems people seek to resolve from the study of archaeological remains arise out of the historical experiences of each community and each generation, and that we must not expect our discipline to develop in the same way as have the natural sciences, geology or mathematics over the past three hundred years.

Returning to the situation in present-day Thailand, I believe that overseas archaeologists working in Thailand have often been out of step with the concerns of Thai scholars investigating their own past. While there are ethnocentric, anti-foreign tendencies within the Thai academic community, they do not at the moment seem to have wide support. Thailand is a society tolerant of diversity and many Thai archaeologists still welcome the presence of foreigners working there – even if they are not too interested in their conclusions – for they see them as a source of new techniques and analytical procedures to stimulate indigenous Thai archaeology.

Finally I want to return to a major problem addressed in this paper. Does the research of Western archaeologists in developing countries serve any useful purpose to the host society? Is it a morally neutral activity of interest to us, and harmless to them, or is it, as I caricatured it earlier, a form of cultural imperialism and exploitation which appropriates other people's pasts and serves to strengthen the economic and cultural domination of western capitalist states?

A few years ago Lowenthal (1985) showed that all our reconstructions of the past are, in a sense, fictional – the past is a foreign country – and that we travel into the past only to

give some meaning to our present. If we accept this, does it imply that archaeological and historical science has no legitimacy, that there is no objective reality or permanent value to our reconstructions of states and process in the past? Yet, as Trigger pointed out, the data of archaeology are not entirely a construction of our own mind, even if their recording and analyses are colored by our specific concerns with the past (ibid. 15). All societies need this ‘foreign country’ to be approached through the exercise of historically and archaeologically trained imagination, rather than by subverting and appropriating it for narrow nationalist or racist purposes, as in Nazi Germany in the 1930s. If the discipline of archaeology, as practiced by Western archaeologists in Southeast Asia, helps local researchers to exploit a methodology which can enable them to examine and respect their pasts, then I will accept that while much of our effort serves the suspect aims of cultural imperialism, the exercise can still be justified.

SUMMARY

In this lecture I have tried to argue that archaeology is more than a pleasant hobby – that it has a social and political function – that all societies need to know about their past. Formerly myths of origin, biblical creation myths, legends of totemic heroes served well enough but today in an increasingly secular world informed by science we can do better, and must draw on the methodologies of archaeology to connect the present to those thousands of generations of our ancestors who lived before the emergence of historical documentation. Archaeology in the service of political nationalism, however, is a two-edged sword. It can be beneficial in so far as it encourages an interest in local origins, educates a people who may have few other sources of information on their more remote past to relate to their ancestors and take a pride in their achievements. But nationalist archaeology can easily lead to xenophobia and manipulation by unscrupulous politicians and a media looking for short-term advantages. Archaeologists working in a country with a strong nationalist historical tradition need to be aware of the problem and ready to counter the misrepresentation of their researches by those with other agendas.

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Figure 1 French colonial archaeology in Viet Nam in the 1920s. Notice the social and physical distance between the French visitors and the Vietnamese labourers.



Figure 2 French colonial archaeology in Viet Nam in the 1920s. Who is doing the work?



Figure 3 Notice of a public lecture on "the prehistory of our Fatherland" given in Lodz (Poland) under the Nazi occupation.

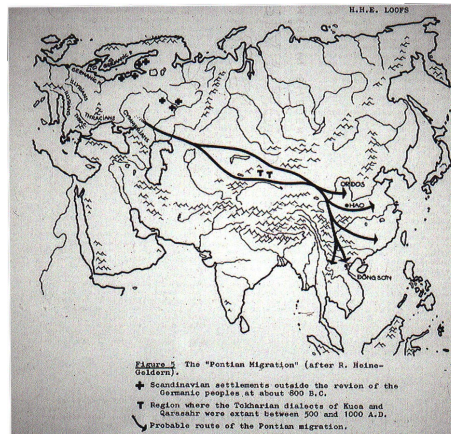


Figure 4 Diffusionist archaeology. The map shows the hypothetical route of the Thraco-Cimmerian migration from southern Russia which, according to R. Heine-Geldern, brought the creators of the Dong Son Culture to northern Viet Nam.

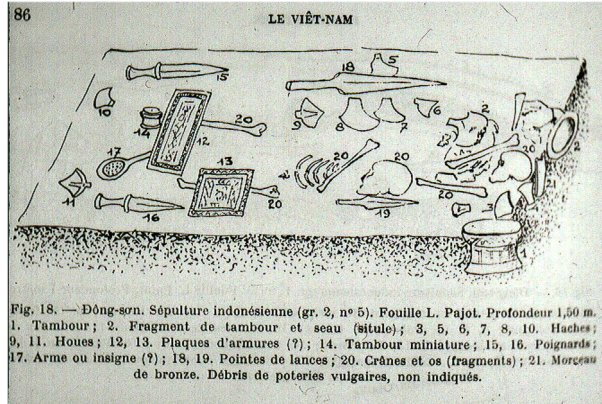


Figure 5 An "Indonesian" burial at Dong Son, Viet Nam from the excavations of Louis Pajot in the 1920s.



Figure 6 Cham inscription from Tra Kieu, Central Viet Nam.