Review Article

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Taking part for the first time in a Pacific Science Congress, a number of Vietnamese archaeologists presented papers at the 14th Pacific Science Congress held in Khabarovsk, Russia in August–September, 1979. I was to have been the co-chairman of the panel at which the papers included in this review were presented but was unable to attend the Congress. M. Van Trong, the vice-director of the Institute of Archaeology of Vietnam, kindly sent me the copy that I am reviewing, for which I thank him very much. I feel that this publication will not receive wide distribution. As it presents summaries of the views of prominent Vietnamese archaeologists on major topics of interest in Vietnamese archaeology, based on the data recovered during almost 20 years of Vietnamese archaeological research (which has been published in Vietnamese and is not widely known), I believe that the volume is of value in making this work available to the non-Vietnamese reading audience. It will also serve as an introduction to several of the following articles in this issue of Asian Perspectives.

Vietnamese archaeological publications suffer from the lack of good-quality paper for illustrations, so there are usually few illustrations in these papers, and they are often difficult to interpret. There are further problems in the translation of technical terms, so that at times, without good illustrations to refer to, it is not possible to be sure what is meant. As more and more communication develops between Vietnamese archaeologists and other archaeologists concerned with Southeast Asian prehistoric archaeology, these difficulties will be resolved.

The first of the eight papers is titled “New Knowledge on Dongson Culture from Archaeological Discoveries These Twenty Years,” by Van Trong. Following a brief review of the archaeological work done during French times, he points out that the weakness of the early interpretations of the Dongson Culture resulted from not considering Dongson Culture to be of local origin and from working with data from only five Dong-
son sites. By 1979, the Vietnamese had discovered a total of 90 Dongson sites from three river drainages—the Red River, the Ma River, and the Ca River—and from the mountains, foothills, the high and low plains, and the coast. They have divided Dongson into three periods (epochs, in their translation). The largest number of sites is from the first period in the Red River system, from the mountains, hills, plains, and coast. Sites of this first period are also found in the Ma River and Ca River systems in considerable number. The second period has the second largest number of sites in the hills, plains, and coast in the Red River valley, but only one site from the mountains. In the Ma River valley, there are more sites than in the first period, and through all three periods they are found only in the hills and interior plains. In the Ca River system, there are fewer sites in the second period but in all localities, while they are known only from the hills and interior plains in the early period and none is known from the third period. In the late period, only one site is known from the hill-high plain area and three from the low plains and coast of the Red River, whereas most of the late sites are from the Ma River. The results of preliminary research on these finds indicates that Dongson sites, used for both living and burial, formed a recognizable culture lasting for over 2000 years, from the end of the second millennium B.C. to the beginning of the second millennium A.D. Dongson graves may be classified in two major stages, the first lasting until the fourth century B.C. and the second from the fourth century B.C. to the third century A.D. Leading into the Dongson Culture were the Phung Nguyen, Dong Dau, and Go Mun Cultures. The sites of all three of these cultures are in the area of the Hung Kings of folk memory, thus forming the cradle of Vietnamese civilization.

The second paper, by Hoang Xuan Chinh, is titled "A Few Remarks on Hoabinh Culture Basing on New Documents." It is a bit difficult to follow because of the problems in translation of technical terms. With 92 Hoabinhian sites now known (38 more sites than before the Vietnamese archaeologists began research), it is stated that Vietnam is the birthplace and native land of the Hoabinhian. I feel that there can be disagreement with this statement, on the grounds that so little exploration and research has been done in many areas where the Hoabinhian is now known (i.e., Burma, northern Laos, and southern China and possibly as far west as Assam) that we are a long way from knowing where it began. According to this paper, and others I have seen, the Vietnamese now consider that the Hoabinhian Culture is totally Holocene in dating. The site of Tham Hoi is considered as early Hoabinhian and it has a $^{14}$C date of 10,875 ± 175 b.p. They state that the Hoabinhian Culture developed out of a pre-Hoabinhian which is called the Son Vi Culture; two sites with this culture, Ong Quyen and Hang Pong, are $^{14}$C dated 18,390 ± 128 and 11,330 ± 180 b.p. From what I can make out of the San Vi Culture, it corresponds with what I have been calling Early Hoabinhian. Hoabinhian tools are worked (flaked) on one side and some polishing of tools is found. Pottery comes later. Pots have the "rope motif," which I assume refers to cord marking. A number of Hoabinhian sites have been found with burials in "huddling up posture" and covered with yellow ochre. I would assume this means vertical, tightly flexed burials. Stone tools were associated with these burials. A few of the early Hoabinhian sites are considered to be Middle Stone Age or Mesolithic while most are considered as Neolithic. No definitions of these terms are presented. Cultures similar to the Son Vi Culture are also found outside of Vietnam. Specific mention is made of the finds of D. T. Bayard and T. T. March in the Pa Mong region of Laos, in 1973–1974, and that some of the pebble tools van Heekeren excavated at Sai Yok in central western Thailand are similar to Son Vi Culture tools. Instead of considering
Bacson and Hoabinh as two different cultures, they are regarded here as either two local types of the same culture or Bacson as a later phase of the Hoabinhian Culture. In closing, reference is made to the need to exchange data on the Hoabinhian sites of the different countries of Southeast Asia, and that this need should lead to a conference on the subject. I heartily agree that such an international conference is needed to clear up many terminological misunderstandings and to set the stage for the great deal of future research needed to better understand the Hoabinhian Culture in its distribution through space and time.

The third paper, titled "First Discoveries on Pleistocene [sic] Man Culture and Fossilized Fauna in Vietnam," is by Hoang Xuan Chinh, Nguyen Lan Cuong, and Vu The Long. During the French period, only two sites with fossilized man and fauna had been discovered, Phai Ve by Mansuy and Thung Lang by Fromaget. Comparisons of the finds with more recent discoveries have indicated that the dating suggested was too early—they only belong to the Late Pleistocene—and the teeth considered by Fromaget as ape-man's are Pongo teeth. Many more finds have been made, with preliminary results as follows:

1. Twenty-one fossilized human teeth have been recovered from five caves in association with fossilized animal bones, dating from middle to late Pleistocene.

Nine teeth found at Tham Khuyen and a tooth found at Tham Hai (Lang Son province) bear primitive features characteristic of Homo erectus: almost all of them have cingula, their lower surfaces are of square shape, the trigoid being larger than the taloid. But a few characteristics of more evolved character have appeared: the lateral face connecting the protocoid to the metacoid, the metaconus are clearly less developed. . . . The five teeth found at Tam Om (Nghe Tinh province) are near to the teeth of Homo sapiens in many features in their shape and size but have some likeness with those of Homo erectus (their height is relatively low, its inside face is curved, the top of canine teeth is relatively sharp). . . . The four teeth found at Hang Hum grotto (Hoang Lien Son province), though mostly are of great size, but their form is characteristic of those of Homo sapiens, their date belong to Late Pleistocene, corresponding to Riss-Wurm interglacial time, from about 80 to 140 thousand years ago. . . . The two teeth of the old man and a fragment of forehead bone found at Keo Leng (Lang Son province) are very like those of Homo sapiens in size and form. These are real fossils of Homo sapiens, and date towards Late Pleistocene, about 20 to 30 thousand years ago. . . . (pp. 15-16)

2. Many archaeological sites have been found representing to late Palaeolithic. At several sites in Thanh Hoa and Song Be Provinces "troppen and troppung-tools" (I assume this would be chopping and chopping-tools) have been discovered, along with a few fairly typical Chellian and Achellian hand adzes, similar to tools from other countries in Southeast Asia. From a site in Bac Thai Province have been recovered many tools and "sharp points of pebble splinters" of a form and technique distinct from those of the Hoabinh-Bacson Culture of the same region. In the hilly region, 120 sites have been found with the Son Vi Culture. These sites, found in limestone caves, are "characterized by an abundance of longitudinal bladed cutting tools having the shape of sections of a grape fruit, tools formed by a quarter of a pebble etc. . . . In this culture there are a few tools of a preexisting form of Hoa Binh-Bac Son culture tools and in Con Moong site the Son Vi culture level lying under Hoa Binh-Bac Son culture level shows that it is a Pre Hoa Binh culture level directly leading to Hoa Binh-Bac Son culture level" (pp. 16–17).

3. In a number of excavations, fossilized animal remains have been found with fossil
man. These fossils, dating from late middle Pleistocene to the beginning of the Holocene, are typical species of the Pongo-Stegodon-Ailuropoda complex. Included are loose incisors and canines of *Gigantopithecus Blacki* von Koenigswald discovered at Tham Khuyen (Lang Son Province), the southernmost such discovery and the latest date (beginning Middle Pleistocene). Hundreds of fossils of *Pongo pygmaeus* spp. have been found. Besides loose teeth, this includes two fragments of jaw with molar and premolar teeth. *Ailuropoda melanoleuca* jovaalis, previously unreported for Vietnam, have been found. From Keo Leng, skulls and jaws have been found almost complete. At Son Vi, an Ailuropoda specimen was found in the level containing Son Vi Culture tools, giving the latest date (18,390 B.P.) for Ailuropoda in Vietnam. These fossil remains show that the middle and late Pleistocene climate was relatively hot and wet, with no abrupt changes. No cold weather animals have been found.

The next paper, titled “Neolithic Age in Vietnam and Its Evolution,” is by Nguyen van Hao. Again, there is difficulty in interpreting this paper because of translation problems in the terminology of stone tool and pottery forms and decoration. The “Neolithic” is divided into four periods. Here the Hoabinhian as such is not included as Neolithic, unlike Hoang’s paper on the Hoabinhian, where most of these sites were considered as Neolithic. The first stage or epoch, the term used by the Vietnamese, is that of the Bacson Culture, but nothing is said of the relationship of the Hoabinhian to the Bacsonian. It is mentioned that, unlike the Hoabinhian, “hewed tools on both sides” are widespread in the Bacsonian Culture. I assume that this means flaked on both sides rather than monofacial flaked like most Hoabinhian tools. Fifty of these sites have been located, dating from as early as 10,000 years ago. A footnote (p. 26) presents six 14C dates for Bacsonian sites, but two of these are in disagreement with the dates published in *Radiocarbon*, and are further lacking in the correct numbers of the samples. From Bo Lum, the sample listed as Bln I is given as 9900 ± 200, whereas in Kohl and Quitta (1978:391), the number is given as Bln-1001 I and dated 9990 ± 200. The second fraction of this sample is numbered as Bln II, dated 10,295 ± 200, while the number should be Bln-1001 II, with the same date. From Bo Nam, the two dates from the same sample are 7960 ± 60 and 7875 ± 60, listed in the footnote as Bln I and II but properly Bln-915 I and II. From Tham Hai, Bln-1002 I is correctly listed as 9705 ± 80, but Bln-1002 II is listed as 9545 ± 70, while the report in *Radiocarbon* lists it as 9645 ± 70. These are minor errors, but they could lead to problems in the future.

The second period of the “Neolithic” is represented by only 10 sites, all cave sites in the northeastern coastal area and from offshore limestone islands. Shell dates from Ha Lung Cave are 6310 ± 60 (Bln-1439 I) and 6485 ± 60 (Bln-1439 II). Artifacts are similar to those of the Bacson, but cord-marked (rope motif) pottery is found through all layers in the sites, while some early Bacson sites do not have pottery in their lower levels. Shell temper was used in this second period pottery.

Sites of the third period are much more widespread than the earlier sites, are larger, and are usually in the open along large rivers or along shallow seashores. Seafood is an important resource. Stone tools are similar to those of Bacson but become smaller and smaller as time passes, become “trapezium” shape for the adzes, and are more delicately made. There are more mortars and pestals than was the case earlier, and much more pottery is present. Three cultures of this period have been identified.

The Cat Beo Culture is known from only one site, on the coast in Hai Phong Province. There is some difference in the stone tools from earlier cultures and the pottery, mainly
pots with rounded bodies and bottoms and spreading rims on the outside, “has marks of shell and weaving motives” (p. 23). A possible meaning for this is crenelate impressions from seashells and possibly carved paddle patterns and/or basket marking. Dating for this site is a bit of a problem, though the most likely date is that given in the article as 5645 ± 115 (IK 328). Kohl and Quitta (1978:392–393) present three dates from that site that differ markedly but consider that ZK-328.0 (not IK) probably gives a truer date. Their dates are > 40,000 (Bln-1350) for a charcoal sample from the lower portion of the bottom layer associated with “bifacial chipped stone tools and crude sherds from basket-impressed pottery” (Kohl and Quitta 1978:392). They reported that a portion of the same sample dated in Peking (ZK-306) gave the same reading and they suspect that this may have come from a piece of much older wood that had washed ashore and was then used. Two further dates from the top level, on animal bone with no collagen, are 3425 ± 60 (Bln-1437) and 3850 ± 60 (Bln-1486).

The Da But Culture is known from four sites near the Ma River and in the Len River plains of Than Hoa Province. The main difference between this culture and the others of the same period is the pottery. The main type of pottery is a very large vessel with straight or almost straight sides and rims and rounded bottoms. These have “weaving type” motifs from rim to bottom. This may be what the French called pseudo cord-marked, which was often a carved paddle impression giving a crossed relief pattern. At Go Trung, the latter of the two dated sites, stone and earthenware fishnet weights of top shape were found. The two dates are 6095 ± 60 (Bln-1407) for Da But and 4790 ± 50 (Bln-2090) for Go Trung.

The Quynh Van Culture is known from more than 20 shellmound sites in the plain of Quynh Luu district, at the time of occupation a partly enclosed gulf. Here the common stone tools are flaked and made from basalt. The earthenware pottery is mainly of two types, either very large jars with straight sides and rims and pointed bottoms with “printed” (impressed?) motifs on both the inside and outside, or smaller pots with curved, flaring rims, straight sides and rounded bottoms. These were decorated primarily with “weaving” motifs. Two dates from these sites are 4785 ± 75 (Bln-914 I) and 4730 ± 75 (Bln-914 II).

The sites of the fourth period of the “Neolithic” show considerable change from the cultures of the earlier periods. Here appear the earliest of the shouldered tools, both shouldered adzes and hoes, the first sawing and boring techniques in stone tool manufacture, a variety of personal ornaments, and much more variation in the pottery form and decoration. While these sites are found in many areas, they are concentrated along the coast. Three cultures are identified for this period. Seventeen sites of the Ha Long Culture are known, situated along the coast of northeast Vietnam and on offshore islands. These people were fairly skilled in seafaring. Their shouldered adzes had flaring symmetrical or asymmetrical blades, probably prototypes of the later bronze shouldered adzes. They had bracelets that were triangular or T-shaped in cross section. Their pottery had shell temper and was often decorated with “S letter motive, or grain motive. They are represented by one or two stripes in relief running around the brims or on the shoulders of containers etc.” (p. 26).

The Thach Lac Culture is found along the coast of Nghe Tinh Province, the same area as that of the Quynh Van Culture. The shouldered adzes are lenticular or lenticular with flat edges in cross section. Pottery ornamentation is often “motives of S letter, made by many parallel drawing lines” (p. 26). The Bau Tro Culture is mainly in Binh Tri Thien
Province and possibly further south. A characteristic feature of this culture is large shouldered adzes with curved surfaces. There are colored (painted?) high-rimmed pots similar to earthenware of the later Sa-huynh Culture. Some of the Sa-huynh sites have a similar type of shouldered adze.

The fifth paper, by Chu Van Tan, is titled "Sa-huynh, a Civilization Type of Metal Age in Vietnam." As with the other cultures, the new research has resulted in expansion. The number of known sites has doubled from 18 to 36, and the region has been extended from the coastal sand dunes into the interior and even back into the mountains of Gia Lai—Cong Tum and Quang Da Provinces. Chu divides the Sa-huynh Culture into two periods, with sites of the earlier period in Nghia Binh and Thuan Hai Provinces and sites of the later period expanding to include Dong Nai Province. There is a gap in time between the early and late sites, but there are sites in Nghia Binh Province of the Binh Chau type which are intermediate in time and which have many features similar to the Sa-huynh Culture but are different in other ways. These cultures developed during the last two millennia B.C. Besides the Sa-huynh pottery, which has been described in more detail elsewhere (Solheim, ed., 1959), the characteristic elements of material culture include:

- tools of necked type—long neck, symmetrically spread blade—bracelets with section of an isosceles trapezium—ear-rings of ring, disk shape, and ear-rings with books [sic; probably hooks]. . . . Tradition of cremation or of reintering a body, yellow earth is scattered inside or around the funeral jar. (p. 29)

Features of the earlier period include:

- stone thin hoes of oval shape with narrow neck; shouldered adzed [sic] of buffalo tooth shape; bobbins of pulley shape made of earthen-ware with circle motives; lightly curved fish-hooks; strings of stone beads of bamboo internode shape; stone earrings with round section and four hooks of bud shape; little earth pot with coloured [painted?] ornaments; earth pot in miniature of various types; high footed bowls with a large brim and having groups of cogged teeth; big funeral jars of egg shape with large shoulders, no necks, their brims being fairly spread. (p. 29)

For the later period characteristic elements are:

- spread bladed iron adzes; weights in earthenware of pear shape; leech shaped earrings with three hooks made of precious stone, or of crystal; stone earrings of animal head shape; earthenwares of vase shape having high base sometimes called lamps; earthen bowls of frustrum shape with a flat bottom, and a spread brim; funeral jars of cylindrical shape or egg shape with the middle part. Swelling outward, with no shoulders or with narrow shoulders and with spread brims. (p. 29)

These people were not only skillful on the rivers and the sea but were agriculturalists as well. In the later period, some graves included gold or silver artifacts, suggesting the beginnings of a class society. At this time, Chu feels that the archaeological evidence suggests the origin of the Sa-huynh Culture in the Long chain of mountains of central Vietnam. He notes the many elements of the Sa-huynh Culture that have been found widespread in Southeast Asia but disagrees with me that these make up a particular tradition. I
feel he did not understand that I was referring only to the pottery when I talked of the Sa-huynh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition and was not suggesting that this was a cultural tradition. I have gone into this in detail elsewhere (Solheim 1981:49). Finally, Chu points out that the Sa-huynh Culture sprang up and developed in the same region as the later Cham and that it follows that “Sa Huynh culture in itself was the basis of development for Champa culture.” He goes on to say:

In Binh Tri Thien area, Sa Huynh culture intermingled with Dong Son culture and when Dong Son inhabitants built their civilization, founding Van Lang State in the North. Sa Huynh people perhaps followed the same process in building Ho Ton State, and Doc Chua people also established their civilization in Mekong and Dong Nai deltas. On archaeological point of view, men of these three areas perhaps were born from a Mon Khmer basis . . . (p. 31)

I would agree heartily with the notion that the Sa-huynh Culture developed into the historic Cham Culture, but would not agree with the suggested Mon Khmer source for the three early cultures, as the Cham were and are Austronesian-speaking people (see Solheim 1979:198-199 for more on the Cham relationships).

The next paper, “The Appearance of Ancient Metallurgy in Vietnam,” is by Nguyen Duy Ty. There is controversy among the Vietnamese archaeologists as to whether the Phung Nguyen Culture should be considered as “neolithic” or early bronze age. There is also controversy about its dating, which I will bring up below. The only bronze found in Phung Nguyen sites has been a few bronze nodules, probably from casting spillage. No casting molds have been found. In the following Dong Dau Culture were found “bronze fishhooks, sharp points, axes, arrow-heads, javelins, files, etc.” In the Go Mun Culture, which came next, bronze artifacts were more abundant and bronze sickles appeared. With the Dongson Culture came iron and a further increase in bronze, particularly of large artifacts such as the bronze drums and large bronze containers with their attached bronze figures of humans, animals, and miniature artifacts. Casting molds of earthenware and sandstone are found from the Dong Dau Culture and on. The pre-Dongson bronze is primarily copper and tin, while the Dongson bronze contains considerably more lead, an obvious addition to the alloy. In this paper the one 14C date given for the Phung Nguyen Culture is 3328 ± 100 B.P. Other archaeologists date the Phung Nguyen Culture well back into the third millennium B.C. (see the paper by Nguyen ba Khoach in this issue). A final statement: “Bronze metallurgy was born very early about the middle of the second millennium B.C. on the basis of ore sources in Vietnam . . .” (p. 36).

The seventh paper, by Do van Ninh, is on “Tombs with Coffins of Pirogue Shape.” He reports five boat-shaped coffins found at Viet Khe in Hai Phong with a 14C date of 2480 ± 100, with typical Dongson artifacts associated. A wooden oar was found with one of these coffins. Eight further boat coffins were recovered in Ha Son Binh Province with a 14C date of 2325 ± 60 B.P. Besides typical Dongson artifacts, bamboo ladies and dippers of gourd were found with these coffins. The skeletons had black teeth. Other burials in smaller boat-shaped coffins dating from the first century B.C. have been found in Ha Son Binh, Hai Hung, Ha Nam Ninh, and Ha Bac Provinces and in Ha Noi. Besides typical Dongson artifacts, some Chinese artifacts were found, including some Wu Shu coins. A hollowed tree trunk, similar to the boat-shaped coffins, was used for a sixth- to seventh-century A.D. burial at An Khe in Thai Binh Province. This tradition continued to the six-
teenth and seventeenth centuries A.D. and in some areas is still practiced. Coexisting with the boat-shaped coffin were brick tombs of Chinese culture. From the tenth century A.D. and on, following Vietnamese independence from China, the use of brick tombs stopped but the boat-shaped coffins continued. While boat-shaped coffins are known from most of the other countries of Southeast Asia, it is here stated that Vietnam had the earliest of this type of coffin. I would amend this to say that the earliest dated boat-shaped coffins have been found in Vietnam, but so few of these have been found elsewhere in situations similar to those in Vietnam that at present we cannot say where this practice may have originated.

The final paper, by Nguyen Duy Hinh, a "Note on the Stupas of the Cham (Cam)," makes six different points: (1) There was much destruction of Cham stupas and other monuments by American bombing and dynamiting. (2) Corrections are made of some of Parmentier's suggestions on Cham architecture as based on his use of Greco-Roman architectural concepts and terminology. For example, "The backrest of the Po Nagar statue at Nha Trang, for example, which was a bas-relief penetrated with Hoa Lai style with its worm-like pattern, was not reproduced accurately by the scholar. Thus, the dating of Po Nagar would be much more recent" (p. 42). (3) Instead of a unified Cham style of architecture, there are a northern and a southern style as well as differing local styles within these two more general styles. The Cham produced not only stupas derived from Indian motifs but also several purely Cham architectural works, and at times northern and southern styles influenced each other. "In brief, Cham arts followed not an unilinear evolution but a complex multilinear development" (p. 43). (4) Buddhist and Brahman elements are found separately or together in various architectural works. (5) "Geometric and flowered figures and innumerable decorative patterns characteristic of Champa, that can be seen at Hoa Lai, Khuong My, Chien Dang . . . have been overlooked by Western scholars while their attention was attracted by Nandins, Makaras and a few Indian motifs." (6) "We can observe many things that have long become familiar to us: the motifs of Buddhist arts of the Ly dynasty have been seen on the so-called Ma Trung altar-platform. Leaf figures, creeper-like friezes of bas-reliefs, figurines of animals and other ornaments on our towers were of the same style as those of Champa. This is a striking proof of the acculturation between various nationalities since very early times" (p. 43).

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