INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1965 it was universally believed that Southeast Asian culture, including its art, primarily derived from India and China and included very little that was original. Archaeological discoveries, beginning with finds in northeastern and northwestern Thailand in 1965 (Bayard 1970; Gorman 1970; Solheim 1967, 1968a, 1970, 1971, 1980), have completely changed that belief. In this paper I review new perspectives on one portion of these beliefs, the relationship between the ancient art styles of China and Southeast Asia.1

This paper is reasoned at a high level of abstraction and so is far removed from specific data from known stratigraphic context. To present an argument such as I present here, so that it would be fully acceptable to a knowledgeable and critical audience, it would be necessary to present the art styles I refer to in terms of a series of specific motifs and patterns that could then be shown to be present in specific published sites for which there are reliably dated sequences of decorated pottery or other decorated materials. A number of such published sites would be needed, say at least ten or preferably more for each area involved in my argument, that is, North China, South China, Mainland Southeast Asia, Island Southeast Asia, Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. Probably only North China could satisfy this requirement, though there might be enough published sites for South China as well. It would be necessary to read Chinese as well as English and Vietnamese. For much of Oceania ethnographic data would also be needed. A team effort might be able to make a good start at this time. (For a beginning of the sort of approach I am talking about, see Pearson 1982.) I am unable to undertake such a research project but feel that it is worthwhile to present my argument in the way that I do, as there still would appear to be many researchers who regard Southeast Asian and Oceanic art styles, and much else, as derivative from Chinese culture. If they are not willing to agree with my conclusions, I hope they will at least admit that they present a possible alternative and that the question is open.

1Subject of a talk presented to the China Society in Singapore 24 November 1979.
Early Chinese Art and Its Possible Influence in the Pacific Basin is the title of a book consisting of the proceedings of a symposium held at Columbia University in New York City in August 1967. Noel Barnard, the editor of these proceedings, says of these papers in his introduction, “all are concerned with the subject of diffusion in the Pacific Basin and aspects of the thesis that numbers of art forms and artifacts extensively distributed in the area were, in all probability, anciently derived from China” (1974:xxxiii). After speaking of the wealth of new archaeological data that had accumulated in mainland China since an earlier conference on a somewhat similar subject, he said:

Similarly, specialists concerned with the various island cultures ranging from Melanesia to Polynesia were equally aware that a deeper understanding of many aspects of the now rapidly increasing corpus of archaeological materials—pottery in particular—cannot be achieved without constant reference, in the first place, to the Southeast Asian ceramic scene and thus ultimately to China. (1974:xxxv)

This statement, in its final four words, means that Barnard, and probably many other informed archaeologists at that time, fully believed that the Southeast Asian ceramic tradition(s) derived totally from China.

A photographic exhibition, held in conjunction with the symposium at Columbia University, was published in a book edited by Douglas Fraser (1968), an art historian. In his introduction Fraser (1968:1) mentioned that the hypothesis that early Chinese art had a significant impact on certain art styles of the Pacific Basin (including Island Southeast Asia) was controversial. He went on to say that “If today many accept this viewpoint, there are an equal number who remain wholly unconvinced, attributing similarities to convergence or coincidence.” He did not attempt to look at all of the logical alternatives for a historical relationship. These would include: if “A” (Chinese art) is historically related to “B” (certain Pacific Basin art styles), “A” could be (in part) ancestral to “B,” “A” could be (in part) descendant from “B,” or “A” and “B” could have (in part) a common ancestry. Following the presentation of the photographs, Fraser’s conclusion (1968:118) was that “In short, there appears to be no logical alternative to the view that early Chinese art did significantly influence the art forms of various cultures of the Pacific Basin.” I now proceed to support the third alternative, not included by Fraser, that the two art styles in question have as their historical relationship a common ancestry (in part), and that this common ancestor is what I call the Old Southeast Asian Art Style.

Before moving on, it is necessary to struggle with two sets of definitions that seem very simple to many. The first has to do with “China” and “Chinese” and the second with “Southeast Asian.” A dictionary definition of “China” is “The country so called, in Asia” (The Oxford University Dictionary 1955:302), and for “Chinese,” “Of or pertaining to China” and “A native of China” (303). These definitions are not static because China has not been static. The “China” of today is not the same as that of 1000 years ago, which in turn was different from that of 2000 years ago. Slightly modifying what I have said elsewhere (Solheim 1979a:200, 1979b:84, 1980), the term “China” should have its beginning for the area and time of the first Han Empire, and “Chinese” then would be the people of Han and their culture, and what followed. Earlier historic countries and/or political entities such as Chou and Shang/Yin should be referred to as such, or the cultures could be
grouped as Proto-Chinese. Earlier still, the so-called Yangshao, Lungshan, and other similar entities could be called pre-Chinese. To distinguish between Chinese and non-Chinese, I consider that what the Han considered as savages—at the time of the Han Empire and in their histories of the dynasties that came before them—were non-Chinese, and further that peoples who did not consider themselves as Chinese or Han were also non-Chinese.

"Southeast Asian" (not even included in the 1955 edition of The Oxford University Dictionary) would mean "of or pertaining to Southeast Asia" and "a native of Southeast Asia." It would require a book to justify Southeast Asia as more than a geographical area. What is by many considered as the geographical entity of Southeast Asia follows political lines and does not include nearly enough territory. It is necessary, for the purposes of this article, to consider Southeast Asia as a cultural region, here defined as it was at 1000 B.C. and before, and for up to 1000 years after. Culturally, Southeast Asia extended from the northern limits of the Yangtze watershed (roughly the Tsinling Mountains) in the north, through all of present-day Indonesia in the south, and from the Philippines and western New Guinea in the east, to northeastern India (including all of Assam before it was divided into several parts) in the west. Its boundaries in the west were very uncertain. This northern inclusion of South China fits with the definition of Chinese, as these people were considered savages by those of the north. This inclusion of South China has become more apparent with recent archaeological finds, but was distinctly noticeable before reliable archaeological data were available (Linton 1955:523).

THE CHINESE ART STYLE

Having defined Chinese as beginning with the Han Dynasty, it is necessary to admit that by Han times the Chinese Art Style was already well formed and traditional. It does not appear that there was a direct and uninterrupted evolution leading to the Chinese Art Style of Han times, but most certainly the Proto-Chinese cultures of the Shang/Yin and Chou, and within the Chou the Huai art styles, were of major influence on Chinese art. Chinese prehistory and Chinese art are not my specialities, and in treating Chinese art I limit myself to secondary and tertiary sources. I am only concerned here with a very limited view of the Shang and Chou art antecedents of Chinese art from these sources. It is these antecedents, however, that the specialists are referring to when they talk of the "Chinese" relationship with Pacific Basin and Southeast Asian art styles.

I make no attempt to define the Shang Art Style but only present excerpts from expressions of three people: one an archaeologist, who is expert on the prehistory of China; one a general anthropologist, who had much personal involvement with ancient and "primitive" art; and the third a prehistorian–anthropologist who was especially knowledgeable on Southeast Asian art history.

The archaeologist (Chang 1977:291–293) had this to say:

Shang art . . . was an art that primarily worked with animal motifs. Images and forms of animals—serpent, dragon, phoenix, owl, falcon, tiger, sheep, oxen, buffalo, cicada, elephant, rhinoceros—and their bodily parts, in realistic or stylistic motifs, permeated Shang ritual art on bronze vessels, stone sculptures, bone, jade, and ivory carvings with stone and bone inlays. Human images constituted another significant category of artistic work.
Referring to the animals represented in Shang art, the anthropologist Linton (1955:532–533) remarked that

The choice of animals is suggestive. Although the Shang territory lay far north... very few northern animals are shown. The high development of bear ceremonies throughout Northern Eurasia and the fact that two species of bear were Hsia totems makes the omission of this animal the more remarkable. The favorite subjects were tigers, water buffalo, rams, and bulls, depicted as conventionalized split animals known as *T’ao-t’ieh*. This selection makes it appear improbable that Shang art was developed out of animal art of the steppes, and suggests a southern rather than western origin for it.

Referring to the surface designs on the bronzes, he went on to say:

No close parallel for designs can be identified outside of China, but the present writer feels that they show a kinship with the Dong Son designs, and also with the historic arts of certain culturally conservative areas in Indonesia and Melanesia, and even with the arts of the Polynesian Marquesans and Maori. Although the assumption is quite unprovable, I would not be surprised if archaeological research eventually reveals the presence of an Old Southeast Asiatic art style from which all of these, including Shang, was derived.

According to Heine-Geldern, the prehistorian-anthropologist (1937:180), it is characteristic of the Shang art style for the decoration to have several parts, primary motifs being stylized animals and secondary motifs angular pseudo-meanders and spirals, with a tendency for decomposition of the primary motif so only the eyes remain. Heine-Geldern has hypothesized that the earliest art style in Southeast Asia was a monumental art style with relatively simple forms (Solheim 1979a:168, 1980:279). He felt that this style extended far into China and introduced the bull’s head into Shang art (Heine-Geldern 1966:173–174).

It is a bit more difficult to categorize Chou art. Early Western Chou was apparently primarily a continuation of the Shang/Yin art style, but there were major and rapid changes in this style around 950 B.C. Many earlier elements dropped out and new ones, mostly unknown in the area before, came in, though a few had been present previously (Chang 1977:376). About 650 B.C. an artistic renaissance took place in Chou art, giving rise to what has been called the Huai style. Rich and varied, Huai style incorporated both ancient and new elements. The Ordos area to the north was said to be the source of many of these new elements (Chang 1977:177). Among these new elements were “granulation or dotted bands forming outlines, granulation or dotted surfaces, S-shaped double-spirals, and circles on the bodies of animals” (Samolin 1974:189). Samolin mentioned (189) that by the time the Huai style was well developed, the area of its origin had become a part of the Ch’u state, not a part of the Proto-Chinese area or culture at that time (a controversial point; see Barnard 1974 and Solheim 1980). “The Ch’u territory thus provided a route of advance for influences from the northwestern borderlands into what is now central China . . . . It may well be that the origins of the Huai style are to be sought” in that direction.

In talking about the Huai art style of Middle Chou we become involved with the “Dongson Culture” of northern Viet Nam. Many authors believe that it was by way of the “Dongson Culture” that many of the “Chinese” decorative elements spread in Island Southeast Asia and Melanesia (Heine-Geldern 1937, 1966; Badner 1974). Karlgren supported the importance of the Huai art style to the
origins of the Dongson art, though he was specific in saying that Dongson was not a direct product of the Huai style (Karlgren 1942:14–15). Karlgren felt that Ordos art had been a strong influence on the Huai style:

Especially as several (though certainly not all) of the décor elements . . . common to early Dong-so’n and Huai occur in the Ordos art as well (some of them even introduced from Ordos into Huai . . .), it is very tempting to construct a great cultural area of three contiguous provinces: Ordos—Huai China—early Dong-s’o’n, with a free interchange of art motifs, and having in common a set of religious ideas . . . .

(1942:18–19)

Fraser’s paper, presented at the Columbia University symposium, was concerned with a number of motifs that he found in specific locations in New Zealand, the New World, and Indonesia. He said that precedents for every one of these motifs are found in the archaeological art of Late Chou times or earlier in that area.

Support for a Sinitic origin comes also from the priority of China in such motifs . . . . The Dong-son culture clearly has nothing to do with our complex. I therefore suggest that the complex is Sinitic in origin and probably of Chou date, but I do not know where this complex was centered in China or when and how it reached the other areas. The Ch’u culture . . . provides a clue that the original location may have been South China, presumably near the coast. (Fraser 1974:651–652)

In a postscript to this paper, Fraser (1974:652–653) accepts suggestions by William Watson and Heine-Geldern for interpretation of the data he presented. Watson suggested that a number of motifs found in Chinese art must have been a part of a religious substratum that showed up now and again in Shang and Chou times. Heine-Geldern suggested that an art style widespread in Siberia was taken up in pre-Shang times and survived in the area, at least until the end of the Chou period. This art, being largely on wood, is poorly known archaeologically. Fraser continues:

If the complex is indeed of pre-Shang date and non-royal in origin, this would go far to explain the vigorous primitive quality of the motifs which seem so indecorous by Chinese standards. In addition, the chronological problems would be greatly eased if China were to harbor such an iconographic complex from pre-Shang times down at least into the 1st millennium A.D.; this would mean that the complex could be transferred to other parts of the Pacific Basin at various times. But since the complex seems to be centered in China, I propose to call it the Old Sinitic complex.

THE OLD SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART STYLE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO EARLY CHINESE ART

I have recently (1979a–b, 1980) completed a rather detailed examination of a number of Heine-Geldern’s hypotheses having to do with Southeast Asian art styles and “Dongson Culture.” The 1979 and 1980 papers were largely concerned with the same subjects as this one and there is no need to repeat the arguments. A summary of some of my conclusions is appropriate, however. Heine-Geldern had hypothesized two distinctive art styles for prehistoric Southeast Asia, the monumental art style and the ornamental art style (1937:177–179). I suggested that what Fraser called the Old Sinitic complex (OSC) is much the same as Heine-Geldern’s ornamental art style. I proposed that the term Old Southeast Asian Complex
(OSEAC) should replace Heine-Geldern's ornamental art style and suggested that the monumental art style would probably be a part of this as well, with the OSEAC largely ancestral to the OSC and including much of it. In the 1980 paper I called attention to the new archaeological data from Viet Nam which clearly showed that the great majority of the motifs found in Dongson art had been present in Viet Nam, as expressed on its pottery, for fifteen hundred or more years before the beginning of Dongson, and that many of these motifs had been found on pottery in Island Southeast Asia and out into Melanesia several hundred years earlier than the beginning of Dongson in northern Viet Nam. (More recent dating from Viet Nam has Dong Son beginning by 800 B.C., so this would change the time of the motifs in Dongson art to twelve hundred or more years before Dong Son.) I therefore said:

Recognizing that Dongson art was only a late expression of the ornamental art style in a portion of Southeast Asia and without particular importance for the spread of the ornamental art in Island Southeast Asia and Oceania I suggest that we no longer consider the Dongson culture as any more than one phase of the Van Lang Period (Bronze Age) of Vietnamese history. (Solheim 1979a:195)

Before closing I would like to refer to several statements made earlier in this article. I noted that in Barnard's introduction to the papers presented at the Columbia symposium (1974) he said that all the papers were concerned with diffusion of art motifs from China to the Pacific Basin. Most of the specifically archaeological papers, however, denied this statement in one way or another. He further stated, in effect, that Southeast Asian pottery was derived from China. To date no pottery has been reported from North China earlier than the Yangshao pottery, while pottery was being made and used in Southeast Asia several thousand years earlier in northwestern Thailand (Gorman 1970) and in South China (Meacham 1977:423).

In this paper I have not specifically supported the third alternative that Fraser did not propose in his attempt to find the relationship between early Chinese art and certain art styles of the Pacific Basin—that is, that both of these have a common ancestor. Actually, in proposing the OSEAC I did support just this alternative. As the 1980 paper presented the details, I will briefly summarize now. Linton's statements, quoted earlier, are very suggestive in this direction; all they need is some supporting archaeological evidence. To provide this evidence, I will show that two of the secondary motifs that Heine-Geldern stated were a part of the Shang art style, the pseudomeander and spirals, were present in northern Thailand and Viet Nam several hundred to more than a thousand years before their presence in Shang art. The earliest pottery found at Ban Chiang in northeastern Thailand is the incised and impressed black pottery from the basal layers (White's [1982] "Early Periods" 1 and 2). While the vessel pictured here\(^2\) (Plate 1) is of unknown provenience, it is typical in form (Brown 1977:34#7) and method of decoration for the black Ban Chiang pottery. The running, interlocking scroll, as in the lower horizontal band of decoration, is a fairly common motif of the black pottery (Brown 1977:38/1-4 and 8, Plates 1-5, 6-7, 8b, 9), while the interlocking meander

\(^2\)This exciting piece was given to me in February 1980, following my talk to the Southeast Ceramic Society of Singapore, by Mr. David Mun of Singapore. I would like to thank him again for this most thoughtful gift.
(an angular running interlocking spiral or scroll) of the upper band is, to my knowledge, rare. This piece should date at about 3500–3000 B.C. (Gorman and Charoenwongsa 1976:26; White 1982:59). Plate II is a jar recovered from the bottom layer of Non Nok Tha and dated probably c. 3000 B.C. (Bayard 1972). Both of these date well before the beginning of the Shang Dynasty, but this does not necessarily mean that the Shang secondary motifs were derived from them. The varieties of running interlocking scroll and the pairs of connected spirals, found on the Dongson bronzes, were also present on northern Viet Nam pottery by around 2000 B.C. or earlier (Davidson 1975:91, Fig. 7), and both the scroll and the meander were present in southern Viet Nam and Cambodia by around 2000 B.C. (Solheim 1980). A variety of meander has been found on a sherd of the earliest pottery in Hong Kong, dated around 3200 B.C. (Meacham 1975: Fig. 9, top right). It is reasonable to suggest that these motifs were widespread elements of the OSEAC by 2000 B.C. and the likely predecessors of these motifs in the Shang art. The curvilinear scroll was also present in the western Philippines (around 1000 B.C.), earlier than the beginning of Dongson in Viet Nam (around 750 B.C.), and thus could not have spread from the Dongson phase of Vietnamese prehistory (Fox
PLATE II. Large jar from Non Nok Tha, northeastern Thailand, with incised and impressed pseudo-meander pattern on rim and shoulder; from bottom layer.

1970:Figs. 23, 33). Both the curvilinear running scroll and the meander were present in the central Philippines by around 800 B.C. (Solheim 1964:Fig. 17, Plate 7; 1968b:Fig. 5-1, Plate Vb, d, e, g, h) and in eastern Indonesia as early or earlier (Solheim 1980).

I mentioned above that Samolin had listed the use of granulation or dotted bands or surfaces, and S-shaped double spirals as new elements of the Huai style art, it was suggested that these elements came from the Ordos to the north of China or from the west by way of Ch’u. The motifs illustrated in Plates I and II are accentuated by a variety of granulation (texturing the surface), in these cases by a crenelate rocker stamp, changing to dotted or dashed surfaces in the examples from Viet Nam and the Philippines. I have not noted in the Old Southeast Asian Art Style the small circles on the bodies of animals mentioned by Samolin. Karl­gren’s suggestion of a free interchange (diffusion) of art motifs in the Ordos—Huai China—Dongson culture areas seems valid, with a number of the motifs previ­ously thought to have come from Ordos probably originating and spreading from Southeast Asia sometime previous to Dongson times.

The secondary motifs of the Shang bronzes and pottery were hypothesized to have given rise to the patterns of the Geometric Pottery of South China (Chang 1977:412-414). Before $^{14}$C dating the Geometric Pottery was dated as post-1500 B.C. to go along with this assumed origin (Solheim 1980). Meacham (1978:125-
126) has pointed out that early Geometric Pottery was known in South China as early as 2500 B.C. and certainly was widespread before 2000 B.C. (beginning of Shang around 1700 B.C.). It could, therefore, be the source of the geometric background of the Shang bronzes and hard pottery. It is this pottery that I have hypothesized as the direct source of the “Malay” pottery (Solheim 1981a). I have further suggested that it was the Nusantao (Austronesian speaking), non-Chinese, water/trading people of coastal South China and northern Viet Nam who were the ancestors of the present-day Malay and who brought this kind of pottery and its manufacture to Island Southeast Asia (Solheim 1975, 1981b). I now modify this suggestion to say that the Nusantao, water/trading people of coastal northern Viet Nam intermarried with the earlier Nusantao in some areas of Island Southeast Asia, and this combination was the ancestor of the present-day Malay people.

The monumental art of Heine-Geldern’s Southeast Asian two art styles is rarely found in archaeological context as ordinarily it was executed in wood and so did not last in the ground (Solheim 1980). This is the explanation suggested by Fraser for the archaeological rarity in China of the motifs he discusses (1974:651–652). I would suggest that these motifs presented by Fraser—and those presented in the book he edited (1968)—are part of Heine-Geldern’s archaeologically very rare monumental art, and that this woodcarver’s art (done occasionally in bronze and stone in Shang China) was closely associated with the ornamental art in Southeast Asia, with the latter now becoming known to us through the recovery of prehistoric pottery.

Previous to the archaeological excavations and research of the last 15 years in Southeast Asia, it was widely accepted that much of the Southeast Asian and Pacific Islands art style had originated in China (without careful definition of the term “China”). We now see that not only did much of the Southeast Asian art style originate in Southeast Asia (including South China) but that Southeast Asia is a likely source for many motifs of the art of the Proto-Chinese and possibly the Ordos. In his conclusions on the cultural development of South China, Meacham (1977:427) refers to culture traits appearing virtually simultaneously and independently over the area. I do not agree with his use of the word “independently” but rather that, as he says a few lines later, this “must be taken as evidence of continuous cultural inter-flow,” in other words diffusion, moving in all directions. When, before 14C dating, the presence of closely similar art motifs in Ordos, China, and Southeast Asia was interpreted as the result of diffusion from north to south, probably by migration, no one objected. Now that we find 14C dates for a number of these motifs, making them older in the south than the north, we find people objecting to my saying that these motifs moved (diffused—by whatever method) from south to north (Meacham 1977:421). I have to admit feeling that strictly local and independent evolution of cultures anywhere in the world (except in such circumstances as Easter Island) is rare, and that communication among peoples by trade, migrations, or intermarriage between different groups (in other words diffusion) is a much more important source for new ideas, new styles, and new artifacts in the development of cultures. It must be remembered, however, that the people of the different cultures that are in communication with each other are the ones who decide whether a particular element of culture is to be adopted and adapted to their own culture. In this they can be considered independent.
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