In recent years, a considerable amount of archaeological field research has been carried out in Southeast Asia. Chester Gorman figured prominently in the new era of research in terms of both quantity and quality. The results of this research (in some instances not yet in print) have occasionally been startling. For example, Gorman's retrieval of evidence (1970:79–108) for early plant manipulation in a Hoabinhian context from Spirit Cave in Thailand and of evidence for an early bronze technology and rice agriculture from Non Nok Tha in Thailand (Bayard 1970:109–144) has revolutionized the prehistories of Southeast Asia. In all instances new research has changed the "facts" of Southeast Asian prehistory as presented before 1960. There is, for example, some evidence that a Bacsonian and a Hoabinhian are represented from the Philippines, even though it has been thought for many years that such sites are confined to Mainland Southeast Asia and Sumatra (Peterson 1979:120–139).

While some of the changes in Southeast Asian prehistory are due simply to an expanded empirical base, others are due to political shifts or are the result of developments in the discipline of archaeology itself. There is a close and complex relationship among political attitudes, archaeological research, and historical developments in the field. Scholarly images of Southeast Asian prehistory are a direct reflection of paradigmatic developments in archaeology plus the unconscious political habits of individual archaeologists and anthropologists. There is, in addition, an interplay between the evolution of archaeology as a discipline and colonialism, which is mirrored in the reconstructions of Southeast Asian culture history. The stylistic evolution of such reconstructions will be discussed, together with the pertinent transformations within archaeology, in order to demonstrate how political atmosphere and paradigm shifts have affected, and are related to, archaeological perspectives for Southeast Asia.

A different vantage point will be suggested from which to evaluate representations of Southeast Asian prehistory. To a great extent, all scholars are prisoners of

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the political and academic biases and attitudes of their times. Existing portrayals of
the prehistory of Southeast Asia have been greatly affected by colonial attitudes
that often operate below the level of awareness among individual archaeologists. In
a number of ways political factors may be as significant as the effects of new data.
In archaeology these influences have often resulted in skewed archaeological inter-
pretations. Underlying the distortions is the cause, a fundamental misunder-
standing so great as to constitute a conceptual pathology that is widely shared by
archaeologists: that is, that prehistory is discoverable, that objects speak for them-
selves, and that archaeologists simply describe what they find. So long as these
epistemological errors prevail, genuine objectivity is not possible. Prehistories are
creations/interpretations of the archaeologist rather than explanations (Binford and
Sabloff 1982:138) and as such are vulnerable to influences that warp the interpreta-
tions. They are based on contrasts between objects and sites that yield information.
This is the essence of description. What is being presented in a description are a
few contrasts subjectively selected from an infinity of potential contrasts (Bateson
1979:110). Thus, descriptions are information, but not all or even most of the
information that could be generated. The selected differences are organized into
classifications in which the taxons are defined by the criteria that created the
contrasts. Prehistories may be seen as classifications of these classes, another level
of organization. Significantly, many alternative prehistories can be constructed
from the same descriptive classes. It is then clear that a prehistory is not "real," but
only one of many possible classifications that could be written to contrast one
archaeological site with others. The widespread misapprehension which leads ar-
chaeologists to believe that prehistories are discoverable parts of reality functions as
an anesthetic that numbs many archaeologists to the fact that archaeologists are
influenced by many factors. An awareness of the errors and of the sources of
warping is a step toward objectivity.

Beyond the basic errors, there are four facts to consider that have influenced the
interpretations of prehistory in Southeast Asia. Some of these require elaboration.
First, most research into Southeast Asian prehistory has been idiographic in nature.
That fact reflects the basic orientation of archaeology, which has until recently
been a descriptive discipline. The dominant research goals of archaeology were and
largely remain idiographic (reconstruction of past lifeways, reconstruction of cul-
ture history, preliminary data ordering) (Peterson 1977; Peterson and Peterson
1977; Dunnell 1982). It has only been within the past 20 years that nomothetic
research has taken place anywhere. This has been a period of debate and change for
archaeology, and many oppose the inclusion of nomothetic as well as idiographic
research goals (for example, Hawkes 1968; Leach 1972). It is most unlikely that
such opposition will have any effect on the stately, inexorable movement of ar-
chaeology into a mature stage (Kuhn 1962). Archaeology is a young discipline; as
such, an initial stage characterized by a concentration on data collection, classifica-
tion, and measurement was to be expected. Now, however, a more mature ap-
proach is demanded by recent theoretical developments in the field. Given that the
inclusion of nomothetic research goals first occurred in the 1960s it is scarcely
startling that Southeast Asian archaeologists produced only descriptive site reports

1The discussion of Kuhn's ideas of paradigm changes in this article suffers from a number of misun-
derstandings. It is more consistent with Kuhn to regard archaeology as being in a pre-paradigmatic state.
Also, Kuhn's approach to paradigm change is that it is beyond the reach of rational change.
and culture histories until the 1970s. The archaeological literature for Southeast Asia has simply reflected the idiographic state of the discipline.

Second, interpretive or nomothetic research has begun only recently in Southeast Asia (Dunn 1970). This research is quite different from earlier research in that now attempts are made to explain rather than describe archaeological phenomena. Again, the trend reflects developments in the discipline, where nomothetic research is quite new.

Third, the stage frameworks or reconstructed culture histories that exist are idiographic. There is widespread misapprehension of the descriptive nature of culture histories both within and outside archaeology. Many individuals assume that since culture histories go beyond individual archaeological site reports, they are also beyond the idiographic level. The fact remains, however, that culture histories are merely classifications of some classes of archaeological information and constitute data-ordering rather than explanation.

Fourth, colonialism has affected archaeological interpretations and insights in Southeast Asia to a considerable extent. In some instances this is due to the politics of power and economics; in others, it is a result of conflicting epistemologies. It is ironic that archaeologists, who are anthropologists, have failed to recognize the existence of culturally different attitudes in the realm of scholarship and have often forced their own perspectives on the reconstructed prehistories of Southeast Asian countries as well. There has been much willingness to accept those interpretations on the part of both Western and Asian scholars.

A BRIEF CHARACTERIZATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

The four points just noted are best examined through a brief analysis of the approaches used in the past by Western archaeologists working in Southeast Asia. Two basic approaches are represented: a culture history approach and a nomothetic approach. Although there is a rough correlation with time reflected here (the earliest approaches were descriptive reports or culture histories), enough scholars are still attempting to “outline” the prehistory of the area that I am reluctant to characterize these as periods in the research of Southeast Asian prehistory.

Culture History Approach

I wish initially to establish that culture histories are descriptive. They are, in fact, special types of classifications. Just as prehistoric tools are classified by certain attributes to form artifact classifications which serve as a basis for comparison, archaeological sites are classified by attributes of time, space, and cultural content into classifications which serve as a means for ordering and comparing archaeological sites. These stage frameworks, as they are sometimes called, are selectively descriptive summaries of the archaeological sites from specific geographical spaces. They serve to order the masses of data represented by the accumulation of descriptive site reports for regions of the globe. The alternative to such summaries is unrealistic; that is, to present the information about each site individually. For Southeast Asia, where relatively little research has been done, the sheer volume of published information on sites requires some means of summarizing the data which are represented. Culture histories are therefore indispensable for communi-
cation within the discipline and especially for communication across disciplines. However, such devices remain idiographic rather than explanatory.

The ordering of archaeological data represented by culture histories enables one to perceive, through comparison, the basic changes in technology and subsistence which occur over time in a region when chronological information is also available. The combination of information on time, space, and form is the essence of good "descriptive" archaeology, and many of the techniques for gaining that information are relatively new. Perhaps that is a partial explanation for the descriptive fixation of archaeologists; a great deal of the creative energies of archaeologists has been spent on the necessary task of refining these techniques. Even though causal questions were not posed, considerable attention has been given to the development of concepts or mechanisms which could account for the observable changes which occurred in prehistory. Concepts such as diffusion or innovation can be said to have some explanatory weight, but they are often used in reference to particular events in unique, descriptive contexts. The terms actually refer to complex and poorly understood cultural processes rather than to events. When the concepts are used in culture history they often assert much but explain very little. For example, "the beginning of the Southeast Asian Neolithic is attributed to the spread of populations of Mongoloid physical type from China" (Shuter and Shuter 1975). This quote implies that the Neolithic of Southeast Asia was the direct result of population expansion from China. There is no evidence to support the assertion that such an event occurred; it is a method of accounting for changes that ignores much more than it explains. Sometimes "direct diffusion" is used to explain the presence of similar artifacts in different cultural contexts. "According to the hypothesis of the French excavators, at a certain time the people using these primitive implements came into contact with a people using polished manufacts, with the result that they began to polish some of their own stone tools" (Stein Callensfels 1928). Note that no evidence is adduced to support the contention that borrowing occurred, nor is any reason as to why the recipients should take on the labor intensive technique of stone polishing. It is not beyond reason to expect more meaningful explanations of distributive patterns.

Two types of culture histories are represented for Southeast Asia. The first can be referred to as "colonial-antiquarian" culture histories. I refer to the second type as "internal-developmental" culture histories. Colonial-antiquarian culture histories are, for the most part, representative of earlier work in Southeast Asia. The best-known reconstruction is that of Heine-Geldern (1932), who attempted to trace the movements of prehistoric peoples through a combination of ethnographic evidence and information on linguistic and adze-type distributions. Many of the first archaeologists to work in Southeast Asia made few attempts to synthesize archaeological data in any way (for example, Mansuy 1902; Colani 1927; Patte 1932; Collings 1937; Noone 1939). Other archaeologists who did construct culture histories include Beyer (1948), van Heekeren (1957), and Movius (1948). Unfortunately, early or recent, most share one thing in common: an apparent attitude which colored their thoughts and publications on Southeast Asian prehistory.

It is hardly surprising that colonialism has played a key role, because until quite recently Southeast Asia has been under the political and economic domination of predominately Western powers. In retrospect, the colonial biases of Western archaeologists seem apparent. As Solheim (1969, 1970) points out, the atti-
tude seems to have been (and in some instances still is) that Southeast Asia was a cultural backwater, an area incapable of producing its own innovations and totally dependent for change upon cultural borrowing from more developed cultural centers. The point of origin of the innovations is often not specified. The reconstructed culture histories produced by Western archaeologists reflect colonialist—perhaps, racist—attitudes which mirror the cultural attitudes of the times. Let me provide some examples from the archaeological literature. From the translation by Skinner (1957) comes the following statement by Heine-Geldern: “diffusion of groups speaking an Austro-asiatic language and probably having Mongoloid bodily characteristics, with Neolithic Schulterbeil Culture, from a region not yet known via Southeast Asia to the south Chinese coast, Formosa, Philippines, North Celebes, Japan, N.E. Korea, perhaps also a part of India.” Beyer (1948:38), in speaking of the origins of the Neolithic, says that: “While the Early and Middle Neolithic culture apparently entered the coastal and island region of Eastern Asia partly from the West and partly from the north or northwest—as has previously discussed—the typical Late Neolithic of the region seems to be chiefly a development in Central China or along an axis extending from north central China to Indo-China.” Collings (1937:103) pursues a slightly different line:

The only conclusion that can be arrived at is that the cave folk collected these sherds, for some reason or other, from a more advanced and pot using people of neolithic culture who perhaps lived in open sites as was suggested in the case of the Baling Caves. Many of the sherds are of very good quality and it is inconceivable to the writer that they could have been made by such people as these cave dwellers who were in an obviously low stage of material culture.

Van Heekeren (1957:128), discussing the distribution of quadrangular adzes in Indonesia, states that, “the presence of these tools in Indonesia should be ascribed to a wave of migration from the Asian continent between the second and first millennium B.C.” A. H. Dani (1960), in a discussion of the Hoabinhian of Southeast Asia, says, “A complete change from the food-gathering stage to a food-producing economy . . . suggests an intrusion from outside, from a region where such economies must already have existed. It is not easy, however, to find such a region and demonstrate the way in which the new cultural type or ideas reached here from that region.” The obvious answer to these ponderings is that the ideas were often indigenous.

Some of the more extreme examples of a colonial attitude are quite recent. Mo- vius (1948:41) states, “In other words, the archaeological, or palaeo-ethnological, material very definitely indicates that as early as Lower Palaeolithic times Southern and Eastern Asia as a whole was a region of cultural retardation.” In a discussion of the Hoabinhian, Fairservice (1959:105) comments that

The impression one gets from these remains is one of remoteness and even of backwardness. In none of the sites are there good indications of agriculture or even of domesticated animals (except perhaps the dog). The people of the caves, rock shelters, and kitchen middens were food-gatherers, and in spite of the excellent polished tools and ornaments which they possessed in their later phases of occupation their culture still appears quite primitive—as if even their hunting techniques were somewhat retarded. One wonders whether they are truly representative of the prehistoric cultures of Southeast Asia or whether they really represent fringe areas.
A number of archaeologists evidently could not see Southeast Asia as a donor area. For these individuals and others, change in prehistoric Southeast Asia was the result of borrowing, or of intrusion of peoples from elsewhere. The correlation of this attitude on the part of some archaeologists with the colonial period is too obvious to be overlooked.

In recent years, there has appeared a culture historian of a different type who represents a reaction to the colonial attitudes embodied in earlier reconstructions. Other scholars (such as Solheim 1969, 1970 and others; Jocano 1967; Fox 1971; Glover 1973) have stressed the role of innovation in Southeast Asian prehistory and have repudiated the idea that the region was a cultural backwater. A single quote will suffice to establish the point. Solheim (1969) states that

The most obvious difference between my reconstruction and the traditional reconstructions based on that of Heine-Geldern's is that in mine Southeast Asians are innovators, contributing much to world culture and in particular contributing the foundation for North Chinese culture and its later expansion, as opposed to seeing Southeast Asia as a cul de sac with innovations and progress coming from the outside, and in particular owing much of its progress to migrations from the north, China in particular.

The internal-developmental culture historians, while offering a more balanced, noncolonial summation of Southeast Asian prehistory, are still bound to the use of the concepts of diffusion and innovation as mechanisms of change in their reconstructions. The tendency to overplay the explanatory power of "diffusion" and "innovation" is one of the last vestiges of the recent past. Another is the seeming inability of some culture historians to recognize that their reconstructions are not "real," that they are interpretations of archaeological data which exhibit political and cultural nuances and colorings.

Nomothetic Approaches

The emergence of nomothetic research and synthesis in the archaeology of Southeast Asia has been quite recent (Dunn 1970) and must be seen as the direct result of developments in the discipline as a whole. Nomothetic research began in archaeology within the last twenty years and is characterized by the use of idiosyncratic information to address cause-and-effect relationships in prehistory. Great variability has been characteristic of the nomothetic approach to Southeast Asian prehistory. Dunn (1970:1041–1054) attempted to explain differences between Mainland and Island Southeast Asia by analogy to a population genetics model. The analogy is so superficial as to render the argument useless as an explanation, and empirical violations of the model are numerous. Another questionable attempt at explanation is Hutterer's (1976) argument that the diversity of archaeological sites in Southeast Asia is a reflection of diverse ecological conditions in tropical rainforests. The argument is ecologically and theoretically naive (J. Peterson 1976:236; W. Peterson 1976:236–237), and has not been demonstrated by archaeological excavations or ecological investigations of actual tropical forest conditions. Such conclusions must rest on the sound empirical foundations of excavation rather than on speculation. There is little or no evidence in the literature to support either (a) unusual cultural diversity in prehistoric Southeast Asia as contrasted with other areas or (b) a correlation between forest diversity and cultural diversity (an idea which suggests simple determinism).
Gorman has presented some of the more valuable attempts at the nomothetic approach to Southeast Asian prehistory. In one article (Gorman 1977) he presented two alternative models explaining the origins of agriculture in Southeast Asia; in a more recent article (Gorman and Charoenwongsa 1978) he concentrated on explaining the emergence of domestication, metallurgy, and urbanization. Both have the invaluable attribute of resting on the hard empiricism of excavation and should be seen as devices that stimulate research. For contrast with the foregoing quotations, compare the following:

The hypothesis is advanced that the initial domestication (a result of human intervention in the ecological affairs) of rice was not a result of cultural preadaptations per se, nor a result of population pressure (none is documented for the northern Thai Hoabinhian), but rather reflects a biological shift in Oryza itself. The small-seeded perennials of the Pleistocene, in the face of slight changes in temperature, precipitation, [sic] changed to a larger-seeded and more reliable annuals. (Gorman and Charoenwongsa 1978:35–36)

These and other interpretive schemes (for example, Kress 1977; Peterson 1974) are different in kind from the culture history approach. They are, first of all, nomothetic in orientation; they address questions of cause and effect, and they are capable of generating testable predictions in some heuristic sense. Much of current and future archaeological research in Southeast Asia is or will be guided by insights from the explanatory schemes that exist.

CONCLUSION

The nature of Southeast Asian archaeological research has been idiographic until very recently. Most of the research has culminated in site reports and reconstructed culture histories, that is, in description or data ordering. An appraisal of archaeological publications for the area reveals certain patterns. There is a progression, first of all, from data reports to reconstructions of culture history to the presentation of explanatory models. Second, the culture histories fall into either diffusionist or internal developmental categories. Diffusionist reconstructions show some relationship to political and economic history.

These patterns are due to an interplay of political and academic developments over time. The first pattern, that of a progression from data reports to explanatory models, is most closely related to changes in the discipline of archaeology. The second pattern, that of a shift from diffusionist to internal developmental cultural histories, correlates with the history of colonialism in Southeast Asia. Both political and academic factors must be considered in evaluating the archaeological literature for the area.

Epistemological errors in archaeology have contributed in a major way to bias in the interpretation of prehistory. The conceptual pathology involves the belief that facts lie before the observer, that objects speak for themselves, and that archaeologists merely describe what they find when prehistory is written. The effects of these epistemological errors have been many, but a primary effect has been the acceptance by non-Western scholars of the biases and assumptions of Western scholars. There appears to be a conceptual progression at work: that facts are discoverable, that prehistories are the presentation of these facts, that published Southeast Asian prehistories are therefore “true” and are not subject to prejudice, bias, or political
influence. Since this progression is based on fundamental errors, it is clearly incorrect. There is a great need to understand the subjective nature of culture history reconstructions and the errors that lead to their warping and biasing.

A related problem generated by the same epistemological errors is in the realm of methodology in archaeology. There is an astounding tyranny of method over mind/theory in the discipline of archaeology which stems from the same conceptual pathology discussed earlier. This is that rigorous archaeological retrieval and analytical methods insure "scientific facts" and objectivity and that advanced, expensive methods of retrieval and analysis insure superior culture histories and research. This attitude, communicated to non-Western scholars, results in training programs narrowly focused on method rather than on conceptualization. Methods of retrieval and analysis should serve the ends of conceptualization. Presently, training in traditional methods of excavation and data analysis is considered sufficient for the student. The root problem is that epistemological errors have been transmitted through training programs to non-Western scholars. Much of the training (Lyons 1977) has been by Westerners who perpetuate the errors with which they were socialized and trained, and is based on a literature in method and culture history which for the most part is written by Western scholars. The result of the socialization and training is a continuation of the same fundamental errors by non-Western scholars. Deliberate prejudice, bias, and colonial attitudes are in general matters of the past, but a problem persists in the exportation of Western epistemological errors which are conveyed in training programs that focus only on traditional methods and ignore conceptual training. Students are given interpretations of culture history flavored by Western thought and political history, and training in methods which do not allow them to perceive the errors.

Perhaps the most important point to be made concerns the evident role colonialism has played in the presentation of culture histories for Southeast Asia. The effect of this still-evident academic colonialism has been devastating. It has warped the classification and ordering of the prehistoric data. It has imposed constraints on the pursuit of knowledge in Southeast Asian archaeology by denying the area a properly innovative cultural background and by representing the area culturally as retarded and thus not worth investigation. Worst of all, it has affected the self-image of Southeast Asians, both lay persons and scholars. The colonial heritage is still very much in evidence in the way Southeast Asians perceive their own histories, and in the inheritance of the epistemological error that facts and culture histories lie before the observer.

Once the nature of the epistemological errors is understood, some possible solutions become apparent. Most important is training which identifies the errors that exist in Western thought and literature in archaeology. This should provide the understanding that research questions are related to methodology and that testability of research results implies that more than one acceptable culture history can be written. Understanding of the complete research procedure from concepts to the publication of results is necessary. Another important solution is to structure training to include phases in research beyond the simple retrieval of objects (field methods). There should be training which carries through lab analysis and report preparation as well. Thorough training in the research act as well as the inculcation of epistemological awareness should go far toward combating the philosophical problems which exist in both the East and the West.
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