
Reviewed by Wilhelm G. Solheim II, University of Hawaii

This is a first-class book, and the first one that includes both the Holocene prehistory and the early history of much of Mainland Southeast Asia, written by one author and giving roughly equal weight to both subjects. There are a number of relatively minor points with which I disagree, but I am amazed at the quantity and quality of the data presented.

The total area of Mainland Southeast Asia is not defined but could, as Higham states (p. 1), "extend from the Irrawaddy to the Yangzi." I would include more area to the west and north, but rather than trying to cover all of Mainland Southeast Asia, Higham concentrates on the valleys of the Red, Mekong, and Chao Phraya rivers and the area in between. No one could do more, as so much of the area of Southeast Asia is still a blank as far as its prehistory is concerned. Similarly, for some areas very little is known of the early historic period to the fall of Angkor. I would go further and say that major portions of these rivers and the areas between are virtually unknown as well, but Higham does the best that can be done with the information available.

Higham divides his text into seven chapters. The introduction (pp. 1–30) presents the context of Southeast Asia and the history of archaeological research therein. Chapter 2, "Hunter-Gatherer Communities and Early Domestication" (pp. 31–89), covers the so-called Hoabinhian and Bacsonian of Viet Nam, northwestern and central-western Thailand, and western Cambodia. In considerably more detail, Higham describes Khok Phanom Di and its contents, a site that he excavated near the northeastern tip of the Gulf of Thailand. His theme in this description is model making of developing social organization and complexity.

Chapter 3 (pp. 90–189) covers "The Expansion of Domestic Communities." Here the author presents the population expansion that took place roughly from the fourth into the first millennium B.C. This time span is when bronze and later iron became important local manufactures. Again, emphasis is placed upon cultural and social development. Higham uses the cultural framework of four general periods proposed by Donn Bayard for northeastern Thailand (p. 99), not only for Thailand but for the whole area covered. Summaries of the finds at the major sites in northeastern Thailand are emphasized, with good coverage also for sites in central and western Thailand and in both northern and southern Thailand. Sites in northern Viet Nam are less thoroughly covered. While much excavation has been done in Viet Nam, little has been published in languages other than Vietnamese.

Chapter 4 (pp. 190–238) is titled "The End of Autonomy and Emergence of Chiefdoms" and covers the period from about 600 B.C., with the possible beginning of iron manufacture, to about A.D. 300, for some areas. During this time a hierarchy of sites begins to develop in all areas described, with fortification and/or water control in the form of moats and reservoirs around the larger sites. Some of these sites may have had a population of 1000 or more. This period covers the development of the Dongson Culture in northern Viet Nam, the Sa-
huynh Culture in southern Viet Nam, and several other similar but distinct cultures in northeastern Thailand—distinct at least according to their pottery styles. The greatest amount of data is for the many sites in northeastern Thailand.

“The Development of Mandalas” is the title of chapter 5 (pp. 239–320). Mandala in Southeast Asia refers to a centrally organized territory without fixed boundaries, the extent of its political control varying according to the abilities of its ruler. Higham covers several of the better known of these mandalas, including Funan, in the delta area of the Mekong; the following Chenla, with its center to the north of Funan, in the middle Mekong area of Cambodia and southern Laos (although Chenla, as examined by Higham, was probably not a single entity but several small mandalas vying with each other for power and control of trade); Dvaravati, in central Thailand; northeastern Thailand without a named mandala; the later portion of the Dongson Culture; and the development of Champa in central and southern Viet Nam.

The first five chapters rely mainly on archaeological data. The time period covered is protohistoric, with information coming from an art-historical approach to sculpture and architecture, inscriptions often associated with architectural remains, and Chinese historic records. Chapter 6 (pp. 321–355) covers “The Angkorian Mandala: A.D. 802–1431,” which could be considered as historic. The final chapter (pp. 356–362) is “Concluding Remarks: The Structure of the Past in Southeast Asia.”

I remark on a few minor inaccuracies, as I see them; the different points of interest between myself and Higham and the resulting different interpretations of data; and a possible alternative interpretation of the entrance of Indian influence to Southeast Asia.

On pages 36–37, Higham states that Madeleine Colani considered that the Hoabinhian was “certainly after the end of the Pleistocene period.” In fact, when she first proposed the Hoabinhian, Colani believed that it came during the very late Pleistocene. At the meeting of the Pacific Science Congress in Bandung in 1929, pressure was put on her by van Stein Callenfels, and others to consider that it was totally in the Holocene, mainly because the associated fauna did not include any extinct Pleistocene fauna. She rather reluctantly went along with this argument (Solheim 1974:19–20).

Higham apparently thinks that pottery first entered the Thailand Spirit Cave occupation during the laying down of the top layer. He states (p. 60): “It must be recalled, that there may have been a hiatus of many generations between the abandonment of Spirit Cave at the close of layer 2, and its subsequent reoccupation by people bringing ceramics with them.” Chester Gorman (1970:93) clearly states: “The surface of Layer 2 was compacted, and numerous potsherds were scattered about and pressed into the surface as if they had been walked on long enough to level them into the surface compaction. . . . The surface of Layer 2 can be viewed as a living surface during the use of which new cultural elements came into the Spirit Cave area.” This certainly means that ceramics entered Spirit Cave at the time of formation of the top of Layer 2, not Layer 1.

The dating of early bronze manufacture in northeastern Thailand has been controversial since dates were first announced. Higham has been the best informed of those arguing against the early dating that Donn Bayard and I have presented. In this book, he proposes dates that fall toward the early side of what he has previously argued for. For Non Nok Tha, he says (p. 126): “Thus, the bronze-bearing levels probably fall within the time span 2000–1000 B.C., though greater precision is still not possible.” He notes copper mining, not yet dated (p. 147), at Phu Lon, at the northwestern edge of the Khorat Plateau. He further notes copper working at several sites near Lopburi (p. 168) and states: “When the radiocarbon dating for this industrial activity is available, it would be surprising if the time span were not within the period 1500–250 B.C.” Since he wrote this, more publications have appeared on this early copper mining and working (Bennett 1988; Natapintu 1988). Surapol Natapintu (1988:122) has stated: “At this moment I am convinced that copper-
based metallurgy was well developed in mainland Southeast Asia by the second millennium B.C., if not earlier.” During the Circum-Pacific Prehistory Conference, held in Seattle in August 1989, Vincent Pigott reported two dates for copper working in the middle to late third millennium B.C. Finally, Higham has told me that in the excavation at Nong Nor in early 1991, near Khok Phanom Di, southeast of Bangkok, he discovered a burial with bronze bracelets, the site securely dated to the mid-third millennium B.C. Although this does not confirm our early dates for bronze working at Non Nok Tha, it at least indicates that they are not unreasonable. This also suggests that the date of the third millennium B.C. “from an organic crust adhering to a potsherd,” recovered by E. Saurin at Hang Gon in southern Vietnam, may not be far off, in spite of Higham’s statement that “little if any value attaches to such a sample” (p. 169).

This brings me to consideration of a rather important difference in interpretation of the data between Higham and me. He considers that cultural innovations, such as rice and metallurgy, came from the north along the coast and moved inland in Southeast Asia along the rivers (pp. 184–189). I have no argument against maritime movement of ideas and peoples, but I believe that the communication between seashore and inland areas goes back thousands of years before the coming of metallurgy and that ideas and peoples moved in both directions. I suspect that both the domestication of rice and the development of metallurgy occurred in the interior of Southeast Asia and moved to the coast before they, and other cultural elements, were carried to new areas by a maritime culture.

Now I come to a difference in our interests: Higham is most interested in internal social development, while my interest centers on broad area similarities and how they might have come about. In his presentation of the data from Khok Phanom Di and his discussion of its meaning (pp. 70–89), Higham illustrates several impressive pottery vessels (pp. 79, 81, 88). Nowhere does he mention, however, the similarity of these vessels—both in pattern and techniques of decoration and in elements of form—to the pottery from Laang Spean not far away in Cambodia, from late Neolithic sites in peninsular Malaysia, or from the Sa-huynh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition. These similarities are not exact, but I find it hard to believe that they do not reveal a connection. I have been expressing this belief for over 30 years and focusing on the process of the spread of these similarities since about 1974 (Solheim 1975a, 1975b).

When Higham talks about maritime trade and maritime contact between Southeast Asia and outside, I always get the feeling that he considers that Southeast Asians had nothing to do with these contacts. He talks about Indian coastal traders bringing trade materials and ideas to Southeast Asia and India (pp. 208–209, 244, 312–313, 359) and about Indian and Chinese expansion in Southeast Asia (p. 307). I know of no evidence for a maritime tradition in India before the Cholas of around the middle of the first millennium A.D. The earliest reference I have seen to Indian trade with Southeast Asia is in third-century A.D. folktales of eastern India that tell of Indian princes and merchants traveling to Southeast Asia as supercargo on Southeast Asian ships.

Higham, in his last chapter, does emphasize the unity through diversity of Southeast Asia and its considerable independence of cultural development up until Indian and Chinese contact. I feel, however, that his thinking is in the framework of a similar development path that followed in Europe, the Middle East, and the rest of Asia. I believe that cultural evolution in Southeast Asia, except to some extent for northern Vietnam after about A.D. 44, was different and can best be considered in its own light rather than through the theoretical filter of Western cultural change.

REFERENCES


Solheim, Wilhelm G. II 1974 The Hoabinhian and Island Southeast


Reviewed by Hsio-Yen Shih, University of Hong Kong

This is the fourth volume in the “Early Chinese Civilization Series,” which has already produced studies of the Shang, Eastern Zhou and Qin (sic), and Han periods. Compared to the other titles, this work is more multidisciplinary in approach, as befits the wide competence of its authors, one of whom is the university professor of history and sociology and the other, professor of fine arts and anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh. Their view of culture as system and process requiring integrated study led them to examine the organization of economic, sociopolitical, and ideological life between the eleventh and eighth centuries B.C. not only through traditional textual accounts and bronze inscriptions but also through recently available archaeological evidence for material culture.

Hsu and Linduff correct one view of the Chou as conquerors who repulsed the Shang, for the Chou thought of themselves as “inheritors of an already defined Hua-Hsia, or Chinese culture” (p. 1). The first chapter sets the Chou background in the Neolithic and Shang periods. Its survey of Neolithic cultures in five geographic/ecological zones is succinct and generally accurate, although omission of the Sung-che phase in the Southern Yangtze Valley sequence is a lapse. Whether Neolithic interaction led to a “necessary and inevitable” fusion, and whether early historic competition for commodities “forced organization of a political entity that could maintain stability,” are theoretical statements of social evolutionary processes that might be debated. Proximity and population pressure stimulating agricultural production to produce surplus, plus the circumscription of competing “nations”: these conditions demanding a political and social order “able to distribute, organize, and utilize resources were present at the beginning of the Bronze Age in China” (p. 9). The Hsia is seen as one of many early polities moving from confederacy to monarchy by establishment of a patriarchal succession. Others not recorded in history may be identified with various archaeological cultures.

The authors’ review of Shang material culture focuses on the bronze industry but, surprisingly, they do not link it to the pottery industry, upon which it must have relied for experience of heat control as a molding and carving technique. The identification of the Chou as part of the Hsia confederacy is supported by the Er-li-t’ou “palace” foundation, which is closer to Western Chou architectural remains than to
Shang structures at Er-li-kang, P'an-lung-ch'eng, or An-yang. The Chou, however, embraced Shang state organization, agricultural practices, and written languages.

The Hsia-Chou connection is further amplified in chapter 2, on the preconquest Chou, although the Chou allegiance to the Shang is also acknowledged. Of greater interest is the Chou history of moving from agriculture to a seminomadic mode of existence in the course of migrations from original homelands (possibly in southern Shansi) and ultimately back to agriculture. The Chou thereafter retained close ties with various western and northwestern border peoples. On the other hand, the Shang enfeoffed the Chou chieftain Tan Fu, and the Chou oracle bones found at Ch'i-shan testify to Chou sacrifices to Shang ancestors. There is some evidence, however, that the Chou were selective in the cultural practices they adopted from the Shang, as for example in administrative structure, for which their own functionally differentiated offices proved more efficient.

In chapter 3, Hsu and Linduff examine the Chou conquest in relation to the notion of the Mandate of Heaven. The decisive battle at Muyeh lasted only one day. Although the general productivity of the Chou is not considered to have been greater than that of the Shang, its military organization, particularly of infantry and strategy, is deemed superior. Excavation of the “Ho” tsun (vaselike bronze container) in 1965 provided a long inscription including such terms as t'ien-shih (Chamber of Heaven), t'ien-ming (Mandate of Heaven), and chung-kuo (Central Kingdom). T'ien-ming is compared to the Shang notion of Shang-ti (Ruler on High). The earlier notion was intimately connected to the deification of past kings and queens, ancestor worship, and patriarchal authority; the later term implied a universal supreme being and the moralization of political authority, thereby preparing the ground for Confucian humanism with its new worldview demanding rationalism and exertion of the human will.

Chapter 4 treats the history of the Chou royal house and relies primarily on bronze inscriptions. This section suffers from negligent proofreading or editing. On page 113, line 20, “not many more” should surely read “not much less.” On page 121, line 7, “while” should be “when.” On page 135, line 4, “the I.A. state” is mysterious, and second from last line, the character for Hsing (邢) is missing. On page 143, line 5, what is this state of I?

Errors are found in earlier chapters as well. On page 81, line 14, and page 85, line 27, the I-Chou-shu's I should be 必, not 易 (probably the most frequently cited source in the entire book). In later chapters, on page 161, next to last line, “Hsiang” should be “Hsing.” On page 173, lines 27 and 28, two different “Shih” should be differentiated with characters. On page 219, line 12, the characters for Lu-ch'uan are missing. On page 221, line 7, Kiangsi Province must be “the neighbour of Kiangsu and Chekiang to the south”; line 27, central Anhui could not be situated on the Yangtze; line 31, “Kiangsi” must be “Kiangsu.” On page 278, line 23 and third from last line, “the” should be inserted before “former estate” and “royal court.” On page 318, line 18, characters should be inserted for Ying-shan. When a second printing is made, perhaps these and other small errors will be corrected.

The relationship between nationhood and Chou "feudalism" is explored in chapter 5. A single ruler in the T'ien-tzu (Son of Heaven) for a single cultural entity in the Hua-Hsia was balanced by the tsung-fa ranking of political authority, involving contractual and personal bonds between king and vassals as well as a system of delegated authority. Ranking is seen in the organization of burial sites and in the allotment of numbers of specific ritual vessels for each position. The definitions of bronze vessel types given in this book (p. 173) should be read with caution. Surely the Western Chou kwei was 統 and not 戴—a bowl-like container for cooked grains rather than a platter (or helmet, as the second character suggests).

The following chapter on Chou expansion, both political and cultural, supplies a list of non-Chinese peoples with whom the Chou were in contact (p. 190). This list may be compared to the earlier list of Chou vassal states given in chapter 5 (pp. 158–163).
Toward the end of chapter 6, some confusion seems to have crept in about geography. Can any site in Kiangsi be situated in the Pearl River Valley (p. 219)?

Chapter 7 describes the Chou governmental structure. Proper editing could clarify dubious syntax in several passages. For example, on page 232, line 7, what does "other ranking countries" mean? On page 246, the sentence in lines 28–31 is unclear. On page 255, paragraph 2 begins by noting "a general tendency towards institutionalization," continues with discussion of "individual responsibilities," and ends by stating that "these individualized assignments represented a government bureaucracy not fully institutionalized."

After a chapter on "The End of Western Chou," two chapters on arts and crafts and daily life complete the study. It is unusual to consider, as Hsu and Linduff do (p. 289), that pragmatism was the condition of Western Chou arts, manifesting a change toward ethics in government and other aspects of culture. Again, what does this mean? On the whole, illustrations in the book are adequate, but figures 9.35 and 9.36 (pp. 324–325) are exceptionally bad. Why reproduce illustrations from another book when it is possible to obtain good photographs from Beijing?

If this review has ended with several caveats, these should not be taken to denigrate the whole. Long awaited, Hsu and Linduff's contribution to Western Chou studies will prove indispensable.