

# Introduction

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THE 12TH CONGRESS of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association, co-organized with the National Museum of the Philippines, was held from 26 January to 2 February 1985 at the Callao Resort near Peñablanca, Cagayan Province, northern Luzon, Philippines. The venue was made available through the generosity of the governor and provincial government of Cagayan Province, and essential funding was provided by grants from the Ford Foundation (Jakarta and Delhi offices), the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Australian National University, the Asian Cultural Council (New York), and the National Museum of the Philippines (see IPPA 1984 for further information). To all these institutions, and to the many individuals whose enthusiasm made the congress possible, the editors offer a sincere "thank you."

The conference was organized around four themes, one of which, origin and expansion of the Austronesians, is the generalized subject matter of the 13 papers published in this issue of *Asian Perspectives*. Other papers in different congress themes have already been published in *Modern Quaternary Research in Southeast Asia* (vol. 9 [1985]), and *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* (vol. 6 [1985]).

Of the 13 papers published here, three (Reid, Blust, and Fox) are entirely or partly linguistic in content, seven (Solhiem, Meacham, Bellwood, Thiel, Ha Van Tan, Ngo The Phong, and Ngo Sy Hong) are basically archaeological, and the other three (Chang, Pham Huy Thong, and Uytterschaut) cover themes in palaeobotany and biological anthropology. Not all of the papers are focused solely on the question of Austronesian origins, but all cover fields of information and debate that may be considered highly relevant.

Of the linguistic papers, Reid discusses the difficulties of recognizing linguistic cognateness after the passage of perhaps 8000 years, but concludes generally in favor of Benedict's Austro-Tai hypothesis (while using a different approach), which would suggest a location for Proto-Austronesian in southern China or Taiwan. Blust draws similar conclusions for Proto-Austronesian from comparisons within the Austronesian family, using the technique that he refers to as linguistic palaeontology, but he is unwilling to extend as far as acceptance of the Austro-Tai hypothesis. Fox considers the nature of early Austronesian society through a comparison of kinship terminologies, and suggests that both

unilineal and bilateral modes of descent and kinship reckoning could have been developed by related Austronesian societies from a fairly malleable ancestral form.

Of the archaeological papers, Bellwood concurs in general with the conclusions of both Reid and Blust and regards the southern China-Taiwan region as the most likely “homeland” for early Austronesians (the homeland concept being one which deserves careful definition). Solheim and Meacham, on the other hand, make strong arguments for an expansion of early Austronesians from the islands of Southeast Asia, south of Taiwan. The issue is developed in other directions by Thiel, who discusses the results of her recent excavations in northern Luzon, and by Ngo The Phong, who compares the early pottery from Island Southeast Asia with that from coastal Neolithic sites in northern Vietnam. As far as the question of “Austronesian origins” is concerned it is clear that agreement between all concerned scholars is still far away, and one might wonder whether the unabridged reality behind the question will forever lie beyond the range of our interdisciplinary sleuthing.

The other papers in the volume are perhaps less involved with this field of scholastic disagreement. Chang surveys the evidence for early cultivation of rice in Island Southeast Asia, Pham Huy Thong describes recent Vietnamese research on the Chamic-speaking peoples, Ha Van Tan discusses the Vietnamese pottery sequence, and Uytterschaut examines the biological affinities of various Philippine populations.

The editors should mention here the pleasure of all delegates at the congress that four Vietnamese and two Chinese speakers were able to attend in person, despite some fairly frustrating visa and airline problems.

Even if we cannot answer all questions connected with Austronesian origins and expansion with finality, at least the papers published here will spell out many of the problems and issues and hint at areas where further research is needed, whether in linguistics, archaeology, or biological anthropology. The essential point, of course, is that scholars should agree about their definitions, since so much time is often wasted on issues which may be no more than semantic red herrings. The simple fact that linguistic, biological, and archaeological boundaries never coincide with perfect efficiency need not be a cause for despair; it simply makes the whole study of mankind past and present so much more interesting.

#### ON RADIOCARBON DATES

Where contributors have quoted precise radiocarbon dates, rather than age range estimates, the following standardization procedures have been adopted: (a) each date has been checked, where possible, against the lists given in Bayard (1984), Bronson (1984), or Bronson and Glover (1984); (b) suffixes of uncalibrated radiocarbon dates have been converted to b.p. (years before 1950).

Age range estimates are simply left in A.D./B.C. form. Where authors (such as Meacham) have used calibrated radiocarbon dates, the situation is made clear in the text. Most authors, however, have chosen to present uncalibrated dates.

#### REFERENCES

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- 1984 A checklist of Vietnamese radiocarbon dates, in *Southeast Asian Archaeology at the XV Pacific Science Congress*: 305–322, ed. D. Bayard. Dunedin: University of Otago Studies in Prehistoric Anthropology 16.

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