

THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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**THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WUCHENG CULTURE
(IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCULTURAL CONTACTS
BETWEEN BRONZE AGE INHABITANTS
OF THE LOWER YANGTZE VALLEY AND INDOCHINA PENINSULA)**

In the present paper the author makes an attempt to generalize and analyze the finds of the late Neolithic and Paleometal Periods from the Middle and Lower Yangtze. The presence of stable contacts (including ethnologically significant traits) is traced between the ancient cultures of this region and the Indochina Peninsula, inhabited by representatives of Austroasiatic peoples (the Viet, the Khmers). Based on comparisons, the Bronze and Iron Age inhabitants of the major part of South China are concluded to be Austroasian. Particular attention is paid to the Wucheng culture and its complex social structure.

Keywords: *Yangtze Valley, Bronze Age, Wucheng culture, the Viets (Yue), the Khmers, Austroasiatic Peoples.*

Introduction

The origin and development of civilization in the Yangtze Valley became a subject for research in recent decades only. In contrast, the classical civilizations of the Ancient Orient, (including the Middle Huang-Ho (Yellow) River) have been studied for a century or more. Circumstances effecting research into the Yangtze Valley changed only after certain archaeological discoveries made in the 1970's. These discoveries included the earliest (for that period) Hemudu culture rice (Zhejiang Province). This find encouraged Chinese archaeologists to consider the origins of the Hemudu culture in this region as being earlier and independent of the later wheat-farming Huang-ho origins. After this find many others followed in the 1970–1980s such as the aristocratic necropolises of the Liangzhu culture (Zhejiang Province), dated to around 3000–2700 BC; jades from Lingjiatan (Anhui Province) dated even earlier but demonstrating highly

sophisticated technical capacities; very early pottery (probably among the oldest in Asia) found in Xianrendong (Jiangxi Province) and Yuchanyan (Hunan Province: here examples were found together with rice grains); the remains of the Wucheng Bronze Age city and the tomb of a local ruler or aristocrat in Xin'gan (both Jiangxi Province); an Iron Age royal tomb in Yinshan (Zhejiang Province), and many others (for description of these finds see (Tyūgoku sinsekki..., 1995, vol. 2; Huang Shilin, Zhu Naicheng, 2003; Lapteff, 2006; Kuzmin, 2006)). By the 1990s, material from Yangtze and other regions of China proved sufficient for Su Bingqi (2004) to proclaim the multiregional origin of the Chinese civilization consisting of local civilizations. Although it is still too early to speak of a clear chronology and localization of all sources of the origins of the Chinese civilization (this would serve as the subject of a separate research paper), the material collated so far is sufficient to propose the multicentral origin of its development.

The connection between this region and Southeast Asia was proposed based on materials from archaeological findings in Vietnam (V. Goloubew, L. Pajot, H. Parmentier) and research into the Bronze Age culture of South China (B. Karlgren and others) carried out in the first half of the 20th century (Trung tâm..., 1994: 8–12; Goloubew, 1930; Karlgren, 1942). South China was claimed to be a part of ancient Southeast Asia by Heine-Geldern, who also proposed the term “Dongsonian civilization” (1937: 177–206), and later this concept was developed by Wilhelm Solheim II, H.R. van Heekeren, William Meacham, and others (Solheim 1990; Meacham 1979, 1988). In the USSR, the relationship between the regions was studied by D.V. Deopik (1994) and P.V. Pozner (1994). S. Kučzera was one of the first to report the Wucheng finding (1977: 112–113)*. Unfortunately, field material from South China is far from numerous, limiting the present research mainly to several types of bronze artifacts, such as drums and daggers. The larger volume of material, which has only become available over the past 10–20 years, provides the opportunity to re-examine these mainly theoretical conceptions, and to search for exact ties between specific archaeological cultures in Yangtze, South China, and Southeast Asia. Of course, a thorough description of the Wucheng and other cultures is beyond the limits of a journal publication. The purpose of the research in question lies in revealing similarities in the material culture of the Middle and Lower Yangtze with those of Indochina within the framework of the vast period from the Neolithic to the Iron Age, and to propose the possibility of a relationship between the cultures of the two regions.

Contacts between the ancient inhabitants of the Yangtze Valley and the continental part of Southeast Asia in the Neolithic and Early Metal Periods

The successive development of material culture which can be witnessed from the Neolithic Period onwards in the Middle Yangtze Valley was probably created by the same ethnicity (group of ethnicities), which according to the latter written Chinese sources, is referred to as the Viets (Yue). Some similarities between the peoples inhabiting Yangtze and Indochina can be observed as early as in the Neolithic Period. The spread of rectangular and shouldered axes in both regions represents the most characteristic common feature (Fig. 1).

*The issues of interrelations between the archaeological cultures of South China and Southeast Asia in Russia have been studied by R.F. Its (1972), S.A. Komissarov (1994, 2004), M.Ye. Kravtsova (2004), and others.

During the period of approximately 3000 to 2000 BC, the Liangzhu culture with its relatively complex social structure can be clearly distinguished in the region of East China. In recent years, the luxury cemeteries of Liangzhu rulers or aristocracy have been discovered as well as settlements and cemeteries for the middle and lower classes thus providing a more or less complete picture of this archaeological culture. Liangzhu had a hierarchy of settlements and cemeteries, created by a defined plan. The probable center (the largest settlement) of the Liangzhu culture was located on Mojiashan Mountain. It was surrounded by two most luxurious cemeteries in Fanshan and Yaoshan, a middle class cemetery in Huiguanshan and a lower class cemetery in Wujiabu (Zhang Xuehai, 1999; Yuhang..., 2001; Tyūgoku sinsekki..., 1995, vol. 2). The sophisticated technical levels demonstrated by ritual jades and glazed ritual pottery should be also noted (Fig. 2). The developed technical capacities for producing pieces of jade displayed in these finds are difficult to achieve even in today's society. This has led some researchers to propose the possible existence of metal tools in Liangzhu, examples of which have not yet been discovered (Ren Shinan, 1995: 130). Sophisticated levels of technical achievement are also evident in channel and dam systems, and in certain signs used on pottery, which have reasonably been interpreted to be the origins of a writing system (Zhang Binghuo, 2003). All these facts lead us to suppose that the Liangzhu culture represented a complex formation with elements of social differentiation. It was without doubt, the most developed society in the region. This culture actively influenced the peoples of neighboring and more distant territories. Objects characteristically close to the Liangzhu type (more probably, created by a mixed population of Liangzhu and local people) were found recently on a broad territory from areas near to the Shandong Peninsula (Huaning type sites) in the North and to the northern part of the Guangdong Province in the south, not far from Vietnam (Shixia culture sites) (Zhu Feisu, 1999; Tyūgoku sinsekki..., 1995, vol. 2: 73–92). Black polished Liangzhu pottery with carved ornaments shows some similarity to the Ban Chiang site ceramics from the Khorat Plateau in Thailand, although no similar type has been discovered in the geographical distance between these sites. Bowls set on high pedestals narrowing to the top are also typical of Liangzhu (3rd millennium BC), the central part of the Indochina Peninsula (Ban Chiang (3rd–2nd millennia BC), Samron Seng, Phum Snay, (1st millennium BC – 1st millennium AD) (Fig. 2, 2, 3, 5). They have also been recorded in North Vietnam (Dong Son culture, 8th–1st c. BC), which may represent a missing link between South China and Cambodia.

Around 2000 BC, the Liangzhu culture went into decline. Nonetheless, some Liangzhu sites have been recorded subsequent to this period, the latest of which (Tinglin, Shanghai municipality) are dated to the 17th c. BC

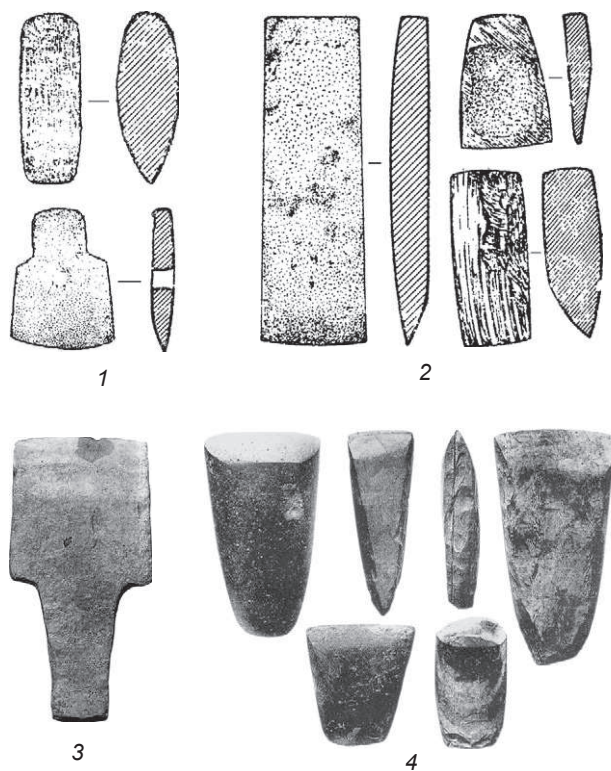


Fig. 1. Rectangular and shouldered axes of the Late Neolithic.

1, 2 – Beiyinyangying, Yangtze valley; 3, 4 – Cambodia (after (Beiyinyangying..., 1993; Mansuy, 1902, 1923)).

(Shanghai..., 2002), which determines the latest date for this culture. After the 20th c. BC, the Liangzhu culture gradually transforms into the Maqiao (Song Jian, 1999), which exhibits much more local characteristics with its furthest boundary limited to the mouth of the Yangtze River.

In the history of Southeastern China, the post-Liangzhu period can also be referred to as the Wucheng period, after the most powerful cultural center of that epoch, which stretched from the coastal region to the depths of the continent, to the Poyanghu Lake region. This period can be dated to approximately 1500–1000 BC (if dated according to the existence of the ancient Wucheng city site). The boundaries of the Wucheng culture included the region around Poyanghu Lake and the lower – middle Ganjiang River which flows from the lake. The main sites of this culture were found in the Middle Ganjiang area*. The following sites should particularly be noted: the Wucheng settlement site (610 sq. m; here, bronze tools and arms, their moulds, pottery and primitive porcelain, and human burials were found (Wucheng...,

*The map of the main sites of the Wucheng culture was completed by Peng Minfan (2005).



Fig. 2. Pottery found at the sites of the Liangzhu culture (1, 4); and in Indochina Phum Snay (2); Ban Chiang (3); Samron Seng (5) (after (Jiangsu..., 2004; Fuquanshan..., 2000; Nathapintu Surapol, 1987; Mansuy, 1902)). 2 – photograph by the author.

2005)); Xin'gan – the tomb of an aristocrat or ruler with a significant bronze inventory and traces of human sacrifice (Xin'gan..., 1997), and Tongling – copper mines, exploited mainly in the Wucheng Period, with the remains of mine constructions, bronze and wooden mining tools (Liu Shizhong, Luo Bence, 1997)*.

In the previous period, in the Poyanghu region, agricultural settlements had already been established, some of them walled. Specific attributes of social complexity and numerous signs on pottery (probably a pre-writing system) were revealed, but nothing has yet been found which could indicate the existence of a highly diversified class society, such as that in Liangzhu (Tyūgoku sinsekki..., 1995, vol. 2: 393–432; Jiangxi Jing'an..., 1989). The Wucheng culture developed on the basis of its society being significantly influenced by the Liangzhu culture**.

*For a more detailed description of the sites see (Laptev, 2006, vol. I: 205–277).

**This influence can be witnessed by finds such as jade embellishments of the Liangzhu type, for example, so called *cong* (a cube with cylindrical opening inside it, often decorated by a face motive (Xin'gan..., 1997)).

To the north of Wucheng, in the same period one sees the rise and fall of the Shang civilization in the middle of the Huang-ho valley. At first, the Wucheng find was considered to be connected to the expansion of the Shang culture (Jiangxi Qingjiang..., 1975: 70–71). However, material accumulated more recently shows that this is at least a gross exaggeration (Xin'gan..., 1997: 203; Peng Minfan, 2005: 245; Laptev, 2006, vol. I: 275–277).

Other Bronze Age cultures existed in the Yangtze River basin aside from the Wucheng, the most significant of which are the Panlongcheng and Sanxingdui cultures. Bronze objects of the Panlongcheng culture (to the north of Dongtinghu Lake, Hubei Province) are the oldest to have been discovered in the Yangtze Basin (middle 2nd millennium BC). Despite the fact that they are not of local origin, they are strongly related to the Shang culture. In this ritual complex, Shang bronze vessels dominate (Ozawa Masahito, Tani Toyonobu, Nishie Kiyotaka, 1999: 175–177). Finds from the Sanxingdui culture in the Sichuan Basin differ markedly from Shang bronze and pottery complexes: its main peculiarities consist in angular bronze masks and human figures (Ibid.: 236–239).

The Wucheng culture and its external contacts

In Chinese historiography, key evidence of connections between the Wucheng and Shang cultures can be found in the bronze inventory. In the author's opinion, bronze should be considered in the context not only of Shang bronze but of all the neighboring bronze traditions in the region of East and Southeast Asia (see (Lapteff, 2008: 242–252)). The following bronze complexes should be regarded as being spatially closest to Wucheng: the Shang bronze complex, Vietnam Red River bronze complex, Upper Yangtze Sanxingdui bronze complex, and the more distant Thailand Khorat Plateau complex, which includes relatively early bronze and iron artifacts (Nathapintu Surapol, 1987). The distinct feature of the Shang complex which makes it most strikingly different from the others is the predominance of abundantly decorated bronze vessels. Bronze arms are also significant (Imai Kōji, 2000; Hayashi Minao, 1972), but it is obvious that their role is secondary to that of the vessels. For the Shang the production and use of bronze vessels was a necessary part of religious practice as vessels were used in rituals. For the Sanxingdui the main ritual object is the human mask or human figure. If in Shang ornaments the main motive is the fantastic beast (so called “taote” ornament), in Sanxingdui it is the human face. In the Indochinese bronze complex, arms and agricultural tools dominate. Multiple bronze axes, arrows, less numerous swords and spades prevail in this complex. In addition, some musical instruments can be seen, such as small bells (Fig. 3). Later the bronze

drum became an important religious symbol, but mainly in the Dong Son period, 8th – 1 c. BC (Hà Văn Phú, 1996; Lê Xuân Diễm, Hoàng Xuân Chinh, 1983; Trung tâm..., 1994; Nathapintu Surapol, 1987; Tranet, 1995: 27; Zhongguo..., 2001). It should be noted, that the bell (big or small) is an important ritual object in the cultures of South China in general. It is the prevalent bronze artifact in Fujian. Similarly, it is one of the most significant bronze artifacts in Indochina, especially in Cambodia. In the case of artifacts being found with ornaments, these are mainly spirals; sometimes the image of a human being appears in ornaments and plastics (Fig. 4).

The first excavations in Wucheng in 1973 revealed that the bronze items were totally different to those of the Shang tradition. Hardly any bronze vessels are known from the Wucheng city site. Only four bronze vessels and one lid made in local manner (with a head of a bird on it) have been found over the course of thirty years of excavations (Wucheng..., 2005: 361–366). Of course, this hardly compares with the Shang sites, where hundreds of vessels of different types have been found. There is no doubt that these Wucheng vessels (with the exception of the lid with bird's head), which in no way differ from the Shang vessel patterns, were imported products. No casting forms for vessels have been found which could be attributed to the Wucheng culture.

In contrast, many bronze axes, spades of different types, casting forms (witnessing their local origin) and also swords and arrows were found in Wucheng (21 bronze objects and 57 forms) (Ibid.). Bronze is present in almost all sites of the Wucheng culture including rural settlements (Fanchengdui, Xiaojiashan, and others) where 266 objects of armory and 130 working tools of different types were found (Peng Minfan, 2005: 122) (Fig. 5).

The different types of Wucheng bronze axes resemble those of the Dong Dau culture (2nd half of the 2nd millennium BC) in the Red River valley, which later developed into the Go Mun and Dong Son cultures (Fig. 3). It is worth noting that the casting forms for these types of axes were also found on territory between the two cultures' distribution areas in the Guangdong Province, dated to approximately the same period (Leih Ngaahm, 1995: 87–94). This may represent a connecting link between the Wucheng and Dong Dau cultures. Some similarities can be seen in iron agricultural tools in Cambodia, although these tools belong to a much later period (Fig. 3). Ornaments in bronze in Wucheng are not particularly diverse. Mainly they consist in round spiraling, totally different from the Shang geometrical spirals, although very similar to the Indochina type of round spiral. Many potsherds bear signs, different from the Shang characters, but similar to signs found on pottery dating to the preceding period here and in the Liangzhu culture. In the Wucheng period, such signs had already developed into longer versions, up to 12 characters long



Fig. 3. Bronze and iron arms, agricultural tools, and their casting forms.
 1 – Xin’gan; 2 – Dong Dau; 3 – Phum Snay; 4 – Wucheng; 5 – Guangdong Province; 6 – Ban Chiang (after (Jiangxi Qingjiang..., 1975; Xin’gan..., 1997; Nathapintu Surapol, 1987; Thanh Duy, 1966; Lê Xuân Diệm, Hoàng Xuân Chinh, 1983; Trần Quốc Vương, Hà Văn Tấn, Diệp Đình Hoa, 1975; Leih Ngham, 1995)). 3 – photograph by the author.



Fig. 4. Bronze musical instruments.
 1 – Xin’gan; 2 – Fujian Province, second half of the 2nd millennium BC; 3, 4 – Phum Snay; 5 – Sumitomo Collection, Shang Period; 6 – Chongyang, Hubei Province, Shang Period (after (Xin’gan..., 1997; Sen’oku..., 2002; Zhongguo..., 2001; Yang Cong, 1998)). 3, 4 – photographs by the author.

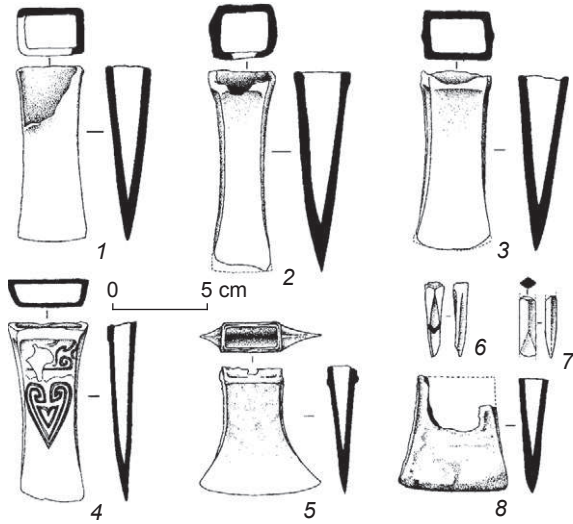


Fig. 5. Main types of bronze tools from Wucheng ancient city site (after (Wucheng..., 2005)).

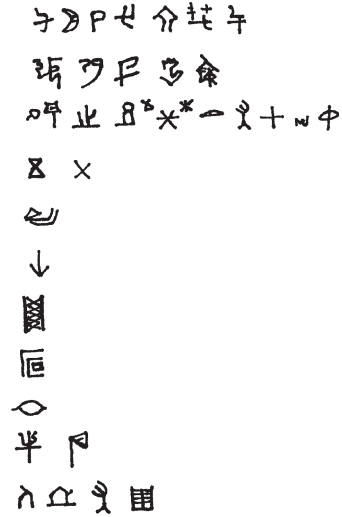


Fig. 6. Signs on potsherds from Wucheng (after (Wucheng, 2005)).

on one potsherd and can thus be regarded as a local writing system (Fig. 6).

In 1989, not far from the Wucheng city ruins in Dayangzhou, Xin'gan County, a large tomb of the same period was found (Xin'gan..., 1997). The tomb is a large round tumulus with a rectangular burial chamber approximately 10 m long and 3.6 m wide. The chamber was divided into three parts with a wooden sarcophagus and main body in the center. In the side chambers, the remains of three sacrificed humans were found. The inventory of the tomb is extremely rich, especially in bronze (480 objects), jade (1072 items, not including small beads or jade incrustation), and pottery (356 items). This quantity of bronze and jade easily outnumbers that found in the famous tomb of Fu Hao, the largest and most famous in the Shang capital Yin-Xü (Ozawa Masahito, Tani Toyonobu, Nishie Kiyotaka, 1999: 185–187). Here one can also see a large number of Shang bronze vessels, although significantly less than was found in the Fu Hao tomb (50 against 200). As the tomb probably belonged to a ruler (or very high ranking aristocrat), one finds items which differ from those found at the Wucheng settlement burials. As in the case of the Fu Hao tomb, where objects from the north (Ordos) and the south (Yangtze) are distinguished, in Xin'gan foreign objects can also be found (Shang bronze vessels). The presence of such objects indicates the probable exchange between both cultures, although more interesting is the presence of certain bronze vessels, which have local traits like the lid of the vessel from Wucheng, mentioned above. The lid is decorated with a bird head and made in a style different from those known in Shang, although the ornament itself is very similar to those of Shang.

Traits common to the Wucheng culture can also be seen in the Dong Dau and Sanxingdui cultures (for example,

a bronze mask and other objects similar to Sanxingdui artifacts were found in Xin'gan). Of particular importance is the total absence of Shang and Zhou hieroglyphic script not only in this, but also in much later periods in the Poyanghu region. As the basis of the Shang and the Wucheng cultures differs, there is no reason to speak of their ethnical relatedness. At the same time however, the presence of a syncretism indicates that intensive exchange (even possible migrations) took place between the two cultural traditions, Wucheng and Shang, which brought a mixed type of art to life in the form of local style vessels. This notion is very important, as it helps to reattribute many vessels and other bronzes.

Middle and Lower Yangtze ritual bronzes from museum collections and their relationship to Indochinese Bronze Age cultures

Archaeological material from the Yangtze Basin sheds new light on South Chinese bronzes from world museum collections. Bronze collecting (mainly vessels) began in China long ago (at least in the Warring States period, 403–221 BC (Rawson, 2004: 1–34)). When the main world collections of bronze were accomplished (before the Second World War; only in a few cases, such as in the case of the Miho Museum, were important collections formed after the War), there was no awareness of the regional attribution of bronzes within China, and in the majority of cases no information on the place of their excavation was provided due to the fact that some items had been passed from one hand to another over a period of hundreds of years. Now, due to new archaeological data, it has become possible to define the possible region of origin

of certain bronze objects. Different local influences can be traced in vessel production in form and ornamentation, though there is no doubt, that the idea of the ritual bronze vessel is most characteristic of the Shang culture (more specifically, to the pre-Shang Erlitou culture). A number of ancient bronzes with distinct southern features are held in the collections of the former Sumitomo family, Hakutsuru Sake Company, and the Miho Museum.

The collection made by Barons Sumitomo includes a bronze drum on four legs attributed to the Shang period which is decorated in relief with a human face and plums, similarly to a bronze mask found in Xin'gan (Fig. 4, 5). This peculiarity demonstrates the drum's very possible Yangtze origin. This was confirmed in 1977 by the finding of a similar type of drum on four legs but without a human face, in Chongyang, Hubei Province, in Middle Yangtze (Fig. 4, 6) (Sen'oku..., 2002; Zhongguo..., 2001). The same can be said of bronze bells with a handle pointing downwards, from the Miho Museum and from the Fu Hao tomb, the origin of which can be attributed to the Middle or Lower Yangtze (Miho Museum, 1997; Xin'gan..., 1997; Falkenhausen, 1999).

One may now speak even more clearly of the origin of two bowls with a "cut spiral" ornament on the bottom from the Sumitomo Collection and the Hakutsuru Museum. The ornament on the two bowls is very similar although the bowl from the Hakutsuru Company collection has a specific Dong Son ornament showing oarsmen in plums, which indicates its attribution to the Viet culture. At the same time, its bottom has the "cut spiral," as does a pedestalled bowl from Xin'gan. Thus, one may propose that all three items originate in one region: the Lower or Middle Yangtze (Fig. 7) (Hakutsuru..., 2000; Sen'oku..., 2002; Phạm Minh Huyền, Nguyễn Văn Huyền, Trịnh Sinh, 1987).

Among the numerous items of this period held in Japanese museum collections, a unique vessel in the form of water buffalo from the Miho Museum must be mentioned (Fig. 8). This bronze object is attributed due

to its form and ornament to the Middle Yangtze, Shang – Early West Zhou (i.e. Wucheng) period. The form of the vessel in the shape of an animal is characteristic of the Yangtze region, whereas it is combined here with the characteristic Shang idea of the bronze ritual vessel (Miho Museum, 1997: 172–173). The statuette of a water buffalo is of itself a very rare image in bronze found on the territory of China. The water buffalo played a special ritual role in the rites and beliefs of the ancient Viet people in Yangtze – North Indochina and the Khmer people in Cambodia. In the Central Plain, the water buffalo cannot survive. Although Shang ritual vessels bear reliefs of horned animals, these are made in a very abstract manner and their species cannot be clearly determined. The water buffalo should be clearly distinguished from the bull. These represent different species which had a totally different meaning in the minds of the Southeast Asian peoples. This fact can be evidenced by the ethnography of the modern Khmers (for details see (Laptev, 2008)). Several artifacts have been recorded depicting the water buffalo in the region of East and Southeast Asia. Except for a few finds to the south of Yangtze, the figure of the water buffalo as part of a vessel, relief or as a separate figurine, is widely represented in the Shizhaishan culture in Yunnan, and though its date is much later, around the 2nd half of the 1st millennium BC, the manner in which this animal is depicted is very similar to that of the figurine-vessel from the Miho Museum (Dian, 1986; Delacour, 2001: 113). Several more water buffalo figurines decorating bronze bells have been illegally excavated by local inhabitants at the Phum Snay prehistoric site, Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia (the site can be dated to the end of the 1st millennium BC – 1st half of the 1st millennium AD). One more statuette of a walking water buffalo dated to the Bronze Age is also preserved at the National Museum of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. The Khmer people practice a water buffalo sacrificial ritual on particularly important occasions (Tranet, 1995: 80–82; 2006, ill. 84 on p. 23). Thus, the figurine from the Miho Museum is not only a

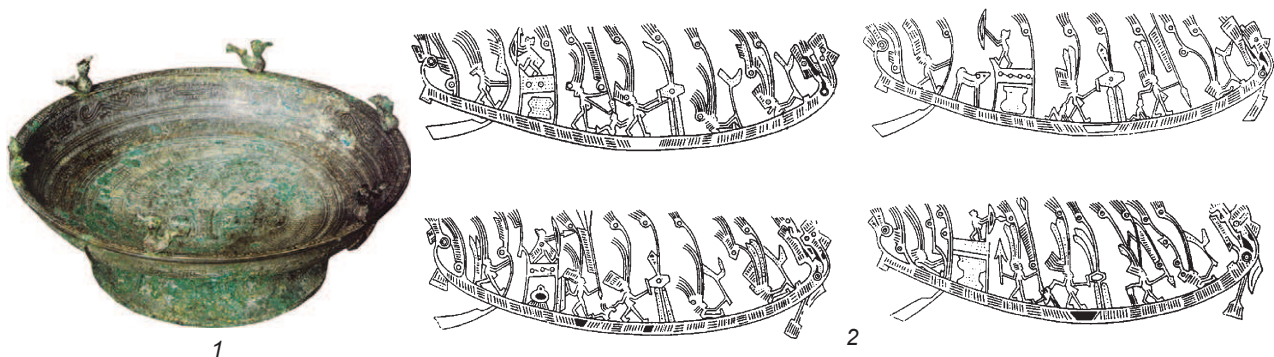


Fig. 7. Images of oarsmen with plums on bronze vessels and musical instruments.
1 – Lower Yangtze, from Hakutsuru Collection (after (Hakutsuru..., 2000)); 2 – Dong Son culture (after (Phạm Minh Huyền, Nguyễn Văn Huyền, Trịnh Sinh, 1987)).



Fig. 8. Figurines of water buffalo.

1 – Middle Yangtze Region, second half of the 2nd millennium BC, Miho Museum collection (after (Miho Museum, 1997)); 2 – Shizhaishan culture, Yunnan Province, 2nd half of the 1st millennium BC (after (Dian..., 1986)); 3 – Phum Snay, photograph by the author.

unique item of Yangtze bronze, it is also an important source of evidence indicating the relation between the Yangtze region culture and the Indochinese culture.

Discussion

The issue of the ethnic attribution of the Wucheng culture cannot be solved by archaeological data alone. Nonetheless, archaeological material provides the opportunity to attribute the creators of a material culture via their creations. Archeological remains from Wucheng culture sites share some similarities with Indochinese and Yunnan remains, earlier materials from Liangzhu and also Southeast China (Shixia culture). The assumption of the existence of a Proto-Malay (Austronesian element) in Yangtze Delta has been convincingly rejected by W. Meacham (1988). The discussion of this issue deviates from the focus of the present paper, however, it should be mentioned that, the author knows of no archaeological material, which can confidently be connected exclusively with the ancient Austronesians. The only common trait, the existence of rectangular and shouldered Neolithic stone tools, which is mentioned by the followers of the Austronesian concept is also characteristic of Indochina, for example of the Khmers (Fig. 1). It is possible that research into the ancient Khmers could be the key to resolving this issue.

As studies have shown, at least from the Bronze Age, the material culture in Cambodia developed successively through the Angkor period (9th–15th c.) up to modern times; even the location of inhabited areas often coincides with locations of ancient settlements. According to M. Tranet, the modern Khmers are basically the same people as they were in prehistory only having experienced indianization (1995: 35–37). The origins of the Mon-Khmer people can most probably be found in Indonesia, and although they are attributed to the Austroasiatic peoples, the fact that they are close relatives of the Austronesian peoples has been

proven genetically (Ibid.: 6–9). The Viets and Thais are totally different from the Khmers physically and belong to more northern Austroasiatics. The Bronze Age culture of Yunnan is close to that of North Vietnam. Thus, one may suppose that the ancient Yunnanese ethnic attribution was close to those of the Viet people. At the same time, Yunnan is also the possible origin of the Thai people, who are also northern Austroasiatic (Ibid.: ill. 159). The Lower and Middle Yangtze region culture shows similarities to the Austroasiatics (abstractly called “Viets (Yue)”) (Tranet, 2006: 5–7). The similarities of the Viets to the Khmer are few (water buffalo cult, some types of pedestal pottery), and not necessarily direct. It is impossible, however, to distinguish any regions of prevalence of the Khmer or of the Austronesian culture in the Yangtze region.

Conclusions

The Wucheng culture also perished, probably due to military defeat. In the latest layers of the Wucheng city ruins the skulls of 21 individuals were found on the city rampart, supposedly young men, some with wounds, who were probably killed during combat (Wucheng..., 2005: 501–514). After this layer, not only did the Wucheng city site cease to exist, but the Wucheng culture seems to totally disappear. The region was devastated. Hardly any bronze objects attributable to the next period, the first half of the 1st millennium BC, have been found (Lapteff, 2006, vol. I: 368–384). In the post-Wucheng (Zhou) period, this territory became a part of the Chu State, which spread here from the Dongtinghu Lake region in the Central Yangtze. In the 1st millennium BC, the Chu, Wu and Yue gradually accepted the Zhou culture of the Huang-ho people, their writing system, and some traditions, but at the same time, preserved their own peculiarities throughout this long period, very gradually becoming a part of the symbiotic “Han” culture.

The Bronze Age culture of the Lower Yangtze region (Wucheng culture) shares similarities with quite distant Indochinese cultures and differs markedly from the Shang culture in Huang-ho. Its formation was influenced by the Liangzhu culture at the Yangtze mouth, but was based on the development of local agricultural communities. Proximity to natural sources of copper (ancient Tongling copper mines) also seems to represent an important factor in its rise and development.

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