

The Post-Neolithic Culture in the Lower Basin of Dong Nai River (Southern Vietnam)

Le Xuan-diem

I. About the Post-Neolithic Concept

Southeast Asia is a cultural, historical area which has a rather peculiar development process. The transitional period from Paleolithic to Neolithic, from Neolithic to Bronze, from Bronze to early Iron Age, did not prove clearly the change in terms of material culture. So there have been different opinions among archaeologists who proceeded to set up the vestiges, the archaeological cultures belonging to above said periods. Efforts moreover have been made to determine the development models, the new concepts which are suitable to the characteristics of the performance process of the ancient culture in Southeast Asia. Among them, there has been a concept about the Metal Age which is generalized implying the Bronze Age and the early Metal Age. Moreover, there have been some classical concepts, such as the Mesolithic Age which includes the Microlithic culture, the Copper period, or the Eneolithic period. This concept has not yet been popular nowadays.

For the vestiges belonging to the transitional period from Neolithic to Bronze, there has not been any common idea among archaeologists which have to deal with a vestige, or archaeological culture correspondingly. It is the case of Phung Nguyen site (Vinh Phu, North Vietnam), a typical site of the Phung Nguyen culture. Someone has classified this site and its culture as belonging to the late

Neolithic-early Bronze [Khoach N. B. 1980]. Another opinion has classified it as belonging to Bronze Age [Wong T. Q. *et al*, 1975]. Similarly, in Thailand, there are Khok Phanom Di, Ban Kao, Khok Charoen sites..... which have never been identified as under the category of Neolithic Age, or for their earliest part belonging to Neolithic Age [Higham, 1982]. But it has been redetermined as vestiges of the post-Bronze-Neolithic [Watson, W. 1979], or as local Neolithic sites, which continued to develop after the appearance of metallurgy [Charoenwongsa, P. 1988].

In the lower basin of Dong Nai river, the same category of sites were rather generalized by up to 80 sites belonging to the Metal Age. The age of this category of sites (or vestiges) could begin with Cau Sat site (Dong Nai) in about 4500 BP, and continue to exist till about 2400 ± 100 BP (Rach Nui, Long An). Among these sites, the stone products were found generalized in big quantity, from about 200 pieces like at An Son, Rach Nui (Long An), or around 800-1000 pieces like at Cau Sat, Suoi Linh, Binh Da (Dong Nai), or even up to some thousand pieces like at Phuoc Tan (Dong Nai). In addition, the stone products here were also found generalized among Bronze or early Iron sites.

It is possibly said that this type of sites proved a big reality of the Metal Age culture in the lower basin of Dong Nai river. It

Le Xuan-diem : Professor, Institute of Social Science, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

黎春焰：越南胡志明市社會科學研究院教授

represented clearly the cultural and technical tradition of the late Neolithic period, but it still existed and continued to develop after the Neolithic age. So in this case, the use of the concept of post-Neolithic culture seems to be more reasonable and more correct than those of post-Bronze-Neolithic, early Bronze or late Neolithic-early Bronze.

II. The Cultural Content

The post-Neolithic culture of the lower basin of Dong Nai river were mainly identified among the stone artefacts. Until now about ten thousands of these types of products have been gathered from settlement, factory and burial sites. These materials, based on stone analysis results, were types of rocks like dacite, andesite, basalt, phtanite, schiste, quartzite, rhyolite, diosite, granite, sand-stone..... These types of rocks were found rather generalized in the forms of edge seams at hilltops, the underground rock veins, the pebble fields alongside Dong Nai, Song Be rivers, as the basaltic blocks or veins at the red basaltic hills. The characteristics of these types of rocks were different. Therefore, they had been exploited and made into products with different functions by different techniques of manipulation.

(1) The most generalized type of products was axes, adze, axes, and hoes. They were made of, generally, types of rocks like dacite, andesite [Fontaine, H. 1975]; a few of them were made of basaltic, phtanite [Mallener, L. 1963]. The clashing technique was generalized. Most of the axes, adze-axes, hoes still maintained clashing marks over their body. The polishing technique was generally applied to the edge part or a part of the body.

Moreover, a few of the adze-axes, hoes (or spades) were polished at the whole body and carefully elaborated. Generally speaking, axe, adze-axe, hoes were of two types. One type had no shoulder, including triangle, or trapezium or rectangle shape. The most generalized were the trapezium shaped. The shouldered type consisted mainly of open curved shouldered, then the right angled shouldered, and rarely the pointed angled shouldered.

The shouldered type was found in bigger quantity than the unshouldered one. But there were some contrary cases. For example, at Cau Sat (Dong Nai) there were 222 pieces of unshouldered type, and 72 pieces of shouldered one; or at Suoi Linh (Dong Nai), 305 pieces of unshouldered type and 56 shouldered pieces.

Apart from the difference lying in the existence or absence of shoulder, the axes, adze and hoes showed generally their convex or hyperbolic cutting edges, their asymmetric bi-bevel, their rectangular or oval to rounded rectangular shape of cross-section.

(2) For the second type of products, a rather big quantity of them were chisels. They were generally made of dacite, andesite. The most generalized were the four sided cylinder chisels, with their square or quasi-square section, their blade edges being symmetrically or asymmetrically bevelled, their width bigger or smaller than their body. There were even blades being tapered to sharp points. Besides, there was a type of chisels with equal triangle and thin blade, and another type with slendered

shoulder, their shape being similar to narrow shouldered, long bodied axes.

In general, most of the chisels still maintained clashing marks, polishing marks restricted only to the bevel part and to a part of the body.

- (3) The third type of products was sharp points, arrows or lances. They included different types of leaf shapes - thin and flat, and different types of prism shapes with symmetric and asymmetric sides. There was otherwise another type which had been originally adze-axes, broken or clashed, to constitute sharp points used as throwing or launching lances. Over the body of these products, there were no polishing marks left. But for the type of lance produced out of the adze-axes, there were polishing marks.
- (4) The fourth type of products was sickles or cutters (*couteau-gauille*), consisting of about 100 pieces. These tools were found in some of the sites (Cau Sat, Suoi Sinh, Phuoc Tan...). They were made of large flakes, whose shapes were crescents or semi-crescents, or triangles; the cross-section of the body was symmetric or asymmetric triangular shape; the blades were polished slenderly; the cutting-edge was straight or perpendicular.
- (5) The fifth type of products was knives. There were about 5 pieces of them; discovered at Phuoc Tan, Ben Do..... They were made of phtanite with a whole body polished; the shape being perfect and neat. There were trapezium with upper part being narrow and the lower part large, provided with nodes at both knife side ridge. The blades were

polished slantingly or symmetrically, with the cutting-edge rather convex.

- (6) The sixth type of products was ornaments. They were not generalized and in small quantity. They included three types. The rude-rings type had a big size, with its heavy weight and oval cross-section. The dish shaped rings type had their body flattened; their body cross-section was a symmetric triangle shape; their size was rather large, but their weight was not heavy. The rings were quasi-round or similar to letter D, their size was not large, and their form neater and thinner than the two other types.

All above mentioned ring types were polished wholly. But the two latter types were polished rather elaborately.

Another adornment was pendants. They had been polished wholly, oval shaped, perforated at one end, or semi-spherical, provided with a node to tighten a hanging string.

- (7) The seventh type of products was slabs of lithophone. They have been discovered at Binh Da, Go Me (Dong Nai), Da Cai (Binh Thuan) sites. They come with both sides straight, parallel or slightly concave in the middle part; the cross-section of the body was flat lozenge, or semi-lozenge, or flat hexagon shaped. Over the body surface, there were clashing marks left, showing three main sections of the making process: initial shaping, shape finishing, standard sound creating. The rock materials used to make them were metamorphic schiste, whose hardness is 7/10 (according to the hardness scale of

Mot).

These lithophone slabs have been classified as belonging to the category of Ndut Sieng Krak lithophone. This lithophone has been acknowledged by musical experts as singular ancient musical instrument in the line of the ancient musical tradition of Southeast Asia [Schaeffner, A. 1954].

- (8) Apart from above mentioned artefacts, there was a big quantity of grinding-stones. These grinding stones were all made of sandstone, showing still polishing marks with regular smooth ground working faces, or with concave pan shape, or with V shaped grooves or stepped grooves.

Generally speaking, the stone products (or artefacts) found in the post-Neolithic sites in the lower-basin of Dong Nai river constituted an important part of the Metal Age culture in this region. Among them, there were axes, adze-axes, hoes and ornaments which had appeared in a rather clear successive sequence. Based on this, some of the archaeologists have sketched the outline of local development of the Metal Age culture here. A process has been acknowledged from the key sites which have been dated by C14. Among them, the earliest were Hav Sat site; next came Nui Gom (or Hang Gon) site, with C14 date of 3950 ± 20 BP; then successively Binh Da site (Dong Nai) with C14 date of 3180 ± 40 BP; Ben Do site (Ho Chi Minh City) 3100 ± 140 BP and 3040 ± 110 BP; Doc Chua site (Song Be) 2990 ± 105 BP and 2495 ± 50 BP; An Son site (Long An) 2858 ± 60 BP and 2775 ± 50 BP; Bung Bac site (Ba Ria, Vung Tau) 2570 ± 100 BP, 2450 ± 40 BP and 2376 ± 40 BP; Rach Nui (Long An)

2400 ± 100 BP; and Cu Lao Rua site (Song Be) 2300 ± 100 BP. [Con, D.L and Nguyen Duy Ty, 1993].

III. Cultural Identity

In the course of about two thousand years long development, the post-Neolithic culture of Dong Nai river had changed and have been identified archaeologically as belonging to particular cultural periods. However, these artefacts have been constituting a reality that had its singular cultural identity, clearly different from the artefacts of the contemporaneous cultures in other territories. The clearest way is possibly to observe the axe, adze-axes, hoes, chisels.

Among these artefacts, the most generalized types were the shouldered and the unshouldered ones. These two types had particular shapes which had linkages with certain areas or cultures. In the central and western Highland territory of Vietnam; there was the "buffalo tooth" shaped of adze-axe, which have been considered as typical artefacts in this region [Liem, Bui Van and Vo Cong Quy, 1993]. In the territory of Southern Thailand, there were generalized quadrangular axes with lozenge, or flat oval, or triangle shaped cross-section.

In the lower basin of Dong Nai river, there were no adze-axes which show the typical characteristics of those above mentioned areas. As presented above, here were the shouldered and unshouldered types. They had all their cross-section in rectangular shape, or of a shape with equal convex at both faces.

Ornaments were also the artefacts which might intensify the post-Neolithic cultural

identity in the lower basin of Dong Nai river. The industry of making ornaments had reached its culmination for many late Neolithic, post-Neolithic cultures in Southeast Asia. The Phung Nguyen, Ha Long cultures (Northern Vietnam) had their own factories to produce different kinds of ornaments, and had reached a very elaborate level. Their ornaments, either diversified or multi-coloured, were all made of different kinds of gems (jade, nephrite, phtanite.....). In many post-Neolithic sites in Southern Thailand, and in Cambodia, there were highly generalized kinds of ornaments with nice shapes, good material, well elaborated.

Meanwhile, in the lower basin of Dong Nai river, most of the post-Neolithic sites had no ornaments. Even in some sites containing ornaments, there were only a small quantity of them, with few types, and their shapes being simple.

Generally, the stone artefacts of the post-Neolithic in this area were highly practical in character, with little meticulous elaboration. Even for the lithophone slabs, a kind of musical instruments yielding attractive, correct, carefully elaborated and fine sound; but their appearance was still as rude as the Paleolithic products.

This kind of lithophone, until now, has been discovered in the three sites of Binh Da, Go Me (Dong Nai), Da Cai (Binh Thuan) near the Dong Nai riverside, and in some places in the middle basin of Dong Nai river, such as in Ndu Sieng Krak (Dac Lac), Bu Do (Lam Dong), Loc Tan (Song Be). It is possibly said that lithophones were singular artefacts of the post-Neolithic in the basin of Dong Nai. Their dates are actually determined as over or under 3000 years BP [Diem, L. X, Nguyen Van Long 1983]. This

was the age in which the local post-Neolithic culture had developed the most strongly.

For its outstanding singular identity, its long term and stable development tradition, the post-Neolithic culture in this area should deserve its proper name of Cau Sat culture.⁽¹⁾ This culture, in the course of the local development, was integrated into the Bronze culture and the early Iron culture, constituting the singular aspects of the cultural center of the Metal Age in the lower basin of Dong Nai river [Chinh, H. X. and Bui Van Tren, 1980].

Note

(1) Cau Sat is the archaeological site that had the earliest date in the post-Neolithic culture tradition in this area; located at Xuan Loc district, Dong Nai province.

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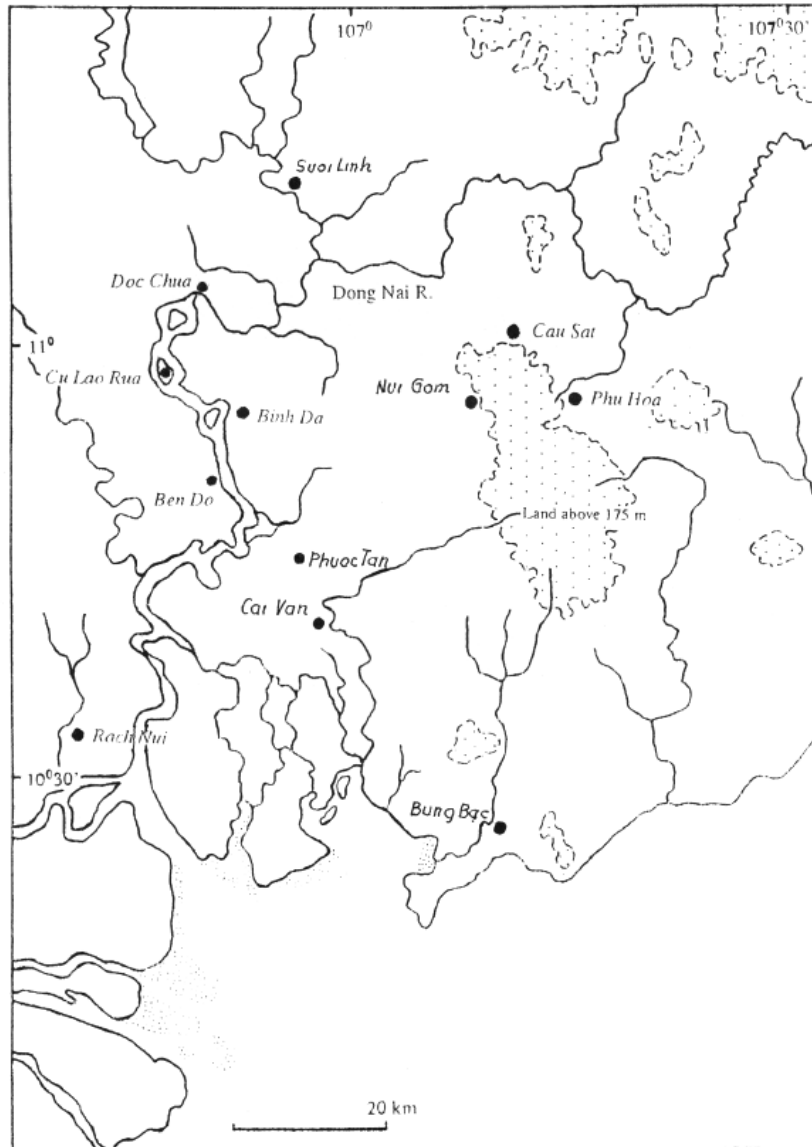
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The location of key sites of the Metal Age in the lower basin of Dong Nai river (Southern Vietnam)
 越南東那江金屬時代遺址

越南南部東那江下游的 新石器時代後文化

黎春鎔

【摘要】

越南南部東那江下游發現新石器時代與金屬時代交替之際的文化，有超過80處聚落、作坊和墓葬遺址，出土的石器數以千計，年代約介乎公元前4500-2400年之間。雖然明顯已進入金屬器時代，但因新石器時代晚期文化特色仍然持續，故名為「新石器時代後文化」較為恰當。

石器數目極豐，種類繁多。有肩及無肩石鏃、石鋤、石鏟大量出土，都帶打製及磨光痕跡。部份石鏃、尖狀器亦然。大石片打製成的鐮刀和切割器，刃部兩邊皆有磨礪痕跡。另有少量裝飾用的石環及鑽孔石環飾出土。石環全經磨光處理，斷面有作圓形、橢圓形、半圓形及扁身三角形等。此外，還有無數礪石、磨石、砍砸器及石杵等。部份聚落遺址甚至發現石琴。

這些遺存所代表的文化，伸延2000多年，是東那江下游地區金屬器文化的一個重要階段。出土的石器無論在工藝水平、種類及造型方面皆極具特色，有別於其他同期文化。例如石鏃斷面多為方形，與越南中部及西部高地典型的「水牛齒形」及泰國南部常見的菱形、扁橢圓形和三角形有很大分別。東那江下游出土的飾物，亦明顯比其他東南亞同期遺址少及簡單，很多遺址甚至無發現飾物。大體來說，絕大部份出土石器都是實用器物，裝飾性不高。就以石琴而言，雖然音色極佳，但外表粗糙一如舊石器時代製品。這類石琴在越南其他地區也有出土，應屬公元前3000年左右遺物，而這段時期正是東那江下游「新石器時代後文化」發展最蓬勃的年代。循著這個軌跡，此地的石器製造業與早期冶煉業並肩發展，奠定了東那江下游這個金屬器時代文化中心的地位。