

ancestors. This is a very timely message and this book conveys it admirably.

REFERENCE

Wang Gungwu. "Empires and Anti-Empires: Asia in World Politics." In *The Fall of Great Powers: Peace, Stability, and Legitimacy*, edited by Geir Lundestad, pp. 235–58. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

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The Origins of Ancient Vietnam. By Nam C. Kim. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. xvii+354 pp.

Nam Kim is a careful and well-informed scholar. He has written a very carefully researched and highly informative book, one that elucidates the most recent findings on the origins of state formation in what is today northern Vietnam. The book also validates what many scholars have surmised from earlier evidence: that a politically sophisticated society, founded by an aristocratic elite, was already in place in what we today call the Bắc Bộ area well before its incorporation as one of the southernmost territories under the control of the Han Dynasty.

The primary evidence for this conclusion comes from the excavation of the major walled site at Cổ Loa, just northwest of the modern capital city of Hanoi. Kim has since 2005 conducted fieldwork focused on that site in collaboration with the Viện Khảo Cổ (Vietnamese Institute of Archaeology). But, before turning to that evidence, he finds that he must first survey and synthesize in considerable detail both the relevant general archaeological record for Southeast Asia as a whole, with emphasis on comparable walled sites.

He then explores state formation and warfare in the region to lay a foundation for the remainder of the text. He covers the emergence of social complexity resulting from the development of agriculture and metallurgy and from the increasing population density in the area adjacent to Cồ Loa, which appears to have been a crossroads for prehistoric economic exchange.

The non-specialist is struck by the considerable evidence presented for cultural continuity and *in situ* development from the Paleolithic to the Bronze Age, featuring increasing social complexity concomitant with the rise of and wide distribution of bronze artefacts, especially in the Đông Sơn era (≈ 600 BCE to ≈ 200 CE). The area showed much greater population density than other parts of Mainland Southeast Asia. It should be noted that this density is reflected in the later figures presented for the Bắc Bộ region in the well-known work of Hans Bielenstein (1947) on the Han census of 2 CE, a work which does not appear in Nam Kim's bibliography but one whose findings correlate well with his own.

The author goes on to emphasize the interweaving of technological development, political consolidation and social stratification that lay at the roots of the eventual formation of the polity that began the construction of a major walled site in the period before significant pre-Han contact. That site was to become Cồ Loa, the major focus of his treatise.

The location itself is described in meticulous detail, and, without rehearsing the minutia thereof, suffice it to say that by its size alone it constitutes the most impressive site of its kind in Mainland Southeast Asia for the pre- and early Sinitic period.

Probably begun in the fifth century BCE, Cồ Loa had two meandering concentric outer ramparts, the outermost some eight kilometres in length. Even today those outer walls still stand up to twelve metres in height and twenty-five metres at their base. The site also had an inner rectangular citadel-like structure, representing the removal of something like two million cubic metres of material. All of this is without parallel for its region and era. That it is evidence of a substantial local polity, pre-dating at its inception significant

influence from further north, is amply demonstrated by the recent work of both the Vietnamese archaeological team and the author himself. And that it points to early state formation cannot be doubted. As Lisa Lucero (2006, p. 281, cited on p. 202) points out and as Nam Kim notes,

Ancient tropical societies, such as the Maya, are often relegated to the unknown or mysterious or, worse yet, are seen as a result of outside influences because of the traditional bias in anthropology of largely focusing on civilizations in temperate areas.

This bias has obviously led to a well-deserved push back in the post-colonial era.

Indeed, political agendas and anachronistic labels have proven a constant threat to academic impartiality in Asian archaeology, and the archaeology of Vietnam has not been entirely immune to this affliction. Viewpoints rooted in colonialist mentalities, Asian as well as Western, have often coloured the results of scholarly work as presented to the larger public for well over a hundred years. Therefore, whenever the fruits of even the most meticulous and disinterested research, such as that in hand, can be read to confirm some prior notion of national exceptionalism or historical precedence, we need to be watchful, lest work like this be put to such misuse. The author of this book is himself acutely aware of the problem, of which he offers a thorough overview in chapter 11. Because of his work to take the larger picture into account, this chapter may eventually prove to be one of the most useful discussions in the entire book for future students of Southeast Asian archaeology.

In sum, the fields of Vietnamese studies generally and Vietnamese archaeology in particular are the beneficiaries of this excellent study by Nam Kim, one with considerable positive implications for the future of both fields.

REFERENCE

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Deathpower: Buddhism’s Ritual Imagination in Cambodia. By Erik W. Davis. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. xi+320 pp.

Deathpower: Buddhism’s Ritual Imagination in Cambodia is an authoritative, far-reaching synthesis of theory, existing literature and fieldwork. In the best scholarly tradition, Davis never loses sight of the concrete realities of ritual practice, recorded thoughtfully and systematically, even while he examines a range of philosophical approaches to ritual and conceptual systems that ritual exemplifies. The book will doubtless be required reading for students of Cambodia, of Theravada Buddhism and of the anthropology of death for some time to come.

Davis describes the core practices of Cambodian funeral ritual itself and goes on to discuss other Buddhist practices associated with death: the setting of temple boundary stones, the iconic making of monks’ robes from shroud remnants, the annual Bhjṃṃ Piṅḍa festival (to honour the dead and feed hungry ghosts), and witchcraft. In his analysis, these practices relate to a common imaginary rooted in Cambodia’s long historical tradition as an agricultural society.

I initially resisted what seemed the overly dramatic terminology of “deathpower”, which builds on a concept of “biopower” developed by Foucault.

[W]e may imagine that death somehow multiplies life. The ability to master this paradoxically productive power, to manage that which death produces, and to put all the parts back into their proper places is at the heart of what I call deathpower. (p. 2)

However, in the end the book convinced me of its usefulness as an analytical tool.