

SECTION II

ARCHAEOLOGY

OTHER PEOPLES' PASTS: Western Archaeologists and Thai Prehistory*

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Introduction

In this paper I examine the role of foreign archaeologists in developing a prehistory specifically for Thailand, and more generally for Southeast Asia, in the context of generalised notions of "Cultural Imperialism," and the influences of colonial rule and Western archaeology in developing countries. The main question I want to pose is this: should the research of Western archaeologists working in Southeast Asia be viewed as the legitimate application of an objective and universally valid scientific method of understanding the past? Or is it no more than a form of cultural imperialism, part of the intellectual apparatus whereby predatory Western capitalist states manipulate and control other people's knowledge of their own past (Gero and Root 1990)? This might seem to be an extreme position to take, but it is an argument being put forward in cultural situations as different as aboriginal Australia, Black Africa, Hispanic America, and by some Amerindian groups in the United States (Hamil 1987).

My own concern with these problems comes from my involvement in prehistoric research in Southeast Asia over the past twenty-five years, an appreciation of the very different value given to archaeology by both national governments and educated people, and the intensity of archaeological research in the countries there: Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Burma (Bray and Glover 1988). Arising out of this is the question of whether we could ever expect to see the emergence of a single coherent discipline of archaeology (in the sense that physics, chemistry and geology are single disciplines), which could be applied to the material remains of man throughout the world.

The European Invention of Prehistory

First I should say a few words about archaeology, and especially about the growth of prehistory. Archaeology is the systematic investigation of our past through studies of the material by-products of behaviour: abandoned settlements, burials, and all objects, whether of great artistic value or not, tools and weapons, manufacturing debris, food remains and even faeces, which survive from the past, usually buried in the ground. The development of archaeological methods for discovering new facts about the past is very much the product of the European Enlightenment and the growth of the natural and social sciences in the nineteenth century.

Modern archaeology has its roots in antiquarianism, in particular the discovery between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries of the roots of European culture in the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. This awareness permeated the middle and upper classes of Europe, and considerable knowledge of the classical past was expected of the educated and politically powerful families of Europe, whose houses and gardens were filled with statuary and decorative designs modelled on those of antiquity. Political power depended on classical allegories for its expression and the antiquary played his part in establishing the rules of the game.

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Another factor in the growth of archaeology came with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century with its emphasis on progress and reason for bettering the human condition. Renaissance scholars were unable to resolve the question of whether the cultures of antiquity were superior to their own. The philosophers of the Enlightenment had no doubt and proposed many hypothetical schemes which traced human progress from savagery to civilization—the ancestors of the programmatic frameworks of Morgan and Engels. In developing these schemes the eighteenth century savants drew heavily on the accounts of “primitive societies” gathered by travellers and explorers in the Americas, Africa and Asia. By the later nineteenth century this purely intellectual interest in cultural evolution had absorbed Darwin’s concepts of biological evolution, and was expressed in aggressive social evolutionary terms by writers such as Herbert Spencer, who saw progress resulting from “the overrunning of the less powerful and less adapted by the more powerful and more adapted” (Greene 1963, 85). This provided a comforting philosophy for the (largely European) nations which were then overrunning much of the world.

It is no coincidence that the nineteenth century also saw the spread of nationalist and racist ideas among European intellectuals, who were increasingly inclined to view cultural differences between ethnic groups as being based in their biological inheritance. First explicitly formulated by the comte de Gobineau (1853–55), the Darwinian view of cultural evolution underlay the whole structure of, for example, John Lubbock’s enormously influential *Prehistoric Times* (1865). Lubbock argued that technologically less advanced peoples were morally and intellectually inferior to civilized ones, and that within European society the criminally-inclined and lower classes were biologically inferior to the middle and propertied classes. Thus biology was thought to explain both inequalities in Western societies, and the perceived superiority of European societies over all others (Trigger 1989).

This geographical expansion of European knowledge and power brought the realization that the Enlightenment concept of an orderly progress towards civilization could not be reconciled with the abundant evidence brought back to Europe of societies coexisting at every “stage of development”; naked hunters and primitive cultivators of the tropical forests, such as the “Tribal” peoples of India or the Hill Tribes of Thailand, living in close proximity to sophisticated urban civilizations and rooted in one or the other of the great religious traditions of Asia. To explain this “anomaly”, distinctions were made between progressive (usually Western) societies and static Asian, African and American ones, and between “outward-looking” coastal peoples and those of the mountainous and forested interiors of continents with their “limited intellectual horizons.” Social, biological and geographical determinisms of this sort proved attractive to many European writers. These were particularly strong in Germany, and provide a major theme in, for instance, Gustav Klemm’s *Universal Culture History* (1843), and in the writings of Friedrich Ratzel (1894–95), who provided one of the most explicit formulations of the role of diffusion and migration in creating the patterns of cultural plurality which

faced the early ethnographers. Also influential at this time were the culture–morphological ideas of Leo Frobenius, who argued that cultures were like living organisms and had stages of childhood, maturity and senility (Kriel 1973). The presence of the monuments of Indianized Southeast Asia such as Borobudur, Prambanan and Angkor, abandoned or in decay at the time of colonial settlement, confirmed European prejudices that Southeast Asian civilization had declined from a period of greatness and needed the revitalization from the experience of European culture and technology.

Colonialist Archaeology in Southeast Asia

It can, I think, be accepted that the whole concept of prehistory was a European one and its development within Europe was profoundly influenced by the social, political, and commercial links between Europe and the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In order to understand the way European prehistory has influenced, and been influenced by, the experience of investigation in non-Western countries, Trigger’s (1984) distinction between what he calls “nationalist, colonialist and imperialist archaeologies” provides a useful framework for this exercise.

In the colonial territories of Southeast Asia ruled by France, Britain and the Netherlands, some investigation of prehistoric remains started in the late nineteenth century, often as a sideline interest of colonial administrators, surveyors and geologists. People such as Earl in Malaya; Garnier, Jammes and Mansuy in Cambodia and Vietnam; Wray and Evans in Malaya; Noetling in Burma; and the Sarasin cousins in Sulawesi; observed, and occasionally excavated, in caves and shell middens, despite the fact that the great monuments of the classical Indianized kingdoms attracted most attention (Glover 1986; Higham 1989a, 17–28).

Trigger has characterized colonialist archaeology as a distinct mode of archaeological thought (1984, 360–3). During the colonial period, archaeologists and ethnologists regarded the tribal cultures of Africa, Asia and the Americas as a living museum of the past. The first generation of prehistorians working in Southeast Asia all adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, this dominant mode of thought as well as the European archaeological procedure of the early twentieth century. Concentration was on material form and typology for the recognition of culture groups and culture areas, and an explanation of all changes in the archaeological record as the result of the diffusion of techniques or the migration of peoples from one culture area to another. This may have satisfied contemporary European perceptions of the structure of social processes, but it has meant little to the people of Southeast Asia. The paradigm, almost universally held in the heyday of European colonial rule in Asia and Africa, that societies do not change without external stimulation, played a part, if a minor one, in giving intellectual support to colonialism. It denigrated indigenous cultures, characterized them as uninventive and static, and put them on a

level with "primitive" phases of European development, thus helping to justify the "civilizing mission" of Europe in bringing backward native peoples up to the cultural level of the twentieth century.

A few years ago, when I had the occasion to consider the state of prehistory in Indonesia in the light of the ideas set out above (Glover 1986), I argued that prehistoric archaeology, an alien European concept and practice introduced into Indonesia in the days of Dutch colonial hegemony, and refurbished in a period of European and American intellectual dominance in the mid-twentieth century, was an abstract mental construct, satisfying certain concerns of Western bourgeois society, but of no significance to more than a handful of Indonesians. Until very recently a very large part of the investigations into Indonesia's past have been carried out by European researchers. Indonesian prehistory, as reflected, for example, in the well-known books of H. R. van Heekeren (1957, 1958, 1972), or in the most recent prehistory by Bellwood (1985), was designed to meet Western and not Indonesian interests. Following from this was the implied conclusion that research into prehistory by the few Indonesians undertaking it, was likely to be a derivative and sterile occupation, with no roots in Indonesian culture, satisfying none of the desires many Indonesians had to know more about the past of their own societies. In 1986 I argued that European contributions to the prehistory of Indonesia, though many in quantity, have not been very significant. Although we have constructed some sort of "Prehistory of Indonesia" it is for external consumption only and of little relevance to Indonesian interests in their own past. I am still uncertain as to whether this pessimistic and negative view of the state of Indonesian prehistory is recognised and accepted by local researchers.

Prehistory in Thailand, 1960s–1975

In Thailand, in contrast to the situation in the European-dominated territories of the region, an interest in prehistory was late in developing.¹ Archaeology was, until the early 1960s, largely confined to art-historical studies of sculpture, temples, painting and fine arts, and was mainly the prerogative of aristocratic, Western-educated Thais on the fringes of the royal clan (Higham 1989b, 25–7). Structurally, archaeology is still almost exclusively taught and studied at the Fine Arts University (Silpakorn) or at the Government Department of Fine Arts. This slow start to prehistoric archaeology in Thailand can be explained by the fact that, alone of the Southeast Asian countries, the kingdom was never the colony of a Western power. Not having been subjected to alien rule with their political institutions overthrown, Thais could more easily than, say, Vietnamese, take their past for granted. Critical historiography, in Thailand, was not well developed, and the country was an agrarian, quasi-feudal state.

There were some casual observations on prehistoric sites and materials in Thailand by foreigners in the 1930s (Evans 1931; Sarasin 1933), and during his enforced residence in west-

ern Thailand from 1943–44, the self-taught Dutch prehistorian H.R. van Heekeren (1947a, b), who made the first significant contribution to the prehistory of Thailand through his observations on pebble choppers, which he had found in caves and along the banks of the Kwae Noi river. However, it was not until the early 1960s that the systematic investigation of Thai prehistory was initiated by a series of joint field projects: the Thai–Danish Expedition, led by van Heekeren and Per Sørensen (Heekeren and Knuth 1967); the Thai–British team, led by William Watson, a Chinese specialist, and Helmut Loofs working from Australia (Watson and Loofs 1967); and two Thai–American groups, one led by William Solheim from the University of Hawaii (Solheim and Gorman 1966; Bayard 1971), and the other headed by George Dales and Bennett Bronson of the University of Pennsylvania (Bronson 1976; Bronson and Dales 1978). Until about 1980 most sustained work in Thai prehistory was carried out by overseas researchers and was published in English, usually in international journals or monographs published overseas.²

Most of the foreign archaeologists working in Thailand and elsewhere in Southeast Asia from the 1960s onwards, worked with a rather different research mentality than that of the colonial era. In place of the view that change comes primarily through diffusion or migration from outside, a neo-evolutionary adaptive model was generally followed, in which all societies were seen as dynamic and changing over time, seeking to manipulate natural environmental systems in such a way as to maximize the rate of energy flow into culturally preferred directions. A sort of uniformitarianism of social processes was accepted, but the forms and structures of society were seen as being transformed over time by the interaction between accumulating knowledge, and the forms of organization and technology specific to particular places and times.³

Trigger characterized this new approach as part of the imperialist archaeology mode, particularly as influenced by the American "New Archaeology" of the 1960s (1984, 363–4). By stressing internal change and adaptation it eliminated previous tendencies which downgraded non-Western peoples by failing to recognize their independent creativity. Yet the new approach was interested in the archaeology of various parts of the world simply as data with which to establish generalizations about human behaviour that were of concern to Western intellectuals. It denied the intrinsic value of national traditions or local cultures, and was interested only in developing nomothetic generalizations about cultural processes. This was really not so different from the colonialist and evolutionary archaeology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which saw a value in "primitive" cultures only to the extent that they helped Europeans to understand their own past through these living examples of past stages of society.

The early prehistoric excavations in Thailand mentioned earlier, at Sai Yok, Ban Kao, Khok Charoen and Non Nok Tha, provided the first real training in the aims and methods of prehistory for a generation of Thai archaeologists, many of whom are still active in research today.⁴ During the following thirty years Thailand underwent dramatic social and economic transformations; the country became more urbanized, second-

ary and tertiary education was extended widely and, following the political upheavals in neighbouring countries and some within Thailand itself, a new generation of Thais has emerged who require new explanations of their past. With relatively few historical sources, many Thais have been looking with enthusiasm to archaeology to provide them with this new understanding, but of course the questions they seek to answer from archaeology are not necessarily those favoured by overseas archaeologists. In particular, as I understand it, Thai archaeologists show rather little interest in generalised explanations couched in terms of evolutionary processes, and not very much in comparative archaeology outside Thailand. If there is one thing which they are seeking to achieve at the moment, it is documentation and conservation of the wealth and variety of the material remains of man in Thailand over the past four or five thousand years. As in Indonesia, but in marked contrast to what is happening in Vietnam, most resources devoted to archaeology in Thailand go into the reconstruction of the great temples and ancient cities of the Khmer, Sukhothai and Ayudhya phases of the Thai medieval period. This is archaeology in the service of both nationalism and business, for Thailand is a country where tourism is a major industry.

Prehistory in Thailand 1975–1990s

By about 1980, quite a number of those Thai archaeologists who had gained experience of Western-style archaeology through participation in foreign-led field programmes, and who had studied in America, Europe and India, started to take the lead in pre- and protohistoric field research in Thailand.⁵ A further group of Western archaeologists joined them to initiate combined projects. Some of these, such as J. S. Penny, W. K. Macdonald, W. Schaufler, D. Welch, J. White and R. Wilen, were students of the first generation of American researchers, and they were joined by Charles Higham of the University of Otago, working first with Gorman at Ban Chiang, and later on his own account at Ban Na Di, Khok Phanom Di and Nong Nor, with myself excavating at Ban Don Ta Phet in western Thailand, and Marielle Santoni and her colleagues at Obluang and other sites in the northwest. Quite a number of the “pioneering” western researchers, such as Per Sørensen, Donn Bayard and Chet Gorman, continued their fieldwork, although usually at a reduced level. Gorman’s work was cut short by illness and his premature death, aged only forty-three, in 1981. In the 1980s these researchers were joined by Vincent Pigott, Anna Bennett and Vanessa Coote, specialising in archaeometallurgy, and the Italian team led by Roberto Ciarla from IsMEO, Rome, researching on the junction between pre- and protohistory in central Thailand.

By the late 1980s prehistoric archaeology in Thailand had more than made up for its late start and substantial achievements seemed to have been made. Sites such as Spirit Cave, Non Nok Tha and Ban Chiang were known internationally, as well

as within Thailand, and regional, though often disputed, chronologies were emerging, especially in the northeast where most work has been done (Bayard 1984). The idea that Thailand was one of the places where an early and indigenous transition to settled village agriculture was made, had been aired—though not settled—by Gorman’s work at Spirit Cave and other sites in Mae Hong Son province (Gorman 1970; Yen 1977). It was being strongly argued by some Western researchers that an early and independent tradition of bronze metallurgy had developed in northeast Thailand in the third millennium BC—one which owed little or nothing to parallel developments in North China and Western Asia (Solheim 1968; Gorman and Charoenwongsa 1976; Bayard 1979).

Only in Vietnam, of all the Southeast Asian countries, had more prehistoric sites been surveyed, excavated and written about than in Thailand, although very little of this was known to Western (or to other Southeast Asian) archaeologists at the time because of difficulties in obtaining and reading Vietnamese publications. In Higham’s (1989a) synthesis of (primarily) the prehistory of mainland Southeast Asia, work in Thailand had the dominant place, and this is reflected in the teaching on Southeast Asian prehistory in courses in London, Canberra, Otago and, probably, in several university departments in the United States.

In view of what I have said above we might think that Western involvement in the prehistory of Thailand has been an unqualified success. From a position of almost total ignorance in 1960, we are at a state where reasonably accurate textbooks can be written and attractive and informative museum displays on Thai prehistory mounted (e.g. White 1982). Numerous Thai students have received undergraduate and postgraduate training (the latter mostly overseas), and they are now, within a single generation, setting the direction and pace of field research, while more senior university and Fine Arts Department staff have been publishing numerous well-illustrated books and articles in Thai for a public that seems to have a lively and increasingly well-informed interest in its past. Despite this there are, I believe, grounds for unease concerning the development of prehistoric archaeology in Thailand, and the relationship between Western and Thai archaeologists. To understand this we need to consider Trigger’s “third mode” of archaeology.

Nationalist Archaeology

In some newly-independent countries, and where native peoples appear to be being denied the right to their cultural identity, forms of nationalist archaeology have developed in reaction to the colonialist and imperialist modes. Trigger believes that prehistoric archaeology has, almost everywhere, arisen out of an attempt to satisfy nationalist aspirations (1984, 358–60). Without accepting that this is the only inspirational source, it is clear that the development of European prehistory was much stimulated by the post-Napoleonic surge of nationalism and

Romanticism. This is particularly well exemplified in the case of Germany, where the humiliation of defeat and occupation by France led to glorification of supposed ancient Teutonic military values whose physical remains were eagerly sought and displayed in the cause of a revived German Empire. In Ireland, Israel, Mexico, Iran before Khomeini, Vietnam and the Libya of Gaddafi, among other places, it is easy to see how archaeology has served, if not been created by, a growth of national consciousness. Nationalist archaeology is strongest amongst peoples who feel threatened, insecure, or deprived of their political rights by more powerful nations, or in countries where appeals for national unity are being made to counteract serious divisions along class or ethnic lines. Nationalist archaeology tends to emphasize the more recent past, and to draw attention to the political and cultural achievements of past civilizations with visible, monumental architecture and centralized political structures. Earlier prehistory, or the archaeology of small-scale pre-literate communities, tends to be ignored by nationalist archaeology, which, not surprisingly, is inclined to replace colonialist or imperialist archaeology in newly independent countries. The popularity of classical and Islamic archaeology in Indonesia, the focus on the Dongson period in Vietnam, and on the archaeology of Sukhothai in Thailand, are cases in point.

The assertion that only "native peoples" can properly interpret their own past—that it is their exclusive property—found very explicit expression a few years ago in Zimbabwe. Some years earlier, the Director of Antiquities of the time, Peter Garlake, had been forced to resign on account of his refusal to interpret the ruins of Great Zimbabwe in a way acceptable to the white settler government of Rhodesia, which saw them as proof of ancient white settlement in southern Africa by Sabaeans or Phoenicians. In independent Zimbabwe, an attempt was made to appropriate the monuments for the narrower purposes of Greater Shona nationalism. It was claimed by Dr. Ken Mufuka, the first African Director of Museums and Monuments, that not only does Great Zimbabwe belong to the indigenous African past—a point agreed by all professional archaeologists since Randall MacIver's excavations there in 1904—but that "only black Africans can properly understand and interpret the monument" (Garlake 1984, 123).

The archaeology of New Zealand, enthusiastically developed by white settlers earlier this century, has increasingly become an area of confrontation between Maori and Pakeha as Maori determination grows that they should define, interpret and control their present and past culture. "Almost without exception, scholars of Pakeha descent are seen as raiders from another culture," and those archaeologists that do not come to terms with Maori interests risk being seen as "little more than birds of prey feasting on the carcass of [someone else's] culture" (O'Regan 1990, 99).

Australia too, once the happy playground of imperialist archaeology, provides a pertinent example. Since the late nineteenth century Australia was seen by European archaeologists as a sort of Palaeolithic Park, a continent-wide experimental laboratory where hypotheses relevant to European stone-age

archaeology, and law-like generalizations about culture process, could be tested by Cambridge graduates making their academic reputations, and on their way to well-paid jobs. White Australian archaeologists have recently been forced to compromise with aboriginal interests. I quote from a representation by R. F. Langford on behalf of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community:

You say that as scientists you have a right to study and obtain information on our culture. You say that because you are Australians you have a right to study and explore our heritage, because it is a heritage to be shared by all Australians, black and white we say that you come as invaders, you have tried to destroy our culture, you have built your fortunes on the lands and bones of our people and now, having said sorry, want a share in picking over the bodies of what you say is a dead past. We say that it is our past, our culture and heritage, and forms part of our present life. As such it is ours to control and it is ours to share on our terms (1983, 2).

Clearly the academic discipline of prehistory, exported from Europe, and successfully grafted on to white Australian society, has been (at least for the moment) decisively rejected by the people whose past archaeologists seek to study. It has been rejected on the grounds that European notions of history, biological and cultural evolution, as enshrined in archaeological practice, are quite different from Aboriginal ones: that archaeological work does not serve Aboriginal interests, which are to gain control over land, and thus their own destiny; and that Aborigines, passionately interested in the specific details of their own past, resent having their heritage serve as an experimental ground where white academics can test general theories and advance their own careers.

Nationalist and Xenophobic Tendencies in Thai Archaeology

Despite not suffering from the post-colonial traumas that affect most of its neighbours, Thai archaeology has recently shown some signs of cultural nationalism with claims that foreign archaeologists have sent home antiquities without declaring and recording them, that items have "disappeared" and no reports produced, and that incompetent foreign post-graduate students came to study for their theses and had to be taught archaeological methods by senior Thai students. Some were said to "be taking advantage of the low cost living [in Thailand] and turning up drunk twenty-three hours a day. Some had affairs with native girls" (Sukphisit 1991). Most of these xenophobic rumblings have appeared, not surprisingly, in Thai language newspapers, or in periodicals designed primarily for home consumption such as the *Muang Boran Journal*, but some

of the discussion has been aired in Thailand's English language newspapers such as the *Bangkok Post* and *Nation*.⁶

What are we to make of this? The claims that foreign academic archaeologists have actually being making off with "cultural property" is almost certainly false and mischievous. If one wants to acquire antiquities in Thailand, you do not go there as an archaeologist registered with the Fine Arts Department and the National Research Council, but as a tourist, with a full wallet and a few introductions, and you will find Thai nationals only too willing to sell their cultural heritage to the *farang*, as they do to wealthy Thai collectors who have most of the best collections.

The claims that Western archaeologists who have worked in Thailand have not fully published their findings deserves examination and no doubt some reprimands. The Joint FAD–University of Pennsylvania excavations at Ban Chiang in 1974–75 are held to be a case in point (Sukphisit 1991), but the fact that the American co-director, Chester Gorman, became seriously ill soon after the second season, and died not long afterwards, should be remembered. Subsequently one of his former students, Joyce White, has continued the analysis and publication of that research (White 1982, 1986, 1990). Where are the detailed publications from the Thai excavations at Ban Chiang by the Fine Arts Department in 1967, 1969 and 1972, and by Thammasat University?

The pioneering excavations and surveys by van Heekeren and Sørensen are published in four substantial volumes and in numerous journal and book articles (Heekeren and Knuth 1967; Sørensen and Hatting 1967; Sørensen 1973, 1979, 1988). The 1966–68 excavation at Non Nok Tha has spawned at least three monographs, some with lengthy sections in Thai (Bayard 1971; Pietrusewsky 1974; Higham 1975), in journal articles too numerous to list here, and the final report is nearing completion (Bayard and Solheim, personal communication). Higham and Kijngam's 1980 excavations at Ban Na Di are comprehensively published in a three-volume monograph with a substantial Thai summary (Higham and Kijngam 1984), and Higham's 1985 joint excavations at Khok Phanom Di have two massive volumes in print, one in press, several more in the pipeline, and a dozen or so journal articles are available (Higham, Bannanurag et al. 1987; Higham 1989; Higham and Banannurag 1989, 1990, 1991; Banannurag 1991). This last project alone represents a greater commitment to detailed post-excavation analysis and rapid publication than has been attempted by any native Southeast Asian archaeologist on any site, in any country. Higham also has produced a substantial and much used (in Thailand?) archaeological textbook (Higham 1989a) which, as with Bellwood's (1985) volume on Indonesia and Malaya, relies almost entirely on writings in Western languages.

In counterbalance to this, however, I must stress that in the past four or five years there have been a substantial number of publications by Thai archaeologists; these are well illustrated, usually in colour, with limited text descriptions and lacking, as

far as I can judge, in the sort of extended analyses of excavated data such as one finds in, say, the publications by Sørensen or Higham and his colleagues. This, I suspect, reflects the different interests in, and priorities given, to the details of prehistoric archaeology by Western and Thai scholars.

I list some of the publications of Western archaeologists, not to boast how much we have done, for I have argued earlier that much of what is done and written by Western archaeologists may be irrelevant to Southeast Asian interests, but at least to defend Western archaeologists against the accusation that information from all this research has not been made available.

Synthesis

Earlier in this paper I referred to the question of whether we could ever expect to see the emergence of a single coherent discipline of archaeology which would be applied to the material remains of man throughout the world, and which would develop the same sort of data and interpretations whether it was undertaken by, say, Eskimo archaeologists in Africa, or Vietnamese in Ecuador. Trigger's (1986) conclusions, which I entirely agree with, were that, whereas the technical procedures of archaeology will become increasingly standardised, the problems people seek to resolve from the study of archaeological remains arise out of the historical experiences of each community and each generation, and that we must not expect our discipline to develop in the same way as have the natural sciences, geology or mathematics over the past three hundred years.

Returning finally to the situation in present-day Thailand, I believe that overseas archaeologists working in Thailand have often been out of step with the concerns of Thai scholars investigating their own past. While there are, as I have indicated above, ethnocentric, anti-foreign tendencies within the Thai academic community, they do not at the moment seem to have wide support. Thailand is a society tolerant of diversity and many Thai archaeologists still welcome the presence of foreigners working there—even if they are not too interested in their conclusions—for they see them as a source of new techniques and analytical procedures to stimulate indigenous Thai archaeology (Shoocongdej 1993; Charoenwongsa n.d.).

Finally I want to return to the main problem addressed in this paper. Does the research of Western archaeologists in developing countries serve any useful purpose to the host society? Is it a morally neutral activity of interest to us, and harmless to them, or is it, as I caricatured it earlier, a form of cultural imperialism and exploitation which appropriates other people's pasts and serves to strengthen the economic and cultural domination of western capitalist states?

A few years ago Lowenthal (1985) showed that all our reconstructions of the past are, in a sense, fictional and that we travel into the past only to give some meaning to our present. If

we accept this, does it imply that archaeological and historical "science" has no legitimacy, that there is no objective reality or permanent value to our reconstructions of states and process in the past? Yet, as Trigger pointed out, the data of archaeology are not entirely a construction of our own mind, even if their recording and analyses are coloured by our specific concerns with the past (1986, 15). All societies need this "foreign country" which is their past and which is better entered through the

exercise of historically and archaeologically trained imagination, than by subverting and appropriating it for narrow nationalist or racist purposes, as in Nazi Germany in the 1930s. If the discipline of archaeology, as practised by Western archaeologists in Southeast Asia, helps local researchers to exploit a methodology which can enable them to examine and respect their pasts, then I will accept that while much of our effort serves the suspect aims of cultural imperialism, the exercise can still be justified.

NOTES

1. My view of Thai archaeology and prehistory is of course an external one, by an archaeologist who has undertaken periodic field research in Thailand from 1980–1990, is reasonably familiar with the literature published in European languages, but does not read or speak more than a few words of the Thai language. Of the foreign archaeologists who have undertaken significant research in Thailand, I believe that only Donn Bayard is really proficient in Thai, and the late Chester Gorman, Charles Higham and more recently Marielle Santoni, had or have quite reasonable spoken Thai.
2. The *Journal of the Siam Society* was the only regular outlet within the country for disseminating the results of these researches, although the *Silpakorn Journal* and then the *Muang Boran Journal* published short reports in Thai or English, and in Thai from, respectively, 1957 and 1975.
3. In practice, the perceptions of prehistoric cultural processes varied much among the foreign archaeologists of this period. The older, European-trained archaeologists, such as van Heekeren, Watson and Loofs, tended to see the Near East and China as *the* great centres of prehistoric cultural innovation, exporting populations, ideas and techniques east and southwards to Southeast Asia. Sørensen seems largely to have shared this mentality, whereas the American-trained archaeologists, such as Solheim and his students, tended to stress local innovation and indigenous process of change.
4. Among the Thai archaeologists who gained their earliest experience of prehistoric research on the joint expeditions of the 1960s, I should mention the names of Chin You-di, Vidhya Intakosai, Pisit Charoenwongsa, Nikhom Suthiragsa, Pricha Kanchakom, Prapat Yothaprasert among many others, not all of whose names are recorded in the reports.
5. Of the Thais who studied abroad following the first wave of Western archaeologi- cal field expeditions, I can think immediately of Vidhya Intakosai, Pisit Charoenwongsa, Nikhom Suthiragsa, Surapol Natapintu, Pthomrer Ketudhat, Surin Pookajorn, Rachanee Banannurag, Pornchoi Suchitta, Warangkhan Rajpitak and Somsuda Rutnin, most of whom are active in research today. There must be others whom I know less well and their omission from this list means only that I would be grateful to have further names.
6. The English language newspaper magazine *Outlook* of 13 May 1991 contained a report by journalist Suthon Sukphisit (Sukphisit 1991) on a seminar or conference held at Silpakorn University where major criticisms were made of the role of foreign archaeologists in Thailand. The then Dean of the Faculty of Archaeology, Acharn Veerapan Maleipan articulated these complaints and asked, "Why do we have to continue seeking foreign cooperation when there were many well-trained Thai archaeologists" (my paraphrasing). I hope that I have answered this question to some extent.

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