DEFINING THE HUNDRED YUE

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ABSTRACT

The term Yue as a reference to non-Han peoples has been used in many different ways. In late Shang times it seems to have been used to refer to people in northwest China but by late Warring States to Han times it was more generally used to indicate the partly- or un-sinicized peoples of southern China who belonged to different ethnic and linguistic groups and had no political or cultural unity. Since historical, archaeological and anthropological evidence indicates considerable cultural continuity in South China from the prehistoric populations to those of today the term Yue still has some use as a broad reference to the peoples and cultures of this region back into the first millennium BC.

INTRODUCTION

In any discussion of the ancient Yue[1], or any other people named in early historical records, it is necessary to examine very closely the anthropological content of the name, and to raise the question of whether or not the term has any validity or usefulness in modern research. One of the crucial aspects of this question is the degree to which the linguistic affiliation of the Yue people can be determined.

The character used for Yue may have come from a pottery mark (Tang 1975) of unknown meaning in the Dawenkou culture of around 2000 BC in Shandong province. It may have been a personal name or emblem. The term Yue occurs fairly frequently in the oracle bone writings of the late Shang dynasty, ca. 1200 BC. According to Shima Kunio, supported by David Keightley (1983), it refers to a people or powerful chief northwest of the Shang territory. Lefeuvre (pers. comm. 1986) believes the term refers to a person, Lord Yue, but notes one inscription mentioning "the land of Yue". Generally, Yue was an ally of the Shang and a buffer against hostile tribes further north and west. There are few references from the Western Zhou period; one puts a Yue chieftain in present-day Henan province, and a place called Yue in Henan is mentioned in later texts.

Beginning in the Spring and Autumn period and through the Warring States era, the term was applied to a powerful state in the lower Yangzi Basin, which flourished from the 7th century BC until its demise in 334 BC, and also to the people of that state. The term was used for many of the unsinicized or partially assimilated peoples of south and southwest China and northern Vietnam during the Qin-Han era (255 BC - AD 221), with divisions based on the names of states or tribal federations existing during that period: Min Yue, Nan Yue, Lo Yue (Lac-Viet in Vietnamese) etc. Apparently because of the complexity of the clan and tribal organizations and affiliations, the term Hundred Yue was frequently used, beginning in the third century BC. There were also Mountain Yue mentioned from the second century BC in southeast China who offered continuous resistance to Chinese control well into the Tang period (AD 618-907).

It should be clear even from this brief summary that the word Yue was used during the Zhou and Han dynasties to cover the peoples living in a vast territory from Jiangsu to Yunnan. To the more civilized inhabitants of the Central States during the Spring and Autumn/Warring States periods, the Yue people were at best semi-barbaric, living on the outer fringes of civilization. The Hundred Yue were similarly viewed in the Qin-Han period, even though the process of sinicization was well under way. Certainly the scholars and scribes who wrote the histories were not anthropologists, and did not devote any great effort to the study of these barbarians. In common with all imperial systems, the attitude frequently

expressed in these writings is that these barbarians had 'no culture' and were in essence human animals, at one with nature and lacking all the important elements of civilization that sets man apart from beasts. To the citizens of Han, the Yue and other barbarians had no modesty or morality, their speech was like 'animal shrieking', and they aspired no higher than to satisfy their basic instincts and needs. One should therefore be extremely cautious about the use of the term Yue in any sense other than a movable historical collective name applied by the Han Chinese to the barbarian inhabitants of a large tract of territory in southern China and northern Vietnam.

It is clear that, as Chinese civilization was extended to the south and southwest, the term Yue moved with it. Even some of the sub-divisions of the Yue continued in use or were revived. The 'Yang Yue' tribe or chiefdom name, for example, was in the Middle Yangzi at the end of Western Zhou, but by the end of the Warring States it was south of Chu; by Qin it was in Lingnan and by later Han in Guilin. There can be little doubt that it is only the term, not the people, which continues to move southward with the borders of the Chinese empire.

This continual spread of the term Yue means that it was likely to be applied to different ethnic groups, marked by different physical characteristics, different language families, different material culture and different social structures as they came into contact with the Chinese. Therein lies the obvious difficulty in making use of the term Yue. With such reservations, it is extremely difficult to speak of Yue culture in any sense understood by anthropologists today, and one must subject any compilation of Yue traits to a very critical appraisal. It is simply begging the question of Yue ethnicity to describe the history of various Yue groups and/or states, list the few descriptions of peoples and then overlay the data from archaeology and ethnology. Despite their very valuable work on historical references to the Yue peoples, Lo Hsiang-lin (1955) and many other commentators before and since have generally not kept a critical perspective, with the result that a cumulative picture of a single unifying Yue culture usually emerges from their writing. Lo even believed that all of the Yue people derived from the dispersal of one original tribe, but this is quite clearly not the case.

Unfortunately, the historical texts abound in political-military detail, but have relatively little ethnographic information from specific areas. One Han source states that the inhabitants of the southeast coast had "the same characteristics and way of life". Another writer of the same period noted that the Nan Yue (Guangdong only) were "of diverse stocks and types". Common traits such as tattooing, short cropped hair, fighting abilities, adaptation to water environment and so on, figure prominently in most descriptions of the Yue people (e.g. Song 1991). These descriptions are usually amalgams representing large, province-sized, geographic constituencies, so one cannot be certain of the degree of variety from group to group, but even if such traits were shared by all the peoples in the area this would hardly establish that they were of one ethnic group. Needless to say, the presence of a single trait cannot be used to link the Yue peoples in any ethnic sense. Wei's (1982) claim that the presence of tattooing among the Taiwan hilltribes, the Li of Hainan and the Tai people of Yunnan indicates a common origin with the ancient Yue is clearly wrong in reasoning; we know that such customs may spread from group to group.

What is almost totally lacking from the historical references are moderately detailed descriptions of the Yue of one village, or of one county. Of course what was reported was what interested or shocked the Han Chinese, or what was of military or administrative value; consequently there is very little information on Yue rituals, belief systems, clan or kinship structures. By Tang and Song dynasty times there were much more detailed accounts of the various ethnic groups of south China, but by this time most of the Yue had been assimilated. Those aboriginal groups which were still either 'wild' or partly sinicized were no longer called Yue, but were identified by other names. Some of these names have continued down to the present and for others linguistic affiliations can be proposed. In Lingnan, for example, Schafer (1967:48-53) lists the Tang era aboriginals as: Li, Mien, Mak (probably Tai-speakers), Nung (?), Huang (possibly Mon-Khmer), Wu-hu (probably Vietnamese), Tan (?), and Lao (probably Tai). The ethnic diversity which comes into clearer focus by the end of the first millennium AD is certainly a reflection of that which existed in ancient times. A 6th century AD source notes that "the Man, Tan, Li and other tribes have no leaders, live in grottoes, cut their hair short, tattoo their bodies and like to fight. Their ancestors were the Nan Yue" (Lo 1955:215).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

One attempt to build a picture of Yue culture through historical references and the knowledge of minority ethnic group cultures surviving today and elements now embedded in the mainstream of Chinese culture was made by Wolfram Eberhard (1968). In *The Local Cultures of South and East China*, he attempted to reconstruct Yue culture from chains of related customs and

beliefs. While one might agree with some of his conclusions regarding clusters of traits which characterized many of the peoples called Yue, it has to be admitted that the methodology he employed is very dubious and is not widely accepted by scholars. There is a great potential in his methodology to split or lump the cultures of distinct ethnic groups, or to create strange and unverifiable hybrids out of similar or shared features.

For example, Eberhard linked under one chain the beliefs and customs found across southeast China about the Great Yu, sacrifices to Yu, the 'breathing earth', legends of the execution of Fang-feng, the Hie clan, the double ninth festival, the poncho and the sedan chair. It is very difficult, to say the least, to follow his reasoning that these traits all point to a mother Yue culture. Eberhard interpreted this chain and others as evidence of the origin of the Yue culture from elements of Thai and Mien cultures, which he believed were earlier. He postulated other chains of Yue culture traits around bronze and bronze drums, iron, the cult of the snake, the dragon boat, figure magic, bells and the chicken. Many of these also are to be found in the Thai and Mien cultures as reconstructed by Eberhard, and of course in others as well. The Mien were supposedly a mountain folk who practised slash-and burn cultivation, while the Thai were lowland people practising wet-field rice agriculture. In its broad outlines Eberhard's scheme may be correct in one sense: that the Yue shared many cultural elements with these groups among others. My thesis is that the Yue included these groups, among many others (most notably the Austroasiatic-speakers). It is very difficult to follow Eberhard's hypothesis into the linguistic realm where the best evidence suggests that in the southeastern coastal provinces the Yue were partly if not mainly Austroasiatic-speaking. I know of no linguist who has proposed that Austroasiatic languages derive from Mien and/or Tai.

Although one may criticize many aspects of Eberhard's methodology and his conclusions, it is certainly true that many cultural traits practised by peoples formerly called Yue were incorporated into high Chinese culture. And this process probably did begin around 1000 BC as he suggests. It is without doubt worthwhile to attempt to identify and trace the evolution of those elements, but with a much stricter degree of historical and geographical control, where possible with input from linguistics and archaeology. It already seems clear however that no over-arching Yue culture will emerge from such studies, since the available data strongly suggest that the term Yue masks a considerable ethnic diversity.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

There is certainly considerable diversity in the archaeological remains over the period and geographic zone of the ancient Yue, but it is very difficult to relate this diversity to ethnic differences. Much of the diversity may not be related so much to the existence of different ethnic groups as to ecological aspects and adaptive strategies, geographic factors and lines of communication, and some random (i.e. for reasons unknowable) clustering of traits. The spread of new styles or innovations in pottery, stone and bronze artifacts may in many cases be related to intensity of contact between groups, but it also depended on the receptivity and creativity of the groups which were in contact. It has often been pointed out in the literature that we should not expect a neat match of ethnic groups and archaeological cultures in Southeast Asia, and indeed such a convergence may have been rare. From the beginning of the Neolithic, we should expect 'an ever increasing cultural diversity over time' (Hutterer 1976: 227) - at least until the spread of state civilization which began to reverse the process and led to a degree of homogeneity.

Obviously, a widely distributed artifact type such as the shouldered adze, which is found in different geographic zones over a wide area of central and southern China and northern Indochina, must have been adopted by many different ethnic groups, contrary to what Heine-Geldern believed. On the other hand, even a very specialized style of pottery decoration, such as the double-f pattern found in parts of Guangdong and eastern Fujian, surely had a distribution across ethnic lines. It is highly likely that, once it began to flourish, double-f was adopted by all the groups (probably Austroasiatic, Tai and Hmong-Mien) which occupied its area of distribution. Within this area there was a variety of burial and ritual practice (cremation, primary and secondary burial), and variety in subsistence patterns (lowland rice cultivation, upland shifting horticulture, coastal fishing and gathering). The shouldered adze is found throughout the double-f area, but tripod feet are found only in the northern parts, while pebble picks and choppers are much more frequent in the coastal zone. The region of double-f was included in, but smaller than, the area of the Nan Yue of Qin-Han times. But there is no evidence to suggest that they were a single ethnic group and many reasons to assume that they were not.

I make some self-criticism here. My proposal (Meacham 1977, 1983) of a Yue Coastal Neolithic could be seen as a cultural horizon of the type I am now criticizing. However, the concept was not tightly defined at the time precisely for this reason, and I was at pains to

point out that "the inhabitants of the Yue cultural sphere probably belonged to a different ethnic and linguistic group (*or groups*) from those of the Lungshanoid..." (emphasis added). The intention was to highlight the distinctiveness of these archaeological cultures from the Lungshanoid, not to suggest that the Yue cultural sphere was a well-integrated cultural horizon of its own. The Lungshanoid cultures flourished in precisely the region (Jiangsu and Zhejiang) where the ancient Yue state appeared, so it is clearly not possible to define an archaeological Yue horizon that underlies all of the archaeological cultures in the areas and at the times indicated by historical sources to have been inhabited by Yue peoples.

There do not seem to be any archaeological criteria that could be used to distinguish Yue from non-Yue. If the historical information is not detailed enough to make this kind of judgement, when one is limited to the material record recovered by archaeology, the task is hopeless. Geometric pottery has been suggested as a marker, but there is simply no reason or evidence to suppose that this single element was shared by all the peoples referred to as Yue. There were non-Yue who had geometric pottery (e.g. the Shang and others north of the Yangzi), and Yue who did not (e.g. in Yunnan and northern Vietnam). The bronze drum is another example of an artifact type which clearly spread across ethnic lines. From an origin in the Guanxi-Yunnan to northern Vietnam region, and probably among both Tai and Mon-Khmer-speaking peoples, bronze drums spread into Indochina, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, probably by trade.

Perhaps twenty or thirty years from now, when we have very good chronologies and local cultural facies fleshed out for every district in South China, it may be possible to propose some preliminary ethnic divisions based on subsistence strategy *and* burial/ritual practices *and* detailed pottery typologies *and* other cultural components. But even such an optimistic ethnic linkage could only go as far as to propose a group X, another group Y and so on. I doubt we will ever be able to put a real face on the people in question. Even in Taiwan, with its high degree of isolation and internal evolution over several millennia, and with a fairly well recorded 19th century ethnography, it is still not possible to trace archaeologically the aboriginal groups of the ethnographic present back more than a few centuries. Before about AD 1500, the links are highly speculative and tentative.

What the archaeological evidence from southeast China does provide is an increasingly clear picture of continuity of populations through time. While one cannot be dogmatic about this, it does appear that from Late Paleolithic through Neolithic, Bronze Age and into historical times the population was relatively stable, deriving from the preceding people of the region. The grand migration schemes of the past have now given way to the concept of cultural interaction, exchange, possibly trade, and diffusion of individual traits. Even the sinicization of the Yue appears as a gradual and incremental process rather than an imperialist event, leading to cultural trauma. It is highly probable that Han culture, both material and non-material, was often taken up by Yue people without the physical presence of Han Chinese, once again masking the ethnic identity of the people behind the material culture.

GENERAL INDICATIONS FROM ETHNOGRAPHY

There is sufficient evidence from ethnography to provide good reason to doubt that the languages spoken by the peoples called Yue all belonged to the same language family. Surviving non-Han ethno-linguistic groups which inhabit the ancient Yue areas include the Zhuang, Dong and other Tai-speakers of Guanxi, Guizhou and Yunnan, the Li of Hainan who speak a Kadai language related to Tai, the Hmong and Mien, Vietnamese, and other Mon-Khmer groups. There is no evidence to suggest that any of these peoples migrated from non-Yue areas, and much evidence to indicate that they were previously more widespread in southeastern China. In Tang times, for example, it was recorded that the Li had settlements all along the coastal lowlands of western Guangdong province, along with the Tan (a group of uncertain identity) and the Cantonese (sinicized Yue); there were other (probably Zhuang and Mien) tribes in the interior - the mountain Yue.

Vietnamese of course has the strongest pedigree as a surviving Yue language, albeit with very strong influences from Chinese. There is no doubt that the Vietnamese are directly descended from the historical Yue of northern Vietnam and western Guangdong, and their language is the best evidence that at least in the coastal regions of southernmost China, some of the Yue peoples spoke Austroasiatic languages. Cantonese is also known as Yue, a character which was interchangeable with the older Yue during the Han dynasty, and may derive from a language similar to proto-Viet-Muong, although a Tai ancestor has also been suggested. In any event, there has been such heavy sinicization that its origins are almost entirely obscured. It is clear however that Cantonese began to emerge in the 1st millennium AD as the assimilation and inter-marriage with northern Chinese settlers of the local, former Nan Yue, peoples accelerated.

THE EVIDENCE FOR AUSTROASIATIC

One of the best studies of Yue language in southeast China is that of Norman and Mei (1976), who studied historically recorded Yue words, possible loan words in Chinese and residual Austroasiatic forms in present-day Min dialects. They present a compelling argument that at least two of the recorded Yue words were Austroasiatic:

1) Zheng Xuan's (AD 127-200) commentary on the *Zhou li* has: "The Yue call 'to die' ... ", with the character reconstructed by Norman and Mei as *'tset'*. They conclude that "there can be no doubt that this word represents the Austroasiatic word for 'to die'.
2) The *Shou wen* (AD 121) has: "The Nan-Yue call 'dog'.... ", with the final word being the crucial one, reconstructed as *'siog'*, again with strong links to Austroasiatic words for dog.

Norman and Mei note that "Duan Yu cai mentioned in his Commentary to the *Shou wen* that this word [*siog*] was still used in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, but did not give further detail". Tuan wrote his Commentary in AD 1800-1807, and was a native of Jiangsu. His remark that the word was still in use may come from his own experience. If Norman and Mei are correct in the identification of the word as Austroasiatic, it is remarkable that some remnants of the former Yue language were still in existence in Jiangsu as late as 1800. This was probably a survival in one of the region's dialects of the old Austroasiatic word, not yet dislodged by the Chinese word for dog. In this regard, it is worth noting that, by the early Han dynasty, when most inhabitants of the old territory of the Wu and Yue states had been assimilated, it was recorded that there were still Yue people in Zhejiang who kept to the old customs, had short-cropped hair and body tattoos. Lo Hsiang-lin (1955: 41) quotes an example of the persistence of tattooing long after the 'complete assimilation' of the Yue: among 3000 soldiers on a campaign in Shandong province at the end of the Yuan dynasty (AD 1368), 500 had tattoos; common patterns were the dragon, snake, and bird. Lo believed that the population of Shandong at the time still practised some of the ancient Yue customs.

Norman and Mei (*ibid.*) proposed that a number of loan words entered Chinese from Austroasiatic during the time of contact with Austroasiatic-speakers in the Yangzi Basin. Among the suggested loan words is *kiang*, one of the Chinese words for river - but only found in Old Chinese names of rivers in South China, from the Yangzi Kiang and southwards. From this and other loans (the words for fly or gnat, tiger, ivory and crossbow), they suggest that "the Yangzi valley was inhabited by Austroasiatics during the first millennium BC". One can accept these conclusions while remaining sceptical of their further proposal that all the various Yue peoples of ancient southeastern China were Austroasiatic-speaking. The evidence they quote concerning the survival of some Austroasiatic forms in the Min dialects seems quite strong, but Lin (1990) found Tai elements in the same dialects. Even granting all of their proposed loans and survivals, there would appear to be sufficient evidence from other sources to reject their proposal "that the term Yue was essentially linguistic". Undoubtedly some, perhaps even most, of the Yue in the Southeast spoke Austroasiatic languages, but there were certainly others, as mentioned above: the mountain Yue, who probably spoke early Hmong-Mien, and some valley and coastal lowland dwellers who spoke Tai-Kadai languages. For Guangdong, Benjamin Tsou (n.d.) has noted certain shared elements between Cantonese and Mon-Khmer, and raised the possibility that a very early sub-stratum of Cantonese was Austroasiatic.

THE EVIDENCE FOR TAI

A number of modern linguists have considered the actual and theoretical evidence for the existence of Tai languages preceding Chinese in large tracts of South China. Forrest (1948, 1973) for example, noted that Tai-related dialects are found in remote northern villages of Guangdong, much of Guanxi and Guizhou, and these constitute "remnants of a large body of Tai-speakers which once occupied most or all of these provinces ... and were still [by 500 BC] almost unaffected by Chinese influence" (1973: 103-104). Forrest maintained that:

> Cantonese resembled the Tai dialects which preceded it in Guangdong in its preference for fricatives over aspirates ... Apart from [this], any influence which the earlier language had on the development of Cantonese seems to have been in a conservative sense. The Tai languages show no disposition towards a reduction of final consonants and little towards palatalisation, and such habits of pronunciation may well have inhibited the weakening of consonants when Chinese speech spread among a Tai population rather than a Hmong one (1973: 232-3).

Although Forrest followed Maspero in considering Vietnamese to belong to the Tai family, his comments on the possible conservative influences of the Tai substratum are still relevant.

Recent research by Chinese linguists has turned up very strong evidence of Tai vestiges in Yue areas. Lin (1990), for instance, found Tai elements in some of the Min dialects studied by Norman and Mei; Zhengzhang (1990) found Tai affiliations in certain place names of

the ancient Wu and Yue states, and proposed possible interpretations of the place names based on Tai languages; Wei (1982) found a close correlation in words, combinations and rhyming scheme between Dong Zhuang languages and the famous Yue song recorded in the sixth century BC by a nobleman of the state of Chu. All of this evidence certainly needs to be subjected to further study and criticism, as does that adduced by Norman and Mei, but it would seem fairly well established that Tai languages were very common in southeast China prior to 500 BC and for a considerable period after that date. Once again, however, it is necessary to reject the claim that the Yue were exclusively Tai-speakers, and it is still very much an open question whether Tai or Mon-Khmer languages were dominant in the Yue areas.

THE EVIDENCE FOR AUSTRONESIAN

Others have proposed that the Austronesian family of languages originated in southeast China, and this idea has gained currency among Austronesian linguists in recent years. Unfortunately for this school of thought, there is no direct evidence to support it, nor is there any indication from the study of existing languages/dialects or from historical references that any Austronesian languages were ever spoken on mainland China in ancient times. Most of the discussion has centred on the role of Taiwan, where reputedly the earliest off-shoots from the main evolutionary stem of Austronesian languages are found. At least one archaeologist, Huang Shih-chiang (1989), has claimed that the Neolithic peoples of Taiwan were Yue, on the basis of some highly imaginative interpretation of historical references. This claim can be easily dismissed, as there is an enormous material cultural gap between the Bronze Age Yue of southeast China and their Neolithic contemporaries on Taiwan; whatever contacts there were between the two groups must have been extremely rare. However, if Austronesian originated on the Chinese mainland, as claimed, in the period 5000-3000 BC, it is possible though unlikely that there were remnants of this ethno-linguistic group still in existence during first millennium BC among the historically recorded Yue.

In various articles Bellwood (1983, 1984, 1988) has outlined a scenario for the spread of Austronesian-speaking peoples from an ultimate homeland in South China. He claims that the Proto-Austronesians were located in or near Taiwan. Blust (1988) goes further with the claim. "If Taiwan was not the Austronesian homeland it was certainly settled from the adjacent coast of China during the initial dispersal of Austronesian speakers [ca. 4000 BC]". I have argued elsewhere (1988; 1992; 1995) on mainly archaeological grounds against the hypothesis of a migration of people from the mainland to Taiwan at any time prior to AD 1600. Norman (1988) remarks that "theories that Austronesian languages were spoken on the mainland of China ... cannot be verified linguistically." Furthermore, it is rather far-fetched to propose that a significant ethnic group in South China, among the early rice cultivators, has disappeared without a trace, not only with no direct survivors but no trace in the historically recorded Yue words and no vestiges amongst the many dialects now spoken by southern Chinese.

Recently the debate has taken an unusual twist, with proponents of a South China Austronesian homeland now claiming that no Austronesian language was ever spoken there, and that proto-Austronesian only developed in Taiwan or in Luzon, according to differing schemes. The original migrants ("perhaps a canoe load or two") who left the mainland to settle on Taiwan are supposed to have spoken pre-Austronesian, an undefined entity which may have been related to Benedict's proposed Austro-Thai or Austric. Sagart (1993) maintains that Proto-Austronesian and Old Chinese are genetically related, and that both originate from a common ancestor in Shandong province, but his arguments have not been generally accepted. He also recently (Sagart n.d.) proposed a Proto-East-Asiatic linking all the major East Asian language families. All of these proposed distant language ancestors might be termed the 'great grand-daddy of them all' as far as Southeast Asian language families are concerned. Of course, such remote genetic relationships between the major language families are still and will always be highly conjectural, and they are, as Gedney (1989: 119) maintained, "so far back in time as to be irrelevant". The speculation about the location of homelands of the main proto-languages (proto-Austronesian, proto-Tai, etc.), not to mention the grand reductions to a single proto-language of major families, does not have much to contribute to the prehistory of either the areas or the languages concerned. In view of the major changes which are generally agreed to have taken place in the hypothesized homeland areas, whether Austronesian, Tai or Chinese, the limitations which are inherent in the methodology must be recognized when using present linguistic diversity to generate a homeland hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

Leaving aside the Austronesian question, it seems highly likely that the peoples called Yue at various times by the Han Chinese spoke Austroasiatic languages, early forms of Hmong/Mien, Tai-Kadai languages and perhaps languages in other families now extinct. Even within the

main divisions of the Yue recorded in the Han era, i.e. Dong Yue, Min Yue, Nan Yue, Lo Yue (Lac-Viet) it is quite probable that many languages and more than one language family are represented. Among the Lo Yue of southwest China and Vietnam, for example, it was recorded that the variety of languages created major difficulties for the administrators. With this ethno-linguistic diversity there was undoubtedly a great variety in cultures, religions and social structures of the Yue peoples which is not reflected in the early historical accounts.

Because of the variety suggested by the historical, archaeological, and linguistic evidence, it would seem wise always to use the plural: Yue peoples, Yue languages, Yue cultures. And we need to continually remind ourselves that the word Yue does not, so far as can be determined, imply any larger anthropological structure, ethnic affiliation, language family or cultural complex. Rather, it seems to have been a catch-all word for 'barbarians of the south', and is no more precise anthropologically than the terms *gui lo* (foreign devil) or 'black' are today. This is not to say that the term has no value or content at all for anthropology, but that its parameters are very broad.

The evidence from historical sources certainly suggests that many of the peoples called Yue had a number of traits in common, but as mentioned above the presence of some or all of these traits does not necessarily mean that the group in question was of the same ethno-linguistic affiliation or even the same physical type as other Yue peoples. We cannot rule out the possibility that there were Negritos (Australoids) in South China even as late as Han, who shared with their Mongoloid neighbours some cultural traits such as tattooing, poncho-style clothing, drinking through the nose, adaptation to water and so on, but who may have practised minimal or no horticulture, spoke languages now extinct, and had very different belief systems. This warning applies even more to archaeological data, and it is generally accepted that different peoples in the same region may have had the same or very similar material cultures while people of the same ethno-linguistic group or physical type in different regions may have had very different material culture.

If the anthropological content of the historical term Yue is so broad and amorphous, should it be used at all ? It is not my intention to argue that we should not use the word, but rather that we keep ourselves fully aware of its serious limitation. Wherever the historical sources refer to Yue people inhabiting an area, it is not unreasonable to refer to the appropriate Bronze Age or Early Iron Age inhabitants of that area as Yue. Prior to about 1000 BC, however, it would be prudent not to use the term at all, for risk of confusion with the Shang dynasty Yue in the northwest, and also because the word Yue had not yet been applied to the peoples of South China. Certainly, the Neolithic population was ancestral to the Yue of early historical times, but the term is best restricted to the periods and areas where it was used in ancient texts.

NOTE

1. Ywat in medieval Chinese, Viet in Vietnamese

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