FAUNAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES FROM PLEISTOCENE TO HOLOCENE IN VIETNAM

Hoáng Xuân Chinh*

Questions about faunal change and cultural development from Pleistocene to Holocene times in Vietnam, as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, have attracted the attention of many scholars. In the past Colani considered that the Hoabinh culture could be dated from "Upper Palaeolithic (Magdalenian) to early Neolithic-Bacson" (Colani 1927). Later, Solheim (1970) put forward other definitions for the Hoabinhian as a technocomplex lasting from 50,000 to about 5000 years ago. Gorman (1971) also wrote on this subject. These scholars considered that the Hoabinhian culture, or a Hoabinhian technocomplex, occupied the transitional period from the Pleistocene to the Holocene.

In defending a Paleolithic date for some Hoabinhian sites, these scholars explained that the modern unfossilized faunal remains at some sites meant that there was a continuity of species existing in relatively stable ecological settings from very ancient to recent times (Mansuy 1931). However, we can now see, after analysis of recently discovered archaeological and faunal materials, that there was change and development in fauna and culture during the transitional period from Pleistocene to Holocene in this region.

In recent years, a series of caves containing fossils in a yellow sediment of Upper Pleistocene date has been discovered in the mountains of northern Vietnam. Among these caves the most important are those of Hang Hum (Hoang Lien Son Province), Phai Ve and Keo Leng (Lang Son Province) and Lang Trang (Thanh Hoa Province). The faunal elements present in these caves are listed in Table 1. The fauna here are rather similar to Upper Pleistocene fauna in Yunnan in a "Pongo-Stegodon-Ailuropoda" pattern, but they differ from the faunal remains in Hoabinhian layers.

Up to now, nearly 120 localities of Hoabinhian culture have been found. Generally, the deposits in these sites consist of a dark gray soil which covers the layer of yellow sediment. This deposit contains an abundance of land snails of the species *Cyclophorus fulguratus*, *Cyclophorus siamensis*, and *Cyclophorus speciosus*. In addition, there are freshwater shellfish of the species *Antimelania siamensis, Antimelania swinhoei, Brotia costula, Brotia variabilis* Benson, and *Angulyagra* sp.

Indo-Pacific Prehistory Assn. Bulletin 10, 1991:74-78 (P. Bellwood ed., *Indo-Pacific Prehistory 1990*, Vol 1)
* Vien Khao Co Hoc, 61 Phan Chu Trinh, Hanoi, Viet Nam

Pongidae
- *Pongo pygmaeus*
Hylobatidae
- *Hylobates* cf. *concolor*
Cercopithecoidea
- *Macaca* cf. *mulatta*
- *Macaca* cf. *assamensis*
- *Macaca* sp.
- *Semnopithecus*
Hystricidae
- *Hystrix subcristata*
- *Hystrix* sp.
- *Atherurus* sp.
Rhizomyidae
- *Rhizomys* cf. *troglodytes*
Muridae
- *Rattus* sp.
Elephantidae
- *Palaeoloxodon namadicus*
- *Elephas* cf. *indicus*
Stegodontidae
- *Stegodon orientalis*
Tapiridae
- *Megatapirus augustus*
- *Tapirus indicus* cf. *intermedius*
Rhinocerotidae
- *Rhinoceros sinensis*
- *Rhinoceros* sp.
Suidae
- *Sus scrofa*
- *Sus* cf. *lydekkeri*
- *Sus* cf. *officinalis*
- *Sus* sp.
Cervidae
- *Rusa unicolor*
- *Muntiacus muntjac*
- *Muntiacus* sp.
- *Cervus* sp.
- *Elaphodus* sp.
Bovidae
- *Bubalus bubalis*
- *Bibos gaurus* sp.
Caprinae gen and sp. indet.
Procyonidae
- *Ailuropoda melanoleuca fovealis*
Ursidae
- *Ursus thibetanus kokeni*
Canidae
- *Cuon javanicus antiquus*
- *Cuon* sp.
- *Nyctereutes* sp.
Mustelidae
- *Arctonyx collaris* cf. *rostratus*
Viverridae
- *Paradoxurus* cf. *hermaphroditus*
- *Paguma larvata*
- *Viverra* cf. *zibetha*
Felidae
- *Panthera pardus*
- *Panthera tigris*
- *Neofelis nebulosa* cf. *primigenia*
- *Felis* sp.

TABLE 1: FAUNAL ELEMENTS OF UPPER PLEISTOCENE DATE FROM VIETNAMESE CAVES

There is also a great number of animal bones and teeth present, most of them identifiable to modern species. These are not fossilized. Probably they are the bones of hunted animals that were brought to the caves by Hoabinhian people.

In comparing the fauna of the Upper Pleistocene with that of the Hoabinhian, one finds that the latter contains *Macaca, Hylobates, Hystrix, Rattus, Palaeoloxodon, Elephas, Rhinoceros, Sus scrofa, Cervus* sp., *Rusa unicolor, Muntiacus, Bubalus bubalis, Bibos gaurus, Ursus thibetanus, Arctonyx collaris, Paradoxurus, and Panthera tigris*. However,

Ha Van Tan 1976. The Hoabinhian in the context of Vietnam. *Vietnamese Studies* 46:127-97.

------ 1986. The Nguòm industry in a wider perspective (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No. 3. Hanoi.

Ha Van Tan and Nguyen Khac Su 1978. The Son Vi culture as being in the decade after its discovery (in Vietnamese). *Khao cò hoc* No. 4. Hanoi.

Hoang Xuan Chinh 1984. Nguòm rock-shelter and the phases of development from Sonvi to Hoabinh (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No. 3. Hanoi.

Le Trung Kha and Vu The Long 1976. Ten years of palaeontological research (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No. 18. Hanoi.

Le Van Thue 1983. *Pongo* teeth at Nguòm rock-shelter (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No. 4. Hanoi.

Le Van Thue and Dang Huu Luu 1988. Faunal remains in the Dieu rock-shelter (Thanh Hoa) (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No. 3. Hanoi.

Mansuy, H. 1931. *La préhistoire en Indochine*. Paris.

Nguyen Lan Cuong 1971. After the excavations at Hum cave, Tham Khuyên and Keo Leng caves (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No. 11-12.

Solheim, II. W.G. 1970. Northern Thailand, Southeast Asia and world prehistory. *Asian Perspectives* 13:145-57.

Vu The Long 1984. The relationship between the fauna in Hoabinh-Bacson caves and the fossilized fauna of the late Pleistocene in Vietnam (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No 1-2.

------ 1984. The Hoabinh people and the animal world (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No. 1-2.

Vu The Long and Hoang Van Du 1981. Zoological species belonging to the Pleistocene and the geochronology of sediments contained in caves in the northern part of Vietnam (in Vietnamese). *Khao co hoc* No. 1.