CONSIDERING MEACHAM'S CONSIDERATIONS ON SOUTHEAST ASIA

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In his preceding paper, Meacham singles out recent writings by Bellwood, Headland and Reid and myself for critical scrutiny. The issues addressed, though related, are separable and I leave the other writers to provide for themselves an *apologia pro vita sua*. Here is mine.

Meacham considers that my recent review of Southeast Asian dates (Spriggs 1989) relies too heavily on an early date from Pa-chia-ts'un to put forward the idea of a Neolithic spread from Taiwan to Luzon and Sulawesi and points east. He presents, and must be thanked for same, evidence from Chinese language sources casting doubt on the stratigraphic integrity and even the identification of the material of the dated sample from that site and suggests it should therefore be rejected. Given the evidence presented in English for the first time about the context of the Pa-chia-ts'un sample I must agree with that rejection.

But is this the devastating blow to the hypothesis of Neolithic spread from Taiwan that Meacham suggests? I think not. The reason is that, *contra* Meacham, the hypothesis of that spread in my paper did not rest on the single, now rejected, date. There is a bit of selective quotation involved in Meacham's reading and so I will quote the relevant passage in full from my 1989 paper (Spriggs 1989:605):

> The Taiwan situation requires some comment. The earliest Neolithic sites on the island are assigned to the Corded Ware or Tapenkeng Culture (Chang 1969b). There is, however, only a single date for an early Corded Ware site, Pa-chia-ts'un at 6300 BP (Chang 1973:525). The next-earliest pottery-associated date is 4500/4400 BP, later than Neolithic dates for Luzon, Talaud and Sulawesi. Other developed Corded Ware sites date to the period 4000-3500 BP. Can we accept the single early date? There is certainly considerable Neolithic 'action' prior to 4500 BP, but how long a period does it represent?
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> What is certain is that in southern Taiwan there is a range of sites with non-specialized flake tool assemblages, seen as 'Palaeolithic survivals' by their excavators. The sites at Ch'ang-pin (Chang 1969a) and O Luan Pi (Li 1983) give consistent dates down to 5600 BP, suggesting at least that Neolithic culture was

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> not universal on the island by that time. One might conclude that Taiwan's Neolithic goes back to around 5500 BP and perhaps back to 6300 BP.

I would suggest that this passage shows sufficient caution in evaluating the Pa-chia-ts'un date, but agree that expansion is necessary of the statement about there being considerable Neolithic 'action' prior to 4500 BP. As I am sure Meacham would appreciate, a review article cannot include the detailed argumentation necessary to back up every statement.

Early Neolithic Action on Taiwan

The relevant sites to consider are Ts'ao-hsieh-tun, K'en-ting, Niu-chou-tzu, Tung-chiao, Feng-pi-tou and O-luan-pi, as well as the Ta-p'en-k'eng site itself. The dates discussed in this and the following sections have been calibrated (N.B. those in Meacham's paper have not [ed.]).

Ts'ao-hsieh-tun, K'en-ting and Niu-chou-tzu are Red Corded Ware sites, generally thought to derive from earlier Coarse Corded Ware contexts such as are represented by the remains of the Tapenkeng culture. The dates for these sites calibrate to 4500/4450 BP, 4000 and 3900 BP. If they *do* in fact derive from the Tapenkeng culture, then dates for it must extend back beyond 4500 BP. O-luan-pi Phase II, which is bracketed by dates of 5550 BP (aceramic) and 3400 BP (OLP Phase IV) and suggested by the excavator as c.4000 BP, is also a Red Corded Ware site (Li 1983:80). In Chang's sequence (1974; cf. Chang *et al.* 1974) Tung-chiao would fit into the next phase of Plain Red Wares, the date here being 4250 BP, but with a wide standard deviation producing a calibrated age range of 4850-3700 BP. Feng-pi-tou dates, where an undated Tapenkeng culture deposit underlies the lower shell mound levels, begin at 3650 BP. At Ta-p'en-k'eng itself, Yuanshan levels dating to 2950 BP overlie the Tapenkeng culture deposits.

In this context it is surprising that Meacham is surprised that I, and before me the Ta-p'en-k'eng excavator K.C. Chang, do not accept a radiocarbon date of 3080±350 BP (calibrated 3350/3300 BP) from the base of the Tapenkeng culture deposits at the site. Given dates for succeeding cultural phases on the island starting at 4500 BP I would have thought the reasons for rejecting the date would be uncontroversial.

A conservative view would be that the Tapenkeng culture, the earliest ceramic phase on Taiwan, dates to somewhere between 5500 and 4500 BP. This assumes, however, that the aceramic dates at sites down to 5550 BP represent an island-wide aceramic down to that time. If regional differences are allowed then the time span of Tapenkeng could go earlier.

In fact, Meacham rather weakens his already somewhat blunt point by a statement which tends to support one of the conclusions of my 1989 paper, which I have re-stated above. He even draws attention to two further pertinent dates from Quemoy and the Pescadores:

> All of this is not to say that the Tapenkeng Culture of Taiwan may not indeed date back to 5000 BP or more. My own feeling is that it does. There are dates on

> Neolithic deposits of 7600-5600 BP from the offshore island of Quemoy, and newly published dates (Tsang 1989) of 5100-4600 BP from the Pescadores in the Taiwan Strait. All these dated samples are unidentified shells (presumably marine) (Meacham, this volume page 402)

Early Neolithic Action in Luzon, Talaud and Sulawesi?

Part of Meacham's argument is that there should be equally early, considerable Neolithic action prior to 4500 BP in Luzon, Talaud and Sulawesi. The evidence, however, is simply not there. The earliest Neolithic dates in these areas can be taken as fair approximations of the beginnings of the Neolithic in the areas concerned. There is no major phase equivalent to the Tapenkeng remaining undated in these sites and so the situation is not comparable. Unlike Taiwan, what you see is what you get. Rabel cave contains pottery from the base of its deposit with a consistent suite of dates for occupation between 4850 and 3050 BP. Ulu Leang 1 in Sulawesi has produced a pottery-associated date of 5000/4900 BP with a further date at 4550 BP. The earlier date comes from the base of levels with pottery at 20-30 cm below the surface. An aceramic date of 6600/6550 BP comes from 50 cm below surface. On Talaud at Leang Tuwo Manee a sample which 'dates the first appearance of pottery in the site' (Bellwood 1976:261) gave a date of 4550/4450 BP, with a preceramic component below this dated to 5200 BP. Thus, although there are two dates somewhat prior to 4500 BP, neither suggest a missing phase of the Neolithic as we see in Taiwan. A hypothesis (it was never stated as more than that) of Neolithic spread south is still supportable, although obtaining direct dates for Tapenkeng sites is clearly a critical priority to assess the idea.

Early Neolithic Action in Timor

Timor, further south again, presents a slightly different case in that the Neolithic dates do not relate directly to the beginnings of ceramic occupation at the dated sites. At Lie Siri the earliest pottery is found in Horizon Vc, whereas the earliest pottery-associated dates came from VIa and VIb at 3850 BP. From Vb aceramic levels comes a date of 6635±140 BP (calibrated 7500 BP). The excavator considered that Vc dated between 5500-3700 BP uncalibrated (Glover 1986:67). At Uai Bobo 1 the earliest pottery dated to 3800/3700 BP in Horizon IIIa, although ceramic levels below this were not dated. At Uai Bobo 2 pottery first appears in Horizon VIII, although the earliest date with a pottery association is Horizon IX at 4150/4100 BP. Aceramic Horizon VII gave a date of 6300 BP which allows bracketing of the first appearance of pottery between 6300 and 4100 BP. The excavator suggests an uncalibrated age for pottery of 4500±200 BP while admitting the possibility of minor disturbance affecting the dating (Glover 1986:169).

The earliest direct association with pottery is therefore 4150/4100 BP, with pottery continuing for 10-20 cm below the dated horizons in some cases. Although the beginning of ceramic levels is not as tightly dated as in the Sulawesi and Talaud sites, there is no

important cultural difference between the dated levels and those immediately below. Again, there is no missing Tapenkeng-like phase.

CONCLUSION

The Neolithic begins on Taiwan prior to 4500 BP with its earliest cultural phase effectively undated. The earliest Neolithic in Luzon and Sulawesi starts around 5000/4900 BP with no evidence of such an earlier undated phase. On Timor it starts sometime earlier (though probably not significantly earlier) than 4150/4100 BP. Moving east, the earliest Lapita culture dates in Island Melanesia are between 3850 and 3450 BP (Spriggs 1990). I detect a trend in this data, a pattern matched by linguistic subgrouping of the Austronesian languages. Meacham sees no such pattern. Will somebody please come up with some new data?

ENDNOTE

This short 'update' on the Island Southeast Asian Neolithic gives me the opportunity to thank Barbara Harrisson for checking on some of the Sarawak dates, results of which were not available when the 1989 paper went to press. The Lobang Jeragan date of 4300±160 BP did turn out to be on bone and so cannot be used to establish a date for the early Neolithic of the Niah area (Spriggs 1989:603). Also I must apologise for misquoting Barbara Thiel on the identification of shell from Lal-lo as '*Anadara* sp.' (1989:600). I was working from a draft copy of her *Asian Perspectives* paper (Thiel 1989) which I was given reason to believe was the text as it was to be printed. When it was published a few months after my paper went to press the species name had been revised to '*Batiss* spp.', presumably a typographic error for *Batissa* spp. The change, however, does not alter the state of confusion as to the actual identification of the Lal-lo shells; there is still the same number of possible choices. Any other corrections to the date list would be much appreciated.

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