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## HONG KONG

The inclusion of Hong Kong in the section on 'Southeast Asia' may warrant some explanation. In the first place, it is not argued that present-day Hong Kong, a thoroughly Chinese place with some non-Chinese elements (probably in much the proportion as in Shanghai some time ago), should be counted as part of Southeast Asia any more than the equally at least 90% Chinese Taiwan qualifies for such a label. However, the past of Hong Kong as well as the 'ethnographic present' of Taiwan definitely attach both these islands to the Southeast Asian cultural area.

Furthermore, much of southern China can be looked upon as having in the remote past belonged to the Southeast Asian cultural sphere rather than to that of northern China; its inhabitants, too, were ethnically akin to Southeast Asians. It is also well known that for some time during the last centuries BC the centre of gravity of states in southeastern China and northeastern Southeast Asia (such as Nam Viet) was Canton, a stone's throw from Hong Kong.

In this connection it seems appropriate to draw attention to a recent work by William Meacham, *Rock Carvings in Hongkong*, published by the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 1976, which emphasises this point. While perhaps not epoch-making, this booklet of 63 pages (English and Chinese text, and many illustrations) is more important than it may appear at first sight.

The reason is twofold. Nobody outside Hong Kong (where the carvings have long been known and even recorded as early as 1819) seems to have had any knowledge of these petroglyphs. Thus, the 'discovery' of a number of surprisingly sophisticated and artistically pleasing rock carvings in the Hong Kong area is in itself little short of sensational, especially as very little is known about such things from the wider area of southern China and northern Southeast Asia, and it becomes a real archaeological thriller when all evidence indicates that the main carvings were executed by people obviously belonging to the cultural sphere of the Vietnamese Bronze Age.

This cultural sphere, that of the Dongson Civilisation (so called after the main site in North Vietnam) or its immediate predecessor, probably the earliest bronze-using culture in Southeast Asia (the controversial dates for early bronze in northeastern Thailand notwithstanding), is still ill-defined. The most glamorous artefact of the developed Dongson Culture, the bronze kettle-drum of Heger I-type, is found throughout Southeast Asia, from southern China through the Indochinese Peninsula and the Malay Peninsula to the easternmost part of Indonesia just short of Irian Barat (West New Guinea); recently Heger I drums were discovered in Kanchanaburi province of Thailand, bordering Burma. The only parts of Southeast Asia from which Heger I-type bronze drums have so far not been reported are Burma proper, the Philippines, and the islands of Kalimantan (Borneo, both the Indonesian and the Malaysian part) and Sulawesi (Celebes, Indonesia). It could be argued that where there are these Dongson drums there must have been some Dongson cultural influence, but what form this influence took and how it was transmitted is anybody's guess: from purely trading relations to a loose system of political vassalage, there are many possibilities, including that of a 'children-of-the-Sun'-type migration! In my opinion the most likely explanation for this wide distribution of Dongson drums is that, several centuries after the full development of the Dongson Culture in its homeland in North Vietnam (although drums found near Kuala Lumpur, West Malaysia, were dated as early as the 5th century BC shortly after the beginning of the Dongson Culture), its prestige had reached such heights that the dearest dream of Southeast Asian chiefs as far away as in the Moluccas was to possess one of these enormously impressive (and expensive) drums which would presumably confer added status and legitimacy. In other words, rather than thinking in terms of ordinary trade, an

unproven physical migration or improbable political links, one might best explain the wide extent of this 'Dongson cultural sphere' by the desire of far-flung local chiefs to be part of it - with eyes turned to the heartland - in some sort of mythical, rather than political, vassalage, not unlike the relationship to India which prevailed throughout the area a few centuries later.

Exactly how far this heartland of the Dongson culture extended, however, is still unknown. It probably included the best part of the present North Vietnam, parts of northern Laos and maybe Thailand, much of Yunnan and the area included in the two Kwang provinces (Kwang-tung and Kwang-si) of southern China at least. From the finds explained and analysed in Meacham's book, it becomes a probability that this Dongson heartland stretched up to and included present-day Hong Kong: a remarkable discovery indeed.

Moreover, since it is also shown that some of the decorative motifs used in the rock carvings have been perpetuated in the prehistoric pottery of the area, it is probably right to surmise that Hong Kong's pre- and protohistoric civilisation owes much to Dongson inspiration, as do a number of other civilisations throughout the mainland of Southeast Asia and even beyond, amongst which one could count those of Samrong Sen (Cambodia), Sa-huỳnh (Vietnam), Kalanay and Tabon (Philippines) and, in my opinion, very probably even Ban Chiang (Thailand). It is simply a matter of putting styles, typologies, and such historical events as are known, in order in time and space in the most scientific and sensible manner. The book by Meacham on the hitherto unknown rock carvings in Hong Kong helps much in this respect. It is therefore a most welcome contribution to the growing body of literature on Southeast Asian archaeology which students in this field should take quite seriously.

It may also be news to some members of the Association that, contrary to what its title may lead one to expect, the *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society*, now edited by William Meacham, also contains much that is of value and interest to the professional Southeast Asian archaeologist at large, as opposed to the merely local amateur. For instance, the first volume of the *Journal* (1968) contained an article by Professor Nobuhiro Matsumoto on 'Ancient Sea Navigation in South-East Asia'; vol.III (1972) contained reports on early Neolithic sites in south China and on problems of Hong Kong archaeology as seen in

the context of the wider area; all but two articles in vol.IV (1973) deal with areas outside Hong Kong proper (G.H.R. von Koenigswald, 'Early Man in Java'; Wilhelm G. Solheim II, 'Early Neolithic in South China and South East Asia'; Henri Fontaine & Georgette Delibrias, 'Ancient Sea Levels in Vietnam'; C.J. Barrett, 'Tai Wan Reconsidered'); much of vol.V (1974) is also devoted to south China, India or general archaeological topics (K.C. Chang, 'Interrelationship of North China, South China and Southeast Asia in Ancient Times'; Asok K. Ghosh, 'Denticulates in India'; F.H. Kendall, 'Thermoluminescence Dating'; F.P. Lisowski, 'Vertebrate Palaeontology and Museums in China'; H.Y. Shih, 'The Archaeology of the Yangtze Delta'; C.T. Yeung & W. Meacham, 'Recent carbon-14 dates from South China'); and again, of the six articles published in the latest volume (VI, 1975), only two are concerned with Hong Kong itself, the rest being about Southeast Asia or China (Don Bayard, 'North China, South China, Southeast Asia'; J.C.S. Davidson, 'Recent Archaeological Activity in North Vietnam'; William Meacham, 'The Middle Neolithic of the South China Coast'; Wilhelm G. Solheim II, 'The Nusantao and South China'). According to the contents of the *Journal*, therefore, Hong Kong, although not now properly speaking belonging to Southeast Asia, has become one of the centres of dissemination of archaeological scholarship concerning the Southeast Asian cultural sphere of which it was clearly a part in the remote past.

We shall hear more about this in due course. In the circumstances outlined above, Mr Meacham has kindly agreed to act as local correspondent for IPPA (*Newsletter* and *Bulletin*) and will keep us informed on the role of Hong Kong in Southeast Asian archaeology in the past and in the present.

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## PHILIPPINES

### Megalithic Monuments in Mindanao?

It was recently brought to my notice that in the course of an AID-sponsored road construction project in Mindanao, the southernmost great Philippine island, Australian engineers came across curious big stones which the bulldozers could not easily remove.