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VIETNAM

- THE VIETNAMESE INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE COMMITTEE OF VIET NAM, editorial board. *Dong Son Drums in Viet Nam*. Editorial Supervision of Japanese edition: Hiromitu Hakari and Erika Kaneko. Tokyo: Rocco Shuppan, 1990. 282 pages. Plates, map. Y38,00; ISBN 4-8453-3038-5.

Dong Son drums are large, elaborately decorated kettle-drums made of bronze, with a height and diameter of up to one metre, of unknown date and made for unknown purposes, although generally considered to be about 2000 years old and to have some ritual significance. Dong Son (or Dongson) is the name of a burial and habitation site in northern Vietnam, on the southwestern edge of the Red River delta, where these drums were found for the first time in an archaeological context during excavations in the 1920s. They had been known already for almost three centuries from various parts of Southeast Asia, but as surface finds only, i.e., kept in villages, palaces, or temples. The first such drum to reach Europe was one from Indonesia, which was sent by the Dutch naturalist G. E. Rumphius in 1682 as a present to the Duke of Tuscany. European travellers to Southeast Asia, mainly Austrians, Germans, Dutch, and Frenchmen, discovered more and more of these drums, until 165 were known by the end of the 19th century, and several books about them appeared. The most

seminal of these was by the Austrian scholar Franz Heger, published in 1902, who classified those kettle-drums into four categories (ever since known by the name of "Heger I-IV"), with the Heger I drum being the earliest. It is with these earliest drums, now referred to by Vietnamese archaeologists as "Dongson drums," and only those found on the territory of present-day Vietnam, that the book under review is concerned.

Dong Son Drums in Viet Nam is a magnificent, superbly produced, large boxed volume. It consists of 244 pages of plates and drawings of all the known Heger I drums in Vietnam, preceded by two color plates of the most glamorous of them all, the Ngoc Lu I drum, with a short description of each in English and Vietnamese, 15 more pages of tables, and finally, as "Introduction," a ten-page text in English and Vietnamese by the late Prof. Pham Huy Thông, former Director of the Archaeological Institute of Vietnam and Vice-President of the country's Social Science Committee. A separate 35-page folio, also included in the box, contains the same textual information in Japanese, without the illustrations. But here, interestingly enough, Prof. Thông's Introduction precedes (as it should) the catalogue, which in turn is followed by a couple of postscripts of twelve pages all together, which, dated 1 March 1990, brings knowledge about the topic up to that date (the publication of the main volume was authorized in 1987); Western and Vietnamese readers would no doubt have liked to see this information also in English and Vietnamese. In all three texts there are, perhaps unavoidably, a number of typing or printing errors, especially when foreign names are concerned; the name of the German traveller E. C. Barchewitz, for instance, appears in three different versions: as Branchewitz in the English, Barchewitz in the Vietnamese, and Barchewits in the Japanese text. But on the whole the editors certainly did an excellent job, in difficult multilingual and cross-cultural circumstances.

The Vietnamese researchers themselves performed an admirable task in still more difficult circumstances, in collecting and collating, over the last quarter of a century or so, documentation on the drums in Vietnam. Figures show that more than half of this information is post-1975 and therefore of particular interest to scholars outside Vietnam, as from then on archaeological reports in the unified country were almost exclusively published in Vietnamese, poorly illustrated, and not easily obtainable. Thus, while there were 65 Dong Son drums known from Vietnam in 1975, by 1985 this figure had risen to 144, with 115 being fully documented. It is the 115 "classifiable" drums that are illustrated in the catalogue. They are, however, not all held in Vietnam, as four are in Paris, one is in Stockholm, of another the present location is unknown, and three are lost. According to the Vietnamese alphabet, they are classified in the five groups A, B, C, D, and Đ (the "barred D"), having each several subgroups. In addition there are 15 unclassifiable and 14 unexamined drums, as well as 13 miniature drums—7 of which are photographed—excavated in burials in Dong Son itself. Although Vietnamese archaeologists had patiently assembled all this information, the photographing and publishing of it was only possible through a generous grant from the Toyota Foundation.

It must have become clear by now that the volume under review has to be seen as a very useful tool for all scholars interested not only in Vietnamese archaeology but also in that of a much wider region extending from southern China to New Guinea. Why this must be so, apart from the wealth of metrical information it contains about the drums themselves, is explained in the aforementioned very perceptive, albeit sometimes overenthusiastic, Introduction by Prof. Thông at the end of the volume, which endeavors to expound the meaning of these drums in the Bronze Age as well as for present Vietnamese. This is shown in the subtitles "Bronze drums as an original

and characteristic artifact of the Dong Son culture” and “the Dong Son drum, symbol of the ancient civilization of Viet Nam,” culminating in the bold statement that the drums are “the key to understanding Dong Son culture and thus the spirit of Viet Nam” (269). Although some expressions, formulations, and ideas may be a little irksome to the Western reader, such as the frequent use of “correct” or “not correct” in the assessment of work done by non-Vietnamese (“colonial” and other) archaeologists, Prof. Thông’s article provides us with an understanding of the Vietnamese government’s view of Vietnam’s past and hence its role in present eastern Asia. After all, Vietnam is a Socialist country and there is a “correct” attitude towards everything, including the past.

“The past must serve the present,” Chairman Mao once said (at a time when Sino-Vietnamese relations were, on the surface at least, cordial), and Ho Chi Minh applied the same precept to Vietnam, albeit with an ironical twist. For, while archaeology is for China a means to demonstrate to the world the long-standing greatness of Chinese civilization (the Cultural Revolution notwithstanding), for Vietnam it became a matter of proving its equally long-standing cultural independence from China, so as to forestall a repetition of Chinese attempts to simply take over the country and turn it into another province of the “motherland.” It had thus to be shown that the Viet Bronze Age not only owed nothing to Chinese influence (which is patently true), but also was as remarkable (also true) and as ancient as the northern Chinese Bronze Age, if not even older than the latter (not true). To this end a legend invented in the 14th century A.D., about the Hung Kings who ruled over a powerful Viet kingdom from 2879 to 258 B.C. was again promoted from the 1960s onwards, and it was officially claimed that the Bronze Age began in Vietnam in the 3rd millennium B.C. (repeated on p. 262), although archaeological proof for this claim has not been found. The Dong Son culture proper is seen as the final phase of this long-lasting Bronze Age, but in popular belief this distinction is somewhat blurred and Dong Son symbolism—including the drums—stands for the entire imagined Hung Kings period. This Dong Son symbolism now pervades life in Vietnam to such an extent that it seems to have become a truly national symbolism: a nation has finally found its roots!

While this is a wonderful thing to have happened, one wishes it could have been achieved without having recourse to pretence, as the Dong Son culture ranks in its own right amongst the great bronze cultures of the world, and there can be little doubt that its creators were the distant ancestors of the Vietnamese. *Dong Son Drums in Viet Nam* must be read and perused with the above considerations in mind.

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THAILAND

LINDELL, KRISTINA, JAN-ÖJVIND SWAHN, and DAMRONG TAYANIN. *Folk Tales from Kammu—IV: A Master-Teller's Tales*. Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, No. 56. London: Curzon Press, 1989. 229 pages. Nine illustrations, indices of motifs and tale-types, bibliography, sample story in the vernacular. Paper £6.75; ISSN 0069-1712; ISBN 0-7007-0214-8.

This volume is part of an ambitious project started in 1972 that set out to study Kammu