

DONG SON CULTURE IN VIETNAM

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Dong Son culture is named as per Dong Son archaeological site found in 1924 in Dong Son commune, the Ma river, Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam.

The first Dong Son excavations were carried out from 1924 to 1932 by Mr.L.Pajot- a tariff staff, ancient objects collector in Thanh Hoa province. In the report of the year 1929, Mr. V.Goloubew- a French scholar in the French School of the Far East expressed his view about the first Dong Son excavations that: "The late bronze age in the Northern Vietnam and North- central Vietnam". By this view, he wished to allude to the ancient archaeological culture, found lately. The term "Dong Son culture" was first put forward by Mr.R. Heine Geldern - the Austria archaeologist in 1934.

By archaeological excavations in Vietnam from 1954 to the present we can clearly define that Dong Son culture is the first period of the primary iron age, existed about a millennium, from VIII century B.C to I century A.d. However, in some places of this cultural area, the period could last to II- III A.d.

The birth of Dong Son culture is the result of brilliant convergence of many previous cultures before Dong Son culture belonging to the late bronze age throughout their domain in big rivers, the Vietnam Northern deltas, mainly in the Red river. Distributed sphere of Dong Son culture basically is in the North of Vietnam. The birth of iron technique in that period helped to accomplish bronze metallurgy technique and enhance successfully Dong Son bronze objects.

There are about 500 archaeological sites known in Dong Son culture now existing in Vietnam from Vietnam frontier with China to the North, with Laos in the West, and with Quang Binh province in the South. Among these sites include all of typical archaeological vestiges such as: archaeological dwelling site ; burial ; archaeological site- archaeological dwelling site - burial ; fossils and scattered objects. The major quantity of vestiges were found in Thanh Hoa province, about 80 places. In the Red delta there are about 130 vestiges, among them, 1/3 vestiges of the old Ha Tay province. Three provinces: Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh in the Ca river, in the North of Dong Son culture have about 54 vestiges.

By the archaeological researches in Vietnam from 1954 to the present, Dong Son culture is defined that the old Au Lac's Dong Son culture existed about one

millennium , from the end of the late bronze age to the iron age. The most early change from Quy Chu culture, pre-Dong Son culture appeared in the delta of Red river. Results of inspect C.14 in the models of ash coal from the deepest Dong Son earth's plates in the Da hill and Thong temple, typically in the red river: 270+₋₉₀(ZK 305) and 2655+₋₉₀(ZK 309). Thus Dong Son culture could be appeared from VIII to VII B.c. In some places, archaeologists excavated iron agricultural implements and vestige of iron metallurgy in the early Dong Son culture. In the Ma river, the changing period from Quy Chu to Dong Son culture was later, from VII to VI B.c.

Dong Son culture widely distributed but it was still unified. Passing over 90 years of study , we now all know that it is the unity between Lac people and Au people in the old Viet group in the ancient Asia. The environment and ecological conditions are so convenient for people to inherit Dong Son vestiges through 2000 years (the best environment for people who belong to the agricultural civilization).

The unity is expressed clearly by bronze Dong Son collection. The striking symbol of Dong Son culture is drums with delicate technique. Dong Son culture generated Dong Son drums, however not only Dong Son people used and cast drums, but they also used foot-shaped axes with slanting blade or trimming knife shaped axes, daggers with shield-shaped handle, daggers with clove-shaped handle. Specially, daggers with handle casted into statue of man with arms akimbo and bronze container: jars and vessels with patterns like decoration on bronze drums. Other bronze objects belong to following groups: agricultural implements collection, weapon collections, living utensils collections, musical instruments collection, artistic jewelry. It is easily to realize their Dong Son character through figures, patterns. With Dong Son people's original metallurgy technique, after a long time, these objects were oxidised. The special colour of oxidization made difference between Dong Son objects and other objects. The unity of Dong Son culture is the unity in diversification. Besides high unity, in wide sphere, the difference are only in locals, areas. We can divide Dong Son culture into local forms in a unified type: Duong Co culture, Red river's culture, Dong Son culture or Ma river's culture, Lang Vac culture or Ca river's culture. The reason of local differences is different origins of Dong Son culture in the beginning period of Pre-Dong Son culture in large areal rivers. The diversification of Dong Son bronze express local differences of Dong Son culture. In spite of the same type of objects, each areas have different figures. For example: food-shaped or boot-shaped axes with slanting blade in the red river

but trimming knife- shaped axes with slanting blade in the Ma river. In the Red river, spears often have a socket shorter than blade, cross section of blades is various rhombus. But spears in the Ma river have well- proportioned cross section, some have holes. Sugar cane leaf- shaped spears with handle are private products of the Ma river. In the Red river, ploughshares are in shape of betel leaf or cordate, big size, but in the Ma river, ploughshares are in shape of duck foot, in the Ca river, they are triangle. Agricultural implements also have their own local features such as: big and firm spade and scoop of the Red river, smaller and thin spade and scoop of the Ca river. The differences in size of the same object type are also distinct features. The result of coffin excavations shows that inhabitants in the Ca river would like to use daggers much more than inhabitants in the Ma river and the Red river.

The last period of Dong Son culture was marked by the appearance of exotic factors. For example: bronze funeral objects instead of pottery, wood objects, meanwhile local bronze objects in local coffins gradually vanished. This phenomenon along with expansion of Han people in the South. In the Red river and Ma river the phenomenon happened in I century A.d. But in the deeper south, in the Ca river, Dong Son culture prolonged to the II-III centuries.

It can be said that Dong Son jewellers have well done all steps of bronze casting. The main components of Dong Son brass: copper, lead, tin. The bronze alloy with high lead percent is a distinct feature of Dong Son bronze. The metallurgy technique and bronze distinct alloy were used identifiably in the distributed area of Dong Son culture from high Au Viet land to the ancient inhabitants' Lac Viet delta. It rarely has an exception, for example, Thuong Nong bronze drum and agricultural implements were found in Co Loa, near Hanoi.

According to types and functions, the collection of Dong Son copperware is divided into following groups:

- 1- The weapon collections: lance, arrow, dagger, bayonet, axe, chest guard, bow and arrow, cross bow.
- 2- Agricultural implements collection: axe, hoe to grub earth, spade, ploughshare, sickle, awl, chisel, rasp.
- 3- Living utensils collection: jar, pot, vase, vessel, tray, plate, basin, bottle, pot, ladle, kerosene lamp, incense burners.
- 4- Musical instruments collection: bell, tintinnabulum, drum. Besides, there are decorations such as: pan-pipe, gong ... on the cover of drum, jar, or small statue.

5- Jewelry: armlet, ankle ring, earring, waistband

6- Small statue: small anthropomorphic figurines, zoomorphic figurines was glued on the other back. These statues were used as decorations, handle or clasp.

7- Replicas of objects: small objects for funeral, bronze house wares. Metallurgy technique created simple and slender.

The same objects in each local have differences in figures and patterns. Figures of objects were changed to adapt to ecological condition in each area. There are 3 main figures and patterns in the sphere of 3 rivers along to Dong Son culture.

1- Duong Co, the Red river

2- Dong Son type, the Ma river

3- Vac village type, the Ca river

The relationship between Dong Son culture and other neighbored cultures contributed to enhance local colours in the culture development, on the other hand, it also affirms Dong Son people's openness in integration with neighbored cultures.

The style of sunken socket in some spears, axes, spades, daggers with zigzag blades, daggers with animal-shaped handle, waistband, round statues, flat statues are internalization of Dong Son culture from Dian culture (Yunnan province, China). Crock with feet, bronze basins, bronze vase are objects that Dong Son people learned from Han people, however, Dong Son people created skillfully these objects with decorations of rope patterns, human with feathers, star and the sun among other objects. Bronzes of Dong and Han culture diversified objects of Dong Son culture. Dong Son waistbands were glued tintinnabulum. Wild animals in Dian objects such as: elephants, tigers on the handles of daggers become more gentle in Dong Son objects. Meanwhile Dong Son culture internalized from other cultures, its influence spreads over other cultures.

Besides, sphere of this influence also spreads from the south of China to islands of Asian. In the southern provinces and seashore of the southern China, people found a lot of objects with Dong Son patterns on bronze drums such as: human in stylized feather, boats, archaeornis.. Brass objects with specific figures of the Red river type such as: foot-shaped axe with decoration of gowned man, axe with square heel with decoration in socket, dagger with man-shaped handle, hook-shaped axe with geometrical decoration... were found in lower section of the

Yangzi river. The specific objects of the Red river type such as: harpoons with nib-shaped handle, U-shaped hoes... spreaded to the northern Chang Jiang river.

Axes with slanting blade, or axe with square heel, sunken socket, triangle spearhead with holes to hang small statues, cordate ploughshare were used widely in Dian culture in Van Nam province. Bronze containers of Dian culture originated from the seashore of Vietnam.

In the sphere of Sa Huynh culture in the South, spearhead and Dong Son axe were easily founded in Tam Ky, Dien Ban. Dong Son bronze drum have not found in the Sa Huynh archaeological sites, but they have appeared in some places of this cultural sphere.

Wherever Dong Son objects were found, we could easily recognize their colour of oxidization, figure, specific patterns. They are typical features of Dong Son culture. In conclusion, we can say that Dong Son bronze is the gold period of Vietnam art.

The unification of Dong Son culture created unity cultural character. Throughout millennium of Dong Son culture existence over Asia-Europe continents, changes of archaeological culture are also reality of history. Lively existence and bright success of Dong Son culture created Dong Son spirit. After 1000 years of Chinese domination, Vietnamese people still were not assimilated and furthermore we all found freedom.