

Correspondence

I

“Southeast Asia’: What’s in a Name”, Another Point of View

I became rather perturbed while reading Donald K. Emmerson’s article in Volume XV, No. 1 (March 1984) of this journal. Through about the first twenty pages I felt increasingly, how can he see Southeast Asia so differently than I do. He talked almost only in terms of political boundaries and political activities of the last forty years or so and not about people and culture. Then I noted the back cover and that he is a political scientist and it began to dawn on me that probably political scientists as a group read nothing more than histories of the most modern times, with a few exceptions, and papers by other political scientists. Then I began to think a bit further and wonder whether instead of this being his fault, or the fault of political scientists in general, it was the fault of archaeologists and possibly more specifically, at least in this case, of the archaeologists specializing in the prehistoric and early historic archaeology of Southeast Asia. Maybe we were not communicating. Finally, I must admit that I read very few political science reports so I should not be critical of political scientists for not reading archaeological reports.

Before reading the article from beginning to end I had scanned the footnotes to see what archaeological reports or publications by archaeologists he had referred to, and found none. I wondered how could he talk seriously about Southeast Asia as a region, or whether it was and is a “real” region, without referring to the prehistory of the area? He did refer to Heine-Geldern, one of the first prehistorians to specialize in Southeast Asia, but he did not mention his hypotheses on Southeast Asian prehistory — which at least in part strongly supported Southeast Asia as a “real” region — but only listed the countries, islands, etc. that Heine-Geldern at one time or another listed as Southeast Asian. He also mentioned the very good summaries of papers by Vietnamese archaeologists on archaeological research in Viet Nam.¹ These two papers were presented by Jeremy H. C. S. Davidson at a symposium held in London in September 1973. Emmerson interprets the results of this research only in terms of the archaeologists’ presumed political ends (page 19), not in terms of what they have to say about the relationships between Viet Nam and other areas of Southeast Asia relevant to the question of whether Southeast Asia is a true region. He goes on to wonder what Vietnamese archaeologists will say about Vietnamese prehistory once they “... begin lavishing on the central and southern sites of Champa and Funan the kind of attention they have devoted to the more northerly repositories of Dong Son civilization...” (page 19). Considering budgetary problems, there has been much archaeological research in southern Viet Nam since 1975 and Vietnamese archaeologists have been publishing

¹In late 1982, I was informed by Vietnamese archaeologists that all Vietnamese two or more syllable place names should be spelled as two or more separate words, all capitalized; “Editorial”, *Asian Perspectives* 23, 1(1980): v.

numerous papers, in Vietnamese, on the subject, but I'll go into that later in this "other point of view".

I found Emmerson's history of the term "Southeast Asia" before and during the Second World War (pages 2–9) very interesting, but it presented a personal puzzle. I grew up in Laramie, Wyoming, from 1929 to 1942, not a location where Southeast Asia would be well known at that time. Yet, by the time I was around 13, in 1937, my first ambition to be a pilot was followed closely by my second ambition to be an archaeologist specialized in Southeast Asia. "Southeast Asia" was a term and an area that was bright in my imagination but any acquaintance with the area could only have come through newspapers, news magazines, and possibly *National Geographic*. The term must have been moderately well known in the United States by the middle 1930s for me, in Laramie, to focus on it as I did.

Emmerson argues (pages 11–14) that political criteria became the deciding factor for defining the area covered by the term "Southeast Asia". He says, "By the late 1970s ... most observers, in the United States if not elsewhere, considered "Southeast Asia" to consist of ten political units: Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and to-be-independent Brunei" (page 13). This is fine for political scientists but would be awkward for geographers, geologists, biologists, and anthropologists, and simply wrong for archaeologists concerned with prehistoric Southeast Asia.

The Eleventh Pacific Science Congress, in 1966, passed the following resolution:

2.2 Resolved that for the sake of clarity researchers be encouraged to designate areas in the Pacific as follows: Northeast Asia, Mainland Southeast Asia, Island Southeast Asia, Oceania, Australia, and the American Rim, and continue to focus on those regions of Oceania, Island Southeast Asia and Mainland Southeast Asia which present the most critical gaps in our understanding of Pacific culture history.²

The ad hoc committee that worked out the names of the areas suggested in resolution 2.2 also presented tentative boundaries for some of these areas. These are as follows: Northeast Asia would extend from the thirtieth parallel of latitude to the north and would include Japan; Mainland Southeast Asia would extend from the thirtieth parallel of latitude (approximately the Yangtze River) to the south as far as Singapore, and from the Irrawaddy River to the South China Sea; Island Southeast Asia would include all the islands off the coast of Mainland Southeast Asia, from Formosa around to the Andaman Islands.... These boundaries are not meant to be absolute; western Burma, Assam and portions of eastern India no doubt should be included in Mainland Southeast Asia for some time periods and western New Guinea very possibly should be a part of Island Southeast Asia for some periods.³

I do not know of any published disagreement with these terms but at least one archaeologist registered disagreement with the inclusion of South China with Mainland Southeast Asia. Richard Pearson⁴ said "Mainland Southeast Asia and South China are two contiguous and separate biogeographic zones with important connections, not a single area, as the Pacific Science Association once attempted to legislate (Solheim 1969 [*sic*]: 3)". I would like to point out that the resolution passed by the Pacific Science Association concerned only the names of the major regions and said nothing about

²Wilhelm G. Solheim II, "International congresses and symposia", *Asian Perspectives* 10 (1967):2.

³*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴Richard J. Pearson, "Interrelationships of Mainland Southeast Asian and South Chinese prehistoric ceramic assemblages", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Sinology, Section on History and Archaeology* (Taipei: Academica Sinica, 1982), p. 63.

their boundaries. Further, the boundaries presented by the ad hoc committee were presented as tentative. The resolution has had considerable effect on the "Southeast Asia" terminology in that Mainland Southeast Asia and Island Southeast Asia (sometimes referred to as Insular Southeast Asia) have come to be commonly used while I do not believe these or similar terms were commonly used before the resolution.

Concerning this question of including South China in Southeast Asia, I had a brief exchange with Kwang-chih Chang, the primary specialist on Chinese prehistory in the Americas.⁵ In reply, Chang said:

There is nothing heretical about regarding South China as part of Southeast Asia at times in the past for some classificatory purposes. Professor Ling Shun-sheng, for example, would extend the cultural area of Southeast Asia to include "South China as far as the Yangtze valley, or even to just south of the Huai River and the Tsinling Mountains".... I myself have stated that "for the purpose of a discussion in its culture history,... Southeast Asia rightfully includes South China as well as the peninsular and island areas to the south".⁶

In many if not most cases when dealing with Southeast Asia it is not necessary to define the term. In their preface to the book *Early South East Asia*, where they explain the purpose and coverage of the book, R. B. Smith and W. Watson⁷ do not define the area of coverage and nothing is lost as a result. In some situations, however, it is necessary. Peter Bellwood, in the one recent book that covers the prehistory of Southeast Asia,⁸ includes China south of the Yangtze River in Mainland Southeast Asia (page 19) and Taiwan in Island Southeast Asia (page 20), but does not mention the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

In a book I am writing at this time I have Southeast Asia in the title and it is necessary to define the term. I quote portions of my definition:

Southeast Asia I use in a cultural-geographic sense to include those areas inhabited by ethnic groups with a generally Southeast Asian culture, and/or speaking a Southeast Asian language of Austro-Asiatic, Austro-Thai, or Austronesian relationship, plus Burmese. This definition results in variable boundaries through time. Much of eastern India during prehistoric times was culturally more related to Southeast Asian than to western Indian culture and some ethnic groups in the eastern-central hills of India still speak Austro-Asiatic languages....

I do not attempt to define Southeast Asian culture but only mention a few elements of culture that were widely found in Southeast Asian cultures, though not necessarily exclusively Southeast Asian, and that tend to distinguish Southeast Asian culture from that of China and India.... These would include houses built up off the ground on piles; tattooing and with this a general lack of clothing in both sexes, particularly above the waist; decoration of the teeth; the chewing of areca nut with betel leaf and lime (also widely practiced in India); animistic religion with ancestral and nature spirits central to this; bilateral kinship systems with a general equality of the sexes and

⁵Wilhelm G. Solheim, "Remarks on the neolithic of South China and Southeast Asia", *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 4(1973): 25–29.

⁶Chang Kwang-chih, "Major problems in the culture history of Southeast Asia", *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology (Academia Sinica)* 13 (1962): 1. Chang Kwang-chih, "Comments on the interrelationship of North China, South China, and Southeast Asia in ancient times", *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 5(1974): 35. Wilhelm G. Solheim II, "Prehistoric South China, Chinese or Southeast Asian?" *Computational Analysis of Asian and African Languages* 22 (1984): 16.

⁷R. B. Smith and W. Watson (eds.), *Early South East Asia* (New York, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. v–viii.

⁸Peter Bellwood, *Man's Conquest of the Pacific: The Prehistory of Southeast Asia and Oceania* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

a tendency in some areas towards matrilineality; land tenure by descent groups; self identification of local groups by distinctive elements of material culture such as hair styles, colors and patterns of cloth such as G-strings and wrap around or tubular skirts, and very possibly pottery styles (form and decoration) in some areas...

Geographically I divide Southeast Asia into two parts, Mainland and Island Southeast Asia. For my purposes Mainland Southeast Asia includes the Yangtze drainage from the Tsinling Mountains on the north (until the Han Dynasty incorporated much of what is known in English as South China), Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula. Island Southeast Asia includes the islands off the coast of Mainland Southeast Asia from Taiwan through the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, East Malaysia, to the Nicobar and Andaman Islands.... Southeast Asia and its two subregions I always capitalize as they have a cultural distinctiveness in their diverse unity going well back into the Pleistocene and continuing until today in spite of the present cultural differences brought about by their different religious histories and the historical accidents of imposed colonial boundaries and the non-Southeast Asian political and economic patterns of today and the recent past.⁹

From the point of view of this archaeologist there is no question that Southeast Asia was, and is, a real region, culturally and historically. I do not see how anyone acquainted with the cultures of the small traditional ethnic groups that have not been strongly influenced by western colonial economies and foreign, introduced religions, which are found scattered throughout Southeast Asia, can say that Southeast Asia is not a true region. The further you move back in time the more apparent this becomes. When you get back to 1 b. c. before any appreciable influence from India or China on Southeast Asia, except for areas of South China and Burma, there are clear lines of contact and strong similarities in material culture linking most of Southeast Asia together. Burma and Assam are very little known for this time but when you go further back the Southeast Asian elements become apparent.

Emmerson (page 18) considers that the definition of Southeast Asia as a region is artificial, that it is "A residual category that fills space on a map..." Finally, he refers to it as an "externally defined" region. Obviously I totally disagree with the first two considerations but cannot deny the third, depending on how it was meant. This definition was not made by the presence of India, China, Australia and the Pacific Ocean providing boundaries for a surrounded area named Southeast Asia. Rather, it has been defined, perhaps artificially, by political scientists from the United States, military authorities from the Americas and Europe, but discovered by historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and various other external humanists. It has been there, waiting to be discovered — and once recognized, defined — for thousands of years. When you live inside a forest it is impossible to see and recognize the forest for all the trees but when you come upon the forest from the outside, it can be recognized as a forest. In the European and more recent American scientific and humanistic traditions it is desirable and rewarding to see, recognize, and define forests while the traditions of Southeast Asia have not had this interest. A few of those natives of Southeast Asia, educated in the western tradition, recognize Southeast Asia as a region of which they are a part and fewer still have become trained in the archaeological and anthropological techniques by which they can take a leading part in the exploration and definition of Southeast Asia as a real region. For the moment, however, this is not the primary purpose of these Southeast Asians. For good or for bad, employed by various institutions

⁹Wilhelm G. Solheim II, *The Prehistoric Earthenware Ceramics of Southeast Asia* (in preparation).

of the new nation-states of Southeast Asia, their major task is to help define the nations of which they are citizens.

Emmerson is rather behind the times on archaeological research in Viet Nam. He talks about "... suspicions that Vietnam is culturally and ideologically too 'northern' to be part of 'Southeast Asia'" (pages 18–19). He refers to the "cultural ambiguity" of Viet Nam and "...the legitimacy of placing Vietnam simultaneously in 'East' and 'Southeast Asia'" (page 19). He goes on in a footnote saying "Even if agreement can be reached that Vietnam is simultaneously 'East' and 'Southeast Asian' observers will still be able to differ over which label deserves priority" (page 19). I cannot see how anyone could consider Viet Nam as East Asian. Without question there was a long period during which northern Viet Nam was a colony of the at that time imperialist China but the majority of the Vietnamese people never became "Chinese" and finally were successful in their revolt against China. Stephen O'Harrow has described five elements that distinguish the Vietnamese from their neighbours.¹⁰ One of these five is "... the incorporation of certain aspects of Chinese cultures not simply by imitation or even by forced assimilation, but by acceptance of and intermarriage with ethnic Chinese who, in their turn, were finally absorbed and vietnamized to a much greater extent than the local population was sinicized". Certainly there are numerous Chinese elements in Vietnamese culture but there were never enough that the Vietnamese would be considered more Chinese than Southeast Asian. Though a small mandarinized upper class may have adhered to a Chinese social model this had little effect on the majority of the Vietnamese population or the many other ethnic groups within Viet Nam. The Vietnamese have been enemies of the Chinese since the Chin Dynasty attempted to incorporate Viet Nam into China. Viet Nam can no more be considered as East Asian than Thailand or Burma can be considered as South Asian, except possibly on a superficial level. This is still more evident during prehistoric times.

There is no reflection on Emmerson for not knowing what the Vietnamese archaeologists have been doing the last ten years, though it might have been wise, considering the "... remarkable energy..." with which the "... Vietnamese prehistorians have been laboring ..." up to 1973 (when Davidson's papers were presented, the source of Emmerson's statements on Vietnamese archaeology), to have kept in mind that much more probably has been done since. While there has been a constant flow of Vietnamese publication resulting from their archaeological research since 1973, with the exception of a very few articles generally available in French,¹² English,¹³ and

¹⁰Stephen O'Harrow, "Men of Hu, Men of Han, Men of the Hundred Man: the conceptualization of early Vietnamese Society", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (in press).

¹¹Donald K. Emmerson, "'Southeast Asia': What's in a Name", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* XV, 1 (March 1984): 19.

¹²Nguyen Phuc Long, "Les nouvelles recherches archeologiques au Vietnam (Complement au Vietnam de Louis Bezacier)", *Arts Asiatiques* 31(1975), numero special.

¹³Stephen O'Harrow, "From Co-loa to the Trung sisters' revolt: Vietnam as the Chinese found it", *Asian Perspectives* 22, 2(1979): 140–64. Wilhelm G. Solheim II, "New data on late Southeast Asian prehistory and their interpretation (excerpts)", *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 8 (1979): 73–87; "A look at 'L' Art préboudhique de la Chine et de l'Asie du Sud-est et son influence en Océanie' forty years after", *Asian Perspectives* 22, 2(1979): 165–205; "Review Article: *Recent Discoveries and New Views of Some Archaeological Problems in Vietnam*", *Asian Perspectives* 23, 1(1980): 9–16. H. H. E. Loofs-Wissowa, "Report of an archaeological journey to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam", *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* 2(1980): 31–39. Donn Bayard (ed.), "Vietnam and South China", *Southeast Asian Archaeology at the XV Pacific Science Congress* (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Studies in Prehistoric Anthropology vol. 16, 1984), pp. 169–217. Special issue on Vietnamese archaeology, *Asian Perspectives* 23, 1(1980): 1–150.

German,¹⁴ this has appeared primarily in Vietnamese publications of very small circulation outside of Viet Nam, in Vietnamese (*Khao Co Hoc* and the proceedings of the annual meeting of Vietnamese archaeologists *Nhung Phat Hien Moi ve Khao Co Hoc nam 1982*, the last issue that I have received).

Emmerson (page 19) states that "... Vietnamese prehistorians have been laboring ... to reconstruct Dong Son culture as a major source of Viet identity in a non-Sinic, that is, 'Southeast Asian', sense". The reconstruction of Dongson culture is naturally done in a "Southeast Asian" sense as it is almost totally Southeast Asian with only a very few, likely minor, Chinese elements. While it was formerly considered that the Dongson culture owed its origin either to a migration from eastern Europe or in some way to Eastern Chou China,¹⁵ it is now clear that the origins of the Dongson culture were there in Viet Nam over the preceding 3000 years and in neighbouring areas of Southeast Asia.¹⁶

Emmerson (page 19), referring to the quote just above, goes on to say "Vietnam's dispute with China provides a political incentive to conduct archeology of this particular kind". "... Hanoi's apparent desire to emphasize the southern as opposed to the northern affinities..." indicates what he means by "... archeology of this particular kind..." There is no need to emphasize southern relationships over northern as they are clearly Southeast Asian relationships as far as origins and prehistoric culture are concerned. My point of view is that the purpose in this archaeology is to discover the origins of the Vietnamese people, which, of course, is in part an internal political purpose.

Emmerson continues with the statement I quoted in part early in this presentation, wondering whether the view of the Vietnamese archaeologists concerning Dongson will continue once they have done archaeological research in the south. He goes on to say (pages 19–20),

Dong Son's claim to regional significance is largely circumstantial, resting as it does on the wide distribution of the bronze drums that so fascinated German scholars in the nineteenth century. Funan and Champa, on the other hand, could be used to associate Vietnam more directly with the "Malayo-Muslim-maritime" character of so many of insular Southeast Asia's polities and cultures.

Pending the implementation of such a research agenda one can speculate that the Vietnamese may be reluctant to face the implications of their protracted southward movement against the descendents of the peoples of Champa and Funan...

Added to this is a footnote in which he says,

The relative neglect of central and southern sites may also reflect their more recent incorporation into Hanoi's jurisdiction, the unimportance of investigating them compared to mobilizing and feeding the southern population, and the difficulty of using them as bridges to ASEAN while Vietnamese intentions in Cambodia remain controversial.

There has been no neglect of central and southern archaeological sites. Within a very short time after the fall of Saigon archaeologists from the north were surveying and excavating in the south.¹⁷ They found the Sa-Huỳnh Culture of particular interest, in part

¹⁴Wilhelm G. Solheim II, "New data on late Southeast Asian prehistory and their interpretation", *Saeculum* 31, 3–4(1980): 275–334; translated into German by Karl Narr.

¹⁵Solheim, "A look", pp. 169–71.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 185–92. Solheim, "New data", *Saeculum*, pp. 9–10. Xoang Xuan Chinh and Bui Van Tien, "The Dongson Culture and cultural centers in the Metal Age in Vietnam", *Asian Perspectives* 23, 1 (1980): 55–59.

¹⁷Chu Van Tan, "Sahuyinh, a civilization type of Metal Age in Vietnam", in *Recent Discoveries and New Views on Some Archaeological Problems in Vietnam* (Hanoi: Institute of Archaeology, 1979), p. 27.

because I had been hypothesizing for some years that this site, as indicated by its pottery, had relationships with sites in the Philippines, Borneo, Indonesia, and Malaya.¹⁸ This widespread pottery I called the Sa-huỳnh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition. Common geometric elements of decoration of this pottery also were common elements on the Dongson bronze drums but these elements of decoration were widespread in eastern Island Southeast Asia and Borneo before the time of the Dongson culture.¹⁹ Previous to 1975 eighteen sites of the Sa-Huỳnh Culture were known and these all near the coast in central Viet Nam and dating between about 500 and 1 B. C. From 1976 to 1979 the number of known sites was doubled and much earlier sites were found in the mountains back from the coast.²⁰ While the Vietnamese archaeologists are not in agreement with me on my interpretation of the widespread Sa-huỳnh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition,²¹ we both hypothesize that the people of the Sa-Huỳnh Culture in Viet Nam were the ancestors of the Cham and that they originated, as Cham, in this area.²² Another surprising result of the post-1975 excavations in central and southern Viet Nam is that they found that there were many similarities in material culture throughout Viet Nam from the later part of the third millennium B. C. until the beginning of Dongson in the north around 800 B. C. when the north starts to evolve in a different direction, probably through close contact with Yueh peoples (non-Sinitic) to the north.²³ It would appear that people living along the coast of Viet Nam were involved in a very widespread trade network, possibly reaching from Korea and Japan to the southeast coast of India, throughout the first millennium B. C.²⁴

Emmerson, in his conclusion, very adroitly reverses his field. He feels that Southeast Asian studies "... has become too 'modern' in the sense of being politically focused and limited". Then, "It is time, I think, to revive and update the 'traditional' anthropological holism that first enabled European writers to imagine seeing a unicorn out there in the wilderness next to China and India" (page 21). While I have been riding the unicorn all the way (in Southeast Asia it is called a rhinoceros), I am in full agreement, but I do believe that some of us have felt Southeast Asia was there all along.

I would like to thank Neil Jamieson and Stephen O'Harrow for reading the first version of this paper. I appreciated their suggestions for improvement, some of which I followed. I alone am responsible for the final result.

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¹⁸Wilhelm G. Solheim II, "Sa-huỳnh Pottery Relationships in Southeast Asia", *Asian Perspectives* 3, 2(1959):97-188; "The Sa-huỳnh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition: past and future research", in *Studies in Philippine Anthropology*, ed. Mario D. Zamora (Quezon City: Alemar Phoenix, 1967), pp. 151-74.

¹⁹Wilhelm G. Solheim II, "Reflections on the new data of Southeast Asian prehistory: Austronesian origin and consequence", *Asian Perspectives* 18, 2(1975): 153-58; "A look", pp. 182-91.

²⁰Chu Van Tan.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 31.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 31. Solheim, "A look", p. 199.

²³Solheim, "A look", p. 198. Hoang Xuan Chinh and Bui Van Tien.

²⁴Wilhelm G. Solheim II, "Philippine prehistory", in *The People and Arts of the Philippines*, by Father Gabriel Casal and Regalado Trota Jose, Jr., Eric S. Casino, George R. Ellis, and Wilhelm G. Solheim II (Los Angeles: Museum of Culture History, UCLA, 1981), p. 47; "Remarks on the lingling-o and bi-cephalous ornaments", *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 10 (in press); *The Archaeology of Central Philippines*, 2nd revised edition (Manila: Monograph of the National Museum, in preparation). H.H.E. Loofs-Wissowa, "Prehistoric and Protohistoric links between the Indochinese peninsula and the Philippines, as exemplified by two types of ear-ornaments", *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society* 9 (1981): 57-76; "Report".

II

I apologize for this late reply to Ernest C.T. Chew's very interesting article, "The Fall of the Burmese Kingdom in 1885", *JSEAS* X, 2 (September 1979): 372–80. Essentially, Chew doesn't accept my book, *King Thebaw and the Ecological Rape of Burma*,¹ because I place heavy emphasis upon the "French Threat" in British India's relations with Mandalay from 1878 to 1886. The passage below from my book (pages 333–34) provides the strategic-political *context* of the "French Threat", which Chew consistently ignores:

The "French Threat" to India's eastern frontier ... must be understood within the larger context of the "Russian Threat" to India's northwest frontier. In 1885, the Russian and British Governments had come to the brink of war over Herat, the "Key to India" in western Afghanistan.

The Indian government simply could *not* afford to become involved — either militarily or financially — on both the northwest and on the east at the same time. In this sense, Viceroy Dufferin's concerns in 1885 were much the same as Viceroy Lytton's in 1879. Both men wanted to avoid involvement on India's eastern frontier in order to concentrate their respective energies on the northwest.

However, in 1885, it appeared that a French-dominated Upper Burma would soon run alongside India's eastern frontier. It was this "threat" more than the hope of new British markets in Yunnan that prompted Dufferin to send the October 22, 1885 Ultimatum to Mandalay. The Ultimatum was designed to end all French influence in Upper Burma, and the possibility that French Indo-China would run contiguously with India's eastern frontier.

The Ultimatum would therefore save the Indian Government from the spectre of having to fight the Russians in the Northwest and the French on the east simultaneously. The Indian Government could again largely forget about India's eastern flank, and devote its energies to the northwest and the "Russian Threat".

The context of the "French Threat" as a counterpart of the "Russian Threat" is again ignored by Chew in his quote from Dufferin's letter to Bernard. Dufferin was covering his administrative backside in this 3 November 1885 letter (as any wise official would do) by noting all the problems he was faced with. But all of these potential causes of war with Mandalay complemented or were part of the "French Threat", which Dufferin had emphasized for many months.

Actually, Churchill had emphasized this strategic-political "threat" most of all, and had decisively pushed Dufferin's concerns in this direction. Chew quotes from the Churchill to Dufferin letter of 18 November 1885, but leaves out key portions of the letter. The missing parts (cited below) were used in my book (p. 243), and emphasized the "French Threat" as a counterpart of the "Russian Threat":

It is French intrigue which has forced us to go to Burmah If ... you finally and fully add Burmah to your dominions before any European rights have had time even to be sown, much less grow up, you undoubtedly prevent forever the

¹Charles Lee Keeton 3rd., *King Thebaw and the Ecological Rape of Burma*, pub. and dist. by Manohar Book Service, 2, Darya Ganj, Ansari Rd., Delhi-110006, India; and by South Asia Books, Box 502, Columbia, Missouri 65205, U.S.A.; price U.S.\$14.00.

assertion of such rights, or attempts to prepare the way for such assertion.... If, on the other hand, this opportunity of protecting India effectually on the East is allowed to pass, these events may follow a course analogous to what has taken place in the N.W. [with Russia]. The aggressions against you need not necessarily be French; they might be German or Italian, or all three.

Chew also says that my ecological interpretation of internal events in Upper Burma is “novel”. Actually, many observers including Grattan Geary, editor of the *Bombay Gazette* in 1885, had commented on the ecological collapse of Mandalay. Geary noted that “the tendency to drought, which has caused so much alarm for some years past, is due to the destruction of timber and the denudation of the hills”. My book stated (pp. 156–57) that:

The 1883–1885 “drought” in the Dry Zone had been caused in the main by the excessive Deforestation of cutch, teak, and other ground-cover in the provinces south of Mandalay and elsewhere during the two decades after 1862. The effects of this long-term Deforestation process were apparently exaggerated by a slight cyclical-dip in the annual rainfall from 1883–1885.

The 1883–1885 “drought” caused considerable crop failures, a shortage of food, and a significant drop in the tax receipts extracted from the provinces south of Mandalay. Hungry peasants from these provinces fled to Lower Burma or became so-called “dacoits”, and were preyed upon in turn by other hungry “dacoits”. Thebaw had to withdraw many of his troops from the Chinese, Kachin, and Shan rebels in the north and east, and use the troops to keep order between Mandalay and the Lower Burma frontier.

... Since Thebaw’s Government lacked a regular supply of modern breech-loading rifles, there was no way that he could force the Shans to once again pay the customary tribute. In order to get enough money for daily operating expenses, Thebaw’s Government had to sell more and more timber leases.... The ecological cycle went round and round. It was accelerated by the rapid disappearance of the forests and other ground cover, which had to be sold to get enough money to import Lower Burma rice to avoid hunger and possible revolution. The Mandalay treasury was almost empty. Consequently, there was little money left over for British imports.

Rangoon observers suggested that it was Thebaw’s “misrule” that was to blame, and that a change of Kings or perhaps annexation was in order. Mandalay observers also blamed Thebaw for the poor crops, the lack of rain, and the continued lack of a male heir to the throne. Thebaw had usually been afraid to leave the Palace and had never performed the annual Plowing Ceremony. This ceremony was supposed to represent Lord Indra, King of the Gods, blessing the crops and calling down the rains. Since Thebaw as the earthly manifestation of Lord Indra had not performed the ceremony, it meant that he had *caused* the “drought”. As the popular bazaar-joke put it: the *only* seed Thebaw had ever sowed was that in Supayalat, which resulted in girl after girl.

In conclusion, I much admire Chew’s series of articles in *JSEAS*, and, like him, certainly welcome a renewed debate on the issues covered in my book.

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