

# Chapter 6

## Competing Imagined Ancestries: The Lạc Việt, the Vietnamese, and the Zhuang



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**Abstract** As we write this abstract, it is 2020 and there are scholars in China hard at work seeking to demonstrate that the Zhuang ethnic group are descended from ancient people known as the “Luoyue.” Not all that long ago, in the 1950s, certain Vietnamese scholars worked equally hard to demonstrate that the Vietnamese were descended from the very same “Luoyue” people, pronounced in Vietnamese as “Lạc Việt.” In both cases, these claims to ancestry from the Lạc Việt/Luoyue were new. They were also both parts of efforts to construct an identity that could unify a group of people and provide them with a sense that their group possessed deep historical roots. This effort has succeeded in Vietnam. In the case of China, it is an effort that is still underway. In this paper, we examine these two “competing imagined ancestries” and ponder how these identity projects will impact the lives of people in both Vietnam and China in the years ahead.

**Keywords** Lạc Việt · Zhuang · Vietnamese · Imagined ancestries · Identity projects

### 6.1 Introduction

From our current position in the twenty-first century, in our age of globalization and digital transformations, one might safely assume that peoples and cultures of the first millennium BC would have little importance or relevance for most people in the present. When it comes to Vietnam and China, however, such an assumption would be false, for in both societies there is an intense interest in highlighting the distant past as a means to create and solidify a sense of identity in the present. While some might argue that this linking of present societies with distant origins is nothing more

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than the common practice of nation-states of seeking to produce a strong sense of national identity, in the case of Vietnam and China this practice is complicated by the fact that scholars in both countries are basing their respective identity projects on the same historical information.

In this chapter, we will examine this phenomenon by looking at the role that an ancient society known as the “Lạc Việt” in Vietnamese or “Luoyue” in Chinese has played in efforts in Vietnam and China over the past century to create a sense of identity for the Vietnamese in Vietnam and an ethnic group called the Zhuang in China. In employing the same information for different purposes, Vietnamese and Chinese scholars (with “Vietnamese” and “Chinese” here referring to scholars inside the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the People’s Republic of China, respectively, regardless of their ethnicity) have both transformed the meaning of the ethnonym “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” to meet their present needs. Originally an exonym that Han Chinese used more than 2000 years ago to refer to a community of peoples in the area of what is now southern China, the term is now used by Vietnamese and Chinese writers as a form of autonym to refer to the ancestors of the Vietnamese and the Zhuang, respectively.

This transformation of an exonym into an autonym is the result of processes of national and ethnic identity formation that have taken place in Vietnam and China at different times. In the case of Vietnam, the effort to strengthen a sense of national identity by connecting Vietnamese with the ancient Lạc Việt/Luoyue people was actively pursued in the 1950s and 1960s, with the result being that today this connection is largely taken for granted. In the case of China, by contrast, it is only in the past 15 years or so that an effort has gotten underway to link the ethnic Zhuang with the ancient Lạc Việt/Luoyue. While it is still unclear how successful this effort will be, the evidence to date suggests that it is highly probable that this idea that the Zhuang are descended from the Lạc Việt/Luoyue will soon be as taken for granted in China as the idea that the Vietnamese are descended from the Lạc Việt/Luoyue is in Vietnam.

That such an effort is underway in China leads to numerous questions about the politics behind this endeavor and its timing. Unfortunately, however, the answers to such questions are beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, in what follows we will simply attempt to document this issue. In particular, we will illuminate how Vietnamese and Chinese scholars have attempted to “imagine ancestry” from the ancient Lạc Việt/Luoyue. In the process, and keeping with the theme of this volume, we will attempt to show how the modern practice of claiming descent from the Lạc Việt/Luoyue is very much because Vietnamese and Chinese scholars have engaged with new perspectives about the past, perspectives that have crossed space and time, and through engagement by local scholars, have transformed communities in Vietnam and China.

## 6.2 Lạc Việt as Exonym and Autonym

In some premodern Chinese and Vietnamese texts, the Lạc Việt/Luoyue (variously written as 貉越 or 雒越) are referred to as a group of “Việt/Yue” 越 peoples from a larger category of “Hundred Việt/Yue” (Bách Việt/Bai Yue 百粵/越) peoples. In ancient Chinese historical documents, the word “Việt/Yue” 越/粵 in the term Hundred Việt/Yue was an ethnonym that referred collectively to diverse communities inhabiting the area of what is now southern China and some of the northern parts of Mainland Southeast Asia, categorized in different groups such as Lạc Việt/Luoyue, Âu Việt/Ou’yue 甌越, and Mân Việt/Minyue 閩越. The term Hundred Việt/Yue appeared for the first time in *Master Lu’s Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Lushi Chunqiu* 吕氏春秋), a text compiled around 239 BC in the Kingdom of Qin at the end of the Warring States Period (475–221 BC) (Kì`êu 2016: 26; Tr`ân 2018: 4). It appears more frequently in texts from the Han Dynasty period (202 BC–220 AD); however, it was not the only term that was used by Han Chinese to refer to peoples who inhabited the regions to the south of their empire, as terms such as “*man*” 蠻 and “*yi*” 夷, meaning “savage” and “barbarian,” respectively, were also employed (Brindley 215: 31).

Meanwhile, the more specific ethnonym “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” originally appeared in the *History of the Han Dynasty* (*Hanshu* 漢書), an official dynastic history that covers events from the Western Han Dynasty period (206 BC–24 AD). In this text, the term Lạc Việt/Luoyue appears in a chapter on “The Biography of Jia Yuan” (Jia Juan zhi zhuan 賈捐之傳) where it states that “(Among) Lạc Việt/Luoyue people, (it is a practice that) a father and his children bathe in the same river” (Ban 92 AD). From this and other passages, it can be unclear whether the term Lạc Việt/Luoyue refers to a region, or a country, or a group of people, be that an ethnic or cultural group. What *is* clear is that the term Lạc Việt/Luoyue was used in this and other early Chinese works as an exonym to refer to a non-Han Chinese group residing in the area around the southern frontier of the Han Dynasty Empire.

Many centuries later, in the twentieth century, scholars in both Vietnam and China began to claim a kind of autonym status for the term Lạc Việt/Luoyue. In the case of China, scholars argue that the Lạc Việt were the ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group that today mainly resides in the Zhuang Autonomous Region in Guangxi Province and parts of the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hunan, as well as in part of the Red River Delta. Vietnamese scholars, meanwhile, argue that the Lạc Việt were the ancestors of the ethnic Việt or the Kinh as this majority ethnic group is now referred to in Vietnam. However, neither of these societies possess historical documents that demonstrate the use of the term Lạc Việt/Luoyue in the past as an autonym for a group of people whom we can unequivocally identify today as either the Zhuang or the Việt. Nonetheless, modern scholars in Vietnam and China have come to employ this term as a kind of autonym that refers to the ancestors of the Việt and Zhuang, respectively.

Vietnamese scholar, Tr`ân Trí Dõi, for instance, has argued that the Vietnamese are the descendants of the Lạc Việt. However, he notes that the term “Lạc Việt” is

only used by Vietnamese today to refer to the historical ancestors of the Vietnamese, particularly as mentioned in ancient Chinese sources like the *History of the Han*, and not to refer to themselves. He argues that the original meaning of the term must have been lost and that somewhere around the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries the term reentered the Vietnamese language with the meaning of “a community of people who are the ancestors of the Việt” (Tr`ân 2017: 52–3). However, and as we will see below, it is only in the twentieth century that Vietnamese scholars began to use the term Lạc Việt to refer to their distant ancestors, while it is only in the twenty-first century that Chinese scholars have come to claim that the Lạc Việt/Luoyue are the ancestors of the Zhuang (Zheng 2005; Zheng and Tan 2006; Liang 2014, 2017 and 2018).

It is difficult to see, however, how both of these positions can be correct. According to modern linguistic categorizations, for instance, the Zhuang language belongs to the Kam–Tai (or Zhuang-Dong) group of languages in the Tai-Kadai language family. Speakers of Tai-Kadai languages can today be found in an area stretching from southwestern China to the Assam state in northeastern India and include peoples such as the Tày, Thái, Nùng, Lào, and Lự in Vietnam. Vietnamese, meanwhile, belongs to the Việt-Mường group of the Austroasiatic language family. As such, it is difficult to see how people who speak languages from different language families can come from the same ancestral group. That said, if we follow the understanding of certain Western scholars who argue that the Han Chinese in antiquity may have employed terms like “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” to refer to diverse groups of peoples speaking different languages who perhaps shared certain cultural practices, rather than to a clearly defined ethnic group speaking a single language (Brindley 2015: 30–31), then such a Lạc Việt/Luoyue cultural group could indeed have been ancestral to the peoples whom we today refer to as the Việt and the Zhuang. This, however, is not how Vietnamese and Chinese scholars have viewed the ancient Lạc Việt/Luoyue. Instead, they have largely viewed the Lạc Việt as a distinct ancient ethnic group in the past with a direct link to a distinct ethnic group in the present: the Việt in the case of Vietnam (although some Vietnamese scholars link the Lạc Việt with virtually all of the ethnic groups in contemporary Vietnam) and the Zhuang in the case of China.

### 6.3 Lạc Việt/Luoyue—an Ethnonym and Its Indeterminate Meaning

One point that all scholars agree upon, regardless of their nationality, is that the term “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” is not Sinitic in origin. Vietnamese scholar Vũ Thê Ngọc, for instance, has argued in a recent article that “*lạc*” was a Vietnamese-language word, the same as the word *nu`oc*, that is, the word for “water” in modern Vietnamese. Vũ Thê Ngọc argues further that this same word can be found in the languages of various minority ethnic groups in Vietnam, such as “*đá*” in Mạ, “*đá*” in Churu, and “*đá*” in Bahnar and Sedang, while in some dialects in the northern part of

Central Vietnam, Vũ Thê Ngọc states that the word is pronounced as “*nác*” (Vũ 1989). Meanwhile, Chinese scholar Liang Tingwang has recently argued that “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” comes from the Zhuang term “*roegvet*” or “*loegvet*.” There is a place in Guangxi Province called “Luwo” town (Luwo zhen 陸斡鎮) that he states is pronounced in Zhuang as “*Roegvet*” or “*Loegvet*,” and he claims that this is the same term as “Lạc Việt/Luoyue.” Liang argues further that this term means to “dig a field” (*watian* 挖田), and that it refers to a kind of bird that digs in fields (*watian zhi niao* 挖田之鳥). This bird, Liang argues further, was the totem of the ancient “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” peoples (Liang 2014: 37; 2018: 102).

While Vietnamese and Chinese scholars thus associate the term “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” with the Vietnamese and Zhuang languages, respectively, other scholars take a different approach. French linguist Michel Ferlus, for example, has put forth the idea, based on historical linguistic evidence, that the two terms that constitute this ethnonym are phonetic transliterations of indigenous words, traces of which can be found in languages from both the Austroasiatic and Tai-Kadai language families. In particular, Ferlus has argued that “*viêt/yue*” comes from a word, \**wat*, that refers to a circular territory around a settlement, whereas “*lac/luo*” originates in the term, \**rak* or \**p.rak*, meaning “human” or “person” or “people.” This term, Ferlus argues, may have originally meant “taro” and came to be identified with a certain group of people who cultivated taro fields (Ferlus 2011: 4, 6–7).

If Ferlus is correct, and in another context, his general methodology has been seriously questioned (Griffiths 2013: 49–53), then the term “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” could have originally meant something like “the region/land of people who call themselves \**rak* (human).” Such an explanation would fit with the idea that the Han Chinese used this term to refer to a multiethnic population that shared certain cultural and social practices. However, it would also mean that such a concept already existed in an indigenous language (or languages) and that Han Chinese adopted that term. If that was the case, then we are left wondering who in this multiethnic world would have called whom “Lạc Việt/Luoyue,” and how it is that Han Chinese came to adopt that usage. Equally mysterious is why the particular characters that were used to denote this term were chosen, for beyond designating sounds, these characters also convey meaning, and it is unclear if these characters were employed simply for their sounds or if there was some significance to their meaning. Depending on which character is used, “*lac/luo*” can mean either “a white horse with a black mane” (駱) or a kind of “owlet” (雛), whereas *viêt/yue* (越) means “to exceed” or “to go beyond.” How such meanings may have related to the ancient “Lạc Việt/Luoyue,” if at all, is unclear.

Regardless of what the term “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” originally meant, there is no evidence that the Việt or the Zhuang historically employed this term to refer to themselves. While the Zhuang did not develop a tradition of recording written history, the Việt did, and the earliest extant Vietnamese historical sources, which date from the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, do not mention the term “Lạc Việt.” Instead, they contain passages that refer to early inhabitants of the Red River Delta region as “Lạc people” (Lạc dân 雜民). In so doing, they follow information that was recorded centuries earlier in Chinese texts. For instance, Li Daoyuan’s (d. 527 CE) *Annotated Classic of Waterways* (*Shuijing zhu* 水經注) quotes an earlier work entitled the

*Record of the Peripheral Region of Jiaozhou* (*Jiaozhou waiyu ji* 交州外域記) to describe conditions in the Red River Delta before that region had been fully brought under Han Dynasty control. To quote,

In the past, before Jiaozhi had commanderies and districts, the land had *lạc* fields. These fields followed the rising and falling of the floodwaters. The people who opened these fields for cultivation were called Lạc people. Lạc princes and Lạc marquises were appointed to control the various commanderies and districts. Many of the districts had Lạc generals. The Lạc generals had bronze seals on green ribbons” (Li Daoyuan 6th century AD).

Vietnamese historian Lê T’ác (1263–1342) cited this information in his fourteenth-century *Abbreviated Record of An Nam* (*An Nam chí lược* 安南志略) in talking about the early inhabitants of the Red River Delta region (Lê 2002 [1335]: 12). While Lê T’ác did not directly refer to these people as “ancestors,” he used this information to talk about what life was like in the Red River Delta region centuries before his time, and in that sense, it could be understood by a reader of this text that the “Lạc people” were ancestral to the people living in the same region during Lê T’ác’s lifetime.

Later premodern Vietnamese historical sources likewise do not mention the term “Lạc Việt.” For example, official historical records, such as the fifteenth-century *Complete Book of the Historical Records of Đại Việt* (*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* 大越史記全書; hereafter, *Complete Book*) and the nineteenth-century *Imperially Commissioned Itemized Summaries of the Comprehensive Mirror of Việt History* (*Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục* 欽定越史通鑑綱目), employ terms like “Our Việt” (Ngã Việt 我越) or “Great Việt” (Đại Việt 大越) to refer to the kingdom, but they do not mention the term “Lạc Việt.” However, official history textbooks in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or Northern Vietnam, 1945–1975) and in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV, 1976-present) have employed the ethnonym Lạc Việt to indicate a population living in southern China and northern Vietnam in the final centuries BC and have referred to such people as the ancestors of present-day Vietnamese.

How did that change come about? It appears that historian Đào Duy Anh (1904–1988) is responsible for developing the idea that the Lạc Việt were the ancestors of the Vietnamese. This is a point that he made in his writings in the 1940s and 1950s, such as in his *Origins of the Vietnamese Nation* (*Ngũ ôn g’ôc dân tộc Việt Nam*) (1950 [1946]), a work which was reprinted in another one of Đào Duy Anh’s books, his *The Ancient History of Vietnam* (*Lịch sử cổ đại Việt Nam*) (2005 [1955]). Meanwhile, the idea that the Lạc Việt were the ancestors of the Zhuang is of even more recent origin, having only been popularized in the last 15 years.

In order to understand how these ideas have emerged in modern times, we need to examine how new perspectives have moved across time, space and communities, and in the process, have shaped the sense of time and space that the Vietnamese and Zhuang communities now possess about themselves. We will begin by investigating how new perspectives about the past that French scholars introduced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led Đào Duy Anh to consider that the Lạc Việt were the ancestors of the Vietnamese, before moving on to see how Chinese scholars were

likewise influenced by Western scholarship in the early twentieth century, leading to intellectual developments that have ultimately culminated in the current claim that the Zhuang are descended from the Luoyue.

#### 6.4 The French Search for Việt Origins

As the area of what is today Vietnam gradually fell to French conquest in the second half of the nineteenth century, French scholars began to examine the land and its people, and one of the first issues that they sought to understand was the question of who the inhabitants of Vietnam were and where they originally came from. At that time, the term “Việt” was not in common usage. French scholars referred to the people whom we now call the Vietnamese as “Annamites,” following the Chinese practice of referring to the Vietnamese kingdom as An Nam/Annan. Meanwhile, the governing elite of the ruling Nguyễn Dynasty employed the term “Hán” to refer to the ethnic group that we now refer to as the Việt. Finally, in the twentieth century, as Vietnamese scholars became exposed to the Western concept of the nation, they variously referred to the inhabitants of their nation by using terms such as “Southern people” (Nam nhân 南人) or “Annam people” (người An Nam), before finally employing the term “Việt” (người Việt) in the post-colonial era.

That a firmly established term for the inhabitants of the area of what we today call Vietnam was not in place in the nineteenth century is a reflection of the different historical concerns of the French and Vietnamese educated elites at that time (Goscha 2012). Whereas the concepts of “nation” and “race” were new ideas of increasing concern to Europeans in the nineteenth century, the Vietnamese ruling elite had long emphasized the importance of a political genealogy that connected the ruling dynasty through a line of orthodox political succession to the mythical (Chinese) emperor, Th`ân Nông/Shennong. This information about Th`ân Nông/Shennong and his earliest successors was first recorded in works like the fifteenth-century *Complete Book*, that is, thousands of years after the time when these early rulers supposedly lived. This historical gap raises questions about the veracity of early Vietnamese historical sources, and as French scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries examined the Vietnamese past, they understandably harbored doubts about the information they found. In response, these scholars turned their attention to what could be learned from earlier Chinese sources. In so doing, these scholars introduced new ideas and perspectives as they approached the past with new interests, namely with a concern to discover the national origins of the Vietnamese.

Early Chinese sources contain a variety of names to refer to different groups of people in the far south of the world as it was known to them, such as Mãn Việt/Minyue 閩越, Âu Việt/Ouyue 甌越, Đông Âu/Dong’ou 東甌, Tây Âu/Xi’ou 西甌, and Lạc Việt/Luoyue. These names referred to various places, and the peoples who inhabited them, in an area that stretched from what is now Zhejiang Province to the northern part of Vietnam. These terms share certain characters, such as “Việt/yue” 越 or “âu/ou” 甌, and it is possible to roughly associate these different terms with separate geographical

areas, with Lạc Việt/Luoyue being the kingdom that was closest to the Red River Delta.

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, in early Chinese sources these various groups are sometimes collectively referred to as the “Hundred Việt/Yue,” which suggests that the term “*việt/yue*” was a unifying term for these various groups of peoples. Based on all of this information, in the early twentieth century, French scholars Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918) and Léonard Arousseau (1888–1929) came up with a theory that in the final centuries of the BC period, “*việt/yue*” peoples had gradually migrated southward from the area of the Yangzi River Delta to the area of the Red River Delta and that in the process had established various subgroups along the way, with the Lạc Việt/Luoyue constituting the “*việt/yue*” group that had migrated the furthest to the south (Chavannes 1901: 418–419; Arousseau 1923: 245–264).

Arousseau also argued that there was a surname that linked the ancestors of the Lạc Việt/Luoyue with the ruling family of an ancient kingdom in the area of what is now Fujian Province, the kingdom of Mân Việt/Minyue. In his first-century-BC *Historical Records* (*Shiji* 史記), historian Sima Qian (145–86 BC) stated that the surname of the ruling family of Mân Việt/Minyue was Sô/Zou 騶. Some 500 years later, in the early fifth century AD, scholar-official Xu Guang 徐廣 (352–425) made a commentary of Sima Qian’s text and claimed that the name Sô/Zou was sometimes written as Lạc/Luo 駱 (Sima 91 BC). For Arousseau, this was sufficient evidence to declare that the rulers of the Lạc Việt/Luoyue kingdom, which he believed had been situated in the Red River Delta, were related to the ruling family of the kingdom of Mân Việt/Minyue, which Arousseau and others have all argued existed in the area of what is today Fujian Province (Arousseau 1923: 257). Arousseau thus employed this “evidence” to support his claim that the Lạc Việt/Luoyue had migrated into the region of the Red River Delta.

At the same time that this “Việt/Yue migration theory” was proposed, other French and European scholars were examining large bronze drums that were being discovered in the greater Red River Delta region (Cherry 2009). Some of these drums contained images of people in boats wearing feathered headdresses. These feathered headdresses were interpreted by some scholars to be a sign of a totemic belief (Finot 1935: 285). Meanwhile, French explorer and travel guide author Claudius Madrolle (1870–1949) built on the Việt/Yue migration theory and the imagery on bronze drums to argue that the original Lạc/Luo people had been a seafaring people who had migrated from the area of Fujian Province to the Red River Delta. Believing that the rulers of the Lạc Việt/Luoyue kingdom in the Red River Delta must have been related to the ruling elite of Fujian, as Arousseau had argued, through a discussion of the seafaring traditions of people from Fujian and an ethnographic discussion of coastal communities in Vietnam, Madrolle argued that the people with the surname of Lạc/Luo must have migrated to the Red River Delta by boat (Madrolle 1937: 315–16).

## 6.5 Đào Duy Anh Links the Lạc Việt With the Vietnamese

While French scholars, therefore, wrote about an ancient kingdom called Lạc Việt/Luoyue and claimed that the ruling family was surnamed Lạc/Luo, they did not use the term “Lạc Việt” to refer to the ancestors of the Vietnamese. In the 1940s and 1950s, however, that is exactly what historian Đào Duy Anh did. In particular, Đào Duy Anh synthesized this information that had been introduced by French scholars such as Arousseau and Madrolle and argued that the Lạc Việt were the direct ancestors of the Vietnamese and that they had originally come from the area of Fujian Province. In making this argument, Đào Duy Anh acknowledged that the term “Lạc Việt” was not used in premodern Vietnamese sources. However, he noted, and as we have seen above, that the term “Lạc” did appear in some early Chinese sources where it possibly referred to the area of what is now Vietnam (Anh 2005: 50).

Based on that fact, as well as on the ideas that French scholars had proposed, Đào Duy Anh imagined a scenario where the ancient Lạc Việt were fishermen who made use of the seasonal winds to sail along the coast from their homeland in the area of present-day Fujian Province to as far to the southwest as the area of what is now Vietnam. As they did so, Đào Duy Anh argued that they would observe the flight patterns of a certain type of bird called a “Lạc” bird. According to Đào Duy Anh, these fishermen then established the Lạc bird as their totem and began to wear feathered headdresses and to paint the bird’s image on their boats. Eventually, some of these men settled in the area of what is today Vietnam, and there they also carved images of the Lạc bird on bronze drums (Anh 2005: 52–53).

Đào Duy Anh’s career as an historian was cut short in the late 1950s as he ran afoul of the Communist Party authorities by supporting a movement that critiqued government policies in what is known as the Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm Affair. Đào Duy Anh was demoted and spent the rest of his career engaged in more practical forms of historical work, such as compiling a work on Vietnamese historical geography. His assertion that the Lạc Việt were the ancestors of the Vietnamese, however, came to be accepted and has been mentioned in many official books on Vietnamese history, from the first of a two-volume *History of Vietnam (Lịch sử Việt Nam)* published in 1971 (Ủy ban khoa học xã hội Việt Nam) to a fifteen-volume *History of Vietnam* published in 2017 (Viện Sử học). Over this same period, some scholars have challenged some of the details of Đào Duy Anh’s argument, but they have nonetheless accepted his claim that the Lạc Việt were the ancestors of the Vietnamese.

For instance, some scholars have questioned Đào Duy Anh’s assertion that the totem of the Lạc Việt was a bird by pointing out that when the term “*lac/luo*” is used in ancient Chinese texts in contexts other than to refer to the “Lạc Việt/Luoyue,” it usually refers to a horse rather than a bird (Kiều 2009: 16). In particular, these scholars note that the term “*lac/luo*” in “Lạc Việt/Luoyue” is usually recorded in early Chinese sources by either the character 雉 or the character 駱 and that only the first of these two characters has the meaning of a bird. Meanwhile, both characters can refer to a horse, and that is usually how we can find these characters used in

ancient Chinese texts, such as in the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經), one of the earliest Chinese texts.

Following this line of reasoning, other scholars have argued that we cannot determine the meaning of “Lạc” based on the meaning of the Chinese characters used for that term. Instead, they argue that those characters were used to transcribe a non-Chinese term and that we, therefore, have to look at languages in Vietnam to determine the origins of the term. For instance, Nguyễn Kim Thân and Vương Lộc asserted in a 1974 article that the word “Lạc” in “Lạc Việt” was a Chinese transcription for the Vietnamese word for water, “*nu’oc*.” According to these two scholars, the term “Lạc/Luo people” in the *Annotated Classic of Waterways*, therefore, refers to dwellers in “water” regions, living on wet-rice cultivation and fishery, that “our ancestors called themselves or were called ‘water (related) people’” and that the term Lạc Việt means a component of the Hundred Việt/Yue community “residing in association with water” (Thần and Lộc 1974: 134–41).

While such debates about the exact meaning of the term “*lac*” continue today, the basic idea that Đào Duy Anh put forth—that the Lạc Việt were the ancestors of the Vietnamese—has been accepted in Vietnam and is by now largely unquestioned. It is, however, an idea of relatively recent origin. It is only with the work of French scholars in the first half of the twentieth century and Đào Duy Anh’s synthesis of that scholarship at midcentury that this idea came into being. Meanwhile, in China during that same period, a similar process of crafting the ancient origins of the Zhuang also took place. As was the case with Đào Duy Anh in Vietnam, there was one scholar who took the lead in developing ideas about Zhuang history, a Zhuang scholar by the name of Huang Xianfan.

## 6.6 A Frenchman’s Search for Chinese Origins

Just as it was the case that the ideas of foreign scholars influenced the way that Vietnamese in the early twentieth century thought about their past, so was it the case that the work of foreign scholars affected the way that Chinese thought about their past in that same period as well, including the pasts of the various ethnic groups that inhabit the area of what is today China. Here, the work of a French Sinologist by the name of Albert Étienne Jean-Baptiste Terrien de Lacouperie (1844–1894) was particularly important. In a series of writings that he published in the 1880s and 1890s, Lacouperie developed a novel interpretation of ancient Chinese history. Countering the established view at that time that Chinese civilization had developed separately from other parts of the world, Lacouperie argued that in distant antiquity certain tribes from Mesopotamia had migrated to China and mixed with the less culturally advanced indigenous inhabitants of that land (Lacouperie 1880, 1885 and 1892).

One such group, according to Lacouperie, was the ancestors of the people that we today refer to as the Zhuang. That said, just as there was no clear sense of a “Việt” identity when French scholars in the nineteenth century began to search for the origins

of the people that we today refer to as the Vietnamese, so was there no clear sense of a Zhuang identity in China when the first Western scholars began to research the past of peoples whom we today refer to as Zhuang. What Western scholars did recognize was that there was a common language family that encompassed languages like Thai, Lao, and Shan, or what we today refer to as Tai-Kadai languages, and certain scholars attempted to determine the history of the speakers of languages in this family. Lacouperie himself was one of the earliest to do so. In his writings in the 1880s and 1890s, he referred to both Tai and Shan peoples and viewed each as original inhabitants of the area of China who then intermixed with “early Chinese immigrants” (Lacouperie 1892: 22) whom Lacouperie defined as “the Ugro-Altaiic Bak families who came from Western Asia some twenty-three centuries B.C., under the conduct of men of high culture, acquainted, through their neighbours the Susians, with the civilization which emanated from Babylonia” (Lacouperie 1885: xxix). These ideas were repeated by later scholars, such as American missionary William Clifton Dodd (1857–1919) in his influential 1923 work, *The Tai Race: Elder Brother of the Chinese* (Dodd 1923).

While such a view of ancient history differed dramatically from what had long been recorded in Chinese sources, it was adopted and promoted by some Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century. In particular, this view of the past was adopted by certain anti-Manchu revolutionaries during the final years of Qing Dynasty rule. These men were inspired by Lacouperie’s argument, as they felt that it pointed to an ancient equivalence between “the West” and China and that this offered the hope that under a different political regime, China could develop and re-establish its equivalence with the West. However, in the years of the Chinese Republic following the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, China struggled not only to gain economic and technological parity with the West but to fend off infringements of its sovereignty by both Western countries and Japan. With these events, Lacouperie’s Sino-Babylonian interpretation of the past gradually fell out of favor (Hon 2010).

## 6.7 Huang Xianfan and an Ancient Zhuang Kingdom

Nonetheless, some of the fundamental concepts that Lacouperie and other Western scholars introduced to Chinese intellectuals continued to influence their scholarship. In particular, the interest of Western scholars in identifying “races” and their attribution of racial and historical change to migration were two new elements that took hold in Chinese scholarship. In the 1930s, for instance, historian Xu Songshi 徐松石 (1900–1999) tried to associate ancient place names in southern China with terms in different languages spoken by people in the region and in doing so argued that many of the place names in areas like Guangxi Province were Zhuang in origin and that this signified that the Zhuang had been one of the earliest migrants into the region (Wiens 1954: 272, Xu 1939: 79–80). Meanwhile, in 1959, anthropologist and sociologist Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 (1910–2005), following the general outline of the

“Việt/Yue migration theory” developed by Chavannes and Aurousseau, argued that the Zhuang were part of these Việt/Yue migrations and that in the first millennium BC they had migrated from the area of what is now Zhejiang Province to the area of Guangxi Province. In the same year, scholar Su Guanchang 粟冠昌 (1923–2007) offered a different view, arguing that the Zhuang are a mixture of indigenous peoples with others who had migrated in ancient times from the area of what is today Sichuan Province (Xu and Wei 2008: 116).

Fei Xiaotong and Su Guangchang produced their writings at a critical time for knowledge production about the Zhuang. For reasons that are too complex to address here, the Chinese Communist Party decided in the 1950s to create an autonomous region for the Zhuang in Guangxi Province. This was part of a larger policy of granting limited autonomy to different ethnic groups. In the case of the Zhuang, however, this process was complicated by the fact that before the 1950s there had not been a strong sense of a Zhuang identity. As such, the creation of the Zhuang Autonomous Region was accompanied by an effort to produce knowledge about the Zhuang to educate both Han Chinese and the Zhuang themselves about the supposed long history of this ethnic group (Kaup 2000). Fei Xiaotong and Su Guangchang both contributed to this process of “nationality building.” However, in the 1950s an extremely significant contribution to this project was made by a Zhuang scholar by the name of Huang Xianfan 黃現璠 (1899–1982).

Huang Xianfan was the first person of Zhuang ethnicity to complete a university education in China. He studied history at Peking University in the 1920s and then went on to study at Tokyo Imperial University in Japan (Wu 2019: 139). In 1957, Huang Xianfan produced a history of the Zhuang (Huang 1957). In this work, he argued that in the first millennium BC, the Zhuang established a kingdom called Tây Âu/Xi’ou 西甌, a name that is found in early Chinese sources. In calling this polity a kingdom, Huang went against the orthodox Marxist interpretation of Chinese history which was that all societies passed through a period of slave society before entering the stage of feudalism and that Chinese society reached the feudal stage before the minority societies did. In particular, Huang argued that the fact that the Qin Dynasty was recorded to have fought against Tây Âu/Xi’ou indicates that it was already a kingdom, and therefore, that it had already entered the stage of feudalism (Barlow 1987: 265–266). Just as Đào Duy Anh was criticized and demoted at this time for his support of the Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm movement, so was Huang Xianfan forcefully criticized for his views on the Zhuang past and was labeled a “rightist” and accused of promoting “local nationalism” (Wu 2019: 145). Nonetheless, just as Đào Duy Anh’s association of the Việt with the Lạc Việt of antiquity endured, so did Huang Xianfan’s linking of the Zhuang with the ancient kingdom of Tây Âu/Xi’ou continue to be accepted for many years, until quite recently.

## 6.8 Su Bingqi and Lạc Việt/Luoyue as a Zhuang Regional State

In the past decade, an effort has emerged in Chinese historical scholarship to identify the Zhuang with the Lạc Việt/Luoyue. Further, Chinese historians are employing an archaeological theory to grant the Lạc Việt/Luoyue a new level of prominence in the early history of the region. The archaeological theory in question comes from the late Su Bingqi 苏秉琦 (1909–1997), the leading Chinese archaeological theorist in the second half of the twentieth century. In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese scholars assumed that “Chinese civilization” first emerged in the area of the Yellow River valley and then dispersed outward. By the 1970s, however, numerous archaeological findings from areas surrounding this supposed cultural center led Chinese scholars to rethink the early development of complex societies in the region. Su Bingqi led the charge and in 1981 proposed a concept that he called “regional systems and local culture types” (*quxi leixing* 區系類型) to explain what we saw as evidence for coterminous societal developments in separate regions that interacted over time, and which eventually created a larger cultural unity (Cowen and Murowchick 2014: 783; Hein 2016: 35). This concept was widely adopted by archaeologists, and it closely mirrored official political views of the ethnic makeup of China as a “single entity with multiple components” (*duoyuan yiti* 多元一體) (Hein 2016: 35).

In examining regional developments, Su Bingqi also developed the idea that regions passed through discernable stages of social and political development, from ancient states (*guguo* 古國) to regional states (*fangguo* 方國) to empires (*digu* 帝國) (Tao 1997: 34–35), with this final term indicating incorporation into the Chinese empire. Based on this theory, some scholars who research the early Lạc Việt/Luoyue have recently argued that the Lạc Việt/Luoyue inhabited a regional state, that is, a political entity that was more complex than an ancient state and which signified a stage of development in a larger historical process of the incorporation of regions beyond the Yellow River valley into the Chinese empire. Further, these same scholars claim that the Lạc Việt/Luoyue were the ancestors of the Zhuang.

Zheng Chaoxing, a researcher at the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum, made these arguments in a 2005 work entitled *Research on the Origins of Zhuang Civilization* (*Zhuangzu weming qiyuan yanjiu* 壯族文明起源研究) (Zheng 2005), as well as in a work that he published with scholar Tan Fang in 2006 entitled *Archaeological Research on Zhuang History and Culture* (*Zhuangzu lishi wenhua de kaoguxue yanjiu* 壯族歷史文化的考古學研究) (Zheng and Tan 2006). Then in 2013, scholar Liang Tingwang of the Central University for Nationalities (Zhongyang Minzu Daxue 中央民族大學) carried out a National Social Sciences Fund of China project on “An Examination of the Ancient Luoyue Regional State” (*Gu Luoyue fangguo kao* 古駱越方國考). In the years that followed Liang produced various articles on Lạc Việt/Luoyue as a regional state (Liang 2014, 2018), but his main contribution has been the publication in 2017 of a magnum opus on the topic, the two-volume *Research on the Regional State of Luoyue* (Liang 2017). Meanwhile, these works

have been accompanied by countless others that examine various aspects of Lạc Việt/Luoyue culture (for overviews, see Qin et al. 2015a, 2015b; Huang and Yang 2019; Yang and Huang 2019).

In making the argument that there was a Lạc Việt/Luoyue regional state that was created by the ancestors of the Zhuang, these scholars may seem to be vindicating Huang Xianfan's claim that the ancestors of the Zhuang had created a kingdom, Tây Âu/Xi'ou, before contact with the Chinese world. However, this new view of the past is essentially a continuation of the orthodox view that opposed Huang's "local nationalist" perspective, albeit in a new theoretical guise. In the 1950s, orthodox Chinese Marxist historians imagined a clear historical progression from slave societies to feudal societies, with the Han Chinese leading the way. Today, scholars like Zheng Chaoxiong and Liang Tingwang likewise envision a clear Sinocentric historical progression from ancient states to regional states to the Han Chinese Empire. In both of these scenarios, minority peoples play a subsidiary and subservient role in the creation of the Chinese empire.

That scholars feel the need to make this argument in a new form appears to be related to two factors. The first is the undeniable fact that over the past few decades numerous archaeological discoveries have been made in Guangxi Province demonstrating the existence in the past of complex societies. Such evidence makes it impossible to support the idea that this region was a slave society before contact with the Qin Dynasty Empire, as the arguments against Huang Xianfan's position in the 1950s claimed. At the same time, archaeological findings are too widespread to associate with a single kingdom, and as a result, the concept of a larger "regional state" allows scholars to associate a variety of artifacts with a single political entity.

At the same time, however, the decisions to declare that various archaeological materials and sites in the area belong to a single regional state and to label that single political entity as "Lạc Việt/Luoyue" have obvious political implications. While the ancient kingdom name of Tây Âu/Xi'ou that Huang Xianfan associated the ancestors of the Zhuang with is still mentioned and is now also referred to as a regional state, the term "Lạc Việt/Luoyue" has become the main term that is used to label the archaeological materials in the greater Guangxi area and that term is associated with the supposed ancient culture and polity of the Zhuang. Further, Chinese scholars are well aware that Đào Duy Anh associated the Lạc Việt/Luoyue with the Vietnamese, and they have published numerous articles that examine and critique Vietnamese writings about the Lạc Việt/Luoyue (Qin et al. 2015a: 96–97; Qin et al. 2015a, 91–97). As such, the use of the term "Lạc Việt/Luoyue" by Chinese scholars to refer to a regional state appears to be quite deliberate.

Indeed, Liang Tingwang makes a kind of veiled threat in the opening paragraph of his 2017 *Research on the Regional State of Luoyue* that appears to be directed at Vietnamese scholars. Using two historical terms that refer to the general area of what is now southern China and northern Vietnam, Nanhai 南海 (Southern Seas) and Lingnan 嶺南 (South of the Passes), Liang Tingwang states that "There are countries that, based on folk tales, say that the Nanhai was developed by their own 'First Emperor' (*dìyige Huangdi* 第一個皇帝) and that the Qin First Emperor 'invaded' Lingnan." Liang then goes on to assert, however, that

Historical records make clear that when it comes to political power in the southern part of China (Huanan 華南) in as early as the period of the Shang and Zhou dynasties [~1600 BC-256 BC], the ancestors of speakers of Zhuang-Dong languages established the regional states of Tây Âu/Xi'ou and Lạc Việt/Luoyue based on orders from the central dynasty, and that they developed and oversaw Lingnan and Nanhai, and opened the Maritime Silk Road. How can this glorious history be allowed to be destroyed?! (Liang 2017: 1).

While this issue of a possible political motive behind the promotion of Lạc Việt/Luoyue culture deserves detailed analysis, one motive is the desire to promote Lạc Việt/Luoyue culture for commercial purposes. As Huang Yan and Yi Qizhi of the Guangxi Teachers Education University's Guangxi Economic Management Cadre College recently wrote, there are various aspects of Lạc Việt culture that can be mobilized for cultural and folklore tourism, from Zhuang dances to Lạc Việt/Luoyue totem rituals (Huang and Yi 2017). Foremost among such cultural resources, however, are what are known as the Huashan Cliff Paintings (Huashan bihua 花山壁畫) or Huashan Stone Paintings (Huashan shihua 花山岩畫). Located along a tributary of the Zuo River (Zuojiang) in the Ningming District of Guangxi Province, are a series of ancient paintings on cliff walls that depict people and animals and which date from roughly the fifth century BC to the second century AD. Some of the imagery in the cliff paintings resembles the imagery on bronze drums from the same period.

In 2016, UNESCO officially declared the Huashan Cliff Paintings a World Heritage Site under the name of the “Zuojiang Huashan Rock Art Cultural Landscape.” On the Web site of the UNESCO World Heritage List, two of the criteria for the recognition of the Huashan Cliff Paintings as a World Heritage Site are listed, and they are, to quote:

Criterion (iii): The Zuojiang Huashan Rock Art Cultural Landscape, with its special combination of landscape and rock art, vividly conveys the vigorous spiritual and social life of the Luoyue people who lived along the Zuojiang River from the 5th century BCE to the 2nd century CE. It is now the only witness to the tradition.

Criterion (vi): The images of Zuojiang Huashan depicting drums and related elements are symbolic records directly associated with the bronze drum culture once widespread in the region. Today bronze drums are still respected as symbols of power in southern China (UNESCO 2020).

No mention is made here of the “Lạc Việt” and Vietnam. Nonetheless, some people in China do view Lạc Việt/Luoyue culture as transnational and have suggested ways to capitalize, literally, on its transnational history. In particular, Liang Fuxing, Chair of the Department of Ethnology and Tourism Economics in the College of Tourism at the Guilin University of Technology, and Luo Dan, a graduate student in the College of Tourism at Guilin University of Technology, have recently argued for the potential of establishing a “Sino-Vietnamese Luoyue cultural industry cooperation zone” (Zhong Yue Luoyue wenhua chanye hezuo qu 中越跨越文化產業合作區) to promote transnational cultural tourism focusing on the Lạc Việt/Luoyue as part of China's larger One Belt One Road Initiative (Liang and Luo 2016). In their proposal, these two authors envision that experts on Lạc Việt culture in Vietnam and China will collaborate on identifying Lạc Việt/Luoyue cultural sites and practices that can be employed to promote cultural tourism, and are seemingly unaware of how differently

Vietnamese and Chinese scholars view their respective society's relationship with the ancient Lạc Việt/Luoyue.

## 6.9 Conclusion

The above references to ideas concerning the Zhuang and the ancient Lạc Việt/Luoyue are meant to serve as “snapshots” of some issues that one can now find discussed in Chinese publications. There is a need for much more research before we can gain a solid sense of what is happening. While much of the scholarship in China has focused on the historical Lạc Việt/Luoyue and Lạc Việt/Luoyue culture, papers like the one above on promoting tourism and a recent MA thesis from Guangxi University on how information about the Lạc Việt/Luoyue has been disseminated on the Internet (Zhu 2017) indicate that the current promotion of the Lạc Việt/Luoyue as the ancestors of the Zhuang is much more than an academic discussion about ancient history. The same can be said about Đào Duy Anh's writings in the 1940s and 1950s that claimed ancestry for the Vietnamese from the Lạc Việt. The arguments that Đào Duy Anh made about the meaning of the character “Lạc” and the idea that this term was a surname of people who originated in Fujian province and then migrated to the Red River Delta by boat may strike a reader today as arcane, but they were closely linked to a larger project of nation-building, and the ideas Đào Duy Anh introduced became important elements in that nation-building project.

With that in mind, it would behoove us to look closely at what is happening in China today, for once again, historians and other scholars are engaged in what are seemingly arcane discussions about the past. However, as was the case in Vietnam some 70 years ago, those academic discussions about ancient history are closely linked to a state-supported identity formation project. In the case of Vietnam, we know that the efforts of Đào Duy Anh, and others in the years that followed, succeeded in inculcating in the population a strong sense of a Vietnamese identity that claims deep roots in antiquity. Will the efforts of Chinese scholars to do the same for the Zhuang succeed in similar ways? If so, what will that mean for Sino-Vietnamese relations or transnational commercial interactions? Will the current two “competing imagined ancestries” from the Lạc Việt/Luoyue somehow morph into a single “shared imagined ancestry” as certain people in the Chinese tourism industry hope? Or will Chinese efforts to create a competing story of Zhuang descent from the Lạc Việt/Luoyue introduce tensions into the Sino-Vietnamese relationship? These, and many other, questions all come to mind when we look at the ways that new perspectives about the past have transformed, and continue to transform, communities in Vietnam and China.

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# Chapter 7

## Ethics, Place, and Cosmopolitan Strands in Early Twentieth-Century Korean and Vietnamese Literati-Intellectuals' Writings



**Will Pore**

**Abstract** The question of whether there is ethics attached to place is fascinating and holds some persuasive power when considering East and Southeast Asia, besides other parts of the world. The persistence of nationalism, totalizing ideologies, and ethnic politics suggest the connection of “place” and “ethics” may still pertain not only in certain narrow, predictable ways, or only to certain geographic locales. In fact, in a longer and deeper inquiry into the cultural and civilizational background of East and Southeast Asia, it is possible to find not only ethics attached to a place, but also a concurrent presence of cosmopolitan features, that is, evidence that localities there in the past and still, as in Europe and elsewhere, possess universalist connections and a consciousness that are defining and resilient.

**Keywords** Korea · Vietnam · Asia · East Asia · Southeast Asia · Colonialism · Anti-colonialism · Literati · Intellectuals

### 7.1 Introduction

Asian interconnectedness has been a common trope for a long time, despite a lack of historical evidence in some instances and occasional countercurrents in recent times. It is easy to assume the reality of this trope, either continent-wide or on a regional basis, such as Benedict Anderson holds (1983), because of the proximity of Asian peoples and territories. In Asia as in other parts of the world, interconnections based on cultural factors, especially those involving linguistic and religious relationships, or those which might be termed networks, interactions, and sharing have long been assumed to have existed (Bisson 2016; Evans 2002). Where there are connections that have been broken, aspirations for their restoration have appeared from time to time.

Among recent considerations of Asian interconnections is that developed by Anthony Milner and Deborah Johnson in “The Idea of Asia,” in which they, like

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some others before, take Japan, Korea, and Vietnam's search in the past for a "spiritual homeland" to have been a kind of transregional connection building or civilizational bonding (2001). Milner and Johnson go on to suggest that a preexisting and deeply held idea of Asian interconnectedness such as that commonly assumed to have existed in the past was essentially the basis of the formal unity created by the nations of Southeast Asia in the mid-twentieth century, which is still in process and conceptually valued (3, 11).

Asian interconnections have been variously dealt with and occasionally even disputed in terms of flows, border crossings, breaks, movements, and "fluidities." One view that disputes interconnectedness by regarding it as less influential is that developed by Victor Lieberman which focuses on Southeast Asia. This counterview holds that Asian geopolitical boundaries have actually been relatively firm and regional flows limited, thus precluding or diminishing the effects of interconnectedness or relationships. Lieberman accepts that change, such as the kind interconnectivity could plausibly have led to, occurred, but in his view the resulting changes were due to autonomous and convergent forces, thus strengthening local developments (2009).

Aligning with Lieberman through an emphasis on a stable locality, but not specifically with reference to Asia, is the fascinating approach to connectivity developed by Jeff Milpas. In this approach, besides its predominately positive image in the minds of many, the concept of a homeland can and has, on the contrary, been tied to ideas of loss, longing, and nostalgia, sentiments often expressed in East and Southeast Asian anti-colonial activists' writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More recently, in a similar vein in the humanities, the sentimentality that "homeland" can evoke has been pursued in Salman Rushdie's semibiographical fiction (1991). Rushdie's work on "imaginary homelands" inventively suggests that "home" can also be viewed and reinforced productively through displacement and instability, a feature that is common in Asian anti-colonial writing. In this way, homeland implies a complex historical connection in which there is a shared concept of the past that has crucial ties to memory and the land.

In "Is There an Ethics of Place?," Jeff Malpas, observes how place, like homeland, is a formative, elemental concept with ties to ethics through a set of "evaluative commitments" (2012, 2). While Milpas acknowledges the reactionary, exclusionary, and related problematic tendencies that can arise from attachment to place, extending to exclusion of the other and the possibility of violence, he ably promotes the commitment to place as a central and productive human endeavor. Along the way, Milpas further enhances his argument for the benign relevance of place through the present-day attention to environmentalism and sustainability, community development and regeneration, indigenous politics, and reconciliation (7).

One of Milpas's more relevant and attention centering ideas is his focus on place as a source of ethics. He goes on to point out how place and ethics together, besides being connected, can also have cosmopolitan features, rather than being only locally derived phenomena. He defines cosmopolitanism as a very strong and pervasive source of a "proper" ethical and political life (2012, 6). Further refining his definition, Milpas elaborates on cosmopolitanism as "a mode of individual or social life that largely eschews any form of local, parochial, or nationalistic attachment" (6). With its urbane,

worldly, progressive, and stimulating intellectual connotations, cosmopolitanism by this definition, veers toward similarities to universalism, internationalism, globalism, and transnationalism. However, Milpas's meaning of cosmopolitanism conveys how a place might be not only a locus of positive values but also a facilitator of "a dialogue of civilizations." It is this feature that best conveys what best distinguishes his cosmopolitanism: a way for people to express their inclusion in civilization and its culture in a collective forum. Therefore, the assumption that the ethics associated with cosmopolitanism could be differently imagined, even opposite, of the ethics that are typically place-based emerges.

## 7.2 Whence Cosmopolitanism?

Cosmopolitanism is conceptually and linguistically a product of the West. It specifically emerges from ancient Greek and Roman sources in which ideas were expressed about how barbarians could become cosmopolites, that is, how they could be turned into Greeks or Romans, and, by extension, global citizens of the known world. Etymologically cosmopolitanism is of ancient Greek origin and was adopted into Latin through contact and the sharing of proximate knowledge. In discussions of the state system since Westphalia, Greece and its city-states get all of the attention as the earliest examples of how international relations arose and are now understood. However, it is Rome that offers a better model through its role as an ancient universal empire.

Rome accepted foreign peoples with relative ease, as long as they adapted to Roman culture and custom. The concept of cosmopolitanism that the Romans acquired from the Greeks included the idea that all human beings are of one race, equal in rights, and form one community. Diogenes had said of himself that he was both homeless and a citizen of the world. But it was the Roman Cicero who uniquely captured how *ethos* and *topos*—ethics and place—might be combined and could turn others into Roman, that is, world, citizens. Cicero stated that "[T]o proceed beyond the universal bond of our humanity there is the closer bond of belonging to the same people, tribe, and tongue" (1913, 57). This in turn led him to expand on what to the Romans was humanity. Humanity is the translation of the Latin *humanitas*, by which the Romans meant not just human society but all human culture and civilization. This extended meaning evolved into the Roman project of fitting non-Romans to the demands of the world city.

## 7.3 Cosmopolitanism in East and Southeast Asia?

Given that there may be a way that cosmopolitanism can be formed and coexist anywhere with ethics and place, its presence in Asia's past can be speculatively investigated. Pursuant to what Milner and Johnson write, the area that I will refer

to as the Sinographic sphere, with China as its center and encompassing Korea and Vietnam, and, to an extent, Japan and adjacent polities offers a plausible area for cosmopolitanism to appear. This sphere had not only connectivity but, based on Milpas's definition, could have ideally developed cosmopolitan features. China as the core civilization of the sphere offered a preeminent "place." Through the sphere's common usage of the Chinese script, a foundational outline of the sphere's civilization and allied culture, including ethics, was created and variously acquired, participated in, and aspired to in outlying states. These forms of Chinese civilization and culture in Korea and Vietnam were not perfect reproductions and Chinese hegemony was at times vigorously contested, but most often an arrangement was found that worked. In the outlying states, a certain understanding resulted, prevailed, and, to an extent, has left an observable imprint that can still be traced.

As evidence of this, the Vietnam scholar Keith Taylor remarks on the China-Vietnam relationship in this way:

For centuries, Vietnamese leaders have looked to China as a source of civilization, for ideas about how to organize society, how to establish hierarchy, how to govern, how to write poetry, how to deal with non-Sinic foreigners. Despite the colonial and post-colonial uproars and the cultural and epistemological revolutions that have occurred in recent times, the Vietnamese and Chinese leaders now eye one another as old associates who may not trust each other very much but still trust each other more than they trust others. They know each other better than they know others. They are comfortable with each other in ways they cannot be comfortable with others. This is not something that suddenly happened. It is based on centuries of learning to live as neighbors for better or worse (2015: 13).

Pre-twentieth-century thought that sprang from the Sinographic sphere helped to facilitate interconnectivity. That thought largely originally evolved from the "Three Teachings" (Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism). The first millennium of the common era in Korea and Vietnam probably presents the most promise for identifying a sense of connectivity and cosmopolitan strands. In both states, Buddhist universalism facilitated such awareness and it was a time of relative cultural diversity, linguistic change, and religious ferment. The aristocratic elite of Korea and Vietnam could alike be both cosmopolitan and truly Korean and Vietnamese at the same time. The extension of the syncretic unity of the "Three Teachings" and the derived, much broader, secular "Chinese Learning" into areas outside of China was possible primarily because of the "interliterate Sinographic sphere," the shared scriptural and textual tradition dependent on Chinese writing (Son 2019). Each of the states outlying China differed in the extent to which they accepted and followed the Three Teachings due to geography, the societal group supporting them, and the consequences of "divergent and historically contingent social, economic, and political circumstances" (Elman, Duncan, and Ooms 2002: 3).

The fact that the states outside of China had self-consciously longstanding, culturally and linguistically diverse societies, however, meant that the local was always inescapable. The somewhat standardized synthesis of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism which conveyed the influence, however variously felt, of the imagined China "homeland" also kept societies in each of the states connected through "Chinese Learning," as a product of the Sinographic sphere which, due to its written nature

and more secular appeal, facilitated the incorporation and epitomization of a model civilization and its culture well into the early twentieth century.

## 7.4 Crisis

In Korea and Vietnam before 1900 and intensifying up to about 1920, the estimation of China and all things connected to it among the traditionally learned, and especially a concerned stratum of the literati, underwent critical changes ranging from rejection to reinvention. These changes prompted a search into submerged indigenous sources of ethics, identity, myth, literature, spirituality, knowledge, and values. However, local opinion of China and “Chinese Learning” declined further and further as the century progressed. These changes occurred and intensified in large part due to the direct colonial domination of Korea and Vietnam by Japan and France. But even long before colonization, China and its civilization had already been variously undergoing a reimagination and, integration of *local* sources of culture and thought had been initiated (Lee 1984: 330–338).

With the crises resulting from foreign domination in Korea and Vietnam, expressions in each state of loss, longing, and nostalgia imagined or real, and the eliciting of relations between ethics and place, as Milpas contends, took place. In addition, in a number of ways, various forms of modernity appeared among the responses to the changes and challenges, including nationalism, Western science, Social Darwinism, Marxism, materialism, and other developments derived from abroad. These also had stimulated literati-intellectuals to summon local historical and cultural sources in Korea and Vietnam as means of confronting the colonial crisis. The idea of Sinographic interconnectivity continued to weaken and the estimation of the local and disconnection gained strength. Others turned their attention even much farther to the wider world.

Under duress during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Korea and Vietnam, a shifting, multi-layered, mosaic-like political and intellectual atmosphere took form. In some ways, the atmosphere of this new milieu was similar to that of the Sinographic sphere, but with wider horizons. Types of this Redfieldian perspective can be found in the works of two representative late nineteenth and early twentieth-century literati-intellectuals: one from Korea, Pak Ŭnsik (1859-1925), and one from Vietnam, Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940), who each wrote at length about their states’ colonization and the changes within them. The University of Chicago-trained anthropologist Robert Redfield (1897-1958) had pioneered interdisciplinary anthropological studies which moved them away from narrowly focused, disconnected, typically village studies, to syntheses that place them in a wider historical understanding of civilization. Observation of Pak and Phan’s responses to colonialism may, therefore, be termed Redfieldian because, as literati who had inhabited the cosmopolitan-like Sinographic sphere in its waning stage, in combination with a strong attachment to their individual homelands, led them to the realization that their local ethics countenanced universal human ethics that could be the basis for transforming life and sharing values worldwide. While there were those in Korea and Vietnam who could be dismissive of China and its assumed cosmopolitanism because of its otherness, it had, even so, transformed their states in the past and might still possibly serve as an inspirational model and source of

ethics. Colonialism therefore intrusively provided a new forum with a modernist “dialogue of civilizations” to take place.

## 7.5 Pak Ŭnsik and Phan Bội Châu

Both protagonists, Pak Ŭnsik and Phan Bội Châu, excerpts of whose works are presented here, are well regarded today in their respective states for their anti-colonial activism and the works they produced in support of that effort. Among their several similarities, they both moved about in other parts of Asia, made contacts with a variety of people, and encountered new ideas from various sources. Interestingly their thinking often converged, even though they never met or corresponded. Some present-day historians regard Pak’s advocacy of the restoration of Confucianism along with a reassertion of Korea’s indigenous past as one of the varied “nationalist” efforts of the time to assert Korean dignity and sovereignty (Duncan 2002: 442–446). In Vietnam, Phan is today similarly regarded by prominent historians (Chương 1967). In truth, however, the most accurate description of the general literati attitude toward foreign intrusions in the past and at this time would have been indifference; it was also not uncommon for them to be collaborators. These two, however, were not only vehement anti-colonial polemicists but also paradoxically pro-imperial China scholarly traditionalists while being innovative thinkers. They never completely rejected the heritage of the Sinographic sphere and yet their writings also often concern the localized, romantically imagined, mythic, heroically militant pasts of their states. In addition, they derived inspiration from divergent foreign figures, ideas, and events. In these respects, they were undoubtedly influenced primarily by Liang Qichao’s similarly themed works and experience. Like Liang, Pak and Phan often regarded their states’ pasts, and the heroic figures and events in them, as the sources of their people’s “national essence,” “national character” or “national soul.” They alike assigned the origin of these national essentia to ancient ethnic roots.

## 7.6 Views from Korea and Vietnam

The following excerpts from Pak Ŭnsik and Phan Bội Châu’s writings present their thought in three categories: (1) China as the imagined homeland and its cosmopolitanism; (2) ethnic and cultural cohesion; importance of locality; emphasis on place, belonging, and self-identity; separation from the imagined and real homeland (3) the future and creative imagining of new connections and cosmopolitanism.

### 7.6.1 *Place: Within the Sinographic Sphere*

While Pak and Phan often early in their lives wrote at some length about China and its civilization in a mostly positive way, they could strongly inveigh against certain aspects of it as well. They show no animosity toward well-established expressions derived from Chinese civilization in Korea and Vietnam, such as traditional observances and practices which had been present so long as to have become assimilated. as a humanistic and civilizationally advanced state, as a state on which their own states had been dependent in various ways, as a place with which they shared geography, history, and impressive cultural heritage, as vast, as world renown, as possessing a people with admirable qualities and great economic potential, but recently having suffered like Korea and Vietnam not necessarily from imperialism alone but from self-inflicted oppression and the disgrace of foreign occupation, as a great empire that had lost its former glory and become powerless are among their several mostly complementary but at times halting statements.

Although Pak Ŭnsik was more constrained than Phan Bội Châu in his estimation of China, he wrote compellingly of Korea's place in the Sinographic sphere in his *The Agony of Korean History* (*Han'guk t'ongsa* 韓國痛史) of 1915. There he states that beginning from long before the world had continuously been governed by the common virtue of The Great Plan (*Hongfan* 洪範), a term found in a passage in the Confucian classic the *Venerated Documents* (*Shangeshu* 尚書) all the sages of "our state" and any other place within the East and North Seas, Pak writes, have been in agreement on the rightness of the principles in that work. He goes on to directly connect the teachings in The Great Plan to the history, beliefs, and spirit of Korea. But he also knew of the contingency of more recent events in the wider world. Between 1908 and 1911, Pak wrote that he was aware of and troubled by global changes. "[T]here are," he writes, "thousands of incidents and a myriad of transformations that are taking place in the world." (Pak 1975: Volume 2, 360).

Phan valued Vietnam's inclusion in the Sinographic sphere to an even degree than Pak did. As an example of this, in his *Inquiry into Vietnamese History* (*Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* 越南國史考) of 1909, he expresses this inclusion in mainly cultural terms but with a pronounced nostalgic as well as political overtone. China provided a lineage and a heritage he writes that had a positive effect on the intellectual development of the Vietnamese people, besides being their place of origination (Phan 1990: 503). Then in *The History of the Loss of Vietnam* (*Việt Nam vong quốc sử* 越南亡國史), Phan writes that it is the Vietnamese people's received knowledge from China and the *principle* (*lẽ* 理) embedded in that knowledge, as understood in Confucianism, which has guided them (Phan 1990: 12). Yet at this time he was clearly attuned to events in the rest of the world. In his *Inquiry into Vietnamese History*, Phan equates the spirit of the Vietnamese with what he understands were the comparable essences of Europe and Japan. He writes that "We Vietnamese indeed have a social ethic just as Europe and a national spirit like Japan's *Yamato damashii* [Yamato spirit]. It would not be a problem for us to be like Japan or England" (Phan 1990: 503).

### 7.6.2 *The Local: What is Ours and Reiteration of “Place”*

In an article, he wrote for *Friends of the West Journal* (*Sōyu hakpo* 西友學報) in 1907, Pak asserts a specific ethnic-based Korean “we-group” and its superiority. Although his use of the stock terms “our Korean people/race” (*a Han chong* 我韓種), “my/our fellow countrymen” (*a tong p’o* 我同胞), “my/our people” (*o in* 吾人), “our people/citizens” (*a min* 我民), “my/our state” (*a guk* 我國) and “our Korea” (*a Tae Han* 我大韓) are not unique to this work and borrow or copy usages found elsewhere during which Korea was within the Sinographic sphere, they suitably evince a Korean separateness and self-identity. In other selections from the same work showing Pak’s separation of the foreign and the indigenous, Korea’s third “other,” an undifferentiated West, in addition to China and Japan, becomes one of his targets (Pak 1920: 509). Pak’s comments suggest that Japan’s forced method of applying unfamiliar, Western forms and practices in Korea has induced suspicions in the oppressed population of Japan’s many manifestations of otherness that further separates it from the Sinographic sphere.

Many reports generated by Japanese military authorities allow some further insight into the Korean political situation. One report dated February 26, 1911, following the formal annexation the previous August, assessed the mood of the Korean population and attempted to rationalize the annexation. The topic of this report is anti-Japanese activities committed by Koreans, a subject on which it provides considerable detail. Besides a concern for violent acts, the report takes note of expressions of derision and ridicule directed by Koreans toward the Japanese and concern for international opinion. In this report, the Japanese authorities had come to sense a need not only to appease Korean public opinion but also to control popular opinion. In specific areas of Korea, groups identified as remnants of the Tonghak movement and *ũibyōng* forces were mentioned by the authorities as sources of potential trouble because of their past activities. The rationalization of the annexation attached to the end of the report states that in effect Japan was responsible for bringing about Korea’s independence, after three hundred years of Qing domination. Finally, the report adds that Japan had, in fact, been insuring Korea’s independence during the last ten years and wished to continue to do so into the future (*Kanjin no haini kōini kansuru hōkoku no ken* 1907).

In 1907 Phan wrote in a portion of *The New Vietnam* (*Tân Việt Nam* 新越南) a short statement in which he identifies the Vietnamese as a “we-group,” and, like Pak, uses the occasion to assert his nation’s uniqueness if not superiority (Phan 1990: 448). This he does through language usages, found not in this work alone, which reveal a modernizing trend in the modified, non-classical Chinese writing style he uses. The following are examples of how Phan elicits the Vietnamese “we” group in various places in this and some other works: “my/our people” (*ngã nhân* 我人), “my/our countrymen/citizens” (*ngã quốc nhân/dân* 我國人/民), “my/our state” (*ngã/[ư] quốc* 我/吾國), “my/our fellow countrymen” (*ngã đồng bào* 我同胞), “my/our Vietnam” (*ngã Việt Nam* 我越南) and “my/our elders” (*ngã phụ huynh* 我父兄).

Phan’s approach to the subject of what is foreign and indigenous is, however, presented in a very persuasively rhetorical way. Beginning by quoting the fearful

words of previous Vietnamese traditional scholars who contemplated the consequences of the encroachment of the West upon their state, Phan suggests that that event was part of an unavoidable worldwide phenomenon. Then, perhaps at this stage influenced by the works of Liang Qichao or other like Chinese writers, Phan discusses those events in terms of the Western pseudoscience of Social Darwinism, which he seems to have accepted. By extension, at places in his works, he understands the people of the world, due to this doctrine, to be divided into “fit” and “unfit” categories corresponding to strong and weak countries.

### 7.6.3 *Lost States*

The issue of what is variously termed lost or vanquished or extinguished states (*mangguk/vong quốc* 亡國) that so frequently appears in the works of Pak and Phan contrasts strongly with the Korean and Vietnamese autonomous heritages. The term “lost state” most likely entered their vocabularies as a result of their having read the works of Liang Qichao and other Chinese reformers such as Zou Rong and Zhang Bingling (Jensen 1997: 298 and 363 note 17). The combination of Chinese characters that form the term is ancient, but Liang, a contemporary of Pak and Phan, whom they both came to be acquainted with to varying degrees, in his use of that term and the nearly homologous “destruction of the state” (*mieguo* 滅國) dates from an essay Liang wrote in 1901 (Levenson 1953: 116). However, Pak and Phan’s self-blaming of their culture and themselves suggests that they may have perceived that such a past may have also cast an ominous shadow of intellectual and material impotence over the present.

In his 1915 work, *The Agony of Korean History*, Pak presents his fullest definition of what to him was the condition of a lost state. This work is emotionally charged but it also reveals that he had a wider view beyond his own state in that it indicates that he had knowledge of other states that shared the same fate. He is able thereby to establish broader causal relationships in interpreting Korea’s lost status:

In the case of the peoples of vanquished states, they are all alike. Whether the states are major or minor, all have experienced stages of advance and retreat, ascendancy and decline. They are all alike (Pak 1975: Vol. 2, 19).

In the preface to *The History of the Loss of Vietnam*, Phan quotes Liang Qichao to express what to him was one of the dismaying facts about colonization: the ignorance and apathy of a wider world in which the names, let alone the people and condition of non-Western states, colonized or not, are barely known. Throughout, he is accurately familiar with the major events leading to the loss of Vietnam (Phan 1990: 9–10). Then, in the preface to *The Misery of Losing Vietnam* (*Việt Nam vong quốc tâm* 越南亡國慘), Phan indicates that he had at the time of this writing come to understand the global influence of power and Social Darwinism and their role in creating lost states, in much the same way as Liang Qichao had earlier and as Pak Ũnsik eventually came to do. Further, in this work, Phan shows that he, like Pak, had a knowing grasp of

conditions in the rest of the world, in particular, that he knew of the existence of other “lost” states.

Phan too can at times heighten the appeal of his commentary with the injection of emotion on the loss of Vietnam and by adding familiarizing touches to his description of the political situation and his comprehension of universal values. More than being emotionally appealing familiarizations, however, Phan’s description indicates that he, more than Pak, understood the loss of the state to involve the Confucian priority of venerating ancestors. This is an approach he pursues in several places in *An Inquiry into Vietnamese History*. In the Introduction to this work, Phan creates the idea of a transgenerational unity composed of the Vietnamese ancestors, the family, and the state that forms a kind of ever-present, ever-living community. As he puts it:

Before one is born there are what are called ancestors and parents and that which follows after are called children and descendants, which extend into the future. In reality, all of these constitute a unity. Where does this body of ancestors and parents come from? Where do our descendants and posterity dwell? Having deeply thought this question through, is it not in our state (Phan 1990: 424)?

Also in his *An Inquiry into Vietnamese History*, still, in the context of state loss, Phan gives evidence that he had gained some knowledge about the elements composing a state that were derived from Western political theory. In a very concise statement, he reveals his comprehension of the existence of a community among lost states.

As to what goes into making a state a state, it is composed of sovereignty, people, and territory. When these three exist, there is a state. When these three are lost, it is not a state. When these three are confiscated by foreigners, then the state has been stolen. The state [of Vietnam] at this time having been given over to foreigners, is a stolen state among other stolen states (Phan 1990: 445).

To combat the unequal power from outside Vietnam, Phan, as did Pak, and Liang before, points to the need to preserve a “national spirit” (*quốc hồn* 國魂) as a potential source of strength for countering the *hauteur*, if not the actual power, inhering in imperialism.

### 7.6.4 *The Future: Creative Imagining and New Connections*

In 1911 in a dream-inspired work, Pak provided a vision for Korea and the world of the future. In this work, Pak would have the mythical Korean past serve as a template for the betterment of Korea and for the world:

Driven by imperialism, which has become a universal rule, the extinction of states and peoples is now called the expression of this century...The equalization of human rights worldwide must be implemented...If such as that can be dispersed equally throughout the whole world, there would be no greater legacy and there would be no higher glory (Pak 1975: Vol. 2, 305).

In the same work, he perspicaciously envisions tumultuous events occurring in Korea in the latter part of the twentieth century. Pak’s assessment that despite its

size Korea would disproportionately affect the world in the future approaches the prophetic. He also writes of hope for the future that will be arrived at in a way different from any previous. Accordingly, he writes that this new hope grew out of his belief that universal principles of justice will prevail and his expansive belief that the rest of the world fundamentally holds to those same principles.

In *The History of the Loss of Vietnam* in 1905, Phan poses this question: “Can it be that times will change?” (Phan 1990: 457). In his search for analogous events, his thought ranges over not only Vietnam’s but also Europe’s history. In doing so, he seems to be heartened by historical comparisons involving the rise and fall of states. Meanwhile, in *A New Vietnam* Phan similarly first brings up a problem faced by all of colonized Asia as a result of the encounter with the West. This problem is again one reflecting Social Darwinist prejudice by addressing “standards of civilization.” Rather than opposing this Western criterion, Phan is inclined to meet the standards that it sets. Because it is such a good defense and boldly optimistic statement of Phan’s aspirations for the future of Vietnam, several of the lines are worth attention:

If we want to rise to the level of civilization and partake of its essence, we must experience firsthand the urban life of other states... This will be so that we can take hold of the ramparts of civilization. If other states have taken a month to do so, it should not be difficult for us to attain it in two weeks. If other states have taken steps of a thousand *li*, we should not find it difficult to take steps of ten thousand *li*. At first, we will follow their lead and afterwards they will learn from us. The Japan of today is the Vietnam of tomorrow (Phan 1990: 454).

*An Inquiry into Vietnamese History*, another of his works from 1909, shows Phan building further on his prognostications and aspirations in *A New Vietnam*. Here Phan again displays some of his best literary talent:

Combining the strength and resources of our ten million people will allow us to achieve even greater strength. Uniting the wills of these ten million people will give us determination. Some decades into the future, or after one or two epochs [of twenty years], for us too, this much anticipated time will arrive. I have even greased the wheels of my chariot and prepared my horse in order to go to greet it (Phan 1990: 434).

## 7.7 Conclusion

The twentieth century was a disruptive time. The condition of losing connections to place and ethics, to tradition, of being manipulated by unfriendly state powers became increasingly common. In Asia, the thought and activities of Pak Ũnsik and Phan Bội Châu, through their works, are illustrative, and to an extent, predictive of events that occurred in their states and other parts of the world. Not only they but many people elsewhere experienced comparable, often traumatizing, circumstances. What they witnessed and what happened to them was like the experiences of many. While the local did lessen in importance, at the same time, events at the local level were often manifest worldwide. The cosmopolitan strands inherited from the Sinographic sphere helped to make it possible for some like Pak and Phan to cast their vision more broadly, and, though at first only haltingly, to accept foreign ideas, if not to

engage in intercultural dialogue. Given the harshness of colonialism, reconsideration of constructed differences, such as East and West, progressed slowly, but reciprocity, a concept found in the Sinographic sphere, did find occasional expression in the thought of enlightened, far-seeing persons like these. Indeed, in the places and in the forms it appeared, modernity may be better understood as a product of East-West reciprocity. In a similar way, the formation of genuine cosmopolitanism came about and may still be recognized in the East, and especially in Southeast Asia today, in the way that transcultural nationalities and identities formed and continue to exist.

On a large scale, the importance of individual nations has lessened as all nations became more interdependent. Connections have intensified. In the same way, the separation between the local and the global has narrowed to the extent that they are now equal realities. Internationalism has intensified and continues to do so. The local and the global coexist and increase in compatibility. In seeking solutions to local situations, appropriate ways and means can sometimes be obtained by observing comparable situations abroad. Cosmopolitanism on many levels has become the norm.

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