

Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau in Bronze Age Data and New Perception

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Abstract: Based on the archaeological records obtained from excavations, investigations, and test excavations at 87 Bronze Age sites in Dien Bien, Son La, and Lai Chau provinces, the authors initially reconstructed a pre- and proto-historic picture of the Northwest of Vietnam. The presence of four bronze drums and some bronze items of the Dong Son culture indicate that this area might have been part of the Tan Hung region in the period of Hung Kings - founders of the country. The authors have published the distinctive characteristics, artifacts, and dates of the Bronze Age sites in these three provinces to support research efforts by other domestic and foreign scientists.

Key words: Archaeology; Dien Bien; Son La; Lai Chau; Bronze Age; bronze drum; Dong Son culture; Hung Kings.

1. New perceptions

1.1. Archaeological sites

Until the present time, 87 archaeological sites have been identified in the three provinces of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau. A number of artifacts from the Bronze Age have been unearthed, proving that they had been used and probably on-site manufactured. However, most of them were accidentally found in the non-cultural deposits. All four Dong Son drums (Ban Thom, Da Do, Ban Beo and Ta Khoa) were retrieved underground without any items accompanied. A majority of other bronze items were also observed in the non-cultural deposits.

1.1.1. Residential sites

Stratigraphically, the thick and unambiguous cultural deposits are very scarce in this region. No site has ever been documented to expose any cultural deposit similar to

that of the Pre-Dong Son and Dong Son sites in the northern and north central plain and midland regions. For this reason, it is likely that people of the Bronze Age did not stay long in one open unsheltered place. Several cave sites also display not very thick and clear cultural deposits. Most of the cultural traces found in excavations and test-excavations in caves and open-air areas pertain to the period of Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age such as Doi Cao (Muong Lay), Huoi Le I, Huoi Le II and Pac Na (Tua Chua) in Dien Bien province; Ban Pho, Sap Viet (Bac Yen), Dan Lanh cave, Lan Mo rockshelter (Muong La), Dan Lon cave (Ma river), Pa Mang II (Thuan Chau) in Son La province; Na Khat Lum, Huoi Han (Muong Te), Nam Don, Nam Han, Nam Kha, Hat Hi, Hat Dau (Sin Ho), Ban So (Tan Uyen),

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Ta Vai I, Ban Xi, Ban Xanh, Ban On (Than Uyen) in Lai Chau province.

There were not many artifacts left behind at residential sites, sometimes only a dozen of sherds and some ground axes observed. Sometimes the cultural deposits are not apparent, suggesting a short-term residence. It is a real challenge to draw a strict line of demarcation between the upper and lower parts of a cultural deposit. Nevertheless, archaeologists were successful in their attempts to demarcate some cultural deposits of the Bronze Age at a depth of approximately 40 cm such as Pac Na, Dan Lanh cave, To I cave, Nam Kha and so on.

The existence of the cultural deposits has demonstrated human occupation of river terraces in the forms of building houses (such sites as Doi Cao, Go Nang Ua, Sap Viet), living in caves or rockshelters (like Nam Kha rockshelter, Dan Lon cave) and so on. It also proves that the dwelling type of ancient people in this period was diverse. They already knew how to build simple houses in the open to shelter from the rain and sun, but still took advantage of traditional occupation of caves and rockshelters.

The residential sites which expose evident cultural deposits at a depth of dozens of centimetres are usually located near rivers, streams or lowlands in valleys. This could be attributed to the fact that ancient people tried to find places with available sources of water for domestic use and farming.

1.1.2. Lithic workshops

The first stone workshop site was discovered by French archaeologist, Ms. Madeleine Colani in Ban Mon (Thuan Chau, Son La) in the region of Dien Bien,

Son La and Lai Chau in 1928. According to her account, there was evidence of grinding and sawing on lithic techniques, quadrangular and shouldered axes and bracelet fragments. Subsequently, a bronze drum was found in Ban Thom and a number of other artifacts were also found in this area. Given these artifacts, Ban Mon was possibly a small-scale workshop which could produce a small number of stone tools and ornaments.

The second lithic workshop site was discovered in Thoc Kim. At this site, archaeologists found stone bracelets and other items which were produced by using raw material and techniques identical to those in Hong Da workshop [17]. Such high-level techniques as grinding, sawing, drilling and polishing have been visible at this site [16, pp.9-17]. The Thoc Kim workshop possessed stone raw material and the method of bracelet production that fairly resembled those in Hong Da workshop in the confluence of Viet Tri (Phu Tho).

The third workshop site near Thoc Kim is located in the mountain of Cha Dai (also called as Doi Mo) close to the right bank of Da river, belonging to Chieng Sai commune, Yen Chau [18, pp.40-53]. These two bracelet-manufacturing workshops shared a common raw material: bedrock. Findings show that there was a complete process of bracelet manufacture in both Thoc Kim and Cha Dai: the rocks were flaked into flat disc-shape blanks, which were cursorily ground on one face to make it flat in preparation for chiseling and drilling to remove the bracelet cores, and finally polished meticulously.

The fourth lithic workshop site was newly discovered in Ta Vai I, Than Uyen

district, Lai Chau province. The presence of bracelets, bracelet blanks, cores, saws and grinding slabs here demonstrated that Ta Vai I workshop produced bracelets at a small scale.

As such, in the area of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau provinces, there existed lithic workshops manufacturing axes and bracelets. In our opinion, the scale of these workshops was not as big as those in Trang Kenh and Bai Tu. Most of their products might have been supplied to the locality. The workshops of Ban Mon, Thoc Kim and Cha Dai were all located close to rivers which were favourable for trading the finished products to other areas. At some workshops, a number of other artifacts have also been found such as bronze drums (Ban Mon), paring knives, bronze handles and potteries (Thoc Kim), indicating daily activities of ancient people at lithic sites. It is therefore more reasonable to call such places as workshop-sites.

1.1.3. Burials

Given the archaeological reports, Bronze Age burial practices have been identified in the Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau area.

Remains from the burial number 1 in Tham Khuong rockshelter, Tuan Giao district, Dien Bien province (excavated in 1974) suggested that the skull of which pertained to a mixed races of Australo-negroid and Mongoloid, the former being better represented [18, pp.40-43]. The grave goods included an item in the form of a bird's head used to cover the knife handle. Apart from that, a bronze knife handle was also retrieved. This is a Dong Son grave.

Another Dong Son burial was found at Cum Don site (Bac Yen, Son La),

containing bone remains and grave goods comprising one bronze axe and one earthen pot [9, p.76].

At the site of Da Do, Phu Ninh district, Son La, a late Dong Son burial was also identified, with grave goods consisting of a bronze vase and bone fragments [3, pp.69-70].

At the site of Nam Don, Sin Ho district, a burial with grave goods comprising coarse-grained bowls, pots and stone beads, as well as another pot burial with 8 lithic beads were identified. These graves all belong to the Bronze Age.

In 2014, a burial was found in Na Pat cave in Chieng Khoang commune, Quynh Nhai district, with skull remains and a lot of grave goods including four halberds, two bronze axes, a kind of shield with holes to string lanyard designed to protect one's chest and various precious-stone beads. This is also a Dong Son grave.

Through the Bronze Age burials in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau as mentioned above, it is possible for us to confirm the existence of Dong Son or post-Dong Son ones in this area by dating the grave goods.

Apart from types of sites presented above, at the site of Ban Kha (Than Uyen district) vestiges of two bronze furnaces were revealed in the 2010-2011 excavation season. A radiocarbon determination of samples collected inside the furnaces gave three dates 1310-1470-195 BP; 1330-195 BP and 1410-200 BP [10]. Ban Kha is also containing the late Neolithic-early Bronze Age tools. Nonetheless, these bronze furnaces were dated to the 7th – 8th centuries AD. Thus, it is necessary to carefully look into the possible associations between the

artifact collection of Ban Kha and these two furnaces.

1.2. Rule of site distribution

The 87 Bronze Age sites have been mapped despite difficulties in ascertaining their names and current administrative place names (the place names of provinces, districts and communes have been significantly changed due to the separation and integration of the administrative borders). Given the site distribution, we make the following comments:

1.2.1. Most of sites are distributed in Son La province (51 sites, accounting for 59% of all sites in the three provinces). It means that the Bronze Age sites are located in the lower land of the whole region. This might be related to agricultural production. There were larger areas of soil apt for cultivation, particularly rice, in Son La than Lai Chau. In the Bronze Age, the northern midland and plain were mostly populated as there were more land for rice growing. And the Bronze Age sites were concentrated here as a consequence.

1.2.2. The Da river played a particularly important role in the Late Neolithic – Early Bronze Age. A number of early Bronze Age sites have been found concentrated along the Da river in the land of Dien Bien (Tua Chua district) and Lai Chau (Sin Ho district). They were also visible along the Da river and its tributaries in the land of Son La. Several crucial sites where the Dong Son drums and other Dong Son items were exposed are located near the Da river. A large number of Dong Son and post-Dong Son sites, that is the late Bronze Age, have been identified in Son La.

The Ma river runs across Son La province and lies within the territory of

Song Ma district. This river is particularly important when we examine the relationship between Bronze Age sites found in its upper course and those of the pre-Dong Son and Dong Son culture in its lower course with a high-density distribution. Nevertheless, it seems that those found in Song Ma district, Son La, primarily fall into the period of Late Neolithic – Early Bronze Age. This raises a question that needs to be answered: what is the association between the brilliant development of the Dong Son culture in the lower course where the Ma river merges into the sea and that in the upper course of the Ma river? There are possibilities that these associations are not as significant as those in the regions of Da river and notably the Hong river. We have not found any typical Dong Son sites in Song Ma district which showed a direct relation with those in the region of Ma river in Thanh Hoa province.

1.3. Artifacts

The 87 Bronze Age sites in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau provinces have introduced a considerable quantity of artifacts. However, the number of artifacts found there is rather modest compared to contemporaneous ones found in the northern and north-central plain and midland areas. Most of the collected artifacts are found by chance in a non-cultural context, not from large-scale and standard archaeological excavations. We have classified these artifacts basing mainly on comparisons between them and their counterparts of the Bronze Age found in other regions.

1.3.1. The Dong Son artifacts

We began with the Dong Son artifacts as they were most distinctive from those in other periods.

First to mention is four Dong Son drums. They are all authentic according to the classification criteria of bronze-drum researchers [4]. Three of which have their forms intact, falling into the short-drum line, the last shows only the drumhead. The decoration on Ban Thom drum looks beautiful, sorted into group A, with patterns of 12-pointed stars, make-up dancers, two curved roof stilt houses and two others with round roof, flying birds, boats and so on [12]. Under a more detailed classification, they can be sorted into sub-group A2, more similar to the drums found in Mieu Mon and Pha Long. The drum from Da Do is decorated with a pattern of a 10-pointed star with peacock's feathers, flying birds and zigzags in between points. The Da Do drum can be put into group B, similar to Phu Duy, Thon Van, Tan Uoc drums and others. The drum from Ta Khoa is decorated with a 12-pointed star, peacock's feathers, make-up dancers, flying birds and boats. It can be sorted into group A like Ban Thom drum. The drum found in Ban Beo is left with only the drumhead decorated with a 12-pointed star, make-up dancers, flying birds and vestiges of 4 toad statues, which can be sorted into group C.

In addition to the four Dong Son drums found in Son La province, some other bronze items have been discovered in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau, namely square-heel pediform axes, round-heel pediform axes, paring knives, bronze spades, spearheads, knife handles and a lot of bronze halberd heads (as a result of the cultural exchange of the Dong Son culture).

It is likely that Dong Son potteries had been introduced into this area. The most represented item is a large-sized, 55cm high

jar found in Tham Puoc (Ta Khoa commune, Bac Yen, Son La). This jar bears some traits similar to that in Lang Ca (Phu Tho) which is also of big size. Such a big jar could be made only in the Dong Son phase when higher temperature kilns were available.

1.3.2. Pre-Dong Son artifacts

It seems easy to classify Dong Son artifacts while distinguishing them from the pre-Dong Son ones encountered difficulty. Some types of pre-Dong Son bronze axes and spears remained existed in the Dong Son phase, whereas there was no standard stratigraphies in this mountainous area for a distinction between layers of two periods. However, an original item found in Dong Dau culture called the bronze handle was found in Phu Yen, Son La.

In regard to lithics, the bracelets made of the same type of bedrock and techniques found in Thoc Kim, Cha Dai, Ta Vai I indicated an apparent and close association with the bracelet manufacturing workshop belonging to Phung Nguyen culture found in Hong Da (Phu Tho). Besides, it is probable that the two-piece stone mould found in Ta Vai I might be related to the stone-mould making technology of the Dong Dau culture, and that the cloth-beating pestle at Pu Pau might be associated with its counterparts of the Phung Nguyen culture.

It was suggested by scientists that some earthenwares share common traits with those of Phung Nguyen culture via decorative patterns represented by the incised potsherds with dotted line and concave-pressing motifs [17]. According to Chu Van Tan, pediform ceramic containers and potteries found in this area have some

traits similar to those of Trang Kenh or Phung Nguyen [18]: the pediform ceramic containers were in a horse-hoof shape with a short secondary hoof looking like those of Phung Nguyen. A big-sized potsherd recovered from the later-period layer in Ban Pho site (Ta Khoa, Yen Chau) displayed many traits that were owned by those of Trang Kenh. The difference between the two lies only in color: Ban Pho potsherds are red and have incised motifs, while those from Trang Kenh are dark-grey and plain. Some potsherds found in Sap Viet shared common materials, forms and motifs with those of Phung Nguyen in that they both had the circle impressed inside rim edge, parallel-line motif in the form of oblique straight lines and wave lines both inside and outside of rims.

In spite of the above, the presence of the items that are comparable with those of pre-Dong Son period remains not really obvious, thus it necessitates more evidences.

1.3.3. Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age artifacts

Up to now, there has been much dispute over the demarcation between the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age in addition to the matter whether the Phung Nguyen culture should be considered to be in Neolithic or Bronze Age.

Many sites in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau provinces presented wholly ground quadrangular and shouldered axes made by using late Neolithic grinding techniques. These axes were still seen over a long period of time in the Bronze Age, especially in its early stage. This phenomenon was best represented in the Phung Nguyen culture in which lithic artifacts were predominant with the emergence of bronze

strings, bronze fragments and verdigris as reliable signs of the early Bronze Age.

We temporarily sorted out those sites with quadrangular or shouldered axes as a criterion for the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age. Another criterion also taken into account is the introduction of pottery (usually potsherds). Using the polished lithic items and pottery as criteria for a division of periods is also a method that previous archaeologists adopted in their studies of Hang To I, Tham Hang, Na Lo, Pa Mang II [15, p.97], Huyen Doi cave, Hang Pong I [1, p.41], [2, p.42] and Dan Lanh cave [5, p.152].

Apart from that, other lithic tools widely seen from the Neolithic to Bronze Age such as pestles, grinding slabs and so on were also used as criteria.

The artifacts of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age are normally observed in the upper parts of the cultural deposit, while flaked tools are often seen in the lower parts. They are sometimes found separately. In addition, a small number of potsherds (about 10-20 sherds) are also recorded, which are usually made of coarse-grain and fired at a low temperature.

1.4. Date determination

1.4.1. Relative dates

Studies of the 87 Bronze Age archaeological sites initially demonstrated the existence of the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age evidenced by various sites, which were investigated and excavated, along with a large quantity of artifacts found accidentally. An apparent period of Dong Son culture in the region was also documented with the undeniable proofs of bronze drums and many other Dong Son items.

Between the early Bronze Age (generally called the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age) and the late Bronze Age is a transitional stage that we used to call it the pre-Dong Son period like Phung Nguyen, Dong Dau and Go Mun in the northern plain and midland. However, in the mountainous area of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau provinces, this transitional stage remains unclear and not convincingly proved by stratigraphy. In spite of that, we think that Bronze Age stages constituted an unbroken chain in this area. Ancient people in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau had lived consecutively on the spot. Subsequently, this chain was prolonged to the post-Dong Son, the Chinese domination and the Monarchy periods.

A question arising from the studies: some archaeological sites revealed a stratigraphy with two cultural layers: the upper falling into the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age, the lower being the Hoabinhian (for instance, the site of Sap Viet). There was no sterile layer in between. It suggested an absence of the post-Hoabinhian phase. Theoretically, compared to other regions, the Hoabinhian is characterized by mostly chipped stone tools developing from the early Neolithic via the middle Neolithic – a transitional stage - to the late Neolithic-early Bronze Age. However, it is not until now, there has been a presence of the middle Neolithic stage in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau. Did the ancient people bypass this stage, even the Hoabinhian, advancing from the Sonvi culture to the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age?

Another issue is that the cultural layers containing the late Neolithic and early

Bronze Age artifacts still comprised flaked tools. The question is: why did ancient people still employ old-dated lithic techniques while having already mastered the advanced lithic techniques of polishing and drilling?

We suggest one explanation: the reason that ancient people continued to use flaked pebbles as choppers/chopping tools, pounding tools, scrapers and so on is that such artifacts were still helpful in their labour and production process.

That is viewed as technical reserves, not a hallmark of the Paleolithic or the Hoabinhian. The same phenomena were also documented from the recent excavations at some archaeological sites like Tra Veo and Tra Xinh (Tay Tra district, Quang Ngai province): flaked pebble tools were found to co-exist with the Sa Huynh-style jar burials, polished stone axes, agate ornaments and beads. They are technical reserves, not a hallmark of the old stone age.

1.4.2. Absolute dates

It is a tough job to date the Bronze Age sites in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau as the cultural layers in stratigraphy were unclear and many artifacts were just recently recovered by chance. Therefore, only artifacts were used for dating.

Four bronze drums found in Son La all belong to the Dong Son culture, groups A, B and C. The oldest drum comprises 4 toad statues. The drums with toad statues have been dated to around the Christian era like the Huu Chung one and those exported to Indonesia. At the site of Da Do, a bronze “thap” (basket - shaped container) was recovered, bearing both the Dong Son motifs and Han elements, which could be

sorted into the post-Dong Son time in some centuries AD.

From our viewpoint and via artifact comparisons, the Dong Son culture existed in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau not earlier than it was in the northern plain and midland, that is, falling into several centuries BC. In the pre-Dong Son period, with the introduction of some workshops resembling Hong Da of the Dong Dau culture, possibly these workshops in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau had not been dated earlier than the Dong Dau culture, or it was dated at approximately 3,300 BP.

Recently, a less disturbed cultural deposit has been exposed from an excavation at Ta Vai I site located on a low hill in Ta Hua commune, Than Uyen district, Lai Chau. The flaked tools were found in the lower layers. The polished tools, coarse-grained potsherds, rust bronze tools, lithic mould for casting arrowheads, bracelets and cores appeared in the upper layers. Four pottery samples at Ta Vai were collected for a thermo-fluorescent analysis at the lab of the Institute of Archaeology. The dates were calculated from the most recent time of burning at the temperature of over 500 degree Celsius to the present, with a hypothesis of annually unchanged radiation during the existence of samples and with a 2-sigma error. All samples gave dates ranging from 2,070 BP to 2,180 BP, that is in the 1st and 2nd centuries BC. If these dates are precise, it can be concluded that pottery of Ta Vai I together with other items retrieved from the cultural layer are from a very late period. While some areas in the Northwest and in the northern plain and midland stepped into the Dong Son

time, people in some areas like Ta Vai I site along Nam Mu river - a tributary of Da river - still used ground lithic tools and manufactured stone bracelets by applying the same technologies of the pre-Dong Son time.

From our point of view, it was likely that there was a certain uneven development in the provinces of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau as a whole. People in some places had used the bronze drums and many other items of the Dong Son culture, whereas others had not yet and still used the backward items and manufacturing techniques representing the pre-Dong Son period.

1.5. Cultural exchange

1.5.1. Situated in the Northwest, the provinces of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau in the Bronze Age must have exchanged their cultures with other areas in the region. Son La and Lai Chau share their borders with Lao Cai and Yen Bai provinces where the Red river runs across. This river is viewed as a “corridor” for a cultural exchange from its upper course in Chinese Yunnan province down to its lower course in Vietnam’s northern plain and coastal area. A large number of sites and artifacts of the Dong Son culture have been identified in these two provinces. It is not contingent that some Dong Son sites, which exposed special items such as basket-shaped bronze containers and bronze drums, are located in the land of Phu Yen within the Da river’s basin but not too far from the Red river. Apart from that, a lot of other Bronze Age sites are also situated on the left bank of Da river, which means on the right bank of Red river in the territory of Lao Cai and Yen Bai provinces. The

Dong Son artifacts suggested an association between regions although it was not very close. Additionally, in the period of the late Neolithic – early Bronze Age, a quantity of sites and artifacts in Lao Cai and Yen Bai were found similar to those in the provinces of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau. It is characterized by various types of ground lithic axes, some earthenwares and the sparse-distribution nature of sites [11].

1.5.2. The area including Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau has a closer relation with Phu Tho. The Da river served as a natural route for traffic, trade and cultural exchanges in the Bronze Age. The Da river runs across these provinces, then merges into the Hong river and Lo river in Viet Tri. That is why a lot of relics found in Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau look like those in Phu Tho and Vinh Phuc:

- The bracelet-manufacturing workshop site of Thoc Kim, Cha Dai and Ta Vai I share their manufacturing steps, lithic raw material, finished bracelets and blanks with those from Hong Da workshop, Thanh Thuy district, Phu Tho.

- The type of square-heel pediform bronze axes recovered in Son La resembles that found in high quantity at sites of Lang Ca and Go De in Phu Tho.

- The type of bronze spades comprising certain items decorated with the geometric pattern near the socket in Son La looks similar to the counterpart in Go De, Phu Tho.

- The type of bronze handles in Phu Yen is similar to the counterpart in the culture of Dong Dau, Vinh Phuc.

- The ceramic jar of Tham Puoc (Son La) looks like that of Lang Ca, which are all big-sized and of coarse grains.

- The bronze spears in Lai Chau are decorated with a concave spearhead-shape motif similar to the counterpart in Phu Tho.

- The lithic mould for casting two arrowheads found in Ta Vai I, Lai Chau bears certain traits resembling that of Dong Dau (Vinh Phuc). We think that cultural and archaeological-relic exchanges between the area of Dien Bien, Son La, Lai Chau and Phu Tho were more profound than in the other regions. The exchanges between the highland and lowland along the Hong and Da rivers likely occurred in two ways. The archaeological records have so far demonstrated that the way from Phu Tho up to the highland was more influential. Whether or not this reflects a historical issue: the region called ancestral land, which is also the largest economic, political and social centre in the context of the formation of the early Van Lang state, significantly affected the surrounding areas.

1.5.3. The area of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau has even an association with further areas in the south of China evidenced by the bronze halberts. Five bronze halberts with spiral motifs on handles were revealed in the graveyard of Na Pat in Quynh Nhai. The type of bronze halberts served as a cultural exchange item. It was also found as grave goods at Go De (Phu Tho). It occurred in many Dong Son areas. The Na Pat burials also introduced two Dong Son bronze axes, six long beads and one round-shaped bronze item with strings for fastening and hanging designed to protect one's chest.

Until the present time, Na Pat has been an intact burial with a highest number of

grave goods ever found in the provinces of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau.

2. Remarks

We have the following comments based on studying the Bronze Age of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau:

2.1. The 87 Bronze Age sites and a considerable quantity of artifacts in these three provinces have contributed to a compilation of a complete scientific dossier serving as a good tool for other scientists.

2.2. The presence of the Dong Son culture with reliable evidence including 4 Dong Son bronze drums in Son La and other items typical of Dong Son have proved that Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau are a distribution area of this culture. The Bronze Age physical proof found in this mountainous area suggested that the land was likely an important territory in the period of Hung Kings - An Duong Vuong, named Tan Hung. It is totally matched with notes in the book *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* saying: “this land belongs to Tan Hung region in the period of Hung Kings” [22].

2.3. The archaeological records and bibliography have indicated that the land of Dien Bien, Son La and Lai Chau were owned by our ancestors since the period of founding the country. This is one of this project’s contributions to consolidating the documents for safeguarding Vietnam’s sovereignty over the Northwestern border area.

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