

The Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside

presents:

On the Cusp of History: Exploring Incipient Vietnamese Civilization

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Exploring the underpinnings of Vietnamese civilization requires an engagement with textual narratives, archaeological data, and even the various agendas of modern-day communities. Like elsewhere in the world, legend, memory, and text have been combined in Vietnam to construct, reconstruct, and detail ancient origins, thus exploring the temporal margins between “prehistory” and “history.” Increasingly, the archaeological enterprise has been used as a means to complement or challenge existing historical and conventional knowledge. Sitting on the cusp of history, ancient communities and settlements of the Red River Delta during the first millennium BCE provide a glimpse of what many consider to be incipient Vietnamese civilization. Of particular interest is the Co Loa site, which occupies a prominent place within the national imagination of Vietnam today. This lecture explores recent archaeological investigations of the site and how findings have contributed to ongoing research about early “Vietnam”. In doing so, it considers the potential complementarity between history and archaeology, while also highlighting some of the methodological challenges researchers face when dealing with the early history of Vietnam.

Nam C. Kim investigates past societies and their lifeways through archaeological research. He is interested in the emergence of early forms of urbanism and archaic states, particularly in Southeast Asia. Kim’s work also explores the links between the material record and the concerns of contemporary societies, as they relate to issues such as national identity and cultural heritage management. Beyond his work on Asian archaeology, his research explores the various evolutionary and cultural dimensions of organized violence, warfare, and peacemaking throughout human history.

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