

Archaeology and the Reconstruction(s) of Early Vietnam

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The reconstruction of the past can be highly impactful for most countries, providing powerful sources of cultural capital for various agendas. The narratives and images conjured up by such reconstructions can be meaningful for notions of national pride, ethnic identities, and cultural heritage. Beyond textual sources, the material record is instrumental in these efforts, and archaeological research over recent decades in Vietnam illustrates this process. Using the Co Loa site of the Red River Valley as a case study, this talk explores how contemporary stakeholders view and use the landscapes, sites, and artifacts that comprise the archaeological past. Believed to be an ancient capital city, Co Loa and its ancient history are viewed by many as integral to the genesis of Vietnamese civilization. Ongoing archaeological research of the site and its surrounding area thus has broad implications for two major reconstruction efforts of the past. The first pertains to the ancient lifeways and cultural history of this geographic space, while the second relates to the wider production of a national history of Vietnam, one that displays either genuine or imagined continuities between past and present.

Biographical sketch: I am an anthropological archaeologist interested in sociopolitical complexity, early forms of cities, and the cultural contexts of organized violence and warfare. I am also interested in the intersections between modern politics, notions of identity, cultural heritage, and the archaeological record. Much of my recent research related to these interests has been geographically focused on Southeast Asia, and I currently conduct archaeological fieldwork in Vietnam at the Co Loa settlement of the Red River Delta. Located near modern-day Hanoi, Co Loa holds national significance and is linked to Vietnamese legendary accounts and traditional narratives. Beyond its historical and national significance, the case of Co Loa is also salient for archaeological theories on emergent civilizations, as it constitutes one of the earliest cases of state formation and urbanism in Southeast Asia.

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12:00 Noon

Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue