Archaeology in the Mist of the Borderland between Thailand and Myanmar

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Abstract: In comparison to other areas in Thailand, the archaeology of highland Pang Mapha, a borderland between Thailand and Myanmar, is very poorly known. Much of what is known is based upon the pioneering work of Chester Gorman, an American archaeologist, who in the 1960s searched for early origins of domestication in Southeast Asia. Since then, the area remained marginal for Thai archaeology until 1998, when the Highland Archaeology in Pang Mapha Project began. This project is the first systematic archaeological research conducted in the seasonal tropical highlands area, and is a long-term multi-disciplinary effort involving 5 research teams: archaeology, physical anthropology, dendrochronology, ethnoarchaeology, and GIS.

This research project addresses a series of general issues concerning the evolution of social organization and the nature of culture change in seasonal tropical environments. The project aims include 1) establishing a comprehensive cultural chronology and building a regional archaeological database; 2) investigating and reconstructing the paleoenvironment in the highlands of Pang Mapha; and 3) studying the relationships between humans and their environment, in particular, the processes of change in social organization through time.

Recent research has revealed remarkable new data on the late- and post-Pleistocene environments, subsistence, and settlement patterns, as well as cultural continuity in the region. Site types include burial sites, habitation sites, manufacturing sites, ceremonial sites, and rock painting sites Preliminary results of this ongoing research will be presented.

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