

# THE QUESTION OF THE FARMER FORTRESS: ON THE ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY OF FORTIFIED SETTLEMENTS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This brief paper addresses some implications of ethnoarchaeological research on the contemporary fortified settlements of the Wa people, on the China-Burma frontier. It provides a summary introduction to the Wa fortifications and their social and historical context. These fortifications can provide information of considerable value for the archaeological study of ancient fortifications and warfare, especially regarding non-state or small-scale societies. I also note that the Wa fortifications can only be properly understood as coming into being within a specific regional-historical context, at the "edge of empire", and as a periphery which forms an integral and also active part of a larger system. Thus, their study also has important implications for archaeological and general anthropological studies of centre-periphery relations in China, Southeast Asia and elsewhere.*

Ethnoarchaeology is commonly defined as the study of material objects and their organization in extant societies, undertaken for the benefit of the interpretation, above all, of the archaeological remains of societies no longer extant. Because ethnographic analogy has been a crucial element in archaeological interpretation ever since it was first attempted, one can also argue that ethnoarchaeology is necessarily at the heart of all archaeology, since we always must build our interpretations by way of analogies connecting ancient remains with a lived or documented present. But fortifications may be rather unusual as objects of explicitly ethnoarchaeological investigations, which most often have focused on movable objects that circulate in exchange or trade, or on the processes of their production. Analogies have, of course, been constructed regarding dwellings,

going back at least to the studies of native American house forms by Lewis Henry Morgan (1965 [1881]). These have occasionally been extended to fortifications, as in the analogies sometimes drawn between British "hill-forts" and the fortifications encountered by the British imperial military in places such as Maori New Zealand (Firth 1927; Fox 1976).

Fortifications have also been studied in their own right, in the direct-historical mode. The most interesting case is perhaps again that of the famous *pa* of New Zealand, where these fortified settlements have been studied archaeologically but often along with definite historical documentation (see Best's classic study [1927] and, more recently, Davidson [1987] and Jones [1994]). Similar research has also been carried out in Fiji and elsewhere in Polynesia (Best 1993; Field 1998), and also in relation to the study of patterns of warfare in other parts of the world (Rowlands 1972; Ferguson 1984; Ferguson and Whitehead 1992; Keeley 1996).

In China and Mainland Southeast Asia, there is also fertile and still unexplored ground for research in both the explicitly ethnoarchaeological mode and the direct-historical mode, with or without reference to historical documentation. Emerging systems of hierarchically-organized prehistoric fortifications are found in both these interrelated regions. They include the famous earthworks of the lower Mekong basin and the less well-known fortified sites of North Thailand (Higham and Kijngam 1982; Moore 1988; Srisakra 1984, 1992), and the multitude of fortified prehistoric structures in the major river valleys of eastern and central China (Xiao 1994; Sun and Yang 1994; Underhill 1994; Underhill *et al.* 1998; Wiesheu 1997). Significant progress has been made in the study of these systems and there has also been considerable discussion regarding their interpretation – whether specific structures were mainly defensive, for water management, or predominantly of symbolic significance. For

example, the ancient earthworks of Thailand and Cambodia have been identified as predominantly water-management devices, but some scholars have cited ancient inscriptions recording victorious Khmer military ventures which indicate that the polities entrenched in such moated sites were attacked in the dry seasons after the moats were certain to have dried out (Parry 1992). Thus, these sites most likely also had at least a partial role as fortifications.

In the Chinese context, on the other hand, analysis and discussion of the wide range of pre- and early Bronze Age fortified sites has only developed recently. This includes those hierarchically organized systems where only the central places are fortified, and not the supporting or subordinate surrounding villages. Questions have also been raised about the conditions under which such fortifications are built, used and fall into disuse. Thus far, however, it has generally been uncommon for scholars to bring any ethnographic data to bear on such issues. Admittedly, the historical continuities of the traditions of fortifications seen in these incipient and ancient "central places" have long since come to an end, and it is for the most part not possible to undertake ethnoarchaeological research on directly comparable "living" structures. But many of the more peripheral parts of China and Southeast Asia are littered with the remains of latter-day fortified settlements, some of which are still inhabited and in use today. Bringing both ethnographic and historical-archaeological data from these sites to the interpretations even of the more ancient remains is worthwhile (even when such sites are not the products of any "peripheral situation" but shaped under different socioeconomic and ecological conditions). Furthermore, because such peripheral fortifications also come into existence along with the formation and expansion of states in the more central places, as integral parts of such larger systems, they are also useful as sources of information about the processes at work on these frontiers, and so indirectly also about the state societies as well.

In sum, we may study fortified sites ethnoarchaeologically, on the one hand to produce a range of reference knowledge useful in the interpretation of the nature and making of fortifications more generally, and on the other hand they can be studied as expressions of historical processes of centre-periphery interaction within larger (even global) systems – processes which are rooted in the more ancient past but which also continue to unfold in the present.

#### THE WA FORTIFICATIONS AND THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In this brief presentation I seek to contribute towards both of these goals through the examination of the structure,

use, and also especially the historical context of the contemporary fortified settlements of the Wa people. "Contemporary" here refers to the period from the late nineteenth century through the middle part of the twentieth century. The Wa fortifications were fashioned under specific circumstances which largely ceased to exist in the 1950s and 1960s, after the Chinese government pacified the areas on the Chinese side of the international border. This border was finally installed here in 1962, running through Wa country and dividing it into two parts. About a third of the Wa population currently lives in China, inside Yunnan province, which is also where I myself have done most of my ethnographic fieldwork. This research, undertaken in a part of the formerly "central" autonomous Wa country which now is part of China, centres on religious practices in the context of local history and the transformation of Wa religious and funerary practices after pacification. In the following discussion, I focus on aspects related to the Wa fortifications and their historical context.

After the 1950s, many fortifications were either destroyed or fell into disuse (on the Burmese side this happened slightly later, in the 1970s). However, several different sources of information are still available. Many walls and ruins still remain in place, and even if the actual defensive purpose has been rendered irrelevant by the overall pacification of these areas, the villages still "inhabit" the ruins and the walls in many locations still carry enormous symbolic weight and organize the life of the settlements. Also, because the period of active use is only decades past, there are a great many elderly people who have lived to tell what used to be. In addition, the circumstances of the Wa fortifications have been reported in various historical documents, dating back to the 19th century and beyond, from both China and British Burma (Scott and Hardiman 1900-01; Barton 1933; Harvey 1933; Luo 1985, 1995.<sup>1</sup> Early British military accounts of fighting with the Wa are also of interest (Couchman 1897; and on British colonial warfare elsewhere in "tribal" Burma see also Conner 1895).

The Wa people inhabit an area east of the Salween River in northeastern Burma, and west of the Mekong in Yunnan Province of China. Their language belongs with the Northern Mon-Khmer group. Today, the Wa number about one million. They were traditionally warrior-farmers, until recently widely regarded as the most fearsome warriors and head-hunters of the northernmost part of Mainland Southeast Asia. The traditional view of the Wa people of the central Wa lands is that they live at the origin of, and thus in a sense also at the centre of, the entire inhabited human world. Indeed, the central, autonomous Wa country was, historically, not part of or ruled by either Burma or China, or indeed by the galaxy of interdependent Shan kingdoms or

principalities found between those two states ("Shan" is a Burmese variant of the word Siam, which is also the Wa term for the Tai-speaking Shan). These Shan states, of various sizes, have had tributary status with and entertained shifting alliances with either China or Burma, and sometimes both.

Historically, the Wa found themselves surrounded by the Shan kingdoms, and by various other "hill" or "tribal" peoples, ruled by either "Burmese Shan" or "Chinese Shan" states or by the more powerful Chinese and Burmese states beyond. There were also intermediary zones between the Wa and their own "peripheries." These were populated by ethnic Wa or other people and either ruled by or dependent on the Shan kings, or themselves establishing smaller Buddhist polities on a similar pattern. The people in the centre themselves interacted primarily with people in the intermediary zones, often receiving tribute. They dealt directly with the surrounding states beyond much less frequently, sometimes with little more than long-distance trade in salt, opium and other items, carried by Panthay Muslims and other traders. The central Wa lands were highly "egalitarian," with little social stratification (more on this below). Nevertheless, despite this lack of social stratification, it is in this autonomous and egalitarian central Wa country and not on the Wa peripheries that the fortification of settlements was the rule.

The central Wa territories were densely populated, and covered roughly a square of one hundred miles to each side, located midway between the Salween and the Mekong. People relied on subsistence farming, mainly on a large number of hill rice varieties grown under regimes of shifting cultivation (recycling fixed plots in the forests around the settlements). Some of the rice and millet varieties were used to make the Wa mainstay, the nutritious and filling Wa rice beer which is made and consumed in large quantities every day and remains one of the main media of social relations. Historically, opium was also grown, and became an important cash crop. Opium became especially important in the early part of the 20th century and was exported largely to China. Opium farming was mainly done on lands at higher elevation, less suitable for food crops. It appears that very little was used in the central Wa country, apart from small quantities used for medical purposes.

The historical roots of this situation, a combination of "primitive" subsistence shifting agriculture with cash crops deeply implicated in the arena of global exchange, can be summarized as follows. Formerly, Wa settlements moved frequently, as revealed by Wa oral genealogical traditions, but there was a successive exhaustion of virgin lands into which they might move to open new land for cultivation. The earlier economy of expansion involved prestige-accumulation at local centres and the spread of further

tributary communities from these ancestral villages. In the absence of new lands (since the lands beyond the frontiers of expansion and dispersal had come to be occupied and controlled by the Shan, the Chinese and so forth), the goals of expansion and the build-up of social hierarchy under expansionist chiefs based in shifting agriculture became less and less attainable. This led to a "devolution" producing autonomous communities which appear to be fiercely egalitarian, but which are still "ruled" by those whom Jonathan Friedman (1979, 1987) and others have called "anti-chiefs," similar to those seen among the Naga people and elsewhere in northern Burma (on the many parallels between Naga and Wa societies and traditions, see Hutton 1969 [1921] on the Angami Nagas, and also Mills 1922, 1937). Such "anti-chiefs" are the result of a transformation (devolution) of a formerly more exalted chiefship, but can also, simultaneously, be regarded as the active denial or negation of the making of such a position, a basis for concentrating real power (*cf.* Clastres 1987).

With few exceptions (such as captive mine-slaves of non-Wa origin), the Wa social universe of the period in question admitted no social rank apart from autonomous warrior-farmers, organized by the exogamous patrilineages which formed the backbone of society (Fiskesjö n.d. b). The road which was taken subsequently, after the above-mentioned developments took place in the last few centuries, was to move beyond subsistence farming and expand into cash crops such as opium. Thus, Wa society can be said to have been transformed towards a particular kind of specialist-producer periphery supplying the more powerful centres such as China, but still on its own independent terms.

We should note that this outline cannot be conveniently mapped onto a linear-evolutionary continuum, and cannot be understood merely as an ahistoric structure of immobile concentric spheres. The structure of the centre-periphery relationship is constantly involved in real historical processes and dynamic transformations, which are not only progressive but also at times reversible. The most important historical developments in the region over the last few centuries have probably been the expansion of the Chinese imperial state into what is now the Chinese Southwest, especially since the Yuan (Mongol) conquests, the rise of the Shan kingdoms since the 13th century, as well as the great increase in the movement of migrants and settlers from central China into Yunnan since the Ming and the Qing dynasties (14th-20th centuries). It is possible to discern a general development since these times with the defeat and displacement of Mon-Khmer ethnolinguistic groups in what is now Yunnan, in favor of the Chinese settlers and of the assimilation of remaining populations. Chinese settlers know

the descendants of such populations as “the aboriginal people” (*benren*).

Wa mythic and historical traditions, as well as Shan, Chinese and other written traditions, suggest that Shan-Wa relations have been characterized by similar developments. Some elements of these traditions, such as the traditions that it was the Wa who built the city of Jaingtung (Kengtung), may be relatively easy to disregard as a hindsight reconstruction of the present relationship between civilized lowlanders and primitive highlanders. But the general thrust of Wa traditions is also supported by the Shan historical chronicles. The traditional coronation rituals at Shan courts in the region (for example, at the court of Kengtung), where the displacement and humiliation of the Wa was re-enacted symbolically, are also of great interest in this regard and probably reflect a real historical displacement in that area (Sao Saimong Mangrai 1965, Fiskesjö n.d. a). There are also archaeological data, as yet largely unexplored, which suggest similar developments in other areas. For example, I have identified an abandoned system of major walled settlements in the valley of Mengding, which currently forms an ethnically-Shan part of Gengma County in China’s Yunnan province. Local Shan traditions, some of which may be preserved in written form, confirm them as the remains of the settlements of the Wa aboriginal people, probably dating to the 1400s when the Shan fought their way into this area from the north. It seems clear that the Wa indeed preceded the Shan here too, and that the fortified settlements were produced in the context of these conflicts. These sites merit preservation, and further in-depth research.

In any case, the dense populations of the central Wa lands were clearly and increasingly affected by conflict over land resources, hunting rights, and threats from the outside. Something approximating a permanent state of war came about inside the central Wa country, where there was little overall political unity. Highly autonomous settlements engaged in complex and shifting networks of alliances and enmities. Foreign powers were the only permanent enemies, and settlements would join as a confederation only in the face of foreign threats. These were uncommon, however, given the deterrent of the traditions of Wa headhunting, which were also bolstered by the widespread rumors that surrounded them. Acts of war as a rule indeed did take the traditional forms of headhunting. Most victims were members of neighboring communities guilty of committing offenses (or of mistaken killings) against an autonomous settlement, and the offending communities were punished collectively through the victimization of a few of their members.

Two kinds of “war” were distinguished: the “road war,” the ambush of people from an enemy settlement (or of unfortunate travellers or mistaken victims as the case may

be); and the “house war” where, ideally, one entered the house of one’s enemy. The “road war” was carried out by small groups of warrior-headhunters; the so-called “house war” was sometimes undertaken by up to several hundred men and was only launched in response to particularly grievous offenses against the honour of the village. The victims’ heads were brought home, used in sacrificial ritual, and temporarily stored at the drum-house. Each village maintained at least one drum-house, a small thatched structure which housed a pair of huge log-drums extracted from the forest. They were beaten only in times of fire, war, or sacrificial ritual, and the drum-house thus served as both communications hub and sacrificial centre. The central drum-house fell under the nominal control of the ritual chief (or “anti-chief”), and took on added importance when the whole village was affected by some important crisis. (In more recent times, the patrilineages inhabiting particular sections within the villages often constructed their own additional drum-houses).

Ultimately, the remains of the headhunting victims were transferred from within the village walls to a permanent arena with a long row of display posts, the famous Wa “skull avenue”, located about half a mile outside of the fortified village, sometimes even closer. The location for this arena was often deliberately chosen so that it would be visible to any travelers, at a major thoroughfare or approach path to the village. According to my investigations in a number of different areas, it was nearly always located to the west of the village, the direction of the setting sun, symbolically associated with death. Interestingly, in the same direction, often but not always in a separate location, there was as a rule also a separate display arena for captured tigers. Here, the complete skins of dead tigers, the meat of which was consumed by everyone, were mounted in life-like manner on bamboo or wooden frames alongside the Western approach to the village. In Wa cosmology, this arrangement is structurally analogous to the treatment of human victims, and it is not inconceivable that the human sacrifice is modeled on this tiger arrangement.

The headhunting figured within a complex system of religious practices, which cannot be discussed in detail here for lack of space. Suffice it to say that it was conceived as having to do with the capture and deployment of the force of the enemy “Other.” This force was used as an “inoculation” against the decay which threatens agricultural production and thus one’s own survival. This is a rather drastic simplification, but at least indicates the way in which the ideology of headhunting was rooted in the above-mentioned context of dwindling resources. Actual raids were as a rule provoked by some infringement on these resources, but they were also often postponed until either of the twin

high-time seasons of late spring (the time of planting the rice fields), and early fall (the first harvest). These were regarded as the most suitable times to carry out attacks and supply victims for sacrifice, thus wedding “religious” and “practical” motives into one.

This situation successively promoted the militarisation of life, and people were concentrated into large fortified villages. These measured, on average, a little less than a kilometre in diameter. They may have as many as several hundred houses, and several thousand inhabitants each. The villages were conspicuously located on hill ridges, often halfway up the hillsides in a temperate location far above the deep and more humid river valleys, but also not too close to the colder upper reaches of the mountain ranges, which rise to 2000 m or more. Before the appearance (in the 1950s) of twentieth century weaponry on this scene, these traditional locations were relatively easy to defend. Originally, dating back two centuries or perhaps more in some cases, these locations may actually have been chosen for agro-ecological as much as “military” reasons.

Note, also, one related aspect of Wa village location which may seem counter-intuitive. The sites chosen were often far removed from springs, streams or other water sources. For a series of reasons, related to concepts of disease, water was instead pipelined in from a distance. In the largest villages, each section arranged for its own pipeline, which was built of split bamboos. Maintenance was also formerly highly ritualized. It might seem obvious that an enemy could defeat a settlement simply by cutting off this water supply and laying siege. In fact, it appears that this never occurred before the appearance of British, who seem to have been the first to have thought of it. Such methods were inconceivable under the honour codes governing Wa warfare. Warfare, as it figured within the Wa cosmology, was limited to appropriating victims for sacrifice. It was motivated by the wish to exact revenge for infringements on village rights in land, and so forth, but not by an intent to exterminate the enemy.

The centrepiece of the village defence against its enemies was the wall (*long*, in the Wa language), which surrounded the entire perimeter. These were constructed of piled-up soil, usually 2-3 m high and 3-4 m thick. Natural features such as rocks and gullies were also often incorporated. The walls were invariably planted with a thorn bush known as *hrax*, with extremely heavily barbed branches which when intertwined would make access equally difficult both for human enemies and for tigers. Even so, enemy penetration sometimes was attempted. In one case that I documented, intruders managed to enter a major village through a weakened area in the wall, in the middle of the night, and then tricked a man into their hands by setting fire to his grain storage, right inside the wall. They then escaped

through opening a village gate from the inside, but also lost one of their number to the gunfire of the defenders.

The earthen walls were surrounded by ditches several metres deep but not necessarily very wide (they could be jumped over, but were so carefully concealed that they would not be detected until it was too late). Sometimes these ditches were dug in several concentric circles. They were equipped with sharpened bamboo stakes prepared with a powerful poison. Poison was also used in automatic traps situated in strategic places, sending off darts to hit any intruder who involuntarily released the trigger mechanism. These bamboo stakes might also be planted inconspicuously alongside the walls, and along those approaches likely to be taken by would-be attackers, such as alongside paths. Poisoned stakes were also used by teams returning from headhunting raids, who would plant them both on and off their return path.

Village gates were made from thick wooden planks, hung on poles in a stone gateway located at the end of an approach tunnel. The gates were bolted shut from the inside in the evening, and opened again every morning, except on taboo days or in emergencies when they would remain shut. The duty of opening and shutting the gates would rotate amongst the men of several houses located nearby, not too far from each gate. Depending on the size of the village, it could have from two up to more than ten such gates. In very large settlements that had expanded over time, the ritual significance of the gates differed. For example, only the older gates might be appropriate for the introduction of new log drums and others might be regarded as improper exits or entries for other ritual occasions. One did not walk directly up to these gates; at a distance of sometimes several hundred metres from the village walls, the roads back from the fields turned into a series of trenches and tunnels planted with thorn bushes. The final approach was a narrow, winding passage constructed to prevent any enemy from shooting straight with either crossbow or firearms. This final, tunnel-like approach was also often paved with stones and had walls reinforced with either timber or with stone slabs. The whole system also made it possible not just to shut people out, but if anyone had entered the village as a *bona fide* visitor but was later discovered to be less than desirable, or if one perchance wanted to keep guests longer than they themselves wished, one simply had to shut the gates and there was no escape.

The Wa fortifications structured the lives of the villagers in a number of ways. Many of aspects of this structuration remain in force today, even where the walls have fallen into disrepair. Ritual life still often revolves around procedures undertaken either “outside” or “inside” the walls. Old sites are still remembered through the preservation of place names, the old gate locations are still used, and houses are

oriented along the same directions as the old defences. This continuity is also particularly evident in the sphere of funerary customs. In the central Wa country, the dead are traditionally buried in the garden of their own house. It is often suggested that this custom, as well as certain features of the rather peculiar Wa tomb layout (including the rock slabs covering the hidden entrance to the tomb), are related to a perceived need to protect the dead against thieves attempting to steal their heads and bodies (even inside the walls). There is, furthermore, a sharp divide between those who enjoy a "good death" and can be buried "inside the walls" in the standard manner in the garden of their house, and those who suffer "evil death" in war or in some other kind of accident, such as death during childbirth, and who must be taken to particular designated places outside the walls for burial, if they can be buried at all.

The features most likely to remain discernible for an imaginary archaeologist returning to investigate a Wa village in the future would be the following four kinds of massive built features:

1. the walls themselves;
2. the ditch-like approach roads and the moat-like trenches surrounding the villages;
3. the sometimes huge worked rocks which were arranged to line and sometimes pave the approaches and to construct the gateways; and
4. the traditional subterranean tombs with their rock "lids."

Little else would remain without excavation: no remains of houses, which were traditionally built entirely in wood and bamboo with straw-thatched roofs. The only surface indication that a particular plot within the walls had once been occupied by a dwelling might be a stepping-stone for the entrance to the house (instead of the usual wooden ladder) or the paired small stones planted in front of a house for the performance of sacrifices to the household deities. The wooden posts planted in connection with cattle and buffalo sacrifices would disappear. In addition, little would remain of the undemarcated sections dividing the patrilineages, which would be detectable only insofar as they were marked by successive expansions of the village enclosure itself.

## DISCUSSION

It is not my intention to add to the many pessimistic so-called "cautionary tales" so often seen in ethnoarchaeology. The Wa fortifications were and in many places still are formidable structures, created within a historical process of increasingly intense competition over agricultural lands and forest resources. As such they represent the contemporary construction of major defensive structures by indigenous people in a non-state and small-scale social context. Even the cursory overview offered here clearly suggests that the

wealth of information available on the layout, construction, history and motivation, use and decline of these walls, as well as on their lingering contemporary relevance and importance, make the Wa fortifications a very valuable source of ethnoarchaeological data.

Beyond this general usefulness, I also wish to suggest that the Wa farmer-fortresses serve to illustrate certain processes at work in peripheral socio-political situations such as those which lie between China and Southeast Asia. There are two such classes of socio-political situations; those directly subordinate to and dominated by one or more centres, and those that remain autonomous. The former include societies which supply centres with specific products or which serve as trading agents, and whose social reproduction takes place under conditions determined at the centres, not locally. The second include societies which have escaped subordination through isolation and those that remain largely independent of the centre as regards their own internal reproduction, but which are nevertheless also linked to the centres by trade or other forms of exchange. The latter group includes various social formations that prey upon the trade routes or other flows of wealth generated within the larger system. I suggest that it is with this last type of social formation that fortifications are most obviously associated and that the fortified settlements of the Wa, by virtue of their position as independent farmer-traders, belong in this latter category.<sup>2</sup>

As I have indicated, in the course of outlining the major features of the historical context of the Wa fortress-villages, they should also be placed within the proper frame of analysis, this being the larger systems in which the central, autonomous Wa society is implicated. This mainly refers to China, Burma and the other components of the system of concentric circles I have described, where we find the Wa in the centre, as if in the eye of the storm, except that here the eye is not a calm refuge but suffers the "structures of violence" produced within the relations of exploitation which obtain in the larger systems. The massive fortifications should be thought of as produced within not only a local context, but as devices made and deployed by autonomous peoples on the periphery as they seek to handle the situation created by powerful processes at work within the larger field. Wa egalitarianism, mistakenly construed as "primitive" society in Chinese and other evolutionisms, can also be understood as a way of avoiding the collapse of autonomy in the face of the threats from the greater powers that loom on the horizon. These external states were already extracting tribute or taxation in the intermediary buffer zone, which in a sense served the same role as the anti-"barbarian" defensive wall systems we see elsewhere in China.

The fortifications found on the peripheries, of course, also come in several different sub-species. On the one hand, we have the structures imposed as defence against the periphery, such as the “Great Wall” in the north of China. Another example is the Ming dynasty anti-Miao walls of Hunan in south-central China, built to separate the so-called “raw” Miao barbarians from the “cooked” people on their way to civilization (Fiskesjö n.d. c and d). On the other hand, we have the fortifications constructed within the autonomous formations themselves. Apart from the Wa fortified settlements discussed here, these also include the Miao fortifications of south-central China (Lombard-Salmon 1972; Fiskesjö n.d. c) and the abandoned systems of fortified settlements found all over southwest China. Regrettably, there has been very little research on such systems, whether archaeological, ethnographic or historical, but one exception is the very interesting research on “secondary state formation” in Guizhou carried out by Wang Ningsheng, the Chinese anthropologist and ethnoarchaeologist (Wang 1996). There are also few comparable descriptions and discussions of the fortifications of the Sino-Southeast Asian highland frontiers. Thus, we clearly have here a wide and open field with rich possibilities for archaeology. Ethnoarchaeological as well as archaeological research can contribute to a new understanding of these regions, which should be of great interest for the study of imperial or regional systems elsewhere and even global interrelations as they are reflected at the “edge of empire.”

#### NOTES

1. On Wa history as it relates to the Shan States in Burma see Sao Saimong Mangrai 1965, pp. 263-275, and also Fiskesjö n.d. a and b.
2. On the study of centre-periphery relations see Rowlands 1998, Friedman 1998, and also the critiques of the “world-systems” perspective (Schmidt 1990).

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