

Ethnic Groups of Viet – Muong Languages and Dong Son Culture

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Abstract: The archaeological data have convincingly proved that the Dong Son (Đông Sơn) culture resulted from the indigenous development of the previous pre-Đông Sơn cultural systems in the basins of the Hồng, Mã and Cả rivers, closely associating people and ancient Vietnamese culture. The ethnological and linguistic data demonstrate the close relationship of language and culture between the Việt and Mường peoples, and other ethnic groups of Viet – Muong (Việt – Mường) language. There are a lot of convincing data to confirm that the Việt and Mường peoples once shared an origin and they themselves were the owners of the pre-Đông Sơn and Đông Sơn cultures, closely connected with the ancient Vietnamese civilization.

Key words: Ethnic, Việt – Mường languages, Đông Sơn culture.

1. Nativeness and continuity of the cultures during the period from Phùng Nguyên to Đông Sơn culture

It has been 90 years, since Đông Sơn culture was discovered. Many aspects of this culture have been decoded, providing important materials to elucidate significant issues in the history of Vietnam at the time of national foundation. There are, however, still controversies surrounding some issues, including the owner of Đông Sơn culture.

As there were not many archaeological evidences available in Vietnam, in the 1960s some scholars tried to find out the origin of Đông Sơn culture on the basis of overseas materials, such as those from the Eurasian steppe (Janse, 1947), the Huai River culture (Kargren, 1942), and Black Sea Coastal culture (Geldern, 1951).

Recently, in the book titled “*The origin of Việt and Mường people*” published in 2013, Tạ Đức – the author – developed the ideas that Đào Duy Anh and Bình Nguyên Lộc used to raise in the past, as below:

- The owners of Phùng Nguyên Culture were direct ancestors of Mường people in Vietnam. They inherently were Mon, Man and Mân Việt people, whose ancient ancestors were the very ancient Đản people – one of the Mongoloid groups that spoke South Asian languages; they were the very owner of the Neolithic culture in Tanshishan, Fujian due northeast of Guangdong (China). They came to Vietnam and Thailand by the sea. At first, they earned a living by doing harvesting and hunting in coastal and surrounding areas of estuaries. And then, they started to grow rice and do gardening, setting up step-by-step cultures such as Phùng Nguyên, Đồng Đậu, Gò Mun in the Red River Delta. They had an originally close and direct relationship with the Neolithic cultures, of which the date is earlier than that of the cultures in Fujian, Guangdong, Taiwan, and Sichuan (4,000 BP).

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- The true owners of Đông Sơn culture were La Va people, or Lạc Việt people, who came from Zhejiang to Vietnam after Mường people (more or less 3,000 years ago). Basically, the foundation and development of Đông Sơn culture are closely attached with migration of Baiyue people from the North.

According to this explanation, there was not a common *Việt – Mường* ethnic group, which would be then split into Việt people and Mường people as seen at present. Moreover, the both groups of people were not native people in Northern Vietnam, but they were just “a general combination of groups that migrated from the North” (Tạ Đức, 2013: 104).

For the past over fifty years, however, hundreds of archaeological vestiges dating back to the Iron Age have been discovered in North Vietnam. They are genealogized as below: Phùng Nguyên - Đông Đậu - Gò Mun - Đông Sơn in the Red River Delta. It is viewed as the main process of foundation and development of Đông Sơn culture - the ancient Viet civilization. The native origin of Đông Sơn culture has been, therefore, gradually elucidated. Most of all researchers have come to a common conclusion that owners of the genealogy of Phùng Nguyên – Đông Đậu – Gò Mun – Đông Sơn were Lạc Việt people; i.e. ancient Việt people – the ancestor of modern-day Việt and Mường people (Institute of Archaeology, 1994). Phùng Nguyên Culture originated from North Vietnam and it is viewed as “the beginning” of the pre-Đông Sơn cultures, which then developed continuously through periods to become Đông Sơn culture in the Red River Delta.

The arguments of Tạ Đức were not

advocated by archaeological as well as other materials. In the Late Neolithic and the Early Iron Era, Hạ Long culture was already formed in the Northeast coastal area of Vietnam. This culture originated from Cái Bèo culture (in the Mid-Neolithic Era, as demonstrated by artifacts found in the layers of this vestige). In Cái Bèo vestige, ones found small quadrangular handaxes, Phùng Nguyên-like ceramic tripods, and some ceramic pieces pressed smoothly and caved with decorative designs that are similar to those of Phùng Nguyên Culture (Nguyễn Khắc Sửu: 127-136).

During the following period, Nguyễn Việt outlined some connections between historical events in the time of Thục Phán – King An Dương Vương (including Cổ Loa Citadel, the Kingdom of Âu Lạc, and the failure of Thục Phán) and relics of Kele Culture in Guizhou, China (Nguyễn Việt, 2010). Tạ Đức argues that Thục Phán-An Dương Vương was a prince of the Chinese state of Shu; he was a member of the Qishi Royal family of La/Lạc Việt descents; “Vac Village was the very destination of migration of the noble family Dian” (Tạ Đức, 2013). According to the above-mentioned arguments, Thục Phán - An Dương Vương, who ruled over the Kingdom of Âu Lạc at the most prosperous time of Đông Sơn culture, had Chinese origin. However, Trình Năng Chung showed fundamental differences between Đông Sơn and Kele cultures, which were clearly demonstrated by artifacts, burial customs, and economic mode. Although those cultures had a certain connection, basically they were different from each other. It is very difficult to find out any traces of Đông Sơn

cultural quintessence in the relics of Kele culture; and vice versa, the influence of Kele culture on Đông Sơn is also very little (Trình Năng Chung, 2014).

All the research findings obtained in archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics demonstrate that Việt people and Mường people have a very close relationship and they share a common origin. Of all the disciplines, the linguistics plays a very important role in this matter. It is not only one of the first signs as well as one important criterion to identify ethnic groups, but it is also a basis to determine the origin and the relationship among ethnic groups. The history of languages is the very history of ethnic groups and their relationships. Language is relatively “conservative”, compared with other cultural factors. According to the Swadesh method (glottochronology) that identifies two languages that were split from the same original language, the proportion of original vocabularies that remain after 1,000 years and 2,000 years is 74% and 54% relatively (Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, 1995). Based on comparisons of historical languages, Vietnamese as well as international linguistic scholars have found a lot of similarities in pronunciation, tone, and fundamental vocabularies between Việt, Mường, Thổ, and Chứt languages. Especially, the similarity between Việt language and Mường language is so great that many linguistic scholars hesitantly consider them as two languages or two dialects of the same language. By showing phonetic rules that illustrate Viet and Mường languages were split from a common language, including: *the rule of tone* (established by Haudricort A.G), *the*

rule of voiceless pronunciation, the rule of monosyllabic words, and the rule of nasal pronunciation (studied by Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, M. Ferlus, and Trần Tri Dối), linguistic scholars have affirmed that Việt language is one of the languages in the Việt-Mường category (some scholars have further classified it as a language in the sub-category of Việt-Chứt languages). In the South-asiatic language family and the entire Continental Southeast Asia as well, Indochina is viewed as the major center for formation of the South-asiatic languages (Nguyễn Hữu Hoàn (chief author), 2013: 92). Languages in the sub-category of Việt-Chứt still maintain some common features of the South-asiatic language family and some common features of the Môn-Khmer branch. There are different opinions about the initial location of Việt-Chứt language though, all scholars have agreed that those, who spoke this language, migrated to many places, of which one significant group moved to plain areas in the lower valley of North Vietnam, where they did wet rice cultivation and the cradle of Viet people was formed afterwards. Recently, the Institute of Linguistics has identified Việt language and Mường language as two among 11 languages of the Vietic sub-branch in the Môn-Khmer branch, South Asiatic language family (Nguyễn Hữu Hoàn (chief author), 2013: 51).

The above-mentioned similarities between Việt language and Mường language make it favorable for communication between people of the two ethnic groups. After moving from home (a place in the plain) to an area of Mường people and staying there for a couple of weeks, a Việt person can understand

and even speak Mường language. The similarity in pronunciation and basic vocabularies is the most typical for language similarities between the two ethnic groups. *It is completely different from language similarities between other ethnic groups.* For some local groups of ethnic minorities in our country, differences in language between them are even great. For instance, Dao people are divided into 7 sub-groups with two language branches. One branch consists of 4 sub-groups, including: Dao Tiên, Dao Đỏ, Lô Gang or Thanh Phán, and Quần Chẹt); the other one consists of the rest 3 groups, including: Thanh Y, Quần Trắng, Áo Dài or Dao Tuyền. In communication, people in the same language branch can understand each other; whereas, people in different branches can understand only 10% of what other say; they have to use an intermediary language to understand each other⁽¹⁾.

The linkages of Việt - Mường ethnic groups with Đông Sơn culture have been shown by Nguyễn Từ Chi (Trần Từ) – an anthropologist. To find out the origin of Việt people in the context that most of the cultural factors of Việt people were covered densely by the Chinese cultures for a thousand years of domination by Northern invaders, Từ Chi tried to seek for “original” factors of Việt cultures in a close neighboring ethnic group – Mường people. For over 10 years, he travelled to areas of Mường people, collecting relevant materials and data. One of his ideas, which was considered as “a breakthrough”, is to study *the upper hem of Mường women’s skirts*. Based on scrupulous measurements, comparisons and analyses, in the book titled “*Patterns of Mường*”, he

describes similarities between patterns on the upper hem of Mường women’s skirts and designs on the bronze Đông Sơn kettledrums – the symbolic product of the ancient Việt civilization. Consequently, he concludes that the owner of the bronze Đông Sơn kettledrums was the very owner of the patterns on the upper hem of Mường women’s skirts; and, most of the bronze Đông Sơn kettledrums have the native origin here (Trần Từ, 1978). In a paper written over 40 years ago that has been recently found in his posthumous manuscripts and introduced in the Review of Museums and Anthropology (vol.1, 2014), he again pointed out the outstanding similarity between designs on the bronze Đông Sơn kettledrums and patterns on the upper hems of Mường skirts as below: the lay-out consists of closed strips with squares, cylinders, slanting patterns; especially, there is a sun-star on both the kettledrum and the upper hem. The traces of Đông Sơn culture still remain in decorations on dragon-heads at the time of Lý – Trần Dynasties and Later Lê Dynasty early period, stone steles, the base of Buddha statues, fish shapes on wood at the time of Mạc Dynasty, the edging and top of stone steles, and dragon-heads at the time of Nguyễn Dynasty. The tradition of Đông Sơn can be seen in many activities at present, such as: The festival “*Dô ông đám*” (*The parade of the elderly*) in Đồng Kỵ Village (Từ Sơn Town, Bắc Ninh Province); the ceremonials of hole-pricking, seed-sowing, and harvesting among Mãng Ư

⁽¹⁾ The comment presented by Lý Hành Sơn, Institute of Anthropology, at the meeting on 31 March 2014.

people; the custom of using the bronze kettledrum among Mường people and Lô Lô people etc.(Nguyễn Từ Chi, 2014: 6-13). By showing the above-mentioned traces and relics, Từ Chi believed: “Owing to various findings of archaeological excavations in coming time, Đông Sơn may be viewed as a factor of common denominators for the early-historic Southeast Asia – a Southeast Asia that hadn’t yet contacted other big civilizations from outside” (Nguyễn Từ Chi, 2014: 13). This is an original discovery that has been then demonstrated by archaeological achievements. The nativeness of Đông Sơn culture does not eliminate exchange with other cultures, as concluded recently in a Ministerial-level research project: “There were really mutual influences and impacts between Đông Sơn culture and other cultures in the North, specifically those in South China” (Bùi Văn Liêm, 2010: 132).

2. Appropriateness between the distribution of Đông Sơn culture and the areas of habitation of Việt – Mường language ethnic groups

All archaeological findings have supported a common agreement that Đông Sơn culture covered three areas, including:

- The Red River Area, of which the center was Cả Village (in Việt Trì City, Phú Thọ Province at present);

- The Mã and Chu River Area, of which the center was Đông Sơn Village (in the former Đông Sơn District that belongs to Hàm Rồng Ward, Thanh Hóa City at present).

- The Cả (or Lam) River Area, of which the center was Vạc Village (in the former Nghĩa Đàn District that belongs to Thái Hòa Town, Nghệ An Province at present).

Of those three areas, the area of Mã and Chu Rivers carries typical characteristics of Đông Sơn culture, since bronze products in the vestiges within this area are used as criteria for recognition of bronze products in the areas of the Red River and Cả River. By now, several hundreds of bronze kettledrums – the symbolic artifact for Đông Sơn culture – have been found in all the three areas, mainly along big rivers in the Northern plain and the North-Central plain.

Remarkably, the three above-mentioned areas were the very residence location of ethnic groups in Việt - Mường language family, as described below:

- *The Red River area.* This area was the main area of habitation for Việt (Kinh) people, of which the neighboring area was the habitation area of Mường people. Anthropological research works, however, show that traces of Mường culture still remain obviously in the habitation areas of Việt people, which can be seen in language, production customs, rituals and beliefs. When Từ Chi was alive, he told his classmates that the midland running from Phú Thọ through Sơn Tây, Ninh Bình and Thanh Hóa was a transitional area between the habitation area of Việt and the habitation area of Mường people. In other words, when moving from the valley in the foot of a mountain towards the Red River Delta, ancient Việt people stopped in this midland to settle down; consequently, the division between the habitation areas of Việt and Mường people started.

- *The Mã River and Chu River area.* Apart from a large number of Việt people living in the plain areas, a relatively part of

Việt people lived together with Mường in mountainous districts, such as Cẩm Thủy (where Mường people make up 52% of the total population), Quan Hóa, Bá Thước, Thường Xuân, Ngọc Lặc, and Như Xuân etc. According to anthropological research findings, the boundary between Mường and Việt peoples in mountainous districts of Thanh Hóa Province is not very obviously identified. In some areas, a number of people, who used to be Mường, have become Việt now, and vice versa. This is recognized via language, customs, beliefs etc. Apart from Việt and Mường, there are also Thổ people living in the area of Mã and Chu River.

- *The Cả River area:* Apart from Việt people, there are also a lot of Thổ people living in this area. Those from 5 branches of Thổ people, including: Mọn, Lâm La, Kèo, Cuối, and Họ, mainly live in some districts such as Nghĩa Đàn (including also modern-day Thái Hòa Town), Tân Kỳ, Quỳnh Hợp. In the meanwhile, those from Đan Lai – Ly Hà branch mainly live in Con Công District; and, those from Tày Poọng branch mainly live in Tương Dương District. Of all branches of Thổ people, the two branches (Kèo and Cuối) that mainly live in Nghĩa Đàn District are considered to have Việt origin by anthropological researchers; they moved from plain districts of Nghệ An Province to this mountainous area during the 17th and 18th centuries, due to poverty, famine, unpleasant customs in the villages of origin as well as war troubles. In reality, however, those groups of migrants moved to the area of Cả River just recently. It is, therefore, necessary to find out their origin

by other ways. We agree with the opinion raised by Lê Mai Oanh that those groups of people are migrant descendants of ancient Việt people, who lived in the West of Nghệ An Province a long time ago. Perhaps, the migration took place from the Bronze Age to the time of Đông Sơn culture (Lê Mai Oanh, 2011: 22).

In addition to the three ethnic groups, including Việt, Mường and Thổ, the ethnic groups of Việt – Mường languages also includes Chứt people with many local branches such as Mày, Rục, Sách, Arem, and Mã Liềng. They live in mountainous areas of Quảng Bình and Hà Tĩnh Provinces. At present, there are two opinions about the origin of this ethnic group. One opinion assumes that they are direct migrant descendants of people in the Pre-Việt – Mường community. They already split from the community, before Mường people split from Việt people. As they lived separately with scattered small groups in an unfavorable environment, they gradually became “backward” and they still keep almost all factors of language and culture of the Pre-Việt – Mường Community (Hà Văn Tấn and Phạm Đức Dương, 1978; Hà Văn Tấn, 1976; Nguyễn Văn Tài, 1976; Nguyễn Văn Mạnh, 1983 - 1996; Võ Xuân Trang, 1998: 5; Nguyễn Hữu Thông and colleagues, 2007: 29 - 31). The other opinion assumes that those people migrated from Thanh Hóa and Nghệ Tĩnh during the late 17th century (Institute of Anthropology, 1978).

The linkages between habitations of ethnic groups of Việt – Mường language family and distribution of Đông Sơn culture can be summarized in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1: Habitation Areas of Ethnic Groups of Việt – Mường languages

Area	Ethnic groups	Habitation location
Red River	Việt	Midland, Plain
		Transitional areas: Phú Thọ – Sơn Tây Midland, Ninh Bình
	Mường	Valleys in the foots of mountains in Phú Thọ, Hòa Bình and Thanh Hóa Provinces
Mã River and Chu River	Việt	Plain districts
	Mường	Mountainous districts
	Thổ	Mountainous and midland districts
Cả River	Việt	Plain and midland
	Thổ	Midland and mountains
?	Chứt	Mountainous areas in Hà Tĩnh and Quảng Bình Provinces

Summarizing all the above-mentioned data, we can realize that at the Bronze Age, the area of habitation of ancient Việt people was very large, including both plain and mountainous areas running from Yên Bái, Hòa Bình, Phú Thọ, and Sơn Tây provinces to Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An, and Hà Tĩnh provinces. Linguistic materials demonstrate that the current pronunciation and vocabularies of Việt people in Quỳnh Lưu, Diễn Châu, Nghĩa Đàn, and Quỳnh Hợp districts etc still have a lot of similarities to those of Việt people in former Sơn Tây Province (especially in Quốc Oai and Thạch Thất districts).

At the Bronze Age, which was more or less 4 thousands years ago, ancient Việt people started large flows of migration, forming 3 groups as below:

- One is the group of those who moved to the Red River Delta after the sea withdrawal, creating an area of Đông Sơn culture, of which the center was Cả Village. Those, who inhabited the plain area in

Thanh Hóa Province, created an area of Đông Sơn culture in the valley of Mã River. The rest moved from Vạc Village to the coastal area. Due to changes in the living environment and influence by Chinese cultures, these ancient people gradually became contemporary Việt (Kinh) people.

- Another is the group of those, who kept staying in mountainous areas, mainly in valleys by the foots of mountains in Hòa Bình Province and a part of Thanh Hóa Province. They were not influenced by Chinese cultures. They are the very contemporary Mường people.

- The rest is the group of those, who inhabited mountainous areas in Nghệ An Province and a part of Thanh Hóa Province. Because of isolation in habitation, they formed their own cultural factors and became Tho people with different branches such as Mọn, Cuối, and Kẹo etc. afterwards. Some researchers think the branch of Cuối people is “an oasis” of ancient Việt people left

after the split of Việt – Mường ethnic groups (Nguyễn Đình Lộc, 2000: 48), since the language of Cuối people is viewed by many linguistic researchers as an independent language from those of Mường, Việt and Chứt people; it cannot be a dialect of Mường language (Nguyễn Văn Tài, 1976: 70).

Regarding to the moment, when ancient Việt people were split into different ethnic groups such as Việt, Mường, Thổ and Chứt, Nguyễn Văn Tài argues that Mường language and Việt language are the closest and most developed among 9 languages of the same language family in the West Annamite Range (including Tha Vung and Patatan) and the East Annamite Range (including Aren, Mã Liền, Sách, Poọng, Cuối, Mường, and Việt). The two groups of language, including Việt and Mường peoples, separated from the Việt – Mường community in the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. (Nguyễn Văn Tài, 1978).

From the historical linguistic perspective, Hà Văn Tấn and Phạm Đức Dương presented a diagram of the split of Việt and Mường languages from the Việt – Mường language group and the division of the Pre-Việt – Mường language family into Việt – Mường language group and the Chứt – Poọng language group, which took place from the middle of the first millennium BC to the second century AD (Hà Văn Tấn and Phạm Đức Dương, 1978).

Based on research works on graves of Mường and Việt people, however, Phạm Quốc Quân argues that burial graves between the two groups started to differ from each other by the 7th and 8th centuries and they became completely different in the 9th century (Phạm Quốc Quân, 1995). This shows the separation in language between

Việt and Mường people did not take place at the same time with the split in culture and custom. Anthropological researchers all agree that separation between Việt and Mường groups took place at the late period of domination by Northern invaders (Institute of Anthropology, 1978; Trần Quốc Vượng and Nguyễn Dương Bình, 1965).

3. Việt and Mường peoples with Đông Sơn culture

As described above, the locations of Đông Sơn culture were mainly attached with the areas of habitation of Việt, Mường, Thổ and Chứt ethnic groups. By now, however, traces of this culture can be seen most clearly in the areas of two ones, including Việt and Mường. In the following part, therefore, we are presenting some comments about the linkages of Việt and Mường peoples with Đông Sơn culture.

3.1. The existence of Đông Sơn culture was closely associated with the national foundation of Hùng Kings. This is recorded in legends of both Việt and Mường peoples. In the community of Việt people, there is a story about Âu Cơ – Lạc Long Quân. In the meanwhile, Mường people also have a legend about a couple of mythological birds named “Ây and Úa”. The birds lived in a spathe named “land and water production”. They then laid a lot of eggs, which hatched out afterwards and became all beings, including Mói (Mường) people and Đào (Việt) people. There is also a story about a woman named Ngu Co. She was inherently a deer and got married with Long Vương (Dragon King), who was inherently a fish. They gave birth to 50 girls and 50 boys. And then, the father took 50 children to the coastal area to establish a branch of the Yellow-Shirt King (or Dị Dàng King).

They were the very ancestors of modern-day Việt people. In the meanwhile, the mother took the rest 50 children to the mountains to establish a branch of the Black-Shirt King. They were the ancestors of modern-day Mường people. Obviously, Ngu Cơ and Long Vương in the legend of Mường people are completely the same as Âu Cơ and Lạc Long Quân in the legend of Việt people.

3.2. In the period of Đông Sơn culture – the time of Hùng Kings, social institutions were formed. Lower social organizations include *tribes* administered by “hereditary mandarins”. Many stories in some books such as *Việt điện u linh* (Collection of Stories on the Shady and Spiritual World of the Việt Realm), *Lĩnh Nam chích quái* (Extraordinary stories of Lĩnh Nam) and legends such as *The family name of Hồng Bàng*, *The Palm Story*, *The Story of Bánh chưng...* as well as *The Records of Historians*, *Hou Han Shu* (Book of the Later Han) and *Jiaozhou Reports* mention the hereditary mandarins, who came from the aristocratic class of ancient Việt people; there were still such mandarins in society of Mường people sixty years ago. The title of a hereditary mandarin was also noted in some historical annals such as *The Completed Annals* and *The Compendium* etc., when mentioning events that took place in the period from the 11th to the 13th centuries in Đường Lâm (Sơn Tây Province) and Nho Quan (Ninh Bình Province) – they are “transitional areas” between Việt people and Mường people more than ten centuries ago. The local inhabitants were surely ancient Việt people at that time.

3.3. In the period of Đông Sơn culture – the time of Hùng Kings, customs and

beliefs were also formed, including the custom of blackening teeth, chewing betel, tattooing body, making *bánh chưng* – *bánh dày* (square glutinous rice cake and dumpling) on the occasion of Tet holidays (as expressed in the legends), winding a turban round the head, putting hair in a chignon, cutting hair, staying in a house on stilts, organizing a boat race (as carved on the bronze kettledrums), chicken-based fortune-telling, and braying stone motars, when a person died etc. Some of those customs and beliefs still remain at present in the community of Mường and Việt people as well. In terms of beliefs, Mường people also worship the Saint Đản (or Tản, i.e. Tản Viên) and Bua Khu (glass), which reflect the history of struggles against natural calamity.

The bronze kettledrum, a typical product of Đông Sơn culture, was respected much by ancient Việt people. After the Việt – Mường split, descendants of ancient Việt people still maintained and used the kettledrums with a great love. In the time of Lý Dynasty, Bronze Kettledrum Temples were built by the government (such as the Ancient Bronze Temples in Thăng Long and Thanh Hóa, where kings and mandarins came to make a worship every year). The ceremonial of beating the bronze kettledrum was still performed in the mid-15th century, when King Lê Nhân Tông visited Lam Kinh to pray and proclaim at the royal tomb (*Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư - Completed Annals of Đại Việt*, 2004: 228). For Mường community, hereditary mandarins kept the bronze kettledrums to show the power (both royal and divine power). Moreover, the bronze kettledrum played an important role in religious rituals and funerals. It was

considered to link the alive with the death. It was also viewed as a magic tool and it was sometimes buried with the dead. During a funeral procession, the powwow disguised himself as a bird (like a bird-man carved on bronze products of Đông Sơn culture). He told the story “Ây and Úa”, describing how Mường and Viet peoples were produced. Mường people still keep a powwow oration of the bronze kettledrum, in which Dịt Dàng – a mythological king of both Mường (Mọi) and Việt (Đáo) – directed people to cast thousands bronze kettledrums for exchange or to be given to hereditary mandarins (Trần Quốc Vượng and Nguyễn Dương Bình, 1965).

4. Conclusion

4.1. Đông Sơn culture originated in the Pre-Đông Sơn genealogies and then developed continuously through different periods, including Phùng Nguyên, Đồng Đậu, Gò Mun and Đông Sơn, in the Red River Delta and the valleys of Mã and Cả rivers. Đông Sơn culture in the Northern midland and plain areas was the most striking. It was a basic ground for the ancient Việt civilizations, resulting in unification of diversified factors of the Vietnamese civilizations at the period of national foundation.

4.2. Ancient Việt people were the very owners of Đông Sơn culture. They were then split into different ethnic groups, including: Việt, Mường, Thổ and Chứt in the Việt – Mường language family. Of all those ethnic groups, Việt people and Mường people are the two closest groups. They played the decisive role in the national foundation at the time of Hùng Kings. This hypothesis has been convincingly proved by folk legends as well as linguistic, archaeological and anthropological data and materials.

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