

A Review of Recent Researches Conducted by Taiwanese Archaeologists in Island Southeast Asia and the Pacific Region*

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The Importance of Archaeology of Taiwan in the Studies of the Pacific Prehistory

"It is extraordinary that the same Nation should have spread themselves over all the isles in this vast Ocean from NZ to this Island which is almost a fourth part of the circumference of the Globe." Captain James Cook at Easter Island, March 1774 (Beaglehole 1969: 354; cited from Kirch 1984: 1).

As the first European explorers sailed into the vast Pacific and encountered what they saw as a Polynesian "Nation" – from Hawaii to New Zealand, and further east to the Easter Island, they were at a maze to the ideas of how these "noble savages" could have navigated a great ocean and colonized most of its islands, since they themselves just started to "discover" the Pacific Ocean (Figure 1). The clear similarities in terms of material culture, of languages, and of ethnic homogeneity, and of behaviors, all

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pointed to a common origin for the Polynesian peoples. As Lieutenant King of the Resolution pointed out, “the same language...hardly requires any other proof of those who speak it being the same people, and originating from the same country” (Beaglehole 1967: 1392; cited from Kirch 1984: 1).

The origins of this Polynesian Nation, since then, have become a major research topic in the Pacific. The questions of how, when, and where these people had become Polynesians have been the focus of generations of scholarly efforts. Combining lines of evidence gathered from historical linguistics, comparative ethnography, physical anthropology, ethnobotany, archaeozoology, and archaeology, models proposed by Bellwood and others (e.g., Bellwood 1987; Irwin 1992; Kirch 1997, 2000; Spriggs 1993) all point to the possible answer that “the Polynesians became Polynesians within their oceanic realm,¹ their varied cultures the product of millennia of local evolution in island environments...from a common ancestor” (Kirch 1984, emphasis added), and this ancestral Polynesian homeland is now being located in the Fiji-Tonga-Samoa region, with evidence from both archaeological remains, physical anthropological investigations, and historical linguistic reconstructions (Kirch and Green 2001).

As the first cultural remains found throughout the Remote Oceania, a region that encompasses southern Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, the entire Polynesia and Micronesia where no human settlement had been discovered before the arrivals of Lapita peoples and their descendants, Lapita Cultural Complex is recognized as the cultural layer that represents the complex history of the Austronesians as they migrated into the Pacific (e.g., Green 1979; Kirch 1997, 2000; Spriggs 1993). So logically the question then becomes: how and where and when did Austronesians become Austronesians before they moved into the Pacific?

¹ This idea was first proposed by Groube, stating that “the Polynesians became Polynesians sometime near the middle of the first millennium B. C., after over 600 years of isolation in the remote archipelago of Tonga” (Groube 1971).

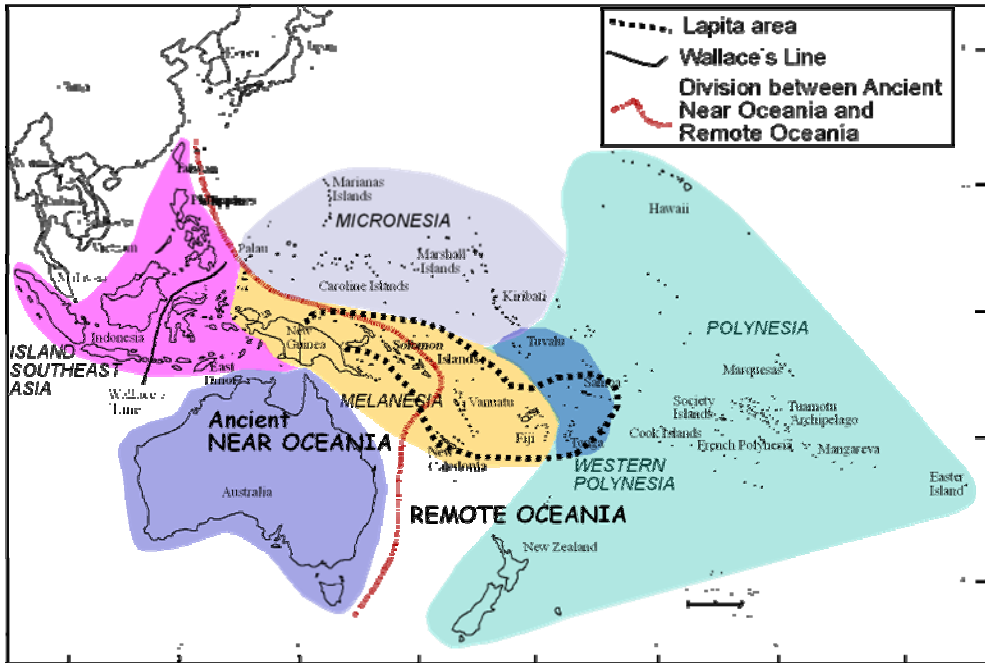


Figure 1. Map of the Pacific with Spatial Distribution of Lapita Culture Complex

There are several models that try to point out the origins of Austronesians. Although some propose that the origin of the Austronesian-speaking people should be in the areas of eastern Indonesia or New Guinea (Dyen 1971; Meacham 1988, 1995; Oppenheimer and Richards 2001; Solheim 1984), most scholars support the idea that ancestors of the Proto-Austronesians originated from southeastern China or island Southeast Asia (Bellwood 1984; Chang 1964, 1989; Haudricourt 1954; Jin and Su 2000; Shutler and Marck 1975; Su et al. 1999, 2000; 李壬癸 1979; 張光直 1959, 1987, 1989). Some of them traveled to Taiwan, either in one major migration or through multiple waves of migrations during a rather prolonged period of time. After settling down and forming what we now recognize as the Proto-Austronesian society, they migrated out of Taiwan into the Pacific (Bellwood 1997:204; Blust 1984, 1988; Kirch 1997; Melton, Clifford, Martinson, Batzer and Stoneking 1998; Melton, Clifford, Martinson, Batzer and

Stoneking 1995; Shutler and Marck 1975; Starosta 1995; Trejaut et al. 2005; 林媽利 2001). Others may have traveled directly from Southeast Asia into Island Southeast Asia and Oceania (Beyer 1948:6; Heine-Geldern 1932; 臧振華 1999). Various hypotheses were proposed to suggest what the primary driven fact might be for these people to migrate into the vast ocean (for example, see Bellwood 1980b; Groube 1971; Kirch 1984; Yen 1974). The evidences to support or reject any of these models are still very limited and preliminary at this time.

Since languages, genes, and material cultures are all subject to change as human beings interact and evolve through time, as witnessed by contemporary Austronesian-speaking populations as they suffered the enormous impacts from colonization and interactions with other peoples, the origin(s) and the migration routes of the Austronesian-speaking peoples as they expanded into the Pacific have remain unclear. Thus, archaeological materials analyzed according to their positions in cultural layers, as well as radiocarbon dates, have been used by linguists and bio-anthropologists as means to further examine and evaluate of the dating of these expansion routes (Blust 1996; Oppenheimer and Richards 2001), base on the assumption that people speaking similar languages, bearing similar genes, generating similar culture materials can be treated as a study unit of a rather broad yet single cultural group.

This idea has been heavily criticized in recent years, at least in the field of Pacific archaeology (Terrell, Hunt and Bradshaw 2002; Welsch 1996; Welsch and Terrell 1991, 1998; Welsch, Terrell and Nadolski 1992), yet even those who criticize does not seems to be able to provide a better starting point for such researches. In my opinion, history, as well as prehistory, is an inseparable "chaîne opératoire" (Leroi-Gourhan 1993), in which every event, no matter how trivial as it initially was at the moment it occurs, will have a influence on events that come after. Yet ironically, in order to study it, history has to be dissected before reassembled. Thus the ideas about studying each and every one of the various types of material culture

presented in a society and their individual history of evolution in the changing social/economic contexts may seem attractive, which dissect the history in terms of categories of object instead of temporal/spatial domains, will still fall into the danger of ignoring the whole by looking in from a small point of investigation, an Achilles' Heel that seems unavoidable to all.

Yet no matter what point(s) of views that one would like to take when he/she starts to investigate, and no matter which model one prefers, the question of whether the Austronesians became Austronesians inside Taiwan or in the Island Southeast Asia needs to be answered by investigating the complex picture of Taiwan in relation to its surrounding areas. Whether Proto-Austronesian culture really formed inside Taiwan before they moved out, or that it actually formed somewhere in the Island Southeast Asia or Southeast China before one or more branches of them settled inside Taiwan, has to be answered by archaeological studies combining with evidences from other disciplines. Settlement patterns, subsistence strategies, botanic and faunal alterations through over-hunting and/or introduction of exotic species, and various aspects of material culture may form a solid foundation for this type of archaeological research.

For example, whether the exchange pattern of pottery, stone tools, and jade artifacts between Taiwan and northern Philippines may be compared with that of the obsidian, shell artifacts, and pottery exchange among Near Oceanic Lapita groups is yet another new dimension of research that deserves our attention. Exchange of such goods have been proposed by Green and Kirch as a strategy to maintain a lifeline back to the homeland while colonizing uninhabited islands (e.g., Green 1987:246; Green and Kirch 1997; Kirch 1988; Sheppard 1993), this particular type of exchange may have had its routes back to the Austronesian homeland area as well. Thus the studies now being conducted by Bellwood and Hsiao-Chun Hung on the comparison of pottery and Jade between the Cagayan Valley of northern Luzon and Eastern Taiwan (Hung in press) deserve our attentions. Furthermore, what implications that these exchange patterns may be for our

understanding of the developments of local social relations, the raise or vanish of local exchange centers and social hierarchies, and how may these communities evolved together to gain reliable accesses to different environmental resources, as shown from the case of Sepik region of Papua New Guinea (e.g., Welsch and Terrell 1998), may raise many interesting research issues for the future.

Thirdly, our further understanding of other pottery traditions in the Melanesian must be further expanded. Similar vessel forms and pottery-making techniques of Lapita pottery have been proposed to be found in the traditions of Island Southeast Asia, such as the Corded Mark Pottery tradition of Taiwan (Bellwood 1980a; Chang 1964; Shutler and Marck 1975), the red-slipped Plainware from Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia (Bellwood 1987:45; Bellwood 1997; Hung in press), and pottery from Lal-lo, northern Luzon Island of the Philippines (Thiel 1984; 臧振華 1999), their relationships to the history of Austronesian expansions also require our efforts.

There are still much to be done for archaeological studies of Taiwan before we may attempt to answer the above questions. As the area between Taiwan and Papua New Guinea remains understudied, it is rather hard for archaeologists at this moment to concentrate their efforts toward these directions. However, we already have made some progress in the recent years. The Lapita Roundtable Discussion organized by the Center for Archaeological Studies, Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica this June, for example, demonstrates our efforts to encourage more cooperation projects between Taiwanese and foreign archaeologists who are interested in these issues. Future projects such as generating a online database for the study of Lapita pottery together has been proposed and was welcomed by all participants, as it will form the base for motif and vessel form comparisons among the entire Lapita region, covering Lapita pottery excavated from the Bismarck Archipelago to the Fiji-Tonga-Samoa area (Chiu and Sand 2005).

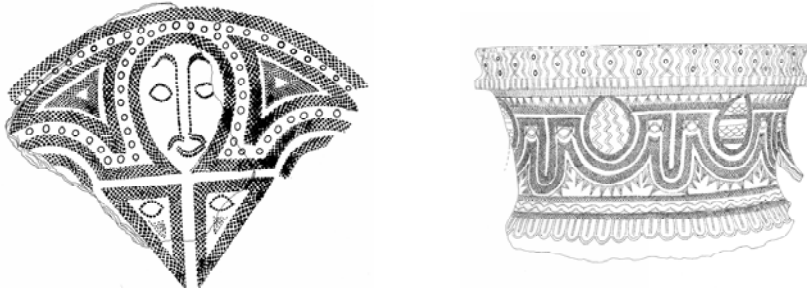


Figure 2. Examples of Lapita Face Motifs from Reef/Santa Cruz and New Caledonia Lapita Sites

Note: Face motif from Site Nenumbo (BS-RL-2), Reef/Santa Cruz (left), and Site Lapita (WKO013A) of New Caledonia (right).

In the next section I will briefly summarize types of archaeology which have been conducted by Taiwanese scholars so far in a region that encompasses Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia and East Timor that is traditionally considered the region of Island Southeast Asia, and the Oceania which includes Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, excluding Australia. Works conducted in countries such as China, Japan, and Vietnam, which traditionally being classified under the region of East Asia or mainland Southeast Asia, are not considered in this paper. I also limited my review to those who physically conducting research plans in the defined region, in order to provide an updated view of what has been done in the recent years. Pei-Yi Guo's paper of this volume may serve as a starting point if one is interested in comparative works done by ethnographers and archaeologists who drew their interpretations of data from works of other Pacific archaeologists (for more references, see Chang 1974; Tsang 1995; 張光直 1987; 臧振華 2000).

Research Themes Carried out by Taiwanese Archaeologists in the Region

In order to answer the question of possible routes of prehistoric Austronesian migrations, Dr. Cheng-Hwa Tsang (臧振華) stands as the first

Taiwanese archaeologist who is able to conduct researches on the Austronesian expansions outside Taiwan (臧振華 1998). He conducted several archaeological surveys and excavations in the northern coast of the Luzon Island with local archaeologist Ray A. Santiago of the National Museum of the Philippines between 1996 and 2001 (Hung in press; 臧振華 2000), and successfully yielded evidences from the Cagayan valley, the Abulug valley, coastal areas between Laoag and Aparri of northern Luzon, that indicate the date for the “out of Taiwan” movement of Austronesians occurred “later than the time period of Tapenking Culture of Taiwan,” and that the red-slipped pottery tradition with other artefacts such as stone adzes, ceramic ornaments, shell rings found in the Nagsabaran site of northern Luzon encompasses similar attributes to both Lapita pottery and the red-slipped pottery found on the eastern coast of Taiwan (Tsang 2005). Whether finding may indicate a post-Lapita back-flow of technology, decorative style, or population from the Papua New Guinean area to the Philippines and further back up to eastern Taiwan is now under investigation.

Dr. Tsang also contributes greatly in terms of inspiring and fostering a new generation of Taiwanese archaeologists to participate in international cooperation projects and further conduct their own archaeological researches in various island groups in the Pan-Pacific region. For example, involving in the original research plan of Dr. Tsang, Miss Hsiao-Chun Hung (洪曉純) has worked at the Cagayan Valley in northern Luzon to investigate the relationships between eastern Taiwan and the northern Philippines since 1996 (Hung in press, 洪曉純 2005). Her recent study on the middle Neolithic jade and pottery exchanges between Taiwan and northern Luzon (dates to about 2,000-1,500 BC) brings out the issue of long-distance intra-island, probably “down-the-line” exchanges (Green 1982), and the implications for future studies on issues such as diffusion, “borrowed” traditions, and population back-flows. Her study suggests that “the 3500 year old pottery from Nagsabaran, Catugan, and Irigayen [of northern

Luzon] reveal a direct derivation from the Formosan pottery tradition,” not the other way around.

Also inspired by Dr. Tsang, Mr. Kuang-Jen Chang (張光仁) focuses his Ph. D. dissertation project on the trade/exchange networks of seven Calatagan cemeteries of Southwest Luzon that date to around mid-15th and 16th centuries AD, to study the possible relationships among these sites (Chang 2006). He is set to challenge our often over-simplified assumption of viewing exotic pottery imported mainly from China as highly valued prestige goods compared to local earthenware without investigating deeply into the social contexts of local communities. Thus, by using mortuary remains from these sites, he is aimed to demonstrate that social hierarchical structures cannot be implied directly from burial goods, and that these artefacts, local or exotic ones, were all used to manipulate social relationships.

Aiming at discussing the complex formation of history and, as a side-effect, to bring multivocal to the creation of local history, Mr. Chin-Yung Chao (趙金勇) recently just presented a paper on the 11th to 18th century Sandalwood trade networks of East Timor (Timor L'este) based on his study conducted in the Tutuala area locates on the eastern part of the island, in which he attempted to discuss the multiple directions of trades out of Eastern Timor to Island Southeast Asian countries during the European occupation period (趙金勇 2005). His research will combine evidence collected from history, archaeology, and geoarchaeology, to study the interacting forces of local trade, ecosystems, and socio-political systems express in sandalwood trades, and how these forces have integrated Timor into the larger regional economic systems, and the possible socio-political outcomes of such an increasing expansion and integration.

Conducting his Ph. D. dissertation research in Pasil Municipality of Kalinga, northern Luzon, as part of the long-lasting Kalinga Ethnoarchaeological Project started by William A. Longacre back in 1973 (Longacre and Skibo 1994; 鍾亦興 2005), Mr. Yi-Shing Chung (鍾亦興)

emphasizes his ethnoarchaeological study on issues involving human-modified landscape formation processes and how this may influence the socioeconomic activities of local communities.

It is rather interesting to note that most of these researches conducted by Taiwanese archaeologists in the defined sub-regions focus on the issues of exchange systems and interactions, in terms of either material culture or human-land relationships. Issues such as when and where did Austronesians become Austronesians, who and what had been exchanged/traded among nearby island groups, and how these exchanged objects may tell us about human relationships created and maintained over these islands have formed the first big research direction in this region. Secondly, issues regarding the formation of archaeological hypotheses are questioned, in terms of critically reviewing and challenging how archaeologists address social relationships or the formation and maintenance of social hierarchy by examining the ideology of exotic vs. local material goods, how to document local prehistory in relation to contemporary power/political and economic situations, and what approaches may be able to help archaeologists to understand the complex process of human-land relationships in an island setting.

My own research is in the same category as well. My research involves the study of Lapita pottery—a prehistoric pottery arguably brought into the Pacific by the Austronesians, its unique decoration of dentate-stamped motifs has become an “index fossil” in terms of understanding culture history and local variation within the region since its first discovery in the Watom Island of Papua New Guinea back in 1909 (Meyer 1909)—in terms of its vessel forms, motif decorations, and clay recipes, and how these factors may influence our understanding of the Lapita pottery-making traditions, its exchange networks, and how these economic and social factors might contribute to the creation or change of its social forms in the long run. My major research interest is to investigate the possible use of symbols (in particular, Lapita face motifs) to construct social hierarchy in local

communities (Chiu 2005b). How these people from various ethnic groups had colonized and established themselves on previously uninhabited islands, how they then developed their local social hierarchies to stabilize their society, and how they interacted with peoples from other island groups, near or far, through the use of symbols (Lapita motifs executed on pottery, stone tool, shell ornaments and bone carvings) are issues that interest me the most.

By hypothesizing that the variations observed from Lapita pottery decorative motifs actually represented the efforts of Lapita peoples to stress both social integration and social differentiation at the same time, probably based on house-based groups, I try to establish my case by looking at factors such as materials acquired, the underlying motif construction grammar shared and used, and vessel-forming techniques employed. In my thesis titled "The Socio-economic Functions of Lapita Ceramic Production and Exchange: A Case Study from Site WKO013A, Koné, New Caledonia" (Chiu 2003) I used evidence from chemical analyses, petrographic analyses, vessel form reconstructions, motif analyses, and contextual information of the site to argue for a case that these Lapita sherds are locally made with whatever the materials that were available, and what was the most important thing to these peoples were to make a Lapita face motif container wherever it was possible once they colonized a new piece of land. Multiple methods of decoration were also employed to execute the same set of motifs, while the face motifs were always made of dentate-stamping, stressing the social importance of "tattooing the pot," the symbol of ancestors (Kirch 1997). Although Site 13A employed a lot of "traditional motifs" shared with other island groups, particularly with the Solomons and the Tongan islands, it nonetheless also, not long after the initial colonization period, started to create motifs of its own. Thus from my study it is quite clear that the processes of intrusion, of integration, and of innovation, the Triple-I model proposed by Prof. Roger Green (1991a), in explaining the colonization processes of the Pacific may also be observed in the making of Lapita pottery

throughout different island groups.

The comparison among motifs found at Site 13A to other published data has reached a conclusion that Site 13A shared a lot of similar motifs with SE-RF-2 of Reef/Santa Cruz Islands (Chiu 2005c). Therefore this year I conducted a field work research on the Reef/Santa Cruz materials now stored in the Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland. I worked closely with Prof. Roger Green, who excavated the site back in the 1971 and 1976, and has over the years published numerous papers on the possible functions of these sites (just to name a few, Green 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1986, 1987, 1991b, 1998; Green and Pawley 1998, 1999; Green and Yen 1970). It has been proposed that SE-RF-2 might have been used as a house, for a duration of only 25-50 years (Sheppard and Green 1991). With more than 80,000 sherds excavated and only 1/3 of them being studied by various MA students, my task for this year is just to locate previously unrecognized face motifs from boxes of sherds as a starting point for further comparisons. By focusing on sorting out just how many face motifs were used at this particular site, their spatial distribution in relation to house structures, and then further comparing them with face motifs excavated from Site 13A, and eventually putting the hypothesis whether similar motif structures or similar preferences on particular types of face motif were used by both sites to the test. The preliminary findings of this project confirm that, during roughly the same period of time, Lapita peoples who occupied the Reef/Santa Cruz islands did share a basic grammar of motif construction with those of New Caledonian, while the Lapita peoples in the Reef/Santa Cruz preferred complex triangular face motifs with elaborated earplugs/headdresses on the sides, the New Caledonian preferred the simplified face motifs what put more emphases on the various expressions of eyes. Variations seen within each site examine also show indication of minor modifications of a general face motif, arguably by various members of a house-based group (Chiu 2005a).

Conclusion

The study of the Austronesian expansion is not, and never will be, an easy task. It requires collaborate efforts to make this construction of the prehistory possible. At this stage, it is still quite a long way to go before we may answer the question of the origins of the Austronesian, and their relationships with surrounding areas and peoples in the prehistoric time. The discussions and debates on Lapita intersect in various ways with the research done throughout the Pacific region. For example, the modeling of the colonization of the Pacific can be compared to the possible colonization of Taiwan and its surrounding areas. What functions did prehistoric intra-island exchange systems have in terms of creating social hierarchies, maintaining social boundaries, in the processes of migration, will be the most interesting subject to pursue in the near future. I thus conclude this paper with a hope that interdisciplinary cooperation projects may also be fostered among scholars from different disciplines, as we need every effort possible to further our understanding of the past.

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