Prehistoric cultural contact between the Philippines and South China

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Abstract

Concerning the prehistoric Philippine culture, although its researchers are divergent on its developmental course and periodization, they believe to various extents that this aboriginal cultural system contains widespread cultural elements from the continent of South China. The available archaeological data accumulated for almost one century suggest that the Philippine Islands were the main link between the aboriginal cultures of the South China and the “Austronesian” cultures in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. This is reflected from the existence of cultural elements from South China continent in the prehistoric Philippine cultural sequence, whose archaeological cultures of the Paleolithic, Neolithic and early Metal ages, especially their principal contents, show without exception close relationship with South China continent.

Keywords: cultural diffusion; culture-prehistoric; Philippines-civilization; South China-civilization.

Introduction

The Philippine Islands were a step land through which East Asian ancient cultures were transmitted to Southeast Asia and Oceania. Archaeological data gathered in the past hundred years indicate that the Philippine Islands serve to link cultures of the Hundred Yue system of South China to those of “Austronesian ethnical groups of the southwestern Pacific”, which is evidenced by the growing influx of cultural elements from South China during the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and early Metal Ages into prehistoric cultures of the Philippines.

Paleolithic and Mesolithic cultures and South China

In the Philippine Islands the following Paleolithic and Mesolithic cultures are known: Liwanian, Tabonian, and Rizal-Bulakan.

The Liwanian Culture features typical pebble tool industry, which consists mainly of unifacial scrapers, choppers, and hand axes, and a limited quantity of bifacial flake tools and many of them kept unprocessed surfaces (Figure 1:1–4). No radiocarbon date of this culture is available, but Philippine archaeologists dated the culture to the middle Pleistocene, or 500,000 BP, based on accompanying faunal fossils, which are of the species of elephant, rhinoceros, and wild boar (Jocano 1975, 77–9). However, the horse-hoof-shaped scrapers in the assemblage, whose entire perimeter was retouched, are analogous to the so-called “Sumatra-type”
The Tabonian Culture produces both core and flake tools out of flint and quartz, but the flakes are seldom retouched (Figure 1:5–9). The radiocarbon date of this culture is 30,500 ± 1,100 to 9,250 ± 250 BP (Jocano 1975, 79–85).

Rizal-Bulakan Culture is a Mesolithic culture featuring flake tools made out of obsidian, flint, and other volcanic glass. Tool types consist of small scraper, knife, saw, burin, point and arrowhead. The scrapers and knives are notable for the diverse shapes of blades (Figure 2:1–11). Philippine archaeologist F. L. Jocano believes that the culture falls within the temporal frame of 12,000–8,000 BP (Beyer 1948, 12–4; Jocano 1975, 86–90). Similar tool types have been found in caves on the East Timor, Sulu, and Sulawesi Islands (Figure 2:22–5; Bellwood 1997, 181-7).

In the Paleolithic cultural geography of East Asia, South China and Southeast Asia saw the rise of the pebble tool complex, which differs from the flake tool complex pervasive in North China, and denotes an independent origin. The material culture of Liwanian and Tabonian Cultures identifies with this complex.

The Mesolithic tools of the Rizal-Bulakan Culture corresponded to those from the widely discovered sites of the Lianhuachi Upper Culture (or Zhangzhou Culture), which featured in producing small stone implements such as scrapers, points, arrowheads, burins, drills and so on with flint and quartz (Figure 2:12-21), in the coastal areas of Fujian and Guangdong, and were again absent in North China even in other loci of South China. This betrays a continued contact between South China and the Philippines and Southeast Asian islands and might hint a special contact between the Lianhuachi Upper Culture and the Rizal-Bulakan Culture or other aboriginal cultures of Mesolithic Age in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian islands.

The mainland elements in Philippine Neolithic and Bronze Age materials

Philippine Neolithic and Bronze Age materials are lacking stratigraphic evidence, and cannot be handled by archaeological cultures. But we may make out a list of elements of South China cultures among them.

“Proto-Neolithic” tools such as chipped and roughly ground axes, which have been found in Bataan, Rizal, Bulacan, Batangas Provinces, are the earliest ground tools in the prehistoric Philippines (Beyer 1948, 17-9; Jocano 1975, 92-7). These tools are roughly square in shape; their blades are ground whereas the remaining area are untouched (Figure 3:1–3). Such axes are in line with the Bo Son Culture of North Vietnam. They have been widely discovered in Guangdong (Qingtang and Shilaodun Sites in Yingde City), Thailand (Banyan Valley), North Vietnam (Bo Lum and Bo Nam in the Gulf of Tonkin), and dated to 10,000 BP.
The ground axes and adzes are circular or oval in section, shouldered, and square or trapezoid in general (Figure 3:3–8, 11 and 12), among which the most common type in prehistoric East Asia is the square axe and adze. Adzes that have concave blades are mostly found in late Neolithic and early Bronze Age cultures in the coastal areas of Fujian and Guangdong, especially among the Fubin Phase. The shouldered and stepped axes and adzes are unique to South China and Pacific islands (Beyer 1948, 28-37) and absent in Prehistoric cultures of North China. The Philippines appear to be a jumping board of these types of tools.

Stone tools that have indented blades have been found among Neolithic and Bronze Age sites along the western coast of Taiwan (Dapenkeng, Yuanshan, Fengpitou, Kenting, Ngoluanpi, Shihsanhang), coast areas of Fujian (Jinmen, Pingtan, Yunxiao), Guangdong (Baojingwan), and Hong Kong (Ng

![Figure 3](image-url)

Figure 3 The ground stone tools found in Luzon Island, the Philippines.
1, 7 and 11. axes 2–6, 8 and 9. adzes 10 and 12. mortars (pitted anvils)

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<tr>
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<td>Club-shaped bark cloth beaters</td>
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<td>9. compound beaters, Phung Nguyen Culture, Vietnam</td>
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![Figure 4](image-url)

Figure 4 The comparison of the stone barkcloth beaters unearthed in the Philippines and other circum-South China Sea areas.
1. unearthed from Fu Tei Wan, Hong Kong 2. unearthed from Longxue, Zhongshan, Guangdong 3. unearthed from Liangzhu, Hangzhou, Zhejiang 4. unearthed from Go Bong, Vietnam 5. unearthed in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand 6. unearthed from Paishui River, Tainan, Taiwan 8. unearthed in Cebu, the Philippines 9. unearthed on Luzon Island, the Philippines 10 and 11. compound beaters, Phung Nguyen Culture, Vietnam
Ka Yuen). Analogous artifacts have been found in Rizal Province of the Philippines (Beyer 1948, 40), which have almost no differences from that of the coastal areas of Fujian, Guangdong and Taiwan (Figure 3:9 and 10).

Bark cloth (tapa) is also an important ethno-archeological heritage from South China to Southeast Asia and the Oceania islands. Tang Chung’s typological researches on the bark cloth beaters revealed the logical sequence of their development from compound bark cloth beaters to club-shaped bark cloth beaters (Figure 4:1–3) and elucidated the process of its diffusion from the Pearl River Delta, which is its origin, via Indo-China Peninsula to Malay, the Philippines and the Pacific islands. The compound and club-shaped bark cloth beaters with grooves have been found from the prehistoric sites in China (mainly Taiwan), the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, etc (Figure 4:4–9), so they can be seen as one of the key elements of the aboriginal cultures in South China diffused to the Philippines (Beyer 1948, 40 and 59-61; Jocano 1975, 101).

Tools, ornaments and clothing made of shell have been found in Fujian (Tanshishan, Xitou, Zhuangbianshan, Mulinshan), and Guangdong (Pearl River Delta), and Taiwan (Figure 5:5–9). Not a few spades, knives, bracelets and earrings made of shell have been found in the Philippines (Figure 5:1–4; Jocano 1975, 96-100). Today ornaments made of pearl and shell and “Pearl-shell costume” are features of the Gaoshan people in Taiwan and Austronesian ethnic groups.

Jade earrings found in the Philippines are hardly different from their East Asian Continent counterparts. Ring-shaped earrings with four or three protrusions and zoomorphic earrings (Figure 6:1-4; Jocano 1975, 114-6) have been found in Taiwan (Zhishan Yan and Peinan Cultures), Vietnam (Go Mun and Sa Huynh Cultures, and South China (Shixia Culture, Figure 6:5–14). It is generally believed that these types of artifacts were invented in the Indo-China Peninsula.

Bronze axes with broad blades and indented sockets,
bronze willow-leaf-shaped spears found in Batangas Province on the Luzon Island, iron spears with willow-leaf-shaped bodies and indented sockets, and iron arrowheads with double wings found in Tabonian cave tombs (Figure 7: 1–9; Beyer 1948, 54-5; Jocano 1975, 107-22) all find indistinguishable analogies in pre-Qin cultures in Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi Provinces.

Pottery wares from the Philippines, although they do not constitute a chronological sequence, find analogies among South China cultures (Jocano 1975, 128–34; Bellwood 1997, 219-21). The Dimolit Group, which features plain and red coating as well as round jars, plates, dou-stemmed bowls with perforated ring foot, is linked with the Peinan Culture in Taiwan. The Lal-lo group, which features plain red-coated pottery, stick-tip imprints, serrated appliqué and ring-foot with small openwork decorations, find analogies among Yuanshan pottery of Taiwan and the earliest potteries of Polynesia and Melanesia. The Kalanay (Figure 8:17–22), Tabonian (Figure 8:1–10), and Novaliches

**Figure 7** The bronze and iron implements and pottery molds unearthed in the Philippines.
1. iron spearhead  2. bronze spearhead  3 and 4. pottery mold for bronze foundry  5–7. bronze axes (1, 2, 5 and 7. unearthed from Batangas on Luzon Island  3, 4 and 6. unearthed from Tabon Caves on Palawan Island)

**Figure 8** The groups of the prehistoric potteries of the Philippines.
1, 3, 4, 9 and 15. fu-cauldrons  2, 7 and 8. jars  5, 11 and 16. bowls  6, 17 and 18. vessel lids  10, 12, 13 and 19–24. potsherds  14. stemmed bowl
(Figure 8:11–16) Groups, which feature geometric designs and round bottoms, are comparable with Neolithic cultures in coastal areas of Fujian, Guangdong, and Taiwan; similar wares even remind us of pottery of the Gaoshan ethnicity in Taiwan. Again these pottery groups are absent in North China cultures.

**Additional remarks**

The “Austronesian ethnical groups” is an important subject in international anthropology; the origin of these groups has been hotly debated. Western scholars used to overlook South China materials while single-mindedly focus on Southeastern Asian materials. The aboriginal cultures of South China have long been neglected; still, cultures of the present-day She, Yao, Li, and Zhuang peoples that have intimate connection with the “Austronesian ethnical groups” have also passed out of their notice.

In the past decade, however, South China materials have begun to draw attention of international anthropologists, archaeologists and linguists, who “discovered” the ancestors of “proto-Austronesian” among archaeological and linguistic materials of South China. Indeed, without the archaeology of South China or ethnography of the three archipelagos of Southwestern Pacific, the ethno-archaeological “Proto-Austronesian Cultural Sphere” would not be complete (Wu 2003). The Philippines, as an intermediate part of this sphere, was evidently interacting with South China cultures in prehistory.

**References**


**Postscript**

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