I. New Prehistoric Discovery in Taichung City: Hui-Lai Li Archaeological Site

Located at latitude 24°09'58" N. and longitude 120°37'50"E., Taichung City's Hui-Lai Li is in Situn District in terms of administrative district; situated in the west of Taichung basin in terms of geography. Hui-Lai Li is at an elevation of 70 meters, and the west of the site overlooks the Dadu basin and Nantun District. The Archaeology Department has started to excavate and investigate the archaeological sites at the intersection of Shihjhung Road and Huilai Road as well as the No.144 City Government difei land area at the intersection of Shihjhung Road and Henan Road since 2002. The finds include artifacts belonging to Niu Ma Tou Culture and Fan Zih Yuan Culture, which was dated 1,300 years before present. Hui-Lai Li extends to Shin Kong Mitsukoshi Department Store, Tiger City, and other famous shopping centers as well as the designated land for the City Government's new buildings. The area of unearthed remains covers at least 150,000 m².

The artifacts of Hui-Lai Li were distributed nearby Fazih River. The random excavation around Huilai Cuo Section along Henan Road indicated that Hui-Lai Li Archaeological Site had been of a dwelling place with a huge population during Niu Ma Tou Culture. In 2004, the jade rings and ceramic shards representing Ying Pu Culture were discovered in the designated land area for the City Government's new buildings. The area of unearthed remains covers at least 150,000 m².

The finds serve as the first-hand evidence for scientists to probe into the life of the Iron Age villagers in Taichung basin, especially around Fazih River area.

It has been identified that the animal specimens excavated in Hui-Lai Li are birds, rabbits, deer, Formosan Reeve’s muntjacs, Meles meles Linnaeus, and Herpestes urva. The Meles meles Linnaeus, which have been extinct in Taiwan, are part of the Mustelidae family.

Was the ancient Taichung basin a lake or wetland? Further in-depth investigation is required in order to unveil this myth. Information related to paleoecological settings should be collected to identify the cultures and spatio-temporal distribution of Hui-Lai Li Archaeological Site. Next, the relationship between Niu Ma Tou Culture and red cord-marked pottery culture in north and south areas is to be explored; how Ying Pu Culture, Fan Zih Yuan Culture, and Iron Age were related should be discussed in detail as well.

Since Hui-Lai Li Archaeological Site was first excavated, the event involved in a wide range of levels from central and local educational authorities, necessary personnel such as the Mayor or the mayor candidates, archaeologists from other institutions, representatives of the people, borough wardens, the general public, students of primary, junior high, senior high schools, and universities, local cultural heritage workers, news and magazine publishers, and mass communication professionals, and the staff of the Department. The whole event best illustrates a modern version of “archeological efforts in the metropolis”.

While the excavation was still underway, the Museum launched two exhibits “The Lost Prehistoric Hui-Lai Man” and “The Story of Ancient People in Taichung” as well as activities like “A Root-Seeking Trip in Taichung” and “Life Learning: A Journey to the Past-Archaeological Class” so as to boost the public’s insight for, and
understanding and appreciation of the cultural heritage, and hence, become proud of their own culture. Through these carefully planned classes, the general public could have a glimpse of the nature science of “archaeology” and prehistoric cultures of Taiwan. By visiting the archaeological site, they could visualize the knowledge they acquired on books. The Department hopes to spread and instill respect for cultural heritage in the younger generations, so that people are aware of the importance to preserve the archaeological sites.

II. New Archaeological Discovery

During the Japanese colonial period, Mori Ushinosuke was the first scholar who climbed Mount Ali (Alishan) and investigated archaeological sites. He found chipped and grounding stone implements and ceramics in six localities upstream of the Zenwun River. Five of them were inhabited by the Tsou People. In the 1930s, Folk Customs and Ethnology Classroom of Imperial University, Taipei (the predecessor of the Department and Graduate Institute of Anthropology, National Taiwan University) conducted a large-scale research project focusing on the mountain aborigines and found stone axes on the ground, among which nine belonged to the archaeological sites in Alishan Village.

In 1941, Kano Tadao excavated at Tsou sites such as Vuyio and Yingana. He found several slate coffins at Vuyio; red and black ceramic sherds with cobweb patterns and thick plain ceramic sherds with quartz grains at both sites. As for stone implements, in addition to thin chipped stone axes, there were flat grounding adzes, narrow adzes, and grounding arrowheads. He believed that these artifacts were used by the Tsou’s ancestors.

Archaeological efforts in the Mount Ali area slowed down after Taiwan’s Retrocession, but resumed in 1993. Researchers from the Institute of History and Philosophy, Academia Sinica carried out a systematic archaeological exploration along the upstream of Zenwun River. They discovered another 15 sites and re-excavated the Yingiana site. Since 1997, researchers at the Department have consistently conducted investigations and test excavations in this mountain area. To date, more than 40 sites have been recovered. The test excavation took place in the border of Vuyio site (the Vuyio site was discovered by Kano Tadao in 1941) called “Daimaeyayan (spelled as Taawayyana in the Tsou’s language).” To ensure the chronological order of prehistoric cultures in Mount Ali, archaeologists conducted a series of large-scale excavations at the Taptanu and Niahosa sites from 2002 to 2003. These efforts, for the first time, have confirmed the existence of prehistoric cultures in this mountainous area, which could be classified into two layers: Yingiana Phase I or early cultural layer characterized by red cord-marked wares (about 3,800 years B.P.) and the Yingiana Phase II or later cultural layer featuring plain red and brown wares (900 B.P. to 200 B.P.).

The red cord-marked pottery from the mid Neolithic Age, Yingiana Phase I (the second cultural layer) represents the earliest human culture in Mount Ali. According to carbon-14 dating test, the Yingiana Phase I is approximately 3,800 years old, which means that the aborigines who owned the red cord-marked pottery culture moved inland from the coastal terraces approximately 4,000 years ago. They were everywhere, expanding from hills, small mountains, and even river terraces in the...
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mountains. These findings have contributed greatly to the research of prehistoric peoples’ upland expansion on the island.

The culture of plain red and brown wares with sand belonged to a cultural group that closely interacted with its neighboring groups. In addition to the same remains as those unearthed in Yingiana Phase II, the jade ornaments and bracelets, exclusively available in the Peinan Culture, were discovered at Veijo site in the late Neolithic Age. Also, at Niahosa site, researchers uncovered serpentine arrowheads, which were not commonly seen west of Taiwan’s Central Range. As the evidence indicates, the people who created the plain red and brown wares during the late Neolithic Age in Mount Ali already had frequent interaction with people on the east coast.

III. Miao’s Dangling Leg Houses

Dangling Leg Houses, the traditional architecture of Miao’s housing, have unique characteristics. Dangling Leg Houses use wood selected from local areas and utilize small areas of land. They are spacious, beautiful, and cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Dangling Leg Houses are popular among the Miao mountainous communities in Gueijhou, Hunan, and east Sichuan.

The Dangling Leg House in the Museum comes from Jhanghua Village, Pingtue Town, Jinping Prefecture, in Gueijhou Province, close to the Cingjian River. This Dangling Leg House, in the resting mountain style with the holding wooden frame, is over ten years old. The Dangling Leg House, with a floor space area of 85 ping (equivalent to 280 m²), contains three stories. The ground floor is used to raise livestock and as storage space. The second floor is used as living quarters, with three halls. The hall in the middle is the main hall, where ancestor-worship ceremony, meals, and the receiving of visitors take place. The two side halls are then divided to bedrooms, guest rooms, heating room, storage, and hallways. The top floor is the attic used to hang clothes to dry and as storage space for grain.

The houses are originally built on slopes. Before the house is constructed, a two-story platform is built, and the stairs are made of solid pebbles to form strong resistance and protection. The house then is built on the solid two-story platform, approximately 100 m². The outermost post hangs from the top floor and seems to be suspended in midair, without reaching the bottom floor, creating a “dangling leg” effect. Therefore, the houses have been coined, “dangling leg houses.”

The roof constructed of China fir is used to prevent the outer wall from deterioration caused by heat and rain. The dangling legs are decorated with carved golden paws for aesthetic effect. The cozy patio in front of the main hall is furnished with a long leaning bench, known as “beauty bench.” This is the favorite place of the Miao people, where they rest, appreciate the scenery, and welcome their friends.
IV. The New Collection of the Miao People in the Anthropology Department

In order to strengthen the folk collection of minority groups in Southeast China, in 2004 the Ethnology Division of the Anthropology Department purchased more than 1,000 pieces of a Miao collection, including embroidery, clothing, and one Dangling Leg House. The Miao collection comes from Hunan, Guangsi, Gueijhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Hainan, and other provinces. By comparison, the richest collection draws from the southeastern Gueijhou, where most of the Miao people reside. Southeast Gueijhou located east of Yunguei Terrain is the dividing line for the Yangtze River and Jhujiang River. The water area is simply divided into the Cingshuei River system in the north and Duliou River system in the south. The early collection in the Anthropology Department mainly comes from the Cingshuei River Area, with approximately more than 400 pieces mostly from areas in Shihbing, Taijiang, Danjhai, and Leishan. Particularly, the Museum has a rich collection of embroidery pieces from the Shihdong Area. The 2004 new collection not only increases the number of clothing and embroidery products of the Duliou River System but also enriches the Museum’s clothing collection from areas in South Gueijhou, northwest Gueijhou, northeast Gueijhou, Yunnan, and the like.

The registration method of the new Miao clothing collection follows that of the 1985 ethnological cultural system, dividing the Miao clothing into more than 80 styles with one or two specimens per style. The naming of the style follows the place name of its administrative village and township. The registration method is based on that of the Miao language. The different groups of the Miao are distinguished by the distinct colors used in clothing. Nevertheless, the relevant issues dealing similarities with other cultures remain unsolved. By comparison, the 400 specimens of the Miao's early collection were categorized according to each village. Although the new registration method eliminates complexity and confusion, more detailed information shall be provided for better understanding.

The Dangling Leg House stored by the Anthropology Department is the first and the only one in a museum collection in Taiwan. It came from Jhanghua Village, Pinglyue Township, Jinping Prefecture, Gueijhou Province, belonging to the Cingshuei River System. Due to the current construction of a water dam, the village had to be moved elsewhere. Accordingly, the Dangling Leg House was purchased by the Anthropology Department.

Our rich collection in embroidery, clothing, the Dangling Leg House, utensils, and the others indicates our determination to cross-cultural research. The material culture of the Miao people embodies the significant elements of their traditional and modern life styles. In addition, the underlying symbolic system reiterates the thinking pattern and cultural logic of the Miao people. Furthermore, the beautiful and rich cultural resources properties are not only works of art but also the records of the Miao people’s migration history.