

Examining the explanatory model of the cultural continuity in Taiwan

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Introduction

In this paper, I will focus on a debate about whether the separate cultural layers in Kiwulan (KWL) site in Northern Taiwan belong to the same prehistoric ethnic group. The KWL site is located at Ilan city and near a riverside at the northern margin of the Ilan plain in Northeastern Taiwan. The site was excavated during 2001 to 2003 by the Department of Anthropology of National Taiwan University.(Chen 2004) According to the archaeological remains, the site can be divided into a lower culture layer and an upper culture layer, dating from 1300B.P. to 800B.P. and 600B.P. to 100B.P.respectively based on radiocarbon dates. However, there is a debate about whether the archaeological remains from both layers belong to the same culture or not, because the archaeological remains show both similar and different patterns. Chen (2004) argued that these two layers belong to the same culture based on similar pattern of artifacts. However, Chiu (2004) stated that they belong to different culture or ethnic group due to the distinct style of mortuary practice. The difference of these explanations shows distinct explanatory models in terms of archaeological evidence. The following I will examine these two explanations, explore the philosophical theories behinds them, discuss their strength and weakness, and conclude that combination of these two models might be a better way to explain the cultural continuity. (Chiu 2004)

Archaeological evidence

The excavation covered an area of 2,800 sqm and revealed hundreds of thousands of artifacts from a total of 262 archaeological excavation areas. The following I introduce the archaeological evidence found in these layers respectively.

1. Lower culture layer (1300-800 B.P)

The archaeological evidence include a wide variety of pottery, post holes, slabs which are associated with households, 35 burials, few iron knives and artifacts, grinding stones, slabs, imported ornaments such as glass beads, agate beads, metal bracelet, glass earrings, fauna remains such as deer and pigs. There is no much evidence relates to practices of agriculture, and hunting and gathering are believed as the main subsistence. For the pottery, there are different kinds of shape and form, including bowls, vessels, and pots. The most common type of pottery is the pottery with stamped geometric decoration. Although there are many types of pottery in the living area, only geometric decoration pottery and plain vessels found in burials as burial goods. In addition to pottery, imported ornaments are also the common burial goods. For the burials, secondary burial is the most common type, and slabs were used to serve as funerary utensils. The people abandoned this settlement around 800B.P due to the environmental change (Chen 2007).

2. Upper culture layer (600-100 B.P.)

The archaeological remains found in this period were more than lower culture layer. The archaeological evidence includes pottery, imported ceramics and stonewares, wooden artifacts such as table wares and tools, grinding stones, metal artifacts such as knives and points, imported ornaments such as glass beads, agates beads, and metal bracelets, pipes which made of stone, clay, and metal, local ornaments made of

animal bones, shells, and wood, and fauna assemblage. In addition to artifacts, 90 burials and wooden pole structures were also excavated. These wooden poles were found aligned in a north-south direction with construction marks, which were interpreted as the remains of house structures. The distribution of features shows that the cemetery is located at the north part of house structures, which indicates the settlement was organized in some order. According to historical records, this settlement was believed as the biggest settlement in the 17th century (Nakamura 1938). The potteries were usually decorated with geometric design, which is similar to the pottery in earlier period. For the burials, the common funerary utensils were wooden boards. In addition to imported ornaments, imported ceramics were also the common burials goods (Chen 2007).

Links between evidence and behavior

Chen (2007) focused on the similar archaeological remains in both layers. In both layer, he pointed out that they find similar burial goods, such as local pottery, glass beads, and agate beads. Although the forms and shapes of beads are not completely the same in both layers, he argued that the distribution and pattern of burial goods is similar. Agate beads and glass beads usually serve as necklace on deceased, and some small beads seem they are part of the decoration of clothes. In addition to beads, pottery is the common burial good in both layers. He states that the people from these two periods have similar mortuary practice based on the distribution of burial goods, especially for the ritual. Moreover, the pattern of pottery in both layers shows the similar surface treatment, stamped geometric decoration, which shows the same system of decoration and the same technique for making pots. For the households, both periods were found post holes and wooden poles, which indicates they might have similar household structures. He thought that if we focus on singular artifact, we might think these remains belong to different groups. But when examining all of the archaeological remains together, both layers indicate similar pattern of artifacts and shows some continuity of cultural element.

On the other hand, Chiu (2004) stresses the difference between these two layers mainly based on mortuary practice. The common burial in lower cultural layer is secondary burials and the people used slabs as funeral utensils; however, most burials in upper culture layer are primary with bodies in flexed position. Moreover, wood is the common funeral utensil in upper culture layer rather than slabs. Although people from both layers used beads as burial goods, the forms and shapes shows slightly different. For example, the lower culture layer was found glass earrings, which is absent in upper culture layer. Based on Person (1999) arguments, he stated that mortuary practices are social and political behaviors. Mortuary practice and associated burial goods are not only artifacts, but also rules and custom related to the core element of a culture. Besides, he believed that mortuary practice usually links to the ritual, the worldview, and the view of life and death of an ethnic group. The viewpoints for mortuary practice of an ethnic group seldom change and will pass down from generations to generations unless they face significant influence. Therefore, he stated that the people from tow layers belong to different cultures, because their mortuary practices are different, and there is no relevant evidence shows any factor which will affect the culture change if they are the same group.

1 Behavior at different scales

Discussion

1. Context of the monograph's explanatory model

The same culture hypothesis is based on the similar human practice on daily life, such as making pattery, living, and mortury practive. This viewpoint stress that we should examine the artifacts as a

whole. On the other hand, different culture hypothesis thinks that mortuary practice reflects the view of life and death of an ethnic group, which is the core element in a culture and seldom changes with time. However, style of pottery or household tends to be influenced by other culture. This approach emphasizes that mortuary practice can be viewed as counterpart of society.

2. Relevant philosophy of science

I think Chen's (2007) argument is based on the inference of best explanation, because he examined all of the evidence found in these two periods, and thinks these two periods belong to the same culture can fit most evidence we found so far. As Lipton (2000) mentions, a good explanation should require a cause which can explain both the fact and other possible phenomenon, and should explain as many phenomena as possible. I think Chen's argument fulfills these requirements, because his argument can explain different type of artifacts instead of singular evidence.

On the other hand, I think Chiu's (2004) argument is based on the D-N model or unification. D-N model relies the logic connection and hypothesis building. In this case, it shows that Chiu's argument is based on the hypothesis that the mortuary practice is the core element in human culture and seldom changes with time unless they face significant influence. Also, any ethnic group has distinct mortuary practice. Because there is no evidence shows any factor that affects the mortuary practice between these two periods. By applying the D-N model, he infers that the people from two layers belong to different group based on the hypothesis of mortuary practice. Besides, I think his argument is also relative to unification.

3. Critique I think both arguments need more theoretical framework to support the inference. Although Chen's argument can explain more evidence in this site, there is no really connection that can explain the people belong to the same group. On the other hand, Chiu's argument only relies on the mortuary practice, which overlooked other possible phenomenon that can provide clues for this question. I think his argument should also consider other evidence in order to give better explanation. (Chiang 2010)

Conclusion

Reference

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