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Taiwan Maritime Landscapes from Neolithic to Early Modern Times

PAOLA CALANCA, LIU YI-CHANG, and FRANK MUYARD, eds.

Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2022.

Located some 130 km from the Asian mainland, the island of Taiwan is sufficiently large to have been home to inland populations whose lives did not revolve around regular access to coastlines. Yet, and as evident from this edited volume's title—*Taiwan Maritime Landscapes from Neolithic to Early Modern Times*—maritime connections have played a central role in its development. More crucially, the reference to Taiwan as an “island tossed by Asian currents” (Introduction by Paola Calanca and Frank Muyard, p. 13) highlights a trait shared by islands, namely, their liminal condition as a space encountered by steady flows of visitors, traders, conquerors, and wanderers emanating from multiple directions. But a case can perhaps be made that this is particularly so in the case of Taiwan, which stands at the geographical center of an assortment of nearby seas, straits, islands, and extended coastlines.

Beyond geographical considerations, such “Asian currents” have also brought about impactful—and on occasion rapid—changes in Taiwan's political and academic climate. In his chapter, “Taiwan's Place in East Asian Archaeological Studies,” Frank Muyard offers a perceptive review

of the impact of such developments on archaeology. There is, to begin, the limitation of a textual record whose usefulness extends only to the end of the sixteenth century, along with the enduring disjunction between archaeological and historical studies. Importantly, the arrival of mainland scholars in 1949 was associated with the pursuit of archaeological and historical studies that for some time focused on China at the expense of research on the island's native Austronesian populations (which earlier Japanese ethnographers had written about). More recently, research on Taiwan has increasingly incorporated contributions from ethnography, archaeology, and history to shed light on past native populations and more recent arrivals from the mainland. Yet, the field of Taiwanese studies remains underfunded by the government—Muyard records only 55 professional archaeologists working in Taiwan—with the current population showing still limited awareness of their island's archaeology and history.

While Taiwan's variegated past may account for some of the public's muted interest in its prehistory and history, the island's position at the center of constantly shifting flows of interaction offers scholars welcome opportunities to consider not only the impact of interaction networks on Taiwan itself, but also its own contributions to regional developments. Thus, each of this volume's chapters includes a discussion of interaction with one or more of the following regions: the mainland, Japan's southern islands, the Philippines, and regions farther south in the South China Sea. Crucially, and reflecting the editors' stated acknowledgment of the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach, several chapters incorporate and interpret the results of recent oceanographic and paleoclimatic studies, along with research on seafaring. While environmental studies are only now beginning to impact research on Taiwan, readers should be encouraged by the potential which such methodological breadth holds for the study of its past.

The chapter "Climate Changes and Neolithic Human Migration 'Out of Taiwan,'" by Lionel Siame and Guillaume Leduc, takes an environmental approach to address the topic of seafaring. After first discussing present-day seasonal (monsoonal) changes in winds and currents in the South China Sea, the authors consider the effect of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) on areas near Taiwan. Previous research suggests that the period 4500–2500 BP was marked by an increase in ENSO amplitude and frequency, itself correlated with a weakening—during ENSO's El Niño phase—of the Kuroshio ("Black current"), the strong year-round northward current which flows in the Luzon Strait and along Taiwan's east coast. Such conditions, the authors propose, would have facilitated the Austronesians' initial southern dispersal from Taiwan and the associated movement of nephrite artifacts.

In "Taiwan Prehistoric Maritime Trade Networks and Their Impacts," Liu Yi-chang reviews the island's development within the context of broader migratory and diffusion currents. These changes, which chart the inland expansion of increasingly diverse cultures, reveal shifts in Taiwan's primary contacts with surrounding regions. Early connections with the mainland include foraging groups who crossed the land bridge 30,000 years ago and ceramic-using cultivators arriving

about 6000 BP. By 4000 BP, a maritime reorientation toward the south was associated with the Austronesian expansion, followed by later finds of Taiwan nephrite and shared ceramic styles at several South China Sea locations, along with the arrival—from the south—of metal technology and Indo-Pacific glass beads. By the tenth century, increasing trade contacts with China's mainland had curtailed these southern exchange networks. In "Cross-Strait Migration during the Early Neolithic Period of Taiwan," Tsang Cheng-hwa considers the origin of those proto-Austronesian populations which came to be associated with Taiwan's early Neolithic Tapenkeng culture, dated to 6000–5000 BP and now better known following recent excavations at the sites of Nankuanli and Nankuanli East. Based on similarities in pottery, stone tools, settlement patterning, and subsistence (fishing, hunting, and limited farming), Tsang argues that these early Neolithic settlers originated in the area encompassing the Pearl River Delta, Hainan, and the Gulf of Tonkin (rather than along the coast of present-day Fujian) and that familiarity with maritime environments and the pursuit of new habitats (rather than population pressure) were the propelling factors behind their settlement in Taiwan.

Looking toward the northeast, Chiang Chih-hua's chapter "Possible Relationships between Taiwan and the Southern Ryukyu Islands during the Early Neolithic Period" reviews the evidence of contact between Taiwan and Japan's southern island chain. Evidence of a possible 2800 BCE date for the beginning of the Southern Ryukyus' pottery-using Shimotabaru culture helps explain its more pronounced similarities to Taiwan's Tapenkeng culture (4000–2500 BCE) than to its Middle Neolithic (2500–1450 BCE) populations (associated with the Austronesian expansion toward the Philippines). Shared traits include subsistence activities (exploitation of maritime resources and horticulture), settlement patterns, and artifact assemblages. However, differences in pottery traditions warn against a simple diffusion or migratory model to account for early links between Taiwan and the Southern Ryukyus. In "The Austronesian Dispersal: A Lanyu Perspective," Chen Yu-mei assesses the "Out of Taiwan" model of Austronesian expansion from both a localized and a multidisciplinary perspective. With a focus on the island of Lanyu, she reviews the available archaeological, ethnographic, linguistic, and genetic evidence and points to complex and shifting patterns of interaction linking Taiwan and the Philippines. Thus, archaeological evidence indicates early contacts between Lanyu and Taiwan, with the former's reorientation toward the south in later periods, while ethnographic, textual, and linguistic data all point to closer links between Lanyu and the Batanes Islands to its south over the past centuries. Most interestingly, genetic data indicates that "the Batanes and Lanyu are both genetically closer to their respective nearby islands" (p. 131), challenging the idea of "Lanyu being a stepping-stone on the southward migration route from Taiwan" (p. 131).

In his chapter "Interactions and Migrations between Taiwan and the Philippines from the Neolithic to the Early Metal Age," Liu Yi-chang considers cultural developments—with a focus on material culture—in Taiwan and on Luzon Island to shed light on the nature and direction of inter-

action between the two islands during the period 6000–1600 BP. At present, evidence of such interaction remains doubtful until 4200 BP, at which time the presence of pottery and nephrite objects on Luzon indicates the beginning of sustained interaction originating in Taiwan. Starting around 2400 BP, interaction becomes bidirectional, with Taiwan nephrite objects now reaching not only Luzon but also southern regions of the South China Sea; in the other direction, a range of stylistic elements, behaviors, and objects (e.g., dotted triangle patterns, burial practices, agate, glass, metal) begin reaching Taiwan. This expansion of interaction networks in the South China Sea is well supported by Aude Favereau and Bérénice Bellina in “Reviewing the Connections between the Upper Thai-Malay Peninsula and the Philippines during the Late Prehistoric Period (500 BC–AD 500).” Relying on the stylistic and technical elements of Kalanay-type ceramic vessels, the authors point to back-and-forth interaction between the two regions—which are separated by about 2,500 km—involving the movement of styles, people, and in some cases the pots themselves. In their view, small mobile groups of traders would have facilitated such contacts as well as the movement of other glass and stone ornaments throughout the South China Sea. The authors also question why Taiwan appears to have played a relatively limited role in such expanded spheres of interaction, with no Kalanay-type ceramics yet found on the island.

In “Textual Sources on Cross-Strait Contact through the 1st Millennium AD,” Hugh Clark reviews the textual evidence pertaining to China’s offshore islands from the first millennium BCE to the twelfth century CE. The sparse and vague references mention the “Isle of Yi,” the island(s) of the “Liuqiu” kingdom, and the land of “Pisheye,” with debate revolving around whether any of these can be equated with present-day Taiwan, the Penghu (Pescadores) Islands, the Liuqiu/Ryukyu island chain, or even some of the Philippine islands. Clark attributes China’s meager written record about offshore islands to its Sinitic culture’s disinterest in the maritime world. In contrast, occasional references also point to the operation of routine “informal, below-the-radar” (p. 183) trade between islands and coastal settlements, along with raids by so-called Pisheye pirates. While familiarity with (and the occupation of) the Penghu Islands and Taiwan deepened in later centuries—culminating in the Qing invasion of 1683—knowledge of maritime conditions and navigation remained surprisingly limited until the nineteenth century, as Chen Kuo-tung illustrates in “Chinese Knowledge of the Waters around Taiwan from the 16th to the 18th Century.” Not only did Chinese sailors misunderstand and fear crossing the Kuroshio when traveling to the Ryukyu Islands, even the sparse references to the Taiwan Strait remained determinedly impressionistic in their mention of differently colored swift currents and calmer waters.

The dearth of detailed information about Taiwan for much of its prehistory and history stands in sharp contrast with the richer picture painted by later Spanish (and other) texts. In “A Century of Contacts between Manila and Taiwan in Spanish Sources (1582–1683),” Manel Ollé situates the island at the center of an expanding and quarrelsome geopolitical world focused on trade. Ollé’s review covers not only Spanish Philippines’ short-lived presence in northern Taiwan but also the

alliance between Spain and Portugal (based in Macau); the participation of Japanese, Chinese, and native traders; and the expulsion of the Dutch from Taiwan in 1662 by Koxinga, itself followed by the Qing takeover of the island in 1683. Of particular interest are the Spanish references to the customs (including languages) and distribution of Taiwan's indigenous groups. Paola Calanca's "The Maritime Environment around Taiwan: Perception and Reality" complements and enriches the previous three contributions as it gathers information from a large number of Chinese sources. From the mid-first millennium CE, archaeology and texts together indicate the possession of maritime knowledge among China's coastal populations, along with their presence in Taiwan. Beginning from about the sixteenth century, the texts—some admittedly written by members of the elite with limited knowledge of navigation—point to the frequent crossing of the Taiwan Strait, with some providing useful information about sailing conditions, including winds, currents, shoals, and the dangers of sailing near or through the Penghu Islands. Based on current knowledge of oceanographic conditions in the strait, Calanca also attempts to locate currents named in the texts, the most dangerous of which may have referred to unstable (and thus dangerous) surface conditions rather than currents per se.

In the volume's final chapter, "Restructuring Our Understanding of the South China Sea Interaction Sphere: Evidence from Multiple Disciplines," Roger Blench points to the contributions made by multidisciplinary studies to our understanding of the nature and impact of evolving interaction networks in maritime Southeast Asia. Crucially, the emerging composite picture painted by varied disciplines—archaeology, paleoclimatology, linguistics, material sciences, and genetics—remains uneven and on occasion inconsistent, a reflection in part of inadequate temporal and geographical coverage. Disagreements about the interpretation of available data also play a role, as in the case of Blench's challenge of the demographic model of Austronesian expansion. His discussion of *bulul* (seated figures with arms crossed) and metal gongs in island Southeast Asia also supports his proposal that the inclusion of additional data on shared social practices and iconographic elements is likely to continue impacting and enriching our understanding of early basin-wide interaction, including those networks in which Taiwan played a role.

Francis Allard

Department of Anthropology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4035-4842>