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A Trade Diaspora Model for the Emergence of Ancient Metallurgy in Taiwan

This chapter applies a three-stage trade diaspora model to explore the emergence of metallurgy in ancient Taiwan, a long-standing archaeological question. It reviews previous and recent studies, applies the trade diaspora concept as a framework, and builds a model to explain the gradual introduction and localization of metal pyrotechnology.

The Blihun Hanben site, a newly designated national archaeological heritage site, was excavated during the Suhua Highway Improvement Project. Archaeologists identified two cultural layers and unearthed nine tons of ceramics, six tons of iron slag, iron metallurgy remains, over 200 burials, and several household structures. These findings indicate intensive iron-working from at least 1600 years ago and limited smithing up to 2000 BP. The presence of exotic artifacts suggests that the site was linked to a South China Sea/Southeast Asia Sea maritime trade network and waves of migration from Southeast Asia. Analysis of the Blihun Hanben site data supports the trade diaspora model, emphasizing the gradual evolution of itinerant craftspeople into settled trade diaspora communities and their interactions with local populations. Petrographic and typological analyses of ceramics reveal high mobility and sustained connectivity, while the presence of black pottery and metallurgical remains reinforces the influence of foreign craftspeople on local technological practices. This study refines previous assumptions by demonstrating that the adoption of iron technology was not a singular event but a long-term process of technological entanglement between trade diaspora groups and local communities. The proposed model highlights the need for multiple lines of archaeological evidence to reconstruct Taiwan's early metallurgical landscape.

Keywords: *Taiwan; trade diaspora; Metal Age; iron metallurgy; ceramics.*