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"Houses" in the Wansan Society, Neolithic Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I utilized the house society concept to not only interpret how Neolithic Wansan people in Taiwan might have organized themselves, but also to understand the differences among the inhabitants of the houses. I approach this by analyzing the distribution of archaeological features and artifacts (i.e. postholes, burials, ceramic and lithic artifacts). The results of this analysis demonstrate that the residential houses in the Wansan Society were not only places where the people lived and interacted with one another, but they were also places where the living intertwined with the dead through situating the deceased members around the residential houses. Furthermore, the correlation between the presence of possible ancestor symbols and the variations of artifacts among houses suggests that the social differentiation of the Wansan Society was likely related to the people's ability to claim their association with the ancestors.

1. Introduction

Recent applications of the house society concept to archaeological research have stimulated intense discussions on how houses might play a significant role in establishing, organizing, maintaining and reproducing certain social relations (see Beck, 2007a,b; Dueppen, 2012; Gillespie and Joyce, 2000; Hodder and Cessford, 2004). In addition, rich ethnographic accounts on the dynamic interactions between the materiality and the sociality of the house, offer archaeologists a more flexible framework to approach the study of houses and their inhabitants in prehistory (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Kirch and Green, 2001; Mckinnon, 1991; Sparkes and Howell, 2003; Waterson, 1990). These researchers show that employing "houses" as units of analysis can assist archaeologists to construct well-grounded interpretations.

The study of "houses" in Taiwanese archaeology is still in its infancy due to the rare presence of identifiable domestic architecture. However, informed by previous ethnographic works conducted in several Taiwanese Austronesian speaking societies, my colleague and I (Chiang and Liu, 2013) propose that the clustered arrangement of postholes at archaeological sites should be viewed as evidence of actual houses. Since the Austronesian-speaking peoples in Taiwan utilized perishable wooden posts to build the main house structure, the clear concentration of postholes in archaeological sites is recognized as the most plausible evidence of standing structures (Chijiiwa, 1960). As more areal excavations are being carried out in Taiwan, the spatial organization of these postholes, and their associated features and artifacts, constitute important clues for archaeologists to envision the existence of various house structures. More importantly, both linguistic and ethnographical research on Austronesian societies in Taiwan suggest that house structures are more than physical shelters for housing a group of people with the same biological roots. These structures can also represent basic social units recognized by local people. In addition, they appear to play an role in organizing the social, ritual, political, and economic life of these people (see Blust, 1980, 1995, 1996; Chen, 1995; Chiang, 2001; Chiang and Li, 1995; Tan, 2004; Yeh, 2002). This research demonstrates that the significance of the houses found in contemporary Austronesian-speaking societies is likely to have had a long tradition in Taiwan.

In order to understand how the Wansan Society (a Neolithic society in Taiwan) might have been organized, the following paper employs a house-centered approach to analyze archaeological data excavated from the Wansan site. By examining the distribution of archaeological features and artifacts, I illustrate the possible presence of several house groups. The associated artifacts and features from each assumed house group are also analyzed to understand the roles of building structures in the Wansan Society. In addition, the distribution of unusual objects, jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects, and their close association with burial contexts, suggests the presence of social differentiation in this Neolithic society. Drawing on the rich ethnographic cases from Taiwan, I propose that the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects might have represented an ancestral symbol. The disparate ratio of "foreign" objects between house groups further suggests that the inhabitants who inherited ancestral symbols were also likely to control local resources. Inspired by the house society concept, I thus put forth a possible interpretation on how the house inhabitants were

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organized as a result of one's exclusive ability to control the ancestral symbol.

2. House society model

The theoretical framework that inspired my analysis and resulting interpretations is derived from the anthropological study of the so-called "house society." The concept of the "house society," which was first proposed by Lévi-Strauss (1982), is defined as:

> A corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both. [1982:174]

In a house society, members of a social house unit are not only unified by the physical house buildings or specific material objects, but also by the need to ensure the continuous existence of the group by naming, maintaining, and manipulating these physical architectural structures or material objects. The concept of house societies specifically points to the role played by the physical buildings of a house in the formation of different social groups. In addition, particular types of material objects associated with the house can also be used to organize people into different social groups. When house members identify themselves as belonging to the same social house, they tend to express their identity by manipulating the material aspects associated with it. The idea of house societies explicitly links how social relations are created, organized and sustained with specific materiality, and it also emphasizes the importance of the long-term development of social house groups.

The concept of house society has been widely discussed and examined in both socio-cultural anthropology and archaeology (see Beck, 2007a,b; Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Gillespie and Joyce, 2000; Gonzalez-Ruibal, 2006; Sparkes and Howell, 2003). Among these studies, rich ethnographic cases have been recorded in various Austronesian-speaking societies that testify to the importance of houses in this area and suggest a possible continuous cultural tradition in these societies (Waterson, 1990). According to their linguistic and ethnological research, Patrick Kirch and Roger Green have further argued that the "house society" was likely an archaic "cultural pattern", commonly present in ancient Austronesian-speaking societies (Kirch and Green, 2001). More importantly, several ethnographic observations have noted the relationships between houses, material objects and social relations among these societies. These observations have not only enriched our understanding of contemporary societies, but they have also provided various means for archaeologists to further frame their archaeological interpretations on prehistoric societies.

The first observation is that houses in these societies are more than just architectural entities; they are also regarded as basic social, economic, ritual and political units (Carsten, 1995; Errington, 1987; Kirch and Green, 2001; Monaghan, 1996; Waterson, 1995). Aside from being demarcated by physical properties, members of houses form their sense of belonging through daily activities or so-called "shared/common substance" (i.e., cooking in the same hearth, co-eating, or sleeping in the same room) (Carsten, 1995; Waterson, 1995). Identities and allegiances of house members are not fixed from birth and can be changed throughout a life cycle of the house (Waterson, 1995:216; Gillespie, 2000b:1). Second, the continuity of social house groups and the ritual aspects of house structures are emphasized in these societies (Ellen, 1986; Fox, 1993; Lévi-Strauss, 1987; McKinnon, 2000; Sather, 1993). Based on ethnographic descriptions, the continuity of a social house unit can be maintained in a number of ways, including the transfer of the house, the title of the house, portable heirlooms, certain architectural posts or furniture within the house buildings, or through the practice of residential burials (Adams and Kusumawati, 2011; Bloch, 1995; Joyce, 2000; McKinnon, 1991, 2000; Waterson, 2000). This aspect of continuity grants the house structures a sort of sacred power and allows the houses to be viewed as living organisms. Therefore, the house buildings are also ritual sites where different kinds of rituals are performed within and for the houses. The emphasis on the continuity of this social unit and its close association with materiality has received the attention of archaeologists and has inspired various archaeological interpretations (Chiu, 2005; Gillespie, 2000a,b; Joyce, 2000; Kirch, 1997, 2000; Tringham, 2000). At the same time, the importance of the houses' continuous existence resonates with the diachronic perspective that archaeological research has typically focused on. The last observation is that certain features or portable objects belonging to the house functioned as a type of "inalienable possession" (Weiner, 1992), a tendency which was likely associated with the initiation and development of social differentiation in the society (Fox, 1993; McKinnon, 1991, 2000; Waterson, 1990).

The observations discussed above, which were drawn from ethnographic research and focus upon the relationships between the material world and social relations offer archaeologists a venue from which to interpret prehistoric social relations (Bloch, 1995; Bourdieu, 1973; Ellen, 1986; Cunningham, 1973; Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Carsten, 1995; Fox, 1993; Gibson, 1995; Waterson, 1995). These observed relationships between houses, material objects and social relations might be the social structures that are followed and reproduced by the house inhabitants' daily interaction with the physical structures. More importantly, these relationships can be observed in different types of societies, from the egalitarian Langkawi society to the highly hierarchical Medieval European societies (Carsten, 1995; Lévi-Strauss, 1982). Even though Lévi-Strauss originally proposed to view house society as a transitional social stage from kinship-based towards class society, these ethnographic studies do not imply that societies will experience the same developmental process. Instead, it has been argued that each instance of social transformation should be historically contingent and context dependent (Beck, 2007a:16).

3. House society as an interpretive model for exploring prehistoric Taiwanese societies

In Taiwan, the linguistic and ethnographic research illustrates that houses were likely to have been an important factor in organizing social groups and consolidating social identities in Taiwanese Austronesian-speaking societies (Blust, 1980, 1995; Chen, 1995; Chiang and Li, 1995; Chiang, 1999; Huang, 1999). More importantly, anthropologists have come to realize the feasibility of utilizing the concept of the house society to reexamine the social organization of these societies (Tan, 2004; Yeh, 2002). Since the concept of house society explicitly considers the process of how social identity and relations are formed and organized through objects or places (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Gillespie, 2000a,b), I argue that this concept can serve as an effective model to explore social relations of prehistoric Taiwanese societies, and can further our understanding of the relationship between mute artifacts and the dynamic social life of people in ancient times.

Most Taiwanese archaeological researchers have focused on establishing a cultural–historical framework based on artifact typologies. In such studies, archaeological features and artifacts

are viewed as markers of specific cultural entities or as evidence of population migrations or intergroup exchanges. As a result, sites with similar archaeological assemblages are often attributed to a specific cultural group. For instance, pottery vessels with certain characteristics (i.e., vessels with cord-marked decorations on the body, incised-lines, and a raised ridge separating the lip from the neck) and polished stone tools, represent the earliest Neolithic culture in Taiwan, also known as Tapenkeng culture (Chang, 1969). As further data is accumulated, the temporal–spatial framework of archaeological materials is becoming increasingly complex (see Liu, 2011; Tsang and Li, 2014). Furthermore, these archaeological materials are still considered reflections of fixed social entities and are not associated with the dynamic social relations that structured them. However, recent discoveries from large areal excavations are beginning to question the static reconstruction of past societies. In this paper, I propose that the house society concept can bring forward an alternative interpretation to understand the features and artifacts unearthed in these recent excavations.

Drawing from the observed characteristics of the house society in contemporary Austronesian-speaking societies, I suggest several archaeological implications when investigating the archaeological materials from the Wansan site. These include: (1) the repetitive utilization of the same location for the construction of building houses; (2) the ancestral rituals practiced in houses or house groups; (3) the images or writings associated with the ancestors, as depicted in personal belongings or structures; (4) the material objects signifying symbolic relevance; (5) the artifacts related to daily life in each house or house group; and (6) the variability of the artifacts in terms of quantity or quality. These implications question whether people organized themselves around residential dwellings, and whether there are quantitative and qualitative differences in the artifacts among the residential houses at the Wansan site.

In the following section, I introduce the Wansan site by presenting its location, excavation history and chronology Next, based on the archaeological implications mentioned above, I analyze the distribution of postholes to determine where the Wansan people might have constructed their houses. After identifying the possible locations of the house structures, I examine the distribution of burials and their relationship with the houses to demonstrate the possible ritual practices associated with these houses. In order to prove that the Wansan people conducted their daily lives in these houses, I analyze the types of artifacts associated with these buildings and further compare the differences among the houses. In essence, the concept of house society is used to provide an analytical framework for exploring how the Wansan people were organized into different social groups and how they were differentiated from each other. Based on various ethnographic studies, I argue that house members formed their sense of belonging through their experience of living together. Furthermore, I propose that houses marked with ancestral symbols were likely to have controlled local resources, while houses that lacked these particular symbols depended solely on "imported" goods.

4. The Wansan Society

The Wansan Society is located in the Dongshan Township, of Ilan County, in the northeastern part of Taiwan (Fig. 1). It is approximately 4.5 km southwest of the Luodong Township, at lat. 24°38′25″N and long. 121°45′25″E. The site is situated on a small hill known to the locals as Yuansan. This small hill sits upon the boundary of where the Ilan Plain and the Central Mountain Range intersect (Fig. 2).

The Wansan site, first discovered in 1963, has undergone four excavations. The first three excavations investigated the size and content of the site. Only the fourth excavation uncovered an area large enough to identify numerous postholes, stone coffins, urn burials, and a large amount of lithic and ceramic artifacts. Therefore, this paper mainly addresses the data excavated during

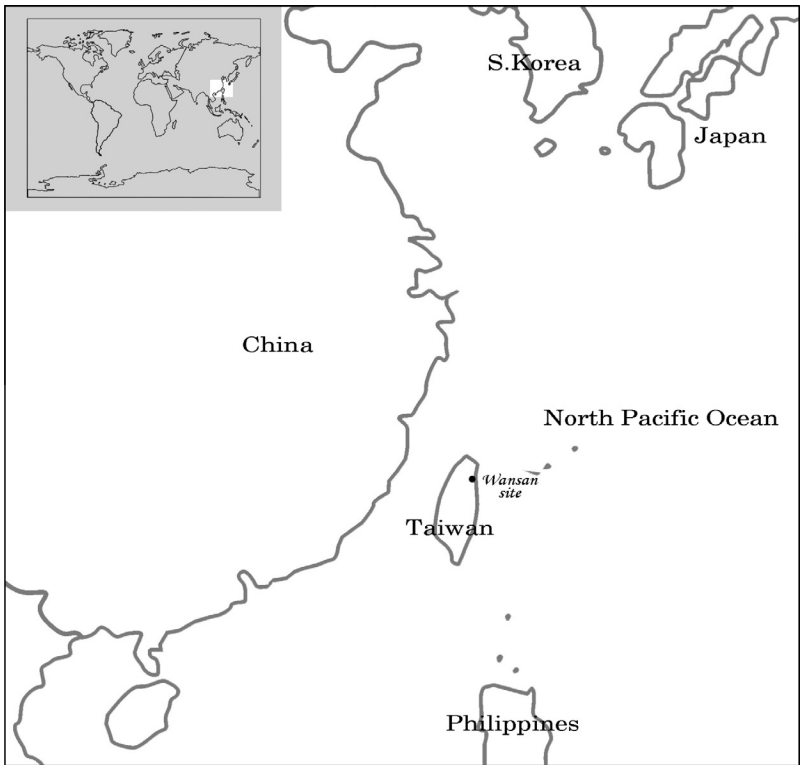

Fig. 1. Location of the Wansan site.

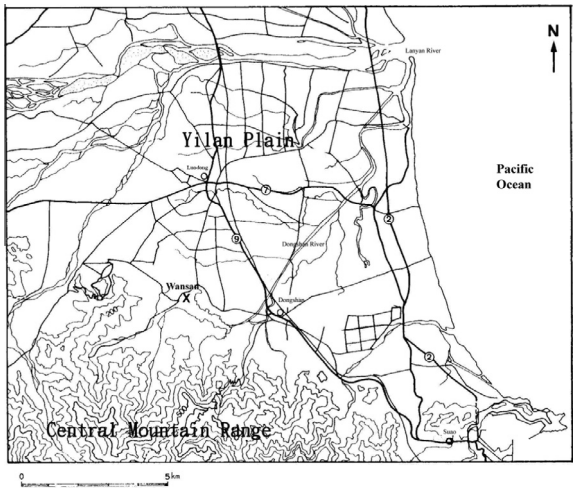

Fig. 2. Map of the location of the Wansan site (revised from Liu (1996)).

the fourth season from which the possible location of house structures and the associated artifacts can be analyzed.

The results of the surface surveys and previous excavations indicate that the main habitation area covers the entire surface of Yuansan hill above the 15-m contour line (Fig. 3). The fourth excavation season generated 39 radiocarbon dates. These dates suggest that the site was occupied from 3700 to 2700 years ago.

4.1. House locations

There are currently no standing structures at the Wansan site; however, various ethnographic works conducted in the Austronesian-speaking societies of Taiwan indicate that wooden posts were the main architectural features for residential houses (Chijiiwa, 1960; Kun, 2010). Consequently, clusters of postholes suggest the possible locations where the house structures might have been constructed. Moreover, as illustrated in Figs. 4–6, burials and ceramic artifacts were concentrated on areas outside or near the posthole clusters. Assuming that these posthole concentrations represented the location of the houses, the forebears of the inhabitants were likely to have been buried within a close proximity to their houses.

Based on the distribution of postholes, burials and artifacts at the Wansan site, seven areas, representing the possible house locations, were recognized (see Figs. 5 and 6). It is not certain whether these areas were all occupied simultaneously due to insufficient dates. Yet the association between artifact concentrations, burials, posthole clusters and the uninterrupted stratigraphy imply that the Wansan people utilized these seven areas to build their houses for generations. Even though the exact number of houses could not be explicitly identified in the current analysis, the locations of where the houses stood are acknowledged.

4.2. Lives associated with these houses

More than 5000 lithic artifacts and 25,000 ceramic artifacts were unearthed in the 1998 excavation. Most artifacts were presumably utilitarian objects associated with the inhabitant's daily practices (i.e., lithic tools used for manufacturing, maintaining, cooking, fishing, hunting, etc.). The comparison of artifact types between each possible house area indicates that similar activities were performed in the majority of these areas (Tables 1 and 2). Ground and chipped stone tools (i.e., axes, adzes, arrowheads, etc.), pottery vessels and spindle whorls were some of the common artifacts found in these areas. According to this artifact inventory, daily life in the Wansan Society involved hunting, fishing, woodworking, land clearing, harvesting, weaving, and producing lithic tools and pottery. The seven likely house locations were places where the Wansan people conducted their daily lives. The distribution of these artifacts demonstrates that the Wansan people habitually discarded broken objects near their houses (see Figs. 5 and 6).

In addition to the clear concentration of artifacts and their close association with every house structure, the thick stratigraphy and the radiocarbon dates also suggest that people had continuously lived in the seven areas. During this time period, people followed certain spatial rules in terms of where daily waste could be deposited. The similar composition of the waste implies that these house structures were residential houses where people conducted their daily lives. Based on ethnographic studies from house societies, the repeated occurrence of basic activities in each area illustrates that inhabitants of house structures can form separate social units through daily interactions. Crafting (i.e., weaving or ornament making) and the production of useful implements (i.e., lithic tools) all occurred around these house structures. In addition to these

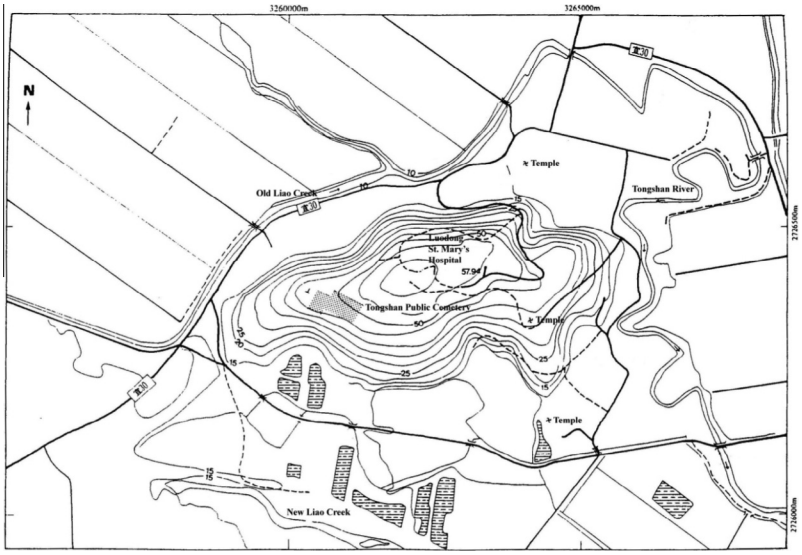

Fig. 3. Contour map of the Wansan site (revised from Liu (2000)).

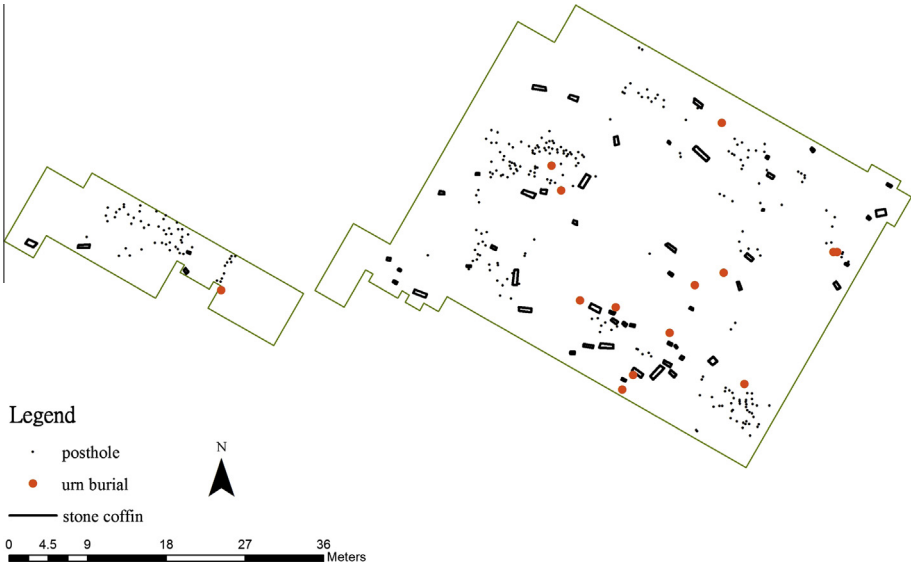

Fig. 4. Distribution of postholes and burials (two types of burials were identified at the Wansan site: stone coffins and urn burials).

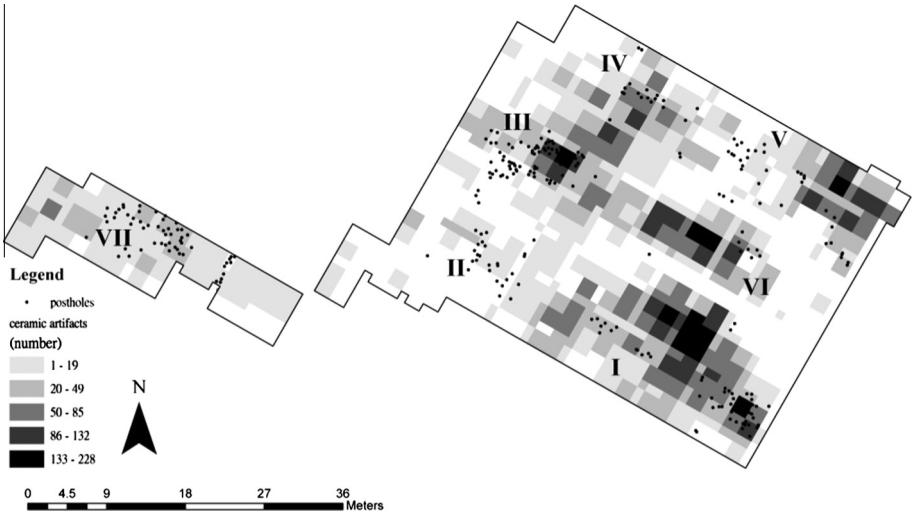

Fig. 5. Distribution of postholes and ceramic artifacts.

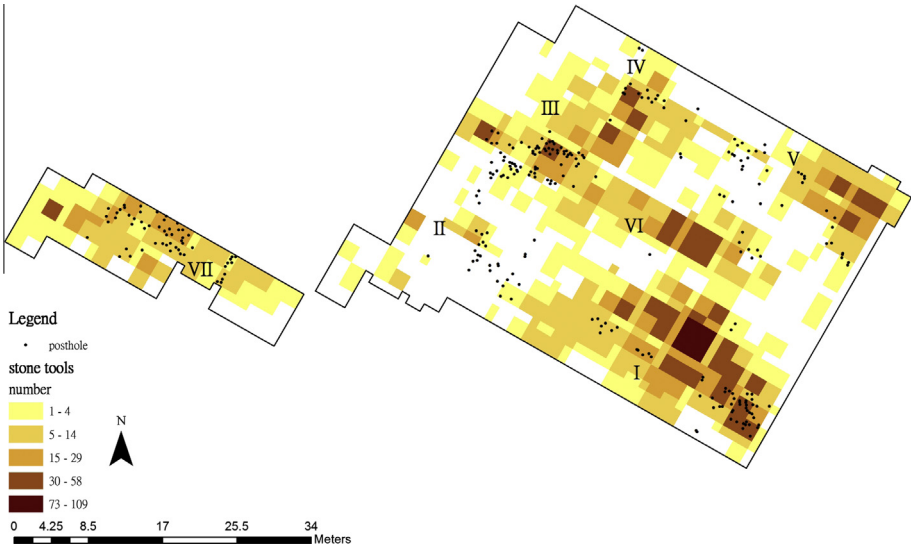

Fig. 6. Distribution of postholes and stone tools.

social and economic activities, common mortuary practices among inhabitants were also noted. Burials with common features were found around all houses, implying a shared identity and solidarity among residents (Adams and King, 2011; Chesson, 2003; Hodder and Cessford, 2004; Kuijt, 2000, 2008).

4.3. The holy houses

At the Wansan site, the placement of the burials around houses suggests that these houses were more than just shelters for the Wansan people. Research on residential burials has already illustrated the significance of this particular practice in understanding the formation of social identity, the importance of social memory, and the veneration of ancestors (see Adams and King, 2011).

Two types of burials were identified at the Wansan site: slate coffins and ceramic urns. Both practices, whether assembling different slate slabs to form a box-shaped coffin or using clay to make a large urn, involved a process of decision-making and negotiation between individuals and groups. For example, the materials used to make coffins and urns were not locally available; thus, the descendants of the deceased had to travel to or barter with other societies to acquire such materials. The time and energy spent on preparing the actual funerary rituals signify the importance of ancestral veneration in the Wansan Society. Although the burials were hidden underground, their existence and locations were not forgotten since the houses were passed on from generation to generation. Unlike the houses that were built of perishable wooden material, these stone coffins and urns were made from hard materials that could potentially last much longer. Like other Austronesian-societies in Taiwan and Southeast Asia where the house is likely a prominent feature for the living, it is probably the underground burials placed around these houses that constitute the critical features on the landscape. The existence of these burials in close connection with the houses thus further ensures the continued symbolic significance of the houses, even long after the structures are abandoned (Chiang and Liu, 2013).

Ethnographic evidence from house societies indicates that certain rituals or feasts were often conducted to deepen the connection with house ancestors. Contemporary practices reveal how the ritual of recognizing ancestors is tied to the construction of social identity and the delimitation of a communal group—sometimes at the level of an entire community, but also as individual residential groups. Waterson (1990: 209) also observed that in Southeast Asian societies, the sense of closeness between the living members and the ancestors is a prominent feature. More importantly, as argued by Grove and Gillespie (2002:13) in their discussion of the domestic burials in Mesoamerica during the Formative period, the deceased often can be transformed into ancestors through mortuary rituals. The burials near domestic houses, therefore, represent a spatial contiguity between the living house members and their ancestors. Gillespie also pointed out:

> The deposition of burials or parts of human remains on house land, with or without the building of elaborate tombs, and the use of heirloomed costume ornaments and other valuables that are indexical signs of ancestral personages are means by which archaeologists can demonstrate the perpetuation of the house. [2007:35]

In Taiwan, as was for most Austronesian-speaking societies, burying deceased family members inside or near the house was an important tradition until the early 20th century. The earliest evidence of this practice in Taiwan can be traced back to the earliest Neolithic population, the Tapenkeng culture, around 5000 years ago (Tsang et al., 2006). Several large-scale excavations of the Neolithic and later periods in Taiwan also uncovered evidence of burials being placed underneath or around houses implying the long history of this particular practice (Chen et al., 2007; Lien, 2008; Tsang and Li, 2014). Due to the emphasis on reconstructing cultural–historical frameworks in Taiwanese archaeology, archaeologists have not yet tried to explore the significance of this practice in prehistoric Taiwanese societies. On the contrary, ethnographers have already pointed out the relationship between the house and the burials in the traditional Taiwanese Austronesian-speaking societies (Chiang, 1999; Huang, 1986). As in the Bunun society in central Taiwan, Huang (1986:380) argued that "family members confirm their right to inherit the land by burying their deceased members inside the house. Their house represents the society, and the acquiring of the house signifies their identity towards the society." In addition, the members of the Paiwan society, an indigenous society in Southern Taiwan, also connect with the past by burying their deceased members inside houses (Chiang, 1999: 383). These ethnographic studies reveal the significance of how people construct their unique identities through interring their deceased members in close proximity to their houses. Moreover, by forging a connection with the past and allowing a process of continuity for the house, this burial practice demonstrates the claim of house property and ownership.

4.4. Variability among the house areas

The analysis of lithic and pottery artifacts indicates that there is no significant variance in artifact types among these seven house locations, implying that these houses all served as residential dwellings. Yet, the comparison of the raw material and style of the artifacts among these locations suggests a unique distribution pattern in Area VII (see Fig. 5). Thus, in the following analysis, I examine the variability among these areas, specifically focusing on whether the residents of each area had unique access to foreign goods (i.e. jade) or specific styles of artifacts.

In terms of jade artifacts in Taiwan, the only jade quarry on the island during the Neolithic period was located approximately 100 km away from the Wansan site (Hung, 2004). As a result, all the jade artifacts recovered from the site were likely brought in either through exchange or trade. The number of jade artifacts found in Area VII was greater than in all of the other probable house locations apart from Area I. At the same time, the jade artifact types found in Area VII were similar to those uncovered in all of the other areas (Table 3). However, the styles of certain artifact types, such as earrings and pendants, possessed by the inhabitants of Area VII differed from those found in the other house areas. While most of the Wansan people wore the circular-shaped earring and half-circle shaped pendant, not a single one was found in Area VII (Tables 4 and 5).

In addition to the jade artifacts, the ratio of imported pottery vessels also suggests the uniqueness of Area VII (Fig. 7). In this area, almost half of the pottery vessels were made from a type of brown sandy clay that was not locally available. The same can be observed from the distribution of lithic artifacts (Fig. 8). In other words, the inhabitants of Area VII might have relied more on imported pottery vessels and lithic tools than the other inhabitants.

This analysis also indicates that residents of Area VII did not have access as wide a selection of artifacts as did other areas. Take the net sinker, for example. All the net sinkers were made from locally available pebbles or sandstones. There were four styles of net sinker recovered from the site, including Style A (ground net sinkers with grooves on two ends), Style B (ovoid pebbles with two notches on the long side), Style C (groove on the midline of the net sinker) and Style D (groove on the long side) (Figs. 9–12). It was common for the Wansan residents to utilize

Table 1
Number and relative frequencies of different lithic artifacts in each area.

Area		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	Total
Adze-axe	Number	117	6	34	15	30	28	21	251
	RF (%)	4.2	4.6	4.1	3.8	4.0	4.4	4.8	4.2
Anvil	Number	15	1	4	1	1	4	0	26
	RF	0.5	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.4
Arrow	Number	101	4	37	24	22	39	35	262
	RF	3.6	3.1	4.5	6.1	2.9	6.1	8.1	4.4
Chopper	Number	23	2	6	1	1	5	0	38
	RF	0.8	1.5	0.7	0.3	0.1	0.8	0.0	0.6
Curved knife	Number	14	0	6	2	1	1	8	32
	RF	0.5	0.0	0.7	0.5	0.1	0.2	1.8	0.5
Disk	Number	101	3	40	12	39	22	9	226
	RF	3.6	2.3	4.8	3.1	5.2	3.4	2.1	3.8
Hammer	Number	12	0	3	1	1	3	1	21
	RF	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.4
Hoe-axe	Number	163	7	69	26	37	44	22	368
	RF	5.8	5.3	8.3	6.6	4.9	6.9	5.1	6.1
Knife	Number	84	0	16	10	32	19	16	177
	RF	3.0	0.0	1.9	2.6	4.2	3.0	3.7	3.0
Mortar	Number	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
	RF	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Multiperforated tool	Number	274	11	52	24	44	65	27	497
	RF	9.7	8.4	6.3	6.1	5.8	10.2	6.2	8.3
Net sinker	Number	147	11	78	33	36	57	49	411
	RF	5.2	8.4	9.4	8.4	7.9	8.9	11.3	6.8
Ornament	Number	175	11	82	49	38	73	43	471
	RF	6.2	8.4	9.9	12.5	5.0	11.4	9.9	7.9
Perforated disk	Number	93	3	10	14	26	18	7	171
	RF	3.3	2.3	1.2	3.6	3.4	2.8	1.6	2.9
Pestle	Number	3	1	2	0	2	1	0	9
	RF	0.1	0.8	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.2
Pointer	Number	7	1	2	2	1	3	2	18
	RF	0.2	0.8	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.5	0.5	0.3
Polished disk	Number	11	0	1	3	1	2	2	20
	RF	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.8	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.3
Polished perforated disk	Number	57	3	13	7	22	7	5	114
	RF	2.0	2.3	1.6	1.8	2.9	1.1	1.2	1.9
Scraper	Number	26	2	8	2	1	5	3	47
	RF	0.9	1.5	1.0	0.5	0.1	0.8	0.7	0.8
Sickle	Number	12	0	2	2	2	2	2	22
	RF	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.4
Whetstone	Number	435	25	92	67	140	76	81	916
	RF	15.5	19.1	11.1	17.1	18.5	11.9	18.7	15.3
Unclear	Number	938	40	271	95	278	166	101	1889
	RF	33.4	30.5	32.7	24.3	36.8	25.9	23.3	31.5
Total	Number	2811	131	829	391	755	640	434	5991
	RF	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

more than one type of net sinker (Table 6), yet only one style was found in Area VII. The same was observed for the foot rings of vessels (Table 7). Both of these examples illustrate the uniqueness of Area VII. While the members of Area VII had more access to acquire foreign goods, they did not possess as many styles in their locally produced artifacts as did the members of other areas.

Judging from all of the artifacts uncovered from each of the areas (Tables 1 and 2), the number of artifacts unearthed from Area VII was no more than in other areas. This implied that the occupation was neither longer, nor was the population any larger, in comparison to other areas. If the ability to obtain foreign goods indicates economic affluence, the residents of Area VII should have had smaller numbers of exotic artifacts. However, the extent of foreign goods possessed by these residents is no less than the others, implying that they had to rely on a broader social network to acquire foreign goods. Therefore, the differential ability to obtain exotic goods at the Wansan site suggests that the social network employed by these inhabitants was likely established through unequal social status as opposed to economic power.

Moreover, the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects from these areas had a restricted distribution. The burials with jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects were found in Areas I, II, III, IV, and VI (see Fig. 13). In essence, every area had this particular object except in Areas V and VII. Table 3 lists each area with the associated number of jade objects, and as indicated, there was no significant difference in the total number of objects uncovered—except in the burials of Area V and VII. This being the case, the types of jade artifacts found in differing areas of the excavation

Table 2
Number and relative frequencies of different ceramic artifacts in each area.

Area		Type			
		Vessel	Non-vessel	Unclear	Grand total
I	Number	10,733	61	165	10,959
	RF[a] (%)	97.9	0.6	1.5	100.0
II	Number	493	9	1	503
	RF (%)	98.0	1.8	0.2	100.0
III	Number	4890	65	52	5007
	RF (%)	97.7	1.3	1.0	100.0
IV	Number	1595	46	23	1664
	RF (%)	95.9	2.8	1.4	100.0
V	Number	3686	25	38	3749
	RF (%)	98.3	0.7	1.0	100.0
VI	Number	4538	33	22	4593
	RF	98.8	0.7	0.5	100.0
VII	Number	1494	22	10	1526
	RF (%)	97.9	1.4	0.7	100.0

[a] RF refers to relative frequency in the posthole group.

Table 3
Number of different jade objects in each area.

Area	Adze-axe	Arrowhead	Bracelet/Earring	Pendant	Broken objects	Total
I	67	14	31	5	15	132
II	2	0	0	1	1	4
III	15	2	11	3	2	33
IV	11	1	8	3	6	29
V	14	3	19	0	4	40
VI	14	5	0	0	3	22
VII	15	9	14	3	3	44

Table 4
Number of different types of jade earrings in each area.

Area	Circular shape	Polygon shape
I	2	7
III	3	
IV	2	
V	3	1
VII		2

Table 5
Number of different types of jade pedants in each area.

Area	Half-circular shape	Polygon shape	Short-tube shape	Long-tube shape	Round shape
I	4	1			
II	1				
III	2		1		
IV	2				1
VII			2	1	

showed certain variations. This suggests that the residents in all of the areas were able to acquire jade artifacts for their deceased members; however, there were restrictions on the types of artifacts they could obtain. Even though the inhabitants of Area VII had the largest number of earrings, not a single jade zoo-anthropomorphic object was found in this area. Through a study of the individual stylistic variability that they possess and the archaeological contexts in which they are found, I attempt to explore the meaning of the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects in the following section. I argue that these objects signified the differences between each of the respective house groups.

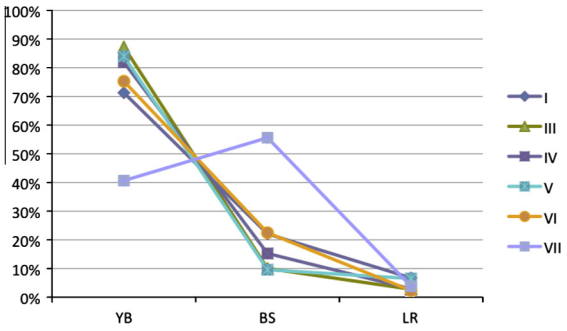

Fig. 7. Comparison of the relative frequencies of imported vs. local ceramic artifacts in each area.[1]

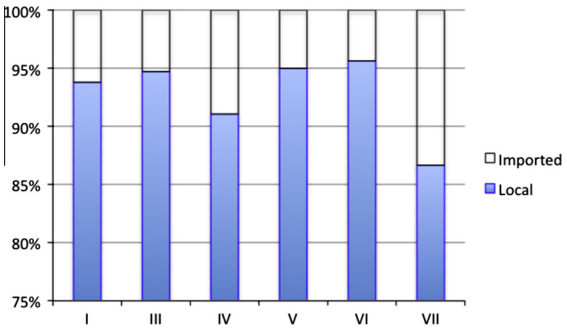

Fig. 8. Change in the relative frequencies of imported vs. local lithic material in each area.

Fig. 9. Style A net sinker.

Fig. 10. Style B net sinker.

[1] YB, BS, and LR refer to different pottery types. YB and LR were made from locally available clay, while BS was imported.

Fig. 11. Style C net sinker.

Fig. 12. Style D net sinker.

4.5. Meaning of the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects

The analysis of the distribution of artifacts among the seven areas suggests that the inhabitants of Area VII were more dependent on imported goods than the other residents. Nevertheless, when it came to burying their deceased members, the inhabitants of Area VII did not include any jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects in the burials. Furthermore, the artifacts (i.e., local materials, manufacturing tools, etc.) that were ultimately entombed with the deceased members of Area VII appeared to have been bound by certain restrictions. There was less variety in the artifacts found in this area. Other than treating the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects as burial goods, what else did these specific artifacts mean to the Wansan people? What is the relationship between the zoo-anthropomorphic objects and the distinct distribution of the utilitarian artifacts?

In Neolithic Taiwan, jade was commonly used to produce certain tools and ornaments, such as adzes, arrowheads, bracelets, earrings, etc. Among the tools and ornaments associated with daily life, some were also utilized as grave goods. Since only one jade quarry has been identified in Taiwan, combined with the fact that, based upon the results of a chemical analysis (Hung, 2004; Hung et al., 2007), most of the jade objects are believed to be from this same quarry, the ability to acquire such jade objects may be an indication of the different social networks enjoyed by each individual or group. Most importantly, these specific zoo-anthropomorphic objects were often recovered from burials around residential dwellings. The superior quality of the jade and the anthropomorphic designs suggests that these zoo-anthropomorphic artifacts may not have been simple burial goods for the commoners (Fig. 14). The significance of these unique burial objects in Taiwanese prehistoric societies requires further discussion (e.g. Ku, 1994; Sung and Lien, 1984).

Table 6
Number of different net sinkers in each area.

Area		I	III	IV	V	VI	VII	Total
Style A	Number	130	69	29	29	50	49	356
	RF (%)	88.4	88.5	87.9	80.6	87.7	100.0	88.8
Style B	Number	11	5	2	5	1	0	24
	RF (%)	7.5	6.4	6.1	13.9	1.8	0.0	6.1
Style C	Number	4	1	2	2	3	0	12
	RF (%)	2.7	1.3	6.1	5.6	5.3	0.0	2.9
Style D	Number	2	3	0	0	3	0	8
	RF (%)	1.4	3.8	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	2.2
Total	Number	147	78	33	36	57	49	400
	RF (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Richness		4	4	3	3	4	1	

Table 7
Number of different ring-foot in each area.

Area		I	III	IV	V	VI	VII	Total
Flared	Number	51	26	4	9	29	3	122
	RF (%)	75	55.32	66.67	36	82.86	100.00	66.84
Horn shape	Number	5	6	0	4	4	0	19
	RF (%)	7.4	12.77	0.00	16	11.43	0.00	10.16
Inverted	Number	12	15	2	12	2	0	43
	RF (%)	17.6	31.91	33.33	48	5.71	0.00	22.99
Total	Number	68	47	6	25	35	3	184
	RF (%)	100.0	100.00	100.00	100.0	100.00	100.00	100.00
Richness		3	3	2	3	3	1	

Fig. 13. Zoo-anthropomorphic object.

Based on ethnographic studies conducted in house societies, the privilege from claiming a close association with ancestors often distinguishes one house group from the others. Furthermore, a physical object related to the ancestors can also represent an "inalienable possession." This possession can affirm rank, authority, power, and even divine rule because it can represent a group's historical or mythical origins (Weiner, 1992:51). Unlike other objects that can be circulated in the society or between societies, the "inalienable possession" is often preserved in the original group and cannot be circulated unrestrictedly.

More importantly, as illustrated in several current Austronesian-speaking societies, the association between the ancestors and the house is expressed by displaying anthropomorphic motifs in various ways, including in ritual practices or in daily life (Waterson, 1995). For example, *tavu*, the wooden human figure that stands in the center of certain noble houses in the Tanimbar society in Indonesia, is argued to be "the house (as a structural group) rooted in, and supported by, a particular individual human form (the actions and powers of both the founding ancestor and the present head of the house)" (McKinnon, 2000:92). This human figure does not refer to a specific person. Instead, the images on the *tavu* are "so playfully abstracted, that it is difficult to say not only whether they might have represented a particular (perhaps the founding) ancestor, but also whether they represented a male or female form" (McKinnon, 1987:7). The *tavu* represented the connection with the ancestors, and thus constituted the essential identity of the house itself, setting it apart from other houses (McKinnon, 1987, 1991, 2000).

This close association between anthropomorphic motifs and ancestral worship is also considered in the studies of prehistoric Austronesian-speaking societies. For example, anthropomorphic motifs inscribed on pottery vessels indicate the existence of house societies in the Lapita society, located in the South Pacific (Chiu, 2003; Kirch, 1997). Chiu argued that the Lapita vessels decorated with the human face designs were inalienable objects for the social house groups, because they "[spoke] of house origins and crest prerogatives" and represented a "sign of history" (Chiu, 2003:343).

Likewise, in Taiwanese Austronesian-speaking societies, material objects with anthropomorphic designs symbolized the house ancestors and were used during certain rituals (Ferrell, 1969; Li et al., 1963). In the Vataan Amis society, for example, the twelve posts inside ancestral houses were carved with anthropomorphic designs. All of the images carved on the posts portrayed family ancestors, harvest gods, or historical heroic figures (Li, 1962). Also in some of the Pingpu societies, effigies were built at the entrance of houses to symbolize the presence of ancestors. Even tools, such as knives with anthropomorphic images on the handles, were also intricately designed to honor the ancestors (Hu and Tsui, 1998; Hu, 2006).

As illustrated in the village of Patjalinuk of the Paiwan society (an Austronesian-speaking society in Southern Taiwan), the most significant architectural feature was the ancestral house. In the Paiwan society, an ancestral house should first serve as a house for the living before becoming an ancestral house. The most important feature of the ancestral house was the main post carved with ancestral images (Tan, 2004). Inside the house, numerous artifacts associated with daily life were displayed. Tan Chang-kwo argued that displaying these used objects inside the ancestral house confirmed the claim of being related to the ancestors (Tan, 2004:133). Moreover, Tan stressed that the main post inside the ancestral house represented the concept of "inalienable possession" in the Patjalinuk society (Tan, 2004:135). This main post offered "cosmological authentication" to verify the close connection between the owner and the ancestors. Additionally, the main post allowed the possible differentiation of the owner's house from those of others. For the Patjalinuk society, the primary purpose of ancestral images was not to focus on the exact identity of the ancestors, but rather on the "representation" of the ancestors (Tan, 2004:127).

In Taiwan, the discovery of material objects or features bearing anthropomorphic designs from Neolithic sites is quite rare. This could be due to the fact that perishable materials were usually used, and therefore are not likely to survive archaeologically.

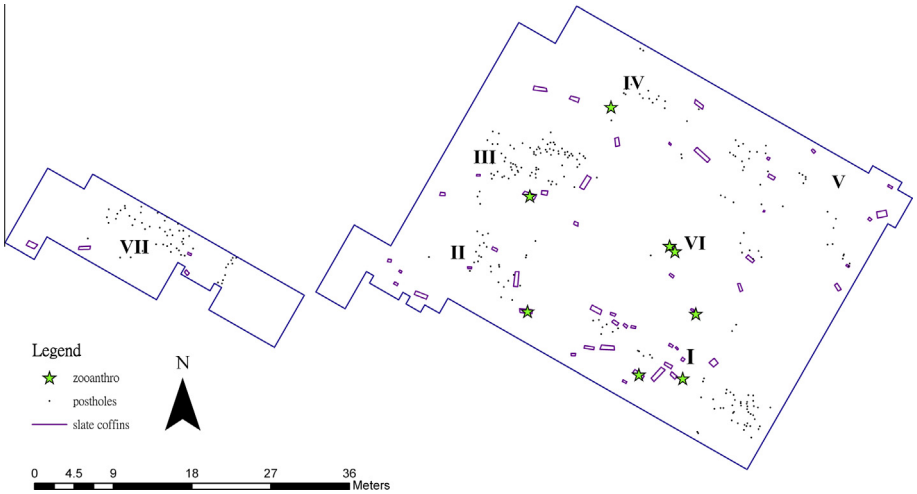

Fig. 14. Distribution of the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects.

Nevertheless, anthropomorphic designs dating from the late Neolithic period (3500 B.P to 1800 B.P.) were discovered. The most noticeable objects manifesting anthropomorphic designs were the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects unearthed in the burials of the late Neolithic period.

Drawing on the rich ethnographic literature on both Taiwan and other Austronesian-speaking societies, I argue that these jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects could have been a type of "inalienable object", the kind that used images to strengthen a connection with ancestors (Mills, 2004; Weiner, 1992). These objects acted "as transcendent treasures, historical documents that authenticate and confirm for the living the legacies and powers associated with a group's or an individual's connections to ancestors and gods" (Weiner, 1992:3). These objects were unlikely to have been circulated unrestrictedly, as very few were unearthed from existing sites. In other words, only specific individuals or groups could have claimed the ownership of these objects during the Neolithic period in Taiwan. Thus, the unique ability to possess these objects indicates a group or an individual's different social status within the Wansan Society.

Since these objects were closely associated with the ancestors and their burials, the objects might have also been considered heirlooms. In Tanimbarese houses, the "named" houses retained heirlooms as a sign of history, status and power (McKinnon, 2000:172). The difference between the named and unnamed houses lay in the inability of unnamed houses to establish or maintain their connection with the founding ancestors. Moreover, the heirloom could have been exchanged between allied houses during public ceremonies, such as mortuary rituals. At the same time, the heirloom might signify the resources owned by house members that could be used to compete with other houses (Joyce, 2000:210).

It is worth noting that not every burial consisted of grave goods that were all unique to the Neolithic inhabitants. The majority of graves included pottery sherds, suggesting that pottery vessels were common burial objects. Various ornaments made from jade (i.e., earrings, bracelets, and pendants) were often discovered in the burials. Eight of the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects were uncovered during the 1998 excavation. Five of which were buried inside the stone coffins and urns, while the remaining three were recovered outside, but in close proximity, to the burials.

As mentioned earlier, these zoo-anthropomorphic ornaments were imported objects, since jade was not locally available. In addition, as there is no evidence indicating the production of jade artifacts (i.e., production tools, blanks, waste, or debitage) at the Wansan site, these artifacts were likely to have been imported as complete products. Consequently, the ability to possess these objects signified the existence of a social network within the Wansan Society. If these zoo-anthropomorphic objects represented a connection and continuity with ancestors of the Wansan Society, then the residents in both Area V and VII likely lacked the ability to claim their affiliation with these ancestors. It is possible that the residents of the Areas I, II, III, IV, and VI formed another larger social group which could bury their deceased members with the zoo-anthropomorphic objects, and also controlled local resources (i.e., rock, clay, etc.) from which to produce further artifacts.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the spatial distribution of features and artifacts excavated from the Wansan site suggests the following results. First, the arrangement and construction of the house structures, site chronology, and the abundance and variety of artifacts, suggest a long-term occupation at the site. Moreover, the concentration of the artifacts and their association with features seem to suggest a deliberate emphasis on maintaining the positions of buildings, features, and burials from one generation to the next.

The presence of residential burials signifies the emphasis on the connection between the living members and the ancestors of the Wansan Society. Members of the same house were likely to have formed their sense of belonging by sharing various subsistence activities and house chores, while the practice of interring the deceased members near the houses further strengthened the cohesion of this social group. Moreover, some social groups possessed and interred the special jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects with their forebears, while other groups seemed to have lacked this ability to own the exclusive objects. If these zoo-anthropomorphic objects represented "inalienable objects", members might have used these objects to confirm their connections with ancestors, as suggested in various ethnographic cases. In the Wansan Society, the ability to show a close connection with the ancestors and knowledge of the house's history might have constituted the foundation for social differentiation. Although it was a common practice in the Wansan Society to emphasize the connection with ancestors through the practice of residential burials, members of select houses were also likely to have formed strong relationships with each other because of their shared ancestral origins. Furthermore, the differences between the groups with zoo-anthropomorphic objects and the groups without were not only observed in the ownership of these objects, but also from the materials and styles of the objects associated with their daily lives. The group that possessed the zoo-anthropomorphic objects would have been able to explore more locally produced objects and would have shared similar styles amongst its members. The group that did not possess this type of object, on the other hand, would have constructed a wider social network with other societies in order to obtain external resources. Consequently, the members of this group would have collected objects of various styles.

The variation in the type and quality of artifacts among the buried members testifies to the enduring nature of social differences within societies. The people living in these houses were enmeshed in repeated acts of daily life, rituals, and cooperation that would have created a sense of common or shared identity. And yet, differences among houses could still have existed due to disparities in status, wealth, role, gender, age, and so on.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I utilized the house society concept to not only interpret how the prehistoric Wansan people might have organized themselves, but also to understand the differences among the inhabitants of the houses. The results of this analysis suggest that the residential houses in the Wansan Society were not only places where the people lived and interacted with one another, but were also places where the living connected with the dead by burying the deceased members around the residential houses. Furthermore, the depiction of ancestral symbols and the variability of artifacts among houses suggests that social differentiation in the Wansan Society was likely associated with the people's ability to claim their association with the ancestors. The house group that could assure their connection with the ancestors had better knowledge regarding how to utilize local resources to manufacture objects associated with daily life. They were also more capable of constructing a wider social network within society to share similar artifacts with other houses in the Wansan Society. Houses without this ancestral connection, on the other hand lacked the capability to fully explore local resources and were limited in options. In sum, disparate technological traditions (expressed in the artifacts uncovered) among the houses were likely to have resulted from

social differentiation, which emerged as a result of some groups lacking the ability to affirm their connection with the ancestors.

The concept of the house society encourages archaeologists to explore how prehistoric societies were organized by employing a house level analysis. At the same time, the rich ethnographic studies on these societies offer archaeologists various approaches to understanding the dynamic interactions between material objects and social relations in ancient societies. The analysis of the archaeological materials from the Wansan site illustrates that every house structure can form an independent economic unit, and that two larger social units can be further discerned through the presence of jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects. Ethnographic observations assist us in understanding how the prehistoric Wansan people made use of the jade zoo-anthropomorphic objects, and how these particular artifacts shaped certain forms of social relations. In this analysis, the concept of house society proved to be a valuable framework to interpret the prehistoric Wansan Society, particularly with regards to the dynamic social relations among the inhabitants. Finally, using the concept of house society as an analytical framework can be very beneficial to archeological studies, as it allows past societies to be analyzed without necessarily being categorized into a strict form of social organization.

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