Fakes and Misjudgments in Japanese Archaeology

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In November 2000, the Japanese archaeological community received an unparalleled shock in both scholarly and psychological terms with the revelation of the hoax concerning the "Early and Middle-Palaeolithic Finds" in Miyagi Prefecture and Hokkaido. Despite the doubts expressed by some researchers before this hoax was exposed, these had no effect and it was only when a newspaper company took hidden video footage that the scholar involved had to confess to the hoax. There is no choice but to acknowledge that the Japanese archaeological fraternity lacks the critical acumen required to see through such fakes, in that the spirit of critiquing data and the various conditions for debating these data have not been sufficiently developed.

In the case of the example of Japanese fakes cited in this paper, the data were accepted as archaeological data for several decades owing to carelessness on behalf of scholars regarding the initial survey and reports.

Such fakes are not rare in the scientific world, nor in human society, with the "Piltdown Man" incident in Britain as but one example. If we are to reflect seriously on this recent hoax in Japan and adopt measures to prevent a recurrence, we must foster some kind of system of appraisal that can be applied to the various fields of archaeology, establish a forum where the detection of such fakes can be made public, and, if a counterargument cannot be offered, have the courage and resolve to accept the situation without demur. It will only be when the world of academia and people's sensitivities have overcome their hesitation to point out fakes and misjudgments that, in this post-hoax era, the Japanese archaeological world will be able to lay claim to a future.