

INTRODUCTION

This book covers a very long and enormously rich and complicated period in China's history. Beginning with the first peopling of the region some 1.6 million years ago, it pays special attention to the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods and concludes with the first imperial unification of China at the time of the Qin (秦) and Han (漢) dynasties.

When I first became interested in the archaeology of China as an undergraduate in the late 1980s, there was basically one book available in English on the subject – K. C. Chang's *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (Chang 1986). Even after my command of Chinese improved and I was able to read primary materials, the available data were not that extensive: preliminary reports in three major archaeological journals and a handful of textbooks, mostly published for local consumption by students in the few departments of archaeology that existed in China at the time. The illustrations of artifacts and sites in those publications were for the most part fuzzy black-and-white photos and drawings of poor quality. Today, the same field is almost unrecognizable: hardly a week passes without reports of new discoveries, and the numerous academic articles and books are accompanied by top-quality illustrations and data tables.

This flood of new publications is the outcome of the hundreds of archaeological excavations and surveys conducted in China every year. Consequently, our knowledge of Chinese archaeology

has dramatically expanded and our ideas about China's prehistory and early historic periods have been revolutionized. This very richness of new (and older) data, however, poses a real problem for the writing of a broad synthesis, such as this book. Selectivity is necessary and obvious, and our criteria for inclusion must be based not on how famous or spectacular a certain find is, but rather on how much it contributes to the specific issues we address.

Given China's antiquity, significant size, and ecological diversity, Chinese archaeology can make a vital contribution to our understanding of how societies develop, adapt to their respective environments, and interact with one another. For this reason, I focus on the development of local sociopolitical and cultural trajectories and the formation of local identities on the one hand, and on evidence for interregional interactions and the creation of shared cultural norms on the other. These themes populate the entire book and hold together its different chapters. But, for every period, I also include additional pertinent issues and analyze them from anthropological and historical perspectives. These themes guide my selection of the primary data included in the book. They also determine the spatial coverage of the book, which includes – but also extends beyond – the traditional focus on the Yellow River basin, and several chapters discuss the archaeology of China's northeast,

northwest, southeast, and southwest. The archaeology of more distant regions within the borders of present-day China, such as Xinjiang, is also discussed, but only in cases where it is relevant to issues such as the development of long-distance contacts.

Although the book's time frame stretches from the earliest presence of humans in China through to the Han dynasty, it ranges primarily from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, a period that spanned thousands of years and witnessed a series of significant formative events, transitions, and transformations. These include the emergence of agricultural communities, the establishment of a sedentary way of life, the development of sociopolitical complexity, advances in technologies such as ceramics and metallurgy, and the appearance of writing, large-scale public works, cities, and states.

The book is organized chronologically, although there is a degree of overlap between chapters that focus on different regions or topics during roughly the same time period. Each chapter (with the exception of the introduction and Chapter 1) is divided into two main parts (each of which is further subdivided): the first presents the relevant archaeological data with as little interpretation as possible, while the second uses these data to address various broader issues related to the main themes of the book, such as the development of economic adaptation, social trajectory, cultural change, the formation of local identities, and interactions between different regions of China.

A SHORT BACKGROUND TO THE HISTORY OF CHINESE ARCHAEOLOGY

China can boast of a long history of research into its material remains.¹ As in most other ancient cultures, sporadic mentions of ancient artifacts appear in early texts, but starting from the eleventh century CE they began to take on a much more systematic form. Under what is called “traditional antiquarianism,” scholars of the Northern Song

(北宋, 960–1126 CE) and later dynasties classified collections of old artifacts, mainly bronzes and jades, dated them to ancient periods, identified their names and functions, and published their studies in elaborate catalogues.

Western-style modern archaeology arrived in China during the early years of the twentieth century, along with many other Western intellectual influences. The Swedish geologist J. G. Andersson, who was hired to work for the Geological Survey of China, is credited with many early discoveries of prehistoric remains, as well as with the introduction of modern archaeological methods to China. A number of other foreign archaeologists also worked in China during these early years. However, soon after Andersson's first discoveries, Chinese archaeologists such as Li Ji (李濟) and later Xia Nai (夏鼐) entered the field and became its leading figures. The first large-scale projects – such as the prehistoric excavations at Zhoukoudian (Chapter 2) and the excavations of the Bronze Age site at Yinxu (Chapter 8) – were conducted by Chinese archaeologists or carried out jointly with non-Chinese archaeologists. The dramatic discoveries made during this period, including, for example, the identification of the earliest documents in Chinese history, gave archaeology the high prestige it enjoys in China today.

After the Second World War and the Chinese Civil War, and with the rise of the Communist Party to power, archaeological research was incorporated into the state system. The field was now better supervised and the training of archaeologists in university departments and at the Academy of Social Sciences was regulated. During most periods, including the Cultural Revolution, field research continued uninterrupted, but the framework for interpretation was imposed from above to both fit the Marxist paradigm and serve nationalist goals (Tong 1995). After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the ensuing reforms led by Deng Xiaoping, Chinese archaeology became increasingly open to the outside world. New methods

and frameworks of interpretation were introduced and a number of international collaborations were established.

The legacy of this long intellectual history shapes the way archaeology is conducted in present-day China. For example, the names by which we identify different types of bronze vessels and the functions we assign to them are in most cases based on the work of imperial-era scholars from the traditional antiquarianism school. As in many other parts of the world, nationalist sentiments influence the interpretations of archaeological data, including their transformation over time. Nonetheless, such issues – which have been dealt with by previous research (e.g., Falkenhausen 1995; Tong 1995) – are beyond the scope of this book. Here, I transcend entrenched concepts and stale debates and look at the data with fresh eyes. Admittedly, my own models pervade this book, but I hope that by presenting some of the more raw data, you will form your own interpretations and perhaps even reject mine.

The themes that run through the chapters of this book are the local trajectories of economic, social, and cultural change and the interregional interactions among the local societies represented by these trajectories. While regional variation and interregional interaction may seem a natural framework for discussing a region as large and complex as China, serious discussion of these topics got under way relatively late in Chinese archaeology. In 1986, the fourth edition of Chang's seminal book, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* was published. This was not merely an updated version of the third edition, published almost ten years earlier, but rather a conceptual breakthrough in the understanding of China's ancient past and the development of Chinese civilization. Most notably, Chang argues in his book that the dominant mechanisms that catalyzed the development of Chinese civilization were contacts between different regional Neolithic cultures (Chang 1986: 234–42). Initially, this “Chinese interaction sphere” model was seen

by many as heterodox, but it has since become widely accepted, at least by researchers of the Late Neolithic period, although few researchers have attempted to apply Chang's model to regions beyond the basins of the Yellow and Yangzi Rivers and to periods later than the Neolithic.

Part of the reluctance to accept interactions as an important catalyst of social change and cultural development is the self-image of what constitutes “Chinese culture,” including its sources and its development. This self-image, which evolved during the late preimperial and the early imperial eras, was projected back onto earlier periods as an elite-based description of a homogeneous Chinese culture superior to any other culture in its orbit. This anachronistic view was carried over to the modern era and perhaps even exaggerated by nationalist ideas imported to China from the West. It is probably not coincidental that the first challenges to this model were published in the mid-1980s during the chairmanship of Deng Xiaoping, whose reforms included the economic revitalization of selected regions throughout China and certain measures for regional autonomy.

The new “multiregional” approach should also be viewed in the context of the tremendous surge in archaeological discoveries in China over the past three decades, an increase partially explained by the close association between salvage archaeology and the tide of construction projects that has swept the country, including in many areas previously considered peripheral by Chinese archaeologists. These findings have highlighted the unique features of local cultures. Used to create local tourist attractions and to boost local pride, the new discoveries have been instrumental in what has been termed the “regionalist paradigm” of Chinese archaeology (Falkenhausen 1995).

A SHORT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Awareness of interactions between prehistoric societies is not new in archaeological research. In

fact, during the first half of the twentieth century, archaeologists devoted a great deal of effort to locating and identifying similarities in the shapes and styles of objects found in distant locations, and to speculating about the connections between the societies to which those objects belonged (Schortman and Urban 1992). A reaction against the simplistic “diffusionist” models that were often put forward to explain such similarities led archaeologists throughout most of the second half of the twentieth century to focus their research on local trajectories and the adaptation of local societies, almost completely disregarding evidence pointing to external contact. One critic termed this intellectual trend “the premise of calorific priority” (Sherratt 1995: 7). In recent years, however, this attitude has changed, and since the mid-1990s there has been renewed interest in cross-cultural interactions. Scholars who are part of this new movement address the interplay between local and supra-local processes to reconstruct and better understand the complexity of worldwide historical processes. Likewise, similar trends can be found in the discipline of history, with the growing popularity of so-called world history.

Archaeological studies of interregional interactions inevitably start with patterns of artifact distribution, but without a clear theoretical framework through which to study these patterns, we are unable to gain meaningful historical or anthropological insights. If we are not careful, “interaction” might easily become just a modern replacement for the term “diffusion” of fifty years ago, “which in causing everything, explained nothing” (Schortman and Urban 1992: 8). To avoid this we need to be explicit in our use of the term. In my view, interactions can arise from one of two processes (or from a combination of both):

1. The movement of people.
2. The movement of artifacts (and, to a lesser degree, materials).

In prehistoric societies, and especially among illiterate cultures, the transmission of information (including ideas, religious beliefs, etc.) should be viewed as the outcome of these mechanisms rather than as an independent mechanism. When analyzing archaeological data we should ask which of these two mechanisms was responsible for the patterns observed and what level of interaction was most likely to have created those patterns. The movement of people, for example, could consist of the large-scale migration of an entire population to a new territory, a one-time military invasion, the migration of a small group of people, or the travels of a handful of individuals from one place to another. Historical and ethnographic documentation of such movements should be used as analogies for findings from the archaeological record (Anthony 1990). Similarly, artifacts can be transferred from one place to another as part of large-scale trade, in exchange of “royal” tributes, in small-scale and down-the-line exchanges, through the occasional exchange of gifts, or through the transmission of religious relics and paraphernalia.

The two models of interaction that are most often proposed are those of migration and trade. Because migration and diffusion have often been used as synonymous terms (Trigger 1989: 150–74), archaeologists have in more recent years tended to altogether avoid the subject of migration. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that during historic periods – and presumably in prehistoric times as well – human groups of different sizes migrated over short, medium, and long distances (Anthony 1990). The movement of even a small number of people could, directly or indirectly, lead to meaningful social, political, or economic changes, but we must be extremely cautious in invoking the notion of migration. Clearly, there are different types and scales of migration, and we need to be specific about what exactly we mean when we employ the term “migration” as well as

how a proposed model is supported or challenged by the archaeological data.

Unfortunately, migration is commonly understood in archaeology as the horde-like movement of an entire population and its replacement of the entire (or most of the) local population at the target destination. For example, Russian archaeologist Elena Kuzmina argued that in the Eurasian Steppes the late second millennium BCE was an epoch of large-scale migrations that “were necessitated by demographic causes – population pressure – and intensified by climatic crisis” (Kuzmina 1998: 72). Data presented in support of the existence of such migration and often associated with the spread of languages (such as the Indo-Iranian) are often quite vague, yet descriptions of migratory waves that shaped the history of Eurasia nonetheless remain popular (e.g., Frank 1992: 9). In China too, large-scale migrations and population replacements are often evoked to explain changes in material culture (e.g., Fitzgerald-Huber 2003: 63; Wu 2002a: 60–1). When studying the archaeological record we must instead ask ourselves what the direct evidence is for such a cataclysmic event. Do we see a systematic destruction of sites, the total replacement of artifact styles and techniques, or a clear discontinuity in local developments? We should be more explicit about which aspects of the material culture changed and remained relatively stable. In many cases, the aspects of material culture that changed most rapidly were those associated with prestige objects and ritual practices. Therefore, migration, if it took place at all, was probably limited to small segments of the society such as the elite or specialists of various kinds (Shelach 2009).

Unlike the explanations based on diffusion and migration that fell out of favor for a time, research into ancient trade remained part of the archaeological agenda even during the heyday of the “new archaeology.” Trade was perceived as a functional system – not unlike subsistence and adaptation

systems – of the kind commonly studied by archaeologists. The most obvious advantage of the concept of trade over migration is the focus on objects and raw materials rather than on people, thereby enabling archaeologists to employ scientific methods such as trace element analysis in charting transmissions from one place to another. Thanks to scientific methodology, there is currently little doubt that transmissions through trade, sometime across vast distances, took place between human societies as early as the Neolithic period, if not earlier (Renfrew and Bahn 1996: 335–56). On a more theoretical level, trade is by nature a two-way interaction, and thus a focus on trade can help archaeologists escape some of the inherent biases and political implications of migration studies.

Despite their many advantages, studies of trade are rarely integrated into an anthropological model that addresses sociopolitical and economic processes. Discovering an exotic raw material or foreign object can indeed be exciting, but it does not provide an explanation of the socioeconomic impacts of trade. For that, we need to address issues such as the mechanisms and volume of trade, the impact of trade relations on the local economy, the ways different social groups and individuals used trade to elevate their socioeconomic standing, and the ways foreign objects or ideas were manipulated to produce social or political benefits. This kind of perspective compels us to examine the context in which the foreign object or material was found (e.g., mundane vs. ceremonial; elite vs. commoner). The types and quantities of artifacts may indicate whether we have found evidence of large-scale trade in commodities for daily use, small-scale trade in prestige items, or a down-the-line system of exchange in artifacts that have passed through many hands and have slowly percolated from region to region.

One insight suggested by recent studies of interaction is that we should imagine interaction not as something flat but rather as a multidimensional

field made up of different types and levels of contact and exchange. Moreover, although different types of interaction networks tend to overlap, it is possible that a central node in one type of interaction network (e.g., a religious center) would be located on the fringes of another type (e.g., economic exchange) (Flad and Chen 2013). We should take such insights to heart when considering the function of a certain site or the position of one region vis-à-vis others.

Another theoretical perspective through which to study interregional interactions is political context. Under this heading are theories that analyze the domination of one region over another, interregional competition, and emulation. Chang's Chinese interaction sphere model (Chang 1986: 234–42), for example, does not explain how interactions were carried out but instead examines their sociopolitical and cultural effects. In fact, Chang's model may be seen as describing a specific manifestation of “peer-polity interaction,” where sociopolitical evolution takes place in the context of interactions between polities of equivalent scale, power, and level of social complexity (Renfrew 1986).

If peer-polity interactions are those among equal partners, at the other extreme of the spectrum we find center-and-periphery models that describe imbalanced relations between polities of different scales. Such models, including Immanuel Wallerstein's “world system” model, are relevant only to the second part of this book and are described more fully in Chapter 9.

Rekindled interest in mid- and long-range interactions between societies located within the current borders of China and beyond has generated novel data and new interpretations of existing data. Unfortunately, however, these discussions tend to focus on issues of origin and the spread of cultural traits. Such discussions are often associated with

nationalistic or patriotic sentiments and tend to produce more heat than light.

Another related practice in Chinese archaeology is correlating archaeological cultures in areas outside the so-called “core of Chinese civilization” with the names of people who, according to ancient Chinese texts, inhabited those regions. Two noteworthy examples include Wu En's identification of certain types of graves from north-east China containing bronze artifacts and dating between the ninth and the fifth centuries BCE with a group named the Mountain Rong (Shanrong 山戎) (Wu 2002a: 60–1) and the common association between archaeological cultures from the Gansu-Qinghai region, such as the Siwa, Siba, and Kayue cultures, with the ancient Qiang (羌) people (cf. Li 1993: 119–20; Liu 2000: 25). Similarly, the prehistoric populations of the Sichuan basin are sometimes equated with the Ba (巴) and Shu (蜀) peoples, or the ancient inhabitants of Lingnan with the Yue (越) (Peng 2002). The problem is not merely that most of these analogies are anachronistic, but more fundamentally that they create the false impression that they provide an explanation while, at best, they simply label a material culture with a “historic” name. In the worst cases, such labeling infuses our understanding of the archaeological data with later biases regarding the lifestyle, political organization, and economic activities of the people who inhabited the peripheral regions in question.

I avoid this historical method as much as possible in this book and focus instead on the archaeological data and what they can tell us about ancient interregional contacts: What were the interaction mechanisms? What was moved by the interactions? How frequent and intensive were they? Which segments of society took part in these interactions, and how did contact with external groups affect the local society?

CHAPTER I

THE GEOGRAPHIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL
BACKGROUND

This chapter provides the environmental framework necessary to understand the archaeological materials presented in the rest of the book. With its current borders, China is the fourth largest state in the world, a little larger than the contiguous United States, covering an area of some 9,330,000 km²,¹ across about 35 degrees in latitude and 75 degrees in longitude. Within this vast territory the climate ranges from humid subtropical conditions to extreme arid environments, and elevations range from the highest in the world to below sea level. This variation is highly relevant to this book because it is bound to have affected human adaptation across China as well as the nature of interactions among local societies.

This chapter considers significant topographic features – such as the main rivers, mountains, deserts, and plains – and describes their effects on the local environment in aid of a discussion on how they may have facilitated or hindered inter-regional interaction in ancient times. It continues with an overview of regional variation in climatic patterns, soils, and vegetation, and explains how subsistence activities and other adaptations continued to be constrained by local environmental conditions. Finally, it draws on results from paleoenvironmental studies in China to provide an overview of environmental change over thousands of years. Later chapters describe these changes in greater detail and illustrate how this information serves

the important purpose of setting the environmental framework within which the issues of cultural change and other processes can be addressed.

DEFINING “CHINA”

Names by which the region at the focus of this book is currently known, such as Zhongguo (中國), China, and Kitaia, all appeared later than the periods described herein. The term “Zhongguo,” usually translated as the “central state,” was coined during the Eastern Zhou period (771–221 BCE). At the time it was understood in the plural form, the central states, and denoted the major states located in the central Yellow River basin. Even in the Qin and Han periods, the term had not yet acquired the all-inclusive meaning that it has today. In fact, throughout the imperial era, the Chinese and their Asian neighbors referred to themselves and to their state by the names of the changing dynasties (for example, the people of Han – 漢人 – or the people of Tang – 唐人). In Middle Ages Europe, China was known as Cathaya, a name driven from Khitan (in Chinese Qidan 契丹), the name of the non-Chinese tribe that founded the Liao dynasty that ruled north China and a vast area of the steppe between 916 and 1125 CE. The word “China” appeared in European languages only during the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries (Wilkinson 1998: 722–5).

More important than the formation of these later names, any kind of self-identification with a shared multiregional identity appeared relatively late in China. Only during the Western Zhou period (1047–771 BCE) did the Zhou elite exhibit what may be seen as symbols of a shared identity. Literary references to a shared identity, using terms such as Xia or Hua, Hua Xia, and Zhu Xia (夏, 華, 華夏, 諸夏), first appeared during the eighth century BCE, and it took several centuries for this collective identity to spread to wider segments of the population (Falkenhausen 2006: 166 and 402). A common identity became canonical only after the imperial unification of 221 BCE, when the political borders of the Chinese Empire were clearly demarcated and the cultural dichotomy between the Chinese and their neighbors, especially the nomadic people of the steppe, was highly emphasized (Di Cosmo 2002; Pines 2005: 90–1; Poo 2005). Even so, the process of identity formation and the dissemination of a Chinese identity to new regions and wider segments of the population continued throughout the imperial era.

In geographic terms, the borders of China are not a historically fixed reality. During some periods, such as the Tang (618–907 CE), political boundaries expanded, reaching beyond the current borders of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in some areas. At other times, such as during the Southern Song (1127–1279 CE), the area under the control of the Chinese Empire shrank dramatically, with some of the areas most identified with Chinese civilization falling into the hands of foreign dynasties. Moreover, some regions currently within PRC borders have only recently been incorporated into the Chinese realm, and their historic association with what can be defined as Chinese culture is negligible. Well-known examples include Xinjiang in the PRC's north-west and Tibet in the west.

How then can we discuss the archaeology of China for periods during which neither China nor any kind of Chinese identity existed or look at a

region whose historical borders have constantly changed? One way of overcoming this problem is to focus on the area traditionally viewed as the “cradle of Chinese civilization” – the Yellow and Wei River basins – and ignore the majority of developments outside it. Another approach is to discuss the archaeology in China. This inclusive approach sees any archaeological data discovered within the borders of the PRC – regardless of their historical or cultural affinity – as the target of our study. In this book, however, I adopt an altogether different approach, based on the assumption that the origins of Chinese culture predate the explicit recognition of Chinese identity or identities by many millennia and that they coevolved across a relatively large region. In other words, I believe that Chinese identities were constructed from pre-existing ways of life, religious beliefs, technologies, symbols, habits, and traditions that evolved in many different parts of China during the Neolithic and Bronze periods. As discussed in the following chapters, some of the most salient features of the region's prehistory are the constant interregional and intersocietal interactions and the gradual development of shared cultural elements. This stratum of shared culture was instrumental in the creation of some form (or forms) of shared identity and, finally, a unified political entity.

This approach does not lead me to a belief in the homogeneity of Chinese culture, or that it was predesigned during the Neolithic period. On the contrary, in this book I demonstrate that regional and interregional variation was one of the prominent features of the Neolithic and Bronze periods, and that this variability was inherited by the more formally defined Chinese culture of the late preimperial and imperial eras. This implies that, while I do not attempt to predetermine what should and should not be included in the definition of Chinese culture, the primary focus of the book is a wide geographic area inside of which societies were in relatively close contact with one another during prehistoric periods. Other regions, beyond this

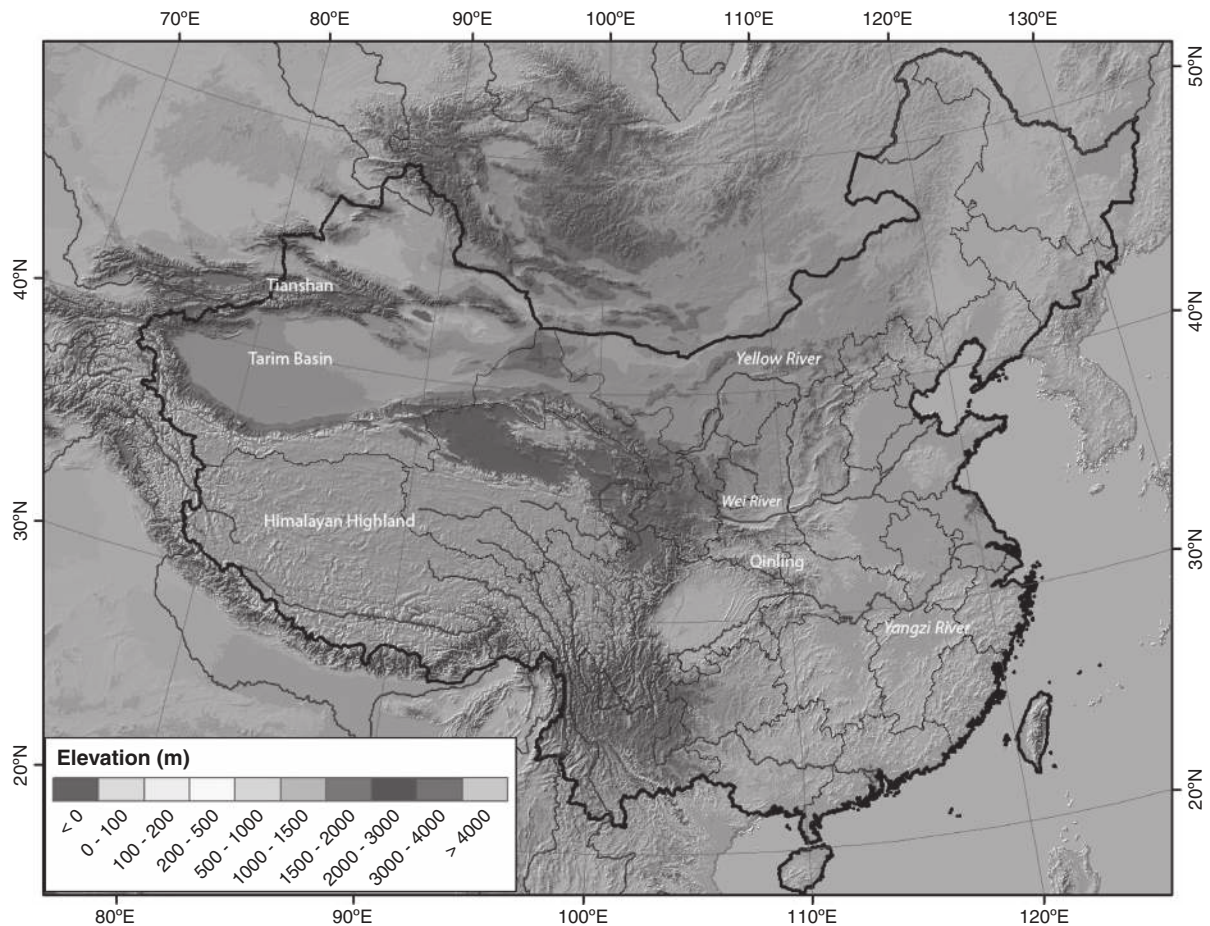


Figure 1. A topographic map of China.

core of interactions, are less frequently addressed, although their unique sociocultural trajectories, as well as contact between them and societies in the core area, are discussed.

THE TOPOGRAPHY OF CHINA

Based on the definition given earlier, the geographic focus of this book is determined neither by China's current or historical borders nor by traditional preconceptions, but rather by focusing on the areas in which Neolithic and Bronze Age societies coevolved. This area is centered in what is sometimes called "China proper," that is, the area around China's two largest river basins, the

Yellow River (黄河) and the Yangzi River (长江). But it also extends beyond their strict topographic limits, northward to the Liao River (辽河) basin, westward to the Wei River (渭河) basin and the Gansu corridor, and southward to the Nanling (南岭) mountain range (Figure 1). Regions beyond this core area are by no means culturally or ecologically unimportant to the content of this book. For example, we discuss contact with the more mobile populations of the steppe region to the northwest as well as with people living in the subtropical zone south of the Nanling range (a region known as Lingnan 岭南).

A broad overview of China's topography (Figure 1) reveals a meaningful pattern: The western

parts are covered by mountains that decrease in height as we move eastward, while most of the wide valleys and plains are located in the east. Because the plains were more suitable for human habitation, especially once agriculture became the main economic base, the population has been unevenly distributed since antiquity, with the largest concentrations found in and around the wide valleys. By way of illustration, today some 90 percent of China's population is concentrated in those same valleys that constitute only one-third of the country's area (Figure 2). We can suppose that most of the human population in antiquity was also located in the east, while the mountainous western part of China was relatively sparsely populated. An exception is the Sichuan basin, located deep inland in western China. This region, highly suitable for agricultural production, was an ancient hot spot of population aggregation. Another exception is the Wei River basin, where population concentration also occurred early. This region remained an important cultural and political center during the entire period discussed in this book.

Another important general observation is that China proper is relatively isolated. It is surrounded by high mountains in the west, steppes and deserts in the north and northwest, an ocean in the east, and a tropical mountainous region to the south. It is commonly argued that these buffer zones that separated China from the centers of other great Old World civilizations are the reason Chinese civilization remained relatively isolated from external influences throughout its premodern history. While there might be a grain of truth to this argument, in the following chapters I demonstrate that even during early prehistoric periods long-range contact with societies in those so-called buffer areas and beyond played a meaningful role in the social, cultural, and technological changes undergone by societies in China proper.

The topography of China was shaped by the huge Himalayan massif to the west. The dramatic uplift of this area, which happened relatively recently in geological terms as a result of the tectonic collision of the Indian subcontinent with the Asian continent, is responsible for more than just the formation of the Himalayas (including the world's highest summits). The same process was also responsible for the formation of all the major mountain ranges in China, which run from west to east, perpendicular to the geological collision. These mountain ranges together with the rivers that run between them divide China into physiographic belts. Among these ranges, the Qinling (秦岭), which divides the Yangzi and Yellow River basins, is regarded as the boundary between north and south China. In the north, the Taihang (太行) and Yan (燕) mountains demarcate the plains of north China and separate them from the steppe and the forest zones to the north. In the south, the Nanling (南岭) range separates the Yangzi River basin from the subtropical regions to its south.

This topographic layout is an important factor influencing the nature of contacts between groups in different parts of China. Because in antiquity the long-range movement of people and the transportation of goods were facilitated by river navigation and land transport along modestly inclined river valleys, east-west movements were relatively convenient. North-south movements, in contrast, were constrained by the need to cross high mountains, wide rivers, and marshy areas. These conditions are thus highly pertinent to the theme of our book, since they shape interregional interactions. In the later periods, discussed in Chapters 10 and 11, constraints on large-scale north-south movements were one of the obstacles facing those who sought to unify China and, subsequently, those who wanted to stabilize unification once achieved. Under the Sui (隋, 581–618 CE) and Tang dynasties, this problem was partly resolved