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Li Liu and Xingcan Chen

Excerpt

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CHAPTER 1

CHINESE ARCHAEOLOGY: PAST, PRESENT,
AND FUTURE

The archaeological materials recovered from the Anyang excavations . . . in the period between 1928 and 1937 . . . have laid a new foundation for the study of ancient China.

(Li, C. 1977: ix)

When inscribed oracle bones and enormous material remains were found through scientific excavation in Anyang in 1928, the historicity of the Shang dynasty was confirmed beyond dispute for the first time (Li, C. 1977: ix–xi). This excavation thus marked the beginning of a modern Chinese archaeology endowed with great potential to reveal much of China's ancient history. Half a century later, Chinese archaeology had made many unprecedented discoveries that surprised the world, leading Glyn Daniel to believe that “a new awareness of the importance of China will be a key development in archaeology in the decades ahead” (Daniel 1981: 211). This enthusiasm was soon shared by the Chinese archaeologists when Su Bingqi announced that “the Golden Age of Chinese archaeology is arriving” (Su, B. 1994: 139–40). In recent decades, archaeology has continuously prospered, becoming one of the most rapidly developing fields of social science in China.

As suggested by Bruce Trigger (Trigger 1984), three basic types of archaeology are practiced worldwide: nationalist, colonialist, and imperialist. China's archaeology clearly falls into the first category. Archaeology in China is defined as a discipline within the study of history that deals with material remains of the past and aims to reveal the laws of historical evolution, based on historical materialism (Xia and Wang 1986: 1–3). This definition, to some extent, summarizes the practice of archaeology in China since the early twentieth century. It consists of two important components: Archaeology is a means to discover the evidence for reconstructing China's national history, on the one hand, and its goal is to verify the Marxist theoretical framework, on the other. The former, in particular, has been the essential objective throughout the development of Chinese archaeology (Chang 1999).

THE FORMATIVE PERIOD (1920s–1940s)

The beginning of modern archaeology can be traced back to 1928, when the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, launched the excavation of Yinxu (The Waste of Yin), a capital city of the late Shang dynasty, at Xiaotun in Anyang, Henan province. This excavation was the first state-sponsored archaeological project in China. Fifteen seasons of excavation took place between 1928 and 1937, and were ended at the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. This series of excavations at Anyang was not a random occurrence, but was preceded by several lines of cultural, political, and technological development that served as the foundation for the establishment of archaeology as a new discipline.

The Historical Context of Chinese Archaeology

There has been a tradition of interest in antiquarianism throughout Chinese history. Many antiquities were thought to possess a divine nature, and some bronze vessels were regarded as symbols of power and authority. This tradition encouraged the collecting and recording of ancient artifacts and, at the end of the nineteenth century, led directly to the discovery and decipherment of oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang dynasty. The discovery of the original source of the oracle bones at Xiaotun in Anyang further facilitated the identification of the late Shang capital city Yinxu at that site (Li, C. 1977).

The emergence of nationalism around the turn of the twentieth century was a significant political stimulus to the development of modern archaeology. Toward the end of the Qing dynasty, many revolutionary intellectuals were discontent and sensed that China under the Manchus was politically and militarily inferior to foreign countries. This discontent led to awakening nationalism. Liang Qichao, a Confucian reformer, was the first to heighten the Chinese national consciousness, particularly in response to Japanese aggression. Writing in a journalistic context, Liang argued in 1900 that people in China had failed to give a consistent name to their own country through history, and had always referred to themselves as people of the current ruling dynasty, which was in some cases not established by Han Chinese. Thus, the name “China” (*Zhongguo*), Liang noted, “is what people of other races call us. It is not a name which the people of this country have selected for themselves” (Liang, Q. 1992: 67–8).

In the early twentieth century, the concept of nationalism was ethnically centered on the Han Chinese, and minority groups were largely neglected (Dikotter 1992: 123–5; Townsend 1996). This ethnocentric nationalism was explicitly addressed by Sun Yat-sen when he said, “China, since the Qin and Han dynasties, has been developing a single state out of a single race” (Sun, Y. 1943: 6). According to Sun, although the Chinese people were distinct from

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all other “races” of the world, the boundaries of the race were drawn along the borders of the Chinese state, and no comparable ethnic distinctions were made within China itself. Minority peoples were thus expected to adjust their beliefs and behavior if they wished to be counted among the “Chinese people” (Fitzgerald 1996: 69). Within this broad political climate that emphasized China as a whole entity, many Chinese intellectuals constantly endeavored to promote broader consciousness of national identity, and the search for Chinese cultural origins became an important part of their intellectual agenda. The initial impetus for archaeological research was closely tied to this issue.

It should be noted that, after the 1911 revolution, as the revolutionaries gained power and controlled the country, the Chinese nationalism moved away from its racist/ethnocentric orientation to one of a state-based political entity. In time, the Nationalist government prescribed an elaborate cultural regimen to assist the people of Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, and the Xinjiang and Han regions to achieve a thorough comprehension of their common national identity as joint members within a republic of five ethnic peoples (*wuzu gonghe*), and to “recover” the sentiment of “central loyalty” toward the state (Chiang, K.-s. 1947: 10–13). This new concept of multiethnic nationalism, however, seems to have been practiced more in the political arena than in the cultural domain, with the dominant ideology in China remaining centered on the cultural superiority of the Han race. The legendary sage-ruler known to the Chinese as *Huangdi* (often translated as “Yellow Emperor”) was progressively elevated to the status of the founding ancestor of the Han Chinese, as a symbol of national identity (Leibold 2006; Liu, L. 1999). It was only after the 1950s, under the rule of Communism, that multiethnic nationalism began to affect archaeology. This is evident in the shift of emphasis from the Central Plain (*Zhongyuan*) to a focus on multiregional development (see later in this chapter). It is not surprising, therefore, that the choice of locations for early excavations done by Chinese archaeologists was based on the primary concern to search for the indigenous cultural origins of the Han Chinese. Moreover, influenced by the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the traditional Confucian ways of learning were criticized, while western science and field methodology became influential (Li, C. 1977: 34–5; Xia, N. 1979). A group of young historians, referred to as “Doubters of Antiquity” (*yigupai*), led by Gu Jiegang (1893–1980), developed a skeptical view of textual accounts of Chinese history. Their mission was to search for scientific evidence by which to reconstruct Chinese history (Schneider 1971). Archaeology, therefore, was endorsed by the *yigupai* as a scientifically based discipline to achieve this goal.

In the early twentieth century, modern archaeological fieldwork methods were introduced into China by Western scholars, who were not, however, necessarily archaeologists. The major investigations by foreigners included surveys of Paleolithic sites in Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and northern Shaanxi by E. Lecent and P. Teilhard de Chardin; excavations of *Homo erectus* remains

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at Zhoukoudian near Beijing by O. Zdansky, D. Black, and J. F. Weidenreich; and excavations of a Neolithic site at Yangshao in Henan by J. G. Andersson (Chen, X. 1997; Li, C. 1977).

Zhoukoudian is located at a cluster of limestone hills in Fangshan County, 48 km southwest of Beijing. It became world famous after some of the earliest human fossils were discovered there in limestone caves. The site with abundant fossil remains – referred to as dragon bones (*longgu*) by the locals – was first discovered in 1918, with large-scale excavations following in 1927 under the leadership of the Geological Survey of China. During the first year of excavation (1927) an extremely well-preserved hominid lower molar was discovered, and was named *Sinanthropus pekinensis*, or “Peking Man” (now classified as *Homo erectus pekinensis*), by the Canadian anatomist Davidson Black. In 1929 the Chinese scientist Pei Wenzhong (Pei Wen-chung) discovered the first complete skullcap of Peking Man. Until the excavations were interrupted by World War II in 1937, a large workforce essentially “mined” the deposits at the cave site, removing more than half a million tons of material in the quest for fossils (Jia, L. and Huang 1990; Wu, R. and Lin 1983). At this time in the 1930s, when national unity and ethnic identity were major concerns, the discovery of Peking Man led some academics and government officials to argue that these fossils showed evidence of an indigenous genesis of Chinese ethnicity (Leibold 2006).

The hominid fossils found before World War II and subsequently lost in the confusion of wartime were studied by the German paleontologist J. F. Weidenreich. On the basis of twelve morphological features present in both Peking Man and modern peoples in East Asia, he concluded that some of the genes of Peking Man were transmitted into the modern Mongoloid populations who inhabit the same region of the world (Weidenreich 1943). This view, although controversial, was later adopted by many Chinese archaeologists to support the multiregional development theory of human evolution (Wu, R. and Olsen 1985; Wu, X. 2004).

An equally important discovery around this time was the Yangshao culture found by Johan Gunnar Andersson, a Swedish geologist. He was employed by the Chinese government in 1914 to conduct geological surveys, but it turned out that his achievements in archaeology surpassed those in geology. Andersson first participated in the early expeditions at Zhoukoudian. What made him famous, however, was not Zhoukoudian, but Yangshao village in Henan, where he found and undertook the first excavation of a Neolithic site in China. The name of this village was then used to designate the first recognized Neolithic material assemblage in the region: the Yangshao culture. Andersson asserted that the Yangshao material remains belonged to the ancestors of the Han Chinese, but suggested that the Yangshao pottery was probably transmitted from the West, as the stylistic patterns of Yangshao painted pottery looked similar to those from the Anau culture in Central Asia and the Tripolje

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culture in southern Russia (Andersson 1923). As a result, Andersson's diffusion hypothesis initiated a decades-long debate on the origins of Chinese culture and civilization (Chen, X. 1997; Fiskej  and Chen 2004).

It should be noticed that not all foreign expeditions in China were for the purpose of scientific archaeological fieldwork. After the Opium War in 1840, China was forced to open its doors to the world. China soon became a hunting ground for foreign imperial powers, as well as for adventurers from Europe, North America, and Japan – such as Aurel Stein, Sven Hedin, D. Klementz, and P. Pelliot – who were in search of exotic antiquities in the Far East, especially in the northwestern part of China (Chen, X. 1997: 42–51; Hopkerk 1980). These activities began when the government was weak and local officials were corrupt. The treasure hunters were able to carry away large quantities of artifacts from China to their own countries without significant hindrance.

The behavior of these treasure hunters in China was humiliating to Chinese who had a strong nationalist consciousness, especially historians and archaeologists (Bryson 1997). These activities, which were later stopped by the Chinese government, have had a long-term impact on state policies regarding the handling of cultural relics and excavations in China. These policies include the prevention of the export of antiquities from China and prohibitions on foreigners unilaterally conducting archaeological work in China.

The Beginning of Modern Chinese Archaeology

Although the scientific field methods used by Western archaeologists were enlightening to Chinese scholars, their general research orientations were not considered satisfactory. Paleolithic and Neolithic remains were thought by some Chinese scholars to be too remote to be connected directly to early Chinese history (Chen, X. 2009: 109–27; Li, C. 1990 [orig. 1968]), especially the Three Dynasties. Andersson's proposal, which traced the origins of the Yangshao painted pottery to the Near East, was even less appealing. As Fu Sinian (Fu, S. 1996: 187) complained, “the foreign archaeologists in China do not pay any attention to the material which represents indigenous Chinese culture, but are only interested in the remains which indicate cultural connections between China and the West.”

Excavations in Anyang

It was in the 1920s that a group of Chinese scholars, who had received training in modern archaeology from Western universities, returned to their homeland with a high spirit of nationalism to build a strong country with science and technology. The first was Li Chi, a PhD trained in physical anthropology at Harvard, who, with others, launched a series of archaeological research projects

beginning in 1926. Excavations in Anyang from 1928 through 1937, organized by Li Chi in his position at the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, were the first attempts to search for indigenous Chinese cultural origins through archaeology.

The excavations in Anyang yielded numerous material remains, including hundreds of bronze objects, nearly 25,000 pieces of inscribed oracle bones, bronze workshops, palace and temple foundations, and large royal tombs. These discoveries proved the site to be a capital city of the late Shang dynasty, and for the first time provided archaeological evidence confirming the existence of ancient indigenous Chinese culture (Li, C. 1977).

The excavations in Anyang not only marked the beginning of modern field archaeology conducted by Chinese scholars in China, but also became a field station where many leading Chinese archaeologists were trained. Most associates of Li Chi who worked in Anyang (such as Tung Tso-pin, Liang Siyong, Kao Ch'ü-hsun, Shih Chang-ju, Guo Baojun, Yin Da, and Xia Nai) became the first generation of Chinese archaeologists who dominated the field for decades on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait (Chang 1981b, 1986a).

Despite the success of the archaeological work at Anyang, there was still a gap in the evidence of material cultures between the historical Shang dynasty and the Neolithic Yangshao, as the latter was then regarded to be a cultural diffusion from the Near East. Chinese scholars were still dissatisfied with the general notion that predynastic cultures in China were derived from ripples of influence extending from the West. Fu Sinian (Fu, S. 1934) made the objection that the study of Chinese history by foreigners was mainly focused on Sino-foreign relationships, which was only a “semi-Chinese” (*ban Han*) endeavor. He continued, however, that the more important issues to be studied were those “completely Chinese” (*quan Han*), that is, concerned with building the basic structure of Chinese history.

Discovery of the Longshan Culture

The evident cultural disconnect between Yangshao and Anyang prompted archaeologists to search for a direct progenitor of the Shang, and the general consensus among archaeologists and historians was that the most likely area was in eastern China. After work at Anyang was halted around 1930 due to the civil war, the excavation team moved its operations to Chengziya in Longshan township, Shandong, where Wu Jinding's (Wu Chin-ting) previous preliminary surveys revealed promising discoveries (Fu, S. 1934; Li, C. 1990 [orig. 1934]; Wu, C.-t. 1938).

The excavations at Chengziya were more fruitful than the excavators had expected. Distinctively different from the Yangshao painted pottery, the black pottery from Chengziya was similar to the Neolithic remains found at Hougang in Anyang, which were found directly beneath the Shang cultural remains.

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Uninscribed oracle bones found at Chengziya provided an even more direct link between the Longshan and the Shang cultures. The Longshan culture of black pottery in the east (representing indigenous Chinese culture) thus came to be viewed as a system independent from the Yangshao culture of painted pottery in the west (thought to be a result of foreign diffusion). Chinese archaeologists hoped that “if we can trace back the distribution and development of the black pottery culture at Chengziya, most problems in the formative period of Chinese history would be resolved” (Li, C. 1990 [orig. 1934]: 193). Therefore, as Li Chi further pointed out, this discovery not only identified a homeland for a part of the Shang culture but also made a major contribution to knowledge about the origins of Chinese civilization (Chen, X. 2009).

Excavations at Doujitai in Shaanxi

While the Academia Sinica headed by Li Chi was working in Henan and Shandong, the National Beiping Academy, led by Xu Xusheng, carried out excavations at Doujitai in Shaanxi province in 1934–7. The intention of this project was to search for the prehistoric origins of the Zhou dynasty. Su Bingqi, who later became the paramount senior archaeologist in China, participated in this project, which established his first research achievement in ceramic typology, focusing on changing forms of the *li* vessels (Falkenhausen 1999a; Su, B. 1948). Su regarded *li* as a vessel form of diagnostic value for distinguishing ethnic affiliations and Chinese civilization. His approach has served as a model of archaeological methodology for several generations of Chinese students.

Western Origin, Dual Origins, and Indigenous Origin of Chinese Civilization

Identifying the origins of Chinese culture has been one of the most sensitive issues in Chinese archaeology. Upon his discovery of the Yangshao culture, Andersson determined to find the route of the eastward cultural diffusion in northwestern China. On the basis of his findings in the Gansu region, Andersson established a sequence of ceramic cultures that perfectly supported his hypothesis. According to this sequence, the Yangshao culture was preceded by the indigenous Qijia culture in far western China, so that, by extension, an even more remote Western origin of the Yangshao pottery seemed plausible. Discovery of the Longshan culture in the 1930s, however, changed the paradigm that proposed a solely Western origin for Chinese civilization, as inferred from the Yangshao painted pottery. The Longshan culture, characterized by black pottery, was thought to represent the indigenous Chinese culture that arose in eastern China concurrently with, but independently of, the Yangshao culture in western China. As a result, a new concept about the dual origins of Chinese civilization was put forward: Whereas the Yangshao

culture diffused from west to east, the Longshan culture moved from east to west. The two traditions were thought to have encountered one another and mixed, later becoming the progenitor of the Shang civilization (Chen, X. 1997: 217–27). This proposition dominated in archaeological circles until the 1950s (Chen, X. 2009: 69–74).

During the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) and the subsequent civil war (1945–9), major archaeological projects were halted, although some fieldwork was still occasionally carried out in peripheral regions. Xia Nai participated in Academia Sinica's expedition in the northwest, where his excavations yielded stratigraphic evidence indicating that the Qijia culture was in fact later than the Yangshao culture (Xia, N. 2000 [orig. 1946]). This conclusion challenged Andersson's sequence of prehistoric cultures in western China and therefore subverted his theory on the Western origin of the Yangshao culture. Xia Nai's victory over Andersson on this issue became a legend, which has inspired Chinese archaeologists for decades.

During this formative period of the discipline, Chinese archaeologists struggled to achieve two primary objectives: (1) to defend their belief in the indigenous origins of Chinese culture against foreign diffusionism, and (2) to reconstruct a reliable cultural history based on material remains, to resolve awkward uncertainties found in textual records, which had been highlighted by radical historical revisionists known as "Doubters of Antiquity." These objectives, in turn, determined the nature of archaeology as an enterprise closely aligned with the ethnic nationalism centered on the Han Chinese.

DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (1950–PRESENT)

When the Communist Party took over China in 1949, the archaeologists in the Institute of History and Philology at the Academia Sinica divided into two groups. Li Chi and several of his colleagues moved to Taiwan, and Xia Nai and Liang Siyong stayed in the mainland. Xia Nai was the one who eventually gained the most international recognition in the discipline (Chang 1986b; Falkenhausen 1999b). Since the 1950s, archaeological fieldwork, research, and training developed rapidly, but dramatic fluctuations occurred in accord with the vicissitudes of varying political tides. Archaeological activities can be divided into three periods: before, during, and after the Cultural Revolution.

Archaeology Before the Cultural Revolution (1950–65)

Soon after the founding of the People's Republic of China, in the 1950s and early 1960s, archaeology was in high demand by the state, as the country undertook groundbreaking construction projects on a tremendous scale. In 1950, the Institute of Archaeology, led primarily by Xia Nai, was established

under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (or Academia Sinica), which changed its name to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1977. Then, in 1952, Peking University's Archaeology Program, headed by Su Bingqi, was set up under the Department of History. These two newly created organizations were the leading forces in conducting archaeological research and in training young archaeologists at that time. Many provinces also set up an archaeological institute or a Management Bureau of Cultural Relics, which was primarily involved in salvage archaeology. In addition to Peking University, two other universities (Northwest and Sichuan) started archaeology programs to train students. The number of professional archaeologists multiplied from a mere handful before 1949 to more than two hundred by 1965. Moreover, the first radiocarbon laboratory was set up in 1965 at the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, soon followed by a second one at Peking University. Three major archaeological journals – the so-called Three Great Journals, including *Kaogu Xuebao* (Acta Archaeologica Sinica), which resumed its previously interrupted publication under a new name, as well as *Kaogu* (Archaeology) and *Wenwu* (Cultural Relics) – were established in Beijing.

Paleolithic Archaeology

Paleolithic archaeology was carried out by the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology, Chinese Academy of Sciences. Excavations at Zhoukoudian were resumed after the 1950s. This site has so far yielded hominid fossils of more than 40 individuals dating from 550,000 to 250,000 years ago, more than 100,000 stone artifacts, and a large number of mammalian fossils. In addition, cranial remains of *Homo erectus* dating to 700,000 years ago were discovered in Lantian, Shaanxi province, and two incisors of *Homo erectus* dating to 1.7 million years ago were found in Yuanmou, Yunnan province. Hominid fossils and stone implements belonging to archaic *Homo sapiens* and *Homo sapiens sapiens* were found in many locations over northern and southern China (Liu, Q. 2010; Lü, Z. 2004b; Wu, R. and Olsen 1985).

Neolithic Archaeology

Most fieldwork projects in the 1950s were carried out in the Yellow River Valley in connection with hydraulic construction projects in the region. The excavations at Miaodigou in Shanxian County, Henan province, were a breakthrough that completely changed the proposition of dual origins for Chinese civilization. Archaeologists identified a ceramic assemblage, which they named Miaodigou Phase II, representing a transitional culture between Yangshao and Longshan (Zhongguo Kexueyuan 1959). This discovery confirmed the relationship between the Yangshao and Longshan cultures as being successive, rather than contemporaneous. Chinese civilization, therefore, seems to have

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derived from a single source – the Yangshao culture, which originated in the Central Plain region (Chang 1963; Chen, X. 2009: 69–74).

It should be noted that the first attempt to interpret ancient Chinese history by using a Marxist model can be traced back to Guo Moruo's (Guo, M. 1930) *A study of ancient Chinese society* (*Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Yanjiu*). In this publication, Guo introduced the Morgan-Engels evolutionary theory described in Engels's (1972 [orig. 1884]) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*; accordingly, Guo applied concepts such as matrilineal and patrilineal society to Chinese prehistory. These two extremely influential books have shaped archaeological and prehistoric research in China for decades. Under the Communist regime, implementing the Marxist interpretation of Chinese history was seen as a new mission for the discipline, in addition to the search for Chinese cultural origins. The first application of this evolutionary scheme in archaeology was the analysis of a Yangshao site at Banpo near Xi'an. The excavations, led by Shi Xingbang, revealed a large portion of a Yangshao settlement. Based on burials and residential patterns, the Banpo Neolithic village was described as a matrilineal society in which women enjoyed high social status and in which "pairing marriage" was practiced (*Zhongguo Kexueyuan* 1963). Such statements soon became standard phrases adopted in many interpretations of Neolithic sites dating to the Yangshao period. Although some criticisms demonstrated faults in both theory and applications (Pearson 1988; Tong, E. 1998: 262–72; Wang, N. 1983, 1987), the classic evolutionary model was commonly accepted among Chinese archaeologists then, and has continued to be influential, but to a lesser extent, today (e.g., *Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan* 2010: 204, 413, 652–3).

Archaeology of the Three Dynasties

After 1949, Shang archaeology remained a focus of research, and Anyang resumed its importance as a center of archaeological excavations that yielded royal tombs, sacrificial pits, craft workshops, and inscribed oracle bones. These finds provided enriched understanding of the spatial organization of the site (*Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan* 1994b). In the early 1950s, Shang material remains datable to a period earlier than Anyang were first recognized at Erligang, near Zhengzhou, Henan. A fortified Shang city belonging to the Erligang phase was then found at Zhengzhou. The enormous size of the rammed earth enclosure (300 ha in area) and the abundance of remains found at the site (craft workshops, palace foundations, and elite burials) indicate that it may have predated Anyang as a capital city (*Henansheng Wenhuaaju* 1959). This discovery encouraged archaeologists to search for the earliest remains of the Xia and Shang dynasties. Endeavors devoted to such a search proved fruitful, as the subsequent survey in Yanshi County, western Henan, by Xu Xusheng revealed an even earlier large site, known as Erlitou, which was thought to have been an early dynastic capital city (Xu, X. 1959).