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Setting the scene

The objective of modern Chinese archaeology is to construct national history.

Su Bingqi (1997: 4)

There is no need to emphasize the significance of Chinese civilization, which produced one of the few pristine states in the world nearly four thousand year ago. But it is rather surprising to note that, compared to other civilizations, little has been done in Chinese archaeology to systematically study the processes of state development. The aim of this book is to reveal the trajectories through which Neolithic culture developed from simple villages to complex political entities in the middle and lower Yellow River valley, the region in which the first Chinese states evolved. The most crucial time period for understanding these processes is the eve of the emergence of states, when the Longshan culture flourished.

The Longshan culture of Neolithic China was distributed through the middle and lower Yellow River valley in the third millennium BC. As the platform for fundamental social change it anticipated the emergence of early Chinese states and civilizations, the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. Several cultural traits mark a new stage of social development in the Longshan period. Writing systems may have been practiced (Chang 1999: 64–65; Postgate *et al.* 1995: 467–468); copper and bronze were used for making small implements and ornaments (Linduff *et al.* 2000); town walls were built and violence and warfare were widespread (Liu, L. 2000b; Underhill 1989, 1994); burial configurations indicate the presence of social hierarchies (Fung 2000; Liu, L. 1996a; Pearson 1981; Underhill 2000); regional cultures became more extensively distributed and interaction between them intensified; and finally, the Neolithic cultures of this region became increasingly complex, forming the foundation for the development of civilizations (Chang 1986: 234). Because of its crucial temporal and spatial situation, the Longshan culture has been a major focus in the study of early Chinese civilizations. Without understanding the social organization and transformations of the Longshan culture, we simply cannot conduct any meaningful study on the emergence of early states in ancient China.

Constructing the Longshan culture in archaeology

The Longshan culture is one of the Neolithic ceramic assemblages identified by the pioneers of modern Chinese archaeology early this century. It was named after the site found at Longshan in Licheng, Shandong, by Wu Jinding (Wu 1930) in 1928. Since that time views of this culture have continuously changed as new archaeological

data have become available. In particular, the term “culture” here refers to a distinctive material assemblage, and the changing interpretations of the Longshan culture have been heavily influenced by the ongoing recognition of new ceramic types.

At first, the Longshan culture, mainly characterized by black pottery, was thought to have arisen in the Shandong region independently of the Yangshao culture – the painted pottery tradition found in north and northwest China. It was believed to have contributed to the foundation for the Shang civilization (Li Chi 1934). By the end of the 1930s, archaeologists had found more than seventy Longshan sites in a broad region including the Shandong, northern Henan, and Hangzhou Bay areas. Archaeologists also began to notice regional variation of pottery forms, and then concluded that only the Longshan culture in the northern Henan region was the direct forerunner of the Shang civilization (Liang 1939).

After the 1940s, more sites containing black pottery were found over an even broader area ranging from Taiwan and Fujian in the south to Liaoning and Hebei in the north. Archaeologists then argued that the Longshan culture was centered in the Yellow River valley, with variations of this mainstream culture in surrounding areas (An 1959, 1979).

Some archaeologists in the West also held this core-periphery view of the Longshan culture. Chang (1959) proposed the concept of a “Longshanoid horizon” to characterize the many similarities in stone and ceramic modes and phases that occurred throughout eastern coastal China during a limited period of time. He suggested that the Longshanoid horizon reflected cultural expansion from a single nuclear area, the Central Plains, which traditionally has been regarded as the cradle of Chinese civilization. This interpretation seemed to fit this intellectual tradition, as well as the available archaeological data, which showed a complete sequence of Neolithic development in the Central Plains, but not in other areas.

By the early 1960s, the sequences from Miaodigou in Shanxian (Institute of Archaeology 1959a) and Wangwan in Luoyang, Henan (Peking University 1961) showed that the Longshan was chronologically later than the Yangshao culture, rather than contemporary with it as originally thought. The stratigraphy and ceramics indicated that the Yangshao culture developed into the Longshan culture through an intermediate phase. At the same time, sites in the Hangzhou Bay area, which had been included in the Longshan culture by Liang (1939), came to be regarded as separate from it and were identified as the Liangzhu culture, since they manifested rather distinctive regional traits (Institute of Archaeology 1959b: 31).

By the 1970s, researchers had come to recognize that the “Longshan culture” of different regions derived from different cultural contexts (An 1972). For example, in the Shandong region it was derived from the Dawenkou culture (Shandong Museum 1976); while in the western Henan and southern Shanxi regions it developed from the Yangshao culture through an intermediate phase, the Miaodigou II (or early Longshan) culture (Institute of Archaeology 1959a; Zhang Daihai *et al.* 1984).

Continuing archaeological discoveries have suggested that, although Longshan cultures in different regions seem to share some common traits, they represent distinct local sequences and traditions. Therefore, in the early 1980s, Yan (1981) proposed that the regional variants of Longshan culture should be regarded as

separate cultures. At the same time he also proposed the term “Longshan period” as a name for the time when these cultures flourished.

At present, both “Longshan period” and “Longshan cultures” are used in the archaeological literature. The concept of a “Longshanoid horizon,” accordingly, simply refers to as “a spatial integrating device crosscutting a number of regional sequences” which “began in the north and the Yangtze valley by the middle of the fourth millennium BC and continued along the eastern coast all the way to Taiwan and the Pearl River delta up to the middle of the third millennium BC” (Chang 1986: 238).

As the early discoveries of major Longshan sites were made in different regions, the local cultures they represented were named after the modern provinces. For example, the Longshan culture found in the Shandong region (also called the Typical Longshan culture to emphasize its originality) was referred to as the Shandong Longshan culture; the Hougang II culture found in northern Henan became known as the Henan Longshan culture; and the Keshengzhuang II culture found in central Shaanxi was called the Shaanxi Longshan culture (An 1981: 255). Archaeologists soon recognized that these major sites cannot fully represent the cultural variations in each provincial region, that the regional Longshan cultures should be further classified into several sub-divisions based on ceramics, and that this classification often cross-cuts modern provincial boundaries. Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1 illustrate

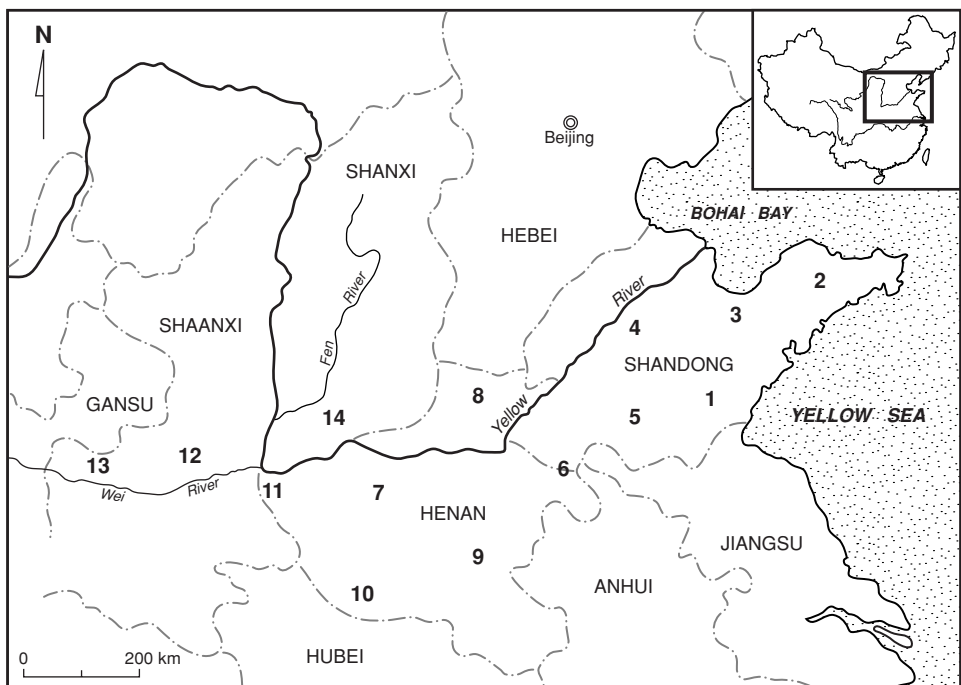


Figure 1.1 Map of the middle and lower Yellow River valley showing the distribution of the major variants of the Longshan culture. 1: Liangcheng; 2: Jiaodong; 3: Yaoguanzhuang; 4: Chengziyai; 5: Yinjiacheng; 6: Wangyoufang; 7: Wangwan; 8: Hougang; 9: Haojiatai; 10: Xiawanggang; 11: Sanliqiao; 12: Keshengzhuang; 13: Shuang’an; 14: Taosi.

Table 1.1 *Chronology of the major regional archaeological cultures discussed in the text*

BC	U. Yellow R.		M. & L. Yellow R. and Huai R.			M. & L. Yangzi R.	
	Gansu	Shaanxi	Shanxi	Henan	Shandong	Hubei	Jiangsu
1100	Regional Bronze cultures	Shang & Proto-Zhou		Shang			
1500							
2000	Qijia Machang Banshan	Erlitou & regional cultures	Erlitou & regional cultures	Erlitou & Xiaoyuan	Yueshi	Erlitou & regional cultures	
2500	Majiayao	Late Longshan			Dawenkou	Shijiahe	Liangzhu
3000	Yangshao	Early Longshan Yangshao			Beixin	Qijialing Daxi	Majiabang Hemudu
5000							
6500	Dadiwan I	Laoguantai		Peiligang	Houli	Chengbeixi	Kuahuqiao
7000							

the distribution of the fourteen spatial and chorological divisions of the Longshan culture.¹ In this book, I use either “Longshan culture” or “Longshan period” as required by the specific contextual need for clear description of data. Although the social implications of regional ceramic types are unclear, nevertheless, for convenience, I use terms such as “Henan Longshan” or “Shandong Longshan” to indicate the spatial distribution of the Longshan sites in question.

Longshan culture and constructing national history

In general there is a marked difference in research focus between Western anthropological archaeology, especially in America, and archaeology in East Asia, including China. As described by Ikawa-Smith (1999: 626), “East Asian archaeology is national history or it is nothing” would be an overstatement, but it is not too far from the reality.

The formation of the discipline in the first few decades, from the 1920s to 1940s, was stimulated by scientific methods and nationalist principles in order to reconstruct an indigenous national history. Its recent development in the past fifty years has been a continuation of reconstructing cultural history, with strong influence partly from the Morgan-Engels schematic evolutionary doctrines favored by Marxists, and partly from changing concepts of nationalism. The discovery and ongoing study of the Longshan culture have constituted an important component in this trend.

The discovery of Longshan culture and nationalism

The nationalist movement in modern Chinese history has played a crucial role in the development of Chinese archaeology. Excavation of the first major Longshan site at Chengziyai, in fact, was a product of nationalist endeavor.

Modern archaeological methods were introduced into China first by foreigners when J. G. Andersson (Swedish) started excavation of a Neolithic site at Yangshao in 1921, E. Licent (French) and Teilhard de Chardin (French) began to survey Paleolithic sites in the Ordos region in 1922–1923, and B. Bohlin (Swedish) initiated large-scale excavations at Zhoukoudian in 1927 (Chen 1997: 87–113). The scientific methods used by the Western scholars were enlightening to Chinese scholars, who were, however, dissatisfied with the general orientation of the research. These Paleolithic and Neolithic remains were thought to be too remote to be connected directly to early Chinese history (Li Chi [1968] 1990), especially the Three Dynasties. Andersson’s proposal, that the origins of the Yangshao culture might be traced to the Near East (Andersson 1923), was even less appealing. As Fu Sinian (1934) 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.”

It was at this time that a group of Chinese scholars, who received training in modern archaeology from Western universities, returned to their homeland with high nationalist fervor. The first was Li Chi, who, with others, launched a series of archaeological research projects beginning in 1926. There were three well-planned major archaeological expeditions which were joined or conducted by the first generation

of Chinese archaeologists before the 1950s: the excavations (1) of *Homo erectus* remains at Zhoukoudian, near Beijing; (2) of the Shang capital city, Yinxu, in Anyang, Henan, and (3) of the Neolithic culture at Chengziyai in Shandong. While the first project was viewed as rather irrelevant to the Chinese national identity at the time, the choice of locations for the last two projects was clearly motivated by the search for indigenous Chinese cultural origins.

Under the leadership of Li Chi, the excavations in Anyang from 1928 to 1937 yielded numerous material remains, including hundreds of bronze objects, nearly 25,000 pieces of inscribed oracle bones, bronze workshops, palace/temple foundations, and large royal tombs. These finds not only proved the site to be a capital city of the late Shang dynasty, but also connected the Shang to more indigenous culture origins. As Li Chi (1954) summarized it, in addition to the style of inscriptions, there are three typically Chinese cultural elements: divination with fire-cracked bones, silk cultivation, and a certain decorative style, all of which originated in China.

Although excavations in Anyang for the first time confirmed archaeologically the existence of indigenous ancient Chinese culture, however, because there was a gap between the Chinese material cultures of the historical Shang dynasty and the Neolithic Yangshao, the latter was then regarded as somewhat of a cultural diffusion from the Near East. Chinese scholars were still dissatisfied with the general notion that pre-dynastic cultures in China were derived of ripples extending from the West. Fu Sinian (1934) objected that the study of Chinese history by foreigners was mainly focused on Sino-foreign relationships, which was only a “semi-Chinese” (*ban Han*) endeavor. However, he continued, the more important issues to be studied were those “completely Chinese” (*quan Han*), that is, concerned with building the basic structure of Chinese history.

The cultural disconnection between Yangshao and Anyang urged 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 war, the excavation team later moved its operations to Chengziyai in Longshan township, Shandong, after Wu Jinding’s preliminary surveys had revealed promising discoveries there (Fu 1934; Li Chi 1934).

The excavations at Chengziyai were more fruitful than the excavators had expected. Distinctive from the Yangshao painted pottery, the black pottery from Chengziyai was similar to the Neolithic remains found at Hougang in Anyang, which were directly superpositioned by the Shang cultural remains. Uninscribed oracle bones found at Chengziyai provided an even more direct link between the Longshan and Shang, since it was the inscribed oracle bones which ultimately distinguished ancient Chinese culture from other parts of the world. The Longshan culture of black pottery in the east (representing indigenous Chinese culture) was thus viewed as a system independent from the Yangshao culture of painted pottery in the west (thought to be foreign diffusion). It became hopeful that “if we can trace back the distribution and development of the black pottery culture represented by Chengziyai, most problems in the formative period of Chinese history would be resolved (Li

Chi 1934: xvi)” (author’s translation). Therefore, as Li Chi (1934: xiv) pointed out, this discovery not only found a homeland for a part of the Shang culture, but also enlightened our knowledge about the origins of Chinese civilization.

For decades, archaeologists struggled to achieve two missions: to defend their belief in the indigenous origins of Chinese culture against foreign diffusionism, on the one hand; and to reconstruct a reliable cultural history based on material remains, in order to clear up uncertainties in textual records which had been attacked by historical revisionists known as *yigupai*, Doubters of Antiquity (Schneider 1971), on the other hand. These objectives, in turn, determined the nature of archaeology as an enterprise closely aligned with the racial/ethnic nationalism of the Han Chinese. Not until after the 1950s, under the reign of communism, did multi-ethnic nationalism begin to affect archaeology, which shifted from emphasis on the *Zhongyuan* (Central Plains) to focus on multi-regional development (for more discussion see Liu, L. and Chen 2001a).

Longshan culture and a changing view of national history

The changed view of national history in archaeology, from a *Zhongyuan*-centered tradition to a multi-centered parallel development, was not simply a product of political propaganda, and did not happen overnight. It has gradually emerged and become crystalized in the last twenty years, resulting from a complex interplay of several factors. These include voluminous new archaeological discoveries made in areas outside the Central Plain which was traditionally regarded as the core area of Chinese civilization, the recognition of diversified regional cultural traditions based on these new findings, increasing confidence in the credibility of textual records, and a changing view of nationalism in recent years.

Multi-regional development in archaeology: the *quxi leixing* model

Rapidly growing results of archaeological fieldwork in the past fifty years have produced a very large database, which allows archaeologists to generate various research strategies. Initiated by Su Bingqi, a research model known as *quxi leixing* “regional systems and local cultural series” was proposed more than twenty years ago (Su and Yin 1981; Wang, T. 1997). It is based mainly on ceramic assemblages, with an emphasis on independent development of, and interaction between, different regional cultural traditions. The *quxi leixing* concept was intended to provide a methodological framework for the reconstruction of Chinese prehistory, as it shifted away from the center-periphery model to a multi-regional approach to the development of Chinese civilization (for the historical background of this trend see Falkenhausen 1995; Wang, T. 1997). As stated by Su Bingqi (1991), after 10,000 BP six relatively stable regional divisions (*quxi*) had formed within the area embraced by historical China: (1) the Northern region centered in the Yan Mountains and the Great Wall area; (2) the Eastern region centered in Shandong; (3) the Central Plains, an area generally including central Shaanxi, southern Shanxi, and western Henan; (4) the Southeastern region around the Lake Tai area; (5) the Southwestern region including the Lake Dongting area and the Sichuan Basin; and (6) the Southern region including an area

from Lake Poyang to the Pearl River delta. The six regional cultures are further divided into a number of local phases (*leixing*). Each of these regions, according to Su, had its own cultural origins and developments, and interacted with the others in the developmental processes of Chinese civilization.

Yan Wenming suggested a similar model to articulate “the unity and variability of Chinese prehistoric culture,” seeing the Central Plains as the center of the flower and cultural traditions in the surrounding areas as the layers of petals (Yan 1987). Instead of giving equal weight to all regional cultures implied in Su’s hypothesis, Yan’s model emphasizes the leading role of the Central Plains in the processes toward civilization, while acknowledging the existence of elements of civilization in the peripheries in prehistory. However, this somewhat compromised approach to cultural diversity seems to have been overshadowed by Su Bingqi’s radical model.

Although the *quxi leixing* concept has not been accepted by all Chinese archaeologists due to its vagueness in both theory and application (An 1993a), it has exerted a strong influence in the discipline. The construction of a fixed framework defining archaeological prehistory has become a goal pursued by many archaeologists. The ceramic typologies which form the material basis for the *quxi leixing* concept, therefore, have played the most important role in this endeavor. As a result, classifying archaeological cultures and phases in ever more elaborate detail has become a major task for many Chinese archaeologists.

New concepts of nationalism and archaeology From a broader political background, the concept of nationalism has also changed through time, as both the Nationalist and Communist governments have attempted to bring China’s multi-ethnic population into a coherent and viable political unit. After the 1950s, the concept of nation in China became equivalent to that of the state, best described by Fei Xiaotong (1989) as *duoyuan yiti* (single entity with multiple components). Fei argues that China, as an actual ethnic entity without self-awareness of its coherent national identity, has gradually come to existence through thousands of years. This formative process was amalgamative, with a dominant core constituted by the Huaxia, and then by the Han people. However, the cultural interaction between the Huaxia-Han and other ethnic groups was not a one-way diffusion, but mutual influence. This multiple national entity now, according to Fei, includes all constituent ethnicities (more than fifty) and covers the entire territory of modern China. It seems that this new concept of nationalism fits relatively well with the archaeological paradigm proposed by Su Bingqi. It is not clear whether Su and Fei reached their similar conclusions spontaneously, or one influenced the other. Evidently the *quxi leixing* concept in archaeology and the *duoyuan yiti* paradigm in sociology mutually support each other in constructing the national history.

A state-directed project in the 1990s pushed the task of national-history building to its peak. During his visit to Egypt, Song Jian, the State Counselor (*guowu weiyuan*), was introduced to a detailed chronological record of dynastic Egypt which started from 3100 BC. Dissatisfied with the Chinese dynastic chronology which not only begins a thousand years later but is also less precise than that of Egypt, Song Jian

called for a project to reconstruct an accurate chronology of the Three Dynasties, so that Chinese civilization would be comparable to that in Egypt (Song 1996). This project, known as the Xia Shang Zhou Chronology Project, was officially launched in 1996. For nearly four years, more than 200 experts in history, archaeology, astronomy, and radiocarbon-dating technology were involved in the project, focusing on nine primary research topics, which were further divided into forty-four sub-topics. A budget of about 17 million yuan (US\$ 2.1 million) was directed to the project. Archaeology certainly benefited from such a generous financial commitment from the state, which supported some major excavations. By 1999 the project achieved its major objectives in reconstructing the time frame of the earliest dynasties dating back to 2000 BC (Xia Shang Zhou 2000). This project has generated much criticism from both China and the West, regarding its methodological problems, political motivations (Jiang 2002; Lee 2002), as well as some idiosyncratic matters (Liu Qiyu 2003: 847–850). There is no question that the chronology of the Three Dynasties has apparently become more detailed than before; however, the project has not made Chinese civilization temporally comparable with some older civilizations in other parts of the world. A new research organization, the “Center for the Study of Civilization” was established in 1999 under the Department of Archaeology at Peking University (Centre for the Study of Ancient Civilization 1999). Encouraged by the achievement made in the Three Dynasties Project, archaeologists are now determined to find the ultimate origins of Chinese civilization, which ought to be embedded in the Neolithic cultures. The Longshan culture thus has become the focus of this new pursuit (Li Boqian 2001).

Longshan culture in legendary history

It should be pointed out that the application of the *quxi leixing* model is not limited to ceramic classifications, nor is nationalism employed purely as political propaganda. With increased knowledge about regional archaeological cultures, scholars have developed a strong willingness to construct cultural history based on archaeological material remains and the historical record. There has been a tendency to identify archaeological cultures and phases, or even sites and artifacts, directly with specific ancient groups of people named in legends or historical literature. For example, some scholars have argued that the Henan Longshan culture may have been the Proto-Xia, the group that gave rise to China’s earliest recorded dynasty (Tian 1981); the Taosi variant in south Shaanxi may have been related to the Taotang clan (Wang Wenqing 1987); and the spread of ceramic vessels, *jue* and *he*, represents the historically documented development and migration of the Xia and Shang peoples (Du 1990, 1992a). By this means, archaeological assemblages (mainly pottery typology) become historically meaningful, although the logical connections between the two sets of information have not been made explicit.

In recent years, some terms taken from ancient Chinese legends have become favored in discussions of the Longshan culture, such as *Wudi shidai*, the Five Emperors period (Yan 1992). This refers to the legendary heroes and sages who ruled before the Xia dynasty, and the time period was characterized by the coexistence of “ten

thousand states,” each possibly composed of a walled town and some villages (Chang 1999: 68–71; Yan 1997: 51). This situation seems to match recent archaeological discoveries in the Longshan culture, which have revealed a number of walled towns (Yan 1997; Zhang Xuechai 1996b).

Because the term “Five Emperors” comes from Chinese tradition, it seems to be a more authentic description of the archaeologically demonstrated culture than foreign terms like “chiefdom” (Yan 1997: 51–52). However, the Five Emperors were possibly not historical personages (for a discussion and some references to this subject, see Chang 1983a: 2), and it is impossible to ascertain their chronology. Although these interpretations make archaeology more relevant to the construction of national history, the two classes of data (legends and archaeology) are not directly comparable. Each of them must be critically studied in its own terms with methods appropriate to each form of information. Only at the end, once the documentary and archaeological records have been independently worked out, can they be considered together.

Evolutionary approaches to the study of Longshan culture

Archaeologists in the West have gone through a series of changes regarding cultural evolution, from the emergence of classic evolutionary paradigms in the nineteenth century (e.g., Engels [1884] 1972; Morgan [1877] 1963), to a strong reaction against this approach in the first decades of the twentieth century (Harris 1968; Wissler 1914), to the enthusiasm for neo-evolutionary models in the 1950s to 1970s (e.g., Fried 1960; Morton 1967; Sahlins 1958; Service 1962, 1975), followed by dissatisfaction with, modification of, and increasingly controversial debate over, evolutionary approaches since the late 1970s (e.g., Blanton *et al.* 1996; Blanton *et al.* 1981; Earle 1977, 1978, 1991a; Feinman and Neitzel 1984; Helms 1979; Wright 1984; Yoffee 1993). In Chinese archaeology the picture is rather different.

Evolutionary models in Chinese archaeology

Up to twenty years ago the only theoretical thinking concerning cultural evolution in Chinese archaeology was dominated for decades by the Chinese version of Marxism. This has led to a basic theoretical weakness in the preference for a unilineal perspective of social evolution (Tong Enzheng 1995). Following the Morgan-Engels theory (Morgan [1877] 1963; Engels [1884] 1972), many Chinese archaeologists have believed that all primitive societies progressed from a matrilineal/matrilocal/matriarchal clan organization to a patrilineal/patrilineal/patriarchal society, and that this corresponded to the transition from an egalitarian society to a stratified society. This transition is thought to have been a result of differentiation in the means of economic production. According to this theory, the development of the means of production, especially metal implements, promoted the divergence of crafts from agriculture. This division of labor formed a fundamental condition for the accumulation of surplus and commodity exchange. As a result, stratification emerged in clans. Then cities, craft centers, and commercial centers were developed, and a class society based on private ownership and exploitation was established (Shi Xingbang 1983: 37). This evolutionary scheme has been implanted in the minds of several generations