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0521811848 - The Chinese Neolithic: Trajectories to Early States

Li Liu

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### **The Chinese Neolithic**

This book studies the formation of complex societies in prehistoric China during the Neolithic and early state periods, *c.* 7000–1500 BC. Archaeological materials are interpreted through anthropological perspectives, using systematic analysis of settlement and burial patterns. Both agency and process are considered in the development of chiefdoms and in the emergence of early states in the Yellow River region. Interrelationships between factors such as mortuary practice, craft specialization, ritual activities, warfare, exchange of elite goods, climatic fluctuations, and environmental changes are emphasized. This study offers a critical evaluation of current archaeological data from Chinese sources, and argues that, although some general tendencies are noted, social changes were affected by multiple factors in no pre-determined sequence. In this most comprehensive study to date, Li Liu attempts to reconstruct developmental trajectories toward early states in Chinese civilization and discusses theoretical implications of Chinese archaeology for the understanding of social evolution.

LI LIU is Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at La Trobe University. She has published various articles on the Chinese Neolithic and is the author of *State Formation in Early China* (with Xingcan Chen) (2003).

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*LI LIU*

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Dedicated to  
my parents, my sisters, and Tom and Vicky

## CONTENTS

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|   |         |
|---|---------|
| <i>List of illustrations</i>  | page ix |
| <i>List of tables</i>   | xiii    |
| <i>Preface</i>  | xv      |
| <b>1 Setting the scene</b>  | 1       |
| Constructing the Longshan culture in archaeology                                | 1       |
| Longshan culture and constructing national history                              | 5       |
| Evolutionary approaches to the study of Longshan culture                        | 10      |
| Alternative research strategies   | 13      |
| The scope of the book   | 16      |
| <b>2 The changing environmental contexts of China's first complex societies</b> | 19      |
| Geographic settings   | 20      |
| Reconstruction of paleoenvironment and cultural development                     | 22      |
| Conclusion  | 31      |
| <b>3 Household subsistence and ritual</b>                                       | 33      |
| Introduction  | 33      |
| Household activities: a general survey  | 34      |
| A household at Kangjia  | 48      |
| Implications of Kangjia archaeological remains                                  | 60      |
| Conclusions   | 71      |
| <b>4 Spatial organization and social relations in communities</b>               | 73      |
| Introduction  | 73      |
| Spatial orders of settlements in the Neolithic period                           | 74      |
| Settlement organization in the late Neolithic period                            | 95      |
| Discussion and conclusions  | 113     |
| <b>5 Community burial patterns</b>  | 117     |
| Introduction  | 117     |
| Alternative approaches to Neolithic burial patterns                             | 118     |
| Regional variability in burial patterns   | 126     |
| Discussion  | 151     |
| Conclusion  | 157     |

|   |      |
|---|------|
| <i>List of contents</i>   | viii |
| <b>6 Development and decline of complex societies in the Central Plains</b>     | 159  |
| Introduction  | 159  |
| Methods   | 159  |
| Data  | 161  |
| Regional settlement patterns  | 162  |
| Social complexity in the less-circumscribed regions                             | 185  |
| Settlement patterns and social organization                                     | 188  |
| Discussion and conclusions  | 189  |
| <b>7 Development and decline of social complexity beyond the Central Plains</b> | 192  |
| Introduction  | 192  |
| Regional settlement patterns in Shandong  | 193  |
| Regional settlement patterns in Central Shaanxi                                 | 208  |
| Settlement patterns and social organization: a comparison                       | 219  |
| Discussion and conclusions  | 221  |
| <b>8 Trajectories toward early states</b>                                       | 223  |
| Introduction: from chiefdoms to states  | 223  |
| The Erlitou culture – searching for the Xia dynasty                             | 226  |
| The Proto-Shang culture   | 236  |
| Conclusions   | 238  |
| <b>9 Reconstructing social processes</b>  | 239  |
| Introduction  | 239  |
| Development of social hierarchy and integration                                 | 239  |
| Dynamics of social change   | 246  |
| Conclusions and further research questions                                      | 251  |
| <i>Notes</i>  | 254  |
| <i>Appendixes</i>   | 256  |
| <i>References</i>   | 275  |
| <i>Index</i>  | 301  |

## ILLUSTRATIONS

---

|      |  |               |
|------|--|---------------|
| 1.1  | Map showing the distribution of the Longshan culture.                                    | <i>page</i> 3 |
| 2.1  | Map of the Yellow River valley.  | 21            |
| 2.2  | Distribution of major lakes on the Central Plains recorded in ancient texts.             | 22            |
| 2.3  | The maximum changing positions of the East Asian Monsoon frontal.                        | 24            |
| 2.4  | Paleovegetation map of China.  | 26            |
| 2.5  | Changes in site frequency from the Early Neolithic to Early Bronze Age.                  | 28            |
| 2.6  | Holocene sea-level changes in China.   | 29            |
| 3.1  | The major sites mentioned in chapter 3.  | 34            |
| 3.2  | The ratio of gender-specific tools from four Neolithic burial sites.                     | 36            |
| 3.3  | House F17 at Jiangzhai.  | 37            |
| 3.4  | House F11 at Huanglianshu.   | 38            |
| 3.5  | House F37 at Yuchisi.  | 39            |
| 3.6  | Correlations between food vessels, tools, and sizes of houses in the Neolithic period.   | 41            |
| 3.7  | House F33 at Yuchisi.  | 44            |
| 3.8  | House F204 at Yinjiacheng.   | 45            |
| 3.9  | Human skeletons in pit no. 1 at Wangchenggang.   | 47            |
| 3.10 | Distribution of Longshan houses and pits at Keshengzhuang.                               | 48            |
| 3.11 | Distribution of the major sites in Lintong mentioned in chapter 3.                       | 49            |
| 3.12 | Sketch map of the Kangjia site.  | 50            |
| 3.13 | Profile of the vertical distribution of house structures at Kangjia.                     | 50            |
| 3.14 | Example of the basic house structure at Kangjia.   | 52            |
| 3.15 | Animal images painted on the floor of house F267 at Kangjia.                             | 52            |
| 3.16 | Burials M53, M54 and M55 at Kangjia.   | 54            |
| 3.17 | Oracle bones from Kangjia.   | 54            |
| 3.18 | Burials M56 and M57 at Kangjia.  | 55            |
| 3.19 | Burials M58 and M59 at Kangjia.  | 56            |
| 3.20 | Age profiles of water buffalo, pig, and sheep/goat bones from Kangjia.                   | 58            |
| 3.21 | A comparison of the proportions of pig and deer bones at the Baijia and Jiangzhai sites. | 61            |



|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>List of illustrations</i>  | x   |
| 3.22 Histograms showing the distribution of faunal and human remains at Kangjia.                            | 62  |
| 3.23 A comparison of the percentage of arrowheads from Yangshao and Longshan sites.                         | 64  |
| 3.24 Jade turtle shells and plaque from Lingjiatan.   | 66  |
| 4.1 Locations of major sites mentioned in chapter 4   | 74  |
| 4.2 Distribution of residential features and burials at Jiahu, Phase I.                                     | 76  |
| 4.3 Distribution of houses, burials, kilns and ditches at Jiahu, Phase II.                                  | 77  |
| 4.4 Layout of the Yangshao culture village at Jiangzhai.  | 80  |
| 4.5 House F47 at Jiangzhai.   | 81  |
| 4.6 Anthropomorphic designs from Yangshao sites.  | 83  |
| 4.7 A large building (F105) and a medium building (F104) found at Xipo.                                     | 84  |
| 4.8 Plan of a large building (F901) at Dadiwan.   | 86  |
| 4.9 Ceramic artifacts from F901 at Dadiwan.   | 87  |
| 4.10 The large building (F3) at Anban.  | 89  |
| 4.11 Human figurines and hats discovered from Shaanxi and Central Asia.                                     | 90  |
| 4.12 Layout of the walled settlement at Xishan.   | 94  |
| 4.13 The layout of Yuchisi.   | 97  |
| 4.14 Histogram showing four rankings in the distribution of food vessels from Yuchisi.                      | 98  |
| 4.15 Artistic reconstruction of a house compound at Zhaojialai.   | 102 |
| 4.16 Plan of the Pingliangtai walled site.  | 103 |
| 4.17 Plan of the Wangchenggang walled site.   | 104 |
| 4.18 Plan of the Guchengzhai walled site and palatial compound.   | 107 |
| 4.19 Plan of the Taosi walled site.   | 109 |
| 4.20 A comparison of similar artifacts from the Dagudui quarry and Taosi site.                              | 112 |
| 5.1 Location of major Neolithic sites discussed in chapter 5.   | 118 |
| 5.2 Example of a tomb with an <i>ercengtai</i> ledge, M2005 at Dawenkou site.                               | 121 |
| 5.3 Examples of egg-shell pottery goblets.  | 122 |
| 5.4 Distribution of three jade forms: <i>cong</i> , <i>bi</i> , and <i>yazhang</i> .                        | 123 |
| 5.5 Examples of musical instruments or ritual paraphernalia from Neolithic sites.                           | 124 |
| 5.6 Distribution of burial clusters of Phase II at Jiahu.   | 127 |
| 5.7 Bivariate plot showing the correlation between burial size and the number of grave goods from Jiahu.    | 128 |
| 5.8 Distribution of burials at Shuiquan in Henan.   | 129 |
| 5.9 Bivariate plot showing the correlation between burial size and the number of grave goods from Shuiquan. | 129 |
| 5.10 Distribution of burials and pits at Longgangsi.  | 130 |

| <i>List of illustrations</i>  | xi  |
|---|-----|
| 5.11 Bivariate plots showing the correlation between burial size and the number of grave goods from Longgangsi.           | 131 |
| 5.12 Proportions of bone awls found in grave goods at Longgangsi.   | 132 |
| 5.13 Plan of the Hongshanmiao cemetery site.  | 132 |
| 5.14 Plan of the Shijia cemetery site and a secondary burial pit (M25).   | 133 |
| 5.15 Sex ratios among different age groups from Shijia, Yuanjunmiao, and Jiangzhai.                                       | 134 |
| 5.16 Pyramid-shaped distribution of the burial hierarchy at Taosi.  | 136 |
| 5.17 Burial distribution of section III at Taosi.   | 137 |
| 5.18 Distribution of three burial groups at Dawenkou.   | 139 |
| 5.19 Bivariate plots showing the correlation between burial size and the number of grave goods from Dawenkou.             | 140 |
| 5.20 Bivariate plots showing the correlation between the distribution of grave goods in Yuchisi burials.                  | 142 |
| 5.21 Spatial distribution of burials at Chengzi.  | 143 |
| 5.22 Bivariate plots showing the correlation between burial size and the number of grave goods from Chengzi.              | 144 |
| 5.23 Distribution of burial-pit clusters at Chengzi.  | 145 |
| 5.24 Distribution of burials and sacrificial pits at Yangshan.  | 146 |
| 5.25 Bivariate plots showing the correlation between burial size and the number of grave goods from Yangshan.             | 147 |
| 5.26 Distribution of burials at Huangniangniangtai.   | 149 |
| 5.27 Burial M48 at Huangniangniangtai.  | 150 |
| 5.28 Bivariate plots showing the correlation between the number of grave goods and <i>bi</i> disks at Huangniangniangtai. | 151 |
| 6.1 Distribution of Peiligang sites in Henan.   | 163 |
| 6.2 Comparison of convex rank-size curves from Peiligang and Yangshao settlement clusters.                                | 164 |
| 6.3 Distribution of Yangshao sites in Henan.  | 165 |
| 6.4 Yangshao settlement hierarchy in western Henan and Zhengzhou.   | 166 |
| 6.5 Yangshao settlement distribution in western Henan.  | 167 |
| 6.6 Yangshao settlement distribution in the Zhengzhou region.   | 168 |
| 6.7 Longshan settlement distribution in southern Shanxi and Henan.  | 169 |
| 6.8 Map of the Yellow River valley and the distribution of fourteen site clusters.  | 171 |
| 6.9 Comparison of site size and site numbers in southern Shanxi.  | 172 |
| 6.10 Three levels of settlement hierarchy of the early and late Taosi phases.   | 173 |
| 6.11 Distribution of sites in the early and late Taosi phases.  | 174 |
| 6.12 Longshan rank-size distributions from Shanxi and Henan.  | 175 |
| 6.13 Longshan settlement hierarchy from Yiluo, north and central Henan.   | 177 |
| 6.14 Distribution of Longshan sites in the Yiluo valley.  | 179 |
| 6.15 Distribution of Longshan sites in northern Henan.  | 180 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>List of illustrations</i>  | xii |
| 6.16 Distribution of Longshan sites in central Henan.                                       | 183 |
| 6.17 Comparison of the number of sites and the largest site size from Yangshao to Longshan. | 185 |
| 6.18 Distribution of sites with Dawenkou and Qujialing elements on the Central Plains.      | 186 |
| 7.1 Longshan settlement hierarchies in Shandong.  | 195 |
| 7.2 Distribution of Longshan sites in Linyi.  | 196 |
| 7.3 Rank-size distributions from Longshan site clusters in Shandong.                        | 197 |
| 7.4 Distribution of major Longshan sites in Rizhao.   | 200 |
| 7.5 Distribution of Longshan sites in north Shandong.                                       | 202 |
| 7.6 The Longshan pottery sherd incised with eleven characters from Dinggong.                | 204 |
| 7.7 Distribution of Longshan sites in the western Shandong.                                 | 206 |
| 7.8 Distribution of Laoguantai sites in the Wei River valley.                               | 209 |
| 7.9 Distribution of Yangshao sites in the Wei River valley.                                 | 209 |
| 7.10 Distribution of four Longshan site clusters in the Wei River valley                    | 211 |
| 7.11 Longshan settlement hierarchies in the Wei River valley.                               | 212 |
| 7.12 Rank-size distribution for the Longshan site clusters in the Wei River valley.         | 213 |
| 7.13 Site distribution from late Yangshao to Longshan in the lower Qi River valley.         | 215 |
| 7.14 The change of cultural distribution in latitude in the Hulu River valley.              | 217 |
| 7.15 Change in settlement location, frequency, and size in the Hulu River valley.           | 218 |
| 8.1 Distribution of Xinzhai, Erlitou, and Xiaqiuyan sites.                                  | 227 |
| 8.2 Settlement hierarchy of the Erlitou culture.  | 228 |
| 8.3 Convex rank-size curve of the Erlitou culture.  | 228 |
| 8.4 Sketch map of the Erlitou urban center.   | 230 |
| 8.5 Plan of palatial structures no. 1 and no. 2 at Erlitou.                                 | 231 |
| 8.6 Location of Erlitou regional centers in relation to distribution of metal and salt.     | 234 |
| 9.1 Four models of settlement systems in the Longshan and Erlitou cultures.                 | 241 |
| 9.2 Structure I at Lutaigang.   | 249 |

## TABLES

---

|     |   |               |
|-----|---|---------------|
| 1.1 | Chronology of the major regional archaeological cultures discussed in the text  | <i>page 4</i> |
| 5.1 | Cross-cultural comparison of burial variability from Neolithic and early Bronze Age sites   | 152           |
| 6.1 | Generalized correlation among four variables for measuring social complexity  | 160           |
| 7.1 | Change in site distribution corresponding with marine transgressions in northern Jiangsu  | 198           |
| 9.1 | Correlation among social organization, settlement hierarchy, administrative hierarchy, and population size in the Yangshao, Longshan, and Erlitou periods | 240           |
| 9.2 | Social development from the Neolithic to the early Bronze Age in the middle and lower Yellow River Valley   | 243           |

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*PREFACE*

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Chinese archaeology is a fast-growing field of study, and new information is accumulating rapidly. Such a tremendous volume of data can provide insights for our understanding of social evolution in world history. However, because of the language barrier and methodological and theoretical differences between Chinese and Western archaeologists, the Chinese data have not been so widely accessible as data from other parts of the world. Much effort has been made by archaeologists in recent years to bridge the gap between Chinese specialists and international readers, and this book is also an endeavour of this kind.

This book is based on my Ph.D. dissertation research on settlement patterns of the Longshan culture, completed in 1994, and the contents of chapters 5 and 6 were partially published in 1996. However, a large part of the book presents new data and analysis, which is the result of my research in recent years.

I would like to first express my greatest appreciation to my dissertation advisors: Kwang-chih Chang, Richard Meadow, and Rosemary Joyce of the Anthropology Department at Harvard University, who gave me tremendous help and encouragement, not only during the course of writing the thesis but also throughout the years I was studying at Harvard. I am especially grateful to the late Professor K. C. Chang, whose advice and help at every step of my academic life have been extremely valuable in many ways.

I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to Thomas Patterson, Peter Rigby, and Anthony Ranere at Temple University in Philadelphia, where I spent the first four years of my graduate study in the United States. Stimulated by their unstinting help in matters from language to ideas, I began the study of anthropological archaeology. Without their patience and support I would have not been able to take the first step in the long journey of my academic career in this field.

Generous institutional support from La Trobe University, where I have been teaching Chinese archaeology for the past eight years, has enabled me to complete this book. I would like to thank especially Vice-Chancellor Michael Osborne, and Head of School Tim Murray, for their consistent support.

I am extremely grateful to many archaeologists in China. Among countless names, my Chinese colleagues in the Shaanxi Institute of Archaeology were very supportive of my excavation project, which contributed to my dissertation research. In recent years I have worked on several projects with Chen Xingcan of the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. I benefited most from our collaborative research projects on the procurement of salt and copper resources in

early Bronze Age China, and on regional settlement patterns in the Yiluo region (jointly conducted by Lee Yun Kuen, Henry Wright, and Arlene Rosen), which dramatically improved my understanding of social processes in early China. Constant exchanges of ideas on many issues with Chen Xingcan, Li Xinwei, and Ma Xiaolin in recent years have also given me intellectual inspiration to form the new interpretations presented in this book.

During the nine years of revising the book, I have received much encouragement and help from many individuals. David Keightley, Henry Wright, Arlene Rosen, David Frankle, and the Series Editor, John O'Shea, provided many critical and constructive comments. Jing Zhichun, Tang Jihen, and Lee Yun Kuen allowed me to use the information from their unpublished papers.

I am thankful to Wei Ming and Qiao Yu, who made high-quality illustrations, and to Susan Bridekirk and Tonia Ekfeld who edited earlier versions of the manuscript.

A special expression of thanks is due to my husband, Thomas Bartlett, who has supported me academically and spiritually throughout our years together. He has not only helped me to improve my English writing skills, and edited several versions of the manuscript of this book, but has also encouraged me to persevere in seeking to achieve difficult academic goals. I am also indebted to our daughter, Vicky, who has learnt at a young age to put up with my frequent absence from home, due to my working in the office over weekends and on fieldwork in China.

Finally, I am grateful to my parents who highly value intellectual work. Their influence throughout my entire life has always encouraged me to pursue ever-higher levels of scholarly accomplishment.

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