

# The Transformation of Academic Culture in Mainland Chinese Archaeology

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## Abstract

Although antiquarianism in China can be traced back at least to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, modern archaeology was introduced from the West into China in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and developed in isolation from 1949 to 1978. However, after China opened her door to the world in 1978, there have been noticeable changes in the academic culture of Chinese archaeology, which can be illustrated in terms of its disciplinary objectives, research agendas, methodologies and theoretical frameworks. These changes reflect a cultural transformation resulting from the economic, social, political and ideological changes taking place in contemporary China.

## The Meanings of “Academic Culture”

Before exploring the academic culture of Chinese archeology and its transformations, let me begin by discussing the meanings of the term “academic culture.” In this article, I consider academic culture to be the academic pursuits of scholars belonging to one discipline in one particular

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society. Generally speaking, this group of scholars makes their living within one economic system, shares the same cultural identity and traditions, is controlled by the same state, and influenced by more or less the same social, political and ideological paradigms. Therefore, the pursuits of this group are shaped and influenced by a common set of external factors, upon which a unique academic culture develops. During the formation of such an academic culture, personal characteristics, experiences and cultural backgrounds of individuals also play a role, but this aspect will not be discussed here.

An academic culture can be distinguished by the disciplinary missions and objectives defined by scholars of this culture, the methodologies and theoretical frameworks they utilize, and the implicit and explicit restrictions they experience in choosing research fields and in conducting academic exchanges with other groups. In a word, an academic culture can be understood in terms of the social, political and ideological factors that shape academic pursuits within a given discipline, and the different commitments and careers that scholars develop given these factors. The transformation of the academic culture of Chinese archaeology from 1949 to the present can only be understood by examining these factors.

Many scholars have synthesized and/or analyzed the development of Chinese archaeology since its establishment in the 1920s, and the political, ideological and social factors determining and affecting this development, from the May Fourth Movement, the Anti-Rightist movement, the Cultural Revolution, to the Reform and Opening after 1978 (e.g. Chang 1986a; Chen 1997; Liu and Chen 2001; Olsen 1992; Falkenhausen 1993, 1995; Institute of Archaeology 1984; Tong 1995; Trigger 1989; Wang 1983; Xia 1986). Important personages such as Gu Jigang and his school of Doubting Antiquity, political leaders Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, and prominent Chinese archaeologists Su Bingqi and Xia Nai and their impact on Chinese archaeology, have also been discussed (e.g. Chen 1997; Liu and Chen 2001; Wang 1996; Tong 1995). However, there has been very little discussion from the perspective of the academic culture of Chinese archaeology, particularly on the changes that have taken place since the 1980s,<sup>1</sup> the area I explore in this article.

China has now entered its third decade of reform and opening. With globalization, and China's closer connections with the rest of the world in recent years, how have China's economic, social, political and ideological changes over the past two decades affected Chinese archaeology? How do Chinese archaeologists evaluate their work when encountering critics from

the West, and how do they define the position of Chinese archaeology within world archaeology? Although it is impossible to give a comprehensive review in an article of this length, I will in the pages that follow briefly discuss these issues.

## **Historical Background: Antiquarianism in China and the Introduction of Modern Archaeology**

With its legacy of having a civilization dating back more than 4000 years, China is a country with very rich ancient remains. Many nobles and rulers in ancient China had a strong interest in collecting items of the past, believing that many of them were symbols of ruling power and legitimacy (Liu and Chen 2001).

According to Chang, Chinese antiquarianism can be traced back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (1986a). Many scholars have discussed this antiquarianism and its lasting influence (e.g. Chang 1986a; Liu and Chen 2001). Only one point should be added here to that discussion: the centralized political system, characteristic for much of Chinese history, also has shaped the scholarly thought of antiquarianism and Chinese archaeology. In ancient China, important items found anywhere were often sent to the central government to please the emperors and to enforce centralized power. The central plain (*zhongyuan*), where the central government was located, was not only a political but also an economic, cultural and academic center of the nation. Thus, scholastic pursuits often focused on the history, society, culture and ethnic groups in this central region (generally the Han people), and the academic culture of much social science, particularly history, historiography and archaeology, has been focused accordingly.

Modern archaeology in mainland China did not develop from antiquarianism but was introduced from the West at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a by-product of global colonization.<sup>2</sup> The historical, social and academic background of this introduction has been discussed by many scholars (e.g. Chang 1986a; Chen 1997; Liu and Chen 2001), and need not be repeated here. Very briefly, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1949, many Westerners came to China, some for treasure hunting, others for academic work (Chen 1997). The discovery and excavation of the Neolithic Yangshao culture and Beijing Man were the two most significant achievements made by Western scholars working in China from the 1920s to the 1940s as pioneers in Chinese archaeology. On the other hand, thousands of Chinese artefacts were looted or taken out without China's permission by Westerners such as

Anrel Stein (1862–1943) and Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) during this period. This history has been bitterly memorized by many Chinese scholars, and has influenced the development of the academic culture of Chinese archaeology.

The first generation of Chinese archaeologists was trained by leading scholars in Western Europe and the United States, and began their academic pursuit in the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> One of their major objectives was to search for the origins of Chinese civilization; a second was to stop the foreign looting of Chinese relics (Fu 1928). After the Opium War, a group of Chinese scholars became skeptical about historical records, arguing that these records were not to be trusted (Liu and Chan 2001). Consequently, the origin and development of Chinese civilization and history, which had been recorded in historical documents, became unclear. In addition to this, some Western scholars such as J. Andersson inferred that the Neolithic in the Yellow River Valley was probably the result of cultural diffusion from the Middle East (Chen 1997), casting doubt on the Chinese origins of Chinese culture. Archaeology thus came to be perceived as a reliable way to trace the Chinese origin and development of prehistory and civilization in China (Chen 1997), and to restore the confidence of Chinese people in their own heritage.

Modern archaeology in mainland China was influenced by the West from the 1920s to 1949 in excavation techniques, methods, and interpretation of data, and also in its theoretical framework. On the other hand, although the first generation of Chinese archaeologists was trained in the West, many of them had a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism when pursuing their academic activities (Fu 1928), as implied above. This is due mainly to the social background of that period, but it has become a characteristic of the academic culture of Chinese archaeology up to the present, although some changes are now underway.

### **The Academic Culture of Archaeology in Mainland China from 1949 to 1979<sup>4</sup>**

The Guomintang government of China lost the civil war and retreated to Taiwan in 1949, taking with them not only some 65,000 items of the royal collection from the Forbidden City, but also some archaeologists and the artefacts in their custody. Since 1949, archaeology in the Chinese context has been, in effect, divided into two. While the archaeologists who went to Taiwan focused on the historical archaeology of China, since the artefacts

in their custody are mainly of the Bronze Age (of course they also study the prehistory of Taiwan), their counterparts in mainland China study both prehistoric and historic archaeology.

The three decades from 1949 to 1979 were dramatic in mainland China. The country formed a close association with the former U.S.S.R. in the 1950s, and Soviet archaeology was perceived as the model for Chinese archaeology to follow, from disciplinary objectives, to field methods, data classification and interpretation, and theoretical analysis (*Kaogu* Editorial Board 1985). It was during this period that Marxism was firmly established as the sole theoretical framework in mainland Chinese archaeology, and the disciplinary objectives were to promote patriotism and to strengthen people's confidence in building a socialistic society (*Kaogu* Editorial Board 1985).

The close tie with the former U.S.S.R. was broken after 1959 (Tong 1995), and China remained isolated until 1978. The development of archaeology in these years was also a process independent from the rest of the world. The political movements in these three decades impacted archaeologists and archaeological work to various degrees, with the Cultural Revolution bringing the most severe consequences (Tong 1995). It was also during these decades that the academic culture of Chinese archaeology was most fully formed.

### **1. The academic social organization of Chinese archaeology**

The academic social organization of Chinese archaeology comprises both civil and academic sectors. The headquarters of the former is the State Bureau of Antiquity Management (*Guojia Wenwu Ju*) formed in 1949 (State Bureau of Antiquity Management 1998) in Beijing. Under this bureau, there are local institutions for antiquity management in all major cities, provinces and municipalities, and many counties. Policies and decisions related to archaeological pursuits, cultural heritage preservation and management are distributed from the top to the bottom within this system, and implemented by archaeologists of varying levels, including museum archaeologists.

The academic section consists of research institutes and universities, such as the National Institute of Archaeology, and the Institute of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Palaeoanthropology (IVPP). The former was founded in 1950, and the latter was officially established in 1957 in Beijing (Xia 1986). There are no direct administrative links between the two

institutes and all other archaeological organizations in mainland China.<sup>5</sup> However, as the two institutes are homes of prominent Chinese archaeologists and palaeoanthropologists, and as respecting and following authorities is a salient feature of Chinese academic culture, scholars of these institutes have in effect served as disciplinary leaders.

There are also the universities. Archaeology was first established as an undergraduate major in Beijing University in 1952, and later in more than ten other universities in mainland China (Xia 1986), all within departments of history before 1979.<sup>6</sup> The archaeology department of Beijing University is also home for many leading Chinese archaeologists, and has been another academic center for Chinese archaeology since 1949.

In summary, before the 1980s, scholars of the academic sector played crucial roles in the development of archaeology in mainland China, from guidance and consultation to leadership. They proposed the objectives, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks for Chinese archaeology, led large-scale and important projects, trained young scholars, established the format of academic writing, and decided the fate of collaborations with foreign scholars.<sup>7</sup> While the significance and contribution of such leadership towards Chinese archaeology in these three decades is undeniable, it also helped to create a quite monolithic academic culture in Chinese archaeology.

In mainland China, all archaeologists belong to the public sector. As political neutrality is not encouraged in mainland China, all archaeologists are required to follow contemporary political and ideological discourses, to obey the government representatives such as the director of the institutes, and to conduct their academic pursuits accordingly. This is another salient feature of the academic culture of Chinese archaeology.

## **2. Missions and objectives of Chinese archaeology**

Since 1949, the mission of archaeology has been to preserve Chinese antiquities, to strengthen people's confidence, and to promote nationalism and patriotism (Liu and Chen 2001). As is well-known, from the late 1950s to the late 1970s, mainland China experienced a highly unstable and dramatic period, as political movements followed one after another. Archaeology, being a discipline studying the past, was attacked as being politically incorrect during this time. It was argued that the past only belonged to the "exploiting class," and therefore should be ignored; only the present should be focused upon: the new society created by working

people led by the Communist Party (Tong 1995; Xie 1998). Chinese archaeologists, particularly those in charge of the Institute of Archaeology CASS<sup>8</sup> and the State Bureau of Antiquity Management, had to emphasize the political and social usefulness of archaeology as a tool to serve the construction of socialist society and communist ideology (Tong 1995; Xie 1998).

Even in the late 1970s, when the Cultural Revolution came to an end, the objectives of archaeology remained more or less the same. In a textbook written by the Archaeology Program of Jilin University and the Committee for Antiquity Management (CPAM) of Hebei Province in 1976, it was stated that Chinese archaeology was part of the communist cultural and ideological system, and should serve the workers, farmers and soldiers (Archaeology Program of Jilin University and CPAM of Hebei Province 1978).

According to this textbook, the objectives of Palaeolithic research, for example, were threefold. The first objective was to prove that Engel's theory of human beings as created through labor was correct. The second was to prove that since the Palaeolithic, the ancestors of modern Chinese had been living on the landmass called China today, and that there were no genetic and cultural influences from other regions. The last objective was to prove that the Palaeolithic was the early stage of a "primitive communist society," and that such a society lasted for a long period of time. Private property and class only occurred very recently in human history, it was argued, and would eventually become extinct. Thus, it was proposed that Palaeolithic study should enforce confidence to carry out the revolution towards eventually wiping out private property and classes in the world (*ibid.*, 80–81). For Neolithic research, the objectives were to study the causes and processes of private property, classes and states in order to strengthen the determination to eventually eliminate these social structures (*ibid.*, 89). For historical periods, archaeology should aim at investigating the time, the process and the causes of slavery and feudalism, and reveal the cruelty of these societies (*ibid.*, 121).

### **3. Research agenda**

Given these objectives, it is inevitable that research was restricted to certain issues. There was never an explicit regulation as to what should and should not be researched, but it seems that Chinese scholars chose their topics in accordance with contemporary social and political paradigms.

Topics of articles published from 1950 to the end of the 1970s in *Kaogu* illustrate the period's research agenda:

- Introduction of archaeological work in the [now former] U.S.S.R.
- Methodological discussion such as typology and stratigraphy, as well as comparison of excavation techniques and problems between the U.S.S.R. and China.
- Deciphering and examining Chinese archaeological remains (artefacts, ecofacts and features) discovered in mainland China.
- Analysis of cultural changes in prehistoric and ancient China.
- Analysis of physical anthropology in China.
- Political and ideological issues related to archaeological interpretations.
- Criticism of Western archaeological arguments from a political perspective.
- Archaeometrical issues such as C14 dating.

Articles on similar topics were also published by another prestigious journal during this period — *Wenwu* [Relics] (*Wenwu* Editorial Committee 1986). The research focus during this period was on Chinese archaeological remains and cultures; studying foreign archaeology was very rare, as was cross-cultural comparison. Ancient artefacts from the West (e.g. Central Asia) found in China were occasionally studied only to demonstrate the cultural exchange between China and foreign countries; these changes were often interpreted as evidence of a powerful ancient China. In the mid-1950s, probably before the launch of the Anti-Rightist Movement in mainland China, a few Chinese scholars studied European and Asian ancient cultures (for example, Shi 1957). However, such research disappeared after 1957 and only resumed after 1980.

During this period, research not only on foreign cultures but also on foreign influences on Chinese culture was too politically dangerous to be conducted. Human and cultural evolution in China was thus portrayed as an indigenous process with little external influence and cultural interaction (Institute of Archaeology 1958). Any suggestion of significant foreign influences was severely criticized as an attempt to downgrade Chinese culture and to promote imperialism and capitalism (Archaeology Program of Jilin University and CPAM of Hebei Province 1978: 121).

Consequently, foreign scholars working in China before 1949 were either not mentioned, or only criticized. For example, the foreign scholars who had participated in the excavation of Zhoukoudian where Beijing Man

was found were seldom mentioned in university textbooks. Swedish scholar J. Andersson was vigorously criticized for his hypothesis that the Neolithic Yangshao culture in the middle Yellow River Valley was probably the result of a cultural diffusion from western Asia, although Andersson himself gave up this hypothesis in the 1930s (Chen 1997). These comments and critiques were the products of a distorted period in mainland China.

#### **4. Theoretical framework**

For political and ideological reasons known by everyone, the theoretical framework of Chinese archaeology has been Marxism since 1950. For example, Pei Wenzhong stated that the human and cultural remains of Peking Man were “an attestation of Engels’ theory that labor created man” (Pei 1987:159). In 1962 there was a debate as to whether the Neolithic Yangshao culture was a matriarchal or patriarchal society. While Xu Shunzhan argued that the Yangshao society was patriarchal, and Yang Jianfang disagreed, both arguments were based on Morgan’s theory and Engels’ essay *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Kaogu Editorial Board 1985).

Apart from Marxist concepts and theories, from the 1950s to the 1970s all other terms from the West were perceived as “bourgeois thought” and discredited (Tong 1995). In a training handbook written by top Chinese scholars in 1958, the concept of “prehistory” was severely criticized as a “bourgeois attempt to exclude human activities in the Stone Age from human history,” and consequently to “downgrade certain peoples as barbarians” (Institute of Archaeology CASS 1958: 3).

During these three decades, the philosophic base for Chinese archaeology was dialectical materialism alone, and archaeological data were interpreted solely based on Marx’s theories of social and cultural evolution (Olsen 1993; Tong 1995; Liu and Chen 2001). For example, the human bodies (some beheaded) found in the royal burials of the Bronze Age were interpreted as evidence of a society based on slavery, while the Neolithic burials with grave goods of similar quantity and quality were interpreted as evidence of an egalitarian “primitive communist society” (Kaogu Editorial Board 1985).

#### **5. Methodology**

As Chinese archaeology was introduced from the West, a multi-disciplinary

approach seems to have been applied from the very beginning. In the 1930s, archaeological surveys and excavations were carried out by geologists, palaeoanthropologists and archaeologists together; faunal and floral ecofacts as well as human remains were analyzed by corresponding specialists (Chen 1997). This seems to be a tradition more or less maintained in Chinese archaeology.

Although quite isolated from the world from 1949 to 1978, Chinese scholars nonetheless applied new methods developed in the West to mainland Chinese archaeology.<sup>9</sup> The principle of radiocarbon dating was introduced into China in 1962, and the first C<sup>14</sup> laboratory in China was established in 1965 (Xia 1986). The first report of radiocarbon dates was published in 1972 (Xia 1986). Both thermoluminescence and archaeomagnetism dating were introduced into mainland China in 1978 and applied to archaeological research from 1979 onwards (*Kaogu* Editorial Board 1985). Pollen analysis was first applied to the Banpo Neolithic assemblage in the middle Yellow Valley in 1963 (*Kaogu* Editorial Board 1985). Insects, animal and plant remains found in archaeological sites were also analyzed in the 1970s (*Kaogu* Editorial Board 1985). There seemed to have been no severe political or ideological restrictions on adopting methods from the West for Chinese archaeology from 1950 to 1978; it was argued that such adoptions were to improve and ensure that Chinese archaeology could fulfill its political and social commitment more efficiently and accurately (Xia 1986).

## 6. Academic exchanges

From 1949 to 1979, academic exchanges were conducted mainly between China and a few socialistic countries, such as the former U.S.S.R., North Korea, Mongolia, Romania, Albania and Vietnam, mainly in the form of exhibitions and visits of scholars (*Kaogu* Editorial Board 1985). Japanese archaeology was also discussed, as aspects of it were relevant to Chinese archaeology. Occasionally, archaeological discoveries made in India, Cambodia, Peru and Mexico, as well as Australia and Greece, were also briefly reported (*Kaogu* Editorial Board 1985). However, there was no formal academic exchange with Western countries. Collaboration with foreign scholars was absolutely unthinkable during that time.

Overall, in spite of all the political and ideological obstacles, the three decades from 1949 to 1979 are a period of development for archaeology in mainland China. It certainly was a period of individual and group conflicts

and struggles, and a period when many antiquities and monuments were destroyed. However, it was also during this period that a large quantity of valuable archaeological data was accumulated, dating from the Palaeolithic to the historical period. The initial chronologies of Chinese prehistory and ancient history in both the Yellow and the Yangzi River valleys were established. Ethnographic data were collected for the purpose of investigating technological development in prehistoric China, such as the investigation of the Naxi minority in Southwest China in its pottery manufacturing (*Kaogu* Editorial Board 1985). In addition, various new methodologies were applied to Chinese archaeology. All these were significant achievements during these three decades, resulting from the devotion and hard work of many Chinese archaeologists. It cannot be denied that due to political and ideological restraints, Marxism was the only theoretical framework of academic interpretation then, without even a comprehensive discussion of the contents of Marxism related to archaeology (Tong 1995). But it is both unjustified and unfair to many Chinese scholars to conclude, as was written about the period of the Cultural Revolution, that “the supposedly academic research conducted in China did not constitute true scholarship, but rather merely served political power struggle, reaffirming political authority” (Tong 1995:178).

## **The Academic Culture of Archaeology in Mainland China from 1980 to the Present**

### **1. The academic social organization of Chinese archaeology**

The two sectors of Chinese archaeologists remain, as outlined above, but provincial institutes of archaeology have been established from the late 1980s to the 1990s as new forces in the academic sector (Olsen 1992). This expansion is partially due to economic development after 1978, and the trend of decentralization (Olsen 1992; Liu and Chen 2001). The acceleration of infrastructure construction and the implementation of laws on cultural heritage preservation have resulted in frequent and large-scale excavations (Liu and Chen 2001), and the national institutes no longer have sufficient financial and human resources to cope with the increased demand. Therefore, young archaeologists in provincial, city, and county institutes become an important sector of academic social organization in China, focusing on local archaeological work.

While this is certainly beneficial to Chinese archaeology, there seems

to be sometimes a reduced collaboration between national and local scholars. From the 1950s to the 1970s, as there were often insufficient professionally trained archaeologists in regional academic institutes, scholars from national institutes were often warmly welcomed to conduct excavations and surveys, and the ownership of artefacts was transferred to national institutes without much local objection. This situation is now changing, particularly in eastern China, where the economy has been rapidly developing since 1978. Today, collaborations between central and local archaeologists are still possible, but the ownership of unearthed artefacts often remains in local institutions.

Before the 1980s, the state was the only funding agency for archaeological work in mainland China. Now, funding agencies include not only the national and local governments, but also property developers or construction companies, since funds from the state cannot meet the increased demand. The diversified funding sources enable the expansion of archaeological work along with economic growth, and the preservation and accumulation of data.

## **2. Missions and objectives of Chinese archaeology**

Generally speaking, the objectives of Chinese archaeology as stated by leading Chinese scholars today are similar to those stated from the 1950s to the 1970s. For example, it is argued that the objectives of prehistoric archaeology is to “investigate the origin of agriculture and civilization in China” based upon Marxism (Yang 1997:7). A leading Chinese archaeologist argued in 1993 that the objective of prehistoric archaeology should be to reconstruct Chinese prehistory in order to “revive national culture, to help us understand our nation, to enhance national confidence, and to contribute to the cultural history of the world” (Su 1993:10).

However, some scholars argue that because Chinese civilization is the only surviving ancient civilization in the world, and because China is a country with varied and rich ancient remains, Chinese archaeology should contribute more to the theories of world archaeology and the reconstruction of human history, rather than focusing on China alone (Yu 2001). One may still argue that there is a sense of national pride behind this, but this perception of Chinese archaeology from a global perspective indicates a broader view of the discipline’s objectives after 1978.

In this new era, materialism, individualism and the emphasis on financial gain have emerged as prominent values in mainland China. It seems

that the public now considers archaeology to be a discipline with low financial rewards for individuals and little relevance for modern society; even the existence of this discipline is questioned by some (see <http://www.ccrnews.com.cn/>). On the other hand, economic growth also enables the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage for leisure activities and tourism. In this milieu, Chinese archaeologists have to rethink the direction and the position of the discipline. The general consensus today is that archaeology in contemporary China should provide data to both physical sciences and other social sciences, and make a contribution to the social and cultural development of society, as well as the understanding of human prehistory and history (<http://www.ccrnews.com.cn/>).

### 3. Research agenda

Current research agendas can be revealed by examining topics of articles published in *Kaogu* from 1980 to 2000 (see Table 1), and topics of articles

**Table 1: Topics of articles published in *Kaogu* from 1950 to 2000**

Topics	1949–1979	1980–2000	Change	%
<b>General</b>				
Archaeological theories	4	11	7	175
Scientific analysis and approaches	35	128	93	265.71
Archaeological experiments	0	3	3	300
Techniques for preservation/restoration	18	30	12	66.67
<b>Artefacts</b>				
Pottery and kiln analysis	27	57	30	111.11
Tools	14	17	3	21.43
Others	66	178	112	169.70
<b>Features</b>				
– Burials	42	78	36	85.71
– Cities, temples etc.	55	60	5	9.09
<b>Archaeological analysis</b>				
– Archaeological culture	40	93	53	132.5
– Cultural chronology	13	34	21	161.54
– Subsistence strategies	4	1	–3	–75
– Kinship and marriage	2	2	0	0
– Social structure/class struggle	20	3	–17	–85
– Origin of Chinese civilization		9	9	
– Settlement pattern		10	10	

**Table 1:** (Cont'd)

Topics	1949–1979	1980–2000	Change	%
Fine arts	40	44	4	10
Zooarchaeology	3	5	2	66.67
Ancient science	9	6	-3	-33.33
Chinese history and society	20	31	11	55.00
Physical anthropology – Chinese	10	18	8	80
Chinese philology	101	79	-22	-21.78
Archaeology of ethnic groups	5	19	14	280
Ethnologic analysis	14	5	-9	-64.29
Review on work progress	21	44	23	109.52
Disciplinary direction/goals	1	4	3	300
Ancient environments	3	20	17	566.67
Individuals and archaeology	1	12	11	1100
Book reviews	72	86	14	19.44
<b>Foreign academic exchange</b>				
– Overseas exhibition	1	1	1	100
– Other countries	1	11	10	1000
– Japan	9	14	5	55.56
– Central Asia	2	1	-1	-50
– Europe	2		-2	-100
<b>Introduction of foreign archeology</b>				
USSR archaeology (1955–1962)	54		-54	-100
North Korea	9		-9	-100
Mongolia	6		-6	-100
USA	1		-1	-100
West Europe	3		-3	-100
Other East European countries	15		-15	-100
Japan	4	6	2	50
India	3		-3	-100
Australia	1		-1	-100
South America	2		-2	-100
Southeast Asia	2	1	-1	-50
C14 report	6	20	14	233.33
Field report (dig and survey)	1635	2184	549	33.58
Political critics and arguments	82	2	-80	-97.56
<b>Subtotal</b>	2490	3389	899	36.10
News and briefs	44	216	172	390.91
<b>Total</b>	2534	3605	1071	42.27

and books published in other venues from 1980 to 2000. Although most topics are similar to those published before 1979, a few changes are apparent. No articles on archaeology of the former U.S.S.R. and other socialistic countries are present in this period, and overt political arguments are also largely absent. On the other hand, Western theories have been introduced into mainland China, such as new archaeology, post-processual archaeology and cognitive archaeology (Miu *et al.* 1993).

In recent years, the three most important issues of human history have also become popular in Chinese archaeology — namely, the origin of human beings, the origin of agriculture, and the origin of civilization (Liu and Chen 2001). As mentioned above, before 1978 human evolution in China was portrayed as an independent process without any influx of external genes. Franz Weidenreich was often criticized even up to the early 1980s in Chinese university classes for his identification of the human remains found at the Upper Cave at Zhoukoudian as possibly being Eskimo, Melanesian, or even Caucasian (Wu *et al.* 1999). This implies that there were “foreign” prehistoric people in mainland China — an assertion that was politically unacceptable before the 1980s.

Recently, however, the existence of “foreign” genes has been recognized. A fragment of human skull and three teeth dated to approximately 200,000–300,000 years ago found in Chaoxian, in the Yangzi River Valley, was recently described as “bearing certain characteristics often similar to those of the Neanderthals, which are not found in other fossils in China” (Wu *et al.* 1999: 120). The authors are cautious on this point and do not give further interpretation as to how human remains with Neanderthal features — and thus not “Chinese” — could have been found in the central area of China, but this implicit recognition of “foreign” genes is nonetheless a noteworthy change.

When discussing the origin of *Homo sapiens* in China, Wu and his co-authors again point out that human remains found in three places in Yunan, Sichuan and Guangxi in southwest and south China bear characteristics similar to Neanderthals, but different from those found in the contemporary Yellow River Valley (Wu *et al.* 1999: 174). Furthermore, the authors infer that there might have been genetic exchanges between China and the West in the late Pleistocene (Wu *et al.* 1999: 174).

Based upon the discovery of the aforementioned human remains and the results of genetic analysis, some Chinese geneticists and archaeologists have recently supported the replacement hypothesis, that human beings originated in Africa some 100,000 years ago and subsequently migrated to

China (Qian *et al.* 2000; Yu 2001). On the other hand, the majority of Chinese physical anthropologists and palaeoanthropologists still argue for the multiregional hypothesis, stressing that human evolution in China was a continuous process from *Homo erectus* to *H. sapiens sapiens*, that there might have been genetic exchanges between China and the West, but there was no replacement of one species by another (Wu *et al.* 1999; Wu 2001). As Wu has stated (2001), archaeological and physical anthropological data do not seem to support the replacement hypothesis in China. Some may suspect that nationalism has played a role here. Whatever the case, patriotism is not stated as a reason for the rejection of the replacement hypothesis, which would have certainly been the case had the same debate been held prior to the 1980s.

However, not many archaeologists became involved in this debate, probably because this is a topic primarily involving genetics and physical anthropology, beyond the knowledge of many archaeologists. However, two other topics have been under hot debate. In the 1920s, Vavilov hypothesized that China was a center for indigenous agriculture (1992). Ding Ying, an agronomist, argued in 1933 that rice was first domesticated in South China (Ding 1933). An Zhimin is the first archaeologist who discussed this issue in 1949 (Miu *et al.* 1993). But it was not until the end of the 1970s that this topic became popular in mainland China (Lu 1999). For example, over 140 archaeological articles on Chinese agriculture were published from 1980 to 1989, compared to only 16 from 1949 to 1979 (sources: Miu *et al.* 1993). The journal *Agricultural Archaeology* published its first issue in 1981. At least two international conferences have been organized by Chinese scholars on this topic since the 1980s.

The popularity of this topic results from numerous archaeological discoveries made since the 1970s. Up to the 1970s, the origin of millet and rice agriculture in China was either hypothesized as being introduced from the Middle East and Southeast Asia respectively (Sauer 1952), or considered not clear (e.g. Carter 1977). Archaeological data after the 1970s, however, indicate that China is one of the indigenous centers for the origin of agriculture, and research on this topic began to attract much attention not only from archaeologists, but from agronomists, historians and botanists as well.

The origin of complex societies and civilization in China has, as earlier noted, been a central issue in Chinese archaeology since its beginning. It was with this purpose that the Archaeology Section of the Institute of History and Philology excavated the Anyang ruins of the Shang Dynasty

from 1928 to 1937, until this was stopped by the outbreak of the Second World War (Chang 1999). After 1949, the search for the origin of Chinese civilization continued, and the topic has become more popular as more archaeological data has been discovered since the 1980s. A project on the precise chronology of the beginning of Chinese civilization was launched in 1996 (Liu and Chen 2001). A “Center for the Study of Civilization” was established at Peking (Beijing) University in 1999 (for a detailed review, see Liu and Chen 2001), with historians, linguists, archaeologists and natural scientists together investigating this issue.

It should be pointed out that this center at Peking University does not focus only on Chinese civilization. It also studies other civilizations as well, from North Africa to the Middle East (<http://www.pku.edu.cn/academic/archeology/center>), and invites articles on these topics. This indicates that archaeology in mainland China is now trying to broaden its research agenda from a focus only on Chinese archaeology to archaeology in other areas of the world.

This extension of research agendas is visible in works published recently that offer cross-cultural comparisons. For example, Wang compares and analyzes the impetus and processes of the origins of Chinese and Mesopotamian civilizations (1994), and Li compares cultural similarities and differences based upon archaeological discoveries in China, North America, Japan, Mesopotamia, New Zealand and Egypt (1997). Recently, Bai has proposed that through cross-cultural comparison, the developmental trajectories of Chinese civilization can be revealed, and the similarities and differences of human cultures, and elements causing these similarities and differences can be discovered (2001). Bai further argues that Chinese civilization was part of world civilization, and the development of this civilization was not isolated but related to many other external factors, including the absorption of diverse cultural influences (2001: 8).

Indeed, one of the most noticeable changes of academic discourses in Chinese archaeology after 1978 is the recognition of the existence of other cultures. Over the last 50 years there have been debates as to whether metallurgy, chariots, and the domestication of horse were introduced from Central Asia into the Yellow River Valley (Mei and Shell 1999). Recently some Chinese scholars support the hypothesis of a cultural diffusion from the West (An 1993; Shui 1997; Mei and Shell 1999), but others disagree (Li 1990; Wang 1998; Wang and Song 2001). There is no consensus on these topics, but Chinese scholars can now freely express their opinions without being criticized for downgrading the importance of Chinese culture.

After 1980, many archaeological sub-disciplines in the West have been introduced into Chinese archaeology. One of these is environmental archaeology. It has been argued that environmental archaeology in the Chinese context is a development from the 1960s, since pollen and environmental analysis were applied to the Banpo site then (Shi 1991). Nevertheless, environmental archaeology only became a popular research field after the 1980s. For example, only ten papers on environmental archaeology were published before 1980 in journals, but two special volumes on this field, consisting of 73 papers in total, were published in 1991 and 2000 respectively, in addition to other articles published in journals and as chapters of books.

Before 1980, environmental analysis was often a single task at a single archaeological site, only conducted by scientists of other disciplines, such as the pollen analysis at Banpo. Now, archaeologists and other scientists carry out projects in a region by using multi-disciplinary approaches. One example is a project carried out from 1994 to 1998 on shell-midden sites and the environment in the Jiaodong Peninsula, in the lower Yellow River Valley (Institute of Archaeology CASS 1999). Based on archaeological and natural science data gathered from 20 shell midden sites, the authors reconstructed the ancient environment in that area between 6000 and 4860 years ago, investigated the interaction between human beings and natural resources during that period, and revealed the possible trajectory from gathering to agriculture (Institute of Archaeology CASS 1999).

Many archaeologists in China now consider the reconstruction of ancient environments an essential part of their projects. The time span of environmental archaeology is not restricted to prehistory but is also expanded to historical archaeology of late, exemplified by a project on a village settlement in northeast China dated to 2100 years ago (Zhao Zhi-jun, personal communication).

Analysis of settlement patterns has been another new research field in Chinese archaeology after 1980. The concept of settlement patterns was introduced into mainland China by K. C. Chang in 1984 when he delivered six archaeological seminars at Peking University (Chang 1986b). From the 1990s, settlement pattern analysis has been applied to archaeology in mainland China, particularly to the Neolithic assemblages. For example, Liu and Dong analyzed the prehistoric settlements found in the north and south areas of the Great Wall, and argued that different environments and subsistence strategies significantly influenced the changes and continuity of settlement patterns (Liu and Dong 1997). Generally speaking, the foci of

settlement pattern research in mainland China are ecology, environments, human activities (including technologies), and the changes of social structures as revealed by settlement patterns. This is similar to Western practices as introduced by Chang (1986b).

After the 1980s, the identification of the functions of stone and bone artefacts has also become a research field in mainland China, utilizing both experimental archaeology and use-wear analysis. The first paper in this field was concerned with distinguishing bone flakes caused by carnivores' biting and human striking (Lu and Huang 1985). Using experimental archaeology and comparative microscopic observation as major approaches, this research convincingly established the different characteristics of bone flakes produced by human and animal activities.

The history of Chinese archaeology is another new field for research, represented by a book written by Chen Xingcan, published in 1997. Chen focuses on prehistoric archaeology in mainland China from 1895 to 1949, reviews the social and political background, and evaluates the performance of Chinese and foreign scholars working in China during this time. He acknowledges the contributions made by foreign scholars to Chinese archaeology, and gives reasoned comments on their academic contributions. Some arguments and hypotheses made by foreign scholars in the 1920s and 1930s have been proven incorrect by later archaeological discoveries in China, but Chen argues that their mistakes were mainly caused by limited data and imperfect excavation techniques at that time, not by their prejudice of viewing Chinese cultures as inferior (Chen 1997:133). Chen's research represents another change of academic culture in Chinese archaeology. It seems that at least some Chinese scholars are now able to review the disciplinary history and work done by foreign scholars from an academic perspective rather than a political and ideological one.

The revival of research on antiquities indicates another change in academic culture after 1978. As mentioned above, there has from ancient times been a strong interest in China in collecting antiquities. However, this fashion of collecting almost vanished during the three decades from 1949 to 1978. This was not only because collecting antiquities was politically wrong, since those items represented the feudalistic and rotten past (Tong 1995), but also because people did not have the financial means to collect.

After 1978, as more and more people began to follow the path of "getting rich first," collecting antiquities became fashionable again. At present, antiquities of less significance and in large quantities (e.g. coins

and some pottery items) and/or dated to a recent age (after the 16<sup>th</sup> century) are allowed to be sold in antique shops run by local antiquity administrations. The private entrepreneurs and the newly emerged middle-class are the major buyers of these antiquities, while the suppliers are antique shop, plus, very unfortunately, the looters of archaeological remains, who consider looting as a fast and easy way of getting rich.

The looting of ancient sites hardly existed in the decades before the 1980s in mainland China, firstly because free antique markets were not allowed, and secondly because the rigid ideological and political control from cities to villages prevented such looting activities. Chinese archaeologists, along with the Chinese state, are fiercely fighting the looters. On the other hand, there are many papers and books now written by archaeologists mainly for collectors, who have become an important market for archaeological publications and artefacts. The *Chinese Antiquity News* (*Zhongguo Wenwu Bao*), which is edited by the State Bureau of Antiquity Management, has added a weekly section for collectors since 2001, publishing articles on news and laws related to antiquity collection, and on how to identify and appraise ancient items ([www.ccrnews.com.cn](http://www.ccrnews.com.cn) 2001).

In summary, it seems clear that research agendas in Chinese archaeology after 1980 have been influenced by the Western academic world as well as by market force, both resulting from the opening of China after 1978. The political, ideological and administrative control of the state over the discipline seems to have been weakened, as indicated by the disappearance of political arguments and criticism in academic archaeological writings after 1980, and the application of Western research agenda and theories.

#### **4. Theoretical framework**

Today, the major theoretical framework in mainland Chinese archeology is still Marxism. However, some Chinese scholars have expressed different opinions. Harrell has pointed out that Tong Enzheng was the first Chinese scholar who “challenged the Morganian paradigm directly” (2001: 141). In a paper published in 1988, Tong also argued that the Marxist theory of prehistory was not fully correct for two reasons: first, the ethnographic database at the time of Marx and Engels was very limited, and second, Marx and Engels proposed their hypothesis on prehistoric societies as part of their overall framework of the evolution of human society, a framework

that argued for the inevitable extinction of capitalism and the coming of classless communism (Tong 1988). Tong said that to support this argument Marx and Engels had to find evidence, and their idea of primitive communist society in prehistory “was a powerful weapon” to defend the argument that capitalism was not a necessity of human history (1988: 189). Thus Tong not only challenged Morgan; he also said that Marx and Engels could not be right in every word they wrote. Tong argued that archaeologists should not be restricted by Morgan’s framework when trying to reconstruct Chinese prehistory (1988:191). This is a very brave statement even in the late 1980s in mainland China.<sup>10</sup>

Another eminent Chinese archaeologist who has been working in China directly challenged Marxism in 2001. In a series of five articles on Chinese archaeology in the new millenium, Yu (2001) argues that Engels’ hypothesis on the importance of labor for the transition from ape to man was totally incorrect, because the ability to “labor” was “acquired,” not inherited. Furthermore, Yu frankly states that Engels’ hypothesis as to the existence of matriarchical society lacked evidence, and was not valid; and the hypothesis about an egalitarian, classless and peaceful pre-historic society was only in imagination, for the purpose of attacking capitalism.

Yu’s papers illustrate another important change in the academic culture of Chinese archaeology after the Reform era — Marxism, or at least certain parts of it, can be criticized. If Tong in 1988 only voiced his disagreement subtly, Yu directly and explicitly challenges several principles of Marxism related to archaeology. Yu’s papers were published in the official *Chinese Antiquity News*, edited by the State Bureau of Antiquity Management. This would have been totally unthinkable and politically unacceptable before 1978.

The publication of Yu’s paper does not indicate that Marxism has been totally discredited in China. Nor does it imply that Western archaeological theories now dominate Chinese archaeology. In fact, there are basically two schools at present with respect to the theoretical framework of Chinese archaeology. One school strongly supports the application of Western approaches and theories, represented by scholars like Yu, and scholars trained in the West and recently returned to China. Another school also supports the application of modern scientific approaches to Chinese archaeology, but does not think that Western approaches such as those of New Archaeology are necessarily correct (Zhang 2001). In short, as stated by the head of the State Bureau of Antiquity Management recently in a

meeting in Nanjing ([www.ccrnews.com.cn](http://www.ccrnews.com.cn) 2001), Marxism, Mao's, Deng's and Jiang's thoughts will remain as an ideological and theoretical framework for Chinese archaeology; but Western theories are allowed to be discussed and applied to archaeological study in mainland China now.

## **5. Methodologies**

The two decades from 1980 have witnessed the application of almost all major Western methodologies to Chinese archaeology. The Science and Technology Center at the Institute of Archaeology CASS was established in the early 1990s. Today, this center has the necessary technological and human resources for pollen and phytolith analyses, zooarchaeology and physical anthropology, as well as radiocarbon dating. In the provincial institutes, various methods are also used, often involving experts from other disciplines or from the national institutes.

Another approach utilized after 1980 is archaeological experimentation, which is to investigate archaeological issues through various experiments, from making stone tools to cultivating cereals. The experimental approach was initially used in the 1930s by Pei Wenzhong to investigate whether Palaeolithic bone flakes found in Zhoukoudian, Beijing resulted from human striking (Lu and Huang 1985). Pei's work was continued by Lu Zun'e, a professor of Palaeolithic Archaeology with the Archaeology Department of Peking University, and his students in the 1960s and from the 1980s (Lu and Huang 1985). The research agenda include techniques required for stone flaking and the production of microblades and bone tools, and for prehistoric stone mining. Recently, more Chinese archaeologists have utilized archaeological experiments and use-wear analysis, from investigating the process of foxtail millet domestication (Lu, in press) to identifying the function of Palaeolithic flakes under a high power microscope (Hou 1992).

A noticeable trend of methodologies in Chinese archaeology is the multi-disciplinary approach, as mentioned earlier in terms of environmental archaeology. Generally speaking, the application of the multi-disciplinary approach is determined by financial and human resources, both of which are often insufficient (as in many other places of the world as well). However, there are now no political or ideological obstacles for the application of these methods. Chinese archaeologists are willing to use these approaches when feasible.

## **6. Academic exchange**

Academic exchange in Chinese archaeology made a great shift after 1978 from “the East” to “the West.” From the 1980s there has been a continuous flow of students and scholars to the West, particularly North America, to study archaeology or to conduct academic exchange. These activities are funded by both the Chinese government and private sources in the West, such as the Harvard-Yenching Institute. It has been reported that with the Institute of Archaeology CASS alone, more than 400 scholars went to foreign countries, as well as to Hong Kong and Taiwan, for academic exchange, while more than 1000 foreign scholars visited the institute from 1978 to 1997 (The Institute of Archaeology CASS 1997). Some students obtained their Ph.D and have returned to China, making significant contributions to Chinese archaeology in both theory and methodology.

The Regulation for Foreign Participation in Archaeological Work in China was promulgated in 1991. Since then, collaborations between Chinese and Western scholars have become popular. Now Chinese scholars are collaborating with scholars and institutes from the U.S.A., Japan, Australia, Germany, Canada and France (The Institute of Archaeology CASS 1997). These projects are supported by both foreign and Chinese funds.

Language used to be an obstacle for academic exchange. Now foreign scholars are publishing articles in leading Chinese archaeological journals (although often in translation), while Chinese scholars are publishing in English and other foreign languages. Among the first of these foreign authors was physical anthropologist Peter Brown, who published an article in *Renlei Xuebao* (*Anthropologica Sinica*) in 1987, and archaeologist Michael Pirazuoli, who published an article on Dian culture in southwest China in *Kaogu* (*Archaeology*) in 1990 (Miu *et al.* 1993). Since then, a considerable number of articles authored by foreign scholars have been published in several journals, and the topics range from physical anthropology and prehistory to historical archaeology. Meanwhile, leading foreign scholars like Colin Renfrew and George Rapp have been invited to serve as advisors of the leading archaeology journals such as *Kaogu* and *Kaogu Xuebao* (*Archaeologica Sinica*).

## **Discussion**

What are the social and political meanings of all these changes in the academic culture of mainland Chinese archaeology? How significant are

these changes in relating to the development of archaeology in China? It is impossible to give a full account on these issues here, but a few points may be briefly discussed as follows.

### **1. From centralization to regionalism and its impact on mainland Chinese archaeology**

The economic growth after 1978 in mainland China has resulted in a decline of centralization. The economic, political and ideological control over regions by the central government has been weakened. Regional governments and/or institutions, particularly those in the developing coast areas, now have greater financial powers and can afford to allocate relatively more resources to archaeology and cultural heritage preservation. For example, the Guangzhou City government could pay more than 120 million *yuan* (over 100 million HK dollars) as a compensation to a Hong Kong property developer in order to preserve an ancient palace dated to 2100 years ago, which was discovered in the centre of the city in the late 1990s. This generosity would not have been feasible before the reform era in any part of mainland China, and is still not feasible in many less-developed regions in western China.

Meanwhile, the social demand for leisure activities has been increasing in these regions, and tourism has become an important industry. The demand for salvage archaeology has also been increasing due to the fast-growing infrastructure construction (Falkenhausen 1995; Liu and Chen 2001). All these economic, social and cultural changes give rise to the development and increased importance of regional archaeology in mainland China — the regionalism or decentralization of mainland China archaeology.

Economically, local archaeological organizations now have substantial financial means from the local government or other sources to purchase modern equipment and/or attract talented scholars. Socially, as cultural heritage is now considered an important resource for both local leisure activities and tourism, the ownership of archaeological discoveries and ancient monuments is often kept locally. Academically, the emergence of many local journals provides more channels for local archaeologists to publish their work, which facilitates cross-horizontal academic communication (Falkenhausen 1995), which had not been available before the 1980s. The central-oriented thinking in the academic culture of archaeology is now changing to multi-regional thinking.

Olsen voiced his concern over this trend in 1992, saying that “decentralization has ... brought an increasingly localized focus among many archaeological research institutes” (1992:4). K. C. Chang, the late prominent American scholar of Chinese archaeology, also perceived this trend as possibly negative for the development of Chinese archaeology (Chang 1997). Falkenhausen (1995) discussed in detail other academic and theoretical problems related to this regional paradigm in 1995. However, regionalism has its positive as well as negative aspects. While the refusal or reduction of collaboration between national and local archaeologists may cause obstacles in terms of academic exchange, the increased human and financial resources available to local archaeologists has had a positive impact. Since the early 1990s, local archaeologists have made many important archaeological discoveries, among them the Pengtoushan and Bashidang assemblages in the middle Yangzi River Valley, attesting to the origin of rice agriculture in this region; and the Yuchanyan Cave at the border of the Yangzi River Valley and South China, where early pottery and rice husk were found (Lu 1999). The research topics of these local archaeologists range from the origin of agriculture to the existence of the Mesolithic<sup>11</sup> in China (e.g. Yingde Museum *et al.*), which go beyond their own region. Data gathered by local archaeologists is now used in national, even global archaeological endeavors.

Some of the problems pointed out by Olsen, Chang and Falkenhausen in the early 1990s still remain today, such as assigning archaeological assemblages to local ethnic groups (*ibid.*). Some Chinese archaeologists have realized these problems (e.g. Chen 1999). It is hoped that further research will be less influenced by this superficial and narrow-minded approach.

## **2. The direction of archaeology in mainland China — where to go?**

The influx of Western ideas and scholarship since 1978 has had a profound influence on Chinese archaeology. Does this mean that Chinese archaeology is simply going to follow Western Archaeology from now on? What is the direction and the characteristics of this discipline in mainland China? These are issues being intensively discussed at present.

Su Binqi attempted to solve the issue of disciplinary direction by establishing a “Chinese archaeological school” in the 1980s (Wang 1996). He defined this school as one of archaeology with a historical orientation infused by Marxism (Su 1993). Yet similar structures have been found in

the former U.S.S.R. and other countries (see Glover 1999, discussing Vietnam). Other scholars are concerned with the suitability of some basic terms for Chinese archaeology. For example, the application of the terms Mesolithic, microlithic and Neolithic in China has been questioned in a debate about the Mesolithic in China since the late 1980s (Chen 1990; Lu 1998; Yingde Museum *et al.* 1999; Zhao 1989), since the contents of these terms differ in China and Europe. Chinese scholars now argue about whether some new terms should be created to reflect the particular archaeological characteristics of China (Yingde Museum *et al.* 1999).

Still others argue that Chinese archaeology should have its own theoretical framework. Su Binqi (1993) argues that his multi-regional model (*Quxi Leixing*) for the formation of Chinese civilization is such a framework. Su's model recognized that the Yellow River Valley was not the only cultural center in prehistoric China, and that there were six regional systems in pre-historical China, all with their unique cultural sequences (Wang 1996; Liu and Chen 2001). His argument is based on the cumulative and voluminous archaeological data found in areas other than the central plain after the 1970s, and is certainly an abandonment of the central-oriented thought which has dominated Chinese history and historiography for thousands of years. However, some argue that this model is a methodological framework (Liu and Chen 2001: 327). Even if his model has proposed that there is more than one lineage of cultural evolution in China, this model still seems similar to the theory of multi-lineage cultural evolution proposed by Steward (Trigger 1989) more than 80 years ago.

After all, what should be the Chinese characteristics for archaeology in mainland China? Should it still be imbedded with history and historiography, or should it turn to anthropology, as argued by younger generations of archaeologists (<http://www.ccrnews.com.cn/>)? The former has a tradition in Western Europe while the latter is based in the North American tradition. If a "market economy with Chinese characteristics" is a mixture of government-controlled and free-market economics, should Chinese archaeology become a mixture of Chinese historiography and anthropology, and/or a mixture of Marxism and other Western theories and approaches? Or is it possible to establish such an archaeological school at all? There is no consensus on this issue at present, but this debate is beneficial to the development of archaeology in mainland China, as the direction of the discipline needs to be reconsidered, debated, and clarified.

Another issue discussed at present is the self-evaluation of Chinese

archeology in relation to Western critics. As noted above, the development of Chinese archaeology from 1949 to 1978 took place when China was an evil in the eyes of the West (and still is an evil in the eyes of some in the West today), and was politically and economically isolated, even sanctioned. On the other hand, Chinese people, particularly Chinese scholars, have been proud of their culture and heritage. This pride and this isolation, plus the bitter memory of 19<sup>th</sup>-century history, produced a sense of “anti-Westerness” under the promotion of nationalism by the state from 1949 to 1978, which became a feature of the academic culture of Chinese archaeology.

After 1978, academic exchanges between mainland China and the West have, as noted, greatly increased. While this increase results in more academic collaborations and communication, disagreements, even resentments also arise. A typical example is the debate held on the internet concerning the chronology project for the beginning of Chinese civilization (see <http://www.pku.edu.cn/academic/archeology/center>). Recently, an American scholar stated that the academic level of Chinese archaeology is only parallel to that of the U.S.A. in the 1930s (<http://www.ccrnews.com.cn/>). This view represents the perception of many (although not all) Western archaeologists that Chinese archaeology is backward and amateur, and its data are suspicious and unreliable.

Whether such a perception is justified is a complex issue that cannot be fully discussed here — although it should be noted that some Chinese archaeologists have argued that this perception bears the legacy of the colonial era, whereby these scholars still portray themselves as superior and Chinese scholars as inferior ([www.ccrnews.com.cn](http://www.ccrnews.com.cn)). While most scholars anywhere in the world would not be pleased to receive such comments, not all Chinese archaeologists, particularly those who are younger, dismiss them as merely insults. They do not agree with all the harsh judgements of Chinese archaeology, but they do agree that archaeological work in mainland China should be evaluated not only from their own but also from a Western perspective, and agree that Chinese archaeologists should try to identify their shortcomings and find solutions ([www.ccrnews.com.cn](http://www.ccrnews.com.cn)). It is recognized that the objectives and missions of archaeology in mainland China need to be clarified ([www.ccrnews.com.cn](http://www.ccrnews.com.cn)), that the historically-oriented direction should be adjusted, and that quantitative analysis is far from sufficient (Chen 1999). This ability and willingness to accept criticism and evaluate performance from another (Western) perspective indicates that archaeological scholarship in

mainland China has become more open, and less political and nationalistic — certainly less anti-Western — since the 1980s.

### 3. Nationalism and Chinese archaeology

The issue of nationalism has recently drawn attention not from Chinese but from Western or Western-based scholars. As China has become more economically powerful, it is argued, there is a revival of nationalism (Wang 1996), and Chinese archeology is criticized for its strong sense of nationalism, with the comments on the Chronological Project on early Chinese civilization serving as an example (<http://www.pku.edu.cn/academic/archeology/center>).

Chinese archaeology does have a strong commitment to promoting nationalism and cultural identity, and to legitimizing and “reaffirming” political authority, which is a legacy of Antiquarianism back at least to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Sima 1978). This political commitment reached an extremely high level during the Cultural Revolution, and many scholars had to conduct their work in accordance with contemporary political discourses. However, after 1978 there is no evidence that nationalism in Chinese archaeology has been developing towards aggression and irredentism.

Nationalism is not unique to archaeology in mainland China. It was, and still is a major political, ideological and social motive for conducting archaeological work in many countries and regions in Europe and Asia (Trigger 1989; Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996; Glover 1999; Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Meskell 1998). For example, in recent years, there has been an apparent trend of cultural “de-sinicization” (*qu Zhongguo huai*) in the academic culture in Taiwan, from the attempt to make the Palace Museum (*Gugong Bowuyuan*) more Taiwanese and internationalized (<http://www.mingpao.com.hk/>), to the shift of archaeological focus from China-proper to Taiwan and Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, archaeological data are used to claim a cultural development free of Chinese influences (Glover 1999).

If nationalism is not unique to China, then why has the nationalism in mainland Chinese archaeology caused such vigorous attacks, while the increased nationalism in Taiwan has received little or no criticism, and even sympathy (Wang 1996)? Chinese and Western scholars will probably have different answers to this question. But as Chang has pointed out (2001: 8), one reason is that the politics and ideology in mainland China are not compatible with those of the West, while these paradigms in

Taiwan have increasingly approached “Western standards” in recent years. In addition, while the Taiwanese government is an ally of the U.S.A., the communists in mainland China were, and still are, viewed as a threat to the West. All together, this produces an ongoing sense of distrust and even resentment between mainland China and the West. Thus mainland China is viewed as a potential danger, “irredentist, territorially ambitious” (Wang 1996:9), a source of regional instability and the “greatest threat” to the U.S.A. (Chang 2001). This image has had its impact on the Western academic world. Therefore, the aforementioned state-funded project on the chronology of the beginning of Chinese civilization has been labeled as an attempt to provoke nationalism and even irredentism (<http://www.pku.edu.cn/academic/archeology/center>), while the nationalist trend in Taiwan has been supported.

Nationalism is an ideology promoted by the state when the country is under threat, or is in a process of reconstruction, or is powerful and seeks recognition (Wang 1996). Archaeology, being a social science, and an important discipline for the construction of cultural and national identity, is likely to be continuously used as an instrument of nationalism in mainland China, as well as in many other countries (Dietler 1994; Glover 1999). As Wang pointed out, nationalism can be positive in some historical frames (1996: 23). It is when nationalism goes to the extreme, and is “prodded out of place by calls for containment, by latent enmity and by near-hysteria” (Wang 1996:23) that it becomes dangerous. At present, these traits do not seem to have a vivid presence in the academic culture of archaeology in mainland China. On the other hand, it certainly will not help to keep nationalism in its proper place if there is a sense of national enmity both in and towards mainland China.

In summary, the academic culture in mainland Chinese archaeology is in a sense typical among developing countries. The local establishment of the discipline was a by-product of colonization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the discipline has been sometimes used since that time to build up national identity and confidence, and to combat foreign power and threats. In this sense, it is comparable to that in Vietnam (Glover 1999). On the other hand, the academic culture of archaeology in mainland China also differs from that of other countries, not only in its long and enduring affiliation with history and historiography, but also in the distorted political and ideological influences imposed onto this discipline from 1949 to 1979, and the rapid economic development after 1979 and its effects on disciplinary advancement. The lesson from this is that a politically stable, ideologically

liberal, and economically sound society is crucial for the development of archaeology, and perhaps for any academic discipline. Furthermore, it is also important to have free academic communication, to respect (to tolerate is insufficient) the right of everyone to have his/her own arguments, to treat different opinions as academic statements rather than political and ideological conspiracies, and to have ongoing mutual respect within the academic world. Only in a nation and a world in which these standards are not called into question can archaeology develop and flourish.

## Notes

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1. A quite detailed review of anthropology in China was published in 1994 (Guldin 1994), but this work does not much focus on Chinese archaeology.
2. A referee for this article has noted that the political movements in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries in China were responsible for the introduction of modern archaeology. This seems true. Indeed, the stimulus for and major cause of these political movements — the May Fourth Movement and the Doubting Antiquity School, among others — was the realization of and discontent with an inferior and weak China in the face of a wave of colonization from Western powers during this period (Chen 1997), with the failure of the Opium War being a significant landmark.
3. The first archaeological excavation directed by Chinese archaeologist Li Chi was conducted in 1926 (Wei 1936). In 1928, the national archaeology team was formed within the Institute of History and Philology in China (Wei 1936). Archaeological journals and monographs were published from 1928 onwards (Wei 1936). Stratigraphy and typology were firmly established in China in the 1920s (Chang 1995). Although archaeology in China prior to 1949 progressed discontinuously due to political and social instability, some important discoveries were made during this period (see Chen 1997).
4. A referee for this article argues that the period before and after 1966 should be treated separately, as the Cultural Revolution strongly hindered the development of Chinese archaeology. This is largely true. The impact of the Cultural Revolution has been discussed in detail by Tong (1995), and will not be repeated here. However, it should be noted that the Cultural Revolution was not the only political movement prior to 1979. The three decades from 1949 to 1979 witnessed several political movements, including the Anti-Rightists and the Four Clearances (*Siqing*) occurring in the 1950s and the 1960s respectively; the latter was a direct prelude to the Cultural Revolution. These

political movements were all obstacles of varying degree to the survival and development of archaeology and other sciences in mainland China. They only disappeared after 1979, when a relatively politically peaceful and ideologically tolerant environment began to emerge for academic pursuits. Hence 1979 is taken as a landmark for the development of Chinese archaeology in this article.

5. Tong argued that Xia Nai, the late director of the Institute of Archaeology CASS from 1950 to 1979, “was the highest administrator of Chinese archaeology” (Tong 1995:195). This statement is incorrect. Xia certainly was a very influential scholar in Chinese archaeology, but he did not have direct administrative power over universities and local institutes.
6. In the early 1980s, anthropology departments were established in Zhongshan and Xiamen universities, and the archaeology program was within the anthropology department in these two universities. However, the anthropology department of Xiamen University was dissolved in 1994 and the archaeology program was relocated to the history department. Now only in Zhongshan University does archaeology remain within the anthropology department.
7. Prominent archaeologists in mainland China exert their influences in various ways. First, they often have direct access to a vast database in that they lead important projects. Second, they often serve as editors of prestigious journals in Chinese archaeology, such as *Kaogu* (Archaeology), *Kaogu Xuebao* (Archaeologica Sinica), and *Renlei Xuebao* (Anthropologica Sinica), and influential books as well. Third, they often have students as their followers. Fourth, they serve as key consultants of the State Bureau of Antiquity Management on issues such as whether an excavation can get permission, whether a collaboration between Chinese and foreign archaeologists can be allowed, and so on. Thus they have great power over the academic pursuits of many Chinese archaeologists. Finally, as many of them are with institutions equipped with the best laboratories and human resources, they can establish a variety of collaborations with many local archaeologists.
8. CASS stands for the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.
9. Tong, however, offers a harsh assessment of methodology in this era, claiming that “there was little improvement during this thirty-year period in terms of research facilities, tools, and methodology” (1995:192).
10. Tong was sent to Harvard University by the Chinese government in 1982, at a time when academic exchange with the West had just began. How his academic thinking was influenced by this experience we can never know, since he passed away in 1997 in the United States.
11. Originating in Europe, the term “Mesolithic” refers to the transitional period from the Palaeolithic to the Neolithic in Europe, characterized by the emergence of bow and arrow, and microlithic tools.

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