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Chinese Civilization

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Antiquity in
Chinese Civilization

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Dedicated
to the memory of

Michael Lenz
19.12.1923 – 29.7.2007

a most successful market gardener, a true
gentleman with a great love of music, a
generous benefactor, and a wonderful friend

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NOTE ON CONVENTIONS

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As a rule, citations are given in the form chapter or *juan* number.page number.

All *zhengshi* 正史 (Standard Histories) are quoted according to the Zhonghua shuju edition, if not stated otherwise, giving the *juan* and the page number.

Translations from the Classics by James Legge are given as Legge, p., i.e. without full bibliographic treatment of the books and their various reprints and without indicating the book title, wherever the context already provides this information.

If not stated otherwise, the *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 ed. refers to the Yiwen yinshuguan reprint of Ruan Yuan's 阮元 1815 Jiangxi edition of the Song print in 8 vols.

Abbreviations used in the notes:

CSJCCB	<i>Congshu jicheng chubian</i>	叢書集成初編
GXJBCS	<i>Guoxue jiben congshu</i>	國學基本叢書
QSW	<i>Quan Song wen</i>	全宋文
SBBY	<i>Sibu beiyao</i>	四部備要
SBCK	<i>Sibu congkan</i>	四部叢刊
SKQS	<i>Siku quanshu</i>	四庫全書
ZZJC	<i>Zhuzi jicheng</i>	諸子集成

ICS series D.C. Lau, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies, ed., *The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1993-)

CHACH *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, ed. Michael Loewe and

Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

SS	<i>Songshi</i>	宋史
DNWH	<i>Dongnan wenhua</i>	東南文化
HJAS	<i>Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies</i>	
JAS	<i>The Journal of Asian Studies</i>	
JHKG	<i>Jiang Han kaogu</i>	江漢考古
JSYS	<i>Journal of Sung-Yüan Studies</i>	
KG	<i>Kaogu</i>	考古
KGXB	<i>Kaogu xuebao</i>	考古學報
KGyWW	<i>Kaogu yu wenwu</i>	考古與文物
LSYJ	<i>Lishi yanjiu</i>	歷史研究
MS	<i>Monumenta Serica</i>	
TP	<i>T'oung Pao</i>	
WW	<i>Wenwu</i>	文物
WWB	<i>Zhongguo wenwubao</i>	中國文物報
ZYWW	<i>Zhongyuan wenwu</i>	中原文物

The index prefers the Chinese terms to avoid numerous entries due to different possibilities to translate them. However, we refrained from changing the essays accordingly. This means that in looking up the entries of the index in the essays, the Chinese term may not be found but a translation be given instead, e.g. the index has *tianzi* 天子, while the text uses "Son of Heaven." The footnotes are not indexed.

THE PRESENT PERCEPTION OF THE ORIGIN OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION

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Moscow State University

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Introduction
About Traces of the Origin
Concerning the Xia Culture
Archaeological Cultures and Variants
Concerning Chronology and Absolute Ages
Concerning the 'Colonization of the Past'

Introduction

Our topic ventures into a field that has witnessed a lot of public debate during the last eight years: the chronology of Chinese antiquity.¹ National Chinese as well as international attention was attracted by the "Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project" (*Xia Shang Zhou duandai gongcheng* 夏商周斷代工程) from 1996 to 2000 which united "more than 200 Chinese scholars from different scientific fields, including archaeology, history, epigraphy, and the natural sciences."² The declared aim of this research project was to provide a scientific basis for the dating of three periods, particularly the dating of the Western Zhou kings before 841 B.C. and the late Shang dynasty, and furthermore to establish a chronological framework for the Proto-Shang period and the Xia dynasty. The findings are intended to assist further research into the origins of Chinese civiliza-

¹ This article is related to the introduction to Mayke Wagner, *Neolithikum und frühe Bronzezeit in Nordchina vor 8000 bis 3500 Jahren. Die Nordöstliche Tiefebene (Südteil)* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006). The text profited from discussions with Dieter Kuhn and Nikolaus Boroffka.

² Li Xueqin, "The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project: Methodology and Results," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4.1-4 (2002): 321.

tion³ and “to make Chinese civilization in antiquity [...] historically tangible and thus also available for use in the present.”⁴

The implementation of this project showed that modern Chinese society, everywhere engaged in a non-stop super-boom of economic modernization and westernization, is not only aware of its own antiquity but the society expects its experts to obtain and impart more factual information about antiquity. But who initiated the project? Interestingly, according to Li Xueqin 李學勤, it was Mr. Song Jian 宋健, then Director of State Committee of Science and Technology.⁵ Mr. Song Jian is known as a specialist in cybernetics and system analysis, so it is perhaps not surprising to find time-control and absolute-age determination as major tasks on the agenda.

About Traces of the Origin

What new information did the Chronology Project reveal concerning the origin of Chinese civilization, regarding its characteristics and its age in particular?

In summer 2000, i.e. toward the end of the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project, there were two meetings for Chinese archaeologists and historians in Peking, the subjects and discussion contributions of which were symptomatic of the basic tendencies of the direction of research at that time.

The first of them was a two-day symposium on the origins of Chinese civilization and on early state forms. It was jointly organized by the Museum of Chinese History and the editorial desks of the journals *Kaogu* 考古 and *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, and thus de facto by the Archaeological Institute and the History Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. This was an internal exchange of views that was meant to clarify the historians' and archaeologists' present stance on the key topics mentioned above and to apply this practically in the design of the new perma-

³ *Xia Shang Zhou duandai gongcheng 1996–2000 nian jieduan chengguo baogao, jianben* 夏商周斷代工程 1996–2000 年階段成果報告, 簡本 (Report of the Results of the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project from 1996 to 2000, short version) (Beijing: Shijie tushu chubanshe, 2000), p. 1.

⁴ Dieter Kuhn, “Einführung in die Gegenwart des Altertums in China,” in Dieter Kuhn and Helga Stahl, eds., *Die Gegenwart des Altertums. Formen und Funktionen des Altertumsbezugs in den Hochkulturen der Alten Welt* (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 2001), pp. 57–58. For more details see Dieter Kuhn, “The Three Dynasties in the ‘Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project’” (unpublished manuscript, December 2003).

⁵ Li, “The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project,” p. 321.

ment exhibition in the Museum of Chinese History.⁶ The second was a five-day international conference organized by the Archaeological Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (hereafter: the Academy Institute) on the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation. It bore the programmatic title "Chinese Archaeology and World Archaeology in the 21st Century."⁷

The origin of Chinese civilization is a question that has dominated cultural-anthropological research in the broadest sense throughout the country for several years now. It determines the direction of the recovery and evaluation of archaeological and historical sources and decides the selection and utilization of natural science disciplines in everything from the search for the earliest evidence of rice cultivation⁸ to the improvement of radiocarbon dating technology.⁹ It is not a new school of thought, but it revived the public debate which was stimulated by finds in the late eighties and early nineties which did not fit into the traditional picture of the origin of Chinese civilization.¹⁰ In the Chinese case the origin of civilization is equated with the founding of a state¹¹ and at the same time with the threshold between the "wild" negative epoch and the "civilized" positive

⁶ Short versions of the contributions to the discussion were published in "Zhongguo wenming qi yuan he zaoqi guojia xingtai yantaohui fayan zhaiyao" 中國文明起源和早期國家型態研討會發言摘要, *KG* 2 (2001): 86-95.

⁷ Most of the papers were published in *21 shiji Zhongguo kaoguxue yu shijie kaoguxue* 21 世紀中國考古學與世界考古學 (Chinese Archaeology and World Archaeology in the 20th Century. Collected Papers of the International Symposium on the 50th Anniversary of the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and "Chinese Archaeology and World Archaeology in the 20th Century" [with English abstracts]) (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2002). The English parallel title indeed gives another century than the Chinese title. The Chinese one, mentioning the 21st century, was the official title of the conference.

⁸ For example Yan Wenming 嚴文明 and Yasuda Yoshinori 安田喜憲, *Daozuo, taoqi he dushi de qi yuan* 稻作陶器和都市的起源 (The Origins of Rice Agriculture, Pottery and Cities) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2000).

⁹ Qiu Shihua 仇士華 and Cai Lianzhen 蔡蓮珍, "Tan shisi duandai jishu de xin jin zhan yu 'Xia Shang Zhou duandai gongcheng'" 碳十四斷代技術的新進展與 "夏商周斷代工程," *KG* 7 (1997): 1-4, 12. Qiu Shihua and Cai Lianzhen, "Xia Shang Zhou duandai gongcheng de tan shisi niandai kuangjia" 夏商周斷代工程的碳十四年代框架, *KG* 1 (2001): 90-100.

¹⁰ "Zhongguo wenming qi yuan yantaohui jiyao" 中國文明起源研討會紀要, *KG* 6 (1992): 526-549; Zhao Hui 趙輝, "Zhongguo wenming qi yuan yanjiu zhong de yige jiben wenti" 中國文明起源研究中的一個基本問題 in Yan and Yasuda, *Daozuo, taoqi he dushi de qi yuan*, p. 135.

¹¹ Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚 in *KG* 2 (2001): 90.

era of the great achievements. At first the material characteristics of beginning civilization or initial state need to be defined in order to recognize them in archaeological finds, assemblages and artefacts. The various debated catalogues agree on the following characteristics of beginning civilization: cities, i.e. residential places with defensive walls and palace and/or temple as *loci* for performing secular and religious power;¹² royal burial places standing out against common graveyards as materialized social stratification; bronze metallurgy and a writing system.¹³ From these criteria it follows that in China according to traditional opinion the beginnings of civilization and state coincide with the dawn of the Bronze Age.¹⁴ According to the historical concept of the Three Dynasties it is the first, the Xia dynasty, which is supposed to show the rise of all these features. The archaeological site Erlitou 二里頭, which is assumed to have been the palace site of the rulers of Xia, indeed exhibits most of them, but lacks the decisive component of writing.¹⁵ No inscription links this archaeological site and thus the whole archaeological concept of the Erlitou culture unquestionably with the historical concept of the Xia dynasty.¹⁶ Instead, assumed characteristics of civilization are discovered in other archaeological contexts which date substantially older than the Erlitou culture or are located outside of the Erlitou core area, i.e. the modern provinces Henan, southern Shanxi, eastern Shaanxi and northern Hubei.¹⁷

In northeast China, new finds that do not meet the above mentioned criteria of early state include the "Temple of the Goddess" (Nüshen miao 女神廟) with an adjacent area the size of a football pitch which was presumably built on at the same time but has not been excavated yet, and the pyramid-style tombs made of stone in the Niuheliang 牛河梁 find region.¹⁸ These structural remains do not fit into the picture because they are

¹² Xu Hong 許宏, *Xian Qin chengshi kaoguxue yanjiu* 先秦城市考古學研究 (An Archaeological Research on Cities in Pre-Qin Period) (Beijing: Yanshan, 2000).

¹³ Liu Qingzhu 劉慶柱, *KG* 2 (2001): 86.

¹⁴ Yu Weichao 俞偉超, "Shiji zhi jiao hua kaogu (lian'ai zhi wu)" 世紀之交話考古 (連載之五), *WWB* 7.3.2001, 7.

¹⁵ Li Liu and Xingcan Chen, *State Formation in Early China* (London: Duckworth, 2003).

¹⁶ Robert L. Thorp, "Erlitou and the Search for the Xia," *Early China* 16 (1991): 1-38; Yun Kuen Lee, "Differential Resolution in History and Archaeology," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4.1-4 (2002): 377-379.

¹⁷ Liu and Chen, *State Formation in Early China*.

¹⁸ Fang Dianchun 方殿春 *et al.*, "Liaoning Niuheliang Hongshan wenhua 'nüshen miao' yu jishizhong qun fajue jianbao" 遼寧牛河梁紅山文化 '女神廟' 與積石家群發掘

of monumental character, supply evidence of pronounced use of ritual and thereby fulfill the criteria for the identification of civilization except metal, but nevertheless date incontestably to the Neolithic period because of the ceramic vessels and other types of finds.

Among traditionalists, two different ways of dealing with these new finds may be observed. Either one stands by the chronological position of the threshold of civilization and declares the group of characteristics or individual proven characteristics to be of insufficient relevance from the point of view of civilization, or one accepts the defining value of the characteristics and moves the threshold of civilization along the time axis. For Zhang Zhongpei 張忠培, Niheliang is one of the reasons for bringing the threshold of civilization forward to the end of the fourth millennium B.C.¹⁹ This is in line with the demand of Su Bai 宿白 and Xu Pingfang 徐蘋芳 that research of the Neolithic should concentrate on the origins of civilization.²⁰ According to Li Xueqin, the problem originates in the application of non-Chinese theory to Chinese material, and during the symposium he proposed that the problem should be solved by establishing objective criteria that may be valid not only in China but throughout the world.²¹ The threshold of civilization is fiercely debated because it carries an evolutionistic judgment: it divides the development of Chinese society into a negatively connoted, earlier era of the 'primitive society' (*yuanshi shehui* 原始社會), which it was important to overcome, and indeed the sooner the better, and a more recent era that begins with the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou) and with which one associates all the positive ideas of order and progress.

Kwang-chih Chang related the beginnings of China to the concept of 'interaction sphere,' e.g. the first intense contact and exchange among separate regional cultures. "By 3000 B.C., the Chinese interaction sphere can properly and appropriately be called China, as it became the stage where Chinese history began to play out, with its clearly defined actors, events, motivations, and story lines."²² This approach is indicative for a common acceptance of early cultural pluralism and diversity in China

簡報, *WW* 8 (1986): 1-17. For a summary of all so far published excavation results in the region of Niheliang see Mayke Wagner, *Neolithikum und frühe Bronzezeit*.

¹⁹ *KG* 2 (2001): 87.

²⁰ Su Bai and Xu Pingfang, "The Current Situation of Chinese Archaeological Research and Its Trends of Development," *China Archaeology and Art Digest* 3.4 (2000): 408.

²¹ *KG* 2 (2001): 87.

²² Kwang-chih Chang, "China on the Eve of the Historical Period," *CHACH*, pp. 37-73, here p. 59.

since the 1980s.²³ It resembles very much the European scientist's attempts to understand the Bronze Age as the first epoch of a united Europe.²⁴ Specific technological and socio-cultural features that spread over areas which are roughly identical with the present political entities referred to – China and Europe – were in both cases taken as indicators for active communication and joining. The concept of our global present-day media society “uniting by communicating” shines through this fabric of current approaches in cultural history research.

K.C. Chang's ‘interaction sphere,’ however, is the archaeological period of the “so-called Longshan cultures” which “are also of great importance in the comparative study of Chinese cultures of the third millennium B.C., providing tangible and reliable clues to the reasons why and how civilizations and states first came into being.”²⁵ In the catchment area of the Yellow River a rapid increase in settlement density can be seen in the archaeological record especially for the second half of the third millennium B.C. From west to east archaeological cultures, such as Machang 馬廠 and Qijia 齊家, Keshengzhuang 客省莊, Laohushan, Taosi 陶寺, Hougang 後岡 II, Henan Longshan 河南龍山 and Haidai Longshan 海岱龍山, are related to this phenomenon during the so-called Longshan period,²⁶ though only the Qijia culture and Haidai-Longshan culture have been thoroughly studied to date.²⁷

However, all these cultures did not appear just from nothing. The source of the specificity of the Haidai-Longshan culture, for example, is

²³ Su Bingqi, “A New Age of Chinese Archaeology” in Roderick Whitfield and Tao Wang, eds., *Exploring China's Past. New Discoveries and Studies in Archaeology and Art* (London: Saffron, 1999), pp. 17-25; Lothar von Falkenhausen, “The Regionalist Paradigm in Chinese Archaeology” in Philip L. Kohl, ed., *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 198-217.

²⁴ For example, *Götter und Helden der Bronzezeit, Europa im Zeitalter des Odysseus*. 25. Ausstellung des Europarats. (Bonn: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1999). Carole Gillis, Deborah Olausson and Helle Vandkilde, *Dawn of Europe* (Lund: University of Lund, 2004).

²⁵ Chang, “China on the Eve of the Historical Period,” p. 59.

²⁶ Yan Wenming, “Longshan wenhua he Longshan shidai” 龍山文化和龍山時代 in Yan Wenming, ed., *Shiqian kaogu lunji* 史前考古論集 (Essays on Prehistoric Archaeology) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1998), pp. 24-34.

²⁷ Corinne Debaine-Francfort, *Du néolithique à l'âge du bronze en chine du nord-ouest. La culture de Qijia et ses connexions* (Paris: Ed. Recherche sur les civilisations, 1995); Luan Fengshi 樂豐實, *Haidai diqu kaogu yanjiu* 海岱地區考古研究 (Archaeological Research in the Haidai Region) (Jinan: Shandong daxue chubanshe, 1997).

the Dawenkou 大汶口 culture complex (4100–2600 cal. yr B.C.).²⁸ Pottery production as well as jade carving exhibit signs of high professionalism and the type-set of ritual drinking and pouring vessels survived until transformation into bronze objects about a millennium later. Elaborate tomb constructions and furnishings prove that the people at that time already appreciated sophisticated ritual paraphernalia to be seen in line with the Shang Culture.²⁹

The question which needs to be raised is why construct a barrier between Dawenkou culture and Longshan culture and call Longshan in the third millennium B.C. “civilized,” but Dawenkou in the fourth millennium B.C. “primitive”?³⁰

Concerning the Xia Culture

These cultures and periods of Longshan and Dawenkou lay outside the scope of the Chronology Project. It was difficult enough to establish the chronology of just the Xia dynasty. Li Xueqin, leader of the Chronology Project, is one of the historians who believes that the period of doubting the veracity of the annals and thus the historicity of the Xia dynasty came to an end when the traditional Sima Qian 司馬遷 genealogy of the Shang kings was confirmed by the oracle-bone inscriptions excavated in Anyang 安陽 and interpreted by Wang Guowei 王國維.³¹ Physically the Xia dynasty is not datable because there are (as yet) no finds which could be related by inscriptions to the annals. The question raised by archaeology about what finds were to be dated as Xia dynasty under these circumstances was answered by historical research; it was an answer which had been provided from the very beginning: the find site of Erlitou.³² Erlitou

²⁸ Luan, *Haidai diqu kaogu yanjiu*.

²⁹ *Dawenkou – Xinshiqi shidai muzang fajue baogao* 大汶口 – 新石器時代墓葬發掘報告 (Dawenkou – Report on the Excavation of Neolithic Tombs) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1974), pp. 22–25; *Dawenkou xuji – Dawenkou yizhi di er, san ci fajue baogao* 大汶口續記 – 大汶口遺址第二三次發掘報告 (Continuation of Dawenkou. Reports on the Second and Third Excavations of Dawenkou Site) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1997).

³⁰ Zhang Zhongpei, *KG 2* (2001): 87.

³¹ *KG 2* (2001): 87; also Chang, “China on the Eve of the Historical Period,” p. 72: “Since the genealogy of the Shang dynasty given in the *Shi ji* has been essentially validated by the newly discovered oracle-bone inscriptions, there would seem to be good reason to accept its genealogy of the Xia dynasty as well.”

³² Wangchenggang also appears in the overview of Qiu and Cai, albeit without measurement data. Qiu and Cai, *KG 1* (2001): 99.

had long been interpreted as the place of residence of the Xia kings primarily because of the remains of palace-type structures.³³ But the existing physical material from Erlitou does not allow dating in calendar years before c. 3750 cal. yr BP (1800 cal. yr B.C.) and hence not back to the period proposed by Sima Qian.³⁴ It cannot be related to Wangchenggang 王城崗 II and III. This is precisely where the problem of the archaeological methodology lies: how can the Erlitou material be related to Neolithic finds? Not directly, it would appear. At most, Erlitou could have been the last palace residence of the Xia dynasty.³⁵

In fact, the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project found a solution for this problem that is worthy of Solomon. We read that "... most scholars came to support the argument that all of the periods of the Erlitou culture (which sometimes had been debated as belonging in part to the Shang dynasty period) belonged to what is now called the Xia culture; the Erlitou culture is also found in the core region of the Xia people, as is recorded in literary sources. At the same time, the origin of the Xia culture can be traced back into the Henan Longshan culture. Using literary records concerning the dates of the Xia dynasty, we determined that the beginning of the Xia was approximately in 2070 B.C."³⁶

This is a cultural-historical statement wherein historical and archaeological terms and information are amalgamated. The obtained absolute ages for samples from (archaeological) Erlitou culture contexts obviously did not reach the date of the beginning of the (historical) Xia dynasty given in written sources. Therefore the (archaeological) Erlitou culture had to be merged with its predecessor, the (archaeological) Henan Longshan culture. The Henan Longshan culture, however, dates roughly to about 2500 – 1900 cal. yr B.C., i.e. starting 430 years earlier than the Xia dynasty. So only the later part of Henan Longshan culture can be meant to belong to the Erlitou culture. Logically the archaeological record of the Henan Longshan culture ought to exhibit some kind of cultural break or a new quality of features (for instance: house / tomb construction, tools, weapons or technologies, *et cetera*) at 2070 cal. yr B.C., which give reason to fractionate the material at this point. At present there is no such evidence. Thus, from a methodological point of view, "Xia culture" as

³³ For a comprehensive discussion of the "Erlitou Problem" see Thorp, "Erlitou and the Search for the Xia"; Chang, "China on the Eve of the Historical Period," pp. 71-73; Lee, "Differential Resolution," pp. 377-379.

³⁴ Qiu and Cai, *KG 1* (2001): 98-99.

³⁵ Wang Wei, "Rückblicke und Ausblicke auf die Archäologie der Xia, Shang und Zhou," *Eurasia Antiqua* 6 (2000): 323.

³⁶ Li, "The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project," p. 332.

used in the above mentioned sense seems to be a highly interesting case of discordance between historical and archaeological records. What needs to be understood clearly is the use of the term "culture" with different concepts: In the Henan Longshan culture and the Erlitou culture it is a technical term from the science of archaeology and used mainly as a taxonomic unit, as a "box" for sorting artefacts of the same type or style. Material aspects dominate this concept. In Xia culture the ethnic aspect is the decisive factor in relation to the 'Xia people.'

Recording geographically and temporally delimited find inventories in archaeological cultures was introduced in China in 1959 by Xia Nai 夏鼐, who was director of the Academy Institute from 1962 to 1982;³⁷ and it remains normal practice today. As one of the available methods for ordering finds, it is of unquestionable value and is one of the tools of the trade of archaeology. Furthermore, establishing the sequence of cultures, "family trees of archaeological cultures," has become an important method of investigating the origins of civilization among archaeologists.³⁸ Cultures are seen as historical subjects, between which there are supposed to have been exchanges and which came together to form cultural groups.³⁹ From here it is only a small intellectual step to interpreting them ethnically and identifying them with peoples and cultural heroes known from historiography.⁴⁰ Understanding Xia culture as an archaeological term would take us back to a concept that originated in the early twentieth century in Europe in the course of the strengthening of national identity. This concept identified an archaeological culture with a clearly defined territory and a certain ethnos that was finally easy to relate to a modern nation. This attribution of archaeological cultures to ethnicities has, in China just as in other parts of the world, not produced any heuristic effect as yet. This is because an archaeological culture is not an agent, not an acting group of persons, but rather an abstract concept, an intellectual tool rather

³⁷ Xia Nai, "Guanyu kaoguxue shang wenhua de dingming wenti" 關於考古學上的文化定名問題, *KG* 4 (1959): 169-172.

³⁸ Tang Jigen 唐際根, *KG* 2 (2001): 91-92.

³⁹ Zhao, "Zhongguo wenming qi yuan yanjiu," p. 137.

⁴⁰ For example, the Upper Xiajiadian 夏家店 culture is often connected with the Donghu 東胡 (Eastern Barbarians) (e.g. Yang Hu and Gu Zhijie, "Das Gräberfeld Zhoujiadi im Banner Aohan, Autonome Region Innere Mongolei, China," *Eurasia Antiqua* 4 [1998]: 32), the Taosi culture with the mythical emperors Yao and Shun, and the Taosi find site Xiajin with the capital of Yao (Liang Xingpeng 梁星彭 *et al.*, "Shanxi Linfen Xiajincun Taosi wenhua mudi fajue baogao" 山西臨汾下靳村陶寺文化墓地發掘報告, *KGXB* 4 (1999): 483.

than a real work-piece. It can serve as the starting point for further cultural historical interpretations, for the discovery of social connections or procedures, but it cannot be mistaken for these itself.

Archaeological Cultures and Variants

Since historiography had conveyed the image of a mono-central development of civilization along the Yellow River, archaeological research came up with a new interpretative mode and coined adequate terms for the diverse finds outside of this core area. To denote limited kinds of an archaeological culture, in the sense of a subgroup, the term *leixing* 類型 (variant; type) is still used today. For a regionally linked group of consecutive archaeological cultures, the term *quxi* 區系 (regional system) has become established. Both terms were introduced by Su Bingqi 蘇秉琦 (1909–1997) in 1975.⁴¹ Current archaeological terminology reveals that there are no objective, generally binding criteria according to which the classification of a group of characteristics as an archaeological culture or a variant may be effected. The basic tendency is as follows: if archaeologist A subscribes to a mono-central theory of the origin of civilization, (s)he will lay greater emphasis on correspondences and work with few cultures and many subordinate variants that derive from it; if archaeologist B prefers a multi-central or decentral model, (s)he will stress the differences between the many groups of characteristics, which A describes as ‘variants’ while B calls them cultures. As discoveries progress, the constant increase in information necessitates an equally constant review of the validity of earlier interpretations and the sustainability of definitions of culture. In the case of the most cited Neolithic archaeological culture of China, Yangshao 仰韶, the increase in the number of finds during the eighty years since discovery of the eponymous site by the Swedish geologist Johan Gunnar Andersson in 1920, has led to the term Yangshao being today nothing more than a synonym for “Neolithic in the north-Chinese lowland plain except for the province of Shandong.” Geographically, Yangshao extends over an area as large as central Europe and covers a period of some 2000 years.⁴² Subsumed within this category are find groups that essentially have only one characteristic in common: the ceramics are painted – and yet the styles and motifs of the painting are not shared at all. The term Yangshao culture is consequently of no use today

⁴¹ Su Bingqi, “Guanyu kaoguxue wenhua de quxi leixing wenti” 關於考古學文化的區系類型問題, *WW* 5 (1981): 10–17.

⁴² Chang, “China on the Eve of the Historical Period,” pp. 49–52.

in the scientific systematization of finds; it is also misleading because it suggests a cultural homogeneity and continuity that has been belied over the years by numerous finds.

In China, the idea of a multi-central Neolithic development has established itself.⁴³ The vehemence with which the regional culture formations, independent of the classical core area, were championed by local specialists, including the occasional polemical overestimation of them, was a foreseeable reaction to the dogma of core area theory, which has had a lasting effect on research.⁴⁴ In the intellectual process of liberation from the dictates of historiography, it was realised that one could best do justice to the specificity of Chinese cultural history by singling out more or less isolated, autochthonous civilization levels and forms and by observing their dissemination and their interchange with other groups, their merging into larger units that exist for some time and disseminate over large areas before decaying and becoming something new – i.e. by investigating the diversity of cultural phenomena and the dynamics of their constant change.⁴⁵ In the third millennium B.C. there was a particularly wide dissemination of certain cultural components that is suggestive of increased interactivity among settlement groups. However, to interpret this interactivity as unification, and to regard the third millennium B.C. as the beginning of everything “Chinese” solely on account of this uniformity,⁴⁶ is historically and archaeologically inadequate and it merely skates around the problem of the civilization threshold by a different route.

Even though in archaeology the object of study does not act, as it does in myrmecology, and even though theories on social behavior are tested not in a laboratory arena but only in the field,⁴⁷ the scientific approach in archaeology is nevertheless the same.⁴⁸ The “series of archaeological experiments” at Erlitou is so unsatisfactory because it is still in the initial

⁴³ Zhao, “Zhongguo wenming qi yuan yanjiu,” p. 136.

⁴⁴ von Falkenhausen, “The Regional Paradigm in Chinese Archaeology.”

⁴⁵ Wang Wei 王巍, *KG* 2 (2001): 91.

⁴⁶ “With the definition of ‘interaction spheres,’ for the first time we can discuss the issue of the name ‘China.’ I suggest that from this point on, as the regions with which we are concerned came to be joined together in archaeological terms and exhibit increasing similarities, the interaction sphere may be referred to as ‘Chinese.’ Chang, “China on the Eve of the Historical Period,” p. 59.

⁴⁷ Bert Hölldobler; Edward O. Wilson, *Ameisen. Die Entdeckung einer faszinierenden Welt* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1995), p. 255.

⁴⁸ Cf. also Hansjürgen Müller-Beck, “Was sagt der Begriff ‘Materielle Kultur’? Ein Kommentar” in Ulrich Veit, ed., *Spuren und Botschaften: Interpretationen materieller Kultur* (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), pp. 131–132.

phase and facts are insufficient. Fundamental questions, such as the chronological and functional relationship of the two courts, "Palace No. 1 and No. 2,"⁴⁹ and the extent and plan of the total built-on area are only being asked today. Only through as large as possible a number of "archaeological experiments," i.e. a continual review of the hypotheses by field work and the causal connection of the results with the outcome of other relevant special sciences will it be possible to arrive at a satisfying high degree of plausibility.

If we consider the identification "Hisarlik = Troy/Ilios,"⁵⁰ on the basis of which generations of scientists have been working for 130 years, it is obvious that the identification "Erlitou = capital of Xia," which was first posited in 1959, still has some way to go before it is accepted. The archaeological balance after the Chronology Project is positive because it has led to a resumption of excavations with new objectives and working methods by a new generation of excavators.

The special methodical potential of cultural historical research in China lies in the existence of contemporary written and archaeological sources even for the earliest periods and the possibility of comparing divergent information and interpretations. This potential can only be fully harnessed for scientific benefit, however, if archaeological research proves capable of divorcing itself from historiography. This is true for historical archaeology, and particularly for prehistoric archaeology, which is confronted with the retrospective representation of history. This necessity was articulated several times by the younger generation of archaeologists during the Symposium as well as the Conference and has been published elsewhere.⁵¹

Concerning Chronology and Absolute Ages

Basic to all reconstructions of cultural history by means of archaeology or history is time-control or precise dating of artifacts and events. As mentioned above, the Chronology Project had absolute-age determination, mainly the improvement of radiocarbon dating technology as major task on the agenda. The discussions of the results, however, reveal an unin-

⁴⁹ *Yanshi Erlitou. 1959 nian – 1978 nian kaogu fajue baogao* 偃師二里頭. 1959年 ~ 1978年考古發掘報告 (The Erlitou Site in Yanshi. Excavations in 1959~1978) (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe, 1999), pp. 138-159.

⁵⁰ Joachim Latacz, "Homers Troia/Ilios: Erfindung oder bewahrte Erinnerung? Ein Überblick" in *Troia – Traum und Wirklichkeit, Begleitband zur Ausstellung* (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2001), p. 26.

⁵¹ Zhao, "Zhongguo wenming qiyuan yanjiu," p. 136.

formed use of the data based on misunderstanding of the potentials and limits of the methods.⁵²

Chinese archaeologists began using conventional radiocarbon dating in the mid-sixties. Among newer methods is what is called high-precision dating, which allows the standard error of age determination to be decreased to about ± 30 years or even less and a fine-grained absolute chronology to be established by wiggle-matching.⁵³ In addition the technique of accelerator mass-spectrometry (AMS) has been introduced. The biggest advantage of AMS is that it requires only a small amount of sampling material. Usually 1 to 5 mg of pure carbon is enough to obtain a reliable date.

Seeds, nuts and leaves of terrestrial plants, cereal grains produced during one year are ideal samples to be measured with high technical precision and minimal standard errors. Frequently, however, dated samples consist of charcoal or ash particles, which often have larger deviations in age. For example, if the source of an ash sample was a fireplace in a house or an ash pit in which household waste was collected, then the sample itself might be highly non-homogeneous. The sample might contain particles of burned straw which are contemporary with the existence of the excavated house, but it might also contain wood particles much older than the house itself.⁵⁴ For AMS dating only a small amount of material is selected from the bulk sample. Thus, dated material might consist of the youngest or the oldest particles. In the case of bulk samples the small error bars obtained by highly sophisticated techniques are very likely overestimated and the final age determination might be unrealistic. In all above mentioned cases the measurement cannot be representative of the whole sample and, most importantly, the date obtained would not be representative of the dated event, e.g. the construction of a house or the appearance of a settlement. Thus the objective of the study is not accomplished.

Conditions are not improved if a wooden beam from the building is sampled. In Qinghai province we witnessed how villagers washed beams from a ruined house in the nearby stream to prepare them for use in building a new house. Mud bricks have to be renewed frequently, whereas parts of timber often survive several generations of inhabitants. In this case too,

⁵² Lee, "Differential Resolution."

⁵³ Zhang Xuelian 張雪蓮, Qiu Shihua, Cai Lianzhen, "Liulihe Xi Zhou muzang de gao jingdu niandai ceding" 琉璃河西周墓葬的高精度年代測定, *KGXB* 1 (2003): 137-160.

⁵⁴ For example, the present inhabitants of Reshui valley, Qinghai province, use the wood from excavated tombs of the 6th to 8th century A.D. for fire-wood in their houses.

the date, no matter how precisely it is measured, might nevertheless not be representative of the house construction period. In the case of coffin wood, a similar “old wood effect”⁵⁵ is perceptible: several decades might lapse between the felling of a tree and the funeral for which its timber is used. We know from personal communications that carpenters hold special coffin wood in reserve for a long period, sometimes even leaving it to their successor in business. And furthermore it is common practice that people have their own coffin made and stored at home many years before passing away.

These current observations warn against constructing interpretations upon a single date obtained for one excavation unit or even a whole site. Instead, what is required is more systematic collection of datable material for instance from different parts of a pit or house and a cautious determination of the sample material by archaeobotanists. Choosing material for radiocarbon dating and interpreting the results of measurements and calculations is not a simple task.⁵⁶ By communicating with geochronologists before sampling in the field, when submitting the samples to the lab and during data interpretation it is nevertheless possible to obtain much more information than assumed at present.⁵⁷ The quality of absolute age determinations depends not merely on raising the precision of lab technologies but on precision of the archaeological context related to each sample and of the mutual understanding of aims and conditions in the research of both involved scientists: archaeologist and geophysicist. When comparing archaeological and historical records it should be remembered that for instance dendrochronology supplies data with annual resolution.

⁵⁵ See for comparison: Reinhard Jung, Bernhard Weninger, “Appendix: Zur Realität der Diskrepanz zwischen den kalibrierten ¹⁴C-Daten und der historisch-archäologischen Datierung in Kastanas,” in Reinhard Jung, ed., *Kastanas. Ausgrabungen in einem Siedlungshügel der Bronze- und Eisenzeit Makedoniens 1975–1979, Teil 1* (Kiel: Verlag Oetker/Voges, 2002), pp. 281–298.

⁵⁶ More discussion about the problem of calibrated vs. uncalibrated dates is provided in the article by Pavel Tarasov and Mayke Wagner, “Environmental Aspects of Chinese Antiquity: Problems of Interpretation and Chronological Correlation” (“Gudai Zhongguo de huanjing yanjiu – guanyu jieshi he niandai duiying fangmian de wenti” 古代中國的環境研究 — 關於解釋和年代對應方面的問題, *Dongfang kaogu* 2 [2005]: 263–271).

⁵⁷ Dieter Jäkel, “Critical comments on the interpretation and publication of ¹⁴C, TL/OSL and ²³⁰Th/U dates and on the problem of teleconnections between global climatic processes,” in Werner Smykatz-Kloss, Peter Felix-Henningsen, eds., *Palaeoecology of Quaternary Drylands* (Berlin: Springer, 2004), pp. 233–242.

Concerning the 'Colonization of the Past'

A fruitful theoretical approach to studies of the development of civilizations has been provided by the sociologist Norbert Elias in defining civilization as a process. He proceeded from the assumption that "one never can say for sure that people of a given society *are* civilized. But on the basis of systematic investigations with reference to verifiable evidence one can say with high certainty of some groups of people that they *have become* more civilized, without necessarily associating this with the thought that having become more civilized is better or worse, or has a positive or negative value. Such a change in personality structures can easily be proved as a specific aspect of the developmental process of social structures."⁵⁸

This concept of process in an assumed initial phase can be extended to the entire development of social structures. If one conceives of civilization as a continuous transformation of human communities from the beginning of their existence, one is better able to track down the many different aspects of transformation in spatial and temporal references, how they are interrelated, how they have been determined, the varying pace of change, points of culmination in which the strands of development of several aspects meet, ruptures, faults, regressions and rhythms. An academic threshold of civilization is a barrier to objective and unprejudiced perception. It cannot be fixed in time and space, as we have seen above. Without a chronological and regional threshold of Chinese civilization, the wealth of archaeological information as provided for instance by large settlement excavations like Dongguan 東關⁵⁹ and Dahecun 大河村⁶⁰ can be fully utilized for the reconstruction of cultural history.

"The survival of the fittest" is the axiom that guarantees great social prestige for any living being of high age. Therefore it is a habit of humans and human societies to prove their authority and right for dominance by age. It was and is practiced in ancient and modern times, on an interpersonal as well as an international level, in Europe as efficiently as in Asia. Studies of the prehistory of peoples or states are related to the making of

⁵⁸ Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*, Bd. I: Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), p. 22.

⁵⁹ *Yuanqu Gucheng Dongguan* 垣曲古城東關 (The Dongguan Site in Gucheng, Yuanqu) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2001).

⁶⁰ *Zhengzhou Dahecun* 鄭州大河村 (The Dahecun Site in Zhengzhou) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2001).

civilizations, and the determination of the civilization's origin can be utilized to demonstrate their age.

Reflecting on the results of archaeological work in Africa, North America and Australia, Bruce Trigger found that "archaeological studies have refuted the idea, sustained if not created by nineteenth-century anthropologists, that non-literate peoples were primitive and unchanging."⁶¹ This prejudice and attitude of cultural superiority towards non-literate peoples in far distant regions in fact also underlies perceptions of non-literate peoples in far distant time periods. Just as European colonization of the New World was overcome during the second half of the twentieth century, it is high time now to overcome the "colonization of the past."

⁶¹ Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 376.