

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH IN EAST ASIAN PALEOANTHROPOLOGY

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

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I am a paleoanthropologist who has been working in East Asia on a variety of topics related to the reconstruction of East Asian prehistory. I am currently involved in several collaborative paleoanthropological research projects in the region, primarily in China (see Figures 1–3 and captions for descriptions of my current projects). Our multidisciplinary research projects' ultimate goals are to develop a deeper understanding of hominin lifeways in Pleistocene East Asia. What follows is a personal perspective on the development of my international collaborations in East Asia. I have what many would consider an atypical background, which in most cases serves as a strength. This atypical background includes living and working in Korea (~5 years), China (~3 years), and Japan (~1 year).

I was originally born in South Korea, but around the age of one I ended up living in an orphanage outside the city of Seoul. After about six months, I was adopted by an American family, and subsequently raised and educated in the United States. Although I was raised as a Caucasian-American, in fact my phenotype indicated that no matter how hard I tried to assimilate I would never fully be considered a typical American. For instance, during my first semester in graduate school, after speaking with me for ten minutes one of the professors in the anthropology department asked me: "Why is your English so good?" Despite speaking English in American fashion and having a typical American name, questions like that were always being raised. At least partially because of this I became interested in learning more about my ethnic background (i.e., what is it truly like to be Korean, or at the minimum, Asian). The opportunity to find out finally presented itself when I was accepted to attend Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea as part of an undergraduate exchange program.

While at Yonsei University I had the opportunity of meeting Drs. Bae Kidong¹ and Kim Byungmo, who were professors of archaeology at Hanyang University.² In particular, Bae gave me the opportunity to spend time working as an exca-

vator at a diversity of archaeology sites ranging from the Early Paleolithic (Chongokni, Naechon) to Neolithic-Bronze Age (Konam-ri) to the Three Kingdoms Period (Chayouro), and as a laboratory technician in the Hanyang University Museum. This opportunity, particularly spending four months each working at Paleolithic sites like Chongokni and Naechon, solidified my desire to specialize in the East Asian Paleolithic. At the same time, spending so much time with the Hanyang University faculty and students facilitated my learning about the Korean language and culture. Because the Hanyang University community understood my circumstances, they took it upon themselves to teach me how to be "Korean." These experiences taught me how to understand and work well with other Korean scholars and students.

After spending so much time living and researching in Korea, I realized that in order to truly understand the development of East Asian prehistory that I would have to conduct some research in Japan and China as well. This is particularly pertinent because most of my research involves human evolution during the Pleistocene and well precedes the formation of distinct Chinese, Korean, and Japanese civilizations. Having established my collaborations in Korea, I then began spending time in Japan, with an initial invitation to visit the "sensational" Early Paleolithic site of Kami-Takamori in Miyagi Prefecture, where purported Early Paleolithic handaxe caches were found.³ Although I had questions about the handaxes, this initial interaction led to my introduction to Dr. Tomida Yukimitsu at the National Science Museum in Tokyo, who is the chief curator of vertebrate paleontology. Tomida and I hit it off and we began collaborating soon after, studying the Hanaizumi faunal assemblage which is housed in his museum.⁴ Tomida also introduced me to the researchers from the Nojiriko Museum, who are in charge of excavating and curating the vertebrate fossils and lithic remains from Tategahana, a Paleolithic kill site of elephant (*Palaeoloxodon naumanni*) and giant deer (*Sinomegaceros yabei*), and one of the oldest archaeological sites in Japan.



Figure 1. An official visit by the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP) to the Early Paleolithic Xujiayao site in northern China. Pictured from left to right: Norton, Wei Qi (IVPP), Gao Xing (IVPP), Wang Yiren (Institute of Archaeology, Shanxi Province).

One of the advantages of graduate school is the opportunity to meet scholars and students from other countries, particularly places where one is interested in working. In this regard, during my first semester in graduate school I became close friends with Dr. Gao Xing who was from China and was in the U.S. studying Paleolithic archaeology. After completing his Ph.D., Gao returned to China, and subsequently became the vice-director of the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP), Chinese Academy of Sciences, in Beijing, China. Gao is currently a leading figure in the field of Paleolithic archaeology in China. Because of our close relationship, Gao invited me to be involved with a number of his research projects in China. Furthermore, once I completed my Ph.D., Gao invited me to spend a couple of years in the IVPP as a postdoctoral research fellow, where we would be able to further collaborate and I would be able to help his students learn vertebrate taphonomy. While in the IVPP I also had the opportunity of interacting a great deal with paleoanthropologists (Drs. Wu Xinzhi, Liu Wu) and Quaternary vertebrate paleontologists (Dr. Jin Changzhu). These interactions not only led to a more in-depth understanding of the Chinese prehistoric record, but it facilitated more collaborative research.

What These Experiences Mean for the Development of International Collaborations

As noted by Boivin et al. (2008), trust, respect, and reciprocity are critical for the success of any international collaborative research project that involves scholars from different countries and cultural backgrounds. Understanding these traits is particularly important when an American is trying to set up a collaborative research project in East Asia. It is somewhat tricky in East Asia because, in general, China, Korea, and Japan are relatively rigid stratified societies and



Figure 2. Norton (center) carrying out an experimental bone breakage study of pig femora in collaboration with Wu Xianzhu (left) from Chongqing Normal University and Pei Shuwen (right) from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology. These taphonomic experiments were conducted in front of the Yunxi County Museum and near the Huanglongdong site, in Hubei Province, central China.

there is a distinct pecking order. Much of how Boivin et al. (2008) describe trust, respect, and reciprocity for collaborating in India is clearly applicable to working in East Asia.

Trust. It is impossible to collaborate with someone if there is no trust. This is particularly relevant in East Asia, where cultural and linguistic barriers often lead to many miscommunications and misunderstandings. Even if communication is a problem, if there is a sense of trust, then it is still possible to collaborate.

Respect. In addition to trust, collaborators need to respect each other and understand what each offers to the collaboration. If there is no respect, then it is difficult asking the other to do anything toward resolving any issues or problems that may arise. Any collaboration where there is a lack of respect will be short-lived.

Reciprocity. This is perhaps the most important feature to successful collaborative research in East Asia. Although in many cases indigenous scientists initially help the foreign scholar get set up, eventually there has to be some form of payback. The closeness of relationships will determine whether immediate or delayed reciprocity are in effect. Immediate reciprocity usually involves a quicker payment of services and indicates a relationship that is not so close. This can be in the form of money or gifts, and is given at the beginning of collaboration. Delayed reciprocity involves the delayed repayment of services offered. This form of reciprocity is usually between scientists who respect and trust each other. These relationships usually develop as the result of long-term collaborations that eventually become personal



Figure 3. Working with the local villagers in Pingyi County, Shandong Province, eastern China. As in most regions of the world, the local villagers are usually valuable sources for information regarding presence/absence of archaeological sites and materials in the vicinity. In this particular photo, the research team is examining a set of fossilized bones that the local villager had collected over the years, with the villager's grandchildren observing intently.

friendships (i.e., the collaborators actually enjoy working with each other).

Because I have spent close to nine years living and working in Korea, China, and Japan, fortunately or unfortunately, I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. In general, East Asian scholars are generally nice people and relatively open-minded when interacting with foreigners. Much of the bad and the ugly are due to miscommunications and misunderstandings, particularly when the ultimate goals of either side are different. This seems to happen most often when there is a lack of trust between the different parties. Problems also arise when competing research teams actively interfere with progress.

For all of my successful collaborative research projects, probably twice as many initiatives have failed to get off the ground. Without going into too much detail, some roadblocks I have encountered relate specifically to the trust, respect, and reciprocity factors mentioned above. In some cases, there was a lack of trust and respect, while in other cases, one side wanted immediate reciprocity, while the other side was expecting long-term delayed reciprocity.

Overall, I think the key to successful collaborations (i.e., as seen through the coauthored papers that are usually the end result of such collaborations) is the trust and respect that develops from spending a great amount of time working with each other. For example, in general foreign researchers usually give first authorship to East Asian scholars on peer-reviewed journal articles in order to gain their trust. In my particular case, because of my close relations with my col-

laborators, they rarely ask for first authorship on our papers. Rather, I work to help them in other ways. A good example of this is during my two year postdoctoral stint in the IVPP, I spent almost every day editing papers and abstracts that IVPP researchers and students were trying to publish in English. Although it was not part of my required duties as a foreign postdoctoral researcher, I found it to be a rewarding experience, particularly when I could see how happy it made them to have their research published in English.

Moving Forward

The research that I am involved with is multidisciplinary in nature and involves biological anthropologists, Paleolithic archaeologists, vertebrate paleontologists, geologists, and dating specialists. Most of the research has involved the analysis of previously excavated material that is stored in museums and research institutes. However, we are currently expanding this to include field survey and excavations in places like China, where abundant Pleistocene limestone cave deposits and open-air localities exist (Norton 2009). Preliminary field survey results in China have identified a number of regions that have great potential for large-scale multidisciplinary research involving foreigners and Chinese. Ongoing and developing research in Korea and Japan are multidisciplinary as well.

My interactions with East Asian scholars have resulted in a number of good learning experiences for both sides. The one primary conclusion that I can draw from these experiences is that the future potential for international cooperative paleoanthropological research in East Asia is great, as long as trust and respect continue to exist between research teams.

Notes

1. Following East Asian standard procedure, the family name is listed first, followed by the given name.
2. Kim has since retired, but Bae is still there.
3. All of the Paleolithic finds from Miyagi Prefecture were later exposed as a hoax.
4. Also included Drs. Hasegawa Yoshikazu (Gunma Museum of Natural History) and Kohno Naoki (National Science Museum).

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