

Sigrid Schmalzer. *The People's Peking Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 346 pp. Hardcover \$85.00, ISBN 978-0-2267-3859-8. Paperback \$26.00, ISBN 978-0-2267-3860-4.

The development of human evolutionary studies in many areas of the world was often influenced by social and political changes within each individual country. This is especially pertinent in a country like China, where the influence of Karl Marx and Frederick Engel's communist manifestos played an especially important role. In particular, Engel's underlying theme that labor created humanity appears to have been heavily influential in China. Interestingly, the writings of Marx and Engels prompted the Chinese to advocate more public dissemination of scientific findings and a greater role of the laypeople to contribute to the development of scientific research within China. Sigrid Schmalzer's *The People's Peking Man* examines this developmental history in the field of Chinese paleoanthropology (human evolutionary research) in some detail. Schmalzer uses the findings from the famous Zhoukoudian site as the foundation for her study. Because of the many important hominin finds that could be used for addressing a wide variety of human evolutionary debates, since 1987 Zhoukoudian has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This recognition attests to the importance of the findings from Zhoukoudian to the broader international community.

Zhoukoudian¹ (dragon bone hill) is a limestone hill located approximately 50 kilometers southwest of the capital city Beijing. Zhoukoudian is filled with Pleistocene² cave and fissure deposits. The contents of the sediments of the various caves explains the international notoriety of the site. In particular, two cave localities have received the most attention. Zhoukoudian Locality 1 came to the attention of the international scientific community in the late 1920s following the discovery of hominin fossils that came to be known as *Homo erectus*.³ Soon after, excavations at the Zhoukoudian Upper Cave site, which received its name because it is directly situated above Locality 1, revealed the presence of multiple modern *H. sapiens* fossils that were interred.⁴ In the popular press, Zhoukoudian Locality 1 came to be known as the "Cave Home of Peking Man,"⁵ thus the justification for the title of Schmalzer's treatise.

Schmalzer reviews the history of paleoanthropological research in China using the discovery and influence of the *Homo erectus* fossils excavated from Zhoukoudian Locality 1 as the foundation. She goes into detail about the roles played by the major scientists (both western and Chinese) from the 1920s to the present day. In Schmalzer's view, the sociopolitical environment of twentieth-century China heavily influenced the development of human evolutionary research. Much of the information about the history of Chinese paleoanthropol-

ogy presented by Schmalzer—who spent a year as a visiting scholar at the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP)—is both credible and factual. Her analysis is based on many direct correspondences and interviews with top Chinese paleoanthropologists. What I found particularly interesting is that Schmalzer interacted with and interviewed many of the leading figures in Chinese paleoanthropology today, many of whom are my own close colleagues (e.g., Wu Xinzhi, Liu Wu, Gao Xing, Chen Chun).

Schmalzer's study produced many interesting points. For example, in the fourteen history textbooks published between 1927 (the year the first hominin fossils were discovered at Zhoukoudian) and 1949 (the year Mao Zedong came to power), Schmalzer notes, only two discussed the Peking Man fossils. This lack of interest may have been due to the large amount of political unrest in China between the 1920s and the 1940s. However, it was not until after Mao came to power that Peking Man became a figure of national importance. As Schmalzer justifiably observes, after Mao came to power, the Chinese leaders used Peking Man to argue that Chinese culture could be pushed back to the Middle Pleistocene. Thus, the finds from Zhoukoudian, particularly the *H. erectus* fossils, became a matter of national pride and importance.

One of the highlights of the treatise is Schmalzer's emphasis on the contributions to the field by local people interested in contributing to the evolutionary history of China. In many societies, the contributions of laypeople are sometimes disregarded by scientists. A good example of this practice is the work in Japan at the Paleolithic Tategahana Nojiriko site.⁶ When excavations began at Tategahana in the 1960s, the principal investigators made the decision to allow anyone and everyone to participate in the excavations. Although specialists participated in the excavations and laboratory work, more often than not, schoolteachers, housewives, and children were also actively involved. Unfortunately, because of the presence of many local people in the research at Tategahana, the findings from that site are still not widely accepted by the broader Japanese scientific community. However, as Schmalzer observes for China, the role of local people in Chinese paleoanthropological research seems to be relatively widely accepted.

Another interesting point raised by Schmalzer is the question of racism in China. Although most Chinese do not admit to being racist, Schmalzer points out that many Chinese view darker-skinned peoples to be dirty. A recent research paper about racism in China by an undergraduate student who took my Race and Human Variation course reiterates this point, particularly by pointing out that the race question is becoming more common with the increase in the number of Africans living and conducting business in China.⁷ The question of racism in China is becoming increasingly important as relations between China and many African countries are developing at an exponential rate. China is quickly funneling money into different African nations in order to facilitate the development of these coun-

tries' infrastructures and further strengthen ties. Even the IVPP has developed a collaborative relationship beginning in 2008 with South African research institutes under the auspices of the Bilateral Program in Paleosciences. Thus, Schmalzer's discussion of racism in China is timely, and important, and will likely need to be addressed by cultural anthropologists and sociologists who specialize in China. I would imagine that this topic is already being researched extensively.

Overall, Sigrid Schmalzer's review of the development of paleoanthropology in China that uses Zhoukoudian as the foundation is interesting and informative. *The People's Peking Man* will clearly be of interest to readers from a wide diversity of disciplines, ranging from cultural anthropology and sociology to history and, of course, general Chinese studies. In particular, I think this would be an interesting read for an upper-division/graduate seminar as a case study of the influence of Marx and Engel's communist manifestos on the development of various scientific fields in China.

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NOTES

1. The traditional spelling of Zhoukoudian was "Choukoutien." In older literature, one can find Zhoukoudian spelled that way.
2. The Pleistocene is the geological epoch that immediately precedes our current epoch, which is the Holocene. The Pleistocene began about 2.6 million years ago and the Pleistocene-Holocene transition occurs about 12–10 thousand years ago. The Pleistocene is usually divided into three different periods: Early (2.6–0.78 million years ago); Middle (0.78–0.120 million years ago); Late (0.120–0.01 million years ago). Zhoukoudian Locality 1 dates to the Middle Pleistocene, with the most recent dating analysis placing it between 780,000 to 400,000 years ago.
3. Noel T. Boaz and Russell L. Ciochon, *Dragon Bone Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
4. Christopher J. Norton and Xing Gao, "Zhoukoudian Upper Cave Revisited: A Taphonomic Perspective," *Current Anthropology* 49 (2008): 732–745.
5. Lanpo Jia, *The Cave Home of Peking Man* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1975).
6. C. J. Norton, Y. Kondo, A. Akira, Y.Q. Zhang, M. Diab "The Nature of Megafaunal Extinctions during the MIS 3-2 Transition in Japan," *Quaternary International* 211 (2010): 113–122.
7. Hailey Berkey wrote a term paper during the fall 2009 semester for my Race and Human Variation course (ANTH 375) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Berkey's paper is titled "A Search for Identity in the Middle Kingdom," and it focused on the question of racism in China. I cite her paper here with her consent.