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Contextualizing an Archaeology of Asia

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This volume offers an archaeology of Asia whose geographic coverage ranges from the equator to the upper latitudes, and from the South China Sea to the lakes of eastern Kazakhstan. For many readers picking up this book, their first question is likely, “Why Asia?” The answer is fourfold: Asia is vast; it is diverse; its history merits comparison with other regions of the world; and for the last century Western archaeologists have largely ignored Asia’s archaeology. The primary goal of this volume is to bring to the fore Asia’s past as part of world archaeology by including case studies on subjects of global archaeological interest.

Asia is vast in geographic, demographic, economic, and political terms. Physically, Asia constitutes the world’s largest landmass, contains a large percentage of the world’s population, and all of the world’s institutionalized religions. Three of the world’s four most populous countries today (China, India, Indonesia) are found in Asia. Countries across the region are becoming the world’s economic and political superpowers, and these developments represent the endpoints of millennia-long histories. The region’s geographic size is so large, and the internal divisions (particularly between South, East, and Southeast Asia) so pronounced that a single volume can only hope to capture a sense of its history.

The Asian land mass also encompasses extraordinarily high social, ethnolinguistic, and ecological variability. Ecologically, the region stretches from the arctic to the equatorial. Its multiple social histories intersect and overlap, and ethnolinguistic groups span large areas. Studying ancient Asia requires the use of multiscalar approaches that transcend both neoevolutionary frameworks that archaeologists so commonly embrace, and also modern nation – state boundaries that blur the borders of ancient polities and interactional networks. Even today, Asia’s industrial centers and high-tech cities exist alongside lowland peasant farmers and upland swidden cultivators. These farming communities continue to trade with small-scale forest foragers across parts of India, and nomadic pastoralists in western China. Coastal strandlopers across Southeast Asia barter with settled villagers, and

both struggle with pirates in the Southeast Asian seas. Such relationships between groups practicing different economic strategies have deep historical roots, as state economies across ancient Asia were founded on the coexistence of forest and maritime foraging strategies with agrarian economies.

In many respects, Asia is unique. This is clear through its archaeological record, which contains distinctive hominoid and hominid varieties during the Pleistocene, unusual subsistence adaptations from the Holocene, and singular complex polities from the last three millennia that lack analogues elsewhere in the world. This record challenges neoevolutionary frameworks that continue to dominate Americanist research on emergent complexity, despite nearly 30 years of critique. The early Holocene transition to sedentary agricultural life, for example, took varied forms across Asia and occurred at very different points in time (Underhill and Habu, this volume). In addition, myriad forms of foraging (for example, hunting, gathering, maritime and pastoral nomadism) persisted across Asia and many evolved in lockstep with ancient states (Morrison, this volume).

Asia's archaeological record is also known for some "firsts." The geographer Carl Sauer (1952), for example, was one of the first scholars to recognize Asia as a hearth for the origins of agriculture: some of the world's earliest domesticated plants are found in Asia (Crawford, this volume). The world's earliest pottery technologies also appeared more than 12,000 years ago among complex Jomon hunter-gatherers in Japan (Underhill and Habu, this volume). Asia is also the linguistic and genetic origin area for populations that settled island archipelagoes across the entire Pacific Ocean (Bellwood, this volume). Yet Asia's uniqueness does not render it incomparable to developments elsewhere in the Old and New Worlds, and understanding Asia's ancient histories is integral to explaining developments across the Eurasian continent.

Several discrete writing systems functioned across Asia by ca. 3500 B.P. (Keightley, this volume), and some of the world's largest early states and empires emerged in ancient China (Shelach and Pines, this volume; Allard, this volume). Complex polities emerged along the region's coasts, in conjunction with far-flung trade overland, and maritime networks and ideological movements that spread from South Asia to the eastern most reaches of the region (Ray, this volume). Early states appeared in most of Asia's river deltas and fertile river valleys, and many South Asian states developed into empires (Sinopoli, this volume). States also developed along the borders of Asia's empires, among sedentary farmers and among pastoralist nomads (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin, this volume). Linking farmers with pastoral nomads and foragers (Morrison, this volume), these systems merged coastal and inland regions and moved goods, animals, and people thousands of kilometers within Asia, and from Asia westward.

The foregoing discussion has emphasized Asia's size, its diversity, and its uniqueness; yet the region's archaeological sequence also merits comparison with other parts of the world. The Asian archaeological record is a fundamental aspect of organizational and environmental changes since the Pleistocene, and thousands of trained archaeologists study and manage its cultural heritage. Despite the acceleration in the pace of Asian archaeology since the 1960s, however, results of this

research remain largely inaccessible to the Western archaeological world in part for linguistic reasons. A burgeoning Asian archaeological literature is regularly published in more than ten languages, and Asia's archaeological past remains a foreign country to most archaeologists trained in Europe and North America. Even archaeologists working within different Asian countries have difficulty reading across their national boundaries.

Those of us who have had the opportunity to work in Asian archaeology are constantly impressed by the amount and intensity of research undertaken in the region, and by how little of that work is visible in the English-language literature. Asia's huge geographic scale, its historical importance to cultural developments in the West, and its overwhelming cultural diversity make it a rich source of comparative material on subjects ranging from the origins of agriculture to state formation. Growing numbers of archaeologists and historians now acknowledge Asian archaeology's relevance to world archaeology, and increased numbers of Western archaeologists have launched research projects in Asia in the last 15 years. Yet continued difficulties in accessing the Asian archaeological literature were a central reason for the construction of this volume.

Chapter topics for the volume were selected with dual objectives in mind: the first was to foreground some of the more noteworthy aspects of the archaeological sequence and of the rich datasets that are available for study. The second was to provide comparative information on social issues for archaeologists working elsewhere in the world. Space constraints, relative to the size of the landmass that this volume showcases, require a light touch rather than an in-depth exploration. We encourage readers to use this volume as a springboard for learning more about Asian archaeology, and for incorporating Asian material into their comparative research worldwide.

Goals of This Volume

This volume is not designed to serve as an introductory text to the archaeology of specific subregions in Asia; myriad textbooks and summaries have been published that provide chronological frameworks and culture histories to subregions within Asia. For China, key English-language texts include Barnes (1999), Chang (1986), Li (1986), and Nelson (1995). Several summaries are also available in English on different aspects of Japanese archaeology, including Barnes (1999), Farris (1998); Hudson (1999); Imamura (1996) and Mizoguchi (2002). Western archaeological coverage of Korea is less intensive than that of Korea or Japan, but two volumes – one by Barnes (2000) and the other by Nelson (1993) – are especially useful. The number of English-language volumes published on South Asia is enormous, but two books by Allchin and Allchin (1993, 1997) and one by Khanna (1992) are good starting points. Textbooks on Southeast Asian archaeology have been divided neatly into the insular (Bellwood 1997) and the mainland (Higham 1989, 1996, 2002) regions.

This volume is also not intended to provide a comprehensive background to social theory in Asian archaeology. Instead, this volume samples Asian archaeolog-

ical research on “social archaeology.” Readers who judge Asian archaeology theoretically impoverished do so by imposing their Western ideas on Asian archaeology and run the risk of intellectual ethnocentrism. Social approaches in Asian archaeology take different forms than those employed in the West, and Asian archaeology has multiple indigenous intellectual traditions that contrast markedly with those found in Euroamerican archaeology. Epistemological, cultural, and sociopolitical reasons underlie these differences, and the fact that nationalism and heritage management concerns guide regional archaeological traditions across Asia is paramount (Glover, this volume; Nelson, this volume; Mizoguchi, this volume; Sinopoli, this volume). This is especially clear in the case of Chinese archaeology, which until recently employed a Marxist evolutionary framework to interpret state formation (Li and Chen, this volume; von Falkenhausen 1993:846–7). Asian archaeology’s historiographical orientation (von Falkenhausen 1993, 1995) and its emphasis on identity politics have thus far precluded concern with several topics (for example, gender and power) that are currently in favor with Euroamerican archaeologists.

Although some of Asia’s leading archaeologists and scholars have contributed studies to this volume, publication constraints preclude involvement in this volume by many of Asia’s important scholars; we owe them a great intellectual debt, and their work is cited throughout the volume. This volume’s chapters draw from authors’ own research and articulate that research into broader issues. Four substantive themes structure the volume from the mid-Holocene onward: (1) sociopolitics of archaeology, (2) formative developments across the region, (3) case studies in emergent complexity, and (4) the nature of ancient states. At least one methodological thread, which focuses on the interdependency of texts and archaeological remains, also weaves together several of the volume’s chapters. Discussion of these themes helps strengthen the comparative framework for understanding archaeological practice in various areas of Asia, and to trace divergent trajectories in the history of the discipline.

Sociohistorical Contexts of Asian Archaeology

Like other areas throughout the world, several regional traditions in Asian archaeology have colonial roots. Asian archaeology must thus be understood first within its historical, social, and cultural contexts. The book’s first section, accordingly, uses case studies of archaeological practice in Asia to examine the complex relationship between archaeology, heritage management, and national identity. The strong historical tradition in East Asia has a time-depth of two millennia and flavors Asian archaeological traditions like that of China. The countries of Southeast Asia were subjected to strong cultural influences from the maritime countries of Western Europe, and most came under their direct political control at various times from the late sixteenth to the 19th century. Scholarly interest in the past of these countries, and especially archaeological research into their past, developed from the mid 19th century and was strongly influenced by the traditions and concerns of the various colonizing countries.

The first chapter in this section, by Ian Glover, discusses the influence of colonialism in the history of archaeological research across Southeast Asia with an emphasis on Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. He points out the differential impact of colonialist archaeology and its consequences in these countries, and explores how, and where, current archaeological research bears the imprint of Western thought through its theory and practice. Comparisons are drawn between this dynamic in Southeast Asian archaeology and East Asian archaeology. Only through such analysis can we understand the role of science – and Western empiricist research – within an Asian context.

That archaeology is also political practice is clearly illustrated in the following chapter on the “Two Koreas” by Sarah Nelson. Twentieth-century Cold War history has affected the nature and scope of archaeological work in the Korean peninsula, as archaeological traditions in North and South Korea diverged sharply after World War II. Nelson argues that South Korean archaeology’s dual focus on chronology building and identifying ethnic groups is related to its search for a national identity.

This section’s last chapter, by Koji Mizoguchi, explores the relationship between sociopolitics and historical identity construction in Japanese prehistoric archaeology. Following World War II, scholars studied the Yayoi period to understand the failure of Japan as a modern nation-state. One reason behind the current widespread public interest in Jomon archaeology, Mizoguchi argues, lies in the close association of Jomon archaeology with the roots of Japanese identity. These three examples, drawn from different parts of Asia, illustrate the historical and political embeddedness of archaeological practice and provide the necessary foundation for studying particular developments in the Asian sequence.

Formative Developments in Ancient Asia

Asia’s uniqueness is one pillar of the rationale for this volume. Research in the last several decades has firmly established East and South Asia as one of the world’s most important regions for formative developments. This is especially clear in the origins of plant and animal domestication, which occurred more than 9,000 years ago. Because some of the earliest dates for domesticated plants derive from east-central China and their antiquity rivals those of the Near East, Gary Crawford’s chapter focuses on East Asia as its case study. Not only was domestication early in East Asia, however; the timing and directionality of the adoption of domestication varied and brought with it a range of consequences. This chapter summarizes our current knowledge regarding the origins of plant and animal domestication in East Asia, and examines reasons why the timing of the adoption varied from one region to the next.

Asia has also experienced diasporas in its 1.8 million year sequence of human history; the origins and spread of agriculture across the region provides an excellent example. As Peter Bellwood explains in his chapter, the consequences of early agricultural development in several regions of Asia included population growth, the

geographic expansion of food-producing populations into areas previously used by foragers and nomads, and the expansion of language families. Bellwood examines evidence from archaeology, linguistics, and biological anthropology, and argues that agriculturalist expansion lies at the root of many of the world's major language families (although farmers may not always have replaced foragers in the biological sense). History, environmental variations, and prior cultural configurations dictated many of the outcomes, some of which played a fundamental role in the large-scale genesis of human cultural and biological patterning from mid-Holocene period onward.

Emergent Complexity in Asia

Ancient Asia is perhaps best renowned for its early complex societies, and organizational shifts in that direction occurred as early as the mid-Holocene. The paper by Anne Underhill and Junko Habu investigates the economic and sociopolitical organization of early sedentary communities in East Asia with a focus on the Chinese Neolithic (ca. 7100–5700 B.P.), on Jomon-period Japan (ca. 16,500–2400 B.P.), and Chulmun-period Korea (ca. 7000–3000 B.P.). Their study demonstrates how the emergence of complex societies involved an increase in vertical inequality and an increase in heterogeneity. Such changes included increased variety in subsistence strategies, production of valued goods by craft specialists, the development of social inequality, and material evidence for the elaboration of rituals. Evidence from each region exists for increased inter-community interaction, some competitive and some peaceful, that lead to the formation of regional polities. Such changes directly or indirectly laid the foundation for the development of more complex societies that emerged in some regions during the later prehistoric period.

This volume's chapters describe many early states that arose in several parts of Asia, while leaving some areas (like the Indus valley) that have been the subject of extensive research to other publications. Multiple pulses of state formation characterized Asia over a 3,000-year period, involving the emergence, collapse, and regeneration of complex polities built on elements of preceding states. The Mongol empire was one of Asia's latest pre-industrial states, and its expansion to Western Europe's margins made it one of the most successful empires in recent world history.

Writing is commonly associated with state formation across the Old World, yet some of Asia's earliest writing systems preceded state formation. This is evidently the case in China, where writing first appeared in the Late Neolithic, where writing became firmly linked to power and authority. David Keightley's chapter summarizes our knowledge of the origins of writing in China, and explores the social, religious, and political significance of early Chinese writing systems. He argues that these writing systems were not linked simply to ritual and shamanism as had been previously proposed, but also to high status. He also raises the possibility that only some elites were literate, and that writing was used as performance and for registry rather than documentation.

The next chapter, by Li Liu and Xingcan Chen, focuses on social and political changes that accompanied (or instigated) technological transformations associated with the adoption of metallurgy, and specifically bronze metallurgy. Because the earliest dates for bronze metallurgy in Asia derive from China, China forms the case study for studying sociopolitical change from the Neolithic to Bronze Age. Although archaeological evidence suggests that complex societies developed in several regions in Neolithic China, many of these entities collapsed ca. 4000 B.P. This variable trajectory forms the basis for discussion and analysis in this chapter. Examining a range of archaeological data permits the investigation of dynamics of social and economic change, and also the roles that actors and factions played in these processes. This chapter examines settlement patterns, variability in political formations, and the development of complex polities in northern China. Their comprehensive review of sociopolitical change in ancient China that emphasizes ancestor cults and prestige goods production provides a compelling alternative to both standard Chinese (Marxist) approaches and Western neoevolutionary models.

The scale and longevity of some Asian states, and particularly the Chinese states, makes them distinctive worldwide. So, too, does their demographic scale and monumental achievement. Yuri Pines and Gideon Shelach combine archaeological and documentary data to explore power, identity, and ideology in the core of one such Asian megastate: the Qin dynasty. In so doing, they challenge the accepted view of cultural continuity in China. Their examination of the Qin also identifies a social and political Bauplan of the Chinese state that subsequent civilizations emulated for two millennia. The Qin state, they argue, emerged through peer-polity interaction, in which elites were able to successfully manipulate the ruling ideology.

Crossing Boundaries and Ancient States

The monumentality of ancient states invariably draws archaeologists to study their cores rather than their peripheries, and most Asian archaeologists are no exception. Yet it is at the margins of some of Asia's early states – and particularly at the edges of empire – that we see the most interesting developments of secondary states, both sedentary and nomadic. It is also along the peripheries of ancient Asian states that foraging strategies, whether land-locked or maritime, apparently developed and thrived. As several authors in this volume illustrate, Asian political and economic formations do not conform to conventional models that archaeologists apply elsewhere, and thus compel revision.

Francis Allard's chapter focuses on developments along the southern boundary of Han China. Imperial China began with the founding of the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C. (see chapter 10). This short-lived dynasty established the foundations for the unified and homogeneous Han dynasty that followed (ca. 206 B.C.–A.D. 220). The expansionist Han empire exceeded the Roman empire in scale, and rivaled that of Alexander the Great. The Han empire effectively Sinicized much of what is now considered China. Although substantial research has been undertaken on the archaeology of the Han empire within the borders of present-day China, less atten-

tion has been paid to the archaeology of its peripheries. Yet one hallmark of the Han dynasty involved the expansion of trade and empire to its north, south, and west along the Silk Route. This chapter explores the archaeology of the Han empire's southern periphery, from what are now the southwest provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi to the Chinese border with northern Vietnam. It reviews the history of research in this region, discusses the nature of archaeological data from a series of excavated sites, and offers new theoretical frameworks that deepen our understanding of this region and polity.

Such developments occurred not only along China's southern borders, but also along its western and northern borders during periods of successive state formation. William Honeychurch and Chunag Amartuvshin focus on archaeological evidence for complex polities that developed on the northeast Asian steppe in conjunction with some of China's largest early empires, from the Xiongnu polity (third century B.C. to A.D. second century) to the rise of the Mongol empire. They use these case studies to examine structural influences of mature state systems on neighboring regions and models for interregional interaction. The historical trajectories of these steppe polities, which flourished along the margins of China, complement our extant knowledge of state formation in East Asia.

Not only did states form along the margins of other states; populations continued, or turned to, foraging-trading strategies as these states emerged. Kathleen Morrison's paper discusses the complex, long-term historical ecology of foraging in South and Southeast Asia, and focuses on the integration of foraging strategies with agriculture, wage labor, tribute relations, and pastoralism in a succession of world systems. Asian foraging strategies must be viewed as particular relations of humans to the natural world, as relations of power and affinity, and sometimes as interdependence with others. Case studies from India provide some examples of historically situated tactics deployed within contexts of specific local ecologies, polities, exchange networks, and cultural frameworks.

Several chapters in the volume illustrate how some of Asia's earliest states linked populations within and across political boundaries perhaps as much through ideological power as political force. By the mid-first millennium B.C., religious ideologies tied to South Asian states also spread through missionaries and traders who traversed the desert expanses of the Asian steppe and sailed across the Bay of Bengal into the South China Sea. Himanshu Ray's chapter examines the nature, diffusion, and impact of Buddhism as it moved ever eastward into Southeast and East Asia. Emerging during the "Axial Age" (*sensu* Eisenstadt 1986), Buddhism became Asia's premier religious ideology and shaped social and political structures from the bottom up rather than through political hegemony. As it moved across the Asian continent, Buddhism evolved into different forms to accommodate local cultures, and today remains dominant in much of East and Southeast Asia. That Buddhism traveled along commercial maritime and terrestrial routes but operated independently of the mercantile system suggests an intriguing kind of mutualism.

Several of the volume's chapters focus on the archaeological record for selected empires that arose across Asia by the first millennium A.D. East and South Asian imperial case studies described in this volume were large states containing diverse

ethnic compositions that were forged through conquest and coercion (following Sinopoli's [2001] definition), but they varied greatly in their duration and their territorial scope. Carla Sinopoli's chapter focuses on archaeological evidence for several early historic period South Asian empires: their expansion, consolidation, and collapse. She has selected case studies that linked South Asia to neighboring polities in all directions: the Achaemenid and Seleucid empires, the Mauryan empire (which stimulated the spread of Buddhism eastward), the Kushana empire (with roots in Central Asia), and the Satavahana empire (of peninsular India). These varied in the degree of imperial control that penetrated local political, economic, and social structures. The Kushana imperial hegemony she describes, for example, bears some parallels to the Han example of Sinicization that Allard (this volume) documents. Combining settlement pattern data and other lines of archaeological evidence with documentary data provides a useful chronicle of the changing landscape of imperial politics and administration, economy, and military organization.

Concluding Thoughts

This volume's range of topics, geographic scale, and time depth vary greatly, yet some methodological and theoretical issues surface in multiple case studies. The first concerns the interdependency of texts (from oracle bones, royal annals, literary sources, and religious texts to monumental inscriptions) and archaeological remains. That archaeologists must critically engage the documentary record has been emphasized in calls for "source-side criticism" (see also Feinman 1997; Stahl 1993; Wylie 1985). Case studies throughout Asia also highlight this need to avoid privileging documentary sources over other kinds of data, to evaluate the authenticity of sources and the social contexts in which they were written (Sinopoli, this volume; Stark and Allen 1998) but also to understand their contexts of recovery (Morrison and Lycett 1997). Writing in ancient states, as David Keightley (this volume) points out, was not always intended to produce documentary records. Such issues become important in this volume's chapters on the Qin dynasty (Shelach and Pines), on the expansionist Han empire (Allard), and on a plethora of South Asian examples (Sinopoli).

Many chapters in this volume also challenge the sharp division between East and West imposed largely by a 19th- and 20th-century Western intellectual tradition. Asia's variability in ancient sociopolitical trajectories, for example, eludes the application of more conventional models of emergent political complexity that use as their baseline examples from the New World or the Near East (Underhill and Habu, this volume). It also resists the conventional dichotomization between despotic Asian states and democratic Western civilizations (Shelach and Pines, this volume).

This volume was entitled "An Archaeology of Asia" to indicate its necessary incompleteness: a single book cannot hope to capture the entire spectrum of theoretical approaches that characterize Asian archaeology today. The keyword in understanding Asia's archaeology is diversity: in climate, geography, language, genetics, and the variety of social formations which emerged, collapsed, and regen-

erated in the last three millennia. This vast array of developments across Asia rippled out in all directions to neighboring regions to affect their respective histories. This volume's chapters seek to illustrate some ways that, at different points in the prehistoric past, the region's diversity was counterbalanced by unifying threads – economic, social, ideological – that linked linguistically distinct populations, and moved their goods and political systems across terrestrial and maritime landscapes. Studying these threads in the archaeological past creates a distinctive cultural mosaic that we know today as Asia, and enriches our understanding of developments across the Old World during the last 12,000 years.

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