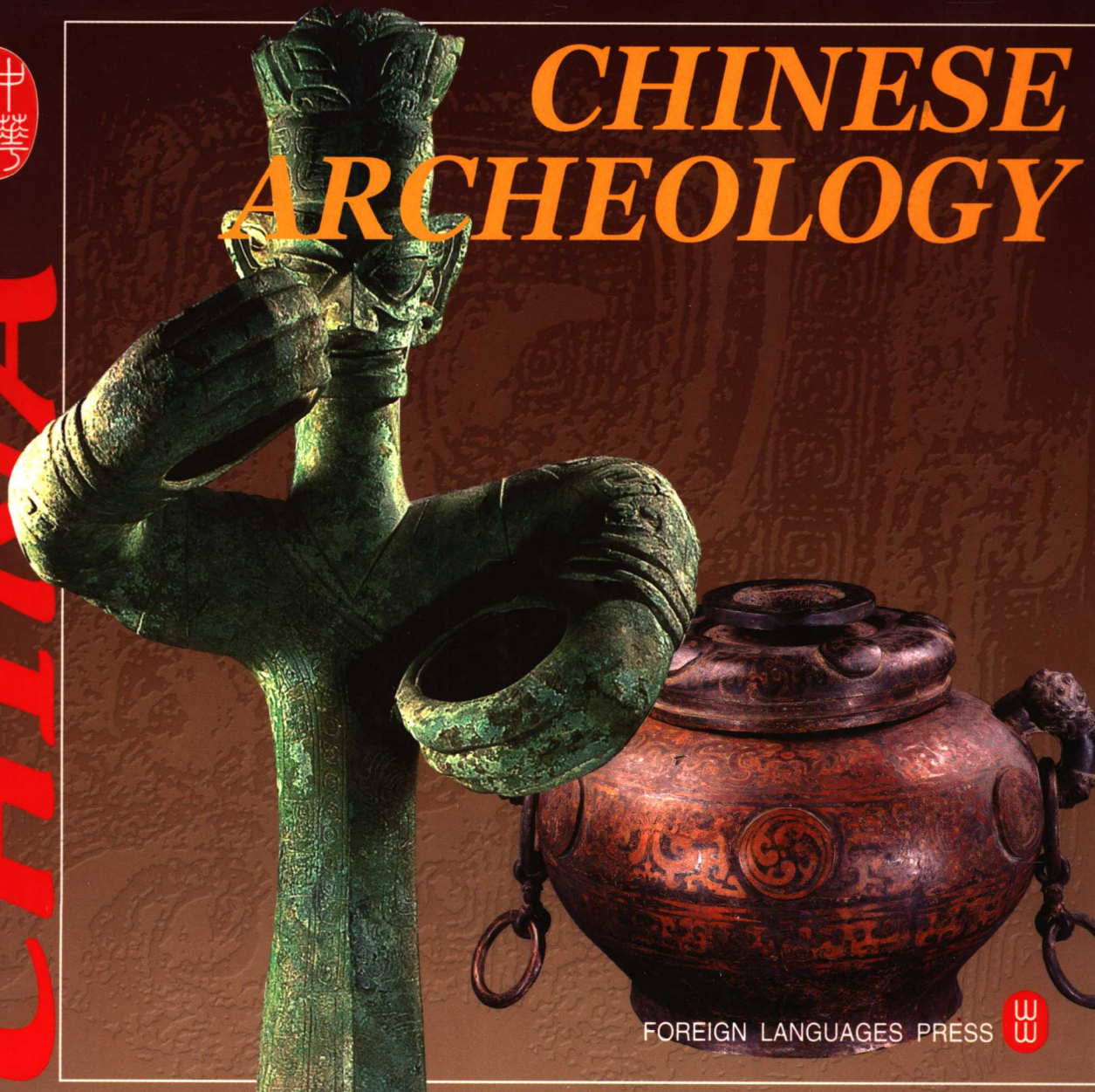




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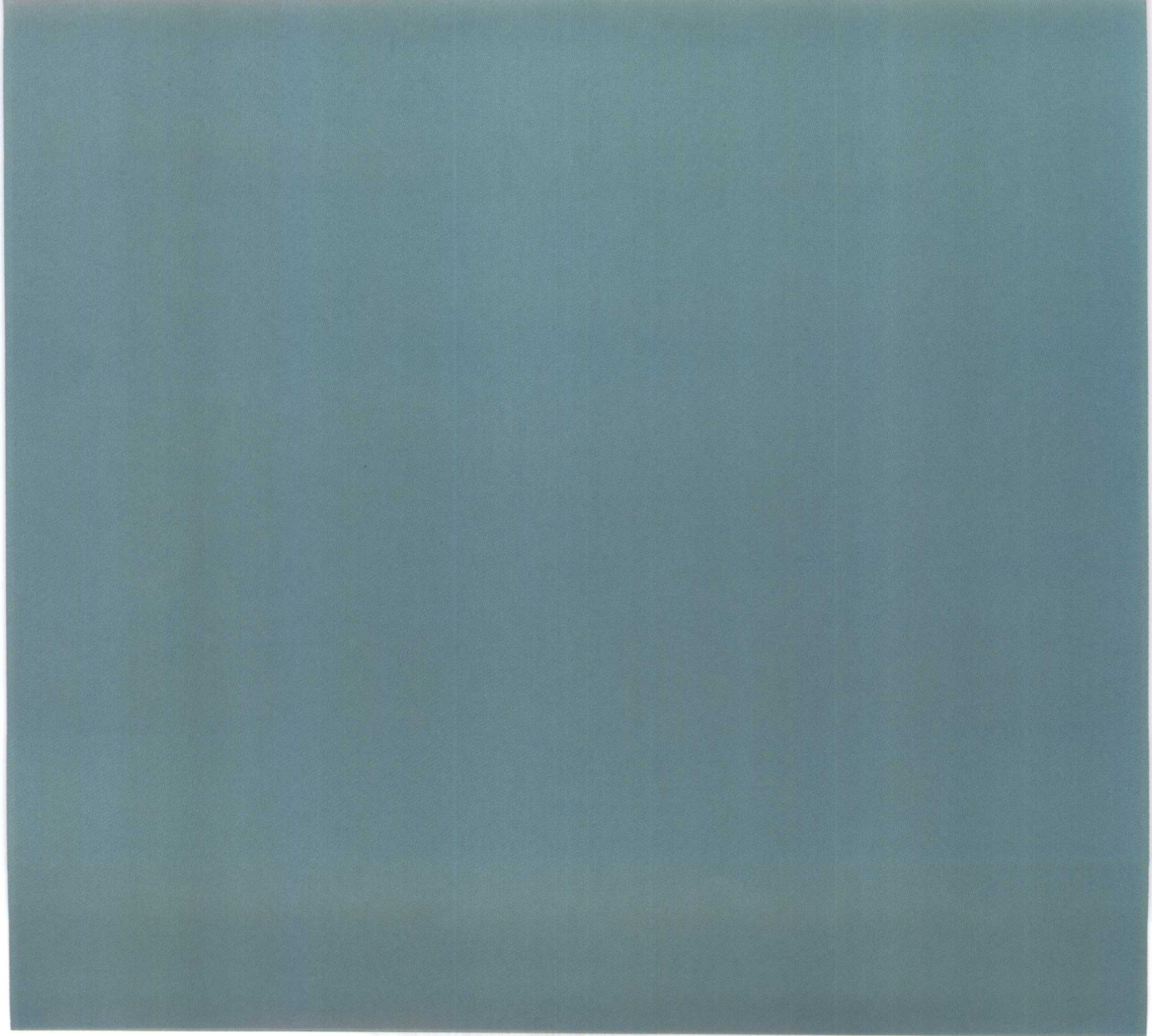
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# *Chinese Archeology*





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# Preface

Yang Yang     Director of Overseas Exhibitions Department of the National Museum of Chinese History

China is one of the world's ancient civilizations. Its continuous 5,000-year history and traditional culture have enabled it to exert a significant influence on the development of world civilization. China is a great country with abundant cultural-historical resources. Its vast accumulation of ancient literature, together with successive archeological discoveries, have given her a high place in the treasure-house of the world's cultural heritage.

To gain a complete and accurate knowledge of ancient history, man must possess reliable historical data, as well as a correct viewpoint of history. Historical data consists of written records and tangible materials. The former are passed down from generation to generation while the latter are obtained mostly through archeological discoveries. As is well known, written records are unavoidably subjective. Therefore, tangible materials obtained by archeological means – not subjective like written materials – are much more credible. They not only can correct historical mistakes passed down in written data, thus helping to restore the original picture of ancient society more accurately and completely, but also can independently answer the historical questions

that written accounts cannot, revealing the truths and laws of history's development. For example, when and where were the ancestors of the Chinese nation born? When and where did Chinese civilization take shape? Such major questions of the pre-historical periods are being discussed among Chinese archeologists.

Archeological discoveries have shown that human reproduction started on the vast Chinese land as early as one million years ago. From early humans' remains, one cannot only find the different links in human evolution, but also the physical features characteristic of the Mongoloid race. From the articles and goods they have left, one can not only see the inheritance of the skills of making stone implements and artifacts in the entire Stone Age, but also see that the jade cutting skills of later generations have been passed down from those remote years. All this demonstrates that those early residents of the Chinese land were the ancestors of the Chinese nation.

True history goes back to ten thousand years ago. Primitive farming was invented, causing a revolution in food production, otherwise called "agricultural revolution." At the same time, domestication, permanent settlement, and handicrafts emerged. The division of labor gave rise to barter and then to social disintegration. The civilization that began over ten thousand years ago marked a decisive step that our forefathers made toward civilized society.



When history was about to step over the threshold of five thousand years, a higher level of social organization that took root in but eventually superseded the clans and tribes appeared as a result of violent social upheavals. An embryonic form of the state was born. The state is the highest generalization of civilized society. It signified the dawn of civilization in China.

People used to call the Yellow River the “mother river,” believing that it was the cradle of Chinese civilization. However, archeological discoveries have shown that the first glimmer in the dawn of the Chinese civilization known to us emerged in the West Liaohe River basin, with the stone sacrificial altar, goddess temple, and stone mound of the Hongshan culture as its symbols. They were matched in achievement by the earth-tomb pyramid and large numbers of jade sacrificial vessels of the Liangzhu culture on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. The economic, cultural, and social development of the time in the Central Plain was not at all at the forefront of the Chinese nation. However, in the long process of historical development, the Central Plain admitted the numerous elements of civilization of its surrounding regions, turning itself into a great crucible



that played the most important role in the formation of Chinese civilization. As a result, it was four thousand years ago that the Middle Kingdom based in the Central Plain, namely, the Xia (c. 21st-17th century B.C.), Shang (c. 17th-11th century B.C.), and Zhou (c. 11th century-256 B.C.) dynasties, were established one after another. They created the brilliant bronze culture. Based on those ancient examples, cultural exchange relentlessly pushed forward the development of civilization. The integration and reintegration of the different cultures – this was the basic formation of Chinese civilization and the origin of the multi-cultural Chinese people.

This is the conclusive answer to the above historical questions, drawn from archeological study.

Chinese archeology is an important segment of world archeology. It has experienced stages of development roughly similar to world archeology, namely, from relic archeology centering on the study of ancient artifacts, to modern archeology based on field archeology, and finally to contemporary archeology with the complete restoration of the history of the ancient human society as its objective.

The study of ancient utensils appeared very early in China. It began to take shape in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) about one thousand





years ago. It was mostly epigraphy, or the study of inscriptions on ancient bronzes and stone tablets by later generations. Although there were many kinds of ancient objects for study, it mainly concentrated on bronzes with inscriptions from the Shang and Zhou bronzes and those from the Qin and Han stone tablets with the aim of correcting historical records or filling in missing written records.

It is generally accepted that modern Chinese archeology began with the unearthing of the ruins of Yangshao Village in Mianchi County, Henan Province in 1921, more than half a century behind Europe. The geological survey institute of that time was not only responsible for surveying and unearthing a large number of ruins of the Neolithic Age in Yangshao Village, but also organized, from 1927 onward, the unearthing of the Zhoukoudian cave in Beijing from the Paleolithic Age, and discovered abundant fossils of Peking Man, a large number of stone artifacts and animal fossils, and traces of long-term fire use. It became a major event of the time in the archeological study of the Paleolithic Age in the world.

An archeological section headed by Li Ji was set up in the History and Language Institute of the then Academia Sinica in 1928. It immediately organized the unearthing of the Yin Ruins to the north of Anyang City in Henan. The survey lasted ten years. The scale of the work and its achievements were rarely seen even in the history of world archeology. During the excavation, the section found the capital city of the late Shang Dynasty and a complete royal tomb area, and obtained large numbers of objects and written data inscribed on oracle bones, lifting the study of Chinese ancient history to a new stage. At the same time, many ruins of the Neolithic Age were surveyed and excavated, and the relative chronology of the Yangshao, Longshan, and Yin cultures were established. This not only laid the initial basis for the archeological years in the Central Plain, but also was an important clue for the source of the Yin culture. What was even more important, a generation of archeologists came of age through tests in the work. A number of effective field archeological methods and a management system were formed through the excavations, producing a far-reaching influence on the later development of Chinese archeology.

In the more than half a century following the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially since the initiation of the policy of reform and opening to the outside world, Chinese archeology has developed on an unprecedented scale and made great achievements that have attracted world attention. Chinese archeology has entered a golden age. Important findings have been made in the study of early humans and cultures on the Chinese territory. According to incomplete statistics,



Chinese archeologists have discovered more than 60 sites with ancient human fossils, nearly 1,000 ruins and sites of the Paleolithic culture of different periods, and more than 100,000 stone implements. They are widely distributed in the southern and northern parts of China, and even in the frontier areas of Tibet.

The establishment of the pre-historical archeological cultures and chronology laid a solid foundation for the study of the origin of Chinese civilization and the formation of the state. There are about 7,000-8,000 Neolithic ruins in China, and hundreds of them have already been excavated. The unearthed relics, which have been sorted scientifically and radiocarbon dated, have provided relatively precise chronologies for the Neolithic cultures discovered in different places, thus establishing the archeological sequence of the Neolithic Age in China. It has created very favorable conditions for understanding the multiple genealogical structures of pre-historical cultures in China, for studying the interrelations of the pre-historical cultures and their development, and for further probing into the origin of Chinese civilization. The archeological practices and the theory of archeological culture zones, systems, and types advanced by Su Bingqi have greatly deepened the archeological study of the Neolithic Age in China. The great achievements in archeological study have fully shown that the emergence of the national culture and civilization came out of local cultures.



Study of the history and cultures of the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties in conjunction with ancient historical literature and records has been one of the major academic topics of Chinese archeology. An early city and the Erligang ruins of the Shang Dynasty were discovered in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, in the early 1950s, then another Shang city at Yanshi in the same province in the early 1980s. Again in the 1990s, a Shang city was discovered at Xiaoshuangqiao in Zhengzhou and identified as the site of the early-Shang capital. The study of the Xia culture was initiated on the basis of the study of the Shang and early-Shang cultures. From their studies of the early-Shang culture, archeologists now believe that the Erlitou culture was part of the Xia, not the Shang. The large palace foundation discovered in the Erlitou ruins showed that it was the site of the Xia capital. The new achievements in the study of the Xia culture marked a major breakthrough in Chinese archeology and historiography. The most important achievements in the archeological study of the Zhou Dynasty were: first, the excavation of the Feng and Gao ruins of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 B.C.) with the discovery of large numbers of tomb burials and architectural sites from the Western Zhou; and second, the excavation of the Zhouyuan ruins at Qishan, Shaanxi Province, with the discovery of buildings at Fengchu Village and oracle inscriptions of the Western Zhou Dynasty. These provided important new data for the study of the palace dwelling system of the Western Zhou. Apart from



the important archeological discoveries in the Central Plain, the major archeological discoveries of the Sanxindui sacrificial pit in Guanghan, Sichuan Province, and the Dayangzhou Shang tomb in Xingan, Jiangxi Province, both belonging to the Xia-Shang-Zhou period, yet different in character from the Xia-Shang-Zhou culture, have also attracted attention worldwide.

The many major archeological discoveries dating back to the Qin (221-206 B.C.) and Han (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) dynasties and subsequent periods have greatly widened our field of vision and knowledge of ancient Chinese history. The terracotta warriors and bronze horses and chariots at the Qinshihuang Mausoleum, called the eighth wonder of the world, amazed the world with their magnificence and fine craftsmanship. The study of imperial tombs of past dynasties has always been an important field of Chinese

archeology. Around 200,000 tombs of different types in different dynasties have been surveyed or excavated by archeologists so far. The archeological study of the capital cities of the past dynasties has also aroused close attention. Some of them have been methodically surveyed or excavated. Great achievements have been made in the survey or excavation of: the three major capital cities of Xianyang, Chang'an, and Luoyang in the Qin and Han dynasties; the city of Yecheng of the Wei Kingdom (220-265); the city of Luoyang of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534); the city of southern Yecheng of the Northern Qi Dynasty (550-577); the two capital city sites of Chang'an and Luoyang and the city site of Yangzhou of the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties; the city of Bianliang of the Northern Song Dynasty; the city of Lin'an of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279); the capital Zhongjing of the Liao Dynasty (907-1125); the capital Zhongdu of the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234); and the capital Dadu of the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368). Moreover, many important discoveries have been made in regions inhabited by ethnic minorities and in frontier areas.

The study of religious historical ruins and objects is of great importance in probing the evolution of ancient history and culture. Past study of Buddhist ruins and relics was usually from the perspective of art history. In and after the 1950s, Su Bai and other archeologists began to examine cave temples and Buddhist ruins from an archeological perspective. By using archeological methods, they studied and revealed the historical changes of the Buddhist ruins in conjunction with the historical literature, and produced internationally recognized scholarship.

Inscribed bamboo slips have been discovered from time to time in Chinese





history. For example, bamboo slips of the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) inscribed with ancient scripts found in the walls of Confucius' house during the reign of Emperor Wudi (r. 140-87 B.C.) of the Han Dynasty and the "Ji tomb script" found in Ji Prefecture (now Jixian County in Henan) in the second year (281 A.D.) of the Taikang reign period of the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) helped promote the study of the Confucian classics and ancient Chinese history. In the past 50 years, the number of bamboo slips unearthed, the scale and scientific character of the excavations, and the level of study, have all far surpassed those in previous times. Just like the discoveries of the oracle bone inscriptions and the scrolls of Buddhist scriptures in the caves at Dunhuang, discoveries of bamboo slips have greatly broadened the research area of ancient Chinese history. The slips present new data for enriched historical study.

As mentioned above, China is a great country with abundant cultural-historical resources. This has two implications: first, China's archeological ruins are abundant and varied. There are numerous questions that need to be studied. Some of them are important topics related to the historical development of mankind, for example, the origin and early development of man, the origin of agriculture and its impact on human society, and the origin of Chinese civilization and its contribution to world civilization. All these are research topics for Chinese archeology, but are also important topics in the world. China must be looked at from the elevation of world history. Chinese archeology should play its own role on the greater world archeological stage in conjunction with international archeologists. Only in this way can China live up to its role as a great culture. Secondly, the cultural-historical resources, especially the archeological resources abounding underground, are a valuable cultural legacy left by our ancestors, which cannot be regenerated. It is true that the endless archeological discoveries are exciting, but judging from the majority of excavation briefings and reports, these discoveries are limited to the modern archeology based on field work rather than extracting all the historical information left behind by ancient society from unearthed archeological ruins. We should hold ourselves responsible to our descendants by earnestly protecting and making rational use of our limited cultural-historical resources so that Chinese archeology will truly become scientific, with the aim of completely restoring the history of ancient human society.



## The sacrificial altar, goddess temple, and rock graves of the Hongshan culture in Liaoning

The Hongshan culture was discovered at Hongshan, Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia in the 1930s. Its central area is located in the basin of the Laoha and Daling rivers. It was a Neolithic culture in the north with farming, livestock breeding, and hunting as its modes of production about 5,000 to 6,000 years ago.

Ruins of a goddess temple, sacrificial altar, and rock graves of the Hongshan culture were found at Niuheliang in the basin of the Daling River in 1981. They were located in Nulu'erhu Mountain, extending 10 km from west to east and five km from north to south. There were 16 sites arranged according to the elevation of the mountain slopes. This was the first Chinese discovery of such ruins from the Neolithic Age. The goddess temple was located at the top of the mountain ridge. It was a subterra-

nean building in the shape of the Chinese character “亞” over a flat area of 75 sq m. Fragments of six individual terracotta figures of the goddess were excavated. One of them was three times the size of a real person and the others were the size of real humans.

The sacrificial altar and rock graves at the second location were unearthed on a slope southwest of the temple, facing the temple in the distance. There were five square rock graves and a round sacrificial altar, 160 m long and 50 m wide. They were all built of rock and were surrounded by rock enclosures. In the center of one grave was the large No. 1 tomb. Buried inside were jade ornaments with hooked cloud patterns, jade bands, a jade dragon with a pig head, a jade ring, and a jade object with two animal heads and three holes.

### Painted ceramic pot

It is 41 cm high and has a diameter of 12.6 cm. A red clay vessel for holding water, it was discovered in the No. 5 tomb at Niuheliang, Jianping County, Liaoning in 1992. It has a lid in the shape of an inverted bowl. It is painted all over with black cirrus patterns. It is now kept in the Liaoning Provincial archeological Institute.







#### ◀ Ruins of the goddess temple

The goddess temple is located on the top of the mountain ridge. It is a subterranean, planar earth-wood structure in the shape of the Chinese character “亞.” The main part is 25 m long from north to south, and ranging from 2 to 9 m wide from west to east. Fragments of the terracotta figure of the goddess, terracotta dragon head, bird's claws, and color wall paintings have been found.

#### Jade articles unearthed from the No. 4 tomb of the No. 1 burial ground at the second location at Niuheiliang

The No. 4 tomb is a stone coffin, and burial jade articles were found on the chest and abdomen and the back of the head of the corpse.

