

Preface

This book draws on many sources of inspiration and has gone through quite a long gestation period starting about 10 years ago. When studying at Peking University in 2006–2007, I encountered for the first time the wide variety of prehistoric grave forms and burial customs characterizing the Liangshan Region. Intrigued by this diversity, I decided to focus on this area for my dissertation research, integrating grave remains, settlement material, object deposits, and single finds to understand this generally overlooked place on the eastern rim of the Tibetan Plateau.

The major problem that I had to address was how to analyze this heterogeneous body of data and tell its story. During my search for a suitable approach, two sources of inspiration came to be particularly important: Dwight W. Read's work on classification and statistics in archaeology; and a class on life history analysis for lithic technology with P. Jeff Brantingham. When taking Jeff Brantingham's class, my main focus of research was on graves and not lithics, so why not apply the life history approach to graves for a change? This was how my idea of "graves as composite objects" was born. Prior to taking Dwight Read's classes on classification and statistics, I had thought the material from the Liangshan Region to be too diverse and limited in number of objects and sites to allow for any meaningful statistical analysis. Thinking further about issues of classification, it soon became clear to me that in combination with a life histories/*chaîne opératoire* approach, statistical analyses of well-defined subsections of the material at hand could go far in understanding even this rather problematic body of evidence from Southwest China. Additionally, when searching for a potential connection between the large variability of the local archaeological material and its multifaceted environment, I turned to geospatial analysis as well as ethnographic accounts from high-altitude marginal environments.

Combining these different strands of inquiry, my research on "Cultural Geography and Interregional Contacts in Prehistoric Liangshan (Southwest China)" laid the foundation for a number of separate projects, one of them being the analysis of the burial material from the Liangshan Region and the development of a scheme of analysis fitting for such a varied body of data. The results of this project are described in this volume. Having grown from one aspect of my dissertation, this monograph

combines two aims: to provide an analysis of the understudied burial record of the Liangshan Region and to propose and test a scheme of burial analysis that allows for integrating complex and unevenly preserved and/or reported data sets.

Such a project would never have been possible without the support of a considerable number of people. First and foremost, I would like to thank Lothar von Falkenhausen and Sun Hua 孫華 who—one in the USA, the other in China—have accompanied my first steps on the ground of Chinese archaeology, have taught and supported me throughout my studies and beyond, and have opened doors for me so that I could gain access to original material, meet excavators, and become involved in local fieldwork myself.

For the formation of my methodological framework, Dwight Read, Jeff Brantingham, and John Papadopoulos have been particularly inspirational and I am very thankful for their readiness to discuss my ideas at various points during my research. During the initial phase of designing my database, discussions with Willeke Wendrich were particularly important, and I am very grateful for her insistence on a solid bridging argument between theory and material that pushed me to develop my approach further.

My research would never have been possible without the support of numerous people in China, especially during my year of field research in 2010–2011 and during a number of summer visits when I re-examined old material, collected information on new finds, and acquired relevant publications. At my home base in Chengdu, Jiang Zhanghua 江張華 from the Archaeological Institute of Chengdu 成都文物考古研究所 has been exceedingly helpful, granting me access to material, introducing me to archaeologists in various parts of Southwest China, and advising me in practical matters concerning life and research in Sichuan. Discussions with him have greatly helped me in making sense of the complex archaeological record of Southwest China, and he and his family have made me feel welcome and at home in Chengdu. Li Yongxian 李永憲, Lü Yongliang 呂宏亮, and Zhao Deyun 趙德云 from Sichuan University 四川大學 have been very helpful and welcoming as well, sharing their thoughts and publications freely and allowing me access to their library and collections. Many other people at both institutions and at the Archaeological Institute of Sichuan Province 四川省文物考古研究院 have been of great help during my various research trips to China as well.

In the Liangshan Region itself, I am greatly indebted to Liu Hong 劉弘, former head of the Liangshan Museum 涼山彝族自治州博物館, who welcomed me to Xichang, granted me access to all of their finds, and arranged for me to be taken to a considerable number of local sites. I am very grateful to the other members of our excursion team as well, especially Song Ge 松哥 (Huang Yunsong 黃云松), our skillful and always cheerful driver, and Wang Nan 王楠, with her great knowledge of the local landscape and wonderful singing voice. In Huili, Tang Xiang 唐翔, the head of the Cultural Bureau of Huili 會理縣文管所, allowed me to investigate in detail the burial goods and excavation records from the cemetery of Fenjiwan 糞箕灣, and I am greatly indebted to him for this wonderful opportunity. In Yunnan, Liu Xu 劉旭 and Min Rui 閔銳 from the Archaeological Institute Yunnan 雲南省文物考古研究院 showed me some of their material and connected me with local

researchers in northern Yunnan, allowing me to include much firsthand material from this region into my research as well.

The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA provided a very nurturing atmosphere during my studies and dissertation research from 2007 to 2013, and both the Institute and UCLA as a whole supported me greatly in many ways—institutionally, inspirationally, and financially. The Studienstiftung likewise has provided both material and ideational support throughout all my studies. On the intellectual and personal level, many teachers, friends, and peers have been greatly supportive, especially everyone at the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology as well as many other scholars working in China. In terms of laying the foundations for my concept of burial analysis, discussions with Chen Pochan were particularly inspiring, as were his enthusiasm and great kindness that is missed by all who had the privilege to know him. I am also greatly indebted to Lin Kuei-chen with her quiet kindness and support during our studies at UCLA and our fieldwork in Sichuan. Her love for mathematics, the hard sciences, and ceramics has had an inspirational effect on me, and I am thankful that she opened my eyes to these complex worlds.

For writing the present volume, my postdoctoral time at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München has been particularly productive. While at Hebrew University in 2013–2014, my postdoctoral advisor Gideon Shelach gave me great freedom to pursue my work as I choose but was still there to discuss questions of research when the need arose. Discussions with various people at Hebrew University greatly helped me to gain a wider perspective whenever I was stuck in matters of detail. I am especially grateful to Yuri Pines who accompanied my stumbling readings of bamboo-slip texts; to Leore Grossmann who welcomed me generously into her lab community; to my lab mates who opened my eyes to various areas of archaeological research and life in Israel; to Michal Biran and her team of Mongolia specialists who introduced me to yet another area of research; and to the financial staff of Hebrew University who was very supportive and helpful with my constant travels to sites, libraries, and conferences.

In Munich where I spent a little over a year from 2014 to 2015, the Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) was a very inspirational place for interdisciplinary discussions and a source of uncomplicated support for various types of endeavors. These include research trips to China to gather further material for this volume, participation in conferences to present my ideas and receive constructive feedback, and a lecture series on questions of culture contact that I organized at the University of Munich with the help of my colleague Catrin Kost and support from the Graduate School Distant Worlds. I would like to thank Susanne Schaffratt and her team at CAS for their help throughout all of these activities and I am very grateful to the CAS as a whole for its generous financial support. I am especially indebted to Thomas O. Höllmann and Hans van Ess from the Institut für Sinologie who made my research there possible by matching the funding for my position at the CAS from funds of their own and welcoming me into their institute. Venturing from Chinese Studies into the Institute of Archaeology, Carola Metzner-Nebelsick let me be part of her Graduate and Postgraduate Colloquium that became my second home during my time in Munich. I am very grateful for her warm welcome and great

interest in connecting research and researchers throughout Eurasia. Discussions at her colloquium as well as at the colloquium in Chinese Studies helped me rethink and sharpen my arguments expressed in the present monograph, and my colleagues at both institutes made me feel more at home in Munich.

A number of people have been extremely helpful in reading and commenting on my manuscript in various stages of writing. Lothar von Falkenhausen's suggestions on its structure and his comments on the outline and the first draft have been of great help. During the process of writing, Emily Cole's help has been indispensable for sharpening my line of argument and rendering the prose readable. I want to thank her for reading and rereading large parts of the present book, commenting on it in great detail, and discussing questions of content and structure. I am greatly indebted to Bryan Miller for his valuable comments and edits on all chapters and appendices, as well as for his help with literature on Mongolia and northern China. I would also like to thank my editor, Hana Nagdimov, for her patience and her support throughout the long process from book proposal to publication. Likewise, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who commented on my book proposal and sample chapters and helped me greatly in improving them.

My family and friends in Europe, China, and the United States have helped me to preserve my good spirits during the writing process and the many rounds of editing and rewriting in between job searches, teaching, and administrative duties as well as several intercontinental moves. None of this would have been possible without the help of my husband, Lawrence Kao, who patiently accompanied me on the near-nomadic life of a young academic between temporary jobs, field work, and conferences in various parts of the world. He has taken care of many of the practical aspects of our various moves and daily life so that I could concentrate on writing and still keep my sanity during the whole process.

Oxford, United Kingdom

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The Burial Record of Prehistoric Liangshan in Southwest
China

Graves as Composite Objects

Hein, A.

2017, XV, 534 p. 161 illus., 58 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-42383-8