

Summary of the “International Symposium on the Origin of Ancient Chinese Civilization and Its Early Development”

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In when, where, what environments and on what background was the ancient Chinese civilization evolved? How was it developed? Moreover, what are its characteristic features? These problems are all of priority academic value. Since 1980s, Chinese scholars have gained much knowledge about the feature of the ancient Chinese civilization and its developmental process, and also discovered a batch of crucial sites dated 4000–5000 BP, which are very significant to the research into the origin of the ancient Chinese civilization. In the meantime, the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project has obtained phasic achievement, which lay foundation for further studying the origin issue.

Therefore, the Research Center of Ancient Civilizations, CASS, held the “International Symposium on the Origin of the Ancient Chinese Civilization and Its Early Development” in Beijing from August 1st to 3rd, 2001 in Beijing.

The attendants discussed mainly on the following subjects. The first is the theories of the origin of civilization and its related concepts. The debate is concentrated on the concepts like civilization, civilized, civilized society and state as well as class, stratification, chiefdom and monarchical power, and brings about two views. One view emphasizes theory is the top priority and the different understanding to the same concepts would lead to the different standards on the civilization and its origin. The other view maintains that the research should not only start from the theory and concepts, but should pay more attention to the archaeological sites. The second is the features of ancient Chinese civilization and its developmental pattern. Although there are several opinions on this subject, the attendants greatly approved that the Longshan culture has played an important role in the origin of ancient Chinese civi-

lization and its development process. Besides, based on already obtained archaeological data discovered in the Yellow River valley, Yangtze River valley and other regions in China, the attendants believe that the formation process of civilization is various in different regions. The third is about the standards of civilization. Along with development of the science, the standards on how to judge civilization are more positive. In various standards, the city, metallurgy, writing, ritual ceremony and religion as well as agriculture are the most important. The fourth is how to judge the degree of civilization represented by archaeological remains. Settlement archaeology is the primary approach. Furthermore, the attendants also believe it is useful to establish temporal-spatial framework of prehistoric archaeology, to cognitive prehistoric civilization based on the known Shang civilization, and to evaluate archaeological material which could useful to the origin. Besides, they also regard that the comparative study between ancient Chinese civilizations to other world civilizations would useful. To present, it is limited to take archaeological information to prove the emergence of state and the evolution of ideology.

After the discussion, they commonly understand that it is necessary to strengthen co-operation of archaeology with other disciplines, including natural sciences, history and foreign history in the future. The macro sites and large scaled graveyards are our research priority and trend. Besides, we should establish a theory, which could solve the problems such as what Chinese civilization is and what its characteristic features are. Due to scientificity is one of trends in the development of archaeology, we should pay more attention on how to choose research subject scientifically, and lay a good foundation for further comprehensive study.