ANNUAL REPORT: CHINA YANGGUANZHAI 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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Yangguanzhai students wash pottery and roof tiles in the lab station

The 2017 YGZ field season began in Xi'an at Northwest University (NWU), with a series of lectures pertaining to the history of Chinese archaeology, the material culture of the Neolithic period in the Wei River Valley, the site structure of Neolithic sites in the area, archaeological method and theory, environmental archaeology, and human osteology. Lectures were provided by the field school staff, and by Prof. Qian Yaopeng and Prof. Zhang Hongyan of NWU, as well as Wang Weilin of the Shaanxi History Museum. The students had the opportunity in the NWU labs to observe reconstructed pottery vessels from the relevant time periods. We also visited the NWU campus archaeology museum and the Shaanxi History Museum for overviews of the material culture of the province, and the Banpo Village Museum to observe an excavated Neolithic village site. The students also took optional outings to the Muslim Quarter, the Great Mosque, and the ancient city wall of Xi'an. We were also able to visit the Shaanxi Institute of Archaeology Jingwei Field Station, where recently excavated material is stored.

Excavation this season returned to the northeast corner of the site, where most past field seasons have worked. Our research questions focused on further exploring this part of the site's residential area, and working to understand the use history of the large pits founds throughout the site and the structure of the Neolithic dwellings. Students were divided into four groups and excavation proceeded for three weeks.

In the three weeks of excavation, the students discovered six pits, one possible house, one infant burial, and many intrusive historic and modern features, including part of an irrigation canal from the early twentieth century that had been identified in previous seasons. This part of the site appears to have been heavily disturbed by historic and modern activity, and the material and features excavated included a large quantity of roof tile possibly dating to the Ming Dynasty, regular circular drill holes attributed to modern factory construction, and a small quantity of porcelain. Due to the heavily disturbed nature of this part of the site, which has had occupation spanning several millennia, students learned a great deal about formation processes and site taphonomy.

One group excavated a feature that appeared to be a wattle-and-daub house, which had later been used as a midden over several phases. Inside the midden fill was a neonatal infant skeleton, well preserved but with the limbs and cranium severely disturbed. The infant was oriented with the head to the west, which is typical for this period, but it was buried on its site with no ceramic vessel, which is an atypical mortuary treatment. The infant remains were block lifted for future laboratory excavation and analysis. Unfortunately, we did not have time to finish excavating the rest of this feature, and it was temporarily backfilled to be continued in the future. Three flotation samples were also taken from within the possible house feature, to allow future paleoethnobotanical researchers to identify activities that took place in different parts of the feature.

Another group of students continued excavation inside a pit that had been partially excavated by a previous field school season. This group focused their efforts on understanding site formation processes, employing such techniques as measuring the depth of sediment deposited after a rainstorm, and using GIS datasets to estimate deposition and erosion processes in the Wei River Valley.

The students in the other two groups faced the challenge of understanding very complex stratigraphy in their excavation trenches, including modern and historic features that intruded on Neolithic ones, and many features with ambiguous edges. We employed Luoyang spade coring to understand the subsurface stratigraphy and guide the excavation plan, and the students also learned how to draw top plans and profile cross-sections of their trenches to gain a clearer understanding of the relationships between the features. Students participated in geophysical mapping using the technique of Real Time Kinematic (RTK) satellite navigation, which was employed to fix datum points and elevations of each excavation trench in time and space.

On some days, the team went to a storage facility to wash, sort, weigh, and label the pottery we had excavated. Students learned how to distinguish Neolithic and historic pottery, and how to identify the different fabrics, decorations, and vessel types of the Neolithic pottery they had excavated. On one day, we also visited the ongoing excavation of the Yangguanzhai cemetery, where students helped scrape the surface and learned to identify the openings of individual graves by changes in fill color and consistency.

The research findings from this season will be disseminated in publications and conference presentations. Dr. Ye Wa used her time at YGZ this summer to complete an extensive field report on pit feature H85, which was revised and added to by Yang Liping, and is forthcoming in the journal *Kaogu yu wenwu*. This publication will clear the way for the publication, in the United States, of a volume or a dedicated journal issue in English on the work of the field school's past field seasons.