S-17 – Technologies and the formation of early civilization in China: a global perspective

East Asia Commission

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Abstract:
Among the several primary civilizations that had a far-reaching impact of the development of humankind was that of early China. Over the last decades, Chinese archaeology witnessed significant progress on the research of formation and early development of Chinese civilization. Under the framework of a national-based project named “Exploration to the origins of Chinese civilization”, a number of important sites had been scientifically excavated and, more importantly, a series of research concerning technology, economy and complexity of societies have been carried out at an unprecedented level. The proposed symposium aims to provide a platform for an extensive exchange of knowledge and trans-disciplinary discussion, which is expected to examine the interaction between technologies and societies during the early stage of Chinese civilization from a global perspective. Hence it is consistent with the main theme of the congress: “Science, Technology and Medicine between the Global and the Local”.

This period (2500 BC-200 BC) witnessed a great advance of technologies, which had fundamentally affected the social organization and complexity of Chinese early civilizations. Many of these innovations happened via the interaction among various regional cultures of China or under the influence from other parts of Eurasia. Metallurgy is long held as an important element of civilization and its rise in the Central Plain China during the late 3rd millennium and the early 2nd millennium BC is likely to be the result of hybridization between technical knowledge from Eurasia Steppe and local demand on prestige artifacts. The widespread of rice and soybean as well as the introduction of wheat from West Asia significantly increased the diversity of staple crops in the Central Plain and enhanced the resistance of agricultural system to natural calamities. In addition to pig, cattle and sheep became common domestic animals, which did not only provide new sources of protein but also play important roles in ceremonial practices. The archaeological investigation on sites in southwest and east China demonstrated that there was large scale salt manufacturing in this period, providing essential resources to support the rise of early states.

This symposium will showcase the most recent development of the researches concerning the previously mentioned technologies during the period of 2500 BC- 200 BC, so as to shed new lights on how China became the origin of many technologies transferred in Eastern Asia and how Eastern Asia ethnic groups formed this common civilization in the subsequent historical period. It will also provide insights and examples for the issues such as the choice of technology to be learnt in different Chinese subordinate areas, and their following localizations.

Keywords: early technologies – civilization formation – China – global perspective – cultural interaction.
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