

PERSONALIA

“I am a Chinese Archaeologist”: On the 70th Anniversary of Academician Wang Wei

The title quotes lyrics of the outstanding archaeologist of the People's Republic of China, Academician Wang Wei. He composed several songs dedicated to his favorite field of knowledge: “Member of Archaeological Team”, “Yangshao Ray”, and a well-known song “Sanxingdui, Sanxingdui” about one of the most interesting Bronze Age sites in China; Academician Wang Wei participated in the works at the site. The scientist believes that every significant archaeological culture and major archaeological site should have its own “anthem”. And he is doing his best to ensure that the number of established important archaeological sites and cultures will grow.

Wang Wei was born in Changchun into a family of intellectuals on May 4, 1954. His family approved of his interest in music and singing. Wang Wei's youth fell on the period of the Cultural Revolution; therefore, after graduating from high school in January 1970, he, like many other young people at that time, was sent to one of the villages of Nong'an County, Jilin Province, where he worked in a production team until January 1972. Upon returning home, Wang Wei worked first as a metal worker, then as deputy chairman of the trade union committee at the Changchun Boiler Plant; after joining the Communist Party of China in 1974, he served as a deputy secretary of the Party Committee of the Liuyuan People's Commune in Changchun for about a year, in 1977–1978. This is how leadership skills were developed.

In 1978, Wang Wei entered the History Department (majoring in archaeology) of Jilin University, where he specialized under the general guidance of the outstanding archaeologist Prof. Zhang Zhongpei. In 1982, after graduating from university, he was employed by the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing, where he has been working to the present day. At the Institute, Wang Wei made a career starting from junior researcher to director; he headed the institute in 2006–2017. In addition, from 1998 to 2012, Wang Wei was the dean of the Faculty of Archaeology at the Graduate School of the CASS, and from 1999 to 2016, he was the editor-in-chief of the journal *Kaogu* (*Archaeology*). In 2011, he was elected a full member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and since 2018 he has headed the Department of Historical Sciences of the CASS. In 2008, the scientist was elected a deputy chairman, and in 2013, a chairman of the Board of



the Archaeological Society of China. Since 2012, he has been a Chairman of the Expert Council on Archaeology of the National Social Science Fund of China. As a visiting specialist and professor, Wang Wei collaborated with the Peking, Fudan, Nanjing, and Jilin universities; since 2017, he has been heading the Center for the Study of Ancient Civilizations at Henan University (in Zhengzhou); since 2023, he has been an honorary director of the Institute of Ancient Civilizations at Nanjing University.

Academician Wang Wei's major research interests include the Bronze and Early Iron Ages archaeology of China (the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties, according to traditional chronology), the issues of emergence of civilizations and early intercultural contacts in East Asia, as well as the archaeology of Japan in the Early Metal Age and Sino-Japanese cultural relations in antiquity. In

addition, he published several papers addressing the issues of early Chinese jade studies.

In 1982–1987, Wang Wei took part in the excavations of the settlement site and burial ground of Liulihe of the Western Zhou period in the Fangshan District in Beijing, where the Yan Kingdom and its capital were situated. His special field of interest was the study of *che-ma keng* (pits with chariots and horses)—sacrificial structures within the elite tomb complexes).

In 1987–1990, the scientist was sent by the Institute of Archaeology of the CASS to Japan to complete his internship at the Institute of Archaeology in Kashihara, Nara Prefecture, and at the Ibaraki University, where he mastered not only the classic *kambun*, but also the spoken Japanese language. In Japan, Wang Wei participated in the excavations of the mansion of Prince Nagaya-no Okimi in the capital city of Heijō-kyō of the Nara period, the Fujinoki Mound in Nara Prefecture, shell mounds in Chiba Prefecture, and others. In January 1995, he got his doctorate degree in literature (D. Litt.) at Kyushu University for the monograph “A View from China on the Yamatai State and Political Power Among the *Wa* People” published in Japanese in 1993. In this study, on the basis of the analysis of archaeological materials, the researcher traced the process of development of Japanese statehood in 200–500 AD, examined the state origins and prerequisites, its social basis, and, most importantly, made a comparison with the emergence and development of early Chinese states.

In 1995–1996, Wang Wei worked as a visiting researcher at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Waseda University (Tokyo), where he wrote a dissertation entitled “The Distribution of Early Iron Products and the Exchange of Iron Technologies in East Asia” (the dissertation was published as a monograph in Beijing in 1999). This study covered the period from the 4th century BC to the 6th century AD, and presented the analysis of background and historical significance of the emergence and spread of iron processing technologies as the most important factor in the development of civilizations in the East Asian region. Wang Wei defended his dissertation at the Graduate School of the CASS in July 1996 and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Thus, he became the first Chinese archaeologist to hold two academic degrees gained in China and Japan.

In 1996–1998, Wang Wei led excavations of the palace area of the Shang fortified settlement in Yanshi, Henan Province. The excavations revealed one of the earliest representations of such features of traditional Chinese architecture as the central position of palace and the axial layout of city. The remains of palace buildings from the Early Shang period were uncovered at the site; the constructions formed a *siheyuan*-type building characteristic of traditional Chinese architecture (location

of buildings around the courtyard, with the entrances facing the courtyard). The results of excavations in Yanshi were listed among the 10 most important archaeological discoveries in China in 1997 and were awarded the 2nd degree prize of the National Administration of Cultural Heritage for achievements in the archaeological field research. The derived archaeological data were used in the implementation of the nationwide Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project, where Wang Wei supervised the thematic program “Study of the Chronology of the Site and Cemetery of Liulihe of the Western Zhou Period” (1996–2000).

In 2000, the scientist conducted excavations at the site of Zhouyuan, Shaanxi Province, where the remains of large buildings of the Early Zhou period were arranged symmetrically along the north-south axis, probably being the ruins of an ancestral temple. This research project was awarded the 3rd degree prize of the National Administration of Cultural Heritage for achievements in archaeological field research.

In 2003–2004, Wang Wei carried out large-scale excavations at the site of Xiaomintun on the territory of the Yin capital (Yinxu) in Anyang, Henan Province, where dwellings, bronze foundries, and a cemetery of the Late Shang period were found. The study expanded significantly the current knowledge about the culture, economy, and social structure of the Late Shang, and won the 2nd degree prize from the National Administration of Cultural Heritage for success in archaeological field research. Wang Wei became the only Chinese archaeologist to be awarded this prestigious prize three times.

In 2001–2018, Academician Wang Wei led the implementation of the first five stages of the key scientific and technical project “Study of the Origins of Chinese Civilization”, which was included in the program of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the PRC. In addition, he was the leader of several projects of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: “Study of the Influence of Environmental Changes on the Evolution of Human Lifestyle and the Development of Civilization in the Middle and Lower Reaches of the Yellow River” (2000–2004), “Origins and Early Period of Development of ancient Chinese Civilization” (2001–2005), co-head of the Joint Sino-American research project “Study of the Location of Settlements in the Yellow River Basin in the Anyang Region, Henan Province” (1999–2002), the Joint Sino-German project “Comprehensive Study of Bronze Age Cultures in the Northwestern Region of China” (2000–2005), the Joint Sino-Japanese project “Archaeological Research on Intercultural Contacts in East Asia in Prehistory” (2001–2003), as well as the leader and participant in other major Chinese and international research programs. In 2012–2021, he was the leading

expert of the National Social Science Fund project “The Origin of the Mongols and the Imperial Mausoleums of the Yuan Dynasty”; in 2020–2022, he led a group of experts who acted as scientific consultants during the excavations at Sanxingdui (Guanghan County, Sichuan Province).

Wang Wei took part in many joint archaeological research projects in Germany, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Honduras, and other countries. He was elected a corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute (in 2001) and a foreign member of the Society for American Archaeology (in 2006). Wang Wei participated in scientific events in Russia and Siberia, made a presentation at the international conference “Terra Scythica” in 2011; he was a co-organizer and participant in the international symposium “Multidisciplinary Methods in Archaeology: The Recent Achievements and Prospects” in 2015; he joined the editorial boards of the journal “Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology of Eurasia” and the oriental studies issues of “Vestnik NSU. Series: History, Philology”.

Wang Wei was elected to the 12th (2013–2018) and 13th (2018–2023) National People’s Congress (NPC).

He was a member of the Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee at the 13th National People’s Congress.

Academician Wang Wei has published over 100 major scientific papers and two monographs. He was also one of the authors and editors of two volumes of the fundamental summarizing work “The Archaeology of China” — “The Age of Xia and Shang” (2003), and “The Period of Two Dynasties” (2004), these books were awarded the Guo Moruo Prize of the 1st degree.

In recent years, Wang Wei quitted some administrative duties and passed his responsibilities onto his students and associates; he focused on scientific and popularization activities. He prepares monographs and creates large television programs and documentaries that attract attention of tens of millions of his compatriots to archaeology. Wang Wei’s creative activities are on the rise, same as the Chinese archaeology as a whole. Let us wish Academician Wang Wei new scientific discoveries and new songs of course!

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