

PART **I**

Current Issues in Chinese Archaeology

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CHAPTER

I

Introduction: Investigating the Development and Nature of Complex Societies in Ancient China

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There are two main goals of this book. One goal is to reveal the diverse methodological and theoretical approaches to understanding prehistoric and early historic era societies that characterize current research efforts in Chinese archaeology. The authors discuss geographical areas that later became part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) (Figure 1.1). They are major scholars in the field of Chinese archaeology from diverse areas of the globe, including members of collaborative Sino-foreign research teams. The important contributions of some of the authors from mainland China are published in English for the first time. Chinese archaeology is a thriving field with scholars continuing to develop diverse methods of fieldwork and interpretation. The chapters demonstrate a variety of thoughtful approaches to investigating the past. No single theoretical or methodological approach characterizes current research about ancient China.

The second major goal is to provide English readers with new data about ancient China that are significant for understanding regional variation in social, economic, and political organization over time. The chapters offer diverse interpretations about the organization of individual settlements and regions, involving a range from small-scale, sedentary societies, to polities including several settlements. I believe that the

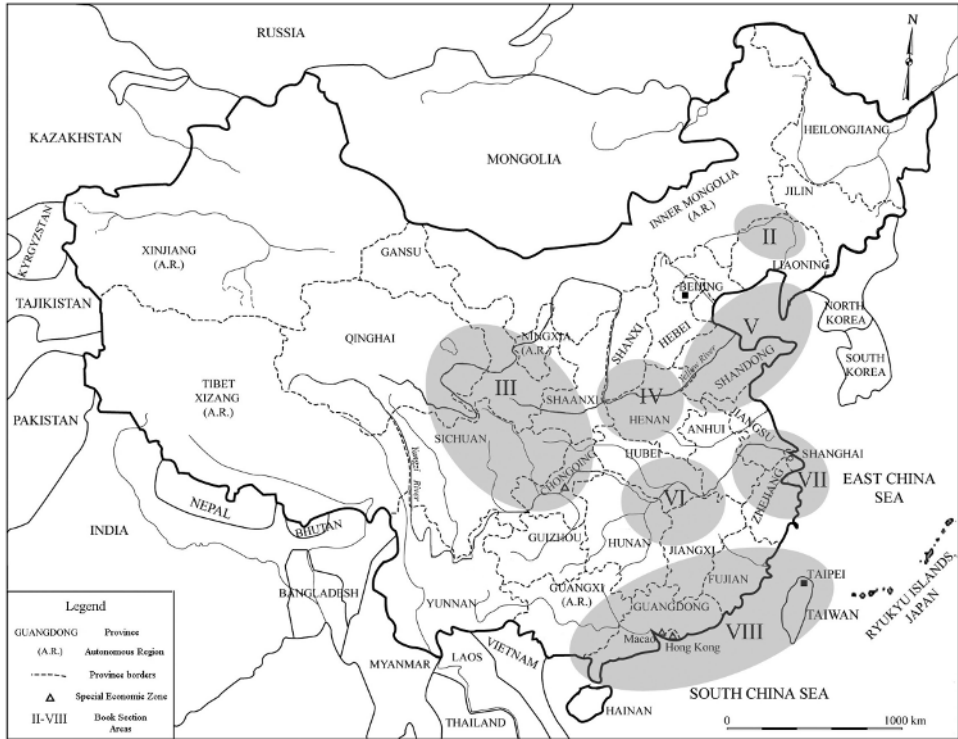


Figure 1.1 Modern political areas and geographic areas (shaded) referred to in consecutive sections of this book. (Figure by Pauline Sebillaud and Andrew Womack.)

archaeological record of East Asia is extremely important for global comparative research on the development and nature of ancient complex societies. The chapters in this book show that it is essential to consider the archaeological record for many regions of China, not just the Central Plain area of the Yellow river valley where the earliest undisputed states and writing systems developed. Furthermore, the chapters reveal significant regional diversity in the trajectories of change and in the nature of the societies that developed. After explaining my decisions about the subject matter and organization of the book, I offer some suggestions for future avenues of research on different kinds of social relations in the past.

The chapters in this book are organized by sections centered on major geographic areas rather than by groupings using the terms “Neolithic period” and “early Bronze Age” as in most other publications about Chinese archaeology. These terms are overly simplistic as chronological indicators, since in some areas such as the Southeast, relatively small-scale societies flourished for millennia after the emergence of early states and the onset of bronze production (tools, ornaments, and/or vessels) further north (Figure 1.2). These terms also mask significant regional variation with respect to social, economic, and political organization over time, often leading to assumptions about homogeneity in social, political, and economic organization.

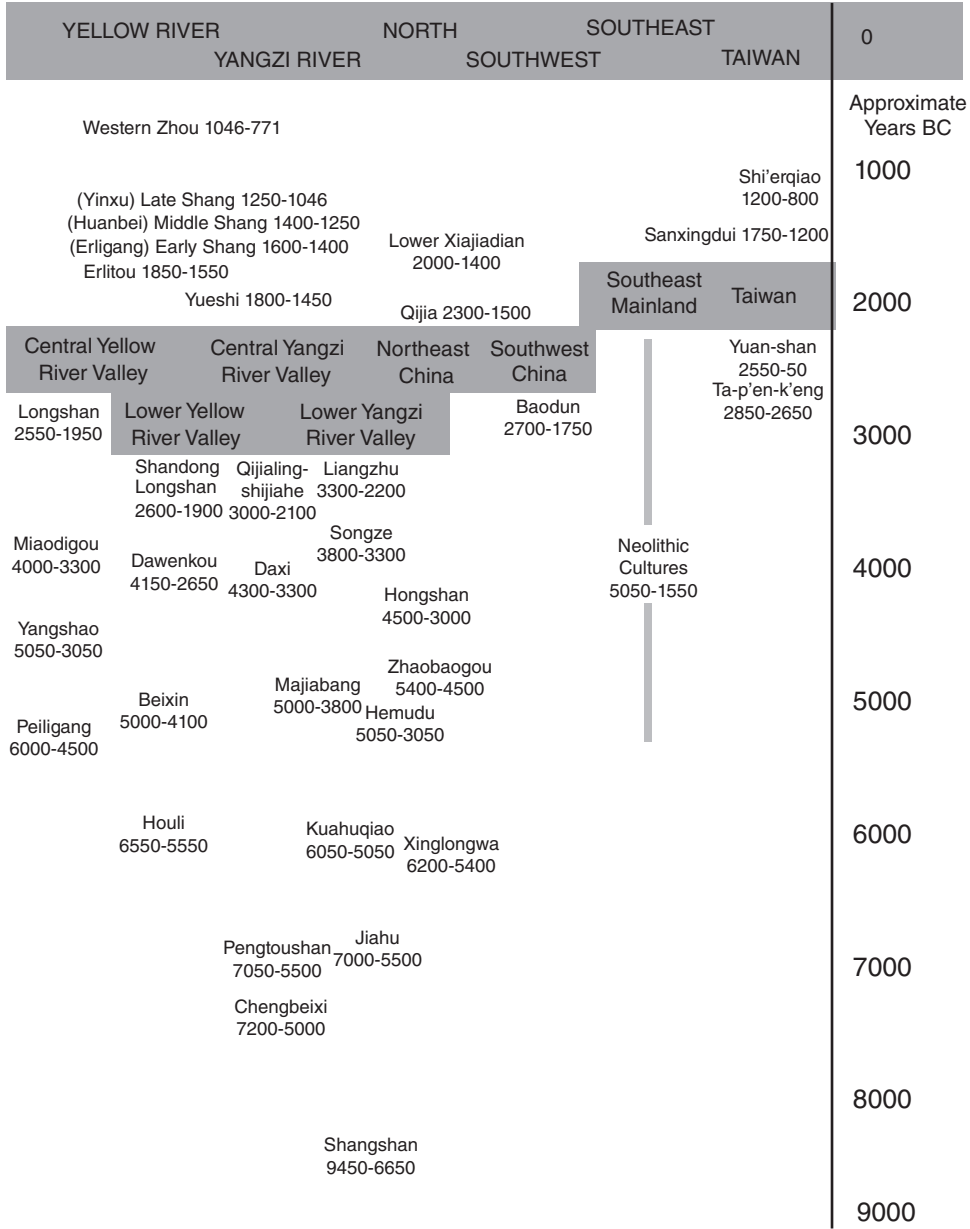


Figure 1.2 Time line of cultures discussed in this book. (Figure by Andrew Womack.)

My priority is to illustrate a range of research on prehistoric and early historic era societies (*c.*7000–1000 BC), rather than attempting to cover briefly several eras over a very long time span. It is not possible, therefore, to include chapters about important issues such as the origins of agriculture during the early Holocene, or chapters emphasizing eras after the late Shang period – the first period with an undisputed, fully developed writing system. For each geographic area covered, the chapters

provide interpretations about social relations at various spatial scales on the basis of archaeological remains for more than one era. They make it clear that complex societies of varying forms developed in several regions and during several periods. There are discussions about relatively early, small-scale societies and about large-scale societies, variously defined, for each major geographic area.

It is a challenge to group the contents of the chapters into meaningful geographic areas. The main point to emphasize is that they are macro-regions. Each one contains smaller physiographic regions that deserve intensive study in their own right (Figure 1.1). In each section, some chapters refer to large geographic areas, while others discuss smaller areas. The organization of the book enables readers to trace trajectories of social change from chapter to chapter and to observe diverse approaches to archaeological research within each macro-region. The following major geographic areas are included: the Northeast, the Upper Yellow River and Upper Yangzi River regions, Western Central Plain region and environs, Eastern Central Plain region and environs, the Middle Yangzi River region, the Lower Yangzi River region, and the Southeast. A single book can only take initial steps in portraying the regional variation in social, economic, and political organization that developed in the areas currently comprising mainland China and Taiwan. I hope to see future books discussing in more detail the large, diverse regions that are included in this volume. Other volumes also are needed for different regions in the Southwest and Northwest that could not be covered here, including modern Yunnan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. My decision was to focus on regions that had been more extensively introduced in the English literature, so readers could recognize the significance of the current research efforts. It was not possible to include chapters on all of the fine research being done in the selected regions, either.

Key themes in the chapters include investigation of internal settlement organization, household subsistence production, regional settlement patterns, the nature of early urbanism, craft specialization, political economy, and the ideological basis of social hierarchy. Given the relatively abundant English-language publications about burials from different regions of mainland China in particular, I asked the authors to focus on residential remains whenever feasible. While the chapters reveal significant diversity in the development and nature of early complex societies, they also illustrate general patterns that characterize more than one geographic region such as increase in interaction among communities, development of settlement hierarchies, increase in nucleation of population at single settlements, and increase in degree of social inequality over time. The investigators share many research goals with archaeologists who work in other areas of the world. In addition, as everywhere with professional archaeologists, there are debates about interpretation of remains. At the same time the rich descriptive data provided by authors make it possible for readers to consider their own interpretations.

The chapters focusing on relatively small-scale societies raise issues that are relevant to analysis of many other archaeological sites and regions. For example, what constitutes the community? How can we interpret spatial groups of houses within a settlement? How can we relate these spatial groups to different kinds of social groups that may have existed? Or, what might these spatial groups indicate about the nature of economic organization? At a larger scale, how can we interpret clusters of settlements within a relatively small region? Some scholars make an effort to address these issues

by considering the nature of social groups formed on the basis of kinship. Other chapters that discuss larger-scale societies also argue that analysis of kinship relations continued to be very important for the organization of early complex societies. Similarly, some authors emphasize social inequality with respect to social groups, in addition to that for individuals. The tendency in the North American archaeological literature is to focus on the rise of particular kinds of individual leaders and their strategies to increase personal power. Archaeological research in China shows that it is also important to consider agency from the perspective of social groups. In addition, the chapters discuss an often neglected dimension of research on the development of complex societies: change in the degree and nature of social integration at the site and regional levels. For example, some chapters refer to increased cooperation among members of kin groups with respect to economic and ritual affairs. Despite the challenges, the goal of understanding intra-group relations at varying social and spatial scales is essential. It often is assumed that social hierarchy was a key organizing principle, but we also should consider how cooperative relations played a role in social, economic, and political life.

A key issue for authors who write about relatively large-scale societies is the development and nature of urbanism. The chapters reveal fascinating variation in the nature of settlements identified as cities with respect to scale, layout, and organization. In some regions, there is a relatively dispersed pattern of urbanism, while others have sites in a more nucleated pattern. Some of the recently investigated urban areas are enormous in scale. The chapters show that data from several regions of China need to be considered as archaeologists seek to compare and understand the nature and functions of areas that comprise urban centers. For these discussions it is not sufficient to include only sites from areas of the Central Plain in modern Henan province where the Erlitou and Shang states developed. Differences in the degree and nature of settlement nucleation and settlement layout (involving, for example, varying numbers of rammed-earth walls and ditches, with habitation remains in areas beyond the walls as well as within them), need to be explained. These differences are indicative of variation in the processes involved in the establishment and operation of the urban settlements. Some urban centers were built upon earlier settlements, while others were newly established. Research also is providing important new data about subsistence and craft production in urban centers in comparison to the smaller communities around them. It is clear that economic data at the regional level are important for understanding early urbanism in China.

The chapters provide much food for thought about the challenging task of explaining how and why different kinds of social changes took place in various regions of what later became the PRC and ROC. They illustrate a thoughtful process by which scholars continue to evaluate approaches to interpreting the past. Many authors aim to identify major differences in social, economic, and/or political organization from one phase to another. Some authors emphasize an ecological approach to spurring social and economic change, while others emphasize the importance of technological change, or the importance of control over the production, distribution and or use of highly valued goods. Some scholars draw analogies about social organization on the basis of observations regarding cultural traditions during various historical eras. A major concern for every author is the protection of cultural heritage in China, which is the topic of the second chapter in the introductory section of this book.

The chapters in this *Companion* illustrate the importance of explaining the nature of each form of regional organization that developed during the later prehistoric and early historic eras, rather than focusing on the application of labels such as “state” or “chiefdom.” It is clear that diverse complex societies developed in a number of regions of China. There are several challenges ahead for archaeologists who research this issue, too. One will be to refine the chronology of large, individual sites in order to understand phases of expansion and contraction of settlement areas over time. This will make it possible to refine arguments about social and economic organization at the site and regional levels. Another challenge will be more study of individual regions by means of systematic, regional surveys for information about changes in settlement patterns over time. Research at the regional level also will benefit from more excavation at sites involving similar methods of data collection, including screening and flotation. This will facilitate an understanding of the nature of social relations among communities over time.

I hope that the impressive work of the scholars in this volume inspires more research on social change in different regions of China. The following suggestions are aimed to facilitate this research and to provide greater understanding of the growing data from China about the development and nature of early complex societies. Every year there are striking technological innovations that aid archaeological research, but in my view some basic methodological issues with respect to the research process are equally important for all of us to keep in mind.

We should aim to include explicit statements about the goals of research and how particular kinds of data were collected in order to address specific research questions. There should be more explicit explanations about the methods of analysis that were used to reach particular conclusions. This includes the challenge of explaining how different patterns of material remains may be indicative of particular kinds of social relations. We need to consider alternative explanations for the patterns we see in our data. Explanations about research designs and the supporting evidence to arrive at particular conclusions will help resolve debates. We should think creatively about how different characteristics of features and artifacts may be significant. This should include objective assessments of function and different aspects of stylistic variation. Investigations of production methods, exchange of objects, and consumption patterns, for example, need to include arguments about how particular patterns of material culture would support a given interpretation.

With respect to the issue of economic organization at the local and regional levels, we will benefit from more research on organization involving household strategies and cooperative relations in addition to variation in developing political economies. Another intriguing issue is changing ritual relations among households and communities, in conjunction with related systems of craft production. Explicit statements about research designs, methods of analysis, and interpretations are needed here, too. More sharing of archaeological information about specific research topics through translated publications and international conferences with focused goals, will facilitate discussion and awareness of key methodological issues that are relevant to more than one world area. More translation of archaeological research results from different world areas into Chinese and English would be beneficial as well.

Explaining how and why particular kinds of social change occurred is challenging. The diversity of social formations in different regions requires that we think creatively and expect variation in casual factors of change. More focus on agency from different points of view would be useful, including the perspective of the average household. Here again we need to think about how to collect the kinds of data that would provide evidence for particular processes of change regarding both vertical and horizontal social relations. In addition to research about processes involved in an increase in degree of social inequality, we also need to investigate potential causes of greater social integration in a region, such as increased interregional exchange. Other issues that should be explored in greater depth involve ethnicity and different types of intergroup relations. For example, changes in artifact styles or food ways might be related to changing concepts of ethnicity and/or social cohesion. Studies of interactions involving people from large-scale polities with those in smaller polities should consider the perspectives and social strategies of a range of participants.

In order to address these challenging issues, we should refine our methods of using comparative ethnographic and historic data from different areas of Asia to facilitate archaeological interpretation. More information on relatively small-scale, traditional societies in China and neighboring areas, past and present, would be helpful for linking different aspects of material culture to various types of social relations. This will assist us in developing methods to investigate issues such as the organization of household labor in different ecological zones, production and distribution of different kinds of craft goods, the nature of household ritual practices, and ideological bases of social hierarchy. We will benefit from more communication among archaeologists, historians, and ethnologists beyond modern political borders in different areas of Asia. There is only limited information published in English about the rich cultural diversity during the historic era for the regions covered in this book. At the same time, there seems to be growing interest among archaeologists in Asia for more comparative ethnographic data from other world areas. A more fundamental issue is that we require sufficient discussion about the methods we use to draw analogies from ethnographic accounts to aid in archaeological interpretation.

More communication is also needed among archaeologists and historians about the nature, dating, and interpretation of passages derived from the diverse textual data available from more than one period of Chinese history. The textual data are understandably regarded by more than one author in this book as a source of potential information about earlier eras. Given the insufficient understanding of these diverse textual data among English readers and my own deficiencies with respect to this complex subject, I asked Jinping Wang, an historian of China whom I met at Yale, to help me present passages from various early historical texts consistently, and to provide readers with current information about the approximate dates of these passages. Her additions are presented in the notes to each chapter with the code “[JW].” I also am grateful to Fang Hui for his assistance in understanding these texts and the oracle bone inscriptions from the late Shang dynasty.

It has been a tremendous privilege to make available the work of the scholars represented here, and I am grateful for their enthusiasm to participate in this book project. The completion of this book would not have been possible without a virtual international army of talented graduate students and young scholars specializing in

the archaeology of China who spent countless hours translating into English the many chapters that were submitted in Chinese. Other chapters represent some of the results of the many Sino-foreign collaborative fieldwork projects that have taken place in mainland China since the mid-1990s.

This book uses the accepted methods for the romanization of terms according to the locations in which authors work: Pinyin for terms regarding mainland China, and Wade-Giles for Taiwan. Surnames for scholars working in these areas are placed before personal names. At their request, the names of scholars born in mainland China who work in North America and regularly publish in English are presented in the traditional English order. In order to avoid confusion, on the first page of each chapter, in the Contents list, and in the Notes on Contributors and Notes on Translators and Other Assistants, all surnames are placed in CAPS (even English names, for the convenience of the growing number of archaeologists in China who read English). Since all foreign-born scholars doing collaborative fieldwork in mainland China also publish in Chinese, their names in Chinese are included. I hope these editorial decisions help the increasingly linguistically sophisticated younger generation of scholars in all areas of the globe who wish to keep up with the literature in both Chinese and English.

Editing the translated chapters required a balancing act: of preserving the original tone while also presenting the important content in a way that would be meaningful to readers of English who are most familiar with the North American archaeological tradition. It was frequently essential to rephrase the raw translated English and to consolidate discussions about particular issues. Regrettably in some cases the submitted chapters were too long for the space allotted to them, and I chose the content that I judged was the most significant. The editing of these chapters was a long process that involved many communications with translators, authors, and other bilingual volunteers (please see the Notes on Translators and Other Assistants for a list of the many people who made the completion of this book possible). Another dedicated group of individuals read the translated chapters at different stages, offering invaluable suggestions about edits to improve clarity. These volunteers also made helpful suggestions for chapters submitted in English. Any errors are my sole responsibility.

For all chapters, I have standardized figures for site size into hectares (ha) and square meters (sqm), allowing comparison from one site to another and comparison to figures presented in other English-language publications about ancient China. I am very grateful to Wiley-Blackwell for the ability to provide Chinese characters (at the first instance of use) for key sites, types of remains, and concepts; and references. I attempted to provide consistent translations for terms, but no doubt readers will note some differences within this book and with other publications.

After consultation with some of the authors, for convenience of the readers, and to save space, given the already considerable length of the book, I decided to shorten the long names of institutions in the text that often are listed as authors and editors in Chinese language publications. Abbreviations in pinyin, the most common Romanization system for Chinese characters, are provided for institutional names. The proper full names in Chinese are provided in the reference section for each chapter. An effort also was made to provide Latin names for species of plants and animals. Figure 1.3 illustrates generic forms of vessels that are commonly referred to

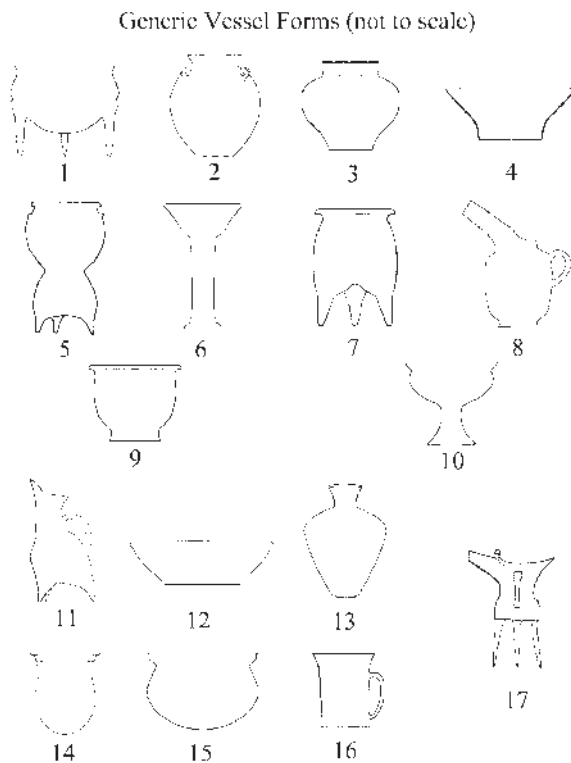


Figure 1.3 Common generic vessel forms (and assumptions about function). Key: 1, *ding* 鼎 tripod; 2, *guan* 罐 jar; 3, *hu* 壶 necked jar; 4, *wan* 碗 bowl; 5, *yan* 甗 tripod steamer; 6, *gu* 觚 beaker; 7, *li* 鬲 tripod; 8, *he* 盃 pitcher; 9, *gui* 簋 food pedestalled dish; 10, *dou* 豆 stemmed dish; 11, *gui* 鬶 tripod; 12, *pen* 盆 basin; 13, *weng* 瓮 urn; 14, *gang* 缸 vat; 15, *fu* 釜 cauldron; 16, *bei* 杯 cup; 17, *jue* 爵 tripod. (Figure by Andrew Womack.)

in chapters. In addition, throughout the book I inserted “Editor’s notes” in brackets (followed by “[Ed.]”) when I felt that it was necessary to provide additional explanation for particular terms. I also inserted chapter numbers to refer readers to other chapters in this *Companion* where they will find additional relevant information.

Another editorial decision was to provide equivalent ranges of dates in chapters to facilitate comparison of archaeological remains across space and time. This was another challenge, given debates about dating and the fact many Neolithic specialists present dates in years BP while Bronze Age specialists usually present dates in years BC. The dates in each chapter are as the authors presented them, but equivalent dates in years BC (calculated using the archaeological standard, 1950, for the present) are provided within parentheses when deemed useful. To avoid confusion I felt it was necessary to provide relatively consistent date ranges for each era discussed in the book. In the cases where there were diverging opinions, I attempted to present ranges of dates that would be acceptable to most scholars. Readers should consult the particular literature for each region and era to obtain more detailed information about

the radiocarbon dates available and the specific debates that exist. The field will benefit from more radiocarbon dates from all regions.

I wish I could adequately thank each of the numerous individuals, in addition to the authors, who made this book possible. The talented translators and other bilingual assistants are well on their way to productive careers of their own in archaeology. A huge, special thanks is due to the following individuals who helped with a variety of tasks, including assistance with resolving questions about content, editing text, editing figures, and communication with authors: Guo Mingjian, Robert Murowchick, Lin Hu, Lin Minghao, Jason Nesbitt, Pauline Sebillaud, Steve Victor, Daniela Wolin, Andrew Womack, and Ingrid Yeung. I am very grateful to Jinping Wang for her invaluable assistance with the references to early historical Chinese texts. I also thank the following scholars for their advice about proper terms (Chinese, English, Latin) for plants and animals: Jade d'Alpoim Guedes, Chen Xuexiang, and Song Yanbo. My discussions with Zhichun Jing and Rowan Flad were particularly helpful in making a decision about the organization of chapters. I am grateful to Zhichun Jing also for his insightful comments about a draft of this introductory chapter. I thank my Shandong University colleagues Fang Hui and Luan Fengshi for advice about more than one aspect of this book. I will be eternally grateful to Rosalie Robertson and Julia Kirk at Wiley Blackwell for their belief that the long wait for my work to be completed would be worth it. Janey Fisher skillfully dealt with a variety of challenging issues during the copy-editing process. Last but not least, I thank all of the authors for their patience with my numerous questions and requests for clarification. I am glad that readers can now see the results of your important research.