

**Past and Future of IHAC – International Conference for the 30th anniversary of the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations**

**Veranstalter:** Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations, Northeast Normal University of Changchun

**Datum, Ort:** 11.10.2014–12.10.2014, Changchun

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The 30th anniversary of the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations (IHAC), Northeast Normal University of Changchun (China) has been celebrated with the International Conference „Past and Future of IHAC“ from 11th to 12th October 2014. Founded by the Chinese professors Zhou Gucheng (Fudan University), Wu Yujin (Wuhan University), and Lin Zhichun (Changchun), IHAC was the first institute to establish chairs and academic research positions for Assyriology, Hittitology, Egyptology, and (Western) Classics (Latin and Greek Philology) in the People's Republic of China.<sup>1</sup>

The staff at IHAC deals with history, art, archaeology, philology, and linguistics of the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean region. Every year international scholars are invited as visiting professors to teach and research at the Institute and its unique library. Also the Journal of Ancient Civilizations (JAC) is issued every year with contributions of international scholars as well as outstanding Chinese researchers.

The festival act was held under the chair of the current director of the IHAC, Zhang Qiang (Changchun). It included speeches of the Vice President of the Northeast Normal University, Wang Yan (Changchun), of one of the first directors of the IHAC, Zhu Huan (Changchun), and of the honorary director of IHAC, Wang Dunshu (Changchun). Together with several other speakers, who had graduated at IHAC, they stressed the high engagement and charismatic character of the main founder, Lin Zhichun, who did a lot of research on the Greek (military) *polis* and the constructed concepts of ‘Feudalism’ and

‘Despotism’, comparing it with developments in Chinese history.<sup>2</sup>

After the festival act the conference dealt with the full broad of Ancient Civilizations in East and West, so reflecting the approach of the IHAC. The first section was opened by a talk of YUSHU GONG (Peking University). He revisited the concept of *Liushu*, six types of writing, as an approach to analyze not only Chinese writing but also other writing systems such as Sumerian. He defended the nowadays by some scholars rejected concept, who instead prefer the three types of writing of *Sanshu*, by modifying it with integration of the ancient ideas about the developments of symbolic writing. By analyzing some of the Sumerian symbols with his modified model, he also suggested that such writing systems were created by a small group of people within a short time, and a longer development process with several preceding stages cannot fit to such a clear system.

WANG XIANHU (Sichuan University) then focused on the political and economic development of Ancient Mesopotamia from the Uruk period to the end of the Ur III period. By discussing recent research literature, he deduced that the different, often deconstructing and partial views, have not enlightened the historical development yet. For example he showed clearly that the different models about the economy of Ancient Mesopotamia have failed due to adopting only recent views, modernist or primitivist ones, for analyzing the ancient facts. So a new theoretical approach has to be developed, whose cornerstones he outlined shortly.

LI XIAODONG (Changchun) revealed the different views of Chinese and Western scholars on the concept of matrilineality to describe some interesting phenomena in ancient societies, for example matrilineal inheritance or matrilineal systems. So Chinese scholars use the terms *fluxi* and *muxi*,

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<sup>1</sup> For a short overview over the history of IHAC in the first years cf. e.g. W. Brashear, *Classics in China*, *The Classical Journal* 86,1 (1990), 73-78: id., *China Update* 1997, *The Classical Journal* 94,1 (1998), 81-85: website of IHAC: <<http://ihac.nenu.edu.cn/>>.

<sup>2</sup> For the discussion cf. L. R. Sullivan, *The Controversy over ‘Feudal Despotism’: Politics and Historiography in China, 1978-82*, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 23 (1990), 1-31.

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which have to be translated as patriarchy and matriarchy. This causes misreadings and misunderstandings of Western models which try to distinguish between political matriarchy/patriarchy and socio-legal matrilineality/patrilineality. Therefore a discussion about the definition of such concepts between East and West is a necessary starting point to go on further with comprehensive and comparative research.

ÅKE ENGSHEDEN (Changchun) presented his fresh analysis of an inscribed stone fragment from Egypt, now in Verona, Italy. Dating from the 30th dynasty (380-343 B.C.), the long sides show statuettes of deities related to the Osirian cycle and the local pantheon of Memphis. By rejecting the traditional view that this fragment was a part of a *naos*, he proposed that the monument was part of a screen wall protecting a shrine of the sacred falcon, a symbol that became afterwards common for the successors, the Ptolemies, after the conquest of Egypt by Alexander. This shrine may have stood in the now destroyed temple of Imhotep (Asklepieion) at Saqqara, according to the inscriptions, and is a very interesting detail for the reconstruction of this transitional period between the traditional and new powerhouse, mainly the question about the tying of the new authority to the Pharaonic traditions.

The second section included three papers which concentrated on philosophy and religious cult: KISOR K. CHAKRABARTI (Elkins, WV) presented his paper on the Indo-Greek intellectual exchange, especially by comparing Plato's philosophy with Indian philosophical writings. By pointing on similar concepts of the self – being different from the body, eternal and subject to reincarnation –, the theory of real universals and of the ideal state he proposed an influence of Indian thoughts on Plato. Although there are no direct sources to prove this, he pointed to the other evidence of contacts between Greece and India in antiquity, so this could be „likely“.

His wife, CHANDANA CHAKRABARTI (Elon, NC) then paralleled the concept of mysticism in Greek and Indian thought. She suggested that the timeless act of mysteries formed a kind of unity and was, therefore, to-

tally different from the time coupled, antagonistic world, so the former became the new 'reality' of the participants of the mysteries.

WANG SHAOHUI (Changchun) afterwards presented his new hypothesis on the use of *ornitheion* in the columns I-VI of the famous Derveni papyrus, found in Northern Greece in 1962 and dating to 5th or 4th century B.C. By pointing to the common ritual practices of the Orphic cult, he proposed a new understanding of the word *ornitheion* in the libation context, not as a real 'bird' but as an bird-formed equipment in and for this libation, presenting archaeological evidence to proof his new understanding.

The two papers of the last section dealt with the developments in the 5th and 4th century B.C., a very current topic in European and worldwide research of ancient societies, too: SVEN GÜNTHER (Changchun) focused on the financial measures mentioned in the *Poliorketika* („How to survive under siege“) of Aeneas Tacticus, the first military theorist in the middle of the 4th century B.C. By combining the 'etic' view of the New Institutional Economics with an 'emic' view on the regulation frames created by the author – hereby adopting the frame-analysis-model of Erving Goffman – he analyzed a puzzling passage in chapter 13 about the financing of foreign mercenaries. He revealed that Aeneas Tacticus wanted to defend his conservative model of a *polis* as an exclusive city-state for citizens, distant from the bad foreign influences, by creating high transaction costs for the pay and maintenance of these soldiers for the whole community and even by putting distances between the foreign mercenaries and (possible) conspiratorial citizen factions in the text structure.

MATYLDIA OBRYK (Changchun) reflected on the use and considerations about language in Aristophanes' „Frogs“. Focusing on the central topic of the comedy play, the function and role of poetry in public discourse, she showed how important language itself as the basis and material for every poetry was for Aristophanes. She also connected the clash between oral and literal culture as well as that of traditional and modern approaches at that time to the case of the Peloponnesian War and the crisis of the democratic concept, therewith

showing the closeness between the cultural sector and the public life in Athens.

In summary, the conference showed the width of research that is done at and around the IHAC. The talks and the discussion unfolded the necessity of exchange between Western and Eastern studies on civilizations, especially in the field of terminology and in the different understandings for example of 'development', 'sources' and 'time' – not only for research on ancient civilizations but also for methodology or modern (popular) views on history. Therefore, a broad discussion of the concept of studies on ancient world civilizations is as well desirable as up to date.

**Conference overview:**

Gong Yushu (Peking), *Liushu Revisited*

Wang Xianhua (Sichuan), Temples, Cities, and City-States in Early Mesopotamia

Li Xiaodong (Changchun), The Misreading of Matrilineality and the Way of Reconstruction of the Remote Society

Åke Engsheden (Changchun), Ancestral Cult and the Sacred Falcon in the 4th Century BC

Kisor K. Chakrabarti (Elkins, WV), Intellectual Exchange with Reference to Plato's Philosophy and Indian Philosophy

Chandana Chakrabarti (Elon, NC), Mysticism in Greek and Indian Thought

Wang Shaohui (Changchun), Revisit *ornítheíon* in the Columns I-VI of the „P. Derv“.

Sven Günther (Changchun), Framing the Financial Thoughts of Aeneas Tacticus: New Approaches of Theory of Economic Discourses in Antiquity

Matylda Obryk (Changchun), Reflection on Language in Aristophanes' „Frogs“

Tagungsbericht *Past and Future of IHAC – International Conference for the 30th anniversary of the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations*. 11.10.2014–12.10.2014, Changchun, in: H-Soz-Kult 03.11.2014.