

Academic freedom, political correctness, and early civilisation in Chinese archaeology: the debate on Xia-Erlitou relations

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Introduction

The interpretation of archaeology is inevitably affected by the social, cultural and intellectual background of researchers. This is certainly the situation in the study of early Chinese civilisations and their material remains, particularly in regard to the Erlitou culture in the middle Yellow River region in China (c. 1900-1500 BC). The spatial and temporal definitions of the Erlitou culture are partially coincident with those of the Xia dynasty as recorded in ancient texts. The type-site of Erlitou, in Yanshi, Henan province, has revealed much evidence indicating the development of a large and complex political centre there. But the historical or dynastic affiliation of the Erlitou site/culture has generated much debate among archaeologists and historians in recent years. A general tendency in the debate, as seen in publications, is that most Chinese archaeologists and historians believe that the Erlitou site represents the material culture of an early dynasty, Xia or Shang, while most scholars in the West have reservations regarding such interpretations (Liu & Chen 2003: 26-35; Liu 2004: 223-38; Liu & Xu 2007). The debate is not merely academic, but reflects broader social issues. In 2007 I conducted a survey of opinions held by scholars and students worldwide concerning relationships between the Erlitou culture and prehistoric dynastic regimes, particularly Xia. The survey's purpose was to understand why people develop different viewpoints – whether cultural, political, economic, intellectual, or a combination thereof – toward this particular issue.

The Xia-Erlitou relationship

For the majority of Chinese people, there is little doubt that Xia was the first dynasty in Chinese history. This popular view arises in part from the dramatic successes achieved in decipherment of oracle-bone inscriptions and in archaeological excavations at Xiaotun in Anyang, Henan, since the early twentieth century. Many names of kings found in the oracle-bone inscriptions unearthed from Xiaotun match the Shang royal genealogy recorded in *Shiji*, written by Sima Qian around the first century BC (Wang 1959). Archaeological investigations by Li Chi and many other archaeologists in Anyang during the past 80 years have also confirmed that locale as the late Shang city of Yin Xu, which is recorded in

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ancient texts (Li 1977; Institute of Archaeology 1994, 2000, 2003). These achievements, revealing Shang as a true historical dynasty, greatly encouraged people's belief in ancient texts, particularly *Shiji*, which also gives a royal genealogy of the Xia dynasty (Wang 1994; Institute of Archaeology 2003: 21-3;). So it is inferred that Sima Qian must have had access to ancient documents which recorded the earliest dynasties of Xia and Shang, but were later lost in antiquity. In fact, few archaeologists or historians in China today express in publication any doubt regarding the existence of Xia, either as a dynasty or as a people.

The whereabouts of the Xia dynasty's material remains has been a major unsolved question since the early decades of modern archaeological research in China. In the 1950s Xu Xusheng and his colleagues conducted a survey project to search for the 'ruins of Xia' and discovered Erlitou in Yanshi; he suspected that the site belonged to a Shang capital (Xu 1959). Subsequent archaeological investigations further indicate that a coherent zone of material remains, similar to those at the Erlitou site proper and known as the Erlitou culture, is found across western Henan and southern Shanxi, a region which overlaps the territory of the Xia and Shang dynasties as recorded in ancient texts. Since then Chinese archaeologists have been engaged in extended discussion and debate, focusing on the ethnic and historical affiliations of the Erlitou site and Erlitou culture. Numerous opinions have been put forward, and viewpoints have changed through time as new data have become available (Du & Xu 2005, 2006). Mainstream views, which are particularly dominant in Chinese publications today, can be summarised, in general, as favouring the conclusion that the Erlitou site/culture, at least in some of its phases, represents the material remains of the Xia dynasty (e.g. Zou 1980; Zhao 1987; Du 1991; Song 1991; Li 1997; Gao *et al.* 1998; Wang 1998; Chang 1999: 71-3). Most scholarly disagreements about this view mainly concern questions relating to particular archaeological cultures or sites with which Xia as a polity may be identifiable (see summary in Liu & Xu 2007).

In the West, many scholars, but not all (e.g. Childs-Johnson 1995), hold opinions different from those of Chinese archaeologists (e.g. Keightley 1978; Allan 1984, 1991; Thorp 1991, 2006; Linduff 1998: 629; Bagley 1999: 130-1; Railey 1999: 178-86;). These opinions may be summarised as follows: The existence of the Xia dynasty is questionable, and the argument that Erlitou represents Xia cannot be proven. A common critique holds that the dynastic status of Xia was invented by the Zhou dynasty, who conquered the Shang, although much less complex in social organisation. The invention of a previous dynasty was intended to justify the Zhou conquest of Shang under the Mandate of Heaven (Allan 1991: 57-73). Moreover, some Xia kings are said to have been Western Zhou fabrications (Keightley 1978: 432-3). At present, no contemporary inscribed objects have been unearthed which directly identify the Xia; thus there is no way to prove, with hard evidence, the existence of Xia as a dynasty or as any type of political entity. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that increasing numbers of sinologists have recently begun to accept that Erlitou shows a high degree of cultural-political sophistication, which can be seen as indicating a civilisation or state-level society (e.g. Allan 2007).

The third view regarding this debate is that, although there is no way at present to prove archaeologically the existence of the Xia as a dynasty, nevertheless early oral traditions may have preserved the memory of a Xia people, who are recorded in ancient texts which have survived in versions datable to the mid- to late first millennium BC. (Liu & Xu 2007:

898). These two classes of data (legends and archaeology) are not directly comparable, and archaeological data should and can be analysed as primary source-material, independently of traditional texts. Each of these two types of evidence must be critically studied on its own terms, with methods appropriate to each type of information. Only after the documentary and archaeological records have been independently worked out can they be considered together (Liu & Chen 2003: 148; Liu 2004: 10; Liu & Xu 2007: 900).

Interpretation and politics

One explanation for the Chinese view has been proposed recently, as follows: '*The main reason why the majority of Chinese archaeologists these days insist on the identity of Erlitou and the Xia is a fear of being branded as unpatriotic; for – absurdly, considering the current regime's revolutionary ideals – the uncritical acceptance of the textual heritage has become a measure of "political correctness"*' (Falkenhausen 2007: 188). As defined here, 'political correctness' is a concept which is believed to have been adopted from *The Quotations of Chairman Mao*, referring to the Communist Party ideology, by the American radical Left in the 1960s. Its meanings and applications have changed through time – being initially taken seriously and later used ironically as a criticism of dogmatic attitudes (Perry 1992). In general it describes language or rhetoric intended to avoid giving offence to groups defined by gender, race, culture, disability, age, etc. This term is now used almost exclusively in a pejorative sense in the West, and does not have equivalence in China today. 'Political correctness', in the context of Falkenhausen's statement cited above, is apparently understood as a measure of conformity to 'the current regime's revolutionary ideals', which seems to be similar to the original meaning in *The Quotations of Chairman Mao*. The term 'revolutionary ideal' (*geming lixiang*, 革命理想) normally refers to the political ideology of Communism/Socialism and was commonly used during the Cultural Revolution era in China. In this case, we can only understand 'political correctness' in the statement above as the political ideology promoted by the state and Communist Party in China.

One celebrated expression of political orthodoxy in recent years is the so-called Four Cardinal Principles (*sixiang jiben yuanze* 四项基本原则), proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1979. These are: adherence to the socialist road, maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat, upholding the leadership of the Communist Party, and adherence to Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. These principles were further elaborated in 1996 by former President Jiang Zemin (Jiang 1999), who called for the integration of socialism and patriotism. To implement patriotic propaganda, since 1997 the Central Propaganda Department has nominated more than 200 Sites for Patriotic Education (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi* 爱国主义教育基地), primarily targeting students in primary and middle schools. The selections of these sites emphasise Chinese modern history, but some ancient archaeological sites and museums are also nominated, such as the Neolithic site at Banpo Museum in Xi'an and the Yinxu Museum at the Shang dynasty capital city in Anyang, Henan (see <http://www.ccnt.com.cn/html/agjy/>). Interestingly, Erlitou and locations believed to have been related to the Xia dynasty are not included on the lists.

Given this background, the term 'political correctness' in China today can be defined as language, rhetoric, behaviour and policy aligned with the Four Cardinal Principles,

including patriotism. Xia and Erlitou are apparently outside the scope of official political guidelines for patriotic education. But the central point of Falkenhausen's statement is that patriotism and political ideology are the major forces motivating mainstream interpretations, in contemporary China, of links between Xia and Erlitou. If this is the case, we would have to believe that Chinese archaeologists voluntarily extend the political guidelines to issues relating to Xia-Erlitou relations.

An analysis of opinions

In order to understand whether or not the state ideology is an underlying force driving interpretations of the Xia-Erlitou relationship in contemporary Chinese archaeology, we need to answer the following questions:

- (1) Do most Chinese archaeologists believe Erlitou represents the Xia dynasty?
- (2) If so, how has such an opinion been formed?
- (3) Is Chinese archaeologists' belief in ancient texts due to a need to demonstrate their own political correctness?
- (4) Do Chinese archaeologists agree with the connection between Xia and Erlitou in order to show their patriotism?
- (5) Do any archaeologists in China disagree with the proposed connection between Xia (or Shang) and Erlitou?
- (6) If they disagree, are they afraid of being branded as unpatriotic or politically incorrect?

To address these issues, I prepared two sets of similar questionnaires which I sent to two groups of people interested in the archaeology of early China (and the questionnaires were also circulated among some other people). The first group is composed of archaeologists within China (referred to hereafter as the 'China Group'). It was not compulsory for the respondents to reveal their names, and most responses were collected through people who circulated the questionnaire. From this group 75 people responded, including 45 archaeologists at archaeological institutes and museums, 13 university professors, and 17 university students. The second group consisted of scholars and students outside China (in the USA, Canada, Australia and Hong Kong; referred to hereafter as the 'Outside China Group') who do research or take courses relating to Chinese archaeology and early history. This part of the survey was carried out with an internet survey tool, which received anonymous responses. Twenty-eight of these people responded, including 11 university professors, one research fellow and 15 university students. This second group included people with both Western and non-Western ethnic or educational backgrounds, with a majority belonging to the former. Since people in this group are not working under the Chinese political system, they are presumably much less influenced by issues of Chinese political correctness than the Chinese archaeologists in China, so the views from these two groups can be contrasted.

Survey results

The survey format differed slightly for the two groups, including four questions for the China Group (questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 below) and five for the Outside China Group (questions 1,

2, 4, 5 and 6 below). Some questions were stated identically to both groups, while others were not. The rationale for asking different questions to the two groups is based on the diverse opinions expressed in publications as mentioned in the beginning of this article. Accordingly, it is assumed that each group may hold opinions different to its counterpart regarding some issues under the circumstances discussed above. I present the two groups' results below in two columns, as applicable. Since each question may have more than one possible answer, the total number of answers counted for each question is not equivalent to the number of people who responded to the particular question.

Question 1

Question 1. The Xia dynasty recorded in ancient texts was historically factual

Answer choice	China group		Outside China group	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
a. Agree	35	49%	6	22%
b. Disagree	3	4%	6	22%
c. Unknowable	9	13%	1	4%
d. Possible	27	38%	16	59%
e. Other opinions/comments	11		7	
Answered question	72		27	
Skipped question	3		1	

For this question, nearly half (49 per cent) of the China Group agree that the Xia was historically factual, while only a very small proportion (4 per cent), comprised of two researchers and one student, disagreed with this view. On the other hand, in the Outside China Group, an equal proportion (22 per cent) of respondents favoured each of these two contrasting views. In both groups high percentages of people believe that the Xia was possibly historically factual (38 per cent and 59 per cent respectively).

Eleven people in the China Group expressed other opinions, mostly to the effect that, while records relating to the Xia dynasty in some ancient texts are reliable, it is nevertheless difficult to confirm details about the Xia from those documents. Some pointed out that one should not be influenced by textual information when conducting archaeological research, but also allowed that, if the data from archaeology and history match, then the texts should be considered credible. One student states that '*as a proud Chinese I choose "agree", but as a researcher-to-be I choose "possible"; but either way, we need to have sufficient evidence to prove it.*'

In the Outside China Group seven people provided comments. Three stated that current evidence from history and archaeology cannot either support or oppose the proposition that Xia existed. One person does not agree that the Xia dynasty is historically factual as recorded in the ancient texts, but adds the proviso that the ancient accounts might reflect some underlying historical reality. In contrast, one respondent is confident that there was a Xia dynasty, and even provides an alternative Xia chronology (1953-555 BCE) based on his/her research.

The answers given to this question demonstrate that, indeed, a higher proportion of respondents in China than in the West believe that Xia existed, albeit in some forms which may not be exactly the same as recorded in the ancient texts.

Question 2

Question 2. (for the China Group) How do you reach the conclusion that the Erlitou culture represents the Xia? or, (for the Outside China Group) The Erlitou culture may represent the Xia dynasty as recorded in ancient texts because . . . :

Answer choice	China group		Outside China group	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
a. I learned it from textbooks in high school (question for the Chinese only)	1	2%		
b. I learned it in history or archaeology courses at university	31	56%	7	32%
c. I learned it in political education classes (question for the Chinese only)	0	0%		
d. I reached this conclusion in my own research	22	40%	7	32%
e. Some ancient texts are reliable	10	18%	13	59%
f. It can be proved by archaeological evidence			5	23%
g. Other reasons/comments	26		14	
Answered question	55		22	
Skipped question	20		6	

More than half (56 per cent) of China Group respondents to this question first learned about the Erlitou-Xia link in university classes, while 40 per cent found support for this relationship through their own research. In the Outside China Group, about one third of people (32 per cent) chose these two answers. In addition, a clear majority (59 per cent) believe that some ancient texts are reliable, including six students among 13 respondents.

In the China Group, of 26 respondents who added further comments, five pointed out that, although they first learned this view in classrooms, their opinions were formed later based on their own research. Five people also stated that the argument for the Xia-Erlitou connection is the current mainstream view in Chinese archaeology and it is plausible, but that further research is needed to confirm it. Others also emphasised that the location and scale of the Erlitou remains coincide with those of the Xia dynasty as recorded in ancient texts, arguing also that, if ancient records describing the Shang dynasty can be proved credible, why should those about the Xia be considered merely legendary? A university professor pointed out that when teaching about issues relating to Erlitou, various interpretations of its historical identity are discussed in the classroom, touching not only on the Xia but also the Shang and other possibilities. Regarding the several sources for initial knowledge of the Xia-Erlitou link, a student said that he/she has never questioned the existence of the Xia since first reading about this dynasty in a dictionary as a child. It is notable that no respondent learned about the Xia-Erlitou relation from political education classes.

Based on these responses, we may conclude that the educational system, research environment, and popular culture in China all introduce the idea of the Xia dynasty, and emphasise a positive connection between the Erlitou site and Xia (or Shang); however, this consensus is not derived from any explicit political guidelines.

Question 3

Question 3. (for the China Group only) Regarding the opinion that the Erlitou culture may represent the Xia dynasty recorded in ancient text, my view of this link is . . . :

Answer choice	Count	Percentage
a. It is unquestionable, and can be proved by archaeological evidence	10	14%
b. It is very possible, but needs further proof from archaeology	50	72%
c. It is impossible because it cannot be proved in archaeology	1	1%
d. This question is very important because archaeology must be integrated with ancient texts	11	16%
e. This question is not very important because archaeology does not have to be integrated with ancient texts	7	10%
f. Other opinions	15	
Answered question	69	
Skipped question	6	

A high majority (72 per cent) of respondents to this question believe in a possible connection between Xia and Erlitou, although further archaeological evidence is needed. A considerable percentage of people (16 per cent) affirm that the Xia-Erlitou relationship is very important for the reason that archaeology must be integrated with textual information. These opinions represent the professional mainstream in contemporary Chinese archaeology. Three people emphasised that the Erlitou culture (at least in some phases) coincides with the Xia in time, space and level of social complexity; but one person further pointed out that the extent of the Xia territory cannot be determined based on the archaeological record. Three people believe that China has very rich textual records and, if they are not utilised, we would lose a wealth of information for our research. Thus, these respondents add, the historiographic orientation of Chinese archaeology has an intellectually justifiable rationale, but the ancient record of the Xia is very limited, and should not be used dogmatically. Two people argued that Erlitou does not equal Xia, and two other people suggest that we should be cautious about the interpretation of Xia-Erlitou relations, given the lack of evidence for writing at that time.

Notably, 10 per cent of respondents consider the Xia-Erlitou relationship not important, agreeing with the reason given, that archaeology does not have to be connected with ancient texts. People holding this opinion include four researchers (8.9 per cent of the total 45 researchers), one university professor (7.7 per cent of the total 13 professors), and two students (11.8 per cent of the total 17 students). The proportion of students is slightly higher than that of the two other groups. In addition, one scholar suggested that the archaeological study of state formation can be carried out independently of the historical record. According to this view, new discovery of early states in pre-literate regions is potentially as important as finding the Xia dynasty recorded in ancient texts.

Question 4

Question 4. (for the Outside China Group only) I believe that the Erlitou culture has no relationship with the Xia dynasty recorded in ancient texts because . . . :

Answer choice	Count	Percentage
a. I learned that interpretation in history or archaeology courses at university	2	20%
b. I reached that conclusion in my own research	0	0%
c. Ancient texts are unreliable	4	40%
d. The relationship cannot be proved by archaeological evidence	6	60%
e. Other reasons/comments	9	
Answered question	10	
Skipped question	18	

This question is designed for people who disagree with the putative connection between Xia and Erlitou, and about 36 per cent of those surveyed in this group (10 out of 28) answered it. Interestingly, no one reached this conclusion through his/her own research. In the comments, seven people pointed out that there is no conclusive evidence to either support or oppose the connection between the Xia and Erlitou.

Question 5

In the China Group, a large majority (88 per cent) of respondents chose the answer, 'I will openly express my opinion, as this is my academic freedom, not a political issue'. A few people expect to be criticised by their colleagues as unpatriotic or too pro-Western, for doing so. However, no one anticipates being criticised as 'politically incorrect'. Among the three people who disagree with the Xia as historically factual (see Question 1), one selected answer 'e' in Question 5 (I openly express my own opinion), and one selected 'd', explaining that *'If not necessary, I would not openly express a personal opinion which differs from the mainstream view, since doing so may invite some disagreement. Furthermore, many Western scholars oppose the idea that Erlitou is related to the Xia, so, if I openly acknowledge my viewpoint, I may be criticised. Although I may not be "branded as unpatriotic", since this issue touches national sentiment, it may lead to some unpleasant reactions.'* It seems that people with minority opinions do worry about being criticised. Nevertheless, such a concern does not necessarily prevent people from expressing their opinions. For example, one respondent selected 'b' and 'e', one selected 'a' and 'e', and one selected 'a', 'd' and 'e'. These results apparently mean that they would openly convey their ideas, even at risk of being criticised as unpatriotic or pro-Western.

For the Outside China Group, although nearly half (48 per cent) of those responding to this question believed that this opinion is academic discourse, not a political issue, considerable proportions thought that their Chinese counterparts are afraid of being isolated by their domestic colleagues (19 per cent), criticised as unpatriotic (24 per cent) and too pro-Western (10 per cent); these proportions are much higher than what the Chinese acknowledged in the corresponding answers (4 per cent, 1 per cent and 3 per cent respectively). Some Outside China respondents also believe that the educational system, as well as factors involving academic, economic and political issues, affect the

Question 5. (for the China Group) If I express my opinion that the Erlitou culture may not be related to the Xia dynasty, then ...; or, (for the Outside China Group) My opinion regarding the viewpoint of Chinese archaeologists, that the Erlitou culture represents the Xia dynasty recorded in ancient historical texts is ...:

China group			Outside China group		
Answer choice	Count	%	Answer choice	Count	%
a. I may be criticised by my colleagues and become isolated	3	4%	a. They are afraid of being criticised by their colleagues and becoming isolated	4	19%
b. I may be accused of being 'unpatriotic'	1	1%	b. They are afraid of being accused of being 'unpatriotic'	5	24%
c. I may be classified as 'politically incorrect'	0	0%	c. They are afraid of being classified as 'politically incorrect'	1	5%
d. I may be criticised as 'too pro-Western'	2	3%	d. They are afraid of being criticised as 'too pro-Western'	2	10%
e. I will openly express my opinion, as this is my academic freedom, not a political issue	63	88%	e. This opinion is academic discourse, not a political issue	10	48%
			f. Because the Chinese educational system only teaches mainstream ideology	3	14%
			g. This opinion is related to economic interests, and is not a political issue	0	0%
			h. This opinion is related to academic, economic and political interests	3	14%
f. Other opinions	13		i. Other opinions	8	
Answered question	72		Answered question	21	
Skipped question	3		Skipped question	7	

opinions of Chinese archaeologists. However, only one respondent (5 per cent) thought that political correctness plays a role in regard to the Xia-Erlitou question. In the comments, one Outside China respondent remarked: *'this issue is closely related to nationalist interpretations of history within China. Although the Xia-Erlitou question is only a small part of the nationalist interpretation of Chinese history, that nationalism is extremely strong and thus scholars who question the Xia-Erlitou connection cannot avoid appearing to oppose the "party line" to some degree. However, this may not have any serious consequences for such scholars.'*

The issues involved in this survey questionnaire appear to reflect sharply divergent views between the two groups. While China Group respondents overwhelmingly deny much non-academic influence on their archaeological interpretations, considerable percentages of people in the other group insist that such influence exists, although not necessarily always from political factors.

Question 6

Question 6. (for the Outside China Group only) If I express my opinion that the Erlitou culture may be related to the Xia dynasty, then . . . :

Answer choice	Count	%
a. I may be criticised by my colleagues and become isolated	2	12%
b. I may be criticised as 'too pro-China'	4	24%
c. It is because this opinion is only academic discourse, not a political issue	14	82%
d. Other reasons	8	
Answered question	17	
Skipped question	11	

Most people who answered this question in the Outside China Group believe the debate is academic discourse, but a few people do have concerns of being criticised by their colleagues as 'too pro-China', if they support the Xia-Erlitou link. In the comments, one person says: *'I do not believe that the Erlitou culture is necessarily related to the Xia Dynasty. However, if I did say that I believed it was, most of my colleagues would say that I am too gullible and insufficiently critical.'* Another respondent (a Westerner) also comments that he/she has encountered problems on all the fronts proposed in the answers. His/her paper was rejected for publication by a journal a few years ago because his/her discussion on the Xia dynasty was criticised by a reviewer as holding 'Chinese views'. He/she further states that *'there is a group of people in the field of Chinese archaeology in the West (mainly in the USA) that has decided to shut out people who hold opinions different from their own. Basically, these people have a strong resentment against China and Chinese researchers which biases their scholarship.'*

Comparing answers from Question 6 with those from Question 5, minorities in both groups seem to have encountered the criticism of being too favourable to the other group. Although we do not know how often such cases have in fact occurred, they may have generated a subtly intimidating self-censorship on both sides, inhibiting some people from bold expression of non-mainstream opinions.

Other comments

In the China Group, 16 respondents provided further comments, which can be summarised in the following points: (1) Some Westerners are prejudiced against China; their understanding of China remains in the Cultural Revolution era, and their comments on China are often subjective. Their criticism of 'political correctness' among Chinese archaeologists may reflect a situation in the West; that is, people may be accused of being 'politically incorrect' if they do not criticise China. (2) The relation between the Xia and Erlitou has nothing to do with modern politics or patriotism. Chinese people today can make their own choices on whether or not to pay attention to politics. Most Chinese scholars do not do research from political perspectives, and there is academic freedom, although methods and approaches are not the same as those in the West. 'We' (i.e. Chinese scholars) have not experienced any political demands in archaeology, and there is no pressure to accept the textual heritage. One respondent wrote: *'no individual or party representative has ever suggested or implied to me that the Xia-Erlitou issue is relevant'*

to patriotism or political correctness.' (3) The Xia-Erlitou relation is primarily an academic discourse. However, some local government officials have attempted to gain a personal reputation for political and economic achievements by promoting a local cultural heritage, and when doing so their preference for historical interpretations may coincide with some established academic viewpoints. This situation may lead to the promotion of particular archaeological interpretations.

In the Outside China Group ten people provided additional opinions, which may be represented by four comments. (1) The study of Xia-Erlitou should be carried out further: *'There is a possibility of cultural relations between Erlitou and the Xia Dynasty, so the archaeological work should continue and not be judged based on what is not known, especially when so many historical records were either lost or destroyed throughout ancient Chinese history.'* (2) No agreement between Chinese and Western scholars can be reached, due to methodological differences: *'We will never reach any agreement on this issue until we reach some agreement on what constitutes evidence and what constitutes logical argument. Until that happens, we are only talking past each other.'* (3) The Xia-Erlitou question is more political than academic: *'Strong opinions on the Xia-Erlitou correspondence are related almost entirely to the nationalist interpretation of history within China, which is perceived by Western scholars as a dangerous development. Current evidence is inadequate to either prove or disprove the theory, so strong opinions on the question are more likely related to politics than to mere academic opinion.'* (4) The Xia-Erlitou issue has been overemphasised: *'The coordination of archaeological and textual evidence requires great subtlety. Currently, very few scholars combine high-level skills in both textual analysis and archaeology. Hence much of what is published on the Erlitou/Xia problem lacks methodological sophistication. From a purely anthropological perspective, the importance of the Erlitou/Xia problem is arguably overrated; it need not matter very much whether the Xia existed, and whether or not it corresponds to the Erlitou culture . . . The Erlitou/Xia problem may be resolved only through assiduous and methodologically cutting-edge scientific research.'*

The comments from the Outside China Group are much more diverse than those of the China Group. This gap may arise from the fact that the survey questions concern only the latter group's own history. On the contrary, most members of the former group, who are heirs to a cultural tradition that favours free thinking, inevitably feel a less personally intimate relationship to the subject. For those reasons, the main discrepancies between the two groups may also reflect different styles of reasoning.

Conclusions

This survey is an attempt to understand the thinking of scholars in China and other parts of the world in regard to particular interpretations of Chinese history, and to compare the differences between the two groups. Based on the responses received, we can now answer the six questions posed in the beginning of the article.

1. The majority of archaeologists in China do believe that Erlitou, at least a part of it, is related to the Xia (or Shang).
2. The responses from both groups indicate that an individual's preference for a particular view about the Xia-Erlitou issue has more to do with broad educational and cultural traditions, as well as with the historiographic orientation in Chinese archaeology, than

with contemporary political ideology. In some cases, archaeological projects defined as bearing on the Xia-Erlitou relationship are supported by local government officials because of careerist ambitions for political and economic achievement, but there is no evidence that archaeologists' opinions are guided or controlled by the state.

3. No evidence suggests a positive connection between acceptance of the textual heritage and 'political correctness' in the Chinese archaeological community, although a small proportion of people in the Outside China Group believe there is such a connection.
4. Nothing in the China Group's responses supports the view that opinions about the Xia-Erlitou issue are related to expression of patriotism, although such a relation is posited by several respondents in the other group (24 per cent).
5. In regard to the dynastic affiliation of the Erlitou culture, 10 per cent of China Group respondents do not think this an important issue, holding that archaeology does not have to be associated with history. This view would also be supported by many people in the Outside China Group.
6. For China Group respondents who do not hold mainstream views, few expect to be criticised as unpatriotic or too pro-Western, and a clear majority would openly express their personal opinions. No one is afraid to be branded as 'politically incorrect'. Similarly, most Outside China Group respondents do not think 'political correctness' is an important issue in Chinese archaeology. These results seem to counter the assertion made in Falkenhausen (2007), cited above.

A significant number of people in the West do have a tendency to be critical of the 'Chinese views'. However, it is not clear whether there exists outside China a coherent mainstream opinion strongly opposed to the connection between Xia and Erlitou. The results from this survey differ from the opinions expressed in previous publications, reviewed above. This situation may indicate that some people in the West, who are seen as not critical enough of the 'Chinese views', probably feel pressure from their colleagues and ordinarily hesitate to express their views. A similar explanation may apply to the minority of Chinese archaeologists outside the mainstream, who would not openly express their opinions. Nevertheless, the fact that a non-mainstream view on this topic was published in a reputable Chinese journal (Xu & Liu 2008) indicates a normal level of academic freedom in China today, at least in relation to the Xia-Erlitou issues.

Different views will inevitably exist, regarding the correlation between archaeology and the history of Chinese civilisation, and debate on these issues will invigorate ongoing intellectual inquiry. There is nothing inappropriate in the fact that people of different social and cultural backgrounds may use different approaches and methods to investigate archaeological and historical questions and so reach different conclusions. But it would be more productive to promote further intellectual discussion rather than to politicise the debate.

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