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Archaeology Minor Internship Report – Sichuan Archaeology Experience (1st July-30th July)

Supported by the CUHK Anthropology and Sichuan Archaeology Unit, I joined an internship with 8 other CUHK students in Sichuan for the whole July. Thanks to the arrangement by the Sichuan Archaeology Unit, I worked as intern in both Sanxingdui 三星堆 and Jiangkou 江口 sites. The below are the memorable tasks of the internship. There will also be a short session which includes some insights gained from Sichuan on Hong Kong's cultural heritage work.

Experience in Sanxingdui site

2 nd	Visiting Shifang Museum
3 rd	Pairing up pottery pieces
4 th	Pairing up pottery pieces (include adhering the pottery pieces)
5 th	Pairing up pottery pieces, adhering the pottery pieces, being introduced to basic archaeology theories
6 th	Learning to identify Sanxingdui pottery types and variations, being introduced to collection records, classifying pottery pieces into pottery types.
7 th	Pairing up pottery pieces, classifying pottery pieces into pottery types
8 th	Pairing up pottery pieces, classifying pottery pieces into pottery types
9 th	Classifying pottery pieces into pottery types, adding up pottery pieces
10 th	Adding up pottery pieces, learning and practising plastering
11 th	(Working station flooded. Work ceased)
12 th	Describing pottery, visiting Sanxingdui Ruins Park and surrounding rural areas
13 th	Compiling and organizing information

Unfortunately, Sichuan in the first half of July was rainy. In one of the days, work even got suspended because the working station was flooded. Consequently, most of the work was done indoors and mainly involved processing the same group of pottery pieces excavated. When I first arrived at the working station and was acknowledged of my job, I was actually shocked to see the amount of pottery pieces that we were going to process. Looking at the pottery pieces, our job was like piecing together boxes of mixed puzzle together with most of

the pieces extracted. I had no way to begin my work. Thanks to the guidance of Sanxingdui teachers and my teammates, I began the work by first classifying the pottery pieces by their “big details”, acknowledging the fact that pottery pieces from the same pottery must have the same, or similar colour and thickness. It was until we classified them into the big groups then we started comparing the pottery pieces on our hands according to how they look and their composition (some pottery are made with clay and some are mixed with sand), and according to their inner colour. It is sometimes much easier to determine whether a piece belongs to a pottery through its inner colour compared to determine it through its outer colour, because the outer colour can be controlled by the craftsman, but this is less likely to happen to the inners of a pottery.

Consequently, our task became much easier as we became more familiar with the pottery pieces and narrowing our search as similar pieces are grouped together. We were introduced to additional processing work on 5th July, adhering the pottery pieces together. This was done by first removing the adhered clay and soil on the pottery edge with a surgery knife and toothbrush, as the soil will hamper our later processing work. Once the pottery is cleaned then we adhered the pieces together with melted plastic. To me, this is one of the most calculated task in our processing work. We would have to ensure that the correct amount of plastic is added – If we add too little plastic then the pieces cannot be adhered, if too much it would be possible that the pieces slipped off. As for the heating, we would have to determine the degree the plastic is heated. It would be best to melt it into a liquid state, but the plastic would be blackened if heated too long. It is not a pleasant sight to reveal the blackened parts on the recovered pottery. If too much plastic is applied, we would use a heated knife to remove the redundant parts. Learning to adhere the pieces again facilitate our processing work, as we were able to see a fuller picture of the pottery parts, especially when pieces were adhered and they could be presented in a 3D manner.

Later when Dr. Ran came back from work he introduced us to pottery in Sanxingdui. We were given a conceptual framework of Sanxingdui pottery and were explained the purpose of processing pottery pieces. One aspect of archaeology was to explore the typological change of material goods over time and therefore, archaeologists outline a region into chronological stages, the materials of which have respective characteristics. By comparing the characteristics through various stages, archaeologists would be able to figure out its changes over time. Processing the stage four pottery in Sanxingdui would enable academics to study this stage of pottery. Compiling data from other stages, it allows comparison and conceptualization. Later

we visited the storage and were introduced to all four stages of Sanxingdui pottery, including its remarkable types, composition changes and typological changes. An example of the objects introduced is *Xiaoping Diguan* 小平底罐, which existed throughout the later three stages of Sanxingdui, varying from a rather flat object into one that was taller and slimmer, the top part of which became shrugged as time changes. We had been working on Sanxingdui pottery for a while, but it was until Dr. Ran returned we were given a conceptual framework on the pottery, and were given a sense of mission on what we were doing. In the upcoming days, we not only try to piece the pottery together, but also tried to identify the pottery types from the pottery pieces. (In this sense, the top part and the bottom part of the pottery is much more important to our task because it was easier identifying pottery from these parts).

The last three tasks of our archaeological experiences in Sanxingdui included adding up the pottery pieces, practising plastering and describing the objects. The adding part was actually not easy. We were given two charts that helped as mark down the pieces found, one is the “colour-type” chart, and the other “colour-ornament” chart. Therefore, there were many things to consider before putting one piece of pottery into the chart. This kind of census enables archaeologist to find the comparative portion of each type of pottery in certain places and time, which might again hint at some of the chronological changes happening over time. Another similar work is to describe the objects: The aim of publishing archaeology reports is to make excavated materials easily and clearly accessed by the academics, most of whom were not able to examine the materials on site. Therefore, object description is an



Practising plastering

important part where we have to reveal as much details about the objects as possible. We started from general information like pottery type, colour and overall shape, then describe the details like ornaments and additional parts from top to bottom, attempting to present the object as clear as possible. Plastering was a bit similar to adhering pieces. Once accumulating a certain amount of pottery pieces, archaeologists can use plastering to fill in the missing pieces of a pottery, revealing the whole shape of the pottery. Unfortunately, I was unable to recover a pottery to

this degree, so the teachers gave me a piece of pottery with a missing piece instead. The process was a bit less challenging than adhering pieces because we were able to edit and fine-tune our work.

Overall, the internship in Sanxingdui was a step-by-step experience where I attempted to learn how the cluster of pottery pieces would be compiled and published in an archaeology report. Although it did not guarantee a complete understanding of Sanxingdui pottery, I consider the first half of July adequate for me to learn of the basis of archaeological publication.

Experience in Jiangkou Site

15 th	Learning and practising rubbing
16 th	Practising rubbing and describing excavated materials
17 th	Classifying and adding up iron nails
18 th	Learning and practicing Realtime Kinematic (RTK) device (classroom setting)
19 th	Learning and practicing usage of RTK device (fieldwork), learning and practicing usage of related cartographical software
20 th	Visiting Renzhou archaeological site, experiencing tomb cleaning work, visiting Renzhou Giant Buddha Site and nearby Daoist stone murals
21 st	Performing reconnaissance along <i>Wuyang Cheng</i> walls, practising usage of RTK device (fieldwork)
22 nd	Learning and practising usage of Luoyang Shovel, visiting tomb sites in Jiangkou Museum, classifying and adding up iron nails
23 rd	Performing reconnaissance along <i>Wuyang Cheng</i> walls, classifying and adding up iron nails
24 th	Interviewing inhabitants from surrounding areas, compiling and organizing information
25 th	Interviewing inhabitants from surrounding areas, compiling and organizing information.
26 th	Interviewing inhabitants from surrounding areas, compiling and organizing information.
27 th	Learning and practising relic photo-shooting, participating in an exchange conference

The work in Jiangkou was much more diversified albeit less specialized and dedicated. Most of the work were done for up to three days.

The first task I did in Jiangkou was to practice rubbing, which is another difficult part I encountered in the internship experience. Through rubbing paper into an object, mostly flat and inscribed, the inscriptions and ornaments on the object would be revealed in a 2D sense, also allowing publication. I worked on bronze coins, silver coins and also golden tablets. Firstly, we have to rub the object onto wet paper, then wait for it to dry to a certain degree, then adding ink onto the paper to reveal the inscriptions. This task was difficult for two reasons: (1) it was easy for the paper to move away when we were waiting, or when we were applying ink. Once moved, the paper would be rendered useless and had to be discarded. (2) We would need to hold an abstract idea of when the paper is dried. If the paper is too wet, the ink will spread and the original inscriptions cannot be copied clearly. If too dry, the imprints would become unclear on the paper. However, despite its difficulty, it appears to be my favourite work in Sichuan. One reason is that I fared quite well in this task. Another reason might be related to my major: It is the first time I saw how the material I read came into publication and to me, it is actually quite amazing to see the inscriptions take shape on the paper. If I am to continue archaeological work in the future, I would hope to focus my technical expertise in this aspect.

Then again I was assigned to object description. The objects excavated in Jiangkou were much more diversified and therefore, sometimes the methods we used in Sanxingdui pottery description would not be applied. We had to consider the excavated material before describing, but overall, I found it easier because it was much more flexible.

Then we were introduced to RTK, Realtime-Kinematic, devices. RTK is a device increasingly use in archaeological work. By comparing data of the desired destination with two set-up control points, archaeologist will be able to obtain instant and accurate coordinates of the destination. Such technology is useful in a cartographical sense, especially when archaeologist need to establish grids before excavating. We first learned



Finding control points with RTK devices

about the devices in a more classroom setting before bring them out to be used in the fields. Later, we extracted the data used in a classroom setting into the computer, which contains cartographical software, through which we were able to a small map displaying the place's attitude. The RTK devices are not only useful in creating maps and receiving information about a location, but also allow us to locate – we also tried doing it the other way round, first locating the points we would like to work on with the computer software, then extracting them into the field devices. Later, we would be able to locate these points through the devices.

As the weather is much better in the second half of July, we did plentiful of outdoors work in Sichuan. We visited the archaeological site at Renzhou, where the archaeologists were excavating a number of *Yamu* 崖墓 there. The tombs are located near the mountains and there were no established roads to reach them. Therefore, it took us quite an arduous journey to reach them. Aside from visiting the archaeological site, we also experienced some excavation work there by help cleaning the tombs. Another major outdoor work was to perform reconnaissance along *Wuyang Cheng* 武陽城 walls. Again we would have to explore some of the less established rural areas to locate tombs and possible archaeological findings. It did surprise me to see that when recording the location and details of reconnaissance findings, archaeologists nowadays do not use paper and pen but instead mobile phones. It does not look professional but it is actually much more convenient as locations can also be roughly located and saved with the phones. When we trailed along the countryside, I was quite amazed that in Sichuan historical relics could be anywhere in the rural areas. A tomb, especially the ones during Qing, might be located near a farm, or just a 30-minute walk from the major roads. We also practiced the Luoyang shovel, which digs up soil in a vertical sense, allowing us to examine the soil composition, or possible archaeological findings, in the soil. Stratigraphically, this is important.

In the later days we were assigned to interview villagers about Zhang Xianzhong's sunken treasures. This was my most unenjoyable task in Sichuan, because the indigenous replied us in local Sichuanese. My groupmates were able to get much information about the geographical information about the sunken treasures and villagers' opinion on archaeological exploration in surrounding areas, but I was unable to and had to wait for their transcription. Fortunately, when we were interviewing a villager, he showed as a family book which includes information about Zhang's events in Sichuan. I was really happy as I could finally make some contributions by textualising and analyzing the book. The book did show an alternate view where Zhang did not murder Sichuan's people. This was the doing of the Qing government. Nevertheless, this is overall not an enjoyable task to me. I tried hard to comprehend what the villagers said but to

no avail.

In the last day we were introduced to relic photo-shooting. I have been taking photography as a hobby but the relic photo-shooting experience is awe-inspiring to me. It was taken very seriously, hoping to bring out the details of the relics in a detailed and comfortable manner. To achieve this, we would have to consider various aspects, like brightness, angle, lighting and background. The lesson only lasts for a morning but I already felt like I learnt a lot from the teacher.

Generally, the Jiangkou experience was different compared to that of Sanxingdui. However, I also enjoyed the experience as I was acknowledged of the different aspects of archaeological work, getting to know how multi-disciplinary the work could be.

Insights on Hong Kong's Cultural Heritage Work

Aside from practising various archaeology work and tasks, the teachers in Sichuan were also very kind to bring us to various museums and cultural relic sites. For instance, during our stay in Sanxingdui we were brought to the Shifang Museum, Sanxingdui Museum and the Sanxingdui Ruins Park; the Jiangkou teachers introduced us to the Renzhou Great Buddha site and the Daoist murals. We also visited the Jinsha Museum, Zhuge Liang's temple, the Provincial Museum and Chengdu Museum. These experiences have offered me some insight into Hong Kong's Heritage Work, which I would hope to present it below.



One of the shops using “Sanxing” to name itself

I believed that one of the more significant aspect of Sichuan's cultural heritage work lies not in its institutional work, but in its non-institutional work. Throughout our visit in Sanxingdui and Jiangkou, the historical vibe was everywhere. Our reconnaissance in Jiangkou



Bronze statues in the Sanxingdui Ruins Park, recording archaeologists' work there.

led us to see the ubiquity of cultural relics everywhere. When interviewing villagers, most of them have established knowledge on Zhang's tales, and they even attempted to deduct where the unexcavated sunken treasures were, and in Sanxingdui when we visited the surrounding places, the local people seem also to build a sense of community as people living in Sanxingdui, taking pride of the history and culture of this famous archaeological site – this is exemplified by most of the shops name. They uses either the words “*Shu* 蜀” or “*Sanxing* 三星”. People in Sichuan all have an established sense and affiliation towards their cultural heritage. I believe that this is important. Public engagement in cultural heritage gives meaning and support to the cultural heritage work. If people do not show interest in cultural heritage, it would only

render cultural heritage work meaningless and the people working in this field would not gain the accreditation they deserve.

When we looked at Hong Kong, however, people's interest in cultural relics are not easily observable. I believe this is to a certain degree related to Hong Kong's setting:

First of all, Hong Kong is an urban center, most of its buildings process a modern vibe, characterizing the city as a city of progressiveness. Under such circumstances, not a lot of people showed interest towards the relics. Sichuan is progressive alright, but it exploits on its wonderful, attractive relics as a significant characteristic of the city.

Additionally, Hong Kong's cultural heritage work is limited by its archaeological resources. Looking at Sanxingdui, Jiangkou and the various museums, there were a large pool of archaeological resources available for exploration and excavation. In Hong Kong, archaeological experience is only available in small areas in Hong Kong. Most are done, unknown to the public, in outlying islands like Sai Kung. Even if there are possible findings, it

is not easy that they will get exposed by Hong Kong's people.

Hong Kong's cultural heritage work is also hampered by its divided opinions. Albeit being a small place, Hong Kong is actually quite divided. As aforementioned, most available archaeological resources were available in outlying islands and the New Territories. There is actually much heritage work that can be done in the New Territories. However, I believed that people in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon have divided opinions with people in the New Territories – It is not an old matter to speak of Hong Kong's land problems. Land supply is abundant in the New Territories, but most traditional families and landlords refused to give up their lands, using heritage preservation as a reason. To many Hong Kong people in the Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, cultural heritage preservation is only an excuse for the landlords to retain their land. As such, a lot of people did not see heritage preservation in the New Territories as important. Rather, the landlords' hold of land is seen by people as a reason to Hong Kong's land shortage. When the Queen's Pier was about to be demolished, there were lots of opposing voices from the urban areas. When the New Territories' land was to be reclaimed for urban development, there is actually less people from the urban areas that came out to opposed governments' projects. The above may be able to exemplify the clash between Hong Kong urban people and rural people. There should be further observation whether Sichuanese people have different feelings (i.e. whether urban people in Chengdu clashed with the rural people or not, or are they conscious of local cultural heritage projects).

Lastly, Hong Kong's cultural heritage work is not successful because of Hong Kong people sees "history". Admittedly, Hong Kong is a "nowhere" until its colonization. It was a small place without much historical significance. Only when the British came and developed an entrepôt here did the idea of "Hong Kong" exist. To many people, it was till then did Hong Kong develop a history. Therefore, it is difficult for the public to accept Hong Kong relics before colonization. Most of the people settled here were not even the indigenous. Therefore, the public function of cultural heritage work is to a certain extent limited because not a lot of people see heritage work in earlier periods like Song as important.

On the institutional aspect, Sichuan museums are much more developed with advanced tour guides (visitors will be able to get an earphone from the tour guide, as a result of which the tour guides do not need to shout). Additionally, they also benefited from a much bigger gallery which allow more people to examine the artifacts at one time. Therefore, they are better at developing people's sense towards culture. Comparatively, Hong Kong's museums did not

seem to progress for a long time. Take the History Museum as an example. Its most recent change was to allow free access to its museum's standing exhibition, with no intent to apply new technology in aiding people's learning in the museum. Allowing free access, I believe, is actually not a good idea: Firstly, the museums need its funds for improvement, relying only on the government is actually not a pleasant idea. Opening the museum to tourists without charging them money is actually not a good idea. Secondly, it actually prizes down the museum's exhibits. In earlier times people would have to pay to enter. They have a more established sense of mission to visit the museum. Nowadays, the museum is just a free public space. Lastly, the museum became flooded with people as a result. Without controlling the numbers of people entered, it actually affects others' enjoyment in the museum. When it comes to museology, I believe that Hong Kong museums, especially the History Museum can learn from the other countries' strategy. The current situation is just not satisfying.

The above hope to draw comparison between Sichuan's and Hong Kong's situation to see how Hong Kong's cultural heritage work can be bettered. Without doubt, Hong Kong's current heritage work is not satisfying, but work has to be done not only from the institutions and the museums themselves. Reconciliation and education is also important for Hong Kong's people to explore Hong Kong's culture in a historical sense.