

More on Peking Man

(*Sinanthropus Pekinensis*)

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by Eileen Meier

Following up on a footnote in Encyclopedia Britannica section on Peking Man, I obtained the book "Peking Man" (1975) by Henry L. Shapiro from the local library through inter-library loan.



China Letter Sheet; October 19, 1989

This work states that a division of labor occurred within the Peking Man community. Women gathered fruit, nuts, roots and grubs while men hunted to obtain meat for the group. There was no picture in this book showing a digging stick.

"The Dawn of Humans: Expanding Worlds" by Rick Gore in National Geographic (May 1997) reports that "many Eastern sites in China yield numerous choppers and flakes but no hand axes. Hominids may have been making their big tools from bamboo." Perhaps the item held in the woman's hand in a bamboo digging stick in China (PRC) postal stationery item discussed in Fun with Research: Peking Man, OWA Vol. XVII, Number 1, Pg 5-6.

At a charity rummage sale I found a book "Food in History" by Reay Tannahil (1973). This book describes early man's diet as "eggs, nestlings, fruit in trees. On ground lizards, porcupines, tortoises, ground squirrels, moles, plump insects and grubs. Man learned how to kill larger animals such as buffalo and rhinoceros, whose bones were found in Peking Man's caves. They also hunted otter, wild sheep and boar. 70% of meat diet was deer."

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"Even today primitive man gathers fruit and other vegetable foods primarily, and hunt only secondary. Modern hunter-gather societies derive an average of 35% of their calories from fresh meats" according to Edward O. Wilson in "On Human Nature" (1978). Therefore, the women of the Peking Man group supplied the day to day foods while the men brought home a welcome addition to the basic vegetarian diet.

In an attempt to learn more about the original bones, which were lost in 1941 when a Japanese invasion was feared, I wrote to Peking Union Medical College, China. I received an answer from Cao Chenggang, Department of Anatomy at PUMC. He states that the Peking Man fossils were lost. The data gathered by F. Weidenreich (German) gives excellent accounts of the body structure. The 100th anniversary of Beijing University was celebrated by the issuance of a stamp on May 4, 1998 by the Peoples Republic of China (Scott 2867).

What happened to the bones? Harry L. Shapiro tells us that it is well known to paleontologists that Chinese drug stores were a likely place to look for petrified fossils as peasants brought "dragon bones from their fields for sale". For centuries petrified bones were used in Chinese pharmacopoeia for their medicinal properties. Perhaps that was the fate of the bones of Peking Man.

According to Harry L. Shapiro in "Peking Man" (1975); "The Chinese believe that 'Asians evolved in Asia not in Africa'." However, three reports support the "Out of Africa" migration theory:

1- May 12, 2000 The Washington Post "Out of Africa" by Guy Gugliotta states "Two fossil skulls from a 1.7 million year old *Homo ergaster*, unearthed at Damanisi, in the Black Sea Republic of Georgia, probably represent the first human ancestors to journey out of Africa."

2- May 14, 2001 The Washington Post "Science Notebook" states that "DNA markers on male chromosomes of East Asian males (12,000 from 163 population groups) could be traced to African ancestors who lived between 89,000 and 35,000 years ago."

3- March 21, 2002 The Washington Post "Our Single Species Ancestor?" by Guy Gugliotta reports that "a million year old skull fragment found in the desert of Northeastern Ethiopia that scientists say offers new evidence that a single species of human ancestor (*Ergaster* is an early form of *Homo-erectus*) spread across the continents of Africa, Europe and Asia long before modern humans (*Homo-sapiens*) made their appearance.

Concerning human evolution, an April 18, 2002 Washington Post article by Guy Gugliotta "Suddenly Humans Age Three Million Years", states "molecular biologists

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using DNA sequencing suggest that the origin of primates maybe backdated from 65 million to 85 million years ago, before dinosaurs went extinct. This revision of the evolutionary tree of primates diverged from chimps about 8 million years rather than 5 million years ago." Giving humans 3 million years more to evolve from early genus Homo to modern man (*Homo-sapiens*).

"Human evolution may be over", according to biologist Steve Jones of the University College of London; thus begins an article in "The Week" February 15 2002. "Modern civilization has thwarted Darwinian selection. People who were weak, susceptible to disease or just stupid used to die in childhood or get eaten by predators. Half the children born used to die before adolescence. Today, shielded by medicine and social welfare, 98% of children live on well past reproductive age and pass on their genes. Things have simply stopped getting better or worse for our species."

Critics insist that evolution will persist, driven by such traits as sexual attractiveness and intellectual fitness. The biologist Christopher Wills of the University of California states "There is a premium on sharpness of mind and the ability to accumulate money. Such people tend to have more children and have a better chance of survival."

The Peking Man Site is located on Dragon Bone Hill in Zhoukoudian, 50 km southwest of Beijing. On December 2, 1929 the most important discovery of all was made. In a branching cave where a fissure crosses the main cave in which Wenzhong Pei found the first and almost complete skull cap of Peking Man in the red sandy clay which is equivalent to the 10th layer in the main section.

In the 1930s another discovery was made in a cave on the top of the hill. Skulls and other fossils of ancient man, named Upper Cave Man by scientists, were found there.

In the excavation of 1959, another relatively complete mandible, attributable to an aged female, was found in layer 10.

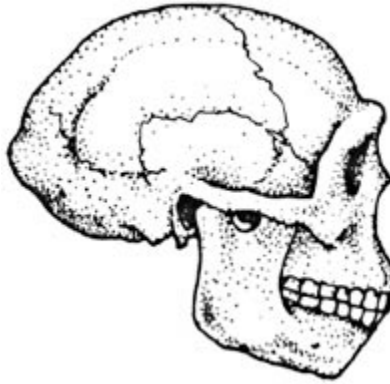
Layer 10, the lowest layer bearing Peking Man fossils, is dated about 500,000 years ago, while Layer 3, the upmost layer bearing Peking Man fossil, is dated from 230,000 to 250,000 years ago. Thus, Peking Man had lived in the cave for about 260,000 years.

Peking Man was a cave dweller, toolmaker, fire user, gatherer, and hunter. In view of fossil records and cultural remains, he was superb in his capability of adapting himself to environment with his adaption of physiological structure and technical ability.

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Peking Man Skull:



Above illustration is a reconstruction done by Franz Weidenreich, based on bones from at least 4 different individuals. A complete skull has never been found. All skeletons/skulls are composites.

I would like to dedicate this article to the late Mr. C. Y. Chan, who introduced me to the stamps issued by the Asian Nations to celebrate Chinese New Year and to the ancient civilization of China, opening the door onto an entirely new world and perspective on history.

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