

Foreword

Bioarchaeological Perspectives on Migration and Health in Ancient East Asia

Bioarchaeological research provides a unique and valuable platform from which to address key attributes of lifeways and living conditions, especially in those areas of the world where large samples of human remains from archaeological settings are available. East Asia is just such a data-rich region. In particular, and as is so well illustrated by the contributions presented in this book, there is a remarkable human skeletal record derived from numerous contexts, ranging from simple-scale societies in early Japan to expansive empires in late-period China. Virtually everywhere in East Asia, societies at one point or another underwent economic change from foraging to farming or pastoralism. This gives us the opportunity to characterize the impacts of these fundamental adaptive transitions. Among the sources to draw on for some areas of East Asia are the historical records and medical texts that describe a range of characteristics, including, for example, illness, population movement, and demographic context. In addition, for at least some regions, there is an archaeological record that provides important insights into diet, material culture, social complexity, and settlement, areas that are crucial for understanding the human biological record as it is represented by skeletal remains.

Like all other regions of the world, the early work on human remains in East Asia was motivated by widespread interest in population history, especially classification and racial reconstruction based on measurement of skulls. Indeed, some of the great early twentieth-century biological anthropologists—such as Sir Arthur Keith—investigated remains from a variety of settings to explain the origins of cultures. The leading early twentieth-century East Asian biological anthropologist, Wu Dingliang (吴定良), published extensively in one of the leading journals of his day, *Biometrika*.

During the past decade or so, bioarchaeology in East Asia has begun to develop, moving beyond the near-singular focus on population history and descriptions of skeletons, and turning to the study of health and well-being, bio-

cultural adaptation, and behavioral and dietary inference (e.g., Pietrusewsky and Douglas 2002; Pechenkina et al. 2002; Oxenham and Tayles 2006). Although still in its embryonic stage, bioarchaeological research in this region is revealing key facets of the human condition as they apply to the study of this vast region of the world during the past 10,000 years of human evolution.

The present volume represents an exciting contribution to the ongoing discussions by anthropologists, other social and behavioral scientists, and historians about past populations in Asia, addressing such central questions as: What were the consequences for health in the transition from foraging to rice farming? How was the transition different in this setting from other regions where agriculture developed, such as North America and Europe? Where do modern Japanese (and other Asian groups) derive from? What is the earliest record of infectious diseases (such tuberculosis and treponematosi)? What is the record of conflict and aggression in East Asia? How did rising social complexity impact human health? The chapters presented in this important volume provide us with a major stepping-off point for promoting new studies in a region of the world that will yield answers to long-standing questions. Importantly, the book brings together a group of scholars from diverse backgrounds and perspectives who study human behavior in the past from various points of view and help us to address important questions from multiple contexts.

Clark Spencer Larsen
Series Editor

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