Dominic Hosner

In China three campaigns of systematic archaeological field surveys stipulated by the State Council covering all provinces were started in 1956, in 1981 and in 2007 lasting approximately three to five years. Sites of all prehistoric and historic periods were registered and documented by local teams of archaeologists. The second initiative during the 1980s resulted in a vast amount of collected data which were classified and evaluated by the provincial archaeological institutes. The State Administration of Cultural Heritage successively edits the results in the series ‘Atlas of Chinese Cultural Relics’ separately by provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the administration of the Central Government. Altogether 32 volumes have been planned, of which 22 are already published.

This data compilation, as formulated by the editorial committee, summarizes the huge amount of original information, records comprehensively important discoveries of unmovable relics, and creates a basis for heritage protection work, site management and research. The focus was on designating relics of national, provincial and local importance, assigning sites to certain prehistoric and historic periods, and categorizing them as tombs, buildings and other types of relics.

The structure and layout of all volumes are consistent. In the first part of every volume, as an overview all documented sites are mapped on several provincial maps in chronological order starting from the Palaeolithic followed by the Neolithic and the Bronze Age up to historical dynasties or in smaller steps of successive archaeological cultures.

The scales of provincial maps are diverse, ranging between 1:10,000,000 and 1:2,100,000. The small scale often results in a clustering of sites in areas with high site density. For clarification these areas are shown on additional larger scale maps. The sites in the atlases are indicated by signs of different colour and size, explained in the legend. Different colours may indicate diachronic
phases or synchronic local variants of one archaeological culture. The size of a sign commonly refers to the status of the particular site, applying a three-tiered site hierarchy with big dots indicating national heritage sites, middle-size dots indicating a provincial/autonomous region level of heritage, and smallest dots indicating sites on a city/county level or non-classified sites. Short texts which accompany these maps provide the general characteristics of each prehistoric and historic period, often with a more detailed chronology than employed in the maps. Separate chapters describe the most representative sites and archaeological finds of the relevant periods. The main body of each volume, however, consists of an extensive site index providing a short description for every single site. Site characteristics include information on discovery, research, means of conservation, approximate size, depths of cultural layers, attribution to archaeological cultures or historical dynasties, representative finds, and seldom reference to publications or institutions in charge of research. The sites are arranged in chapters for all counties and cities with precise reference to the location indicated on county or city maps with scales ranging between 1:10,000 and 1:750,000.

The atlases, which provide the most comprehensive coverage of all known heritage sites obtained by salvage and research excavations, systematic surveys and occasional discoveries, are published in Chinese with English abstracts.

**Publication**

Wagner, M., et al., Mapping of the spatial and temporal distribution of archaeological sites of northern China during the Neolithic and Bronze Age, Quaternary International (2012), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2012.06.039