Growth And Stability Among Complex Societies in Prehistoric Lingnan, Southeast China

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One significant advance in the field of Chinese archaeology over past decades has been the identification of numerous prehistoric societies characterized by unequal access to status and wealth (henceforth referred to as 'complex societies') in areas peripheral to the Yellow River valley, a region traditionally regarded as the cradle of Chinese civilization. Lingnan, an area which comprises the two modern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi in Southeast China, also witnessed the emergence of small-scale complex societies prior to its incorporation into the unified Qin and Han states during the last centuries of the pre-Christian era (Allard 1995). Our present ideas regarding pre-Qin Lingnan are largely based on the results of archaeological fieldwork, itself supplemented by a limited corpus of historical references to the area by the literate Chinese living to the north.

Significantly, neither the complex societies in Lingnan nor the majority of such societies in other parts of China seem to have developed into large and highly complex polities, a phenomenon apparently restricted to the Yellow River valley during the second millennium B.C. when a number of historically recorded dynasties established powerful states in that region. Furthermore, the archaeological record of complex societies in prehistoric Lingnan, incomplete as it may be, appears to point to an uneven developmental pattern throughout the region, with some of these societies apparently experiencing rapid hierarchical devolution following a period of growth in scale and complexity.

This paper examines the circumstances and features of five instances of complex socio-political development in Lingnan over a period from the late Neolithic to the early Iron Age (ca. 3000 -200 B.C.), with each of these trajectories tested against recent models dealing with the issues of societal types, complexity, growth and stability (Fig. 1). The developmental patterns identified in prehistoric Lingnan serve as the basis for a general discussion of socio-political stability in small-scale complex societies, with the dynamic interplay between local leaders and their followers identified as an important locus of change.

Political-economic Strategies and Developmental Trajectories

In recent decades, ethnographic and archaeological studies have called into question the neo-evolutionary frameworks proposed by Service (1971) and Fried (1967), as well as those models which rely on single exogenous or internal factors to explain culture change. However, although many have questioned the progressivist and strict typological implications of such evolutionary schemes, the recognition of socio-political variants has not been accompanied by a general abandonment of a unilinear perspective (Feinman

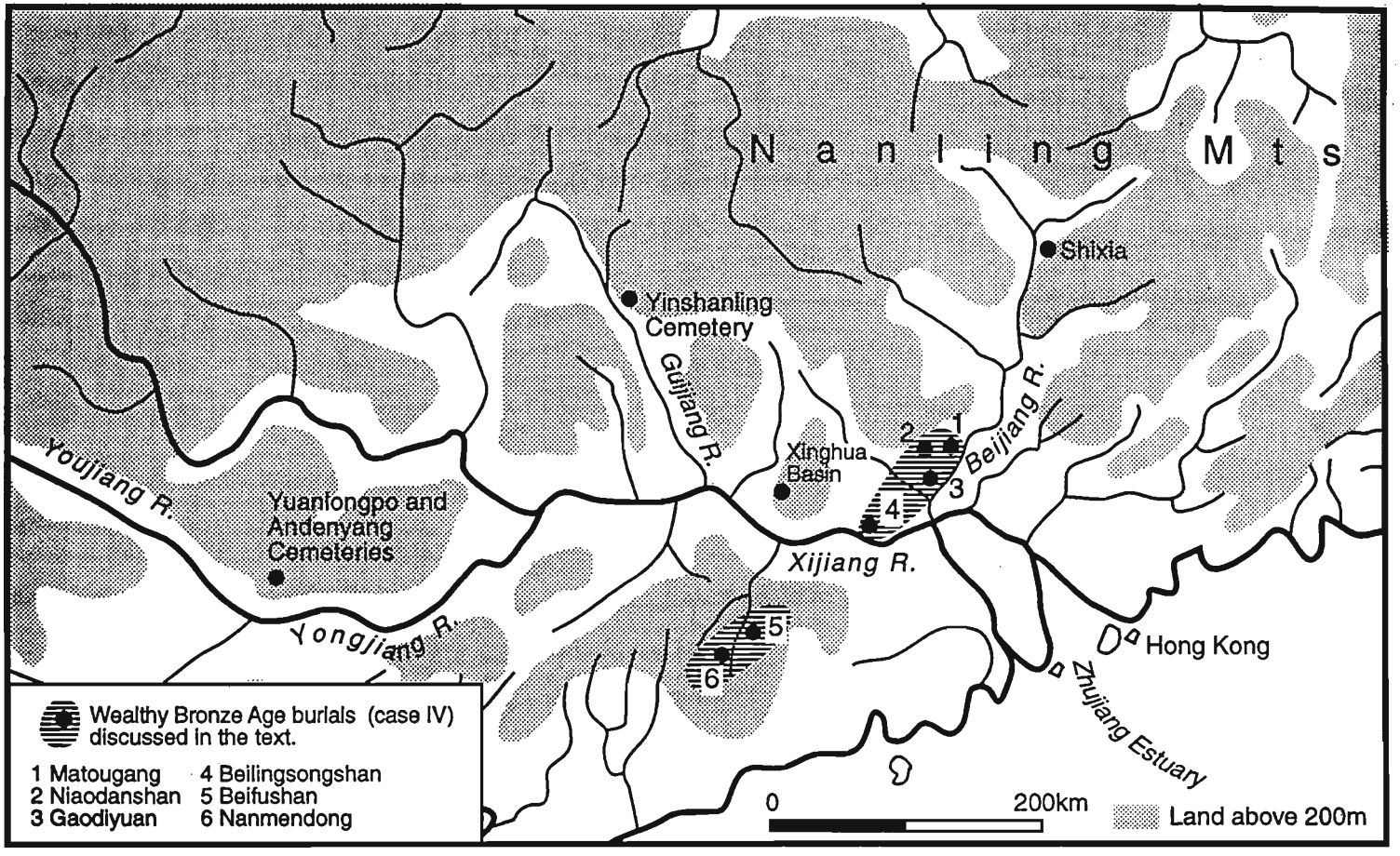

Figure 1 Map of Lingnan and location of archaeological cases discussed in the text

1995:263). Recent forays into the topic of cultural evolution include attempts at determining whether we can in fact speak of inherently different types of socio-political systems and distinct developmental trajectories. Importantly, these endeavours have benefited from an increasing reliance on ethnographic data to try and identify the behavioural locus of culture change, in other words seeing how such change may be explained by the actions of real human participants who differ in their personal objectives and in their ability to mould and react to their internal and external socio-political environments.

A number of ethnographic and archaeological studies have attempted to distinguish different political-economic strategies in a wide range of complex societies (*e.g.* Blanton *et al.* 1996; Drennan 1991; Renfrew 1974; Strathern 1969,1978). Significantly, a number of these studies seem to agree in identifying two generally contrasting methods of gaining and retaining political power, with each emphasizing either the external or internal dimensions of such power. For example, Blanton *et al.* (1996) distinguish between "network" and "corporate" strategies, while analogous dichotomies include those of "finance" vs "home production" (Strathern 1969), "individualizing" vs "group-oriented" chiefdoms (Renfrew 1974), and "wealth distribution" vs "staple finance" (Gilman 1987).

The network strategy, which sees individuals attempting to manipulate external relations for their own benefit, is associated with the movement of exotic goods, knowledge and/or marriage partners among separate social systems whose elaborate arts often evidence a certain 'international style'. The control of a prestige-goods redistributive system allows ambitious individuals to expand their factional base locally and to compete in the extra-local arena. The prevailing ideology permits ostentatious display as well as the promotion of powerful individuals through their representation in art and writing (Blanton *et al.* 1996:3-5). In contrast, the corporate strategy is associated with a more egalitarian ideology which encourages social cohesiveness across lineages through the vehicle of communal events (*e.g.* fertility rituals). There is a lesser emphasis on external relations and on ancestral rituals which advertize and support the claim of individual lineages and their respective heads to elevated status. The 'financing' of power in corporate strategies is more likely to rely on the promotion and appropriation of local primary production surpluses such as agricultural staples (cf. D'Altroy and Earle's "staple finance" strategy, 1985) (Blanton *et al.* 1996:3,5-7).

A number of those archaeological correlates believed to be associated with each strategy are discussed in the studies mentioned above. Network systems may be characterized by the following: evidence of significant external contacts (goods, ideas); significant numbers of prestige goods and indications of an advanced technology associated with their production; a prestige goods economy; and often dramatic differences between high and low status in the domestic and funerary spheres (*e.g.* house size, the scale and 'quality' of burial assemblages, the size and complexity of graves, and funerary behaviour).
Corporate systems, in contrast, display evidence for the reduced importance of external contacts (*e.g.* fewer exotic goods or copies of such), as well as greater equality among status levels, with burials sometimes communal. High status burials may contain a large

proportion of utilitarian artefacts (e.g. tools and ceramic vessels) rather than prestige goods, which do not play a central role in the social system. Other possible correlates of corporate strategies include large spaces used for communal rituals, as well as technological advances in the utilitarian sphere. Even though their discussion of different strategies seems to support the above distinctions, Blanton *et al.* nevertheless warn that predictions of "reduced consumption of prestige items overall and a greater degree of wealth equality" in corporate systems remain "issues that require further empirical testing" (1996:7).

Some researchers have commented on the developmental and spatial dimensions of the two contrasting socio-political strategies described above. Blanton *et al.* suggest that, although both strategies coexist in any single system at any one time, one tends to predominate (1996:2). Significantly, they add, the suggested typology does not fit existing neoevolutionary schemes because "both corporate and exclusionary [network] strategies produced political-economic systems of varying scale and degree of complexity" (1996:3).

It has also been suggested that different regional trajectories may be characterized by either one of the two strategies. Feinman suggests that middle-range polities on the Northwest coast of North America, although differing in scale and complexity, all made use of network strategies. In contrast, similarly varied Polynesian societies would appear to have adopted corporate strategies (Feinman 1995:268-74). The case for lengthy developmental sequences being characterized by single strategies is also made by Drennan, who points to the maintenance of "individualizing" strategies in central Panama and the Alto Magdalena (in Columbia), while the sequences in the Valley of Oaxaca and the Basin of Mexico displayed "group-oriented" strategies (Drennan 1991). In contrast, Blanton *et al.* propose that "...viewed broadly, Mesoamerican social history from the Early Formative to the Spanish conquest consisted of *cycles* (my italics) of long duration alternating between network and corporate emphases... "(Blanton *et al.* 1996:13).

Although network and corporate strategies are associated with social systems of varying degrees of scale and complexity, it has also been suggested that the actual strategy in use may impose limitations on system growth and stability. Whereas Renfrew appears to see "individualizing chiefdoms" as more 'advanced' than "group-oriented chiefdoms" and more likely to develop into highly complex polities (such as the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization) (1974:84-85), Drennan proposes that "the more integrated local economies and the tradition of mobilizing resources to create spaces for communal ritual" are better suited to the later development of states than systems characterized by "internal economic independence and fiercely personalized status rivalry" (Drennan 1991:285). Blanton *et al.* agree with this latter view when they propose that "exclusionary power strategies were principally associated with comparatively small, autonomous polities.... Corporate systems of differing scales also developed, but large-scale polities seem always to have been based on some kind of corporate strategy" (1996:3).

The apparent inability of network strategies to produce highly complex polities may be associated with some inherent instability of network systems. Both Strathern (1969:44)

and Blanton *et al.* (1996:4-5) comment on the fact that ambitious individuals in such systems ("finance" strategies in Strathern's terminology) are disadvantaged by a highly competitive and fluid environment in which it may be impossible to maintain, at a distance, control over important external linkages and the flow of prestige goods. However, although agricultural intensification may benefit leaders in both corporate and network systems, the latter have the advantage in those areas with limited agricultural potential but good access to communication routes since the central requirement remains the control of the flow of goods (Blanton *et al.* 1996:7).

Objectives and the Nature of the Data

In a recent study of prehistoric Lingnan, I proposed that the emergence of complex societies in that region was sometimes associated with the use and local transformation of goods and ideas originating north of Lingnan in central China. It was also found that in some of the sequences associated with these complex societies, peaks in the degree of inequality were apparently followed by a process of hierarchical devolution (Allard 1995). Together, these findings suggest that we may have at our disposal an appropriate data base for the testing of some of the previously discussed models dealing with political-economic strategies and developmental trajectories. In this paper, an attempt is made to determine how well the evidence associated with the five sequences in prehistoric Lingnan aligns each of these with either the 'network' or 'corporate' strategy (or the contrasting types within analogous dichotomies). We also consider the developmental dimensions of these strategies as they apply to each trajectory and address the question of system 'stability' by paying close attention to the timing and nature of transitions marking a change between different strategies.

Attempts at identifying political-economic strategies in use during any of the five trajectories under consideration are hampered by an absence of detailed settlement data (partly the result of erosional factors), public works or monumental architecture associated with these sequences. Although some limited settlement evidence is used in the task, it is burial evidence that must be relied upon as the primary means of trying to understand socio-political processes in prehistoric Lingnan. Furthermore, this burial evidence presents its own set of problems. For example, the absence of both cemetery plans and detailed lists of grave goods for some of the sequences makes it difficult to comment on the degree and nature of inequality in the social systems associated with those trajectories. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated, the available burial information does seem to present evidence of meaningful temporal patterning.

While the archaeological correlates already described will serve as the basis for the identification of the strategies in use, it is proposed here that we can add one further correlate to this list, namely the location of high and low status graves within the burial area. In keeping with the many prerogatives of high status in network systems, it is suggested that wealthy graves in such systems are likely to display partial or complete isolation from low status burials. This contrasts with the cemeteries of corporate systems where wealthy burials are likely to be distributed among low status graves without any clear demonstration of 'distancing'.

Five Trajectories in Prehistoric Lingnan

CASE I: The Late Neolithic in Qujiang County (northern Guangdong Province)

Fieldwork in Qujiang county has revealed continued occupation from the Palaeolithic onward, as well as the presence of the so-called 'Shixia Culture' (ca. 3000 - 2300 B.C.), named after the site at which burials and occupational strata have yielded a wide range of artefacts (Fig. 2). Shixia is located near the centre of a large and well-watered karst area, with nearby rivers providing access to the Pearl River delta to the south and to central China through mountain passes in the Nanling mountain range to the north. Ideas regarding culture change in Qujiang during the Late Neolithic rely on knowledge of the stratified deposits at Shixia (which span pre- to post- Shixia Culture levels) as well as more fragmentary data recovered from other sites in the area.

Although a detailed list of grave goods and a plan of the settlement and burial ground at Shixia have yet to be published, the available information allows us to propose the following trajectory. Stage 1: the slow growth of a corporate system at least partly dependent on rice cultivation; stage 2: a relatively short-lived network system in which dramatic social inequality is associated with clear evidence of external contacts; stage 3: a return to a system characterized by a corporate strategy. An outline of this trajectory is presented below and is based on information obtained from the following sources: GDBWG (1991:220), GDBWG and QJWHJ (1978), Mo (1961), QJWBH (1988), Yang (1986;1988), Zhu (1981;1984:34-36), and Zhu *et al.* (1981). A more detailed summary in English is provided in Allard (1995:94-106).

Stage 1 (mid 4th - mid 3rd millennium B.C.)

The occupation of Shixia prior to the 'emergence' of Shixia Culture is indicated by the presence of material in the lowest stratum, while the earliest stages of Shixia Culture at the site are associated with the remains of houses (one of these 40 metres long, possibly a meeting house?) and of storage and cooking pits, with the pits and house walls yielding the earliest carbonized remains of domesticated rice in Lingnan. The 20 or so burials are in small pits, most of these characterized by the practices of pit scorching and secondary burial. Burial goods include a wide range of ceramic vessels and lithics, including large perforated shovels and long adzes believed to be agricultural implements. The latest burials are, on average, slightly larger and wealthier than the earlier ones, with some yielding jade pins and beads. Ring-footed vessels, large stone 'picks' (probably agricultural tools) and *yue* 'battle-axes' also make an appearance at this later stage.[1] Domesticated rice, burial practices and some artefact features appear to have been adopted from areas north of Lingnan, while the *yue* battle-axes are very similar to the *yue* of the Late Neolithic culture of Liangzhu (ca. 3300 - 2100 B.C.) centred some 1000 km northeast of Shixia along the lower reaches of the Yangtze River.

Stage 2 (middle centuries of the 3rd millennium B.C.)

This relatively brief stage, associated with 44 burials at Shixia, presents evidence for a dramatic increase in social differentiation during the late Shixia Culture. The wealthiest and largest graves - one of which measured 3.3 m x 1.4 m x 1.8 m (l,w,d) - are usually secondary burials, with four of these each yielding over 100 artefacts. An average of five to seven artefacts were recovered from the smaller graves. Ceramics now include a wider range of vessel types than before, while a number of exquisite and labour intensive

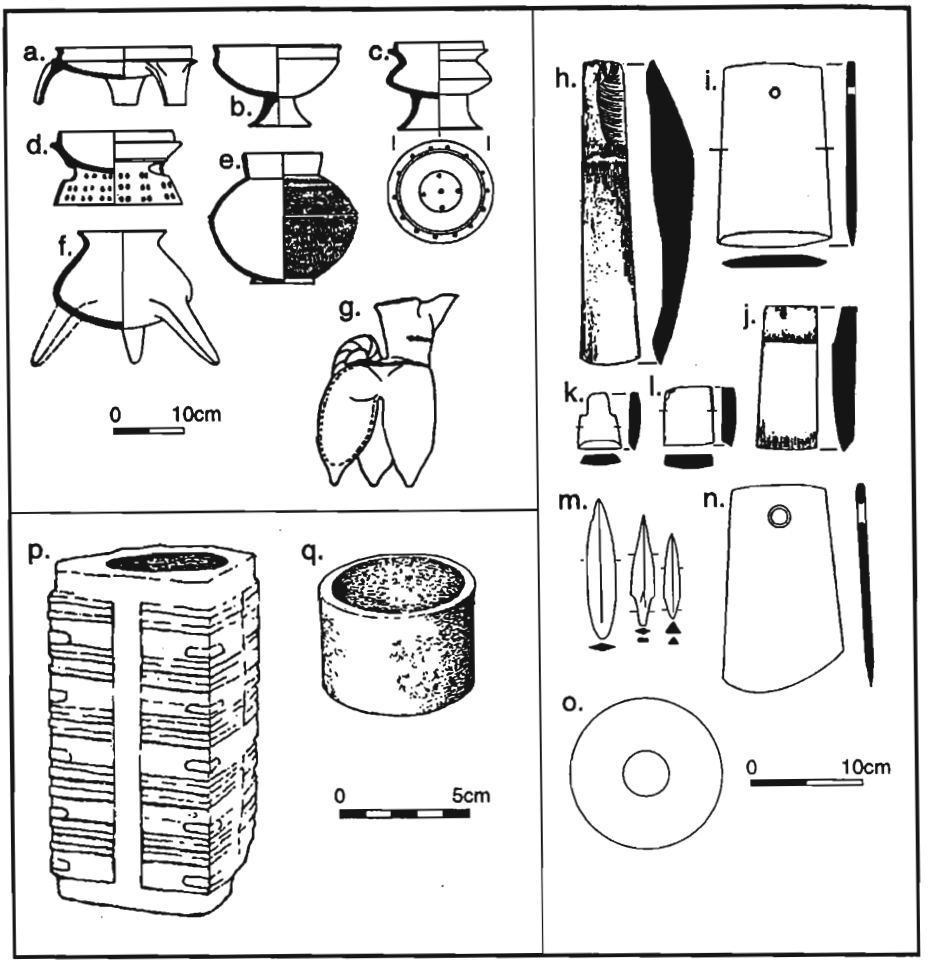

Figure 2 Artefacts of Shixia culture
a. Ceramic tripod dish; **b.** Ceramic stemmed vessel (*dou*); **c.** Ceramic rice steamer (*zeng*); **d.** Ceramic dish with perforated ring-foot; **e.** Ceramic pot (*guan*); **f.** Ceramic tripod cauldron (*ding*); **g.** Ceramic three-legged pitcher (*gui*); **h.** Stone pickaxe (*jue*); **i.** Stone shovel (*chan*); **j.** Stone stepped adze (*ben*); **k.** Stone shouldered adze (*ben*); **l.** Stone trapezoidal adze (*ben*); **m.** Stone arrowheads (*zu*); **n.** Stone 'battle-axe' (*yue*); **o.** Stone perforated disc (*bi*); **p.** Stone tube with rectangular sides (*cong*); **q.** Stone bracelet (*huan*). Artefacts redrawn from GDBWG and QJWHJ 1978: 3,4,7,11,14; Wu 1988: 188; Lam 1984: 165,169.

ornaments, many made of jade and found mostly in the wealthier burials, are added to the previous lithic assemblage. These include slit-rings, pendants, one *bi* disc and six *cong* tubes.[2] Although a local manufacture is likely for the majority of these ornaments, it is important to point to the close similarities between the *bi* discs, *cong* tubes, the previously mentioned *yue* axes, and the counterparts of these artefacts in Liangzhu Culture, where

they are believed by some scholars to have had a ritual role. Significantly (and in contrast to expectations regarding network systems), the high status burials contain a large proportion of utilitarian artefacts such as agricultural tools and ceramic vessels. Finally, mention should also be made of the nearby and contemporary site of Chuangbanyang where 14 burials have been located, one of which contained over 20 artefacts, including a *cong* tube very similar to that found in one of the late burials at Shixia.

Stage 3 (end of the 3rd - 2nd millennium B.C.)
A process of hierarchical devolution and possibly decentralization marks the 'decline' of Shixia Culture, a transition taking place at approximately the same time as a similar decline of Liangzhu Culture. A total of 32 graves have been reported from the relevant stratum at Shixia, with 13 of these yielding no burial goods. Pit scorching is rare, secondary burials are absent, and burial pits are shallow. The grave good assemblages now contain fewer artefacts and are less varied than those recovered from Shixia Culture burials. Settlement evidence at Shixia and other sites includes the remains of houses, pits and kilns. Although the large pickaxes and perforated shovels characteristic of Shixia Culture are now absent, perforated 'dagger axes' and knives make an appearance. Although two *bi* discs were recovered from a non-burial context at one site, Liangzhu Culture type stone ornaments are notable by their rarity. Significantly, the utilitarian ceramics now point to a more advanced technology, with vessels now higher fired, wheel-made and decorated with regular and clear geometric patterns.

CASE II: The Late Neolithic in Xinghua Basin (Fengkai County, western Guangdong Province)
Fieldwork in the small and isolated basin of Xinghua has identified over 50 Late Neolithic sites, very few of which have undergone systematic excavation. The results of this fieldwork are discussed in Yang and Deng (1989) and Allard (1995:106-18). Relying mainly on burial evidence, the proposed trajectory appears to be similar to that recorded for Qujiang county (case I), with the slow growth of a corporate system culminating in a short-lived network system in which external contacts play an important role, followed again by the reappearance of a corporate system.

It is suggested that the cemetery of Wusaoling, in use from 2600 to 1900 B.C., may be associated with a period of slow and stable growth (GDWKY and FKBWG 1991). A total of 111 graves were excavated, all of these secondary burials. Although a list describing the contents of each burial has not yet been published, a number of general observations can be made. The burial pits, which were baked prior to use, are small and display a regular arrangement within the cemetery (Fig. 3). Limited social differentiation is suggested by the assemblages, which range from nil (in the case of 26 burials) to seven grave goods, and which include mostly small stone artefacts (*e.g.* axes, arrowheads, chisels) and simple tripod vessels. Along with the practice of secondary burial and pit scorching, a number of 'Shixia'-type artefacts point to the likelihood of interaction with northern Guangdong. These include four ring-footed vessels, a large pickaxe, three large perforated shovels and three tall stone rings. Significantly, if Chinese archaeologists are correct in seeing the more dispersed northern portion of the cemetery as evidence for its growth in that direction, then the presence of two slightly larger and wealthier burial pits at that end of the cemetery (one containing two Shixia-type artefacts: a large stone shovel

and a ring-footed vessel) may indicate emerging social inequality prior to its abandonment.

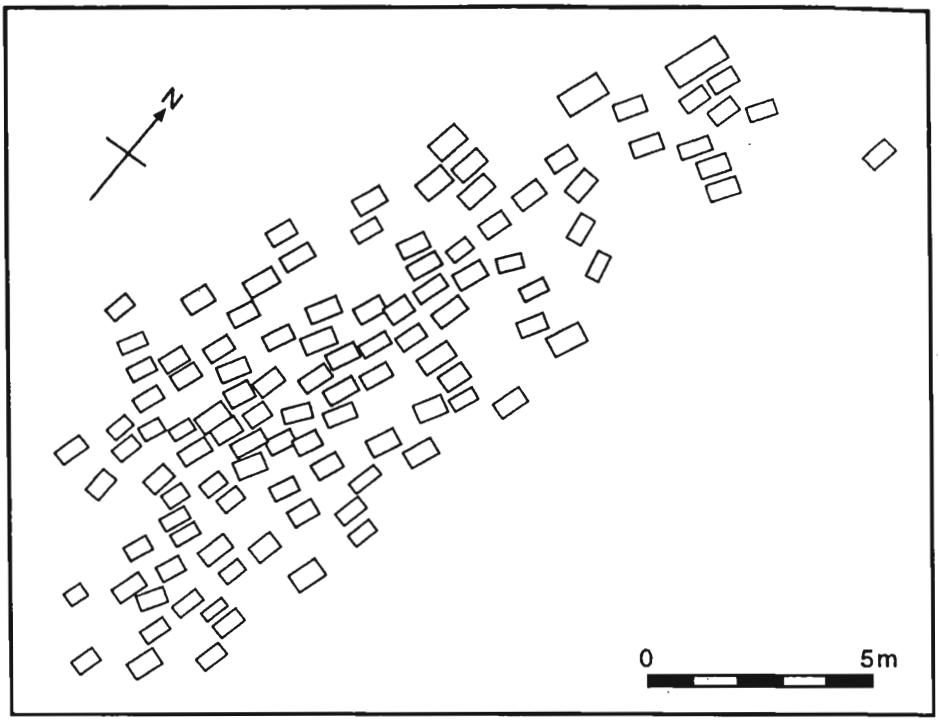

Figure 3 Plan of Wusaoling Cemetery. Redrawn from GDWKY and FKBWG 1991:2.

The nearby isolated burial at Lumeiduimianshan, carbon dated to 2200 - 2000 B.C. (a period which corresponds to the later stages of the Wusaoling cemetery), presents clearer evidence for the emergence of inequality associated with the appropriation and display of exotic artefacts. Measuring 3.3 m x 1.0 m, this burial yielded a total of 17 artefacts, 11 of which were common lithics and vessels. The other six artefacts included one *yue* axe, one *cong* tube, two bracelets, one perforated ring-foot vessel and one *dou* stemmed vessel, all of which (along with the baking of the pit) are characteristic of Shixia Culture (see case I).[3] While it is difficult to determine the place of manufacture of the stone artefacts, the fact that the *cong* was not made of jade suggests that it did not come from the Liangzhu Culture area. A second isolated burial (this one undated) was found on Luoshagang hill. Measuring 2.5 m x 1.4 m, it contained ten grave goods, including four Shixia-type artefacts: a bow-shaped pickaxe, a *dou* stemmed vessel, a tripod plate with perforated legs, and a ring footed plate.

The archaeological landscape associated with the Final Neolithic and early Bronze Age in Xinghua basin contrasts with the one associated with the wealthy burials discussed above. Interestingly, the transition to this later stage appears to postdate the decline of Shixia Culture by a few hundred years. Shixia-type artefacts and features are now absent.

Surveys conducted in Xinghua basin reveal a reduction in the number of sites, most of which are now found on low mounds in the well-watered portion of the basin, suggesting increased reliance on cultivation (Allard 1995:73-74). The only known burial site is the much later one at Niuweishan, where seven jar burials dated to about 600 B.C. yielded few artefacts. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, as in the case of Shixia, the material culture of these later periods continues to display greater technological competence in the utilitarian sphere when compared to the Late Neolithic, as seen by higher fired and more carefully decorated ceramic vessels.

CASE III: The Bronze Age in Wuming County (southern Guangxi Province)
Located some distance from the main arteries of communication and from the mountain passes giving access to central China, the large basin centred on Wuming county is bounded on one side by the copper-rich Daming mountain range. Situated near the slopes of this range, the cemeteries of Yuanlongpo and Andengyang have added much to our knowledge of the Bronze Age in Guangxi. Separated by only 500 metres and believed to have been used at different times, these two cemeteries provide an opportunity to record the features of a single and lengthy trajectory in one small area. The published excavation reports of Yuanlongpo and Andengyang, although lacking plans of the burial grounds and detailed grave good lists for the majority of the burials, appear to reveal the presence of a corporate system displaying slow and stable growth over a long period of time.

The large cemetery of Yuanlongpo, where a total of 350 burials have been excavated, is thought to have been in use during the Western Zhou (1100 - 771 B.C.) and Spring and Autumn (771 - 481 B.C.) periods (Allard 1995:144-146; GXBWG 1990:233; GXWGD *et al.* 1988a). This lengthy period of use, combined with the large number of graves and their regular arrangement within three clusters, together suggest the long-term and continuous occupation of the area by settled communities. The burials are typically small, simple and narrow, although a total of 21 are vertical pits with either a ledge or a side chamber. The more than 1,000 burial goods recovered include a large number of ceramics (mostly simple coarseware vessels), 110 bronzes (mostly weapons and tools), about 100 stone artefacts (moulds, whetstones and pebbles), and over 200 jades (including complete rings and slit-rings, bracelets, and small necklace 'tubes'). Fragments of lacquer have also been found in the fill or on the floor of 54 burials.

Importantly, aside from two 'exotic' bronze vessels which may have been cast in central or north China, the artefact inventory at Yuanlongpo displays local or generalized Lingnan-wide features. The contents and structure of the wealthy burials M130 and M147 (two of the seven graves described in the report) may be used to illustrate the point that, although social inequality and craft specialization were present at Yuanlongpo, there were no dramatic differences in funerary behavior among status levels. Burial M130 was a simple vertical pit (2.5 m x 0.6 m) that yielded 12 artefacts: four ceramic vessels, one bronze *yue* battle-axe, two jade rings, two small jade necklace 'tubes', one whetstone, and two other stones. Burial M147, a vertical pit (4.0 m x 0.6 m) with a ledge, yielded at least eight artefacts, including two ceramic vessels, one of the two bronze vessels of non-local manufacture, one lance, one *yue* axe and three stone mould fragments. While it is interesting to note the presence of the 'exotic' bronze vessel in an apparently high status

burial (M147), it appears that status at Yuanlongpo was not dependent on the appropriation and display of goods of non-local manufacture or inspiration.

Dated to the Warring States period (481 - 220 B.C.), the 86 burials excavated at the nearby cemetery of Andengyang displayed a regular arrangement (GXBWG 1990:234; GXWGD *et al.* 1988b). Even without the help of a cemetery plan or detailed grave goods list, the data provided in the report once again hints at the existence of a corporate system. The number of grave goods, totalling 205, varied from 1 to 14 per burial, with thirty percent of the burials yielding no artefacts whatsoever. Graves were generally small, with size ranging from 1.04 m^2 to 2.0 m^2. The 86 bronzes were mostly weapons and tools, while the 54 ceramics were mostly utilitarian vessels. Although a total of 57 jade rings are reported, their association with other criteria of wealth is unclear. Burial M14, the largest and wealthiest grave, contained five small bronze bells, five bronze bracelets (out of a total of 11 at the site), two bronze tools, one bronze lance and one ceramic cup. While the presence of bronze non-utilitarian goods may signal the higher status of M14's occupant, a number of features suggest this burial's association with a corporate system, including the small total number of goods, the presence of some tools and utilitarian ceramics, and the absence (in any of the burials) of exotic goods.

CASE IV: The Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (600 - 200 B.C.) in central and southern Guangdong Province

A total of nine wealthy burials dating to the period 600 - 200 B.C. have been excavated at 6 separate sites located northwest, west and southwest of the Pearl River delta. These include two burials at Matougang in Qingyuan county (GDWGW 1963, 1964), one at Niaodanshan in Sihui county (GDBWG 1975), two at Gaodiyuan in Sihui county (He 1985), one at Beilingsongshan in Zhaoqing city (GDBWG and ZQWHJ 1974), and, in Luoding county, two burials at Nanmendong (GDBWG 1983) and one at Beifushan (GDBWG and LDWHJ 1986). Archaeological maps of Guangdong suggest limited occupation in the vicinity of any of these burials prior to their appearance (GDWHT 1989:156-7;160;162-3;172-3). Evidence contemporary with the burials is also scant, although dense scatters of artefacts and a single poor burial have been located in the general area of the wealthy burials in Luoding county. While the large distances separating some of these sites suggest distinct socio-political units, all of these burials appear to have been associated with network systems in which external contact played an important role. A more detailed summary of this data is provided in Allard (1995:177-184).

Although the graves of 'commoners' have yet to be located, the siting, contents and structural features of the wealthy burials all point to the high status of their occupants. In each case, we encounter one or two wealthy burials located on low mounds. Apart from two of the burials (one of which had been disturbed), the number of grave goods ranges from 30 to 139. The dimensions of four of the six graves for which the measurements are available range from 8 m^2 to 38 m^2. The presence of network systems is also suggested by the nature of the burial assemblages, which include many bronze weapons and other elaborate non-utilitarian bronzes, but few utilitarian artefacts such as tools of production or ceramic vessels (Fig. 4). A greater emphasis on utilitarian goods is evident in the later burials (*e.g.* Beilingsongshan).

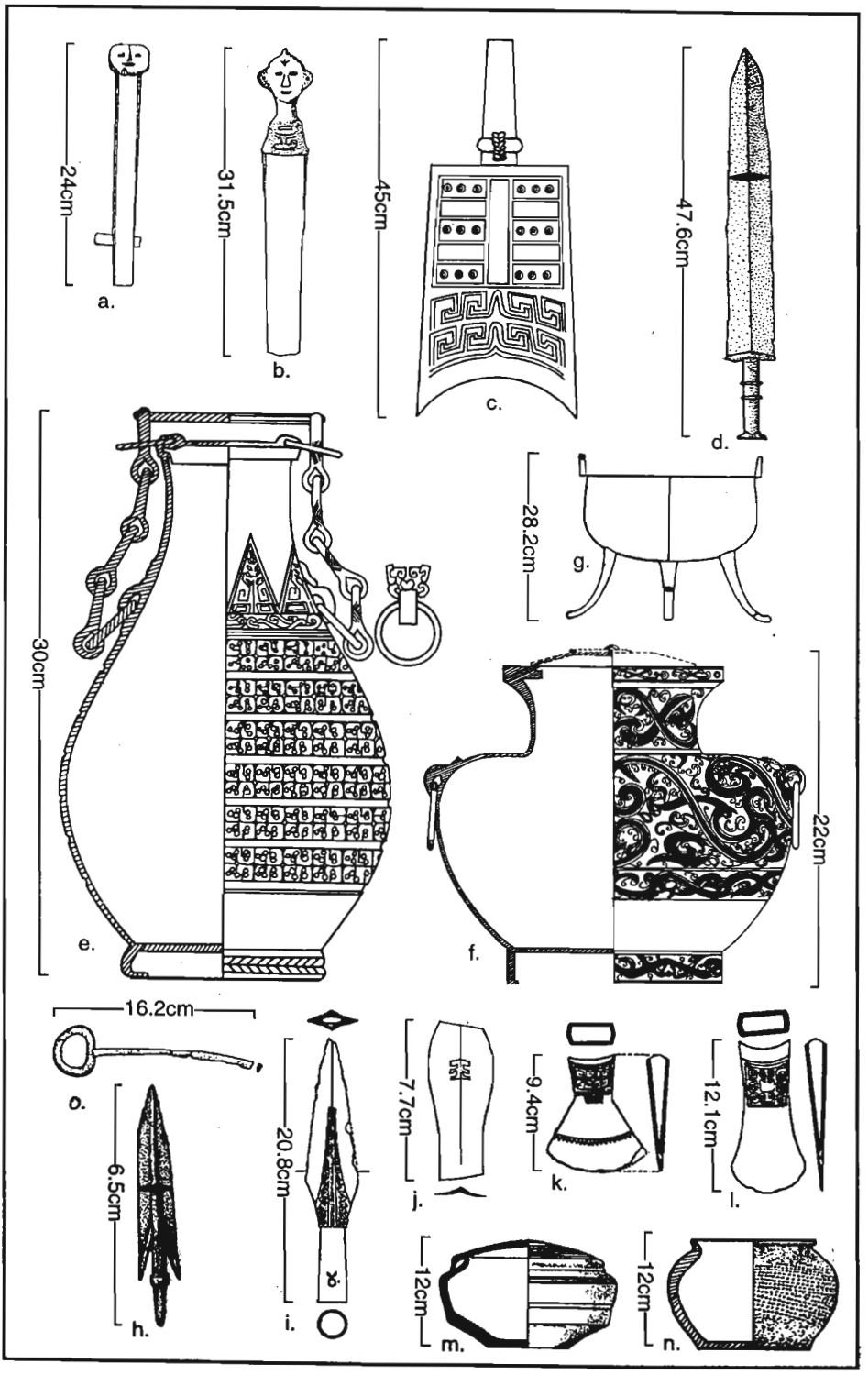
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Figure 4 (facing page) Artefacts recovered from wealthy Bronze Age burials in Central and Southern Guangdong Province
a. Bronze human-headed staff (Nanmendong, Luoding county); **b.** Bronze human-headed staff (Matougang, Qingyuan county); **c.** Bronze bell (*zhong*) (Beilingsongshan, Zhaoqing city); **d.** Bronze sword (*jian*) (Niaodanshan, Sihui county); **e.** Bronze flask/bottle (*hu*) (Beilingsongshan, Zhaoqing city); **f.** Bronze urn/vase with silver inlay (*lei*) (Beilingsongshan, Zhaoqing city); **g.** Bronze tripod (*ding*) (Niaodanshan, Sihui county); **h.** Bronze arrowhead (*zu*) (Niaodanshan, Sihui county); **i.** Bronze spearhead (*mao*) (Nanmendong, Luoding county); **j.** Bronze 'scraper' (*miedao*, incomplete) (Nanmendong, Luoding county); **k.** Bronze axe (*fu*) (Matougang, Qingyuan county); **l.** Bronze 'battle-axe' (*yue*) (Matougang, Qingyuan county); **m.** Ceramic lidded vessel (*he*) (Beilingsongshan, Zhaoqing city); **n.** Ceramic vessel (*guan*) (Beilingsongshan, Zhaoqing city); **o.** Bronze 'paring knife' (*xiao*) (Niaodanshan, Sihui county).
Redrawn from Lam 1984: 59,61,63; GDBWG 1975: 104,105; GDBWG and ZQWHJ 1974: 75; GDWGW 1964: 141; GDBWG 1983: 44,47.

There is also the possibility of trade relations at this time between the state of Chu in central China and the occupants of these wealthy burials, many of which are located near large waterways which link different parts of Guangdong (discussed in Allard 1995:169-175;185-189). Certainly, the recovery of numerous weapons in these burials, along with elaborate bronze vessels and bells either manufactured in Chu or copied from Chu prototypes, points to the importance of achieving success in external relations, while craft specialization is also indicated by the presence of other labour intensive artefacts such as jade ornaments. The fact that most of these wealthy burials have yielded sets of bronze human-headed staffs specific to Lingnan also hints at a region-wide elite sphere of interaction and 'international style'.

The brief use of these burial sites, combined with an absence of contemporary or subsequent attached settlements and cemeteries, all support the suggestion that these were small, short-lived and highly unstable social systems. Certainly, the importance of warfare and the likelihood of a highly variable trading environment both suggest that local power was, in large part, dependent on the vagaries of the external environment.

CASE V: The Warring States cemetery at Yinshanling (northern Guangxi Province)
The cemetery of Yinshanling, which has yielded 110 Warring States (481 - 221 B.C.) burials, is located in an isolated basin along a stream which empties into the Guijiang river, a major artery linking the centre of Lingnan with mountain passes providing access to central China (GXWGD 1978). The nature of the burial assemblages indicate some degree of contact with the state of Chu, which may have campaigned against the local tribes inhabiting the region (Allard 1995:172-173).

A close look at the cemetery plan (Fig. 5) and the detailed list of grave goods would seem to suggest the presence of a stable but clearly hierarchical corporate system. There is a bimodal distribution of both the total number of burial goods (range: 1-42) and grave size (1.0 m^2 - 8.4 m^2), with both variables correlated with each other and with the number of

of Chu-type artefacts and human headed bronze staffs. A limited number of graves are characterized by the presence of ledges and/or a layer of pebbles on the floor of the grave.

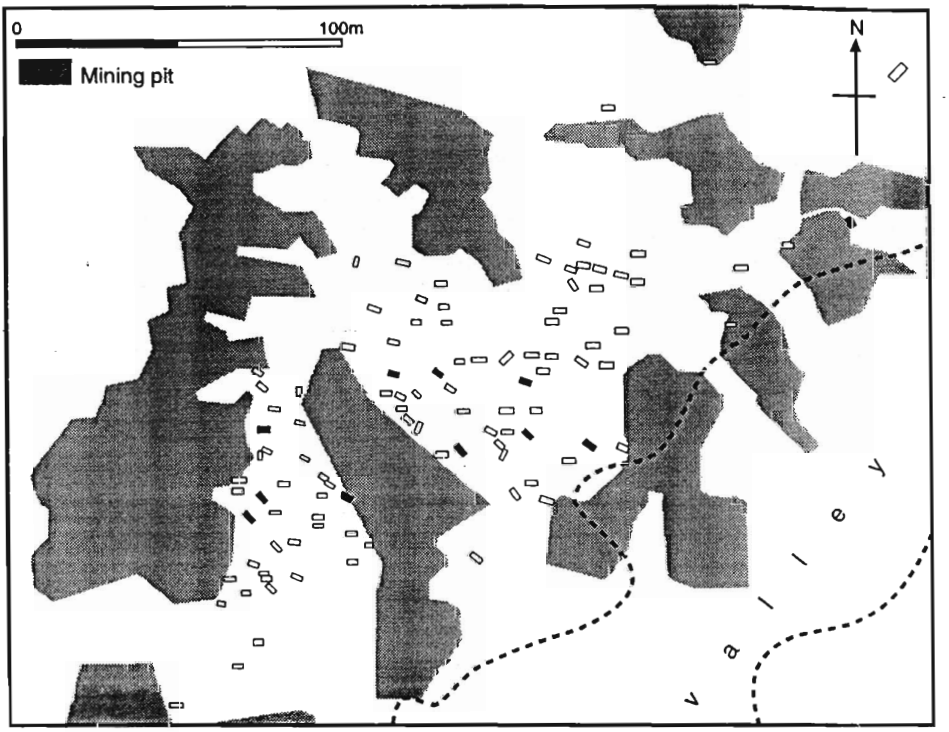

Figure 5 Plan of Yinshanling Cemetery (darkened rectangles represent wealthiest burials). Redrawn from GXWGD 1978:212.

Notwithstanding the above observations, other features point to the presence of a corporate rather than network system. First, the 'high status' variables such as burial wealth and size display a smaller relative range and more continuous distribution than in the network systems previously identified in the county of Qujiang (case I) and the basin of Xinghua (case II). Second, of the more than 1,000 burial goods excavated at the cemetery, only 24 are of Chu type. Furthermore, these 24 artefacts are mostly simple looking weapons (7 swords and 16 spearheads), with only a single elaborate bronze vessel recovered. Third, high status burials typically contain significant numbers of utilitarian goods, including bronze cooking vessels, bronze and iron tools, and ceramic vessels. Finally, a look at the cemetery plan clearly shows that wealthy burials were broadly distributed among low status graves.

A correlation between the number of weapons and burial wealth points to the importance of warfare as a possible means of gaining and retaining power at Yinshanling. Whatever the case may be, the apparent developmental stability witnessed there appears to continue into later periods, with the cemetery still in use following the incorporation of the region in the Han empire.

Discussion

An absence of monuments and of detailed information about public spaces and settlements in prehistoric Lingnan has forced an almost exclusive reliance on burial data to identify political-economic strategies in use among the five sequences considered here. Any conclusions we may draw must thus be tempered by the realization that a more varied data base could alter such interpretations, particularly as both the domestic and public spheres would certainly also display evidence of the strategy in use. Even new findings within the funerary sphere itself could lead to a reassessment of the evidence. For example, the discovery of (as yet unidentified) public architectural spaces or communal burials in what we have identified as 'network' systems would force a re-evaluation of the relative importance of corporate strategies in those cases. In the same way, the discovery of very wealthy burials containing exotic goods near 'corporate' cemeteries could reverse interpretations regarding the strategy in use. We must also keep in mind Blanton *et al.*'s observation that although one may be dominant, both strategies can play a role in any one system (1996:2).

Initially, it should be pointed out that most of the archaeological correlates which we associate with either of the two strategies tend to co-vary. Most significantly, there appears to be a generally good correlation between the intensity of external contacts and the degree of social inequality. Network systems, characterized by an emphasis on such contacts and a variety of high status prerogatives, appear to be associated with the following: 1) the later stages of Shixia Culture (case I); 2) the late third millennium B.C. in Xinghua basin (*e.g.* the wealthy burial at Lumeiduimianshan and possibly the latest stages of Wusaoling cemetery) (case II); and 3) the wealthy isolated Bronze Age burials in central and southern Guangdong Province (case IV). In contrast, corporate systems, characterized by the lesser importance of external contacts and limited high status prerogatives, would include those systems associated with: 1) the periods preceding and following the late stages of Shixia Culture (case I); 2) the cemetery at Wusaoling (except perhaps for its latest stages) and possibly much of the second millennium B.C. in Xinghua basin (case II); 3) the Bronze Age cemeteries of Yuanlongpo and Andengyang in southern Guangxi Province (case III); and 4) the cemetery of Yinshanling in northern Guangxi Province (case V).

Although all of these sequences are associated with systems of low complexity, there is evidence that cycling can and does occur between network and corporate strategies. This is most apparent in the case of the trajectory which includes Shixia Culture. While we lack burial evidence for the later stages of the sequence in Xinghua basin, and for the periods prior to and following the presence of wealthy Bronze Age burials in those areas where they are found, both cases also present evidence for the appearance of hierarchical societies, followed by systems displaying greater social equality with less importance being ascribed to external contacts. Interestingly, in the case of Xinghua basin (as with the period which follows Shixia Culture), the fact that greater social equality is associated with technological advances in the production of utilitarian ceramics supports our tentative identification of a corporate strategy operating at this time.

One significant finding regarding the growth and stability of complex societies is that the network systems identified among these sequences appear to be inherently unstable. In

comparison with corporate systems, they are relatively short-lived and seem to develop into more decentralized systems rather than become associated with increasingly large burial grounds (and large settlements) in which social inequality becomes even more apparent. This is in contrast with corporate systems, such as those associated with the Yinshanling, Yuanlongpo and Andengyang cemeteries, which are seen to grow slowly (and over a long period of time) in scale and possibly also in hierarchical complexity. Significantly, the picture that thus emerges from a consideration of all the five sequences is one in which **the slow and stable growth of corporate systems becomes interrupted at intervals by the adoption of network strategies and subsequent destabilization and decentralization, with the cycle again recommencing following these transitions.** Unfortunately, the long sequences in southern Guangxi (Yuanlongpo and Andengyang cemeteries) and northern Guangxi (Yinshanling cemetery) do not shed further light on this cyclical model because they are interrupted by the incorporation of the region into the powerful Han state.

It is suggested that a more careful consideration of the behavioural dimensions of network and corporate strategies can provide insights into the processes which underlie the political-economic cycling discussed above. The network/corporate model proposes that the instability of network systems may be the result of the difficulties associated with trying to monopolize beneficial links with external systems. While such factors can certainly play a role, we may also consider the internal dimensions of socio-political stability, in particular what Giddens calls "the dialectic of control", whereby the respective needs of both leaders and commoners are negotiated to a satisfactory conclusion, thus assuring the continued support of the former by the latter (Giddens 1984:374). Thus, the structural integrity of the system may be compromised when the cost of supporting a leader is not balanced by the benefits gained from doing so. It is suggested that the abandonment of a leader may result from a realization on the part of commoners that positions of power and influence have become both overly demanding and increasingly inaccessible. This phenomenon of socio-political **dislocation** may be associated with the physical, social and ideological separation of leaders from the rest of the population. In contrast, systems characterized by **integration** display greater long-term stability.

Instability of network systems may in part be due to the fact that these are typically dislocated systems in which the degree of 'separation' between leaders and commoners is matched by the excessive demands made on the latter. The physical separation and size of the burials, the large amount of labour required to manufacture the many prestige goods associated with high status, and the fact these burials may contain few utilitarian goods, are all indicative of a system in which the increasing importance of competing in the external arena has not been accompanied by a continuing involvement in the local sphere of production. The data presented in this paper suggests that integrated systems grow in a stable manner because positions of power remain potentially accessible to all, regardless of who is in power. Significantly, it is when the external environment begins to provide opportunities for significant advancement that a process of dislocation sometimes takes place. This is what seems to happen in the case of Shixia, Xinghua basin and the wealthy Bronze Age burials when exotic goods and ideas become available. Importantly,

the data also implies that the availability of exotic 'ideas' rather than the goods themselves may be sufficient for such a transformation to take place.

However, it remains unclear why certain integrated systems experience a process of dislocation while others do not. In the case of some (*e.g.* the cemeteries in southern Guangxi), this may be due to the fact that truly exotic ideas and goods rarely penetrate as far as these isolated systems. However, this is not so in the case of the integrated system associated with the Yinshanling cemetery, which was in contact with the state of Chu located to its north. Whatever the case may be, it appears as if systems such as those associated with Yinshanling may owe their stability to the fact that competition in the external arena never achieves disproportionate importance and that control over basic production remains the main means of gaining and retaining power, with positions of power potentially accessible to all. With regard to leadership dynamics in egalitarian societies, Spencer proposes that successful leaders must be able to coordinate both the external and internal dimensions of power (1993:43). Possibly this is also the key to sustained as opposed to transitory success in more complex societies.

While the data from Lingnan allows us to distinguish between what appear to be (in Blanton *et al.*'s terminology) 'network' and 'corporate' strategies, the dislocation/integration model attempts to provide a behavioural explanation for the fact that cycling between different strategies can occur and the finding that some network systems may be inherently unstable. Rather than focusing solely on the 'proximal' factors of environment, trade or warfare to explain hierarchical collapse, we thus also consider the internal dynamics of social systems and propose that the inhabitants of a 'dislocated' system may decide to withdraw their support for the existing leadership and relocate when faced with labour demands which are *perceived as excessive in relation to* the opportunities offered for the betterment of their lives or political 'advancement'. Certainly, an association between devolution and the archaeological correlates of dislocation may be easier to understand in the case of relatively small systems, the simple agricultural technologies of which are unable to support a highly hierarchical structure and which do not/cannot discourage relocation (*e.g.* absence of coercion; much uninhabited productive land).

The fact that systems characterized by a dislocated socio-political structure typically appear to undergo a process of devolution rather than develop into highly complex polities has not been accompanied by a concerted effort on the part of archaeologists to investigate this interesting aspect of developmental trajectories. There undoubtedly exist numerous uninvestigated archaeological cases to which the ideas discussed above can be applied. In closing, I will briefly note a few cases already presented in the literature which, in my opinion, appear to display evidence for the cycling phenomenon between integrated and dislocated systems, and for the relative instability of the latter.

Within the territory of present-day China, the pre-metal archaeological cultures of Hongshan (in northeast China) and Liangzhu (in the lower Yangtze River valley in central-east China) both appear as the culmination of long developmental sequences characterized by gradual increases in the scale and complexity of local systems. The Hongshan and Liangzhu suddenly appear as highly dislocated systems whose elite burials

are isolated and contain large assemblages of highly elaborate and labour intensive goods, especially jades. In both areas, these two cultures are followed by an apparent return to more egalitarian systems.[4] Similarly, there is the example of Wessex in southern England, where a long period of 'group-oriented' societies characterized by monumental architecture (*e.g.* Avebury, Silbury Hill) and communal burial was followed by the emergence of an individualizing ideology expressed in numerous barrows whose rich burials display clear evidence of craft specialization and interaction with the European mainland. The richest of these burials date from 2000 - 1500 B.C. and are themselves followed by a period during which

> "long-established systems of acquiring prestige and demonstrating elite status through the acquisition of prestige goods disappeared and new systems based on upon the ownership of land and the production of agricultural surpluses came into force. The most obvious manifestations of this transformation were the emergence of a settlement pattern and a system of land division redolent of a new and much more rigorous control of territory, and a burial pattern which eschewed conspicuous consumption in death and instituted what appear to be family-based cemeteries" (Cunliffe 1993:163).

Notes

[1] *Yue* are battle-axes used in ancient China. Two axes, believed by the excavators to have been used as weapons, include the stone *yue* shown in figure 2.n and the bronze one shown in figure 4.k

[2] A *Bi* is a round flat piece of stone with a hole in the centre. A *Cong* is a long stone tube with rectangular sides and a cylindrical hollowed out centre. These artifacts, both of which were sometimes made of precious stone (e.g. jade), are believed to have had a ceremonial role in ancient China. In prehistoric times, *bi* and *cong* are believed to make a first appearance during the third millennium B.C. in the lower Yangtze River valley at sites of the Liangzhu Culture. Examples of a *bi* and *cong* are shown in figures 2.o and 2.p

[3] A *dou* is a stemmed vessel. An example of a ceramic *dou* is shown in figure 2.b

[4] A discussion of Liangzhu Culture in English is provided in Huang (1992), while Shelach provides a short discussion of Hongshan Culture (1996:47-60). It should be pointed out that Shelach identifies those societies associated with Hongshan Culture as 'group-oriented' rather than 'individualizing' systems (e.g. Shelach 1996:56-60).

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Abbreviations

FKBWG: Fengkaixian Bowuguan (Fengkai County Museum)
GDBWG: Guangdongsheng Bowuguan (Guangdong Provincial Museum)
GDWGW: Guangdongsheng Wenwu Guanli Weiyuanhui (Cultural Relics Management Committee of Guangdong Province)

GDWKY: Guangdongsheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo (Research Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology of Guangdong Province)
GJWWJ: Guojia Wenwuju (Cultural Relics Bureau of China)
GXBWG: Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu Bowuguan (Museum of the Guangxi Zhuang Minority Autonomous Region)
GXWGD: Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu Wenwu Gongzuodui (Cultural Relics Work Team of the Guangxi Zhuang Minority Autonomous Region)
LDWHJ: Luodingxian Wenhuaju (Cultural Bureau of Luoding County)
QJWBH: Qujiangxian Wenwuzhi bianzuan Weiyuanhui (Editorial Committee of the Qujiang County Annals of Cultural Relics)
QJWHJ: Qujiangxian Wenhuaju (Cultural Bureau of Qujiang County)
ZQWHJ: Zhaoqingshi Wenhuaju (Cultural Bureau of Zhaoqing City)

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