



DR. LIU WU | 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM
FRIDAY
OCTOBER 20, 2023 **UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**
4130 WWPB

**New Research in Paleoanthropology in China:
Human Fossil Discoveries in the 21st Century**

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Abstract

This year, 2023, represents the 101st anniversary of Emile Licent and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's discovery of a child's fossilized incisor at Erdos, Inner Mongolia: The first human fossil from China. Five years later, in 1927, Davidson Black gave the genus and species names *Sinanthropus pekinensis* to a lower molar from the Lower Cave deposits of the Zhoukoudian site. Numerous specimens were subsequently discovered, making this the most important site in China in the 20th century. In 1950, the systematist Ernst Mayr lumped all Chinese and concurrently discovered Javanese specimens in *Homo erectus*. With continued fieldwork, human fossils have been recovered from about 80 Chinese sites. Ranging in age from about 1.7 mya to 10 ka, these fossils have been allocated chronologically to *Homo erectus*, "archaic" *Homo sapiens*, and "early modern" humans.



**Professor Liu Wu at
Hualongdong site, East China**



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Pittsburgh

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University Center for International Studies
Department of Anthropology

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Since the turn of the 21st century, paleoanthropology in China has made tremendous advances, both in the discovery of new human fossils and in the use of sophisticated analytical tools in geological, paleontological, and systematic studies. For example, “early modern” human fossils – dated to 120-100 ka - discovered at the sites of Huanglongdong, Zhirendong and Daoxian confirmed the emergence of *Homo sapiens* in East Asia as early as 120 ka. Further, morphological studies of the late Middle Pleistocene human fossils from Panxian Dadong and other sites indicate that the transition from archaic to modern human morphology may have occurred earlier.

Over the past decade, study of late Middle Pleistocene human fossils dating from about 300 ka-to-120 ka from several sites in China – such as Xuchang, Hualongdong (Hualong Cave), Xiahe, Haerbin, and Penghu – has documented a very complicated evolutionary picture of diversity in morphology, taxonomy or even behavior, which has substantially impacted traditional views of human evolution in East Asia.

Dr. Liu Wu is a Research Professor at Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP), Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Editor in Chief of *Acta Anthropologica Sinica*. For several decades now, he has spear-headed ground-breaking field and laboratory work in paleoanthropology and, more generally, anthropology. Indeed, his meticulous field surveys and excavations of numerous Chinese sites have uncovered an abundance of human fossils, including 120-to-80 ka “early modern” humans from Huanglongdong, Zhirendong, and Fuyandong (Daoxian), as well as ca. 300 ka late Middle Pleistocene humans from Hualongdong. Integrating study of these specimens with other human fossils, Dr. Liu proposed that “early modern” humans may have emerged in East Asia as early as 120 ka. In addition, from detailed analyses of morphological variation in ca 300-to-120 ka late Middle Pleistocene human fossils, Dr. Liu has added considerably to changing the simple view of human evolution in East Asia that had become received wisdom by advancing our understanding not only of the more complicated evolutionary relationships between, but of a greater taxic diversity represented by East Asian late Middle Pleistocene humans.