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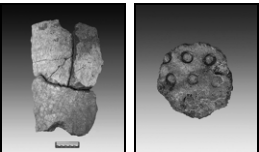
Ruins could be earliest ‘houses’ in China

By WANG KAIHAO
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Recently discovered ruins of six semi-basement dwellings in Hebei province are thought by archaeologists to be among the earliest-known “houses” in China.

The dwellings, unearthed from the Sitai site in Shangyi county, Zhangjiakou, were from 10,400 to 10,000 years ago, said Zhao Zhan-hu, a researcher with the Hebei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, at a conference with the National Cultural Heritage Administration in Beijing on Wednesday. The dwellings are from 7 to 10 square meters.

They are part of a series of discoveries spanning from 6,800 to around 10,000 years ago found through excavations by the Hebei provincial institute from 2020 to 2022, Zhao said.



Pottery artifacts unearthed from the Sitai site in Shangyi county, Hebei province.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

He pointed out that two early periods — from 10,400 to 10,000 years ago and from 9,200 to 9,000 years ago — probably represent a previously unknown type of archaeological culture, judging from the unearthed pottery and stoneware.

“About 800 excavated artifacts including embossed pottery cylinders, pottery planks and grinders feature their own characteristics,” he said. “Their evolution was seen to be continuous.”

The stone blades found on the site also inherited features from other nearby sites. The traditional processing of such micro blades spanned over 100,000 years in the region.

“It is a major breakthrough in decoding the early stage of the Neolithic period in North China,” he said.

In China, the Neolithic period is often considered to last from 10,000 to 4,000 years ago, and the Sitai site marks a key transition from the mobile dwellings in the Paleolithic period to gradual settlement, Zhao said.

Separately, findings of millet on site provided key clues to the origins and early development of agriculture.

“The appearance of agriculture is an important indicator of Neolithic culture,” said Zhang Chi, a professor at Peking University. “It took time for people who chose to settle down to develop early-stage agriculture through taming edible plant seeds in the wild.”

In China, some older archaeological findings were speculated to be “houses” but their true nature is still debated by academics. For example, at the Xiaonanshan site, Raohe county, Heilongjiang province, some ruins from 16,000 years ago were speculated to be regular settlements.

“Thanks to the Sitai site, we have the oldest example of settled dwellings in China with solid evidence,” Zhang said. “There must be even older ones somewhere else, but they await to be found.”

In Zhang’s eyes, the importance of the Sitai site can be better evaluated in the bigger picture of Northeast Asia. For example, in Transbaikalia, a region of Siberia near Lake Baikal, similar dwellings of its time were also found. Considering other findings in Northeast China like Xiaonanshan, they might show how the human population migrated.

According to Zhao, more interdisciplinary research projects will be launched at the site, including studies of the natural environment as well as fauna and flora of its time.

“We expect to know more about what kind of momentum the early Neolithic culture and agriculture had in North China,” he said.

Tibetan theatrics



An actress performs for residents to celebrate the upcoming Tibetan New Year at a new settlement in Luntse county in Lhokha, Tibet autonomous region, on Wednesday. The residents moved to their new homes in early January ahead of the festival, known as Losar New Year, that falls on Feb 21 this year.
JIGME DORJE / XINHUA

Two Sessions

HK delegates eye closer integration

By XI TIANQI in Hong Kong
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Hong Kong delegates to the nation’s forthcoming two sessions are actively seeking ways to further release the city’s potential in national blueprints and enable the city’s younger generation to shine on the broader stage of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The annual sessions of the National People’s Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in Beijing focus on China’s major socioeconomic achievements over the past year and next-stage development blueprints. The 14th CPPCC National Committee session will get underway on March 4 and the 14th NPC session will begin on March 5.

Hong Kong business leader Andrew Yao Cho-fai was re-elected as an NPC deputy this year.

Yao, who used to serve as the chairman of the Hong Kong United Youth Association, said he will bring some concrete motions to Beijing on how to help Hong Kong youngsters utilize opportunities in national development.

With normal cross-border travel fully resumed, Yao said he is restarting his summer exchange program for Hong Kong students to do internships in mainland companies and organizations. The program had been running for 15 years but was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a recent trip to Shanghai, Yao saw how popular new energy vehicles are in the city and that the locals showed strong interest in new brands. He hopes to bring some new energy vehicles designed by domestic brands to Hong Kong and help young people better understand the mainland’s rapid development in unmanned driving and new energy technology. He reckoned it as the best way to cultivate young people’s national pride.

In his view, the government has already done a lot in helping Hong Kong youngsters to integrate into the Greater Bay Area and many activities launched by the government have become more professional and well-organized. He suggested more Hong Kong organizations engage in the activities and encouraged young people themselves to embrace the opportunities to the north.

CPPCC National Committee member and Hong Kong lawmaker Johnny Ng Kit-chong told a news conference on Tuesday that he will submit various proposals on livelihood issues, industry development and economic revival, for Hong Kong to further leverage the special administrative region’s unique advantages in national blueprints.

With mature supervision and favorable policies in digital finance, Hong Kong can offer great facilitation to the Greater Bay Area’s development on metaverse and other “Web 3.0” technologies, Ng said.

Given its latest developments in innovation and technology, the city

has a role to play in the mainland’s vitalization of rural areas and promoting traditional Chinese medicine to the world, he added.

In the post-pandemic era, he also suggested Hong Kong brands attach greater importance to the vast mainland market, which may bring greater rewards and also serve mainland people’s diversified needs.

The Hong Kong government can strengthen collaboration with the mainland to channel more support for the development of local youths, and attract more overseas talent to the country, Ng said.

CPPCC National Committee member So Cheung-wing said his proposal focuses on economic development, adding that Hong Kong should further deepen links with other cities in the Greater Bay Area to accelerate integration.

He continued that the Hong Kong government should better leverage the city’s strength as a leading offshore renminbi trading center and launch more preferential policies to further enhance its status as an international financial hub.

Lawmaker Peter Koon Ho-ming, who was elected a CPPCC National Committee member for the first time, cares more about social welfare policies.

He believes some policies and conditions on the mainland regarding the elderly are superior to those in Hong Kong, and plans to put forward proposals on encouraging and facilitating more Hong Kong residents to enjoy post-retirement lives in mainland cities.

Hong Kong, Hainan to deepen trade ties

By LIU YIFAN in Hong Kong and CHEN BOWEN in Haikou

There’s broad scope for win-win cooperation between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Hainan province as the tropical island ramps up efforts to turn itself into the world’s largest free-trade port by drafting policies to lure professionals and businesses from the SAR, the Hainan Free Trade Port Promotion Conference in Hong Kong heard on Wednesday.

“Hainan can become Hong Kong’s best partner in trade and economic cooperation as the island’s resources and pillar industries are complementary to those of Hong Kong,” said Shen Xiaoming, secretary of the Communist Party of China’s Hainan Provincial Committee.

As one of the country’s major opening-up measures, the central government aims to turn Hainan Island into a globally influential and high-level free-trade port by the middle of the century. The Hainan Free Trade Port is set to initiate independent customs operations by 2025.

Hainan has formulated 10 measures so far this month to open up its professional services market to Hong Kong, and is soliciting suggestions and opinions. The proposed

measures include encouraging Hong Kong financial institutions, such as banks and insurance companies, to set up branches or offices in the province.

Meanwhile, a total of 50 Hong Kong professional qualifications for physicians, social workers, tour guides and structural engineers, involving more than 10 industries, would be recognized in the FTP.

In his opening address at the conference, Leung Chun-ying, vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, urged Hong Kong’s professional services sector to seize the rare opportunity of Hainan’s “great opening-up and development” to expand the market and contribute to the SAR’s go-global strategy, as well as Hainan’s high-quality development.

According to official figures, Hong Kong is the top-ranking source of new foreign-invested enterprises in Hainan, accounting for two-thirds of the island’s total investments.

With the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic, cooperation between Hong Kong and Hainan will usher in “explosive growth” in opportunities, Leung said.

“The cooperation between Hai-

nan and Hong Kong is growing very fast,” Huang Cui, deputy director of Hainan Provincial Bureau of International Economic Development, said at the conference.

“We have built Hainan-Hong Kong cooperation pilot zones in Haikou and Sanya, held many symposiums and produced materials to help people better understand the FTP policies.”

On Oct 27, Hainan issued 5 billion yuan (\$730 million) in offshore local government bonds in Hong Kong. It was the first issuance of blue bonds and sustainability bonds by a Chinese local government in the international capital market.

“Hong Kong is an important source of tourism for Hainan, and an international platform for promoting Hainan tourism,” said Albert Yip, director general of Sanya Tourism Promotion Board.

“Hainan has visa-free access for tourists from 59 countries. With this policy, Hainan can work together with Hong Kong to launch multi-destination tourism products to draw more global tourists. We can create a one-hour flying circle to give more entertainment options to our international tourists.”

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AI to influence future direction of education

ChatGPT sparks discussion about role of technology, teachers and students

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The arrival of ChatGPT will push educators to focus more on teaching subjects that technology is not good at, a senior education expert said.

Andreas Schleicher, director of education and skills for the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development, said he actually welcomes this development and thinks it gives people the chance to concentrate less on tasks that technology can perform equally well.

“The future is not about technology versus humans. The future is about integrating technology with humans,” he said. “ChatGPT pushes us to think harder of what makes us human.”

What is very clear is that the kinds of things that are easy to teach and test have also become easy to digitize, he said in an interview with China Daily on the sidelines of the World Digital Education Conference.

“The world no longer rewards you just for what you know. Baidu knows everything,” he said. “The world rewards you for what you can do with what you know, and I think ChatGPT pushes us to work harder on this.”

If students are also smart as a smartphone, it means educators are not doing enough, he said. People should focus on developing human skills that actually are important, such as imagination

and creativity, he said.

The arrival of artificial intelligence really pushes people to think hard about what education is and the purpose it serves, as well as what knowledge, skills, attitudes and values humans possess that complement artificial intelligence, he added.

While search engines such as Google or Baidu simply extract knowledge, ChatGPT goes a step further and analyzes a search before providing a single answer.

Schleicher said he thinks the chatbot will become a very powerful tool in the development of education. He added that young people should learn to understand the algorithms.

“If you do not understand an algorithm, you will soon become the victim of that algorithm,” he said. “There’s a great risk that we’ll just slavishly follow the answers that we get from ChatGPT rather than question it and create new knowledge.”

A very important implication for education is to make young people ready to navigate ambiguity, manage complexity, distinguish fact from opinion and understand computational thinking as well as the ideas and nature of algorithms, Schleicher said.

As a device, ChatGPT is going to make learning much more interesting and powerful, but as a purpose and objective, humans need to work very hard to win that race with technology, he added.

Health on track



A doctor gives a free health check to a child on the train D956 in Shanghai on Wednesday. The Shanghai railway department and Shanghai Changzheng Hospital launched the event to promote health education. YIN LIQIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Protein-based booster shots help fight Omicron

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China has recently rolled out two protein-based COVID-19 vaccines to serve as booster shots against Omicron subvariants, bringing new weapons to China’s fight against mutated strains of the virus.

The vaccines are SCTV01C by SinoCellTech and SCB-2019 by Clover Biopharmaceuticals.

They are both recombinant protein subunit vaccines that were approved for emergency use by the National Medical Products Administration in December.

The two vaccines are also recommended as a booster for those inoculated with three inactivated vaccines, according to the National Health Commission’s second booster dose campaign targeting older adults and immunocompromised individuals.

Recombinant protein subunit vaccines use fragments of protein from the disease-causing virus to trigger immunity against it, while inactivated vaccines use the dead version of the pathogen for protection. China has now granted five

protein subunit vaccines for emergency use, according to the administration.

Starting on Tuesday, Beijing residents can apply to take the SCTV01C vaccine as a booster in selected locations in the city, while residents in Changxing, Zhejiang province can begin receiving the first doses of the SCB-2019 vaccine. Both companies plan to roll out their vaccines in other provinces in the future.

Both SCTV01C and SCB-2019 can offer protection against multiple Omicron subvariants, such as BA.1 and BA.5, when administered as a booster shot for those inoculated with inactivated vaccines, which is a large portion of the Chinese population.

According to phase three clinical trial results, SCTV01C can trigger a high level of antibody response in a person after 28 days of receiving the shot as a booster.

As for SCB-2019, the vaccine had demonstrated broad and robust cross-neutralizing of multiple Omicron subvariants, including more recent strains such as Omicron BF.7, BQ.1.1 and BA.2.75, the vaccine creator said.