

**Magnus Fiskesjö and Chen Xingcan 2004
*China Before China: Johan Gunnar Andersson,
Ding Wenjiang and the Discovery of China's
Prehistory*. Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern
Antiquities. ISBN 91-9706-16-3-8.**

Reviewed by Tim Murray

In recent times the historiography of Chinese prehistoric archaeology has been a hive of activity. Monographs and encyclopedia entries (some of which have been written by the indefatigable Chen Xingcan) have significantly improved our understanding of the complexities of doing archaeology in China during the twentieth Century. Obviously Chinese society itself has been in a ferment of change (political, cultural, social and economic) and this book charts the work of Swedish archaeologist Johan Gunnar Andersson and his Chinese colleagues in the discovery and initial characterization of prehistoric China, against this background. *China Before China* began as an exhibition at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (MFEA) in Stockholm of cultural properties removed from China in 1926. What is striking here is that the MFEA houses the largest collection of artefacts from prehistoric China out-

side of the Middle Kingdom. A book that traces the origins of this important collection becomes *de facto* a book about the origins of prehistoric archaeology in China.

There are many stories here and the authors do an excellent job of explaining why Andersson (an accomplished geologist) went to China and how his research there makes perfect sense within the context of the history of Swedish archaeology. This dual reflection about China and Sweden is one of the major strengths of this very welcome discussion. Another strength are the illustrations – people, places and historic contexts (including excerpts from field notes) that are full of interest and add much to the text. The bulk of these are in black and white. Of particular note is a group of images of ceramic vessels in colour that complete the book.

China Before China is more than a book documenting an exhibition, it demonstrates the virtues of principled collaboration. The authors both contributed text and translations and their work mirrors the highly effective original collaboration between Andersson and the person who brought him to China the splendid Ding Wenjiang. This book deserves a wide audience as a genuine contribution to the historiography of Chinese archaeology.