

AIA Jane C. Waldbaum Field School Scholarship Final Report
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This summer, I was able to participate in the Liulihe Archaeological Project, led by researchers from the Beijing Institute of Archaeology. The Jane C. Waldbaum Field School Scholarship generously covered part of the program costs, allowing me to pursue this incredible opportunity. The Liulihe site was the capital city of the Yan state during the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE), with excavated inscriptions confirming the existence of an enclosure system during this period. Significant remains include rammed-earth city walls, moats, large rammed-earth buildings, and sacrificial relics, providing insight into early urban planning and the lives of people in Bronze Age China. Our investigations during the field school focused on a burial site located in the northern part of the city and we were each assigned to one of four tombs, handling all aspects of the excavation process.

Our fieldwork began with what are arguably the two most important techniques in Chinese field archaeology: 刮面 (“guāmiàn”, scraping the surface) and 找边 (“zhǎobiān”, finding the boundary). My trowel became my trusty companion as I spent the first week learning to perceive differences in soil color, texture, and composition to determine the exact dimensions of my assigned tomb. This skill continued to be crucial later on for identifying traces of the cover boards and side panels of the outer and inner coffins, with only gray soil and black ash remaining where there was once wood. We also familiarized ourselves with other important tools like the spade and shovel used for digging down layer by layer in the early stages of excavating a tomb, as well as the unique Luoyang spade that was originally invented by grave robbers but has long been repurposed by archaeologists for exploration purposes. Two weeks in, when we began encountering skeletal remains and pottery burial goods, I was also taught how to meticulously excavate them using bamboo tools and brushes, as well as to write records, photograph, and

collect them. This whole process really trained my analytical thinking, as the disrupted condition of the bones and the presence of highly compacted soil deposits within the tomb allowed us to hypothesize that there may have been an event where water forcefully entered the tomb and disturbed its contents.

Beyond fieldwork, I was able to gain additional insight into Chinese archaeology through a series of guest lectures on other important Bronze Age sites across China, such as Anyang and Sanxingdui. We also had workshops on technical drawing and 3D modeling for artifacts and site features. The latter was particularly interesting as we saw how photographs and data points taken with a Real Time Kinematic rover could be used to create precise digital reproductions of features. On our off days, we had field trips to world heritage sites like the Great Wall, Forbidden City, and Peking Man Site at Zhoukoudian. We also visited the Capital Museum and Chinese Archaeological Museum where many bronzes from Liulihe are on display, some alongside interactive screens where you can zoom in on inscriptions or turn the vessels around in any direction to view all its sides. As an art history student interested in object-based research and education, this short experience on both creating and interacting with 3D models has sparked an interest in further exploring its cultural heritage applications.

I am truly grateful to have had the chance to participate in archaeological fieldwork for the first time at Liulihe, which has provided a well-rounded learning experience unlike any other. My time at the field school and in Beijing has allowed me to hone important hands-on skills for future research and deeply enriched my understanding of Chinese archaeology. This would not have been possible without the generous support from the Archaeological Institute of America and the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship donors—thank you for allowing me to partake in this invaluable opportunity.

Photos

(Credit: Beijing Institute of Archaeology)



The two most important techniques:
刮面
(scraping the surface) and
找边
(finding the boundary)



Learning to use a Luoyang spade



Photographic documentation



Field trip to the Capital Museum and Chinese Archaeological Museum