



Archaeologists Enzheng Tong (right) and Brian Dervin Dillon excavating at Late Prehistoric site CA-LAN-807, Los Angeles County, California, in 1980.

ENZHENG TONG: ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERO

Brian Dervin Dillon, Ph.D.

In 1980 I was a research archaeologist at UCLA and the youngest employee of its Institute of Archaeology. As a minty-fresh Ph.d. from Berkeley, my own stratigraphic level was two stories below ground in the sub-basement of the Kinsey Hall archaeology building. When not running field projects in Central America or in California far from campus, one of my jobs was to welcome visiting scholars and show them around. Archaeological guests came from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. I picked them up and dropped them off at the airport, and guided them to their lecture locations. I also took them to local museums and archaeological sites. Because I taught the UCLA archaeology field classes, I was pleased to invite some of these visitors to my own excavations nearby. In addition to American students and colleagues came others from Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, England, France, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Malawai, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Panama, Samoa, Scotland, Somalia, Togo and Tonga, as well as North, Central, and South American Indian tribal members and Native Hawaiians. Of all the archaeology students and scholars from the four corners of the earth I met at UCLA the most interesting, entertaining and outgoing was Professor Enzheng Tong.

Tong was born in Hunan in 1935, and was almost twenty years my senior. He began doing Neolithic and Bronze Age archaeology in the late 1950's in Southwest China, and earned his B. A. in History in 1961 at Sichuan University. In 1964 he moved on to the more challenging archaeology of Tibet, which became his lifelong passion. An expert in traditional Chinese history and prehistoric archaeology, Professor Tong always preferred

the archaeologically uncharted lands to the west. He was the first to discover early cultures in Southwest China and in neighboring Tibet that had developed independently of mainstream Han influences from farther north and east. Tong had great empathy and sympathy for the Tibetan people, always aware that regardless of his own personal feelings, he was sponsored and supported by the same government that had invaded Tibet and destroyed that country's independence. Tong was fascinated by what are officially called China's "ethnic minorities" for, unlike most Chinese archaeologists, trained as historians, he also studied and taught anthropology and world prehistory.

Visiting from Sichuan University, Chengdu, China, Professor Tong was delivered into my care in 1980 in no little part because of my Chinese wife and my family's long connection with that country. My maternal great-great-grandfather was a China trader from 1848 onwards, while my paternal grandfather was one of the U.S. Army artillerymen who had blown down the gates of Peking with cannon fire, fighting against the Boxers during the Summer of 1900. The other UCLA archaeologists thought that Professor Tong and I would hit it off, and they were right. He and I became good friends. Tong and I had many discussions about world politics, Chinese history, American history, Chinese-American history, anthropology, and prehistoric archaeology. After several visits to my place, I was invited to his digs near the UCLA campus. Tong lived in very cramped quarters with a half-dozen other visiting Chinese scholars in a tiny apartment. He was the only humanist, the others were engineers, mathematicians, and physicians, at least one of them a government watchdog keeping an eye on the others. They were not exactly hot-bunking it, but still putting up with personal space and privacy so minimal that any dorm-dwelling American freshman, by comparison, was a king in his castle.

Tong yearned for any escape from his sardine-like existence, so he became a regular visitor at my place, and a regular companion on various archaeological junkets. I took him to local excavations, surveys, surface collecting efforts, and rock art recording and site mapping exercises. Since I was running the UCLA Archaeological Survey, Tong began haunting the place, very interested in our site inventory, map plotting, and archival methods. I also hauled Professor Tong and, upon occasion, some of his roommates, to L.A. Chinatown on shopping and exploring ventures. Since I had a truck, we could load up on things like 50 lb. sacks of rice, that were banned from the bus, their usual form of transportation. Enzheng Tong loved literature, poetry, folklore and folk music. I introduced him to Hawaiian Slack Key, Guatemalan Marimba, and Veracruz harp music. He learned Spanish slang, essential in Los Angeles, and the words to "*El Tilingo Lingo*" the song whose first stanza seemed to describe the both of us. I discovered that he not only read science fiction, but also wrote it, for both children and adults. One of his stories had been voted China's best, and was later made into a movie. My new friend was a *bona-fide* Renaissance man.

Professor Tong was very proud of his research program, and of the fact that he was just about the only archaeologist working in Tibet. Here he was truly a pioneer, and still enjoys "founding father" status. His high-elevation digging seasons were necessarily very short, at most eight weeks, tightly sandwiched between the annual ascent and descent of the snowline. Even on the warmest days of the brief Tibetan summer, he was inevitably excavating down into the permafrost. And, it took his truck convoy six weeks of road time just to get to his fieldwork location, and another six weeks to return.

Tong was also immensely proud of Sichuan University in Chengdu. Once again, I had a family connection here, through my wife's Hawaiian-born Auntie Alice Chong (1909-1972). She was one of the handful of Ginling Girl's College teachers who evacuated that institution after the horror that was Nanking in 1937-38. From Shanghai in 1938, always just one step ahead of the Japanese, Alice Chong moved her female students by truck, train, steamship, riverboat and on foot, more than 2,500 miles behind enemy lines to Chengdu, Sichuan Province, in Free China. Here they created *Ginling in Exile* at West China Union University, an institution founded at the turn of the century by Americans from Wesleyan University. Eventually five Chinese Universities, all refugees from Japanese-occupied territory, re-established themselves there. After the war, the institution outgrew its missionary origins, and evolved into Sichuan University, the largest and most prestigious in Southwest China.

In discussions with Tong about my Hakka wife's ethnicity, I was surprised to learn, in 1980, that this group was not considered to be one of the 50+/- "official" ethnic minorities recognized by China at that time. Professor Tong, like most Mandarin speakers of his generation, had been taught that the Hakka were "Han" just like 95% of the post-1949 PRC Chinese population within an idealized, homogenized, majority. So, my wife and I gave him a crash course in overseas Chinese ethnology, of a type not then available within the PRC. While most longtime California Chinese are *Punti*, speaking what is usually called "Cantonese" in the Western U.S., and many of the much more recently-arrived East Coast Chinese are Mandarin speakers from North China, virtually *all* Hawaiian Chinese are Hakka, speaking neither Mandarin nor Cantonese.

More than a million Hakka Chinese live outside the PRC: they have never considered themselves Han, continue to speak their own language, and remain proud of their cultural identity. They never followed some of the more objectionable "Han" practices: Hakka women, for example, have always enjoyed much greater equality with men than most Chinese women, and their feet were never bound. The Hakka have had a long and distinguished history in South China since their migration to the Guangdong (Kwangtung=Canton) area around 900 years ago. Their name was bestowed by the much longer-established people they settled amongst. *Hakka* can be translated politely to "Guest People" or less politely to "Intruders." The Hakka valued skill in warfare as much as scholarship: for nearly a millennium they were warriors and sometimes bandits, feared throughout South China. Floating Hakka communities became the famous "boat people" of Hong Kong harbor between the 1860's and the 1970's; some venturing farther from shore became pirates. Surrounded by antagonistic neighbors, many Hakka communities, by the 18th century, took the form of fortified villages, more than a thousand of them circular and multistory. These were unique enough to be misidentified as "military installations of unknown function" by Americans studying satellite imagery in 1985. The photoanalysts, as ignorant as they were paranoid, were told by anthropologists and historians that what they were looking at were circular Hakka villages, not nuclear reactors or missile silos.

The greatest upheaval in modern Chinese history, prior to World War II and the Communist takeover in 1949, was the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-64. From start to finish, it was Hakka inspired and led. The Taipings came within a cat's whisker of overthrowing the hated Manchus, and for many years their own capital at Nanking challenged the Manchu one at Peking. Tragically, more than 20 million Chinese died during the bloody years of the Taiping Rebellion and almost as many more perished after the defeated Hakka became

targets of vicious Manchu retribution. Many Hakka fled China as refugees, including my wife's people, who had the very good fortune to reach the tolerant Kingdom of Hawaii, where they were made welcome. Generations later, a second wave of rebels, led by Hakka Sun Yat Sen, and financially supported by the overseas Chinese of the Pacific Rim, including Hawaii and California, continued the fight, finally overthrowing the Manchus, once and for all, in 1911. After 1949, however, the Hakka got "edited out" of the new, politically correct histories, there being room now for but a single strain of "true revolutionaries." Many decades later, Hakka recognition finally began to emerge within the PRC, mainly through the efforts of Deng Xiaoping, himself Hakka, who had somehow survived being purged no fewer than three times by the ruling Han Chinese elite.

Enzheng Tong, on his first venture outside the PRC in 1980, heard this alternative history for the first time. He also had as little patience for dogmatic, Marxist-Leninist pseudoarchaeology, the "official" party line that government archaeologists were supposed to follow, as I did. Such thought control specified in advance which discoveries may be made, and which may not. Results were preordained in formulistic, cultural evolutionary fashion. Stratigraphy must equate, from bottom to top, with "primitive capitalism" through "slave society" and so forth and so on, inevitably culminating in the "Communist paradise" of modern, post-1949, China, the only place on earth where fully evolved. Marxist-Leninist pseudoarchaeology was the self-fulfilling prophesy of rigid political doctrine, its interpretations and final conclusions formulated long *before* any evidence for them was archaeologically searched for. In other words, 35 years ago Chinese archaeologists were compelled to think in exactly the reverse of the scientific method.

Tong very nearly got himself permanently "edited out" just for teaching what Americans would consider normal (i.e.: objective, non-judgmental) archaeology and anthropology, for he was an early victim of the so-called "Cultural Revolution" in 1966. His classroom was invaded by Red Guards, who began an immediate inquisition. Tong's hands were bound, he was blindfolded, gagged, and a dunce cap was put atop his head. He was forced to sit at the front of his own classroom while the Red Guards taunted and humiliated him, loudly discussing his fate during an extended "people's trial" with his own students as witnesses against him. Tong's students were questioned whether his research was directed towards the discovery of ancient traces of "class struggle", or, instead, of discredited and insidious ancient "bourgeois elements" such as art, architecture, and ceramics. They were asked if the ancient cultures studied were being measured against the *Little Red Book*, the sole "approved" source of knowledge in China, or against other reference works, such as excavation reports, all now dismissed as irrelevant.

In 1966 Tong's familiarity with the work of non-Chinese scholars and with the archaeology of foreign lands was considered *counterrevolutionary* in the Xenophobic "New China," and proof of treasonous disloyalty. Enzheng Tong had taught his students that each culture through time and space deserved to be evaluated on its own terms. This was completely unacceptable to the rabid, uneducated, Red Guards now in control of his university. The kangaroo court branded Professor Tong an "an Enemy of the People." Penalties for this "offense" ranged from summary execution to prison terms. Tong was sentenced to internal exile and hard labor as punishment for daring to take a stand against xenophobia and ethnocentrism. He was ripped away from his family, his profession, and his livelihood.

In one gulag Tong and some of his fellow prisoners had an illicit radio. Late at night, with lookouts watching for guards, the set would be assembled and the *Voice of America*, broadcast in both English and Mandarin, tuned in. The prisoners believed that much of what they heard was propaganda, the western equivalent of the Red Guard's exhortations, but the part of each broadcast most appreciated was the music. The *Voice of America* ran the soundtracks of recent movies, musicals, and stage shows, as well as popular standards and rock and roll. Tong's favorite from the years he spent behind barbed wire was the stirring soundtrack to the 1963 Hollywood Horse Opera *How the West was Won*. He promised himself that if he was ever forgiven for teaching "felony archaeology" and could get out of the prison camps, he would move heaven and earth to see this movie and go to America to find out for himself what the "West" was all about. The pogrom finally ended and Tong was released after nearly eight years of confinement. He went back to work in Tibet in 1974, fully ten years after his most recent prior field season. Five years later, considered fully "rehabilitated," he was promoted to Professor of History at Sichuan University. The following year, he was allowed to leave the PRC for the very first time, and came to California. After a few dinners together, Professor Tong shared his nightmarish Cultural Revolution experiences with me. He said that being in Los Angeles was like a dream come true, one he had hoped for over the years in the gulags. And now he wanted to meet cowboys and Indians. I told him that L.A. was fantasyland, not the "real West" but that traces of it still survived nearby. The Navajo big *rez* was a just a little too far away, but we could reel in the San Joaquin Valley, the Southern Sierra Nevada and the Owens Valley in a long day's drive. Bakersfield, Kernville, and Lone Pine beckoned, places where he could meet both cowboys and Indians in their native, Western, habitat.

Tong told me: "*I want to ride a horse, and I want to shoot a gun.*" But I made an executive decision to forgo the *Broncos* as I did not want his neck broken if he got bucked off a borrowed horse. Hardly a theoretical concern, my old hometown best-buddy, a true Cowboy, had been on the Rodeo circuit long enough to break forty bones; another high school age-mate was killed by a single head-kick from his own horse. So I told Tong that modern-day cowboys, like archaeologists, rode *in* pickup trucks, not *on* horses. Since he also wanted to shoot guns, I gave him an all-day tutorial on rifle, pistol and shotgun out in the California desert. At the end of the session I presented him with his very own cowboy hat. On the long drive home Tong noticed the little *Ford* logo on the glove box release button inside my 1957 *Ranchero*. He told me that an ongoing argument with one of the prison camp *Torquemadas* had resulted from his belief that Ford still made cars and trucks. His jailer was convinced, however, that *Ford* meant the Model T (1908-1927) and *ONLY* the Model T, the masterpiece of "capitalist exploiter of the masses" Henry Ford. Tong was thrilled to be vindicated ten years later, riding inside a 1957 Ford pickup truck with *tailfins*, made thirty years *after* the last Tin Lizzy rolled off the line.

Enzheng Tong left UCLA to spend a second consecutive year as a visiting scholar, this time at Harvard University. We warned him that this move was decidedly retrograde, both intellectually and culturally: few cowboys, Indians, or pickup trucks would be found in Massachusetts. Back at Chengdu by 1984 Professor Tong now became the Director of the Sichuan University Museum. Then, in 1986, he was finally confirmed in his Ph.D. degree, the Chinese academic system not granting Doctorates previously. The following year he was again a visiting Professor in America, this time at the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan. All through this period Dr. Tong continued to publish a steady

stream of articles and books. His objections to the Marxist-Leninist mental straightjacket, what Deng Xiaoping called “an entire generation of mental cripples,” now found their way into print, as did a number of thought-provoking pieces contrasting the culture, history, and archaeology of North versus South China. Many were reminiscent of the discussions we had during his first months in California, out from under PRC thought control.

In 1989 the Chinese student democracy movement seemed to vindicate Enzheng Tong’s thirty-year commitment to objective archaeology and anthropology. He and a hundred other Chinese scholars, teachers, and writers signed a letter in support of the students and sent it on to Beijing. But the Tiananmen Square Massacre on June 4th crushed the intellectual freedom movement and the government now sought retribution against its supporters. Dr. Tong, one of the most prominent suspects, was ordered to denounce the democracy movement and to confess his error in supporting it. Unwilling to compromise, he became a political exile once again. This time, he sought refuge in the United States. He taught briefly at UCLA, then at the University of Washington, the University of Pittsburgh, at Carnegie Mellon University, and at West Virginia University, sometimes in Anthropology, sometimes History, sometimes Art. His final home was at Wesleyan University, as the Sullivan Fellow of its Art Department. Dr. Tong died on April 20, 1997 after a short illness: he was only 62. Wesleyan University’s Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies has named one of its research facilities the *Enzheng Tong Archaeology Library*.

Many American anthropologists, archaeologists and historians complain about how little regard our own society has for us, and how little understanding it has of what we do. Many gripe about how little we are paid, and bemoan the financial sacrifice and the years we must invest in education just to achieve such poverty. But no American academic was ever thrown in jail just for teaching anthropology or archaeology. We all take freedom of speech, of thought, of assembly, and academic freedom for granted. Few, if any of us, have ever had to choose between giving up our profession or foreign exile.

Enzheng Tong got his first taste of academic freedom in California in 1980. This came after many years of punishment for his dedication to the same anthropological principles archaeologists around the world consider essential. He survived this nightmare with his humanistic faith intact, and returned to archaeology and history with renewed dedication. But after his pilgrimages to America Tong suffered a new and different archaeological martyrdom, for his support of the student democracy movement of 1989. His subsequent escape to America and to academic sanctuary was nearly miraculous.

Dr. Tong’s writing, teaching, and attitudes formed a bridge between China and America. I was in China on the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Two days later I was the only Caucasian amongst a group of Asian-Americans invited to an international amity banquet, hosted by high-ranking PRC officials. Ironically, this was held in Beijing’s Great Hall of the People, on Tiananmen Square. Enzheng Tong never lived to see the newly-transformed China that only now is beginning to embrace the ideas he fought so hard for. Statements made at the 2014 banquet he could not attend vindicated Tong’s years of sacrifice, and may herald a new time of intellectual freedom in his native land. Although he left us years ago, Enzheng Tong was, and continues to be, an international archaeological hero, at the forefront of both the oldest and the youngest of the world’s scholarly traditions.