A Bioarchaeological Study of Health and Social Change in Ancient China (P.L. Walker, PI)

Abstract
This project will produce a database of osteological observations that will provide a unique health-related perspective on the socioeconomic transitions that occurred during China’s long, well documented history. Funding is requested for travel to key Chinese research institutions where data will be collected on the height of China’s ancient inhabitants based on long bone measurements. These data will be obtained directly from skeletal collections as well as from unpublished technical reports that are currently unavailable outside of China. These osteological data will be used as proxies for health status. A strong correlation exists between height and the lengths of a person’s long bones. Adult height, in turn, has been shown to have a strong correlation with an individual’s history of net nutrition, or diet minus claims on the diet made by work, physical activity, and disease. These skeletal data will thus allow me to make strong inferences about the human health consequences of the social changes that occurred as the Chinese population shifted from hunting and gathering to agriculture during the Neolithic revolution and then became increasingly socially stratified with the emergence of chiefdoms, early states, and other more recent forms of sociopolitical organization. An important ancillary benefit of this project will be the establishment of long-term collaborative relationships with Chinese colleagues. The enormous scientific potential of these collaborative relationships means that they have great promise for garnering extra-mural funding from granting agencies within the United States, as well as in China.