

# The Chinese Upper Paleolithic: Geography, Chronology, and Techno-typology

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**Abstract** This article reviews the archaeology and chronology of the Chinese Upper Paleolithic and the human fossils attributed to this period. The onset of the Upper Paleolithic in China dates to ca. 35,000–30,000 years ago and is marked by the appearance of a few body decorations and well-shaped bone tools that were added to stone tool assemblages, including core-and-flake tools in North China and cobble tools in South China. The proliferation of blade assemblages in northwest China is interpreted as the cultural impact or the physical presence of bearers of blade industries from western Eurasia. The ensuing appearance of microblade assemblages in North China by 23,000–22,000 years ago reflects the use of local siliceous crystalline nodules by a population that recognized the advantages of this raw material. At that time in South China, prehistoric artisans continued to shape their stone objects from the available flat river cobbles. During the later part of the Chinese Upper Paleolithic (ca. 21,000–10,000 BP), foragers also made bone tools, antler objects, pottery, and shell tools, which laid the technological foundations for the early Neolithic period. One difficulty in this research is that human fossils are rare. Few are well dated and morphological, cultural, and biological interpretations are hotly debated. Our review attempts to facilitate the understanding of a poorly known period in Chinese archaeology and its place in human cultural evolution.

**Keywords** China · Upper Paleolithic · Techno-typology

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