



The People's Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China

Sigrid Schmalzer

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In the 1920s an international team of scientists and miners unearthed the richest evidence of human evolution the world had ever seen: Peking Man. After the communist revolution of 1949, Peking Man became a prominent figure in the movement to bring science to the people. In a new state with twin goals of crushing “superstition” and establishing a socialist society, the story of human evolution was the first lesson in Marxist philosophy offered to the masses. At the same time, even Mao’s populist commitment to mass participation in science failed to account for the power of popular culture—represented most strikingly in legends about the Bigfoot-like Wild Man—to reshape ideas about human nature.

The People’s Peking Man is a skilled social history of twentieth-century Chinese paleoanthropology and a compelling cultural—and at times comparative—history of assumptions and debates about what it means to be human. By focusing on issues that push against the boundaries of science and politics, *The People’s Peking Man* offers an innovative approach to modern Chinese history and the history of science.

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