



Prof. Dr. Zhou Mingzhen (Minchen Chow) working in his study in April 1995

Preface

In memory of Minchen Chow on the Centenary of his birth

Prof. Dr. Zhou Mingzhen (1918–1996), also known as Minchen Chow, was the founder of mammalian paleontology in China and a worldwide well-known Chinese vertebrate paleontologist. He assisted Yang Zhongjian (C. C. Young), founder of vertebrate paleontology in China, in formulating the development of the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP), Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), and succeeded to the Director of the IVPP after Yang's death in 1979. He made great effort to bring the IVPP to world prominence. He was elected as Academician of the CAS in 1980, and awarded the Romer-Simpson Medal of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (N.A.) (SVP), the highest award in the field of vertebrate paleontology, in 1993.

Zhou Mingzhen co-founded *Vertebrata Palasiatica* with Yang Zhongjian in 1957, when the Laboratory of Vertebrate Paleontology was upgraded to an institute. As the Deputy Editor-in-Chief (1961–1979) and Editor-in-Chief (1980–1996), his service helped the journal gain a good reputation among the global vertebrate paleontologist community. For his great contributions to vertebrate paleontology and the journal *Vertebrata Palasiatica*, this Special Issue is compiled in memory of his centennial birthday.

Zhou Mingzhen graduated from the Department of Geology, Chongqing University in 1943. After shortly employed in the Geological Survey of Sichuan, the Chongqing University, and the Geological Survey of Taiwan, he went to study in the United States. He received an M.Sc. degree from the University of Miami, Ohio in 1948, and then a Ph.D. degree from Lehigh University,

Pennsylvania in 1950. Dr. Zhou returned to China in 1951 and briefly employed at the Shandong University as an associate professor. He was transferred in 1952 to the Vertebrate Paleontological Group of the Institute of Palaeontology, CAS, which was integrated with the Cenozoic Research Laboratory of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce in 1953 and finally became the today's Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP), CAS. Since then, he remained in the institute until his death in 1996. He was the Vice President of the International Palaeontological Association, the directors of the Palaeontological Society of China, the Chinese Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, and the Association of Natural History Museums of China. He was also an Honorary Member of the SVP.

Zhou Mingzhen acted as the leader of several large expeditions on fossil vertebrates. He was the Chinese leader of the Joint Sino-Soviet Paleontological Expedition to Nei Mongol, Ningxia, and Gansu, in 1959–1960. This ambitious project was aborted because of the souring of political relationship between the two countries. Later in 1963–1964, he led the IVPP team to resume the expedition to the Dzungaria and Turfan basins in Xinjiang. Both expeditions resulted in significant findings of various vertebrate groups.

Upon the finding of Paleocene mammals in southern China in the early 1960s, Zhou organized and led the expeditions to the “Red Beds” of South China, which lasted over 10 years. After reported in scientific publications and introduced to colleagues abroad in 1970s and 1980s, the results of the expeditions were considered one of the most important paleontological discoveries worldwide in the 20th century by that time.

Zhou was not only the principal organizer, but also a major player in the research activities. In the early years of his career on vertebrate paleontology, he studied various vertebrate groups, e. g., dinosaur eggs, turtles, and lizards. But soon after, he focused his interest mainly on the fossil mammals and achieved himself as the founder of mammalian paleontology in China. Contributions in several topics constituted the majority of his research achievements in this field.

Zhou's studies on the Eocene mammalian faunas covered the description of a number of new taxa found at various sites, the discussion of their relationships, the determination of their biostratigraphic implications, and the intercontinental correlation.

The discovery and study of the Paleocene mammals, including endemic anagalids, pantodonts, and condylarths, etc., are major achievements of the expeditions to the “Red Beds” in southern China led by Zhou. The monograph entitled “Mammalian fauna from the Paleocene of Nanxiong Basin, Guangdong” (Zhou et al., 1977) has become a classic reference for the study of Chinese (and even Asian) Paleocene mammals.

Zhou was a pioneer in studying Mesozoic mammals of China. He paid a special attention to the Mesozoic mammals early on in his career by reviewing two Mesozoic mammals from northeastern China described by Japanese paleontologists. Later he published two papers with Tom Rich on two Jurassic mammals, *Shuotherium* from Sichuan and *Klamelia* from Xinjiang, in the early 1980s. Zhou also made substantial contributions to the study of the Chinese fossil

proboscideans, among which is the most representative one demonstrated in a monograph coauthored with Zhang Yuping. Zhou always had a particular interest in Quaternary studies, such as mammals associated with the early hominids and climate changes, which are tied closely with hominid evolution. He also led the long-term efforts in establishing the biostratigraphic framework for the Cenozoic terrestrial deposits in China and their global correlations.

Zhou's achievements other than the pure scientific activities are even more important to the development of vertebrate paleontology in China. Since the establishment of the Laboratory of Vertebrate Paleontology in 1953, Zhou Mingzhen had assisted Yang Zhongjian in stewarding the institute through its ups and downs in nearly three decades. He also joined in formulating the first through seventh Five-Year plans for economic and social development of China and was instrumental in drafting national strategic planning documents for paleontology in general and vertebrate paleontology in particular.

During the period of the Laboratory of Vertebrate Paleontology, Zhou Mingzhen managed miraculously, in roughly a couple of years, to buy more than 20 nearly complete sets of back issues of vertebrate-paleontology-related journals, as well as many books, from a book dealer in Holland, and built up a library from scratch. Many of the journals were dated as started from the late 19th century or the early 20th century. Zhou also helped establish the journal exchange programs with international peer institutions, which have been lasting to this day.

Zhou Mingzhen always kept abreast on the newest disciplinary development in the West. He was an early supporter of plate tectonics theory in China, and promoted its significance to paleontology in numerous occasions. He was one of the first to introduce into China both cladistics and vicariance biogeography in the 1980s and 1990s respectively, which have had a huge impact on the Chinese colleagues beyond the field of paleontology. He also positively promoted to foreign colleagues the significant research of the IVPP researchers, and encouraged the international exchanges and joint expeditions. He had main responsibility in bringing about the traveling exhibits of Chinese fossil vertebrates, including the exhibit "Dinosaurs from China" in Tokyo, Japan in 1982, which was the first after China's open-door policy.

Zhou was a brilliant scholar and a very good tutor. Many researchers of younger generations, working and learning at the IVPP, had received his instructions. In addition to the restrict requirement, he had also created opportunities for students to improve their ability of various aspects. He encouraged and recommended the students and young researchers to study abroad in pursuing their academic degrees or for a short-term training. Many of them have become the vertebrate paleontological researchers with international influence. As his student and assistant in his last decade, his enormous knowledge and agile thinking have greatly impressed me. He also gave me his kindly care in my life, which my wife and I will remember forever.

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