



# Archaeological Discoveries and Significance of the Baliqiao Site in Fangcheng

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**Abstract:** Since 2022, the Henan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology has carried out archaeological excavations at the Baliqiao Site. Remains such as rammed-earth building foundations, roads, sacrificial pits, and walls have been discovered. The unearthed relics include pottery, stone tools, jade wares, turquoise inlays, oracle bones, and cast bronze relics, etc. The period of this site ranges from the second to the fourth phases of the Erlitou Culture and it is the largest Erlitou Culture site in the southern Henan region. The archaeological findings at the Baliqiao Site play a crucial role in exploring the settlement layout of the regional center of the Erlitou Culture and the transportation of mineral and metallurgical resources.

**Keywords:** Baliqiao Site, Erlitou Culture, Settlement Layout

## I. Site Overview

The Baliqiao site is located in Chengzhuang Village, Zheyang Subdistrict, Fangcheng County, Henan Province, on the western bank of the Pan River. It is named after the Baliqiao Bridge. Covering an area of approximately 1.35 million square meters, it is a large ring-moat settlement from the Erlitou period. Positioned at the northeastern edge of the Nanyang Basin, the site guards a critical passage connecting the Central Plains to the Jiangnan Plain. Historically, this region has served as a significant area for cultural exchanges and interactions between the north and south, holding substantial strategic importance. It also marks a key node along the documented "Xia Route" in ancient texts. (Figure 1)

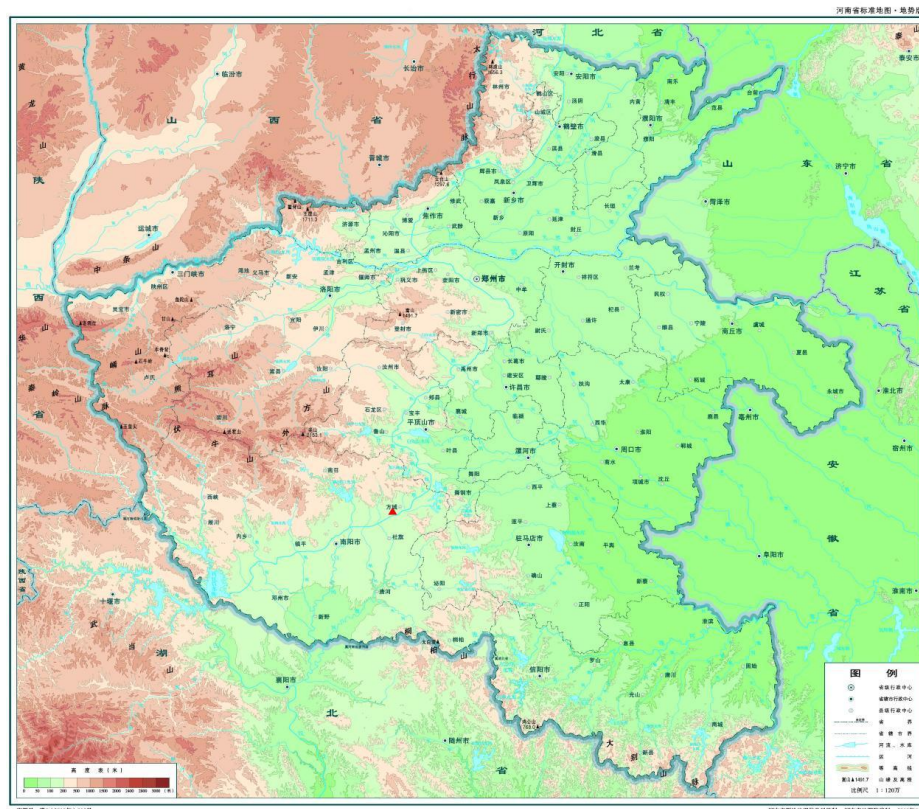


Figure 1: Location map of the Baliqiao site

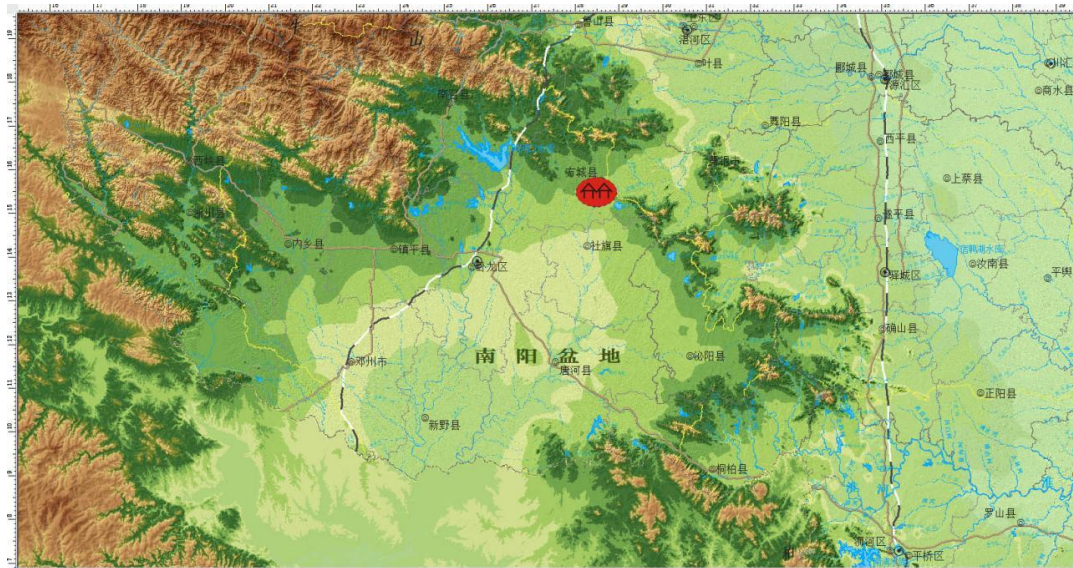


Figure 2: Topographic map of the Baliqiao site's surroundings

## II. Archaeological Discoveries

In 2022, supported by the "Archaeological China - Xia Culture Research" project, the Henan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology, in collaboration with the Nanyang Institute of Cultural Heritage, conducted systematic excavations at the Baliqiao site, yielding significant findings.

Through comprehensive surveys, the boundaries and

internal structure of the site were delineated. The site has a rectangular layout, with the southern moat measuring 750 meters and the western moat about 1,800 meters. Within the site, 11 trench-like relics were identified, arranged in an orderly grid pattern that divides the southern part of the site into multiple zones. This "multi-grid" layout resembles the planning observed at the Erlitou site. (Figure 3)

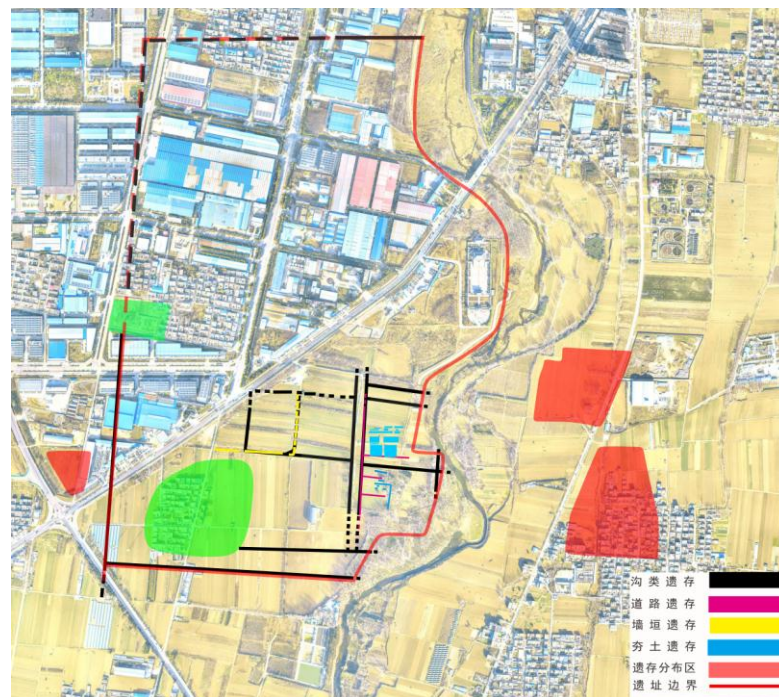


Figure 3: Plan view of the Baliqiao site





In Area C, adjacent to the Pan River and situated on higher ground, a cluster of rammed-earth foundations spans approximately 48,000 square meters. Among these, the No. 1 rammed-earth foundation is a rectangular yellow earthen platform. A large building was discovered atop the foundation, oriented north-south, featuring surrounding corridors and a courtyard in the front. The main structure measures 12 meters in depth and 31 meters in width, covering 372 square meters. It has two rows of postholes on each side, spaced 1.2–1.5 meters apart. (Figure 4) The No. 2 foundation is located east of the No. 1 foundation, with the two foundations aligned in an east-west configuration. Postholes have been discovered at the site. The construction process

involved filling and compacting large extraction pits, ash pits, and pottery kilns formed during clay extraction for pottery-making. Relatively pure yellow soil was then layered and compacted, with finer gray soil used for the outer layer of the rammed-earth foundation. Around the rammed-earth foundation, there are regularly shaped ash pits containing numerous intact pottery artifacts, primarily polished black clay vessels. These include wine vessels, food vessels, and storage containers, as well as painted stone human figurine heads, jade haft-shaped artifacts, and turquoise items. These finds are contemporaneous with the rammed-earth foundation and are likely ritual pits associated with the rammed-earth structures.



Figure 4: No. 1 rammed-earth foundation and associated sacrificial pits

Area A, located in the central part of the site, is a zone for handicraft workshops, where remnants of walls and bronze-casting artifacts were found. The well-preserved southern wall measures 190 meters in length. Excavations revealed that parts of the wall were built by filling and compacting pre-existing trench-like features. The main wall is 4.5–5 meters wide, with a remaining height of 1.5 meters. The base shows clear stratification from repeated

construction, with sloping sides and a width of up to 8–10 meters at the bottom. (Figure 5) Cast bronze artifacts were discovered in the fill of ditch-like remains at the base of the walls. Testing by the Cultural Heritage Conservation Center of the Henan Provincial Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology identified these as lead-tin bronze alloys. Additionally, copper corrosion and copper slag were found in the central area of Zone A.



Figure 5: Cross-section of the wall

Artifacts from the site include pottery, stone tools, jade, oracle bones, and turquoise items. The pottery combinations and forms closely resemble those of the Erlitou site. Three jade artifacts, all handle-shaped, were discovered. Stone tools consist mainly of axes and chisels, with no agricultural implements identified. Turquoise items are primarily

finished inlays, with fewer decorative pieces, along with a small quantity of raw turquoise material, preliminarily traced to the Shangluo region. Other notable finds include stone yue axes, painted stone figurines, and inscribed symbols, reflecting the spiritual lives of the Baliqiao inhabitants. (Figure 6 - 8)



Figure 6: Pottery from the Baliqiao site





Figure 7: Jade handle-shaped artifacts from the Baliqiao site



Figure 8: Turquoise items from the Baliqiao site

### III. Site Value

The Baliqiao site, covering 1.35 million square meters, features well-defined functional divisions, including rammed-earth architecture, craft

production areas, walls, roads, and other facilities. High-grade artifacts such as jade, oracle bones, turquoise inlays, and bronze-casting remains highlight the site's advanced social productivity and



status, marking it as a significant southern core settlement of the Xia Dynasty.

The site was established during the second phase of the Erlitou culture, a pivotal period for the outward expansion of Xia culture. As Xia culture extended through the Fangcheng Pass into the Nanyang Basin, numerous Erlitou culture settlements were constructed. The Baliqiao site, a large central settlement near the pass, was built to assert control over the south, making it a key site for the Xia Dynasty at a critical time and place.

Geographically, the site served as a vital link between the Central Plains and the Jiangnan Plain, ensuring the safe transport of southern resources such as copper, turquoise, and cinnabar to the royal capital. It was an essential hub for the resource transport and control network of the Erlitou royal capital.

The settlement layout, functional zoning, pottery combinations, artifact styles, and spiritual elements at the Baliqiao site exhibit a high degree of consistency with those of the Erlitou site, demonstrating a strong connection between the two. This reflects the Xia state's governance model, where the royal capital exercised substantial control over regional central settlements.

Previous studies on Erlitou-era settlements have primarily focused on the Erlitou site. Regional central settlements such as Wangjinglou and Dashigu lack detailed understanding of their layouts. The settlement layout of the Baliqiao site fills this gap in the study of regional central settlements.