

[The People's Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China](#)

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Sigrid Schmalzer

"Peking Man", discovered in the 1920s by an international team of scientists and miners, was deemed powerful evidence of human evolution. After the communist revolution of 1949, Peking Man also became Exhibit A in the movement to bring science to the masses. Even Mao's populist commitment to mass participation in science, however, could not erase the capacity of popular culture - represented most strikingly in legends about the Bigfoot-like Wild Man - to reshape ideas about human nature.

In this elegant and persuasive account of paleo-anthropologic development in China, Sigrid Schmalzer rewrites our understanding of the relationship between Chinese social, scientific and political cultures. She shows the ways that the emergence of the modern Chinese state rested on both scientific developments in the area of paleo-anthropology, and the ways that they were deployed to combat long-standing popular superstitions in service of new political realities. Her book successfully places Darwinian concepts in the context of popular political history and the developing Chinese nation-state, and thereby makes a valuable contribution to the knowledge and development of the human sciences in China and beyond.

Both experts and amateurs will find [The People's Peking Man](#) to be a terrifically engaging as well as instructive read.