

GOOD SHOT

PHOTO BY REN CHENMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Young monks play table tennis at a Buddhist temple in Ruili, Yunnan province, on Tuesday. After watching a ping-pong game from the London Olympics on TV, they decided to organize a match themselves. The prize for the champion is 3 kg of bananas.



New characters found on oracle bone relics

By XINHUA in Dalian, Liaoning

Chinese archaeologists have discovered six new characters from oracle bone relics housed in a museum in Lushun, Liaoning province.

Song Zhenhao, a research fellow with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences who leads a team of experts researching the inscriptions, described the new findings as another breakthrough since such inscriptions were discovered more than 110 years ago.

He said no new characters from oracle bone inscriptions had been reported in the 32 years since the Compilation of Oracle Bone Inscriptions was published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1980.

Inscriptions written on tortoise shells and animal bones represent the original characters of the Chinese written language.

He said the six new characters were found among a 1,700-piece collection of bone inscription relics housed in the Lushun City Museum. It is the only known collection that has not yet been studied by authoritative oracle bone inscription experts.

Studying the relic collection

in the Lushun City Museum was listed as one of China's State social fund projects earlier this month, and Song is the project's chief expert.

Song said the team took rubbings from the text images of the 1,700 pieces and photographed them, which led to the characters being identified.

He said an initial study showed that the 1,700 pieces of bone inscriptions were made to keep records on agriculture, religion, weather and wars 3,000 years ago during the Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC).

Wang Ruo, deputy director of the Lushun City Museum, said that the experts believe the six new characters are nouns that refer to the names of specific places or people.

"Experts are still working to decipher the characters," he said.

Among these relics, one part of a whole picture of inscriptions has 150 characters. Such a

long article is rare among bone inscriptions, Song said.

He believes the team will discover more new characters after a thorough study of the collection.

To date, archaeologists around the world have identified 4,000 bone inscription characters from studying 130,000 relics, but only half of the characters have been deciphered, Song said.

Chinese characters constitute the oldest continuously used system of writing in the world. The graphic logograms of the characters tell both meaning and pronunciation.

According to the team's project schedule, the experts will classify the relics based on dating and the content of the inscriptions, which will eventually lead to a published compilation by 2014.

Song said deciphering bone inscriptions will greatly contribute to research on the early

Chinese history of the Shang Dynasty.

Oracle bone inscriptions were first discovered in 1899 by Beijing scholar and antiquarian Wang Yirong, although farmers had been unearthing the relics in Anyang, Henan province, for many years. Wang noticed symbols that looked like writing on animal bones and tortoise shells.

Media reports said an estimated 160,000 pieces of tortoise shell and animal bones with inscriptions have been recovered from the Yin Ruins in Anyang since the ruins were discovered in 1928. The site, placed on the World Heritage List, in 2006 has been proved to have served as the imperial capital of the Shang Dynasty. A large number of the relics have been collected by private collectors.

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Measures urged to halt foreign prostitute influx

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

Experts on Beijing's public-security operations have urged authorities to do more about the influx of foreign sex workers, after the arrest of four foreign women at a downtown club.

Police raided Qixingdao bar in Chaoyang district on July 18 and arrested 15 suspected prostitutes, including the four foreigners, according to a statement by the Public Security Management Corps under the Beijing Public Security Bureau on Tuesday.

Located in the basement of Huasheng International Mansion, an office building close to many embassies, the bar was closed on Tuesday. An employee of a warehouse next door who did not want to be identified said it will stay shut for two months.

A sign for the bar, written in Chinese and other languages, still hangs on a wall outside the building.

Ou Yang, a publicity officer for the Public Security Management Corps, said the arrests were part of a citywide campaign that started in April 2010 targeting entertainment venues that allow obscene shows or prostitution.

"During previous investigations, we found the bar (Qixingdao) was used by foreign prostitutes, and employees there also knew about the prostitution," he said. "Those foreigners could communicate with customers in gestures and simple Chinese to indicate that they were prostitutes."

"Some cars parked at the gates were used to take the foreigners and customers who made a deal in the bar to hotels

or other places."

Ou did not disclose further information about the arrested women, including their nationalities.

A police officer stationed in Sanlitun, an area popular among foreigners for its bars and restaurants, said his office has assigned three officers to target prostitution since the campaign started.

"The officers investigate bars and entertainment venues randomly and also collect clues from venue owners or residents," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

As China has opened its door to the world, the capital has seen an influx of foreign sex workers to the point that it is now a serious problem, said Dai Peng, director of the criminal investigation department at Chinese People's Public Security University.

While some women are the victims of sex traffickers, others are working in the sex industry willingly because they can earn more money that way than in their own countries, he said. Many of the willing prostitutes are in China on student, tourist or temporary-worker visas.

"Meanwhile, prostitution has developed in a concealed way. People prefer to contact prostitutes through the Internet, which is difficult for police to investigate," he said.

Wang Hongjun, director of the university's public-security management research department, said that foreigners working as prostitutes happens not only in big cities like Beijing and Guangzhou, but also in smaller areas.

"The majority of foreign sex workers are from neighboring countries, such as Russia

and Vietnam, and entertainment venues and hair salons are still the main places where the prostitution occurs," Wang said.

He spoke highly of the campaign on prostitution in the capital, but said the crackdown can solve the problem only on the surface, and it can't deal with the root causes.

Both Dai and Wang urged exit-entry administrations to make stricter checks of foreigners' backgrounds and why they want to come to China.

"After foreigners enter our country, police and administrators should pay more attention to their visa deadlines and urge them to update certificates if they want to stay longer," Dai said, adding that foreigners will get the same punishment as Chinese if they are found to be involved in prostitution.

Prostitution is illegal in China. People face an administrative detention of 15 days if found working as prostitutes. Employees of businesses involved in prostitution are obligated to report it.

However, Dai added, a thorny problem now is how to balance development of the entertainment business against the prostitution crackdown.

"After all, an entertainment venue's business will be affected if it is related to prostitution," Dai said.

In April 2010, police arrested more than 1,100 people who were allegedly engaged in prostitution and shut down many Beijing venues, including the Heaven Earth nightclub, the No 8 Club KTV and the Sunworld Dynasty Hotel KTV.

Li Yu contributed to this story.

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