

# **In "Dinosaurian Faunas of China"**

**Dong Zhiming (1992)**

**China Ocean Press, Beijing: vii-viii**

## **PREFACE**

The vast history of the earth is something that we understand only poorly, but it is something for which humanity is gaining an ever increasing appreciation. It is a humbling experience looking back through the millenia and seeing how often history has repeated itself. The actors have changed often, but many of the trends have been very consistent and just like the life of an actor, species are born, grow, change, and eventually die.

The history of the world can be likened to the written history of mankind. The layers of rocks make up the pages, and the fossils they contain are the letters and words that tell the stories. The latest books are newer, more numerous, and easiest to read. The older volumes are rarer, more obscure in language, and are poorly or incompletely preserved.

In some parts of world, certain chapters in the history of dinosaurs have been well preserved. Examples include the Morrison Formation (Upper Jurassic) of the western United States and the Judith River Formation (Upper Cretaceous) of Alberta. But these are only windows into the past, and the history of dinosaurs in North America is incomplete because whole chapters have not been preserved. China, on the other hand, is the only country in the world where enough of the pages have been preserved intact to show what was happening throughout history. Unlike North America, which was frequently flooded by inland seas, there were always places for Chinese dinosaurs to live, die, and be fossilized.

The history of dinosaurs has been available for reading and interpretation since the fossils of these remarkable animals were first discovered more than 150 years ago, but very few people have had an opportunity to do research on this fascinating subject. This trend has changed in recent years, in large part due to the efforts of the author of this book, Dong Zhiming, and his colleagues in China. In a relatively short time, a huge number of dinosaur skeletons, eggs, and footprints have been collected, studied, and displayed. Traveling exhibitions of Chinese dinosaurs in England, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, the United States, and Wales have helped to bring international attention to these invaluable dinosaurian resources. Yet, this is just a drop in the ocean. In spite of the immense popularity of dinosaurs, and the tremendous number of specimens available for study in places like China, there are relatively few specialists in the world who work on dinosaurs. Think of it, there are thousands of dinosaur specimens available in the field and yet only a couple of dozen people around the world collect and study them.

This book represents a summary of what is currently known about the dinosaurs of China. But with new discoveries being made all the time, the book will have to be completely rewritten within a decade. And when the book is rewritten, it will be because of the efforts of the author of this book, his colleagues, and students.

**Philip J. Currie**

**Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology**