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The Integration of Ordos Regional Culture and the Evolution of Subsistence Patterns during the Pre-Qin Period¹

Zhao Guoxing

Abstract: The city of Ordos is located in the southwestern of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China, and it is one of the principal centers of the Northern Frontier cultures. During the Pre-Qin period, it functioned as a key contact area between agrarian and nomadic populations, facilitating sustained cultural interaction and ethnic integration. Habit of existence evolved from hunting and gathering period to mixed farming and hunting during the Yangshao culture, marked by the emergence of integrated agriculture and animal husbandry, and subsequently to agropastoral economies in the Longshan culture and Early Shang periods. By the Shang–Zhou period, pastoralism, herding and hunting became the dominant subsistence strategy. This evolution of subsistence strategies promoted the processes of cultural integration, together shaping the distinctive cultural landscape of the Ordos region.

Keywords: Northern Frontier culture; The city of Ordos; cultural integration; Habit of existence

I. The Landscape of Northern Frontier Culture and Pre-Qin Period Cultural

Northern Frontier Culture is a distinctive form of regional culture, which represented the cultural achievements and shaped through the long-term interaction, exchange among diverse ethnic groups across the northern frontier as well. It constitutes the component of Chinese civilization while also reflects the distinctive characteristics of regional cultural development. Base on its vast geographical expanse, the Northern Frontier has developed a diverse and multifaceted cultural landscape, characterized by both complexity and regional distinctiveness. (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Grassland Scenery in Central-Southern Inner Mongolia

Inner Mongolia is famous as its rich historical and cultural heritage. The diversity of cultural traditions developed across this vast region constitute and became an important component of Chinese civilization. However, there has long been a lack of a unifying concept that encapsulates all these cultural elements. In response, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region proposed the concept of “Northern Frontier Culture”. This concept embodies the region’s distinctive identity, particularly highlighting the integration of diverse ethnic groups, and the forging of a strong sense of community for China². After accepting the cultural mission of the new era, local governments start to promote this cultural brand in an innovative way. The purpose of these efforts is to inherit the core of Chinese culture, while developing traditional culture in Inner Mongolia.

The Ordos region, located at the crossroads of the Northern Frontier and the Central Plains, holds exceptional historical significance and serves as a key to extensive cultural and economic exchanges. The region not only witnessed sustained interaction and integration between nomadic and agrarian cultures but also functioned as an important bridge connecting different regions and ethnic communities. It exemplifies the historical development of the Chinese nation as a community of pluralistic unity and vividly reflects the diversity and inclusiveness of traditional Chinese culture. The Hetao Plain, a core zone of interaction between agrarian and nomadic cultures, undergo successive shifts in subsistence patterns—from predominantly nomadic to agrarian, and subsequently back to nomadic practices—eventually giving rise to a hybrid agro-

pastoral system³. Throughout this process, nomadic, agrarian, Yellow River, and Great Wall cultures interacted, integrated, and evolved, together forming the important cultural foundations of the Northern Frontier Culture.(Figure 2).



Figure 2: The Yellow River in Central-Southern Inner Mongolia

Hetao Culture can be traced back to the “Hetao Humans”, who lived along the Salawusu River (also known as the Wuding River or Hongliu River) in Uxin Banner of Ordos, approximately 140,000–70,000 years ago. Their activities gave rise to what is known as the “Hetao Human Culture,” an important archaeological manifestation of the region’s Paleolithic cultural heritage(Figure 3)⁴.



Figure 3: Panoramic View of the Salawusu Site

The Wulanmulun Site was discovered in May 2010 and dating to 60,000–45,000 years ago in the Late Pleistocene epoch. More than 15,000 stone tools, about 15,000 ancient animal fossils, and abundant evidence of fire use, including ash, charcoal, and burnt bones, have been found at the site⁵.

The Zhukaigou Site is located in Ejin Horo Banner, and it represents a cultural sequence spanning the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. Archaeologists have revealed rich cultural deposits, featuring a diverse assemblage of artifacts and cultural remains that display distinctive regional characteristics. This archaeological tradition has consequently been designated the Zhukaigou Culture. These discoveries demonstrate the continuity of human activity in the Ordos region since the Paleolithic. In subsequent historical development, this region became an arena for the activities and interactions of ancient nomadic groups, including the Xianyun, Guifang, Yiqu, Loufan, and Linhu. Their presence and exchanges further enriched the cultural diversity and contributed to the development of its later historical and cultural tradition (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Current Landscape of the Zhukaigou Site

After the Qin Dynasty, it started to strengthen its political influence over the local regions. Emperor Qin set up several commanderies, including Beidi, Shangjun, Jiuyuan, and Yunzhong, along with their subordinate counties, eventually forming an administrative system. Measures like population migration, land reclamation, and building the Great Wall further reinforced the Qin Dynasty's control over the area. These actions enhanced economic and cultural exchanges between the Ordos region and the central plains, and boosted agricultural development as well as the growth of local culture.

During the Qin Dynasty, General Meng Tian was dispatched to drive out the Xiongnu and recovered the "Henan territory," including the Ordos Plateau. The Great Wall and the road networks were built by the emperor strengthened the central government's control over the borders, while also increasing exchanges between the Ordos region and the Central Plains. Qin-era artifacts unearthed in Ordos, including cocoon-shaped pottery jars, serve as tangible evidence of the economic and cultural connections between northern border and the Central Plains. These items can help us to understand the production methods of the time, and give us a better sense of Ordos culture's place in border culture.

II. Evolution of Subsistence Patterns in the Ordos Region during the Pre-Qin Period

(A) Paleolithic Culture with Combined Gathering and Hunting

The Paleolithic Culture in the Ordos region include Laushe Site, Ulan Muren Site, and Shuidonggou Site are some of the most representative Paleolithic sites. They span roughly between 140,000 and 15,000 years ago and together form a continuous cultural sequence from the middle to the late Paleolithic. These sites have yielded abundant animal remains, such as woolly rhinoceros, *Camelus knoblochi*, *Megaloceros ordosianus*, *Bubalus wansijocki*, *Bos primigenius*, *Equus przewalskii*, *Cervus elaphus*, and *Procapra przewalskii* and so on. There are many cut marks found on fragmented animal bones show that early humans used stone tools to process their prey, especially large herbivores. In addition, various stone tools, such as scrapers, pointed tools, and serrated tools, were all essential for hunting and handling prey.

Besides hunting, gathering also played an important role during the Paleolithic era. Plant remains like water and roots were found at these sites, which show that plant-based foods supplemented people's diets back then. Stone tools like cores and flakes might have been used to collect and process plant foods, which proves that there were diverse survival strategies. The ash heaps indicate that early humans already knew how to use fire, which is important for understanding human biological and cultural evolution.



Figure 5: Stone Tools Unearthed from the Salawusu Site

In the Paleolithic phase, hunting was an important part of survival in this region. Hunting not only provided meat but also resources for making clothes and tools, especially during the cold seasons. Meanwhile, hunting helped to supplement plant-based carbohydrates, vitamins, and other nutrients, which balanced out a diet that was mainly meat. The variety of plants and animals added diversity to their diet and helped their resilience, laying an important foundation for the development of early human communities.

Research on the Să răusu, Ulan Mulun, and Shui Donggou sites shows continuity and innovation in using stone tool production techniques. By analyzing the animal and plant remains further indicates significant environmental changes, including shifts between cold and warm periods as well as wet and dry conditions. These environmental changes affected the ways of life of prehistoric populations in the Ordos region.

The Middle to Late Paleolithic period in the Ordos region is an important stage for studying the evolution of modern humans, especially how they appeared and developed. During that time, local people used a mixed subsistence strategy based on hunting and gathering, making stone tools from locally available pebbles. These tools had various purposes, including hunting, processing plant foods, and making other tools. These phenomena show a relatively advanced level of technological adaptation. At the Ulanmulun site, many traces left on the tools, providing evidence of processing large herbivores, and the ash indicate that people were already able to control fire and eat cooked food.

Many sorts of stone tools and animal remains provide us with valuable evidence to speculate on the survival methods of early humans. Refined tools like stone tips and scrapers demonstrate the development of stone tool technology and their various uses. Overall, archaeological evidence suggests that survival during the Paleolithic in the Ordos region mainly relied on a combination of hunting and gathering. The use of knapped stone tools facilitated the exploitation of animal and plant resources, with large herbivores constituting an important component of the dietary economy.(Figure 6).



Figure 6: Woolly Rhinoceros Fossil

(B) Yangshao Cultural Remains: Agro-Hunting Complementarity and the Integration of Farming and Animal Husbandry

Due to environmental and climate conditions, the Neolithic period appeared relatively later here compared with many other parts of China. However, the Ordos region reflect the development of some key features of Neolithic culture, such as crop planting, pottery making, polished stone tools, permanent settlements, and animal domestication etc. Within this broader context, the emergence and development of the Yangshao culture sites marked an important shift in local life style. Archaeological evidence shows that millet-based farming gradually increased, while hunting remained an important complement to cultivation. The coexistence of farming and hunting shaped the region's unique ecological conditions and resource usage. And, the development of animal domestication and pastoralism gave local communities a certain economic foundation, which help to form a complete economic system.

1. Agro-Hunting Complementarity in Early Yangshao Cultural Remains

In the Neolithic phase, the Yangshao culture established settlements along river valleys and developed early forms of agricultural production, including slash-and-burn cultivation. Meanwhile, animal husbandry, permanent dwellings, and pottery production gradually became established features. The widespread use of polished stone tools marked a significant technological advance over the knapped stone technologies. Together, these developments reflected a transitional subsistence economy in which agricultural production initially coexisted with, rather than entirely

replaced by hunting and gathering ,forming a diversified economic system.

In Ordos, early Neolithic sites such as Lujiapo, Guandi, and Yangwan, approximately 6,500 years ago, provided important evidence for some of the earliest Neolithic activities. The Yangwan Site in Jungar Banner is a important site of the Banpo phase. Its semi-subterranean, wooden-framed earthen structures, together with adjacent storage pits of circular, square, rectangular, and oval forms, indicating practices associated with the storage of grain and other goods. These architectural and storage features reflect the settlement patterns and material traditions (Figure 7-8)⁶.

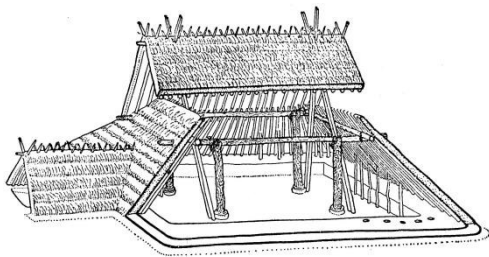


Figure 7: Yangwan Site Dwelling Remains

Figure 8: Reconstruction Diagram of Yangwan Site Dwelling

The residents of Yangwan originally lived in large-scale kinship communities. When choosing a site to build, they tend to be close to the water source, or choose a slope with shade and sun against the sun. A public building in the centre of the settlement is presumed to have been used as a gathering place, implying that social organizations based on kinship have initially taken shape. Judging from the spatial layout of settlements and the existence of public facilities, the social organization at that time was gradually becoming more complex⁷.

Stone The relics unearthed from the Yangwan site are mainly stone tools and pottery tools. In the combination of stone tools, there are both beating tools and grinding

and polishing tools, such as axes, knives, grinding rods, grinding boards, chisels and spades. These relics show that there were a variety of activities related to farming, food processing and handicraft production at that time. Pottery is mainly made of sand or clay blanks. The shape of the utensils includes cans, pointed-bottomed bottles, round-bellied cans and basins. Many utensils also have rope patterns or thread patterns on the surface. The differentiation of these relics in terms of species and functions shows that there was an obvious specialization in the production and use of tools at that time, and also provided an important basis for understanding the technical level of Yangwan settlements and their increasingly diverse lifestyles.

The analysis of these tools shows that the livelihood economy at that time mainly relied on early agricultural production, supplemented by hunting. People grow grain and use grinding stone tools - including axes, hoes and perforated knives - to reclaim land and harvest crops; at the same time, hunting is still important in the local economy. Fine stone tools, such as arrows, blades and stone pieces, are very suitable for hunting and processing animal resources such as animal skins and meat. The coexistence of agricultural tools and hunting tools reflects a diversified survival strategy, which is what we often call the complementary relationship between farming and hunting.

In terms of pottery production, the early Yangshao culture has shown a relatively mature technology in rope pattern finish and painting decoration, and the functional differentiation of utensils is also becoming more and more obvious - wide-mouthed jars may be used to store grain, and narrow-necked bottles are suitable for storing liquids. As archeologist Zhang Zhongpei pointed out, the early Yangshao culture in the Ordos region was closely related to the Yangshao culture in the Central Plains, and was also influenced by the Hongshan culture in northeast China. It is worth mentioning that the wide application of fine stoneware technology has not only promoted the formation of unique local cultural traditions, but also promoted the technical and cultural exchanges between them and Longshan cultural traditions.

Generally speaking, a mixed livelihood system of agriculture and hunting was formed in the early Yangshao culture period in the Ordos region. This diversified

livelihood strategy reflects the adaptation of early Neolithic settlements to the local ecological environment. At the same time, it also promotes the subsequent evolution of the region's culture through continuous cultural interaction and technical exchange. (Figures 9–10).



Figure 9: Polished Stone Axes

Figure 10: Polished Stone Knives

2. Late Yangshao Cultural Remains and the Integration of Cultivation and Animal Husbandry

In the late Yangshao culture, the cultural development along the Yellow River in northern China showed increasingly diverse livelihood strategies and distinctive geographical characteristics. The Ordos region is a unique cultural distribution area, where the combination of agriculture and animal husbandry has gradually become an increasingly prominent feature of local culture.

The Haishengbao culture type is distributed along the Yellow River in the south-central part of Inner Mongolia, dating back to about 5,500 years ago, which is an important embodiment of the development process of late Yangshao culture in the region. Its characteristics are closely related to the process of expanding northward and adapting to the local environment in the Miaodigou stage of Yangshao culture. In the south-central part of Inner Mongolia, these cultural influences are mixed with local traditions, which has jointly contributed to the emergence and development of Miao Digou culture. Around the same time, the Majiayao culture arose in Gansu. Haishengbao culture and Miaodigou culture are closely related in terms of cultural type, and both of them also maintain continuous cultural exchanges with the Hongshan culture in Northeast China. These cultural connections reflect that in the late Yangshao

culture, the dissemination of technology, material traditions and lifestyles in northern China has become more and more frequent.

The combination of tools of Haisheng Bulang culture includes large stone tools, fine stone tools, and tools processed or transformed with aggregates, antlers and pottery pieces. Large stone tools mainly include hoes, spades, knives, grinding wheels and grinding sticks; some sites have also unearthed axes, disc-shaped tools, spinning wheels and stone tools with grooves. Ceramic pieces have also been processed into tools, especially large spades, knives and spinning wheels. Among them, the number of pottery spades and knives is obviously more than that of stone tools, which shows that the modified pottery tools are widely used in daily production activities. The combination of fine stone tools includes chisels, scrapers, composite tools (such as bone daggers inlaid with stone pieces), as well as stone pieces and stone knives. Bone tools include needles, needles, and daggers embedded with stone pieces. In addition, the unique tools such as wide axes with oval cross-sections, knives with grooves, semicircular tools and exquisite fine stone tools further reflect the technical process system of Haishengbao culture.

Animal remains also provide more examples for this diversified survival strategy. Home animals include pigs, dogs, sheep and cattle; the species they are hunted include deer, badgers, mammoths, tigers and American bison, as well as aquatic and bird resources such as fish, turtles and birds. These remains indicate that the early economic activities of the region were dominated by manual agriculture, and later gradually supplemented by animal husbandry, hunting, fishing and gathering. Crops, livestock and a variety of wild resources coexist, reflecting the comprehensiveness and diversity of the survival system of Haishengbao. (Figure 11).⁸.



Figure 11: Pottery of the Haishengbulang Culture

By the late Yangshao culture, the improvement of productivity seemed to be accompanied by the widening of the wealth gap and the emergence of a new social class. These changes are also reflected in the construction of defensive building structures; for example, the Ashan culture, which was distributed in the Hetao area about 4,500 years ago, showed more obvious nomadic cultural characteristics, which can be confirmed by its rich bone tools and fine stone remains. The expansion and diversification of production activities have exacerbated the differences in people's access to resources and wealth; the emergence of defensive stone fences reflects the increasing importance that people attach to territorial protection and community security at that time. These archaeological features together show that social complexity increased in the late Neolithic period.⁹

In 1988, the site of the stone wall of Zhaizi Gedan was discovered. This is an oval stone fence built according to the natural slope of the hill, covering an area of about 15,000 square meters; there is a pyramid-shaped platform in the centre, indicating that the settlement may have been used for public activities, religious ceremonies or Defence. The building reflects the growing organizational capacity of local communities, which may also indicate an increased emphasis on the protection of settlements and resources. With the emergence of other defensive buildings in the region, the site provides important evidence for the increased social complexity of the late Neolithic period and the change in the pattern of community organization¹⁰.

A large number of Neolithic agricultural tools, including axes, grinding discs and

grinding sticks, as well as some large pottery, were unearthed in the archaeological excavations of the site of the Zhaizi Gedan stone wall of the stock. These findings show that the livelihood economy of the site does include agricultural activities. These unearthed cultural relics, together with the large-scale stone fences in the ruins, provide important clues for understanding the socioeconomic transformation of the late Yangshao culture; they show that socioeconomic activities at that time were gradually shifting from a relatively stable agricultural production mode to an increasingly diversified economic practice and more complex forms of social organization. (Figure 12).



Figure 12 Stone-Walled Settlement at Zhaizhigedan Site

With the cooling of the climate and the intensification of drought, the relative importance of agriculture in the Ordos region is gradually declining, and animal husbandry is becoming more and more prominent. According to Han Maoli, this process promoted the formation of the northern agricultural and pastoral staggered belt, and was also closely related to the earliest major division of labour in human history¹⁰. During this period, the scale of animal husbandry expanded significantly and became an important part of local life. Agriculture did not disappear, but continued to coexist and interact with animal husbandry, gradually giving rise to an increasingly integrated

mixed agricultural and pastoral economic model. This economic form promotes the diversification of livelihoods and enhances the ability of communities to adapt to changing environmental conditions. At the same time, the increase in the frequency of use of bone tools and fine stone tools reflects the changes in technical practices and resource utilization methods related to the development of nomadic activities.

(C) Agro-Pastoral Economy from the Longshan to the Early Shang Period

The Longshan cultural relics found in the Ordos region, including the Yongxingdian site and the Zhujiagou site, show a diversified economic model of livelihood, covering crop cultivation, animal husbandry, handicraft production, fishing, hunting and gathering. This model reflects the increasingly complex and diversified local economic life from the Longshan period to the early Shang Dynasty.

The Yongxingdian culture is regarded as an important embodiment of the development of agriculture and animal husbandry in prehistoric Inner Mongolia¹¹. In the archeological excavation, semi-underground houses with rounded corners were unearthed. Some of the floors were covered with clay and some were coated with lime plaster. There is also a slightly raised round stove lined with slates in the house for cooking. The unearthed things include pottery, stone tools and bone tools. On the whole, the combination of these settlement remains and artefacts shows that it used to be a relatively stable settlement. Crop cultivation, food processing and storage constituted an important part of economic life at that time¹². At the same time, evidence related to animal husbandry also shows that agricultural activities and nomadic practices are complementary. Therefore, the Yongxingdian community seems to have developed a diversified economic system: settled agriculture is an important economic foundation, while animal husbandry provides an additional source of livelihood and makes the economy more resilient. (Figures 13–14).



Figure 13: Ceramic Li Tripods and Yan Steamers from Yongxingdian Site

Figure 14: Ceramic Yan Steamers from Yongxingdian Site

By combining crop cultivation with animal husbandry and other resource-based practices, Yongxingdian site diversified their economic base and enhanced their capacity to adapt to the local environment. Archaeological studies show distinctive regional characteristics, while also pointing to cultural links between the preceding Ashan culture and the subsequent Zhukaigou culture. During this period, the relative importance of agriculture seems to have decreased, and animal husbandry activities have become more and more prominent. This transformation of more emphasis on animal husbandry was particularly obvious in the Zhujiagou period, and also marked an important stage in the economic development of agriculture and animal husbandry in the Ordos region.¹¹.

The Zhujiagou site is located in Zhujiagou Village, Ejina Hetao Banner, and dates to approximately 4,200–3,500 years ago, spanning the period from the late Longshan period to the early Shang dynasty. The site was discovered in 1974, and a total of 83 residential structures, 207 pits, 329 tombs, and 19 urn burials were excavated. A total of 1,200 artifacts were unearthed, including 510 pottery vessels, 270 stone tools, 420 bone tools, and 51 bronze objects. These remains provide important archaeological

evidence for the study of the settlement patterns, material culture, and subsistence practices of the Zhujiagou culture (Figure 15)¹².



Figure 15: Dwelling Remains at Zhukaigou Site

Zhujiagou culture occupies an important position in the prehistoric cultural sequence in southern Inner Mongolia, providing key evidence for understanding the development process of ancient society in northern China. Its economic activities are mainly agriculture, as well as animal husbandry, pottery, brewing and barter. Polished stone sickles and stone knives, coupled with traces of millet and other grains, show that local agriculture has been quite developed. These crops are not only used to sustain livelihoods, but also provide raw materials for brewing. In this way, agricultural production and handicrafts are closely linked.

Animal husbandry is also an important part of Zhujiagou culture. A large number of animal remains were unearthed in the ruins, which can confirm that there were pigs, sheep and cows at that time. At the same time, Zhujiagou culture also provides evidence for the gradual separation between agriculture and animal husbandry. As pointed out in the Historical Analysis of Ordos, this process represents an important stage in the formation of the nomadic tradition in northern China. This evolution does not mean that the two economic forms are completely independent, but more like the original interrelated survival system, agriculture and animal husbandry are gradually becoming specialized. Therefore, in a sense, this actually marks an important node in the

transformation of economic organization and social structure in the northern region of ancient China. (Figure 16)



Figure 16 Small Bronze Artifacts Unearthed from Zhukaigou

The Zhukaigou site includes residential and burial areas and has a very long time span. From an archaeological perspective, its cultural development can be divided into five stages: the first and second stages correspond to the Longshan period (around 2500–1900 BCE), the third and fourth stages to the Xia period (around 2070–1600 BCE), and the fifth stage to the Erlitou phase of the Shang period (around 1600–1450 BCE). Pollen evidence shows that, based on the relative proportions of amaranth and mugwort, the climate during this time gradually shifted from semi-arid conditions to a colder, drier environment. This environmental change limited agricultural development, making it hard to develop a farming economy that could match the social level of the Central Plains at the same time.

Because the environment got worse, natural factors held back the farming development of the Zhukaigou culture, so it did not move into a farming civilization in the same way as the farming culture of the Central Plains; when we look at tools used for production, farming tools became fewer over time, and later bone arrowheads and short-sword weapons appeared, which showed that the economic makeup started to change in this period; it is also worth noting that the share of cattle and sheep in animal

bones went up, which suggests the natural environment had worsened; however, this did not stop the Zhukaigou culture from developing, instead, the people there changed how they used land in time, actively adjusted their economic makeup, and turned the social economy from farming toward livestock raising or a mix of farming and livestock raising.

The way of life of the Zhukaigou culture changed a lot as it developed; this change shows the progress and growth of the society's economy at that time, and it also shows how human society adapted to changes in nature and how it responded to them; in the early stage of the Zhukaigou culture, the farming economy was the main part; but as nature changed and human society kept developing, the farming economy slowly could not meet people's growing needs; in this situation, raising livestock slowly appeared and slowly became an important part of the society's economy at that time; during this change, there were more livestock and more kinds of livestock, and the livestock-raising economy slowly became the main economic type of the society at that time; this change not only made productivity and living standards better in the society at that time, but also helped livestock-raising culture form and grow; at the same time, changes in nature were also one important reason for the change of the Zhukaigou culture; as the weather became dry and cold and rainfall became less, farming production in the Zhukaigou area was greatly limited; to deal with this challenge, people began to slowly turn to raising livestock and a livestock-raising economy.

(D)Livestock-raising-based Shang and Zhou culture

In the time of the Zhukaigou culture, the Ordos area in northern China slowly showed an early form of livestock-raising culture; the split of livestock raising from early farming culture marks the first social division of labor in human history; the Zhukaigou culture mainly relied on a farming economy, and it also included different economic models, such as raising livestock, handmade production, and wine making.

Since the Shang Dynasty, the northern people who moved around, known as Rong,Di', and Hu, grew strong in a narrow east-west belt in northern China; because of environmental factors, this area, which had once been good for farming and herding, slowly changed in its ways of producing and living; the special location and cultural

environment created a nomadic culture with rich content; people also call this area the northern nomadic culture belt or the Great Wall culture belt; archaeological discoveries show that this area was not only a birthplace of regional culture in northern China, but also saw nomadic culture and farming culture meet, clash, and mix.

Studies of ancient environment and archaeology show that agricultural development in the Ordos region was further constrained by climatic and arid conditions throughout the Shang and Zhou periods; farming grew less dependable in certain areas, so herding and hunting took on greater importance within local survival strategies; pastoral communities became more mobile, while livestock and wild animal resources gained greater significance, gradually reshaping the regional economy; by the late phase of this era, herding and hunting had turned into core components of local subsistence and formed a typical pastoral-hunting livelihood pattern.

The Xiongnu were a well-known people who moved around in early northern China, and they grew strong at the foot of the Yinshan Mountain in Inner Mongolia; according to the “Historical Records: Biographies of the Xiongnu,” the Xiongnu were later generations of the Xiahoushi, and their name was Chunwei; before the Tang and Yu times, groups such as the Shanrong, Xianyun, Hunyun, and others lived in the north; they moved together with their livestock, did not have a fixed home, and did not farm, but they still had their own land; they had no written records, and they were limited by speech; when they were children, they could ride sheep and use bows to shoot birds and mice; when they grew up, they shot foxes and rabbits for food; so in old Chinese books, the Xiongnu were described as a people who moved around and controlled the north of the Central Plains from the Warring States period to the Qin and Han dynasties¹³.

From the Spring and Autumn period to the Warring States period, people found many graves and cellars of nomadic people in the Ordos area, such as the Baohaishe Society graves, the Taohongbala burial ground, the Xigoupan Xiongnu graves from the Warring States period, Gongsuhao M1, the Yulong Tai Xiongnu graves, the Sujigou cellars, the Shihuigou graves, the Alu Chaideng graves, the Nianfangqu old cellars, and so on; the form of these graves, the ways people buried the dead, and the objects buried with the dead all show that they should be remains of the Xiongnu culture that lived

here at that time(Figure 17).



Figure 17: Landscape of the Xigoupan Tomb Complex

Evidence from archaeology and paleoclimatic studies shows that the Ordos area grew colder and drier beginning in the early Shang Dynasty. As environmental conditions deteriorated, local farming groups adjusted their livelihoods. Farming gradually became constrained while herding activities gained greater importance. This economic transition gave rise to distinctive Ordos bronzes, mostly small ornaments, tools and weapons decorated with stylized animal patterns including tigers, wolves, horses and cattle. Known internationally as the “Ordos Animal Style”, this artistic tradition employs vivid animal motifs to demonstrate the significance of animals within the economy and culture of northern nomadic societies and provides key material evidence for frontier pastoral-hunting cultures.



Figure 18:Ordos animal motif bronze plaque

The Ordos area was not only a busy stage for nomadic people, but also a place where Central Plains culture and nomadic culture met and mixed; during the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, farming skills and farming tools from the Central Plains were slowly brought into the Ordos area, and this had some effect on local ways of production; at the same time, archaeologists have found many sites in the Ordos area and have unearthed relics tied to hunting life; these sites hold many tools for raising livestock and hunting, and daily items, such as horse gear and flat rings, as well as bronze objects that show the nomadic production and life scenes of the grassland; these relics prove that raising livestock and hunting already existed in the Ordos area at that time, and they also show in a lively way the actual scenes of nomadic people in production and life.

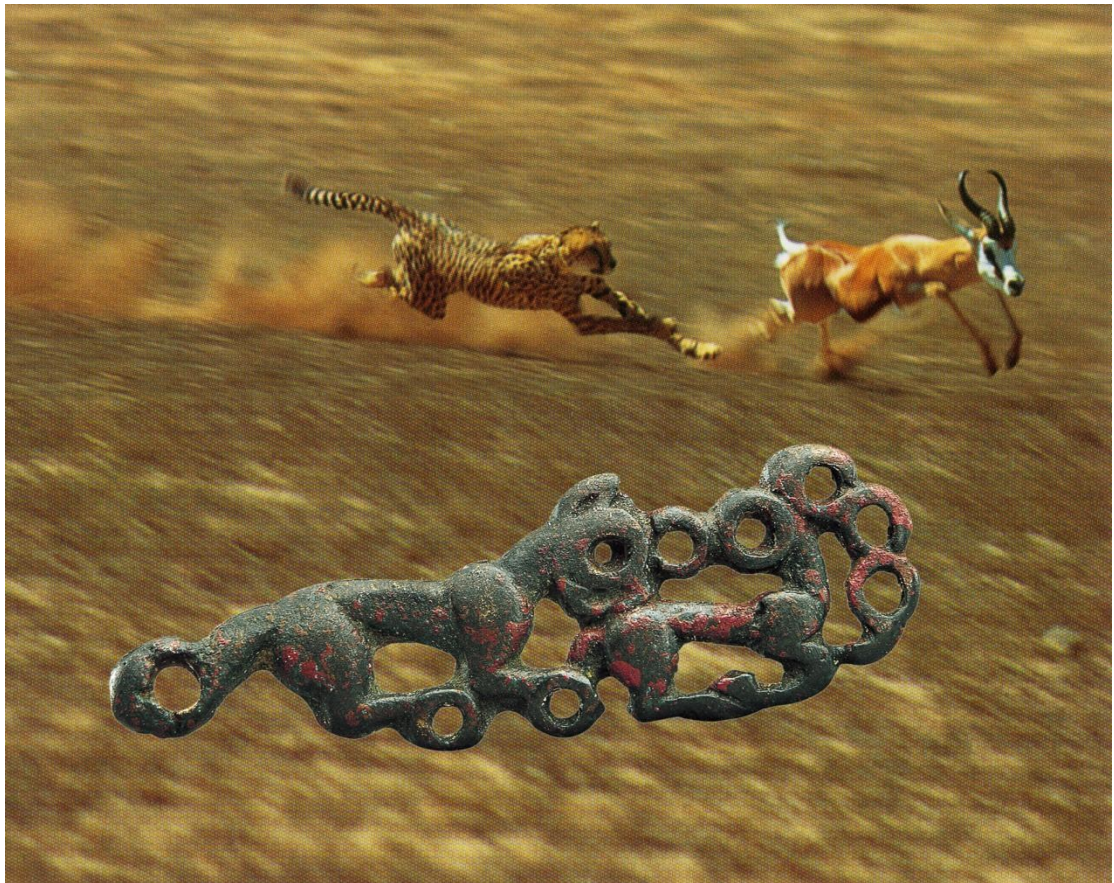


Figure19:Ordos animal style bronze

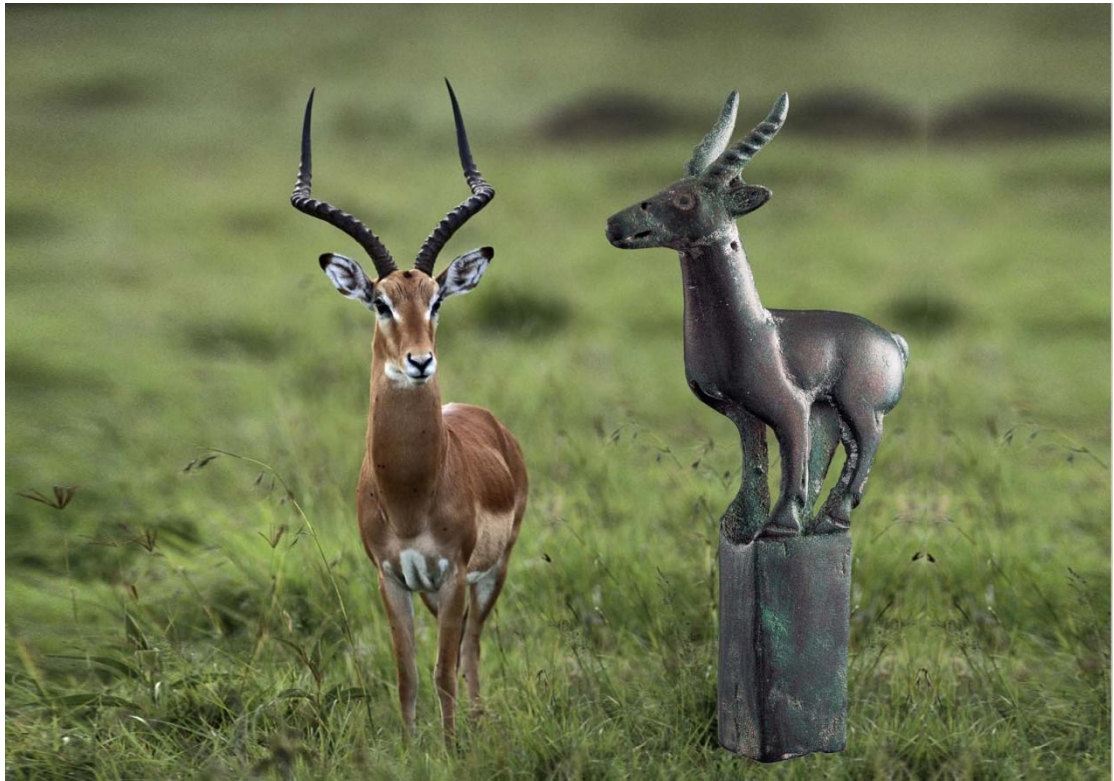


Figure20:Ordos bronzes and nomadic culture related photos

What archaeologists have found shows that in the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the people in the Ordos area made their living mainly by hunting, while gathering and a small amount of farming were only supplements; the animal bones, horn products, and other relics found at the sites fully show this feature of their economic life; as livestock raising kept developing, the people in the Ordos area slowly formed a way of life in which they moved to places with water and grass and followed their livestock; besides livestock raising, hunting was also one important economic source for local people; and a large number of hunting tools and weapons, such as bows and arrows, prove how often and how important hunting was for the people at that time.

III. Cultural Fusion and the Evolution of Subsistence Models in the Ordos Region

(A) Mutual Promotion

In the Old Stone Age, the mixing of cultures in the Ordos area showed up in the deep contact and clash among different stone tool cultures; these cultures may have come from nearby areas, or they may have been brought in by people who moved there; this mixing made hunting and gathering work better, and so it prepared a strong base for the

local way of living; after sorting out the western cultural elements in the stone tools from the Wulanmulun site, we can see that they show features of western Old Stone Age culture, such as tools with saw-like edges used together with hollowed tools, special chipping methods, and stone arrowheads with collars; in particular, the discovery of stone arrowheads with collars may offer a new line of evidence for studying east-west cultural exchange in the Old Stone Age and the routes by which modern humans moved.

First, stone arrowheads with collars have become key material proof of cultural exchange between the East and the West; some stone tools found at the site show clear features of the Mousterian culture in the middle part of the Western Old Stone Age, and this strongly shows that the Ordos area was an important bridge for cultural exchange between East and West; as a typical example, the appearance of stone arrowheads with collars not only shows that ancient humans made great progress in tool-making skills, but also reflects the close contact and interaction between Eastern and Western cultures in the Old Stone Age¹⁴.

Second, these arrowheads also work as a cultural link between East Asia and North Africa; according to what scholars have studied, the spread route of collared arrowheads is, to some degree, in line with the northern migration route of modern humans who left Africa; the stone arrowheads found at the Ulan Mulun site are very likely to be important proof that the Atillean culture of North Africa spread to East Asia, and they also make this place a key passing point that links the two areas¹⁵.

At the same time, stone arrowheads with collars were also an important force that pushed the way of living to change; their special design let hunters aim and shoot from far away, and this greatly made hunting safer and more efficient; the rise of this skill marked a big step forward in how early humans hunted, and it also helped the way they got food to change; as hunting skills got better, early humans could catch more prey, so their food sources became richer; this did not only push the economy of early human society forward, but also led to a more varied social structure, such as the rise of special work like hunting, gathering, and processing(Figure 21).

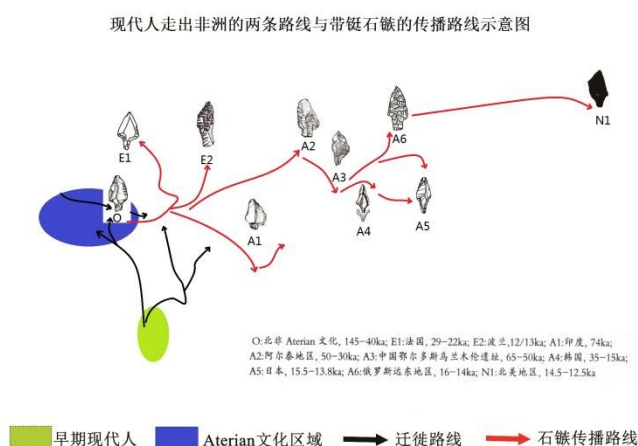


Figure 21: Distribution Map of Tanged Stone Arrowheads (Adapted from China Cultural Relics News, Nov. 8, 2013, p. 006)

Previous archaeological research suggests that the Neolithic cultures of the Ordos region can be broadly divided into the Yangshao and Longshan cultural traditions. Between approximately 7,000 and 6,000 years ago (BP), cultural elements associated with the Banpo and Miaodigou phases of the Yangshao culture spread northward from the Guanzhong region along the Yellow River. This process reflects the expansion and regional adaptation of Central Plains agricultural traditions into central and southern Inner Mongolia. Among these cultural influences, the Miaodigou phase appears to have had the widest geographical reach.

Building upon cultural traditions associated with the Yangshao and Hougang Phase I cultures, the locally developed Haishengbulang culture emerged between approximately 5,800 and 5,000 years ago (BP). It was followed by the Laohushan culture (c. 4,800–4,300 BP) during the early Longshan period and subsequently by the Zhukaigou culture (c. 4,200–3,500 BP), which extended from the late Longshan period into the early Shang period. This process shows a continuous flow of cultural interaction, local adaptation, and transformation, where foreign cultural influences are selectively incorporated into developing local traditions.¹⁶

In the Yangshao period, the painted pottery from the Ordos region became an important expression of cultural exchange and technology sharing. The pottery unearthed from this area shows typical Yangshao-style patterns, like images of fish and

birds, while also reflecting interaction with neighboring cultural traditions, especially influences from the Longshan and Hongshan cultures. Pottery from these different cultural areas blended together through unique decorative patterns, diverse shapes, and increasingly refined craftsmanship. These developments weren't just simple cultural imitation, but showed how local traditions selectively absorbed and transformed foreign artistic and technical elements.

Cultural exchanges also boosted the development of agricultural techniques in the Ordos region. Polished stone tools became increasingly common and were more efficient than the earlier chipped tools for land preparation, harvesting, and food processing. Cultivated crops like millet (*Setaria italica*) and broomcorn millet (*Panicum miliaceum*), along with related farming practices, spread to the area through cultural exchange and population movement. The introduction and local adaptation of these techniques and crops strengthened the agricultural aspect of the regional livelihood economy and provided an important material foundation for the later development of more diverse economic activities.

During this period, animal husbandry developed alongside agriculture. Domesticated pigs and dogs were common, and there's also evidence of managing larger livestock like cattle and sheep, showing that animal farming was gradually expanding. The coexistence of crop cultivation and livestock management created a complementary relationship between farming and herding activities. This integration diversified sources of livelihood and encouraged the exchange of techniques, materials, or production practices between nearby communities. So, the development of agriculture and animal husbandry shows how cultural interactions helped shape and transform mixed livelihood strategies in the Ordos region.

(B) Co-Shaping Regional Identity

The cultural development of the Ordos region is deeply rooted in the prehistoric tradition of the Hetao area. In the long historical process, various local cultures have been continuously exchanged and integrated, and have evolved over the years. Before the Warring States Period, it has gradually shaped a cultural identity system unique to this region. On the one hand, the agricultural culture and nomadic culture in the region

have always retained their own unique development characteristics and will not be easily assimilated by foreign cultures; on the other hand, the two cultures will continue to interact in the process of long-term coexistence, completing mutual communication and adaptation and integration. These two types of cultural traditions have never developed alone in an isolated state. They can rely on the layered dissemination of technical systems, production methods, material products and cultural values to continue to produce in-depth interactions. This dynamic cultural development relationship can fully reflect the core development characteristics of intertwining and interdependence between various regional cultural traditions.¹⁷.

For a long time, the continuous interaction between agricultural and pastoral traditions has greatly enriched the overall cultural composition of the Ordos region, and slowly shaped the local regional cultural identity with great characteristics. From the existing archaeological records, it can be found that agricultural traditions and nomadic traditions will not develop independently, but will develop In the process, they will constantly influence and adapt to each other, and will also take the initiative to absorb various cultural elements of each other. On the one hand, this kind of continuous cultural integration process has extremely key research value in the northern border region of China; on the other hand, the completely different survival strategies in the region have laid a solid foundation for the formation of regional cultural diversity and allowed the exchanges between different cultures to continue for a long time. Judging from the overall historical development vein, the Ordos region can be said to be a typical historical sample of long-term coexistence, two-way interaction and intermingling between agricultural traditions and nomadic traditions. The unique cultural identity of the region is also gradually formed by relying on the long-term intermingling of the two cultures. (Figure 22).



Figure 22: Sanbei Farm in Ordos

Since the Paleolithic Age, human beings have settled in the Ordos region for a long time, and various cultural exchange activities have been carried out on this land. With the continuous advancement of the historical process, the local agricultural communities and nomadic communities have maintained close exchanges and interactions on the basis of adhering to their own unique cultural traditions. It has also given rise to the development trend of long-term cultural communication, cultural adaptation and cultural integration. On the one hand, this kind of cross-cultural interactive development model was of great significance before the Qin Dynasty; on the other hand, at this stage, the agricultural tradition of the Central Plains and the nomadic culture of the northern region had a deep collision, which could effectively promote the development of various local cultural practices in the direction of diversification, and also make the local cultural The department has completed the phased transformation and upgrading.

The Ordos region is located at the junction of the Central Plains and the northern border. This special location makes it the core area where various cultural traditions intermingle. On the one hand, from the Yangshao culture and Ganqing culture of the Neolithic Age, to the subsequent development of Hongshan culture, Miaodigou culture and various local cultures, these cultures There is a close mutual influence between chemical systems. Different technical traditions, production methods and material

cultures will continue to complete the process of inheritance, adaptation and reorganization in this region. The new cultural elements will not directly replace the original local culture, but will be selectively integrated into local cultural practices, which will gradually shape the regional cultural identity with strong regional characteristics.

The migration activities of nomadic groups in the north and the external expansion of political forces in central China will further deepen various cultural interactions in the region. In the process of the development of the times, social groups with different economic and cultural traditions can rely on migration, cultural exchanges, ethnic intermarriage, technology transfer and resource sharing. Enjoy and other forms of deep interaction. These development processes have slowly built the Ordos region into a border region with great development vitality. The most distinctive feature of the region is that it has rich cultural diversity, and all kinds of cultures have always maintained a state of continuous interaction. The regional culture finally formed is not only a complete and unified cultural tradition system, but also not The result of long-term contact with culture and mutual adaptation and integration.

We can clearly prove the specific manifestation of this kind of cultural interaction from the development and change of survival strategy. Before the Qin Dynasty, the Ordos region had developed a diversified economic system integrating agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting and gathering modes, and the role of trade exchange and material trade in regional development has also changed. It has to be more and more important. On the one hand, the actual value of these production activities will have certain differences with the changes of regional environmental conditions and historical development background; on the other hand, settled agricultural communities will take the initiative to adapt to the environmental characteristics of grasslands, learn from and use relevant pastoral production methods, and nomadic communities will also allow in the ecological environment and social conditions. Under the circumstances, actively introduce suitable farming technologies and crop varieties. It is this two-way mutual adaptation model that has slowly contributed to the unique mixed agricultural and pastoral economy in the northern border areas.¹⁸.

The diversified development of the region's economy can build a wider geographical exchange network; the flow of various agricultural products, livestock, handicrafts, metal products and other material resources has effectively consolidated the connection between the Ordos region and the surrounding neighboring areas. On the one hand, trade and cross-regional interaction can broaden the channels for local access to various resources; on the other hand, such exchange activities can also promote the dissemination of technology, artistic styles and cultural customs. We can see that economic interaction has always been an important way to adjust and reshape regional cultural boundaries.

When we focus our research perspective on the level of production development and daily life, we can see the coexistence of the two mainstream economic lifestyles of intensive agriculture and nomadic agriculture from the development history of the Ordos region, and we can also clearly see the various interactions between the two; the relationship between these two types of production modes is not just simple. The opposition also includes the multiple relationships of competition, adaptation, collaboration and mutual influence. This unique combination of production methods has laid a key foundation for the development of cultural exchanges in the region, and has slowly created an exclusive development tradition with both agricultural and pastoral characteristics in the local area.

In general, the formation process of Ordos culture is closely related to the development and change of the local livelihood economy. The long-term interaction between agricultural and pastoral communities can effectively promote the exchange of various technologies, greatly enrich the economic practice of the region, and readjust the local resource utilization model. Style and social organization form. On the one hand, the ever-changing environmental conditions will force communities to take the initiative to adjust their livelihoods and selectively absorb the practice mode of neighboring cultures; on the other hand, the two-way interaction between cultural integration and economic adaptation will slowly create the unique regional development characteristics of the region. From this research perspective, it can be seen that cultural diversity, economic complementarity and long-term continuous two-way

interaction have jointly created a highly recognizable regional identity in the Ordos region, which has also profoundly influenced the overall development process of ancient Chinese civilization....

IV. Conclusion

The vast majority of cultural relics we have excavated in the Ordos area can play a very key reference role in the development and research of the frontier culture and ancient Chinese civilization in northern China. In the pre-Qin period, the lifestyle of the local people has undergone a long evolution process, from the mainstream hunting and gathering mode of the Paleolithic period, Gradually transitioned to the combination of agriculture and animal husbandry in the early Neolithic and Bronze Age. In the Shang Zhou period, the pastoral economy in the region slowly became the dominant lifestyle. This complete set of development process can not only reflect the stage changes in production technology and natural environmental conditions, but also intuitively show how the ancestors adjusted their lifestyle in time according to the ever-changing ecological environment and social environment.

From the overall development vein, it can be found that the evolution process of livelihood strategies is closely related to various cultural interactions in the region; the northward spread of agricultural technology and crops, the development and adaptation of nomadic production mode, and the circulation and integration of various material cultures have continued to promote exchanges and ditches between different communities. Through. Agricultural tradition and nomadic tradition will not develop alone with an independent and isolated economic and cultural system. Instead, they will continue to influence and adapt to each other in the process of long-term development, and will continue to absorb each other's high-quality cultural elements. On the one hand, diverse cultural interaction can provide sufficient development momentum for the iterative change of livelihood mode; on the other hand, continuous economic adaptation can also create new development conditions for subsequent deeper cultural exchanges.

Overall, the pre-Qin history of the Ordos region can fully show that there is a close relationship between environmental adaptation, economic change and cultural integration. There has been a long-term coexistence and interaction of agriculture,

animal husbandry, hunting and other livelihoods in the local area, which has also made this region slowly precipitate its own unique development. Show characteristics. On the one hand, the evolution process of these continuous development has shaped the exclusive economic form and cultural appearance of the Ordos region; on the other hand, it has also created a unique regional identity in the region that is highly recognizable in the overall development vein of ancient Chinese history.

Looking at the overall development of the Ordos region in the pre-Qin period from the perspective of this research can provide a very key research example for us to interpret the cultural diversity of the northern border and clarify the formation process of regional economic interaction patterns. The development history of this region can prove that cultural integration will not completely eliminate the geographical Local characteristics and differences, different cultural traditions can fully achieve coexistence and development, two-way interaction and mutual empowerment in the process of long-term communication and adaptation. The development experience of the Ordos region has a high reference value, which can help us sort out the specific formation mechanism of the northern border culture, and can also make us more clearly understand how various regional traditions are interrelated in the overall development process of Chinese civilization.

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