A Study of the Yan Culture and the Central Plains Culture Elements in the Shanrong Culture

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that have been investigated and/or excavated: 1. Xibozi 西柏子 2. Yuhuangmiao 玉皇庙; 3. Hulugou 胡卢沟; 4. Xiliangguang 西梁岗; 5. Longqingxia 龙庆峡 Villa District, all the above five are at Yanqing 延庆 county, Beijing; 6. Dongnangou 东南沟 at Pingquan 平泉 county, Hebei province; 7. Lishugoumen 梨树沟门 at Luanping 滦平 county, Hebei province; 8. Qingzigon 青子沟 at Luanping county; 9. Hushihua 虎什哈 at Huailai 建平 county, Hebei province; 10. Xiaobaiyang 小白阳 at Xuanhua 宣化 county, Hebei province; 11. Pangjiabu 庞家堡 at Xuanhua county; 12. Ganzibei 孟子堡 at Huailai 建平 county, Hebei province; 13. Beixinhu 北辛堡 at Huailai county; 14. Wudaohuzi 五道河子 at Lingyuan 凌源 county, Liaoning 辽宁 province. Among the 14 sites, only the Xibozi site is a bronze hoard and the other 13 are all tribal cemeteries. Chronologically, the Xibozi hoard was the earliest site, which is dated at the middle or late stage of the Western Zhou dynasty, i.e. from the middle of the 10th century to the beginning of the 9th century BC. The Wudaohuzi cemetery at Lingyuan was the latest site, which is dated at the middle or late stage of the Warring States period, i.e. from the middle of 4th century to the beginning of the 3rd century BC. There were no periodic gaps in the sequence of the development of this culture; this shows that the Shanrong culture in the north of Hebei province sustained for about 600 years.

According to the records in Zuo zhuan 左传 (The Zuo Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annual), Shiji 史记 (Records of the Grand Historian) and Zhanguoce 战国策 (Strategies of the Warring States Period), we infer that the owner of this culture might be the Shanrong tribe recorded in these historical documents.

II

Up to now there are 14 relatively important sites of the Yuhuangmiao culture (Shanrong culture)
was the nearest one to Shanrong, so the conflicts and communications between them were the most frequent.

Through researching the elements of the Yan culture and the Central Plains cultures in the Shanrong culture, we try to analyze the relationship among them during the Western Zhou, the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods, and the growth and decline of the relative strength between the Shanrong tribe and the states of the Central Plains. From the results of the analyses, we can see the processes of development of the Shanrong culture and its integration with the other cultures, and to draw the pattern of the processes.

During the about 600 years from the Western Zhou dynasty to the Warring States period, the Shanrong culture absorbed many elements from the Yan culture and the Central Plains cultures. These elements are reflecting in bronze weapons, ritual vessels, chariot fittings, coins, lacquer wares, silks, pottery craftsmanship, livestock raising and so on. These elements belonged to the aspects of economy, military affairs, as well as politics, culture and ideology. This phenomenon reflected that the contacts between the Shanrong tribe and the State of Yan and the Central Plains were long lasting, frequent, wide and multi-channeled.

According to the statistics, the earliest element of the Yan culture and the Central Plains cultures adopted by the Shanrong culture was ge-dagger-axe, a kind of bronze weapon. From the Xibozhi hoard dated as in the middle or late phase of middle stage of the Western Zhou period to the Wudaohexi cemetery in the middle or late stage of the Warring States period, there was no gap in the sequence. The absorbing of decorations of bronze vessels was in almost the same status. The adoption of cowrie as currency began in the late stage of the Western Zhou or the early stage of the Spring and Autumn period (this can be confirmed by the tomb M10 in Dongnanqou, Pingquan) and later the gold imitation of cowrie and bronze imitation of cowrie covered with gold foil were also adopted. The adoption of ritual bronzes began in the early stage of the Spring and Autumn period (in Yuhuangmiao cemetery) and continued to the middle and late stages of the Warring States period. Altogether there are 58 pieces belong to five categories (cooking vessel, food container, wine vessel, water vessel and music instrument) including 16 kinds (ding-tripod, li-tripod, zeng steamer, dui-cereal container, dou-deep wine spoon, bi-spoon, lei-wine container, hu-water pot, guan-jar, fou-water container, jia-wine vessel, pan-water container, yi-washer, he-wine flagon, jian-water container used as mirror, and yongzhong-music bell with tube-shaped handle on top) have been found. Among the items of the Shanrong culture absorbed from the Yan culture and the Central Plains cultures, the ritual bronze is the most significant in number and in contents. Among the 58 pieces of ritual bronzes, there are 25 water vessels, making up 43% of the sum total; 14 wine vessels, making up 24%; nine cooking vessels as well as nine food containers, making up 15.5% respectively; only one music instrument, making up less than 2%. We can draw the conclusion that the Shanrong people liked the water and wine vessels that come from the Yan and the Central Plains. But, they were not keen on the cooking vessels, food containers and music instruments representing the ritual system of the Central Plains. This also showed the inborn pragmatic ideal and principle of this nomadic tribe. The adoption of lacquer ware and silk began in the early stage of the Spring and Autumn period and lasted to the early stage of the Warring States period (in the Yuhuangmiao cemetery). The adoption of the bronze dagger in the style of the Central Plains, bronze chariot fittings and the elements of their parts might begin in the middle stage of the Spring and Autumn period and lasted to the middle and late stages of the Warring States period. In the early cases, the adopted categories and number of those from the Yan and the Central Plains cultures are obviously fewer than those later cases. The wheel-making technique and the modeling craftsmanship of fine clay-pasted pottery might be first introduced into Shanrong at the middle stage or late of the Spring and Autumn period and become popular at the early stage of the Warring States period. The utilization of the sharp-top knife coin of the Yan style might begin at the late stage of the Spring and Autumn period (in the Yuhuangmiao and Hulugou cemeteries.) The pig raising might begin at the late stage of the Spring and Autumn period, or between the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period (in the Hulugou cemetery and YLM30 at the Longqingxia Villa District.) The change of the directions of the tombs, from the
original east-west direction to the co-existence of east-west direction with south-north direction, began at the late stage of the Spring and Autumn period or the early stage of the Warring States period (the Hushiha Paotaishan cemetery.) In the middle and late stages of the Warring States period, the directions of the tombs in some cemeteries were mostly south-north direction, and the occupants of the tombs lay with the heads to the north (in the Wu-daohezi cemetery.) The changes of the directions of the tombs and the occupants of the tombs reflected the declining of the nomadic society of the Shanrong tribe. The burial tradition and system lasted for hundreds of years began to collapse in the Spring and Autumn period and perished in the middle or the late stage of the Warring States period. The Shanrong tribe adopted many aspects of burial customs of the Yan and the Central Plains intentionally or unintentionally, willingly or unwillingly.

III

The Shanrong tribe absorbed the cultural elements of the Yan and the Central Plains in five ways.

1. The "take-over policy." That is to take the vessels, tools or other objects of the Yan or the Central Plains directly into the Shanrong tribe. It existed in the early and late stages, especially popular in the early and middle stages. It was the simplest, most primitive and primary way of adopting. For instance, the bronze ge-dagger-axe, bronze ritual vessels and chariot fittings, currency (including cowries, bronze cowries with gold foil, gold cowries and sharp-top knife coin), lacquer wares and silk. The changes of these objects were nothing but possessors.

2. The main parts of the objects were in the style of Shanrong culture but the secondary elements were in that of the Yan and the Central Plains. The nature of the joint style was still of the Shanrong culture. The embodiment of this way is the adoption of the decorative designs on the bronzes. The bronze cauldron unearthed from the Xibozi hoard was decorated a line of double-ring pattern which was from the Yan and the Central Plains cultures around the rim, but the whole type of the object were in the traditional shape of the Shanrong culture. The hui-dragon design cast on the hilt of the bronze daggers, YHM35:1 of the Hulugou cemetery, M11:5 of the Ganzibu cemetery and M37:1 also cannot confuse the identification of the Shanrong nature of these daggers. This way of adoption emerged in the early stage of the Shanrong culture and became mature and popular in the middle and late stages. Compared with "take over policy," this way was a revolution in the progressive character because it was the first and primitive practice of creative re-process in the cultural interfusing by the Shanrong people.

3. The redesign, remold and complicated processing of two or more cultural elements from different cultures. The objects made in this way became "two-in-one" forms of cultural diffusion. The cultural natures of objects in this form were difficult to identify and could be confirmed only in the given cultural remains. For example, the main body of the bronze cauldron unearthed from M1 in the Beixinbu cemetery was in the shape of the Shanrong style but its handles and ring foot were in the style of the Yan and the Central Plains cultures. It showed that the level of this absorbing and adoption was much higher than that of the former two, not only in the objects themselves but also in the cultural connotation embodied by them. It can be regarded as the second revolution from the nature of its progress. The cultural elements and ingredients utilized by this way were many more than that of the first revolution and the creative work in it were more complicated and profound. This way of absorbing and adoption promoted the cultural natures from the distinct stage into the indistinct stage-the sign of a new breakthrough and new horizon of cultural diffusion.

4. Accompanied with the extending of the cultural communication and the deepening of the cultural diffusion, the outlook of the Shanrong people were broadened and the ability of selecting objects was strengthened. From the middle and late stages of the Spring and Autumn period on, the objects of absorbing were not limited in the decorations and some kinds of vessels or tools but changed into the new productive techniques and modes such as the wheel-making and reduction method of firing skills of pottery wares and pig-raising. This was the intentional selection of the Shanrong people for improving the productive force and the modes of production and life. This change also showed the adoption of fixed living and farming of the Shanrong people from Yan and the Central Plains. At the end, this nomadic tribe became a half-agricultural tribe. It
was the third revolution of the Shanrong tribe.

5. During or after the complete assimilation of the economic basis to that of the Yan and the Central Plains, the superstructure of the Shanrong society collapsed, the tribe disintegrated and the Shanrong culture decayed. This situation was reflected by the overall collapse of the burial system of the Shanrong culture. For example, the tombs of Shanrong style and the urn burials of the style of the Yan scattered together in the late stage of the Hulugou cemetery; 30 percent of the tombs in the Hushiba Paotaishan cemetery were in south-north direction; all of the tombs in the Wudaohezi cemetery were in south-north direction. In the tombs of Yuhuangmiao, Hulugou and Longqingxia Villa District, many cases of pig jaw or whole pig head used as sacrifices were discovered; on the other hand, in the Wudaohezi cemetery, only few cases of horse teeth used as sacrifice were found.

All of the above-mentioned situations showed, under the comprehensive penetrating and strong influencing of cultures of the Yan and the Central Plains, the Shanrong tribe gradually, actively or passively, intentionally or unintentionally gave up or disobeyed the long-lasting tradition and principles and pursued the systems of the culture of the Yan and the Central Plains blindly or unwillingly since the late stage of the Spring and Autumn period. In the middle and late stages of the Warring States period, along with the decline of military power and economy, the Shanrong tribe had to give up the whole system of its own and to adopt some systems of the Yan and the Central Plains. This represented the complete perish of the religious worshipping and superstructure of the Shanrong tribe with the assimilating of the economic basis.

Taking a broad view of the process, contents and ways of Shanrong tribe's absorbing the cultural elements of the Yan and the Central Plains, we can preliminarily induct five characteristics: (1) the historical continuity and endurance; (2) the historical stage and gradualism; (3) the comprehensiveness and diversity; (4) the pragmatism and selection; (5) the absorbing and adoption realized three revolutions and were historically progressive.

IV

Limited by the productive forces of the Shanrong tribe itself and the tendency of the social development in the Warring States period, the tribal society of the Shanrong inevitably disintegrated and finally withered away. However, when reviewing the history of the development of the Shanrong society, we can still argue that the Shanrong tribe improved the scale and width on the adoption of the elements of the Yan culture and the Central Plains cultures and made remarkable progress in its late stage. This progress was much more outstanding and profound than that of the Donghu culture to the north and the early Xiongnu culture to the west.

References Cited


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