



Han Jianye (Beijing, China)

## “THE PAINTED POTTERY ROAD” AND EARLY SINO-WESTERN CULTURAL EXCHANGES\*

**Keywords:** Painted Pottery Road, Sino-Western Cultural Exchanges, North Road, South Road

“The Painted Pottery Road” as a concept was first proposed by Li Ji (李济) in 1960<sup>1</sup> and was used to sum up Johan Gunnar Andersson’s theory that “the Yangshao culture came from the West;” in other words, painted pottery is essentially western in origin.<sup>2</sup> In actually, Li Ji doubted that the direction of “the Painted Pottery Road” ran from west to east.<sup>3</sup> Pei Wenzhong (裴文中, while also doubting “the theory that painted pottery came from the West,” indicated as early as 1942 that the painted pottery of Xinjiang originated later than that found in the Yellow River Valley.<sup>4</sup> From this analysis, he further proposed that the Silk Road came into existence in the prehistoric period.<sup>5</sup> In 1965 Su Bingqi (苏秉琦) argued that the movement of the painted pottery of the Yangshao culture, including that of the Majiayao, had been from east to west rather than in the opposite direction.<sup>6</sup> In 1978 Yan Wenming (严文明) published an article entitled “The origin of painted potteries from Gansu,” in which he identi-

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<sup>1</sup> Li Ji (Li 1996, 57–60) notes that “some believed that there was a painted pottery road in advance of the silk road. Others undertook great effort to compare the discoveries of Chinese painted pottery cultures with similar discoveries in the Eastern Europe.” In the article, “some” and “others” may refer to the Swedish archaeologists J. G. Andersson among others.

<sup>2</sup> Andersson 1923; Andersson 1925.

<sup>3</sup> Li Ji 1927.

<sup>4</sup> Pei Wenzhong 1942, 34–39.

<sup>5</sup> Pei Wenzhong 1987, 256–273.

<sup>6</sup> Su Bingqi 1965, 51–82.

fied the source, evolution, and direction of the painted pottery of Gansu and showed that painted pottery gradually expanded east to west, while also demonstrating that the western origins of the Yangshao culture is unfounded.<sup>7</sup> In 1982 Chen Ge (陈戈) pointed out that since there was more painted pottery from Xinjiang in the east than in the west, it had thus originated in the east. He concluded that the direction of painted pottery went from east to west, and not in the opposite direction.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, the idea of “the Painted Pottery Road” has come to refer to the westward route by which early Chinese culture traveled as detected by painted pottery, while western culture was brought to China along this same route.<sup>9</sup>

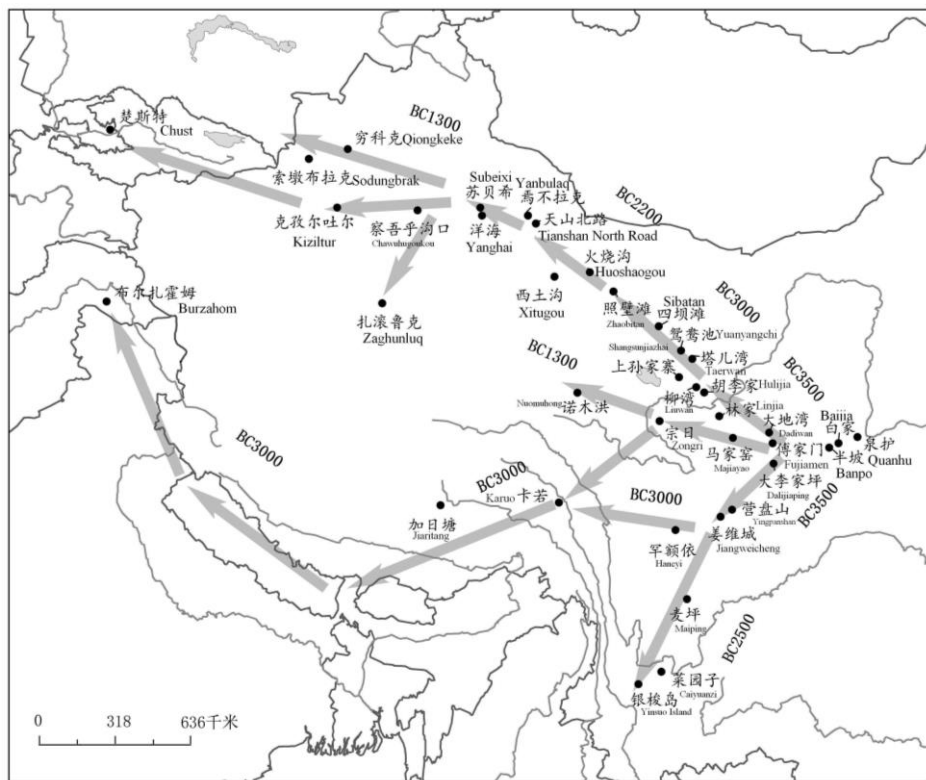


Fig. 1. “The Painted Pottery Road”. Sketch Map

<sup>7</sup> Yan Wenming 1978, 62–76.

<sup>8</sup> Chen Ge 1982, 77–103.

<sup>9</sup> In 2005 we argued that “the Sino-Western cultural passage might well be called ‘The Bronze and Iron Age Road’, or ‘The Sheep and Horse Road’, or even ‘The Painted Pottery Road.’ Regardless of the term that one chooses, this road was the precursor of the Silk Road that began in the Han Dynasty, and had a more profound and lasting influence on the development of civilization both East and the West.” See Han Jianye 2005b, 91.

In this article the term “early Sino-Western cultural exchange,” refers to the cultural communication between “early China,” or “the early Chinese cultural sphere” and Western culture. The upper limit of this period is c. 6000 BC after “the early Chinese cultural sphere” had taken shape<sup>10</sup> whose deeper origins perhaps began with migrations in the Paleolithic Period, while its lower limit ended with the formal opening of the Silk Road in the first centuries A.D. The high and steep Tibetan Plateau caused early Sino-Western cultural exchanges to occur around it with the southern route becoming the South Road and the northern route the North Road. Naturally, these designations are intended as convenient references as both routes in reality contained numerous branches (Fig. 1). This paper will present a concise chronological analysis of the route by which Chinese painted pottery was transmitted from east to west beginning in the Shaanxi-Gansu area of China and will also discuss the nature of early Sino-Western cultural exchanges.

## I

The long-distance migration of people in the Paleolithic Period is the most exciting chapter in the early in the history of cultural interaction as it established basic settlement patterns and cultural distributions that are still in existence. Following the Neolithic Period, large-scale migrations and cultural exchanges continued, whereby the pottery of early Chinese culture, as seen in the Shaanxi-Gansu region, was transmitted from east to west, while Western culture penetrated China along this same route.

The earliest evidence of painted pottery in China is associated with the Baijia culture<sup>11</sup> located in the Shaanxi-Gansu region along the Wei River and on the upper reaches of Han River. Chronologically, the Baijia culture ranges from c. 5800 BC to c. 5000 BC and extends as far west as the central region of Gansu.<sup>12</sup> The pottery, some of it painted a simple red, was produced by an agriculturally oriented people. This was followed by the Lingkou and Banpo type of pottery of the Yangshao culture which subsequently developed between 5000 BC and 4200 BC, when straight-line geometric and fish patterns in black were popular. The distribution range was limited to Shaanxi and thus did not travel as far west as the pottery of the Baijia culture. About 4200 BC, Yangshao culture developed a late form of the Banpo phase called Shijia, characterized by new elements, such as the dotted and hook-like leaf pattern in the shaped as triangles and a bean-pod

<sup>10</sup> Han Jianye 2005a, 65–71.

<sup>11</sup> Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Gansu sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2006.

pattern among others. The Banpo phase expanded westward into central and southern Gansu, southwest to Sichuan on the Shaanxi-Gansu border, and perhaps to the northwest corridor of Hexi.<sup>13</sup> In c. 4000 BC the Yangshao culture developed the Quanhu phase, while the western extent of this pottery remained limited to central and southern Gansu.<sup>14</sup>

## II

The first significant stage of the westward expansion of a painted pottery by an agricultural people was the Quanhu phase in c. 3500 BC which succeeded the earlier Yangshao culture following the formation of Shilingxia pottery of the Majiayao culture. From its inception, this pottery diffused along different branches of the northern and southern routes.

**The North Road:** the later period of the Quanhu type was confined to the northwest in the regions of Minhe, Huzhu, and Xunhua in eastern Qinghai, represented by the remains of Hulijia<sup>15</sup> and Yangwapo<sup>16</sup> at Minhe. The pottery was painted black and rarely red or reddish-brown, although some contain a red or orange-yellow ceramic coating. The designs include curved triangles, dotted and hooked leaves, arcs, and frequently grids or nets, and groups of lines that may or may not have been serrated to form an “X”-shaped pattern. The basic subject matter and composition, although largely unchanged from the past, tend to be more complex and intricate and thus closer to the succeeding Shilingxia style.

**The South Road:** the later period of the Quanhu and Shilingxia phase was confined in the southwest to the Upper Reaches of the Minjiang River and the Bailongjiang River, represented by the sites of Boxi<sup>17</sup> and Yingpanshan<sup>18</sup> in Mao County and by the site of Jiangweicheng<sup>19</sup> at Wenchuan in northwestern Sichuan. These painted potteries were primarily composed in black with complex designs like curved triangles, parallel lines, ripples, swirls, and grids or nets.

<sup>13</sup> The region extends to the southwest where it reaches Longnan (southern Gansu), e.g., Dajiaping Period I. See Beijing Daxue kaoguxue Xi, *Gansu sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo* 2000, 1–36.

<sup>14</sup> Han Jianye 2008.

<sup>15</sup> *Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo Ganqing Gongzuodui*, Qinghai sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2001, 40–58.

<sup>16</sup> Qinghai Sheng Wenwu Kaogudui 1984, 15–20.

<sup>17</sup> Chengdushi Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo *et al.* 2006, 1–12.

<sup>18</sup> Chengdushi Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo *et al.* 2002, 1–77.

<sup>19</sup> Sichuan Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo deng 2006, 3–14.

Regardless of the road, the style of painted pottery at this time differed from that on the central Shaanxi plain: most notably there is a marked trend toward more complex designs constituting a sharp contrast to the otherwise simple and declining style current in the eastern Shaanxi plain. There are three reasons for this change: (i) the Miaodigou phase of Yangshao culture in the core area of the central plains (i.e., those of southern Shanxi and western Henan) was in decline, and consequently with a weakening of Yangshao unity, it was impossible to exert any noticeable influence on the surrounding region; (ii) Qinghai and Sichuan were too far from the central plains to remain in continuous contact; (iii) there may have existed among the local cultures in the hunting and gathering economy of the “Mesolithic Period” a merging of indigenous cultures with the painted pottery culture and thereby promoted variation.<sup>20</sup>

### III

The second stage of the western expansion by an agricultural people is represented by painted pottery that originated in c. 3000 BC upon the formation of the Majiayao phase of the Majiayao culture. It, too, followed the north and south road with the latter subdivided into two separate branches.

**The North Road:** the Majiayao phase of Majiayao culture expanded considerably far from central Gansu to northeastern Qinghai and the Hexi Corridor, including the sites of Shangsunjiazhai at Datong in Qinghai<sup>21</sup>, Ta'erwan at Wuwei<sup>22</sup>, and Zhaobitan at Jiuquan<sup>23</sup> in Gansu. The pottery was primarily painted black both inside and outside the vessel and are decorated with complex compositions, notably flowing lines. The popular patterns include groups of arcs or straight lines, concentric circles, ripples, whirls, and grids or nets along with illustrations of numerous dancers. After 2500 BC, the Banshan phase of Majiayao culture emerged in this region, such as the Liuwan “Banshan type of tomb remains” at Ledu<sup>24</sup> and the Yuanyangchi early tomb remains at Yongchang<sup>25</sup>, which are similar to remains in central Gansu.

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<sup>20</sup> On the second and third explanations, see the reasoned opinions of Yan Wenming 1978, 62–76.

<sup>21</sup> Qinghai Sheng Wenwu Guanlichu Kaogudui 1978, 48–49.

<sup>22</sup> Gansu Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2004, 8–11.

<sup>23</sup> Li Shuicheng 2001, 121–135.

<sup>24</sup> Qinghai Sheng Wenwu Guanlichu Kaogudui, Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1984.

<sup>25</sup> Gansu Sheng Bowuguan Wenwu Gongzuodui *et al.* 1982, 199–228.

**The Northern Branch of the South Road:** the Majiayao phase of Majiayao culture expanded into the Gonghe basin in eastern Qinghai Province, perhaps having merged with local indigenous culture that had lacked a pottery tradition and thereby formed the Zongri phase of Majiayao culture as represented by the remains of Zongri period I.<sup>26</sup> The pottery can be divided into two categories. The first is a fine clay terracotta, ornamented in an exquisitely crafted color of black. The class, style, and motifs generally resemble the painted pottery of the Majiayao culture in central Gansu; in addition, there were also found basins containing the design of numerous dancers or porters. The second category is demarcated by a coarse sandy-brown pottery, some of which were painted a purplish red, with designs such as birds, triangles with folded tips, and straight or bent lines, which might have derived from the indigenous component. The Gonghe basin still formed part of the Zongri phase of Majiayao culture after the formation of the Banshan phase, but it is clear that both ceramics belong to one of these two categories.

**The Southern Branch of the South Road:** in northwestern Sichuan at the sites of Boxi and Yingpanshan in Mao County along with the site of Jiangweicheng in Wenchuan, the distinctive Majiayao phase of Majiayao culture has been excavated, revealing a continuation of the earlier local Shilingxia phase of Majiayao culture. There must have been close contact with the south-central region of Gansu. After c. 2500 BC the culture in central Gansu gave way to the Banshan phase and expanded into the northwest, while the Majiayao phase in northwestern Sichuan and its successors continued to spread to the southwest along the western border of the Sichuan basin into north-central Yunnan. Among the Maiping remains at Hanyuan in Sichuan,<sup>27</sup> the Caiyuanzi remains at Yongren,<sup>28</sup> and the Yinsuodao Period 1 remains at Dali<sup>29</sup> in Yunnan and elsewhere are an array of objects, such as jars, bottles, and bowls exhibiting the distinct designs of marks made by rope and lace, as well as stone knives with holes (some of which have two holes and a concaved back), long adzes and chisels related to the Majiayao phase of Majiayao culture. Naturally, there were also ubiquitous features like engravings, and stamped and geometric patterns testifying to the prevalence of local tastes. Since Yunnan and other areas do not contain evidence of painted pottery at this time, they can only be regarded as having developed painted pottery as the result of cultural influence.

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<sup>26</sup> Qinghai Sheng Wenwu Guanlichu, Hainan Zhou Minzu Bowuguan 1998, 1–14; Ge Sangben, Chen Honghai 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Sichuan Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo *et al.* 2008, 11–19.

<sup>28</sup> Yunnan Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo, Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo Yunnan Gongzuodui *et al.* 2003, 263–296.

<sup>29</sup> Yunnan Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo *et al.* 2009, 23–41.

## IV

The most noticeable feature of the western expansion of the farming culture that produced painted pottery during the second stage of this westward expansion is its far-flung penetration along the South Road into Tibet and even Kashmir.

The Karuo culture represented by the Karuo remains at Changdu<sup>30</sup> in Tibet dates to an upper limit of c. 3000 BC.<sup>31</sup> The early assemblage characterized by jars with high necks and open mouthed basins are similar in shape to those of the early Zongri phase of Majiayao culture, replete with the popular false ring foot and the use of a small amount of black color on which folded lines, grids or nets, and numerous other decorations are frequently found. In addition, other items, including polished stone implements such as knives bearing a hole (some made with a concaved back), long adzes and chisels, as well as semi-subterranean houses and domesticated pigs and crops, like millet, are similar to both. These cultural characteristics also exhibit similarities with the Majiayao phase of Majiayao culture in northwestern Sichuan.<sup>32</sup> Possibly, the Karuo culture was the result of the merging of Majiayao culture in eastern Qinghai and northwestern Sichuan with a local culture that lacked a ceramic tradition during the westward expansion of this painted pottery.<sup>33</sup> It cannot be dismissed that the Karuo culture or a similar culture by this time might have spread over the southeastern region of Tibet near Lhasa and even Sikkim. The engravings, stamps, and numerous other decorations were excavated at Jiaritang in Damxung where stone knives, long stone adzes and chisels, and pottery shards<sup>34</sup> were found, while stone knives, long stone adzes and chisels, and pottery shards were likewise discovered in Linzhi and Motuo,<sup>35</sup> all of which share close affinities with Karuo culture. The same holds true further south in northern Sikkim, where discoveries of polished stone implements, including knives, adzes and chisels have been made.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Xizang Zizhiqiu wenwuju guanliweiyuanhui *et al.* 1985.

<sup>31</sup> There were 41 <sup>14</sup>C data for the Karuo culture, resulting in the corrected date of c. 3200–2000 BC. See Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1991, 243–250.

<sup>32</sup> This link must have been realized in western Sichuan. Among the remains of Haneyi Period I at Danba in Sichuan, there were recorded flat-bottom bottle-like vessels, black painted pottery, stone knives with one or more holes, and stone adzes, which were either contemporary with or later than the Majiayao phase of late Majiayao culture. Sichuan Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo *et al.* 1998, 59–77.

<sup>33</sup> If Majiayao culture was earlier than Di and Qiang culture, then Karuo culture was an “aboriginal that developed from the absorption of Di and Qiang culture in the northwest” (Xizang Zizhiqiu Wenwu guanliweiyuanhui *et al.* 1985, 153–156).

<sup>34</sup> Xizang Zizhiqiu Wenwuju, Sichuandaxue Kaoguxi, Shaanxi Sheng Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Wang Hengjie 1975, 310–315; Shang Jian, Jiang Hua, Zhao Lin 1978, 136–137.

<sup>36</sup> Dani, Masson (eds.) 1992.

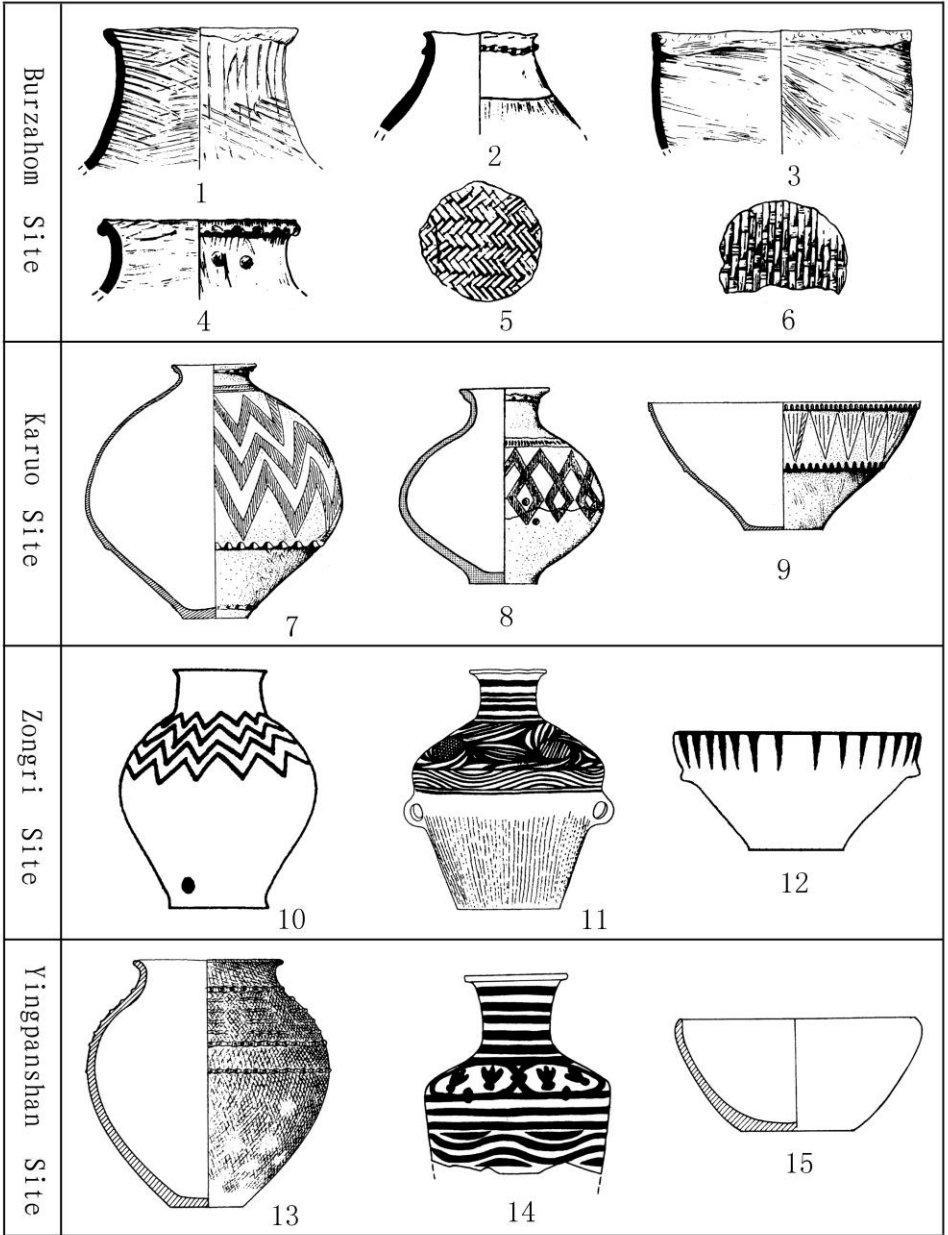
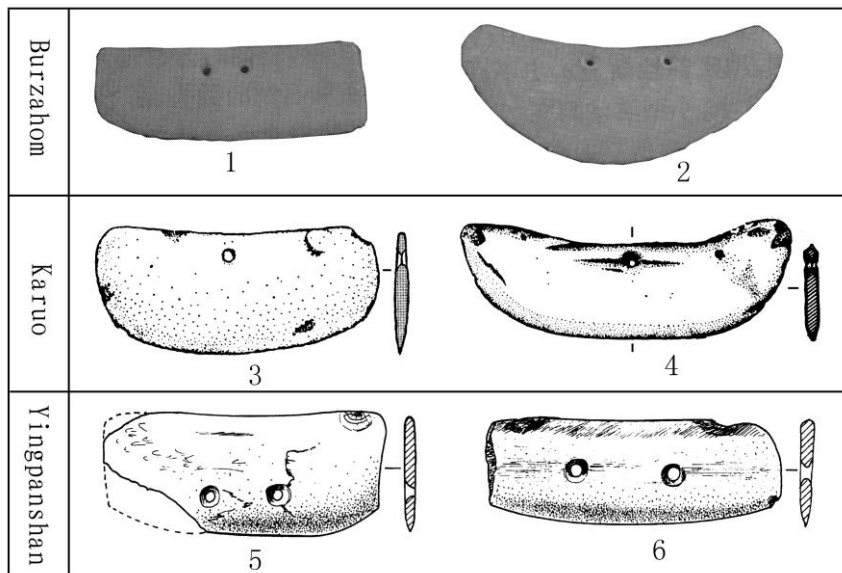


Fig. 2. Potteries from Burzahom site in Kashmir, Karuo, Zongri and Yingpanshan site in China





**Fig. 3. Stone knives with a concave back from Burzahom site in Kashmir, Karuo and Yingpanshan site in China**

Surprisingly, the Burzahom period I B remains in Kashmir share a great many similarities with the Karuo culture.<sup>37</sup> Both were basically composed of coarse gray ceramics made from a clay-strip forming technique, although some brown ceramics are also known; the pottery is characterized by small mouthed, high necked jars and pots and flat bottomed basins and bowls; other notable features are an out turned lip, an elaborately decorated neck and body, a false ring foot, and the same textile used to make imprints on the bottom (fig. 2); both were popular appearing alongside stone knives with one or two holes, polished long stone axes, adzes, and chisels among other tools, particularly stone knives with a concave back made with a great deal of skill (fig. 3); both cultures had subterranean houses with wooden pillars supporting the roof. There are so many similarities between both cultures that they cannot be the result of coincidence. Since these factors abruptly emerge in Burzahom period I B and its date cannot be earlier than the Karuo culture,<sup>38</sup> the

<sup>37</sup> In 1972 according to the similarities between the Burzahom culture in Kashmir and the Yellow River Valley culture in China, Mughal and Halim argued for the westward transmission of the Yangshao culture (Mughal, Halim 1972, 33–110). In 1982 Dikshit argued that such a similarity was the result of the southward transmission of the Longshan culture and that the transmission route might in fact have been a series of mountain passes that linked the Gilgit River with Xinjiang (Dikshit 1982, 30). Huo Wei thought it was closer to the Karuo culture (Huo Wei 1990, 101–107).

<sup>38</sup> The absolute chronology of Burzahom Period I A, B, and C are 3000–2850 BC, 2850–2550 BC, and 2550–1700 BC, respectively (Dani, Masson (eds) 1992).

only explanation can be that it is associated with the long distance westward penetration of the Karuo culture along the southern foothills of the Himalayas. Naturally, there are also a number of differences. For example, the pottery of Burzahom period I B is generally has a plain surface, houses were constructed in deep underground caverns, sheep were raised and wheat was farmed, while the pottery of the Karuo culture regularly sports complex engravings, stamps, and geometrical patterns, the houses were built in shallow pits using rocks, and pigs were the primary livestock animal and millet was grown. It is thus clear that the Karuo culture influenced the Burzahom culture to a limited extent.

Although the early cultural exchanges along the South Road were primarily oriented westward, it is possible that some cultural elements spread eastward on it. For example, the dance pattern of the Majiayao and Zongri culture,<sup>39</sup> the bronze knife of the Majiayao phase from the site of Linjia in the Dongxiang county of Gansu,<sup>40</sup> the domesticated sheep of the Shilingxia and Majiayao phases,<sup>41</sup> had perhaps originated in the west. One possible route used for the eastward transmission of Sino-Western cultural exchanges was the South Road.

## V

The third stage of the westward expansion of an agriculturally based culture represented by its painted pottery began in c. 2200 BC after the formation of the Machang phase of Majiayao culture, which expanded westward along the North Road and Hexi Corridor. With respect to the Qijia culture east of the Hexi Corridor, there is a small amount of painted pottery similar to that of the Machang phase.

The Banshan phase of Majiayao culture arrived in the western end of Jiuquan, during the Machang phase from where it subsequently advanced to Dunhuang. Remains of the Machang phase at the western end of the Hexi Corridor were later than the remains found in the east, which can be divided into two periods. The earliest was the Machang phase, while the remains of Zhaobitan at Jiuquan and Xitugou at Dunhuan<sup>42</sup> constitute the later period, of which there are

<sup>39</sup> Similar themes appear in the Near East and southeastern Europe between 9000 and 6000 BC.

<sup>40</sup> Gansu Sheng Wenwu Gongzuodui, Linxia huizuzhizhou Wenhuaaju, Dongxiangzuzuzhixian Wenhuaquan 1984, 111–161.

<sup>41</sup> Many oracle sheep bones of the Shilingxia phase of Majiayao culture have been discovered at the site of Fujiamen in Gansu. The custom of accompanying sheep shoulder blades with the dead have been detected in the tombs at Shizhaocun Period 5 in Tianshui and are dated to more than 5000 years ago. In south-central Gansu, people not only raised sheep, but also used them as part of their religious worship. Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo Ganqing Gongzuodui. 1995, 289–296; Zhongguo Shehuikexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1999, 50–71.

<sup>42</sup> Xibeidaxue Kaogu Xi *et al.* 2004, 3–7.

few examples of painted pottery with distinctive designs. Instead most contain nets or grids composed of straight lines and have no color inside the vessel.<sup>43</sup> The later period was discovered at the sites of Ganguya and Xihetan at Jiuquan<sup>44</sup> and are classed as a “transitional phase,”<sup>45</sup> as they seem to belong to the later period of the Machang phase; the painted pottery is ornamented with such patterns as lattices and inverted triangular nets or grids on the neck, vertical bands and groups of bent lines adorn the belly. The remains of both periods contain a preponderance of indigenous characteristics, which must have resulted from the influence of the Hehuang area based on the local Banshan phase. It is worth noticing that at this time the Machang phase might have reached eastern Xinjiang, because among the remains at Tianshanbeilu in Hami there are double-handled jars with a painted lattice pattern and other designs reminiscent of the painted pottery associated with the Machang phase.<sup>46</sup>

After about 1900 BC, in the midwestern section of the Hexi Corridor and in eastern Xinjiang, the Siba culture and the Tianshanbeilu culture at Hami suddenly began producing similar pottery. The Siba culture is represented by Sibatan remains in the Shandan county of Gansu,<sup>47</sup> including Huoshaogou in Yumen and Ganguya in Jiuquan<sup>48</sup> among other sites. The painted pottery of these cultures basically consists of colored decorations which were painted after the vessels had been fired. Generally there is a thick black overlay on a purplish-red base with designs of parallel horizontal lines, arc patterns, lattice and checkered patterns, triangles, nets or grids, vertical patterns, puffy clouds, frets, arcs, dots, varying lizard patterns, and handprints among others. There were also human figures with inverted triangular torsos, which may have been a derivative from the Machang phase.<sup>49</sup> The Tianshanbeilu culture is best represented by the remains from the Tianshanbeilu tomb in Hami<sup>50</sup>, testifying to the development of a local brand of pottery painted in black, consisting of various patterns, like nets or grids, lattices, vertical patterns, a “Z” shape, handprints and leaf veins, and peculiarly there are also male and female figures. Most of the pottery consist of single or double-handled jars with vertical bands, nets or grids, lattices, and handprints in black, sharing similar characteristics to the pottery of the Siba culture and appearing to have originated from the Hexi Corridor.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Li Shuicheng 2005, 239–278.

<sup>44</sup> Gansu Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2005, 44–48.

<sup>45</sup> Li Shuicheng 2001, 121 – 135.

<sup>46</sup> Shui Tao 1993, 447 – 490.

<sup>47</sup> An Zhimin 1959, 7–16.

<sup>48</sup> Li Shuicheng 1993, 80–121.

<sup>49</sup> Yan Wenming 1978, 62–76.

<sup>50</sup> Lü Enguo, Chang Xien, Wang Binghua 2001, 179 – 184.

<sup>51</sup> Li Shuicheng 1999, 53 – 65.

During this stage of the westward expansion of the painted pottery culture, it is clear that numerous elements of western origin were simultaneously being brought eastward. Characteristic of Siba culture and the Tianshanbeilu culture in Hami is a rich variety of bronze wares, such as arc-backed knives, swords, lances, dagger axes, adzes, chisels, awls, arrowheads, spears, mirrors, earrings, bracelets, cauldrons (鍤), bells, tablets, buttons, beads, pipes, pins, and found only in the Tianshanbeilu culture of Hami, jars with handles decorated with horizontal and vertical lines, all of which are of a western origin. Western culture also penetrated further east and played a significant role in the emergence of bronze ware and in the subsequent development of the agricultural and pastoral character of the Qijia, Zhukaigou, and Xiajiadianxiaceng cultures, as well as the emergence of the Erlitou culture,<sup>52</sup> the birthplace of Bronze Age civilization in China.

## VI

The fourth stage of the westward expansion of painted pottery was transmitted along the North Road beginning in c. 1300 BC with the formation of Yanbulaq culture. In terms of the Xindian, Kayue, Siwa, Shajing, and Nuomuhong cultures in Gansu and the Qinghai provinces, these painted potteries developed from that of the Majiayao and Qijia cultures with the exception of the Nuomuhong culture which expanded to the Qaidam Basin<sup>53</sup> and not much beyond.

The Yanbulaq culture was situated in the Hami basin and Barkol grasslands of eastern Xinjiang as represented by the remains of Yanbulaq in Hami.<sup>54</sup> The most characteristic painted pottery designs are in black with a coating of red and include ripples, vertical bands, multi-scale patterns, an “S” and “C” shape, and an arc pattern, among others. This culture developed from the Tianshanbeilu culture in Hami as well as from others. The Yanbulaq culture was most responsible for the formation in the southern and northern Tianshan of the “High-Neck Kettle cultural tradition.” From here pottery shapes, like the long-necked pot, the belly cup and belly bowl, the *dou* (a type of tray with a ringed foot, 豆), and the cylindrical cup and jar were gradually transmitted to the west, leading to the formation of a series of painted pottery cultures, including the Subeixi,<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Fitzgerald-Huber 1995, 17–67; Han Jianye 2009, 37–47.

<sup>53</sup> Qinghai Sheng Wenguanhui *et al.* 1963, 17–44.

<sup>54</sup> Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu Wenhuating Wenwuchu *et al.* 1989, 325–362.

<sup>55</sup> Xinjiang Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo *et al.* 2002, 42–57; Xinjiang Tulufanxue Yanjiusuo, Xinjiang Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2011, 1–22.

the Chawuhugoukou,<sup>56</sup> the Yili River valley culture,<sup>57</sup> and from east to west in Xinjiang, the Chawuhugoukou culture which later expanded southward to the edge of the Tarim Basin.<sup>58</sup> These cultures were in many ways similar to one another, but they also had their differences. For example, the pottery of the Subeixi and Yanbulaq cultures were painted black on a red base, while the pottery of the Chawuhugoukou culture employed a red overlay on a white base, unlike the pottery of the Yili river valley culture which was painted black or red.

There is a noticeable relationship between the Chawuhugoukou culture and that of the Chust. The Chust culture began in the Ferghana basin near the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium BC.<sup>59</sup> It produced a painted pottery of red on red with such designs as nets or grids, lattices, checkered patterns, triangles, and created earthenware like bowls, single handled cups and jars, as well as two handled jars, all resembling those fashioned by the Chawuhugoukou culture. The Chust culture's painted pottery assemblage does not include any influence from the earlier Namazga I-III culture, but the Chawuhugoukou culture followed the Gansu-Qinghai cultural tradition, which contains a complete evolutionary sequence. The implication, then, is that the Chawuhugoukou culture had exerted a considerable amount of influence on the Chust culture.

Along with further westward expansion of the painted culture at this time, there was a greater variety of bronze tools, weapons, horse gear and decorations, and even a small amount of ironware, such as knives, swords, and arrowheads that were introduced into Xinjiang from the west, which then penetrated the western region of China including Qinghai and Gansu. Consequently, the early Iron Age in western China began prior to 1000 BC.<sup>60</sup>

## VII

Since the discovery ninety years ago of the Yangshao culture, people have been attracted by its beautiful painted pottery, which gave birth to the name, “Painted Pottery Culture.” Later as the number of archaeological discoveries throughout China were made, many other cultures with painted pottery have been

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<sup>56</sup> Xinjiang Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1999b; Xinjiang Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2002b, 14–29.

<sup>57</sup> Xinjiang Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 1999a, 59–66; Xinjiang Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo 2002a, 13–53.

<sup>58</sup> Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu Bowuguan *et al.* 2003, 89–136.

<sup>59</sup> Dani, Masson (eds.) 1992.

<sup>60</sup> Han Jianye 2007.

found, but the Yangshao culture remains the most representative of this type. The Yangshao culture was located in the central region of China. The early period of this culture, in which painted pottery lasted some 1,500 years (c. 5000–3500 B.C.), is now recognized as the core of the “cultural circle of early China” or the “cultural center of early China.”<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the painted pottery culture of western China – Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Xinjiang and even Tibet – had its roots in Yangshao culture. In this sense, the westward transmission of painted pottery is the earliest attested movement of Chinese culture to the west.

Yangshao culture and other painted pottery cultures were situated on the loess plateau, which created a dry farming culture commonly referred to as “children of the yellow earth.”<sup>62</sup> Only a highly advanced agricultural society could invest the resources and time necessary for the creation of a painted pottery and provide the stability required for its use and storage. Throughout its westward expansion, painted pottery always retained its fundamental agricultural features, even as herding and hunting and even nomadic elements were added to it. In this sense, the westward transmission of painted pottery was in actuality an early westward transmission of Chinese culture, which reflects a process by which migrating farmers remembered the “yellow earth” from where they came even as they sought a new homeland. If in fact the painted pottery culture of the Shaanxi and Gansu regions were inhabited by the Qiang, then it was the Qiang who must have played a very important role in early Sino-Western cultural exchanges.

In general, the “Painted Pottery Road” ran from east to west, expanding and transmitting early Chinese culture in Shaanxi and Gansu, but it also allowed for western culture to enter China. This road lasted from the fourth to the first millennium BC, during which time there were four remarkable stages – c. 3500 BC, 3000 BC, 2200 BC and 1300 BC – of the western expansion of painted pottery. Although there were numerous routes, generally they can be grouped into either the North Road or the South Road that encircled the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. Along these roads, the factors that allowed for dry farming cultures to flourish also enabled painted pottery to originate in central China and gradually to move westward, while from the West wheat, sheep, horses, carriages, bronze and iron smelting technologies were gradually introduced into China, further deepening Sino-Western exchanges of goods and ideas and people. In short, the “Painted Pottery Road” serves as the primary conduit of early Sino-Western cultural exchanges, and thus the precursor of the “Silk Road,” which would come to play such an important role in the civilizations of China and the West.

<sup>61</sup> Han Jianye 2004, 59–64.

<sup>62</sup> Andersson 1934.

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## Abstract

“The Painted Pottery Road” as a concept was first proposed by Li Ji (李济) in 1960 and was used to sum up Johan Gunnar Andersson’s theory that “the Yangshao culture came from the West;” in other words, painted pottery is essentially western in origin. The “Painted Pottery Road” signifies the expansion and transmission of early Chinese culture, manifested in the form of painted pottery, westward from Shaanxi and Gansu, as well as the eastward movement of western culture. “The Painted Pottery Road” lasted from the fourth to the first millennium BC, during which four periods – c. 3500, c. 3000, c. 2200, and c. 1300 BC – characterize the westward expansion of painted pottery. Although numerous routes were used for its transmission, generally speaking they are grouped around the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau as the North Road and the South Road, respectively. “The Painted Pottery Road” was thus the primary route of early Sino-Western cultural exchanges, serving as the precursor of “the Silk Road,” which subsequently exerted a great deal of influence on the formation and development of Chinese and Western civilization.