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(3-5 August 1992)

**Social structure and Political Order as Reflected in the
Maoqinggou Burials: A Few Preliminary Remarks**

The cemetery of Maoqinggou (Liangcheng, Inner Mongolia) was discovered and excavated in 1979¹. It was published in the Monograph *E'erdusi shi qingtongqi* ("Ordos Bronzes")² edited by Tian Guangjin and Guo Suxin in 1986. Since then Maoqinggou has been the focus of several contributions concerning the chronology of the cultural contact between the Ordos area and other parts of East and Central Asia³. Furthermore, Maoqinggou with its 79 burials of the Chunqiu and Zhanguo periods (771-481 B.C. and 481-221 B.C., respectively) seems to be the only Iron Age site in the Ordos area, which may provide a sufficient quantity of data for a cautious reconstruction of social structure and political order.

Out of 81 burials, one was dated to the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-906) and one to the Liao dynasty (A.D. 937-1125); all the others belong to the Eastern Zhou period (771-221 B.C.) The latter were divided by Tian Guangjin and Guo Suxin into four temporal phases beginning with the late Chunqiu period and ending with the late Zhanguo period.

All the graves are rectangular, almost vertical pits facing east (66 graves), west (1 grave), or north (12 graves); the dimensions of the grave mouths range considerably (from about 1.4 m by 0.6 m to 2.6 m by 1.1 m); special features are a ledge *ercengtai* (in 1 grave), a wooden chamber *guo* (in 1 grave), coffins *guan* (in 3 graves), and wall niches (in 4 graves). In 65 pits human skeletons or bones were found; all are single burials, the bodies as a rule lying

¹ For related sites in the Ordos area, see Ge Shanlin: *Nei-Menggu zizhiqiu Zhungerqi Sujigou chutu yi pi tongqi*, Wenwu 1965.2: 44-45 [Sujigou]; Guo Suxin & Tian Guangjin: *Xigoupan ' Xiongnu mu*, Wenwu 1980.7: 1-10 [Xigoupan]; Nei-Menggu zizhiqiu wenwu gongzuodui: *Liangcheng Yinniugou muzang qingli jianbao*, Nei-Menggu wenwu kaogu 3: 25-32 [Yinniugou]; Ta La & Liang Jingming: *Hulusitai Xiongnu mu*, Wenwu 1980.7: 11-12 [Hulusitai]; Tian Guangjin: *Taohongbala di Xiongnu mu*, Kaogu Xuebao 1971.1: 131-144 (Taohongbala); Tian Guangjin: *Nei-Menggu Zhungerqi Yulongtai di Xiongnu mu*, Kaogu 1977.2: 111-114 (Yulongtai); Tian Guangjin & Guo Suxin: *Nei-Menggu Aluchaideng faxian di Xiongnu yiwu*, Kaogu 1980.4: 333-338, 364, 368 [Aluchaideng].

² pp. 227-341.

³ For an English overview, see Emma Bunker: *Ancient Ordos Bronzes*, in: Jessica Rawson & Emma Bunker: *Ancient Chinese and Ordos Bronzes*, Hong Kong 1990, pp. 291-362. On certain aspects, see the papers of Emma Bunker, Guo Suxin, and Wu En presented in the workshop *The Chinese and Their Northern Neighbors*, Pittsburgh 1991. For a more general evaluation in German, see Thomas O. Höllmann & Georg w. Kossack (ed.): *Maoqinggou. Ein Pisenzeitliches Graeberfeld in der Ordos-Region*, Mainz 1992 (forthcoming).

stretched and supine (a single one lying prone). Only nine graves did not leave any burial goods; in the others the amount differs considerably. Burial goods include pottery vessels (only in east-west orientated graves); buckles and ornaments, such as bronze and iron hook buckles, belt hooks, garment hooks, belt plaques, belt ornaments, and stone pearls; weapons (mostly akinakes-type daggers); and animal heads (of *Bovidae*, *Equidae*, *Capridae*, and *Canidae*).

Determination of sex was attempted in 59 burials. However, it seems that sexing – as usual – was not infallible. Perhaps this is why the data in the excavation report are not consistent: in the report itself the overall male/female ratio is given as 38 to 21, in the concluding table it is 36 to 23 (table 1,2)⁴. In this respect it is useful to differentiate between east-west and north-south orientated burials: in the former the male/female ratio is 31 to 16, in the latter it is 5 to 7 (table 2) . The following correlations between archaeological and anthropological data are made on the assumption that these determinations are correct.

Male and female burials are rather uniform with regard to grave structure and corpse posture. The male/female ratio of certain features - like coffins (1 to 2) or wall niches (3 to 1) – is of no statistical significance: the same holds naturally for the single case of a prone posture (1 woman).

In 13 pits no grave goods could be found. Seven of these are male burials, only two female burials (due to fragmentation sexing was impossible in the four remaining cases), only one category of grave goods can be related to gender: Weapons (daggers, knives, spears, ge-halbards, picks, and arrows) were exclusively excavated in male burials (table 11)⁵. In other cases at least a clear preference is obvious. This holds especially for ornaments and buckles, such as "cylindric" ornaments (only in 4 female burials: table 6), "bird-shaped" belt plaques (male/female ratio 13 to 3: table 5), "animal shaped" belt plaques (5 to 1: table 4), hook buckles (8 to 1: table 7); more complicated is the distribution of belt and garment hooks

⁴ See also the anthropological determinations of Pan Qifeng published on pp. 316-327 of Tian Guangjin & Guo Suxin: *E'erduosi shi qingtongqi*, Beijing 1986. In his table 1 (p. 317) combining both, sexing and ageing (and therefore obviously referring to the better preserved skeletons), the male/female ratio is even as close as 14 to 12. The following data are mainly based on the editors' table (pp. 306-313).

⁵ Whorls can probably be associated with females, but were only found in one grave.

(male/female ratio 5 to 10: table 7) and stone beads (big sets only with women: table 8). In all cases, however, the chronological sequence is an important contributory factor⁶.

This reservation also holds true for animal heads and bones found in 13 male burials and 3 female burials respectively (table 3). Furthermore it seems that a deposit of more than one pottery vessel (general male/female ratio of vessels 17 to 6) was restricted to males (table 10).

Grave	Sex	Age	Grave	Sex	Age
1	f	35-40	36	f(?)	50-55
5	f	25±	38	m	40-55
6	m	25+	42	m	35-40
9	f	60+	43	m	35-40
10	f	16±	45	m	50-55
15	m	35-40	47	m	40±
18	m	50±	48	m	22-24
19	f	22-24	49	f(?)	50+
20	f	50±	50	m	35-40
25	f	22-24	57	m	55+
27	m	55+	63	m(?)	55+
31	m	40-45	67	f	20-22
35	f(?)	40+			

Table 1. Age determinations.

Orientation	male	female	[child]	[no determination]
East-west	31	16	6	14
North-south	5	7	-	-
Total	36	23	6	14

Table 2. Sex determinations.

⁶ Some artifacts are prevalent during temporal phases that show a dominance of male or female burials.

Grave	Sex	Age	Bovidae	Equidae	Capridae	Canidae
2	m	adult	1	-	7	-
6	m	55±	2	-	12	-
14	f	adult	-	-	2	-
16	f	adult	-	-	6	-
17	m	adult	-	-	6	-
18	m	50±	1	-	2	-
23	m	adult	2	-	-	-
27	m	55+	1	-	1	-
29	m	adult	1	-	2	-
31	m	40-45	-	1	-	-
37	?	?	2	-	3	-
41	f	adult	1	-	2	-
43	m	35-40	1	-	6	-
45	m	50-55	-	1	-	-
58	m	adult	-	-	1	1
63	m(?)	55+	1	-	7(?)	-
75	m	adult	2	2	5	-

Table 3. Animal heads.

Grave	Sex	Age	Quantity
5	f	25±	2
27	m	55+	2
29	m	adult	1
31	m	40-45	1
38	m	40-45	1
55	m	adult	1
74	?	?	1

Table 4. "Animal-shaped" belt plaques.

Grave	Sex	Age	Quantity
5	f	25±	17
6	m	55±	16
12	?	?	2
22	m	adult	9
29	m	adult	1
31	m	40-45	6
37	?	?	3
43	m	35-40	34
44	m	adult	2
45	m	50-55	14
55	m	adult	7
60	m	adult	16
61	?	child	18
63	m(?)	55+	16
65	?	?	4
66	f	adult	2
68	m	adult	1
70	m	adult	5
71	f	adult	18
74	?	?	7
75	m	adult	12

Table 5. "Bird-shaped" belt plaques.

Grave	Sex	Age	flower-shaped	cylindric
5	f	25±	4	1
6	m	55±	2	-
8	?	?	3	-
9	f	60+	-	1
10	f	16±	51	2
47	m	40±	3	-
55	m	adult	1	-
62	?	?	2	-
66	f	adult	-	1
69	?	child	2	1

Table 6. "Flower-shaped" and cylindric ornaments.

Grave	Orientation	Sex	Age	Hook buckles	Garment and belt hooks	Grave	Sex	Age	Quantity
1	N-S	f	35-40	X		3	f	adult	22
4	E-W	m	adult	X		5	f	25±	48
6	E-W	m	55±		X	6	m	55±	2
9	E-W	f	60+		X	7	m	adult	5
11	E-W	m	adult		X	8	?	?	2
12	E-W	?	?		X	9	f	60+	3
15	N-S	m	35-40	X		10	f	16±	57
20	N-S	f	50±	X		11	m	adult	1
21	N-S	f	adult	X		17	m	adult	1
24	N-S	m	adult	X		22	m	adult	1
25	N-S	f	22-24	X		33	?	child	3
32	E-W	f	adult	X		34	?	child	2
39	E-W	f(?)	adult	X		37	?	?	2
43	E-W	m	35-40	X		39	f(?)	adult	2
45	E-W	m	50-55		X	44	m	adult	1
47	E-W	m	40±		X	45	m	50-55	1
49	E-W	f	50+	X		47	m	40±	5
53	N-S	f	adult	X		49	f(?)	50+	3
55	E-W	m	adult		X	55	m	adult	5
58	E-W	m	adult	X		59	?	?	2
59	E-W	?	?		X	60	m	adult	3
60	E-W	m	adult		X	61	?	child	3
63	E-W	m(?)	55+		X	63	m(?)	55+	9
67	E-W	f	20-22	X		65	?	?	10
76	E-W	m	adult	X		66	f	adult	2
81	N-S	f	adult	X		67	f	20-22	1
						68	m	adult	4
						71	f	adult	2
						74	?	?	2
						75	m	adult	2
						81	f	adult	2

Table 7. Hook buckles, belt and garment hooks.

Table 8. Stone, wood, and bone beads.

Grave	Sex	Age	Quantity
2	m	adult	1
6	m	55±	5
10	f	16±	5
47	m	40±	6
55	m	adult	6
58	m	adult	2
62	?	?	1

Table 9. Bronze beads.

Grave	Sex	Age	Grave	Sex	Age
3	f	adult	43	m	35-40
5	f	25±	44	m	adult
6	m	55±	45	m	50-55
9	f	60+	46	?	child
11	m	adult	57	m	55+
22	m	adult	58 (2)	m	adult
23	m	adult	59	?	?
29	m	adult	60	m	adult
30	?	?	61	?	child
31	m	40-45	62	?	?
33	?	child	63	m(?)	55+
34	?	child	64	?	child
35	f(?)	40+	65	?	?
37	?	?	68	m	adult
38 (2)	m	40-45	69	?	child
39	f	adult	74	?	?
41	f	adult	75	m	adult
42 (3)	m	35-40	77	?	?

Table 10. Pottery vessels (quantity in brackets, if more than one piece).

Grave	Sex	Age	<Dagger>	<Knife>	<Arrow>	<Spear>	<Pick>	<Helbard>
6	m	55±	1		7			
18	m	50±	1				1	
27	m	50+		1		1		
29	m	adult	1					
38	m	40-45	1				1	
45	m	50-55	1					
55	m	adult	1					
58	m	adult	1					1
59	?	?	1		6			
60	m	adult	1		6			
70	m	adult	1		2			
75	m	adult	1		4			

Table 11. Weapons.

All in all, the association of grave goods confirms the anthropological classification. If one tries to sex mainly on the basis of archaeological data – and ignores, up to a certain degree, the anthropological determinations - one would come to a rather similar result. Only three burials [Nr. 5, 10, and 71], identified as female by the anthropologists, might be regarded as male on archaeological evidence (no weapons, but at least hook buckles, "animal-shaped" belt plaques, "bird-shaped" belt plaques, and bronze beads: tables 4, 5, 9)⁷. Since archaeologists sometimes find it difficult to agree on gender-determination it would be of interest to closely examine the evidence upon which these three "anomalous" cases rest.

Though this would change the overall male/female ratio to almost two to one, this would hardly influence the basic assumption, that a clear and continuous predominance of one sex over the other cannot be stated. However, the question, why male burials prevail in the (mostly earlier) east-west orientated graves, while female burials dominate in the (probably later) north-south orientated graves still awaits an answer. But even during the phases dominated by burials of one sex, the other sex is not necessarily disadvantaged in regard to the amount and quality grave goods.

⁷ However, the existence of "flower-shaped" and cylindrical ornaments in two of these graves (nrs. 5 and 10) makes a new assessment rather difficult (table 6).

The situation is similar in view of age groups. The mean age at death for adults (over c. 15 years of age) is around 40 years: females a bit less (36 years), males a bit higher (44 years). A correlation between (high) age and (high quantity and quality of) grave goods cannot be stated. While quite a few adults were interred without any grave goods, all the children (without determination of sex and age) were at least accompanied by pottery vessels. Furthermore, some of the richest graves belong to young women. Only the bearing and the deposit of weapons was obviously restricted to men from their forties onwards.

If sex and age, or a combination of both, were not the criteria for social status, other criteria have to be looked for. Ideas and concepts like kinship ties (maybe demonstrated by "animal-shaped" belt plaques), accumulation of wealth, hereditary power, or personal authority may help us to explain the inequality reflected by the burials. However, they cannot be proved on the basis of only one cemetery (of less than a hundred burials) covering several hundred years. Nevertheless future excavations may provide us with additional material – and additional hints – for comparative research. Only on this foundation and with the help of careful anthropological determinations a gradually deeper knowledge of social structure and political order – but not of ethnic affiliation or identity⁸ – may be gained.

⁸ In my opinion it is impossible without written evidence.