

# On the Bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian Culture

Liu Guoxiang

**Key Words:** Upper Xiajiadian culture bronze periodization

The Upper Xiajiadian culture was named after the excavation of the Xiajiadian 夏家店 site in Chifeng 赤峰 city, Inner Mongolia 内蒙古. Other excavated sites of this culture include the Hongshanhou 红山后 and Yaowangmiao 药王庙 in Chifeng city, Nanshangen 南山根 and Xiaoheishigou 小黑石沟 in Ningcheng 宁城 county, Zhoujiadi 周家地 in Aohan 敖汉 banner, Dajing 大井 in Linxi 林西 county and Longtoushan 龙头山 in Keshiketeng 克什克腾 banner etc. Bronze is one of the key characters of the Upper Xiajiadian culture and had attracted the attentions of the academic circles both in and out of China even from the beginning of its discovery. Since this culture distributed at the east end of the

Eurasia Steppe, which is in the middle of the Northeast China and Central Plains area, its bronzes are not only the important material for the study of the bronze cultures of the ethnic attributions in north Steppe, but also an irreplaceable factor in the study of the interaction and diffusion between the bronze cultures of the Northeast China and Central Plains area.

## I. Discovery and Its Distribution

Though a few were discovered in houses and cellars, most of the bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture were from burials. The type and quantity of bronzes are quite different among the burials of different size and scale. There are three types of burial: the stone chamber burial, the stone coffin burial and the earthen shaft burial. Most of the last two types are small. The stone chamber burial has three scales: large, middle and small. Bronzes are rich both in types and quantity in large stone chamber burials. For examples, more than 510 bronzes were discovered in tomb M101 at the Nanshangen site and there were more than 1000 bronze artifacts in tomb M9601 and 390 bronze objects in tomb M8501 at the Xiaoheishigou site (Figs. 1 and 2). The types and quantity visibly decrease in the small stone coffin burials. For example, there were only several bronze bubbles in tombs M7 and M15 at the Xiajiadian site. In some small burials there were even no funerary objects. The bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture mainly distribute in the valley of the Xilamulun River 西喇木伦河 and the district north of it, the valleys of the Laoha River 老哈河 and its two tributaries the Yingjin River 英金河 and the Kundu River 坤都河, the valleys of the Mengke River 孟克河 and the Jiaolai River 教来河, and the district from the east feet of the Nuluerhu Mountain 努鲁儿虎山 to the upper Daling River 大凌河 valley. The middle and upper valley of the Laoha

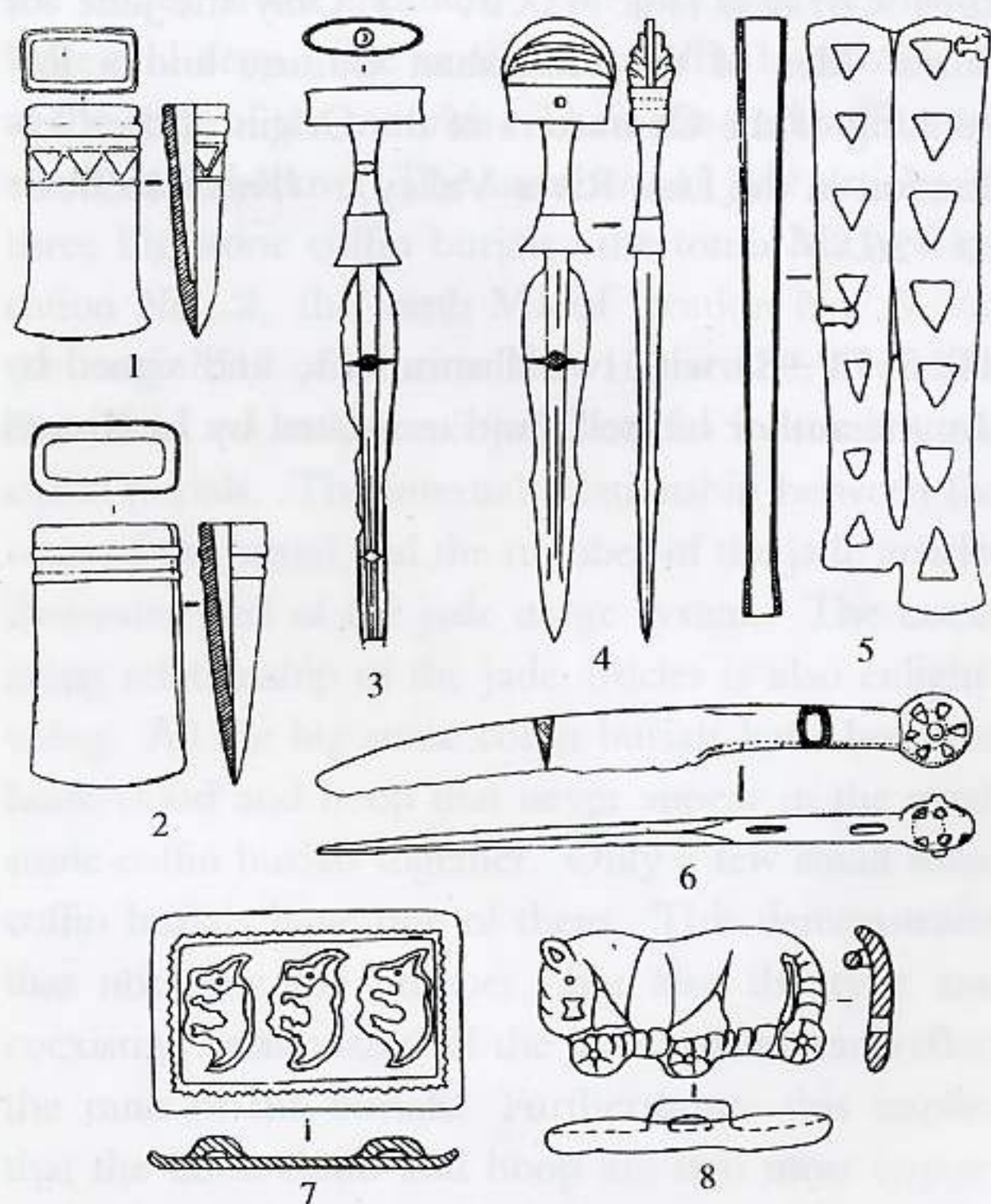


Fig. 1 Bronze artifacts from tomb M8501 at the Xiaoheishigou site, Ningcheng

1, 2. axes 3, 4. swords 5. sword scabbard 6. knife 7, 8. plate ornaments (Scales: 1-6. c. 1/4; the others c. 1/2)



River and the valley of its tributary the Kundu River have the densest distribution.

The bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture are both abundant in type and form. According to their functions, they can be classified into weapons, tools, horse and chariot fittings, utensils for daily use, ornaments and miscellanies. The weapons include short swords, sword scabbards, helmets, arrowheads, dagger-axes, spears and shields. The various short swords have the largest quantity. They can be divided into five types: hollow handle with straight or curved blade, short hilt with curved blade, T-shaped handle with curved blade, human or zoomorphic handle with curved blade and straight handle with straight blade. The tools include knives, axes, adzes, chisels, pickaxes and hoes. The types of knives include the serrate handle knife, the bell handle knife, the ring handle knife and zoomorphic handle knife. Their blades are straight or slightly concave. There are quite a number of axes. Main of them are square hollow top axes, which have rectangular or square bodies and arc-shaped blades with one or several raised arrises around the hollow tops. The horse and chariot fittings include curb bits, curb chains, yokes and bells. The three-rings-ends and tiger-shaped-ends curb bits and deer head-shaped-end curb chain are especially characteristic. The daily use utensils include *ding*-tripods, *li*-tripods, dou-pedestal stands, pots, ladles and spoons. There is only one *ding*-tripod. It has a contracted mouth with two ring ears, oblique arc belly and round bottom supporting by three long thin oblique conical legs. The number of *li*-tripod is two. Both have a contracted mouth, short neck, two zoomorphic ears on the shoulder and round bulging belly conjoined with three solid conical legs. The number of pot is relatively big. Some of them are connections of two, four or six pots. Another interesting type has long belly and round bottom. Its body is divided by raised lines and decorated with various forms of geometrical and zoomorphic designs. One type of the ladle has long handle. The other type has genital-shaped handle. The type and quantity of ornaments are relatively rich. They include plates, mirror-shaped ornaments, rings, stick head ornaments, zoomorphic ornaments, beads connections and bubbles. There are quite a number of openwork zoomorphic plates. Some are individual animal shapes, such as tiger, sheep and rabbit. Some are dual ani-

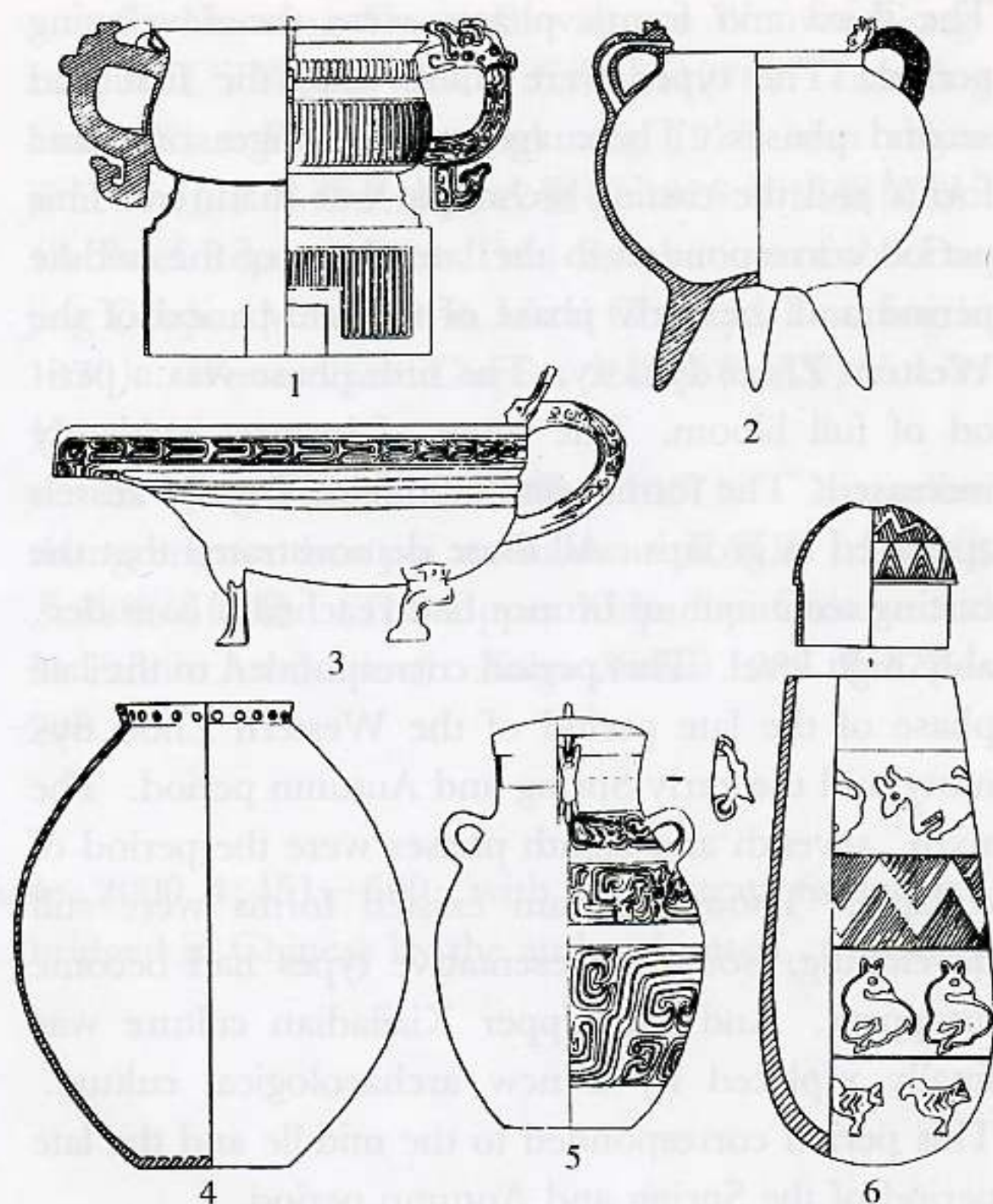


Fig. 2 Bronze vessels from tomb M8501 at the Xiaoheishigou site, Ningcheng

1. *gui*-food container 2. *li*-tripod 3. *yi*-ewer 4, 6. *guan*-pots  
5. kettle (Scales: 1-3, 5. c. 1/9; the others c. 1/3)

mal shapes, such as tiger eating sheep, two tigers back to back and two copulating deers. In addition, there are also rectangular, square, round, semi-round and crescent plates. The animals often appear in the zoomorphic ornaments include bird, snake, frog and duck. Beads connections have various types, such as three beads connection and ten beads connection. The number of miscellanies is small and their shapes are informal. Hook-shaped object, claw shaped object, fork-shaped object and U-shaped object are part of them.

## II. Periodization and Date

The bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture covered a period of nearly five centuries. We tentatively divided it into eight phases. The first and second phases were the initial period. The types of bronzes were simple. But on the whole, the forms and casting technique of bronze objects had established their special styles. This period approximately corresponded to the early period and the early phase of the middle period of the Western Zhou dynasty.



The third and fourth phases were the developing period. The types were more than the first and second phases. There are some changes on some forms and the casting technique was maturer. This period corresponded to the late phase of the middle period and the early phase of the late period of the Western Zhou dynasty. The fifth phase was a period of full bloom. The types of bronzes evidently increased. The forms were manifold. Bronze vessels appeared in groups. All these demonstrated that the casting technique of bronze had reached a considerably high level. This period corresponded to the late phase of the late period of the Western Zhou dynasty and the early Spring and Autumn period. The sixth, seventh and eighth phases were the period of collapse. Though certain existed forms were still developing, some representative types had become disappear. And the Upper Xiajiadian culture was finally replaced by a new archaeological culture. This period corresponded to the middle and the late period of the Spring and Autumn period.

### III. Relationship with Other Local Cultures

The bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture did not develop independently. On the one hand, they remarkably inherited the achievements on the bronze casting of the ethnic groups who lived in the northern Steppe between the Shang and Zhou dynasties, as well as kept special relations with the highly developed bronze civilizations of the Central Plains area which centered in the Yellow River valley. The influences from the simultaneous bronze cultures of the nearby districts, especially the inputting of the bronze ritual vessels and weapons from the Central Plains area, had extremely outstanding affection on the enrichment of the bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture. On the other hand, instead of rigidly adhere to the existed models, the bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture exhibited a rather strong creative spirit that based on the merging and absorbing of the exotic cultural elements. This is the essential motive of their constant development. The bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture deeply influenced the bronzes of its eastern neighbor—the Shiertaiyingzi 十二台营子 culture. The result was the diffusion of the short hilt and T-shaped handle with curved blade short swords in the middle valley of the Liaohe River 辽河. Moreover, they also

somewhat effected the bronze cultures around the Jundu 军都山 and Yanshan 燕山 Mountains, which had the straight blade dagger-shaped swords, and the cultures from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in the Ordos region. All the mining, ore dressing, smelting and casting remains were found at the Dajing copper mine site, Linxi county. This demonstrates that the increasingly mature mining, smelting and casting techniques were the fundamental factors for the development of the bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture. And this highly developed bronze culture occupies an important place in the history of early mining and casting in northern China.

The systematically thorough analysis of the bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture will help us understand the general character of this archaeological culture and its specific position among the bronze cultures in the Steppe of the northern China. There are still some problems in the study of the Upper Xiajiadian culture demanding prompt solution. The number of the scientifically excavated sites and burials is too small. No central settlement has been recognized and excavated due to the insufficient general field survey. The archaeological fieldwork is imbalance in different regions, especially weak in the north of the Xilamulun River. There are still some visible divergences in the study of the ethnic attributions. We believe that along with the resolving of these problems, the study of the bronzes of the Upper Xiajiadian culture will improve to a deeper level.

### References Cited

1. Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo Neimenggu Gongzuodui 中国社会科学院考古研究所内蒙古工作队 (1961). "Neimenggu Chifeng Yaowangmiao, Xiajiadian yizhi shijue jianbao 内蒙古赤峰药王庙、夏家店遗址试掘简报" (A Brief Report of the Trial Excavation at the Yaowangmiao and Xiajiadian Sites in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia). *Kaogu* 考古 1961. 2: 77—81.
2. Liaoning Shaowuda Meng Gongzuozhan 辽宁昭乌达盟工作站, Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo Dongbei Gongzuodui 中国科学院考古研究所东北工作队 (1975). "Ningcheng Nanshangen de shiguomu 宁城南山根的石椁墓" (The Stone Chamber Burials at the Nanshangen Site in Ningcheng). *Kaogu Xuebao* 1975. 1: 117—140.



3. Chifeng Shi Bowuguan 赤峰市博物馆, Ningcheng Xian Wenwu Guanlisuo 宁城县文物管理所 (1995). "Ningcheng Xiaoheishigou shiguomu diaocha qingli baogao 宁城小黑石沟石椁墓调查清理报告" (A Report of the Survey and Excavation of the Stone Chamber Burials at Xiaoheishigou in Ningcheng). *Wenwu* 文物 1995. 5: 4–22.

4. Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Kaogu Yanjiusuo Neimenggu Gongzuodui 中国社会科学院考古研究所内蒙古工作队 (1984). "Neimenggu Aohan Qi Zhoujiadi mudi fajue jianbao 内蒙古敖汉旗周家地墓地发掘简报" (A Brief Report of the Excavation at the Zhoujiadi Burial Site in Aohan Banner, Inner Mongolia). *Kaogu* 1984. 5: 417–426.

Note: The original paper was published in *Kaogu Xuebao* 2000. 4: 451–500, with 22 illustrations and authored by Liu Guoxiang 刘国祥. The English version is abridged in Chinese by the author himself, translated by Li Xinwei 李新伟, and revised by Su Nü 苏女.

5. Liaoning Sheng Bowuguan Wenwu Gongzuodui 辽宁省博物馆文物工作队 (1976). "Liaoning Linxi Xian Dajing gutongkuang 1976 nian shijue jianbao 辽宁林西县大井古铜矿 1976 年试掘简报" (A Brief Report of the Trial Excavation of the Dajing Copper Mine Site in Linxi County, Liaoning in 1976). *Wenwu Ziliao Congkan* 文物资料丛刊 Vol. 7: 138–146.

6. Jing Fengyi 靳枫毅 (1987). "Xiajiadian shangceng wenhua jiqi zushu wenti 夏家店上层文化及其族属问题" (The Upper Xiajiadian Culture and Its Ethnic Attribution). *Kaogu Xuebao* 1987. 2: 177–208.