



Study on the Symbols "Sheng" and "Zu" in Hongshan Culture Rock Paintings

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Abstract: Fertility and ancestor worship are important expressions of social ecology and natural views in Hongshan culture. Based on archaeological findings, numerous archaeological remains related to fertility have been found in Hongshan culture sites. These artifacts reflect the worship, respect, and emphasis on female fertility by the people of Hongshan culture. Additionally, Hongshan culture demonstrates reverence for its ancestors. Archaeological studies have uncovered numerous sacrificial sites and offerings, indicating the reverence and sacrificial activities towards ancestors during the Hongshan culture period. Ancestor worship evolved from primitive totem worship in transitioning from matrilineal to patrilineal societies. Recent surveys and field investigations of rock paintings in the Chifeng region have identified 130 individual "Sheng" and "Zu" character rock paintings, meticulously documented through data recording. Comparative studies of similar "Sheng" and "Zu" character symbols in artifacts and rock paintings from the Hongshan culture period reveal the culture's emphasis on fertility, ancestor worship, and reverence for life. These beliefs and cultural traits were fully expressed in Hongshan culture and profoundly influenced subsequent cultural developments and people's values. This study enhances our understanding of the beliefs and values of the people of Hongshan culture, their regard for life, fertility, and ancestors, and the role of these symbols in cultural transmission.

Keywords: Hongshan culture; "Sheng" character symbol; "Zu" character symbol; rock paintings

Introduction

Hongshan Culture is one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization. It was first discovered in Hongshan District, Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia, hence its name. Hongshan Culture spans a vast area, with its core regions primarily in central and eastern Inner Mongolia and the western Liao River basin, covering an area of 220,000 square kilometers. Fertility and ancestor worship are among the significant themes of Hongshan Culture. Ancestor worship is an ancient and widespread religious practice in human societies, with its origins traceable to the transition from matrilineal to patrilineal societies, a transition in which Hongshan Culture was situated. During the matrilineal period, society was structured around maternal kinship, with women holding dominant roles. Totem worship was prevalent during this time, where various totems were revered to express awe and gratitude towards nature. As society progressed and productivity developed, paternal kinship gradually replaced maternal kinship, leading to the formation of patrilineal societies. During this transition, ancestor worship differentiated from totem worship to become an independent religious belief and cultural tradition.

1.1 Social Ecology and Natural Views in Hongshan Culture

A. Late Neolithic Worship of Fertility and Reproduction

In the early stages of the Old Stone Age, human societies already exhibited worship practices related to fertility and reproduction, evident in numerous cultures and primitive religions. For instance, the "Prehistoric Venus" statue made of limestone and discovered in Austria in 1908 from the late Old Stone Age exaggerated the breasts and abdomen of females, emphasizing the image of a pregnant woman. During this period, people recognized the critical role of breasts in nurturing infants, a determinant of fertility and reproductive ability.

Similar practices are evident in the archaeological remains of Hongshan Culture in the Liao River basin of northeastern China. For example, at the Chifeng City Bayin Changhan site of the Xinglongwa culture (8,000-7,500 years ago), a stone-carved human figure was found in a house site (Fig. 1), described as follows: "Located near the west side of the stove, 0.95 meters from the west wall of the house. The stone-carved figure is 36.6 cm tall, in the round, divided into three parts. The upper part depicts a human face, the middle part depicts arms, with a protrusion between the two arms, and the lower part is carved into a downward-extending conical shape." [1] (p. 308) At the Niuheliang site of Hongshan Culture (6,400-5,000 years ago), fragments of female figurines were unearthed in multiple locations of the "Goddess Temple," with one piece about twice the size of a real person found in the central area of the main room of the temple's west chamber, and others found in various chambers. Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 depict fragments of breasts, specimen N1J1 Cai: 6 and specimen N1J1B: 13. "Specimen N1J1 Cai: 6 is relatively smooth on the surface, resembling a red robe, with a diameter of 17-17.5 cm and a maximum thickness of 10.5 cm. Specimen N1J1B: 13's breast specimen is large and heavy,

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with rows of nipple reliefs arranged from top to bottom, gradually decreasing in size, with a length of 39 cm, a width of 33 cm, and a thickness of 5-13 cm. Nipple diameters are 1.5-2 cm, with protrusions of 0.5 cm and row spacing of 3-4 cm." [2] (p. 31) Fragments of breasts were also found in the gullies on the west side of the temple site. At the Dongshanzui site, a small naked pregnant woman standing statue was unearthed (see Fig. 1.4 from Guo Dashun: Brief Report on the Excavation of the Hongshan Culture Architectural Complex at Dongshanzui, Kazuo County, Liaoning Province, Fig. 2), with the head and right arm missing, a protruding abdomen, a large buttock, a curved left arm, and the left hand placed on the upper abdomen, featuring markings indicating the genitals. Mr. Guo Dashun provided a detailed description of this naked pregnant woman: "The specimen (Fig. 4) was unearthed from the yellow earth layer on the east side of the stone circle platform, polished all over, resembling a red robe, corpulent body, especially round and bulging abdomen, slightly bent lower limbs, and the lower part is incomplete, with a remaining height of 5 cm." [3] These archaeological finds indicate that during Hongshan Culture, there was already a high level of worship for female fertility, demonstrating a significant emphasis on reproduction.



Figure 1-4

(II) Transition from Matrilineal to Patrilineal Societies

In the historical development of human societies, the transition and development from matrilineal communal societies to patrilineal communal societies are also reflected in the archaeological remains of the western Liao River basin. In the early stages of primitive societies, initially, there was little understanding of the role of males in reproduction. In matrilineal societies, there was worship of women and even female reproductive organs. People often only knew their mothers and not their fathers, reflecting the significant role of females in their beliefs. With the development of material culture, matrilineal societies declined, gradually transitioning to patrilineal societies, where male reproductive worship emerged. Historian Zhao Guohua believes, "The worship of the male organ probably began in the middle Neolithic period, prevailed in the late and final stages of the Neolithic period, and many simulated pottery and stone ancestors have been discovered in archaeological findings." [4] (p. 227) Similarly, male reproductive worship has been found in archaeological remains of the Hongshan Culture. Fig. 5 depicts a rod-cone-shaped jade artifact, "excavated from the 16th location, Tomb No. 1 of the Niuheliang site in Lingyuan, now housed in the Chaoyang Museum. It measures 22.6 cm in length with a maximum diameter of 2.1 cm at the thick end." [5] (p. 58) At the 3rd tomb of the 16th location of the Niuheliang site, there is also a jade rod-shaped object, similar in shape to the rod-shaped jade object unearthed from Hutou Gou No. 1, with a specific excavation location on the left waist of the human body. These jade rod-shaped artifacts, although uniform in shape, can reach a length of more than thirty centimeters, indicating the use of substantial jade material and requiring skilled craftsmanship. These ancient relics precisely demonstrate that the Hongshan period was in a transitional phase from matrilineal to patrilineal societies.

As people became aware of the role of males in reproduction, they entered the early stages of patrilineal societies. The emergence of male worship was based on the increasing role of men in social life surpassing that of women, with strong gender implications in the worship of male reproduction. The shift from pregnancy worship to phallic worship reflects the manifestation of reproductive worship in the process of social power exchange.



Figure 5

(III) Worship of Heaven, Earth, and Ancestors

During the Hongshan Culture period, altars, temples, and tombs formed an integrated and distinctive feature. "Tombs" refer to the unique burial forms of the Hongshan Culture, known as the accumulate stone tomb, constructed with stone slabs and blocks, often square-shaped, and located predominantly on hilltops (closer to the heavens). High-status tombs contain numerous exquisite jade artifacts as grave goods, with little pottery and stone artifacts buried. For instance, at the Niuheliang site, Tomb M17 contained jade figurines and a jade phoenix crown, representing the earliest integration of "harmony between man and nature".

"Altars" refer to sacrificial altars, mostly associated with tombs, both square and round, predominantly circular, situated around cairn tombs, especially to the south. Some altars are located in the center of tomb clusters, featuring a three-tier circular structure similar to the Ming and Qing Dynasty altars. "Temples" are wooden structures, typically narrow and elongated, with main halls and side chambers, often yielding sacrificial pottery, clay figurines, painted pottery, and murals, but fewer jade artifacts. According to Mr. Guo Dashun, "Tombs and altars are arranged around temples, creating a strong religious atmosphere with clear reverence for gods (including heaven and earth)." [6] Numerous fragments of clay-made deity statues were found in the Goddess Temple at Niuheliang.

The presence of numerous deity statues and animal figurines within such confined spaces indicates that these were not public gathering places. Only a privileged few could enter these temples to communicate with ancestors. Early ancestral worship practices bear some connection to later Chinese historical practices of mausoleums and temples. The earliest temple rites were closely linked to tombs, as evidenced by Hongshan Culture sacrificial sites. Mr. Su Bingqi believes, "Altars, temples, and tombs were complementary and somewhat akin to the Ming and Qing Dynasty Temple of Heaven, Imperial Ancestral Temple, and Ming Tombs in Beijing." [7] Mr. Tian Guanglin suggests, "During the Hongshan Culture period, ritual systems were already taking shape. Based on recent archaeological discoveries from various Hongshan cultures and the lower strata of Xiajiadian culture in the western Liao River area, the earliest suburbs were likely near prehistoric central settlements, with the earliest societies established on elevated areas with functions like worship of heaven, earth, and ancestors as public political and religious ceremonial sites." [8]

During the Hongshan Culture period, a mature sacrificial system and complete ceremonial centers for rituals were already in place, reflecting contemporary views on natural ecology. Archaeological evidence supports ancient legends like the "Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors," comprising the Heavenly Sovereign, Great Sovereign (Human Sovereign), and Earthly Sovereign, with the Great Sovereign revered as paramount. The Heavenly and Earthly Sovereigns represented divine authority, while the Great Sovereign represented royal authority. The Hongshan Culture period marked the transition from a theocratic society to a monarchic society, laying the foundation for future dynastic monarchies.

1. Symbols of "Sheng" and "Zu" in Hongshan Culture

Some archaeological artifacts unearthed from early human societies, particularly those of the matrilineal clan, reflect a reverence for female fertility. Similarly, in the archaeological remains of the Hongshan Culture period, there are abundant symbols of "生" (shēng, life;birth;fecundity) and "祖" (zǔ, ancestors), symbols of fertility totems, and ancestral totem worship.

1. *Discovery and Statistics of "Sheng" and "Zu" Symbols in Rock Paintings in Chifeng Region*

Rock paintings are among the significant ancient relics of the Hongshan Culture, primarily found within the boundaries of Chifeng City. From the 1980s to the 1990s, through the continuous efforts of Chinese cultural workers, ancient rock paintings were successively discovered at various locations in the Chifeng region. Since 2014, the Rock Art Research Institute and research teams led by Zhou Yushu and Wu Jiakai of Inner Mongolia Hongde University have conducted systematic field surveys of rock paintings in the Chifeng region over the following 8 years.

According to the survey, there are a total of 78 rock art sites, 5,600 rock art panels, and 12,400 individual rock art motifs, along with 7 cliff carvings in the Chifeng area. The administrative divisions covering Chifeng rock art include Bālín Zuoqí, Bālín Yòuqí, Ālǚ Kē'ěrqín Qí, Línxī Xiàn, Kèshíkètè Qí, Wēngniútè Qí, Hóngshān Qū, Sōngshān Qū, Kālāqín Qí, and Aohàn Qí. Through classification, the symbols of "Sheng" and "Zu" in rock paintings are primarily distributed in four areas:

Area 1: Mountainous deserts north of the Xīlāmùlún River, mainly in Sùobèi Mountain rock paintings of Bālín Zuoqí, Hàn Mountain, Sānzuo Mountain, Luòtuó Jǐngzǐ Mountain, and Zì'ér Mountain in Bahrain Right Banner.

Area 2: Rock paintings along the Baichá River, including Gōumén Mountain, Hújiào Tǔ Mountain, Dàhé Lóng Mountain, Wàndéchéng, Shānqián, and Yǒngxīng Mountain in Keshiketeng Banner.

Area 3: Rock paintings along the Yīn River, including Sānzuo Diàn, Fúshān Zhuāng, Wángjiā Yíngzǐ, Chíjiā Yíngzǐ, Kāngjiā Wānzi, Xīndiàn, and Chūtóu Lǎng in Hongshan District.

Area 4: Plains between Shàolǎng River and Lǎo Hā River, including Bái Miàozi, Dà Hēi Shān, Shí Liàn Shān, and Máo'nǎo Hǎi Shān in Wēngniútè Qí, with sporadic occurrences at Zhēnzi Mountain in Dālīnuòèr Lake, Xiǎo Gùlītū Village in Aohan Banner, and Hebei Province Wéichāng rock paintings.

The distribution map of "Sheng" and "Zu" symbols in Chifeng rock paintings is depicted by Zhao Tie (Figure 6).





























































Figure 10

The fertility totem is a symbolic representation of prehistoric humans' contemplation on the phenomenon of fertility, particularly during childbirth. At its core, fertility totem beliefs center around reproduction, which is humanity's defense against the fear of death and the source of hope for continuing life. Marx also once said that fertility is the new manifestation of humanity's inherent strength and the new enrichment of human existence, a dual meaning that only fertility can achieve. In early human societies, childbirth often posed life-threatening risks for women, leading early humans to believe that they might be influenced by a divine spirit in such perilous situations. Thus, fertility totems were created, worshipped, and revered in hopes of safe and successful childbirth. Propagating offspring is also the most fundamental task in human life and a crucial guarantee for human development. According to the characteristics of human psychological development, humans gradually formed a psychological reverence for fertility through long-term survival practices. During the Hongshan culture period, people's contemplation of the "Sheng" (生 shēng) issue is evidenced in the rock paintings of the Chifeng region, including themes related to "Sheng" symbols and fertility gods.

Through surveys and field investigations of rock paintings in the Chifeng region, "Sheng" character rock painting symbols and fertility god totem symbols have been systematically recorded. The "Sheng" symbol resembles a symbol with three upward branches resembling a tree branch. The forms of fertility totem can be categorized into three main types: Type A features human facial characteristics with dispersed branch-shaped or "Sheng" character combinations forming a unified whole on the top of the head. Type A can further be subdivided into outline and non-outline categories, which are not detailed here. Type B features human facial characteristics but in a double-faced combination. Type C combines "Sheng" characters with animals or humanoid forms, though this type is relatively rare. See Table 1 for a detailed list of individual "Sheng" and fertility god symbols.

Table 1: List of "Sheng" and fertility god individual symbols

Category	"Sheng" symbols and fertility gods.						
"Sheng" symbols	Image						
	Size	23cm*16cm	16cm*15cm	10cm*10cm	13cm*4cm	8cm*5cm	13cm*12.5cm
	Image						
	Size	11cm*5cm	5cm*4cm	7cm*6cm	11cm*8cm	11cm*10cm	36cm*16cm
	Image						
	Size	10cm*5cm	16cm*11cm	11cm*10cm	48cm*30cm	35cm*13cm	21cm*8cm
	Image						
Size	22cm*10cm	21cm*6.5cm	33cm*12cm	14cm*8cm	38cm*23cm	71cm*42cm	

	Image						
	Size	13cm*12cm	19cm*11cm	13cm*11cm	12cm*8cm	10cm*9cm	29cm*21cm
	Image						
	Size	unknown	8cm*5cm	17cm*16cm	10cm*9cm	11cm*12cm	
Category	fertility gods						
Type A (Chinese characters and faces)	Image						
	Size	23cm*17cm	40cm*38cm	40cm*26cm	30cm*26cm	25cm*20cm	17cm*15cm
	Image						
	Size	29cm*28cm	10cm*9cm	11cm*10cm	25cm*20cm	23cm*20cm	35cm*26cm
	Image						
	Size	19cm*18cm	37cm*21cm	21cm*11cm	41cm*34cm	21cm*20cm	28cm*22cm
	Image						
	Size	46cm*84cm	23cm*20cm	28cm*18cm	24cm*21cm	11cm*11cm	21cm*18cm
	Image						
	Size	22cm*20cm	26cm*24cm	18cm*16.5cm	23cm*20cm	130cm*75cm	17cm*16cm
	Image						
	Size	18cm*15cm	10cm*8cm	13cm*10cm	9cm*5cm	25cm*20cm	未知
	Image						
	Size	Unknown	Unknown	13cm*11cm	21cm*18cm	19cm*17cm	23cm*12cm
Type B	Image						
	Size	46cm*28cm	39cm*21cm	11cm*7cm			
Type C	Image						

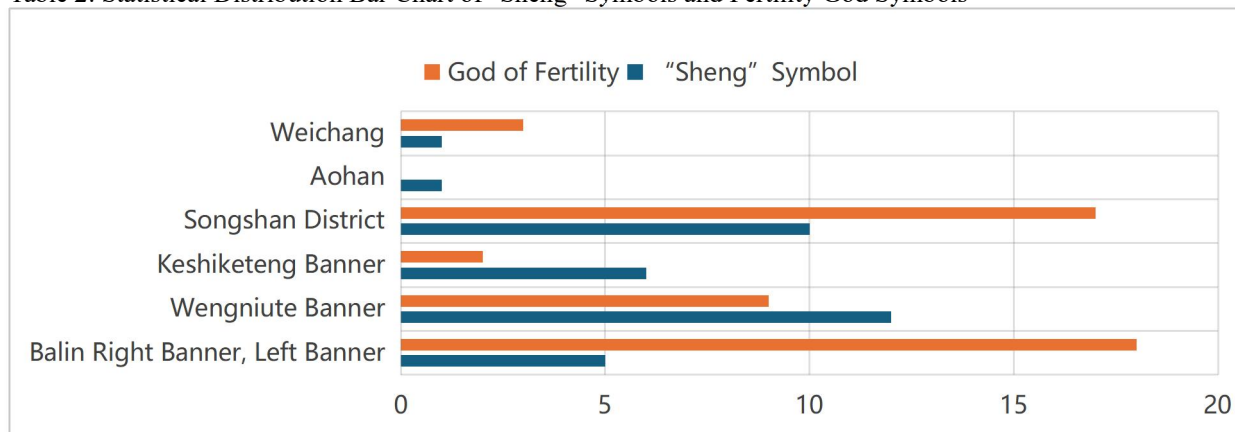
	Size	42cm*27cm	23cm*9cm			
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Through the statistical analysis of the "Sheng" and fertility god symbols in the rock paintings of Chifeng region, a total of 82 individual symbols were identified. Among these, there are 35 "Sheng" symbols and 47 fertility god symbols. Specifically, in Balin Right Banner and Balin Left Banner, there are 5 "Sheng" symbols and 18 fertility god symbols, totaling 21 symbols. Among these, fertility gods include 10 with outlines, 5 without outlines, 2 combined fertility gods, and 1 animal fertility god. Balin Right Banner shows a richer variety of fertility god types compared to other areas in Chifeng, while "Sheng" symbols are relatively fewer.

In Wengniute Banner, there are 12 "Sheng" symbols and 9 fertility god symbols, totaling 21 symbols. Among these, fertility gods include 5 with outlines and 4 without outlines. Wengniute Banner has a higher number of "Sheng" symbols compared to other banners. In Keshiketeng Banner, there are 6 "Sheng" symbols and 2 fertility god symbols, totaling 8 symbols. Among these, there is 1 fertility god with an outline and 1 without an outline.

In Songshan District, there are 10 "Sheng" symbols and 17 fertility god symbols, totaling 24 symbols. Among these, fertility gods include 5 with outlines and 9 without outlines. Fertility god symbols outnumber "Sheng" symbols slightly, with the highest total number. Aohan Banner has only 1 "Sheng" symbol, and Weichang County has 1 "Sheng" symbol and 3 fertility god symbols. For detailed distribution, refer to Table 2. Similar symbols are also found in the Yinshan rock paintings in the upper and middle reaches of the Yellow River, as well as in Gansu and Qinghai rock paintings.

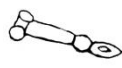



































Table 2: Statistical Distribution Bar Chart of "Sheng" Symbols and Fertility God Symbols



In Chinese culture, the veneration of ancestors and ancestral worship have been traditional concepts for millennia. This reverence for ancestors has pervaded various aspects of society, from the feudal system of ancestral laws to local clan governance systems, and even to the present-day village communities predominantly inhabited by people of the same surname. This cultural practice underscores the deep-rooted nature of ancestor worship in Chinese cultural heritage.

In the rock paintings of Chifeng, there are numerous depictions related to ancestors. The interpretation of the character "Zu" (祖 zǔ) in these rock paintings originates from the oracle bone script character "Qie" (且 qiè), which shares the same meaning as "ancestor" (Zu). In the Hongshan rock paintings, there are many "Zu" symbols, which can be categorized into two main Type A single "Zu" symbols and Type B combinations of two "Zu" symbols. Likewise, representations of ancestor gods can also be categorized into two types Type A single-faced ancestor gods, and Type B combined representations of ancestor gods with two faces. For further details, refer to Table 3.

Category	The symbol for "Zu" (ancestor)						
Type A (single "Zu" symbols)	Image						
	Size	2cm*4cm	33cm*15cm	42cm*22cm	23cm*8cm	40cm*22cm	21cm*10cm
Type B (combined "Zu" symbols)	Image						
	Size						

	Size	17cm*10cm	16cm*9cm	25cm*19cm	27cm*12cm	8cm*4cm	11cm*5cm
	Image						
	Size	43cm*18cm	11cm*10cm	11cm*5cm	24cm*10cm	21cm*10cm	15cm*12cm
	Image						
	Size	18cm*14cm	21cm*8cm	41cm*24cm	18cm*5cm	17cm*8cm	33cm*8cm
	Image						
	Size	23cm*13cm	17cm*6cm	20cm*5cm	10cm*5cm	18cm*14cm	20cm*10cm
	Image						
	Size	11cm*10cm	12cm*10cm	15cm*12cm	15cm*12cm	10cm*10cm	22cm*15cm
	Image						
	Size	20cm*13cm	25cm*18cm	24cm*18cm	18cm*7.5cm		
Type B (combinations of two "Zu" symbols)	Image						
	Size	21cm*12cm	15cm*8cm	22cm*20cm			
Type A (single-faced ancestors for gods)	Image						
	Size	34cm*23cm	41cm*27cm	30cm*35cm	61cm*28cm		
Type B (combined representations of ancestors for gods with	Image						
	Size	42cm*27cm					

two faces)						
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III. Interpretation of Rock Paintings on the Themes of "Fertility" and "Ancestors"

(I) Exploration of "Fertility" and "Birth" in Hongshan Rock Paintings

In the rock paintings of Chifeng region:

There are themes related to "Sheng" (生 shēng) symbols and "Fertility Gods". People deeply explore how humans come into being and are born. For instance, in the rock paintings, it reflects the prehistoric belief that human birth is influenced by two factors. First, the presence of fertility totem in rock paintings influences human birth. Second, fertility is determined by ancestors. This encompasses the early stages of human society's long-term experience with natural laws of survival, during the phases of fertility totem worship and ancestor worship. At that time, people not only contemplated nature and their own life issues but also other related aspects of life extension.

The following is an interpretation of rock paintings in the Chifeng region related to the themes of "fertility" and "ancestors", derived from field surveys by the research team, and published in 2022 by Zhou Yushu and Wu Jiakai in the book "Chifeng Rock Paintings" by Beijing Science Press.

Figure 11: Located at Camel Well Mountain Rock Painting in Bao Ri Wu Su Town, Ba Lin You Qi, Chifeng City. Altitude 729 meters, facing south. The first symbol is a "Fertility God" measuring 38 cm high and 40 cm wide, positioned centrally on the rock surface. The second and third symbols depict two people in a copulatory position, located in the upper left corner of the rock surface. The fourth symbol represents "eyebrows", and the fifth symbol represents "double eyes" representing spirits. Placing the fertility god in an important position signifies the tribe's hope for the god's blessing to prosper and grow.

Figure 12: Located at Three Shops Reservoir North Shore Rock Painting in Chu Tou Lang Town, Songshan District, Chifeng City. Altitude 708 meters, facing east. The rock surface is 60 cm high and 101 cm wide. The first symbol is interpreted as the character double "Sheng" Symbols connected together, representing the concept of "life and growth in nature". The second symbol is interpreted as the character "arrowhead" indicating deterrence. The third, fourth, and fifth symbols represent "double eyes". The sixth symbol can be seen as "gaze", with double eyes and gaze representing spirits. This rock painting signifies that during the risky process of reproduction, susceptible to evil influences, arrows are used for deterrence to ensure the continuous, peaceful prosperity of the tribal family.



Figure 11

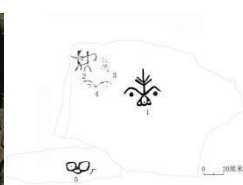


Figure 12



Figure 13: Located east of Shagatala Pasture, Haijinshan Zhongniu Farm, Chifeng City, Wengniute Banner. Altitude 533 meters, facing southeast. The first symbol represents "Fertility God", with a total height of 41 cm and total width of 34 cm. The second symbol is "Fertility Totem". The third symbol is the character "Xuan" (玄 xuán), representing darkness. The image depicts two fertility gods, indicating this may be a place for fertility rituals. Fertility matters are profound and mysterious.

Figure 14: Located at Camel Well Mountain, Bao Ri Wu Su Town, Ba Lin You Qi, Chifeng City. Altitude 736 meters, facing southwest. The first symbol in the image is a human face symbol, 21 cm high and 17.5 cm wide; the second symbol is a human face, 22 cm high and 24 cm wide. The third and fourth symbols have a "Sheng" character crown on top, interpreted as "Fertility Totem". The fifth symbol represents the character "son". The sixth symbol is interpreted as the character "Zu" (ancestor). The seventh symbol is a sheep, likely used as a sacrificial offering. In ancient times, under harsh natural conditions and with limited technology, fertility often faced significant risks. Fertility totems and ancestors overseeing fertility rituals led people to offer sacrifices to ancestors, hoping for blessings and prosperity for future generations.



Figure 13

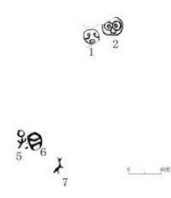


Figure 14

Worship of Ancestors in Hongshan Rock Paintings

The rise of ancestor worship is closely related to the formation of patrilineal clan societies. In patrilineal societies, males became the dominant force in families and societies, emphasizing the continuity and inheritance of family bloodlines. Ancestors, as the source of family bloodlines, naturally became objects of worship and reverence. Through ancestor worship, people sought the blessings and protection of their ancestors to ensure the prosperity and flourishing of their families.

In the development of ancestor worship, a series of fixed rituals and customs gradually formed, which are of significant importance to the development of human society. Firstly, it strengthened the cohesion of families and societies, making people value more the continuity and inheritance of family bloodlines. Secondly, ancestor worship promoted the transmission and development of culture. Through the transmission of rituals and customs, people were able to preserve and promote their historical culture and ethnic spirit. Finally, ancestor worship also played a positive role in the construction of moral ethics. Through ancestor worship, people learned and inherited the moral concepts and behavioral norms of their ancestors, thereby shaping good social and moral customs.

Figure 15: Located at Shili Mountain, Ashhansumu, Wengniute Banner, Chifeng City. Altitude 736 meters, facing south. The rock surface is 75 cm high and 50 cm wide. The first symbol in the image is the character "Zu" (ancestor). The second symbol is the character "Tian" (田 tián), representative Cemetery with a diameter of 8 cm. It depicts the resting place of departed ancestors, possibly interpreted as ancestral graves.

Figure 16: Located at Camel Well Mountain, Bao Ri Wu Su Town, Ba Lin You Qi, Chifeng City. Altitude 698 meters, the rock surface is 95 cm high and 96 cm wide. The first and second symbols on the rock surface depict "men". The third symbol is the character "Zu" , representing "ancestors". The fourth symbol depicts a person engaged in ancestor worship. The fifth symbol is interpreted as the character "Gou" (媯 gòu), representative copulation. The sixth symbol represents a ghost or spirit. This rock painting depicts men and women praying for the blessing of their ancestors for the smooth continuation of their tribe's lineage and perpetuation.

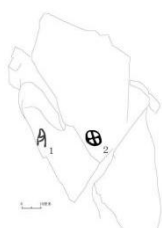


Figure 15



Figure 16

Figure 17: Located at Camel Well Mountain, Ba Lin You Qi, Bao Ri Wu Su Town, Jilin Gacha Township, Chifeng City. Altitude 775 meters, facing southwest. The central figure in the painting is 51 cm tall and 25 cm wide. The first symbol in the image is a deity figure with a square crown on its head, round eyes, disheveled hair on the sides of the head, and unique attire. The center of the figure is composed of the character "Zu" , representing an ancestor figure. The second and fourth symbols in the painting have the "Sheng" character on their heads, representing the fertility totem. The third symbol, "Eyebrow and Eyebrow" , represents the deceased or spirits. The meaning conveyed is that ancestors play a decisive role during the process of fertility.

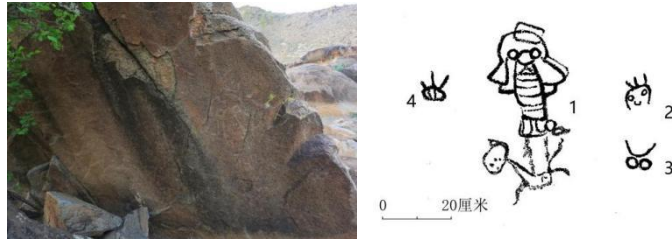


Figure 17

6. Conclusion

Fertility and ancestor worship are important expressions of the ecological and natural views in the Hongshan Culture. Archaeological discoveries have shown that there are many archaeological remains related to fertility in the Hongshan Culture sites. These artifacts reflect the worship, respect, and emphasis on female fertility among the people of the Hongshan Culture. Additionally, the Hongshan Culture also exhibits reverence for ancestors. Archaeological studies have uncovered numerous sacrificial sites and offerings, indicating the reverence and sacrificial activities towards ancestors during the Hongshan Culture period. Rich sacrificial items, including jade artifacts, bone tools, pottery, and stone tools, have also been unearthed from Hongshan Culture tombs. Ancestor worship evolved from primitive totem worship as society transitioned from matrilineal to patrilineal during the development of the Hongshan Culture.

In archaeological remains from the Hongshan Culture period, a large number of "Sheng" (生 shēng) and "Zu" (祖 zǔ) characters have been found. In recent years, through surveys and field investigations of rock paintings in the Chifeng region, it has been recorded that a total of 156 individual "Sheng" and "Zu" character rock paintings were discovered, with detailed data recorded for each. Similar "Sheng" and "Zu" characters have also been found in jade artifacts of the Hongshan Culture, such as jade silkworms, jade chrysalises, jade cicadas, and jade pendants with animal faces. Comparative studies of these characters found in artifacts and rock paintings of the Hongshan Culture reveal the importance placed on fertility, ancestor worship, and reverence for life among the people of the Hongshan Culture. These beliefs and cultural features were fully expressed in the Hongshan Culture and had a profound influence on subsequent cultural development and human values.

The study and interpretation of the "Sheng" and "Zu" characters in prehistoric rock paintings in the Chifeng region provide a comprehensive understanding through the analysis of their forms, combinations, and distributions. This enhances our understanding of the beliefs and values of the Hongshan Culture people regarding life, fertility, and ancestors, as well as the role of these symbols in cultural heritage.

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