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Subsistence of the Daurs

For this prompt, we were provided substantial resources in the form of the eHRAF. This writing will take a look at one culture featured in the eHRAF, the Daurs. The goal is to identify this cultural group its geography and light history; then dive into their subsistence strategies. We will approach these strategies holistically, relating them to information about the division of labor and the historical religions of the Daurs. This brief but informative look will illuminate the importance of food procurement for Daurs and how it shapes their culture.

The Daurs represent one cultural group of a larger group we know as Inner Mongolians. The Inner Mongolian people reside in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR), in northern China. This northern region of China represents over half of the entire Chinese northern border, with the largest neighboring nation Mongolia and a small section Bordering Russia. The majority of this expanse is made up of grasslands (Hui), that lend themselves well to pastoralism but can also harbor agricultural communities. The IMAR regions hold host to numerous group distinctions identified in the eHRAF. There are the Barga, Khiangan, Juu Ud, Khorchin or Jirem, Chakhar, Shiliingol, Alshaa, Ordos, Tumed, Daurs, and a small community of Buriat Mongols. (Jankowiak). The Daurs here will be the focus but they share many similarities with the neighboring groups, giving us a wonderful understanding of the Inner Mongolian groups as a whole.

The historical food procurement of the Daurs was primarily a pastoral endeavor. Daur peasants grow crops of barley, wheat, oats, corn, buckwheat, millet, potatoes, sugar beets, garlic, cabbage, onions, carrots, sorghum, and fruit trees. These farms generally raise pigs, goats, and sheep. The common diet of the herders consists of millet, milk tea, dairy products, and mutton. (Jankowiak) This diet reflects that herders subsist on what they grow on the land. Trading for any commodities not already grown.

This pastoralism is a “household enterprise” meaning everyone in the family had a role to play in the procurement and production. The structuring of the division of labor amongst the Daurs followed patriarchal ideas about gender. Meaning there were separate distinct tasks and responsibilities that would be determined by gender. For the Daurs, women and children were responsible for: milking livestock, butter churning, cooking, sewing, and child-care. The men in these households were responsible for tending the livestock, tending the fields, structural maintenance or construction, any wild game hunting, and defense of livestock and family.

This aligns well with our proposed model of the culinary triangle and its gender identities. We see the feminine doing the cooking and processing of the food. Whereas the men were responsible for the untamed, raw element of tending a herd and livestock. The religion of the Daurs was historically an animalism focus, that in modern times shifted to share in contemporary Buddhist philosophies. This makes sense as the center of the survival of a household rest with its livestock, and the crops it holds most valuable.

The pastoral Daurs are a stark contrast to American modern ideals of procurement. They procure as a whole with every member of a household sharing in the overall subsistence. Each member has the gender (and age) specific roles well defined working in tandem. It’s a unique and interesting contrast between American ideas of individual procurement and the separation we have from our sources of food. The Daurs are an interesting population one to potentially reflect on in comparison to our own ideas of subsistence.

Works Cited

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