

2013 Oral History Association Annual Meeting

Unveiling Tianzhu Walking Horse Culture in the Hexi Corridor

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Why oral history?
Why Tianzhu walking horse?

Evergreen Oral History Initiative

- Working with rural teachers, students, librarians, and community members on library development, we've been hearing cases that our local history and culture are in danger
- Rebuild the communal memory by ourselves
- In 2009 Evergreen launched a pilot oral history project at Tianzhu No. 1 High School, Gansu Province

Let's start from ...

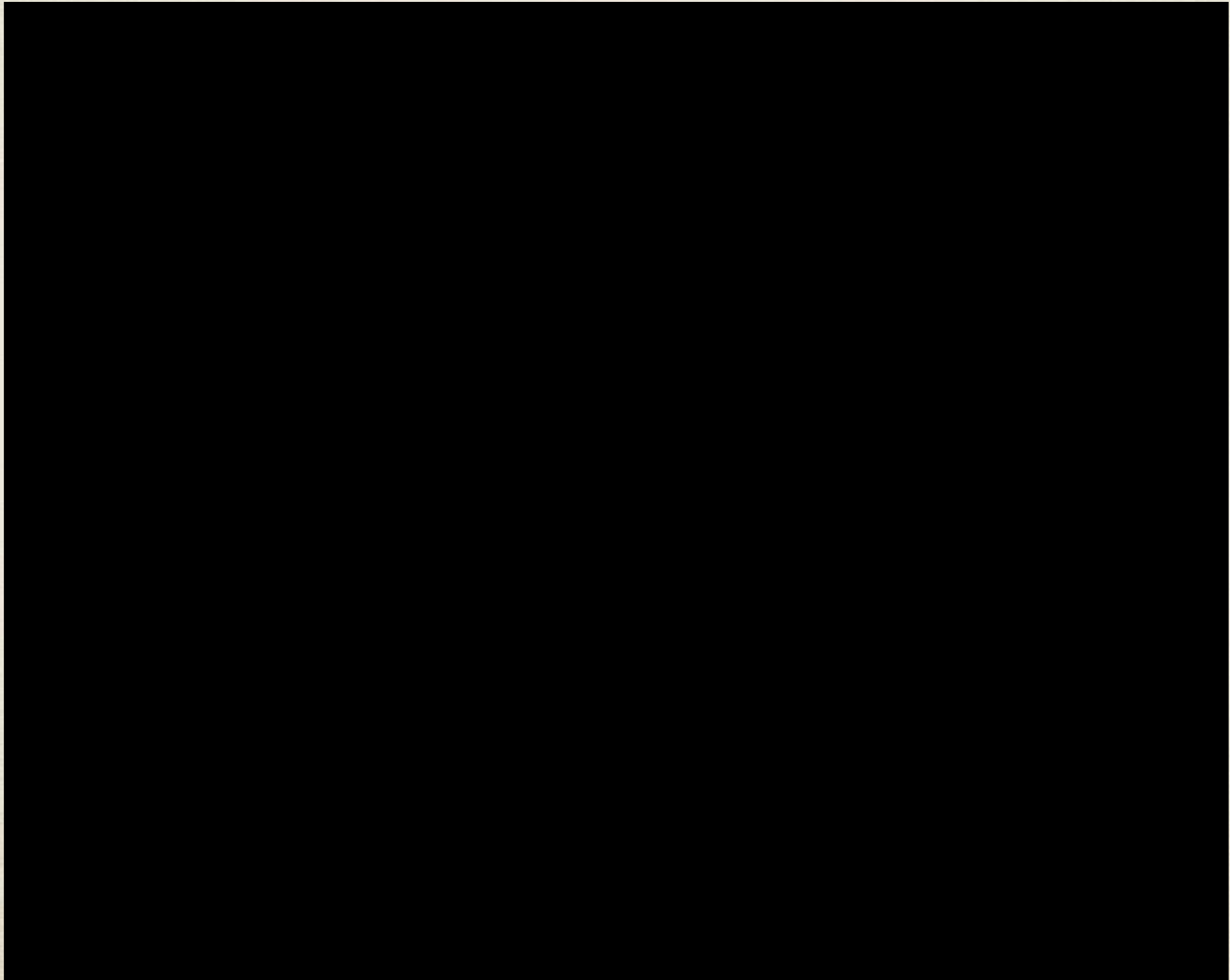


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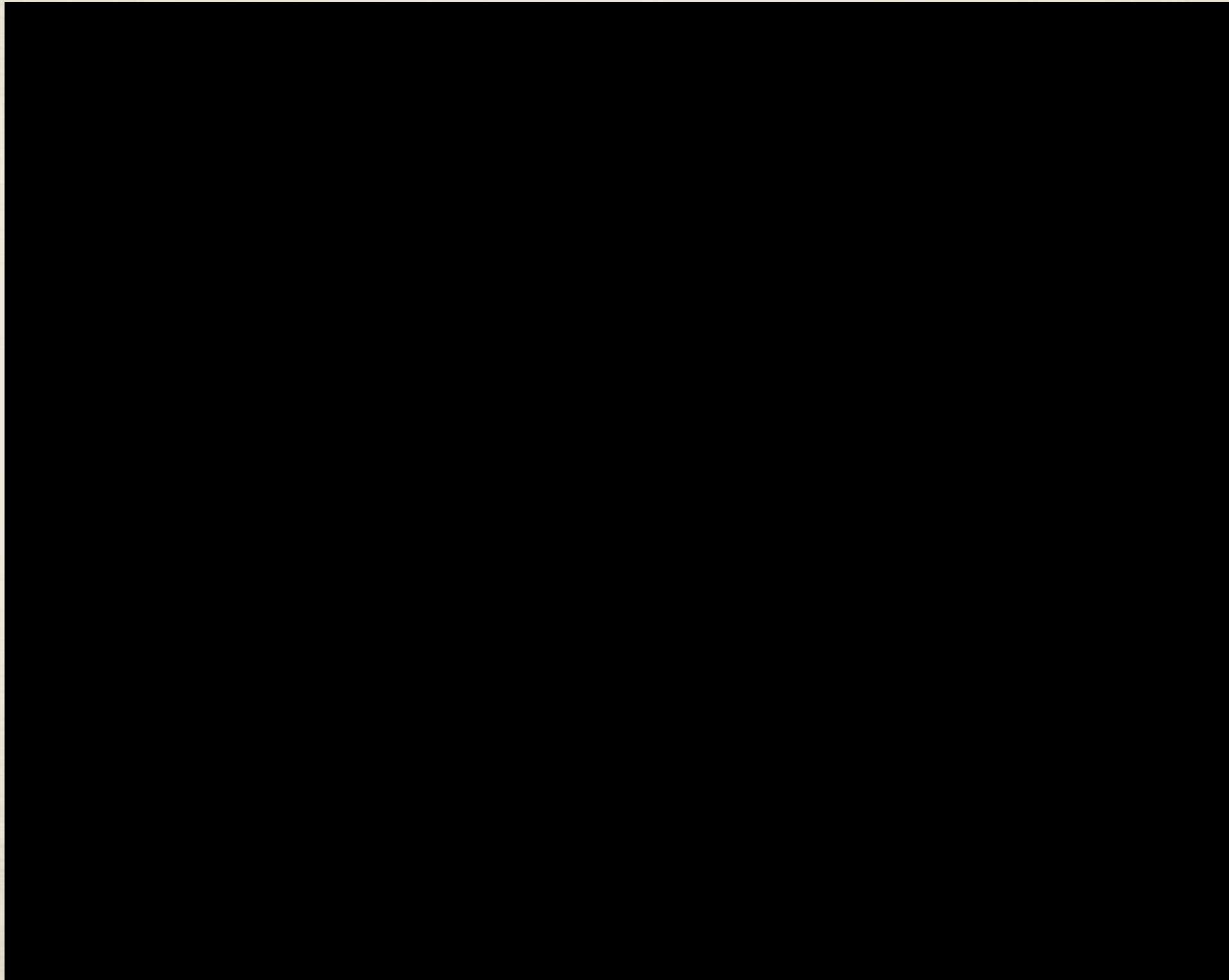
Its prototype - Hexi (Tianzhu) Horse



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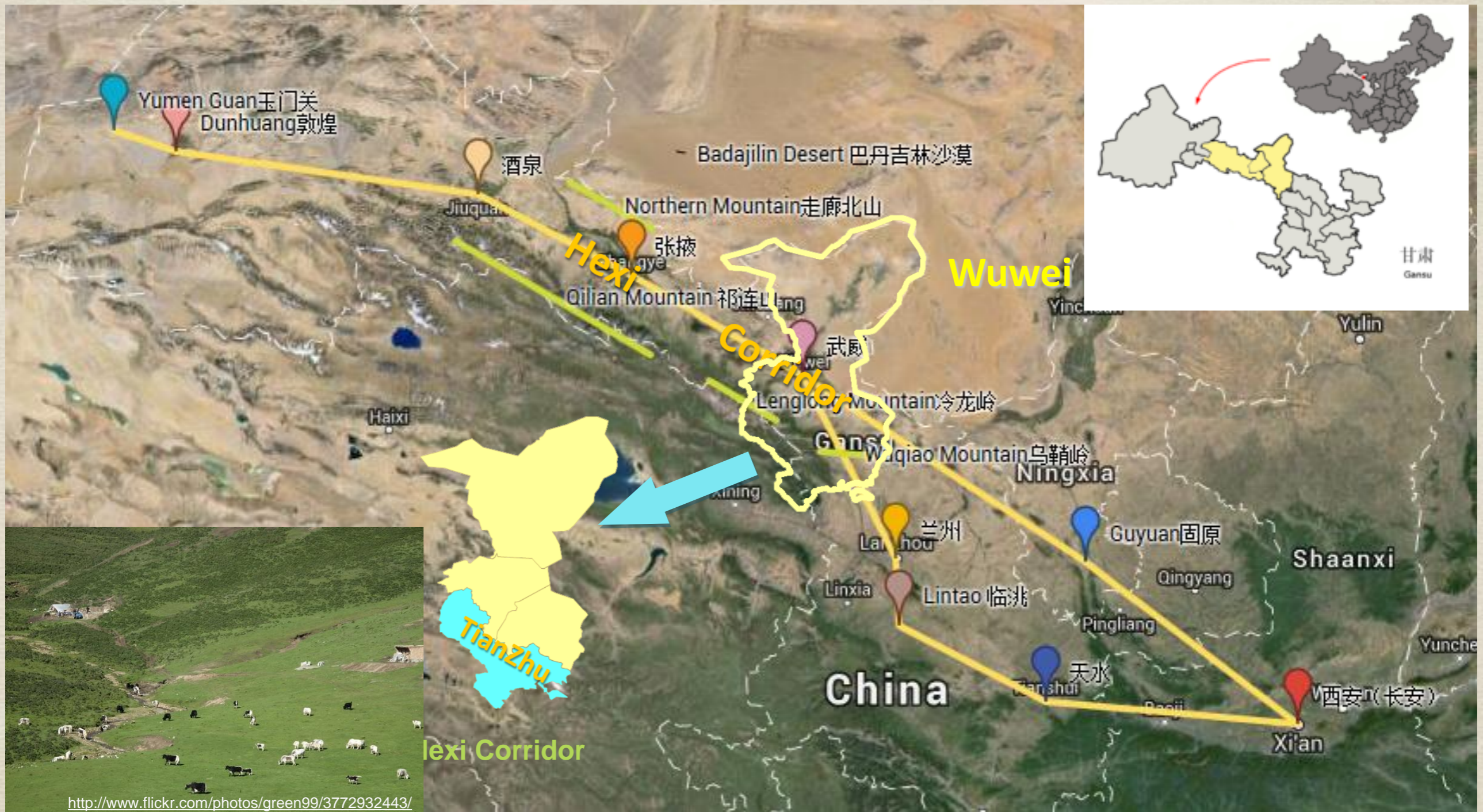
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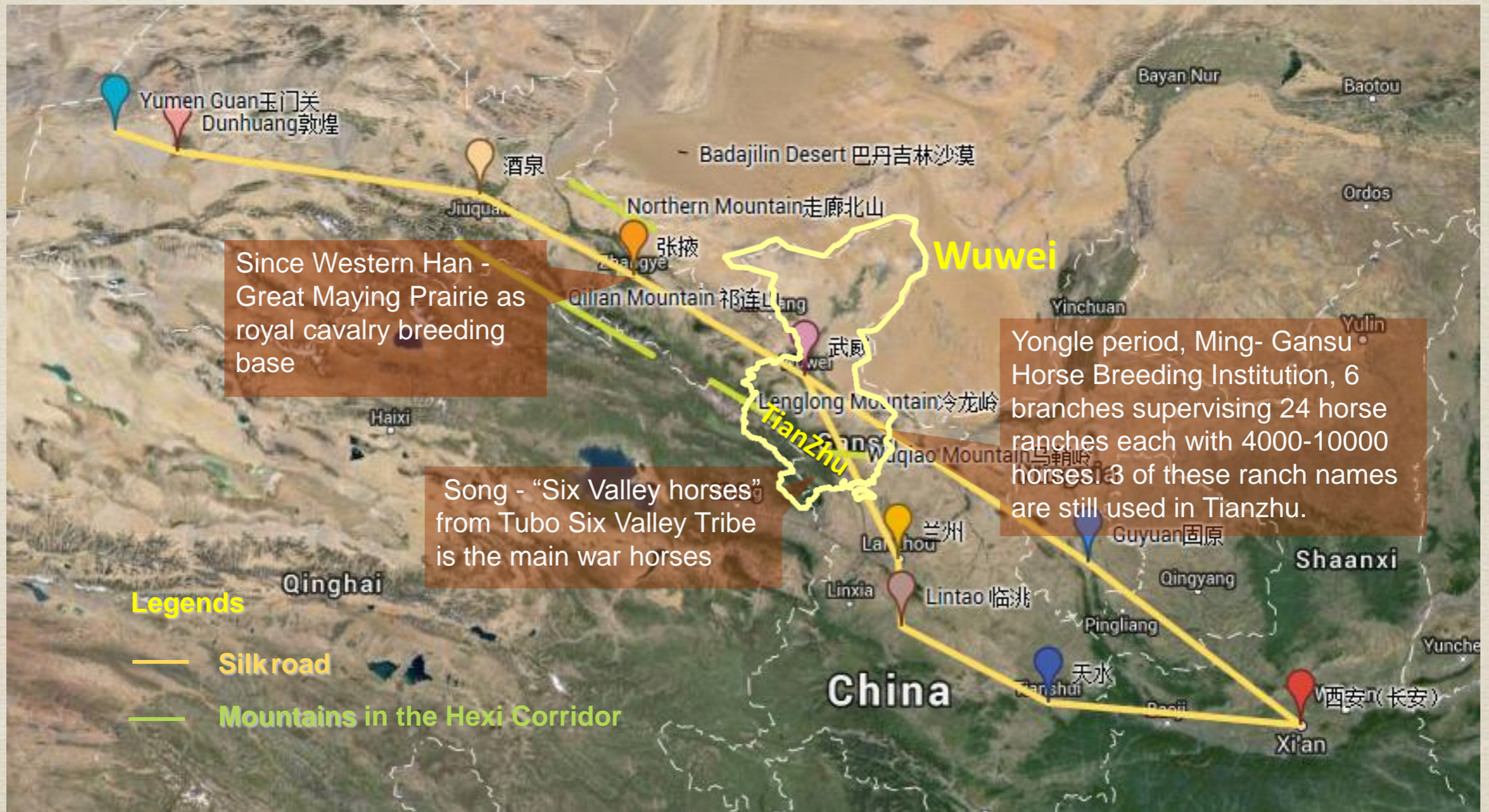
The Local Breed Continued



Forming the Culture - Geography



Forming the Culture - Military Needs

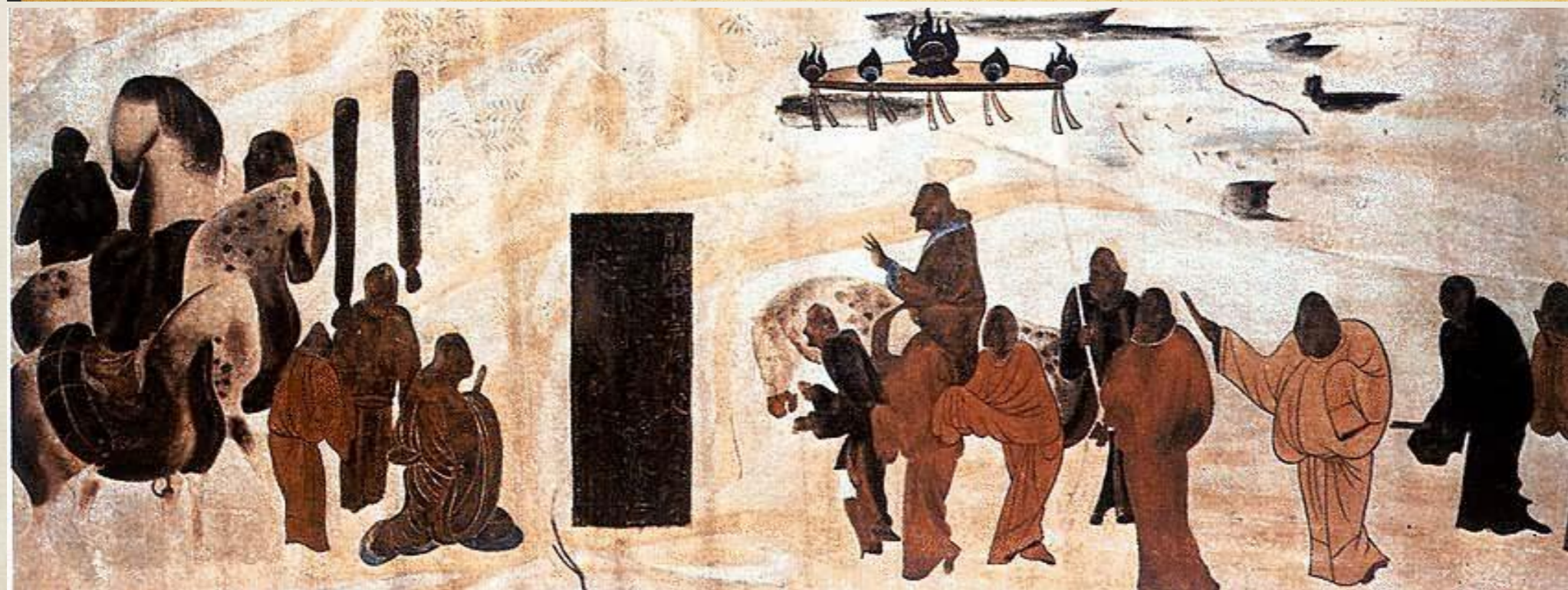
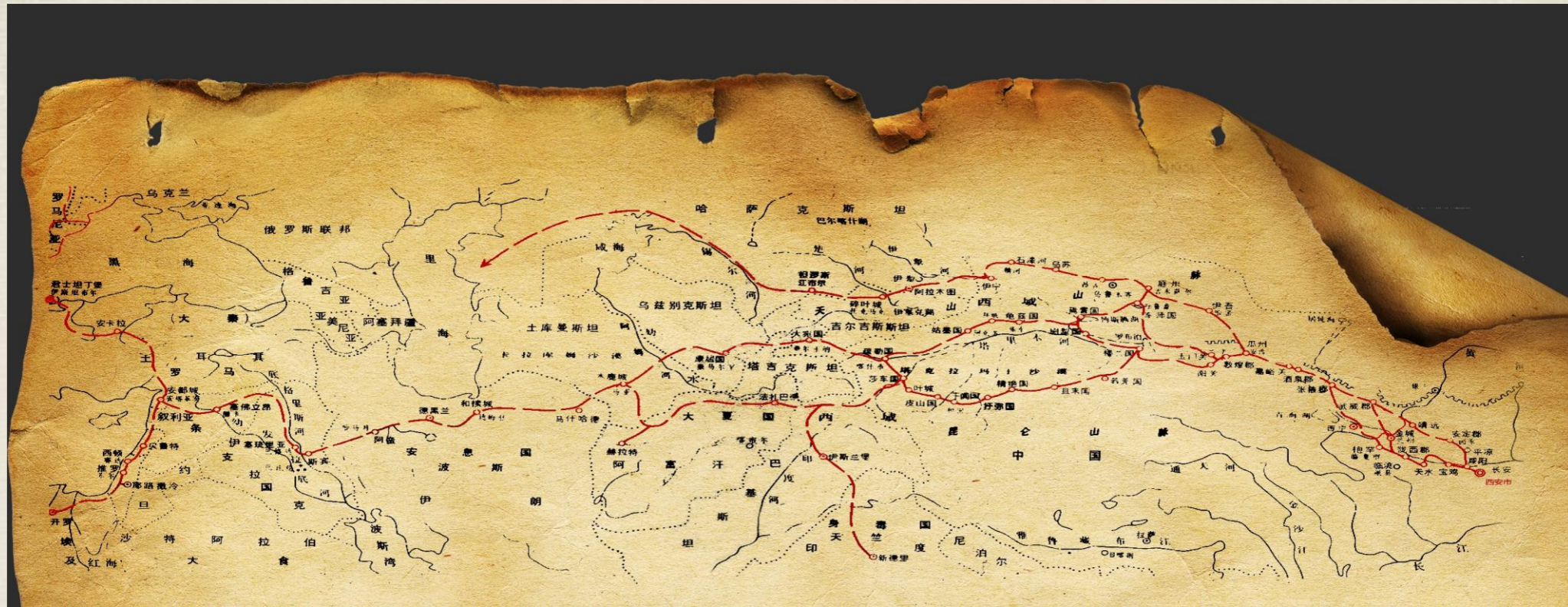


Since Western Han - Great Maying Prairie as royal cavalry breeding base

Song - "Six Valley horses" from Tubo Six Valley Tribe is the main war horses

Yongle period, Ming- Gansu Horse Breeding Institution, 6 branches supervising 24 horse ranches each with 4000-10000 horses. 3 of these ranch names are still used in Tianzhu.

Forming the Culture - Trade Caravan



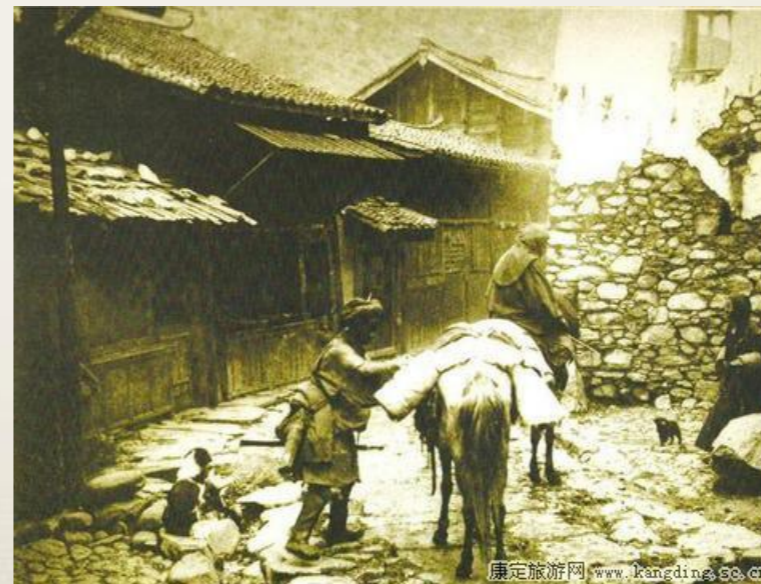
Forming the Culture - Frontier Trade



http://www.flickr.com/photos/ralphrepo_photolog/4079837324/



Eryuan horse market , photo by Jinyan Xu, China Travel



康定旅游网 www.kangding.sc.cn



Tube to make yak-buttered tea
Photo by Guanghui Xie
China Travel

Forming the Culture - Harness



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/melvinto/4724243093/>

Forming the Culture - Courier Horse



The Courier (Tomb brick painting of Wei and Jin Dynasties, Jiayuguan Pass)

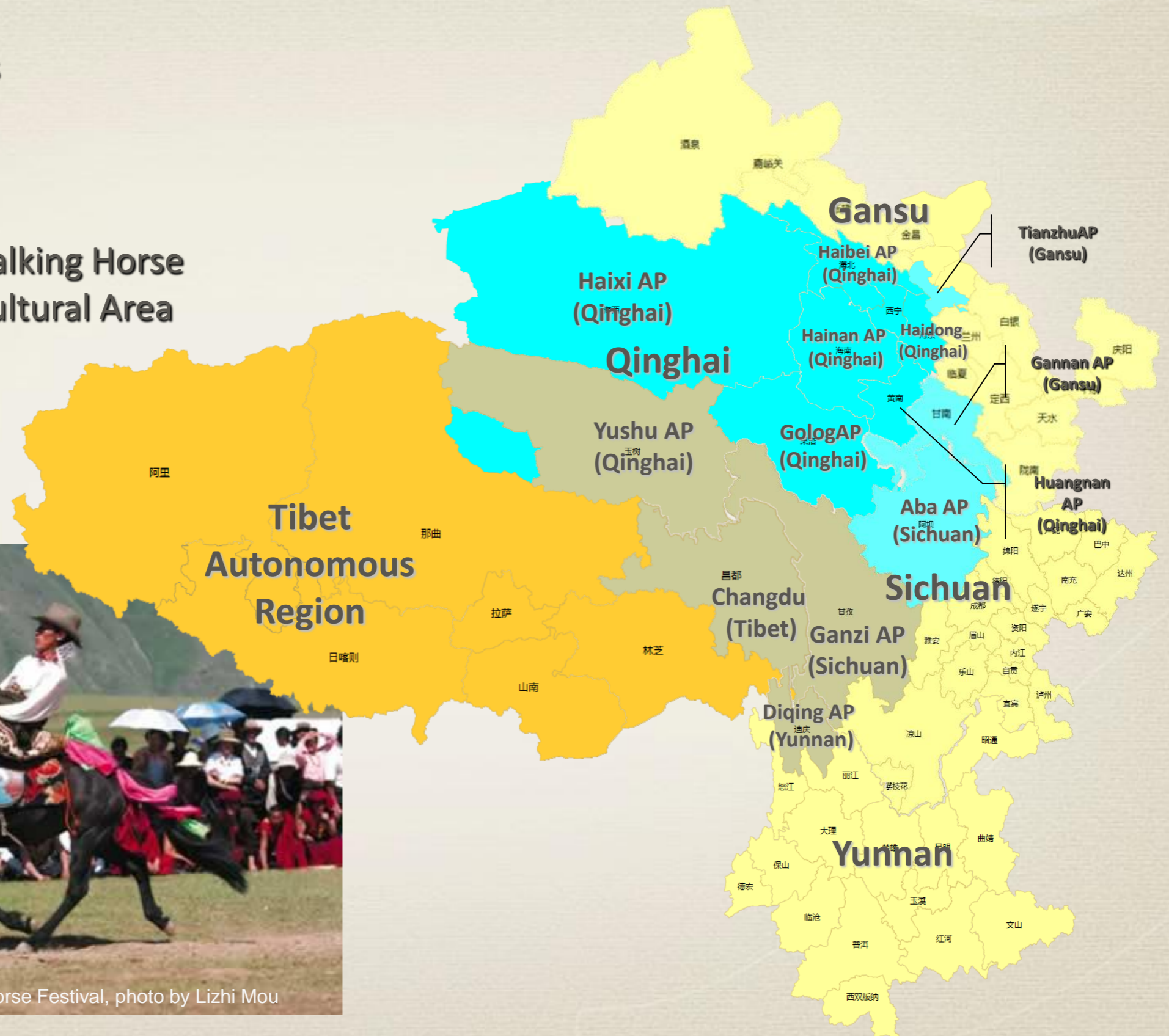
Ethnic Culture and Religion

Ethnic Tibetan Areas

- U-tsang
- Kham
- Amdo

Walking Horse Cultural Area

Some regions in Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang



Ganzi Perfecture Walking Horse Festival, photo by Lizhi Mou

Feb. 2nd Fork Stage Horse Race



Feb. 2nd Fork Stage Horse Race, 2012, photo by Hu Yulong



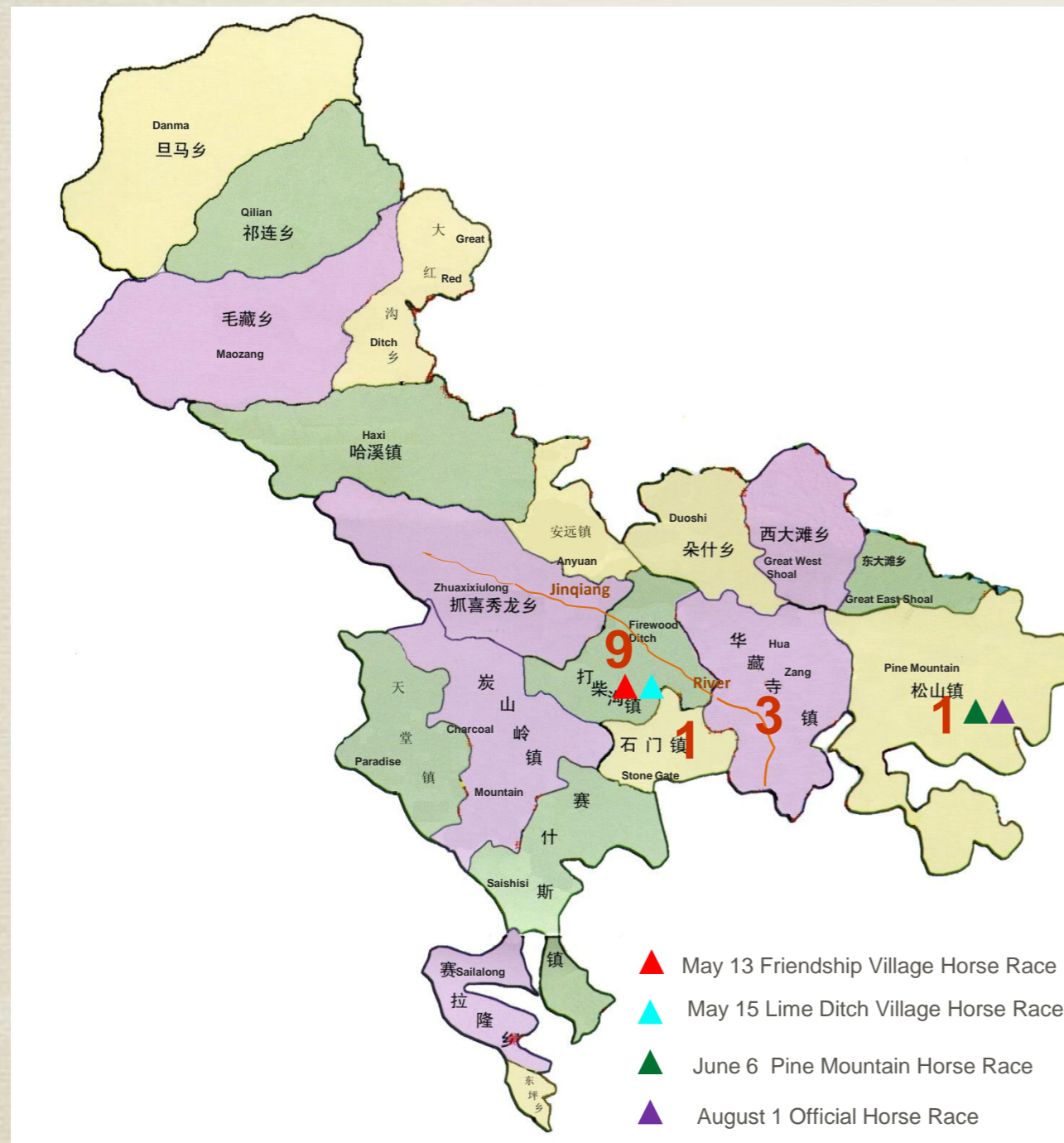
Feb. 2nd Fork Stage Horse Race, 2012, photo by Hu Yulong



Feb. 2nd Fork Stage Horse Race, 2012, photo by Hu Yulong

Our Findings

Our Samples



- 19 interviews, 650 minutes
- 18 interviewees, 14 horse breeders, 1 village chief, 1 Animal Husbandry Bureau official, 1 Culture and Sports Bureau retired official, 1 descendant of a horse shoer.
- 3 village horse races and 1 official horse race

Traditional Walking Horse Culture

Changes since mid-20th Century

Social Changes in this Period

Year	Social Movement Started	Impact on Horse Industry
1950	Socialist transformation	private ranches redeemed
1958	the people's commune	horses bred and used by the production team; family horse breeding gone, horse races and trading stopped
	anti-feudal movement	monasteries destroyed then later reopened in 1980s. Horse breeding by monasteries gone
1966-1976	Cultural Revolution	
1985-1987	household contract regarding farmland, livestock, and grassland established	Family horse farm, horse races and horse trading resumed.
2000	urbanization of small towns	?
	Farming: vegetables, grapes, mushrooms	
	Animal husbandry: white yak farming and industrial chain; pasture management, barn feeding, fattening feeding, forage grass industry	
	Tibetan wine and medicine industries	
	Eco-tourism: one National Forest Park established, and one Tourism Festival started	

Challenge 1 – Shrinking of the Production

- 1980 total horse # 24,000 => 2010 total horse # 8744, Tianzhu walking horse #4500 => 2013 Tianzhu walking horse # 2000+
- Central production area: 3 towns compared with 13 historically. Firewood Ditch Town counts for more than 50% of the production.

Cause - Harness market



- Modernization - use for grazing, cart-pulling, plowing, riding gone



- Degradation of grasslands, and modern animal husbandry: barn feeding and fattening feeding. E.g. Pine Mountain Town



- Alternatives means of livelihood (farming, cattle, sheep, pig husbandry). E.g. Hua Zang Temple town vs. Firewood Ditch Town

Challenge 2 of Sports and Leisure Riding Market

2003-2013, 5k – over 70k Yuan, 14 times . Profit of a common walking horse 10k-30k Yuan. Driven by:

- Walking horse cultural area is better off: “(Qilian, Qinghai) each family raises one to two thousand sheep, four to five hundred heads of cattle” “(Daofu, Ganzi) rely on cordyceps sinensis, tricholoma matsutake and herbs” (Hu Wanliang, 018)
- Rising of equestrian sports in China since 2000

Challenges of Sports and Leisure Riding Market

- Management in branding:

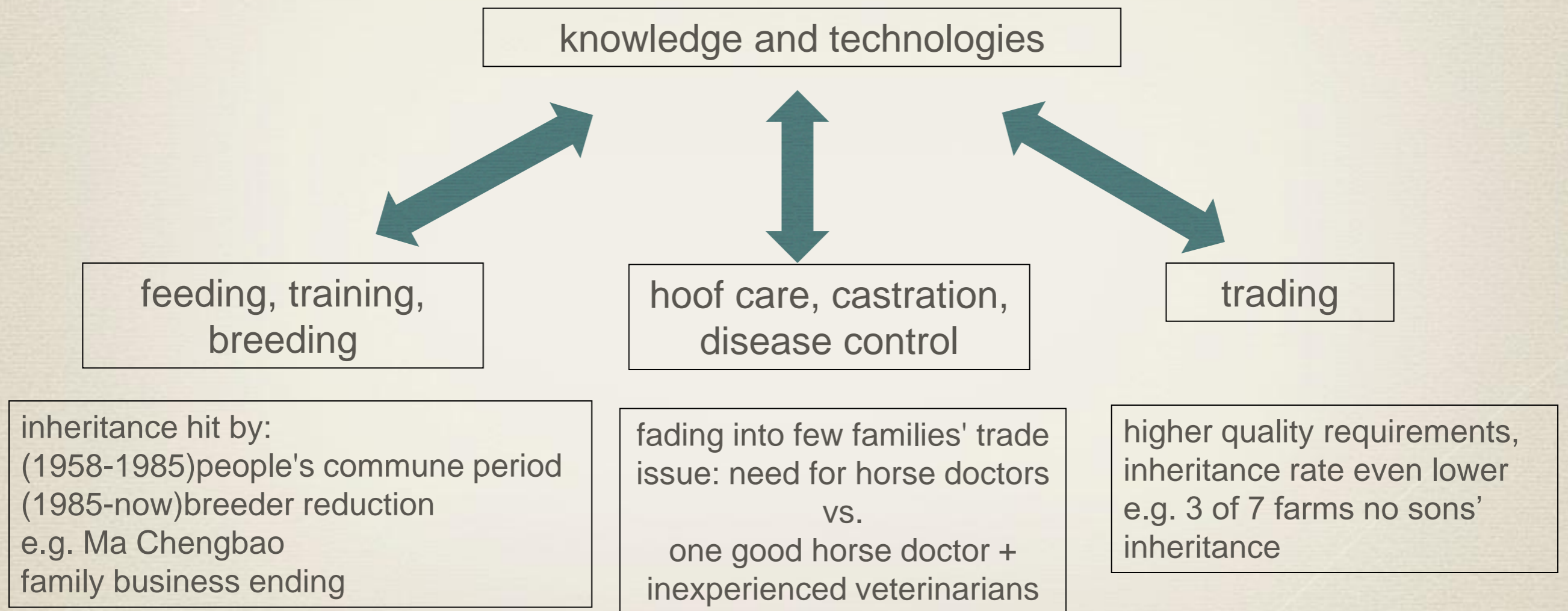


- Degradation and weakness of the breed – conservation and improvement barely supported by the government
- Sightseeing riding – need recreational equestrian to develop

Challenge 3 – Transformation of Horse Races

- Since 1985, horse races: folk fairs and festival fading, though blessing, horse trading/exchange functions remain
- Since 2001, Tianzhu government intervenes -“Culture is a stage where economy is the real show”. On the County Day, August 1, a county horse race together with the Tourism Festival for 7-8 days (not annually)
- Pros: 1) more resources; 2) connected with tourism; 3) byproduct – Tianzhu Walking Horse Association
- Cons: removal of traditional religious and cultural practices (Lunar festival date, ritual, rewarding the top 13) => oral tradition and folk custom in jeopardy

Challenge 4 – Inheritance and Evolution of Technologies



Evolution of Technologies

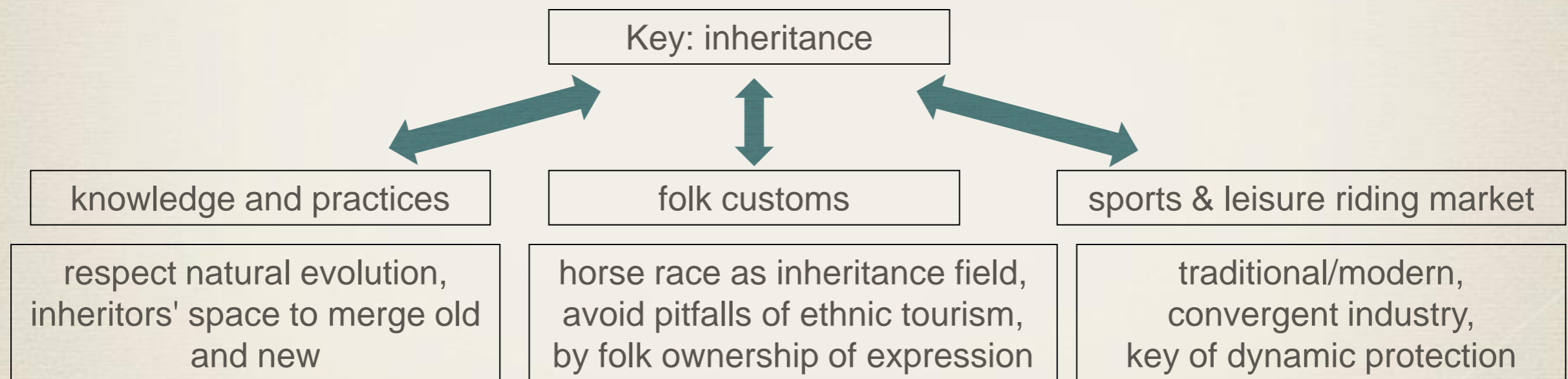
- Driven by sports and leisure riding market- modern and (inter)nationalized
- Signs:
 - Large-scale horse farms, share-holding farms emerging, modern enterprise management & operation.
 - "distant shopping" approach - a primitive form of e-commerce
- Forseeable:
 - Genealogy database of horses, periodic horse appraisal, biotechnological conservation and improvement;
 - E-commerce assisted horse trading to break market isolation and tap into a vast market.

On Protecting and Developing Walking Horse Culture

Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection

Protect the ecological environment in a dynamic and integral fashion:

- 1. Investigation, Documentation and Research-Basis
- 2. Plan and Design, Guidance and Regulation

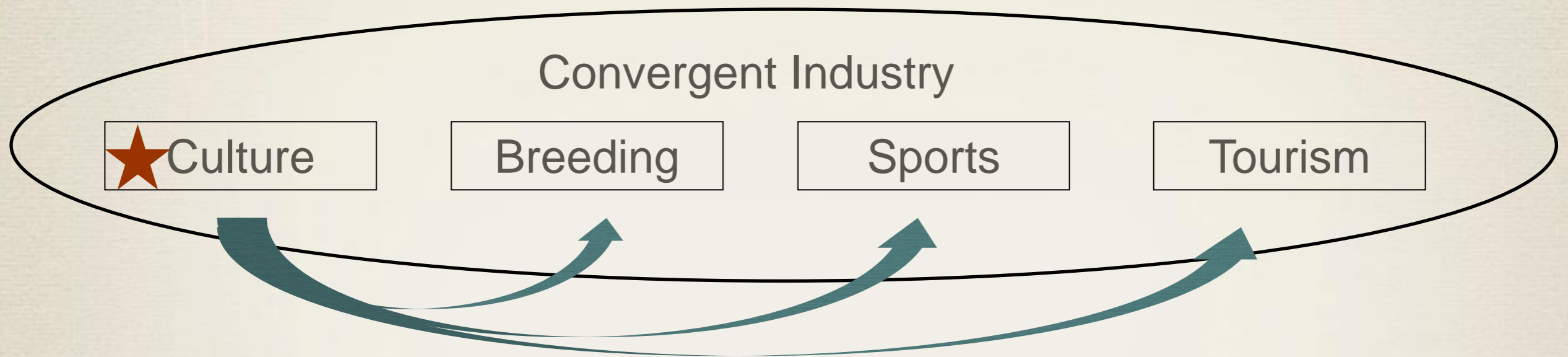


- 3. Dissemination of Culture and Education

key: the public, esp. youth, and local communities, to understand and possibly experience the culture's past and today, and draw wisdom from the tradition and its evolution

Building Convergent Industry

Protecting the culture and its ecological environment



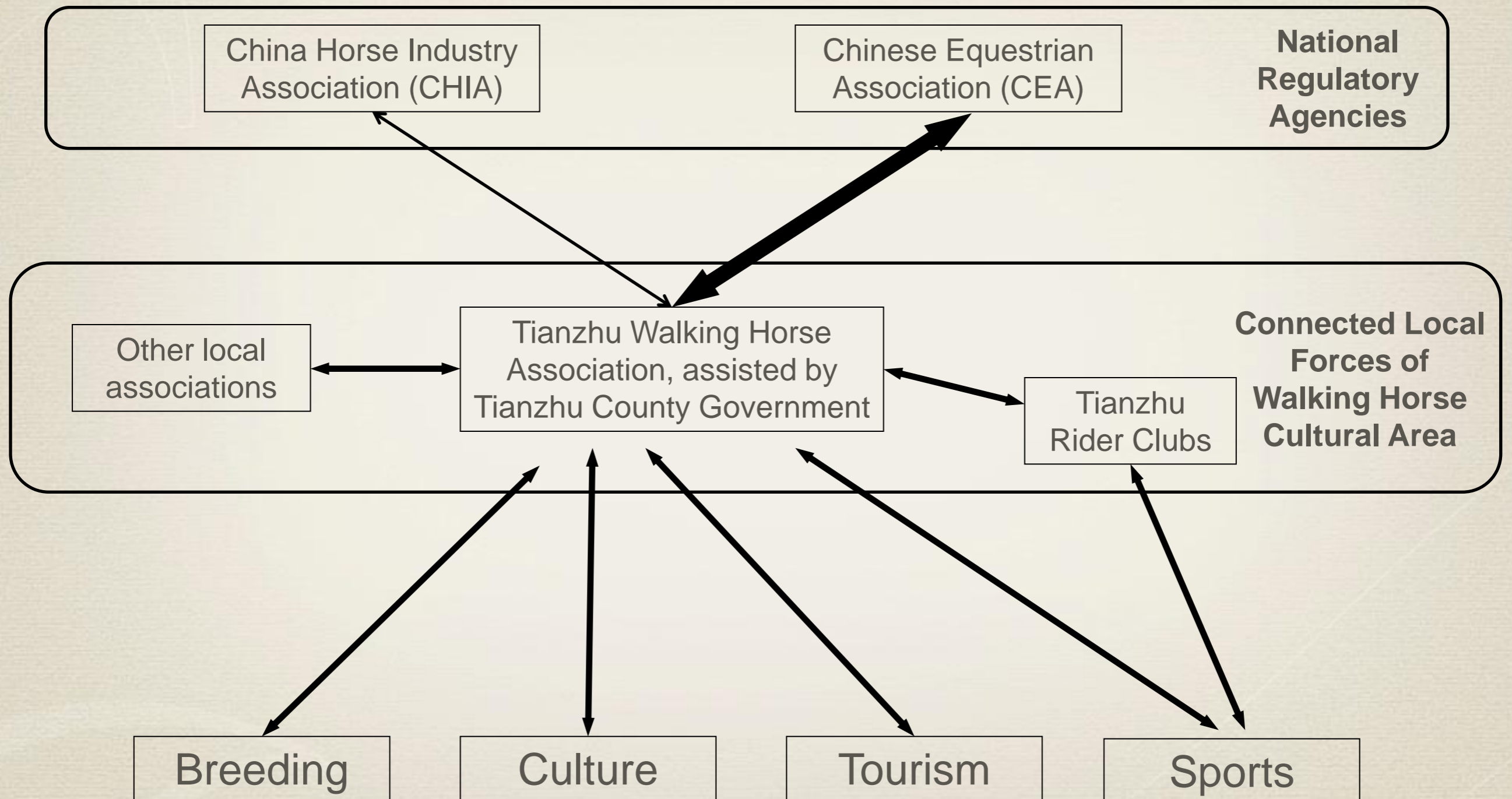
Key: Drive and management by industry association

More functionalities besides 3 aspects of cultural protection:

- + building walking horse related sports system
- + cultivating the culture of leisure riding
- + building industry-related information infrastructure
- + linking the government, NGO and commercial organizations

Reference: International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations (FEIF)

Get the Structure Right



Looking back on this research process, we got the following experience/lessons:

Reflections

Role of Oral History in Minority Culture Collection

Two-fold: qualitative (case) surveys and personal stories/feelings collection

As qualitative (case) surveys

- Issue 1: “surface” and “points” vs. lacking of statistical data (oral history as pilot survey)
- Issue 2: sampling effectiveness vs. get interviewees through personal network

As personal stories/feelings collection

- Issue 3: glimpse of the cultural richness vs. revealing to the full

Target-specific Interview Techniques

- Group interview with middleman preferred for the first interview
- Create the situational atmosphere for in-depth narrative

Jigsaw with Literature/survey Lacking

- Interview and background research alternating

E.g. Tianzhu walking horse hot-sale regions => walking horse cultural area

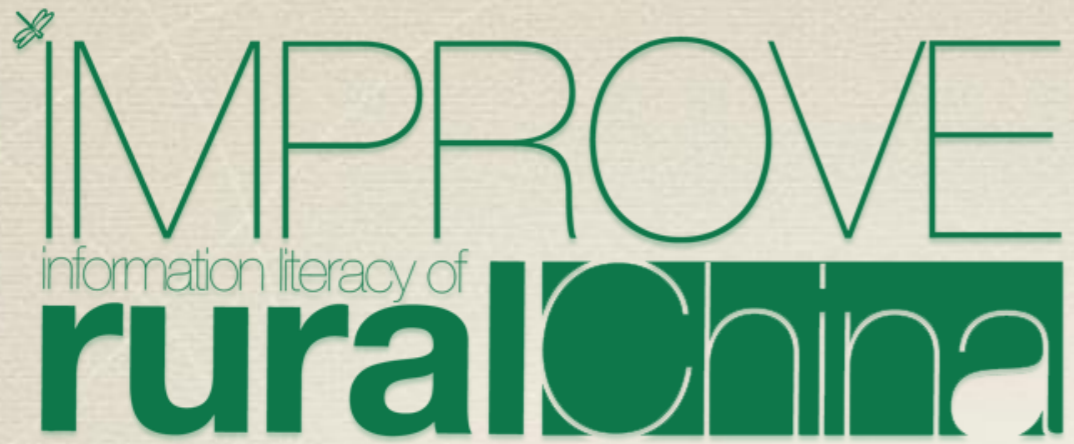
weak management of walking horse industry =>
management mechanism of the convergent industry

- Several key interviews to establish the framework of a module - Get'em first!

Questions

- When oral history needs to construct both “surface” and “points”,
 - Q1: How to effectively use oral history for the survey?
 - Q2: How to effectively chose samples (points) when constructing "surface"? How to overcome the limitation of personal network?
- Q3: Tips to get in-depth narrative when the interviewees are reserved? (How to get that "telling a story" mode?)
- Q4: How to make the best of in-depth stories? (the pain of "stopping here")
- Q5: **How to advance our research further? How to make real impact?**

Q4 and Q5 related to challenge: archiving, sharing, and giving back to communities



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