

Jade Objects Buried with the Tombs and the Tomb Hierarchy of Yue Nobles in Zhejiang During the Late Spring and Autumn Period to the Early Warring States Period

Tiantian Shi

*Department of Cultural Relics and Museum Studies, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, China
15067501796@163.com*

Abstract. In the late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period, an era rife with transgression of ritual norms, the number of dragon-shaped jade huang pendants and dragon-shaped jade pendants unearthed from Tomb D14M5 at Longba in Anji exceeded those found in the second-rank tombs. However, from the three perspectives of local jade burial systems, other burial artifacts, and the jade objects themselves, this numerical superiority cannot be defined as a transgression of ritual hierarchy. It is inferred that the discrepancy between the hierarchy reflected by the buried jade objects and the hierarchy indicated by the tomb structure may be related to the prominent wealth attribute of jade objects under the custom of extravagant burials.

Keywords: Yue noble tombs, tomb hierarchy, jade object hierarchy

1. Introduction

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, it was common for the aristocratic class to use utensils, ceremonial weapons and other items that did not conform to the established ritual norms, a practice referred to as "ritual transgression". Scholars such as Xu Dongshu [1], Li Lingling [2], Song Yin [3], and Tan Xiao [4] have analyzed the phenomenon of the collapse of rituals reflected behind such transgressions from the perspectives of historical documents, musical instruments, and the contents of bronze tripods. Research on the transgression of burial artifacts during this period is mostly found in archaeological reports of relevant tombs. A large number of archaeological materials, including Tomb No.1 of the Chu State in Huangmei, Hubei [5], Tomb No.1 of the Qin Duke in Fengxiang, Shaanxi [6], and the Ying State Cemetery in Pingdingshan, Henan [7], demonstrate that the configuration of burial artifacts in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods exceeded the hierarchy that the tomb occupants were entitled to. Overall, existing research results have focused on regions concentrated with vassal states such as the Central Plains, Shandong, and Hubei, with an emphasis on musical instruments and bronze ritual vessels among burial artifacts, while the southeastern border areas have received insufficient attention.

The Yue State was one of the major vassal states in the southeastern border region during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods. Unlike the Central Plains region and other vassal states, the Yue State did not have the burial tradition of interring bronze vessels. However,

influenced by local cultural traditions, jade objects occupied a high status among the burial artifacts of Yue noble tombs. Typical jade types such as dragon-shaped jade huang pendants and dragon-shaped jade pendants can reflect the identity and hierarchy of the tomb occupants. Against the backdrop of the collapse of rituals and moral principles, did the jade objects buried in Yue tombs exhibit the phenomenon of ritual transgression?

Zhejiang was an important region under the rule of the Yue State, where a number of noble tombs have been discovered. The late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period was an era when the Yue State flourished in national power and expanded its territory, as well as a period marked by chaotic ritual systems and frequent occurrences of ritual transgression. This paper selects the Yue noble tombs in Zhejiang dating from this period as the research object, investigates the relationship between the buried jade objects, the tomb hierarchy and the identity of the tomb occupants, and attempts to analyze the unique local burial culture reflected by the buried jade objects under the influence of the historical background and burial traditions.

2. The jade burial tradition of yue nobles and typical buried jade objects

During the Pre-Qin Period, the custom of burying jade objects prevailed in the Yue State. As Zhang Min pointed out, "buried jade objects are one of the indicative elements of Yue noble tombs" [8]. Jade objects have been discovered in most of the archaeologically excavated Yue noble tombs. In tombs dating from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the early Spring and Autumn Period, such as the Western Zhou tomb at Xiaorenjian in Huangyan, Tomb D1M11 at Laohushan in Yuyao, the Western Zhou tomb at Xishandadunding in Quzhou, Tomb D406 at Bianshan in Changxing, and the Zhou Dynasty mound tomb at the Dongyang Service Area, jade huang pendants, jade jue pendants and various other jade ornaments have been unearthed.

By sorting out the tombs with jade objects unearthed from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the early Spring and Autumn Period, it can be found that these tombs were neither the largest in chamber scale nor the richest in burial artifacts. For example, at Mound No.1 at Laohushan in Yuyao [9], Tomb M11, which yielded jade jue pendants, was a shallow earthen pit tomb furnished with only one piece of proto-porcelain dou stemmed bowl. Among the 34 stone-chamber mound tombs excavated at Bianshan in Changxing [10], no jade objects were found in Tomb D429, which was the largest in scale, located at the main peak and contained the most burial artifacts, whereas a jade huang pendant was discovered in Tomb D406. It is evident that from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the early Spring and Autumn Period, there were no clear institutional norms governing jade burial in Yue tombs.

By the Warring States Period, however, at the Hongshan Yue tomb cluster in Wuxi [11], the extra-large Tomb Qiuchengdun was accompanied by a large number of dragon-shaped jade huang pendants and dragon-shaped jade pendants; the large Tomb Laohudun contained jade objects with transformed dragon patterns; and the small Tombs Caojiafen and Zoujiadun each had only one bi-shaped jade pendant. Buried jade objects thus became one of the indicative elements for dividing tomb hierarchy, with the hierarchy of jade objects corresponding to the hierarchy of tombs. Zhang Min classified and sorted out the buried jade objects from the Hongshan Yue noble tombs in Wuxi, identifying types such as dragon-shaped huang pendants, dragon-and-phoenix-shaped huang pendants, cloud-patterned huang pendants, dragon-head-shaped huang pendants, panchi-dragon-patterned bi-shaped jade pendants, grain-patterned ring-shaped jade pendants, twisted-thread-patterned ring-shaped jade pendants, openwork dragon-patterned bi-shaped jade pendants, and double-dragon tube-shaped jade pendants. Meanwhile, Zhang Min argued that among the buried jade objects, huang-shaped jade pendants and bi-shaped jade pendants, as formal ornaments,

represented the identity and hierarchy of the tomb occupants during their lifetime, and that huang-shaped jade pendants in particular bore more pronounced hierarchical significance [8].

What, then, was the situation of jade objects buried in Yue tombs during the intermediate period of the late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period? Through statistics, the author found that during this period, the buried jade objects in Yue tombs had already developed relatively fixed shapes and decorative patterns. In terms of shape, huang-shaped jade pendants and bi-shaped jade pendants occupied a central position among the buried jade objects. In terms of decorative patterns, dragon motifs and variant dragon patterns such as grain patterns and twisted thread patterns were commonly seen. Overall, dragon-shaped jade huang pendants and dragon-shaped jade pendants should be regarded as the typical artifacts interred in Yue noble tombs during this period.

Did the dragon-shaped jade huang pendants and dragon-shaped jade pendants from the late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period possess the function of indicating tomb hierarchy, similar to the formal jade ornaments of the Warring States Period? To answer this question, it is necessary to conduct a hierarchical study of the six selected tombs.

Table 1. Statistics of buried artifacts from Yue noble tombs of the late spring and autumn period to the early warring states period

Tomb	Tomb Structure	Mound Scale (m)	Tomb Passage Shape	Tomb Length (m)	Buried Jade Objects		Preservation Condition
					Huang-shaped Jade Pendants	Bi-shaped Jade Pendants	
Shaoxing Yinshan M1	Mound Tomb (timber-paved on flat ground)	?	"A"-shaped	100	?	?	Looted
Dongyang Qianshan D2M1	?	36×26×4.7	"A"-shaped	22.12	1 phoenix-head-shaped, 13 floral-tooth-shaped	27	Intact
Anji Longshan D141M1	Mound Tomb	50×42×8	"A"-shaped	≈25	1 standing-bird dragon-shaped, 1 dragon-shaped	1 twisted-thread-patterned	Looted
Changxing Bizishan M1	Mound Tomb	32×18×3.7	"A"-shaped	21.8	2 cloud-patterned	2 grain-patterned	Intact
Anji Longba D14M5	Vertical Pit Tomb	?	Rectangular	≈9.68	2 snake-dragon-shaped, 3 dragon-shaped, 2 cloud-patterned	9 twisted-thread-patterned	Intact
Shangyu Fenghuangshan M3	Vertical Pit Tomb	?	Rectangular	≈7.57	-	1 plain	Intact

Note: Tomb length = Chamber length + Tomb passage length

3. Tomb hierarchy division

The excavation of the Hongshan Yue noble cemetery in Wuxi first revealed the existence of distinct hierarchical differences among Yue noble tombs. Based on mound scale, tomb structure and burial artifacts, the archaeological report divided the 7 excavated tombs into four ranks [11]. There was a strong correlation between tomb hierarchy and burial artifact hierarchy in the Hongshan tomb cluster, reflecting an obvious hierarchical gradient. Its hierarchy division criteria can serve as an important basis for classifying the hierarchy of Yue noble tombs. However, due to the damage of some tombs and the looting of burial artifacts, using the quantity of burial artifacts as an indicative element is prone to large deviations. Therefore, this paper only takes the tomb scale as the indicative element for tomb hierarchy research. Combined with the tomb scale, the six Yue noble tombs can be divided into three ranks.

There is 1 first-rank tomb, namely Shaoxing Yinshan M1 [12]. The tomb adopted a timber-paved-on-flat-ground structure, with the length and width of the mound exceeding 50 meters, and the tomb length being over 50 meters. In academic circles, there is a basic consensus on the identity of the occupant of Yinshan M1: he was Yunchang, the first king of the Yue State. Among the discovered Yue noble tombs, Yinshan M1 is a rare one equipped with defensive facilities (moats) and a layered rammed mound. "The mound of the Yinshan Yue King's Mausoleum was rammed in layers. Looking at the mound tombs of the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn Periods, their mounds were generally not rammed. Even though some large-scale ones were slightly rammed, none were uniformly layered and rammed as solidly and elaborately as the Yinshan Yue King's Mausoleum." Chen Yuanfu also speculated in his article that "a hall for ancestral worship and other rituals should have been built above the Yinshan Yue King's Mausoleum at that time" [13]. In summary, as a king-level tomb, Yinshan M1 has three distinctive features that set it apart from other noble tombs: defensive facilities, a layered rammed mound, and a ritual hall.

There are 3 second-rank tombs, namely Dongyang Qianshan D2M1 [14], Anji Longshan D141M1 [15], and Changxing Bizishan M1 [16]. All of them have "A"-shaped tomb passages, with the length and width of the mounds ranging from 40 to 50 meters, and the tomb lengths being around 20 meters. The burial artifacts in Dongyang Qianshan D2M1 are all jade and stone objects, including some semi-finished products and raw jade materials. For example, a set of artifacts numbered 34 was originally a round lacquered wooden box containing multiple small ornaments, as well as semi-finished products and unprocessed jade and stone materials. Chen Yuanfu inferred that this was a material box for processing jade ornaments, and that the tomb occupant was likely a nobleman in charge of jade production during his lifetime. In the external artifact pit of Anji Longshan D141M1, bronze-imitating hard pottery ritual vessels and musical instruments such as hanging bells were buried as accompanying objects, and 2 pieces of lacquered wooden armors were found inside the tomb, indicating that the tomb occupant held a high status and should have been an important military leader commanding troops in battles. Changxing Bizishan M1 is quite similar to Anji Longshan D141M1: a large number of bronze-imitating proto-porcelain and hard pottery musical instruments were unearthed from its external artifact pit, suggesting that the tomb occupant was also a nobleman of high status. In conclusion, the occupants of the second-rank tombs should be high-ranking nobles who held important positions in the state, such as overseeing jade production and military affairs.

There are 2 third-rank tombs, namely Anji Longba D14M5 [17] and Shangyu Fenghuangshan M3 [18]. They have rectangular tomb passages, with the tomb lengths being around 10 meters. Bronze-imitating pottery ritual vessels such as pottery weights were unearthed from Anji Longba D14M5, indicating that the tomb occupant had a relatively high social status during his lifetime and should be a Yue noble. A jade spear inscribed with the name "King Buguang of Yue" was excavated from Shangyu Fenghuangshan M3. It is similar in shape to the stone spears inscribed with "King Buguang of Yue" unearthed in Liqing Town, Shaoxing in 1957 and Pingshui Town, Shaoxing in 1973, but this similarity alone cannot confirm the identity of the tomb occupant. In addition, a bronze sword and eight bronze arrowheads were also found in the tomb. The author believes that the tomb occupant should have been a general of relatively high rank, and the jade spear may have been a reward from King Buguang of Yue. Overall, the third-rank tombs have no attached accompanying pits and no buried musical or ritual vessels. Compared with the occupants of the first two ranks of tombs, the identity of the third-rank tomb occupants was relatively lower.

4. Hierarchical discrepancy and its causes

Looking back at the previous two chapters, the author found a noteworthy phenomenon: although Anji Longba D14M5 is a third-rank tomb, the quantity and variety of its buried dragon-shaped jade huang pendants and dragon-shaped jade pendants exceed those of the second-rank tombs such as Dongyang Qianshan D2M1 and Anji Longshan D141M1, resulting in a contradictory discrepancy between the tomb structure hierarchy and the buried jade object hierarchy. From the perspective of the historical background, the transgression of burial artifact hierarchy was a common phenomenon in the late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period. However, during this period, the Yue State had relatively limited exchanges with the Central Plains and surrounding vassal states, and the types and combinations of its burial artifacts featured distinct local cultural traditions. This prompts the question: can the hierarchical discrepancy between the buried jade objects and the tomb structure in the Yue State be defined as ritual transgression? Overall, an analysis can be conducted from three perspectives: local jade burial systems, other burial artifacts, and the jade objects themselves.

First of all, from the perspective of local jade burial systems, there were no clear hierarchical norms governing jade burial in the Yue State before the late Spring and Autumn Period. Ritual transgression is defined as behavior that violates established norms. In the first chapter, the author analyzed the situation of buried jade objects in Yue tombs from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the early Spring and Autumn Period and found that there were no clear institutional norms for jade burial in the Yue State during this period. Without established institutions, the concept of ritual transgression is simply inapplicable.

Secondly, from the perspective of other burial artifacts, no phenomenon of inconsistency with the tomb structure hierarchy has been found among other types of artifacts buried in Yue tombs of this period. Taking the proto-porcelain, which was widely buried in Yue tombs during the Western and Eastern Zhou Periods, as an example, the author adopted the research method of Wu Tong [19] to sort out and analyze the proportion of the number of proto-porcelain artifacts to the total number of burial artifacts in Yue tombs of the Western and Eastern Zhou Periods. The results show that from the early Western Zhou Dynasty to the late Spring and Autumn Period, the number of proto-porcelain artifacts buried in Yue tombs continued to increase. A large number of bronze-imitating proto-porcelain ritual vessels were buried in the first-rank and second-rank tombs, whereas such vessels were rarely seen in the third-rank tombs. It is evident that from the perspective of the hierarchy of proto-porcelain ritual vessels, there was no transgression of burial artifact hierarchy in Yue noble tombs during the late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period. It can thus be inferred that the discrepancy between the buried jade objects and the tomb hierarchy cannot be explained by ritual transgression either.

Table 2. Statistics of proto-porcelain artifacts buried in Yue tombs

Period	Burial Status of Proto-porcelain	Tomb Rank						
		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Early Western Zhou to Late Western Zhou	Total number of burial artifacts (pieces)	-	-	41-90	26-40	13-25	6-12	1-5
	Number of buried proto-porcelain artifacts (pieces)	-	-	31-65	19-30	8-18	4-7	0-3
Late Western Zhou to Middle Spring and Autumn	Total number of burial artifacts (pieces)	-	-	71-110	41-70	21-40	11-20	1-10
	Number of buried proto-porcelain artifacts (pieces)	-	-	51-110	26-50	16-25	8-15	0-7

Table 2. (continued)

Late Spring and Autumn to Warring States Period	Total number of burial artifacts (pieces)	>50 0	121- 500	81- 120	61- 80	41- 60	21- 40	1- 20
	Number of buried proto-porcelain artifacts (pieces)	>20 0	61-200	51-60	41- 50	21- 40	11- 20	1- 10

Note: This table is quoted from On the Extravagant Burial Custom of Yue Tombs in the Western and Eastern Zhou Periods.

Finally, focusing on the jade objects themselves, the author found that the jade objects buried in tombs such as Anji Longshan D141M1 and Changxing Bizishan M1 are of pure texture with few impurities and feature exquisite carving with smooth lines. On the contrary, the jade objects unearthed from Longba D14M5 are of inferior quality with impure color and many impurities, and their carving is relatively simplistic and shoddy. It is thus clear that although Longba D14M5 surpassed other tombs in the quantity and variety of buried formal jade ornaments, it still complied with strict hierarchical norms in terms of jade quality and craftsmanship sophistication. This indicates that the jade burial system of the Yue State during the Western and Eastern Zhou Periods did not solely measure the identity and status of the tomb occupant by the quantity of jade objects; the texture quality and craftsmanship sophistication of the jade objects themselves were also important criteria for judging the tomb occupant's hierarchy. It also reflects from a side that the hierarchical core of the Yue burial culture regarding the use of jade objects remained stable.

In conclusion, the author argues that the discrepancy between the hierarchy of buried jade objects and the hierarchy of tomb structure in Yue noble tombs of the late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period cannot be defined as ritual transgression. The existence of such discrepancy may be related to the prominent wealth attribute of jade objects under the custom of extravagant burials.



Figure 1: The jade dragon - shaped pendant buried with the dead in D141M1 of Longshan, Anji (collected from "The Yue Aristocratic Tombs in Longshan, Anji, Zhejiang")



Figure 2. The jade dragon - shaped pendant buried with the dead in D14M5 of Longba, Anji (collected from "The Excavation Report of the Warring States Tombs in Longba, Anji");



Figure 3. The dragon - shaped jade huang buried with the dead in M1 of Bizishan, Changxing (collected from "The Yue Aristocratic Tombs in Bizishan, Changxing, Zhejiang")



Figure 4. The dragon - shaped jade huang buried with the dead in D14M5 of Longba, Anji (collected from "The Excavation Report of the Warring States Tombs in Longba, Anji")

5. Conclusion and discussion

Focusing on the jade objects buried in Yue noble tombs in Zhejiang during the late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period, this paper discusses three issues. First, it sorts out the situation of buried jade objects in Yue tombs during the Western and Eastern Zhou Periods and finds that there were no clear hierarchical norms for buried jade objects in the Yue State from the Western Zhou Dynasty to the early Spring and Autumn Period. Second, drawing on the hierarchical classification criteria of the Hongshan tomb cluster and taking the tomb scale as the core element, it divides six tombs including Dongyang Qianshan D2M1 into three ranks and infers the identities of the occupants of different ranks of tombs. Third, from the three perspectives of local jade burial systems, other burial artifacts, and the jade objects themselves, it analyzes that the discrepancy between the hierarchy of buried jade objects and the hierarchy of tomb structure in Yue noble tombs of the late Spring and Autumn Period to the early Warring States Period cannot be defined as ritual transgression, and puts forward the inference that the discrepancy may be caused by the prominent wealth attribute of jade objects.

Nevertheless, this study still has certain limitations. The causes of the hierarchical discrepancy have not been analyzed further, and only the author's conjecture has been put forward. In addition, the research sample only includes a limited number of tombs, which is insufficient in terms of regional coverage and time span, and thus cannot fully represent the jade burial cultural characteristics of the entire Yue State territory and the entire time period of the Western and Eastern Zhou Periods. Future research needs to further expand the sample scope and integrate multidisciplinary research methods to more comprehensively and in-depth reveal the connotation and evolution rules of Yue burial culture.

References

- [1] Xu, D. S. (2009). The System Arrogation and Function of Object Making in Dongzhou. *Art & Design*, 7, 82-83.
- [2] Li, L. L. (2016). From Music to Rites: On the Adherence to and Transgression of Ritual Proprieties by Zheng Music in the Spring and Autumn Period. *Journal of Zhengzhou University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, 3, 93-97.

- [3] Song, Y. (2018). Food in Ding Tripods and Social Order: A Case Study of Jin-lineage Tombs in Spring and Autumn Period. *Archaeology and Cultural Relics*, 2, 60-66.
- [4] Tan, X. (2020). Glorifying Arrogation: The Political Origin of the Trend of Thought in Seeking "Fu" During Pre-Qin Era. *Journal of the History of Political Thought*, 2, 56-70+197-198.
- [5] Hubei Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, Huangmei County Museum. (2021). Excavation Report on Tomb M1 at the Liuyue Cemetery in Huangmei County, Hubei Province. *Jiangnan Archaeology*, 4, 41-63.
- [6] Shaanxi Yongcheng Archaeological Team. (1987). Brief Report on the Second Drilling of Fengxiang Qin Gong Cemetery. *Cultural Relics*, 5, 55-65.
- [7] Henan Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, Pingdingshan Administration of Cultural Relics, School of History and Culture, Henan University. (2015). Brief Report on the Excavation of Tomb M257 in the Ying State Cemetery, Pingdingshan, Henan. *Huaxia Archaeology*, 3, 9-21.
- [8] Zhang, M. (2011). On the Caste Research of Jades of the Yue State. *Southeast Culture*, 4, 59-66.
- [9] Zhejiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. (2002). Archaeological Report on the Huhangyong Expressway. *Cultural Relics Press*, 48-62.
- [10] Zhejiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. (1993). *Journal of Zhejiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology: 10th Anniversary Commemoration (1980–1990)*. Science Press, 128-169.
- [11] Nanjing Museum, Jiangsu Institute of Archaeology, Cultural Relics Administration Committee of Xishan District, Wuxi City. (2007). Excavation report on the burials of the Yue State at Hongshan. *Cultural Relics Press*.
- [12] Zhejiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, Shaoxing County Administration of Cultural Heritage. (2002). *Yinshan Mausoleum of the Yue King*. Cultural Relics Press.
- [13] Chen, Y. F. (2004). Preliminary Study on the Cemetery System of the Yue King's Mausoleum at Yinshan, Shaoxing. *Southeast Culture*, 3, 21-26.
- [14] Zhejiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, Dongyang Museum. (2008). A Tomb of the Yue State at Qianshan in Dongyang City, Zhejiang. *Cultural Relics*, 7, 4-22+60.
- [15] Zhejiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, Anji County Museum, Zhejiang. (2008). The Aristocratic Tombs of the Yue State at Longshan, Anji, Zhejiang. *Southeast Culture*, 3, 50-60+173+180.
- [16] Zhejiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, Changxing County Museum. (2007). The Aristocrat Tomb of the Yue State Located in Bizi Mount, Changxing County of Zhejiang Province. *Cultural Relics*, 1, 4-21.
- [17] Zhou, Y. Q. (2013). Excavation Report of the Warring States Tombs at Longba, Anji County, Zhejiang. *Cultural Relics of the East*, 3, 16-25+2.
- [18] Shaoxing County Administration of Cultural Heritage. (2002). Warring States Period Timber-Chamber Tomb at Phoenix Mountain, Shaoxing, Zhejiang. *Cultural Relics*, 2, 31-37.
- [19] Wu, T. (2022). Developmental Trajectory of Jade Objects during the Eastern and Western Zhou in the Zhejiang Region and Related Issues. *Archaeology*, 1, 109-120.