

Archaeological Discoveries and Cultural Connotation of Jingchu Tombs

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Abstract. As a branch of Chinese civilization, Chu culture shines with different scenes in the long river of history. Since the birth of Chu culture, Chinese civilization has been divided into two branches: north and south. Chu culture not only includes literature, but more research scholars focus on rich historical materials, mainly focusing on the purpose of the Xiong Family Tomb discovered in the early 21st century. The physical objects of Chu culture prove that Jingzhou, as the core of Chu culture, has a rich cultural heritage. It is worth mentioning that the Jinan City excavated outside Jingzhou is generally considered by archaeology to be the capital of the Chu State, "Yingdu". As a political, economic and cultural center, it has lasted for about 800 years and is the most representative site of Chu culture. This article is based on existing archaeological discoveries, mainly from tombs, explaining the importance of Jingchu tomb culture in Chu culture. By giving examples and comparative explanations, we can analyze the similarities and differences of each tomb in detail, and then explore it. Most of the references come from published papers and archaeological results, and are compared and analyzed based on actual conditions. This paper discovers the similarities and differences between tombs, and unearthed through ritual culture and physical objects, and discusses Chu culture across multiple disciplines.

Keywords: Chu culture, tomb, archeology, history

1. Introduction

In the archaeological world, the research content on Chu culture is not rich: the Ji Nancheng ruins, Mashan tomb group, Baling Mountain tomb group, and Yutai Mountain tomb group constitute a complete Chu culture archaeological system. Among them, Ji Nancheng is called "the largest city in the south", the Baling Mountain tomb group is a high-level aristocratic cemetery in the Chu State, and the Yutai Mountain tomb group is the largest Chu civilian cemetery discovered so far. The archaeological achievements of the Chu tomb in Jingzhou have greatly enriched the academic community's understanding of the social structure, religious beliefs and artistic achievements of the Chu State. The "Confucius's Word" unearthed in the Chu tomb of Wangjiazui and the current version of "The Analects of Confucius" are read in conjunction with the "Analects of Confucius", which shows the spread of Confucianism in Chu during the Warring States Period. The "Classic Prescription Shop" in the Han Shop of Hujia Grassland records 45 traditional prescription techniques, reflecting the combination of Han Dynasty medicine and Chu witch doctor culture. In

terms of artifacts, silk fabrics unearthed in Jingzhou (such as the dragon, phoenix, tiger tattoo embroidery in the Chu Tomb of Mashan) and lacquerware (such as the tiger seat, bird drum set) represent the peak of pre-Qin craftsmanship and reflect the religious aesthetic of the Chu people who "respected phoenixes and venerated redness". These research findings show the richness of Chu culture without exception, providing a large number of physical evidence for the research.

In academic history, the Chu Tomb is the main object of research. Scholars at home and abroad have achieved relatively systematic results in excavation and research on Chu tombs. For example, "Jiangling Chu Tombs", as the foundational report on Chu tomb research, systematically sorted out the shape, combination of burial objects and installment of Chu tombs in Jiangling (now Jingzhou), providing an important standard for Chu culture research. In recent years, with the development of research technology, more attention has been turned to cultural relics protection. For example, unearthed bamboo slips, lacquerware, silk fabrics, etc., dig deep into technical craftsmanship and burial ages, and discuss the social class differentiation and hierarchy of Chu. At the same time, based on archaeological typology and stratigraphy combined with literature verification, multidisciplinary cross-disciplinary cross-disciplinary (such as the application of scientific and technological archaeology in the analysis of burial equipment materials).

This article is based on existing archaeological achievements to further explain the unique charm of Chu culture in all aspects.

2. Archaeological discoveries and types of Jingchu tombs in Jingzhou

The Jingchu tomb group that has been excavated can be roughly divided into high-level tombs, small and medium-sized tombs, and special tombs. This is distinguished by the rank and form of the tomb. At the same time, the shape, coffin system, direction and layout of the tomb further demonstrate the characteristics of the Chu tomb.

2.1. Examples of typical tombs

The first tombs to be given are a group of advanced tombs, such as the Xiong Family Tomb [1]. As the largest and most complete cemetery of the King of Chu discovered so far, the Xiongjia Tomb shows the basic economic and political culture of the Chu Dynasty. According to research, it is speculated that it is the tomb of the King of Chu and his wife during a certain period of the middle and late Warring States Period. The main tomb and the attached tomb show a layout of "same tomb and different caves". It also includes 92 tombs and 40 chariots and horse pits (the maximum pit is 132 meters long, 43 chariots and 164 horses), reflecting the "Son of Emperor's Driving Six" etiquette system. It can be seen that in terms of the ritual system of Chu, it was learned by the Zhou Dynasty, and Chu also inherited the corresponding ritual system. Judging from the unearthed relics, including jade (dragon-shaped pendant, valley-patterned bi), bronze chariots and horse utensils (wrongly controlled by gold and silver), and lacquered wooden utensils (tiger-mounted birds) reflect the Chu royal family's concept of "death is like life". The Xiongjia Tomb has also been unearthed related artifacts that best represent Chu culture today, providing strong evidence for future exploration and development.

The second examples are small and medium-sized tombs. The representative ones are Yutaishan and Jiudian Cemeteries. 558 Chu tombs were excavated in the Yutaishan cemetery, which is the largest Chu civilian tomb group in Chu State. The tombs are small and small, and the burial objects are mainly pottery (li, bowl, bean, and jar). A few tombs are equipped with copper swords or jade rings, reflecting the social stratification of "the difference between scholars and common people".

The Warring States bamboo slips ("Rich Book") were unearthed in Jiudian Cemetery, recording folk divination and taboos in Chu, filling the gap in research on civilian beliefs. The excavation of these tombs provides historical materials for studying the social structure of Chu, the lives of citizens, and the level of economic development of the Chu State. As a material for written records, bamboo slips can be used to judge the cultural development of Chu State through content.

The last characteristic tomb mentioned in this paper is Tianxing Temple M1. Its uniqueness is reflected in the excellent preservation of unearthed bamboo slips and lacquerware. According to archaeological discoveries, it is speculated that the owner of the tomb was "Di Yangjun" in the mid-Warring States Period and was a nobleman of the throne. The tomb-controlling beasts unearthed from the tungsten beasts have unique shapes and superb craftsmanship, which show the Chu people's understanding of tomb culture and their unique craftsmanship [2]. At the same time, the unearth of the tomb-controlling beast also shows the specific manifestation of the "witch" culture of Chu. Academic value is reflected in the content of the bamboo slips, including divination records (such as "The King of the Service is not upright") and dispatches (a list of funeral objects), revealing the aristocratic rituals and witch and ghost culture. The lacquerware unearthed at the same time, the pattern (phoenix bird sways snakes) reflects the religious view of the Chu people's "respecting phoenixes and suppressing snakes".

2.2. Tomb shape classification

First, start with the vertical tomb of the earth pit. As a basic tomb shape, it accounts for more than 90% of the Chu tombs that have been discovered, and it is particularly differentiated by rank. Among them, the civilian tombs are presented as single tomb pits with no steps, like the tomb of M354 in Taishan [3]. The noble tombs are manifested as having one to fourteen steps and tomb passages, and the number of steps is positively related to the nobility of identity.

The second is the coffin system, which also reflects obvious hierarchical manifestations. The tombs of civilians are generally single coffins or no coffins, and are only wrapped in straw mats. The scholar-officials who went to the next level had a coffin and a coffin. Above the throne, multiple coffins show noble identities. For example, the main coffin of Xiong Family Tomb has three coffins and two coffins, and multiple coffins are related to the identity level.

The direction and layout clearly show the Chu people's emphasis on tomb culture. In 80% of Chu tombs, the head of the coffin is facing the east, which is in line with the worship of the sun god in "Chu Ci" that "the sun is about to come out in the east", expressing the worship of totem. A few coffins facing south or north may be related to differences in ethnic origins, such as the tombs facing east Hubei and Chu face south. In terms of spatial concepts, high-level tombs present a "central axis" layout, manifested as the main tomb being in the middle, and the chariot and horse pits and burial tombs are symmetrically distributed. The civilian tombs are dense and disorderly, reflecting the gathering of blood-related families.

The hierarchical and cultural expression of Jingchu tombs show the distinctive characteristics of Chu culture, providing a three-dimensional framework for studying Chu society.

3. The cultural connotation of Jingchu tomb

The Jingchu tomb is not only an embodiment of the Chu people's funeral concept of "death is like life" but also a material carrier of the spiritual core of the Chu culture. Through the shape of tombs, the combination of burial objects and special burial customs, the Chu people's cosmic view, religious beliefs and social structure can be systematically revealed.

3.1. Chu culture characteristics in burial customs

Judging from the burial objects, the first thing is the tomb-guarding beast that exclusively occupies a room in the museum. As the most iconic burial object of Chu tomb, it is usually composed of deer antlers, beast heads and square mounts (such as the double-headed tomb-controlling beast unearthed from Tianxingguan M1), and its function of "leading souls to heaven" echoes the "Soul Return" in "Chu Ci·Soul Conquering". The second is the symbol of Jingzhou's cultural tourism today, the tiger seats and the phoenix drum sets. As a typical Chu musical instrument, the shape of the phoenix bird stepping on the tiger intuitively reflects the totem worship of the Chu people of "respecting the phoenix and suppressing the tiger". The phoenix bird symbolizes the sun god, and the tiger represents the Western God of Death, reflecting the duality of life and death [2].

Let's look at the unearthed silk fabrics, represented by the silk fabrics of Tomb No. 1 of Mashan, including 35 unearthed clothes, including "dragon, phoenix, tiger tattoos", "field hunting pattern belts", etc. The composition of dragons and tigers fighting each other and phoenixes flying in the patterns not only shows the aesthetic of the Chu people's "shocking and beautiful" and also implies the religious meaning of "leading the soul to ascend to heaven". Its embroidery technology (0.1 mm wire diameter) represents the peak of pre-Qin textile technology.

As the most important representative of Chu culture, lacquerware has been unearthed in Jingzhou tombs. Lacquerware unearthed from Chu tombs accounts for more than 70% of the country's lacquerware during the same period. Like the rainy lacquer coffin of M554 on Taishan, the black red cloud patterns and dragon and phoenix patterns, it is veritable to the records of "the gorgeous clothes are like the heroes" in "Chu Ci".

Judging from the tomb ritual, we can also learn about the characteristics of the Chu people in tomb culture. First of all, the cinnabar is paved with cinnabar. High-level tombs are generally paved with 2-5 cm thick cinnabar (such as the main coffin of Xiong Family Tomb), which is both anticorrosive and symbolizes the identity of "descendants of the Red Emperor". It is worth mentioning the remains of deer antlers in Chu's tomb. About 30% of the burial of deer antlers in Chu tombs may be related to the "Witches use deer to communicate with the gods" recorded in the "Shan Hai Jing", which reflects the legacy of shamanism in Chu culture.

Unique burial objects such as tomb-controlling beasts, tiger seats, phoenix drums, etc., are the most iconic burial objects in Chu tombs. Tomb-controlling beasts are usually composed of deer antlers, beast heads and square mounts. Their function of "leading souls to heaven" echoes the "Soul Return" in "Chu Ci·Soul Conquering Souls", becoming a distinctive feature of the Chu tomb burial objects, which is related to its witch culture. As a typical Chu-style instrument, the shape of the phoenix bird stepping on the tiger intuitively reflects the totem worship of the Chu people of "respecting the phoenix and suppressing the tiger". Among them, the phoenix symbolizes the sun god, and the tiger represents the Western god of death, reflecting the duality of life and death.

The remaining silk fabrics and lacquerware craftsmanship that cannot be underestimated are the remaining silk fabrics and lacquerware craftsmanship. The No. 1 Tomb of Mashan, Jingzhou, is known as the "silk treasure house", including 35 unearthed clothes, including "dragon, phoenix, tiger tattoos", "field hunting pattern belts", etc. The composition of dragons and tigers fighting each other and phoenixes flying in the patterns not only shows the "shocking" aesthetic of the Chu people, but also implies the religious meaning of "leading the soul to ascend to heaven". Its embroidery technology (0.1 mm wire diameter) represents the peak of pre-Qin textile technology.

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3.2. Religious beliefs

First of all, there are witchcraft and divination recorded in bamboo slips. For example, the 189 articles of "Zhen Asking for Good and Bad" recorded in the M1 bamboo slips of Wangshan, involving diseases, wars, marriages, etc., such as "I have a heart disease, but I am not willing to eat", and it forms a text-article mutual proof of "Chu Ci Buju" "worry and distracted from what I know" and "I don't know where to follow" in "Chu Ci Buju". The names of gods such as "Tai", "Hou Tu" and "Si Ming" in the inscriptions reflect the many godly beliefs of the people of Chu [5].

The people of Chu admired the phoenix, and the patterns of the phoenix were mostly found on totems in tombs. The pattern of "phoenix and dragons are coiled together" in Mashan silk fabrics confirms the mythical narrative of "the squawk and the jade ring ride a turtle" in "Li Sao". The phoenix is the essence of the sun and the dragon is the clouds and rain, forming the image symbol of the Chu people's view of the universe.

3.3. Social structure mapping

In the Chu State, where the hierarchy is highly hierarchical, the differences in the funeral objects reflect the class differentiation between the nobles and the poor. For example, the Xiong family tomb in the noble tomb was buried with 92 people and the scale of the chariot and horse pit exceeded the Zhou emperor system, reflecting that the Chu Dynasty had ambitions that surpassed the Zhou Dynasty. Among the civilian tombs, only 1-3 pottery pieces are buried in Yutaishan cemeteries, which is consistent with the records of "The rule of Chu in the country and people eat fish and rice" in "Han Feizi", showing the simple life of civilians "fried rice and soup fish".

Finally, it is worth mentioning about the particularity of female tombs. Before the infiltration of Confucian culture, the Chu State's status for women was in a stalemate stage, which also reflected the different lifestyles and status of women of different classes. High-level women, such as Baoshan M2 female tomb owner (the mother of Zuo Yin Shaotu) buried 9 bronze ritual vessels and 24 lacquered wood ware. Their "dragon head shaft" implies that women can participate in sacrificial activities. At the same time, the tombs of civilian women, such as the tomb of Jiudian M411, are buried with spinning wheels and jade pendants, reflecting the family division of labor of "women weaving", but there are no weapons and burials, showing the solidification of gender roles.

4. Conclusion

The archaeological discoveries of Jingchu tombs provide a rich material carrier for the study of Chu culture, and systematically reveal the Chu people's cosmic view, religious belief and social structure. From high-level aristocratic tombs to civilian tombs, the shape, coffin system and burial objects of Chu tombs all reflect strict hierarchical differentiation, reflecting the funeral concept and ritual culture of Chu State's "death is like life". The exquisite craftsmanship of unique objects such as tomb-controlling beasts, tiger seats and phoenix drums, as well as silk fabrics and lacquerware not only demonstrates the aesthetic orientation of the Chu people of "respecting phoenixes and redness", but also contains the religious connotation of "leading the soul to heaven", which echoes the mythological narrative in "Chu Ci". The witchcraft divination and multi-god faith recorded in

bamboo slips further confirm the prevalence of witch and ghost culture in Chu, while the gender differences in tombs reflect the differentiation of social classes and the diversity of female roles.

Overall, the archaeological achievements of the Jingchu Tomb not only fill the gap in Chu culture research, but also deepen the understanding of the social structure, process technology and spiritual belief of Chu State through cross-disciplinary research. The uniqueness of Chu culture in Chinese civilization is not only reflected in its integration with the Central Plains ritual system, but also manifested in distinct regional characteristics, providing an important perspective for exploring the interaction between the north and south cultures in the pre-Qin period. There are still shortcomings in this paper. Although physical comparisons were conducted, it failed to cover the fields of biology and physics in detail. Detection technology can be used to analyze detailed data of unearthed cultural relics, and the help of modern instruments will more clearly display archaeological results.

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