

Analyzing the Social Organization of the Western Han Dynasty

Through the Artworks of the Marquis Haihun Tomb

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Abstract

This article aimed to study the Marquis Haihun Tomb of the Western Han Dynasty, which was unearthed in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, in 2011, to analyze the excavated artifacts of the Marquis Haihun Tomb, and to explore the social organization of the Western Han Dynasty. The sample was the burial artifacts unearthed in the Marquis Haihun Tomb, which were nominated by the highest-level experts and selected during the interviews; the tools used to collect data were a combination of documentary research, expert interviews, and fieldwork; the methods used to analyze the data were descriptive statistics and content analysis. The results of the study were as follows: The Marquis Haihun Tomb contains rich cultural information, which can be used as an important material to study the social organization of the Western Han Dynasty. By analyzing the culture of the tomb, it is possible to distinguish the differences between different nobles and reveal the characteristics within the nobility. This study contributed to the enhancement of historical and cultural awareness and promotes the protection and transmission of cultural heritage. The conclusion asserts that understanding the burial culture is crucial for comprehending the social system of the Western Han Dynasty, and the Marquis Haihun Tomb, as a unique example, offers invaluable empirical data for studying the social organization of the Western Han Dynasty.

Keywords: The Marquis Haihun Tomb of the Western Han Dynasty; Burial Objects; Social Organization; Burial Culture

Introduction

In March 2011, the Marquis Haihun Tomb of the Western Han Dynasty, located on the Dun Dun Hill of Guanxi Village, Xinjian District, Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province, was excavated, which is one of the largest, best-preserved, and richest Marquis-ranked tombs of the Han Dynasty found in China, and is still highly revered by scholars and researched with immense enthusiasm. the Marquis Haihun Tomb excavation created many firsts and was listed as one of the “Top Ten Cultural Relics Events in China in 2015”.



Fig. 1 Geomorphological map before excavation of the main tomb

Source: Photographed by the Author

The Marquis Haihun Tomb is the tomb of the Marquis of the Western Han Dynasty, which has a history of more than two thousand years, and the related documents are scarce, and it has been an important basis for Chinese historians to study the aesthetics and cultural, social customs, the regime, the institutional changes and the national economy of the Western Han Dynasty. the Marquis Haihun Tomb is the best-preserved, most structurally complete tomb with the clearest functional layout and the most complete sacrificial system in the Western Han period, and its discovery is of great significance to the study of the Western Han burial system (Zheng, 2016). the Marquis Haihun Tomb artifacts are beautifully crafted and well preserved, and its rediscovery provides a wealth of physical and pictorial materials for the study of Western Han aesthetic culture. At present, most scholars at home and abroad focus on the archaeological and cultural study of the Marquis Haihun Tomb's works, and few scholars study the aesthetic value of the Marquis Haihun Tomb from the perspective of aesthetic culture.

The author of the thesis has been engaged in teaching, research, and practice in the field of art in colleges and universities for many years and has richer experience in the study of

aesthetics and culture, as well as deeper perception and research results, and has published research papers in first-class journals at home and abroad. The author tries to show the social organization system as well as the aesthetic culture of the Western Han period to scholars and researchers, history enthusiasts and public readers, and students who have researched in the fields of Western Han history, archaeology, and art history, through studying the artworks unearthed from the Marquis Haihun Tomb, as well as to provide a new perspective for the staffs of the cultural institutes and museums on the content of the exhibitions, interpretation of the artifacts, and the protection of the cultural heritage.

This study refers to: Social organization and social structure in symbolic interactionist thought (Maines, 1977). Social organization and risk: Some current controversies (Clarke & Short Jr, 1993). Some Remarks on “The Social System” (Lockwood, 1956), A Macrosociological Theory of Social Structure (Blau, 1977) Findings mostly focused on research from a critical perspective. In this paper, we will select the artworks excavated from the Marquis Haihun Tomb for study and use the artifacts excavated from the tomb as a case study to explore the social organization embodied in the ancient tomb. Through the analysis of the artworks, the social hierarchy and religious beliefs of the time are analyzed.

This paper explores the social structure of the Western Han Dynasty, especially the distribution of social classes and power, through the artworks of the Marquis Haihun Tomb, to understand the society and culture of the Western Han Dynasty. There is a deeper understanding. This is of great significance to help us better understand the development of history and culture, thus enriching our historical and cultural knowledge.

Research Objectives

The social organization of the Western Han Dynasty was analyzed through the artworks of the Marquis Haihun Tomb.

Literature Review

As a primary discipline of history, archaeology has always been an important perspective in academic research, integrating with other primary disciplines. Scholars at home and abroad have conducted extensive research on the Marquis of Haihun Tomb. The literature can be categorized into several types: some focus on the unearthed cultural relics and sequentially introduce different

artifacts (Kim, 2019; Wang et al., 2020), some concentrate on studying the ritual and music system of the Western Han Dynasty (Liu, 2020; Sanft, 2018), and others primarily conduct comparative studies of tombs. Through a review of existing literature on the Marquis of Haihun Tomb, it is evident that research has focused on unearthed artifacts and cultural customs, with limited attention given to the study of Western Han social organization. Therefore, this study analyses the aristocratic burials of the Western Han period in terms of funerary culture, taking the Marquis Haihun Tomb as a special case analysis and comparing the differences of the aristocratic populations, to fill in the lack of research results on the social organization of the Western Han period.

Through a comprehensive assessment and systematic analysis of relevant literature, this study proposes the lack of research results on social organizations in the Western Han period, and through the audited research, it aims to fill in the missing parts of the research on social organizations in the Western Han period. Through the burial objects unearthed in the Marquis Haihun Tomb, the social stratification and differences of the aristocratic class in the Western Han period are analyzed in depth.

Conceptual Framework

This study is research on tomb culture. the Marquis Haihun Tomb was used by the researchers to study the social organization of the Western Han period, and the conceptual framework of the study was defined based on the concepts of social roles and regulations. The specific content is as follows.

Social organizations are usually composed of 2 elements: the first is the “population of relations”; the second is status and roles. Status determines social stratification, which is a natural phenomenon of human development and ultimately leads to differences in populations. This paper categorizes specific groups of people, which ultimately lead to different “relationship groups”. Duties and responsibilities that reflect status will be answered in the “relationship groups”. However, roles are composed of personality, knowledge, abilities, hobbies, and physical and mental conditions. Roles are the labelling of individuals.

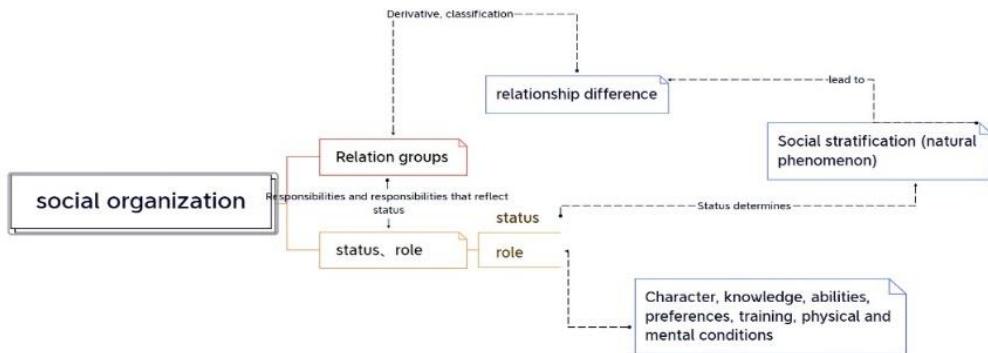


Fig. 2 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study adopts the method of interview method, literature analysis, on-site investigation method (observation method), and sample selection and analysis method. Firstly, three expert professors, three staff members, and four archaeologists will be selected as interviewees in the interview study. Combining different types of interviewees helps to develop a comprehensive research perspective. Their views and findings can corroborate each other, thus deepening the understanding of the social organization of the Western Han.

Second, on-site investigation method (observation method): on-site investigation in the Marquis Haihun Tomb Museum, observation of the excavated artifacts in the Marquis Haihun Tomb Museum, and analysis of the social organization of the artifacts.

Thirdly, through the method of literature analysis, classic literature such as The Historical Records, The Book of Han, The Records of the Three Kingdoms, and The Huainanzi are collected and analyzed, and the information therein is screened, to obtain the relevant information about the Marquis Haihun Tomb and the Marquis Haihun.

Finally, the sample selection analysis method: based on on-site investigation and case analysis, the samples will be selected using experts' opinions, and the 30 samples with the highest expert nominations will be selected for in-depth study (because this selection is part of the Marquis Haihun Tomb of The Marquis Haihun to look at the social organizations and aesthetic value of the Western Han Dynasty, the selection will be reduced to 18 to reflect the social

organizations mainly). The selection of samples will be based on diversity, geographical distribution, social status, and other factors to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

Research Results

Objective 1. The results showed that the analysis of the Marquis Haihun Tomb reveals that artifacts used in funerary rituals were used to differentiate the social organization of the Western Han and to reflect the differentiation of the aristocracy.

During the Western Han Dynasty, nobles could be divided into the following three roles: Marquis, vassal kings, and emperors. Due to the different status, the funeral ceremony, the number of burial objects and the rank were all different. In the funeral ceremony of the Western Han Dynasty, most of the artifacts used were Jade Bi, Jade plugs, and gold-covered silk glazed mats.

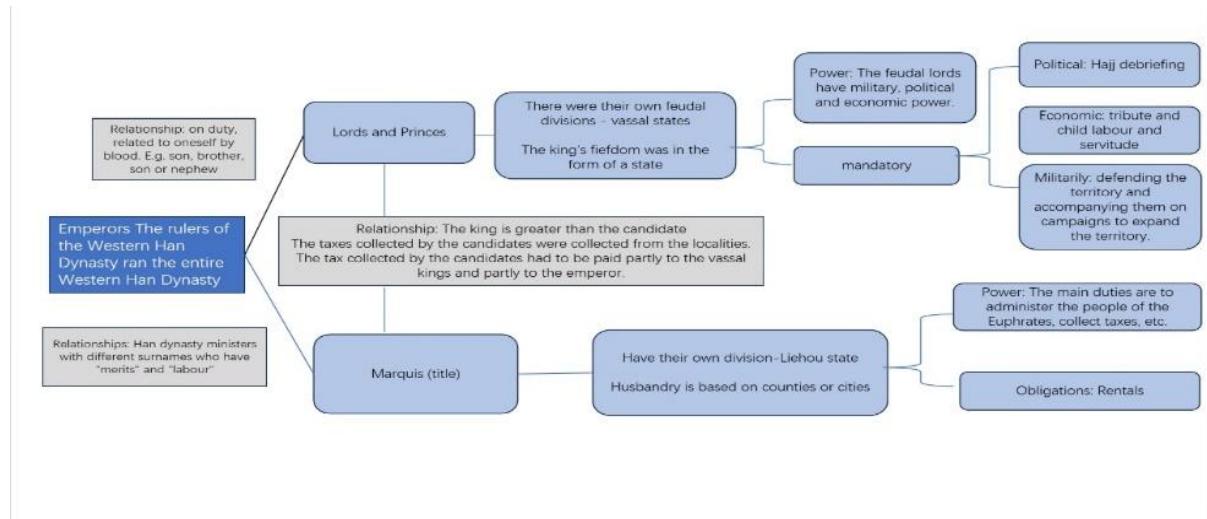


Fig. 3 Aristocrat Group Relationship Chart

Source: Produced by the Author

The Han Dynasty was a period that placed significant emphasis on funerary practices. “Sang” refers to the ritual ceremonies related to death, while “zang” refers to the burial methods for the deceased. Some even describe the Han Dynasty as having a “thick burial” culture. According to historical records, the funerary rituals of the Han Dynasty inherited the funeral customs of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. While the process of funeral rites remained largely unchanged, it became more elaborate. It can generally be divided into three stages: first, pre-burial rituals, including soul-calling, bathing, offering rice, embalming, mourning, and vigil; second, the funeral ceremony, including farewell rites, the procession, and

lowering the coffin; third, post-burial mourning rituals. Thick burials were popular during the Qin and Han periods, characterized by elaborately decorated tombs and a focus on tomb maintenance and offerings. The primary manifestation of the thick burial culture of the Han Dynasty was the abundance of burial goods, which not only met the requirements of funeral regulations but also reflected the development of society and economy, as well as the widespread dissemination of filial piety. The burial goods mostly consisted of clothes, jewelry, incense pouches, musical instruments, and weapons used by the deceased during their lifetime. Due to the abolition of the practice of human sacrifices during the reign of Emperor Wen of Han (The fifth emperor of the Western Han Dynasty), there were rarely any instances of human sacrifices in the thick burial culture of the Han Dynasty.

Burial in jade can keep the body from decaying and make resurrection possible, so by the Han Dynasty, burial jade was extremely common and had gradually evolved into a set of perfect forms of burial jade, including jade clothes, jade grips, jade nine-knuckle plugs, and jade containers. In reviewing the literature, Mr. Xia Nai in “Jade in the Han Dynasty”(Nai, 1983) put forward the definition of burial jade “refers to those burial jades that are specially made for the preservation of corpses, instead of referring to all the jades that are buried in the tombs”. The latter are burial objects, but not considered as burial jades.” Therefore, burial jade is also called “corpse preservation jade”. Combining the above views, the author defines funeral jade as follows: funeral jade is the jade that is buried with the deceased: 1) jade made for preserving the body; 2) jade made only for burial, which will not be used by the deceased during his/her lifetime; and 3) jade with special funerary significance.

In interviews, experts and scholars generally agree that among the burial items unearthed from the Marquis Haihun Tomb, jade artifacts are the most abundant and significant for funeral rites. The reason jade artifacts became a representative aspect of ancient Chinese material culture is largely due to the ideological and moral connotations attributed to them by ancient people, forming a unique jade culture. In the burial of the Marquis Haihun Tomb, jade artifacts such as jade plugs and brocade-covered glass mats were used, and it is worth noting that the 16 pieces of jade placed inside the coffin are also categorized as burial jades. Although these jade bi disks may have originally served other purposes, their burial alongside the tomb's owner, Liu He, indicates their function as burial items, placing them within the category of burial jades. Through a comprehensive review of various literary sources, it is evident that the funeral jades unearthed from the Marquis Haihun Tomb were primarily used for main burial and ritual offerings.

After the death of the Marquis of Haihun, after the invocation of souls and bathing rituals, it is the coffin, that is, to dress the deceased under the coffin. In the interview, Professor Cai Baoquan mentioned that the “Rituals – Funeral Daji” and “Rites of Passage – Shi Funeral Rites” have specific records on the rituals of the coffin. There is a funeral ritual of “rice containing” when the coffin is put into the coffin. Rice refers to the deceased into the mouth of the rice, shellfish (copper coins), and also known as the mouth contains, it refers to the deceased into the mouth of the jewelry. Liu Xiang, “Saying Yuan” of the Western Han Dynasty, reads: “The Emperor is given pearls, princes are given jade, officials are given jadestone, scholars are given shells, and commoners are given grains.” Two ancient funeral rites, each representing a different status of the deceased. It can be seen that the above meal contains the goods of the Western Han Dynasty is a provision, the meal contains due to different statuses of different and different.

In the inner coffin of Marquis Haihun, funeral jades mainly consist of 16 pieces of jade Bi placed on and around Liu He's body, 1 set of jade plugs, 1 jade pillow, and 1 golden-threaded glass mat. These jade artifacts exemplify the prevalent custom of “jade burial” during the Han Dynasty.

1. Jade Bi

Firstly, there are the jade bi disks, among which the 16 pieces can be categorized based on their patterns into grain patterned jade bi, linked grain patterned jade bi, cattail patterned jade bi, and double-bodied kui dragon patterned jade bi, all of which are common decorative motifs found on Western Han jade bi. The 16 jade bi can be divided into two main groups based on their distribution positions (Figure 4): one group consists of 7 pieces placed on the body of the tomb owner (highlighted in blue in the figure), while the other group consists of 9 pieces placed beneath the body of the tomb owner (highlighted in gray in the figure).

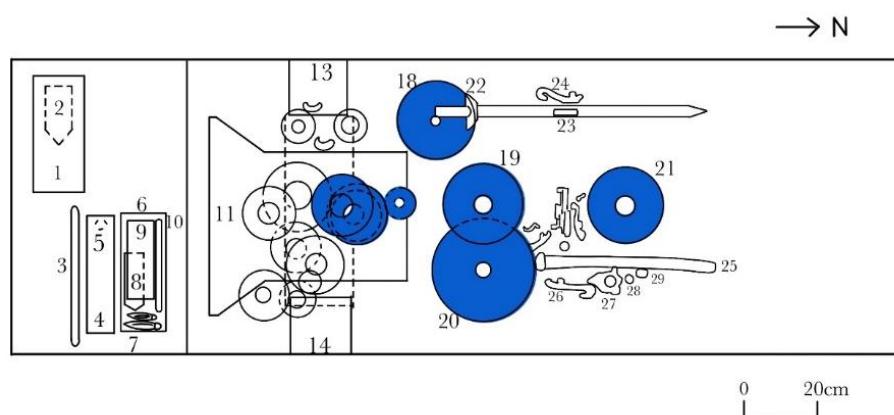


Fig. 4 Shows the Distribution Map of Jade Objects Inside the Coffin.

Placed on the body of the tomb owner are a total of 7 pieces of jade bi (Figure 5), among which 2 pieces are placed on the face, 1 piece on the neck, 3 pieces on the chest, and 1 piece on the hip.

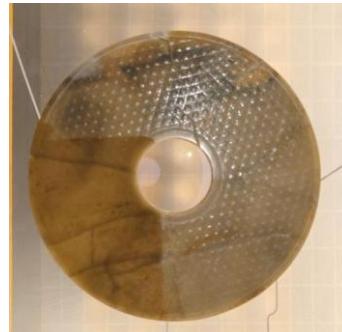


Fig. 5 Shows Valley Pattern Jade Bi

There are total of 9 jade bi placed under the tomb owner, mainly concentrated around the head and the southern side of the head.

During the Han Dynasty, especially after the reigns of Emperors Wen and Jing, lavish burials became prevalent. Many tombs of princes and marquises were discovered to contain jade bi as burial items. Most of these jade bi were placed around the deceased's body inside the inner coffin for burial. In the case of the Marquis of Haihun, Liu He, a total of 16 jade bi were found positioned around and beneath his body, reflecting the prevailing custom of using jade bi for burial. As for the origin of this practice, according to the expert Sun Qingwei, jade bi placed in tombs since the late Warring States period reflected the Taoist belief in “ascension after death.” The primary purpose was to facilitate the deceased's soul in ascending to the realm of immortals.

In summary, the jade bi unearthed from the Marquis of Haihun's tomb not only reflects the Han people's reverence and appreciation for jade but also mirrors their custom of extravagant burials and the superstitious belief that jade can preserve the body and facilitate the soul's ascension. The multifaceted development of the functions of jade bi during the Han Dynasty also indicates that this period was a crucial phase in the transformation of Chinese jade culture.

2. Jade plugs

Jade plugs were also an important type of jade used for funerary purposes during the Han Dynasty. In “Bao Pu Zi: Dui Su,” it is stated: “Gold and jade within the nine orifices make the deceased eternal.” Han people inserted jade plugs into the deceased's eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, genitals, and anus to prevent the leakage of vital essence and preserve the body from decay.

Archaeological findings indicate that jade plugs unearthed from Han tombs are generally incomplete, with only high-ranking noble tombs, such as M1 and M2 in Mancheng, Hebei, containing complete sets of nine-plug jades. In the Marquis of Haihun's tomb, six jade plugs were discovered, including two jade eye covers, two malachite nose plugs, one Jade mouth ornament (Figure 6), and one jade toggle used as an anal plug (Figure 6). Jade eye covers appeared as jade plugs in mid-Western Han period tombs, not in early Western Han period tombs. Given that Liu He was buried in 59 BC, which falls into the late mid-Western Han period, the use of jade eye covers as plugs aligns with previous scholars' assessments of complete jade nine-plug sets appearing in the mid-Western Han period. Nose plugs unearthed from Han tombs are typically short cylindrical jade plugs, whereas Liu He's nasal cavity was filled with two malachite beads with perforations in the center, similar in size to beads used for stringing. It is speculated that these malachite beads originally served as ornaments but were used as nose plugs in this context. Mouthpieces were jades placed in the mouth of the deceased during interment. In "Zhou Li: Tian Guan: Da Zai," it is recorded: "In a grand funeral, the deceased is given jade to hold in the mouth." This suggests that the practice of placing jade in the mouth of the deceased was established during the Zhou Dynasty. This tradition continued into the Han Dynasty, and the use of jade mouthpieces was not limited to individuals of high status; nobles of varying ranks could possess them. The mouthpiece unearthed from the Marquis of Haihun's tomb is unique in shape, resembling the design of a jade seal, with a perforation at the top and the seal script characters "He Huan" carved at the bottom. This mouthpiece appears to be an old jade repurposed; based on its perforation and decorative style, it was likely originally a pendant worn during the Warring States period. Similarly, the anal plug unearthed from Liu He's tomb was originally a cylindrical jade toggle with a shallow relief engraving of valley patterns. In this context, it was repurposed as an anal plug.



Fig. 6 Shows Jade mouth ornament and the anal plug

In summary, the jade plugs unearthed from Liu He's tomb exhibit two characteristics: firstly, there are no complete sets of jade nine-plug jades found in Liu He's tomb, and secondly, most of the jade plugs unearthed from Liu He's tomb were replaced with alternative items. The reason for this may be related to Liu He's status as a marquis at the time of burial. Based on the author's review of jade plug findings from Western Han tombs, only two tombs, those of Prince Jing of Zhongshan, Liu Sheng, and his wife Dou Wan, contained complete sets of jade nine-plug jades. This suggests that only nobles of the rank of prince were entitled to use nine-plug jades. Furthermore, these characteristics may indicate that Liu He's burial was hastily conducted, and there was no time to prepare specialized jade plugs, resulting in incomplete quantities and the use of alternative items.

The gold-threaded brocade silk mat with glass embellishments.

In Liu He's tomb, a set of gold-threaded glass mats (Figure 7) was also found in the inner coffin. It is composed of rectangular pieces of glass, arranged in 32 rows with 12 pieces in each row, totaling 384 pieces, measuring 1.8 meters in length and 0.65 meters in width. Regarding the usage system of the glass mat, according to the research of Zhuang Huiyi, the glass mat may be considered a lower-grade funerary item in the jade burial system of the Western Han Dynasty, even lower in rank than marquises, princesses, and high-ranking individuals. The fact that Liu He used the same grade of glass mat as local county magistrates and daughters married off to princes suggests his dismal political situation in his later years. The author agrees that the use of the glass mat somewhat reflects Liu He's plight as a political failure. However, there are differing opinions regarding whether the usage rank of this funerary item is lower than that of a marquis. In other words, the phenomenon of Liu He's tomb using a glass mat may be seen as a backup plan in the absence of a bestowed jade garment. However, its usage itself does not necessarily indicate that it is a funerary item lower in rank than the usual marquis-level burial practices. According to Xing Lixiang, the leader of the archaeological expert group for the Marquis Haihun Tomb, Liu He's remains were wrapped in multiple layers of clothing on this glass mat, following the custom of binding clothing layers from pre-Qin times. Considering Liu He's status as a deposed emperor who was already suppressed and monitored by the central government, it's natural that he wouldn't have been granted the privilege of a jade garment. Therefore, the use of the binding clothing custom not only conforms to his awkward political situation but also complies with the regulations of the "Zang Lu" (Burial Code). On the other hand, since Liu He couldn't possess a jade garment, using an expensive set of gold-threaded glass mats as a substitute, on top of the binding clothing

custom, not only symbolizes Liu He's enormous wealth but also serves as a consolation for his turbulent political career. Thus, the use of the glass mat does not necessarily indicate that Liu He used a funeral item lower than the rank of a marquis. Instead, its appearance demonstrates that although Liu He was a deposed emperor who didn't receive a jade garment from the central government, he still had the additional luxury of using a glass mat for burial on top of the binding clothing custom enjoyed by marquises, showing his strategic foresight and resourcefulness.



Fig. 7 Shows a Golden-threaded brocade glass mat

In conclusion, the jade artifacts mentioned above (jade bi disks, jade plugs, brocade-covered glass mats) used in funerals are symbols of royalty and are associated with Daoist beliefs of “corpse transformation and ascension to immortality,” aimed at facilitating the smooth ascension of the tomb owner's soul. Among the 18 rituals of the funeral process, they reflect Liu He's social status. As mentioned earlier, dozens of jade bi disks were unearthed from imperial tombs, while only 16 were found in the Marquis of Haihun's tomb. 9 jade plugs were typically used by nobles of the prince level, yet only 6 were unearthed in the Marquis of Haihun's tomb. Similarly, brocade-covered glass mats were typically used by emperors and princes, but the Marquis of Haihun's tomb contained brocade-covered glass mats with gold thread instead, indicating that Liu He's tomb belonged to the Marquis level.

Discussions

Through a detailed documentary analysis of the artifacts excavated from the Marquis Haihun Tomb, this study provides an in-depth and systematic analysis of how social roles and stratification in social organization were reflected through the artifacts in the rituals of the Marquis

Haihun Tomb. This helps to better understand the important role of funerary artefacts in reflecting the social organization and social system of the Western Han period, thus providing valuable references and bases for the study of Western Han history. At the same time, it also helps us to better understand the culture, beliefs and values of the society at that time. In the process of comprehensively categorizing The Marquis Haihun artifacts, this study divides the artifacts into artifacts used in ceremonies (made for preserving corpses, which would not be used by the deceased during their lifetime) and funerary artifacts (used by the deceased during their lifetime, and accompanied to the burial after their death). This classification differs from that of Chen Zheng (Zheng, 2016) and Rao Jianwei (Wei, 2018), who classified artworks into six categories according to material (gold, bronze, jade, lacquer, pottery, and Bamboo Slips). The classification in this study is more detailed and reflects the social organization of the Western Han period in a more comprehensive manner.

Knowledge from Research

Observe those influences on the status and social stratification of the aristocracy during the Western Han period through funeral culture.

These findings will be presented through analyses and an overview of the study's contribution to the field.

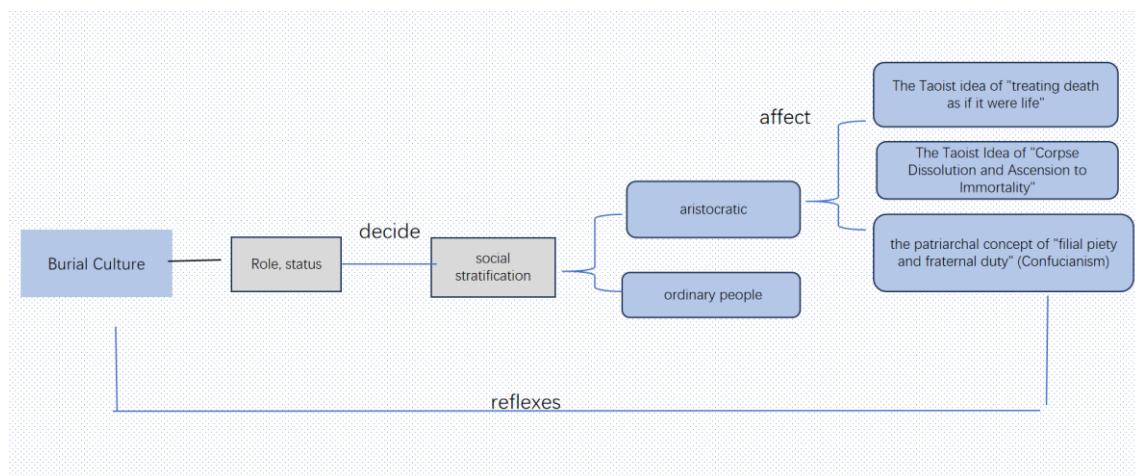


Fig. 8 Framework

Burial culture is bound by roles and status, which determines social stratification, and social stratification gives rise to the “relationship crowd”, which is influenced by the Taoist idea of “treating the dead as if they were alive”; the Taoist idea of “ascending to immortality after

death”; and the patriarchal concept of “filial piety and fraternal duty”, which are finally reflected in the burial culture. The “relationship crowd” was influenced by Taoism's idea of “treating the death as one's life”, Taoism's idea of “ascending to immortality”, and the patriarchal concept of “filial piety and fraternal duty”, which were finally reflected in the burial culture.

Conclusion

This study delves into the importance of the artifacts excavated from the exceptional case of the Marquis Haihun Tomb for understanding the social organization of the Western Han Dynasty. It is found that the discovery of tomb culture can be used to differentiate the social organization of the Western Han period, reflecting the differences between aristocratic groups. As the first relatively stable dynastic period of Chinese feudal society, the Han Dynasty adopted the practice of generous burials, which was related to Han Confucianism represented by the great Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu, who borrowed and learned some of the world governing ideas from the Taoists, Legalists and Yin-Yang and Five Elements among the Hundred Schools of Thought and transformed them academically to incorporate them into Confucianism, forming a new system of Confucianism and proposing the “Divine Right of Kings” and the “Divine Right of Kings”. The divine right of kings” “unity of heaven and man” and “induction of heaven and man” theories, consolidate imperial power with divine right, but these artifacts as thick burials not only reflect the status, power, and cultural pursuits of the aristocracy, but also reveal the characteristics of the social organizational structure of the Western Han Dynasty. However, these artefacts as thick burials not only reflect the status, power, and cultural pursuits of the aristocratic society but also reveal the characteristics of the social organization of the Western Han Dynasty and the social status of the aristocracy.

Suggestions

1. In-depth study of other tombs: In addition to the Marquis Haihun Tomb, further research can be conducted on other Western Han period tombs, such as those belonging to other noble families or common people. This approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of social organization during the Western Han period and the differences between the aristocratic class and the common people.

2. Application of interdisciplinary research methods: Borrowing from various disciplines such as archaeology, history, and art history, interdisciplinary research can be conducted to comprehensively understand the societal organizational information encapsulated in the artistic artifacts unearthed from the Marquis Haihun Tomb.

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