

Original Paper

A Preliminary Discussion on the Arrangement of Pottery at the Eastern Zhou Period Cemetery in Hongyingpan, Weining County, Guizhou

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Abstract

In 2004-2005, the Guizhou Provincial Museum Archaeological Group conducted a trial excavation of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty Cemetery in Hongyingpan, located in Xinjie Village, Zhongshui Town, Weining County, Guizhou Province. A total of 26 burials were unearthed during the excavation, including 11 pottery burials. It is noteworthy that the pottery in these burials was predominantly placed around the head of the tomb owner, a phenomenon that has not yet been discussed by academics. The present study focuses on the pottery unearthed in Hongyingpan Cemetery, exploring its shape, function, decorative features, and interaction with coexisting artifacts. The analysis suggests that the placement of the pottery may reflect the local funeral concept of 'taking the head as the honour' during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, emphasizing the connection to ancestor worship and agricultural rituals. The study also found that the common nipple decoration on the shoulders of the pottery may have the function of gender marking, which provides clues for inferring the gender of the tomb owner. Furthermore, the initial comparison of the pottery forms, craftsmanship and placement practices between the Hongyingpan Cemetery and the Shayuyingpan Class B Tomb in Zhaotong, Yunnan reveals notable similarities. The Jigongshan Culture and the Yinzitan Cemetery in Weining are also examined, leading to the conclusion that there were extensive cultural interactions and regional traditions in the region during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. However, it is emphasized that further archaeological evidence is required to clarify the specific relationships.

Keywords

Hongyingpan Eastern Zhou Dynasty Cemetery, pottery, position

1. Introduction

Pottery as burial goods holds significant importance in archaeological and cultural studies. It offers valuable insights into ancient lifestyles and material culture, while also reflecting—to varying degrees—the religious beliefs, social organization, artistic expression, and technological development of the period. The discovery and ongoing investigation of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty cemetery at Hongyingpan in Weining County, Guizhou Province, have provided critical material evidence for understanding burial customs, social hierarchy, and cultural exchanges in the eastern periphery of the Yungui Plateau during the Eastern Zhou period.

From 2004 to 2005, the Department of Archaeology at the Guizhou Provincial Museum carried out systematic trial excavations at the Hongyingpan site, uncovering a total of 26 tombs. Among these, pottery vessels were recovered from 11 burials, with a notable concentration around the heads of the deceased. This spatial pattern has not been adequately examined in previous scholarship. The arrangement of grave goods constitutes an essential element of funerary ritual, imbued with deep cultural cognition and symbolic meaning. It serves as a key point of entry for interpreting the spiritual worldview and behavioral practices of ancient populations.

Current archaeological research on burial pottery primarily focuses on typology classification, chronological sequencing, and cultural attribution. However, there remains a relative lack of in-depth analysis regarding the specific placement of these objects within the tomb space and the underlying funerary concepts, social structures, and identity markers that such arrangements may express. The patterning of pottery vessels at the Hongyingpan cemetery likely reflects localized burial traditions and cognitive frameworks, warranting further detailed interpretation. This paper takes the placement of pottery unearthed from the Eastern Zhou cemetery at Hongyingpan as its central focus. By integrating analyses of pottery materials, forms, decorative features, and associated artifacts, we aim to elucidate the cultural connotations and social functions embodied by their spatial distribution. We approach this material from multiple perspectives, including the funerary concept of “respecting the head as the primary locus,” ancestral veneration, agricultural rituals, and gender symbolism. Furthermore, we conduct comparative studies with neighboring archaeological complexes, such as the Shayuyingpan cemetery in Zhaotong, Yunnan, the Jigongshan Culture, and the Yinzitan cemetery in Weining.

Through these comparisons, we seek to clarify the cultural attributes of the Hongyingpan remains and to evaluate their role and significance within the broader context of cultural interaction in northwestern Guizhou and northeastern Yunnan during the Eastern Zhou period. This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of regional cultural dynamics, inter community contacts, and the shared ritual practices that may have connected different groups in this frontier area.

The study ultimately emphasizes the importance of contextual and spatial analysis of burial assemblages in archaeological interpretation. By reconstructing the symbolic and social dimensions of pottery placement, we can move beyond purely morphological or chronological approaches to engage with the lived rituals and ideological systems of ancient societies. Future research should combine

detailed excavation recording, cross-regional comparative work, and interdisciplinary methods to further explore the rich funerary traditions of the Eastern Zhou period in southwestern China.

2. Overview of Excavated Pottery and Burials

The Eastern Zhou tombs at Hongyingpan, Weining County, Guizhou, are situated on a small earthen ridge between the Qian River and Zhong River at the southern end of the Zhongshui Basin, approximately 400 metre west of the Yinzitan burial site. According to Liu (2007) between 2004 and 2005, the Archaeology Department of Guizhou Provincial Museum conducted systematic excavations at the site, uncovering 26 tombs. All were elongated vertical pit graves. Traces of burial containers were found only in Tombs M11, M23, M24, and M25; no such evidence was detected in the remaining graves. These were small tombs, each measuring less than 2 square metre in area. The primary burial posture was supine with straight limbs, and there was essentially no overlapping or disturbance between graves. Eleven graves contained no grave goods, while the remaining fifteen held only a few items, reflecting either simplicity in burial customs or local characteristics. The graves were arranged in an orderly fashion with minimal overlapping or disturbance, indicating that the cemetery was planned and likely used continuously by the same ethnic group over a relatively short period. A total of 54 artifacts were unearthed, comprising pottery, bronze, bone, and jade objects. Among these, 16 were pottery items, predominantly placed at the head of the burial pits. The forms included flat-bottomed jars, single-eared folded-rim jars, pottery bowls, and straight-sided cups. The 11 graves containing pottery, 10 were oriented north-south and one east-west. Table 1 indicates that pottery was arranged around the head in eight graves, while the pot in M17 was positioned near the abdomen (the burial positions in M3 and M26 were not detailed in the excavation report and are therefore excluded from consideration). Most tombs yielding pottery also contained bronze artifacts (primarily weapons and ornaments), bone objects (mainly arrowheads), and jade/stone items (such as jade huang and jue rings). Taking M14 and M17 as examples: M14 was situated at the northeast corner of T6, opening beneath Layer 1 and cutting through the undisturbed soil layer at a depth of 26 to 40 centimeter below ground level. Measuring 260 cm in length, 60 cm in width, and 40–50 cm in depth, its fill comprised greenish-Grey clay mixed with yellowish loam containing gravel. The tomb orientation was 10 degrees, with an uneven base. The remains were positioned with the head facing north and the face westward, exhibiting crossed lower limbs; sex was indeterminable. Burial goods comprised one earthenware jar, one bronze ring, one bronze knife, and one pair of jade ornaments (Fig. 1). M17 is situated at the northeast corner of T6, opening beneath the first layer and breaching the undisturbed soil layer at a depth of 27–35 cm below ground level. Dimensions: length 270 cm, width 54–62 cm, depth 21–37 cm. Fill consists of greenish-Grey clay and yellowish clay containing gravel. Orientation: 10 degrees. Human remains lie supine with extended limbs, head oriented north. Burial goods comprised one bronze sword, one bronze tube ornament, one pottery jar, one grinding stone, one bronze arrowhead, and one bone arrowhead. The pottery jar was positioned near the abdomen (Fig. 2).

Table 1. Statistical Analysis of Pottery Placement Locations and Quantities at the Hongyingpan Eastern Zhou Cemetery

Tomb Number	Around the head	Below the shoulders
M4	1	
M5	2	
M8	3	
M9	2	
M11	1	
M13	2	
M14	1	
M15	1	
M17		1

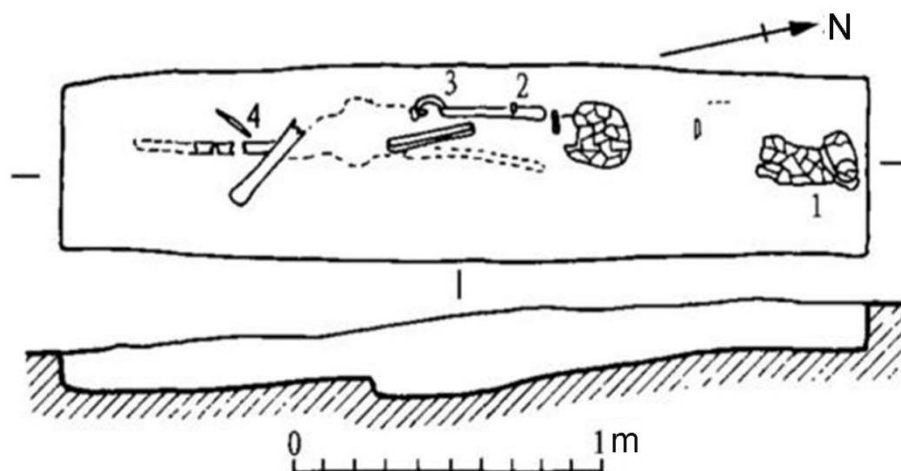


Figure 1. M14 Plan and Sectional Views

1. Earthenware pot; 2. Copper ring; 3. Two jade discs united as one; 4. Copper knife

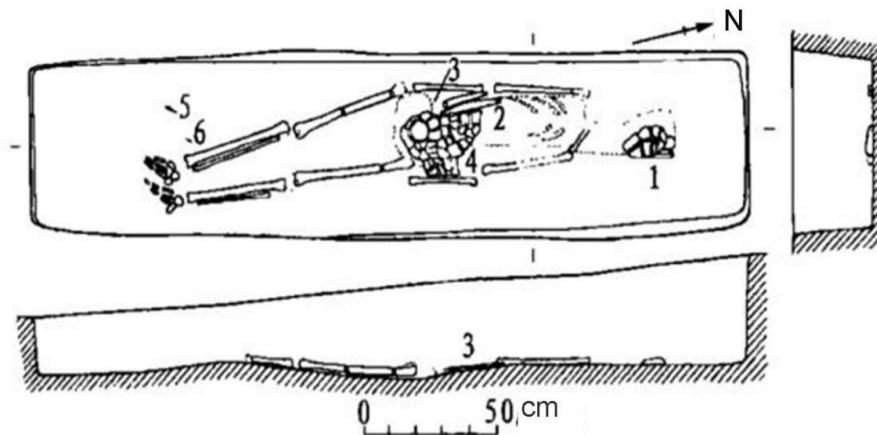


Figure 2. M17 Plan and Sectional Views

1. Brass trim; 2. Copper sword; 3. Grinding stone; 4. Earthenware pot; 5. Copper arrowhead; 6. Bone arrowhead

The pottery unearthed from the Eastern Zhou tombs at Hongyingpan consists entirely of sand-tempered ware. Characteristic by a porous, fragile texture and entirely hand-made, the collection comprises sixteen pieces predominantly comprising jars. The most representative jar exhibits a distinctive form: a scalloped rim with a spout, shoulder decorated with nipple-shaped motifs, and a relatively bulbous body. The vessel types include flat-bottomed jars (Types I, II, and III), single-handled folded-rim jars, ring-footed bowls, straight-sided cups, and small cups, predominantly featuring flat bases. The pottery decoration is relatively simple, comprising pricked patterns on the vessel bodies and symmetrical nipple-shaped decorations on both sides of the shoulders, with nipple patterns predominating (Table 2). In summary, the Hongyingpan burial ground represents a small-scale Eastern Zhou community cemetery characterized by orderly planning and uniform burial customs. As the primary category of grave goods, the specific placement, combinations, and craftsmanship of these pottery vessels provide valuable insights into Bronze Age funerary practices, technical economies, and conceptual worlds within this region.

Table 2. Statistical Analysis of Pottery Decorations from the Eastern Zhou Period Cemetery at Hongyingpan

Vessel form	Without ornamentation	nipple-like pattern	Puncture mark
Type I Flat-Bottomed Vessel		1	
Type II Flat-Bottomed Vessel	1	2	
Type III Flat-Bottomed Vessel	1	4	
Single-eared folded-rim pot	1		
Bowls with foot rings			1
Straight-sided cup	1		
Small cup	1		

3. The Significance of Pottery Placement at the Eastern Zhou Cemetery in Hongyingpan

Based on the excavation data from the Hongyingpan burial site, a clear and repeated pattern can be observed among the tombs that contained pottery: in eight of the eleven burials, pottery vessels were deliberately concentrated around the head and shoulder areas of the deceased. Each of these graves contained no more than three such vessels, suggesting a conscious and non-random placement rooted in funerary custom rather than coincidence. This structured arrangement offers a valuable window into the ritual behavior and underlying cultural worldview of this Eastern Zhou community. Technologically, the pottery itself provides important contextual clues. The vessels were produced using coarse clay and manufactured through relatively rudimentary techniques, with firing processes that were neither advanced nor fully controlled. As a result, the ceramics are characterized by poor durability, uneven surface treatment, and impure glaze quality. Jars represent the most common form, indicating a likely origin in everyday utilitarian use. Yet when viewed in conjunction with other grave goods—such as bronze items, bone artifacts, grinding stones, and small jade ornaments—the overall assemblage suggests a society with limited economic development and emerging social differentiation. Within this context, the pottery’s role in burial likely held symbolic significance that exceeded its practical function.

The consistent placement of these vessels around the upper body of the deceased suggests a mortuary practice that accorded special symbolic importance to the head. This emphasis aligns with a concept we might term “anthropocentric hierarchy”—a belief system widespread in ancient China and East Asia that regarded the head as the sacred seat of identity, spirit, and social honor. Concentrating funerary offerings around this area may have expressed reverence for the deceased, provided spiritual

sustenance, or mirrored a broader cosmological order within the confined space of the grave. Notably, this practice finds resonance in other archaeological cultures of the pre-Qin period. For example, Xu (2020) argue that similar configurations have been observed in the Qin tombs at Xinfeng in Lintong and studies by Xia et al. (2018) indicate that the Kele Type B tombs in Hezhang, Guizhou. These parallels suggest that the concept of “head as honor” was not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader shared tradition among diverse regional cultures. Moreover, the conventionality behind this spatial organization hints at deeper social and ideological functions. In a context of material scarcity, the restrained inclusion of pottery—capped at three vessels per grave—may reflect normative or sumptuous conventions. The act of placing these objects in symbolically charged zones likely served to reinforce social hierarchies, strengthen familial lineage, and consolidate collective memory through ritual performance. By examining both the technical attributes of the pottery and its precise contextual placement, we gain insight into not only the economic and technological conditions of the Hongyingpan society but also its ritual grammar and cultural imagination. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how funerary practices served as a medium for negotiating identity, status, and belief systems in the complex social landscape of ancient Southwestern China.

Secondly, the placement of burial goods, particularly pottery, around the head area in the Eastern Zhou cemetery at Hongyingpan likely reflects a meaningful connection to ancestral veneration and agricultural symbolism within the community. Among the unearthed pottery, jars constitute the predominant type, followed by cups, bowls, and vessels with distinctive rim profiles. Functionally, these objects correspond to containers and utensils associated with food storage, consumption, and possibly ritual offerings. Their consistent deposition near the head of the deceased suggests a symbolic convergence between physical sustenance and spiritual practice. This practice may be interpreted as an expression of the central role agriculture played in the social-economic and symbolic life of the population. In positioning containers that held grains, liquids, or prepared foods close to the head—the seat of identity, memory, and honor—the community might have been articulating a hope for continued abundance, fertility, and prosperity, both in this world and the next. Alternatively, it could imply a symbolic identity between the deceased and agricultural productivity, framing the individual as a guardian or perpetuator of agrarian life even after death. Such an arrangement transforms the tomb into a microcosm of the social-natural order, where the deceased continues to participate symbolically in cycles of growth and nourishment. In addition, the striking uniformity in the placement of these artifacts across multiple burials indicates that this was not a matter of personal or familial preference but rather a culturally standardized practice. The recurrence of this pattern implies the existence of institutionalized ritual knowledge—a set of shared, transmitted conventions dictating the proper treatment of the dead. In this sense, the spatial organization of grave goods served as a material expression of collective ritual norms, reinforcing social cohesion and cultural continuity through repetitive performance. The pottery, therefore, functioned not only as utilitarian object or personal possession but also as a ritual instrument, employed according to deeply ingrained prescriptions

concerning body space, cosmology, and social order. Through the structured placement of ceramics, the living enacted a ceremony that linked the deceased to ancestral forces and ecological cycles, thereby mediating between the human, natural, and spiritual realms. This kind of funerary behavior underscores how burial customs can operate as a form of social memory and cultural reproduction. By adhering to established protocols, the community reaffirmed its values, worldviews, and identity across generations. The Hongyingpan burial assemblage thus offers a compelling case study of how mortuary space was organized to reflect and perpetuate fundamental beliefs concerning life, death, and livelihood in ancient China. Altogether, the concentration of pottery around the cranial zone constitutes a sophisticated cultural text—one that communicates agricultural dependence, collective ritualize, and a profound integration of daily life and symbolic practice in the Eastern Zhou periphery.

Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of the pottery decorations recovered from the Eastern Zhou tombs at Hongyingpan suggests that the spatial arrangement of burial vessels was intimately linked to the social and biological identity of the deceased, particularly in terms of status and gender expression. A notable feature among the ceramic assemblage is the recurrence of symmetrically arranged nipple-shaped appliques, predominantly located on the shoulders of flat-bottomed jars. These decorative elements appear in varying numerical patterns—most commonly in sets of four or six, arranged in two symmetric groups—and may have served as visual and ritual markers embodying culturally constructed notions of femininity and social role. Researcher Zhang Herong of the Guizhou Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology has previously drawn attention to similar decorative patterns observed on pottery from the Hezhang Kele site, specifically Type C jars bearing four nipple-shaped protrusions on the vessel body by Xia Baoguo et al. (2018). Zhang interpreted these features as symbols associated with femininity and possibly linked to fertility beliefs, leading to the identification of associated burials as likely female. This interpretation offers a compelling comparative framework for examining the Hongyingpan material. Within the Hongyingpan cemetery, such nipple-shaped decorations are most frequently identified on flat-bottomed jars, with notable examples deriving from several tombs. For instance, in Tomb M9, Type I flat-bottomed jars displayed two sets of bilateral nipple-shaped decorations, each cluster consisting of two elements. In Tombs M4, M5, and M11, Type II vessels were decorated with two sets of three such elements, while a Type III jar from Tomb M17 featured a single nipple-shaped motif in each of two symmetrical sets. A solitary decoration also appeared on a Type II jar from Tomb M13. The consistency in the application and symmetry of these motifs suggests a highly conventionalized symbolic system rather than arbitrary ornamentation. Significantly, these decorated jars are often found in association with personal adornments such as jade rings and bronze finger rings, objects which themselves are frequently linked to gender and social identity in archaeological contexts. The co-occurrence of symbolically laden pottery and jewelry within the same burials provides reinforcing evidence that these interments may have belonged to women whose social and biological identities were expressed through specific material culture. It thus becomes evident that the decorative program of the pottery functioned in concert with their placement within the tomb to construct and

communicate aspects of the deceased's identity. The nipple-shaped decorations, likely embodying ideas linked to fertility, nurturing, or feminine virtue, served as a form of symbolic communication that complemented the spatial rhetoric of the burial assemblage. Together, vessel type, ornamentation, and placement within the grave formed a multifaceted semiotic system—one that articulated not only personal identity but also community values, cosmological beliefs, and social hierarchies. This decorative grammar, embedded in the material remains from Hongyingpan, offers a rare glimpse into the cultural mechanisms through which gender and status were ritualized and remembered in ancient highland societies. It underscores the importance of incorporating symbolic analysis into the archaeological study of mortuary customs, moving beyond typology and chronology to engage with the intimate relationships between material culture, identity, and belief systems in the past.

4. The Relationship Between Pottery from the Eastern Zhou Period Cemetery at Hongyingpan and Other Burials

Zan (2020) found that from the perspective of immateriality and form, the structural elements of a tomb—including the burial chamber, grave goods, tomb murals, and funerary vessels—constitute the fundamental components of a burial site. The quantity, diversity, and spatial distribution of grave goods serve as fundamental elements in reconstructing ancient social landscapes. These material remains not only reflect the technological capabilities, economic foundations, and exchange networks of their time but also convey deeper cultural meanings and institutional values embedded within funerary practices. Through a careful analysis of the number, types, and arrangement of burial objects, it becomes possible to interpret contemporary attitudes toward death, conceptions of the afterlife, and broader understandings of human existence. Moreover, the structure and composition of mortuary assemblages encapsulate vital information regarding social hierarchy, identity, and collective symbolism. The placement of objects within the tomb—whether surrounding the head, aligned along the body, or grouped in specific corners—often follows culturally prescribed norms that mirror cosmological beliefs and social order. For instance, concentration of pottery vessels in the cranial zone may signal aesthetic, ritual, or ideological priorities rooted in regional traditions. Similarly, variations in the quality, quantity, and origin of grave goods can reveal disparities in wealth, status, and access to trade networks. Cross-cultural comparative studies further illuminate how burial customs and material forms were shared, adapted, or transformed across different regions and periods. The presence of similar artifact types, decorative motifs, or ritual configurations among distinct archaeological cultures—such as those found in the Eastern Zhou sites of Hongyingpan, Hezhang Kele, and Yinzitan—attests to early forms of intercultural communication and integration. These interactions suggest that, as early as the pre-Qin period, there existed dynamic processes of cultural hybridization and mutual influence that contributed to the formation of a shared civilization framework. Such transnational and inter-regional material connections help trace the deep historical roots and developmental trajectories of Chinese civilization. They offer an archaeological perspective on how diverse local traditions gradually

interwove, forming a complex yet unified cultural tapestry that characterized early China. The patterns of ritual practice, aesthetic expression, and technological dissemination preserved in mortuary contexts thus provide concrete evidence for understanding the mechanisms—such as trade, migration, ritual diffusion, and political expansion—that facilitated the integration of multiple ethnic and cultural groups into what would eventually become a cohesive yet pluralistic entity. In this sense, the study of grave goods extends beyond mere typology or chronological concerns. It engages with broader questions concerning civilization formation, cultural identity, and the enduring process of unity within diversity that defines the Chinese nation.

The Hongyingpan burial site does not represent an isolated cultural phenomenon; rather, it constitutes an integral node within a broader network of regional interactions during the Eastern Zhou period. The cultural attributes reflected in its pottery assemblages reveal substantial affinities with several adjacent archaeological cultures, underscoring a dynamic environment of cultural exchange and integration across northwestern Guizhou and northeastern Yunnan. These connections manifest through multiple dimensions of material culture, including artifact morphology, production technology, decorative systems, and burial practices, collectively illustrating a shared cultural milieu despite localized variations. For instance, parallels in vessel forms—such as flat-bottomed jars and high-necked pots—can be traced to findings from the burial sites of Yinzitan in Weining and the Kele cultural remains in Hezhang. Technological similarities, particularly in clay selection, hand-building techniques, and low-temperature firing, further suggest knowledge transfer or shared craft traditions among these communities. Moreover, decorative motifs, such as nipple-shaped appliques, incised geometric patterns, and symmetrical compositions, exhibit striking resemblances to those documented in the Shayuyingpan cemetery in Zhaotong, Yunnan, and the Jigongshan culture, indicating either direct contact or indirect cultural diffusion. The funerary customs observed at Hongyingpan, such as the placement of pottery around the head of the deceased and the inclusion of personal ornaments like bronze rings and jade pendants, also find echoes in surrounding regions. These practices imply not only a shared belief system regarding death and the afterlife but also possibly similar social structures and identity markers cutting across geographical and cultural boundaries. Such widespread cultural consonance points to an active and multifaceted interaction sphere wherein ideas, technologies, and ritual behaviors were continuously negotiated and transmitted. This network of interchange would have facilitated the formation of a regionally coherent yet internally diverse cultural landscape, contributing significantly to the broader historical processes leading toward regional integration in ancient southwestern China. Therefore, the archaeological record at Hongyingpan provides critical evidence for understanding the mechanisms of cultural contact and adaptation in peripheral regions—zones often characterized by hybrid and innovation. It underscores the fact that even seemingly remote communities played essential roles in the larger tapestry of Chinese civilization, participating in and shaping intercultural dynamics long before formal political unification.

4.1 The Connection Between the Eastern Zhou Tombs at Hongyingpan and the Category B Tombs at Shayuyingpan Village, Zhaotong, Yunnan

The Hongyingpan burial ground exhibits multifaceted and systematic similarities with the Category B tombs of Shayuyingpan Village in Zhaotong, Yunnan, Wang (1998) strongly indicating that both sites belong to the same archaeological cultural community or engaged in exceptionally close and frequent ethnic interactions. This cultural affinity is most profoundly manifested in material culture: both sites feature predominantly sand-tempered pottery, with flat-bottomed vessels being prevalent. Jars typically exhibit scalloped rims with spouts, shoulder sections decorated with nipple-shaped knobs, and uniformly bulbous, low-profile forms, all produced using relatively primitive techniques. These highly consistent artefact characteristics, particularly the decorative motif and arrangement of nipple-shaped knobs, reveal that the populations of both regions shared common aesthetic traditions, pottery-making techniques, and even symbolic expression systems. Geographically, Weining and Zhaotong are contiguous, both situated within the cultural corridor spanning northeast Yunnan and northwest Guizhou. This connectivity provided a natural foundation for sustained interaction between the two areas. The convergence of cultural features likely stemmed from multiple mechanisms: a foundation of shared ancestry and cultural inheritance, coupled with frequent trade exchanges, the dissemination of techniques by artisan groups, and inter-community marital alliances. These factors further facilitated the integration and standardization of material culture and burial practices. Particularly noteworthy is the placement of pottery concentrated around the head in graves, alongside the potential religious significance of the nipple-shaped knob motifs, suggesting deep-seated shared spiritual concepts and ritual behaviors. Consequently, the similarities between the Hongyingpan and Shayuyingpan Type B tombs signify that, by the Eastern Zhou period at the latest, a cultural community spanning modern administrative boundaries had formed in this region. This discovery not only deepens our understanding of the archaeological cultural landscape in northwest Guizhou and northeast Yunnan but also provides crucial empirical evidence for comprehending cultural interactions within Southwest China and their historical contributions to the formation of the “multiple-unity” pattern of Chinese civilization.

4.2 The Connection Between the Eastern Zhou Tombs at Hongyingpan and the Jigongshan Culture

The cultural continuity between the Hongyingpan site and the Jigongshan culture provides crucial insights into the archaeological cultural evolution during the Eastern Zhou period in the northwestern Guizhou-northeastern Yunnan region. Studies by Zhang (2022) indicate that as a representative Bronze Age archaeological culture in northwest Guizhou, the Jigongshan culture exhibits typical characteristics including a predominant sand-tempered pottery tradition, a prevalent plain-surfaced pottery style, and a focus on flat-bottomed and ring-footed vessels, all reflecting strong local traditions. The Hongyingpan burial site demonstrably perpetuates this tradition in multiple respects: not only does pottery production continue to predominantly employ sand-tempered clay, but flat-bottomed vessels remain absolutely predominant. Representative artifacts—such as single-eared, folded-rim jars and slender-necked

bottles—can be regarded as direct continuations and progressive developments of comparable Jigongshan Culture vessels in terms of overall form, production techniques, and functional use. Researcher Zhang Herong has explicitly stated that the Hongyingpan-type remains formed and developed by absorbing substantial elements from the Jigongshan culture. This assertion fully reflects the marked continuity and stability in the cultural evolution of this region. Notably, the recurrent burial custom of concentrating pottery near the head of the deceased in Hongyingpan tombs may also derive from local ritual traditions of the Jigongshan Culture or earlier phases, suggesting the enduring transmission of certain spiritual concepts and ceremonial practices in this locality. Nevertheless, the Hongyingpan remains represent not a mere replication of the Jigongshan Culture, but rather an inheritance marked by innovation and continuity with development. This reflects both the strong cultural conservatism and traditional inertia of the local community, and may also indicate that during this new historical period, the Hongyingpan population selectively preserved and reconstructed their traditional culture in response to surrounding cultural influences and social transformations. The lineage between the Hongyingpan remains and the Jigongshan culture extends beyond the continuity of artefact forms, potentially encompassing multiple inheritances of technological systems, ritual activities, social organization, and even conceptual worlds. This provides a crucial case study for exploring the evolutionary pathways of early bronze culture in Southwest China. Further clarification of the relationship between the two holds profound significance for constructing the archaeological cultural genealogy of the Shang-Zhou period in Northwest Guizhou.

4.3 The Connection Between the Hongyingpan Eastern Zhou Cemetery and the Yinzitan Cemetery

According to Li (2006) about the Yinzitan Cemetery, situated merely 400 metre from the Hongyingpan site, though dating slightly later (mid-Warring States to late Western Han periods), exhibits marked cultural affinities. Both cemeteries feature a core ceramic assemblage comprising sand-tempered earthenware jars, cups, and bowls, with plain-surfaced wares predominating alongside nipple-decorated pieces, predominantly flat-bottomed vessels. Notably, certain burials at Yinzitan similarly placed pottery near the deceased's head, a burial custom identical to that observed at Hongyingpan. Given the striking similarities in vessel forms, ceramic traditions, and placement positions between the two sites, it is reasonable to infer that the Yinzitan cemetery likely represents a temporal and cultural continuation of Hongyingpan. Together, they constitute a distinct local cultural sequence spanning the Eastern Zhou to Han periods within the Zhongshui Basin.

The cultural landscape of the Eastern Zhou tombs at Hongyingpan did not develop in isolation but was deeply embedded within a regional network of interactions. To the east, it shared a common lineage with the Jigongshan culture of northwestern Guizhou; to the south, it blended elements of the Category B tomb culture found in the Zhaotong region of northeastern Yunnan; while locally, it continued the traditions established by the Yinzitan burial ground. These multifaceted cultural connections vividly illustrate the 'multiple cultures within a unified whole' cultural pattern of the Eastern Zhou period in Southwest China. They demonstrate that even on the periphery of the Huaxia realm, ancient ethnic

groups collectively shaped the distinctive features of regional culture through sustained exchange, mutual learning, and integration. The Hongyingpan burial site stands as a crucial node for observing this dynamic cultural process.

5. Conclusion

As crucial material manifestations of ancient funerary practices, burial goods serve not only as indicators of the social status and position of the deceased but also as embodiment of profound religious beliefs and cultural worldviews. They offer archaeologists invaluable evidence for interpreting ancient economic systems, social organization, technological capabilities, and intercultural exchanges. Within tomb archaeology, significant research attention has been devoted to the typology, composition, and assemblage of grave goods. However, the spatial distribution of these objects within burial contexts—a aspect rich with cultural meaning—has frequently been overlooked in prior scholarship. This study addresses this gap by examining the placement of pottery vessels in the Eastern Zhou period tombs at the Hongyingpan burial site in Weining County, Guizhou Province. It aims to interpret the funerary customs, social hierarchies, and economic patterns implied by these arrangements. Findings from the Hongyingpan cemetery reveal that pottery vessels were predominantly concentrated around the head area of the deceased. This patterned placement likely reflects a mortuary concept that may be termed “respecting the head as the honored locus,” suggesting a culturally rooted belief in the symbolic importance of the head in rituals related to death and ancestry. Moreover, the close association between pottery forms—such as storage jars, cooking pots, and serving vessels—and daily agricultural life highlights the interplay between funerary rites, ritual activities, and subsistence economies. The presence of such pottery assemblages around the head area may also indicate practices linked to offerings or rituals intended to sustain the deceased in the afterlife.

Additionally, this study investigates specific decorative features of the pottery, such as nipple-shaped protrusions on the shoulders of certain vessels. These elements are examined as potential markers of social identity, including gender distinctions, clan symbols, or status indicators. Preliminary inferences suggest that such ornamentation may correlate with male burials, possibly representing masculine symbolism or roles associated with warfare, hunting, or social leadership. The symbolic resonance of these decorations, alongside their technological execution, provides insight into the cultural values and social narratives of the communities using the Hongyingpan cemetery.

To contextualize these findings, a preliminary comparative analysis has been conducted with contemporaneous archaeological cultures across the region. This includes the Category B tombs at Shayuyingpan Village in Zhaotong, Yunnan, the Jigongshan culture, and the Yinzitan cemetery in Weining. The comparison focuses on vessel morphology, decorative styles, raw material selection, production techniques, and spatial organization within graves. These analyses reveal notable similarities in ceramic forms and mortuary practices, suggesting shared cultural traditions or active intercultural communication across a broader geographic area during the Eastern Zhou period.

The evidence points to the possibility of extensive cultural exchanges and the emergence of regional traditions within this sphere of ancient southwestern China. However, the exact mechanisms of interaction—whether through trade, migration, marital alliances, or conflict—remain unclear. Similarly, the degree and direction of cultural influence among these groups require further investigation. While the shared characteristics in material culture and funerary behavior suggest interconnected communities, the precise social and historical processes underlying these patterns demand verification through future archaeological discoveries and more comprehensive, interdisciplinary research.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes that the spatial organization of burial goods constitutes a critical dimension for decoding the cultural, ritual, and social frameworks of ancient societies. Beyond mere inventory or typology classification, the intentional placement of objects within mortuary contexts offers a rich symbolic language through which communities articulated beliefs about death, identity, and cosmology. The Hongyingpan case study exemplifies this approach, providing not only a window into the ritual behaviors and social organization of Eastern Zhou communities in the Guizhou region but also underscoring the active role of this area in broader inter-regional dialogues. The patterns observed—such as the concentration of pottery near the head and the recurrence of gendered symbolic decorations—reveal a society deeply engaged with concepts of hierarchy, ancestry, and agricultural spirituality. Moreover, the site's material culture illustrates how localized practices intersected with influences from neighboring regions, including northeastern Yunnan and other parts of southwestern China, reflecting a dynamic landscape of cultural adaptation and exchange. These interactions suggest that even peripherally located communities were integral to the network of cultural flows that characterized the Eastern Zhou period.

To advance these insights, future research should move beyond traditional typology studies and embrace more integrated methodologies. Combining detailed technological analyses—such as fabric composition and manufacturing techniques—with contextual and spatial approaches can uncover deeper narratives about production processes, consumption practices, and ritual meanings. Furthermore, employing comparative frameworks across regional archaeological cultures will help clarify the nature and direction of cultural influences, revealing whether similarities stem from shared traditions, exchange, migration, or convergent evolution. Interdisciplinary methods, including archaeological dating, chemical sourcing of materials, and ethnographic analogy, will also be essential in constructing a richer, more nuanced understanding of these ancient communities. Ultimately, such holistic approaches will not only illuminate the funerary practices of the Hongyingpan people but also contribute to broader questions about social complexity and cultural integration in China.

Note

Figure 1 and 2, along with Table 1 and 2, are derived from the arrangement and decoration of pottery from the Eastern Zhou tombs at Hongyingpan, as documented in the Guizhou Field Reports (1993-2003).

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