Journal of Education and Culture Studies
ISSN 2573-0401 (Print) ISSN 2573-041X (Online)
Vol. 9, No. 4, 2025
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/jecs

Original Paper

Material Evidence of the Heji (Harmonious Integration) Policy: Integration Mechanism between the Silk-Threaded Jade Burial Suit and the Jade Burial System in the Tomb of King Zhao Mo of Nanyue

Zhen Gao[1] & Qi Hao[1*]

[1] Guangzhou City University of Technology, Guangzhou, China

[*] Corresponding author.

Received: October 22, 2025 Accepted: November 14, 2025 Online Published: November 20, 2025

doi:10.22158/jecs.v9n4p63 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v9n4p63

Abstract

During the transition from the Qin to the Han dynasty, Zhao Tuo established the Nanyue Kingdom in the Lingnan region and implemented the highly innovative Heji (Harmonious Integration) policy, which provided a stable political foundation for the deep integration of Central Plains and Baiyue cultures.

This paper focuses on the jade artifacts unearthed from the tomb of the Nanyue king, especially the most representative silk-threaded jade burial suit, with the aim of deciphering the cultural codes of integration embedded in these material remains. It argues that the Nanyue jade burial system was not a simple imitation of Central Plains ritual institutions, but rather a bidirectional interaction of "inheritance" and "adaptation" carried out under the framework of the Heji (Harmonious Integration) policy.

Specifically, the silk-threaded jade burial suit strictly follows the burial-jade conventions of the Central Plains in both form and structure, thereby signifying its alignment with political orthodoxy. In contrast, its material composition, decorative motifs, and combined functions display distinct Baiyue characteristics, highlighting the agency of local culture. Employing a research methodology that combines micro-level case study with macro-level analysis, this paper shows that the silk-threaded jade suit and the jade burial system it represents function not only as the material embodiment of the successfully implemented Heji (Harmonious Integration) policy but also reveal the resilient wisdom and practical pathways that underlie the emergence of the early Chinese civilization's pattern of pluralistic unity.

Keywords

silk-threaded jade burial suit, Heji (Harmonious Integration) of the Baiyue, integration mechanism, jade burial system

Introduction

The Qin–Han transition was a pivotal epoch in Chinese history, marked by the emergence of a unified imperial structure and the convergence and intermixing of diverse ethnic cultures. The Nanyue Kingdom (203 BCE - 111 BCE), located on the ountry's southern frontier, offers a unique perspective on this grand historical process. Founded by Zhao Tuo, a former Qin general, the Nanyue Kingdom ruled over the culturally distinct Lingnan region, home to the Baiyue peoples. Confronted with this complex ethnic composition, Zhao Tuo did not impose a policy of forced cultural assimilation. Rather, he creatively enacted the fundamental state policy of *Heji* toward the Baiyue. Through a series of measures—respecting Baiyue customs, encouraging intermarriage, and appointing Baiyue leaders to administrative positions—he effectively mitigated social tensions. Thus, it created an exceptionally conducive environment for peaceful coexistence and cultural interaction between immigrants from the Central Plains and the indigenous Baiyue population (Wang, 2024).

Within this specific historical context, jade artifacts—serving as the most representative material carriers of the Central Plains' ritual and musical civilization and as symbols of power—followed a distinctive developmental trajectory in the Nanyue Kingdom. This evolution provides an exceptionally valuable paradigm for investigating the mechanisms of cultural interaction. The jades carried dual significance: they conveyed the symbolic meaning of Nanyue rulers demonstrating their submission to and political allegiance toward the Central Plains imperial court, while simultaneously embodying local practices of cultural adaptation and integration within Baiyue society in the Lingnan region. Notably, the silk threaded jade burial suit excavated from the tomb of Zhao Mo, King Wen of Nanyue, at Xiang gang Hill in Guangzhou constitutes an irreplaceable piece of physical evidence because of its great antiquity, intact form, and distinctive features (Mai & Lü, 1984). This artifact is not only the earliest and best-preserved silk threaded jade suit discovered to date, but it also continues to stimulate in depth scholarly discussion due to its "dual attributes": its overall form follows Central Plains conventions, whereas specific craft techniques exhibit distinct local features.

Current scholarship on the jade system of the Nanyue Kingdom has produced substantial results, encompassing macro level discussions of its cultural fusion characteristics and micro level analyses of the craftsmanship and functions of individual artifacts. Nevertheless, comprehensive, and intertextual studies that situate the iconic silk threaded jade burial suit within the broader jade system of the Nanyue Kingdom—and within the grand political narrative of *Heji* of the Baiyue—remain relatively underdeveloped. This research gap is the focus of the present study. The study follows a progressive logic: it moves from a core case study to the overall system, and then from material culture back to political insight. First, the silk threaded jade burial suit is examined as the central case, analyzing the cultural

information revealed by its form, craftsmanship, and assemblage. Next, the scope expands to the entire jade assemblage from the Nanyue king's tomb, assessing its overall performance in terms of ritual inheritance and local adaptation. Finally, the analysis returns to the historical context of *Heji* of the Baiyue, arguing that this unique jade system constitutes the most vivid and concrete material testimony of the policy. Thus, the study provides a distinctive case from the southern frontier for understanding the inclusivity and creativity inherent in the formative period of Chinese civilization.

1. *Heji* of the Baiyue: The Political Foundation of Cultural Fusion in the Nanyue Kingdom

The establishment of the Nanyue Kingdom marked a historic transformation in the relationship between the Central Plains polity and the Baiyue ethnic groups. As a significant political entity in the Lingnan region during the transition from the Qin to the Han dynasty, the underlying drivers of its cultural-integration practices can be traced to institutional arrangements at the state level. The Heji policy of Zhao Tuo (c. 230–137 BCE), founding emperor of the Nanyue Kingdom, provided political legitimacy for its long-term rule and established the institutional foundation for interaction and integration between the Central Plains and Baiyue cultures. The systematic implementation of this policy made the Nanyue Kingdom a cultural bridge connecting the Central Plains and the Baiyue, thereby giving its cultural-integration practices distinct institutional characteristics, rather than a simple case of cultural superimposition or one-way assimilation.

The establishment of the Nanyue Kingdom marked a historic transformation in the relationship between the Central Plains polity and the Baiyue ethnic groups. As a significant political entity in the Lingnan region during the transition from the Qin to the Han dynasty, the underlying drivers of its cultural-integration practices can be traced to institutional arrangements at the state level. The *Heji* policy implemented by Zhao Tuo not only provided political legitimacy for the Nanyue Kingdom's long-term rule but also constituted the institutional foundation for interaction and integration between Central Plains and Baiyue cultures. The Records of the Grand Historian (Annals of the Southern Yue) record that "if one attempts to bind them with the laws of the Central States alone, the Yue people would certainly rebel," indicating Zhao Tuo's clear recognition of the limitations of a coercive cultural model. Consequently, the ruling strategy of Nanyue underwent a fundamental shift from military conquest to cultural integration. Thus, the *Heji* policy was elevated from a temporary pacification measure to an institutionalized state strategy, designed to ensure the kingdom's long-term stability and security. This systematic implementation made the Nanyue Kingdom a cultural bridge connecting the Central Plains and the Baiyue, giving its cultural-integration practices distinct institutional characteristics rather than a simple case of cultural superimposition or one-way assimilation. The effectiveness of the *Heji* policy lay in its construction of a multilayered, systematic practice framework. By operating through several channels—cultural symbols, social structures, power distribution, and local administration—it reshaped the ethnic-political landscape of the Nanyue state. At the level of cultural symbols, Zhao Tuo performed bodily-political acts, such as abandoning his Central-Plains official attire and adopting the local topknot

hairstyle, thereby recasting himself from a Central-Plains general into the monarch of Nanyue. This deliberate embrace of Baiyue customs was not merely a personal gesture but a political strategy intended to dissolve the cultural heterogeneity of the ruling elite and to create a psychological precondition for deeper cultural integration. In terms of social consolidation, the Nanyue regime actively promoted intermarriage between Han and Yue peoples, making it a core state policy to stabilize the foundations of its rule. The intermarriage between the royal house of Zhao Tuo and the Baiyue aristocracy, coupled with the encouragement of unions between Central Plains immigrants and the Yue peoples, fundamentally altered the kinship composition of Nanyue society. This "homology of family and state" strategy, grounded in blood-line fusion, laid a social foundation for a new form of state identity that transcended ethnic boundaries. At the level of the power structure, the Nanyue Kingdom established a model of cross-ethnic elite co-governance. Historical records show that the Yue chieftain Lu Jia rose to the position of Chancellor and was “joined by marriage to the king”, reflecting the systematic incorporation of Baiyue elites into the ruling core. By constructing a power framework that combined rule of the “Yue by the Yue” with “Han-Yue co-governance”, the Nanyue regime successfully linked the interests of local elites closely with the fate of the kingdom, forming a stable political alliance. In terms of local governance, the Nanyue state implemented a dual-track system that ran parallel to the traditional prefecture-county system and the ji-mi system. This arrangement allowed the central authority to exercise direct control over more assimilated areas while granting a degree of autonomy to peripheral Yue territories, thereby reinforcing the overall stability of the kingdom. In the core areas under effective central control, the Nanyue state implemented a prefecture-county system; in the remote tribal regions it recognized the autonomy of local chieftains. This differentiated approach to governance demonstrated sophisticated wisdom: it ensured the uniform implementation of state decrees while simultaneously respecting the traditional governance structures of Baiyue society, achieving a balance between centralized authority and local self-governance. The implementation of the *Heji* policy as a systematic state strategy created an unprecedented paradigm of cultural convergence. Within this framework, jade artifacts—serving as the core material carriers of Central-Plain’s ritual and musical civilization—transcended their purely ritual and aesthetic functions to become crucial media for political identity and cultural negotiation. The selective adoption of the Central-Plains jade ritual system by the Nanyue ruling elite was, in essence, a political strategy: through symbolically charged ritual practices they signaled allegiance to the Central dynastic order while simultaneously constructing their own legitimacy. Conversely, the localized adaptations evident in the choice of jade material, the design of decorative motifs, and the modes of artifact assemblage represent a systematic incorporation and strategic re-configuration of indigenous cultural traditions within the “*Heji Baiyue*” political framework. Moreover, archaeological evidence shows that jade objects were deliberately employed in Nanyue tombs and ceremonial contexts to convey permanence, authority, and the sacred power attributed to stone, thereby reinforcing the state's cultural agenda. In sum, the *Heji* policy not only facilitated the political integration of the Central Plains and Baiyue peoples but also reshaped material culture—particularly jade—so that it functioned as a bridge between imperial

symbolism and local identity, embodying the distinctive institutional character of Nanyue's cultural-integration practices. Therefore, an in-depth study of the jade assemblage from the Nanyue king's tomb—especially a systematic analysis of its highest-ranking ritual object, the silk-threaded jade burial suit—constitutes the essential key to deciphering this political wisdom. The jade objects recovered from the tomb, and in particular the silk-threaded jade suit of the highest hierarchical status, have transcended the ordinary category of funerary goods to become a concentrated embodiment and material expression of the *Heji* political philosophy within material culture. As invaluable historical artifacts, these jades provide the most immediate and persuasive archaeological evidence for tracing the transition from "separate coexistence" to "cultural convergence" between the Central Plains dynastic culture and the Baiyue peoples (Chen & Liu, 2011).

2. Declaring the Inheritance of the Central Plains: The Central-Plains "Genetic Code" Embedded in the Silk-Threaded Jade Burial Suit and Mortuary Jade Rituals

Under the overarching *Heji* policy that the Nanyue Kingdom applied to the Baiyue peoples, its cultural practices displayed both integrative and innovative traits. Yet, in the core sphere of mortuary jade rituals—the principal venue for expressing political hierarchy and civilizational identity—the kingdom adhered rigorously to the ritual system of the Central Plains. The silk-threaded jade burial suit and the complete assemblage of jade objects unearthed from the tomb of King Wen of Nanyue were far from being arbitrary local inventions; they constitute a set of ritual declarations laden with explicit political significance. Their standardized forms, structural designs, and modes of artifact combination deeply inherit the core "genetic" elements of the Central Plains' ritual and musical civilization that trace back to the Zhou Dynasty. Thus, while the Nanyue state pursued a policy of cultural synthesis, its mortuary jade practices deliberately reproduced Central-Plains ceremonial conventions, thereby embedding the *Heji* strategy within the material culture of the kingdom.

2.1 The Silk-Threaded Jade Burial Suit: The Lingnan Adoption of the Central-Plains Burial-Jade System

The silk-threaded jade burial suit, the most ritually significant artifact recovered from the tomb of King Wen of Nanyue, provides direct physical evidence that the Nanyue elite fully embraced the Central-Plains burial-grade system. This precious object, more than two thousand years old, comprises 2,291 finely polished green jade plaques linked by silk and hemp cords, forming a complete ensemble of six principal components—head cover, upper garment, sleeves, leggings, gloves, and shoes—that together create a sealed "jade casket" enveloping the corpse and ensuring systematic coverage and protection of the entire body (Bai, 1991). Structurally, the suit displays remarkable consistency with the gold-threaded jade burial suit of Liu Sheng, King Jing of Zhongshan, unearthed from the later Han tomb at Mancheng, Hebei. This similarity demonstrates its lineage from the Western Zhou burial tradition of the "pieced-jade face cover", in which jade plates were sewn onto a fabric mask covering the face; the technique later evolved into the thread-woven construction of the silk-threaded suit. During the Han dynasty, this practice further developed into the conceptual and ritual system of "jade-sealed burial", which emphasized the holistic

preservation of the body. The silk-hemp thread weaving technique employed in the silk-threaded jade burial suit continues the traditional craft of the Shang-Zhou “jade face cover”. This technique predates the later gold-thread and silver-thread jade-suit productions that emerged in the Central Plains, reflecting a distinctive inheritance and innovation in jade-suit manufacture within the Lingnan region. The discovery is of great significance, marking a paradigmatic shift in ancient Chinese burial jade from the Shang-Zhou emphasis on "partial adornment," which focused on the face and key body parts, to the Han dynasty's pursuit of “holistic body preservation”. Although the Nanyue jade suit uses silk-hemp threads to bind and attach the plaques, its core conceptual framework—the belief that "if the physical form does not decay, the spirit will not scatter," and the ritual function of employing jade plaques to construct a sealed space for protecting the body and housing the soul—remains entirely homologous with the mortuary beliefs of the Central-Plains core regions. Therefore, the appearance of the silk-threaded jade burial suit in Lingnan substantively represents the implementation of a high-level Central-Plains burial system on the ountry's southern frontier. It materializes the aspiration of the Nanyue ruling elite to emulate the Central-Plains dynasty, thereby asserting their hierarchical status, and pursuing cultural orthodoxy. This strict adherence to the core ritual institutions established a fundamental framework within which any subsequent localized adaptations would necessarily operate.

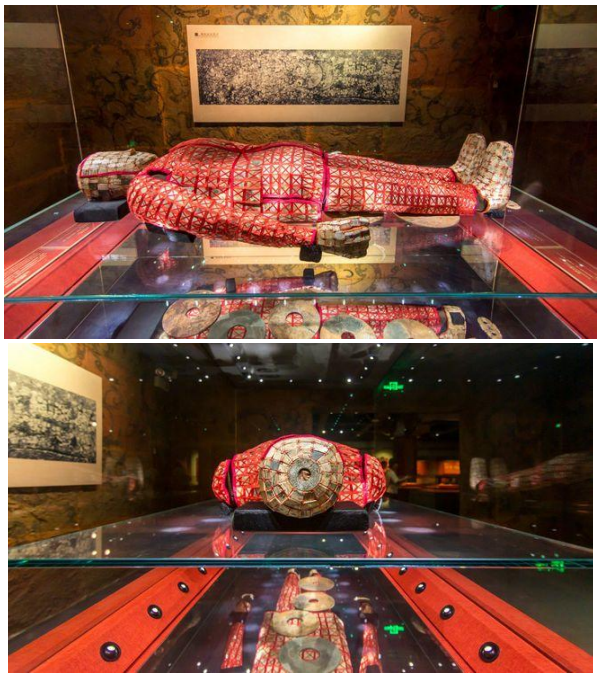

Figure 1. The Silk-Thread Jade Burial Suit of Zhao Mei, King of Nanyue

2.2 Jade Bi Discs and Grouped Jade Pendants: The Standardized Use of Ritual Symbols

Within the mortuary space of the Nanyue king’s tomb, jade’s significance is expressed not only through the silk-threaded burial suit but, more importantly, through the systematic arrangement of jade bi-discs and grouped jade pendants. The overall jade assemblage demonstrates a synthesized inheritance of a

complex Central-Plains system that places “burial jade” at its core while simultaneously incorporating the ritual functions of “ceremonial jade” and decorative purposes. The spatial layout of the 71-jade bi-discs recovered from the Nanyue king’s tomb follows the cosmological and sacrificial schema recorded in the Zhou Guan· Da zone bo (“Offices of the Grand Master”) of the Rites of Zhou, which prescribes the use of a dark-green bi-disc to worship Heaven (Shen, 2013). In accordance with this prescription, the larger bi-discs were positioned between the inner and outer coffins and directly beneath the occupant’s body, thereby creating a sacred ritual zone that mediates between Heaven and Earth and symbolizes a conduit for the deceased’s soul to ascend to the heavens. Particularly those jade bi disks precisely aligned above the head of the deceased, with their perfectly circular perforations, can be understood as symbolic representations of the “Tian Qiao” (Heavenly Aperture) or “Gate of Heaven”—a sacred portal through which the soul ascends vertically from the earthly realm to the celestial world. This symbolic use of bi-discs to create a jade casket-type ritual space originates in the Warring-States Chu burial tradition, which held that jade discs could guide the spirit upward (Liu, 2023; Chen, 2022). The idea is rooted in an ancient cosmology that linked jade’s presumed spiritual conductivity and preservative qualities with the aspiration of celestial ascent. During the Western Han, this tradition merged with the jade-suit system and with lacquer coffins inlaid with jade. By employing both actual bi-discs and their iconographic representations, the practice became fully developed and institutionalized, eventually forming a ritual space—constructed through bi-discs—intended to guide the deceased’s soul to the celestial realm. The replication of this practice in the Nanyue king’s tomb unequivocally demonstrates its deep integration with the mainstream ritual traditions of the Central Plains.

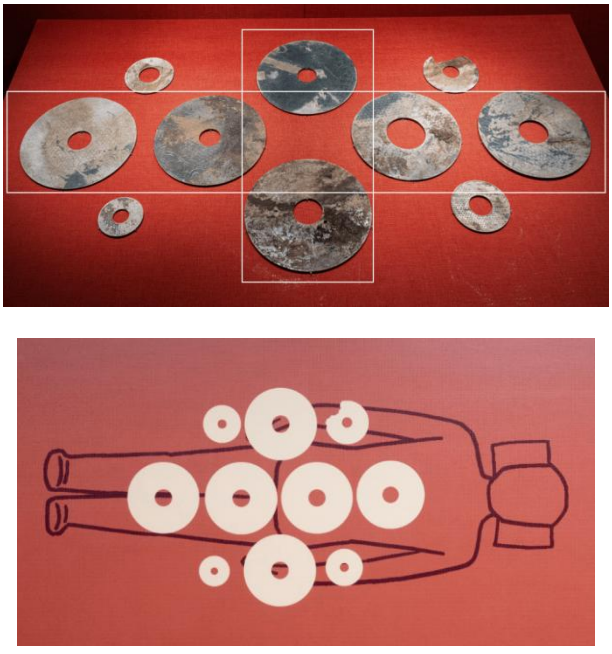

Figure 2. Ten Bi-disks Covering the Silk-Thread Jade Burial Suit in the Tomb of Zhao Mei, King of Nanyue

The grouped jade pendants unearthed from the tomb—comprising jade Huang-pendants, jade tubes, jade beads and other components arranged in a prescribed sequence—correspond to the description in the Classic of Poetry: “presenting him with a composite pendant” . In the Shi Jing the phrase to wear jade-set ornaments records precisely such a composite pendant, indicating that the burial assemblage deliberately reproduced this literary motif. In the cultural sphere of the Central Plains, grouped jade pendants were not merely decorative accessories; they functioned as a core indicator of noble rank and status. Jade’s association with virtue and hierarchy is repeatedly emphasized in the Shi Jing and related ritual texts, where the possession of elaborate jade ensembles signified elite identity. Thus, the Nanyue king’s tomb presents a systematic assemblage of jade pendants that mirrors the Central-Plains convention of using grouped jade ornaments as a status marker, while also reflecting the specific literary allusion to a “composite pendant” from the Classic of Poetry. This duality underscores the tomb’s role as a cultural bridge between southern Yue traditions and the mainstream ritual vocabulary of the Central Plains. Simultaneously, the grouped jade pendants excavated from the tomb—comprising jade Huang-pendants, jade tubes, jade beads, and other components arranged in a prescribed sequence—correspond in their mode of wearing to the passage in the Classic of Poetry that mentions "presenting him with a composite pendant." In Central-Plain’s culture, grouped jade pendants were not merely decorative ornaments; they served as a key indicator of noble status and rank. A total of eleven sets of grouped jade pendants were recovered from the tomb of the Nanyue king. The set belonging to the tomb’s occupant, Zhao Mo, is the most sumptuous: it comprises thirty-two individual ornaments of various materials and measures approximately 60 cm in length. The great number of components and the intricate craftsmanship render it a "symbol or marker of powerful and noble status." Wearing a grouped pendant of this magnitude directly signified the tomb owner’s elevated rank as a feudal lord, thereby conforming strictly to the contemporary ritual hierarchy (Chen, 2009). The normative employment of grouped jade pendants in the tomb of the Nanyue king shows that the ruling elite had fully embraced the Central Plains ideological framework in which “the gentleman compares his virtue to jade” and “uses pendants to illuminate ritual propriety.” This Confucian model was internalized as an indispensable element of the elite’s own representation of power.

In summary, the silk-threaded jade burial suit, the complete sets of jade bi-discs, and the grouped jade pendants recovered from the tomb of the Nanyue king together constitute a coherent system of ritual symbols whose meanings and functions are clearly defined. These artifacts imitate Central-Plains prototypes in form, follow classical protocols in their spatial arrangement, and inherit the Central-Plains concepts of the soul, cosmology, and hierarchical order at the conceptual level (Luo, 1994). This suite of characteristics compellingly demonstrates that, at the most fundamental level of ruling legitimacy and cultural identity, the Nanyue Kingdom actively and proactively integrated itself into the lineage of the Central-Plains ritual and burial civilization. Its adoption and implementation of the Central-Plains jade burial system provides an indispensable cognitive foundation for the subsequent discussion of its localized adaptations.



Figure 3. Jade Pendant Set from the Tomb of Zhao Mei, King of Nanyue

3. Presentation of Indigenous Knowledge: Baiyue Adaptation and Innovation within the Jade System

While faithfully adhering to the core framework of the Central-Plains ritual system, the jade system of the Nanyue Kingdom simultaneously displayed a distinct regional character. This distinctiveness does not indicate a rupture from the Central-Plains model; rather, it reflects a creative reinterpretation of Central-Plains jade culture within the flexible scope afforded by the *Heji* policy. A series of localized adaptations—varying in material choice, decorative motifs, and functional assemblages—deeply embody the craft traditions, aesthetic preferences, and values of Baiyue society. Collectively, these elements forged a uniquely Nanyue jade culture, one that adopts Central-Plains forms while resonating with the spirit of the Yue peoples.

3.1 Divergence in Materials and Craftsmanship

The silk-threaded jade burial suit unearthed from the Nanyue king's tomb exhibits a clear dual character

in both its craftsmanship and material composition. This duality reveals the complex process by which the Nanyue Kingdom adopted Central-Plain's jade-working techniques while implementing localized modifications in its jade production. First, regarding the raw materials used for the jade suit, the jade plaques from different sections of the burial garment display notable variations in color, texture, and probable origin. Some plaques, composed of yellow-brown nephrite, may have been sourced locally from Nanyue itself, whereas the presence of other jade types with markedly different textures indicates a multiple-source procurement network. This material inconsistency reflects, on the one hand, the constraints the Nanyue Kingdom faced in accessing a consistent supply of high-quality jade, and, on the other hand, a pragmatic approach that flexibly leveraged the resources available to them. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that many jade plaques were clearly repurposed from older jade artifacts or jade off-cuts, bearing discernible modification traces from objects such as jade bi-discs and Huang-pendants. Some plaque edges even exhibit incomplete polishing. This practice of integrating older jade fragments with newly produced jade likely stemmed from a motive to conserve precious jade resources, and may also reflect the fact that the Nanyue Kingdom had not yet established a standardized jade production system. Second, at the level of craftsmanship the silk-threaded jade burial suit demonstrates a sophisticated synthesis of advanced Central-Plain's techniques and indigenous technological traditions. The cutting of the jade plaques was executed with remarkable precision, producing kerfs only 0.5–0.7 mm wide. Nevertheless, when compared with the gold-threaded jade suits worn by high-ranking Central-Plain's nobles of the same era, a clear disparity in finishing quality becomes evident. The Nanyue suit shows a relative irregularity in the dimensions and spatial arrangement of its plaques, pronounced variation in plaque thickness, and conspicuous differences in both material composition and workmanship among its separate sections. These traits indicate that the silk-threaded jade burial suit was probably not the output of a single, standardized "jade workshop" system; rather, it appears to have been assembled by different groups of artisans working under varying conditions. The unevenness in craftsmanship thus serves as material testimony to the Nanyue Kingdom's adaptive adjustments as it incorporated the Central-Plains ritual system—adjustments that were constrained by local resource limitations and technological capabilities.

3.2 Incorporation of Baiyue Styles: Manifestations in Decorative Motifs and Forms



Figure 4. Central-Chinese Jade Dancer from the Tomb of Zhao Mei, King of Nanyue



Figure 5. Openwork Dragon-and-Phoenix Double-ring Jade Pendant from the Tomb of Zhao Mei, King of Nanyue

The jade artifacts from the Nanyue king's tomb incorporate a pronounced Baiyue aesthetic in both their decorative motifs and overall artistic style, presenting a vivid character that diverges from the more formalized conventions of the Central Plains. A salient example is the jade pendant depicting a dancer that was recovered from the tomb. The dancer's posture is rendered with a fluid, sinuous "S-shaped" twist, while the sleeves and skirt appear to flutter dynamically.

This treatment stands in stark contrast to the typically dignified and static poses of jade dancer figures that are characteristic of Central Plains tradition. Instead, its lively manner more closely parallels the vibrant style observed on the bronze dancer figurines excavated from the Han-period tomb at Luo bo wan in Guixian, Guangxi. Similarly, the dragon motifs on certain dragon-phoenix jade pendants display a more exaggerated curvature in their bodies, with meticulously carved scales, while the phoenix tails exhibit a forked form (Luo, Li, Qiu et al., 2012). These features depart from the solemn, symmetrical conventions of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, revealing a naturalistic observation of living organisms that characterizes Baiyue art (Hu, 2019). These decorative adaptations indicate that, although Nanyue jade craftsmen mastered the core vessel typologies and manufacturing techniques of the Central Plains, they simultaneously—whether consciously or unconsciously—infused their own visual experiences and aesthetic preferences into their work. Thus, the imported ritual vessels came to bear local emotional

expression.

3.3 Shift in Preference for Functional Assemblages

The most striking localized feature of the Nanyue jade assemblage lies in the relative emphasis placed on different functional groups. In Central-Plains aristocratic tombs, ritual jade objects—such as bi discs, Gui tablets, and Huang pendants—constitute the core of the burial inventory (Xu, Zhang, & Sun, 2021) (Yang, 2012). By contrast, the jade artifacts recovered from the Nanyue king's tomb display a pronounced dominance of decorative jade pieces. The sheer number and diversity of ornamental items—jade sword fittings, belt hooks, and bead strings—are especially conspicuous, together accounting for more than sixty percent of the total assemblage. The jade artifacts from the Nanyue king's tomb contain a significant number of decorative pieces, especially the jade sword fittings. Over forty such fittings have been identified, many of which were often inlaid with turquoise, a material that was abundantly produced in the Lingnan region. In addition, the bead strings recovered from the tomb are composed of a variety of materials—including agate, crystal, and amber—displaying vivid colors and complex assemblages. This pronounced emphasis on decorative function stands in stark contrast to the solemn, hierarchical focus of the Central-Plains ritual system, which privileged jade objects primarily as symbols of rank. The Nanyue assemblage therefore reflects the secularized aesthetic traditions of the Baiyue peoples, who valued elaborate ornamentation and used exquisite jade adornments to assert personal wealth and social status through material display (Li & Chen, 2011). This shift in preference reveals that while Nanyue society adopted elements of Central Plains ritual culture, the practical social function of jade underwent a subtle adaptation, aligning more closely with local customs.

In summary, the jade system of the Nanyue Kingdom was not a simple transplantation of Central-Plains jade culture into Lingnan; rather, it constituted a complex system profoundly infused with, and systematically reconfigured by, local culture. Through the strategic selection of materials and craftsmanship, the localized reinterpretation of decorative styles, and the differential weighting of functional assemblages—operating alongside the inherited Central-Plains ritual framework discussed in earlier chapters—it embodied a two-way dynamic of "inheritance-adaptation." This mechanism materialized the political wisdom of the "Heji (Harmonious Integration)" policy, which the Han dynasties employed to integrate the southern territories, ultimately shaping a distinctive cultural character that "adopts Central-Plains forms while resonating with the spirit of the Yue." This provides a solid evidential foundation for the paper's final conclusions.

Conclusion

This study, through a systematic examination of the silk-threaded jade burial suit and the broader jade assemblage recovered from the Nanyue king's tomb, reveals the profound imprint and innovative practice of the *Heji* policy toward the Baiyue at the level of material culture. The findings demonstrate that the Nanyue jade system was not a simple imitation of Central-Plains ritual institutions; rather, it constitutes a culturally integrated paradigm with its own internal logic, shaped by the specific historical conditions

of the period.

The silk-threaded jade burial suit, as the emblematic artifact of this integration process, is valuable not only for its distinctive chronology and form but, more importantly, for the cultural dialogue encoded in its materiality. Its strict adherence to the Central-Plains burial-jade system in overall shape and construction—evidenced by the jade plates and the use of silk thread to bind them—is combined with unmistakable local characteristics manifested in the choice of jade, the craftsmanship of the fittings, and the specific weaving technique. Together, these features constitute a micro-cosmic illustration of the dual dynamics of “inheritance” and “adaptation”. When the scope is broadened to the whole jangle assemblage, the fusion mechanism becomes markedly more comprehensive and systematic. The bi-discs faithfully reproduce the Central-Plains cosmological schema and reinforce ritual functions within the burial context. The grouped pendants are fully adopted as markers of Central-Plains aristocratic identity. Moreover, the sheer variety and abundance of decorative jade pieces—such as sword fittings, belt hooks, and bead strings—reflect a distinctly local aesthetic preference, while Baiyue naturalistic realism is woven into the decorative motifs of numerous jade objects. Consequently, the jade culture of the Nanyue Kingdom follows a clear trajectory of integration: it rigidly upholds Central-Plains traditions at the level of core ritual frameworks and conceptual foundations to secure political legitimacy and cultural orthodoxy, yet flexibly pursues localized creation and adaptation in material selection, craftsmanship, decorative motifs, and functional groupings, thereby strengthening its cultural affinity and identity within the local society. This integrative wisdom of "harmonizing form and spirit" and "distinguishing core from periphery" enabled the Nanyue Kingdom to preserve national unity and cultural centripetal force while simultaneously safeguarding and invigorating the vitality and creativity of local culture. The complete jade assemblage excavated from the Nanyue king's tomb stands as the most vivid and concrete materialized testimony to the grand political narrative of *Heji Baiyue*.

In summary, the formation process of the Nanyue jade system offers a valuable early case for understanding the mechanisms that underlie the “pluralistic-unity” pattern of Chinese civilization. It shows that a civilization’s vitality rests precisely on its inclusiveness and adaptability—its capacity to creatively transform culture while respecting differences. The silk-threaded jade suit and the broader Nanyue jade culture it represents constitute not merely a distinctive chapter in the history of Chinese jade craftsmanship, but, more importantly, a material embodiment of the flexible wisdom employed in the formation of the Chinese nation. Consequently, the study provides significant guidance for addressing cultural-diversity issues in the contemporary era.

Fund Project

From Ritual Vessels to Digital Symbols: The Social Life of Guangfu Jade Carving (2025-2027) School-Level Research Projects for the 2025 Academic Year (No.60-k0225030).

References

Bai, R. J. (1991). The cleaning and restoration of the silk-thread jade burial suit of the nanyue king of the western Han dynasty. *Cultural Relics*, (04), 64-70+88.

Chen, B. S. (2022). Classics, history and historical writing: Taking Zheng Xuan's discussion of the round mound ritual as an example. *Journal of Sichuan University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, (02), 23-31.

Chen, Q. (2009). *A study of the jade artifacts from the Nanyue king's tomb in Guangzhou*. Beijing: Central Academy of Fine Arts.

Chen, Q., & Liu, Z. H. (2011). A study on the distribution and connotations of jade artifacts in the Nanyue king's tomb. *Southeast Culture*, (02), 75-81.

Hu, T. T. (2019). The phoenix-patterned jade artifacts unearthed from the Nanyue king's tomb and shamanic culture. *Cultural Relics World*, (01), 15-19.

Li, G. T., & Chen, X. (2011). A study of the jade dancers unearthed from the Nanyue king's tomb. *Cultural Heritage*, (01), 150-156+161-162.

Liu, X. D. (2023). A study on the funerary functions of jade artifacts in the main coffin chamber of the western Han Nanyue king's tomb in Guangzhou. *Art and Design Research*, (04), 28-34.

Luo, B. (1994). A preliminary study on jade burial suits and the concept of ascension to immortality in the Han dynasty. *Cultural Relics Spring and Autumn*, (03), 55-56.

Luo, H., Li, L. N., Qiu, Z. L., et al. (2012). A preliminary study on the material and processing techniques of some jade materials from early western Han jade burial suits with gold and silk threads. *Sciences of Conservation and Archaeology*, *24*(02), 61-73.

Mai, Y. H., & Lü, L. D. (1984). A discussion on the tomb owner, burial system and human sacrifice of the Nanyue king's tomb at Xiang gang, Guangzhou. *Guangzhou Studies*, (04), 68-72.

Shen, W. (2013). A brief analysis of the jade usage system in the Zhou dynasty—Centered on the rites of Zhou. *Journal of Hubei University of Science and Technology*, *33*(10), 93-94.

Wang, Y. Y. (2024). The concept of "YuanDe" and the frontier political system of the early Han dynasty under emperor Wu. *Journal of Zhejiang University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, *54*(08), 149-160.

Xu, X. P., Zhang, Y. H., & Sun, E. L. (2021). Artistic characteristics and cultural connotations of decorative patterns during the Nanyue kingdom period. *Silk*, *58*(02), 107-114.

Yang, J. F. (2012). Jade artifacts from the Nanyue king's tomb: Witness to the convergence and integration of chu, Han and Yue cultures. *Southern Ethnology and Archaeology*, (1), 193-224.