

Eastern Zhou Tomb at Lizhou'ao in Jing'an County, Jiangxi

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Key words: Tombs-Jing'an County (Jiangxi Province) Textiles-History Shaft Graves-Spring and Autumn Period

Located at Shuikou Village, Shuikou Township of Jing'an County in Jiangxi Province, the Lizhou'ao tomb, datable to the Eastern Zhou Period, was excavated from 6 January 2007 to 25 October 2007. It is one of the tombs among the thatched house group at Lijiacun in Shuikou Township. About 700m north of the Shuikou township seat and 200m west of a southern tributary of the Beiliao River, the site is situated in the western side of the Shuikou Basin, a basin that had been densely inhabited since antiquity with cultural remains of the Shang and Zhou periods scattered all over. The tomb is at the east side of the Lizhou'ao hill at an elevation of 125m above the sea level.

Tomb Structure

The Lizhou'ao tomb is a large-scale shaft pit-style burial with a circular mound on top. The mound covers an area of 1100 sqm, about 12m high, and 30–35m in diameter. Five layers of piled-up earth can be identified, mainly yellow earth with pebbles. Beneath the mound is a rectangular tomb pit, the central axis of which oriented at 85 degrees. The tomb pit is 14.5m long N–S, 11.3–11.7m wide W–E, and about 4m in depth. The four walls of the tomb stand perpendicular to the ground, and the pit was filled with a thick layer of livid fine clay (*qinggaoni*). A ramp entrance passage cuts into the east wall near the southern end. It is about 3.2m wide, with a remaining length of only

about 5m.

The uneven floor of the tomb pit was covered with a layer of fine clay (*qinggaoni*) about 40–60cm thick, on top of which bamboo mats were laid. 47 coffins were placed in sequence starting from north to south (Figures 1 & 2). Each coffin was first wrapped in layers of bamboo mats and then tied firmly with three rows of bamboo ropes. It seems that the bamboo ropes, about 3–4cm

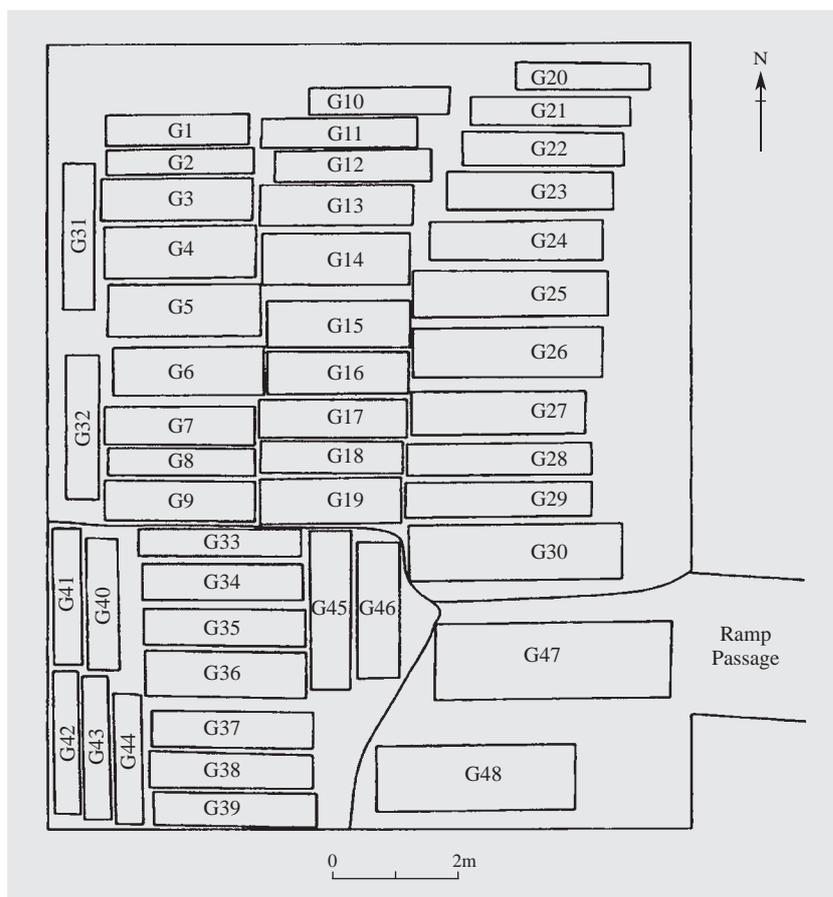


Figure 1. The Arrangements of the Coffins in the Lizhou'ao Tomb



Figure 2. Bird Eye's View of the Lizhou'ao Tomb (Top. South)

thick, were used to tie the coffins when the coffins were entered. But after the coffins were laid these ropes were then loosen and scattered on the bamboo mats. The stratigraphic relationship between the bamboo mats and the ropes is clear: no obvious disturbance or intrusion is discerned. This suggests that these coffins were buried roughly at the same time.

After the coffins were placed, a layer of *qinggaoni* was then applied to cover the coffins and then fill the

tomb pit. Subsequently another layer of yellow earth, about 10cm thick, covered the entire pit. The yellow earth was rammed solid and then baked to form a tightly compressed covering, which can be clearly divided into three sections: the first (Section A) is located in the north of the pit, including G1–G32 (G stands for coffin); the second (Section B), including G33–G46, is in the southwest corner of the pit; the third (Section C), located in the southeast corner of the pit, includes the master coffins G47 and G48 (which is empty). It seems that when the tomb was sealed, Section C was first covered with clay to form a small tumulus. Then Sections A and B were sealed.

Four layers of earth were rammed hard and filled the tomb from north to south. The color of each layer is somewhat different, and each layer is set apart from next one by large stone blocks. Some sections of the earth are firm and solid with clear stratification. Leaves and straws set apart different layers of hard rammed earth and ramming marks are still visible. Every layer contained stamped hard pottery shards, most of which were decorated with fishing-net or checker design. The

earth filled up the pit to the mouth and then extended to a wider area to form a circular mound.

Tomb Furniture and Burial Custom

1. Among the 47 coffins, most of which made of Chinese fir (*Cunninghamia lanceolata*), 28 were well preserved. A majority of the coffins lie east-west and only a few north-south. The coffins range in length from 2.4 to 2.8m and in width 50 to 80cm. They all consist of

a single coffin, with the only exception of G47, which has a coffin and a coffin chamber. These coffins were all carved out of single logs which had been split into two halves, the cores of which were hallowed out using tools such as axe and adze. There are three types of coffins based on the methods of joinery: the first type is by mortise and tenon joint; the second by concave joint; and the third by flat joint.

Type 1 (by mortise and tenon joint). G30 is an example. The coffin measures 291cm long, 79cm wide on the outside and 186cm long, 55cm wide and 40cm high on the inside. The mortise is 14cm high and both walls of the coffin are 12cm thick. No trace of bamboo mats or bamboo hoops were discovered on the coffin, but there were four quadrilateral metal fittings fixed on the eastern and western ends of the coffin.

G47, one of the master coffins, is another example. This is the only coffin protected by a wooden chamber. The chamber consists of a bottom panel and four side panels. No trace of a lid is discerned. The four side panels were attached to the bottom panel by the mortise and tenon joint. Grooved around the edges, the bottom panel, 362cm long, 136cm wide and 17cm thick, is cut out of a single log. All the four side panels are lacquered.

The G47 coffin, measuring 314cm in length, 80cm in width and 54cm in height, is also carved out of a single log with a circular cross-section. The inside of the coffin is an elongated oval shape, measuring 190cm in length, and lacquered with brownish yellow color. The two side walls of the coffin are perpendicular to the flat floor. Both ends of the floor are higher than the middle part. The entire coffin is painted with lacquer. A gold coffin ornament was nailed at the eastern end of the coffin, facing the entrance passage on the east.

Type 2 (by concave joint). It means that at the joint of the lid and the coffin the surfaces are curved to match each other. G7 is an example. It measures 237cm long, 61cm wide and 49cm high on the outside and 184cm long, 45cm wide and 44cm high on the inside. The coffin wall is about 8cm thick. Traces of bamboo mats were found on the surface of the coffin and impressions of crisscross bamboo hoops found on the eastern part of the lid.

Type 3 (by flat joint). It means that where the lids and the coffins meet, the surfaces are flat and smooth. G11, measuring 242cm long, 66.5cm wide, and 61cm high on the outside and 187cm long, 48.5cm wide, 40cm high on the inside, is an example of this type. Traces of

chiseling were found on the floor of the coffins. There are handles on both ends of the lids, some having been broken off deliberately.

2. Judging from the locations where skeleton remains and bamboo cases were found (bamboo cases usually placed nearby the foot), a majority of the dead were buried with their heads facing east, and some west, and some unclear.

22 human skeleton remains were found, and those could be identified are all female, aged between 15 to 25 years. Four of them were buried flexed lying on their side while ten of them in an extended supine position. It seems that some were buried naked and wrapped in textile or bamboo mats. Some wore small jade ornaments or jade sets of exquisite quality.

Grave Goods

All coffins except for those rotten, the condition of which is uncertain, yield grave goods. Most of them were placed in bamboo cases near the feet of the dead. Sometimes grave goods were also found outside of the coffins. Objects such as small bronze tools, wooden weaving instruments, pottery spindles, and lacquered ladles have been discovered. Proto-celadon wares, bronze *Ding*-tripods, and painted and lacquered wooden sword were found too. In some coffins brain tissues, human skulls, teeth, and hairs have been found, which is significant because it filled the gap in the research on human remains of pre-Qin period from south China. Inside many skulls there are jade-green crystals of ferric phosphate sort, with glaring greenish light, which is another extremely rare archaeological find. On some human skulls queues were still attached. This is the earliest example discovered in China.

All together over 650 objects have been excavated: 144 pieces of bamboo and wooden objects, 30 bronzes, 13 jades, 12 lacquer wares, 7 proto-celadon wares, 5 metal objects, 1 gold piece, and more than 300 pieces of textile. In addition, plants and animals such as melon seeds, Chinese pepper (*Zanthoxylum bungeanum Maxim*), rice grains, peach stones, pine needles, and shells were also found.

1. Gold coffin ornament, one piece (G47:1). It consists of a thin gold inner disc and a ceramic frame of a double circle, with a diameter of 48cm. The inner gold disc is about 2 mm thick and 30cm in diameter. It is decorated with three concentric rings of dragon-shaped motifs interspersed with zigzag designs, fashioned in the

method of repoussé and chasing. The innermost ring consists of three simplified dragons, facing one another. The middle ring has five units of spiral-tailed dragon, arranging from right to the left. The outer ring includes seven units of spiral-tailed dragon in the same fashion as in the middle ring. On the outer ceramic frame of two concentric rings there engraved exquisite Cloud-and-Thunder pattern (round and square spiral pattern). The gold coffin ornament decorates the eastern end of the coffin (Figure 3).

2. Textiles, more than 300 pieces, silk or hemp. There are a variety of textiles of different density including



Figure 3. Gold Coffin Ornament (G47:1)



Figure 4. Brocade Found in G26

sha 纱 (gauze of plain weave), *juan* 绢 (silk tabby), *qi* 绮 (patterned tabby), *jin* 锦 (brocade), embroidery and *zudai* 组带 (silk ribbon). A *fangkong sha* 方孔纱 (silk gauze) excavated from G11, about 188cm by 150cm, is the earliest and largest single piece of textile ever found in China, which was sewn together with pieces of the same width (the length of the weft). And from G26 unearthed the earliest example of high density *jin*-brocade, the warp of which counts at 240 threads per cm. It was woven with threads dyed with cinnabar (the mineral pigment red mercuric sulfide) to form various geometric and animal designs (Figure 4). In addition, the earliest examples of dresses and several new kinds of textile have also been discovered.

3. Bamboo wares, including fans, mats, cases, spoons and others. The bamboo fan (G16:13), in the shape of a cleaver, with a handle 37cm long, was woven with fine bamboo splints and is well preserved. This is the earliest example of a complete fan in China (Figure 5). Three pieces of bamboo mats were found. Each measures about 180cm long and 80cm wide. They were exquisitely woven and preserved in very good condition. The bamboo cases include square and cylindrical types; some were wrapped in textiles while others bear metal ornaments on the four corners.

4. Lacquer and wooden wares: including ladles, boxes, a painted wooden sword, plates and so forth. There are several examples of lacquered ladles with a shallow bowl and a curved handle. For example, G28:3 (Figure 6), about 25cm long, is carved out of a single piece of wood. It has a shallow oval bowl and a curved handle, with a ridge in the middle of the handle. On the rim of the bowl there is a small outlet, in the middle of which is also a ridge. It was lacquered in black color.

The lacquered box (G16:1) is of an uncommon shape and preserved in perfect condition. It consists of three small rectangular boxes to form an L-shape. The lid of the box is convex in trapezoidal shape, the surface of which was grooved with circular rings about 5 mm wide. The rings were filled with textile. The entire box was

lacquered. It is 17cm long and 6cm high (Figure 7).

The painted wooden sword is stuck in the scabbard, inseparable now. The scabbard was lacquered in black on one side and painted on the other side with units of dragon-head design, with dragon's tongue stretching out and curling upward. The round hilt, surmounted by a flat pommel, is painted in dark black and wrapped with silk threads. The tip of the scabbard is in the shape of a

flat circle like a coin. The scabbard was painted golden yellow and reddish yellow. The sword and the scabbard are well preserved, with an entire length of 47.6cm (Figure 8).

Wooden wares include weaving tools, boxes, combs, and hairpins.

5. Bronzes: over 30 pieces. Most of them are plain without any decoration and are in the style of the Yue



Figure 5. Bamboo Fan (G16:13)



Figure 6. Lacquered Ladles Found in G28



Figure 7. Lacquered Box (G16:1)



Figure 8. Painted Wooden Sword (G30:14)



Figure 9. Bronze Ding-tripod (G4:2)



Figure 10. Jade Disc (G30:15)



Figure 11. Jade Bodkin (G36:1)

bronzes, including Yue-style *Ding*-tripod, *guasha* knife, and small book-knife. The bronze *Ding*-tripod (G4:2) is 7cm in height and 8.6cm in diameter at its mouth (Figure 9).

6. Jades: 14 pieces, among them a jade disc (G30:15, Figure 10) and a jade bodkin (G36:1, Figure 11). Some are incised with exquisite dragon motifs.

7. Proto-celadon wares, including bowls, cups, were exquisitely fashioned. Both the inside and outside surface was glazed with yellowish green color. There are glaze droppings. The exterior base was unglazed and has the impression of the sand cushion. While their shapes are similar to the Yue-style celadon wares, both the clay body and the glaze have a distinct local feature.

In addition, animal remains and plants have also been discovered. Mellon seeds were found in 11 coffins. Large quantity of Chinese pepper (*Zanthoxylum bungeanum Maxim*) and two peach stones were found in G30, rice grains in G16 and G29, and peach stones in G6.

Preliminary Conclusion

The Lizhou'ao tomb is an extremely unusual example of multiple coffins in a single grave found so far in China. It is also the earliest and the largest in the number of coffins buried, and unique in structure. All the 47 coffins were interred at the same time. Judging from the structure of the coffins and the associated grave goods, most (46) of the tomb occupants are of similar social status. The only exception is the occupant in G47, who seems to be an important local figure of rather high social status since gold ornament was buried. Occupants of the 46 coffins were probably companies in death, which indicates that human victim was also a common practice in this region during the Spring-and-Autumn Period.

A large number of weaving tools and textiles were excavated from the tomb. These textiles were exquisitely produced with sophisticated techniques. An extraordinary case is a single piece of gauze sewn together by the unit of 53cm in width and 153cm in length, which is the earliest and largest example of this kind found in China. It is a significant discovery that corroborates the historical records and furthers our understanding of ancient Chinese textile. Besides, various kinds of weaving tools being buried as major grave goods also indicates that this area was probably an important center for textile production during the Eastern Zhou Period.

Another significant yielding from the tomb is the hu-

man and skeleton remains, which are the first time that such large number of well-preserved human and skeleton remains was unearthed in the red acid soil in the lower Yangtze reach. It filled many gaps in the research on human remains of pre-Qin period from south China.

Objects discovered in the Lizhou'ao tomb are in many ways similar to those in the cliff tombs at Guixi in Jiangxi Province. The assemblage of grave goods is also the same as that in the Yue tombs in Hunan region. All these indicate that these tombs shared the characteristics of the ancient Yue culture in south China. On the other hand, the tomb structure and the lacquer wares bear some characteristics of early Chu culture. Therefore, the Lizhou'ao

tomb represents a type of bronze culture which is basically a Yue culture but influenced by the Chu culture. This indicates the existence of a large-scale, highly-developed bronze culture during the Spring and Autumn Period in the northwestern region of Jiangxi Province.

Since the Lizhou'ao tomb yielded such grave goods as proto-celadon wares and the Yue-style bronze tripod, which bear distinct temporal styles and are comparable to similar objects excavated from tombs of Eastern Zhou period in Jiangxi and adjacent regions, the Lizhou'ao tomb can be dated to 2500 years BP, that is, around the mid to late Spring and Autumn Period.

Postscript: The original article is published in *Kaogu* 考古 (*Archaeology*) 2008. 7: 47–53, with one illustration and three pages of plates. The authors include Xu Changqing 徐长青, Yu Jiang'an 余江安, Hu Sheng 胡胜, Rao Huasong 饶华松, and Liu Xinyu 刘新宇. The summary is written by Xu Changqing and translated into English by I-Fen Huang 黄逸芬.